Quebec Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives on Play-Based Learning

Camille Therrien

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By: Camille Therrien

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Examiner

Dr. Hariclia Petrakos

_____ Examiner

Dr. Nathalie Rothschild

_____ Supervisor

Dr. Sandra Chang-Kredl

Approved by   _____

Dr. Sandra Chang-Kredl, Graduate Program Director

_____ _____

Date   *Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science*

Abstract

Quebec Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives on Play-Based Learning

Camille Therrien

With play recognized globally as a tool to promote children's development and academic learning, the Quebec provincial government has given play a central role in their preschool education program. However, kindergarten teachers are given little information on their roles during children's play and teachers are left to determine how and the extent to which they should integrate play in their classrooms. This study aims to gain a better understanding of Quebec kindergarten teachers' beliefs about play-based learning, their roles during play, and their views about Quebec's mandated free play periods. Through case studies, four Quebec kindergarten teachers were interviewed and profiles were created. The profiles display the teachers' perspectives of play and demonstrate how their beliefs affect their roles during the children's play and their implementation of play in the classroom. Results reveal a lack of clarity amongst the teachers in defining play and play-based learning, and disagreements over the appropriate level of adult involvement - although the teachers all believe in taking on active roles during their students' play. The profiles also reveal the teachers' beliefs regarding the benefits of play and the issue of accountability required of kindergarten classrooms. Overall, the four kindergarten teachers interpret and present play very differently in their classrooms. The results support the need for clearer and more consistent definitions of play-based learning and detailed information of the roles of adults during play, both in research and in the Quebec Educational Program to enhance the practice of play and play-based pedagogies in kindergarten classrooms.

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Quebec Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives on Play-Based Learning

In recent years, there have been significant curricular changes in kindergarten classrooms, shifting towards more play-based learning across many educational systems around the world, including Canada (Pyle et al., 2017). Play has become increasingly recognized as a principal medium in which children learn and develop, as advocates argue for its value in terms of children's overall development (e.g., socio-emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development) and academic learning (Pyle et al., 2017; Pyle & Bigelow, 2015; Walsh & Fallon, 2019). While most agree that play is beneficial to children's learning, some researchers challenge these claims citing replication and methodology problems, as well as research's inability to support causal relationship between variables (Lillard, et al., 2013). Despite these controversies, the research valuing play has led to the development of curricular policies that mandate the use of play-based pedagogies while maintaining high academic standards (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015).

The Quebec provincial government also emphasizes the central role of play in their preschool cycle education program (intended for children who attend kindergarten for 4 and 5-years-olds), stating that: "play is at the heart of learning" (2021a). Furthermore, within the Quebec preschool education program (2021b), it is explained that children who learn through play and who are comfortable in their kindergarten classrooms will see school positively, and be more confident, motivated, and capable of succeeding. While the Quebec education program [QEP] (2021b) emphasizes the importance of play, the QEP writes that with "the support from adults, children are able to engage in learning situations based on a combination of play and real-life experiences…" (p. 9). However, no other information is given regarding the implementation process and teachers' roles during the play. With this push towards more play-based learning and teaching, Quebec kindergarten teachers are left to determine how and to what extent they should

integrate play in their classrooms. The purpose of this study will be to gain a better understanding of teachers' beliefs about play-based learning and how they see their roles within their students' play. Teachers' perspectives about play and the roles they hold during those activities influence their pedagogical decisions and affect whether and how they implement play-based learning. This qualitative case study will examine teachers' perspectives in Quebec Kindergarten classrooms for 5-year-olds in order to better understand how to support children's play and enhance their learning.

Literature Review

Defining Play

Despite most adults' ability to identify children's play (Smith & Vollstedt, 1985), many researchers disagree over its definition and nature (Barblett, et al., 2016; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012; White, 2012). The definitions of play that are offered tend to range from discrete descriptions of various types of play, including but not limited to physical, construction, or pretend, to a list of broad criteria that appear to capture the essence of all play behaviors (Rubin et al., 1983; White, 2012). Based on children's behaviors and dispositions, these broad criteria operationalize play as freely chosen, actively engaging, intrinsically motivating, opportunistic and episodic, pleasurable, creative, and process-oriented where the means are more important than the ends (Rubin, et al., 1983; Smith & Pellegrini, 2008; Sturgess, 2003; White, 2012). Under these conditions, children's play is often described as free as the children set up their play and decide for themselves what to play and with whom to play.

In this conceptualization, play is often described as an activity without adult involvement. It is believed by some researchers that having an adult involved could lead them to "hijack the

play" (Goouch, 2008, p. 95; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). In a classroom setting, it has been further

stated that the teacher's involvement could unintentionally direct children's play away from

child-centered contexts due to the teacher's beliefs about play and the mandated curriculum

objectives (Goouch, 2008). Moreover, there is a belief that within early childhood education

(ECE), play sits separately from "work" – making the distinction between play and non-play

(e.g., school work and teacher organized activities) (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Jenvey & Jenvey,

2002). Thus, play and learning are seen as two polarised, incompatible concepts, as play is

considered child-initiated while learning is seen as a result of a practice or activity initiated by an

adult (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Weisberg, Zosh, et al., 2013).

When teachers determine how the play episodes move forward, such activities have been

coined by Bruckman (1999, p. 75) as "chocolate-dipped broccoli" – these activities may be

playful but they do not fit the definition of play such as being spontaneous, freely chosen, and

process-oriented (Weisberg, Zosh, et al., 2013). These activities would be described as work

disguised as play. Similarly, children seem to make the distinction between learning and play as

they associate learning with teachers and play with self-initiated activities (Synodi, 2010). Thus,

having teachers involved could lead students to think that the activity is "work" rather than

"play" and could undermine the positive effects of play on children's learning. Due to these

beliefs, some researchers advocate against teachers' involvement in children's play. Despite

these warnings, other research suggests that play guided by teachers, a form of play that falls

between direct instruction and free play, can be more effective in helping children achieve

academic outcomes than direct instruction (e.g., Han et al., 2010) or free play (e.g., Chien et al.,

2010). Guided play allows for children to be active partners, while keeping them engaged by

putting their interests and needs at the forefront of learning, and having teachers give them

feedback and direction (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, et al., 2013). Regardless of disagreement surrounding the definitions and the nature of play, and whether or not teachers should be involved, both researchers and teachers agree that play in early education is crucial for children's development (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

The Benefits of Play

Many research reports have confirmed the value of play on children's overall development (White, 2012), as well as children's academic learning or content knowledge, particularly in literacy (Justice & Pullen, 2003; Tsao, 2008) and numeracy (e.g., Vogt, et al., 2018). Similar to current research on the role of play, the literature presented below will be split into developmental learning and subject-based learning – representing the two different orientations toward the value and potential benefits of play. It is also important to note that in the research, the types of play endorsed, and the recommended roles of the teachers will differ significantly depending on the learning objectives and curriculum expectations (Pyle, et al., 2017). The differing teachers' roles and types of play further add to challenges kindergarten teachers may face as they integrate play into their classrooms (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015).

Research on Children's Developmental Learning

Overall, play affects all domains of children's development, including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical. According to White (2012), as children play, they learn and practice cognitive skills including language, problem-solving, creativity, and self-regulation; they practice socio-emotional skills as they interact, negotiate, and compromise with others; and they practice fine and gross motor skills as they move, jump, run, build blocks and draw. Play then presents children with opportunities, both in direct and indirect ways, for growth as it meets the needs of the whole, individual child (White, 2012). In kindergarten education, research has

identified three core benefits of play, including: cognitive, social-emotional, and self-regulation development (Pyle, et al., 2017). Although research confirms the holistic benefits of play on the whole child, the studies presented below will focus on the cognitive and socio-emotional aspects – which is what researchers and kindergarten teachers generally identify as the core benefits of play (e.g., Pyle & Bigelow, 2015)

   Cognitive Development. In research, play supports facets of general cognitive development in kindergarten students including: problem-solving (Gmitrová & Gmitrov, 2004), co-construction of knowledge (e.g., Leseman et al., 2001), critical thinking skills (Andrews, 2015), and negotiating meaning and forming concepts (e.g., Fleer, 2011). For instance, free exploration using blocks and constructive materials has been seen to promote problem-solving and critical thinking skills, as children manipulate and experiment with these materials. In a study by Andrews (2015), kindergarten children displayed critical thinking and problem-solving skills as the students were building ramps for cars. The goal was for the ramps to be solid enough to allow the cars to reach their destinations without the ramps collapsing. While the children were playing with blocks, the teacher explained that they were experimenting with physics, mathematics, and science (e.g., understanding the basic force between objects and motion), and they were practicing social skills (e.g., cooperation and negotiating with one another) and language skills (e.g., communicating ideas and thoughts and actively listening) (Andrews, 2015). Within that play episode, the teacher introduced the activity to the children, decided on the learning objectives, encouraged them to work in teams and provided them with materials. Although the children were free to choose how the play progressed, with whom to play, and the resources they needed, the play had some teacher involvement (Andrews, 2015).

Gmitrová and Gmitrov (2004) also investigated the influence of play on kindergarten children's cognitive performance. In contrast to Andrews' (2015) study, Gmitrová and Gmitrov (2004) looked at pretend play and compared teacher-directed and child-directed groups. In teacher-directed groups, the teachers directed the activity through organizing, monitoring, elaborating, and encouraging the children's play. Gmitrová and Gmitrov (2004) explained that this group was representative of more traditional teaching methods. On the other hand, the child-directed play group was considered free as the children followed their own interests without external interventions. It is important to note that the teachers in this group participated in the play process as they presented the activity and facilitated the play while leaving the children to take on more of an active role in their own play. The results showed that during child-directed relative to teacher-directed pretend play there was an increase in cognitive behaviors related to problem-solving, including: asking questions, stating problems, and suggesting solutions. The results also showed a positive association between cognitive and affective behaviors during the child-directed play, suggesting that positive emotions and motivations were induced in this group as opposed to teacher-directed play where affective behavior was associated with teachers' behavioral stimuli. This led Gmitrová and Gmitrov (2004) to propose motivation as an explanation for their findings, explaining that children's persistence gradually decreased during teacher-directed pretend play.

In addition, some researches argue specifically for the use of collaborative or mutually directed play to facilitate cognitive development (Vu et al., 2015). In the research presented above, the authors mentioned the play being free but it appears that the teachers were minimally involved as they simply set up the environment, presented activities, monitored students, and offered materials. In the Vu et al. (2015) study, the authors emphasized the active role of

teachers to enhance children's cognitive development. Looking at teacher-child play interactions before and after a teacher-training program, they found that teachers who took on more meaningful roles in children's play had students who engaged in higher levels of cognitive and social play (e.g., cooperative and dramatic) (Vu et al., 2015). In post-training, the teachers were involved meaningfully in deeper levels of children's play by taking on more facilitative roles of co-player (e.g., responsive to children's actions, asking questions, and functioning as an actual partner without enriching or furthering the play) and play leader (e.g., enriching and furthering the play). Moreover, in post-training, even the teachers who did not get involved during the children's play had students who engaged in more constructive and dramatic play compared to those uninvolved prior to the training. Vu et al., (2015) suggested that these teachers had appropriately set the stage for the children to engage in higher levels of cognitive play by themselves.

With respect to kindergarten children's cognitive development, researchers both endorse the importance of different types of child-directed play and collaborative play. All seem to show the impact of different degrees of adult involvement – from simply setting up the play area or episodes to more active involvement such as co-player or play leader.

Socio-emotional Development. A further body of research concerning play addresses the connection between play and the development of social and emotional skills. As kindergarten children move into more complex social play, such as pretend play, they begin to collaborate and communicate with one another (e.g., determining rules of engagement, problem-solving, and refining their conflict resolution skills), they learn the social norms and rules of play (e.g., turn-taking), and they practice their self-regulation skills (Pyle & DeLuca, 2017; Taylor & Boyer, 2020; White, 2012). Both free play and collaborative play were linked to the development of

these skills. For example, Andrews (2015) showed that free, block play in groups was linked to cooperation, and improved social and language skills. Conversely, McNamee (2005) highlighted that teacher involvement in play (e.g., asking children to share and act out stories) encourages positive relationships with peers and adults as they work out collaboratively through debates, concerns, and reflect on these issues.

In addition, play in kindergarten classrooms has been linked to children's self-regulation skills. For instance, De Le Riva and Ryan (2015) recommended that child-directed pretend play and rough-and-tumble play could improve self-regulation skills in kindergarten-aged children as they learn to regulate their emotions while negotiating rules, circumstances, and the direction of play. This study recommended that the role of kindergarten teachers should be to help maintain a child-centered environment to improve these outcomes. Although free play can offer opportunities for socio-emotional development, when teachers enter child-guided activities, they can identify situations in which they can potentially model appropriate social and emotional responses (Kirk & Jay, 2018).

Research on Children's Academic Learning

Research also shows that play in the classroom can be considered a vehicle to drive curricular competencies and can lead to academic gains in numeracy and literacy. For example, in a study by Vogt et al. (2018), play has been shown to positively impact kindergarten children's mathematical competencies. In their study, Vogt et al. (2018) applied a play-based program intervention to study kindergarten children's mathematical learning gains. To accomplish this, they compared pre- and post-test scores of an 8-week intervention program to a control group. The play-based approach consisted of using cards and board games that were developed to match mathematics curricular contents (e.g., quantities, counting, number

recognition, and part-and-whole relationships). The educators in the play group were provided with a box of games to introduce to the classroom, and then supported the children as they were playing. In contrast, the control group represented traditional or widely used classroom practices (e.g., counting in day-to-day situations). The results showed significantly higher learning outcomes for the play-based intervention program compared to the control or traditional kindergarten group. It is important to note that the play-based intervention used guided play, as children chose the games and with whom to play with, while the teachers structured the play (Vogt, et al., 2018). Furthermore, post-intervention interviews also demonstrated that educators were more enthusiastic about play-based approaches. Vogt et al. (2018) stated that teachers' positive attitudes towards the play-based intervention contributed to the children's learning success.

