Children’s Play in 1st-8th Grades: What is it?

by

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this study was to explore play inside and outside of the classroom at school in grades 1 – 8. The research question was: Who and what determines the amount and type of play inside and outside of the classroom at school in grades 1 – 8?

Procedure:
Qualitative data were collected from various instruments in order to evaluate play inside and outside of the classroom in grades 1 – 8. A survey was used to request responses from teachers about their opinions and use of play inside and outside of the classroom. A follow-up interview was conducted with three teachers to gather additional information on the role of play inside and outside of the classroom at school in grades 1 – 8.

Findings:
At the participating school district, play is viewed outside the classroom as being important to the administration, teachers and students. Play inside the classroom is important to both teachers and students. Though play is being cut in some schools across the U.S so more time can be spent on academics, this was not the case at this school district. The implementation of a new curriculum has caused some teachers to struggle with implementing play inside the classroom this year but play is still consider important.

Conclusion:
Play is vital to a child’s development. In order for play to exist inside the classroom, teachers need the support of their administration and parents. Many teachers understand the value and importance of play. These teachers work hard to implement different forms of play into their classrooms. Outside the classroom, the district and teachers feel play is important. Children need free play for cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Physical education is equally important because it teaches students how to gain and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But, for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood. –Fred Rogers

I became interested in the topic of play in schools by watching my two elementary school aged children moving through the public educational system. While volunteering in my older son’s first and second grade classes I observed what felt like a loss of child-directed play. When my son reached second grade I noticed the most significant decrease in play in his classroom as school became increasingly academically focused. I started wondering what his education would look like if it was more hands-on, and experience-based.

I started studying the topic of inquiry-based learning (Friesen, 2013) and feeling that students in middle childhood and early adolescence are expected to spend more time working than playing. Yet play is still needed in middle childhood and early adolescence during school hours because it impacts cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Cognitive development is enriched through games with rules, producing new forms of construction. Crafting script for sociodramatic play can include humor and empowers a child to be creative and imaginative (Conklin, 2014). Social development is also enhanced through the use of sociodramatic play by allowing children to improve communication by taking on make-believe roles (Conklin, 2014). During middle childhood and early adolescence children continue to learn emotional competence through play by learning to work collaboratively and cooperatively (Manning, 2006). Physical development allows children to engage in learning through the use of their
whole bodies, and participating in team sports improves coordination, imagination and cooperation (Manning, 2006). Through play children learn self-regulation, increase their memory, improve language skills, and learn to recognize symbols (Bodrova, 2005).

I was inspired to pursue the topic of play in schools by the ideas of John Dewey, Jeanne Gibbs, Jerome Harste, and Lev Vygotsky. These theorists believed that children learn by doing and experiencing. Children learn by practicing the skills needed for adult life. These skills are learned through play. John Dewey believed that education should build on the natural curiosity of the student (Dewey, 1915). Unlike traditional education, Dewey wanted education to focus on the whole student and the individual student needs to learn by living life instead of education focusing on filling the mind with knowledge. He described this style of learning as “occupations” because the student explored their natural environment, engaged in active learning and engaged in real-life activities which provided the student with an opportunity to learn through experience (Dewey, 1915). Dewey felt that the traditional classroom denied the student a place to do work; that the traditional classrooms lacked the tools that children needed to be actively engaged, to create and construct ideas (Dewey, 1915).

Jeanne Gibbs believes that students should learn by discussing, experiencing and applying information to real-life situations and problems (Gibbs, 2014). Jerome Harste wrote, “inquiry provides an opportunity for learners to explore collaboratively topics of personal and social interest using the perspective offered by other as well as by various knowledge domains (psychology, anthropology, economic, ecology, feminism) and various sign systems (art, music, mathematics, language) for purposes of producing a more equitable, a more just, a more thoughtful world” (2001, p. 1).
Lev Vygotsky wanted education to be more student-centered (Vygotsky, 1930). Vygotsky strongly supported the notion of play and the importance of making meaning through play. Play enables children to learn abstract thought (Vygotsky, 1930). Piaget explored the different developmental stages of childhood and the appropriate curriculum to meet these stages (Belin, 1992). Piaget emphasized the idea that children were not passive recipients of knowledge but that the children interact with their environment to build new knowledge (Belin, 1992).

The ideas of Dewey, Gibbs, Harste, Piaget and Vygotsky helped shape my ideas of how important it is for children to learn through experience, to able to apply their knowledge to real-world situations or problems. Children need to be able to move around, seek their own meaning, and apply it to their experiences, not just sit and learn through the repetitive memorization of facts or information. Play is one way of learning through experience, one way of learning to solve problems and to learn to work collaboratively. Through play children can seek their own ideas, their own questions and build their own experiences that foster learning. These ideas made me wonder about play, a child’s drive to play and how play happens at school.

My research project explores the importance of play in the developmental process in primary grades along with ways that play can be included in the curriculum. According to Riley and Jones (2012), the importance of play in the development and learning in the primary grades is often misunderstood. Educators who place an importance on play are often left defending their discussion to include play in the curriculum. As times have changed many teachers have lost the autonomy to make decisions about best practices for the education of their students. The use of structured instructional materials in the
classroom leads to students being lectured and engage in worksheet activities instead of
allowing children to learn through play. When children are required to learn through
worksheets or work on their “own” without disturbing others, they are denied their
are not allowed to be children, stress is sure to follow” (McEachon, 2001, cited in Riley,
2012, p. 82). Brain research has shown the impact of stress on the brain. When children
are allowed to play and to choose the activities in which they participate in their stress
levels are decreased. According to Riley (2012), “when children are given the freedom to
make decisions, such as during play, they develop confidence in their growing abilities”
(p.147). Through play children learn self-efficacy, how to regulate their behavior and the
cause and effect of their actions. The conversations that occur during interactive play
awaken children to diverse ideas. By hearing and discussing different ideas children see
situations in new ways, thus deepening their understanding of concepts” (Riley, 2012, p.
147).

I chose to explore play in grades 1 - 8 because the Common Core State Standards
provided play time in kindergarten by allowing teachers the freedom to implement the
standards in a developmentally appropriate way, which can include play. Many
kindergarten teachers address Common Core Standards by allowing children to learn in
playful ways such as through music, art and playing with different learning tools.
Through music, art and various learning tools kindergarteners are able to meet the
standards of knowing their shapes including 3-D shapes, such as the cube or cone, as well
as meeting the language arts standards of knowing their numbers and letters. Many
kindergarteners are also provided time to play during choice time or center time. In many
preschools in the U.S the focus is on play and learning social skills. The main focus on play has been in early childhood, yet play is still important for the social, cognitive and emotional well-being of the child during middle childhood and early adolescence (Manning, 2006). Unfortunately, as society’s emphasis on academics has increased and the demands for competition in a global economy increases, the role of play in school decreases. The focus on preparation for standardized tests makes it difficult to provide time for children to play.

There appears to be a decrease in the amount of time allotted to play starting in grades 1 -8. This could be due to the change in the type of play presented in these grades. Children in many areas are losing recess in an effort to increase time spent on academics. Beisser (2013) described the loss of unstructured activities in grades 3 to 5. The increased focus on academics means that children in middle childhood and in early adolescence are increasingly losing their play time.

In order to explore these ideas I examined the following question: Who and what determines the amount and type of play inside and outside the classroom at school in grades 1 - 8. This question was asked to determine whether play is decreasing in schools, whether play is of value in our local school districts, and whether teachers view play as important to children. The definition tends to vary throughout the current research and this research project was used to determine the definition of play according to teachers. This research project was an extension of current research and adds to the current conversation about play within our schools.
Chapter 2
Review of Literature

Theories of Play

**Definition of Play.** Play is a difficult activity to define. What one person views as play might not be seen as play by another person. According to Brown (2009), “play is a very primal activity. It is preconscous and preverbal—it arises out of anicent biological structures that existed before our consciousness or our ability to speak” (p. 15). We can think of play in terms of characteristics but to truly define play as it fits to each and every human being would be nearly impossible. Play can be characterized by the purposelessness of the activity, voluntary engagment, peoples’ attractions to play, freedom of time, a lowered consciousness of the self and continuation of the desire to engage in play. Play is often improvised and unplanned but not always. Play has a biological component in that it has survival value for both humans and animals. Animals use play to practice fighting off predators, to practice hunting, to learn about their environment and the rules of engagement. Play is an activity that humans and animals engage in throughout their life-span. Play teaches cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills amongst both humans and animals. Play in both the young and the old helps to relieve stress and builds happiness. Play in adulthood is different from the play of childhood. For adults play becomes the activities of leisure, it is often “influenced by the experiences of the past, shaped by present experiences and responsive to the future normative expectations of every age” (Freysinger, 2006, p. 54). For adults play as leisure is governed by society. Play in childhood is a pursuit to selflessness which in our society is not acceptable for adults. Only when adults let go of the social controls and disciplines
will the selflessness of childhood reemerge allowing the adult to engage in “pure leisure” (Freysinger, 2006, p. 56). Part of growing up has been the ability to regulate emotions and have control over the self in order to accomplish goals, acceptance within society, and compliance to societal expectations. The pressure to grow up has become the antithetical to play and leisure for adults. It is only when adults are willing to disengage from the reality of adulthood, social norms and societal expectation that they can truly express the self fully. The motivations for play across the life-span change as we age though the form of play may remain the same. For example, the sports activities of childhood will transform with changing motivation throughout the life-span. Play in adulthood is voluntary, chosen by personal choice, used for personal expression and engagement, more intrinsically motivated and pleasurable. Play for children has many of the same characteristics as leisure for adults, yet play for children is viewed differently by society.

Children, unlike adults, are permitted by society to be selfless. Play in early childhood is viewed by society as a developmental tool for which children learn cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills. In early childhood play is used to explore the world around the infant and toddler. Through play children develop their language use, “social competence, complex thinking, and creative problem solving skills” (Fromberg, 2006, p. 1). Play in infancy tends to be object oriented. Play at this stage often exploratory and used to practice “newly acquire motor skills” (Garner & Bergen, 2006, p. 3). By about a year old play becomes more interactive as the child is better able to interact with their environment. Children start learning how to engage in social play both with adults and peers during this stage. At about three years of age, the child begins
to engage in pretend play which becomes more elaborate as the child ages. For children play is often characterized by society as the desire to participate, active involvement, non-literal significance of the activity, the lack of focus on the outcome, flexibility of rules, fun, interesting and self-directed (Riley & Jones, 2012). The concept of play in childhood varies significantly depending on the researcher’s theoretical orientations and methods of research creating a lack of consensus on the definition of play in childhood.

