AN EXPLORATION OF FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN USING PLAY AS A TEACHING STRATEGY IN GRADE R

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By

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ABSTRACT

Play has a long controversial history in early childhood education. The controversy of play could be seen from multiple perspectives, which in n less contradicts one another. Amongst the existence of such controversies in South African schools today, the study aimed to explore Grade R teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy. Further examination was done on how play as a teaching strategy is being used to develop Grade R learners holistic understanding of concepts. These positions underpin the researcher's exploration in the study. Vygotsky theory of the zone of proximal development was used as a theoretical stance, where play as a teaching strategy was being integrated from the views of learning from a Vygotsky theory.

The study followed a qualitative research approach for a rich exploration of these experiences. A case study design was used hence situating the exploration within a limited context. The studied school is located in Kwa-Mashu Township in Durban. A combination of several methods was used to generate qualitative data for the study. These methods were semi-structured interviews, followed by observation and document review. Being a case study, the sample of participants was two Grade R teachers whose schools were fundamentally engaged with teaching Grade R.

The findings of the study concluded that although teachers plan and teach in Grade R using play as a mode of learning, several problems still exist, affecting their effective use of play as a teaching strategy. Challenges found include lack of parental involvement in the learners' learning and development, insufficient level of support from the Department of Basic Education in the form of workshops and Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM) for example the outdoor play area dedicated to Grade R learners and insufficient space to use play as a teaching strategy. The Department of Education needs to persuade universities to train ECE teachers continuously in play-based learning and provide them with opportunities to further their knowledge of teaching through play. Furthermore, Grade R teachers should increase their curriculum knowledge on innovative ways to use when teaching through play. The study concluded that in-service teachers should have continuous training on how to use play effectively for a better holistic understanding of how play is being used as a teaching strategy of its own.

DECLARATION

I, Nompumelelo Pricilla Hadebe, declare that this dissertation is my own work. All sources that I have used are indicated and acknowledged by means of APA 6th style of referencing.

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N.P Hadebe (Student)   Date

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Dr Sithabile Ntombela (Supervisor)   Date

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my adorable children: Londy, Una and Asante. Their presence has been enough satisfaction throughout the study. It is my desire that they be inspired by this work to achieve greater accomplishments of their own.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS   Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

DBE   Department of Basic Education

ECD   Early Childhood Development

FAL   First Additional Language

GET   General Education and Training

HSRC   Human Science Research Council

KZN   KwaZulu- Natal

LTSM   Learner Teacher Support Material

NAEYC   National Association for the Education of Young Learners

NGO   Non-Governmental Organization

NQF   National Qualifications Framework

SASA   South African Schools' Act

SGB   School governing Body

UN   United Nations

ZPD   Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This is a report of a study that explored Foundation Phase teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R. A single case was selected to conduct the study in Kwa-Mashu Circuit, which is under the Pinetown District in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. A primary school with two Grade R classes was purposively selected for data generation because the researcher knew the teachers as she had worked in the area before in another project. To better understand how the study was done the chapter has been divided into the following section: the background of the research of the study followed by the rationale for the study.

The critical research questions that guided the research and the objectives of the study are also presented in this chapter. An understanding of the research objective underpins the significance of the study along with the research methodology that followed. The chapter further provides an overview of the chapters by indicating their essence and their chronological presentation. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

For the past decade, public attention around the world has been focused on the Early Childhood education (ECE) (Broadhead, 2006). Early childhood education consists of pre-primary programmes that have Grade R (reception year preceding Grade 1), which offers curriculum to 5-year-old learners and pre-Grade R programmes, which caters to learners between 0 and 4 years of age. In South Africa Early Childhood Development (ECD) includes pre-Grade R programmes, Grade R programmes and Foundation Phase (Grades 1–3). Early Childhood Education emphasises the value of play in learning and teaching environment. According to Broadhead (2004), play affords learners with opportunity to explore, experience, experiment and learn. Learners are encouraged to learn together in creative, investigative and problem solving ways Broadhead (2006).

Before 1994, the education system in South Africa was racially segregated including Early Childhood Education (ECE).Teachers received trainings which promoted racism and ethnic segregation at school, classroom practices were inactive and non-critical, (Banoobhai, 2012). As a result of the racial segregation policy of the apartheid government, White learners received better ECE because of superior facilities provided to them. White learners received subsidies and support from the social welfare agencies, while Coloureds, Indians and Africans received less support and care with unqualified teachers. Non- white teachers were not adequately trained. As a result Coloureds, Indians and African learners attended crèches which offered mostly "custodial" care with unqualified teachers. The state did not want to be fully involved, so the training of non-white pre-school teachers was very limited and did not lead to any recognized qualification. Teachers were trained to function as state agents (Banoobhai 2012).

In 2001 the National Department of Education issued the *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development* (Department of Education, 2001). In this White Paper, the government recognises the need for preparing young learners for formal schooling through the development of a reception year programme. White paper 5 stipulates the main goal of addressing the imbalances of the past. It expresses the importance of an integrated play based approach to child development. The aim of the pre-school programme is to prepare learners for schooling and to develop the child physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally and creatively. The Department of Education commits itself to making Grade R a universal provision of quality, (Department of Education, 2001). To improve the quality of education, the Government has developed and implemented progressive policies and systems (Taoele & Mohapi, 2013).

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The study derives from two fundamental rationales. Firstly, it originates from the researcher's personal experience through her teaching journey. Before working in Higher Education, the researcher was a Foundation Phase teacher for seventeen years, a Head of Department for the same phase and a Department of Education, (DoE) District facilitator for Early Childhood (ECD) with the main focus on Grade R curriculum. In many instances she had noticed that teachers' practices do not tally with what the policy articulates. Most teachers tend to rely on an instructional approach instead of learner centred approach.

Grade R teachers often use play to kill time and usually have minimal expectation of it. Furthermore, teachers lack the 'know how' to monitor play activities. They need to understand play and the way it relates to children's learning in Grade R. This study seeks to increase understanding of ways to approach play in the classroom.

Secondly, in the South African context there is limited published research and academic writing in the Grade R field in general and pertaining to teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R in particular. A study conducted by Cheng, (2001) revealed that early childhood teachers experience challenges in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Another study by Taole & Mohapi (2013) indicated that teachers are faced with several challenges when teaching through play in their environment. This study while perceiving the necessity of researching on foundation phase teachers' experiences focuses specifically on the use of play as a teaching strategy in Grade R as there is a scarcity of research in this area.

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) stipulates that Foundation Phase learners learn through play, on-going teachers' practices appear to be different and un-aligned with the policy articulation. There is thus a disconnection between policy and practice in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R. What is outlined in the policy and what is happening in reality, are different. Several reasons could be used to account for these differences. Considering that schools are open systems that are context bound, the experiences of teachers at Grade R would be vital to explore to this regard. The experiences of these Grade R teachers have not been explored sufficiently, especially within the KwaMashu area of Durban. Most recent studies (Cheng, 2001; Hughes, 2010; Govender, 2011; Izumi-Taylor, Samuelsson, & Rogers, 2010) have been on issues of classroom practices some of which play have been inclusive in curriculum implementation. Very little has been on teachers' experiences within township areas, especially on using play as teaching strategy. Teachers in reception year still see play as different from work rather than being an integrated approach to be used in classrooms.

Davin (2013) posits that in Grade R most teachers use rote and drill activities which give learners little time to construct their own knowledge and understanding. This approach according to

Davin (2013) is inappropriate for the learner and affects their holistic understanding. Play is often regarded as unproductive and its importance and value is overlooked by teachers and parents within rural and township communities (Excell & Linington, 2015). Teachers ignore the contribution of play in the development and learning of young learners, therefore learners are denied the chance to learn social skills. Cheng (2001) avowed that teachers have great difficulties in understanding the idea of learning through play and this is perhaps based on its integrated nature.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study sought to rationalise the need for the alignment of the "intended curriculum" and the "implemented curriculum". The intended curriculum is what is in the written policy, while the implemented curriculum is what is practiced in the field (Hoadley & Jansen, 2010). By foregrounding the curriculum in practice of these teachers, the researcher hopes to draw attention to the situation with regards to play as a teaching strategy in Grade R classrooms and hopefully a remedy may be found through the perspectives of the teachers' experiences. The study will also add to the body of knowledge about play as a teaching strategy in Grade R programmes within the South African context as well as help provide considerations into ECD teachers' understandings of how young children best develop and learn using play.

1.6 FOCUS OF THE STUDY

This study focused on teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R. The various forms of play constitute this focus. But most importantly, how these teachers construct their experiences of using play as a teaching strategy in the classroom is the centre of the focus. The focus on this experience was guided by the policy document (CAPS) that teachers of the Grade R classroom use at the time of the study. However, bearing in mind the nature of the focus of the study, other aspects of the experiences of these teachers were considered as being of potential influence on their classroom experiences but there were of little consideration to the broader picture of their experience not unless in cases where there were direct influence as would be seen in later chapters.

1.7 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study had the following objectives.

1.   To explore teachers' experiences of using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R.

2.   To investigate whether and how play develops Grade R learners holistically.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To attain these objectives, the following research questions were asked:

1.   What are the experiences of foundation phase teachers in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R?

2.   In what ways does play develop Grade R learners holistically?

1.9 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.9.1 Research design

A case study was used as a research approach. According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011, p. 291) "case studies can establish cause and effects in real situations." A case study involves looking at phenomena in its real life context and employs many types of data. A case study is the way in which social data is organized in order to view a social reality (Best & Kahn, 2003.This study used a single case study of one school. Rule & John (2011, p.7) confirm that case studies "assist in generating an understanding of and insight into a particular instance by providing a thick, rich description of the case and illuminating its relations to its broader context." Data was collected from two Grade R teachers in one school at Kwa-Mashu Township.

1.9.2 Sampling Procedure

According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011), sampling is the decision made by the researcher on the choice of participants to be involved in the study. Purposive sampling was employed to select the school. Gerrish & Lacey (2010) suggest that in purposive sampling, the sample is purposely pre-specified from a group that the researcher is concerned with thus giving the researcher information of interest. Purposive sampling was thus used because the school is

pre-specified based on the nature of pedagogy that exists in these Grades. Grade R learns informally using play based approach. The two teachers were selected because they are directly involved in Grade R teaching and it was believed that they would provide rich text on this researched phenomenon. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from the participating school. Purposive sampling consists of choosing participants that are the nearest or are accessible and available (Given, 2008) and has knowledge of the setting (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010).

1.9.3 Data Generation Process

The data were generated using semi-structured interviews, observations and document review (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Teachers were interviewed individually. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide. A semi-structured interview was used in this study because this gave the researcher flexibility when questioning during the interview (Miles & Gilbert, 2005). It allowed the researcher the flexibility to probe the participants' responses further, covering all other aspects that may be important to the participant. Moreover, it allowed the researcher to find out how participants experience a phenomenon of play. The researcher observed four Grade R lessons directly during teaching and learning. Two lessons were observed indoors and two other lessons were observed outdoors during free play activity.

The researcher used the observation to gather "live" data from the participants' classrooms. Lastly, the researcher analysed the relevant documents that the teachers use in their classrooms i.e. planning and assessment files, assessment tasks with various methods of assessment, samples of learners' work, minutes of meetings and newsletters written to parents. Mouton (2002) pronounced that during data generation, the researcher collects various kinds of empirical information or data.

1.9.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used to identify, group and summarize findings (Pope, Mays & Popay, 2007). The researcher used the six phases of thematic analysis as stated by Braun & Clark (2006).   The data were transcribed, coded and then themes were sought in the coded data (King & Horrocks, 2010).

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Strike (2006) pronounces that the researcher should ensure that the research is conducted within an 'ethic of respect' to those who participate. For that reason, the researcher followed the university's ethics policies and applied for ethical clearances from the university's research office. Ethical clearance approval was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Appendix A), thereafter the researcher applied for permission to conduct the study from the Department of Education which was granted (Appendix B). The researcher then contacted the school where she did the research and asked for permission from the school principal (Appendix C). The participants signed informed consent forms and were assured that their names and that of the school would never be disclosed anywhere in the report. They were made aware of the purpose of the study and of their right to withdraw at any time.

Throughout the research, the researcher recognised that it was important to respect the rights of participants concerned. The researcher used a tape recorder (with participants' consent) to ensure accuracy of the recording. The researcher assured the participants that all the data that would be collected during the study would be kept under lock and key in the university store room and after five years, the data would be destroyed.

1.11 CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY

For the purpose of clarifying any ambiguity, the following words have been selected by the researcher to make clarification as to how it would be understood in this study. The definition of these words could also mean something else in other sources of literature and so the choice of definitions used here are primarily relevant for the study and it was based on the scope and purpose of the study. This also guided the researcher to achieve the intended objectives of the study. For this reason, the following words have been defined:

Early Childhood Development (ECD)

Education White Paper 5 in South Africa (2001) defines ECD as "an umbrella term that pertains to the procedures by which learners from birth to 9 years grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially," (Department of Education, 2001). In this report, ECD is used interchangeably with Foundation Phase.

Play (as a teaching strategy)

Play is described as the activities involved during childhood from babyhood to early teenager years. It is the principle approach to learning for pre-school learners. According to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989, Article 31) all learners have a right to play.

Edutainment

Edutainment is the act of learning heavily through any various media such as television programs, video games, music and computer software.

Holistic development

Holistic development is the belief that considers the interrelationship between several aspects of a child's development such as physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language, moral and creative development. This development may not be apparent to every child at the same time and stage in their development. There is nonetheless some amount of change in every aspect concerning the development, therefore making it holistic.

Grade R learning

In South Africa, the reception year/ Grade R forms the first year of schooling within the Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3). In the Grade R year the timetable is called the daily programme and it consists of three main components, namely teacher-guided activities, routines and child-initiated activities or free play. The focus in Grade R is on informal and spontaneous learning in various rings during the day.

Practitioners/teachers

The word 'practitioner' is often used in ECD as a term covering different roles and responsibilities of a teacher. It includes caregivers, teaching assistants and reception year teachers.

Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)

Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is a policy statement for learning and teaching in South African schools.

1.12 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This research report comprises of five chapters.

Chapter one provides an introduction and background to the study. The chapter also provides the statement of the problem, the rationale, significance, focus, objective and critical questions guiding the study. The clarification of terminology, research design and methodology, ethics and outline of the chapters are provided.

Chapter two contains literature review relevant to the study. The literature review examines what researchers have contributed to the body of knowledge on the teacher as one of the key elements in the study. It includes some reviews of studies conducted on play, both in South Africa and in other countries, and a theoretical framework which works as a guideline for the research study. The theory of social constructivism as developed by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky is the lens into the study.

Chapter three outlines the research design and methodology of this study. The key components of this chapter will include research approach, paradigm, the sampling procedures used to select participating teachers for interviewing and observation and the procedure for data generation and analysis. Ethical considerations will also be outlined.

Chapter four focuses on the data analysis and discussion of findings from the data generated from the interviews, observations and document review. Literature is also infused in the discussion of the findings.

Chapter five presents a summary of the findings derived from the study based on the analysed data, as well as the suggestions and recommendations for future studies.

1.13 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview and background to the study where issues of using play as a teaching strategy at the Early Childhood Development level were discussed. The rationale behind the study have been discussed and the forthcoming significance that the study could stand

to contribute. This gave light to the research problem that was identified and presented in the chapter. The entire study was thus directed to solve the identified problem. The chapter also outlined the aim, objectives and research questions that served as a driver for the study. An overview of the research design was presented. This was followed by a conceptual definition of terms and the chapter ended with a chapter outline of the study. The next section presents a review of the related literature as well as the theoretical framework for the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the literature review and theoretical framework of the study. The researcher begins reviewing literature related to the study by defining play, explaining why it is important and discussing challenges thereof. She then reviews literature on play in Grade R learning. Play was looked at from different contexts: international, continental and South African. Although the study is centred on the experiences of teacher only, the literature was nonetheless drawn from various perspectives; this approach to the review was intended to provide a broader understanding regarding play and the experiences from a multi perspective thereof. The section ends with a theoretical framework guiding this study. The theoretical framework creates a framework to understand play as a critical element through which young learners holistic development and learn are being achieved.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING PLAY

Since the study focused on how teachers facilitate play in teaching and learning in Grade R, the understanding of the concept 'play' is required. The various authors define play differently. Play has been described as a foundation of learning for young children, (Gordon & Browne, 2013). 'Play' as argued by Reed & Brown (2000) is a difficult phenomenon to understand it is something "felt" rather than "done", there is no universal definition of play in literature. From the ECD perspective, play can be understood as heavily marked by an element of enjoyment. Hence, definitions of play in early childhood incorporate amusement and joyous activities for learners.

Looking at play in that context Caillois (2001, p. 6) defined it as "a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement." Learners should be engaged in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose. Play can also be educational. Samuelsson and Johansson (2006) claimed that play and learning are inseparable dimensions in pre-school practice. Smith & Pellegrini (2008, p. 1) are of the opinion that play is often defined as an activity done for its own sake, characterised by means rather than ends (the process is more

important than any end point or goal). Pre-school practice is not something that is provided to learners in order to while away time. Instead, play provides learners with opportunities to explore, experience, and learn (Broadhead, 2006). Copple & Bredekamp (2009) defined play as an important vehicle for developing self-regulations as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competency. Play is defined as a universal phenomenon that serves both natural and biological functions (Elkind, 2003).

Although play is viewed differently by teachers and parents, it is still regarded as the child's work. The work of McInnes et al. (2011) indicates that play is considered as a fundamental human right for all learners as stipulated in article 31 of the United Nations (1989). According to the UN Convention (Article 31), the right to play, covers a wide variety of activities such as writing in the sand, pretending to be super heroes, reading a book, singing, dancing and painting a picture (United Nations, 1989). Play is the principle approach to learning for pre-school learners. Play is not only inherently valuable as an enjoyable activity, but it is also a process through which learners learn (Malone & Tranter, 2003).

Vygotsky (1978) argues that play is an activity that gives pleasure. Similarly, Chudacoff (2007, p. 1) sees it as "the spontaneous, joyous activity of learners". The two definitions by Vygotsky and Chudacoff are closely related to the way play is defined by Hornby (2000) in the Oxford Advanced learners Dictionary. According to Hornby (2000, p. 889) play is defined in different contexts, for example: Play of learners is defined as "to do things for pleasure, as learners do." All these definitions point to the fact that playing is integral to learners' enjoyment of their lives. Learners like to play irrespective of age, culture, or socio-economic background. Through playing, learners are creating their own culture, developing their abilities, exploring their creativity and learning about themselves, other people and the world around them. Play has no boundaries in young children.

According to Izumi-Taylor, Samuelsson & Rogers (2010) play is an important process that differentiates pre-school education from primary school education. Research regarding play is complex, and culture is the key factor in determining how people in different nations view play. According to Brock, Dodds, Jarvis, & Olusoga, (2013) pedagogy incorporates practice and the Principles, theories, perceptions and challenges that inform and shape teaching and learning.

