

Play History: Common Trends in preservice teachers' play histories

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates teacher candidates' play histories/autobiographies. The study investigates the questions, (1) What kinds of play and creative experiences do the teacher candidates share in their autobiographies? (2) How will these play and creative experiences influence their integration of play as future Early Childhood Educators? (3) What implications do these findings have for the integration of play and play experiences for Early Childhood Teacher Education? Data sources include the teacher candidates' "play history autobiographies." The data is being analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis through coding for common themes. This poster session will share the initial analysis of the first question and initial interpretations of possible implications for the students as future teachers.

Objectives

The central goal of this study is to analyze and interpret autobiographical play histories of teacher candidates/preservice teachers at SUNY Geneseo, using qualitative thematic analysis through coding for common themes, determined through a literature review and thoughtful discussions, to investigate the potential implications that specific early play experiences have an influence on the importance of integrating play in the classroom for future educators.

Materials & Methods

Data collection:

We collected papers about the students (preservice teachers or teacher candidates) asking them to reflect on their play histories. The questions asked the teacher candidates to share what they played, who they played with, where did they play, how did they play (including a prompt asking about risky play), why they play, and how did they think play supported their learning and development. The assignment was at the beginning of the class during the last semester of the teacher education program before the teacher candidates start student teaching. There were a total of 38 participants, 35 of which were female and 3 were male.

Data analysis:

We have used qualitative thematic analysis as our method of analysis. In this process, we initially read through the play history papers to become familiar with what the teacher candidates shared in their play histories. We discussed our initial reading together in the early process. Through our literature review and initial discussion, we decided to review looking for common types of play and coding based on play type (e.g. dramatic play, sports), who they played with, and other aspects of play we noticed (e.g. technology, sibling play different than their play, etc...). We then independently continued to code for common themes. We are beginning to look for meanings of themes to better understand the lived play experiences the teacher candidates had when they were young.

Results

Method of play	Location of play	Presence of technology	Engagement in risky play	Affect of play on development?	Participation in organized activities such as sports and dance class
Almost every participant mentioned engaging in dramatic play such as "school", "house," Or play with dolls. A significant percentage (47%) of participants mentioned playing "school" or "teacher."	The main 3 locations mentioned by participants throughout this study are their home, a neighbor's or friend's house, and school.	26% of participants mentioned technology without prompting. about half of these participants said that technology negatively impact the younger generations or siblings, the other half of these participants either view technology positively or have mixed feelings.	63% of participants engaged in activities with little to no risk. 11% of participants did not mention risky play at all in their play histories. Only 26% of participants indicated something related to positive risk/taking risks.	82% of participants mentioned that play impacted their social development. 39% of participants mentioned that play impacted their emotional development. 53% of participants mentioned that play impacted their physical development. 15% of participants mentioned that play impacted their linguistic/language development. 32% of participants mentioned that play impacted their creativity and development of imagination. 29% of participants mentioned that play impacted their cognitive development. 5% of participants did not address developmental impacts.	47% of participants mentioned organized activities and sports as play

Discussion

The frequency of dramatic play scenarios being mentioned is significant to note. Most of these future teacher's earliest memories most likely occur around the time they were developing adequate communication and language skills, symbolic representation skills, abstract thinking, empathy, and the ability to see other's opinions. There have been many studies showing that as children begin to make sense of the world around them, they tend to recreate what they see and interpret, resulting in children playing kitchen who have helped their own mother in the kitchen, children playing doctor who have just visited the pediatrician, children recreating chase scenes they see on television, or early school age children playing school. As a child's schema grows and he or she develops a better conceptual awareness of the scenarios they are trying to recreate, they will play more frequently and with more detail, and those dramatic play scenarios become engrained as vivid memories (Fortis-Diaz, E. ., 1998).

Based on the literature review, there have been studies showing the predictive qualities of early behaviors and experiences (Zosh, J. M., et al. .2017, p. 8). The frequency of students mentioning playing school or teacher may be indicative of why they have chosen this profession. As research has shown, behaviors and tendencies that are shown in children early on are significantly predictive for future behaviors, especially if the activity was frequent and habitual. Aligning with the ideals of behaviorist theorists such as B.F. Skinner, when children choose to play school for the first time and enjoy the experience, they are most likely inclined to choose this activity again. This implies that children who often chose to play school and recall playing school as one of the more important play experiences, or at least one that they had frequently, they would most likely pursue a career in teaching.

Research has shown that play is beneficial across all developmental domains (Yogman, Michael, et al., 2018, pp. 26) and it was interesting to see how frequently social development was mentioned as opposed to cognitive and physical development. This may indicate that these future teachers may not consider play wherein they are cognitively developing "free play." As future teachers, cognitive development is taught as learning, discovering, and growing our brains so some activities may not seem like they are particularly cognitively enriching even though they may be. Any time children engage in dramatic play, with or without peers, they are activating their intellectual frameworks along with their social skills and motor skills. These teacher candidates most likely developed in all areas through play, they may have just overlooked the many areas in which their play helped them develop. Also, while these teacher candidates may have been developing cognitively throughout their childhood, it was through play that they most likely saw the biggest difference in their social skills and ability to interact with others. It may be difficult to gauge improvements in cognitive development without a formal assessment, but social skills can easily be observed informally.

It was unexpected to see how few students included technology in their play histories and of those students, how many viewed technology in a negative way. Another unexpected trend was a lack of risky play such as climbing and speed related activities in these play histories. There are numerous benefits to taking risks during play such as developing an awareness of the limits and strengths of the body, developing an understanding of action based consequences, increasing persistence, overcoming challenges, etc. These unexpected trends, along with the inclusion of structured activities as play experiences raise a few questions including:

-In a generation of children with access to technology, why was this not a bigger factor in regards to play?

-What might it mean that many future teachers have not/did not engage in risky play when we know this is beneficial for children, and how might this lack have impacted them as students in grade school?

-Is the inclusion of structured activities as play experiences indicative of a lack of free play due to competition for time with organized sports, clubs, etc.?

Future Directions

This study of play histories was very useful in observing trends related to early play experiences shared by teacher candidates in their autobiographies. Moving forward, the questions: "how will these play and creative experiences influence their integration of play as future Early Childhood Educators? And what implications do these findings have for the integration of play and play experiences for Early Childhood Teacher Education?" may hopefully be answered with a larger sample of participants. This study is still continuing as these students will be completing one lesson, and several play/creative experience related assignments, followed by some questions related to the topic in a post-survey throughout the remainder of this semester. This information will be analyzed and compared in relation to this larger study. The play history assignment, as well as others will likely continue in future semesters.

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