

THE PROMOTION AND BENEFITS OF PLAY IN
FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHING AND LEARNING

BY

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DECLARATION FORM

I Grace Mbangweta Imenda of 14 Meerensee Mews, Richards Bay, sincerely and solemnly declare that the copy of the dissertation submitted by me in January 2012 is original. It is in no way the work of someone else. The product is the result of my efforts through the professional guidance of the recognized supervisor whose name and signature appear below:

CANDIDATE'S NAME: -----

CANDIDATE'S SIGNATURE

DATE: -----

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My husband, Prof. Sitwala Namwinji Imenda, my children and my grand children.

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I wish to thank the almighty God who gave me this opportunity, strength and perseverance to accomplish this project.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated: [a] the ways in which Foundation Phase educators promoted indoor and outdoor play for their learners; [b] which play activities the foundation phase educators valued most and what educational benefits they associated with these play activities; and [c] which play activities were valued most by foundation phase learners and the educational benefits they associated with these play activities.

The study was based on the “mixed methods” (blended) research paradigm, involving the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from focus group interviews and a semi-structured questionnaire. Information from the educators was collected by way of a questionnaire comprising both structured and non-structured sections. Quantitative data were analysed by the use of Microsoft Office Excel, while qualitative information collected from the interviews with the learners was analysed qualitatively. Altogether, seventy-two (72) and thirty-two (32) foundation phase educators and learners, respectively, participated in the study. These were drawn from former Model C, township and rural schools.

On the first research question dealing with the promotion of play, the educator respondents reported that they promoted numeracy through (a) the use of market stands and playing shop (using Rands, litres, and centimetres); (b) play activities involving bean bags – to promote counting; (c) providing opportunities for learners to play with building blocks as counters; (d) playing mathematics games – e.g., touching eyes, ears, knees and legs to promote counting in twos; (e) the use of number games, flash cards and counting blocks to promote the creation of number patterns; (f) games, such as running using sacks, putting water in water bottles, using heavy and light objects, short and long objects – to develop the concept of measurement; and (g) giving learners opportunities to actively take part in number rhymes and songs which promoted the development of measurement concepts.

Plays were also used in the teaching / learning of literacy through strategies that included story-telling, role-playing, rhymes and singing, as well as dialogue; learners taking turns in playing games; learners drawing pictures about song or rhymes; learners imitating animal sounds, word matching games and acting out stories; word

games, phonic wheels, reading games; making letters with dough; alphabet story, such as Sammy snake, fireman Fred.

In promoting life skills through play, the educators reported using weaving, kneading and pretence play / role playing; matching different types of foods, charts, stories and story-telling; activities around environmental management; plays calling for help; painting, colouring, handwork; music; thinking and reasoning games; plays involving rendering sympathy and empathy to others; poems- on how to cross the road.

On the second research question, the educator respondents reported that play was important for developing learners' cognitive, social, motor, language and inter-personal skills. Furthermore, the educators reported that play enabled learners to (a) expand their imagination, (b) become more emotionally mature, (c) enhance their state of school readiness, (d) develop social skills, (e) develop initiative, (f) build and enhance their autonomy and sense of self, (g) take risks, (h) reveal their personalities, and (i) develop self-confidence and self-esteem..

On the third and final research question, the respondents reported that they liked playing with wire cars, hide and seek, wooden cars, soccer, playing *domino* games, puzzles, snakes and ladders, with water and sand, making necklaces, playing with wooden blocks, tyre racing, climbing on the jungle gym, colouring and painting. playing house, netball, tuck, dolls, blocks, laptops, playing games on touch, hockey, rugby, cycling, ski-boarding, ludo, rugby, athletics, *amagenda*, *arigogo*, hop scotch, *umlabalaba*.

The discussion of the results of this study showed that the findings fell in line with the literature review. Recommendations for classroom practice, curriculum planning and implementation, as well as further research have been made.

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) provides the basis for curriculum transformation and development in South Africa – emphasising the importance of healing the divisions of the past through, *inter alia*, the establishment of a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights (Department of Education [DoE], 2003: 1). Education, through the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), is envisaged to play an important role in the realisation of this constitutional directive.

The South African government acknowledges and advocates the vital importance of early childhood education (ECE), as an important component of the NCS. To this end the Government has taken a policy decision to invest in ECE, starting from as early an age as before 3 years. In this vein, White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001) advocates the implementation of ECE programmes and a strong foundation phase that starts with the Reception Year for five year olds. Overall, South African's medium policy goal is to provide all learners with 10 years of compulsory schooling, starting with the Reception Year – which forms the main focus of this study. In particular, the DoE (2001) stipulates that by 2010, all learners that enter Grade 1 should have participated in accredited Reception Year programmes. Further the Government committed itself to subsidising institutions that provide ECE programmes to the tune of 75% of their running costs.

In South Africa, the provision of ECE has been envisioned as an inter-departmental responsibility. In this regard, the major governmental role players in ECE are the Departments of Social Development, Health, Local Government and the Office of the Presidency (DoE, 2001). The Department of Social Development supports many needy children and families while the Department of Health provides free primary health care for children under the age six (6), in addition to the nutrition programmes for needy

children. On its part, Local Government provides childcare facilities and grants for these purposes to non governmental organisations (NGO's). The Office of the Presidency coordinates government-wide programmes and monitors the achievement of national policy objectives as outlined in the National Programme of Action for children (DoE, 2001). In outlining these inter-governmental relationships, in historical perspective, Biersteker (2001: 23) explains as follows:

The 1995 White Paper on Education and Training and the Interim Policy for ECD [early childhood development] (1996) explicitly stated the need for inter-departmental cooperation. As a first step towards inter-departmental collaboration, the Departments of Health, Welfare and Labour were invited to attend the Coordinating Committee for ECD, led by the Department of Education, in 1995. In 1996 a National Inter-departmental Committee was established. By 1998, when an inter-departmental workshop and policy audit was commissioned, all nine provinces were involved in some process of co-operation around ECD, mostly but not always initiated by the provincial education departments. [Parenthesis added by author].

Furthermore, Biersteker (2003: 4) sees ECE as a major contributing factor towards the emancipation of people from the shackles of poverty. In her own words, ECE “holds particular potential for children living in poverty, as it can enhance their long-term capacity to participate fully in the realisation of their rights and abilities”. Accordingly, she further contends that exposing children to appropriate early stimulation, nutrition, health and care through a range of services has many benefits, which can reduce the need later for costly medical, remedial and welfare services. Beyond this, ECE is believed to have a positive and enduring effect on subsequent learning as a child progresses along the school grades. For example, the World Conference on Education which took place in Jomtein, Thailand, in March 1990, affirmed that children who participate in ECE programmes are better prepared for schooling and will perform better than those who have never had the chance to do so (Aboagye, 2003). The same sentiments are echoed by Sturgess (2003: 50) when she surmises that “recent research provides additional evidence

of the strong connections between quality of play in preschool years and children's readiness for school instruction".

The Department of Education White Paper on ECE (2001, section 1.3.2) defines ECE as "an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to about nine years grow and thrive – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially". In section 4 of the White Paper, the government acknowledges the need for consolidating the preparation of young children for formal schooling through the establishment of a Reception Year:

Arising from the lessons learnt on the provision of the Reception Year in the National ECD Pilot Project, the Government proposes to establish a national system for the provision of Reception Year programmes to children aged five, including independent provision outside of the public sector (DoE, 2001, section 4).

Literature from around the world points to the importance of play in ECE (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999). As Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002: 33) observe, "decades of research has documented that play has a crucial role in the optimal growth, learning, and development of children from infancy through adolescence. In the same vein, Althouse (1981) posits that play is an active, self initiated and pleasurable activity. In her view, such an activity must be satisfying for it to qualify as play, and when the activity ceases to be, it also ceases to be play. This view is supported by Garvey (1977: 5) who gives a description of play as an activity which (a) is positively valued by the player, (b) is self-motivated, (c) is freely chosen, (d) is engaging, and (e) has certain systematic relations to what is not play. On her part, McInnes (2011: 4) observes that "play is valued worldwide and is viewed as a fundamental human right for all children as articulated in article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child."

Many of the characteristics of play that Garvey enunciates above are also echoed by Seefeldt and Barbour (1986: 251-252) who advance six characteristics of play as being (a) **intrinsically motivating** (b) **enjoyable** (c) **flexible** (d) **voluntary** (e) **non-literal**, and

(f) **verbal**, (g) **mental**, or (h) **physical**. In being intrinsically motivated, this means that the play activity is not goal-directed; and play is enjoyable in the sense that the child takes pleasure in the activity, although the outward manifestation of this pleasure can vary. With regard to flexibility, this means that a play activity may vary from situation to situation, and from person to person. Play is voluntary in the sense that the individual chooses the activity that s/he wishes to engage in; it is non-literal in the sense that it may be symbolic of real events or situations. Lastly, play qualifies as play when it is a **verbal**, **mental**, or **physical** activity.

From an individual child's view point, play is an important phenomenon which finds expression in different ways, depending on each person's own experience (Tekin & Tekin, 2007). Different researchers have reported a number of positive effects of child's play on early childhood development such as, motivating and orientating children, as well as giving them opportunities to exercise free choice (Tekin & Tekin, 2007). In addition, child's play is seen as having a positive impact on the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of the child (Fromberg, 2002; Broadhead, 2004; Ginsburg, 2007). As such, play is perceived to be a cornerstone of development – in addition to being dynamic and a vital concept in early childhood learning in all cultures. Strickland, (2004) also sees play as a cornerstone of children's development – as children learn through play and interact with their peers, adults, friends and the environment they are in.

The educational importance of the above characterisations of play is that once teachers impose certain activities – which may neither be valued by the children nor are freely chosen by them, then such activities cease to fall under the realm of play. In Althouse's (1981:45) view, play comes about because “children are fascinated by their world from the moment they enter it”, and play is the vehicle through which they begin (and continue) to explore their surroundings. In this regard, it's important for adults, as people upon whom the children depend for a responsive and enabling environment for development, to understand the value of play to children. Accordingly, every educator who works with young children should have a thorough knowledge of the child, in order to be in a position to determine the kinds of activities the children value – collectively and individually.

Commenting on the earlier years of a child's development, De Witt (2009:129) contends that play lays a good foundation for young pre-school learners, as they find themselves spending most of their time playing between the rituals and routines of their daily life. In this regard, De Witt further avers that children's play contributes a lot to the child's physical, cognitive, and emotional, development.

Wesley (as quoted by Brierley, 1994: 71) states that "he who plays as a boy will play as a man". In this regard, Wesley contends that exploration and play help the child's brain to develop by improving his/her language, intellect and physical skills – thereby paving the way to the child's development.

This research discusses the importance of *play* in the child's development – with particular reference to ECE. In this regard, the research starts by presenting the views of various authors regarding the definition of play. This is then followed by a literature exploration of 'the development of children's play'; and then by a section that presents the benefits or value of play. There is also a section that describes some of the games which children play; followed by a discussion of how play may be promoted. One important issue within the context of this study is one related to how the teacher may provide for play in order to promote healthy development in children. These are the issues that are covered within this first Part dealing with the theoretical issues related to play in young children.

1.2 AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM

Children play at home, at school, and everywhere in between; they play with people, things, and ideas. From the time they are born up to the preschool years, children's development is enhanced through various play activities. As Almon (2004: 1) observes:

When young children are ill they often stop playing for a few days. As soon as they are better, their parents notice the spark of play shining in their eyes again. In general, when children are able to play creatively, they blossom and flourish. If they stop playing over an extended period of time, they can suffer a decline and even become depressed or show signs of other illnesses.

Although the driving force behind the desire for play appears to be the pursuance of fun and pleasurable play advances, as the child grows, to more and more advanced levels of cognitive development – whereby the children begin to involve symbolisms and escape the reality of their worldly circumstances. This manifests itself particularly in pretence play, whereby a child may act as a medical doctor or even a hyena or dog. In this respect, children's play becomes symbolic, and is not constrained by reality.

Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren (1993) aver that a child engaged in any play, the particular absorbing activity s/he is involved in is meaningful – it connects and relates the experiences of the child to one another. From the pedagogic point of view, the important point to take note of here is that *play is active: children are doing things*. The other point is that *play is voluntary*: no child is forced to play, generally, or play a particular game. It is also noteworthy that play is driven by an intrinsically motivated curiosity, and the desire for mastery or affiliation.

1.3 DELINEATION OF THE STUDY

Referring to other researchers, de Witt (2009:129) describe play as the child's *work* or *daily task*, which is a reflection of his/her development. In this regard, de Witt sees children's play as an exploration of their world, which means that play is a natural way in which the children make themselves busy with the world around them. Accordingly, de Witt envisions play as an integral part of childhood.

Furthermore, de Witt (2009: 129) contends that through play, the child engages in non verbal communication with his/her world – as a projection of him/herself. As such, the reality of the child's world unfolds from play. This is well captured by Hymes (quoted by de Witt, 2009: 130) who sees play as:-

... thinking time for young children. It is language time. Problem-solving time. It is memory time, planning time, investigating time. It is organisation-of-ideas time when the young child uses his mind and body and his social skills and all his powers in response to the stimuli he has met.

According to Cass (1971: 13) play uses every ounce of a child's energy by engaging his/her imagination – thereby developing the child's skill of both the mind and body. It brings an understanding, warmth, and sympathy towards his/her fellow friends.

Rudolph and Cohen (1984: 93) report that:

... biologists tend to agree that among primates is the preparation for an adult's life and that lessons for the child's life can be inferred. Among those who believe this is Harry Harlow's, who has concluded that "no play makes for a very socially disturbed monkey" and that "monkeys (and children) need playmates to become functioning member of a social unit. Harlow is convinced that "play provides behavioural mechanisms by which activities for adult social functioning can be initiated, integrated [and] perfected.

Further, Rudolph and Cohen (1984: 93) are struck by the similarities in the games children of different cultural backgrounds play in their observation that "at every level of societal development, preliterate, or industrial, children play in startlingly similar ways that suggest a sequence of stage-related, self-initiated tasks and fantasies that may differ in detail but not in kind." The authors further make an observation that it is a common belief among scientists and philosophers that playfulness is a prerequisite to creative thinking in any field. Indeed, philosophers and teachers know that an excess of imitation and conformity in childhood is far more than a release of energy or a waste of good time that could be spent more productively. The view of most philosophers and educationalists is that play is a productive necessity for children. It is the means by which children come to grips with reality, both of the external, objective world, and of their feelings and relationships. Rudolph and Cohen (1984: 97) further express this point by stating that play affects children's "total development, and because it tends to be so physical and motoric, serious consideration is now being given to the effect of this physical activity on neurological development."

Most plays where two or more players are involved are rule-governed – where such rules may be implicit or explicit. This is very important because through rule-governed play,

children begin to acquire social skills and a sense of how to accommodate the place and spaces of other people as part of their shared space (Ogura, 1991; Nicolopoulou, 1999; Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). Through such play, children begin to understand themselves relative to other human beings – thereby moving away from the state of being self-centred (egocentric). Play is also episodic in the sense that it involves shifting goals that children develop spontaneously as they play, and attempt to overcome obstacles or other conditions which limit the fun or pleasure of pursuing certain goals.

Overall, therefore, play is regarded a major contributor to the physical, cognitive, social and personality development of children – and helps lay a solid foundation of almost everything the child learns during his/her pre-school years. It is for this reason that the writer became particularly interested in this area of research for this study.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

De Witt (2009:132) posits that through play the young child learns to approach the world from different perspectives, and discovers that the views of others are not necessarily wrong. A preschooler imitates the social roles of others by putting her-/himself into someone else's shoes. Such *pretence play* enhances the child's empathy for others – as s/he learns how to function in a group and how to be accepted. Gordon and Brown (2004: 123) list a number of points illustrating the value of play for the young child's social development. On her part, Cass (1971: 33,39) defines children's social play from the developmental angle, as comprising **solitary play**, **spectator play**, **parallel play**, **associative play**, and **genuine cooperative play**. All these authors aver the importance of play in the development of the child. Bearing this in mind, it is important to find out what the educators do to promote various play activities for the benefit of the children's emotional, physical and intellectual development. Included in this is a look at how the school learning environment promotes play with regard to the provision of the necessary requisites – such as facilities and other resources, in general, and for the attainment of specific skills and other developmental outcomes. Equally importantly, it also to find out what the learners themselves perceive as the educational benefits of play – or whether or not they do.