In 2001 the National Department of Education issued the *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (*ECD Policy). In this White Paper, the government recognises the need of preparing young learners for formal schooling through the development of the reception year. According to the White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001) ECD programmes should focus more attention on "hands on" experiences, the use of manipulative materials, questioning, and justification of thinking and problem solving materials. Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), (DBE, 2011) have recommended the use of 'play' as an appropriate method for teaching learners in pre-school classes (Grade R). However, there is no consensus on the effectiveness of play in facilitating learning and character modelling. Regardless of the Department of Education in South Africa promoting play in the teaching of Grade R, research on the teaching of Grade R learners in South Africa presents challenges to the teacher depending on the school context.

This study looked at play as the teaching strategy that is used to teach Grade R learners. Playing and learning are viewed as closely related in the development of pre-school learners. Despite the fact that it is difficult to define play, it is easy to see its close relationship with learning. Play is educational in nature. This means play and learning are interrelated in early childhood and it is difficult to separate them. Play does not only meet learners' desire to have fun but also increases their ability to learn (New & Cochran, 2008).

According to CAPS (DBE, 2011), the general aim of the South African curriculum is defined as ensuring that learners acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. Current thinking about how learning takes place emphasizes the use of play in early childhood education. The curriculum requires teachers to break away from using a teacher-directed approach to the constructivist approach (DoE, 1997). Vygotsky places great emphasis on the social, cultural and historical influences on learners' learning and development (Wood & Bennett, 1998). Play is the principle approach to learning for pre-school learners. According to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989, Article 31) all learners have a right to play.

Learners only become bored and argue or fight when they have nothing to play with during learning time (Merwe, 1988). Similarly, Baines & Slutsky (2009) argue that when a teacher turns learning into play, students no longer need to be forced to do an activity, they are intrinsically motivated to participate and they become eager to engage in the activity again in the future. From this perspective, it can be argued that pre-school teachers need to carefully think about what they want to teach and find ways to incorporate it into play to ensure that they achieve their goals. Play becomes inseparable from learning because learners' greatest amount of time is spent in play.

Davin & Van Staden (2005) argue that a reception year programme that limits the child's opportunity to play is one that limits the child's opportunity to learn. Wilson (2012) avers that it is through play that learners learn about themselves and the world around them. It is through play that they develop a sense of competence and make invaluable discoveries about their social, cultural and physical environments. Most of what learners need to learn during early childhood years cannot be taught, but is discovered through play (Wilson, 2012). Through the understanding of play as stipulated in various literature, the study may clarify why teachers use play in a particular way.

Brock, Dodds, Jarvis & Olusaga (2013) contend that purposeful learning has to be linked to the acquisition of knowledge, the solution of practical problems, joint social participation and engagement in the process of learning. Play is important in child development. It represents the best way in which learners can learn in the reception year. With regard to this idea, Grade R learners should be given an opportunity to learn and develop holistically through play.

According to Singer and Singer (1990) play facilitates a child's physical and sensory motor development as he involves himself in free play for example, he runs, jumps, digs, acts, paints, draws, and plays in other ways. The child has direct contact with the living earth and the culture around him. It promotes social learning as he plays with other learners, creating roles based on what he sees in the social world around him, adjusting his own play behaviour to the needs and demands of his peers. It supports emotional growth as the child is able to project his own fears,

joys, jealousies, angers, and ambitions onto toys, puppets, and other playthings, and works out his feelings about a wide range of concerns in constructive ways, Singer & Singer (1990).

Play supports cognitive development as the child works symbolically with art materials, dramatic improvisation, and other modes of representation, constructing patterns of meaning from interactions with things and people. Fox (2011) argues that although it is simple to compile a list of play activities, it is much more difficult to define play. Play is difficult to define because it appears in many forms for example a person making music, doing drama and learners using toys (Saracho & Spodek, 1998).

2.2.1 Edutainment

According to Buckingham and Scanlon (2005), edutainment is a mix type of learning that relies heavily on visual material, on narrative or game-like formats computer games-education-implications for game developers, and on more informal, less didactic styles of discourse. In conclusion, edutainment is the act of learning heavily through any of various media such as television programs, video games, film and music. Both learning through play and edutainment involve learning. The Department of Basic Education's action plan 2014 states that goal 20 aim at increasing learner's access to a wide range of media, including computers, which increase their education (DBE, 2014).

2.3 RATIONALE FOR PLAY

From the time children are born until they become adult, play form fundamental part of their lives. Play has seems to be a natural and universal learning tool for children and adult Wasserman (1990). Furthermore, Wasserman (1990) maintain that play supports children in all aspects of their development. Play teaches children to react and handle circumstances around enjoyable activities and it is regarded as a natural way to learn because it uses all their senses to solve a problem and understand their environment.(Farne',2005) Various studies on play show evidence that play contributes to advances in verbalization, vocabulary, language comprehension, attention span, imagination, concentration, impulse control, curiosity, problem-solving strategies, cooperation, empathy, and group participation, (Badrova &Leong, 2001). According to Bowman, Donovan & Burns (2000), current research provides evidence of a strong

connection between quality of play in pre-school and child readiness for school. The curriculum in Foundation Phase support integration and play-based learning.

2.4 THE ROLE OF PLAY ON EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

There is little debate in the literature about the importance of play in young learners' development (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). Vygotsky (1978, p. 53) argues that "play is the leading source of development in pre-school years." He viewed play as an important component in children's lives. He further argues that play provides benefits for cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral development. Devereux and Miller (2003) proclaimed that play and child development correlates.

Pre-school learners learn to master numeracy and literacy skills during free play. Albon (2011) postulates that the belief in the importance of play cannot be overestimated in early childhood writings. Its importance is far more than what could be its demerits. The true value of play is not that it directly gives learners knowledge, but rather it provides learners with skills they need in order to gain knowledge in other contexts (Reet, 2012). From this perspective, what learners gain from playing in one context can be applied to an entirely different scenario within relatively similar contexts. Thus, it can be argued that play helps learners gain knowledge and skills, which they need in life.

Wilson (2012) contends that play helps prepare learners for what they may do and experience later in life. For example, what roles they might assume as adults in a family and community (parent, teacher, dancer, and fire-fighter), how creative they will be in solving problems and expressing ideas and how well they relate to others. Play enables learners to improve their social skills and achieve a sense of personal motivation (Excell & Linington, 2015).

New & Cochran (2008) assert that social competence is related to play. The association between play and social competence comes in because learners' play occurs with other people. It could be playing in class with others or with toys under the guidance of a teacher. Through play, learners gain experience in being social partners and engaging in social behaviour. By playing with peers,

learners may accumulate the experience of social interaction and learn to solve problems by means of discussion, cooperation, or taking turns. They can also undergo different feelings such as happiness, delight, sadness, or frustration, thus their emotional and social development can be promoted (New & Cochran, 2008).

During play learners use a range of social and interpersonal skills such as sharing, cooperating, taking turns and respecting each other's contribution (Moyles, 2010). This helps them develop social skills which they need in life. Saracho & Spodek (1998) contend that play allows learners to communicate their ideas and feelings and to verify their knowledge of the world. They do this through interactions which they have while playing. Play holistically prepares learners to be good citizens and well behaved members of the society. Learners have to negotiate with others. They learn to be compassionate, tolerant, patient, and understanding through play (Malone & Tranter, 2003).

In Japan the use of play in early childhood education helps to nurture the physical, emotional, social, and language skills in learners. Early childhood education programmes in Japan focus their curriculum on group-oriented environments where learners can learn to play with others. The idea that learners construct their own knowledge through play by interacting with their environment is what motivates the basis of Japanese early childhood education Taylor, Rogers, Dodd, Kaneda, Nagasaki, Watanabe, & Goshiki, (2004).

Wilson (2012) affirms that play helps learners develop their social lives. It enables them to practice cooperation and sharing, leading and negotiating, making friends and standing up for one's self. Learners gain social skills from playing with other learners where they have to exercise patience, team work, understanding, caring and being polite. In the postmodern era, play is viewed as vital in learners' natural growth and development and is seen as normal behaviour for young learners in their entire social lives (Albon, 2011). As learners experience joy, togetherness and accomplishments, they develop a positive sense of self and a zest for living in an ever-changing and challenging world (Wilson, 2012).

Although play is used to facilitate learning, it also enables young learners to have some entertainment and fun while learning. They will be learning in an environment full of what they like most, that is to play. Different role plays, drama, singing and drumming which learners do while learning enables them to acquire comprehensive information. Sanberg & Heden (2011) suggest that dramatizations are most often considered fun. Drama and role plays bring happiness to learners and their sense of group identity will be strengthened. That is very important for a classroom situation to work.

Reet (2012) contends that play and language ability are closely related. Learners learn language from their peers or from the teacher who will be there to guide them during play. Smith & Pellegrini (2008) argue that learners use language humorously. Language skills such as phonology (speech sounds), vocabulary and meaning (semantics), grammar (syntax), and pragmatics (using language appropriately in social situations) are rapidly developed in the pre-school years during play. Some phonological skills can be developed in the solitary monologues when learners babble to themselves when playing, but most benefits of language learning probably come in socio-dramatic play (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). In socio-dramatic play, learners' language is likely to be refined because teachers guide them more during preparations.

Playing with objects allows learners to try out new combinations of actions, free of external constraint, and may help them develop problem solving skills (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). When learners are confronted with a situation during play, they will work it around with their toys probably without any help from an adult. Thus, play enables learners to find solutions to problems on their own. Play improves their problem-solving abilities and creates opportunities and situations where the learners can experiment and be creative (Sanberg & Heden, 2011). Russ (2008) postulates that play therapists have used play as a means to help learners solve problems. The problem could be in form of a puzzle which challenges learners' abilities to use their minds.

In play, learners' negotiation and problem solving skills are promoted. Research done by Wu & Rao (2011) found that German teachers valued the potential of free play in development. Free play was valued because it contains possibilities for learners to think independently. Learners use their own ideas and imaginations to solve a problem. Play enables learners working as

individuals or in groups to come up with meaningful contributions. In groups, learners can work hard at something they are developing themselves, set goals and targets and strive hard to achieve those (Moyles, 2010). Play enhances learners' capacity to think deeply and to reflect before acting (Ashiabi, 2007).

Play has been found to facilitate insight, ability and divergent thinking (Russ, 2003). It enables learners to exercise their cognitive skills. A study done by Sanberg, Lillvist, Sheridan and Williams (2012) found that pre-school teachers describe play competence as a multi-dimensional construct, encompassing different competencies such as attentive, cognitive, and organisational. Learners are usually attentive during play time. They avoid any disruption in their play. They apply all their thinking skills and learn to be organised in the presentation of their games. For example when they do construction of blocks, learners will be attentive, use their minds to figure out which block goes where and they organise things well. Intellectual abilities of learners are challenged during play that makes them become exploratory, experimental and have a desire to acquire more knowledge (New & Cochran, 2008).

Play, in particular, can unite imagination and intellect in more than one way, and help learners discover things at their own pace and in their own way (Roussou, 2004). Through play, learners can use their cognitive structures to discover, explore and develop understanding of the environment around them. This can be done by building or making things with loose materials, observing and interacting with nature, exploring environment and engaging in imaginative activities (Malone & Tranter, 2003).

Garvey (1977) avows that play affords learners unlimited possibilities for trying out new ideas and for elaborating, recombining, and reworking old ones in the light of new discoveries. It enables learners to discovery new possibilities on their own or with little help from the teacher. Play makes learners become creative. Learners ought to be given a play situation that will enable them to come up with new ideas. This is because a vital dimension of both play and learning is creativity, which is viewed here as the source of all learning in pre-school (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008).

John-Steiner, Connery & Marjanovic-Shane (2010) maintain that play helps in meaning making and creativity. In play, learners experience and create a world of meaning with its own specific pre-requisites and values (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006). It enables learners to strengthen inquiry skills and build conceptual understanding (Drew, Christie, Johnson, Meckley & Nell, 2011). Teachers are therefore challenged to create suitable places for learners to play so that they can have opportunities to reach full potentials of creativity. Learners will be creative if they are involved in well-planned play and when time is given for them to review and evaluate their experiences (Tucker, 2005).

Play in early child development provides some form of therapy to learners. It makes a significant contribution towards the mental health and social well-being of the child (Miller, Cable & Devereux, 2005). Learners with emotional problems can find joy and some form of relaxation in play. It can also enable learners to heal quickly from their diseases or health challenges. Good play skills provide learners with a resource for future coping with stress and managing anxiety (Russ, 2008). Play provides the child with a natural avenue of approach to the therapist. Through play, a child is enabled to calmly and without embarrassment reveal his ideas, emotions, wishes, attitudes, and fantasies to the therapist (Lebo, 1955). Therapeutic play behaviour enables the child to immediately release socially unacceptable impulses and aggressive behaviour. Play enables a child to discharge his/her feelings without fear of being censured or punished hence play assist children to deal with stressful situations that they find it hard to articulate (Lebo, 1955, Excell & Linington, 2015).

Saracho & Spodek, (1998) maintain that play is the critical element of the early childhood curriculum. It features prominently and it makes learners learn. Samuelsson and Johansson (2006) proclaim that the curriculum for pre-school places emphasis on the importance of play in learners' development and learning. Tucker (2010) avers that one of the most powerful, self-motivating contexts for mathematics in the home, day care and Grade R settings is play.

Play is enjoyable and it makes learners learn with some enthusiasm (Samuelsson & Johansson (2009). Learners cannot learn like adults. They cannot concentrate in class when a teacher talks for a long time. Hence, play in the pre-school curriculum makes learners concentrate and learn

meaningfully. Play in an early childhood curriculum can be seen as a means to an end, not an end in itself (Almy, Monighan, Scales & Hoorn, 1987). Play is the means whereas learning is the end. Play is a tool that is used to make learners understand instruction, and learning is what teachers hope to achieve. Play learners' not necessarily have an end product (Miller, Cable & Devereux, 2005). It makes more sense to consider play as a process that in itself will subsume a range of behaviours, dispositions, motivations, opportunities, practices, skills and understandings (Moyles, 2010). Through play, learners can repeat, rehearse and refine skills, displaying what they do know and practicing what they are beginning to understand (Tucker, 2005; 2010).

Play makes a decisive contribution to physical development of learners (New & Cochran, 2008). According to de Witt (2009), through play, learners get rid of extra energy and develop their sensory motor skills by means of activities such as lifting, throwing balls, and carrying around objects. Learners jump, swing, run and crawl during play. All that helps in their physical development (Malone & Tranter, 2003). Learners' play enables them to use both their gross and fine motor skills (Fox, 2011). By taking part in practice play or symbolic play, learners can actually enhance the development of their body parts. That helps to make learners grow fit, strong, and ready to tackle school challenges. Body building exercises, which learners play, for example when they use their body parts to spell words, help in their physical development. Physical exercises help learners with blood circulation, the development of bone, muscle can be promoted, and the needs of physical movement can be met (New & Cochran, 2008). Gordon & Browne (1989) represented the value of play as aiming at enhancing self-concept in learners, assisting the child in gaining physical strength and refining eye-hand coordination.

Wood & Bennett (1998) found the following benefits of using play when teaching in early childhood: learners are more likely to remember what they have done in play, learning through play happens easily without fear or erecting barriers, play is developmentally appropriate, children know subconsciously what they need and meet those needs through play. Play enables learners to explore and experiment. Children cannot fail in play as there are no rights and wrongs. Play enables teachers to observe real learning. Learners experience less frustration in play as it reduces discipline problems (Wood & Bennett, 1998).

Learners know intuitively what they need and can automatically meet those needs through play. Because play is enjoyable, it enhances interest, engagement and motivation and provides relevant, meaningful experiences which lead to learning. Wood & Bennett (1998) claim that children often function at a higher level of competence in play than in activities, as a result, play can show the learners' level of understanding thus enabling teachers to observe real learning. In language development, play encourages learners to make up stories, use descriptive language, and communicate ideas and feelings (Wood & Bennett, 1998).

De Witt (2009) proclaims that play helps learners develop the skills necessary for critical thinking. Children learn to manipulate and explore with objects around them. The exploratory and creative activity that young learners do during play form the most important way of developing concepts and understanding about their world. Through play learners learn to solve problems and feel virtuous about their talents.

Isenberg & Queensberry (2002)) argues that success and competency in school is enhanced by play. Play is seen as the best way to implement the curriculum in a reception year classroom. They argue that play is not a break from the curriculum. CAPS confirm by stating that the curriculum in Grade R is play-based therefore play is essential foundation for developing learners' ability (DoE, 2011).

According to Vygotsky (1978), play is an adaptive, organised means by which learners learn to make sense of their physical and social environment. Many recent researchers agree that through play learners gain a feeling of control over the difficulties they confront. When learners play, they learn to focus on the kind of play that they do at that particular time and try their level best to solve problems that they encounter.

To sum up, it can be argued that play is an important part of learners' lives and their creation of meaning. It is a means of getting learners to learn. It is child friendly because naturally all learners want to play. Learners benefit a lot by simply taking part in play; they develop physically, socially and cognitively.

2.5 THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN TEACHING THROUGH PLAY

The constructivist teaching methods allow teachers to differentiate instruction based on learners' knowledge and developmental level. Since the constructivist approach relies on understanding prior knowledge, teachers must find out what learners already know and assist them in forming meaning and understanding by making material relevant and meaningful to them (Byrnes, 2001).

Grade R learning should be built on what learners already know from home or their childcare centres, for example the games they play. Teachers in a constructivist classroom must guide learners in completion of their tasks. Since constructivist theory builds on prior knowledge, using a constructivist teaching method in the classroom encourages transfer of information across contexts.

The teacher plays a fundamental role in the entire process of learners' learning through play. If learners are not involve learners in play, the whole idea of learning will be overpowered, learners should be given an opportunity to choose what to play and how to play. According to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, (DBE, 2011), Grade R learners should be given an uninterrupted time of about forty five minutes in their daily programme for child initiated play (Excell & Linington, 2015). For learners to learn and develop in the direction of the goals and intentions of the pre-school curriculum regarding play, specific competencies are required of teachers in pre-school (Sanberg *et al.,* 2012). They have to provide everything for learners and facilitate the games so that there will be order and learning. It is therefore pivotal for the Grade R teachers to guide young learners towards the future by providing developmentally appropriate activities that are suitable for each learner's level of development. "Grade R teachers should ask learners to help with setting out and tidying up of play areas and encourage boys and girls to play in all areas for example the block and fantasy area" (Excell & Linington, 2011, p 111).