Literacy Skills. Play has also been used to enhance children's literacy skills, including oral language skills, reading and writing. For example, research by Van Oers and Duijkers (2013) has demonstrated that sociodramatic play improves children's vocabulary in a constructed play context (e.g., doctors office) by comparing a play-based and a direct instruction approach. Teachers in the play group served as coaches and supporters as children played out different roles (e.g., patient, shop keeper, or bus driver). The teachers also participated in the play activity where they could elaborate on the activity by asking questions, raising problems, or using new tools and relevant words that the children could appropriately imitate. The teachers could also regulate the shared activities and optimize the chance of using newly learned words (Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013). On the other hand, those in the direct instruction classrooms separated work and free play. Teaching occurred in the context of projects and tasks that were prescribed by the program itself. The teachers in this context were directive, they demonstrated objects or events

and mentioned their names, and asked the children to repeat or act according to the instruction of a specific program (Van Oers & Dujikers, 2013). The results showed that children in the play classrooms were observed to use newly taught words more frequently than the children in the direct instruction classrooms (Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013). These words were believed to be developed as tools for communication and joint exploration, and the regulation of the play activity as they negotiated with their peers and the teachers (Van Oers & Duijers, 2013). They concluded that collaborative play could help promote oral language development. Weisberg, Zosh, et al. (2013) point to similar findings, explaining that: social interactions that occur during sociodramatic feeds children's language development as they establish a play frame and collaborate in it.

Sharp et al. (2012) have also suggested using pretend play in collaborative, playful activities involving phonologically-based literacy games (e.g., focusing on word sounds and discussing different examples of those sounds) with pretend elements to promote reading readiness and comprehension. They also suggested incorporating writing materials in play to promote writing skills, such as creating labels and signs (Sharp et al., 2012). To encourage kindergarten children's language and literacy development, appropriate teacher scaffolding and using the environment have been suggested as techniques to incorporate during children's play (Saracho & Spodek, 2006). More specifically, research has shown that embedding literacy materials within play settings in kindergarten classrooms is related to engagement with those materials and practice of literacy skills (Justice & Pullen, 2003) and teacher involvement can further enhance this engagement (Tsao, 2008).

Overall, research addressing the potential benefits of play for academic learning in kindergarten consistently highlights the involvement of teachers and collaboration with their

students. Research seems to recommend that teachers take on more active roles during the play activities by creating and directing these activities as well as intervening during child-led play to capitalize on learning opportunities (Pyle, et al., 2017). These interventions, according to Van Oers and Duijkers (2013), could be done through orienting (e.g., exploring the situations and focusing on the students' attention on specific aspects of play), structuring and deepening (e.g., setting up the scene, introducing and discussing the play), broadening (e.g., relating the play to other activities), contributing to (e.g., introducing new tools into the play), and reflecting on the play. These strategies may help teachers capitalize on learning opportunities but have to be used in relevant ways. Thus, researchers emphasize the need for proper teacher education (Van Oers & Duijkers, 2013) in terms of intervening effectively in children's play-based learning.

While research demonstrates support for the role of play in both developmental learning and academic skills, the body of literature describes differing roles for teachers and the use of different types of play. It is important to note however that some researchers are skeptical of the current literature on the benefits of play, citing issues such as lack of replication of results or biases on the part of the investigators (Lillard, et al., 2013). Although Lillard et al. (2013) have pointed to flaws within the research, they still advocate for the use of more hands-on, child-driven playful learning as the most positive means known yet to help young children's development compared to more teacher-centered instructional approaches. With research presenting very distinct teacher roles within students' play, teachers are left with conflicting messages about how to integrate play in their classroom (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Thus, teachers have to determine the type of play to foster in their classroom, the environmental contexts that can support the play, and the extent to which they will be involved in the playful contexts (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). This may create challenges for certain kindergarten teachers.

Play-Based Learning and Teachers' Roles

Despite continued debate about the contribution that play makes to child development and students' learning, and the role of teachers during play-based learning, policy makers and curriculum writers forged ahead mandating the use of play in classrooms (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Play-based learning (PBL) has often been cited by research as a tool to unify play and educational pedagogy in kindergarten classrooms. PBL is considered child-centered and focuses on the children's development, interests, and abilities by creating engaging and developmentally appropriate learning experiences (Pyle & DeLuca, 2017). In terms of pedagogy, it involves using play and child-directed elements with some degree of guidance and scaffolding to achieve specific learning objectives (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). In contrast to traditional definitions of play, which focus on it being pleasurable, engaging, and process-oriented rather than purposefully directed on learning, PBL's goal is for children to learn through play (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). PBL keeps the play child-centered and uses play as a tool to keep kindergarten children engaged and motivated in an activity.

Theoretical Frameworks of PBL

Play-based pedagogy is firmly rooted in constructivist and sociocultural frameworks which have influenced how teachers view children's learning and development, and how they see their roles. Constructivist theories, based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development, emphasizes play as crucial in children's cognitive growth and development. Piaget (1951) believed that, through play, children would explore and actively engage with their environment helping them acquire and construct concepts. PBL also stems from Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that gives prominence to the role of significant others in young children's learning and development. He looked at development through social viewpoints and believed

that play episodes could be used as context for socially assisted learning and as a tool that would promote learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) described the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the range of abilities that a child can perform with assistance but cannot yet perform independently. According to the works of Vygotsky, teachers are responsible for supporting children's development through interactions and scaffolding which would enable their skills to improve (Rieber & Wollock, 1997). Vygotsky defined play as a natural setting in which scaffolding could occur. He also believed that play contained all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and was a major source of development for children (Vygotsky, 1978). PBL draws from both of Piaget's cognitive development and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theories, as it focuses on children's play, significant others, and its impact on learning and cognitive development – trying to find a balance between children's free play and academically-focused, adult-structured play in the classroom (Taylor & Boyer, 2020).

Teachers' Roles in PBL

In the next sections, I will describe two frameworks for considering the kindergarten teachers' role in play-based learning: 1) Pyle and Danniels' (2017) continuum of play-based learning and 2) Walsh et al., (2019) and Pyle and Bigelow's (2015) profiles of teachers' beliefs and participation in play.

To date, researchers find it challenging to specifically define play-based classrooms. Teachers continue to show diverse roles during their students' play, with some teachers almost exclusively supporting free play (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Moving away from a definition of play that is strictly child-centered and the binary distinction between children's play and adult-directed "work and learning," Pyle and Danniels (2017) broadened the

definition of play in the classroom to present a continuum that integrates child-centered play in

teacher-initiated contexts. Their work will be featured in this section. In integrating play,

curriculum content, and pedagogy in the kindergarten classroom, Pyle and Danniels (2017)

emphasize the importance of integrating multiple types of play that encompass a variety of

activities and teachers' roles that can support the teaching of academic skills in a playful manner

(Pyle et al., 2017). Thus, this continuum is conceptually broader than free play alone, which

according to Pyle and Danniels (2017) may alleviate teachers' concerns (e.g., the degree of

teacher involvement, teaching curricular expectations in a child-led environment, and meeting

academic standards without influencing the direction of play) over its implementation.

 This continuum includes broad types of play that differ in terms of the teachers'

involvement, including free play, inquiry play, collaborative play, playful learning, and learning

through games (Pyle & Danniels, 2017), each of which will be described next (See Figure 1).

Figure 1
Types of Play in Terms of Teachers' Increasing Involvement (Pyle & Danniels, 2017)
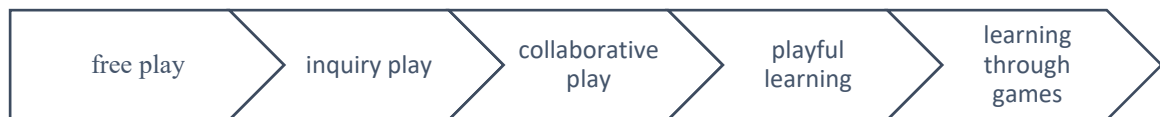
Free play, the most child-directed play, situates itself at one end of the continuum, while

the most teacher-directed play, learning through games, situates itself at the opposite end. As

mentioned previously, in *free play*, children decide for themselves what to play and with whom

to play, and they set up their own play episodes without adult involvement. It is intrinsically

motivating and its purpose is rarely specific to academic learning.

Similar to free play, in *inquiry play,* the locus of control remains largely with the children

but the teachers extend the play by integrating related academic standards (Pyle & Danniels,

2017). For example, in Pyle and Danniels' (2017) study, a teacher demonstrated inquiry play as her students played with paper airplanes. The children initiated the play as they were flying airplanes in the classroom, and the teacher responded to their interest by helping them create a runway and bringing in books with more complex instructions on how to make paper airplanes. She then extended their play by integrating related academic standards, including measurement tools to determine how far their planes could fly, and introducing steps to the scientific method (e.g., testing out different adherents) to determine which would help the planes fly further. Inquiry play in kindergarten is explicitly recommended in early education program documents, such as Ontario's full-day kindergarten program (OME, 2016), as an important play-based strategy and most effective for kindergarten-age children as it supports play and instruction based on children's interests (Brooker, 2011).

This particular strategy fits with the integrative model in early childhood curricula as teachers observe their students and create opportunities for children to seek answers to questions that are important and relevant to them (OME, 2016). This enables teachers to address curriculum contexts in integrated ways by allowing them to make connections, and to engage in relevant and meaningful activities that are connected to the children's real lives. Furthermore, in integrated curricula, authentic learning occurs by engaging learners in real-world problems through inquiry activities that employ higher order thinking skills, discussions, and collaboration amongst learners, and through student empowerment and ownership (Zhbanova et al., 2010).

Compared to inquiry play, in *collaborative play*, the teachers and students share the locus of control rather than having the play solely or mostly controlled by the children. In this context, both teachers and students mutually design the play (e.g., choosing the theme and the resources needed). The children direct the play within the created environment while the teachers direct the

outcome of the play by determining the academic skills that will be developed. For instance, in one classroom, Pyle and Danniels (2017) observed the creation of a veterinary clinic. Using the children's interest for animals, the teacher created a pet shop environment which later transformed into a veterinary clinic after classroom discussions. Within that play, the children chose to act out as clients, veterinarians, and receptionists. The teacher integrated academic skills such as reading and writing as the students read books on proper animal treatment, wrote instructions for animal care, recorded appointments, and drew bones and labelled them. Similar to inquiry play, the teacher extended the children's play. However, the teacher sought to target specific skills, in this case literacy skills, and provided subsequent guidance. During this observation, the teacher was seen joining conversations, introducing concepts (e.g., x-ray machines), assisting students in research and providing them with materials (e.g., helping them build their own x-ray machines). Collaborative play contexts provided opportunities for both child-directed play and opportunities for the teacher to integrate academic skills (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

In *playful learning*, the teachers initiate and become more involved in the play. In contrast to collaborative play, playful learning is more structured in that the teachers design the context of play and ensure that the targeted academic skills are learned while still maintaining a level of playfulness. Overall, the teachers outline the process and the objective of the activities and the children follow the rules (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Pyle & Alaca, 2018). Although the locus of control is mostly maintained by the teachers, the students can influence or have some control over aspects of the play. For instance, in one classroom, the teacher created a flower shop to put in practice the children's math and literacy concepts as part of a whole-class instruction (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). The teacher created order forms for children to fill out as clients,

including the type and color of the flowers they wanted, extra purchases (e.g., balloons), and the

total cost. The forms would be submitted to another student who held the role of shopkeeper

whose responsibility was to write down the number of flowers found on the order form and

process the form. The students maintained some control by choosing the events for which the

flowers were purchased. For instance, although the children followed prescribed instructions,

some decided that the flowers bought were for a picnic and continued the play narratives once

they had purchased their flowers (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

The final and most prescriptive type of play is *learning through games* in which the

teachers make learning academic standards more engaging for students by using games (e.g.,

Words with Friends, Play-Doh, or Math games) (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). In these types of

games, the teachers direct the play outcomes and the process while the students follow the rules

of a game (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). For example, the students in one class chose to play *Words*

with Friends, a game, similar to *Scrabble,* that involves using letter tiles to spell words and

names on a game board. Other classes used *Play-Doh* to make an assigned number of worms and

place them in a scene on theme placemats. The teachers chose the academic skills (e.g., spelling

and numeracy skills) they wanted their students to practice, constructed an activity, and chose a

board or card game where the children had to follow a set of predetermined rules. In this type of

play, the children do not have much control over determining the learning situation.

Overall, teachers can take on different roles during play-based learning, including:

supporting students uninterrupted child-led play (free play), with times of guidance and

scaffolding by following their lead and their interests (inquiry play); or creating mutually-agreed

upon play episodes (collaborative play), by setting up prescribed activities that contain playful

elements (playful learning); or by constructing games with explicit rules for children to follow

(learning through games) (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). It is important to note that the continuum is entirely child-centered but not all types of play discussed above are child-directed (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Whether the play in the classroom is child-directed, collaborative, or teacher directed, all present important opportunities for learning and development.

Teachers' Beliefs and Perspectives on Play-Based Learning

Teachers' pedagogical decisions about play-based learning are to some extent dependent on their beliefs about the approach's educational purpose and how they identify their role within the children's play (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). More specifically, their perspectives will influence how, where, and if they integrate PBL. Overall, it seems that most kindergarten teachers perceive play as children's fundamental right and hold the belief that play supports children's holistic development (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Hesterman & Targowska, 2020; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). They also believe that there is a natural link between play and learning (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). For instance, in Gray and Ryan's (2016) study exploring early years teachers' experiences with play-based curriculums, they found that the vast majority of participants valued play, believed it laid the foundation for future learning, and that it "foster[ed] a love of learning in a natural and unconscious way" (p. 197). Only a few participants believed that there was no or very little learning that occurred during play.