1.5 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many authors and experts aver that play is of great value to learners (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; De Witt, 2009; Emslie, 2008; Gordon & Brown, 2004). It is regarded to be so, as play is taken to involve all the developmental areas of the child, namely: emotional, physical, social, personal and cognitive (Huizinga, 2003; Sturges, 2003). Quoting a number of authors, McInnes (2011: 4) also sums up the benefits of play by stating as follows:

Cognitive-developmental theories of learning such as those of Piaget (1951) and Vygotsky (1976), emphasise the role of play for learning, and play is also seen to promote different aspects of development: social and emotional development (J. L. Singer, 2006; J. S. Singer & Singer, 1980; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990); social development and language (Garvey, 1991; Sachs, 1980); creativity (Dansky, 1980; Lieberman, 1977); problem solving (Sylva, Bruner, & Genova, 1976) and attitude to learning

However, from informal observations the researcher has noticed that in some schools, including former Model C schools where she did her teaching practicum, most teachers did not use play as a medium of learning in the foundation phase – much against the recommendations of the NCS (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011). The teachers appeared not to be aware of the importance of incorporating play activities in their lessons on a regular basis. In personal conversations, it became clear that in the minds of most teachers play was only for Grade R. This was also evident from their timetables which suggested that although play was used by some teachers in numeracy, not much was done in the other learning programmes – i.e. literacy and life skills. It is important to mention that the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) emphasizes play in all the grades of the foundation phase (DBE, 2011). In particular, sections 2 and 3 of the CAPS: Foundation Phase course materials for Grades R-3 in all the learning areas (DBE, 2011), prescribe play activities for both indoor and outdoor. Thus, the discrepancy between the apparent non-use of play in foundation phase teachers'

current practice, on one hand, and the requirements of the NCS, motivated the researcher to carry out this study.

1.6 THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study sought to investigate how foundation phase educators currently promoted both indoor and outdoor play as part of their teaching practices, and the value and benefits they associated with the play activities. Further, the researcher also felt that it was important to find out what play activities were valued or liked by foundation phase learners – and what attendant benefits they associated with these play activities.

1.7 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were to:

- 1.7.1 establish ways in which foundation phase educators promoted indoor and outdoor play for their learners;
- 1.7.2 determine play activities which were valued most by foundation phase educators, and the educational benefits they associated with these play activities; and
- 1.7.3 find out which play activities were valued, or liked, most by foundation phase learners, and the educational benefits they associated with these play activities?

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Thus, more specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1.8.1 What are the ways in which foundation phase educators promote indoor and outdoor play for their learners in their teaching practices?
- 1.8.2 Which play activities are valued most by foundation phase educators, and what educational benefits do they associate with these play activities?
- 1.8.3 Which play activities are valued, or liked, most by foundation phase learners, and what educational benefits do they associate with these play activities?

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Play is children's 'daily work' as it helps them to build their knowledge and skills in their interactions with peers, friends, by themselves and with the environment (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978; Ashiabi, 2007; de Witt 2009). Indeed, because children's play is creative, imaginative, enjoyable, problem-solving, motivating and interactive (Vandenberg, 1983; Godwin, 2007), it allows children to think for themselves. This not only underlines the importance of play in the development of children, but also requires that children participate in various play activities as a matter of course. In so-doing, they should be allowed as far as possible to choose the games they wish to play and how they want to play them – including fantasy play. On their part, educators need to know their role during play. In the same vein, subject and phase advisers – as well as curriculum planners, also need to know their role in ensuring that the facilities and other learning environments are made favourable to various play activities.

Consequently, it is envisaged that this study is important in-so-far as it will be beneficial to practising educators by drawing their attention to the various aspects of both indoor and outdoor play – and the importance thereof in ECE, generally, and the Foundation Phase in particular. In the process, it is envisaged that the findings of the study will shed some light on guidelines related to play activities. In the same vein, it is further envisaged that parents will also see the importance of play in the development of their children, particularly with regard to the support necessary for play activities which are directed towards the development of specific competences and abilities. Lastly, it is hoped that the findings of the study will assist both subject / phase advisers, as well as policy makers, to provide ECE and foundation phase learning environments with the requisite resources and equipment to enhance their capabilities for play activities that will maximise the learners' development.

1.10 ELUCIDATION OF THE KEY CONCEPTS

For the purposes of this study, the following concepts will be understood as defined below.

1.10.1 Outcomes-Based Education (OBE)

Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) is defined as “a learner-centred and activity-based approach to education” (DoE, 2002: 1), “based on outcomes” (Msila, 2007: 150). Referring to Spady’s work, Coetzee (2009: 67) “describes OBE as a model where the successful outcome performance is clear and fixed and time is the variable factor, which is in direct contrast with formal and traditional education where exactly the opposite pattern exists”. Coetzee (2009: 67) further reports that according to Spady, OBE’s four major characteristics are that the approach advocates (a) the formulation of clear performance criteria which are competent, proficient, qualified and professional and often at a high level of demonstrable expertise, going far beyond passing paper/pencil tests; (b) specifying very clearly the credential the learner receives for successfully demonstrating the assessment criteria, the precise nature of the expected assessment and the design of the instructional process; (c) success occurs whenever the learner demonstrates ALL the performance criteria; and (d) each learner proceeds at his/her own pace.

1.10.2 Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS)

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) Grades R-9 (Schools) is seen as an educational tool to root the South African fundamental values of democracy, social justice, non-racism, equality, non-sexism, *ubuntu* (human dignity); an open society, accountability, rule of law, respect and reconciliation – as enshrined in the country’s Constitution (Msila, 2007: 146 & 152). As part of the country’s school system, the RNCS describes the syllabus that learners must cover from Grade R to Grade Nine, in the eight Learning Areas of Languages, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Culture, Life Orientation, Economic and Management Sciences (EMS), and Technology (DoE, 2002: 2)

1.10.3 Early Childhood Development /Education

The Department of Education White Paper on Early Childhood Education (2001, section 1.3.2) defines Early Childhood Development (ECD), or Early Childhood Education (ECE), as “an umbrella term that applies to the processes by which children from birth to

about nine years grow and thrive – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially”. In this study, the writer has made use of a number of quotations where the authors have used the term ECD. These have been left as such, since one cannot alter quotations, although the current writer prefers the term ECE. By way of elaboration, the following concepts give further effect to various aspects of ECE – commonly referred to as SPICE:

Social Development - the ability to form attachments, play with others in ways that optimise co-operation and sharing, and being able to create lasting relationships with others.

Physical Development – related to the refinement of *fine* (small) and *gross* (large) motor skills.

Intellectual Development - the ability and process of making cognitive sense of the world.

Creative Development - special abilities that demonstrate the individual’s inventiveness, innovativeness and resourcefulness, usually expressed in terms of writing, reading, and various art forms – such as singing, playing musical instruments, performing, dancing, and others.

Emotional Development – Enhancement of self-awareness, self-confidence, and coping with feelings as well as understanding them.

1.10.4 Foundation Phase

The Foundation Phase comprises the first four grades of the South African school system – i.e. Grades R to 3. In this Education Phase, the curriculum focuses on “three Learning Programmes: Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills (DoE, 2002: 3).

1.10.5 Reception Year

Formal programmes of study provided to children aged five, in public or private institutions (DoE, 2001, section 4). This forms the first year of the Foundation Phase within South Africa's General Education and Training (GET) band.

1.10.6 Play

Although everyone can recognise play when it takes place, finding a(n) universal definition of it appears to be problematic. Tannock, MT (2008: 357) "play is a multi-dimensional, developmental activity expressed through a variety of forms and actions".

Tekin and Tekin (2007: 201) posit that play "has numerous definitions many of which are unclear [and that] play is easy to recognize but hard to describe". Scales, Almy, Nicolopolou and Ervin-Tripp (1991: 15) see play as "that absorbing activity in which healthy young children participate with enthusiasm". Csikszentmihalyi (1981: 14) describes play as "an arrangement in which one can practice behaviour without dreading its consequences".

Brown (1995:9) sees play as "a spontaneous, nonstereotyped, intrinsically pleasurable activity, free of anxiety or other overpowering emotion, without a visible, clear-cut goal other than its own activity".

Fox (2002: 19) refers to *Webster's Desk Dictionary of the English Language*, which defines *play* as having 34 different meanings, including being light, brisk, or changing movement, such as when a child pretends to be a butterfly; to act or imitate the part of a person or character – for example when children 'play house'; to employ a piece of equipment – for example when children play with blocks; to exercise or take part in an activity for amusement or recreation, like when children play 'tag'; fun or jest, as opposed to seriousness (e.g. to play peek-a-boo or sing a silly song); and the action of a game (e.g., to play duck-duck-goose).

On his part, Piaget (1962) simply defines play as assimilation, or the child's efforts to make environmental stimuli match his or her own concepts.

This study embraces all the above definitional perspectives in its understanding and discussion of 'play'.

1.11 RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods used in this study included the following:

1.11.1 Design and Participants

This investigation took the form of a survey involving seventy-two (72) foundation phase educators selected from the following institution types: (a) former Model C; (b) township, and (c) rural schools. The researcher believed that this would give her a good representation in terms of possible classroom environments, and educators.

In each participating school, the educators involved with foundation phase teaching were requested to participate in the study as sources of information needed to answer the above research questions.

1.11.2 Instrumentation

Data / information was collected by way of two instruments: (a) an educators' questionnaire, constructed by the researcher to ensure that the instrument encompassed most of the variables which would assist her to answer the first two research questions; and (b) an interview schedule for foundation phase learners – also covering the various aspects of the value and benefits of play for learners.

1.11.3 Sampling

Simple random sampling was used to identify participating schools. Altogether, nineteen (19) schools participated in the study. All foundation phase educators in the sampled schools were requested to participate in the study. For the learners, *purposive sampling* was used, based on the two categories of *most playful* and *least playful* learners, identified by educators. Altogether, thirty-two learners participated in the study.

1.11.4 Data Analysis

The Educators' Questionnaire comprised both structured and non-structured sections, so the data / information collected were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data were analysed by the use of Microsoft Office Excel. The information collected from the interviews with the learners was analysed qualitatively. However, frequency tables were constructed for data that best represented itself for this form of representation.

1.12 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following limitations of the study are highlighted:

1.12.1 Research Sample

The research sample of this study was limited only to selected schools in two wards of the Empangeni school district. The limited research sample meant that only a limited number of educators and learners could participate in the study. Thus, the study is limited in-so-far as it does not cover all the schools in the district, let alone the province of KwaZulu Natal. Certainly, a bigger research sample would have yielded more comprehensive and, hence, generalisable, results. Therefore, the findings of the study may be generalised to the whole district, or for that matter the province, only with utmost discretion.

1.12.2 Financial Support

Financial resources were a major constraint. Had there been more financial support for the project, the researcher would have covered more schools, and would have involved more educators and learners.

1.12.3 Time

A study undertaken within the scope of a degree is always limited to the time frames allowed for the study. Thus, time was another limitation and, again, with more time on hand, the study would have been bigger.

However, the above limitations, notwithstanding, the researcher believes that she has gathered sufficient information to meaningfully answer the research questions of this study and make a significant contribution to both the field of study, curriculum planning and classroom practice.

1.13 CONCLUSION

This chapter has briefly introduced the field of the study, brought about an awareness of the research problem, the delineation of the field of study, the aim, objectives and research questions – as well as an elucidation of the key concepts. In so-doing, it is envisaged that the reader shall have a clear understanding of the parameters of this study.

In the next chapter, a review of the related literature is presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter one, the importance of ECD, in general, and preschool education in particular, was highlighted. Overall, the preliminary review of literature presented in chapter one underscored the point that ECD carried certain important benefits for the child. Within the context of preschool education, including the Reception Year which forms part of the Foundation Phase in the South African school system, such benefits include school readiness. Grace and Brandt (2005: 14), see school readiness as “an interaction among children, families, schools, and communities” rather than “merely a process of getting children ready for school or getting schools ready for children” (Pianta & Walsh, 1996: 4). Indeed, there is even an argument that school-readiness has a direct effect on economic and social transformation – as Bredekamp (2005: 19) states:

School readiness matters because achievement gaps continue to persist between children from low-income families and their middle-class counterparts as well as among children from diverse linguistic and cultural group.

Likewise, Aboagye (2003: 92) avers that “the importance of preschool education in the overall development of the child is tremendous”. In the same vein, and in reference to the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (an American preschool programme), Bredekamp (2005: 18) “lists eight dimensions of school readiness with numerous indicators or examples provided to further describe each dimension: language development, literacy, mathematics, science, creative arts, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical health and development”.

Within the notion of ECD and the quest for getting young children to be school-ready, **play** has been isolated as a critical element through which young children learn. To

Tekin and Tekin (2007: 207) “play is a very critical element in and has important long-lasting impacts on the child’s development and learning.” Play is put by Bredekamp (2005: 20) simply as “at least in part the route to school readiness”. Sturgess (2003: 50) makes a simple point that “educators have always considered play to be a staple in early childhood classrooms”.

One of the widely-acknowledged authorities on the subject of *play*, Johan Huizinga, defines play as follows:

Summing up the formal characteristic of play, we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings that tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress the difference from the common world by disguise or other means (Huizinga, 2003: 13).

In stressing the choice element of child’s play, Cole-Hamilton, Harrop and Street (2002) define play as “activities which children choose to undertake when not being told what to do by others.”

Sturgess (2003: 104) puts another dimension to the description of what play is, in her statement that play extends the entire person’s lifespan:

Play is predominant in young children but also lasts across the lifespan as a combination of playfulness and leisure, and in behaviour that might be labelled as games, jokes, and recreation. It is essentially non-literal, opportunistic and episodic, engaging, imaginative/creative, fluid and active, predominantly for the moment and therefore concerned more with means than ends, and joyful. It focuses on a playful or ‘as-if’ attitude and must be intrinsically motivated.

Seefeldt and Barbour (1986:250) explain that for many centuries writers, artists, philosophers, educators and psychologists have been intrigued by the phenomenon of children's play, although their explanations into this area have not yielded a clear exposition of the purpose of children's play. Seefeldt and Barbour further aver that play is a means of practising skills as well as relaxing and learning about the world for both adults and children. However, childhood play is generally seen as distinct, important, and different from adult play. It is for this reason that over the years, growing interest in child development has focused most specifically on what play means for children. In particular, this has involved studies on how children play, and the impact of this on their development.

Rousseau (as quoted by Seefeldt & Barbour, 1986: 250) emphasizes the importance of children developing their natural instincts through play, stating that "a child's play is his natural occupation". In the same article, Seefeldt and Barbour refer to Pestalozzi's work in the 18th Century, who started the first outdoor education school, emphasizing that children should continue playing at school as they do at home, in order to learn. Seefeldt and Barbour go further by referring to other 'social reformers' such as F. Froebel, J. Dewey, Patty Hill and Maria Montessori who stressed the importance of children's play for social, emotional, and intellectual development.

The works of Froebel and Montessori are acknowledged for their development of materials which encouraged and facilitated children's play as part of formal schooling. Within the same realm, it is further reported that Dewey and Hill were of the view that children should have the opportunity to learn through free play. Thus, it is said that Dewey believed that play was of great educational value; that children first learn about their world through play – and that the development of this playful attitude is what keeps one continually growing and learning (Seefeldt & Barbour, 1986).

Smith-Hill (as quoted by Seefeldt & Barbour, 1986: 251) calls for the freeing of child's play from the restrictions of the Froebelian structured programme. Consequently, Smith-Hill, developed large blocks for children's play and emphasized their need for space and freedom in order for full development to occur.

The argument for giving children bigger spaces for free play emphasises the importance of children being the decision-makers during play, choosing what and where to play, choosing roles for each player, and choosing how play will proceed. Occasionally, however, some children will need adult assistance in joining a play group, modifying behaviour, or negotiating a disagreement. Careful observation will help the teacher to decide when to offer assistance and what form that assistance should take (Fox, 2006: 84).

It is quite clear from the fore-going that play is a key medium through which children's development takes place. This chapter presents a survey of literature for the purpose of addressing the research problem outlined in chapter one. In the next section, the writer reviews literature on play activities, as well as the benefits of play, before taking a look at the various ways in which play is (and may be) promoted within the aegis of the school environment. The last section presents some empirical findings, from literature, on the topic as a whole.

2.2 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THEORIES OF PLAY

Given below is a brief overview of the theories of play in order to give a perspective of the various ways play has been conceptualized over time.

Historically, play has been seen as the only mode of education for young children, and this view “has underpinned early childhood programmes since the initial kindergarten developed by Froebel” (McInnes, 2011: 4). McInnes goes further that “this tradition has continued, albeit in different guises, through the work of pioneers in early childhood education such as Montessori” (p. 3). To this end, McInnes (2011: 4) avers that “within the realm of early childhood education play is viewed as essential for learning and development.”

Within the horizons of living memory, McInnes (2011) traces the theories of play back to the surplus energy theory which was credited to H. Spencer in 1873. According to this theory, play was seen as “a product of superfluous energy left over after all other basic

needs have been met” (McInnes, 2011: 3). Verenikina, et al (2003) expand on this by stating as follows:

Surplus energy theory contends that humans have a finite amount of energy that is used mainly for work and survival. Children tend to play more than adults, as children are not so involved in work and survival activity, and therefore have greater amounts of energy to expend. By discharging excess energy in play, balance is restored to the human body.

Thus, the purpose of play was merely to exhaust the excess energy which the children had, aplenty. This theory is credited for the introduction of break time and recess on the school timetable and school year, respectively, on the basis that children needed ‘timeout’ to reduce their surplus energy. Children’s restlessness and inattentiveness were taken as evidence for the need for break time and recess.