**Vygotsky’s Theory of Play.** Vygotsky (1933) determined that pleasure should not be a part of the definition of play because a young child could gain pleasure simply by sucking on a pacifier or an early elementary schooler will only find pleasure in a game that they found interesting. Sporting games, or any type of game with an outcome are often viewed with displeasure when the outcome does not favor the child. Vygotsky (1933) also felt that to “refuse to approach the problem of play from the standpoint of fulfillment of the child’s needs, his incentives to act, and his affective aspirations would result in a terrible intellectualization of play” (p. 77) Play cannot be examined simply by the intellectual aspects of play, but also by the motivations and incentives of the child to engage in various forms of play. As a child matures the motivations and incentives to engage in certain types of actions change. The special needs and incentives of a preschooler are spontaneously expressed through play and important to the whole development of the child. According to Vygotsky (1933), a child under the age of three has many unrealizable tendencies and desires. The young child must gratify the desire at once and without any delay. This need for immediate gratification of desires leaves the child feeling frustrated. The child can learn to abandon his desires. After the age of three the child is better able to regulate his emotions and desires. Children older than three start
using their imagination to meet the unrealizable desires in order to help regulate their emotions. Play becomes a way to fulfill the generalized wishes of the child, in part due to the child’s new ability to understand adult authority. The child at this age has yet to understand the motivations for the play activity but “play differs substantially from work and other forms of activity” (Vygotsky L. S., 1933, p. 80). Only during adolescence can a child determine why they do certain activities. According to Vygotsky (1933), play cannot exist without rules and the child’s attitude towards the rules. Rules are part of the imaginary situation constructed by the child. “In play the child is free. But this is an illusory freedom” (Vygotsky L. S., 1933, p. 97). Through play a child develops meaning with objects. A school aged child learns to convert the internal process of learning about objects to the “internal speech, logical memory, and abstract thought” (Vygotsky L. S., 1933, p. 90). When children play they are required to act against their immediate impulses in order to maintain the play activity. Vygotsky (1933) did not view play as children’s predominate activity but rather as a way for the child to create their own zone of proximal development. “In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (Vygotsky L. S., 1933, p. 95). According to Vygotsky (1933), play becomes a limited activity for school aged children. The focus of play shifts to the athletic type, filling “a specific role in the child’s development but lacks the significance of play for the preschooler” (Vygotsky L. S., 1933, p. 98). For school aged children play moves away from the imaginary situation to being more reality based. The development of rules in play leads to the division of the basis of work and play.
**Piaget’s Theory of Play.** Piaget developed a theory of four cognitive stages. These stages are: Sensorimotor (birth to age 2), preoperational stages (age 2 to age 7), concrete operational (age 7 to 11) and formal operational (adolescence through adulthood). During the sensorimotor stage of development a child is learning through sensory experiences and by manipulating objects. A child in this stage is developing object permanence. Object permanence is that ability to know an object still exists even when that object is out of sight. Once a child learns object permanence the child can begin to associate names and words to objects. Children in the sensorimotor stage engage in functional play. During the preoperational stages of development the child learns through pretend play. Pretend play helps children gain social skills by learning to negotiate, sharing, taking turns and respecting others. Children at this stage still struggle with being able to take the perspective of others and they tend to be illogical. The child lacks conservation, symbolic thought and is often egocentric. Children in the preoperational stage engage in symbolic play, pretend play and learn to play games with rules to build social skills. Symbolic play allows the child to construct new concepts. Through games with rules children learn to think objectively, regulate their emotions, cooperate, and to engage in competition. In the primary grades children are transitioning from Piaget’s preoperational stage to the concrete operational stage of development. During the concrete operational stage of development the child is learning to take the perspective of others, becomes less egocentric but struggles with abstract thought. Children in this stage also learn that they have unique thoughts, feeling and opinions that are not necessarily shared by others. Formal operational stage of development is the final stage of Piaget’s theory. In this stage the child has gained the ability to use deductive
reasoning, increased logic, understand abstract ideas, create multiple solutions to problems and think about the world around themselves.

Aside from the four cognitive stages, Piaget believed that everyone develops schemas or categories of knowledge that help us understand and interpret the world around us. As we gain new knowledge we use our experiences to modify, add to, or change our existing schemas. Piaget referred to the process of taking new information and applying it to our existing schemas as assimilation. “Play is assimilation of reality to the ego, as distinct from “serious” thought, in which the assimilating process is in equilibrium with accommodation to other persons and things” (Piaget, 1962, p.2). Play is used to assimilate reality to ego. During play conflicts can be solved freeing the ego of any limitations set by reality. Another part of the adaption process for changing our existing schemas is called accommodation. This process can also create new schemas. When a child creates a balance between assimilation and accommodation, the child has reached equilibrium. This equilibrium helps the child move from one developmental stage to the next.

**Brain Research on Play**

Brain research has found that when animals play they learn how to navigate and adapt to the world around them (Brown, 2009, p. 33). According to Brown, the animals that played the most had larger brains. Brain researchers have been able to examine the cerebellum which is responsible for language processing, attention and much more. During play the brain is able to make sense of itself. Play actually helps to sculpt the brain. Play allows humans to create simulations of life, create imaginitive situations and experiences that would otherwise not be encountered. We are then able to learn from
these experiences. In infancy the child’s and mother’s brains are in sync; this is called attunement. This attunement which Brown (2009) refers to as the base state of play, protects the infant against surges in emotion that can be detrimental to the brain. When a young child plays with objects they are creating a brain that is better able to understand and solve problems. Imaginative play aids in a child’s developing brain by keeping their emotional and cognitive story line in context with reality. This ability helps with emotional resilience and creativity. “Deprivation studies demonstrate that fantasizing—imagining the inner life of others and comparing it to one’s own—is one of the keys to developing empathy, understanding, and trust of others as well as personal coping skills” (Brown, 2009, p. 87). Social play provides society the ability to function as whole and individually. According to Brown (2009), neuroscience of play has found that an equal minimum education for all at the expense of the nonessential subjects doesn’t produce students who are innovative and creative but only prepares students for assembly line work. When children are allowed to play it increases their learning and memory. Children need to be able to “involve their hands in work, play, and exploration” [in order to develop] “brains in a manner that is in line with our design, the way that primates all have developed during their long evolutionary trajectory” (Brown, 2009, p. 185).

**Types of Play from the Child’s Perspective**

Only children can understand play from their perspective. According to Nancy R. King (1986), a child’s view of work and play are completely different and separate entities. King analyzed different research studies and found that the key difference between work and play is pleasure for primary grade students. In the upper grades the concept of play is viewed in less social context and more in a psychological context. The
child’s mood and interest tend to play a greater role in deciding what is viewed as play and what is viewed as work. King (1986) notes that while academic activities are still labelled as work not all academic activities are viewed as work; these activities become play when they are labelled as “easy or entertaining” by the child (p.234). During this time play becomes any activity that is not “required, evaluated, tedious and difficult” (p. 234). In the upper grades play is broken down into three distinct categorizes, “instrumental play, real play and illicit play” (King, p. 235). According to McInnes (2013), the child’s perspective of play “not only focuses on the observable act but also gives insight into the internal, affective quality of play which is important to learning, namely playfulness” (p. 270). The child’s view of play is differentiated by cues such as the level of adult involvement, “the amount of choice the child has in the activity, whether it is voluntary or not, how easy it is…[and] where the activity takes place (McInnes, 2013, p. 270). These cues determine whether the activity is considered play or work. Based on King’s (1986) theory of play she proposed the following categories of play within schools: Instrumental Play, Real Play and Illicit Play. According to King these different forms of play can be found in schools by educators. The idea of the different forms to explaining the different ways that children engage in play inside and outside of the classroom. Students engage in each form of play for specific reasons whether it is to learn, self-expression or become a member of a community.

**Instrumental Play.** The first category is instrumental play. Instrumental play is any activity that is required and evaluated by the teacher but that the child can find enjoyable to engage in, such as watching a movie, drawing a picture, playing a vocabulary game, or listening to a teacher read out loud. Children enjoy instrumental play
because it allows for “energetic physical activity,” is undemanding and requires little efforts as well as encourages individual expression (King N. R., 1986, p. 235).

Instrumental play is different than spontaneous play because it is not voluntary or self-directed and it serves a purpose beyond that of the participants. During this type of play the teacher maintains control of the curriculum while allowing students to learn in a playful way. When children are able to engage in free play they are involved in active discovery and when teachers disguise work as play the children are engaged in rote memorization. Unfortunately, most play that takes place inside the classroom is play disguised as work or teacher directed play. When play is combined with learning vocabulary, the child’s “verbal fluency and vocabulary building/retention” increased (Belknap & Hazler, 2014, p. 214). Scully and Roberts (2002) study focused on the relationship between play and literacy development in the primary grades. Play in the classroom should allow students to be active, creative and investigative. Play should provide an opportunity to question ideas or concepts as well as communicate with peers.

Perlmutter and Burrell (1995) explored the use of a child-sensitive teaching in a combo kindergarten to second grade classroom in rural North Carolina. The school was connected to the University of North Carolina. At this school the children were able to select tasks to complete assignments. They were able to learn while playing and how to manage work and play in a classroom environment. In this classroom Mrs. Burrell wanted a balance of child-chosen activities as well as teacher-assigned activities. The children were provided ample opportunity to be creative with building blocks, toys, kitchen equipment, water measuring devices and much more. During the play activities the children were observed writing plays or puppet shows, keeping science journals with
measurements for water or building with blocks. The children viewed the “centers” as play but also stated that most of the classroom materials were for work. The children were provided a hands-on opportunity to learn real world skills while building a foundation of skills that could be used later in life. The children also learned responsibility for the materials and the environment for which they worked and played. Perlmutter (1995) concluded that “children need to be able to balance demands of responsibility and relaxation. We all need a healthy doses of work and play” (p. 21). When teachers are unable to ignore the playful behavior of children in the classroom, they try to incorporate the play into the academic curriculum.