The National Association for the Education of Young learners (NAEYC) suggested that teachers of young learners should know that learners are unique, they come from diverse backgrounds and they learn and develop at different strides. Therefore, learners should be taught using different learning styles and materials that are developmentally appropriate (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

The Norms and Standards for Educators display the seven roles of the teacher (DoE, 2000). The practitioner mediates learning in a way which is sensitive to the diverse need of all learners, including those that experience barriers to learning. She demonstrates sound knowledge of subject content and resources appropriate to the level of Grade R learners. Furthermore, Grade R teachers interpret and design learning programme and material and prepare textual and visual material for learning.

2.6 THE PLAY ENVIRONMENT

Play environment refers to both the social and physical environment that the child experiences during indoor and outdoor play to enhance learning. Grade R teachers play a crucial role in planning activities that develop learners. Wood & Attfield (2005, Almon, 2003) mention that most learning occurs when learners interact, play and cooperate with the environment, materials (toys) and with others (peers and adults). The proper planning of the environment is essential for successful teaching and learning in Grade R (Davin, 2013). The environment has an influence throughout learners' development (Bradley, Isaacs, Livingstone, Nasser,True & Dillane 2011). Furthermore, Bradley et al assumed that the environment should be prepared to promote the development of individual learners in the classroom. Observation of learners needs should be the priority in preparing learners environment. Materials, equipment and activities are prepared against the child's prior knowledge and experiences in order to enhance learning.

Learners in Grade R require a well-planned space for effective play. According to Meier & Marais (2012, p. 215), "creativity is best nurtured in an environment that has a great deal of structure and freedom." Therefore planning the environment to assist learners to achieve outcomes is imperative in providing quality play experience. An anti-bias classroom environment provides a more inclusive approach, therefore Grade R teachers should provide a play environment that is inviting and provides an opportunity for diverse learners to play.

A well-organised classroom environment promotes principles such as a positive self-concept, respect for similarities and differences, and communication skills (Soma, 2011). Davin (2013) states the Grade R classroom should be organised into areas. A Grade R teacher should be

creative when setting up outdoor play by considering the skills that need to be developed in the learners and provide a range of activities. Physical activities include balancing, sliding, climbing, sand and water play and swinging are important in the development of a Grade R learner.

Teachers facilitate play in Grade R by primarily ensuring that the environment is conducive for learners to play. Sanberg *et al.* (2012) argue that play is a key developmental task for all pre-school learners. Therefore, the pre-school environment must be made friendly for learners to play. Teachers create the environment for play and learning by making sure that there are no dangerous objects and harmful materials in Learners' play spaces This means spaces must be free from sharp objects such as nails, razor blades and knives (Wu & Rao, 2011; Wolk, 2011).

Sanberg *et al.* (2012) claim that in a didactic perspective the teacher is of great importance in learners' play and the development of the same as the teacher helps the child to 'set the scene' (environment), that is, to create material and physical frames for different games. Learners do need freedom outside but they do not need a free for all. Thus, there is an apparent need for the indoor or outdoor activities to be planned and environment to be set. Bilton (2004) postulates teachers should plan the play activity against what they want learners to learn or objectives to be achieved. Teacher should set up for outdoor activities. They can play with children but must be wary of taking over the play. There can be rich play when teachers and children play together (Bruce, 2011). Sanberg *et al.* (2012) assert that teachers should plan and set the environment.

The physical play environment also concerns the design of rooms and that there is an awareness of the use and placement of furniture. This helps learners with their safety because the place will be inviting. Govender (2011) avers that the most basic requirement to promote active learning is a safe, welcoming, stimulating and nurturing environment that focuses on learning for all learners. If the environment is not friendly, there will be no proper learning.

According to Montessori (1936) the environment should be organised to promote the development of individuals as active learners. The teacher prepares the environment following observation of the child's needs. Materials, equipment and activities are set against the child's prior experiences and knowledge in order to extend and develop learning,

In Grade R the teaching approach that is followed is informal. Using play in Grade R provides the opportunity for fun. It is therefore imperative for Grade R teachers to carefully plan their learning environment by following a daily programme for the Grade R class. The daily programme provides guidelines on how much time should be spent on different activities during the day. The periods in the daily programme are divided into three main group activities: structured activities which are guided by the teacher, and focus on the concepts, content and skills from the three learning programmes and the routine activities and free play activities which are indoors and outdoors.

Davin & Staden (2005) contend that there is no specific way of planning for the different areas in the reception year classroom. The number of areas is controlled by the size of the classroom and the number of learners in the group. Both indoor and outdoor space must offer opportunities for learners to explore a world of knowledge, skills and attitudes through learning content and learning activities (Meier & Marais, 2012). Various activities in the classroom should take place concurrently. This gives learners a chance to make choices on the activity they want to do. The same principle applies to the outdoor activities (Davin, 2013).

2.6.1 Indoor play environment

Indoor play environment consists of many different areas/ corners such as fantasy area, quite area, construction area and creative area. Each area support play. The arrangement of the indoor environment should allow opportunities for whole class work, group work and individual work (Excell & Linington, 2015). The whole class activity usually takes place on a carpet. Close to the carpet is a space for theme table that is used for displaying theme resources. "The classroom should have low shelves to store learners play equipment. Suitable play pictures and posters should be placed above the shelves" (Excell & Linington 2015, p.110). Learners requires a well-planned space that encourage learning through play, however Davin, (2013) articulates that if the classroom is too small to accommodate all play areas, teachers should change the areas weekly or bi-weekly so as to give learners a chance to learn from all different activities. Learners should be given an opportunity to help with setting out and tidying of play areas. Grade R teachers should help learners to have fun and to enjoy learning. Learning should accommodate all

learners and allow learners to play in block area, fantasy area, creative area, book area and in other areas in the classroom (Excell & Linington, 2015).

Block area develops physical, cognitive, moral/spiritual, social, language and creative development. It promotes learning in three subjects in the Foundation Phase. This area includes activities such as small building blocks, beads and thread and puzzles. Fantasy play area encourages learners to take part in make- believe or fantasy play. All children in Grade R should be encouraged to take part in fantasy play. Fantasy area can be used as an extension of the theme for example the theme about "My family" could use equipment like mirrors, clothes, washing bowl, pots etc. to enhance learning (Davin, 2013). Book area stimulates emergent literacy in Grade R. All Grade R classrooms should have appropriate books to display. "Indoor play environment depends on the available resources, the shape and size of the classroom" (Excell & Linington, 2015, p.111).

2.6.2 Outdoor play environment

All types of play can be done either indoor or outdoor. According to Bilton (2004) there are two reasons for having outdoor play: i.) Outside is a natural environment for children and there is a freedom associated with the space that cannot be replicated inside. Children can fully engage into play without any restriction of space as compared to playing games inside (Merwe, 1988), and ii.) Outdoors is a perfect place to learn through movement, one of the four vehicles through which children can learn, the others being play, talk and sensory experience. For learning through movement to truly work, there is need for enough space to move. In crowded spaces, play will be dangerous and learning will be limited (Bilton, 2004).

"The outdoor equipment refers to large permanent pieces of equipment outside the classroom" (Mnene, 2011, p.37). The outdoor play environment should be used as an expansion of indoor play activities and it should be carefully planned to encourage the learners' holistic development, especially physical development (Excell & Linington, 2015). The outdoor equipment should be in a safe and open space. "A well- designed adventure area can facilitate play outdoor equipment includes slides, swings, jungle gyms, tyres, concrete pipes, logs, hoops, ropes, beanbags, bottles, balls and so on" (Mnene, 2011, p 37).

2.7 CHALLENGES IN TEACHING THROUGH PLAY

Many challenges arising from the status of Grade R in South Africa during apartheid experiences continue to disrupt Grade R delivery. Quality programmes in ECD are reflected by a number of factors such as teacher pupil ratio, play environment, teacher training and teacher knowledge, resources, involvement of parents and more. Most teachers are not sufficiently trained. They have little knowledge of teaching through play. Early Childhood educators should have sound pedagogical content knowledge in order to support play.

Grade R teachers are frequently poorly qualified and some teachers have matric with no ECD qualification. A level 4 qualification is not recognised by the Department of Education for salary purposes; nor is it recognised by the South African Council for Education (SACE) as a teaching qualification. Thus Grade R teachers with a level 4 ECD qualification cannot register as teachers with SACE and are only paid a stipend known as a conditional grant by the provincial Department of Education (DoE, 2000).

Due to the fact that teachers in Grade R are often unqualified, therefore, they tend to receive lower salaries when compared to qualified teachers. Besides being paid less, their salaries are not guaranteed. They sometimes wait for more than two months before they are paid (DoE, 2009). According to the DoE, (2000), the qualification in ECE is not associated with the qualifications laid down for educators in other phases of education which starts from REQV13. Because of that, it becomes hard for teachers to register with the South African Council for Educators (SACE) as professional teachers. ECD phase is still overwhelmed by unresolved problems. These following problems affect the teaching and learning in Grade R:

2.7.1 Teaching and learning materials

Lack of suitable teaching and learning materials affect the quality of education in Grade R. This was confirmed by a study done by Govender, (2011) which shows that the absence of Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM) is a hindrance to learning. Data from teacher interviews and classroom observations revealed that teachers had the tendency to rely on the Department produced workbooks and worksheets. Research by the Western Cape Education Department

(2002, p. 1) cautions teachers about the importance of LTSM: learning support materials are an essential part of curriculum development and a means of promoting teaching and learning. This study revealed that teachers were clinical about their use of Department-produced workbooks and policy documents, and were heavily dependent on them - to the point where they became very rigid in their engagement in pedagogy. Teachers need to support their work by having more information and background knowledge on the subject matter to enhance their teaching and learning.

2.7.2 Parental involvement

According to Van Wyk & Lemmer (2009) parental involvement can be defined as a dynamic process whereby educators and parents work together for the ultimate benefit of the learner. Lack of parental involvement may cause problems in Grade R learning. Parental involvement is vital in the successful schooling and education of young learners and it needs commitment from both parents and teachers.

Brown and Medway, (2007) posit that the involvement of parents in their children's literacy development is associated with higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school.

Parental involvement has the greatest effect in children's early years. Its importance to learners' educational and literacy outcomes continues into the teenage and even adult years (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Research shows that learners who receive support from their parents early gain confidence and become independent at a later stage (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004). The education policy of South Africa maintains that parental involvement in schooling is necessary. According to the South African Schools Act 84 of 1986, parents should be part of the school governing body (SGB). Parents are thus obliged by the law to be part of their learners' education during formal school years.

Good relationships between parents and teachers are one of the key factors that make the child develop positive self-esteem. Furthermore, teachers also acknowledge that parental involvement is necessary for the academic achievement of children (Brown & Medway, 2007). Parents have a

role to play in providing teachers with sufficient knowledge on their involvement in school. The National Curriculum Statement, (2002) stipulates that parents have a pivotal role to play in the curriculum. Furthermore, NCS states the value of parental involvement which includes the improvement of learners' performance and reducing school drop-out rates.

Meier & Marais (2012) argue that though parental involvement is valuable to both the school and home, research shows several reasons which should be considered by the school to find out why parental involvement is still a problem. High level of unemployment in South Africa results in failure for parents to provide for their children's basic needs. Teachers should not be overcritical of parents who are not keen on being involved at their child's school, because of unforeseen circumstances. Though parents have problems in involving themselves fully at their children' school, teachers should try by all means to strengthen the relationship between home and school. In addition, Meier & Marais (2012) maintain that parents and teachers should work in collaboration.

2.7.3 Perspectives on Play

Modern Western society views play as offering a time and space for the separation of learners from the adult world of work and a medium through which young learners can make sense of their world. The findings of a case study of two kindergarten teachers in Hong Kong revealed immeasurable problems in understanding the concept 'learning through play' and a gap between the teachers' adopted theories and practice (Cheng, 2001).

New & Cochran (2008, p. 991) argue that in the current Chinese kindergarten curriculum play appears in three forms: as leisure, free activity and separated from the teaching and learning activities. In this way, play is treated as a means to meet the needs of learners' social and emotional development. When play is incorporated into the curriculum, it will make learners like school and they are likely to learn far more than when play is side-lined (Tucker, 2010).

New & Cochran (2008) affirm that in China, play is regarded as the activity in which learners may make fun freely. While playing, learners are usually joyful, excited and roused. They are absorbed in the imagined situation, with rapt attention, initiative and creativity brought into full

play. Play in early childhood is not there for fun alone, but for teachers to achieve their goals and specific objectives of imparting knowledge to learners (Reet, 2012, Hatch, 2007).

Similarly, Vaughan (1993) avers that Chinese pre-school teachers enhance their teaching by using play whereby they will be guiding learners to the objectives of the lesson. Teachers find opportunities to facilitate learners' learning by providing materials or scaffolding within learners' play (New & Cochran, 2008). Wu & Rao (2011) claim that Chinese teachers believed that their learners learn cognitive and pre-academic skills in play. They associated learning results in play with pre-academic learning such as concepts of shapes, weight, quantity, measures, and mathematics. According to Duncan et al., (2007), a sound mathematic background before entering formal schooling is critical to future development. Learners achieve good results when they are exposed to some form of play.

Taylor, Rogers, Dodd, Kaneda, Nagasaki, Watanabe & Goshiki (2004) with Japanese teachers' claims that play embodies the essence of living. One Japanese teacher said, "Play is the child's life itself, and learners learn how to live through play." Another Japanese kindergarten teacher provided additional insight when she said, "Through play learners learn how to interact with others, to become independent, to cooperate with others, and to be creative. Thus, they learn the sources of living and become *yutakana (*empathic, receptive, open hearted) human beings," (Taylor *et al.,* 2004, p. 315). Play in the Japanese context is viewed as a means of promoting learners' social interaction and at the same time maintain their learning abilities.

Furthermore play is seen as a mode of developing the power to live and empowering learners to be competent citizens. Play gives Grade R learners an opportunity to think for themselves, create their own ideas, and use their imaginations when playing with their friends.

Within New Zealand's education community, play in kindergarten is closely associated with ideas about freedom; freedom of expression and creativity are linked to play (Fleer, 2009). In New Zealand, pressures of the modern society on families, coupled with a market driven push for formal learning have resulted in early childhood education professionals playing a strong

advocacy role for the rights of learners to play as it provides the most appropriate platform from which learning can take place.

Play is viewed as both purposeful and exploratory with the ultimate intention of increasing learning. Play is in the curriculum and the teacher's role is mainly to support and facilitate play programmes so that learners can learn from every form of play (Fleer, 2009). Through learners' proper facilitation of play programmes, they would be able to take part in play which helps in their development. Learners' play is linked closely to development in Canada. According to Bevc (2004) learning through play teaches all aspects of child development (physical, cognitive, linguistic and socio-emotional).

In Cameroon, research shows that young learners are given the opportunities to play, "work", and learn together, free from parental supervision and adult control. As books and pencils are scarce, teachers borrow a leaf and use it to write; by so doing the teacher encourages the learners' use of objects in their environment (Kenyatta, 1965, Mweru, 2005), pupils learning to write would be encouraged to practice their writing skills on the ground using sticks while pupils learning about sinking and floating would be encouraged to bring objects such as feathers, leaves, stones and maize cobs and have practical lessons where they observe for themselves the objects that sink or float. There are many benefits that inclusion of songs, dance and games can have in the teaching-learning process. Games of memory for example are important as they prepare learners for school tasks and tests that require recall (Kenyatta, 1965; Mweru, 2005).

In the South African context, play is considered to be a valuable means of working with learners. It is a child's natural means of communication and a means for learners to assimilate learning about what happens in their country and around the world (Hough, 2001). Learners will understand what happens in their country by playing games. For example, a teacher may let learners play a game of naming provinces or countries with their common features. Such games enable learners to enjoy playing and at the same time develop a comprehensive understanding of the country and other countries.

Chikovore, Makusha, Muzvidziwa & Richter (2012) argue that different games that learners in early childhood in South Africa play have a meaning attached, for example, a pit and pebble game commonly played by little girls in South Africa. This game, which frequently involves a friendly rivalry between players, is often played during times of the day at school or home. It promotes interaction and learners also gain mathematically related concepts, such as counting and sequencing (Chikovore *et al.,* 2012). Learners' understanding of language is enhanced by play (Lidelli & Masilela, 1992).

From the review of related literature, it would be realise that play as a teaching strategy is relevant and important for both the holistic and cognitive development of children irrespective of their social and economic background. Both national and international literatures were sort of to this regard. The next section within this chapter deals with the theoretical framework for the study. The inclusion of the theoretical framework in this chapter is a deliberate attempt to relate the relevance of the theoretical framework with the review of related literature.

2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical assumptions that underpin this study are the influential ideas of Lev Vygotsky social constructivist theory. Vygotsky believed that the social setting and the culture in which the child develops is fundamental in learning and development.

 According to Creswell (2013), social constructivists hold the assumption that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Denzin & Lincoln (2005, p. 197) state "social constructivism means that human beings do not discover knowledge so much as we construct it." Knowledge is not constructed in isolation but against a background of understandings, practices, language and so forth. It implies that students take what they can from their experiences and use their partial understanding as a base on which to build more complete and accurate understanding over time and after multiple encounters with the same material (Byrnes, 2001). Vygotsky emphasised the important of language in learning and development. Language is used as a tool for communication and solving problems (Vygotsky, 1986).

Constructivist theory considers individual learning as well as developmental differences to create a well-rounded approach to learning and teaching. In his theory, Vygotsky argues that children are active participants who can build their own knowledge and understanding (Excell & Linington, 2015, p 28). Children learn through interactions that they have in class among themselves and also with the teacher (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky's theory maintains a view that learners get support from an expert adult in order to do a task which may be difficult for them. When a child gets assistance to learn a concept that he/she would not have learnt without an adult's assistance, that is what Vygotsky called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Learners in Grade R are supported by a teacher when they encounter problems during play. They sometimes struggle with completing a task because of certain learning barriers.

2.8.1 The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and learning through play

Vygotsky (1978) asserts that learning occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is described as those functions that have not yet matured in a child but are in the process of maturation. It represents the difference between what the child actually knows and what the child can learn with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other.

In his perspective on learning, Vygotsky argues that play forms the fundamental activity for development and learning and it provides opportunities for joint activity, social interaction, the use of language and problem solving skills (Brock, *et al.,* 2009). Furthermore, Vygotsky states that the child needs someone who will plan and guide learning. The ZPD is core in the theory of Vygotsky because that is where learning takes place. The researcher therefore recognises the work of Vygotsky as being suitable for this study since play in the school is an approach for teaching and learning in Grade R.

Learners interact extensively and use their thinking skills to solve problems. Roussou (2004) argues that Vygotsky's social constructivism is adopted as the basic driving force in the development of highly interactive and participatory environments, where the user is able to

modify, build, appropriate elements, test ideas, and actively engage in problem-solving and critical thinking.