Then came the **renewal of energy theory** in terms of which play was meant to “alleviate boredom while the natural motor functions of the body are restored” (Verenikina, *et al*, 2003: 6-7). This was followed by the **recreation / relaxation theory** which took the view that play was “an activity which occurs after work in order to relax and build up further energy” (McInnes , 2011: 3). Another way to look at this was that play was there to restore “energy that is expended at work” (Verenikina, et al., 2003: 7).

The **practice for adulthood / recapitulation theory** of play was “one which saw the function of play as cathartic” and posited that “through playing children acted out evolutionary stages”, against the pre-exercise theory of Groos which “explained play as an opportunity to practice adult activities and prepare for adult life.” (McInnes, 2011: 3). Verenikina, *et al* (2003: 7) see this theory of play as focusing on the importance of affording children “opportunities to develop skills necessary for functioning as adults.” According to McInnes, although the above theories are generally referred to as ‘classical theories’ may be seen as old theories, she avers that the types of play activities which undergirded these theoretical perspectives can still “be seen in children’s play today and

many early years practitioners will justify play in the curriculum in this way.” (McInnes, 2011: 3).

Subsequently, the **psychoanalytic theories** of Freud and Erikson have defined play “as providing a cathartic function enabling children to explore socially unacceptable and aggressive impulses in a safe context thereby gaining mastery over traumatic events.” (McInnes, 2011: 3). As Verenikina (2003: 7) point out, from the psychoanalytic theoretical point of view, “play reduces anxiety by giving children a sense of control over their world and an acceptable way to express forbidden impulses.”

On his part, Piaget’s theory of play, derived from his concepts of assimilation and adaptation, was an extension of his work on intellectual development – thereby reflecting levels of play in relation to corresponding levels of intellectual development (Verenikina, *et al.*, 2003; McInnes, 2011). Thus, Piaget’s characterization of play places his theory under cognitive theory. To this end, Verenikina, *et al.*, posit that from Piaget’s cognitive point of view, “play consolidates learning that has already taken place while allowing for the possibility of new learning in a relaxed atmosphere” (p.7).

According to McInnes (2011: 3), “Berlyne’s **arousal theory of play** ... attempted to explain the relationship between internal motivation, exploration and play and significant work.” McInnes goes further and explains that other researchers advanced Berlyne’s thinking and “focused on the process of play enabling behavioural flexibility or ‘combinatorial flexibility’ (p.3). Thus, McInnes (2011: 3) explains that:

Within the safe context that play provides, children are able to explore new combinations of behaviours and ideas without worrying about the consequences. Through this they may develop new behaviours which may be used in other, less safe, contexts.

According to Verenikina, *et al.*, (2003: 7) the **arousal modulation theory** saw play as serving the purpose of keeping “the body at an optimal state of arousal, relieving boredom and reducing uncertainty.” They further explain that Bateson’s **communication**

and **meta-communication theories**, expounded in 1976, saw play as promoting the “ability to comprehend multiple layers of meaning”, while Mead’s **theory of self** which was presented earlier, in 1934, envisioned play as centered on promoting the “sense of self in terms of personal identity and social relations with others” (Verenikina, *et al.*, 2003: 4).

Like Piaget, Vygotsky “also saw play in relation to intellectual development however, he emphasised pretend play and the importance of language and social interaction in play” (McInnes, 2011: 3). Indeed, as Verenikina, *et al.*, aver, Vygotsky’s “**socio-cultural theory** views play as promoting “abstract thought by separating meaning from objects and actions.” Further, this theoretical perspective contends that, through play, abstract thought is further enhanced by using actions and objects in symbolic ways – thereby providing for children to reach beyond their actual development in their cognition and self-regulation. Further, it is envisaged that, through play, “children achieve a mental representation of social roles and the rules of society” (Verenikina, *et al.*, 2003: 7).

2.3 A SURVEY OF PLAY ACTIVITIES AND ASSOCIATED BENEFITS

This section presents the array of play activities found in the literature, as well as the educational benefits associated with them. In doing this, the first section outlines various ECD play activities found in the literature, and how they are categorised. This is then followed by a presentation of the educational benefits of play. By and large, the literature reviewed in this section covers the first and second research questions.

2.3.1 ECD Play Activities and their Categorisations

Going back in history, Foster (1930: 248) came up with a number of categories for play activities, as follows: **catching, throwing, kicking** – e.g. baseball, basketball, marbles; **chasing, fleeing** – e.g. king of the hill, pom-pom pull away; **hiding, seeking** – e.g. hide and seek; **jumping, hopping** – e.g. leap frog, jump rope; **folk dances** – e.g. singing ring games, **London bridge**; **informal dramatisation** – e.g. playing house, store, office, dolls; **following directions** – e.g. do this do that, follow the leader; **table games** – e.g.

old maid, snap: **very active play** which may be individual – e.g. skating, swimming; **sliding; rather inactive** play which may be individual – e.g. painting, sewing; and **group games** of the guessing type – e.g. buzz, telephone, lead man.

Down in time, Caillois (1958) came up with four categories of play activities, namely: (a) *Agôn* (Competitive), (b) *Alea* (Chance), (c) *Mimicry* (Simulative) and (d) *Ilinx* (Vertigo). Caillois (1958: 131) explains that *Agôn* refers to a whole group of competitive games, usually hinging on a single quality – such as “speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc.” According to Caillois, *Alea* “signifies and reveals the favor of destiny” whereby a player is “entirely passive” and “does not deploy his resources, skill, muscles, or intelligence” (p. 133). With regard to mimicry, Caillois explains that players involved in it presuppose “the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion ... then at least of a closed, conventional, and, in certain respects, imaginary universe” (p. 135). Caillois (1958: 135) further expatiates regarding what happens during mimicry:

Play can consist not only of deploying actions or submitting to one’s fate in an imaginary milieu, but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving. One is thus confronted with a diverse series of manifestations, the common element of which is that the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself. He forgets, disguises, or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another.

The last game-type, *Ilinx*, includes games and/or play activities “which are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind” Caillois (1958: 138). Thus, “in all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness” (Caillois, 1958: 138). Common examples of these play activities for foundation phase learners include swings, Mary-go-round, racing or sliding downhill.

Emslie (2008: 4) describes five characteristics of play as follows:

Process Orientation – wherein the focus of play is on the process of playing;
Intrinsically Motivated – whereby play is child-initiated and / or is chosen by the child; children play because the play itself is rewarding, and there is no extrinsic reward expected;

Nonliteral Quality – where children constantly oscillate back and forth between reality and imagination – experimenting with new ideas.

Experimentation with Rules – where children create, and experiment with, their own rules when they are playing; and

Active Engagement – where children become intensely involved in the process of playing.

Mildred Parten presents the following categories of play (Fox, 2002: 22):

Onlooker behaviour— when a child plays passively by watching or conversing with other children engaged in play activities.

Solitary independent—when a child plays by him/herself.

Parallel—whereby a child engages in play, even in the middle of a group, while remaining engrossed in his/her own activity. Children playing parallel to each other sometimes use each other's toys, but always maintain their independence.

Associative—when children share materials and talk to each other, but do not coordinate play objectives or interests.

Cooperative—when children organize themselves into roles with specific goals in mind (e.g., to assign the roles of doctor, nurse, and patient and play hospital).

On her part, Cass (1971: 33, 39) describes similar types of children's social play, but transposes a developmental angle to them, and proposes a classification comprising five main categories: **solitary play**, **spectator play** (when children are concerned about

watching each other), **parallel play** (when they like to be near each other), **associative play** (when they often appear to be playing together), and **genuine cooperative play**. She goes further and states that as children grow older, at around 5-7 years old, they begin to play cooperatively together; they become aware of each other's needs and wishes; other children are fun to play with, useful and helpful because children now feel more secure within themselves. She points out, however, that real cooperation has its ups and down, and six-year-olds sometimes go through a quarrelsome stage; and though happily playing together at some times, but others can resort to be aggressive. In spite of these antisocial feelings which they express, they often get on well together particularly in a rich and challenging environment, with knowledgeable adults at hand to care and help them. They understand each other's needs and really need each other's company; they comfort each other and even say sorry if they have hurt another child; they will admire each other's efforts in a very generous way.

The above two characterisations of play – by Mildred Parten and Emslie, respectively, are based on the nature of the play activities, and how the children engage with them. In contrast, Seefeldt and Barbour (1986: 256) describe three categories of play, based on the works of Piaget, as follows:-

Practice play which is seen during a child's sensorimotor stage of development. At this stage the child performs and practises newly acquired motor skills with pleasure.

Symbolic play, which develops into dramatic play – whereby the child uses objects in his/her play to represent reality.

Games with rules – where play becomes more adequately adapted to the real environment and is subjected to rules and order of the real world. Thus, the child reaches a stage where s/he is better able to accommodate and align his/her thinking to the real world.

Smilansky (as quoted by De Witt & Booyen, 1994: 130) advances four types of play, which imply a cognitive hierarchy, and are seen as a basis for the child's cognitive

development: (a) functional play, (b) constructive play, (c) fantasy play, and (d) competitive play, with rules. With regard to these four levels of play activities, Bergen (as quoted by Gordon & Browne, 2004: 261) is also of the view that children's play progresses through a series of stages. Gordon and Browne further contend that the idea of progressing in stages bears its roots in the Piagetian theory – in terms of which play is divided into stages according to the way children use materials. Thus, play begins at the functional level – for example, simple, repetitive, exploratory activity, as simple as a baby playing with his/her toes. The next stage is constructive play, i.e. an activity that has some purpose or goal – such as pouring water to fill a bucket. This stage develops into dramatic play, which involves pretence circumstances. The final stage proceeds to the stage of games with rules. These levels are the most interesting to both preschool and the Foundation phase.

In similar vein to Bergen, Spodek, Saracho and Davis (1991: 189) refer to the earlier works of Jean Piaget who outlined early stages in play development as (a) practice play, (b) symbolic play and (c) games with rules. Clearly, Piaget's classification of the development of play, in terms of these stages, corresponds with his postulated (first three) stages of intellectual development – namely: (a) the sensorimotor, (b) preoperational, and (c) concrete operational stages. This classification has also been described by Verenikina, Harris and Lysaght (2003). Thus, in terms of this classification, the sensorimotor stage of play builds on the existing patterns of social behaviour of the infant or toddler. Symbolic play is represented in dramatic play; this happens among preschool children, as children at this level spend a lot of time playing games.

Spodek, *et al* (1991) further make reference to Sara Smilansky's work. Smilansky is reported to have adapted Piaget's play stages in studying preschoolers, and defined **functional** play as the routine or stereotyped use of play materials or simple motoric activity; she defined **constructive** play as sequential and purposive play that involved transforming situations or objects.

2.3.2 The Benefits of Play in Children's Development

The importance, or value, of play in the development of children is acknowledged from a number of sources, and from varied experts - as Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002: 33) observe:

Theorists, regardless of their orientation, concur that play occupies a central role in children's lives. They also suggest that the absence of play is an obstacle to the development of healthy and creative individuals. Psychoanalysts believe that play is necessary for mastering emotional traumas or disturbances; psychosocialists believe it is necessary for ego mastery and learning to live with everyday experiences; constructivists believe it is necessary for cognitive growth; maturationists believe it is necessary for competence building and for socializing functions in all cultures of the world; and neuroscientists believe it is necessary for emotional and physical health, motivation, and love of learning.

In concurrence, Bredekamp and Copple (1997: 14) also opine that "play is an important vehicle for children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development". Referring to a number of sources, Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002: 33) further explain how, in particular, play contributes to the overall mental development of the child:

Moreover, findings from the recent explosion of research on the brain and learning also delineate the importance of play ... We know that active brains make permanent neurological connections critical to learning; inactive brains do not make the necessary permanent neurological connections. Research on the brain demonstrates that play is a scaffold for development, a vehicle for increasing neural structures, and a means by which all children practice skills they will need in later life.

In this regard, Isenberg and Quisenberry caution “those who view play as a trivial, simple, frivolous, unimportant, and purposeless behaviour” and challenge them “to recognize play for what it is – a serious behavior that has a powerful influence on learning”. Accordingly, they call for an ‘attitude shift’ to result in an increased “level of respect accorded to currently undervalued activities such as recess, physical education, the arts, and rich personal adult/child interactions” (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002: 33).

Tsao (2008: 515) sees the value of play as manifest in children’s development of language and literacy skills which “are the core of children’s experience and, apparently, children’s literacy skills build from their knowledge of spoken language”. In this regard, Tsao goes further and avers as follows:

Competency in language allows young children to communicate with others, enables them to learn and grow, and enriches their lives ...young children engage in language and literacy learning without any direct instruction. While children play and communicate, they are learning intuitively how language works, practicing its nuances, and gaining insights into the meaning of written language. (Tsao, 2008: 515).

Play and language help children to have the ability to learn to read, speak, and communicate with others so that they exchange and share thoughts, ideas and experiences. Spodek, *et al* (1991) concur and posit that dramatic play, like language, is a symbolic activity. In play, children use objects and people to stand for things other than themselves – just as they use sounds to stand for objects or ideas, and later use written symbols to stand for sounds. Through this symbolic learning, children enhance their ability to function in language and literacy. As they gain proficiency in the language, they (children) learn to play with language as they play with objects. Children further develop their language proficiency through reading and telling stories.

Puro (2010) contends that play helps children grow in terms of (a) problem solving and social development; (b) language; and (c) mathematics and science.

Gordon and Browne (2004: 165) also contend that play is intrinsically motivating and naturally satisfying to children. They further posit that play promotes learning for the whole child, and that a wide range of learning opportunities is inherent in any single play activity. In these authors' opinion, all play activity holds the potential for growth and learning, for the child.

Rudolph and Cohen (1984: 197) also aver that play is at the heart of any programme for young children. They contend that play makes a major contribution to the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of young children. In this regard, through play children explore, discover, and learn. They also believe that teachers who observe children as they play can gain important insights into what children are thinking and feeling – and that children need teachers who value children's play.

Fox (2002: 19) reports on research that “indicates that children learn best in an environment which allows them to explore, discover, and play ... It is also closely tied to the development of cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical behaviors”. Arnaud (as quoted by De Witt & Booyesen, 2007:125) contends that child's play develops, just as the child develops on other levels, and that this takes place gradually “as the neonate's energy exceeds his biological needs”, centring round oral activities as described by Piaget. As De Witt and Booyesen (2007: 125) point out, “these oral activities represent the baby's active expansion of the satisfaction feeding offers him”. They give two examples – one of a baby starting to play with her/his toes, or a two year old child starting to squeeze dough with his/her fists; and secondly, the baby vibrating his/her tongue against the mother's nipple in order to expand his/her experience in the oral activities.

Ginsburg (2007: 182) posits that “play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth”.

According to Rudolph and Cohen (1984) emotions are an integral part of learning, whether the learning takes place through play or through formal lessons – or whether feelings are positive or negative. Referring to the work of M. Lowefeld and S. Isaacs,

who addressed themselves to the emotional aspects of play on the basis of their observations of children, Rudolph and Cohen (1984) posit that once teachers recognize that no one grows or learns without some kind of emotional involvement they'll be able to recognize when emotional factors impede or support learning. In line with this argument, de Witt and Booysen (2007:123) also aver that through play the preschool child learns to express and understand his/her emotions; that play teaches the child to control his/her environment, which has great emotional value for him/her in the sense that the child uses his/her imagination and makes his/her own choices and decisions.

On their part, Gordon and Browne (2004: 419), see play as the cornerstone of learning, for the reasons that it (a) develops the child's self-confidence and self-esteem, (b) makes the child to learn to take or appreciate different viewpoints on a matter, (c) helps the child to resolve inner fears and conflicts, (d) allows the child to build trust in self and others, (e) helps reveal the child's real personality, (f) encourages autonomy, (g) makes the child learn to take risks, (h) helps the child act out anger, hostility, frustration and joy, (i) helps the child gain self-control, (j) helps the child to become competent in a number of ways, and (K) teaches the child to take initiative.

According to Gordon and Browne (1989: 329) the value of play in the physical development of the child lies in that:

It provides challenges, it requires active use of the body, it builds the child's fine and gross motor skills, the child learns to gain control of his/her body, it allows for repetition and practice of skills, it refines eye- hand co-ordination, it develops the child's self-awareness, it is an outlet for energy.

Fromberg and Gullo (1992) contend that play enhances language development, social competence, creativity, imagination, and thinking skills. Frost (1992: 48) concurred, stating that "play is the chief vehicle for the development of imagination and intelligence, language, social skills, and perceptual-motor abilities in infants and young children". For his part, Garvey (1977) is of the view that play is most common during childhood when

children's knowledge of self, comprehension of verbal and non-verbal communication, and understanding of the physical and social worlds are expanding dramatically.

Fromberg (1990: 223) claims that play is the "ultimate integrator of human experience". This means that when children play, they draw upon their past experiences things they have done, seen others do, read about, or seen on television, and that they use these experiences to build games, play scenarios, and engage in activities.

Children use fine and gross motor skills in their play. They react to each other socially. They think about what they are doing, or are going to do. They use language to talk to each other or to themselves and they very often respond emotionally to the play activity. The integration of all these different types of behaviours is key to the cognitive development of young children.