Similar to the literature on the benefits of play, most teachers express two distinct views on the role of play in children's development. There are those who believe that play (1) supports social and emotional development, and (2) supports not only children's socio-emotional development but also academic learning (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Pyle & DeLuca, 2017; Pyle, et al., 2018). These different beliefs about the purpose of play in the classroom has led to diverse understandings by teachers on their roles during children's play. This lack of consistency,

according to Fesseha and Pyle (2016), has led to major concerns in PBL given that implementation in kindergarten classrooms is affected by the knowledge and understanding of teachers. In Walsh et al.'s (2019) study looking into teaching within play-based curriculum, the teachers' understandings of their roles during children's play fell into three distinct categories: (1) non-participatory, (2) over-participatory, and (3) appropriately participatory. These categories were derived from interviews and classroom observations examining teachers' mindsets and classroom practices (Walsh et al., 2019).

Non-Participatory Profile

Teachers who were categorized as *non-participatory* equated PBL with notions of developmentally appropriate practices, as they believed that children's learning takes place naturally through play (Walsh et al., 2019). When describing the benefits of play, they focused on the children's social and emotional skills (Walsh et al., 2019). This is similar to Pyle and Bigelow (2015) who described kindergarten teachers' views on play as a vehicle for socio-emotional development. The teachers categorized under this approach believed that the primary purpose of play was, again, to develop children's social and emotional skills and that teachers should not be involved nor guide the children's play as it would detract from the intended purpose of play (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). This dominant viewpoint seemed to be translated in their practice, as they adopted more passive, hands-off, and non-intervening approaches, primarily in the form of encouraging free play with minimal involvement (Pyle et al., 2018).

In most cases, these teachers waited and watched their students during free play, rather than engage and participate in their play. These play-based experiences have become associated with "laissez-faire" teaching (Walsh, et al., 2019). It is important to note that some teachers with similar philosophies were seen to be involved in the children's play through modeling,

supporting, and joining in to support the students' social problem-solving strategies (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Generally, these teachers are more concerned with managing and monitoring the children while they are playing and will only intervene to reduce conflict in the classroom and help the children continue their play episodes. This, according to Fesseha and Pyle (2016), may be viewed as an incomplete conceptualisation of the play-based pedagogy.

Over-Participatory Profile

The second category presented by Walsh et al. (2019) is *over-participatory,* although not necessarily in terms of participating in the children's play. In this profile, the teachers seemed to place greater emphasis on academic learning and see their role in play as principally ensuring that the demands of the curriculum are met. These teachers tend to have a skeptical view about the value of PBL which leads them to be unsure about their role in promoting academic learning in play-based episodes. They show difficulties entering the children's play without adopting an instructive style. When their students begin to play, they have a tendency to interrupt the flow of the play (e.g., asking artificial and inappropriate questions linked to the curriculum) (Walsh et al., 2019). These teachers tend to display playful opportunities that lack richness and depth (Walsh et al., 2019). Generally, these teachers seem to have difficulty trusting play as a medium for academic learning and resort to more formal methods of teaching that emphasize learning outcomes over experience (Walsh et al., 2019).

Similarly, Pyle and Bigelow (2015) found that one of the teachers in their study saw play as peripheral to learning. This particular teacher believed that the overall focus of the classroom was the development of academic skills mandated by the official curriculum. Thus, she kept a strict adherence to those standards. Her role was observed to be to construct the context in which play could occur but left the play to the children. During those times, she supervised the children

and, when needed, she withdrew the children for teacher-directed instruction and assessment (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Pyle and Bigelow (2015) believed that her strict adherence to curricular standards made it difficult for her to integrate academic learning in play contexts. Instead, she viewed play as a "break" from the academic learning which she viewed as the focus of kindergarten programs.

Teachers who view play as peripheral to learning or who are over-participatory tend to believe that play should be implemented separately from learning. This may stem from the teachers' beliefs that play and academic learning cannot co-occur (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). They appear to see learning as more formal and teacher-directed followed with time for free play. Fesseha and Pyle (2016) concluded that these teachers may define play as a recreational activity, used for pure enjoyment and having no practical use in learning of concrete materials. It is important to note that in Fesseha and Pyle's (2016) study, most teachers did not explicitly express a separate view of learning and play. However, their classroom structure revealed contradictions between their expressed philosophies of PBL and its enactment in their classrooms. This may point to challenges regarding teachers' abilities to implement PBL while ensuring that they meet curriculum expectations and standards. According to Pyle and Danniels (2017), those who have difficulties balancing academic expectations of the kindergarten curriculum with the play-based pedagogical approach show little variation in the types of play (e.g., displaying mostly free constructive and sensory play, and playing with toys) in which their students were engaged. These approaches do not align with curriculum-mandated PBL practices, such as the one found in the Ontario full-day kindergarten curriculum (OME, 2016).

Appropriately Participatory Profile

Lastly, some kindergarten teachers' beliefs about their role in PBL fit in Walsh et al.'s (2019) *appropriately participatory* category. These teachers emphasized understanding the students' needs and interests, and gathering knowledge that could be built on in the play-based classroom context. They also valued both the process and the product of children's play, viewing them as learning opportunities to foster children's learning dispositions, knowledge acquisition, and skills development (Walsh et al., 2019). They tended to share the perspective that they needed to ensure a connection between direct instruction and children's play to support their students' true understanding of academic concepts (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Their approach appears to possess a balanced and shared approach to teaching and learning – "at times responsive and on occasions intentional" (Walsh et al., 2019, p. 1168). According to Walsh et al. (2019), this approach is neither overly teacher-led nor fully child-centered. Through teacher and student cooperation, play and curriculum seem to come together. This type of shared pedagogy involves and affords opportunities for both developmental and academic learning. Pyle et al. (2017) support the need for such blended pedagogical approaches which move away from the current binary stance regarding play and academic pursuits and towards the integration of practices, with child-directed and teacher-directed play perceived as complementary.

Those teachers who are able to balance academic expectations and play view their roles in the classroom as more active and existing along the continuum, presented above, from silent and noninterfering observer to the creator of playful contexts which integrate academic standards. In an attempt to integrate play and curricular learning, the teachers ask questions and extend children's play, acting as more knowledgeable others (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Pyle, et al., 2018). Overall, these kindergarten teachers perceive their role in PBL as being responsive and intentional facilitators who do not leave learning to chance, using various types of play in their

classrooms (Hesterman & Targowska, 2020; Pyle et al., 2018). These teachers appear to have

moved beyond traditional practices, into a model that is closely aligned with play-based teaching

according to Walsh et al. (2019).

Purpose of the Study

In light of the research reviewed on play-based learning approaches in the kindergarten

classroom (Walsh et al., 2019; Pyle & Danniels, 2017), the purpose of this study will be to gain

an understanding of the current state of play and play-based learning (PBL) practices within

Quebec kindergarten classrooms, where play is believed to be "at the heart of learning" (QEP,

2021a) and little guidance is given to the teacher on their role during children's play. This project

will extend the existing literature and qualitatively explore kindergarten teachers' beliefs about

play and PBL, and their perspectives about their roles during their students' play. To understand

how PBL may be implemented in kindergarten classrooms, it is crucial to gain an understanding

of the teachers' beliefs about the educational purposes of play and how they perceive their role

within children's play. It is important to note that during the research process, the Quebec

government made changes to the Quebec kindergarten educational program that influenced the

place of play in the kindergarten classroom. At the start of the academic year 2021, the QEP

included two mandated periods of 45-60 minutes of free play in all kindergarten classrooms. To

take into account these recent modifications, a third research question was added to the study to

relay the views of the participants on their experiences following the implementation of the

mandated QEP's free play period. As teachers' perceptions of play would likely impact how play

would be implemented in their classroom, the following research questions were asked:

- What are Quebec kindergarten teachers' beliefs about play and children's
  learning?

- How do Quebec kindergarten teachers perceive their roles in play-based learning?

- What are Quebec kindergarten teachers' views on the mandated QEP's free play periods?

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore Quebec 5-year-old kindergarten teachers' perceptions of play-based learning and how they view their roles during their students' play. The design employed multiple case studies to gather in-depth information on teachers' beliefs and perspectives that could account for how they view their roles in PBL and how they might implement it in their classrooms. The study aims to expand theories related to PBL by identifying themes between the existing literature and kindergarten teachers' experiences and perspectives. It also aims to contribute to the existing literature by expanding PBL theories to the Quebec kindergarten education context. The use of multiple case studies permitted to identify the similarities and differences amongst teachers' views and enactment of PBL.

Teachers' beliefs offer important insight and knowledge about the pedagogy and practice of PBL in kindergarten classrooms. Research has demonstrated that teachers' perspectives about the educational purpose of play and how they identify their roles within that play influence how, where, and if they integrate PBL (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Thus, teachers become crucial agents in implementing play to enhance children's learning in their classrooms. Their experiences and perceptions could help expand existing theories or literature towards practical applications.

With the QEP (2021b) emphasizing the importance of play in preschool education but offering little guidance on how to effectively implement it in kindergarten classrooms, teachers

may fall back on their beliefs, perspectives, and experiences to make pedagogical decisions about using play for children's learning. Through interviews, I investigated teachers' beliefs and perspectives.

Participants

Four 5-year-old kindergarten teachers were selected based on criteria established to participate in the study, including: being currently employed in a Quebec kindergarten classroom. All four participants are, at the time of the study, working in a kindergarten classroom and have varied teaching backgrounds which are presented below. The participants also represent both the private and the public-school sectors. It is important to note that throughout the study, pseudonyms are used to maintain the teachers' confidentiality.

Tim Smith, the first participant, teaches in a French private elementary school in Montréal. He is a first language teacher with 14 years of teaching experience and 11 of those years have been in kindergarten classrooms. With a Master's degree in Education in Leadership and Learning with a focus on 21st Century Teaching and Learning, Tim Smith has taught outside of Canada in Latvia and Belgium. Lucy, the second participant, has 13 years teaching experience and has been teaching in kindergarten classrooms for the past eight years. Lucy has had previous experiences working in daycares but is currently working in the private sector as an English language arts teacher in a French school. Jul2021, the third participant, has 24 years of teaching experience, all taking place in kindergarten classrooms. This year, she is working in the public sector as a French first language teacher. Lisa, the fourth participant, is a first language English teacher from the public sector and the most novice teacher with four years of experience. Her first three years were spent in the intermediate grades before transitioning to the kindergarten program this year.

Procedures

During the data collection process, data were gathered through semi-structured, individual interviews with open-ended questions. Due to the current and on-going pandemic (COVID-19), I refrained from in-person interactions and observations. As well, to reduce exposure to the virus to the participants and researcher, only online interviews were completed through Zoom. The participants chose when and where the interviews were conducted. Prior to the interview, the participants chose a pseudonym and gave both verbal and written consent (See Appendix A). Within the consent form, the participants were also explained that any details provided about their current or former employers and work establishment would be removed from the transcripts to maintain anonymity. Overall, the interviews with each participant lasted between 45 minutes to 90 minutes and focused on teachers' perceptions about play, their roles within that play, and how it affected their classrooms practices. Table 1, presented below, displays the interview guide with questions both in English and French.

Table 1

Interview Guide: English and French Questions

English Questions	French Questions
Can you please walk me through a typical day in your classroom? Please include any details that you feel are relevant or important to understand your program. • Are the other days in your week similar to this one? Do your days vary greatly? If so, could you please explain how?	Pouvez-vous me décrire une journée typique dans votre classe? Essayez d'inclure le plus de détails possibles pour me permettre de bien comprendre votre programme.
Can you talk about the various teaching and/or learning strategies that are occurring throughout different points during the day? You may refer to your daily plans.	Pouvez-vous me parler des méthodes d'enseignement et de stratégies d'apprentissage utilisées à différents moments de la journée? Vous pouvez référer à votre plan de cours.

How would you describe play? What are characteristics that represent all children's play?

Please describe what play looks like in your classroom.
- What types of play can you identify in your classroom?
- What stands out from your students' play?
- As your students are playing, what are you doing?

Do you believe your students learn as they play? Please specify what you think they are learning or which skills they are practicing.

What other aspects of learning could be enhanced through the use of play?

To what extent do you agree with the statement: "students develop academic skills during play" (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016)?

Have you ever used play in your classroom to teach specific academic skills? If so, please describe the event and include any detail you deem important or relevant to understand the activity.
- During the activity, have you noticed anything different about your students' behaviors? Did any problem arise during the activity? Did anything stand out?
- How easy or difficult was it to implement?

Comment percevez-vous le jeu? Qu'est-ce qui caractérise le jeu chez tous les enfants?

Décrivez comment le jeu se présente dans votre classe?
- Quel type de jeu pouvez-vous identifier dans votre classe?
- Qu'est-ce qui se dégage des périodes jeu?
- Qu'est-ce que vos élèves font quand ils jouent?
- Comment occupez-vous votre temps pendant la période de jeu des élèves?

Croyez-vous que vos élèves apprennent lorsqu'ils jouent? Veuillez identifier les compétences que vos élèves développent ou pratiquent lors du jeu.

Quel autre type d'apprentissage pourrait être amélioré ou renforcé à travers le jeu?

Êtes-vous en accord avec la déclaration : 'students develop academic skills during play (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016) ou les étudiants développent des compétences académiques en jouant ?

Avez-vous déjà utilisé le jeu pour enseigner des compétences académiques?
- Pouvez-vous décrire les circonstances et inclure les détails que vous jugez importants et pertinents pour nous permettre de bien comprendre l'activité?

Durant l'activité, avez-vous constaté des changements dans le comportement de vos étudiants?
- Est-ce que des problèmes sont survenus?
- Qu'avez-vous remarqué pendant l'activité?

What do you think teachers should be doing during their students' play in a play-based classroom?

- Please describe how you use play in your classroom and what purpose do you believe it serves.

Quel devrait-être le rôle du professeur quand les élèves jouent dans une classe axée sur l'apprentissage par le jeu?

- Veuillez décrire comment vous utilisez le jeu dans votre classe? À quelles fins sert le jeu dans les classes.