**Real Play.** This form of play is voluntary and self-directed as well as enjoyable. Real play is the activities of recess and meets both the social and psychological aspects of play. This form of play provides children freedom and autonomy. During recess time children are able to “participate in active, often boisterous, physical activities, to seek out specific children with whom to interact, and to dictate the flow of events without adult intervention” (King, 1986, p. 235).

**Illicit play.** Illicit play involves the whispers, laughing and note passing of children. Illicit play can also include individual activities such as doodling in a notebook or playing with a toy behind an open book. These actions are usually completed with the intention of the teacher not witnessing the child’s activity and in “spite of the rules or regulations of the classroom” (King, 1986, p. 235). Illicit play during regular classroom work allows students time to connect with peers. This type of play is often viewed as disruptive by teachers and is often controlled in an effort to prevent it. When teachers intervene in this type of play, children usually suspend the behaviors. Illicit play allows
students to create a community and a peer culture within the strict confines of the classroom and school.

**The Value of Play in Middle Childhood and Early Adolescence**

Creative, imaginative play can be a part of effective classroom teaching (Conklin, 2014); that play is valuable from the perspective of gifted and talented students (Beisser, Gillespie, & Thacker, 2013); and that spontaneous play in science can lead to creative transformation of children’s experiences (Andree & Lager-Nyqvist, 2012). Children need to be actively involved in the learning process in order for them to learn at a deeper level (Riley & Jones, 2012). According to King and Howard (2014), pretend play or dramatic play is “associated with creative thinking, cognition, social behaviour, therapeutic benefits and perspective taking” (p.119). Physical play is not only physically beneficial, it is also beneficial to social organization and cognition.

**The Benefits of Play Inside the Classroom.** When students engaged in more play-based learning the students were more actively engaged in the learning process inside the classroom (Conklin, 2014). In classrooms that allowed time for play both in primary and secondary grade levels, children were better able to learn. Children need choices, the freedom to interact with one another and the opportunity to explore new materials and ideas through play. According to Riley (2012), “Piaget believed that learning occurs when children are curious and interact with the materials in their environment” (p. 148). Children choose activities in which to participate based on their own interests and experiences allowing them to build knowledge of the world around them. Materials to help with mathematics and sciences can be given during this transitional stage to help the children gain their understanding of the topic. Playing with
puzzles, pattern blocks, and magnets can help children to develop spatial awareness, geometric shapes and the concept of magnet force. “When primary-grade children have these types of materials available to choose from, they gain the ability to understand abstract mathematical and scientific concepts that they can use throughout their lives” (Elkind, 2007, cited in Riley, 2012, p. 148).

Maria Andree and Lotta Lager-Nyqvist (2012), examined the use of spontaneous play in primary grade science classrooms. They looked at Vygotsky’s theory of an imaginary situation in children’s play. When children play they are able to create an imaginary situation that is free from the “constraints of the real situation” and play out their natural desires (Andree & Lager-Nyqvist, 2012, p. 1738). Play allows children to “resist and transcend rules and boundaries…set by adults” (p. 1738). Through imaginary play in the science classroom, children can transform classroom learning in relation to their “needs and motives that are personally meaningful to them” (Andree & Lager-Nyqvist, 2012, p. 1739). The study found that through play children were able to explore the norms and values of science as well as taking on different pretend roles in relation to the tasks of science. For example, children could take on the role of researcher, assistant or doctor to complete the required tasks for the science experiment. Through the use of play “the students in these classrooms interpreted their experiences, dramatized, gave life to and transformed what they knew into lived narratives” (Andree & Lager-Nyqvist, 2012, p. 1747).

Play provides children the time to practice their literacy skills. “A critical part of literacy learning is language development” (Riley & Jones, 2012, p. 147). Children learn literacy through the use of language in their environment which allows children to create
different play scenarios. Play enhances language skills by helping children to determine specific word usage and tone within a play situation. Language in play also allows children to learn about their socio-cultural environment. In the primary grades children have developed a significant language ability but their oral language abilities are continuing to grow. Their oral language abilities help them learn to read and write.

According to Riley (2012), “primary-age children need time to hear new vocabulary and experiment with the language in order to build their understanding of the way language works” (p. 148). To encourage language development teachers can create centers that include reading, writing implements, different colored and sized paper, magnetic letters, signs, flannel boards, and word games. Play helped to significantly improve the child’s ability to engage in divergent thinking (Belknap & Hazler, 2014). Bergen’s (2006), investigation into the play-work environment found that there are five forms of play: “free play, guided play, directed play, work disguised as play, and work” (Bergen, 2006, cited in Belknap & Hazler, 2014, p. 212).

Recent studies by Thomas, Howard, and Miles (2006) and McInnes (2013), found a link between play and learning. In these studies children were given a problem solving task. One group was allowed to practice under playful conditions while the other group practiced under formal conditions. The group that practiced under playful conditions “exhibit[ed] significantly improved performance in terms of time taken to complete the task and task accuracy. In addition, behaviourally these children are more focused, attentive and motivated towards the task and are more likely to rate the practice condition as play” (McInnes, 2013, p. 271). These studies also showed the presence of the adult as an inhibition to the learning process of the child as well the style of language between
teacher and child. According to Riley (2012), children learn social skills through play. Working alone on worksheets doesn’t allow children time to develop an understanding of social behaviors. “Play is a natural way for children to interact” (Riley & Jones, 2012, p. 148). During socio-dramatic play children are able to act out how different roles affect their life experiences. Children learn to negotiate the roles taken by each participant and how the person will act during the play scenario providing children the means to practice conflict resolution skills. Through socio-dramatic play children can learn about the “value of specific coins and bills within the context of playing store” (Riley & Jones, 2012, p. 148). While building with blocks, cardboard or role playing children can learn how to measure, learn reading and writing skills and new vocabulary words. In the primary grades many children have learned to play games with rules. “Children who play board games practice such skills as adding, subtracting, reading words, and analyzing possibilities” (Riley & Jones, 2012, p. 148). Children also create their own games with rules in the primary grades.

According to Beisser (2013) students expressed the “importance, necessity and benefits of multiple experiences of play in the cognitive, social, and physical domains” (p. 33). Play was described as being beneficial in fostering experiential learning and structured learning. Play allows for a release of built up energy that leads to an increase in attentiveness after the play time has ended. Play also inspires creativity, improving the learning potential of the students through imagination or inspiration and assists with stress management. When children are not allowed to play their stress level increases and their brain’s ability to perform is reduced. Increasing the time for play can reduce this stress (Riley & Jones, 2012). Play provides the students with opportunities to make sense
of their learning and explorations. According to Riley (2012), children can learn self-efficacy through play; children learn that they have an influence on their own lives through the actions that they take thus teaching children that they have control as they learn to make decisions and take action about those decisions. This includes the free play that takes place during recess.

**The Benefits of Free Play at Recess.** According to Ramstetter, Murray, and Garner (2010) the CDC “specifies that recess is ‘‘regularly scheduled periods within the elementary-school day for unstructured physical activity and play’’ (App. 7). It affords the child a time to rest, play, imagine, move, and socialize” (p. 219). Through unstructured play children are provided a hands-on, experience-based learning environment.

**The benefits of recess on cognitive development.** Outdoor play is important to a child’s physical, cognitive, social-emotional development (Burriss & Burriss, 2011). The advantages of outdoor play are "better performance on standardized measures of academic achievement in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies; reduced discipline and classroom management problems; increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning; and, greater grade and ownership in accomplishments" (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 1). Outdoor play both structured and unstructured improves cognition in young children. Ramstetter et al., (2010) stated that “according to the Cognitive Immaturity Hypothesis, optimal cognitive processing in a child necessitates a period of interruption following a period of concentrated instruction” (p. 522). The unstructured breaks of recess provide the student with a break from the distractions and stresses that interfere with the students’ cognitive abilities. The break of recess, though mostly spent on
socialization, allowed the students to resume normal classroom work with more attention and more productivity. It is beneficial for children when their day is spread out between structured and unstructured activities. Burriss and Burriss (2011) used Piaget’s theories of developmental stages and the concept of distributed effort to explain the benefit of recess. A child’s immature nervous system along with the child’s “limited experience undermine their ability to perform higher-level cognitive tasks with the same proficiency as older children and adults” (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 2). The child’s immaturity should not be viewed as a deficiency to be overcome with additional time spent on task or with the addition of more information but as a consequence of the child’s lack of growth and experience. Recess, due to its unstructured nature decreases the “learning interference” (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 2). When a child is pushed from one focused activity to another, such as structured physical education, the child is not provided any learning recovery time. Only unstructured activities or free choice options will decrease the “interference for learning” (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 2).

**The benefits of recess on socio-emotional development.** The unstructured break of recess also promoted socio-emotional development by permitting the students an opportunity to socialize and to “role play essential social skills” (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010, p. 522). Recess provides a time for students to relieve stress and engage in pro-social behaviors such improving communication skills. Students learn to negotiate, problem-solve, cooperate, share, persevere and self-control during recess. “These unstructured, yet supervised, peer interactions facilitate the development of social skills necessary to interact with others positively and productively” (Ramstetter et al.; 2010, p. 522). Play and recess also stimulate social development and learning. When children play
they are able to gain valuable social skills, they learn to share, cooperate and resolve differences in order to maintain the play activity. “Perspective-taking refers to a child’s ability to simultaneously differentiate their own perspective from another and further recognize that the other’s perspective may be different from their own” (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 3). During this perspective-taking interaction children learn how their behaviors, thoughts and feeling affect others. Teachers can promote prosocial behavior by enabling children to understand how their behavior affects others and that being kind, caring and compassionate benefits themselves as well as others. Children learn social competence which “is complex and refers to relationship building and maintenance with others” (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 3). During recess they learn to compromise, negotiate and communicate both non-verbally and verbally. Recess is not merely an opportunity for physical activity, it is also a time for “stimulating intellectual activity” (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 2).