Vygotsky sees play as a medium through which cognitive development is facilitated in the sense that, not only do children practise what they already know, and through which they also learn new things (Vandenberg, 1986). In concurrence, Hymes (1981) contends that carefully planned play could encourage the development of motor and social skills, as well as help children refine existing cognitive structures and construct new ones.

BabyClassroom (n.d.: 1) posits that "through play, children develop the foundations they'll need to succeed in life, from problem solving and social skills to basic literacy, math and science". As Alan Simpson (as quoted by BabyClassroom, n.d.: 1):

Playing with blocks is how young children learn about shapes and measurements ... Playing with other children is an important part of social and emotional development and learning to negotiate and to share. Playing in a sand table or playing in the sand at the beach, children learn about math and balance and structure. There are so many concepts that young children are just beginning to grasp, they're learning how to explore, and play is such an integral part of that.

Regarding language development, BabyClassroom (n.d.: 2) explains that:

... experts agree that fostering strong oral language skills and literacy awareness in the early years is more important than teaching letter sounds and word recognition. Songs, poems, stories, and age-appropriate videos all help foster your child's language development, but the best way to teach your child about language is simply by engaging her in meaningful conversations.

This is also supported by Simpson (as quoted by BabyClassroom: 2) who contends as follows:

In play, children are using symbolic language. When they pretend that a block cylinder is a bottle of soda and they're going to drink from it, that's a symbol of something, and once children understand symbols, then they can start to understand that letters stand for a word and that a printed word stands for something they understand.

BabyClassroom further postulates that “babies begin to learn math concepts far earlier than we might imagine, and much of that learning occurs through play. When children are exposed to a variety of interesting objects, they begin thinking about relationships like bigger and smaller, more and less, longer and shorter, heavier and lighter”. With regard to science, BabyClassroom contends that, through the process of observing the world, making predictions, testing outcomes, and drawing conclusions, play helps children to constantly hone these skills.

One other benefit of play is that regular observations of children playing holds great potential for providing teachers with assessment information, identify children with special needs, plan future play experiences, evaluate play materials, determine areas of strength and weakness for individual children, plan curricula for individual children, report to parents, and check on a child's on-going progress (Frost, 1992).

To Garvey (1977), play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. In this regard, therefore, Garvey sees play as being important to healthy brain development and that, through play, children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them.

Furthermore, Garvey sees play as allowing children to create and explore a world they can master – in the process conquering their fears while practising adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers.

As the children master their world, play helps them develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and the resilience they will need to face future challenges. Furthermore, undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills. Garvey (1977) further contends that when play is allowed to be child driven, children practise decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue. Ideally, much of play involves adults, but when play is controlled by adults, children acquiesce to adult rules and concerns and lose some of the benefits play offers them, particularly in developing creativity, leadership, and group skills. In contrast to passive entertainment, play builds active, healthy bodies. In fact, it has been suggested that encouraging unstructured play may be an exceptional way to increased physical activity levels in children, which is one important strategy in the resolution of the obesity epidemic. Perhaps above all, play is a simple joy that is a cherished part of childhood.

Garvey (1977) further points out that children's developmental trajectory is critically mediated by appropriate, affective relationships with loving and consistent caregivers, as they relate to children through play. When parents observe their children in play or join with them in child-driven play, they are given a unique opportunity to see the world from their child's vantage point as the child navigates a world perfectly created just to fit his or her needs. In this regard, the interactions that occur through play tell children that parents are fully paying attention to them and help to build enduring relationships. Consequently, parents who have the opportunity to glimpse into their children's world learn to communicate more effectively with their children and are given another setting to offer their children gentle and nurturing guidance. Less verbal children may be able to express their views, experiences, and even frustrations through play, allowing their parents an opportunity to gain a fuller understanding of their perspective. Quite simply, play offers parents a wonderful opportunity to engage fully with their children.

At school, teachers should help make play an integral part of the academic environment. Through carefully structured play, the teacher can ensure that the school setting is properly attuned to the social and emotional development of children, as well as their cognitive development. Furthermore, play has been shown to help children adjust to the school setting and even to enhance children's learning readiness, learning behaviours, and problem-solving skills. In addition, social-emotional learning is best integrated with academic learning. As such, it is concerning if some of the forces that enhance children's ability to learn are elevated at the expense of others. Play and unscheduled time that allow for peer interactions are important components of social-emotional learning. As Spodek, *et al* (1991: 190) observe:

Through play, young children learn to get along with one another. They discover that other children have points of view that are different from their own. They learn to revise their views of the world and negotiate differences. They also learn to share and cooperate. Play also helps to extend children's physical skills. Through play, children learn to manipulate a variety of toys and use their bodies in novel situations, becoming skilful as they engage in play activities.

Agreeing with the above authors, Gordon and Browne (2004: 436) also note that movements are one of the most notable features of young children's behaviour; that teachers know their children through their (children's) movements. Gordon and Browne further point out that, fundamentally, basic motor skills develop in the early childhood years and form the foundation for movement and motor proficiency. In this regard, physical growth and motor development are partly determined by a child's genetic make up – the most important factors in the physical development of the child being the environment, including nourishment, health, safety, stimulation, opportunity, practice, encouragement, and instruction.

De Witt and Booyesen (2007:122) develop the above point further and state that play contributes largely to the young child's sensorimotor development – through activities such as throwing the balls, lifting and carrying around objects, running around, climbing, and construction play. In concurrence, Gordon and Browne (2004: 122) add that the

movement exploration done by children enhances children's ability with regard to (a) problem solving, (b) exercise divergent thinking, (c) responding at their own age and developmental level, (d) learning to cooperating with others, (e) becoming more aware of others' viewpoints of view and ideas, (f) sharing, (g) the notion of taking turns, (h) being self- expressive, (i) being creative, (j) gaining confidence, (k) developing strong muscles, and (l) refining motor skills.

In describing the role of play in children, Gordon and Brown (2004: 142) make reference to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which relies on both maturation and environmental factors. With regard to the notion of maturation, the Piagetian theory sets out a sequence of cognitive (thinking) stages that is governed by heredity which, in turn, affects people's learning by the biological structure of the body as well as the automatic, or instinctive, behaviour of people – such as the infant's sucking at birth.

Staying with Piaget, Althouse (1981: 46) points out that Piaget believes play is important for intellectual development, and that he (Piaget) sees it as the bridge between sensorimotor development and symbolic thought: a stick becomes a gun, a rope a snake. This “make- believe” play stimulates thought about objects that are not present but represented by symbols. Therefore, Piaget suggests that the development of language is dependent on play. Piaget still goes on to say that play is pure assimilation whereas imitation is accommodation. Children assimilate new knowledge into already existing mental structures in so doing it distorts reality to suit themselves.

Althouse further presents objectives for the child's development through play. These have been chosen as realistic ones for the teacher to select from, premised on the understanding that play affects the development of the whole child. Althouse (1981: 49) gives these objectives as follows:-

Cognitive Domain – whereby the child:

- uses various processes such as classifying, creating, observing and predicting in play to solve problems;

- combines material, words or symbols in a unique way during the play experience;
- shows through dramatic play an interest and knowledge gained through experience;
- assumes a role and expresses it through make-believe play;
- substitutes movements or verbal actions for real objectives and situations;
- plays in a way that becomes more realistic and structured.

Affective Domain- whereby the child:

- assumes roles in order to dramatize situations which s/he must cope;
- shows by actions and words that s/he is open to the ideas and suggestions of other children;
- shows through actions and words – such as smiling, laughing, jumping with joy, that s/he enjoys play experiences.

Social Domain – whereby the child:

- shares playthings with other children;
- solves conflicts with other children through verbalisation rather than physical aggression;
- persists in a play episode with others for 10 to 15 minutes (five to six years), 5 to 10 minutes (three to five year olds).

Psychomotor Domain. Within this learning domain, the child develops:

- eye-hand coordination by painting, stacking blocks, putting together construction toys and puzzles, etc.;
- eye-foot- coordination by climbing, jumping, kicking and dancing;
- large and small muscles by running, walking a beam, climbing, throwing.

De Witt and Booyesen (2007: 122) also contend that play promotes the preschool child's understanding of certain concepts. They illustrate this by explaining that through play,

for instance, the child learns what the concepts of up and down, hard and soft, and big and small are further contend that play contributes to the child's knowledge about construction, to his/her creative abilities, his/her understanding of sorting and classification, his/her exploration and his/her search for solutions and answers.

De Witt and Booyesen (2007) view fantasy play as one of the forms of symbolic thought, as it enables the preschool child to bring the reality of the world into the sphere of interest in, and knowledge of, his/her own small world. De Witt and Booyesen also see symbolic play as an essential part of a child's language development. In the same vein, Gordon & Browne (2004: 416) also contend that representation and symbolic thinking take on pretend roles and situations.

Regarding the role of play in promoting social development, Gordon and Browne (2004: 543) opine that social development begins at birth. Within the first few months the baby starts to smile and plays in response to a human voice. Children imitate what they see and adapt social expectations to their own personality. The family and caregivers, teachers, peers and the community all contribute to children's social world and the values and attitudes that are developed.

De Witt and Booyesen (2007:123) posit that through play the young child learns to approach the world from different perspectives, and discovers that the views of others are not necessarily wrong. A preschooler imitates the social roles of others by putting her-/himself into someone else's shoes. Such pretence play enhances the child's empathy for others; s/he learns how to function in a group and how to be accepted.

Gordon and Brown (2004: 123) list the value of play for the young child's social development as follows:

- It (play) offers the young child the opportunity to try on a variety of roles and personalities,
- The child learns co-operation and taking turns,
- The child learns to lead and to follow,
- It creates a broad base for the use of social language skills,

- It helps the child to verbalise his needs,
- It reflects the child's own culture and values,
- It promotes the child's knowledge of society's rules and of group responsibility,
- The child learns how to participate in a group,
- It builds an awareness of the self as a member of a group,
- It promotes the child's self- identification,
- The child learns to show respect for others' possessions and right,
- It promotes the child's self- image and self concept; and
- The child experiences delight as a participant in a play of his/her choice.

Bergen (2002: 1) sums the benefits of play (particularly pretend play) as follows:

Because the development of pretence, receptive and expressive language, and mental representation all begin at approximately the same age (usually between ages 1 and 2), researchers have hypothesized strong conceptual relationships between these processes. Pretend play requires the ability to transform objects and actions symbolically; it is furthered by interactive social dialogue and negotiation; and it involves role taking, script knowledge, and improvisation. Many cognitive strategies are exhibited during pretence, such as joint planning, negotiation, problem solving, and goal seeking.

It's quite clear from the above review of literature that, to a child, play is at the core of all facets of his/her development – physical, intellectual, emotional, and others. At a time when knowledge is growing in specialised fields of study, and a lot of learning takes place in isolated chunks of information, “one of the most significant attributes of play is that it unites and integrates the cognitive, socio-emotional, and motor aspects of learning and development (Emslie, 2008: 9). This is a welcome departure to the all-too-familiar “teaching methods based on teaching discrete skills isolated from children's interests and activities” (Tepperman, 2007: 1). Overall, therefore, “play helps children develop the skills necessary for critical thinking and leadership” (Tepperman, 2007: 1).

2.4 WAYS TO PROMOTE PLAY WITHIN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

In looking at ways in which teachers may be expected to promote play, as a way of fostering learning, it is helpful to reflect on the basic assumptions underlying learning. In this regard, Emslie (2008: 7) advances four basic assumptions which serve as guiding premises to teachers as they endeavour to create learning environments for learners. These are given as follows:

Learning is an active, constructive process: Children learn by doing, and that the learner's retention rate is based on the type of involvement the learner had in the learning experience; that learners learn as they construct their own understandings based on their past experiences, culturally transmitted knowledge, and direct physical and social experiences.

Learning depends on rich contexts: Domains of children's development physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively are closely related and their development is interrelated; children see the world in a holistic way – not separated into individual domains. Therefore, children learn best when they are physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively engaged.

Learning is inherently social: Children learn best and can achieve more when they work and play with peers and adults – as they discuss, negotiate, and compromise.

Learners are diverse: This assumption has two parts. First, all children learn and develop at different rates and in different ways [...] Second, learners are diverse in their cultural backgrounds – which have a bearing and influence on their perception and understanding of the world.

It is a common observation that the young child always want to play near to their mothers. Even when the child wanders away from the direct vision of the mother, s/he experiences a sense of security just knowing that the mother is around. However, as soon as the child realises that the mother is no longer in sight, s/he suffers a sense of insecurity

and starts to cry. The first time most children leave home for an extended period of time to be in the company of strangers is when they go to preschool, or school. This requires special sensitivity to the transition the child is going through – requiring that the teacher take over the responsibility of the mother or guardian. Accordingly, the teacher is expected to provide a sense of security and a safety for the child within the school environment; as Emslie (2008: 28) points out, “children need to feel safe and secure in the classroom”. However, in most cases this marks the turning point in-so-far as free play is concerned. More often than not, the teacher’s constant interventions - often with good intentions under the guise of guiding the children, simply kill the growth of the children through play.

To some people play, as a construct, connotes a teaching approach – as Emslie (2008: 9) puts it, “play is an example of an effective teaching strategy because it matches the ways that children learn best”. However, it is not a *laissez-faire* teaching approach. Rather, it “must be consciously facilitated by skilled teachers, who are well-trained in observing children and in understanding how play contributes to the children’s mastery of concepts and skills” (Tepperman, 2007: 1). To this end, as with any other instructional strategy, teachers using this approach “need good, foundational knowledge in language acquisition, including second-language learning, the processes of reading and writing, early literacy development, and experiences and teaching practices contributing to optimal development” (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp (1998: 4).

The ECD teacher’s role in children’s play is one of facilitator by providing appropriate indoor and outdoor play environments. In providing for such a conducive environment, the teacher must carefully consider (a) the safety of the children – individually and collectively; (b) the age and developmental levels of the children in the design and selection of materials. This helps ensure a useful link between play and the curriculum. In this regard, it is important that teachers closely observe children during play periods, not only for assessment purposes, but also to facilitate appropriate social interactions and motor skills.

More often than not, teachers rarely introduce the games that call for the application of rules as these are seen as the prerogative of older children. This comes from the realisation by the child care centre teacher that organized, competitive games are developmentally inappropriate as well as uncreative for young children. Within the Foundation phase, activities such as relay races, dodge balls, and ‘kick the ball’ are likely to be of more interest to children in Grades 2 and 3, and not so much to the younger ones. While hoping to foster originality and imagination in young children’s play, it is important to realize that not every idea generated by the teacher will be new, no matter how supportive and encouraging the atmosphere of the school. Children’s inspirations will be like flashes here and there, embedded in a foundation of previously played activities. There will always be a lot of “old” mixed in with a little “new”. Hence, the teacher should be prepared for chaotic quality of creative play, since it is impossible to organize a reasonable order by picking up unused materials and returning them to their places, and by seeing that does not deteriorate into aimless running about.

Preschool teachers are likely to see play as functional, constructive, and dramatic play. In promoting functional play, De Witt and Booyesen (1994) aver that children enjoy the sensory stimulation from simple, repetitive activities – for example, a baby banging a spoon on his/her highchair, toddlers climbing onto everything in sight, all of these activities are functional play. Sometimes, these functional play activities give children an opportunity to master skills; other times it is used to get rid of tension or relieve boredom.

Sawyer (as quoted by De Witt and Booyesen, 2007: 130-131) advances the following guidelines for fostering functional play:

Toys should function properly to prevent the frustration of having to play with a broken toy. For example the toy telephone should ring when dialled.

The environment must be such that the child can play safely without undue verbal and physical restrictions. If one has to say “No!” or “Be careful!”, every now and again, the child’s play is severely hampered.

Provide the child with enough toys that will promote his/her sensorimotor development.

Verbalise what the child is doing in order to promote his/her language development.

Allow for outdoor play often.

Be aware that children under the age of three do not easily share their toys. This means that there should be adequate duplication of popular toys.

Hence, in promoting constructive play, children are enabled to construct their own toys from clay, wood and paper. As such, teachers should always emphasize the process rather than the end (De Witt & Booyesen, 2007: 131).

Fantasy Play includes role play – i.e. the dramatisation of a situation and creation of objects in the imagination. For example a child imagines himself as a bird and uses her/his arms as wings.

Competitive Play (with rules) covers all those play activities that are competitive and that are bound by rules. The form of play undergirded by rules is sometimes referred to as “mature” play. According to Bredekamp (2005: 19-20), two major elements are essential for (mature) play. First, play “must include an imaginary situation”, and secondly, “the players have assigned roles with implicit rules for acting each part”. However, Bredekamp (2005: 20) goes further and observes as follows:

Like virtually every other aspect of development, mature play does not happen naturally or occur automatically as children get older. Rather, children must learn how to engage in satisfying sociodramatic play, which means that adults or more capable peers must take responsibility for assisting them in this learning.