Maximum learning occurs when learners interact, play and cooperate with the environment, materials (toys) and with others (peers and adults) (Wood & Attfield, 2005). Learners will be learning as they engage in social interactions during play time. Roussou (2004) asserts that play can unite imagination and intellect in more than one way, and help learners interact fully and to discover things at their own pace and in their own way. Undoubtedly, play is a child's favourite activity and it occurs in an environment where there will be a teacher to assist the child.

Vygotsky's theoretical framework, incorporating the notion of ZDP, challenges the effectiveness of a free-play curriculum, and suggests that adults need to take an active role in encouraging learning through play (Vygotsky, 1978). However, this does not imply formal academic teaching but to understand learning as a form of partnership between learners and adults, between peers and in the context of real-life everyday situations.

Trawich-Smith & Dziurgot (2011) proclaim that a situation in which adults can most effectively enhance play is when learners are in Vygotsky's ZPD - a time when learners can play independently, with just a little indirect guidance from an adult. A teacher can help a child in ZPD by asking a question, giving a hint, or a subtle prompt. That will make the child figure out the concept because of clues which come from the teacher. Trawick-Smith (2010) asserts that most learning and development occur in the ZPD. In the Grade R classroom, teachers can offer slight guidance such as asking learners interesting questions, giving hints, or encouragements that assist learners in solving play problems independently.

Play represents a specialised form of the ZPD (John-Steiner, Connery & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010). Holzman (2010) argues that without creating ZPDs, there is no creativity. Learners play during learning time. When they are faced with a challenge, an adult gives a hint and that will enable learners to be creative and original because they do not completely rely on the teacher to learn. Thus, the ZPD is important in Vygotsky's rejection of the popular belief that learning only takes place by using traditional teaching methods which do not feature play at all (Holzman,

2010). To Vygotsky, play and development complement each other with young learners (Miller, 2011).

Vygotsky (1978) argues that play has a fundamental role in learners' development therefore the teacher has a crucial role to play in developing learners' abilities. Wood & Bennett, (1998) contend that Vygotsky's thoughts on development are that a complex dynamic relationship exists between development and learning where learning guides and stimulates development, and that development is dependent on the social learning environment. In his socio-cultural theory of learning, play, like all other psychological functions, is social in origin, is mediated by language and is learned with other people (peers and adults) in social contexts (Wood & Bennett, 1998). Vygotsky believed that all forms of play have imaginary elements and are inherently rule bound. The developmental course of play is characterised by the changing relationships between imaginary situations and rules which are sometimes implicit and sometimes explicitly negotiated before or during the development of a play sequence (Wood & Bennett, 1998). Despite the criticisms against the constructivist approach, one would argue that the philosophy social constructivism underpinning this approach, when applied correctly, would enrich teachers' engagement in play as a teaching strategy in Grade R.

In summary, Vygotsky's theory explicitly emphasizes children's learning through play. Play has been demonstrated to be central to the theory since it could be used to change from one stage of the child's development to the other. It enables learners to interact socially and learn most specifically cognition at the same time. Play in Vygotsky's theory merely provides an arena for children's intellectual needs to become more mature (Lambert, 2000). It enables learners to be creative and to enjoy their learning activities (John-Steiner, Connery & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010).

2.9 CONCLUSION

The chapter was divided into two main sections. The first section centred on the review of relevant literature most specifically surrounding play as a teaching strategy. The views of teachers were of concern to the review although other aspects related to such concern were also considered in the review. This was partly due to their likely influence on the teachers' experiences therefore it was necessary for the review of literature to be slightly broader to

accommodate for the wideness of the teachers' experiences regarding the use of play in their classrooms. The second section of the chapter was on the theoretical framework, where an attempt was made to relate play as a teaching strategy in Grade R and the aspects of the ZPD developed by Vygotsky. Through the use of this theory the change identified in the problem regarding the difficulties of teaching not being able to integrate play into their teaching could be result. For this reason the theory was appropriate for the study and also for its flexibility for the teachers' implementation in their classrooms. The next section of the study deals with the research design and methodology that was used to explore the research objectives mentioned earlier in chapter one.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the literature review and described the framework for the study. The social constructivist theoretical framework creates a frame through which to understand play as a critical element through which young learners develop and learn. This chapter stipulates how the study was designed and conducted. In an attempt to achieve research objectives namely to explore teachers' experiences of using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R and to investigate how play develops Grade R learners holistically, it was necessary for the researcher to closely observe how teachers use play in their practices.

The chapter begins with a detailed account of the research approach, paradigm and design employed in this study. Furthermore, the sampling procedure employed, the data generation process and method of data analysis are discussed. Data was generated through observations, interviews with Grade R teachers, document review, field notes, photographs and samples of learners' work. This chapter also discusses the measures of trustworthiness and ethics and of the study.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

Naicker (2013) argues that the nature of study usually determines the choice of the research methodology. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach. According McMillan & Schumacher (2010), qualitative research refers to defining the natural flow of processes and events and how participants would interpret them by using data generation strategies that are non-interfering. Furthermore, McMillan & Schumacher (2010, p. 321**)** state that other characteristics of qualitative research include:

- Behaviour is studied as it happens naturally without any control, manipulation, and externally enforced constraints.
- Takes into account the immediate and larger context.

- The researcher generally is an observer in the setting under study as an interviewer, observer or document and artefact collector and obtains data directly from the source.
- The focus is on participants perspectives on the meaning of events and actions and "involves multiple realties as different people construct meaning from the same event.

Qualitative research focuses on gaining meaning (Toma, 2005).This study aims to gain meaning of what is happening in these Grade R classrooms, and why this is happening by using data generation strategies. This study looked at the participants' experiences and perspectives. A qualitative approach is thus suitable for this study.

To overcome the challenges of inventing data and misinterpreting the participants, the researcher has captured participants' responses to the interviews questions in their own words. Furthermore, in-depth and detailed data were generated through notes from indoor and outdoor classroom observations and documentary reviews were recorded fully and explicitly   from two Grade R teachers (Govender, 2011).   Leedy & Ormond (2005) pronounce that an interpretive approach allows the researcher to understand a particular phenomenon, be able to develop new concepts or theoretical standpoints about the phenomenon, and discover the challenges that occur within the phenomenon.

Murray & Berglar (2011) alluded that qualitative approaches to research involve measures that do not use numerical data. Data always takes the form of words rather than numbers. It is therefore the researcher's desire to use this approach in order to have a better understanding of Grade R teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy. Furthermore, this paradigm allowed the researcher flexibility to probe, make sense of, understand and interpret teachers' experiences, knowledge and understanding about play and how play develops the Grade R learner holistically.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm is defined as a "framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place" (Joubish, Khurram, Ahmed, Fatima & Haider, 2011, p. 2083). This qualitative study is located in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretive paradigm attempts to understand the

subjective world of human experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). It focuses on the meaning people bring to situations and behaviour, (Punch, 2009, p18). Interpretivist aims to understand a social phenomenon and give meaning to the world in which the participant lives in (Grix, 2010). Since this study aims to understand the social phenomenon of the Grade R teaching through play, interpretivist is an appropriate paradigm to base this study in. Interpretive studies seek to explore people's experiences and their views or perspectives of these experiences. The aim of this approach is to "understand how individuals and small groups in everyday settings construct meaning and explain their events, actions and experiences of their world," (Creswell, 2009, p. 21). As Neuman (1997, p.68) wrote:

In general the interpretive approach is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understanding and interpretation of how people create and maintain their social worlds.

The researcher's use this approach in order to observe learners playing and learning in various settings and to interpret findings. Furthermore, this paradigm allowed the researcher flexibility to probe, make sense of, understand and interpret teachers' experiences, knowledge and understanding about play and how play develops the Grade R learner holistically.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Murray & Beglar, (2009), a research design enables the researcher to understand the framework within which the study is grounded. This research was conducted using a case study design. A case study is "the study of a social phenomenon" (Swanborn, 2010, p. 13). Gay et al. (2009, p. 427) alluded that case study is a suitable design "when the researcher wants to answer a descriptive question (e.g., what happened?) or an exploratory question (e.g., how or why did something happen?)". Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011, p. 289) define case study as a "specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle," whereas Punch (2009, p. 119) states that "a case study in qualitative research aims to understand the case in-depth and its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its context".

Although there is no single blue print for planning research, a research design is defined as "a plan or blue print of how one intends to conduct the research." It specifies the way in which data will be created, collected, constructed, coded, analysed and interpreted (Mouton, 2001, p. 55; Perri & Bellamy , 2012, p. 20). Furthermore, Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011, p. 115) note that research design is governed by the notion of "fitness for purpose." They further state that the purposes of the research determine the methodology and design of the research.

McMillan & Schumacher (2006, p. 315) allude that "qualitative research design describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions". Furthermore, Macmillan & Schumacher (2006) posit that qualitative study gives the researcher a chance to collect data in a face to face situation by interacting with the selected person in their setting. The two Grade R teachers were interviewed using semi structured interviews to gain an understanding of their views on using play as a teaching strategy in their classrooms.

In this study, I generated data by using observations, interviews, and documentary review. I chose these methods because the participants' knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions are meaningful properties of the social realities' that my research questions were meant to explore, (Mason 2002 p. 63). These methods allowed a meaningful way to generate data through communicating interactively with participants. According to Murray & Berglar (2011), qualitative approaches to research involve measures that do not use numerical data, the experiences and theories that can be produced through the research process.

Merriam (1998) further support by saying that in an interpretive research, the individual brings approach, data always takes the form of words rather than numbers. "Case studies can generate an understanding of and insight into a particular instance by providing a thick, rich description of the case and illuminating its relations to its broader contexts and it might shed light on other similar cases, thus providing a level of generalisation or transferability" (Rule & John, 2011, p.7).

Yin (2009) argues that case studies include direct observation and interviews with participants and enable the researcher to be directly involved in the research process, thus the qualitative

research approach allowed the researcher to get a first-hand understanding of Grade R teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy. The case study has its own limitations which is that it cannot analyse large numbers of cases (Perry & Bellamy, 2012, p.165), but the researcher opted to use it because the purpose of the case study is to assist the researcher in obtaining an in-depth understanding on how teachers use play as a teaching strategy in Grade R. For this reason, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to go where people live and observe them in order to collect rich information that would enable her to answer the research questions. Grade R teachers were observed during indoor and outdoor teaching to see how they facilitate play in their classrooms.

In a case study design, the data analysis focuses on an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (quality versus quantity) regardless of the number of sites or participants for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher collected data on socially constructed meaning that Grade R teachers had on the use of play as a teaching strategy. The two Grade R teachers were interviewed and observed during different rings. In addition, the researcher observed relevant documents that they use in their classrooms i.e. planning and assessment file, assessment tasks with various methods of assessment and samples of learners' work.

The researcher felt it was necessary to use qualitative research as a research approach because she wanted to make sense of Grade R teachers' perceptions, feelings, experiences and situations as they take place in their natural setting (Grade R classrooms) Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter (2006). Newby (2010, p. 115) states that "qualitative research is concerned with different understandings people bring to their experiences and how they respond to them." Lastly, a qualitative research study's strength lies in a limited sample size as it enables in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in context-specific setting and produces rich data (Patton, 2002).

3.5 SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS

According to Ragin & Amaroso (2011), sampling is the decision that is being made by the researcher on the choice of participants to be involved in the study. A sampling procedure refers

to the choice of where to conduct a study and who will form the sample of participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Qualitative research usually involves smaller sizes than quantitative research studies Niewenhuis (2007). Furthermore, Niewenhuis argues that sampling in qualitative research is flexible and often continues until no new themes emerge from the data generation process. In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling to obtain the richest source of information to answer the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Purposive sampling was employed to select the school. According to Martella, Nelson, Morgan & Marchand-Martella, (2013), purposive sampling is made up of cases that are information rich and which the researcher can get important data from. Madi Primary was selected for the study specifically because it assured the time and cost constraints would be at a minimal level since the population was accessible to the researcher.

3.5.1 The Study Site

Being a case study, it is necessary for the research site to be explained in a vivid manner so as to give the reader an understanding of the context. This study was conducted in one primary school in Kwa-Mashu Circuit which is in the Pinetown District under eThekwini Region in the KwaZulu-Natal Province (KZN). The school was given a pseudonym of Madi Primary School. Madi Primary School was built in 1964 as a public primary school. It is a school for African learners and the medium of instruction is Isizulu home language. All decisions on school governance are made through the School Governing Body (SGB) and the School Management Team (SMT).

The physical structure of the school is well maintained and encourages learning. The school is surrounded by KwaMancinza, Richmond farm and Isolezwe informal settlements and shacks that boarder Kwa-Mashu. It caters for learners from Grade R to Grade four. The total enrolment at the school is 618 learners. The school has ten classrooms with thirteen teachers.

There are four cubicle toilets for boys, six cubicle toilets for girls, one toilet for male teachers and another one for female teachers. There is no administration block and no jungle gym for

Grade R learners to play on. Teachers use the back of the classroom and school ground during free outdoor play activities. Madi Primary serves a poverty-stricken community with high unemployment rate. Most learners come from poor backgrounds because the majority of their parents are unemployed and other learners are living with grandmothers.

Map of North Durban

Figure 3.1: Map of North Durban showing the location of the research site

3.5.2 The Participants

The two Grade R teachers from Madi Primary School participated in the study. The participants were chosen because they were the only ones teaching Grade R and it was a relief that they were willing to participate

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011, p. 144) argue that "there is no clear-cut answer, for the correct sample size depends on the purpose of the study, the nature of the population under scrutiny, the level of accuracy required". In support of this, Dattalo, (2008) alluded that the cost of using a high number of participants is restrictive in terms of time and privacy. The sample consisted of two Grade R teachers from one school giving a total of two participants in the study. Wiersma & Jurs (2009) argue that in qualitative research, purposeful sample sizes are small because they are information-rich cases which will be studied in depth.

The profile of the two interviewees is presented in the table below:

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Highest qualification	Length of service in Grade R
Miss C	F	30-40	NPDE	5
Miss D	F	40-50	Matric	9

Figure 3.2 Profiles of Interviewees

3.6 DATA GENERATION PROCESS

In a case study, usually more than one data generation technique is used (Heck, 2005). In this study, data were generated using semi-structured interviews, observations and document review, McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Qualitative research and methods of data generation should be flexible and sensitive to the social context and should be placed in the natural setting Excell (2011). For this reason the researcher felt that it was necessary to go to the participants' place of work and generate the necessary data. Marshall & Rossman (2006) and John & Rule (2011) mutually affirm that qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering data: a) participation in the setting, b) observing directly, c) interviewing in depth, and d) analysing documents and material culture.

This study thus involved three methods of data gathering. These methods allowed the researcher to generate data through communicating directly with the participants. Mouton (2002) pronounces that "during data generation, the researcher collects various kinds of empirical information. In this study, data was generated through document review, semi-structured interviews with two Grade R teachers and through observation during lessons. The table below is presented to show how data was collected

Questions for developing a data generation plan	A data generation plan
Why data was collected?	To explore how Grade R teachers use play as a teaching strategy in Grade R, observe how Grade R teachers plan and teach play activities in various settings.
What was the research strategy?	The research strategies used were interviews, observations and document review.
Who (or what) was the source of data?	Two Grade R teachers.
How much of the data was collected?	Two Grade R teachers were interviewed and observed during teaching and learning at Madi Primary School at Kwa-Mashu.
How often was data collected?	Grade R teachers were observed twice while teaching indoor and another two lesson observation was done during outdoor free play activity
How was data collected?	Data was collected through audio taped interviews, observation and document review.
Justify this plan for data generation. (Why was this the best way of collecting data for these critical questions?)	Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to have one on one discussion with the participants and to gain understanding of teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy and it also allowed flexibility in answering questions. Observation was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to observe the physical teaching and learning environment, and gathered information about classroom practices and the teachers' interactions with Grade R learners during play.

Table: 3.3 Data generation plan as adapted from Vithal & Jansen (2002, p. 22).

3.6.1 Interview: Semi-structured Interview

Interviews are a widely used tool to access people's experiences and their inner perceptions, feelings of reality and attitudes (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Furthermore, Punch (2009, p. 144) pronounces that "the interview is the most famous data generation tool in qualitative research."

He further asserts that an interview is a convenient way of gaining understanding of people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations, and constructions of reality. According to Kumar (2011), Interviewing is a frequently used method of collecting data from people. He further articulated that interviewing can be done in the form of structured and unstructured interviews. Interviews have long been used in qualitative research and require thorough preparation, interpersonal skills and communicative competency, Rule & John (2011)

Structured interviews allow the researcher to ask a predetermined set of questions using the same wording and order of questions as specified in the interview schedule (Kumar, 2011, p. 145). Unstructured interviews have no pre-planned lists of questions Lankshear & Knobel (2004, p. 201) argue that "semi-structured interviews consist of pre-prepared questions that serve as a guide only." According to Heck, (2005) in a semi-structured interview, a set of questions are used but not followed accurately. The set of questions serve as a guide and allow the researcher to probe. This guide is referred to as an interview guide For the purpose of this study the researcher chose to use semi-structured interviews to generate appropriate data from two Grade R teachers. An interview schedule was drawn up so as to avoid the omission of important information during the interview. It also allowed flexibility in answering questions and it allowed the researcher to probe for details on how teachers plan and teach using play as a teaching method. A semi-structured interview was used in this study because this allows the researcher flexibility when questioning, during the interview (Miles & Gilbert, 2005, Henning, van Ransburg & Smit, 2004).). The benefit of using semi structured interviews, according to Walliman (2006), is that it generates data of depth and richness and it allow the researcher to probe in order to ensure that   participants understand the question.

It is for this reason that the researcher chose interviews because the research questions sought to understand teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R. According to Nieuwenhuis (2007), a structured interview comprises of questions that the research prepares prior to the interview. The aim of the research study was explained to the principal of Madi Primary and the two Grade R teachers. The researcher therefore designed the interview schedule which served as a guideline for collecting data. The schedule had two sets of questions: the first set of questions focused on the teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy as well

as the challenges they confront when using play. The second set of questions focused on the holistic development of the learner. The interview schedule also contained questions that require their understanding about play.

The interviews were recorded using a tape recorder, which was useful in keeping accurate records of the content of the interview. The use of a tape recorder has the advantage of preserving an entire interview for later analysis (Yin, 2003). Secondly, it allowed the researcher to focus on the interview process rather than being distracted by taking down notes as the main data capturing technique, and the researcher then transcribed what was said in the interview.

3.6.2 Observation of participants

"Observation is a widely used means of data generation, and it takes many forms," (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 456). They further state that observation is a highly adaptable form of data generation because it enables the researcher to collect data on physical setting, interactional setting and programme setting. It is one of the qualitative research methods which can be used for documenting classroom interactions.