The benefits of recess on physical development. Recess provides time for students to be “active in a mode of their own choosing, practice movement and motor skills, and to engage in interactions with their peers. Importantly, recess affords young children free activity for the sheer joy of it” (Ramstetter et al.; 2010, p. 522). The physical activities that take place during recess are important to physical development in that it contributes to weight maintenance when combined with good nutrition, aides in bone development and adds to a child’s psychological well-being. When children exercise chemicals in the brain are released that support a greater number of neurological connections.
Benefits of Structured Physical Education. Physical education in schools is beneficial to children because children learn techniques to live and maintain an active lifestyle. When the skills of being active are learned at an early age we are better prepared for maintaining an active lifestyle as we age. Society has gradually moved toward a more sedentary lifestyle, obesity rates have increased and many young children need to be taught to be physically active. When children engage in higher levels of physical activity they gain both long-term and short-term benefits. Children who are most active have engaged in “higher levels of aerobic fitness” (Sollerhed & Ejlertsson, 2007, p. 102). Children who are physically inactive are at a greater risk of “heart disease, hypertension, type II diabetes, various forms of cancer, sleep apnea, depression, low self-esteem, diminished educational attainment and earned income, lower marriage rates, high morbidity and premature death” (Sherman, Tran, & Alves, 2010, p. 3). Additional mental health risks include “peer isolation, peer rejection, and peer victimization” (Sherman, Tran, & Alves, 2010, p. 3). Unfortunately, as physical activity amongst children has decreased so has the desirability of physical education courses (Sollerhed & Ejlertsson, 2007). Physical education does not begin and end at the school door but “is the societal program responsible for training and socializing the nation’s youth to be physically active” (Sollerhed & Ejlertsson, 2007, p. 103). Sollerhed and Ejlertsson (2007) study found that an increase in allocated physical education lessons improved students running endurance and motor skills though it did not help overweight children lose weight. Sollerhed (2007) also found “positive change in physiological outcomes when time for physical education was extended” (p. 105). In order for physical education to reduce weight gain students need more than 40 minutes per day of physical exercise.
The benefits of physical education on cognitive development. Increased physical education “research has shown that academic test scores do not drop when DAPE [developmentally appropriate physical education] is included in the curriculum and health-related physical education may have a favorable effect on student academic achievement” (Sherman, Tran, & Alves, 2010, p. 4). In the upper grades physical education has been shown to have a positive relationship on academic performance and participation. According to Bailey (2006), physical activity can “enhance academic performance by increasing the flow of blood to the brain, enhancing mood, increasing mental alertness, and improving self-esteem” (p. 399). A 1950’s study in France concluded that when academic time was cut by 26 percent and replaced with physical education the academic performance of the students did not decline. There was a decrease in absenteeism, less discipline problems and more attentiveness amongst students (Bailey, 2006). “Although the cognitive, social-emotional, and physical attributes of recess correlate with school success (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005), Alexander (1999) reports that approximately 40 percent of American schools decreased or eliminated recess breaks” (Alexander, 1999, cited in Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 4)

The benefits of physical education on social-emotional development. Physical education improves children’s self-esteem, lowers stress, anxiety and depression (Bailey, 2006). Self-esteem is connected with a child’s perception of competence and adequacy of achievement. Physical education has a positive impact on the child’s social development and prosocial behaviors. According to Bailey (2006) “numerous studies have demonstrated that appropriately structured and presented activities can make a contribution to the development of prosocial behavior, and can even combat antisocial
and criminal behaviors in youth” (p. 399). Physical education in schools is valuable to the social development of children because it has the ability of reaching almost all children, is less focused on the outcome and competition, and is able to be integrated with the other school curriculum. Physical education helps children improve their moral reasoning, learn about fair play, learn sportsmanship and learn personal responsibility (Bailey, 2006).

The benefits of physical education on physical development. Regular physical education is beneficial to the physical health of the student. Physical education helps children learn physical skills and how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. According to Bailey (2006), regular participation in physical education activities have been “associated with a longer and better quality of life, reduced risk of a variety of diseases, and many psychological and emotional benefits” (Bailey, 2006, p. 398). Physical activity reduces a child’s risk of obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and increased bone health. The movement skills learned through physical education in childhood help build the foundation for physical activity later in life. Physical education can be used as a way to influence the next generation to lead active, healthy lives. According to Bailey (2006) physical education is most effective when it is combined with classroom activity, “when students’ experiences of self-determination and feelings of competence in their own abilities, and when they emphasized enjoyment and positive experiences” (p. 398).

Challenges to Play in the Elementary School

Primary grade teachers have the challenge of including play and justifying play in an already crowded curriculum where many believe that children have already outgrown play (Scully & Roberts, 2002). The “test-driven school culture” makes it difficult to
“reconcile…play as a legitimate way of learning with the” increase pressure on educators (Scully & Roberts, 2002, p. 93). Unfortunately, education is often focused on paper, pencils and books while it tends to overlook the importance of active involvement in a child’s cognitive development. “Curriculum planned with concrete materials, direct experiences, and hands-on activities builds bridges between the increasingly abstract content children are required to study in the early grades and their unique ways of learning” (Scully & Roberts, 2002, p. 93). Children will often view active involvement as play and thus find the learning experience to be more enjoyable.

**Challenges of Play Inside the Classroom.** As children enter the primary and secondary grades the time set aside for play seems to disappear. But this is a normal part of growing up. We are expected to work more and play less. And we do learn from work and bring play into work. Play is important to early middle childhood and adolescence in that it “contributes to children’s cognitive, social, and psychological development” (Manning, 2006). The focus of education tends to be on preparing students for testing, academic achievement and meeting curricular standards, which does not allow time for play. Educational policies such as Common Core and the Race to the Top have placed the emphasis of education on literacy and mathematic skills in order to close the achievement gap amongst the United States educational system (Belknap & Hazler, 2014). In some cases schools are cutting recess from children’s day to increase academic time and physical education programs are being cut due to a lack of funding (Baker, 2012). Modern society including schools are pushing children into adulthood at the expense of childhood (Elkind, 1988).
Major corporations are pushing for students who are able to be creative, collaborative and innovative in the 21st century work environment (Gibbs, 2006). Yet, it appears that play, creativity and joy are missing from the modern elementary and middle school grades educational framework. “The narrowing in the curricula and increased pressures for testing has come an erosion of joy for both the young people and adults who inhabit classroom spaces” (Conklin, 2014, p. 1228). Play is also being dismissed from the primary grades with the increased focus on standardized testing (Riley & Jones, 2012). Through play children learn to be self-determined.

The 1960’s began the move toward a teacher-directed learning environment. Societal pressures for school accountability and “economically valuable outcomes” along with an increased understanding of the theories of cognitive learning only reinforced the drive toward a goal-oriented learning process (Van Oers, 2013, p. 511). Education began to be viewed as a way to transmit our culture “through unequivocally defined goals, deterministic methods, direct instruction, and empirically validated theory” (Van Oers, 2013, p. 511). During this time period, pedagogues, educationalist, and practitioners were also concerned about the child-centered approach not allowing children to meet their developmental potential. At the same time educationalist, pedagogues and practitioners were concerned that the teacher-directed approach simply reduced children to “trainable production factors in an economically driven society, and schools to neglect their pedagogical responsibility of promoting broad development of autonomous cultural identities in children” (Van Oers, 2013, p. 512).

**Elimination or Reduction of Recess.** In recent years schools are eliminating or reducing recess in an effort to increase time on academics. In 2006 to 2007 the Center on
Education Policy conducted a nation-wide representative survey of school districts, the survey found that “20% of districts had reduced recess by an average of 50 minutes per week to allocate more instructional time for English and Math” (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010, p. 518). The Ramstetter (2010) study found that schools with 75 percent of student who received a free or reduced lunch were allotted the least amount of minutes of recess. These students were only allowed 21 minutes for first graders and 17 minutes for sixth graders. Rural students were allotted the most minutes of recess with 31 minutes for first graders and 24 minutes for sixth graders.

As recess increasingly becomes part of the national policy debate over childhood obesity, many proponents of recess were calling for structured recess instead of unstructured recess (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010). The call for structured recess was to allow more time for physical activity in order to combat childhood obesity. Structured recess is much like physical education, an adult is organizing the game or activity and all children are required to participate. But this idea goes against the concept of allowing children unstructured recess that allows them to meet more than just physical development but also provides children the opportunity to develop cognitively, socially and emotionally. According to Ramstetter et al; (2010) “from the perspective of health and well-being of the whole child, recess time should be considered a child’s personal time. It should not be withheld for academic or punitive reasons” (p. 254).

Outdoor play provides children with a break from the intense indoor scheduled classroom routine. Though some educators are calling for a “decrease or elimination of recess because they believe that providing children with extended instructional time ensures additional learning; however, the contrary occurs” (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p.
2). Children just like adults require time to recover from the highly structured routines of the classroom. Recess provides children time for an unstructured activity allowing them to continue with renewed energy on indoor classroom work. Outdoor unstructured activities provide children with a renewed energy for learning.

Opponents of recess argue that unstructured activity leads to bullying but it is the “nature of the school climate (quality of trust and respect), school order and discipline, student interpersonal relationships, and student-teacher relationships” that determine bullying (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 3). With appropriate adult supervision during recess aggression decreases and prosocial behaviors increase. With the help of educators the outdoor environment is a good location to encourage prosocial behavior and decrease bullying.

Other reasons that have been “given for decreasing school recess include fear of playground injury lawsuits, issues regarding questionable or suspicious adults in the play vicinity, shortage of qualified adult supervisors, additional time needed for instruction (Chmelynski, 1998), time on task, and accountability related to the No Child Left Behind act (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). Recess, however, provides children with a variety of learning opportunities not possible in the traditional indoor classroom” (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 4). Burriss and Burriss (2011), found that schools need to be able to create a district-wide play policy, provide different textured play areas, and provide a variety of play equipment for the children to choose in order to maximize the effectiveness of the outdoor play.