Bredekamp holds the view that mature play is very important in imparting important social and societal values that teachers must be sensitised to playing certain roles in order that the maximum benefits are realised. Accordingly, in Bredekamp’s view, teachers

play the three key roles of Observer, Stage Manager and Co-Player. She expounds these roles as follows:

The observer role is obvious and similar to that played in other areas of the early childhood classroom. In the case of play, teachers must observe carefully to determine whether, when, how, and with whom to intervene. The roles of stage manager and co-player are particularly important to ensure that mature sociodramatic play develops and is sustained and that individual children who may need additional support to become more skilled players receive it. .. As stage manager, teachers can help provide a “theme” for the play that organizes it around a set of common experiences or knowledge, and they can provide time, space, and props to enhance the play ... As co-player, the teacher carefully involves him- or herself in the play, scaffolding language, and intervening to appropriately support and extend the play. In this context, the most helpful teacher support involves, not directly instructing or explaining, but rather, modelling, demonstrating, guiding as well as possibly elaborating and extending children’s language by engaging in one-to-one conversation (Bredekamp, 2005: 20).

The vital contribution that *mature play* makes in the enhancement of children’s state of school readiness is in its promotion of ‘self-regulation’, which Shonkoff and Phillips (2000: 26) see as “a cornerstone of early childhood development that cuts across all domains of behavior”.

In the opinion of Spodek, *et al* (1991: 189), teachers could “combine the work of Parten with that of Smilansky to get a better sense of the level at which children are playing in their classes”. In this regard, the authors advise as follows:

Teachers can observe their children’s play, noting the level at which they play in various activity centers. They can then intervene by modifying the setting, by adding new materials, by raising questions of the children who are playing, or by stepping in momentarily to move play in a particular direction and then stepping out again. Knowing the criteria for play, the teacher can be sensitive that the

activity remains play even when there are adult interventions. It should not be distorted to the point that the children become so reality oriented or sensitive to authority that the activity loses its playfulness. (Spodek, *et al*, 1991: 189).

Bergen and Fromberg (2009:427) concur in their statement that “at any age, for an activity to count as play, it must be voluntary and self-organized”. They identify four growth areas attributable to children’s play, namely (a) social and emotional competence, (b) affiliation, (c) cognitive development, and (d) imagination and creativity. With regard to social and emotional competency, Bergen and Fromberg (2009: 428) contend that “although adults may provide the space and objects with which their children play, during play children practice their power to self-direct, self-organize, exert self control, and negotiate with others”. The children achieve affiliation through negotiating their play together; cognitive growth is achieved through, *inter alia*, “using puns, jokes, exaggerations, and other world play, [through which] they show knowledge of the world and gain power and delight in transforming that knowledge in incongruous ways”.

Young children appear to have limitless capacity for imagination and creativity – and play affords them space and time to imagine many different ways of doing things, as well as create their own world from ordinary worldly materials. In this regard, therefore, play is the vehicle through which children grow in imagination and creativity.

With regard to creative play, modern theorists “have recognized a close relationship between play and the creative process, as well as the importance of play in the process of learning and the development of higher intelligence” (Emslie, 2008: 4-5). It is envisaged that in young children this is expressed primarily in two ways: (a) through the unusual use of familiar materials and equipment, and (b) through role playing and imaginative play. Kostelnik, Soderman and Whiren (1993: 244) make this point as follows:

All creative efforts require two familiar elements of the active imagination: the generation of alternatives and a selection among these alternatives. Children must choose among a variety of materials that may be suitable for their project. In addition, materials themselves may provide ideas for constructions.

According Spodek, *et al* (1991: 198) “teachers can help to develop outdoor games with children”, but ought to realise that a lot of support is needed, especially when rules have to be followed:

Games differ from other forms of play in that there are rules that provide structure. Many children’s games are too elaborate for the preschooler. It is difficult for young children to follow the rules or even remember the intent of the game. Many simple games, however, can be played with the teacher providing the leadership.

Regarding the appropriate materials for use by children in creative play, wooden blocks provide excellent material for children’s construction. Commonly used materials include hollow wooden blocks and smaller solid wooden unit blocks. Cardboard blocks can also be used, as they tend to be less expensive to purchase, although they are not strong. Hollow ones are handy for children to carry as they can slip their hands inside to carry them easily. Children build them to their own specifications to serve their own purposes. The simplest building can allow for social as well as physical learning. Through these blocks children learn all sorts of things. They begin to use physical coordination and eye-hand coordination. Blocks can be combined with other toys to extend children’s play.

As I have indicated above, through these block building activities, children can learn many concepts – including mathematics concepts as they balance their structures. Such mathematical concepts may include informal measurements of length, area and volume, since blocks are representational.

However, blocks take up space in the classroom. Accordingly, the teacher needs to establish a sense of order in the block area.

Board games may also be used. These include games, such as Snakes and Ladders, as well as Monopoly. These games are liked very much by children. These games provide children with practice in basic skills of counting, adding, reading, writing and concentration, as well as in problem solving and strategic thinking.

According to Spodek, *et al* (1991) **Sand and Water** can be used both indoors and outdoors. When it is indoors, they are usually put in a large bowl, set on a table or on a water table. When it is outdoors, it gives children much freedom since there is more space. This also makes it possible to use more sand or water. As such, outdoors children can play in a large sand box, or sand pit, can be used – taking into account the height so that it's low enough for the children to reach. Children love playing with sand because they don't need a tool – just using their hands; this way they can feel it, mould it and they can model damp sand. When necessary tools – such as pails, shovels, strainers, funnels, empty cans, etc., can be used. Indoors or out, **water play** can be provided with water made available in plastic tubs. In here, children can use hoses, funnels, plastic boats and other floating objects. Rules can be established for children who are using sand and water. For example, they can be instructed not to wet others, and / or not to throw sand or splashing water on others. Children should be given plastic aprons to wear so that they should not mess themselves. (Spodek, *et al*, 1991: 197).

Gordon and Browne (2004: 419-420) assert that teachers have two major roles in promoting spontaneous play environments: (a) they are facilitators or supervisors of play and (b) they set the stage and create an atmosphere for play. In this regard, a good teacher:

- is one who guides the play, and does not direct or dominate the situation or overwhelm children by participation;
- capitalizes on the children's thoughts and ideas;
- does not enforce a point of view on children;
- models play when necessary and shows children how specific character might act, how to ask for a turn, how to hold a hammer when hammering; models ways to solve problems that involve children interacting on their own behalf;
- asks questions; clarifies with children what is happening;
- helps children start, end, and begin again;
- gives children verbal cues to enable them to follow through on an idea;
- focuses the children's attention on one another;

- encourages the children to interact with each other;
- interprets children's behaviour aloud, when necessary;
- helps them verbalize the children's feelings as they work through conflicts; and
- expands the play potential by making statements and asking questions that lead to discovery and exploration.

It's quite clear that these tips would give one a good basis for promoting play in one's classroom.

In all, Bergen (2008: 87) sums it all in the following statement:

One of the major characteristics of young children's play is that whatever is in their environment can be used as play materials. For example, the magazine left lying on the floor, the last bites of cereal on the high chair tray, the mud in the yard, the car keys, or the television remote control can all become play facilitators ... For young children play affordances suggest that the magazine can be shaken and the pages ripped; the cereal bits rolled or piled; the mud squeezed, pressed and spread; the car keys shaken and banged against furniture; and the remote control pressed on and off (or thrown across the room).

In furthering the debate regarding plays that require games for small children, Althouse (1981:63) contends that organized games are not thought of as play activities unless children enter and leave the games when they choose. Althouse further states that the best ways to begin outdoor games is to ask them if they would like to go and play a game. If they are willing to play the game children will begin the game, and once this happens others are likely to join. As they mature and become familiar with games they can remain in the game until it finishes. As a teacher, it's always a good idea to choose games which requires some form of participation from all the children. For example, games such as London Bridge, and such-like games, may be used – accompanied by simple rules which require children to be active.

Overall, games are excellent sources of teaching concepts such as colours, classification, visual discrimination, recognition of numerals. Some children will profit more from one kind of game than from the other. The key thing is allow the children the freedom to choose their own games, and roles they want to play. Rules must be kept simple.

In dramatic play, children pretend at being persons other than who they really are. They use objects to represent things other than what they really are. For example, a child can use a stick and pretend as if it is a gun. In dramatic play children develop their own evolving situations, setting the stage and creating their own dialogue. They can pretend to be parents cooking, cleaning, feeding the doll baby, and so-forth. Teachers can extend children's play beyond the confines of the home, and have them (children) use a range of community settings which can serve as the basis for children's learning through socio-dramatic play. In this regard, they children could pretend to be in a supermarket, post office or at the hairdresser's. Teachers can think of other props to organise into prop boxes as they watch and listen to children to find out what interests them. One other prime responsibility of the teacher is to set the stage, providing equipment and materials that will invite children to play. Play should always be under the children's control. (Spodek, *et al*, 1991: 204).

Cohen and Stern (1983: 219) talks about self-initiated sociodramatic play. According to Smilansky, who studied children's play in Israel and the United States, children of four and five year olds spend a lot of time in this kind of play. In dramatic play a child pretends to be someone else, and imitates others. However, the child may also play alone. In sociodramatic play there must be at least one other play, and the children interact with both words and actions in their make believe. In this play, children foster the growth of empathy and consideration of others' situations. A child learns by experiment what it is like to be the baby, the nurse, the mother, the doctor or policeman. It provides countless opportunities for acquiring social skills; how to enter a group and be accepted by them, how to balance power and bargain with other children so that everyone becomes satisfied from the play, and how to work out the social give-and-take, which is the key to successful group interaction.

Puro (2010: 1) observes as follows:

Give children a lot of options when it comes to games and toys, agrees Davis, then allow them to make their own choices. One child might be drawn to puzzles while another prefers blocks. One child might spend hours devising elaborate scenarios involving stuffed animals while another sits quietly with his nose in a book. Try not to push children into playing with the toys you think are most appropriate. When given options, little ones are surprisingly adept at choosing the right toy for their developmental stage, their temperament, and their interests.

Puro further contends that when the adult joins in a child's play, the child should be allowed to take the lead. When parents or teachers respect children's imaginary plays and allow them to be in charge this provides them with an opportunity to develop a healthy self-esteem, and by entering the child's world on his/her terms, an adult helps nurture a long-enduring strong bond with the child.

Regarding problem solving and social development, Puro (2010: 1) observes as follows:

Problem solving skills are essential for social and academic success, and children develop most of their early problem solving abilities through play. Toys like jack-in-the-boxes and busy boxes are naturals for teaching about cause-and-effect relationships. More "open-ended" objects like empty boxes, bowls, and stacking cups provide opportunities for young children to explore size and volume and to manipulate objects in different ways". Children at play make predictions, such as whether or not one object will fit inside another, then they test those predictions as they learn to make sense of the world.

Puro (2010: 1) further observes that "problem solving is also crucial for healthy social development, and children can only learn positive social skills by playing with others. Parents can help by offering little ones tools to navigate emotionally-charged areas like sharing and hurt feelings, then stepping back and allowing them to resolve issues on their own".

To Huybrechts (2010: 1) “there’s no better teacher than a good role model.”

Certainly, the teacher might need to step in once in a while to avoid physical violence, but as children enter the toddler and preschool years, you'll help most by giving them space to resolve conflicts among themselves.

According to Seefeldt and Barbour (1986: 266,267) play can proceed naturally if the classroom setting is well organized. When you see that play in a certain area comes to a stand still, determine which materials will be removed and what new stimuli be added. For example, new colours added to the easel or different textured papers to paint on can provide new enthusiasm or insights to children’s creative expression.

Providing availability and storage of materials allows children to learn concepts of size, colour, shape as well as classifying and organizing. Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) go further to point out that planning and organization require time, and that some activities require more time than others. Children need to be free when they are playing. As a supervisor, the teacher should be able to recognize his/her children as s/he observes in order to offer the necessary feedback and support. Although it’s not a good thing to interrupt children as they play, it’s important to support their play by either nodding one’s head or give a smile. Individual needs should also be attended to. For instance, it may be necessary to help a shy child to enter into play by saying something like: “Pretend you are a nurse and you’re now required to give these medicines to them”!

This kind of support may be just what the shy child needs to get involved in the activity at hand. So, although the children are the main actors, the teacher should be ready to help them.

As an observer, the teacher is in a good position to understand the meaning of play for a child. As the teacher observes, s/he should reflect on the children’s stages of development, as well as the most suitable type of play for them to be engaged in. Through observation the teacher can determine when a child is having real difficulty with what s/he is doing, and needs help. This is possible because accurate observations give clues to the teacher regarding the child’s level of thinking. For instance, the teacher may

make observations of children playing and surmise that the particular toys or materials the child is playing with are beyond his/her ability, or they do not provide enough stimulation for thinking, socializing or expanding his/her motor skills. Lastly, as a teacher, one could assess the child as one carries out the observations. Play is primarily a learning activity for children, so, observing children as they play can provide the teacher with an opportunity for assessing their social, intellectual, emotional and physical skills, as well as their growth, generally.

A very important aspect of play is the responsibility to keep play areas safe and attractive. The general appearance and presentation of the play areas should inspire (not discourage) children to play there. All areas should be set up at the beginning of the day in a fresh, appealing way. Attractiveness fosters attraction. Accordingly, the teacher is the person who bears the primary responsibility for creating and maintaining appealing play areas. When things are left scattered around, they not only lose their appeal, but they also become navigational hazards. Children and teachers rarely watch their feet as they move from one area to another, and loose pegs, little cars, and beads on the floor increase the likelihood that someone may fall and strike his/her head on a hard object – such as the corner of a chair or table; or the floor, itself. The question of keeping safe play areas can, therefore, not be overemphasized.

For the Reception Year, play is normally included in the daily programme because it takes a considerable portion of the school day to play. Therefore, the teacher needs to plan for this play, providing the necessary supporting environment, making sure that the children have enough materials and equipment to use.

According to van Staden (1977:23), a good programme in the Reception Year should enhance all areas of the child's development. Therefore, the educator has to be aware of the different phases of development and the rate at which this development takes place, so that developmentally appropriate activities can be presented. Gordon & Browne (2004) present valuable ideas on what teachers could do to establish play in the curriculum:

- Teachers must understand, appreciate, and value play experiences for young children;
- Teachers should focus on the process of learning rather than on the process of teaching; and
- Teachers should reflect on their observations in order to know what activities, concepts, or learning should be encouraged or extended.

Roopnarine and Johnson (1987: 148) advise ECD teachers to always ensure that the educational as well as recreational foci of children's play involve both indoor and outdoor activities. The Reception Year programme must have an open classroom orientation which emphasizes language and communication, science and nature, dance and movement, arts and crafts as well as dramatic themes.

Language and communication skills are very important in children's development. A child's command of the language is his/her gateway to a successful school career, as well as to his/her social and emotional interactions with the teacher and other children. Language and communication involves reading pre-reading activities, pictures that tell story; songs and poems, etc.

Science and nature are all around us, but many children grow up fearing to study them. The study of science and nature should, therefore, start as early as the Reception Year. A study of science and nature encompasses a number of activities, plants and animals, shapes, sounds, etc. There many things within the classroom environment that could be used to introduce science through playing with the every day toys and other play materials.

Dance and movement are also an integral part of play. It's through dance and movement that children are helped to reap the benefits of exercise – through appropriate body movements, climbing rhythmic motion; finger play and other quick reaction games.

Arts and crafts is one learning area that affords the learner an opportunity to play with materials, such as dough, puzzles, blocks, sand, necklaces and paintings. The Reception

Year curriculum should emphasize the role of the child as an active learner / experimenter. All this allows the child to interact with others socially and cognitively.

Observation of Grade R Learners

When observing children's play, one should use different play categories such as starting with simple manipulative behaviour and routine use of toys – i.e. cognitive play. In functional play, children work with materials and create 'products'. In constructive play, the child transforms and starts imagining objects.

Both social and dramatic play increase the levels of behavioural sophistication, from playing alone; in solitary play, children play beside another child on a similar activity. Parallel play is simple, but calls for a more complex social collaboration. Cooperative play is usually manifest when children play together in groups. After the children have been placed in groups, and play has started, that's when the teacher starts observing them (Roopnarine, 1987: 150).

The teacher also needs to focus on the positive and negative social behaviours as the children interact amongst themselves. Positive behaviours include giving a helping hand to friends, inviting others to go and play, acceptance of gifts, praising and teaching. Observing negative behaviour one should look for rejection of an activity, taking or damaging property, fighting. As a teacher, one needs to look out for all of these behaviours.

Summary

The importance of teachers, parents and school authorities working together to promote play in the early development of children has been summarised by Ginsburg (2007:182-191) as follows:

- promote free play as a healthy and essential part of childhood. They should provide for all children to have ample, unscheduled, independent, nonscreen time to be creative, to reflect, and to decompress. They should ensure that although

parents can certainly monitor play for safety, a large proportion of play should be child-driven rather, than adult directed.

- discourage the overuse of passive entertainment (e.g. television and computer games), and always bear the importance of out-door and free in-door play, in mind.
- demonstrate in their planning for children's daily programmes that active child-centred play is a time-tested way of producing healthy, fit young bodies.
- emphasize the benefits of "true toys", such as blocks and dolls, with which children use their imagination fully, over passive toys that require limited imagination.
- educate families regarding the protective assets and increased resiliency developed through free play and some unscheduled time.
- valorise and reinforce the notion that parents who share unscheduled spontaneous time with their children and who play with their children are being wonderfully supportive, nurturing, and productive.
- discuss with parents that, although very well intentioned, arranging the finest opportunities for their children may not be parents' best opportunity for influence and that shuttling their children between numerous activities may not be the best quality time. Children will be poised for success, basking in the knowledge that their parents absolutely and unconditionally love them. This love and attention is best demonstrated when parents serve as role models and family members make time to cherish one another: time to be together, to listen, and to talk, nothing more and nothing less. Teachers can remind parents that the most valuable and useful character traits that will prepare their children for success arise not from extracurricular or academic commitments but from a firm grounding in parental love, role modelling and guidance.