If you have tried implementing play-based activities?

- Please give an example of what you did with your students or what you would like to do with them.
- Where did you get your ideas about play-based learning?

Avez-vous déjà mis en pratique des activités d'apprentissage ancrée sur le jeu?

- Pouvez-vous donner un exemple de l'activité qui a été faite? Ou que vous auriez aimé faire?
- Ou avez-vous trouver vos idées pour l'apprentissage par le jeu?

Do you often get involved during those activities?

- If so, what do you do while they play?
- If not, what do you do while they are completing the activity?

Vous êtes-vous impliqué durant ce genre d'activité?

- Si oui, de quelle façon vous êtes-vous impliqué dans leur activité?
- Si non, comment avez-vous occupé votre temps durant leurs activités?

What are some challenges of running a play-based classroom?

- What messages do you receive from other teachers in Grade 1 and 2 about children's play in kindergarten classrooms?
- What messages do you receive from the children's parents?

Quels sont les défis à relever pour des classes axées (ou orientées) sur le jeu?

- Comment réagissent les autres professeurs (1iere – 2ieme année) par rapport au jeu dans les classes de maternelles?
- Comment réagissent les parents?

Data Coding and Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded onto a laptop and transcribed verbatim onto a Microsoft Word file. I reviewed the transcripts using the recordings to eliminate errors. Using different text highlight on Microsoft word, pre-coding was done based on the research questions, including: beliefs about play and learning, teachers' roles in play-based learning, and views

about Quebec's mandated free play periods. The goal was to find passages that stood out and were worthy of attention.

In Vivo and value coding were both used during the first cycle of coding. The goal in using In Vivo coding was to prioritize the participants' voices as well as use terms and concepts drawn from the participants' interviews (Saldaña, 2009). Value coding, more specifically coding for attitudes and beliefs, was used simultaneously. Within the coding process, 'A:' stood for the participants' attitudes, 'B:' their beliefs, and 'V:' their values (See Appendix B for a sample of the first cycle coding). By noting these, I hoped to understand how kindergarten teachers' values affect their implementation of play-based learning in their classrooms. Statements were then categorized and placed together based on their ability to respond to the three different research questions. The categories were further refined to create themes, similar to code mapping. A code map was completed for each participant (See Appendix C for a sample of the code mapping). This allowed for the second cycle of pattern and elaborative coding to begin.

To facilitate the elaborative coding process between the participants, the codes of all four participants were inserted into a mind map using the Miro online programme (See Appendix D). This allowed for a better representation and visualization of the overall data to find commonalities and disparities between participants beliefs and views on play in their classroom. It is also important to note that one of the goals of this study was to accurately represent the participants' voices and beliefs about play in their classroom. Thus, it was crucial to identify any potential sources of bias that might have affected the researcher's positionality on the topic and might have influenced the study. Thus, memo notes and a reflexive journal were kept to offer readers an understanding of my interpretations (See Appendix E for shortened version of memo notes and reflexive journal). To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, credibility and

authenticity needed to be maintained. Through rich, accurate descriptions and the use of member

checking, participants were involved in the research process as they reviewed the transcripts and

gave their opinions and comments on the data that was analyzed, including their profiles. After

taking into account their comments and making changes, all participants gave their approval. A

form of peer debriefing also occurred through feedback by my thesis supervisor and lab

members, similar to an auditor. This allowed for a form of triangulation to occur, further

impacting the trustworthiness of this study (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Each participant's interview data were coded in three levels. The first cycle codes were

grouped into roughly 20 categories apiece, then grouped into larger categories, and then one last

time into groups that responded to the three research questions and/or themes of this study,

including: beliefs about play and learning, perceived teachers' roles during play, and views on

the Quebec education program mandated free play periods. For example, Tim Smith's statement:

"…play really develops their cooperation skills…" was first coded as Belief that "play develops

cooperation." This first cycle was highlighted and categorized with similar statements under the

broader category of "socioemotional benefits of play." The socioemotional benefits of play were

then categorized under the still broader category of "benefits of play" which included other codes

such as "academic benefits." Through elaborative coding, these codes were then placed under

one of the three major concepts or themes of this study, in this example, "Beliefs about play and

learning." One quote from each participant was used to illustrate their overall sentiment, attitude

or belief regarding each of the three major themes (See Appendix C).

Pattern coding was completed to identify configurations between and within participants

that could emphasize patterns in the teachers' shared thinking, their beliefs about their roles

during their students play, their enactment of play-based learning and the mandated free play

periods. The elaborative coding allowed for the creation of four profiles, a presentation inspired by the Pyle and Bigelow's (2015) study. They further inform the research questions by incorporating participants' own words. Using elaborative coding, I also hoped to build on previous research, extending the literature to Quebec classroom settings. The goal was to see if Quebec kindergarten teachers shared similar beliefs to those that have been expressed by other kindergarten teachers from different studies and context. It is important to note that participants were involved in the research process as they reviewed their profiles. Thus, the profiles were adjusted after as some participants asked to make changes (See Appendix E: memo notes for demanded changes). After revision, the profiles were sent back through email. This process continued until the participants approved their profiles and deemed that it well represented their beliefs.

Results

Results from the coding and analysis are presented below as individual profiles for each of the four teachers interviewed, organized around the three research questions: teacher's beliefs about play and learning, perspectives of teachers' roles during play, and views of Quebec Educational Program mandated free play periods.

Teacher 1, Tim Smith: Play as a Vehicle for Developmental Learning

Beliefs about Play and Learning

Tim Smith characterizes play as an activity that is actively engaging ("You are being engaged, active in doing something"), pleasurable ("when you play you entertain yourself"), creative, imaginative, and intrinsically motivating as you are "happy in doing what you are doing." Tim Smith also emphasizes play as a child-led or child-directed construct. Throughout

the interview, Tim Smith distinguishes between activities that are truly "free free play" and playful activities such as in his centers, further adding: "I could loosely say that my centers are a form of play. It's more of a structured play which is helping them develop their academic skills." Within his centers, Tim Smith groups four to five students together to work on specific academic skills (e.g., language, numeracy, or fine-motor skills) and works "with certain students at certain abilities." For example, Tim Smith has his students use playdough to practice their numeracy and their fine-motor skills, as he asks students to write out the number and its quantity. He believes his centers are "very oriented" as they are prescribed by rotation, structured, and have a specific learning objective to them. Tim Smith views his centers as having elements of play; however, they do not fit his definition of play. Indeed, Tim Smith may view these activities as work disguised as play.

In his conceptualization of play, Tim Smith communicates the belief that play provides a vehicle for students' holistic development, including their socioemotional and cognitive development:

> "free play, they are listening to others, they are following directions, like teacher directions, following other students' directions, following the classroom rules, asking for help, taking turns in conversation, cooperating with others, controlling their temper in conflict situations, acting responsibly with others, showing kindness towards others…"

When asked to what extent he agrees with the statement that play could enhance academic skills, Tim Smith seems uncertain as he remains silent and then answers with: "First of all, what do you define as your academic skills and what do you define as play." Reflecting on those definitions, Tim Smith agrees with the statement, adding: "Academic skills could be taught

through play." He also emphasizes: "Do I feel like my free play develops academic skills, maybe not…" Thus, when asked directly if Tim Smith uses play in his classroom to develop academic skills, Tim Smith responds with: "Do I do it? No." He attempts to define play-based learning as he interprets it as more "guided and directed," adding: "If I go to my centers in a much freer approach, there is room to develop, for sure, 100% academic skills" – seemingly reinforcing Tim Smith's importance of child-led play. He gives an example, where his students would come in to class and choose between five bins of literacy or numeracy activities. He believes that if he would put those out on a table and guide his students "towards working with these items and then just see what they are going to do with it," he thinks that they could definitely be play-based.

Tim Smith mentions that if he were to implement play as a learning tool and use more of a play-based approach in his classroom, he would need to "follow somebody and see it in action." He comments that with play-based learning "there is a lot of information" but this does not push him enough to implement it himself. Furthermore, he also explains the importance of resources (e.g., diverse array of tools and materials) when implementing play-based teachings.

Perspective About Teachers' Role During Their Students Play

Despite Tim Smith's focus on child-directedness in children's play, he believes in being involved and active during play activities. When discussing the types of roles teachers should have during their students' play, he says: "teachers should be interacting, observing, and helping like enhance their play, enhance their learning. Obviously, lots of observation..." as well. This may stem from his view that he sees himself as "much more of a guided teacher…in the more

guided learning than just free learning." However, Tim Smith specifies: "Realistically, there are things going on but that would be the ideal."

Tim Smith's free play periods occur in the morning as children come in and at the end of the day as "certain kids [get] ready to go on the bus and… leave early." At the beginning of the day, Tim Smith receives book bags and homework. He explains that during those periods he is doing "a lot of circulating and just observing, and obviously intervening." At the end of the day, Tim Smith continues to "circulate around and may prepare the schedule for the next day." However, he does mention that he also "just sits down … with them and play[s]" or he "get[s] involved in their play." In those instances, Tim Smith seems to support and facilitate children's play.

Views on the Quebec Kindergarten Mandated Free Play Periods

At the beginning of the school year, Tim Smith had to introduce two periods of mandated free play where children have the right to choose with what to play and with whom to play with. Tim Smith sees these changes as more positive than negative, mentioning, "I don't think it is a bad thing." However, Tim Smith emphasizes that these changes are "a lot" as he was challenged with "incorporating and really getting into…the routine of having two periods of really absolute free free play." Similarly, he believes other teachers faced similar challenges: "I can imagine teachers who have taught much longer than I have, having to now adapt to a different routine."

Within those mandated free play periods, Tim Smith uses his autonomous, individual activities. Rather than having the children use those activities in rotation, as he does during his daily routine, Tim Smith does not prescribe them. He does specify that he does believe that it is not "necessarily…100% free" play. However, if his students were to ask for certain toys and

games, Tim Smith is "open to giving them the resources within a certain means…to be able to do what they want." He does mention that during those activities, the children may choose with whom to play.

Tim Smith seems to encourage children's free play in his classroom and emphasizes choice and child-led as important characteristics of play. Tim Smith also views free play in his classroom as beneficial to his students' holistic development, including socioemotional and cognitive development. Furthermore, he believes in teachers holding an active role in children's play to enhance the learning and the play. However, there seems to be discrepancies in his held beliefs and his enactment of those beliefs as he discusses being more of a supporter or facilitator of children's play in his classroom. When discussing the mandated free play periods, Tim Smith accepts the changes as he reorganizes his routine. When speaking about play-based learning, Tim Smith continues to value choice and a level of freedom to his play as he expresses that his centers could be interpreted as play-based if they were freer. However, for him to implement more of it in his classroom, he would have to learn from a teacher with successful experience with play-based learning in his classroom or as he explains "an expert" that would share his classroom expertise on play. He would have to take on more of a hands-in approach Table 2, presented below, displays a summary of Tim Smith's profile.

Table 2

Summary of Tim Smith's Profile: Play as a Vehicle for Developmental Learning

Beliefs about play and learning	Perceived roles during play	Enactment of play	Views on the mandated free play periods
Socioemotional and cognitive benefits: "…asking for help, taking turn in	Importance of active teachers' involvement: "teachers should be	Discrepancies between held beliefs and enactment of those beliefs:	Changes are "a lot." Challenged with reorganizing his

conversation, cooperating with others, controlling their tempers…[and] showing kindness."	interacting, observing, and helping enhance their play, enhance their learning."	"realistically, there are other things going on…" Implements free play.	routine and "really getting into… the routine of having those two periods of really absolute free free play."
Importance of choice in play: "free" and "free free play"	Views himself as a "much more of a guided teacher."	During play, Tim Smith supports and facilitates his students' play.	Free play is not "necessarily…100% free."

Teacher 2, Lucy: Play as a Vehicle for Academic and Developmental Learning

Beliefs about Play and Learning

When asked to define play, Lucy answers with: "How do you define play? Play can be defined in so many different ways" suggesting that play is multifaceted and not characterized by a single feature. She then goes on to characterize play as "natural exploration, self-guided, self-thought out, what they want to do, based on their interests…" She also adds creativity to her definition of play. Her definition of play closely aligns with the definitions of free play. However, she expands beyond the beliefs that play is solely child-directed. Particularly in a classroom setting, her definitions of play incorporate varying levels of adult involvement viewing play as a child-centered activity which does not need to be emphasized as fundamentally child-directed.

Lucy also holds the firm belief that play is "…one of …the most important parts of the kindergarten curriculum…" and she believes that children learn as they play. She sees play as a way to support children's socio-emotional and academic development, encouraging lifelong learning as she states: "They are learning all of [the] skills that will last forever in their

elementary years and their whole life." When describing the types of skills her students learn through play and what skills could be enhanced through play, she talks about children asking for help, problem-solving skills, planning and processing skills, practicing trial-and-error, and communication. When specifically asked if students develop academic skills during play, she responds with "Oh absolutely. 100%." She talks about play as a way to teach mathematical competencies (e.g., patterns and sequencing) and language skills (e.g., communicating in English and writing). She considers both the developmental and academic benefits of play.

When describing the influence of play on learning, she states: "That's the best way because they are integrating the information that is enjoyable and if they enjoy it, then, it will stay in their brain and they will be able to find it later." Through motivation, interest, and enjoyment, play provides opportunities for children to internalize concepts. She says: "Kids are eager to do it, right…they see it as fun." Although she views the benefits of child-directed play, she also sees the importance of guidance and adult-directed play in a classroom, as she states:

> "Free play is one thing, right. It is just letting kids be. Play is just another way that kids can manipulate and explore and be creative, right. So, whether that's in their centers where I am providing a situation and manipulative and then I am letting them use those manipulatives and those tools in the way that they wish then it is directed, it is teacher-directed but it is child-centered because they are using the materials the way that they want…there are different ways to use play and different ways to implement it in the classroom and each has its place, each has its goals or worth."