Recess and outdoor play are often the only source of freedom from the traditional tasks of school. During recess children are able to demonstrate their non-curricular
abilities and are able to test these abilities. Children are provided time to practice their running, jumping, swinging and climbing during recess. A child who struggles with reading, writing or arithmetic may be able to show their knowledge about other topics during recess. “Children become both leaders and followers; they practice perseverance, self-discipline, responsibility, and self-acceptance” (Burriss & Burriss, 2011, p. 3). When children play together with their peers they are able to share their unique perspective of the world, as well as provide support and guidance to each other. When children share their experiences with their peers they feel valued. The friendships that are created on the playground are critical to satisfaction in later life (Burriss & Burriss, 2011).

**Challenges to Structured Physical Education.** Physical education is often presented with many barriers in education including lack of teacher training, increased pressure to meet academic standardizes, lack of necessary equipment and facilities, “lack of accountability for delivering quality physical education programs and apathetic or unsupportive administrators” (Sherman, Tran, & Alves, 2010, p. 6). A lack of staff development into teaching physical education to children leads many teacher to feel unprepared and uninterested. When teachers are presented with the decision to spend time on academics instead of physical education they tend to spend the time on academics due to the increased pressure on academics and lack of training. According to Bryan, Dunaway, Hester and Sims (2013), another problem with physical education in schools is the lack of student interest. Many students find physical education to be boring and are unmotivated to participate resulting in a high number of physical education exemptions.
Conclusion: Advocating for Play in School

Play is essential to a student’s cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Play reduces stress and improves a student’s ability to focus and learn. According Sandra Stone (1995), “Frost calls play an “indispensable element in child development. It is the child’s natural process of learning and development and, consequently, a critical ingredient in the educative process” (1992, 19, p. 45). Even teachers who understand the value of play feel the need to defend its use inside the classroom, leaving play reduced to recess time, hidden in the curriculum or used as extra free-time. In a push for more time on academics many schools districts are calling for a decrease in recess time. This decrease has a negative impact on students who need a break from the structured classroom activities.

A play policy needs to be created for each school district. Play should be added in age-appropriate ways to the current curriculum, allowing students to engage in active learning. Children should be provided at least 30 minutes of unstructured play time throughout the day to maximize cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Children should be provided at least 150 minutes for elementary school and 225 minutes for middle school students of physical education each day. To get students motivated to participate in physical education classes the curriculum needs to be altered to create an environment that is more intrinsically motivating to students. When physical education is designed to meet the skill level of the individual student, is viewed as fun and yet challenging enough for the student the student is more likely to participate. When students have a choice of physical activities to participate in they are more likely to find the physical education course fun and motivating. Districts need to implement teacher
training programs to train teachers to be qualified physical education teachers. This will aid in the teachers' ability to inspire children to engage in a healthy lifestyle.
Chapter 3
Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the amount and type of play that occurred during normal school hours both inside and outside the classroom in grades 1 - 8. To gather information I used a mixed methods approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The project addressed this topic by surveying teachers, followed by an interview of a select few teachers at the chosen school district. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the district and participates.

Setting

The study was carried out in a school district located in a suburban town in Sonoma County, California. The district contains three elementary schools and one middle school. Two of the three elementary schools are public charter schools and the middle school is a public charter school. The school district serves 1339 students in transitional kindergarten through sixth grades at the three elementary schools. The charter middle school serves 114 students in seventh and eighth grades. The charter middle school also includes an independent home study program which serves eight students. Six hundred of the students in the three elementary schools and all of the students at the middle charter school reside outside the school district. In the three elementary schools, 467 students received free/reduced hot lunch and 230 of the students were English language learners. The student population is 60% white, 30% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 2% African American, 2% Native American, 0.3% Pacific Islander, 0.6% Filipino and 7% multiple nationalities (Cameron, 2016).
At the three elementary schools there were 62 teachers who taught transitional kindergarten through sixth grade. Each elementary school had a reading teacher, RSP teacher, Speech teacher, and Special Day class teacher. The district shares a school psychologist and music teacher. The district also has a school nurse, physical education teacher, intervention teacher, counselor interns at all sites, and a home study teacher at the Charter Middle School.

The community around the district main focus is agricultural and tourism. The community also consists of house developments and light industry.

The three elementary schools appear to be established as John’s school (pseudonym) being primarily upper class students, Eagle’s school (pseudonym) primarily middle class students, and West’s school (pseudonym) being primarily lower class students. Not all students at each of the schools fit specifically into that category, but based on the types of housing surrounding the schools it appears to impact the types of students who attend each school.

**Survey**

The survey included 18 short answer questions. I created these questions to help provide a picture of what play is in schools today. I wanted to gain an idea of both the importance or lack of importance of play in schools and where the importance lies. Is it important to teachers, schools, or both? The questions were designed to gather information about the teachers and administrators values on play. This information allowed me to determine what types of play and how much play was used inside and outside of the classroom in grades 1 - 8. (See Appendix A). The survey included
demographic information in order to compare responses to teachers’ characteristics and experiences. The demographic information included how many years the teachers have taught, what grades they have taught, the location of the school and how many students they currently had. I also asked about any early education or arts education courses they had taken in order to see if that affected their view of play inside and outside the classroom.

The survey was created using my own set of questions that I felt would provide the answer to my overarching question. To help with the creation of the questions I consulted my advisor as well as my research method coursework to determine the number of appropriate questions (Lane, 2015). I knew I would be surveying teachers and wanted it short enough to get a higher level of participation amongst the busy teachers being surveyed, yet provide enough information to answer my question. The questions were phrased to be non-leading questions. I wanted the teachers to answer the questions with their own opinions not with answers they felt I wanted to gather.

**Data Collection**

A survey was distributed by the superintendent for the district when it was initially sent out via email. The superintendent emailed the survey out twice before a teacher recommended changing the format of the survey from a word document to a Google forms document to make accessibility easier for teachers. The survey was converted to a Google forms document and sent out to the district via my work email. Five surveys were collected via the word document then convert into the Google forms. Nineteen surveys were collected as a Google form. One survey was kept as word document as the participant worked at all of the schools within the district. A total of 25
surveys were collected. In the debriefing document teachers were asked to volunteer for the interview but none replied. I emailed the informed consent form along with survey (See Appendix C).

Follow-up Interview

The interview questions were used to provide a method to gather a more detailed account of play within primary, upper and secondary educational setting. I decided to interview three teachers, with one teacher being a primary grade teacher, one being an upper grades teachers, and one being at the secondary grade level in order to see how their response matched up to the responses from the survey.

After I received zero volunteers from the debriefing document attached to the survey, I proceeded to search for volunteers. My kindergartener’s teacher volunteered her husband who teaches fifth grade at the same school. Another teacher that teaches first grade at the same school spoke with me about volunteering. The final volunteer was found through a mutual friend. The final volunteer teaches eighth grade at the charter middle school. The three teachers interviewed provided an interesting contrast to the survey. The teachers were provided a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview. Two of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and voice recorded while one was a phone interview. The two in-person interviews were conducted at the schools.

The first interview participant, Jillian (pseudonym), has been teaching for 21 years. She has a Bachelor’s of Arts, teaching credential and an arts certificate. She has a passion for reading and helping students learn to read. The second interviewee, Dylan (pseudonym), has been teaching for 27 years. He has a Bachelor’s of Science and a
teaching credential. He enjoys winemaking, architecture design and baseball. The third interviewee, Linda (pseudonym), has been teaching for 3 years as full time teacher and 8 years total including time spent as a substitute. She has a degree in Criminal Justice as well as a multiple subject’s credential from Sonoma State University. She is interested in Math, critical thinking and technology within schools.

The interview allowed me to gather information about their personal and professional theories as well as their personal and professional experiences as they relate to play. This included what had driven them to be for or against play in schools (See Appendix B). The questions for the interview were pre-set and used to gather additional information about the attitudes toward play and how the teachers formulated these attitudes within their personal and professional lives.

**Data Analysis**

To analyze my survey I used the Google form site to create a spread sheet of all of the answers for each of my survey questions. This created a cluster analysis which is a method of sorting various objects into groups by association between the objects (How To group objects into similar categories, cluster analysis, 2015). This analysis allowed me to look through the answers to each of the questions to see if there were any common themes, and determine how many teachers responded in the same manner. After looking for common themes and responses, I looked at the responses that were different to see how many of those responses matched. I also looked for any outliers in the responses that would not fit with the other categories. When looking at the responses I analyzed the answers to see how they could be used to answer the main question.
After looking at all of the answers I conducted triangulation to check the reliability and validity of the responses received by interviewing a select number of teachers to verify the results of the survey. The interview questions and survey questions were created at the same time. The interview questions were created to more closely examine the teacher’s perspective of play and how they came to those perspective. After conducting the interviews I compared the survey responses to the interview response and the current literature on the subject of play in school.

By analyzing the survey and interviews I hoped to find some of the following categories: What determined play in each grade? What types of play took place in each grade? How was play used in the classroom for each grade? What did play look like outside the classroom? In addition, I sought to answer the question of who and what determines the amount and type of play in school in grades 1 - 8.
Chapter 4

Results

This research was conducted to examine who and what determines the amount and types of play inside and outside the classroom at school in grades 1 – 8. The survey and follow-up interview demonstrated that teachers and students played a role in determining the amount of play inside the classroom. Play outside the classroom was determine by administrators, teachers and students.

Survey Results

Survey Demographic Information. During the course of the nineteen days that the survey received participants, twenty-five teachers participated in the survey. The survey participants were almost evenly divided between the three elementary schools. The middle school had only one participant. I received emails from a couple of teachers explaining that the survey did not fit into their job because they were specialists at the school, though they were interested in the subject matter of the research survey (See Figure 1). The number of students in each class varied from about seven students to almost thirty students in each classroom. The middle school teacher reported that she had fifty-four students in her core classroom (See Figure 2). Four Kindergarten teachers responded. In grades first through fourth twelve teachers responded, three from each grade. Four fifth grade teachers and one sixth grade teacher respond. The teacher that responded from the middle school taught eighth grade (See Figure 3). The play policy covered the whole district and only one district was examined for this research. Different classrooms were explored to analyze the differences between how teachers’ use play inside and outside the classroom.
Figure 1. Participation by school. This figure shows the percentage of teacher participation from each school.

Figure 2. Number of students in each classroom. This figure shows the number of students each of the surveyed teachers’ classroom.
Figure 3. Number of responses per grade. This figure illustrates the number of teachers from each grade who responded to the survey.