- Teachers should be a stable force, reminding parents that the cornerstones of parenting—listening, caring, and guiding through effective and developmentally appropriate discipline—and sharing pleasurable time together are the true predictors of childhood, and they serve as a springboard toward a happy and successful adulthood.
- Teachers should help parents evaluate the claims made by marketers and advertisers about the products or interventions designed to produce super-children.
- Teachers should emphasize to parents the proven benefits of reading to their children, even at very early ages.
- Teachers should make themselves available to parents as sounding boards to help them evaluate the specific needs of their child in terms of promoting resilience, developing confidence and competence, and ultimately enhancing the child’s trajectory toward a successful future.
- Teachers should make an effort to support parents to organize playgroups beginning at an early preschool age of approximately 2.5 to 3 years, when many children move from parallel play to cooperative play in the process of socialization.
- Teachers should play the role of ‘advocate’ for developing “safe spaces” in under-resourced neighbourhoods, perhaps by pressing for the opening of a school where there is a dire need for such a facility, library, or community facilities to be used by children and their parents after school hours and on weekends.
- Teachers need to educate themselves about appropriate resources in their own communities that foster play and healthy child development – and have this information available to share with parents.

- Teachers should support children having an academic schedule that is appropriately challenging and extracurricular exposures that offer appropriate balance. What is appropriate has to be determined individually for each child on the basis of his/her unique needs, skills, and temperament, not on the basis of what may be overly pressurized or competitive community standards or a perceived need to gain university admissions.
- Teachers should encourage parents to allow children to explore a variety of interests in a balanced way, without feeling pressured to excel in each area.

Teachers should encourage parents to avoid conveying the unrealistic expectation that each young person needs to excel in multiple areas to be considered successful or prepared to compete in the world. In parallel, they should promote balance in those youth who are strongly encouraged to become expert in only 1 area (e.g. a particular sport or musical instrument) to the detriment of having the opportunity to explore other areas of interest.

- As parents choose child care and ECD programmes for their children, teachers can reinforce the importance of choosing settings that offer more than “academic preparedness.” They should be guided to also pay attention to whether the settings attend to the social and emotional developmental needs of the children.
- Teachers should be encouraged to join with other child professionals and parents to advocate for educational settings that promote optimal academic, cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development for children and youth.
- Teachers should assess their learners for the manifestations of stress, anxiety, and depression in family-centred interviews for children.
- Because stress often manifests with physical sensations, teachers should be highly sensitized to stress as an underlying cause of certain categories of illnesses.

- Teachers should refer cases to appropriate health professionals and social workers when children or their parents show signs of excessive stress, anxiety, or depression.

In concurrence, Almon (2004: 7-8) reiterates and adds to the above points raised by Ginsburg by stating that “leading educators, health professionals, and other child advocates need to work together to examine the role of play in childhood and the ways in which it is endangered. Their findings need to be publicized as widely as possible, with an emphasis on what children need for healthy development”.

Almon (2004) further opines that the formation of commissions of prominent experts needs to be done as quickly as possible, for, there are many countries at this time that are on the brink of eliminating play in early childhood education in favour of direct instruction of academic subjects for young children. Generally around the world, the experience is that once such a change happens, it will be very difficult to reverse the process. For example, the United States has offered academic instruction to five-year-olds in kindergartens for 30 years. There is no evidence that it has worked. To the contrary, there is much concern that it has caused great harm. Nonetheless, rather than admitting failure, policymakers are now insisting that one start teaching reading through direct instruction to three- and four-year-olds. They believe that the younger one begins the better, despite research and experience that prove the opposite.

Further, Almon reports that in 2002, the United States Senate’s Health, Education, Labour and Pensions Committee prepared legislation to support preschool programmes for three- and four-year-olds. Such financial support is badly needed, but the legislation was controversial. In part, it called for healthy steps toward a holistic approach to early childhood education, but it also repeatedly called for early literacy and offered bonuses to states that could show gains in “kindergarten readiness.” These gains would almost certainly need to be shown in academic areas, as few programmes assess children’s gains in social and emotional development. The Alliance for Childhood issued a statement of concern that was signed by leading educators and health professionals – to the effect that parents, educators, and health professionals need to become activists on behalf of young

children and engage directly in the development of healthy approaches to ECD. The statement was distributed in the Senate and to other government officials,

Almon (2004:3) further observes that presently, in the United States and other countries, politicians have actively entered the realm of early childhood education and are insisting that early childhood programs promote early literacy and numeracy at the expense of child-initiated activity. This needs to be countered by grassroots and other forms of activism in every community and in every preschool and kindergarten program. Research and experience clearly show what young children actually need for balanced, healthy development. It is time that the fruits of that research and experience are implemented in every early childhood setting. To do anything else is to promote the miseducation of children.

Parents, educators, and health professionals need to become activists on behalf of young children and engage directly in the development of healthy approaches to ECD. Thus, it is important to develop large-scale public education campaigns to help parents and professionals understand the importance of play and how to strengthen children's play. Most early childhood teachers in the U.S., for instance, receive little or no training in helping children play. Since the play patterns of children are already disturbed, simply encouraging children to play is often not enough. Teachers and parents need workshops, literature, videos, and other educational tools to help them support children in play.

It is also important that parents and community leaders work together to create safe play spaces for children. In this regard, it should be realised that children need play spaces where they can run in the grass, roll down hills and, if possible, play in a stream or fountain. Such play spaces need some adult supervision at a paid or volunteer level. Just as parents now volunteer to coach sports, they can be encouraged to volunteer to supervise free play spaces and receive training on how to do this. A starting place is to organize a play day in a neighbourhood or community.

2.5 SUPPORT FOR MORE PLAY TIME FROM EMPIRICAL STUDIES

It appears that the interest in the topic of ‘play’ goes back a long way. From the literature surveyed, as far back as 1930, there were studies on the kinds of play exhibited by children up to those doing grade 6. Foster (1930: 248) reports of a study in which children in grades 1 to 6 were asked to write down “the names of outdoor games which they had played more than once during the previous year”. In this study, Foster was also interested in finding out if there were any gender biases in the games listed. The findings revealed that both boys and girls were consistent in listing fewer games for indoor than for outdoor. In an attempt to classify the play activities, Foster came up with categories, as follows:

Catching, throwing, kicking – e.g. baseball, basketball, marbles;

Chasing, fleeing – e.g. king of the hill, pom pom pull away;

Hiding, seeking – e.g. hide and seek;

Jumping, hopping – e.g. leap frog, jump rope;

Folk dances – e.g. singing ring games, London bridge;

Informal dramatisation – e.g. playing house, store, office, dolls;

Following directions – e.g. do this do that, follow the leader;

Table games – e.g. Old maid, Snap;

Very active play which may be individual – e.g. skating, swimming; sliding;

Rather inactive play which may be individual – e.g. painting, sewing;

Group games of the guessing type – e.g. buzz, telephone, lead man.

(Foster, 1930: 248-249)

Gender-based analysis showed that boys preferred catching-throwing and chasing-fleeing games, whereas the girls showed greater interest in the jumping-hopping games. With regards to indoor games, the comparison revealed that the popularity of catching-

throwing games among the boys was not nearly as marked as was the case in the outdoor games.

Earlier, Lehman and Witty (in Foster, 1930: 253) reported finding that the play activities engaged in most often by children between the ages of 8½ and 10½ involved (a) pleasurable body movements, usually rhythmical; hiding and finding; imitation of adults; a relatively high degree of skill; efforts at construction; activities for enjoyment which depend primarily on sense organ stimulation; tag games; and singing and ring games.

Although this is an old study, and dealt with children older than the ones who are investigated in this study, the present writer was intrigued by the reported findings. As such, these findings broadened the scope of the writer on this topic.

A further chronological look at the literature further affirms the existence of sex differences in the complexity of children's play activities and games. For instance, Lever (1978: 471) reports that "boys' play is more complex than girls' play, as indexed by such attributes as role differentiation, interdependence between players, size of play group, explicitness of goals, number of rules, and team formation". This study was conducted among boys and girls aged between 10 and 11 years of age. The following quotation may help shed further light on this differentiation:

Boys experience face-to-face confrontations – often opposing a close friend – and must learn to depersonalize the attack. They must practice self-control and sportsmanship; in fact some of the boys in this study described the greatest lesson in team sports as learning to "keep your cool". Girls' play and games are very different. They are mostly spontaneous, imaginative, and free of structure or rules. Turn-taking activities like jump-rope may be played without setting explicit goals. Girls have far less experience with interpersonal competition. (Lever, 1978: 481).

Nonetheless, Lever (1978: 481) is quick to make the following observation:

That the sexes develop different social skills in childhood due to their play patterns in logical conjecture; that those social skills might carry over and influence their adult behaviour is pure speculation.

In their study involving ECD educators in Turkey, Tekin and Tekin (2007: 211) report eight major benefits of play to children, as seen by the educators:

- (a) Play provided child with the opportunity with his or her own world where he or she was free of adult values and external realities;
- (b) It was possible to establish new friendships and strengthen current ones, develop the feelings of belonging in peer groups and teams through play;
- (c) There were many positive feelings for children like enjoyment, happiness, freedom, relaxation, excitement, and entertainment;
- (d) Play satisfied the physical and psychological needs of childhood;
- (e) Play was educational, during play it was possible to develop new talents and learn how to deal with difficult situations. It was a way to growing up by establishing mastery over external world;
- (f) Play helped child to develop and shape his or her personality as well as represent his or her own personality and imagination;
- (g) Play was a natural part and an important need of childhood; and
- (h) Being the winner or best-player was important.

Despite the numerous benefits derived from play for both children and parents, time for free play has been markedly reduced for some children. This trend has even affected kindergarten children, who have had free play reduced in their schedules to make room for more academics. Given the many advantages of play that have been enunciated above, it's little wonder, therefore, that concern has been expressed regarding what has been perceived by some people as a world-wide trend that play time for children has, over the years, diminished. In this regard, Ginsburg (2007: 184-185) laments this trend and offers the following explanations:

There are more families with a single head of household (as well as two working parents) and fewer multigenerational households in which grandparents and extended family members can watch the children. Therefore, fewer families have available adult supervision in the home during the workday, which makes it necessary for children to be in child care or other settings in which they can be monitored by adults throughout the day. This has resulted in a proliferation of organized after-school facilities and activities (such as ‘academic enrichment’ programmes) which offer valuable alternatives to children who might otherwise be left with minimal or no adult supervision. However, this results in much more controlled environments, from the point of view of free play time in which the children themselves control their own play environment.

Many parents have learned how to become increasingly efficient in balancing work and home schedules. They wish to make the most effective use of limited time with their children and believe that facilitating their children to have every opportunity is the best use of that time. Some may use some of the standards of efficiency and productivity they have mastered at work to judge their own effectiveness as parents; this is sometimes referred to as the professionalisation of parenthood – a phenomenon that may create guilt in parents who find it difficult to balance competing demands after a taxing workday. Parents who understand that high-interaction, at-home activities (e.g. reading or playing with children) present opportunities for highly effective parenting may feel less stress than those who feel compelled to arrange out-of-home opportunities.

Parents receive messages from a variety of sources stating that good parents actively build every skill and aptitude their child might need from the earliest ages. They are deluged in parenting magazines and in the media with a wide range of enrichment tools and activities that tout their ability to produce super-achieving children. They read about parents who go to extreme efforts, at great personal sacrifice, to make sure their children participate in a variety of athletic and artistic opportunities. They hear other parents in the neighbourhood talk about their overburdened schedules and recognize it is the culture and even expectation of parents.

The university admissions process has become much more rigorous in recent years in many countries. Parents receive the message that if their children are not well prepared, well balanced, and high-achieving, they will not get a desired spot in higher education. This makes some parents too anxious – thereby resulting in starting to prepare their children too early for higher education. The overall effect of this is that play time is drastically curtailed. Accordingly, children are encouraged to start preparing themselves for university through both academic excellence and a wide variety of activities and volunteer efforts starting at younger ages. In some cases, parents feel pressured to help their child build strong university credentials.

In response to the increasingly rigorous university-admissions process, many secondary schools are judged by the rates in which their students are accepted by the most prestigious universities. Partly in response to this, many students have been encouraged to carry increasingly rigorous academic schedules. In order to cope with these high academic expectations, one of the things that is sacrificed is play.

The pressure for admission to select schools begins for some families long before university, and is apparent as far down as the primary schools – including crèches. The desire for selection to private preschools can even be brutally competitive, and parents may need to consider how best to “package” their preschoolers.

In the United States, there is a national trend to focus on the academic fundamentals of reading and arithmetic. This trend, spearheaded by the **No Child Left Behind Act** of 2001, is a reaction to the unacceptable educational performance of America’s children in some educational settings. One of the practical effects of the trend is decreased time left during the school day for other academic subjects, as well as recess, creative arts, and physical education. This trend may have implications for the social and emotional development of children and adolescents. In addition, many after-school child care programmes prioritize an extension of academics and homework completion over organized play, free play, and physical activity.

The decrease in free play can also be explained by children being passively entertained through television or computer/video games. In sharp contrast to the health benefits of active, creative play and the known developmental benefits of an appropriate level of organized activities, there is ample evidence that this passive entertainment is not protective and, in fact, has some harmful effects.

In many communities, children cannot play safely outside of the home unless they are under close adult supervision and protection. This is particularly true in areas that are unsafe because of increased violence or other environmental dangers.

Almon (2004: 1-2) also echoes some of the points raised above by Ginsburg, and lists the following concerns regarding the reasons for the curtailment of children's play:

Children have become too much dependent on electronic entertainment: television, videos, and computers – thereby leaving little time or inclination for real play. When media-filled children do play, it is naturally full of media characters and stories. It becomes increasingly hard for children to make up their own creative stories in play, for their imaginations have been overpowered by what they have seen on the screen. In extreme cases children are fixated on these screen images and will not allow any changes in the story they are playing out.

Most ECD programmes focus strongly on teaching literacy, numeracy and other academic subjects, so much so, that many children no longer have time to play in ECD centres. ECD centres are now full day, leaving very little time for home play.

The academic approach to ECD has progressively been shifting downward to very young children – resulting in as young as three- and four-year-olds being engaged in far more early writing and reading activities than ever before. Since it is difficult, although not impossible, to assess children on how well they play, normal assessments focus on how many letters and numbers children know, and how many of the basic steps in literacy and numeracy they have taken.

The amount of time spent in sports and other organized activities for young children has increased greatly over the years, beginning with pre-schoolers, so that children have little time for their own play activities.

As Almon (2004: 2) states:

Given the importance of play for children's physical, social, emotional, and mental development, the demise of play will certainly have serious consequences during childhood and throughout children's lives. Indeed, there is growing concern about what kind of society we are creating if a generation of children grow up without play and the creative thinking that emerges from play. Can democracy survive if creative thinking dies out?

Almon (2004:3) further observes:

Brain researchers continually remind us that the brain is not an isolated organ in the body. It is linked to everything else – to language, to movement, to social and emotional experiences. Thus, when the hands, the eyes, the ears, or the heart are being stimulated through life activity, so is the brain.

Going further, Almon (2004: 2-3) cites earlier studies which have shown that:

- children who show the greatest capacities for social make-believe play also display more imagination and less aggression, and a greater ability to use language for speaking and understanding others;
- research in Germany in the 1970s showed that by fourth grade children who had attended play-oriented kindergartens surpassed those from academic-oriented kindergartens in physical, social, emotional, and mental development. The findings were so compelling that Germany switched all its kindergartens back to being play-oriented;
- in U.S.A., the research of the High/Scope Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan is often cited. There, sixty-nine low-income children, ages three and four, who were considered to be at risk of future school failure were divided into three

groups. One, called the High/Scope group, was offered a programme with much child-initiated activity, including play. Another, called the Direct Instruction group, received much instruction in academic subjects. The third, called the Nursery Programme, was a combination of the other two. As the children grew up, those who had been in the High/Scope and Nursery programmes succeeded in school and life – significantly better than the children in the more academic, Direct Instruction programme. At age fifteen, the following results were noted:

- Initially, all three curriculum approaches improved young children's intellectual performance substantially, with the average IQs of children in all three groups rising twenty-seven points.
- By age fifteen, however, students in the High/Scope group and the Nursery School group. . . reported only half as much delinquent activity as the students in the Direct Instruction group.
- By the time the children had grown up and were age twenty-three, the research continued to point to a much higher success level for those who had been able to play in nursery school. The High/Scope and Nursery School groups showed gains over the Direct Instruction group on seventeen different variables.