Observation is regarded as the primary method of studies in anthropology (Rule & John, 2011). It is for this reason that the researcher chose to use observation because it gave her the opportunity to watch Grade R teachers in order to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations which is teaching. Observation was undertaken to ascertain the nature of practice in different classrooms. In addition Robson (2002) supports this by stating that what people do may differ from what they say; therefore observation provided a reality check of what is taking place in the classroom during play.

The researcher went to the identified school with two Grade R classes and observed what was taking place in the Grade R classrooms. She managed to observe the physical teaching and learning environment which included indoor and outdoor setting as well as the teachers' interaction with the learners. The researcher obtained first hand data rather than reported data. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) highlighted that observations allow the researcher to watch participants' behaviours and interactions directly; it allows the researcher to take notes of the

specific evidence of what happened in its natural context. Furthermore, "observation offers the investigator the opportunity to gather 'live data from naturally occurring social situations" (Cohen et al, 2011, p.456).

Observation enabled the researcher to see things that may not have been discussed in the interviews. The researcher was able to observe the physical teaching and learning environment, and gathered information about classroom practices and the teachers' interactions with Grade R learners. The researcher observed the classroom setting (indoor and outdoor area settings) in order to see how the indoor classroom setting and outdoor setting meet the needs of Grade R learners. Furthermore, information on both verbal and non-verbal interactions between teachers and learners in the classroom and outside the classroom was observed. The researcher looked at the educational environment (teaching and learning style, learning material, planning documents, assessment used and the use of resources). The researcher wrote a description of exactly what she saw in the classroom and during outdoor activities.

Photographs were taken as they provided clarity on the spatial and temporal organisation of the teaching and learning environment such as the classroom layout (Mason, 2002). Photographs of samples of Learners' work, charts and other Learner Teacher Support Materials (LTSM) were also taken. Photographs offered a reference point for the interpretation of the data and they assisted the researcher in recalling events that were not observed. The time slots for observations were thirty-five minutes per teacher. Observations during teaching allowed the researcher to receive the natural reality of Grade R and the manner in which teachers conducted play activities.

3.8.3 Document review

Document review is the examination of document in order to gather facts. Mason (2002) asserts that if documentary evidence is used the researcher must give consideration to ontological and epistemological positions. The researcher used photographs because words and text cannot produce all of the elements of visual images. Photographs produce at the same moment both a document and a visual image (see, for example, photographs taken during observation of indoor and outdoor environment of both Grade R classrooms) hence photographs provide an alternative source of data and can be effective in explaining a particular point. The articles, letters,

memoranda, agendas, policy documents, planning files, Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM) and assessment document were scrutinized. The researcher examined these documents in order to understand the tools used to support practice and to supplement information obtained Ayesha (2011, p. 75). This kind of record is often called a *'chain-of-evidence'* (Anderson, 2002, p. 156).

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011, p. 537), "there is no one single or correct way to analyse and present data, how one does it should abide by the issue of *fitness for a purpose"*. Excell (2011) argues that analysis of data involves understanding complexities, details and context. The main aim of analysing data is to interpret and make sense of what was in the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2006). "Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories," (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 367). Qualitative data analysis involves organizing, accounting for and explaining the data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011, p. 537),

The raw data that the researcher collected included audio taped interviews, photographs of the Grade R classroom settings, notes made during classroom observation, drawings done by learners, photos of resources used during teaching and learning, and outdoor area setting. This involved reading the transcript with a view to identify codes of meaning. These codes were identified by the research questions, the observation schedule, the questions used for data generation, the findings and the literature review.

The researcher used different coloured pens for coding similar material. Punch (2009 p. 175) states that "coding is the starting activity in qualitative analysis, and for foundation for what comes later". Furthermore, Punch (2009) argues that coding is the process of putting tags, names or labels against pieces of the data. Content analysis focused on identifying themes that might emerge from the data.

After analysing the data, the researcher look over for common themes in what was observed during indoor and outdoor learning and from what the participants articulated during the

interviews. The themes were used to inform the findings for the study. The researcher followed by dividing the data into sections. McMillan & Shumacher, (2006, p 368) assert that the researcher should form an organising system by: getting a sense of the whole, generate codes from the data, compare codes for duplication and lastly to continue to refine the coding system.

The researcher read the data so as to understand what the two participants said. The researcher wrote a list of emerging themes from the collected data. These themes were influenced by the research questions such as "what are the experiences of foundation phase teachers in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R?" The researcher followed six phases of thematic analysis as stipulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). They articulated that these phases should not be viewed as a linear model but should be understood as a recursive process. The following are the phases of thematic analysis:

- Familiarisation with the data
- Coding
- Searching for themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- And lastly writing up

The researcher read the data repeatedly and listened to the audio recording. She then followed the second stage as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006) which is coding. In this study, patterns were detected and codes were formed. The researcher moved to the third stage which involved searching for themes in which codes are collated and data for each relevant theme is put together (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were then reviewed in the fourth stage by checking if the themes worked relative to the coded extract (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the fifth stage themes were named and defined by identifying the main idea of what the theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and lastly stage six, which is the writing up, can also be found in chapter four. The data collected was organised and characterised in this report according to five key themes which emerged in the data analysis process. (See chapter 4)

3.8 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY IN QUALITATIVE STUDY

Bell (1999) states that reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. In addition, Bell argues that validity shows whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe.

Creswell (2012) argues that validity concern in qualitative research is the credibility of the results. Validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study Patton (2002). To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is important. Validity and reliability of the study will be ensured by trustworthiness through evidence of questionnaires and visual evidence. Ethical conduct is one of the ways the researcher will enhance credibility. The credibility of the findings will be verified through data triangulation. Rule & John (2011) recommend that the use of different participants to check one's interpretations of data and conclusion can be helpful in ensuring trustworthiness, this is called member checking as it informs how they think and plan.

Major & Savin-Baden (2010) mentioned that to ensure trustworthiness, one must consider the aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Guba & Lincoln (1994) state trustworthiness in research is determined by four indicators which is credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. These indicators reflect validity and reliability in a study. Mertens & McLaughlin (2004) asset that trustworthiness can be ensured by using a member checking technique which is used to ascertain whether participants agree with the recorded version of the interviews or not. In order to ensure reliability and validity of the data collected, qualitative observations were conducted in conjunction with semi-structured interviews and document review in order to compare data yielded from the two Grade R teachers. The researcher opted to use different methods of data generation in order to determine if there are any discrepancies in the findings (Maree, 2007).

3.9 ETHICAL ASPECTS

According to Strike (2006), the researcher should ensure that the research is conducted within an ethic of respect' to those who participate. Ethics refers to beliefs about what is proper or

improper, or right or wrong (Narain, 2005). For that reason, the researcher followed the university's ethics policies. The researcher applied for ethical clearances from the university's research office. Ethical clearance approval was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendix A), thereafter the researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the learners' (see Appendix B). The researcher then contacted the schools where she did the research and asked for permission from the school principal and the two Grade R teachers. The participants in the study (two Grade R teachers) were informed before the face-to-face interview that their names and that of the school would never be disclosed anywhere in the report.

Parents of Grade R learners were also given letters requesting permission for the researcher to be in the classroom and observe teachers during teaching and learning. The researcher clearly explained to the participants that if they felt they could not go on with the interview, they could pull out at any time. Throughout the research, the researcher recognised that it was important to respect the rights of participants concerned. The participants' informed, written consent was obtained prior to the data generation process (see Appendix D). The researcher used a tape recorder to ensure accuracy of the record and a camera to take important photos. The photographs provided a reference point for the interpretation of the data and were useful to trigger recall when the data were analysed. (Excell, 2011, p 155). However, before she used it, she asked for permission to do so and explained its importance. The researcher assured the participants that all the data that would be collected during the study would be kept under lock and key in the university storeroom and after five years, the data would be destroyed.

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

All proposed research projects have limitations; none are perfectly designed (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The main limitation of this study is the fact that it was conducted only in a part of KwaZulu-Natal. The sample size of two Grade R classrooms in one urban school in eThekwini region may indicate restricted generalizability.

The researcher used triangulation which is a process of using multiple sources and methods to support findings. The use of interviews, observations, document review, field notes and photographs assisted the researcher in getting rich data to answer the research questions. In

addition, the bias of the researcher might restrict the findings because the researcher mentioned in her rationale that she has been a Grade R curriculum facilitator and Grade R HOD, therefore the researcher has knowledge of the case. The reason the researcher chose this area was based on accessibility to the case. Secondly, the researcher understood that the small sample which consisted of two Grade R teachers from one school was not fully representative of Grade R teachers in other schools.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the research approach, paradigm and design used. A case study method was used to explore the experiences of the selected teacher involved with the teaching strategy surrounding play. The researcher described the sampling procedure employed which was purposive, the data generation process and method of data analysis. Measures to ensure trustworthiness, ethics and limitations of the study were then discussed. Chapter four will discuss the data analysis and findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the research design and methodology used in this study. It elucidated how data was produced using semi-structured interviews, observations and document review. The data that were produced during the interviews were coded using first open coding and later axial coding. Axial coding refers to themes which are influenced by the research questions guiding the study. The researcher presents the results of the study with regard to the research question. which sought to reveal the experiences of foundation phase teachers in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R and how play develop learners holistically. Literature is also infused in the discussion findings.

In this chapter, the researcher presents and discusses data generated through the interviews of two Grade R teachers in one primary school and discusses findings based on the data gathered during observation of Grade R teachers in their natural settings and document review. Document review, involves an examination of the contents of the document. As is the case with literature reviews, a document review would enable the researcher to see how participants plan and teach their work in context. Document reviews are valuable to note what is expected of teachers in terms of their engagement in the phenomenon. Data obtained from the lesson observations and teacher interviews were compared to data from document reviews to determine the extent of teacher engagement in play as a teaching strategy. Documents that were reviewed included the CAPS document for mathematics, IsiZulu Home language English First additional language and Life skills Teachers Guide for the Development of Learning Programmes, Foundations for Learning Assessment Framework, Foundations for Learning Lesson Plans, *Government Gazette* 30880, Department of Education language policy (DOE,1997), Department of Basic Education Learner Literacy Workbooks and samples of learners' work.

The chapter begins by the discussion of the themes and lastly a conclusion of the chapter is presented. In the findings discussion, the researcher presents verbatim quotations of the words of the teachers.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data from the Grade R teachers' interviews, observations and document review are discussed together in order to avoid repetition and overlapping of data. The researcher had taken sufficient notes during the interviews as well as the observations and document review, which created the context within which to examine Grade R teachers' engagement in using play as a teaching strategy. Related topics that emerged from the interview sessions, classroom observations and document review were grouped together to form the main broad themes. The themes are shown in Figure 4.1 below.

THEMES	CATEGORIES
Theme One: Integrating play in Grade R learning	• Teaching language through play • Teaching mathematics through play • Teaching Life Skills through play • Inclusive play
Theme two: Importance of play in learning and development.	• Play and physical development • Play and cognitive development • Play and social development • Play and emotional development • play facilitates independent learning
Theme Three: Theme teaching	• Theme must link up with the objectives and outcomes of teaching and learning
Theme Four: The effect of play environment	• The indoor play environment • The outdoor play environment
Theme Five: Factors instigating difficulties in teaching through play	• Lack of play material • Parental involvement • Support from the Department of Basic Education

4.2.1 INTEGRATING PLAY IN GRADE R CURRICULUM

The experiences of the two participants in relation to teaching through play were grouped under the theme "teaching language through play" that emerged from the data.

4.2.1.1 Teaching language through play

Both participants in this study indicated that they relied on the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement document to develop their content for play. Their planning, according to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement emphases the value of play in their teaching and learning.

Miss D said:

> *Grade R learners play every time they learn, play is everything they do. Most of the activities that they do in various rings involve play and is taken from CAPS document. They sing songs, during literacy lesson, role play characters of the story and they love to do rhymes. They discover meaning of things while learning in groups and as individuals during individual choice time. They communicate using their language as they play. They also draw and colour in activities during learning through play.*

To elaborate on what Miss D said, Miss C added by saying:

> *When we begin to teach literacy, we use songs and rhymes, games and role play. They gain a lot of vocabulary as they play. We use the themes of songs that are suitable to their interests and environment because young learners enjoy fun. Learners teach each other songs "Masidonse kanye kanye, kanye kanye....." which encourages team work. As they sing, they demonstrate by moving. I always start with the basic source, for example the policy documents. It gives direction. I also use my experience.*

Notes from classroom observations indicate that learners in Grade R are too young to concentrate for a long time, thus the use of play enables them to be involved in curriculum activities. Grade R teachers achieve this by involving their learners in an informal, social setting where learners are able to work cooperatively with other group members.

Play is described by Vygotsky as a leading activity that give learners opportunity to use language and to learn through role play (Vygotsky, 1978). Songs, rhymes, and verses are essential for

reading and writing because they help pre-school learners to gain vocabulary and develop listening skills (Davin & Staden, 2005).

Drawing from the findings in this study, it was quite evident that Grade R teachers do involve their learners' in play during different rings. The story of little Red Hen observed during literacy lesson show Miss D involving learners' in role play.

During the story ring, learners were asked to greet one another by singing a greeting song "Good morning, good morning, how are you….." as part of their daily routine (morning ring). Learners moved around the classroom shaking each other's hands laughing. This shows the integration of skills in teaching. The greeting song teaches learners social skills.

The teacher followed by scattering cut outs of eggs and gates on the carpet. Learners' were asked to pick up an egg or gate. This was used to divide the class.

She then introduced the topic of poultry farming taken from CAPS document. Learners discussed products and animals that produce those products. There were different life skills equipment like brushes, paint, bean bags, play dough, beads, home waste material and scissors displayed in the area. The teacher read the story The Little Red Hen from the teacher resource pack. She asked learners to role play the story and asked them follow up questions:

 Learners were asked to sequence the story using sequencing story cards in groups. Others were given a hen puzzle to play with. The last group was given dough to mould six eggs and place them in a basket. Learners who were struggling with completion of the given tasks were assisted by the teacher and other more knowledgeable learner. Vygotsky states in his theory that the child needs someone who will plan and guide his or her learning during play.

Although the shortage of resources was noted during classroom observations, both classrooms had evidence of suitable language rich environment with books, wall charts and other printed materials that develop basic skills of listening, speaking and communication skills in Grade R learners. Both teachers highlighted that they try hard to apply a good Grade R programme but the

resources presented a great challenge in teaching. It is apparent that literacy is the basic skill every person needs.

4.2.1.2 Teaching mathematics through play

Both teachers were seen grouping their learners during numeracy lesson. Learners were given real objects to use for counting. Toys were distributed among different groups.The researcher noted that the toys that were given to learners were not enough which resulted in some learners fighting for toys.

The lesson observed first was a mathematics lesson in Miss C's classroom. It was a 30 minutes counting lesson.

During the mathematics lesson observation (9H30 - 10H00), Miss C used a topic of Number concept development (1-10) and introduced the lesson by asking learners to greet one another singing "good morning, good morning how are you" shaking each other's hands with laughter. This was part of the classroom daily routine.

The teacher discussed the theme and talked about senses and asked learners to make numbers with their bodies in groups. They first counted without understanding the number (rote counting), they counted as if they are reciting a rhyme, then later they begin to understand the amount that a number represents (rational counting). The researcher observed the participant moving from one group to another helping learner to count. They counted in five using a number rhyme 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. They also counted by running and touching the object represented by the number. They counted using concrete objects such as bottle caps, wooden beads, buttons, stones and counters. Grade R learners count using real objects taken from various corners in the classroom. They match numbers and names. Learners used their bodies to write numbers.

During assessment, learners were given worksheets to colour in numbers and do match up activities. Those who struggled were given the number eight to trace. Tracing developed the learners' ability to follow a certain pattern. The teacher assisted those who were struggling with matching activity by giving them play dough to form numbers. Play dough helps the learners to manipulate objects and develop fine motor muscles.

The classroom was conducive to good learning practices that are developmentally appropriate for the Grade R learners considering the fact that these learners come from families with poor economic status. The different learning stations were safe for Grade R learners. Material like scissors and glues were kept in safe containers. Learning material was age appropriate but not enough for the Grade R learners. Learners used maths workbooks to work with. There were counters, number charts, blocks, abacus, and bottle tops for counting in one of the corners in the classroom. During interviews both teachers expressed concern regarding ability to teach mathematics ideas to Grade learners given the lack of specifically of relevant guiding documents from the DBE officials and resources that stimulate mathematics learning.

Whilst observing the mathematics lesson the researcher realised that learner's experience mathematics in their everyday lives while playing. They discover mathematic concepts as they play with blocks, play in a sandpit, in the fantasy corner and making graphs during different rings trying to make sense of their physical world. Learners develop mathematical concepts as they move, touch and manipulate real objects. Chubb (2012) argues that there is a growing need for Grade R teachers to intentionally teach mathematical ideas in such subject from an early age in order to raise their interest.

Some learners were playing game of counting forward and backwards by making movement and clapping hands. The observation highlighted that learners in Grade R learn from their peers and from their teachers through play activities. Evidence from observable data aligns with Vygotsky's ideas when he argues that children are active participants who can build their own knowledge and understanding.

Grade R learners and toy objects

Photo 4.1: Grade R learners are counting nine objects using toys.

Sometimes learners were accidentally photographed when capturing a particular image. The researcher used one or two of these images to clarify a particular point better than written text. Nonetheless, the researcher guaranteed that the children cannot be identified. Though the researcher understand that these learners represent a vulnerable population and as such meticulous procedures should be followed if they are to be photographed.

Both teachers' responses indicate that mathematics was included in a number of activities which integrate with other subjects. They said:

Miss D:

Learners learn to count, measure different things like their heights and play counting games like touching their body parts and play with blocks. They look at that number e.g. 10 and they are able to recall the number they have learnt before e.g. 9. They learn to

match numbers with pictures or match items using the story learnt in literacy. They learn about the pattern of numbers which integrate with patterns in life skills. Our concern is inspiring ways to teach mathematics ideas to our learners since we are not given enough resources that stimulate mathematics learning.

Learners encounter mathematics ideas as they play with blocks in the block area, play in the sandpit, in the fantasy corner and by making drawings during different rings trying to make sense of their physical world.

Miss C:

We divide learners into different groups to do different activities on their own based on the theme. Those activities will include numeracy, literacy and life skills. Learners will sing a counting song, run and take the number or sometimes play in fantasy using resources like binoculars. They also make patterns of numbers on the sand. During outdoor play, learners use skipping ropes to jump in a certain pattern. They also make numbers using dough.

When asked to explain more on the importance of play in mathematics.

Miss C stressed that:

Play is important especially when you teach numeracy; you first show them the number for example five and represent it by the number of learners. Learners think and form meaning of the number five. They then know that five is represented by five learners. I also use counting songs that they enjoy when teaching them numeracy. By counting while they play, they develop thinking skills, problem solving skills and other mathematical skills.