The survey was directed at grades 1 – 8, but I received three surveys from kindergarten teachers and eight surveys from teachers that stated they taught multiple grades, including one principal. Fourteen of the surveys were from teachers in grades first through eighth. I used this data to examine the role of play inside and outside of the classrooms. I excluded the information from the Kindergarten teachers that pertained only to kindergarten. The kindergarten teachers had taught other grades throughout their teaching career and the information that pertained to the primary and upper grades was used. The data was examined by looking at each individual survey question and the grade level taught for each specific question. The number of years of teaching varied from first year to thirty-six years (See Figure 4). The average length of the teaching experience was 15.83 years. Sixteen of the teachers stated that they had completed some form of early childhood education or arts course during college or their credential program. Most of the teachers mentioned some form of additional education in their own schooling. These
included child development courses, drawing, Waldorf, and music. The additional courses did not play a role in the types of play utilized within the classrooms. The play in the classroom depended on the teacher’s preference more than by grade level.

Figure 4. Number of years of experience. This figure shows the number of years each participating teacher had taught.

Curriculum in Respondents’ Classrooms. The curriculum at the schools consisted of segments or teaching “chunks” such as language arts, mathematics, science, physical education, art, social science, and technology. The language arts segment of the day often includes reading, writing, spelling and phonics. In first and second grades the students work on penmanship during writing time and in the third the students work on cursive. The upper grades curriculum was divided into segments of language arts, math, reading, writing, computers, science, social studies and physical education. The upper grades tend to focus on improving and mastering skills and less on teaching basics. The early primary grades focus was on teaching children the basics to reading, writing and
math while still allowing for some type of play time. As the children move up in grades, school becomes increasingly more focused on academics and less on making learning fun. The teachers try to include other segments such as music, “enrichment,” “movement” and “little buddy reading.” Three teachers in first through third grade reported using music. One third grade teacher included an “enrichment” or “movement” segment to the day. One third grade teacher reported “little buddy reading” time as a segment of their day. At one of the elementary schools the children spend time in the school garden. Depending on the day of the week each classroom or grade attends a physical education course, music class, Zumba class, or computers. The computers or iPads are also brought into the classrooms throughout the week. The physical education course at all three sites is 30 minutes per week with a physical education teacher and 100 minutes a week with classroom teacher. Zumba at all three sites was for grades kindergarten to third grade, and Zumba lasted 30 minutes each week.

**Teachers’ Definitions of Play.** The teachers provided different definitions for play. The definitions ranged from physical play to exploring their environment and interests. Play was viewed as a way to express oneself through creativity, body and imagination. The definitions of play included connecting with others, laughing, resolving conflict, negotiating rules and choosing activities. This variation in the definition of play seemed to make it difficult for some teachers to answer the questions in the survey. I did not include my personal definition of play in the survey because I wanted the teachers to provide their own definition of play. I did not want my personal or professional definition to distract them from their ideas of play.
Play Outside the Classroom. According to many of the teachers that were surveyed play outside the classroom consisted of recess and physical education. As part of the physical education classes some students participated in Zumba. A few teachers mentioned that they practiced community building activities led by the teacher as an example of play outside the classroom. During the unstructured play of recess teachers reported that many students participate in pickup games of basketball, tetherball, four square, kick off the wall and chase. Other games consisted of football, whiffle ball, handball, nine square, switch and jump rope. All of the elementary school campuses had a play structure for the students to play on, though this is only available and open when weather permitted. The students created their own imaginary teams and games. In some areas the student have access to chalk for coloring and hula hoops.

When asked if rough and tumble play was allowed at the school, all teachers stated it was not allowed. Most teachers cited safety and legal reasons for not allowing rough and tumble play at school.

When asked about the importance of outside play at each site most of the teachers reported that play was important to the site. The teachers focused on the structured play of physical education as being the main priority. All three elementary schools have a physical education teacher, and one teacher stated that it is “required by law” for the students to have 100 minutes of physical education each week. Another teacher stated that the district recommends 150 minutes of physical education each week. The students are provided Zumba classes, and at one site they are offered a gardening class. The schools participate in a Walk-a-thon and have an end of the year field day.
Other teachers reported the unstructured play of recess as being important and exploration as being encouraged. The upper grades at one school were provided the opportunity to participate in a noon league. Recess was also mentioned as being important because it was scheduled into the student’s day and play during recess just comes naturally. Overall, teachers felt that their site was supportive of outside play time both structured and unstructured.

**Physical education.** The district provides the students with a hired physical education instructor that provided each classroom with one physical education course per week for 30 minutes. The physical education course taught by the outside instructor lasts for fifteen to eighteen weeks of the school year. The district also hired a certified Zumba teacher for one trimester. The district had an adaptive physical education teacher as well for those students with special needs.

**Recess time.** The student’s at all three elementary schools received a morning break that varied between 15 and 25 minutes. The average for primary grades morning recess was 20 minutes and for the upper grades the average morning recess was 15 minutes. The lunch recess varied between 15 and 30 minutes of play time. Most schools allowed children 15 to 20 minutes to eat lunch before dismissing students to the play yard. Eight of the teachers stated that students were provided a 10 to 15 minute afternoon recess with most of those teachers stating that the afternoon recess was only for primary grades. The three elementary school sites all have playground equipment, tetherball, basketball, handball and field for all grade levels. The middle school has basketball hoops for the students. At the Eagle’s school the students have foursquare, a map of the United States and a track painted on the blacktop.
Teachers’ Perceptions of Changes in Students’ Learning after Recess. The teachers’ responses varied when asked if they observed any changes in the children’s learning after recess breaks. Seventeen of the teachers reported that they noticed positive changes in the students after recess. Teachers noticed that students are calmer, more focused, better able to concentrate, less fidgety, and rejuvenated to work. The teachers also stated that the students were more energetic after recess. This energy was stated as both a positive and a negative for the students.

A few teachers reported the negative effects of recess on the students. Some teachers reported that students are hungry after recess, sluggish on hot days, an increase in disagreements, loss of focus, difficulty transitioning from free play to classroom activities, and some students being unable to control their behavior after recess. Teachers reported that the students occasionally return from recess with unresolved conflicts that spill over into the classroom making the transition difficult for students. One teacher felt that the recess breaks are necessary while stating that the students do not return ready for classroom work. Another teacher found that even though the students had a difficult time controlling their behavior after recess, students need to be able to move about, engage their big, gross motor skills in effective ways to “get the wiggles out.”

Play Inside the Classroom. The teachers reported that play is limited inside the classroom but that play time is worked into the schedule. Students were provided choice time, learning games, board games, card games and a chance to engage in pretend play. Teachers included manipulatives for math and language arts as types of play for the students. The teachers use an online website called “GoNoodle” to provide brain breaks for the students in almost all of the grades. GoNoodle provides short videos of dancing or
stretching activities for the students to participate in. Some of the teachers also provided 30 minutes of “Fun Friday” at the end of the day for students to have free play time during the week. During fun Friday the students were reported to engage in puzzles activities, play with blocks, board games, computers, reading and puppets. The students played games of Guess Who, pick up sticks, and jacks. The students create songs and sing to learn math facts, and used puppets to as part of the socio-emotional toolbox when learning how to solve problems. The students have STEM time with hands-on science activities on Fridays in a 4/5 combo class at John’s school. During this students engage activities such as making marshmallow catapults, building bridges with different materials, and building marble tracks. One teacher still allowed some choice time in fifth grade. Another third grade teacher only provide play time inside the classroom after the students work was completed. *Brain breaks, Go Noodle breaks and Fun Friday’s* are mentioned across the grade levels.

**Time for Free Play.** Many of the teachers stated that they provide time for play inside the classroom. Some try to allow time for play daily in their curriculum, others aim for weekly play time, and some stated they do not have time for play at all. Play inside the classroom varies greatly depending the teacher and grade level. The biggest struggle for play occurs in combo classrooms. Some third grade teachers still provide choice time for their students, while other teachers tend to focus more on stretch breaks or *GoNoodle* breaks. *GoNoodle* is used across all elementary grades. In the upper grades teachers stated using the term “academic” in reference to play. As one teacher at John’s school stated, “by third grade, sadly, there isn’t a lot of play left in the schedule.”
Time for Learning Games. The play tended to be more structured with learning games or computer math games being allowed after assignments were completed. The teachers with combination classes reported the difficulty in providing play time for students due to the varying population of students and the individual needs of each student. Learning games in the curriculum consisted of math manipulatives, songs, movement activities, and phonics games. Teachers stated they used games to get the students interested and involved in the curriculum. The teachers also stated that the district curriculum does not include play but allows the teachers to integrate play into their own classrooms. A few teachers stated that play was not a part of the curriculum and the constraints of the curriculum were overwhelming, which limited the amount of time available for play. One teacher felt that creativity, communication and collaboration are enhanced through play and exploration, and most of the teachers surveyed stated they tried to incorporate play into their classrooms whenever appropriate.

Teachers’ Perceptions of the Importance of Play. The survey results showed that the importance of play inside the classroom was placed on the individual teachers. All but one of the teachers surveyed stated that their site did not place an importance on play. The teachers that stated their site places an importance on play singled out brain breaks as being important to their site. Overall the consensus was that each site places the importance on the Common Core Standards, curriculum and having students do well on the state testing. The topic of play was reported as being something that was not discussed or talked about much within the sites or the district. The classroom was to focus on academics, and recess was for play time.
Results of Follow-up Interview

Two teachers from the Eagle’s school and one from Mark’s middle school participated in the follow-up interview. The first teacher, Jillian, taught first grade, the second teacher, Dylan, taught fifth grade, and last teacher, Linda, taught eight grade. Play is difficult in the upper grade because you are destined to have a purpose and an outcome which goes against the idea of play being purposeless. Teachers spend a great deal of time in the upper grades explaining to the children the purpose of what they are learning and what the lesson is.

Definitions of Play. Jillian described play as “a way for students to engage in their learning and have fun while learning.” Dylan described play as “something that does not require a finite set of rules, it is self-generating, did not require equipment or stuff, and a combination of imagination and desire”. Play is ever changing and allows students to become engaged in the learning process. “Linda stated “play is having fun while learning.” Play does not need to be structured and is purposeless, it often makes you laugh. Linda described play as “anything that is enjoyable and fun.”