Almon (2004: 3) further reports that a:

recent study by Rebecca Marcon of the University of North Florida found results similar to those of High/Scope when children from different preschool programs were followed through fourth grade. Those who had attended play-oriented programs where child-initiated activities predominated did better academically than those who had attended academic-oriented programs.

Given all the above, Almon (2004: 3) concludes by lamenting as follows:

I would have thought that such research alone would convince educators, parents and policymakers that it is foolish – and even dangerously unhealthy – to immerse

three- and four-year-olds in direct instruction programs. Yet these programs are gaining favour throughout the United States. The president and Congress have set the highest levels ever for academic achievement for Head Start children, and have supported legislation that would influence all pre-school programs to move in this direction.

The message that comes out of the above findings, as well as Almon's ultimate lamentation, is very clear – i.e. play, for both the short- and long-term development of children, is critical, and has no substitute. In addition, it's without doubt that introducing literacy, numeracy and other academic activities too early, does not do much good to the children. Instead, it appears to be harmful.

2.6 CONCLUSION

In the opinion of the writer, this chapter has succeeded in outlining the literature on play, pertinent to the research problem. Firstly, a further elucidation of **play**, as a concept pertaining particularly to children, has been presented – followed by a presentation of the various categories of play. Subsequently, the important role that **play** plays in the development of children has been presented, tied in with the educational / curricular imperatives thereof. In this regard, a point may be made that in the absence of play (in the context of healthy interactions between and amongst children as they grow up) serious developmental inadequacies and impediments may occur. Thus, the chapter has underlined the importance of various respective roles to be played by various officials and structures, particularly educators, in promoting and providing children with appropriate and sufficient opportunities for play as they progress along the school ladder of learning phases.

In the next chapter, the research methods adopted in this study are described and explained.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigated: [a] the ways in which Foundation Phase educators promoted indoor and outdoor play for their learners; [b] which play activities the foundation phase educators valued most and what educational benefits they associated with these play activities; and [c] which play activities were valued most by foundation phase learners and the educational benefits they associated with these play activities. In chapter two, the researcher presented a survey of literature for the purpose of addressing the research questions outlined in chapter one, and restated above. This enabled her to come up with a framework for addressing the research problem in its theoretical perspective. This chapter covers the descriptions of the research design and target populations, sampling techniques and research samples, instrumentation, administrative procedures related to data gathering, data analysis, as well as ethical issues involved in the study.

3.2 METHODS OF STUDY

The research methods followed in this study are briefly sketched below under various sub-headings.

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

The Quantitative and Qualitative research paradigms are the most commonly cited approaches by researchers (Denzin, 1978; Dzurec & Abraham, 1993; Johnson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 2005), although Schwandt (2000, 210) disputes the need for this differentiation and questions “whether such a distinction is any longer meaningful for helping us understand the purpose and means of human inquiry”. Accordingly, Schwandt (2000: 210) contends that this distinction is further made unnecessary, considering that “all research is interpretive”. The current researcher has

aligned herself with the “mixed methods” (blended) research paradigm – which Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007: 113) define as “an approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints (always including the standpoints of qualitative and quantitative research)”. Earlier, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) saw mixed methods research as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study or set of related studies.

Indeed, research involving *mixed methods* is not new. Johnson, et al (2007: 113) see the recent efforts at promoting mixed methods research as a new movement seeking to formalise “the practice of using multiple research methods”. Johnson, *et al* further report that in the history of the development of research methods, this research design was first associated with the term *multiple operationalism*, as far back as the 1950s. Later the term ‘triangulation’ was coined – which is defined by Denzil (in Johnson, et al, 2007: 114) as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon”. Johnson, et al (2007: 117) sum it all up in their observation that “antagonism between paradigms is unproductive”. They see mixed methods research as follows:

Mixed methods research is an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research; it is the third methodological or research paradigm (along with qualitative and quantitative research). It recognizes the importance of traditional quantitative and qualitative research but also offers a powerful third paradigm choice that often will provide the most informative, complete, balanced, and useful research results. (Johnson, et al, 2007: 129).

This study, therefore, qualifies as a *mixed methods* research project, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collecting research approaches.

3.2.2 Research Design

This study employed the survey research design. A survey is broadly classified as one of the quantitative research designs. However, in this study, data collection involved both

quantitative and qualitative approaches and instruments, in line with the mixed methods research concept explained above. Thus, in this study both quantitative and qualitative data were collected.

In literature, there are various classifications of survey research. LeCompte and Preissle (1993:162) present three types of survey research, namely, **participant-construct**, **confirmatory** and **projective**. Participant-construct surveys are used to measure or ascertain the strength of feelings respondents have about given constructs, or to elicit the categories into which people classify items in their social and physical environments. Confirmatory surveys are the most commonly used approach, usually involving structured interviews or questionnaires intended to verify information, perceptions, opinions or views; whereas projective surveys are used where, for instance, trigger-photographs, drawings or games are used to elicit people's opinions or reactions which may enable the researcher to determine patterns of social interactions unobservable in the natural setting. Other classifications of surveys include categories such as **enumerative or descriptive surveys** - where one wants to *describe* certain characteristics of a population; and **analytical surveys** - where one wants to *explain* phenomena or characteristics of a population. Yet, others classifications are **descriptive**, **exploratory** and **explanatory** (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 233), a survey research design is one whereby an investigator “selects a sample of respondents from a larger population and administers a questionnaire or conducts interviews to collect information on variables of interest”. Commenting on the popularity of survey research designs in education, McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 233) opine as follows:

Surveys are popular because credible information from a large population can be collected at a relatively low cost, especially if the survey is distributed and collected by mail, during a phone interview, or through the internet ... Surveys are also efficient because data on many variables can be gathered without substantial increase in time or cost.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 233) the other advantage of surveys is that “small samples can be selected from larger populations in ways that permit generalizations to the population”. Indeed, in this study, it will be of interest to take a representative sample of Foundation Phase educators, from whom generalisations may be made.

More specifically, this study used a combination of **confirmatory**, **descriptive** and **analytical** survey techniques. Focus group interviews were used to collect data from foundation phase learners, as they were not yet at a stage that enabled paper-and-pencil techniques of data collection – such as completing questionnaires. It was, thus, envisaged that an interview would enhance the reliability and validity of the information collected. The data yielded were largely qualitative in nature, as is typical of interview data. To this end, the study made use of both *within* and *between-methods* triangulation in order to arrive at sufficiently cross-validated findings (Johnson, *et al*, 2007: 114). In particular, the use of between-method triangulation was highly recommended as it ensured that “the bias inherent in any particular data source, investigators, and particular method will be cancelled out when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods” (Denzin, 1978: 14). Furthermore, both simultaneous and sequential triangulation were used (Morse, 1991). With regard to simultaneous triangulation, the questionnaire used consisted of both structured and unstructured elements, ensuring that the results not only complemented each other but were actually self-reinforcing. Sequential triangulation was involved, not only in following up on data from the questionnaires, but also in using the findings from one group (i.e. educators) to fine-tune the instruments and data collection procedures for the learners (i.e. interview protocol).

3.3 RESEARCH LOCALE

This research will be conducted in the Empangeni school district, KwaZulu Natal Province, South Africa.

3.4 POPULATION AND RESEARCH SAMPLE

The target and accessible populations are explained below. This is followed by the description of the two research samples that will participate in this study.

3.4.1 Target and Accessible Populations

The target populations for this study were all foundation phase educators and learners in KwaZulu Natal schools. The accessible population were all foundation phase educators and learners in the Empangeni school district, focusing on schools that offered grades R to 3.

3.4.2 Research Samples

The study sought to reach out to at least eighty foundation phase educators. Participating schools were identified through random sampling from two school circuits in Empangeni school district, KwaZulu Natal province. The Empangeni school district was purposively selected for reasons of accessibility. Altogether nineteen primary schools were randomly selected, and all foundation phase educators in the selected schools were requested to participate in the study. Learners were selected through the help of participating educators to ensure (a) gender parity and (b) equal representation of learners they regarded as **most playful** versus those they thought to be **least playful**. Thus, the sampling was both purposive (most playful versus least playful), as well as stratified (i.e. aiming to get equal numbers of girls and boys). The total number of learners who participated in the study was thirty-two. The reason for the relatively smaller learner sample size was that interview samples are usually smaller than survey samples, but aim to collect much more detailed information. Although the intention was to carry out focus-group interviews, in the end both individual and focus-group interview modalities were used. This was occasioned by the type of arrangements the host schools were able to make.

3.5 INSTRUMENTATION

For the purpose of this study, two main instrument types were used: (a) questionnaire for educators, (Appendix A) and (b) focus group interview protocol (Appendix B). The questionnaire was used for the survey part of the study involving the educators, whereas the interview schedule was used for the learners. The educator questionnaire consisted of four sections as follows: Section A focused on the respondents' biographical information; Section B comprised items focusing on the foundation phase educators' promotion of play for their learners. The educators' perceived benefits of play constitute Section C, while Section D allowed the respondents to make any comments that they regarded pertinent to the topic under investigation. This section focused on collecting as much qualitative data from the respondents as possible – hence, the use of open-ended questions to accommodate the participants' views. This explains why in this study, the questionnaire used was semi-structured, allowing the respondents to express their views and opinions.

The interview protocol consisted of six lead questions. Follow-up questions, based on the initial responses received from the learners, were made use of.

Both instruments were constructed by the researcher.

3.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The validity of the instruments was ascertained through the expert opinions of selected authorities in the field. The reliability of the data collection process was assured by consistently using the same research assistant to interview all the learners. The interviews were conducted in the presence of the researcher to allow her an opportunity to direct the proceedings, where necessary. A pilot study, involving six educators, was conducted before the main study. This helped to sharpen the instruments.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The field work was presented by a great deal of administrative arrangements. First, the researcher applied to the provincial Department of Education for permission to conduct the study. This correspondence is attached as Appendix C. Secondly, the Empangeni district officials were approached (Appendix D), who subsequently only gave a verbal acceptance of the application and referred the researcher to the Circuit Office. Appendix E contains all the other letters written to the various officials and participants.

After all permission had been granted at the various levels, the researcher then proceeded to make initial contacts with all the selected schools for the purpose of making the necessary arrangements for data collection. Subsequently, a second round of visits was made to deliver questionnaires to the participating educators. Similar arrangements were made with regard to the dates for interviews with learners. The need for a research assistant was necessitated by the fact that the researcher was neither a native speaker of IsiZulu nor had functional competence in the language – which was the mother tongue for most, if not all, the learner participants.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data elicited through the use of the questionnaire were analysed by use of the Microsoft Excel. From these data, tables, charts and graphs were constructed. On the other hand, qualitative data analysis approaches demanded that the researcher put the world in brackets, or free herself from her learned ways of perceiving the world, so that she was able to conceptualise things in their most original form. It was envisaged that this bracketing of the researcher's own experiences would enable her to better understand the experiences of the participants. Thus, in this study, the researcher looked for meanings, meaning themes and/or general descriptions in the participants' experiences as they, themselves, found appropriate words to express their views on the questions posed to them. Out of this, the researcher constructed categories of description to represent the emerging themes as a way to best present the data. These categories and/or themes, emerged progressively from the data as the analysis proceeded. Hence, any

generalisations to be made developed as singular particulars were pieced together (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Leedy (2005: 101) classified ethical issues as falling under “four categories: protection from harm, informed consent, right of privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues”. Kumar (2005: 2120) takes the issue of informed consent further, by stating that it would be “unethical to collect information without the knowledge of the participants, and their expressed willingness and informed consent”. In social science research, anonymity and confidentiality are two very important ethical issues to be taken into account. Thus, it is important to protect the identities of one’s information sources, and to ensure that the information collected is reported honestly, but in ways that do not reveal the source of the information – except where this is intended to be the case, and the informants have given their express permission in this regard.

As explained above, the researcher sought and obtained permission to collect data from the schools in the province – first from the relevant government officials and, secondly, from school authorities. In addition, informed consent was solicited from all the participants. In this process, the purpose of the study was explained to each participant, as well as the process and procedure of data collection, before any data collection ensues. Furthermore, at the start of each data collection episode, the respondents were reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation. They were also assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, and that they would not be identifiable, in any way, in the write-up of the report on the investigation. It was also emphasised that the information collected would be used solely for the purpose of the study.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports the results of this study, according to the three research questions presented in chapter 1, namely: to investigate (a) the ways in which foundation phase educators promote indoor and outdoor play among their learners; (b) play activities that are valued most by foundation phase educators and the educational benefits they associate with these play activities; and (c) the play activities that are valued most by foundation phase learners and the educational benefits they associate with these play activities. However, these results are preceded by the presentation of the biographical information pertaining to the respondents. The major findings of the study emerge out of the interpretation of the results. Thus, these are presented and discussed in chapter five.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The biographical information pertaining to educators who participated in this study is presented below under various sub-headings.

4.2.1 Gender

The gender distribution of the respondents is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

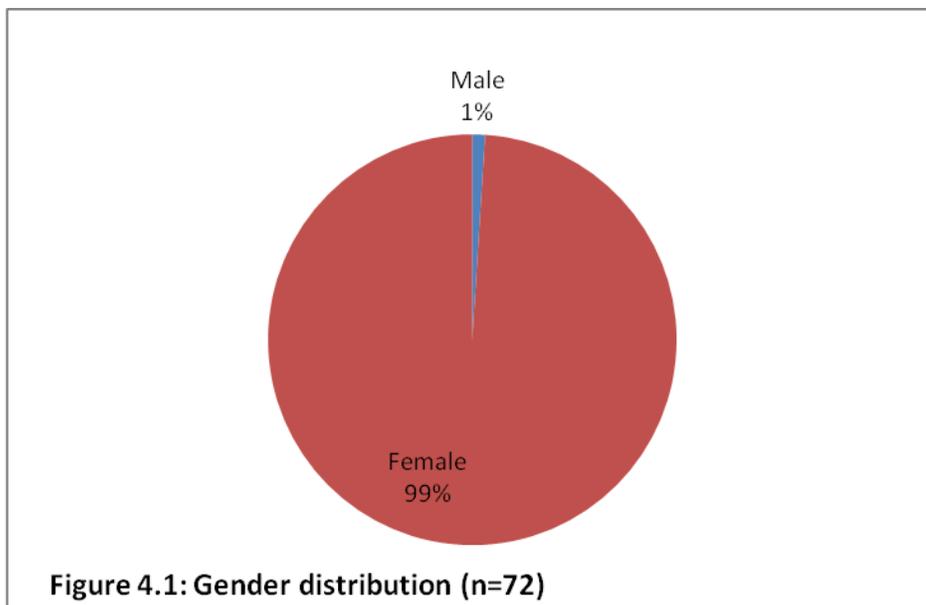


Figure 4.1 shows that 99% of the educators were female and 1% were male. It is quite clear from this information that foundation phase teaching is dominated by female educators.

4.2.2. Age

The age distribution of the respondents is illustrated in Figure 4.2.

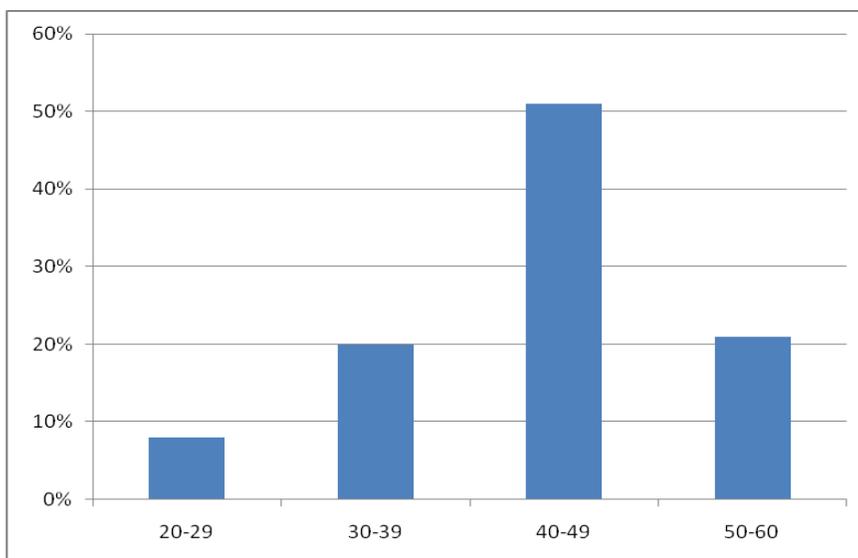
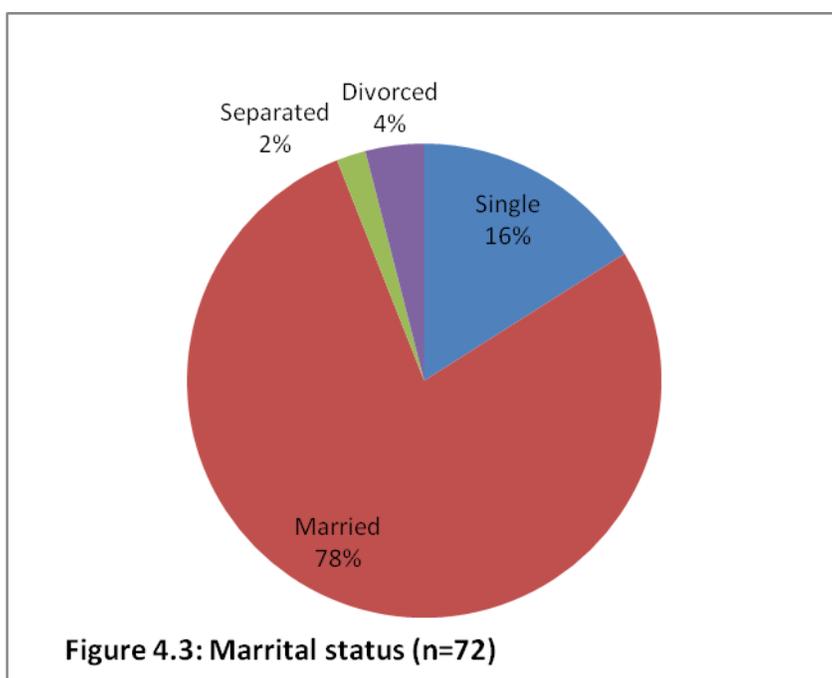


Figure 4.2: Age of respondents (in years) – (n=72)

The results in Figure 4.2 show that 51% of the respondents fell between the ages of 40 and 49 years; 21% were 50 years and older; 20% fell between the ages 30-39 years; 8% fell between ages 20-29 years. Evidently, the highest number of educator participants were forty years and older. This suggests that the study was blessed with mature and experienced educators.