According to the findings in this study, Miss D supported this by saying*:*

Play develops love of learning because here at school, they learn things that are similar to what they do at home. Games are taken from the games they play at home. When they play, they assist each other in learning the rules of the game. Play develops their minds.

It allows learners to extend their skills by developing their language skills and their listening skills. They are able to recall what they have learnt through play. Learners can create their own games and teach each other during group activity time. During outdoor play, they play different games like races using bean bags, catch, balancing and many more games which develop them holistically.

4.2.1.3 Life Skills through play

CAPS Life Skills document (DBE, 2011, p. 8) defines life skills as the subject that is essential to the holistic development of learners and is concerned with the social, personal, intellectual, emotional, and physical growth of learners, and with the way in which these are integrated. Life skills in foundation phase is divided into four study areas which assist the foundation phase teachers to plan and teach play activities. The study areas are beginning knowledge, personal and social well-being, creative arts and physical education. Teachers in ECD integrate these study areas in their topics so as to strengthen the teaching of other core foundation phase subjects. Creative arts develop Grade R learners' fine and gross motor skills.

Life skills is not a stand-alone teaching subject, instead, as a teacher, you must integrate life skills in the teaching process irrespective of which subject you teach. During life skills lessons, learners do a variety of activities linked to the theme which integrate with other subjects. The Grade R life skills learning programme is aimed at enabling learners to develop holistically. Furthermore it is aimed at assisting learners to understand and integrate what they have learnt at school into their daily lives.

During outdoor ring, Miss D took her learners to play games outside. This was the outdoor free play but the researcher noticed that the play activities were more teacher directed than being free play activities. Due to the lack of resources and large numbers, learners played indigenous games that allowed them to form a big circle and one learner was at the centre to lead the game. Games like *"touch"* made them run around the field with laughter. Learners also played throwing and catching using balls. There were too many learners (40 learners) in this class. Some boys fought over turns to throw the ball. The teacher tried hard to be all over the place. Some learners were not attended.

The findings of the collected data, shows that both the indoor and outdoor activities developed learners holistically. They learned to solve mathematic problems, developed critical thinking skills, socialisation skills and creativity in developing new games. Gross and fine motor skills were also developed during play. As Excell (2011) stated, practice play, symbolic play and games with rules are typical of Grade R learners. Games with rules promote social interaction and self-regulation, and provide valuable learning opportunities to Grade R learners (Excell, 2011, p. 61).

Miss C pointed out that**:**

> *Play develops their fine and gross motor while climbing, jumping and catching the ball. Play supports school readiness. Learners develop muscles when holding pens. When they play, they learn to tolerate one another and work collaboratively with others and become more independent.*

Supporting Miss C's idea, Miss D pointed out that*:*

> *Play develops love of learning because here at school, they learn things that are similar to what they learn at home. Games are taken from the games they play at home. When they play, they assist each other in learning the rules of the game. Play develops their minds. It allows learners to extend their skills by developing their language skills and their listening skills. They are able to recall what they have learnt through play. Learners can create their own games and teach each other during group activity time. During outdoor play, they play different games like races using beanbags, catch, balancing and many more games which develop them holistically. We do experience problems when it comes to other play activities such as climbing and balancing.*

Previous literature has also found that play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulations as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competency (Copple & Bredekamp 2009).

4.2.1.4 Inclusive play

Inclusion is concerned with equality. It provides equal opportunity for all learners to achieve in an environment that provides and facilitates quality education to all learners (Davin, 2013). Inclusive play provides equipment and apparatus for all learners to play irrespective of their orientation.

Both Miss C and Miss D pointed out that learners in Grade R experienced a variety of barriers like aggression, which hinders the child's opportunity to play with others, perceptual-motor difficulties, disability and conditions like HIV/AIDS.

Miss C*:*

> *We have a big challenge of learners who have difficulties in learning. Some of these learners are very shy and cannot socialise with other learners even during play time. When asked about how she helped those learners who have challenges, Miss C mentioned that she encourages them to play with others and attend to the problems that they experience. The learners with aggressive behaviour were disciplined.*

During outdoor play, the researcher observed learners playing and Miss C assisting those who were having difficulties. Brock *et al.* (2009, p. 212) state that "marginalisation of a child with Special Educational Needs, [SEN] impede developing social skills through lack of contact and play times with peers

Miss D:

> *There are a lot of problems experienced by the learners that we teach. Some learners are abused, hungry and slow in development. As Grade R teachers, we are required to apply inclusive education and design play material that suits their needs. That causes challenges because we do not get support from the Department of Education on inclusive education.*

The documents that the researcher analysed include lesson plans, records of assessment tasks, CAPS document and samples of Learners' work. These documents "assisted the researcher in

identifying the relevance and gaps in trends" Rule & John (2011, p 80). The researcher realised that the lesson plans are planned according to CAPS and are followed although contextual factors such as the limited time given to it, the overcrowding in the classroom prevent the teacher from allowing learners to play individually during individual choice time.

Records of assessment tasks were not updated. The researcher noticed that teachers were not keeping accurate records of learners' progress report on different play activities done during different rings (periods).

4.2.2 Importance of play in learning and development

The researcher also wanted to verify how Grade R teachers view the impact of play in developing learners. Theorists such as Piaget (1951) agree that play occupies a central role in learners' development and learning. Bevc (2004) contends that learning through play teaches all aspects of child development (physical, cognitive, linguistic and socio- emotional). Learners must play in order to learn (Davin & van Staden, 2005, Gordon & Browne,1989).

4.2.2.1 Play and physical development

From the observation of learners during outdoor play, the researcher noticed that play contributes to the learners' sensorimotor development by means of various activities. Learners enjoyed playing indigenous games like *ingqathu* (skipping), *uqithi* (game where learners climb up the tree and jump down) and racing games using language (*ikati negundane*, meaning cat and mouse). Learners learn the rules of the game and follow them. They work cooperatively with one another and assist those who encounter difficulties. Learners who are more knowledgeable than others are given opportunities to lead. Play contributes to the young child's physical development (De Witt, 2009).

Both participants indicated that though they do not have a structured outdoor play area, but their learners are involved in different play activities that develop them physically.

 Miss C: *Physical play develops their fine and gross motor skills while jumping, running and catching a ball.*

Miss D: *Play develop learners eye –hand coordination. It also encourage health and fitness. For example when they play skipping games and racing games they jump and become fit.*

The above responses is supported by the literature where it states that sensorimotor play involves learning about the world through the senses and physical interaction with the environment Sensorimotor play include running and climbing, dancing, pushing toys, and splashing water. It was noted during document review that CAPS Life Skills document provide teachers with different kinds of physical development activities suitable for each Grade. Both participants planned their physical development activities using CAPS and other textbooks. Their files show how each lesson is planned.

4.2.2.2 Play and cognitive development

Play develops the child's understanding of certain concepts Maxim (1985, p. 146) states that play promotes the child's ability to concentrate and order his knowledge. Play provides the Grade R child the opportunity to gather information for future learning. Play develops listening and verbal skills. It teaches learners creative thinking and encourages learners to solve problems (Perry & Bussey, 1984). Through play the Grade R learners learn to express themselves and develop communication skills.

From the observation of learners during outdoor play the researcher noticed that learners enjoy playing indigenous games like *ingqathu* (skipping), *uqithi* (game where learners climb up the tree and jump down) and racing games using language (*ikati negundane*, meaning cat and mouse). Learners learn the rules of the game and follow them. They work cooperatively with one another and assist those who encounter difficulties. Learners who are more knowledgeable than others are given opportunities to lead.

The participating teachers in this study stated that learners learn new language skills during play

In elaborating their responses Grade R teachers had the following to say:

Miss C: *Play is important in their learning because learners are in a stage of development where they enjoy playing. It develops their listening skills because they are able to listen and answer*

questions. Learners are able to listen and understand the story during story time. Through play, Grade R learners learn about others and the world and they learn to be creative and initiate play activities.

4.2.2.3 Play and social development.

Play develops social skills and Ubuntu to Grade R learners. When Grade R learners play together, they learn to cooperate and take turns and develop tolerance sharing and teamwork. It was noticeable from the findings that learners enjoy playing together and sharing. The findings from the document review show that teachers plan activities that encourage group work.

Miss D:

> *Play develops their self-confidence and as they work as teams during group activity, Learners learn to help each other on the task done. Play develops social skills. They learn to cooperate in group activities and take the lead role in decision making within the group. When they play, they learn to tolerate one another and collaborate with other learners.*

Miss C*: Opportunities for free play are given to those learners who have completed the task first.so play teaches them independent learning and social skills*

The above quotations show that the participants plan the activities that develop learners' social skills. This is supported by the literature in theoretical framework where Vygotsky proposed that children construct their own knowledge and understanding as they interact with the help and support of others (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, Vygotsky held the view that children develop within their social world and that peers interactions are importance in fostering social development (Excell & Linington, 2015 p. 41).

4.2.2.4 Play and emotional development

The participants spoke much about how Grade R learners feel about themselves. The literature indicates that through play, learners learn to express and understand their emotions. Play teaches

them to be in control of their environment (De Witt, 2009, p 132).Furthermore, (De Witt,2009) affirmed that through play learners' learn to express and understand their emotions. Since the school has limited resources to support play learning, teachers tend to be limited in their choice of play activities.

4.2.2.5 Play facilitates independent learning

Evidence from data on both observation and document review reveal that both Grade R teachers use the indoor and outdoor play material that they have to enhance learning. The lesson plans indicate clearly how each teacher will use play material. The classrooms show play materials in various corners (see appendix). CAPS document provides teachers with opportunities to plan lessons that encourage independent learning. During individual choice time, learners were playing independently in various corners. .Previous literature has also found that play encourage independent learning and develop a positive self-image (De Witt, 2009). Most learners enjoyed doing pretend play in fantasy corner.

This is what the two Grade R teachers said on the classroom environment:

MISS D:

> *I do different play activities with them but I like to use role play with my learners because they enjoy doing things on their own... They are also given time to play freely (free play), without teachers' instruction. Opportunities for free play are given to those learners who have completed the task first.*

4.2.3 Using themes to integrate play learning

Teachers need to plan and organise their play activities in a systematic way (Meier & Marais, 2012). Theme is recommended as the best and most frequently used ways of organising the learning content. The foundation phase CAPS document recommends the use of a theme-based approach in young learners' education. The gathering of themes with linked presentations and activities is known as the learning programme in Grade R.

Davin & Van Staden (2005, p. 21) categorised guidelines which may assist the teacher with the process of choosing a theme:

4.2.3.1 Theme must link up with the purpose of the ECD centre and what they want to achieve

The first guideline is based on what the teachers view as important in achieving their outcome. Although there are many approaches to teach content to Grade R learners such as an excursion to the park or using artefacts, a thematic approach is the most versatile teaching approach- in the foundation phase in general and in Grade R in particular Davin (2013).In addition, Davin (2013) emphasised the use of suitable themes in the Grade R classroom to organise the learning content.

While CAPS suggested a number of themes to be used during teaching and learning (DBE, 2011), Grade R teachers still have the responsibility to ensure that the themes are relevant for the learners' environment and are suitable for the needs of that particular class (Davin, 2013). Davin further suggests that themes and activities must be linked to the concepts, skills, values and attitudes of the curriculum and they should be developmentally appropriate, fun and enjoyable.

Learners need to enjoy what you want to teach them, choosing a suitable theme is fundamental in the Grade R classroom. The advantage of a thematic approach is that it creates the learning situations which relate to the learners' world, for example sports, animals, seasons and many more. Teachers should consider the learners' environment when choosing a theme. Jourbert *et al.* (2013) state it would be pointless for a teacher to choose a theme that did not relate to the Learners' experiences. During observation the researcher noticed that each classroom has the theme table to strengthen the learnt content.

The daily planner from two participant's shows that teachers are planning play activities following CAPS. There is evidence of integration of subjects in the planning. Both indoor and outdoor activities are carefully planned. But due to the diversity of learners that the teachers have in their classrooms, some activities are left incomplete by learners.

The two participants believed in using themes in their teaching and learning.
Miss D articulated**:**

> *My role is to plan using themes taken from the CAPS document. Before we plan, we choose a suitable theme. I use pictures and real objects so as to allow them to use all*

their senses. I provide my learners with a variety of resources to stimulate their teaching and learning. I also support those who have learning difficulties. After teaching them I assess them through observation.

Miss C said:

Though CAPS has provided us with themes, we still have a role to plan accordingly to suits our learners' needs. Themes are also developed from the learners' environment. Learners do different activities in groups and as individuals, and as a teacher I have a role to monitor guides and assess them by observing them while they play in different areas. Themes help us to plan together all subjects in a Grade around the same theme.

Integration of subjects in Grade R classroom

Photo 4.2: Theme table showing integration of subjects in Miss D's Grade R classroom

4.2.4 The effect of play environment

This section discusses the findings on the influence of indoor and outdoor play environment to learners learning and development. Vygotsky argued that learners are active agents in their own environment engaging with the world around them (Vygotsky, 1978).

Learning materials in this study refers to all that learners use within and outside the classroom for the purpose of learning, Mnene (2011) believed that teaching and learning can take place

effectively when suitable and correct learning material is available to both Grade R learners and their teachers. Both indoor and outdoor spaces must provide opportunities to explore a world of knowledge, skills and attitudes through learning content and learning activities (Meier & Marais, 2012, p. 239). Classroom environments integrate different types of play activities in the classroom that take place concurrently.

This is what the two Grade R teachers said on the classroom environment:

MISS D:

> *I do different play activities with them but I like to use role play with my learners because they enjoy doing things on their own. When they role play, they show their creative side and they like to perform in front of others. Learners feel that they are in control. Role playing also develops their vocabulary and develops their social skills. Their parents enjoy it too. They are also given time to play freely (free play), without teachers' instruction. Opportunities for free play are given to those learners who have completed the task first.*

Miss D said:

> *As Grade R teachers, we are expected to create learning environments (indoor and outdoor environment) by organising suitable materials, resources and by providing interesting experiences but we have a problem of resources and overcrowded classrooms in this school. Learners are not given the best knowledge of play that they desired.*

She then said**:**

> *I usually do role play with them. They play in different areas like constructive area, fantasy and sometimes play with each other freely (free play), but only those that have done well get the opportunity for free play. When they play outside they use the ball in most times. They run around and play hide and seek. Not all learners get full attention because of large numbers.*

De Witt (2009) affirmed that through play learners learn to express and understand their emotions. During interviews and observations of the two participants, the researcher noticed the

shortage of resources. Since the school has limited resources to support play learning, teachers tend to be limited in their choice of play activities.

Grade R teachers should plan and take certain steps in ensuring that meaningful play is taking place in the classroom. Teachers should plan a variety of play opportunities so as to allow learners development in many different areas. Play opportunities should be given in all the activities. It is important for teachers to maintain safety in the play environment. Play materials and equipment should always be in good condition to avoid injuries.

4.3.4.1 The indoor play environment

The observation of the indoor environments showed that both classrooms' space was logically arranged to enrich active learning. The classrooms had child-sized furniture and low shelves to motivate Grade R learners to be actively involved in their learning. It shows that enough thought had been given to the classroom layout so that the use of space was expanded to suit each learner's needs. Though the class sizes were larger than expected in a Grade R classroom (each group has eight learners), learners tried to move around the classrooms. They were able to choose from a variety of learning materials and in some instances sharing of toys was necessary.

The learning materials, which included educational toys, puzzles, books, blocks and so on, were placed in such a manner that they were accessible to the learners and reinforced a more informal approach towards teaching and learning, as CAPS supports informal learning in Grade R. The indoor learning environments had the potential to offer rich play learning opportunities should the school has enough resources.

Each Grade R classroom had, for example, a book corner with limited relevant books, at least two different sets of blocks and other construction toys, a variety of educational toys and puzzles as well as a different fantasy corner, and there was a theme table in each classroom. Data from the observation schedules revealed that both teachers involve their learners in different play activities during rings. Learners were seen playing in the fantasy area wearing old clothes, shoes, hats, and pretending to be parents. Others were seen doing role play. Two boys were busy in the

construction area playing with blocks creating things. During play learners were communicating effectively with their playmates.

Book corners respective classrooms

Photo: 4.3 Book corners, Miss C and Miss D classrooms respectively

The researcher noticed a number of learners playing with the plastic binoculars and spectacles that were part of the display in Miss D's classroom. On her second visit, the researcher noticed that the theme table had changed. The theme table had a topic of farming. Attention had also been given to different kinds of learning corners. There was a literacy learning corner and a table displaying items that enhance literacy learning. Numeracy learning corners were also evident. The walls of each classroom were covered with different teaching and learning support materials, alphabet charts, birthday charts, a number chart, a weather chart and a seasons chart. There were also displays of the learners' art work. The learning materials were hanged up the wall.

Fantasy corner with Life Skills material

Photo 4.4: Fantasy corner with Life Skills material in Miss C's classroom

The timetable (daily schedule) was displayed on the wall of each classroom. The table below presents the indoor resource found in both Grade R classrooms

A table of available resources present in each classroom

		Miss C	Miss D
1	Indoor resources	X	X
2	Library corner	X	X
3	Theme table	X	X
4	Fantasy corner	X	X
5	Literacy corner	X	X
6	Numeracy corner	X	X
7	Block /construction corner	X	X
8	Toys and Puzzles	X	X

Table 4.3: List of resources found in both Grade R classrooms.

According to Curriculum and Assessment Policy (DBE, 2011) the development of learners fine and gross motor skills and perceptual development is essential in the foundation phase. Both

teachers in Grade R had a long day and worked hard under challenging circumstances. They were seen repeating activities because of limited outdoor activities to do.

Samples of learners' work

Photo 4.5: An example of LTSM and samples of learners' work in Miss C's classroom

4.3.4.2 The outdoor play

The outdoor play environment had limited resources to stimulate play. Learners' outdoor play included climbing trees, skipping ropes, playing with the balls and water play. Over and above this, outdoor equipment for water play, throwing and catching and chasing games was set out each day using some of the indoor resources and was strictly controlled by the teachers. They were seen repeating activities because of limited outdoor activities to do. There was no jungle gym for stimulating outdoor play, thus they found it hard to involve their learners in different free play activities such as activities that encourage coordination, balance and spatial orientation.

Teachers appeared to view their role during outdoor free play in a more supervisory capacity. Although play, movement, games and sport contribute to developing positive attitudes and value CAPS (DBE, 2011, p. 9) learners of Madi Primary were deprived of valuable opportunities to exercise a measure of appropriate independence and to make their own choices in play.

During outdoor play, all the learners played together. Learners were not receiving sufficient time to engage in free play. Play activities were supervised by teachers. CAPS emphasised that the focus in the foundation phase is on games and some activities that involve play. Lack of proper play environment hindered appropriate planning of play activities that develop learners' cognitive, moral, physical, social and creative skills.