Curriculum in Respondents’ Classrooms. When asked about how play could be added to the curriculum for their grade level Jillian responded that having teachers get together or take classes where they could take the curriculum objectives and create a game to meet those objectives would be one way for teachers to collaborate on play in the classroom. A barrier mentioned by Jillian that impacts play in the classroom is that “teachers are getting tired of spending their own money to make play happen inside the classrooms.” Another problem with play is that it is not built into the current curriculum, so if it is going to be brought into the classroom it is something the teacher would need to
add. The twenty-first century environment and the current Common Core Standards provide many correlations to play so Dylan did not understand why it could not be added to the curriculum. Play could be added to every aspect of the current curriculum and Dylan felt it would be nice if someone could find a way to seamlessly add play into the curriculum. The problem for play in the upper grades is the lack of an instructional assistant and the large number of students in the classroom. The teachers lack the time to figure out ways to add play into the curriculum. According to Linda “students need to understand concepts in a way that matches their developmental learning.” Students can learn in this way by playing and not even realize they are learning. For example, the students used paper cut-outs to create the Pythagorean Theorem. The students were able to understand the concept without having to write it on paper. Play could be added to the eighth grade math and science curriculum through songs, hands-on activities, technology, art and projects. Art tends to be difficult in math and science but she was confident that it could be added to the curriculum.

**Play Inside the Classroom.** Play is used in the primary grades to engage the children in the learning process. When children are enjoying what they are learning they are better able to remember what they have learned. Play allows children with different learning styles to engage in the learning process more fully. Not all students learn from reading a book. Jillian stated that “when children are engaged in their learning the concepts can be more solidified.” Jillian felt that providing a way for all of Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences were important to the learning process of the students. “Play was one way to allow students with different intelligences to engage in their learning.” The types of play used inside the classroom consisted of singing,
manipulatives, music, dancing, and computer games. Play in the upper grades classroom needs to be more structured with a clear objective. Dylan had all positive experiences in life with regards to play. Professionally, he enjoyed using play inside the classroom.

Inside his classroom play was used to engage the students in their learning. An example of play used in this classroom was the students were divided into groups, given the same set of materials and asked to build a bridge that would hold a dictionary one day, and on another day the students were asked to create a marble track using the same materials. Another way Dylan added play to the curriculum was to have the children participate in the card board challenge. Play in the secondary grades becomes easier to implement due to the limited subjects taught by each teacher. Linda felt that “students were not going to remember what was said or what they did in class but they will remember how they felt” inside the classroom. If learning can be fun and enjoyable then the students are better able to remember the lesson. Linda felt that as a visual or kinesthetic learner herself that students can learn better when they are able to move around and not just sit at a desk. As a student teacher she remembers being asked to create ways for the students to move around instead of being seated at a desk. This had a major impact on her willingness to use play inside the classroom. When asked at what age should students stop playing at school, Linda felt that play should always be a part of school. When students stop playing they stop enjoying what they are learning, the student shuts down and learning stops. Play keeps students inspired to learn. For example, the students created a rap song to learn about the phases of moon, this helped keep the students engage in the learning process.

**Parental Support of Play Inside the Classroom.** When asked about parent support of play in the classroom Jillian found that parents were happy with what they see,
and the parents are happy to report that their children love to play inside the classroom. The parents are supportive of the play and learning that took place inside the classroom. Dylan felt that parents were supportive of play in the classroom. As long as the students were learning the parents were happy. Linda stated that the parents were supportive of play in the classroom. Some parents have asked about the outcome or reason for certain activities, but as long as Linda can explain the outcome and the parents see the students learning they are happy to have play in the classroom.

**Play Outside the Classroom.** Jillian was the only teacher to mention play outside of the classroom. Jillian also included time for the students to have 25 minutes of physical education each day. During physical education the children participated in different themes each month. These themes included bowling, archery, hockey and kites among other themes.

**Conclusion**

The survey and follow-up illustrated that most teachers feel that play is important inside and outside the classroom at school in grades 1-8. The definitions for play varied amongst the teachers. Play outside the classroom was focused on physical education and unstructured recess time. Many teachers reported positive changes in students after recess, but some also report negative changes in students’. Recess time sometime brought personal difficulties into the classroom while also providing many students the mental break needed to focus in class. Play inside the classroom focused on *brain breaks*, *fun Friday’s* or other activities provided by the teacher. Overall, the teachers felt that play was important to the students both inside and outside the classroom.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

**Play Inside the Classroom.** For this study a survey and three follow-up interviews were conducted to determine who and what determines the amount and type of play inside and outside the classrooms at school in grades 1 - 8.

**Teachers control.** The surveys illustrated that both the amount and type of play inside the classroom is determined by the teacher. The Common Core Standards provide teachers the ability to decide how to meet the standards within their classrooms. “While the standards set grade-specific goals, they do not define how the standards should be taught or which materials should be used to support student” (Common Core State Standards Initiative: Preparing America's Students for College and Career, 2016). This provides teachers with the freedom to provide fun activities for the students. The teachers bring play into the classroom with music, *GoNoodle*, singing, dancing, phonics games, math manipulatives, puzzles and board games. The teachers in the lower grades try to allow time for free play. The teachers also allow children to use computers to play math games. The upper grades participate in activities such as the card board challenge, or the building of bridges with different supplies to hold dictionaries. These different activities allow students to learn in meaningful ways while being engaged in the learning process.

**Curriculum control.** The follow-up interview found that the curriculum chosen by the district also has an impact on play inside the classroom. Each curriculum is different and in the past there have been many curricula that do not provide for play inside the classroom. Past curriculums have also contained play within the classroom. According to Dylan, the current curriculum chosen by the school district in this suburban
area of Sonoma County does not have play specifically written into the curriculum. The curriculum being used by this school district is Math Expressions California, Handwriting without Tears, and Houghton Mifflin Reading Program with supplemental Scholastic Phonic for the lower grades. The district is also using Piloting Writing by Design or Learning Headquarters. The curriculum does provide space for play to be added into every aspect of the curriculum. The problem is that the curriculum leaves the addition of play up to the teacher. As this is the first year of this curriculum being used by many of the teachers, the teachers lack the time to implement play within each aspect of the curriculum. Many of the teachers are focusing on learning the new curriculum. The teachers agreed that play is important and many have found easy ways to add play into their classrooms.

**The concept choice.** An important aspect of play is the concept of choice. During unstructured play it is important for students to have a choice in what activities they participate. This allows for a decrease in their learning interference and an increase in the likelihood they will participate in physical activities. The student’s choice in activities is limited both inside and outside the classroom. During choice time or free time within the classroom, the students are limited in the play options based on what play options are provided by the teacher. The teacher must provide the play options such as computer games, board games, learning games and play spaces. The teachers usually have to use their own money to buy the activities and games for inside the classroom. The teachers own ability to provide games and activities impacts what options the student have access too. The teachers choices in play opportunities for their students are limited by space, time and the curriculum. Teachers must be able to illustrate how the play activity meets
the teaching goals for the students. Play outside the classroom is limited to district funding. The administration must have the funding to paint many of the play activities onto the pavement or to provide the equipment for the sports options such as basketball, tetherball and handball. Even during free recess the student choices in play activities are limited to the options available and to the rules of the school. Students are not able to engage in rough and tumble play due to safety and liability concerns.

*Play inside the classroom.* Many of the teachers use a program called *GoNoodle* (GoNoodle, 2012) to provide the children with “brain breaks” throughout the day. The program provides short videos the children can follow that get the children up and moving. The videos contain stretching or dancing instructions. Each classroom can move up in level as the students participate in the activities. The children get excited as the number goes up and the character changes.

The teachers in primary grade classrooms tend to use music, singing, dancing, phonics and math manipulatives to bring play into their classroom. The teacher used songs to learn skip counting of 2’s, 5’s, and 10’s. Manipulative are used to make funny words using word blocks that contain pieces of words. Jillian stated that she used “play all the time because I want kids to be engaged in their learning and enjoy what they are learning.” The teacher from the upper grades spanish course reported using a flyswatter to “swat” at the vocabulary word as the teacher reads it out loud. The student to “swat” the word first wins. The teacher also had the student “rally words back and forth with a partner.” This was similar to the types of play recommended in the literature. When learning can be made fun and students are engaged in their learning they are better able to remember what they were taught.
The interviews provided a more detailed account of play inside the classroom. All of the teachers interviewed were in favor of play inside the classroom. All three of the teachers discussed the benefits of play and the childrens’ ability to learn better through play. Jillian stated that “as long as they [the students] are learning and are excited to learn, I will use play the whole day.” When students are able to move around and engage in hands-on learning they are better able to remember the learning experience. Parents were also supportive of play inside the classroom. Jillian mentioned a parent complimenting her on the play inside her classroom. This parent was excited to report how thrilled her child was to go to school every day. The consensus was that as long as students were learning, parents and teachers are in favor of play.

Recommendations for Play in the Classroom. The implementation of Common Core Standards should not stop teachers from including play in their curriculum. The new standards allow for each teacher to be creative and to decide how they will teach the required material to their students. For teachers who struggle with finding ways to incorporate play inside the classroom, seeking the help of colleagues and working as a team to come up with creative ideas or activities for the students is one way of overcoming the struggle of play. To help teachers of all grade levels with fun play ideas I have come up with the following list to get them started.

A List of Play Ideas

- Creating learning stations with themes that correlate to the Common Core Standard presented to the students.

- Easy STEM experiments that are grade appropriate
• Allow the students to use technology to create stories, comics, dances or films.