Lucy mentions using play in her classroom as a tool to teach specific academic learning. When enacting play in her classroom, Lucy likely uses more play-based learning through her

centers. For example, she explains that once a concept is introduced, then, she uses play through manipulative (e.g., Play-Doh and word-games) to reinforce those concepts. When discussing her experiences with play-based activities, she states that implementation is "super easy." However, she feels that "given the reduced amount of time the kids have in English, it's almost … a teacher-directed play. It's like situations that are set up but it's not really as free as I would necessarily like." She feels that as a second language teacher, she is "restricted and constricted in time" and wishes she could do more. This likely leads her to "guide the play scenario more than [she is] used to." She believes that with play-based learning, the more time you have the freer it can be.

Perspective About Teachers' Role During Their Students Play

When discussing the role teachers should hold as their students play, she said: "enjoy it with them. Like, get down to their level and play with them." She believes that teachers should have an active role in their students' play and be involved whether it is simply to observe them, or asking them questions about their play. Regardless of her role during the play, she emphasizes children's active role during the play episodes, stating: "let the kids take the lead." Lucy tries to keep the play activities as child-centered, but at times child-led and at a time teacher-directed. Her goal is not to completely "redirect it" when she enters the play. However, if there is an objective to complete during the play scenario, Lucy steps in: "If they are going completely off tangent and there is a goal of the play and I see them veering off, I will jump in and bring them back."

In terms of implementing and enacting play in her classroom, she uses both free play and teacher-directed to teach and enhance academic skills (e.g., mathematics such as patterns and

sequencing; fine-motor skills such as their dexterity; language acquisition and writing) and socioemotional skills. Lucy seems to take on a variety of roles and readjusts her levels of involvement based on the type of play and its objectives.

Views on the Quebec Kindergarten Mandated Free Play Periods

Lucy is a second-language teacher; thus, she is not affected by the QEP mandate on free play periods. Nevertheless, when discussing the new governmental directives, she explains that "the fact that has to be told explicitly to a kindergarten teacher is insane," seemingly hinting to the belief that play should already be an important aspect of kindergarten classroom's curricula and should not be explicitly told to teachers. Reemphasizing her beliefs that play is an important medium for learning and that teachers should have an active role in it. She views the new free play demands positively but makes the distinction between free play and "free-for-all free play." She mentions, "It is not just about free play and letting them go wild in the classroom with whatever game." Based on her previous statement, she views play and her role in play as a "combination of setting up a certain situation but letting the kids take the lead."

When discussing the governmental directives on free play, she mentions colleagues receiving positive reactions from her colleagues in Grade 1 but some reluctance from parents. She gave her opinion on the topic, mentioning that working in a private school, parents' expectations are different as they are sending their children in an "accelerated and rich program." According to Lucy, this leads them to question the value of play and ask: "what do you mean they play all day?" Lucy's experience points to a challenge of implementing play in classrooms: educating individuals, more specifically parents, on its value and its impact on children's development and learning.

Overall, Lucy's beliefs about the important place of play in kindergarten classrooms and her expansions of the definition of play beyond free play (e.g., adult involvement) leads Lucy to view her roles within her students' play as active. She believes in the benefits of different types of play and varying levels of involvement, leading her to view her enactment of play as diversified. This is further supported by her strong beliefs about the place of play within kindergarten classroom environment. Table 3, presented below, displays a summary of Lucy's profile.

Table 3

Summary of Lucy's Profile: Play as a Vehicle for Academic and Developmental Learning

Beliefs about play and learning	Perceived roles during play	Enactment of play	Views on the mandated free play periods
Play is "…one of the most important parts of the kindergarten curriculum…"	Teachers should hold active and involved roles during their students' play: "Enjoy it with them. Like get down to their level and play with them."	Uses both free play and teacher-directed play to teach and enhance academic skills.	"The fact that had to be told explicitly to a kindergarten teacher is insane."
Academic and developmental benefits: Children who play learn "…all of [the] skills that will last forever in their elementary years and their whole life."			However, she distinguishes between free play and "free-for-all free play."
Play is multifaceted: "Play can be defined in so many different ways."	Lucy views play and her roles in play as a "combination of setting up a certain situation but letting the kids take the lead."		
Play incorporates varying level of adult involvement but stays child-centered: "…there are different ways to use play and different ways to implement it in the classroom and each has its			

place, each has its goals or
worth.”

Teacher 3, Jul2021: Playfulness (“Ludique”) as Motivation for Academic Learning

Beliefs About Play and Learning

Jul2021 characterizes play as creative, pleasurable or fun, and freely chosen. When asked

to describe all children's play behaviours (“Comment décrierais-tu le jeu?”), she responds with

“Bien moi je trouve que c'est vraiment la créativité. C'est la créativité.” She also adds: “c'est

l'épanouissement, ils s'amusent” emphasizing fun in her definition of play. Furthermore,

throughout the interview, she characterizes play as pleasurable: “c'est ça qui les attirent.” In one

of her examples, she mentions one of her students who comes alive when she plays. Jul2021

distinguishes, however, between games made for the classroom and games that have been chosen

by her students, saying: “C'est différent. C'est un jeu à grand groupe, tu sais : dirigé. En grand

groupe ce n'est pas pareil. Dans ce genre de jeu là, c'est un peu toi, en tant qu'enseignant, qui

dirige le groupe.” Jul2021 seems to extend her definition of play beyond the traditional free play

contexts, of freely chosen and process-oriented, to include more teacher-guided play.

Jul2021 believes play is beneficial to children's development. Play offers opportunities,

in indirect ways, for children's growth as material becomes more interesting and stimulating

through play: “Ça devient plus intéressant aussi, plus stimulant.” When describing her beliefs

and her experiences in the classroom, Jul2021 mentions how play is beneficial to her students'

socio-emotional skills, including conflict resolution, turn-taking, and sharing. Her beliefs can be

summarized as she responds: “Gérer des chicanes, gérer des conflits. Le partage du matériel,

attendre son tour…” to the question: “what kind of competences are developed during play?”

Jul2021 mentions play as enhancing cognitive skills such as students' self-regulation and creativity. Furthermore, when asked to identify types of skills that could be enhanced through play, she responds: "Bien tout. Tout par le jeu, je trouve que ça va mieux." She then gives the example of teaching multiplication through playful activities (e.g., while jumping). Jul2021 seems to perceive the benefits of play on both the children's socioemotional and academic development.

However, when asked to what extent she agrees with the statement "students develop academic skills through play," she agrees but emphasizes the need for guidance within that play: "Bien je sais qu'ils apprennent par le jeu…c'est qu'il faut quand même les orienter." Jul2021 values playful activities as learning opportunities to foster children's academic learning and skill development. Thus, Jul2021 uses play as a medium to keep kindergarten children engaged and motivated in the activity. Jul2021 truly values the importance of playfulness in her classroom and her teachings based on her personal experiences, stating: "J'essaie tout le temps de mettre un peu de ludique parce que moi en tout cas je trouve ça plus intéressant aussi – plus stimulant." She tends to transform her lessons or activities into games as she feels it keeps her students' attention. For example, she uses the *KIM* game to practice her students' memory and increase their vocabulary (See Appendix F):

> "…Je place des objets au centre. J'en cache un. Les enfants doivent trouver quel objet a été caché. Ils doivent le nommer. J'en profite pour leur donner des stratégies. Par exemple : en prenant une photo (imitation) ou en répétant plusieurs fois dans leur tête le nom des objets qui sont présentés."

Jul2021 response, "tout le temps," to the question do you use more play in your classroom rather than formal methods of teaching, reflects Jul2021 view on the place of play in her classroom.

Perspective About Teachers' Role During Their Students Play

With an emphasis on teachers' guidance during play, Jul2021 believes that she should hold an active role rather than passive role as her students play, stating: "… c'est certain que je ne suis pas assise à ne rien faire." She believes that her role during the mandated free play periods is to join her students ("je vais jouer avec eux"), to set up the play environment and model the play, redirect the play, push them to explore, ask questions, encourage them, and contribute to their play (e.g., "je leur donne des idées"), intervene when conflict arises, and guide them in their play. She also uses that time to observe her students.

In enacting her more playful activities, she seems to direct more of the play episodes towards the academic learning. For example, she uses her *monster game* to teach counting to her students:

"J'ai des images de montres que j'étale un peu partout dans la classe. Je donne une consigne. Par exemple : « Les monstres doivent avoir 5 doigts. » Supposons qu'un élève place 2 doigts sur un monstre et qu'un élève arrive à côté de lui, ils doivent trouver ensemble combien de doigts il manque pour en avoir 5. Il en manque 3 donc l'élève qui est arrivé doit placer 3 doigts sur le monstre. Nous vérifions ensuite, en grand groupe, si tous les monstres ont 5 doigts. Si ce n'est pas le cas, ils doivent trouver une solution."

In enacting her play, whether adult- or child-led, she emphasizes different types of active roles, seemingly not leaving learning up to chance.

Views on the Quebec Kindergarten Mandated Free Play Periods

With the provincial Quebec mandate on free play in kindergarten classrooms, Jul2021 had to change her routine, adding a free play period prior to lunch and one at the end of the day following recess. At first, Jul2021 comments that she was apprehensive of these new changes. She states time as her main challenge saying: "j'avoue que je trouve que je cours après mon temps…" She feels as though she won't be able to accomplish what she had planned to do ("je veux en faire plein, mais je n'arrive pas à tout faire"). Regardless of these challenges, it seems that organizing herself has led her to adapt and she seems to be enjoying these mandated free play periods: "Je commence à m'adapter, mais je ne hais pas ça."

Although Jul2021 seems to enjoy these free play periods, she has some concerns, which is shared by her colleagues of higher grades, that the students will not meet the same academic standards as the previous years, saying: "elle me demandait s'ils vont être aussi avancés que l'année passée." Jul2021 feels that the newly mandated free play periods may interfere with the maintenance of high academic standards. Although she holds the belief that free play is beneficial (e.g., to practice their socioemotional skills), she upholds the need to set up the environment in a way that will promote certain academic skills as she specifies: "Si tu veux leur faire apprendre le nom et le son des lettres, tu peux leur offrir des jeux qui favoriseront cette découverte. Par exemple: des lettres magnétiques et des tableaux, de la pâte à modeler, un bingo des lettres, etc." Overall, Jul2021 emphasizes setting up of her classroom for those free play periods to allow her students to manipulate, explore, experiment, and create during those activities: "Il faut que je mette à leur disposition des jeux qui leur permettront de manipuler, de créer, de s'exprimer, d'expérimenter, etc. Ensuite, ils seront libres de choisir."

Jul2021 believes that free play leads to learning, however, to teach academic learning, it seems that there is a need to set up the free play environment – involving some level of teacher direction. The degree of involvement may be dependent on the learning objectives. However, it is important to note that this was not explicitly expressed.

While Jul2021 tries to maintain high academic standards, she emphasizes playfulness as an important tool in her students' learning. Play is used as a teaching method and is being given priority both as a tool for academic learning and as a developmentally appropriate practice for her students. Jul2021 seemingly uses a variety of play types and views herself as having the important role of supporting her students in the mandated free play periods and creating teacher-directed playful scenarios or activities. Table 4, presented below, displays a summary of Jul2021's profile.

Table 4

Summary of Jul2021's Profile: Playfulness ("Ludique") as Motivation for Academic Learning

Beliefs about play and learning	Perceived roles during play	Enactment of play	Views on the mandated free play periods
Jul2021 emphasizes fun in her definition of play: "C'est l'épanouissement, ils s'amusent." Learning becomes more interesting and stimulating through play. Play is a medium to keep kindergarten students' engaged and motivated : "J'essaie tout le temps de mettre un peu de ludique parce que moi…je trouve ça	Importance of being active and involved: "…c'est certain que je ne suis pas assise à ne rien faire." She believes in joining, setting up and modelling the environment, redirecting the play, pushing them to explore and ask questions, encouraging them, contributing to their	Values both adult- and child-led play. Implementing free play, playful activities, and games.	Apprehensive at first: "Je commence à m'adapter, mais je ne hais pas ça." Student meeting academic standards: "…s'ils vont être aussi avancés que l'année passée." Importance of setting up her free play to promote

plus intéressant – plus stimulant."	play, intervening when conflict arises, and guiding them.	certain academic skills.
Move beyond the traditional definition of free play to include more teacher-guided types of play, especially, in learning academic skills: "…c'est qu'il faut quand même les orienter."		

Teacher 4, Lisa: Play as Directed and Secondary to Academic Learning

Beliefs About Play and Learning

Lisa defines play as an activity that is pleasurable, engaging, freely chosen, and inherently motivating, stating: "Number 1: they have to be enjoying it. They have to be engaged in the play and whatever they are doing, they need to be willing to play. You can't force it upon them." Her definition closely aligns with the definition of free play where the children decide what to play and with whom to play with. However, she mentions in her definition that she also believes in different types of play, distinguishing between free play and more directed-play. She mentions that directed play "helps them to grow as a child and then play better when it is time to play on their own."

When discussing play, Lisa mentions that "100% I believe that they can learn from play." When discussing the benefits of play on children's development, she discusses its impact on their socioemotional skills such as their ability to communicate and deal with "altercations." Furthermore, Lisa seems to believe that play presents opportunities to learn in a fun and engaging manner. As she recalls teaching verbs through play to her 1st grade students, she explains: "Oh my goodness. Not only were they excited…they would get so pumped…they

weren't stressed." Lisa explains that they understood the concepts. It seems that her students were internalizing newly taught concepts in a motivating context.

However, it is important to note that when asked: "Do students develop academic skills through play," Lisa responds with "I agree 100% but there again with this quote it doesn't specify what kind of play we're talking about." Lisa values adult guidance in teaching academic skills through play. Thus, she thinks that "directed play…is very beneficial for students as well" – pointing out to differences between child-directed (e.g., free play periods) and adult-directed play (e.g., Play-5 which will be discussed below). Ultimately, Lisa believes that learning can occur through play but "it's more what kind of play and what are your expectations out of that play."