The Grade R teachers could not provide a range of distinct and inspiring outdoor activities which support creative play in learners. It is essential for Grade R teachers to provide for an environment that allows enough opportunities for learners to play and explore their world.
This is what the two Grade R teachers said on the outdoor play classroom environment:

Miss C:

We have problems in involving our learners in various outdoor play activities because they do not have a jungle gym where most activities take place. We do have knowledge on how to develop material that is suitable for learners in our classroom but lack of resource causes a problem.

Miss D said: *When they play outside they use the ball in most times. They run around and play hide and seek. Not all learners get full attention because of large numbers and shortage of play equipment.*

When asked about how play develops Grade R learners holistically, the Grade R teachers elaborated by saying:

Miss C*: Play provides strong connections between play and learning which make the child ready for formal schooling.*

Miss D agreed with what Miss C said by saying*:*

CAPS have made our lives easier now. We are given themes to use which are integrated. When starting a new theme, for example sight, we plan our lesson in a way that shows integration. We divide learners into different groups to do different activities on their

own based on the theme given. As our theme is sight, we sing songs about it, interpret a picture story, describe, talk about colour, size and sometimes draw. They also run with bean bags making different patterns.

From this conversation it is clear that play increases learners' self-esteem, self-respect and gives learners chances to work in collaboration with each other. During outdoor play, learners play together and teach one another games that they know irrespective of their socio-economic background. Play allows them to increase their confidence through developing new skills and provides opportunities for developing social skills, like tolerance, sharing and respect. They learn to be independent and creative. Learners are able to change an existing game and make it to be more creative for all learners to enjoy.

4.2.5 Factors instigating difficulties in play

There were a number of factors that instigated the differences in play pattern in the learners. These factors were lack of play material, parental environment and support from the Department of Education.

4.3.5.1 Lack of play material

From the observations made in both classrooms it was clear that though the play material is displayed in relevant corners, Grade R teachers still experience shortage of material to cater for all learners during teaching and learning. Learners were seen taking turns as a result; teachers had problems in facilitating play well. Lack of suitable teaching and learning materials affect the quality of education in Grade R. Grade R teachers ended up relying on workbooks and exercise books.

According to CAPS (DBE, 2011) the learning programme indicates that teachers have to do activities that involve different types of play such as fantasy play where learners need a lot of resources like clothes, hats etc. Block/ construction play needs blocks of different sizes, toy cars, etc. Both indoor and outdoor environment requires a lot of material. This school learners' not have an outdoor play area which results in learners doing few activities that do not develop them holistically. The outdoor learning environment is therefore, not inviting to all learners, and it was evident that they were not benefiting adequately. This is contrary to what research says about

teaching and learning environments being inviting such that learners are motivated and encouraged to explore. Both Miss C and Miss D agree that a lack of an outdoor play area affects teaching and learning. When asked about where their learners play during outdoor play, they both responded by saying:

Miss C: *They play outside but we make planned activities since we do not have a proper outdoor play area, they run with bean bags, use sand scoops and do water play.*

Miss D: *They play outside but we do not have an outdoor area (smiling). They only do structured activities. They use bean bags, balls, skipping ropes, buckets and scoops.*

The participants further articulated that edutainment bring excitement to learning. Learners are not aware that they are learning.

Miss D said:
As Grade R teachers, we are expected to create learning environments (indoor and outdoor environment) by organising suitable materials, resources and by providing interesting experiences but we have a problem of resources and overcrowded classrooms in this school. Learners are not given the best knowledge of play that they desired.

Miss C: *Our Grade R does not have a television to watch children problem and play some games which stimulate their holistic development.*

The above extracts indicate the need for edutainment to enhance Grade R programmes. It was observed that learning through play and edutainment are important areas that both use entertainment activities to promote learning. Although during observation it was not as apparent as it was explicitly expressed during the interview process. A reason for such a difference could be due to that fact that during teaching there could have been many considerations to make up for the lack of play materials for the learners.

4.3.5.2 Parental involvement

Parents are known as the child's first teacher. They have significant role to play in the education of their learners (Taole & Mohapi, 2013) Both Grade R teachers believed that teaching through play can be implemented successfully if parents play their role in education. The participants in the study mentioned that parental involvement is important. But they both find difficulties when they try to involve parents. The participants made the following remarks regarding parental involvement:

Miss C:

> *Parental involvement is a problem in this school. Some parents neglect their learners, they dumped them in the beginning of the year and never bother to check on their progress and they do not support their learners.*

Miss D: *They do not involve themselves in the Grade R learning. They think we are playing. Parents needed to change their mind set about early childhood education.*

The absence of parental involvement has created a situation of disconnection between what happens at school and what happens at home. Children love to play with their parents and tell them what goes on at school and the absence of their parents' participation creates problems. From the theoretical point of view the ZPD will not be on going as the learners will only continue with the play that adds to their holistic learning when next they are at school. The participants also added that;

Miss C: *The backgrounds of these learners affect the teaching and learning. Parents do not help their learners; they are too busy, they do not have time to read the Learners' work or notices.*

In addition, Miss D also commented that: *Parents do not come to school if you ask them to come and discuss a learner's problems. They hardly have time for them at home. Parents only go to school for registration and graduation ceremony.*

The participants' comments paint a gloomy picture of the parental involvements of their children. Such level of parental involvement was reported in literature. But this was not common with parents from urban areas and develops countries.

4.3.5.3 Support from the Department of Basic Education

Both teachers indicated that they lacked support from ECD officials who represented the DBE. When asked about the support they needed from the Department of Education, they both stated:

Miss C:

> *We need support with things like, (thinking) supplying us with enough resources that we need for play activities, support by showing us how to plan using CAPS as a new curriculum, and many other things like our salaries are not paid regularly.*

Miss D:

> *I need more support on the Grade R curriculum. The workshops that we receive are very limited and they do know help us much. We need more workshops on understanding the curriculum. These learners require a totally different approach when teaching them. You need to understand them and be competent in curriculum delivery. I also need to know how to involve my learners who have learning barriers in play.*

The nonchalant interest from the DBE has made the use of play to be more difficult for these teachers. The likely consequence of this could be the lack of school based interest to make play important for the school and teachers.by so doing the resources needed for outdoor play are likely not renovated nor make provisions for in situations of budget constraints. From the DBE absence also the parental involvement could be attributed to that since they are not sensitised by the department on the importance of parental involvement with respect to their children play and the contributions it has on their learning holistically.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented the analysed data collected through interviews; observation and document review the analysed data were presented under five main themes. From the analysis, both participants regarded play as an important component in the Grade R classroom. They accepted that the use of play as a teaching strategy develops learners holistically and were appropriate for use at the foundation phase. Nevertheless, a shortage of resources affected the use of play as a strategy for teaching and learning at the selected school. Additionally, the finding revealed that the teachers' efficiency was limited by a lack of support

from ECD officials who seem to have not understood the enormity of the need for support for ECD teaching and learning with play being a strategy. Literature was also included in the discussion of findings.

The next chapter summarises the study and will conclude with some recommendations based on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter presents and discusses the summary of main findings of the experiences of two teachers who teach Grade R in one township primary school. The researcher discusses the challenges that teachers encountered in this study. In addition, recommendations are made to improve the use of play as a teaching strategy in Grade R based on findings of the study. Furthermore, the researcher made suggestions for future research and lastly concluding remarks on this research are provided.

5.2 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The following conclusions were made regarding the themes discussed in the previous chapter. These conclusions were presented to be in relations to the objectives of the study identified in chapter one. Such an approach was aimed to provide an answer to the research objectives.

5.2.1 Integrating play in Grade R curriculum:

Both Grade R teachers use integrated play-based learning as suggested by CAPS to develop their content for play. Their planning, according to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement emphasises the value of play in their teaching and learning. Drawing from the findings in this study, it was quite evident that Grade R teachers do involve their learners in play during different rings. Play is integrated in language, mathematics and Life Skills. Leaners discovered mathematic concepts as they play with blocks in the fantasy corner they develop mathematical concepts as they move, touch and manipulate real objects. They socialize with peers while counting objects. Verbal communication occurred as learners talk about the given tasks in various rings. Learners are actively involved in learning.

Some learners were playing game of counting forward and backwards by making movement and clapping hands. The observation highlighted that learners in Grade R learn from their peers and from their teachers through play activities.

5.2.2 Importance of play in learning and development

Play form an integral part of children learning and development. sensorimotor play involves learning about the world through the senses and physical interaction with the environment Sensorimotor play include running and climbing, dancing, pushing toys, and splashing water. It was noted during document review that CAPS (Life Skills) document provide teachers with different kinds of physical development activities suitable for each Grade. Both participants planned their physical development activities using CAPS and other textbooks. Their files show how each lesson is planned. Both the indoor and outdoor activities are important in developing learners holistically. They learned to solve mathematic problems and socialize with peers.

5.2.3 The effect of play environment

Classroom environments integrate different types of play activities in the classroom that take place concurrently. Suitable play material can enhance learning through play. Learners were exposed to role play that develops them creatively. Both teachers affirmed that through play learners learn to express and understand their emotions. During interviews and observations of the two participants, the researcher noticed the shortage of resources. Since the school has limited resources to support play learning, teachers tend to be limited in their choice of play activities.

5.2.4 Theme teaching

The literature revealed that grade R teachers should use suitable themes to organise the learning content rather than separate subject or study area. Thematic approach is the most useful teaching approach in the foundation phase. The researcher noticed that both teachers plan their activities using a thematic approach (see photo 4.2). "The advantage of thematic approach to teaching and learning is that learning situations which relates to the learners' world are created" (Jourbert, I Bester, Meyer & Evans, 2013: PAGE #). It is therefore essential for Grade R teachers to give attention to meaningful themes for the specific environment and to guard against tedious repetition of themes.

5.2.5 Factors instigating difficulties

Various factors bring about difficulties in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R. The teacher pupil ratio hindered the appropriate practice in Grade R. Lack of both indoor and outdoor resources affect teaching and learning. As a result, Grade R teachers tend to rely heavily on worksheets. LTSM are an essential part of the curriculum and a means of promoting both teaching and learning (Govender, 2011). Teachers should make provision to include a various teaching strategies suitable for overcrowded classrooms. Furthermore, teachers should develop expertise in teaching overcrowded classrooms.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a variety of strategies that the school can employ to enhance play as a teaching strategy in Grade R .These strategies include the following:

5.3.1 Support from adults

Teachers need to add to their scope of teaching strategies and to adapt these to their unique needs and those of their learners. Courses should be designed to assist teachers in developing skills in adapting tasks in order to accommodate learners' readiness and capabilities. They need to develop expertise in presenting lessons to classes of mixed abilities and learners with learning barriers. Teachers lacked the ability and techniques to integrate explicit teaching with learner participation. Cultural tools such as music, rhymes and play, as advocated by Vygotsky, work well for Grade R learners. Screening movies, embarking on field trips and inviting specialists to do presentations can be used effectively to integrate explicit teaching with learner participation (Govender, 2011, p. 68).

Grade R learners need the support of adults for play to prosper. Many cultures and communities recognise parents as young learners' first co-players and that it makes a huge difference to the child and his play if parents are involved (Rogoff, 2003). According to Broker (2010), parents who want to see their learners succeed in formal schooling should play with their learners in an environment that has learning resources. Teachers also have a vital role in facilitating play. They should consider using edutainment to spark children learning in Grade R.

Showing learners movies and other educational programmes is an excellent teaching strategy to expose learners to the different components of learning. Movies provide an invaluable tool in

motivating learners, maximizing their participation and encouraging them to produce their best work.

Grade R teachers need to be well-informed about community resources so as to give the best support to parents in stimulating their children's informal learning at home and in the community at large. Collaboration between teachers and parents will provide maximum support to young learners. Both teachers and parents should have confidence regarding mutual communication in supporting children learning and development. The researcher recommends that it is essential for parents of young learners to provide enough physical and mental space for learners to play with ideas and materials in ways that are most meaningful to the learners' level of development, and not enforce their own ideas in learners' play. Family support increases cognitive and social development in learners. Learners learn to identify the school as part of the whole family life. Good compliments help children with barriers to learning to cope during play.. Play will enable children to exercise their physical body structures. It also enables children to heal from traumatic experiences (Akande, 1999).

5.3.2 Support from the Department of Education

It was apparent from the data collected from the Grade R participants that they experienced the situations where minimum support was given by the Department of Education officials. This includes the curriculum support and the development of Grade R teachers. There is still evidence of inequalities in terms of class size and distribution of learning and teaching support materials for Grade R. Matching these conditions should be an on-going concern for the Department of Education. Within the two-day observation, the researcher realised that teachers worked hard trying to involve all learners in different kinds of play during various rings, but insufficient knowledge of dealing with classroom with large numbers continue to affect the use of play in these classes. The play environment did not offer much support for learners to explore. Although teachers show support in some instances, but not every learner were assisted.

Creating an environment for play is fundamental to supporting play. The Department of Education still experience challenges in providing resources and workshops that enhance

learning through play in Grade R. Teachers should be provided with teacher development courses targeting a range of effective teaching strategies for Grade R classrooms. There is a growing need for Grade R teachers to have pedagogical content knowledge of the Grade R curriculum for more improved "play-based learning." A suitable environment for inclusive play should be an area of interest for future research in early childhood education especially in the South African context since the environment can lead to social, emotional and physical challenges (Brock *et al.,* 2009).

Grade R teachers should pay attention on inclusivity during play and understand that learning is not a one size fits all process, therefore teachers should provide a multitude of opportunities for diverse learners to discover themselves while working as individuals and with peers. Teachers should be creative in designing learning material that caters for diversity in learning.

5.3.3 Learning resources

According to Human Science Research Council (HSRC, 2010) infrastructure in ECD is a particular problem in the South African context, often defined as the biggest challenge in ECD provisioning in the country. Several ECD centres function without basic infrastructure. For the purpose of the study, the researcher focused on Madi Primary School where Grade R classes lack play resources such as learning equipment and learning materials. Both Grade R teachers have more than 40 learners per classroom. The norms which have been set for class ratios of 30 learners per class for Grade R are not operational. Classes are overcrowded; this results in the poor facilitation of play. Appropriate material that develops Grade R learners cognitively, socially, physically, morally and creatively is necessary for both indoor and outdoor settings.

From the researcher's observations, it was quite obvious that lack of equipment existed in the provisioning of material in Madi Primary School regarding outdoor play. This matter needs to be addressed immediately.

The Department of Education should provide sufficient age appropriate outdoor equipment which is safe to play with and provide fun at the school. Grade R teachers should also be trained

on how to use play material. Indoor and outdoor play environment should be inviting and arouse Learners' interests. Grade R teachers should allow learners to interact with text in the classroom so as to gain more knowledge on play. This study concludes that a lack of resources is of great concern. Teachers need more exposure on curriculum planning, development and support.

The play environment should be inviting and equipped with toys that are available so that children can pick-up toys by themselves. The physical play environment also concerns the design of rooms and that there is an awareness of the use and placement of furniture. That helps children with their safety because the place will be inviting. Govender (2011) avers that the most basic requirement to promote active learning is a safe, welcoming, stimulating and nurturing environment that focuses on learning for all children. If the environment is not friendly, there will be no proper learning. As Madi Primary School lacked resources the researcher's recommendation would be to encourage Grade R teachers to be creative in developing suitable play material with locally available resources. They should learn to be creative. Materials found in the environment should enhance learning in various contexts. Grade R teachers should rotate toys and games.

Department of Education should ensure that parenting support measures are entrenched in teacher's training, practices and in policy so as to guarantee good parental involvement that enhances parents' self-esteem.

The DBE should provide more skills necessary to work in collaboration with parents in and in-service training teachers and to be able to work with diverse parents (different educational backgrounds, social class). The curriculum in early childhood should not be about working with learners at school but it should also be about working with and supporting families. Hence, more in-service training for Grade R teachers is required to achieve the desired goal of supporting the ideas of democratic citizenship and lifelong learning.

The Department of Education should speed up the process of addressing inequality among ECD classrooms. Proper training should be given to Grade R teachers and improve their knowledge of play in Grade R classroom. To facilitate good learning in Grade R, it is acknowledged that there is a need to provide teachers with adequate skills that will deepen their knowledge and

understanding regarding Grade R teaching using play is needed. Improving their current status will motivate them and develop their positive self-esteem. Therefore, Grade R teachers' support should emanate in the form of in-service training (INSET) by the department of education in different levels. Relevant workshops should be arranged on teaching through play in Grade R.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following recommendations for future research have been provided below:

- This study has only explored Grade R teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy in one township school. Therefore, a much larger study involving a range of schools from other contexts (rural and urban) is recommended in order to get a bigger picture of experiences of Grade R teachers in using play as a teaching strategy in schools.

- Conduct a study with more participants including parents and learners using a range of child friendly methodologies such as art based methods in order to get the voices of the children in relation to play and entertainment.

- Since play is described as activities involved during childhood to adulthood, there is a need to expand the study in secondary schools to determine how play influences learners' learning and development.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Play is important in children's learning and development. The experiences of Grade R teachers using play in this study indicate that, although teachers plan and teach using play as a mode of learning for learners, several challenges have emerged and continuous effects on the effective of play as a teaching strategy in Grade R. Some of these challenges include; lack of support from the Department of Education on providing resources and workshops that enhance teachers'

understandings of play learning, strategies that improve traditional play and the absence of parental support is still a challenge.

In both classrooms, there was evidence of play used to facilitate learning but there were visible gaps in teachers' knowledge of how best to use play inclusively to promote the learning of all learners and the shortage of teaching and learning materials negatively impacted the experiences of both teachers and learners.

These challenges need urgent attention as Grade R is part of the Foundation Phase which lays the foundation for future learning. If we fail to give learners a solid start in their school lives, chances are they will not be able to recover or regain lost learning opportunities later in life, and we will continue to wonder why our school system is not producing the results we expect. These recommendations are not idealistic strategies, but rather sequences of realistic, daily, practical efforts which in future will yield positive results not just for children, but for the future of South Africa

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APPENDIX A:

Ethical clearance certificate

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

26 April 2013

Mrs Nompumelelo Pricilla Hadebe 212560317
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0247/013M
Project title: An exploration of how Foundation Phase teachers facilitate play in Grade R.

Dear Mrs Hadebe

Expedited approval

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Steven Collings (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor Dr S Ncombela
cc Academic leader Dr MN Davids
cc School Administrator Ms B Bhengu

APPENDIX B:

Letter of authorisation from the Department of Education

education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar	Tel: 033 341 8610	Ref.:2/4/8/601

Mrs Nompumelelo Hadebe
175 S.P.C.A. Access Road
CATO MANOR
4091

Dear Mrs. Hadebe

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct a pilot and research entitled: **AN EXPLORATION OF HOW FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS FACILITATE PLAY IN GRADE R**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 August 2013 to 31 August 2015.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the following school/s and/or institution/s in the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education.