• Build a lego car to test velocity

• Build a house out of cards

• Build a bridge out of toothpicks

• Turn an old board game into sight word game

• Let children choose a topic that interests them and have them create a fun project or game

• Have students write a script

• Create a work of art

• Use music to illustrate a topic

• Have a student write a song

• Create a poster, brochure or advertisement

• Have the children create a drama

• Play word games such as riddles or engage in word play

• Participate in the card board challenge or odyssey of the mind

• Create a classroom economy

Having students create a class economy will help students learn about financial responsibility, which meets one of the Common Core Standards (Nutter-Wiersbitzby, 2012). Students earn class money by completing classroom jobs and exceptional performance within the classroom. The students rent their desk from the teacher. The students must use their money to pay rent and other bills. Any discretionary income can be used to buy school supplies, bathroom passes, etc. Students maintain their own budget.
Students who have the desire to save their money are able to do so and eventually buy their desk from the teacher. The student also can buy other desks and rent them to fellow students. The scenario provides the student with real experiences.

**Play Outside the Classroom.** The amount of play outside the classroom is determined by the district as well as the students. The district has set recess and physical education timing. The children are able to decide how much of morning recess they want to spend playing or eating snacks. The teachers and staff play a role in determining the amount of play available to students as well. Play is withheld if the child is being disciplined or benched during recess. The teachers and staff determine the length of punishment. Overall, the students are provided with 15 to 20 minutes of morning recess, 15 to 30 minutes of play time at lunch, and for primary grades an additional 10 to 15 minutes in the afternoon.

The district exceeds the number of recommended 20 minimum minutes per day of recess by providing primary and upper grade students an additional 20 minutes each day (CDC, Supporting Recess in Elementary Schools, 2014). This additional time provides students more time to get gain social skills, release built up energy and rejuvenate for a return to classroom activities. The extra play time is a bonus for students. The district also recommends that children participate in 150 minutes of physical education each week which is in line with the state government recommendation (CDC, Supporting Quality Physical Education and Physical Activity in Schools, 2014).

**Recommendations for Physical Education.** Physical education is important for students academic achievement, confidence, self-esteem, fitness, motor performance and to gain the ability to lead a healthy lifestyle. Unfortunately, there is a lot of pressure on
teachers to teach the academic subjects at the expense of physical education. To improve physical education for the students, the teachers need strong leadership. The teachers also need to have the confidence to teach age-appropriate physical activities. Teachers often feel a lack of confidence and are unprepared to teach physical education to students due to a perceived lack of ability or skill (Morgan & Hansen, 2007). Teachers need confidence to effectively teach physical education. Schools can provide teachers with staff development opportunities to learn about physical activities.

According to Morgan and Hansen (2007), teachers felt that in-service training “needed to be skills-based, hands-on, and demonstrate techniques and teaching strategies rather than didactic instruction” (p. 104). Schools could hire physical education specialists to help teachers, or physical education coordinators to help facilitate program implementation. Teachers also felt that “when everyone (including the principal) was committed to teaching P.E., students were likely to achieve syllabus outcomes in P.E. (p. 104). The addition of a P.E policy that allocated time into the formal curriculum for physical education would be beneficial. The policy would hold teachers accountable.
Limitations. The limitations to this study included the use of only one school district in one area of a small community. The survey sample was small with only twentyfive responses over the course of nineteen days. The follow-up interview did not include any teachers that were against play in schools or teachers who did not feel that play was important in the classroom which could have changed the results of the research project. Overall, the study was limited by time, participants and location.

Implications and Future Research. Each of the teachers interviewed were in favor of play. This could have been due to the positive experiences each had with play. A few additional interviews would have been helpful to confirm this theory or to get the perspective of play inside the classroom in more detail from the teachers who stated that they did not have time in the current curriculum for play. Interviewing a few other teachers might have established why they struggle with integrating play into their classrooms. The teachers who favored play inside the classroom reported more personal and professional experiences with play. The teacher that struggled to include play could be overwhelmed by the implementation of a new curriculum as well and not necessarily be against play inside the classroom.

Future research could expand this research project by examining a variety of schools or a larger school district. Future research could explore the strict dichotomy between work and play, the influence of historical changes in curriculum on how teachers incorporate play into the classroom, the idea of outsourcing play inside the classroom to GoNoodle videos, the changing mandates for physical education and recess time in different districts. Further research could examine the reasons the one teacher struggled with play. Throughout the course of this study I learned that play is in our schools. Play
takes on many different forms inside and outside of the classroom. When I started this research project I felt that play was lacking in our schools. I felt that teachers were too focused on test preparations to include play, but during the course of this project I found that teachers are advocates of play. Teacher love to see children being engaged in the learning process, and that teachers are against rote memorizations. Worksheets are used to help children learn but they are not the only form of learning taking place within our schools. Play is in our school, play is in our classrooms, and our children are enjoying what they learn when they get to engage in play.

Play is a valuable part of learning. Without play children become stressed and anxious. Play helps children learn cognitively, emotionally, socially and physically. Play is an important aspect of life for both the young and the old. Teachers see the importance of play within the classrooms. The state of California has created guidelines for schools to provide time for recess and physical education. Though schools in other areas might be cutting recess and physical education, this is not the case in California. Play takes on many forms within our schools and each member of the school whether it is administrators, teachers or students, play a role in the amount and type of play that occurs inside and outside of the classroom at school.

Almost all species on earth engage in some form of play. Animals use play to practice survival skills, and like animals without play we can not survive (Brown, 2009). Play allows us to develop cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically. According to Stone (1995), through play children learn abstract thought, divergent thinking, how to express creativity, and encourages problem solving. Socially, play teaches children how to get along with peers, learn social interactions and patterns. Emotionally, play teaches
children to express thoughts or feelings, deal with the realities of the world, provides a risk-free environment to practice real life skills, reduces stress, decreases anxiety and builds self-esteem. It helps us relieve stress and enjoy the world around us. Physically, play improves motor development including gross motor and fine motor skills, builds self-assurance, and allows the children to test their bodies. When children are able to learn through play they are able to engage in active learning. Play is hands-on learning. It is discovering the world around with body, mind and soul. When children learn through play they are better able to remember and enjoy the learning experience.

It is important to teachers to provide time for student to play during schools hours. Children need the opportunity to engage in their learning. Play allows children to learn in an unique way. Play is vital to the development of children. Without play in schools children become stressed and anxious, making it difficult to learn. When children are playing they are able to relax and are better able to remember what they are learning. The new Common Core Standards are opening the door to play within the classroom by providing teachers with the freedom to teach the way they feel is best, though teachers are still feeling the pressure for children to pass state examinations, which tends to infere with the amount of time available to add play into the classroom.
Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Interview

Hello Teachers,

This survey is being conducted as a part of a study for my graduate thesis. I would appreciate you taking the time to answer the questions to my survey. I am interested in the role of play in schools today. Please email this survey back once you have completed it back to me at graduateresearch83@gmail.com. Thank you for participating in my survey.

1. Where do you teach?

2. How many years have you been teaching and what grades have you taught?

3. How many students are in your classroom?

4. What grade do you teach?

5. What early childhood or arts education courses have you completed, If any?

6. Please provide a list of the segments or teaching “chunks” in your day and week schedule? I.E Reading, Math, Science (etc).

7. At your site, how do children engage in play outside your classroom?

8. How do you allow children to engage in play inside your classroom?

9. Does your school have recess breaks? If yes, how long are they? How many per day?

10. Do you see any changes in the children’s learning after recess breaks? If yes, what evidence?
11. Is there time for learning games/free play in your curriculum? If yes, how so?

12. Is play a part of your curriculum? How is it engaged in inside the classroom?
   How is it engaged in outside the classroom?

13. Does your site place an importance on play inside the classroom? If yes or no, please explain?

14. Does your site place an importance on play outside the classroom? If yes or no, please explain?

15. Does your site provide children the opportunity to engage in rough and tumble play?

16. Is there a P.E class or expert at your site? How often does it take place?

17. Is there anything else you would like to say about play at your site?

18. What is play? Briefly discuss what play means to you?

Please return to: graduateresearch83@gmail.com or snail mail to my advisor: P. Lane, SSU, School of Education, 1801 E. Cotati Ave, Rohnert Park, CA 94928.
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Follow-up Interview Questions

1. What does play mean to you?

2. How would you describe your personal philosophy with regards to play?

3. How would you describe your teaching philosophy with regards to play?

4. What are your personal experiences with play that have either lead you toward or away from play?

5. What are your professional experiences with play that have either lead you toward or away from play?

6. At what age do you think children should stop playing in school? Why this age?

7. In what ways could play be added to the curriculum for your grade level?

8. Do parents support play in your curriculum? What are the views on play?

9. What are the types of play that take place inside/outside the classroom?
Appendix C: Informed Consent Forms

Online Informed Consent:

Welcome to My Survey

Informed Consent: Thank you for participating in this survey. Your feedback is important. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. These questions concern play in/out of the classroom for 2-8 grades. The purpose of this survey is to help the researcher measure the amount and type of play inside/outside the classroom. I do not anticipate that taking this survey will contain any risk or inconvenience to you. Furthermore, your participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. All information collected will be used only for my research and will be kept confidential. There will be no connection to you specifically in the results or in future publication of the results. Once the study is completed, I would be happy to share the results with you if you desire. In the meantime, if you have any questions please ask or contact: Kaye Moore at graduateresearch83@gmail.com.

Additionally, if you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, please call or write: Chair, Sonoma State University, Institutional Review Board – Schulz 1105, 1801 East Cotati Ave., Rohnert Park, CA 94928. Although the chairperson may ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

By responding to this survey you are verifying that you have read the explanation of the study, and that you agree to participate. You also understand that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study of what determines the amount and type of play inside/outside the classroom in grades 2-8 being conducted by Kaye Moore of Sonoma State University. We hope to learn the amount and types of play inside/outside the classroom in grades 2-8. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a teacher in a public school that teachers in a grade 2-8.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing this document, we plan to disclose only the grade level that you teach.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with Sonoma State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.
If you have any questions, please ask us. My name is Kaye Moore and I can be reached at 526-7354; graduateresearch83@gmail.com or my faculty advisor, Charles Elster, 664-2350, elster@sonoma.edu.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep. YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

Sign: _______________________________ Date: _______________________________
Epilogue

This thesis was written by a non-teacher. I wrote this thesis to explore play with in schools because I wanted to see whether students were spending too much time on worksheet. I am a parent and want the best education for my children that they can receive. Play is something I as a parent was important to the growth of my children.

As I started this endeavor, I spoke with the superintendent about my thesis. He has since requested a copy that he can use in his professional practice.
References