Perspective About Teachers' Role During their Students Play

Lisa's classroom focuses on the development of academic skills as she explicitly mentions choosing to "push for as much academic as she could" similar to her previous successor. Thus, in her classroom, Lisa keeps an active role in her students' play episode. Lisa usually joins her students; she questions and challenges her students: "I ask them a lot of questions on what they are doing and then I see if I can challenge them further." In her classroom, she implements both mandated free play periods as well as more teacher-directed play through the Play-5 program (See Appendix F). It is also important to note that prior to the mandated free play periods and in her previous teaching experiences, she would use more directed play in her classroom. For example, she would use games to introduce new academic concepts (e.g., verbs) to get the students interested. She would also use playful centers in her

teaching. She explains that "she would love to implement that this year." However, it seems that the free play periods affect her ability to implement these types of play-based activities.

Lisa participates in the Play-5 program where students play by constructing, pretending, creating, exploring, and practise story-telling to enhance their language and personal/social development. Play-5 also asks of teachers to be more directed and involved in the students' play such as joining them and modelling appropriate behavior (See Appendix F). Thus, it seems that within the Play-5 activities, Lisa takes on an active role, going to groups who are playing and asking specific questions about their activities such as: "What are you building? What are you looking at?"

Ultimately, Lisa's belief in the importance of different types of play and adult-involvement in her students' play seems to push her to use more guidance and interventions strategies in her students' play, both during the mandated free play periods and adult-directed play.

Views on the Quebec Kindergarten Mandated Free Play Periods

When discussing the new Quebec mandated free play periods, Lisa comments: "…it is a little unrealistic for me to get enough done." Lisa notes the Quebec government's unrealistic expectations, as she explains the challenges of integrating teaching in the context of free play: "they make it sound like we can just teach it while they are free playing. It is not really realistic for me...." However, she does believe that these free play periods are beneficial to children's socioemotional development as they "interact with other peers freely and on their own." She points to challenges in teaching during free play: "In an ideal world…they can play all day and

then I go in and teach them while they're playing. It's really easier said than done…I find it a lot more stressful on the teachers' part."

The connection between free play and mandated curricular standards troubles Lisa as she mentions potential learning gaps. She believes the two new periods of free play "take away from other activities," stating: "I'm a little concerned with them because again I'm in January now and I'm not as far as I'd like to be and I know I am not the only one…I am a little concerned for that." Colleagues of hers have also mentioned similar concerns as they are "months behind schedule." Lisa explains that she "hopes that they are not expecting the kids to be at the same level this year as kids from previous years with different curricula." Lisa wants flexibility in implementing play in her classroom, as she says: "let's say you to have to play two 45 minutes, use it to your advantage in how you want to implement it." She asks: "Can I make it a bit more directed or allow me to do more a Play-5 approach where I'm allowed to guide them, to teach them?" She would use those free play periods to then "enhance and to practice what we've learned."

With a perceived difficulty in balancing academics and play in the classroom, she agrees with the statement that there should be more guidelines on how to implement play properly in the classroom. Regardless of her scepticism over the new mandated guidelines on free play, her adherence to academics and her focus on the development of those academics in her classroom leads Lisa to keep an active role during her students' play episodes to ensure learning gains. Although Lisa implements different types of play (including the mandated free play periods and directed play activities such as games) within her classroom, her emphasis remains on students' development of academic skills mandated by curricular standards. Table 5, presented below, displays a summary of Lisa's profile.

Table 5

Summary of Lisa's Profile: Play as Directed and Secondary to Academic Learning

Beliefs about play and learning	Perceived roles during play	Enactment of play	Views on the mandated free play periods
Children can learn through play: "100%, I believe that they can learn from play."	Importance of academics in her classroom: "Push for as much academics as she could."	Uses guidance and interventions strategies with her students' both during free play periods and more adult-directed play.	Challenges of integrating teaching in the context of free play: "…It is a little unrealistic for me to get enough done."
However, when it comes to academics: "it's more what kind of play and what are your expectations of that play."	Active and involved in play: "I ask them a lot of questions on what they are doing and then I see if I can challenge them further."	Implements free play and adult-directed play (e.g., Play-5 program).	Potential learning gaps: they "take away from other activities."
Makes the distinction between free and directed play.			

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of Quebec kindergarten teachers' perceptions of play and learning, and how they perceive their roles within their students' play to better understand how they implement play in their classroom. During the process of this study, the Quebec education program instilled two mandated periods of 45-60 minutes of free play in all kindergarten classrooms. Taking these changes into consideration, this study also aimed to understand Quebec kindergarten teachers' views on the newly mandated free play periods. The findings of this study reflect the current literature on play-based learning but in a different contextual environment. The analysis of teachers' views on play and their roles within that play shed light on their different interpretations of play, the mandated free play periods, and play-based pedagogies.

Beliefs About Play and Learning

Similar to the existing research, all participants characterized play based on broad criteria including an activity that is creative, pleasurable, intrinsically motivating, and actively engaging (Rubin et al., 1983; Smith & Pelligrini, 2008; Strugress, 2003; White, 2012). However, there was some confusion over the definition of play as some participants asked: How do you define play? There also seemed to be conflicting beliefs about the involvement of adults within children's play. For example, Tim Smith's overemphasis of the word "free" when discussing play in his interview pointed to his belief that children's choice, with no adult involvement, was an important aspect in his definition of play. This was further supported as he described his centers as being "very oriented" due to his involvement in setting up and directing the play activities – seemingly viewing his center as work disguised in play. On the other hand, Lucy expanded her definition beyond free play to include more adult-directed play as she explained that play may be adult-directed as long as it maintained child-centeredness. It is important to note that Lucy's definition prioritized the play as child-centered – where the focus of the play is on the child but may be directed by the teacher. Lisa shared similar beliefs of her involvement in these activities as she considered them as play. These different beliefs regarding adult involvement reflects the research that play is often defined in terms of the locus of control of the activity, particularly in a classroom environment (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

The participants' differing beliefs on the involvement of adults also led them to have a very different understanding of play-based pedagogy, with a few making the distinction between the concepts of play and PBL. However, some such as Tim Smith seemed to struggle with this distinction as he continued to emphasize the characteristic of free choice in play, reflecting Bruckman's (1999) "chocolate-dipped broccoli" idea – where an activity may be playful but

does not fit the definition of play as being freely chosen and spontaneous. The belief suggests

that once an adult is involved, it is not seen as pure free play anymore (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

This can be seen throughout Tim Smith's interview as he used words such as "free free play."

This mirrors the presence of a dichotomy in the understanding of the constructs of PBL, similar

to Fesseha and Pyle's (2016) study – where play is often considered to be child-led whereas

learning is a result of adult-led practices (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). On the other hand, Lucy, Lisa,

and Jul2021 moved beyond the binary distinction of play and learning, emphasizing the belief

that play-based learning could be child- or adult-directed but remains child-centered (Pyle &

Danniels, 2017). PBL incorporates teacher involvement while emphasizing the importance of

teaching concepts in an engaging and developmentally appropriate manner (e.g., through play)

and expanding on children's interest (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). It values play as a tool to keep

children engaged and motivated, and adult responsiveness to children during those activities

(Hunter & Walsh, 2014). However, Lisa added an interesting view to the topic when

commenting on the influence of play and learning: "It's more what kind of play and what are

your expectations of that play?" pointing to differences in types of play based on varying level of

adult involvement, such as those found in Pyle and Danniels' (2017) continuum. This

highlighted the understanding that play and play-based pedagogies are distinct constructs that

require different pedagogical approaches (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

　　　All participants also valued play as crucial to kindergarten students' developmental

learning. Specifically, all expressed belief in the benefits of play to enhance their students'

socioemotional (e.g., communication, conflict resolution, and cooperative skills) and cognitive

(e.g., self-regulation, problem-solving, and creativity) skills. Furthermore, most teachers saw

play as a tool that could support students' academic skills (e.g., math, language, and writing acquisition) by internalizing newly taught concepts in a motivating context.

Perspective of Teachers' Roles during Play

While all participating teachers communicated the learning potential of play, defining learning as developmental and/or academic, not all participants implemented play in a similar approach. The teachers' expressed definition of play and PBL, and perceived understanding of play in kindergarten classrooms had an impact on the types of play enacted in their classroom and may have had an influence on their perceived roles within their students' play. Similar to Pyle and Bigelow's (2015) study, each teacher's identified purpose of play informed their understanding of their roles in their students' play.

The expressed purpose of play led participants to have different philosophies, viewing play as: (1) a vehicle for developmental learning, (2) a vehicle for academic and developmental learning, (3) as motivation for academic learning, and (4) as directed and secondary to academic learning, categories which were inspired by Pyle and Bigelow (2015) study. Furthermore, within these philosophies, the degree of adult involvement in the participants' definition of play had an important impact on their perceived roles during both mandated free play periods and other play-based pedagogies. Teachers' such as Tim Smith who endorsed the idea of play being a fundamentally child-directed activity that positively influences children's personal and social development (e.g., play as a vehicle for developmental learning) led him to limit his play to the Quebec mandated free play periods and to hold more supportive and facilitative roles during play (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). His profile resembles Walsh et al.'s (2019) non-participatory approach

which may be viewed as an incomplete conceptualisation of play-based teachings as he seemed to manage and mostly monitor his students.

Teachers such as Lucy, Lisa, and Jul2021, who viewed the importance of play as a motivational tool, demonstrated more variations in their expressed enacted types of play (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Lisa's philosophy focused on maintaining high academic standards in her classroom (e.g., play as directed and secondary to academic learning) which resembles Walsh et al. (2019) over-participatory and Pyle and Bigelow's (2015) peripheral to learning profiles. However, contrary to the peripheral to learning profile, Lisa kept and maintained active roles such as challenging and questioning during her students' play including her free play periods and more guided, playful activities to ensure learning objectives occurred. This differed from the existing research as Lisa seemed to find methods to incorporate and ensure academic learning within her play.

Jul2021's philosophy emphasized the importance playfulness or "ludique" as a motivational tool to promote students' academic learning. She also believed in holding roles such as contributing, encouraging, and questioning in her playful activities, her games, and free play periods. She saw the importance of setting up the environment during the mandated free play periods to promote and encourage specific learning objectives (e.g., playfulness as motivation for academic learning). Similarly, Lucy who adhered to the philosophy that play is an important part of the kindergarten curriculum (e.g., play as a vehicle for academic and developmental learning), held many roles depending on the objectives and goals of the play, and actively enhanced the play. Jul2021 and Lucy seemed to closely resemble Walsh et al.'s (2019) appropriately participatory profile as they appeared to approach teaching and learning through play by being responsive and intentional. Furthermore, they viewed play and academic pursuits as child-and

adult-directed leading them to use a wider variety of types of play – a model that closely aligns with play-based teachings (Hesterman & Targowska, 2020; Pyle, et al., 2018).

All participants believed in taking on more active roles during their students' play, whether it is during the mandated free play periods or other playful activities (e.g., playful activities or games). Regardless of their perceived purpose of play, all agreed in being guides during their students' play. However, Tim Smith expressed that in reality there are other things going on during those play periods and, thus, he took on more of a supportive (e.g., preparing the environment) and facilitative roles (e.g., intervening during conflicts). This pointed to an important limitation of this study as teachers' expressed beliefs and perceived enactment of play may differ from the reality of their classroom practices. This also pointed to an important problem within the QEP as the direction given to teachers on their roles during play: "with the support of the adults" is insufficient. Furthermore, there use of the word "play" does not clearly distinguish between types of play (free- and guided-play). Thus, teachers fell back onto their perceived beliefs about play to make decisions about the enactment of play within their classrooms.

Views of Quebec Educational Program Mandated Free Play Periods

When it came to Quebec teachers' views on the mandated free play periods, the interviews with the participants showed mixed reactions. At first, Tim Smith and Jul2021 were apprehensive of those changes but, then, welcomed them as they reorganized their routines. Lucy saw these changes as positive as she continued to emphasize the importance of play in kindergarten classrooms. On the other hand, Lisa viewed those changes as unrealistic. With a firm belief in maintaining high academic standards in her kindergarten classroom, she considered

the mandated free play periods as unrealistic – expressing difficulties in balancing her teaching and free play. Furthermore, Lisa viewed those free play periods as leading to potential learning gaps, expressing the beliefs that her students would not reach the same academic results as the previous cohorts. This sentiment seemed to be shared by most participants and also raised concern from colleagues of higher grades and parents. Similar to Pyle and Bigelow's (2015) study, despite the participants' expressed beliefs about the purpose of play, each teacher worked in an era of accountability where high academic standards were felt. As a result, Lisa requested more flexibility in the mandated free play period in her classroom to implement more guided types of play, similar to those used in her previous 1st grade classroom when teaching verbs in a playful manner.

When discussing the Quebec mandated free play periods, most participants commented on the importance of setting up the environment for these periods. Lucy mentioned "it is not just about free play and letting them go wild in the classroom with whatever games…it is a combination of setting up certain situations but letting the kids take the lead," similar to what Jul2021 does in her classroom. Although the participants did not direct the play narratives, some influenced the materials that could be used. Tim Smith pointed out, however, that it is "not necessarily 100% free play" as he minimally structured the types of materials children could use.

The participants' sentiments and attitudes towards Quebec's mandated free play periods demonstrated that the degree of adult involvement and the participants' beliefs about play, learning, and their roles continue to impact teachers' enactment of free play within their classroom. The participants pointed to an important problem as the Quebec government has not provided its educators with the necessary support to navigate the realm where play meets curriculum and policy (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

Overall, it appeared that most participating teachers encountered challenges rooted in the lack of clarity in the definition of play and PBL, with some questioning the role of the adult during these activities. This led some of the participants to question their role in a play-based context, in particular in the mandated free play periods, where it is unclear whether or not they are offering "truly" free periods of play. Regardless, all participating kindergarten teachers shared the similar beliefs of taking on active roles during their students' play. However, the participants' integration of play in their classroom were distinct. Similar to what was found in Fesseha & Pyle's (2016) study, this lack of consistency in the definition of play and PBL is a major concern given that implementation of PBL is dependent on the knowledge and understanding of the teachers. Thus, there needs to be clarification when asking:

- What is free play?