Sboniso Primary School

Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education

...cod cated in service and performance
beyond the call of duty

Letter requesting permission circuit manager

1750 S.P.C. A Access Road

Cato manor

 4091

14 January 2013

THE CIRCUIT MANAGER

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am presently registered for an M.Ed. Degree in the school of Education Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As part of this programme, I am required to undertake field-based research on a topic titled "An exploration of how Foundation Phase teachers use play as a teaching strategy in Grade R". The study will be conducted under the guidance and supervision of Dr Ntombela Sithabile.

The research will involve teacher interviews, document review, and the observation of lessons in both Grade R classrooms and photographs of indoor outdoor play environment. In the report that will follow, the principles of anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly observed. Should you deem it necessary, I undertake to favour your office with a copy of the dissertation reporting the findings of this investigation.

Your permission to conduct research in this circuit will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Ms Nompumelelo Hadebe

Consent letter to school Principals

<div align="right">

No.1750 S.P.C.A Access Road

Cato Manor

4091

14 January 2013

</div>

The Principal

Mr T Madi

Model Primary School

Dear Sir / Madam

Request for consent to conduct research at your school

I am presently registered for a M.Ed. Degree in the school of Education studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. My study is entitled: "An exploration of Foundation Phase teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R" The purpose of this research is to understand how Grade R teachers' use play as a teaching strategy.

My research will involve teacher interviews, the observation which involves the examination of Learners' work, teachers' files and documents that are used for planning, preparation and delivery of lessons and assessment of play, taking photos of both indoor and outdoor play environment,. Results of the research will be useful to teachers who want to understand their practices in their current context.

I humbly request permission to conduct the study at your school. You are assured that all information gathered will be treated in the strictest of confidence. Throughout the study, and in the

report that will follow, the principles of anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly observed. All data and documents will be shredded once the study has been completed and submitted. Should you deem it necessary, I undertake to favour your office with a copy of the dissertation reporting the findings of this investigation. Your participation in the study would be purely voluntary and you will be free to withdraw participation at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to yourself or the school. Should you have any concerns about the study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the contact details listed below.

Your permission allowing me to conduct research in your school will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Nompumelelo Pricilla Hadebe

Researcher: Mrs N.P Hadebe (0724760000)

Supervisor: Dr Sithabile Ntombela (074100000)

CONSENT LETTER (SIGNED BY THE PRINCIPAL) N.P Hadebe [Researcher] I hereby grant you permission to use our   school for your research. I am aware that the participation of teachers in your research is voluntary and if they may feel uncomfortable, they may withdraw. In addition understand that confidentiality such as privacy will be observed at all times. I will ensure that the school functionality will not be compromised in any way. Permission has been granted.

Principal (print name): _____

Signature: --

Participant's consent letter

1750 S.P.C. A Access Road

Cato Manor

4091

12 May 2013

Dear Research Participant

I hereby write this letter to request your permission to be the participant of my research study that I will conduct in your school. Kindly receive hereof a brief description on how the research will be conducted:

I am a Master in Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. One of the requirements for the fulfilment of this degree is to do a dissertation. My dissertation topic is: Exploring of Foundation Phase teachers' experiences of using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R. The study will assist in better understanding of teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade r classrooms.

This will serve the purpose of informing my practice and knowledge in this area of teaching. Furthermore, this study will afford me, policy makers and other departmental officials the opportunity to understand how Grade R teachers use play as a teaching strategy

Data will be collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. This will involve asking teachers open-ended questions which will be audio-taped. Secondly, observations during teaching will be conducted in order to get an understanding of how the teacher involves learners in play activities. Analysis of teachers' preparations, assessments and scoring will be done as a last method of data generation. It is important for you as a participant to understand that:

a) Your identity and your school will never be exposed. Pseudonyms will be used when writing this report.

b) If during the research study you feel like withdrawing due to certain circumstances, you are allowed to do so.

c) In cases where you don't want to answer questions posed, you are free to remain silent.

The information that will be collected will be used for research purposes only.

Kindly receive my contact details as well as my Supervisor's:

No.175 S.P.C.A Access Road

Cato Manor

4091

Email: 212560317@ukzn.ac.za or MnquheI@gmail.com

 Supervisor's Contact Details

 Dr S. Ntombela

School of Education

Faculty of education

Edgewood Campus

University of KwaZulu-Natal

NtombelaS1@ukzn.ac.za (031) 2603858

I thank you in advance in anticipation of a favourable response.

Yours Sincerely

Nompumelelo P. Hadebe

 Home Tel No. (031) 2610000 Work Tel No. (031) 2603484 Cell No. 0724760000

212560317@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT FORM

I ………………………………………………………………… (Name and surname in full), hereby give consent to be the participant on a study based on: The exploration of foundation phase teachers' experiences in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R.

I fully understand that I am permitted to withdraw from this project if need arises.

Signature ………………………………

Date ……………………………….

Letter to the Parents of the learners participating in the study

University of KwaZulu Natal

Private Bag X03

Ashwood

3605

12 May 2013

Mzali

ISICELO SOKUBA UMNNTWANA WAKHO ABE INGXENYE YOCWANINGO OLUZOKWENZEKA EGUMBINI LAKHE LOKUFUNDA

Igama lami ngingu Nompumelelo Pricilla Hadebe (212560317) ngenza izifundo zami ze Masters e Nyuvesi ya KwaZulul-Natal (Edgewood campus). Nginxusa ukuba ungivumele ngenze ucwaningo egumbimbini lokufunda kwisikole afunda kuso umntwana wakho. Isihloko socwaningo sithi:. "An exploration of Foundation Phase teachers experiences in using play as a teaching strategy in Grade R" Umntwana wakho uzothatha inxaxheba ngokuthi abekhona egumbini lokufundela ngenkathi uthisha ekhombisa ukuthi ufundisa kanjani samdlalo**.** Uma uvuma ukuba umntwana wakho abe ingxenye yalolucwaningo, ngiyathembisa ukuthi konke okuyokwenziwa kulocwaningo kuyogcina phakathi kwami ne Nyuvesi kuze kuphele iminyaka emihlanu bese kushiswa. Angeke umntwana angina ebungozini ngokwenziwa lolucwaningo kanti futhi akunamivuzo yemali noma eyaluphi uhlobo eyotholakala kodwa lolucwaningo lwenzelwa ukuba othisha babenolwazi olunzulu ngokufundisa abntwana benza samdlalo ka Grade R.

.

Uma udingaulwaziolunzulungalololucwaningoungathintananamikulelikheli:

No.1750 S.P.C.A Access Road

Cato Manor

4091

Email: 212560317@ukzn.ac.za or Mnquhe1@gmail.com

Noma: Supervisor's Contact Details

 Dr S. Ntombela

School of Education

Faculty of education

Edgewood Campus

University of KwaZulu-Natal Ntombela S1@ukzn.ac.za (031) 2603858

I thank you in advance in anticipation of a favourable response.

Yours Sincerely

Nompumelelo P. Hadebe

 Home Tel No. (031) 2610000 Work Tel No. (031) 2603484 Cell No. 0724760000

212560317@ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX G:

Observation Schedule

No	Activities	Comments
1.1	Is the classroom environment conducive to learning?	The classroom is conducive to good learning practices that are developmentally appropriate for the Grade R learners.
1.2	Is there a suitable floor covering?	The floor covering is not enough for the number of learners in this classroom. There is piece of old mat at the centre of the class.
1.3	Are the different working stations safe for a Grade R learner?	The different learning stations are safe for Grade R material like scissors; glues are kept in safe containers.
1.4	Learning material	Learning material for play is age appropriate but not enough for the Grade R learners.
1.5	Life Skills equipment	There are different life skills equipment like brushes, paint, bean bags, play dough, beads, home waste material and scissors displayed in the areas.
1.6	Numeracy material	Learners are given maths workbook to work with. There are counters, number charts, blocks, abacus, bottle tops for counting.
1.7	Literacy material	There are insufficient reading materials to cater for all learners. Learners take turns.

APPENDIX H

Interview questions

1. What do you understand about play?
2. How is play significant in young Learners' learning and development?
3. How do you integrate play activities in your lessons?
4. What strategies do you use in facilitating play in your classroom and why?
5. What are the different kinds of play that you use in your classroom and why?
6. How do you prepare your play activities for your learners?
7. Where do your learners play?
8. Where do you get your Learner Teacher Support (LTSM) for indoor and outdoor play and how do you use them?

9. What documents (if any) do you use to facilitate play activities in your classroom?

10. Do you have any challenges in teaching using play in your class? If yes how do you deal with those challenges?

Interview Transcript

First participant

Codes: Interviewer: NPH

Grade R Teacher: Miss C

NPH: Good morning colleague, it is pleasure to me to meet you this morning. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to conduct this research in your school and also spending time with me especially in the morning when you have so much to do. I promise that whatever that we will discuss here will stay between us, no one will ever know about it. In order to keep our conversation anonymity, I will change your identity, pseudonym will be used.

Firstly, I would like to know how long you have been teaching Grade R. and I would like you to answer these questions freely because it is my intention not to use it for assessment of any form or whatsoever.

Miss C: *I have 5 years of experience in Grade R and it was very difficult for me when I first started (smiling).*

NPH: Mm….Grade R is a unique class. Why was it difficult for you to teach Grade R?

Miss C: *It was difficult because I didn't know how to teach them and Grade R need a person who understand how to teach and assess while they play and a person who has love for learners Iam happy now because Iam learning every day when I teach them.*

NPH: Wow (showing interest) you really love teaching in Grade R. As a Grade R teacher, what do you understand about play?

Miss C: *Grade R learners learn by playing. They do not learn like Grade ones. When we begin to teach, we use themes and songs .Learners learn by using concrete objects e.g. when teaching them a number, I show them the number using concrete objects taken from fantasy area so that they enjoy and learn through play. I can say most of the activities that they do in class is play because all their activities gives pleasure to them.*

NPH: Mmm…I get it; tell me how is play significant in your learners learning and development.

Miss C: *I think play is important in their learning because err, learners are in a stage of development where they enjoy playing. Play develops their listening skills because they are able to listen and answer questions. Learners are able to listen and understand the story during story time. They learn new language skills during play. It also develops their fine and gross motor while climbing, jumping and catching the ball. , When they play, they learn to tolerate one another and work collaboratively with others.*

NPH: Ok **…** what about in other subjects, learners' play has any significant?

Miss C*: Oh yes (raising her eyebrows), it is important especially when you teach numeracy, you first show them the number for example 5 and represent it by the number of learners. Learners think and form meaning of five. They then know that five is represented by 5 learners. I also use counting songs that they enjoy when teaching them numeracy. By counting while they play, they develop thinking skills, problem solving skills and other mathematics skills.*

NPH: I guess they enjoy their learning .Mam tell me now, how do you integrate play in your lessons?

Miss C: You know mam**;** *CAPS have made our lives easier now. We are given themes to use which are integrated. When starting a new theme, for example sight which they do now we plan our lesson in a way that it shows integration we divide them in different groups to do different activities on their own based on the theme. Those activities will have numeracy, literacy and life Skills in it .Learners will sing a counting song, run and take the* number *or make patterns of numbers on the sand sometimes play in fantasy using resources like binoculars. During outdoor play, learners use skipping robes to jump in a certain pattern. They also make numbers using dough.*

NPH: You said CAPS has made it easier for you to teach, I would like to know your role now in facilitating play.

Miss C: *Though CAPS has provided us with themes, we still have a role to plan accordingly to suits our learners needs. Learners do different activities in groups and as individuals and as a teacher I have a role to monitor, guides and assess them by observing them while they play in different areas like fantasy area, construction area, library area, creative area and during outdoor play and record in my observation book. When I observe them as they play, I easily*

identify those who have barriers of different nature and try to assist them. There are those who struggle when doing activities I usually support them to show that we work together as a team.

NPH: What strategies do you use in facilitating play in your classroom?

Miss C: *I use rhymes, role plays, songs, draw and do cut and paste activities.*

NPH: What are the different kinds of play that you use in your classroom and why?

Miss C: Err…I do different play activities with them but I like to use role play with my learners because they enjoy doing things on their own. When they role play, they show their creative part and they like to perform in front of others. Learners feel that they are in control. Role playing also develops their vocabulary and develop their social skills. Their parents enjoy it too. They are also given time to play freely (free play), without teachers instruction. Opportunities for free play are given to those learners who have completed the task first.

NPH: Oh yes (laughing) they enjoy being in charge. Mam tell me how do you prepare your play activities for your learners.

Miss C: *I use what is in my areas and sometimes create my own.*

NPH: Do you use any other documents?

Miss C: *Yes*

NPH: Which documents do you use?

Miss C: *I use CAPS document and textbooks.*

NPH: Where do your learners play?

Mss C: *They play outside but we make planned activities since we do not have a proper outdoor play area, they run with bean bags, use sand scoops and do water play.*

NPH: Ok, you mean you do involve them in outdoor play and you do have some resources to use

Miss C: *Yes, we only need a structured outdoor area with jungle gym etc.*

NPH: Where do you get your Learner Teacher Support (LTSM) for indoor and outdoor play?

Miss C: *We are given by the Department of Education*

NPH: What documents do you use to facilitate play activities in your classroom?

Miss C: I use CAPS

NPH: Learners' CAPS show you how to plan your activities?

Miss C: Yes, CAPS do give us guidance but I also use my experience

NPH: What learners' CAPS say about play in Grade R?

Miss C: *CAPS encourages learners to play. It has increase the allocated time to one hour for playing. It emphasise holistically development of learners.*

NPH: I would like to know if there are any challenges you have in using play/ anything that you want to know/ share with me on this topic

Miss C: *My interest is in developing my knowledge of teaching Grade R. I would like to highlight the challenges that I have in teaching Grade R learners. The backgrounds of these learners affect the teaching and learning. There is lack of parental support to some learners and others are abused, hungry and slow in development due to drug abuse by parents when they were still pregnant. Some learners are misbehaving, other do not like to socialise during outdoor play.*

NPH: This is indeed a problem in the holistically development of a learner. How do you attend such problems?

Miss C: *We try to support them by referring them to other stakeholders who can offer help like social workers .We also try to apply inclusive education by teaching them according to their specific needs. This learners' not solve the problem entirely we still need to learn about working with special need learners and support them.*

NPH: Thank you for your time, goodbye. Please do allow me to come back should I need clarity on our discussion.

Miss C: *You are welcome to come back. Goodbye.*

Interview Transcript

Second Participants

CODES: Interviewer**: NPH**

Grade R Teacher: **Miss D**

N**PH:** Good morning Colleague, It is pleasure to meet you this morning. May I thank you for allowing me to conduct this research in your class. I know you could have used this time for something else .I promise you that whatever we will discuss here will remain anonymous, no one will ever know about our conversation. I promise to use pseudonym (not real name) in order to protect your identity.

I would like to know how long you have been teaching in Grade R.

Miss D: *I have been teaching Grade R for nine years now (smiling)*

NPH: Mmm…you have been teaching Grade R for all these years?

Miss D: *Yes and it has been quite an experience*

NPH: Mam tell me, what do you understand about play

Miss D*: Err… I can say Grade R learners play every time they learn, play is everything they do. They think they are playing yet they learn during play.*

NPH: Wow… that sounds interesting. How is play significant or important in your Learners' learning and development?

   Miss D*: As I have mentioned before, play develop their confidence. Play develops love of learning because here at school, they learn things that are similar to those they do at home. Games are taken from the games they play at home. When they play, they assist each other in learning the rules of the game. Play develops their minds. It develops their language skills. They are able to recall what they have learnt through play. Learners can create their own games and take responsibility in their own work.. They even go to the extent of teaching you a particular game because they see you as play mates. They run around in joy.* Through play learners learn

how to interact with others, to become independent, to cooperate with others, and to be creative.(from chapter 2)

NPH: How do you integrate play activities in your lessons?

Miss D: *If I introduce a concept from the theme for example a number or a sound, I always draw from their previous knowledge. They learn to count, measure different things and play counting games. They look at that number e.g. 10 and they are able to recall the number they have learnt before e.g. 9. Here they will learn about pattern of numbers which integrate with patterns in life skills. They are able to play in different corners during rings. They speak to one another as they play.*

NPH: How do you integrate your theme in literacy?

Miss D: I use CAPS document. CAPS show us how to integrate. As our theme is sight, we sing songs about it, interpret a picture story, describe, talk about colour, size and sometimes draw. They also run with bean bags making different pattern. Learners become very creative by creating their own games and songs.

NPH: Mmm… you work so hard in Grade R. What do you see as your role in facilitating play?

Miss D: *My role is to plan using themes, pictures and real objects so as to allow them to use all their senses. I also support those who have learning difficulties. After teaching them I assess them through observation.*

NPH: What strategies do you use in facilitating play in your classroom?

Miss D: *I first make sure that my areas have new things that will interest my learners especially in fantasy because they love to play in that corner. I also use songs, rhymes and games*

NPH: What are the different kinds of play that you use in your classroom and why?

Miss D: *I usually do a role play with them. They play in different areas like constructive area, fantasy and sometime play with each other freely (free play). When they play outside they use water and they run around and play hide and seek.*

 NPH: Now tell me, how do you prepare these play activities for your learners?

Miss D: *Play activities are based on the themes taken from CAPS in most times. I do make my own sometimes or ask learners to do it. I use resources taken from their corner as well.*

NPH: Where do you learners play during outdoor play?

Miss D: *They play outside but we do not have outdoor area (smiling). They only do structured activities. They use bin bags, balls, skipping robes, buckets and scooping.*

NPH: Where do you get your Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM)?

Miss D*: Iam not sure where we get these resources (pointing at the resources) whether from the Learners' or the school.*

 NPH: Do you have any specific document that you use to facilitate play in your classroom?

Miss D: *Yes, I usually use CAPS document because it gives us themes to use on our activities.*

NPH: Does CAPS show you how to plan your play lessons?

Miss D: *Yes, I also create my own ways.*

NPH: What CAPS say about play in Grade R?

Miss D: *CAPS recommend that learners should learn through play in their mother tongue which is sometimes difficult for them to understand. We do code switching in most times*

NPH: **Are learners not confused by code switching?**

Miss D: No

NPH: I would like to know if there are any challenges you have in using play/ anything that you want to know/ share with me on this topic

Miss D*: Iam interested in knowing more about ECD curriculum. Iam currently doing my NPDE and wanting to have more knowledge of Grade R teaching and another thing that I usually face is lack of parental support for learners. These Learners' experience a lot of learning problems and parents learners' not come to school if you ask them to come and discuss the learner's problems.*

NPH: How do you solve this problem?

Miss D: *I refer them to the Institutional Learner Support Team for further assistance or to social workers.*

NPH: May I thank you again for your time and wish you all the best in your NPDE and promise you to come back should I need more information on what we have discussed.

Miss D: Pleasure.