- What are play-based pedagogies?

- What distinguishes free play from PBL?

Implications for Future Research

This study supports the current research on play demonstrating that what play consists of is a contentious issue (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Future research should better define the construct of play and clarify the role of the adult within different types of play, whether free- or guided-play. Furthermore, research should look into creating a broader and more concrete definition of play-based learning. As Pyle et al., (2020) communicated in their study, play-based pedagogies require great consensus and clarity around the role of play and academic learning, especially in kindergarten education.

This research further evidences the need for policy-makers to make a clear distinction between types of play (e.g., free- vs guided-play) in their official documents as their use of the generic term "play" muddles crucial nuances between types of play which can potentially lead to misunderstandings and create confusion (Pyle et al., 2020). These clarifications would impact how teachers' view their roles within play, how these play periods would be enacted, and may influence teachers implementation of other play-based activities. Furthermore, the QEP could benefit from expanding and offering detailed information on what the "support of the adults" (p. 9) should consist of during the children's play as kindergarten teachers' continue to question their involvement within their students play. Teachers' implementation of play would benefit from increased training in a broader interpretation of play-based learning, and more practical methods for its enactment (Pyle & Danniels, 2017).

Conclusion

With significant curricular changes in kindergarten classrooms towards more play-based learning in many educational systems, analyzing teachers' beliefs about play and learning, and how they view themselves in their students' play sheds light on the different interpretations of play and, thus, play-based pedagogies. It also explains how Quebec kindergarten teachers enact their roles in the newly mandated free play periods. These may further impact children's potential learning gains from play. Teachers' perceptions of play-based learning are crucial to understanding how a curriculum can be altered to better support a play structure to learning in early years.

Although this study reflects existing research on play in kindergarten classroom, it does so in the Quebec educational context. It offers an insight into Quebec kindergarten teachers'

philosophy of play, their understandings of their roles during that play and its impact on the

enactment of the mandated free play periods and play-based activities. It also provides an insight

of the concerns teachers face and of the difficulties of implementing all types of play in their

classroom. While this research provides some insight into the existing climate of play, it provides

a unique snapshot pertaining to the Quebec context. There remains more to be done to see how

teachers' beliefs, and policy and curriculum shape teachers' play pedagogy. Policy-makers must

consider this reality, integrate these understandings to enhance the practice of play and play-

based learning pedagogies and, ultimately, children's learning.

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Appendix A

Information and Consent Form

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Quebec Kindergarten Teachers' Perspective on Play-Based Learning

Researcher: Camille Therrien
Researcher's Contact Information: camille.therrien@hotmail.com
Faculty Supervisor: Sandra Chang-Kredl, Ph. D.

Faculty   Supervisor's Contact   Information:
sandra.changkredl@concordia.ca

Source of funding for the study: n/a

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to gain a better understanding of teachers' beliefs about play-based learning and how they see their roles within their students' play. This study will try to represent the current state of play in Quebec classrooms and will offer suggestions to teacher to capitalize on their students' play to enhance their learning.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and to be individually interviewed.

You will start by completing a 5-to-10-minute questionnaire about your professional and academic background.

Furthermore, you will be asked to partake in an online interview. Under the current COVID-19 situation, the interview will be conducted through *Zoom* and will be audiorecorded. During the interview, you may present documents (e.g., classroom schedule) or artefacts (e.g., pictures) that you deem important or appropriate to this study. Once the interview has been transcribed and initial analyses conducted, you will be invited to review the interpretations and findings to ensure that they represent accurately your beliefs and perspectives on the topic of play.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 2 to 3 hours. The interview should take about 45 minutes to an hour. Reviewing the transcripts and the findings should take less than an hour.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might face certain risks by participating in this research, though minimal. These risks include: feeling uncomfortable during the interview due to the questions about your teaching practices, however, the researcher is in no way intent on judging your work; rather, they wish to learn from your expertise as a kindergarten teacher.

You may or may not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits could include a better understanding of the role of play in learning, your roles in play-based learning, and your teaching and classroom practices.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: information on your professional and educational background, your beliefs and understandings about play in learning, and your perspectives on your role during the children's play.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be confidential and you will be invited to choose a pseudonym. Furthermore, any information regarding your place of work will be taken out from the transcripts. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between you, your workplace, and the information you provide.

We will protect the information by keeping your information on the researcher's laptop which is password protected. Only the researcher will have access to this computer.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information after 5 years.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher within four weeks of your interview.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)

_____

SIGNATURE

_____

DATE

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix B

Transcripts and First Cycle of Coding Sample Including In Vivo and Value Coding

Table B1

Legend for Transcripts and First Cycle of Coding

Int = Interviewer
Given Pseudonym = Participants
… = Incomplete sentence
[ ] // = Rephrase
( ) = Researchers' comments
[ ] = missing letters or word
xx = inaudible
Yellow = Beliefs about play and learning
Blue = Benefits of Play
Red = Definition of Play
Green = Teachers' role
Pink = Classroom
Gray = Implementation
B: Beliefs
A: Attitudes
V: Values

Table B2

Transcripts and 1ˢᵗ Cycle of Coding Sample

Transcripts	1ˢᵗ Cycle of Coding	Comments
Smith: [15:15] relaxation music and they're just like relaxing on the floor. Either sitting on the floor or sitting their head on the table just you know. And then usually the afternoon we continue with those autonomous activities. And then I always, [I've I've] // for years I've ended my days: they come in from recess, they have snack, and then it is free play until the end of the day.	Classroom: routine: Relaxation then autonomous activities. Classroom: routine: end of the day: recess, snack, free play.	

Int: How long is that approximately?		
Int: Oh! per day?		
Smith: PER DAY (Voice: louder). So, it's a lot. Do I think it, I don't think it is a bad thing, not at all. Its just a lot, I can just imagine teachers who have taught much longer than I have, having to now adapt to a different routine.	A: Play: about the new QEP demands: "it's a lot." A: May see the benefits of the new QEP demands: "I don't think it is a bad thing, not at all." A: Scepticism about the new QEP demands on play: "I don't think it is a bad thing…its just a lot…." B: Adjustment: Older teachers' may have difficulty adjusting to new QEP demands: "…I can just imagine teachers who have taught much longer than I have, having to now adapt to a different routine."	(Overwhelmed by the Quebec's educational demands on free play) (New QEP demands on free play may be beneficial) (Scepticism about the new QEP demands on free play). (More experienced teachers' may have difficulty adjusting to the QEP demands on free play)
Smith: So just to kind of go back to my beginning of the day which has now changed a little bit. The kids walk in now and start with, I don't want to necessarily say its 100% free play, I use the autonomous activities but I don't prescribe [them], its not by rotation. They are free to take anyone of the 24 autonomous activities. Certain activities, I don't necessarily voice it, but if two kids get together to do the same autonomous activity, I will let them. Because I want to see what [is] going to happen. Sometimes if it gets too many obviously, then, I will intervene and ask kids to go and choose something else of they're liking. So, I started that in the mornings now to just start with this kind of play in the morning with these autonomous activities. And I find it, it kind of lets them trickle in from having taken off their jackets,	Classroom routine: Morning: play B: Definition of Play: Distinguishment between free play and less controlled play: "I don't want to necessarily say its 100% free play, I use the autonomous activities but I don't prescribe them, its not by rotation." V: Definition of play: Importance of Choice: "They are free to take anyone of the 24 autonomous activities."	(Importance of choice in free play) (Importance of choice in free play) (Importance of choice: with whom to play with)

opening their school bag, putting away their lunch box. Like again some do it really fast some take their time so it's a nice transition from getting into the classroom to getting their day started. And that will go on for you know the first 40 minutes of class. And then I'll ask them to put it all away. I mean, even in that, there just learning: remembering with match up the number from your bin to where it goes in the shelving unit. And then I'll start my circle time which now I have really decrease in time. And I tried to saturate a bit more with literacy and numeracy and maybe throughout the day we will put some of the songs for us to sing instead of having them throughout the circle time.	V: Definition of play: Importance of choice: peers: "…if two kids get together to do the same autonomous activity, I will let them." Teachers' role: Intervene: "…I will intervene and ask kids to go and choose something else of they're liking." Classroom: Routine: Morning: …these autonomous activities. B: Transitions: This play allows for an easy transition from home to classroom: "…some take their time so it's a nice transition from getting into the classroom to getting their day started." B: Practical life learning occurs in day-to-day task: "And then I'll ask them to put it all away. I mean, even in that, there is learning…"	(Intervening in conflicts during play) (Free play allows for an easy transition from home to classroom) (Practical life learning occurs as they play)
Smith: Try to do something new and I mean again this school that I work at we are pretty lucky in the fact that we have certain toys that stay or certain corners, like you know the block corner or the kitchen corner and certain toys that stay in our classroom, but then there's also certain toys and bins of toys that we switch, we trade between classrooms. So, I mean there is a garage with cars. I am only going to have it for 3 month and then I give it to another classroom but then I get like you know a castle with the horses, the knights, it gives them something different to play with. And I think that also, if you know, other	A: Implementation: Grateful for Teacher collaboration: "…we are pretty lucky in that…we trade between classrooms." Classroom: "…we are pretty lucky in that…we trade between classrooms."	

schools adopt that type of theory where its you know you've got a budget of 600$ well instead of in three classes buying 200$ of the same thing, why not buy 600$ of different materials and trade them throughout the school.		
[Time Jump] Int: 45.27 That's amazing. And [in terms of,] // while they are playing is there anything that stands out from your students that doesn't normally stand out?		
Smith: They're can be a lot more arguments. I find it really, the free free play, like free for all play really develops their cooperation skills, their problem solving because it has…When I do the centers, its very oriented right like this is your center for the next 40 minutes but when its free free play, I mean they can they need to some of them don't understand the concept of what is sharing. Sharing doesn't mean going take it from the other kid because you want to play with it. Sharing is asking the kid: "when you are finished playing with this, I would like to play with it. Can you give it to me" or sharing is: "I would also want to play; can I play with you?." But so many of them don't have that concept. So, arguments obviously its like: "he took this or she took that from me" and then it's going back to solve what really happened and then bringing the two, the three, the four kids together and okay "what could we have done or said, how could we have…" So, I feel like [with the] // it really develops sometimes a lot of cooperation and there are some kids that are obviously you're A type leader that will rally everybody together to "I want to play kitchen and so are you coming to play kitchen, come play kitchen with me, come play kitchen with me." Whereas maybe the one shyer student doesn't really want to play kitchen but is going to go do it because she feels like she or	B: about play: Distinguishes free play: "…the free free play…" B: Benefits of play: Socio-emotional skills: "they're can be a lot more arguments…. really develops their cooperation skills, the problem solving…" Classroom structure: Centers: "when I do the centers, its very oriented…" B: about play: distinguishes free play: "…when its free free play…" B: Benefits of play: socio-emotional: "…the concept of what is sharing." Benefits of play: cooperation Benefits of play: emotional: "…learning to stand up for yourself."	

he has to. So again, its like learning to stand up for yourself to like: "no no I don't want to play in the kitchen today, I want to draw." You know so in that way free free play develops imagination, creativity, cooperation skills, learning just, you know, just to be yourself and be more of an independent person.	B: about play: distinguishes play: "…in that way free free play…" Benefits of play: imagination, creativity, cooperation skills, forming a sense of identity: "…learning just…to be yourself and be more of an independent person."	
Int: 47.57 And while they are playing, what are you doing? Usually, [during free play] during the free play session, are you… what are you doing?		
Smith: Well. Its usually [near, now at] // near the end of the day or the beginning of the day. So, it now being at the beginning of the day, I am receiving book bags and I am receiving homework. So, I am just trying to like get on top of that also. You know I.m constantly looking around getting up to go why is this kid just sitting there on the chair by themselves not doing anything. Going to find out why or what's or why are there maybe in a bad mood or... So definitely like circulating around seeing what they are doing, encouraging them with the blocks, encouraging them to go further with what they have built, go higher. If they are coloring, encouraging them to add more details to their pictures. So, really a lot of circulating and just observing and obviously intervening with you know friction between students' little arguments so they definitely always need that little bit of help.	Teachers' role: Passive role in the morning: "… I am receiving book bags and I am receiving homework." Teachers' Role: Active role and encouraging play: "…I'm constantly looking around, getting up to go why is this kid sitting there on the chair by themselves not doing anything." Teachers' Role: Active Role: Encouraging them, furthering (deepening), scaffolding; "circulating around, seeing what they are doing, encouraging them with the blocks, encouraging them to go further…" Teachers' Role: Active Role; intervention, observations; "circulating and just observing, and obviously intervening with	

	… friction between students' little arguments…"	

Appendix C

Code Mapping Sample

First Iteration of In Vivo and Value Coding
V: Stability and routines: "I like to give a lot of stability and routine."
B: Routine leads to students' independence: "If its very routine based, they will become a lot more independent and they'll become a lot more independent faster if there's routines and if the classroom is well organized."
V: Organization and routines: "organized and the routine."
Classroom: Morning Routine: "Circle time (20-40minutes) where a lot of the explicit learning comes in."
Classroom Routine: Morning Routine: Circle Time: Calendar and counting of the days. "Numeracy and literacy all within this 20-40minute period."
Classroom Routine: Snack
Classroom Routine: Specialist "either music or dance or physical education."
Classroom: Routine: Snack
Classroom: Routine: Specialist "either music or dance or physical education."
Classroom Routine: Monday morning: "Weekend news."
Teachers' Role: Involved: "I come to see them. I write down what they've done and they go and try to copy the letters that I have written."
V: Following students' pace: "If they can't write the whole sentence, if all they want to do is you … birthday party and they try to sound it out, you know, then I go and write it back down and then they go and do the picture."
Classroom: Routine: Centers: "4 to 5 centers. 5 centers per week because there are 5 days of the week and we do 1 center rotation per day."
Classroom: Centers: "take a good 5 to 10 minute to explain why each center is important."
Definition of play: Distinction between free play and learning/work: emphasis on the free: "its free playdough. Sometimes I want them to write out their names or I have these playdough mats for numeracy work."
V: Importance of having students understand their learning: "Explain why each center is important."
V: Student' the purpose of an activity leads keeps them motivated and engaged: "The center work lasts with the explanation."
B: Benefits of play: Socio-emotional skills: "they're can be a lot more arguments…. really develops their cooperation skills, the problem solving…"
Second Iteration of In Vivo and Value Coding: **Initial Categorization of the Codes**

Category 1: Classroom Information
     Related Codes:
     V: Stability and routines: "I like to give a lot of stability and routine."
     B: Routine leads to students' independence: "If its very routine based, they will become a lot more independent and they'll become a lot more independent faster if there's routines and if the classroom is well organized."
     V: Organization and routines: "organized and the routine."
     Classroom: Morning Routine: "Circle time (20-40minutes) where a lot of the explicit learning comes in."

Classroom Routine: Morning Routine: Circle Time: Calendar and counting of the days. "Numeracy and literacy all within this 20-40minute period."

Classroom Routine: Snack

Classroom Routine: Specialist "either music or dance or physical education."

Classroom: Routine: Snack

Classroom: Routine: Specialist "either music or dance or physical education."

Category 2: Difficulty defining play

Related Codes:

A: Definition of Play: Difficulty defining play: "What is play? Jesus."

A: Definition of play: Difficulty defining play: *long pause*

A: Definition of play: Difficulty defining play: *long pause*

A: Definition of play; about play and learning: unclear: "first of all, what do you define as your academic skills and what do you define as play."

B: about play and learning: difficulty with defining terminology: *long pause*

Category 3: Characteristics of play

Related Codes:

B: Definition of Play: explore

B: Definition of play: active; involved in

B: Definition of play: types of play: "play alone."

B: Definition of play: "when you play you entertain yourself."

B: Definition of play: "…they're up to something. They are entertaining themselves, entertaining each other."

Definition of play: characteristics: imagination and creativity.

B: Definition of play: self-initiated: "…you don't see that initiative by the children anymore either to do these creative things."

Category 5: Socioemotional benefits of play

Related Codes:

B: Benefits of play: socio-emotional: …the concept of what is sharing'

B: Benefits of play: Socio-emotional skills: "they're can be a lot more arguments…. really develops their cooperation skills, the problem solving…"

Benefits of play: emotional: '…learning to stand up for yourself'.

Third Iteration of In Vivo and Value Coding:
Recategorizing the Initial Categories

Category 1: Definition of Play

Subcategories:

2 : Difficulty defining play

3: Characteristics of play

11: Change in the definition of play

12: Loss of play

Category 2: Benefits of play

Subcategories:

5: Socioemotional benefits of play

9: Academic benefits of play

8: Cognitive benefits of play

14: Play and student engagement

25: Fine-motor benefits of play

Category 3: Play-based learning
Subcategories:
1: Classroom Information
7: Distinguishment between free play and other types of play
13: Play-based learning
20: Inspiration for play activities
17: Implementation of play in Smith's classroom
19: Teaching Strategies
10: Distinction between play and work
4: Types of play found in his classroom
21: Challenges to implementing play-based pedagogies
22: Needs and want in order to implement more play-based activities

Category 4: Perceived teachers' roles during play
Subcategories:
15: Active teachers' roles during students' play
16: Supportive and Facilitative roles of the teacher during students' play
24: Teacher involvement in play

Category 5: Mandated free play periods
Subcategories:
6: Attitude towards the mandated free play periods
18: Challenges that come with the mandated free play periods
23: Messages from colleagues and/or parents on the mandated free play periods

Fourth Iteration of In Vivo and Value Coding:
Three Themes Based on the Research Questions

Theme 1: Beliefs about play and learning: "First of all, what do you define as your academic skills and what do you define as play."
(This includes definition of play, benefits of play, and play-based learning).

Theme 2: Perceived teachers' roles during play: "Realistically, there are things going on…"
(This solely include the category perceived teachers' roles).

Theme 3: Views on the Quebec education program's mandated free play periods: "I don't think it is a bad thing…its just a lot…"
(This includes the category mandated free play periods).

Appendix D

Figure D1

Representation and Visualization of 2nd Cycle of Coding

Unrealistic

Apprehensive at first, adapted

Importance place of play in Kindergarten

Socioemotional Benefits

Negative

Mixed

Positive

Reaction

3: Views on the QC mandated free play periods

Concerns

Maintaining academic standards

Learning Gaps

Parents' expectations

Integrating teaching and free play

Teachers perceived students' learning needs

Importance of setting up the play environment

Educating individuals about the value of play

Flexibility

miro

Appendix E

Shortened Version of the Reflexive Journal and Memo Notes

December 14. 2021: Definition of Codes

Definition of play: Beliefs about the definition of play and its characteristics. It can include the attitude about teacher involvement, broad criteria, the types of play, and the distinction between play and non-play activities). Benefits of play: the participants perceived beliefs about the importance of play and its benefits on their students' or children. Teachers' role: the participant perceived beliefs and view of their role during their students' play episode (e.g., the teacher role and the teacher involvement). Classroom: Information regarding the classroom environment, routine, and structure. Any information that would allow me to understand a typical day in their classroom. Implementation: Teachers' enactment of play in their classroom. Includes information such as how they implement play in their class, the types of play implemented, and the implementation of play-based learning activities or lesson plans. B: participants' beliefs that would allow me to understand the participants perspective or worldview. A: participants' attitudes or participants' system of evaluative, affective reactions. V: participants' values or the importance the participants' attribute to another person, thing, or idea (e.g., play, learning, and play-based learning).

Jan 12. 2022: Cycle of Coding Tim Smith

Tim seems to value to the importance of choice in his students' play, he comments often on the socioemotional benefits of play in the classroom and seems to value its importance of play in teaching those skills in the classroom. While discussing inquiry-based teaching, it made me think of the inquiry play discussed by Pyle and Danniels (2017). He also seems to put value on inquiry-based learning but needs more practical experience before attempting to try this type of

teaching in his classroom. When it comes to the implementation of play, one of the issues that Tim seems to come across is the time constraints. Through our interview, Tim made a few comments alluding to the confusing definition of play and learning. I think this confusion leads Tim to misunderstanding play-based learning. Furthermore, I believe that Tim uses a lot more play in his classroom then he believes. From the interview, I believe that Tim Smith uses a lot of free play and playful learning activities in his classroom.

My Position on Jul2021 Cycle of Coding

When doing the interview and doing my cycle of coding for Jul2021, I agree with most of the point she brought up. I do believe that the new policies from the government are important and could have a lot of potential if they were implemented in a different manner. For example, offering more option of guided play for the teachers' rather than enforcing only free play. I believe that those new guidelines offer times for students to practice their socioemotional skills but to create more academic learning opportunities through play, more guidance from the teachers should be implemented. My beliefs may have influenced or impacted the quotes that I have deem important during the cycle of coding. It may have affected the degree of importance of those quotes. Thus, it will be important for me to send a draft of my findings to the participants to ensure the credibility and accuracy of my findings. Furthermore, my findings will be shared with my supervisor as well as other students in my program. They could help me identify bias or different views of the data.

March 13. 2022: Email Lisa about Created Profile

Hi Camille,
How are you?!!
Very well written.

Would it be ok if you change the sentence 'play is one of (if not the most important aspects) of K.
I am fine with the statement and did said that, but think I prefer it to read 'one of the most important' (taking out the one of, if not the most).
There are so many important areas in K...
Is that ok?

Thanks so much!

Sent from my iPhone

March 21. 2022: Email Jul2021 About Created Profile

Voici les modifications suggérées : P. 2 dernier paragraphe. « Je place des objets au centre. J'en cache un. Les enfants doivent trouver quel objet a été caché. Ils doivent le nommer. J'en profite aussi pour leur donner des stratégies. Par exemple : en prenant une photo (imitation) ou en répétant plusieurs fois dans leur tête le nom des objets qui sont présentés. p.3 « j'ai des yeux de monstre…. » J'ai des images de montres que j'étale un peu partout dans la classe. Je donne une consigne. Par exemple : « Les monstres doivent avoir 5 doigts. » Supposons qu'un élève place 2 doigts sur un monstre et qu'un élève arrive à côté de lui, ils doivent trouver ensemble combien de doigts il manque pour en avoir 5. Il en manque 3 donc l'élève qui est arrivé doit placer 3 doigts sur le monstre. Nous vérifions ensuite, en grand groupe, si tous les monstres ont 5 doigts. Si ce n'est pas le cas, ils doivent trouver une solution. p.4 « si tu veux leur apprendre les lettres. Si tu veux leur faire apprendre le nom et le son des lettres, tu peux leur offrir des jeux qui favoriseront cette découverte. Par exemple : des lettres magnétiques et des tableaux, de la pâte à modeler, un bingo des lettres, etc. p.4 Oui, bien c'est ça. Il faut que je mette à leur disposition des jeux qui leur permettront de manipuler, de créer, de s'exprimer, d'expérimenter, etc. Ensuite, ils seront libres de choisir. *Changes were subsequently complete and the newly changed paragraph were resent to Jul2021.

Appendix F

Artefacts

Figure F1

Jul2021: Jeu de KIM

Figure F2

Lisa: Play-5 Program

<u>Potential Play 5 Pursuits</u>
(Working document; please add/personalize – Lynn Senecal, Inclusive Schools Network)

Please note that Play 5 <u>does not replace</u> Kindergarten free play. On the contrary, Play 5 sessions add <u>more play</u> to children's day — recognizing play as a natural/powerful springboard for language and personal/social development (including self-regulation).

General philosophy:
Child-powered play: no screens — no batteries

Please note that the five pursuits are play springboards ('seeds') — not separate categories.

Constructing

General guidelines:

— Open-ended (freestyle) construction materials (i.e., those that lend themselves to imaginative, flexible play)
— Ample amounts of material for two (permitting both cooperative and parallel play)
— Accessible materials (i.e., those that provide good play possibilities for children at a range of developmental levels)
— Variety/novelty (a range of shapes, colors, etc. — avoiding daycare 'staple' toys, if possible)

Good base materials:

— Wooden blocks
— Foam blocks
— Lincoln Log-type kits
— Easy-to-manipulate, freestyle snap-together toys (e.g., Duplo/Mega-style and waffle bricks)

_____
_____
_____

Pretending

General guidelines:

— Materials that encourage children to explore a range of life, professional, and fantasy roles
— Emphasis on general roles, rather than brand/media-linked characters and toys
— Portable materials (Elaborate dress-up and center-based play is best left for traditional free play periods.)

Good base materials:

— Theme-based play-mats (e.g., carpet or foam-puzzle-style town, roadway, and nature mats)
— Structures such as doll houses, etc. may be best left for free play; <u>portable Play 5 alternatives = toy fences, trees, rocks, road signs, mini barns, mini garages, etc.</u>
— Animal pretend-play figures (e.g., dinosaurs, farm animals, wild animals, and pets)
— People pretend-play figures representing a variety of roles (e.g., family, friends, work, and fantasy figures)
— Toy vehicles with good play value (i.e., kid-powered); construction 'cargo' (e.g., old Cuisenaire rods, pebbles)
— Kitchen/restaurant/store supplies (e.g., play food, cooking/serving dishes, shopping bags/baskets, cash register, simple stovetop – e.g., stove 'mat')
— Teacher/school supplies (e.g., writing implements, scrapbooks/notebooks {collect discarded, partially-used ones}, light picture books, mini whiteboards, small toys)
— Care supplies (for doll and toy animal play)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

General guidelines:

— Open-ended games that encourage flexible play (e.g., wooden picture dominos)
— Toys/materials that promote discovery of scientific principles (e.g., floating/sinking)
— 'Toy-swap' options (as some toys lend themselves to more sustained play than others)

Good base materials:

— Discovery games (e.g., those that encourage manipulation, patterning, problem-solving, etc.)
— Portable water-play station (see photos) and exploration toys/materials (e.g., measuring cups, funnels, spoons, strainers, water-wheel beach toys, objects that float/sink, ocean-life figures…)
— Collections (e.g., buttons, pebbles, and shells)

Story-telling

General guidelines:

— Rich modeling of joyful, exploratory play with language/text
— Opportunities for children to share their narratives

Good base materials:

— Large magnetic drawing/writing surface (ideally, two side-by-side easels)
— Large sheets of paper (foolscap easel paper is large/affordable)
— Character magnets around which a narrative is 'spun' through drawing/emergent writing
— Puppets and portable theatre; felt-backed images and felt-board

Creating

General guidelines:

— Open-ended (freestyle) arts/craft materials (avoiding templates that limit creativity)
— Reusable and/or natural materials, if possible (avoiding synthetic craft materials such as foam/plastic cutout shapes)
— Safe, high-quality tools (e.g., scissors, glue, cookie cutters, rollers, and stamps)

Good base materials:

— AquaDoodle mats/water pens
— Play dough (without concern about colour-mixing)
— Scrap bags (e.g., cardboard tubes, construction paper, cardstock, cord, small boxes)
— Drawing materials (a good time to create mixed tubs of 'found' crayons, markers, etc.)

Exploring

And the teacher's/tech's role...

— Meeting (i.e., joining children in their play — an authentic, engaging context for modeling and supporting language and personal/social development)

Meeting

Please note that children who struggle with self-regulation are not removed from their play; rather, they are joined/supported in their play by the teacher/tech — using a 'gradual release of responsibility' model as they develop.

Quebec Play 5 Initiative (Inspired by Boushey & Moser's Daily 5 organizational framework; adapted to reflect/support the Quebec Education Program) – Senecal (www.shapesofmind.org)