4.2.3 Marital Status

The information in Figure 4.3 shows the marital status of the respondents.



According to the information in Figure 4.3, 78% of the respondents were married; 16% were single; 4% were divorced; and 2% were separated.

4.2.4 Type of School

The information in Figure 4.4 shows the number of participants according to the types of schools from which they were drawn.

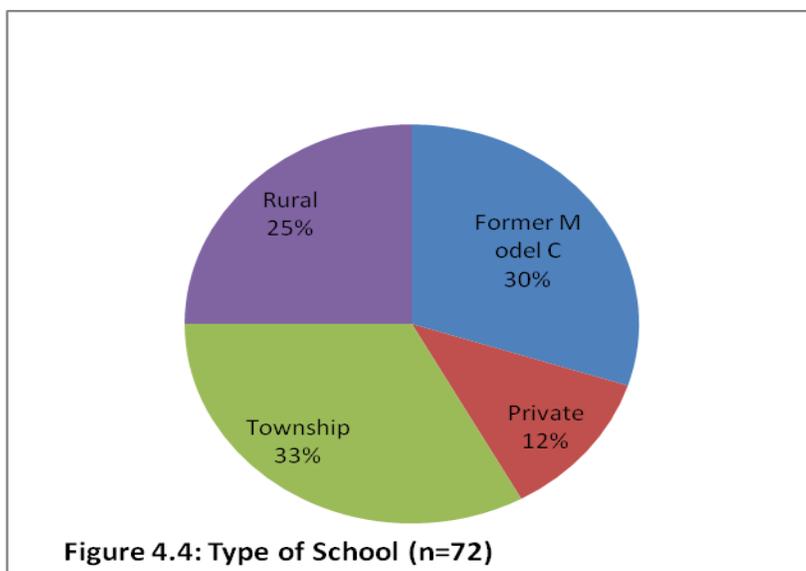
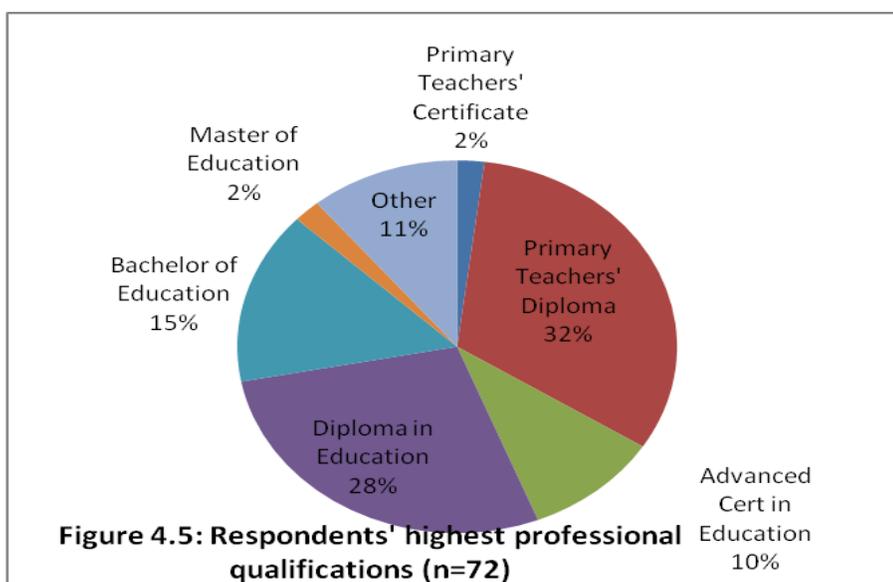


Figure 4.4 shows that; 33% of the respondents were from Township schools; 30% from Former Model C schools; 25% from rural schools; and 12% from Private schools. The researcher is satisfied that the research sample comprised enough representation from the various school types.

4.2.5 Highest Professional Qualification.

The information in Figure 4.5 presents the highest professional qualifications of the respondents.



According to Figure 4.5, 32% of the respondents had Primary Teachers' Diplomas; 25% held Diplomas in Education; 15% Bachelor of Education; 11% had ECD and, Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET).

Certificates and 10% of the respondents held the Advanced Certificates in Education degrees (ACE); 2% had Masters degree in Education; and 2% held the Primary Teacher's Certificate, as their highest professional qualifications.

4.2.6 Years of Teaching Experience in the Foundation Phase

Figure 4.6 shows the respondents' years of teaching experience in the foundation phase.

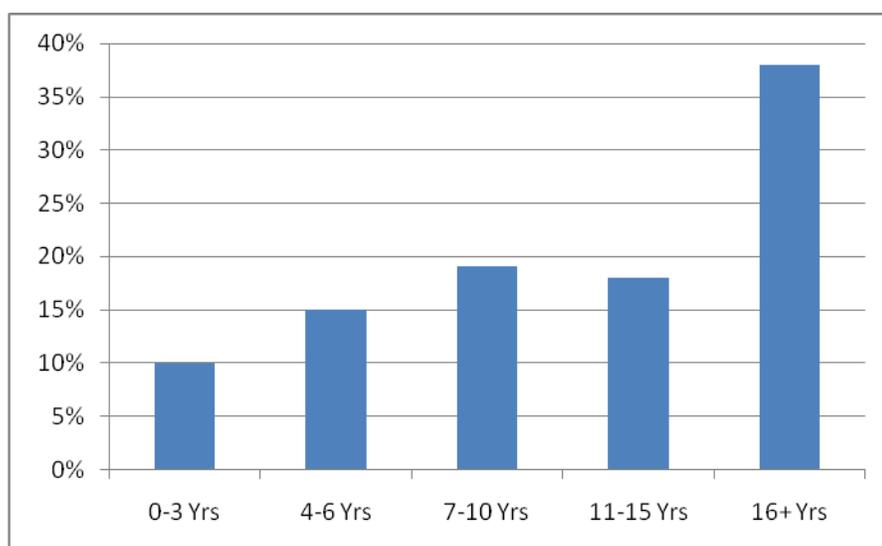


Figure 4.6: Respondents' years of teaching experience in the foundation phase (n=72)

Figure 4.6 shows the distribution of the respondents with regard to the years they spent teaching in the foundation phase. In this regard, 38% of the respondents reported having spent 16 years and above of teaching in the foundation phase; 19% had between 7-10 years; 18% between 11-15 years; 15% between 4-6 years; and 10% fell between 0-3 years. Thus, a combined 56% of the respondents had teaching experience of over 10 years.

4.3 PROMOTION OF INDOOR AND OUTDOOR PLAY

In this section the researcher presents the information related to how the foundation phase educators promoted indoor and outdoor play. This is done by way of presenting the results of the study with regard to the first research question, which sought to reveal the ways in which foundation phase educators promoted indoor and outdoor play among their learners in their teaching practices. The results reported below came from both the open-ended and semi-structured sections of the questionnaire, integrated as much as possible around the themes suggested by the research questions. Thus, the first results presented, represent the educators' responses pertaining to how they promoted play with reference to numeracy, literacy and life skills – which are the three pillars of the foundation phase curriculum. These responses were qualitative in nature. Subsequently, the educators were asked to respond to a semi-structured questionnaire section where they were asked to respond in both quantitative and qualitative modes of response to specific statements dealing with promotion of play. These results are summarized in Figures 4.7 to 4.21 according to a number of sub headings. The information is both in the form of descriptive statistics (diagrams and a summary table) as well as qualitative data elicited as part of the educators' elaborations and from the open ended section of the questionnaire.

4.3.1 Promotion of play through numeracy

All the educators' responses indicated that numeracy was included when they held market stands and in number patterns in numeracy as evidenced by the following:

Counting: They can count by using bean bags, they play shop using Rands, litres, and centimetres. They use building blocks as counters.

Creating on Patterns: Skipping rope.(jump and touch head), number games, flash cards and counting blocks.

Measurement: Run using sack, put bottle of water, heavy or light, short and long; the learners actively take part in number rhymes and songs.

Counting games: play maths games e.g., touch eyes, ears, knees and legs when counting in twos.

Two of the respondents started as follows:

We use stones and beans when doing numeracy.

We make use of games like construction blocks, unifix blocks and maths games.

4.3.2 Promotion of play through literacy

The researcher sought to find out how educators promoted play through literacy and here are their views:

They include play in literacy in:

Story - telling, role-playing, rhymes and singing songs and dialogue and;

Learners take turns in playing games.

Learners draw pictures about song or rhymes.

Learners imitate animal sounds.

Word matching games, act out stories

Stepping stones word games.

Performing stories at a specific time.

Word games, phonic wheels, reading games,

Acting the story, dialogues,

Make letters with dough.

They communicate using language- they draw and write

Poems. days and months.

Alphabet story, such as Sammy snake, fireman Fred.

4.3.3 Promotion of play through life skills

The researcher further investigated how educators promote play through life skills. Their responses were:

“It was included when they were weaving, kneading, and during pretence play”

“Learners use charts and stories and sorting and matching all types of food”.

“Telling stories about fresh foods”.

“Role-playing e.g. mom and dad, baby, brother, and sister”.

“Taking care of environment: collecting litter game”.

“Play games”.

“Play calling for help”.

“Acting, painting, colouring, handwork”.

“Thinking and reasoning games”.

“They socialize when playing”.

“They sympathise with others”.

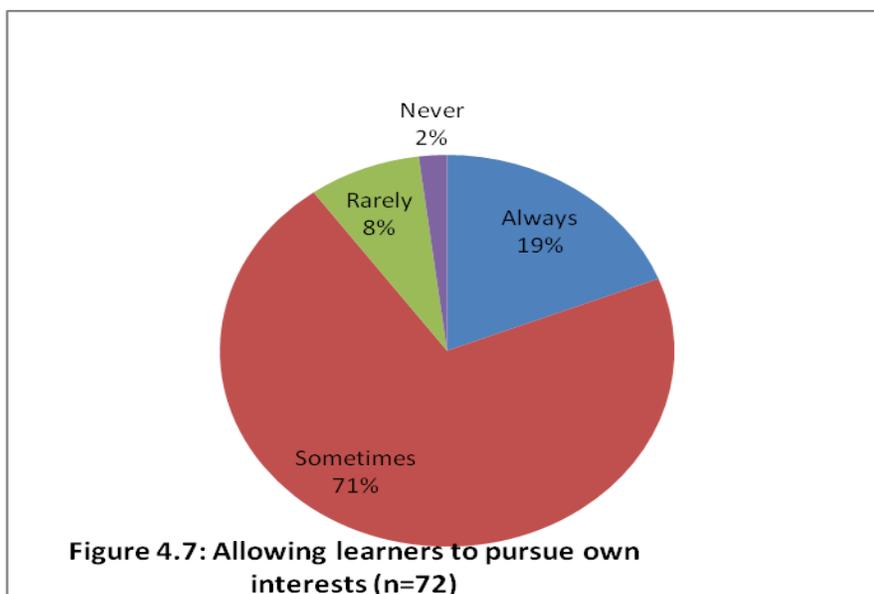
“Happy and sad stories”.

“Poem- on how to cross the road”.

“Art and craft and music”.

4.3.4 Allowing learners to pursue own interests

The first item of the semi-structured section of the questionnaire sought to find out whether or not educators allowed their learners to pursue their own interests during indoor play. The findings are presented in Figure 4.7.



The data in Figure 4.7 shows that 71% of the respondents ‘sometimes’ allowed learners to pursue their own interests during play; 19% of the respondents ‘always’ allowed learners to pursue their own interests; 8% ‘rarely’ allowed learners to pursue their own interests; and 2% ‘never’ allowed their learners to pursue their own interests. The “sometimes” and “always” responses constituted the majority responses, while ‘rarely’ and ‘never’ were in minority, with a combined loading of 10%.

In elaborating their responses, some educators affirmed their answers that they allowed learners to pursue their interests during play activities, by stating as follows:

“Learners have their own choices. They know what they want at their early stages. So allow them to make their own choices.”

“There is always a variety of activities to tickle everyone’s interests.”

“Learners can interact with one another and share interests and ideas.”

“I provide the children with options, creative artwork and school readiness work is compulsory but they can choose which sub activities they participate in.”

“They choose positions they feel comfortable in. They also choose the group they want to belong to.”

Some of the educators who did not allow their learners pursue their own interests gave the following reasons:

“Lack of space, and large number of learners.”

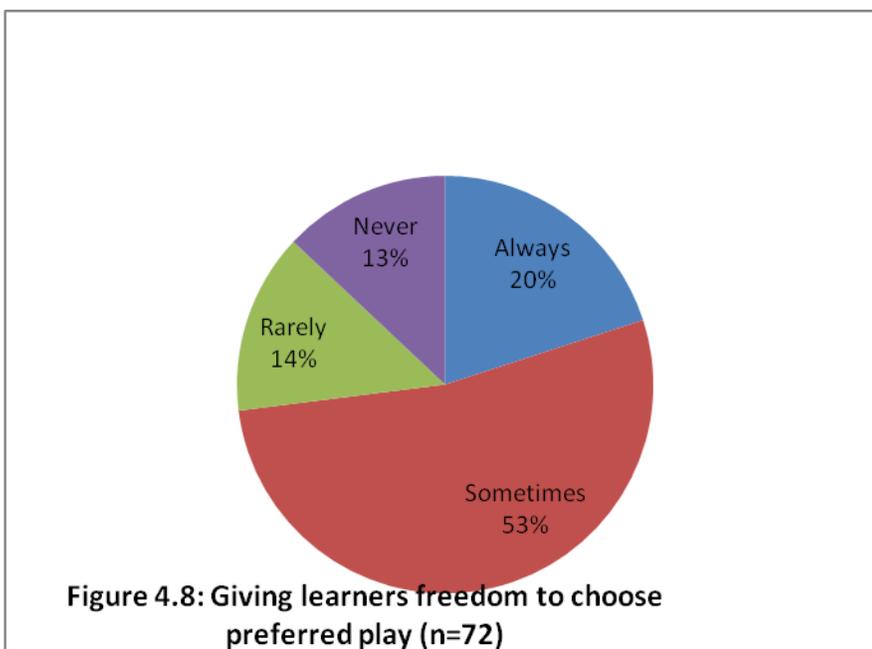
“It can cause too much noise and chaos in the classroom.”

“Children only play if all work has been completed and then they play educational games.”

It is quite clear from the educator who made this last comment that s/he saw school work as being quite separate and distinct from play activities.

4.3.5 Giving learners freedom to choose areas they want to work at

On this item, the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators gave learners freedom to choose areas they wanted to work at. The results of this are indicated in Figure 4.8



According to the figure, 58% of the respondents reported that they ‘sometimes’ gave learners freedom to choose the areas they wanted to work at; 20% reported ‘always’

giving learners freedom to choose the areas they wanted to work at; 14% ‘rarely’ gave learners to choose the areas they wanted to work at; and 13% ‘never’ giving learners freedom to choose the areas they wanted to work at. On this item, the majority response is ‘sometimes’ followed by ‘always’.

In elaborating their answers, some of the educators responded by saying that they gave children the freedom to choose their preferred play areas for the following reasons:

“Learners have unique interests; they may not like what you choose for them, so allow them to choose what they want.”

“Yes, making their own choices is very important. It helps them to learn from their mistakes and their own choice becomes more exciting.”

“By giving them freedom to choose it allows them to be at their comfortable zone. So, they easily adjust to a play.”

“I let them choose, that will help me to evaluate the kind of play they are telling me about whether it will be dangerous to them or not, e.g. throwing of stones, one avoiding it. It would be dangerous if the other one is hit.”

However, some educators reported not giving the learners freedom to choose the areas they liked to work at. The reasons for this included the following:

“Sometimes the children can take advantage and lose sense of direction. Guidance is crucial, I identify problem areas and together we work towards a solution.”

“It causes discipline problems.”

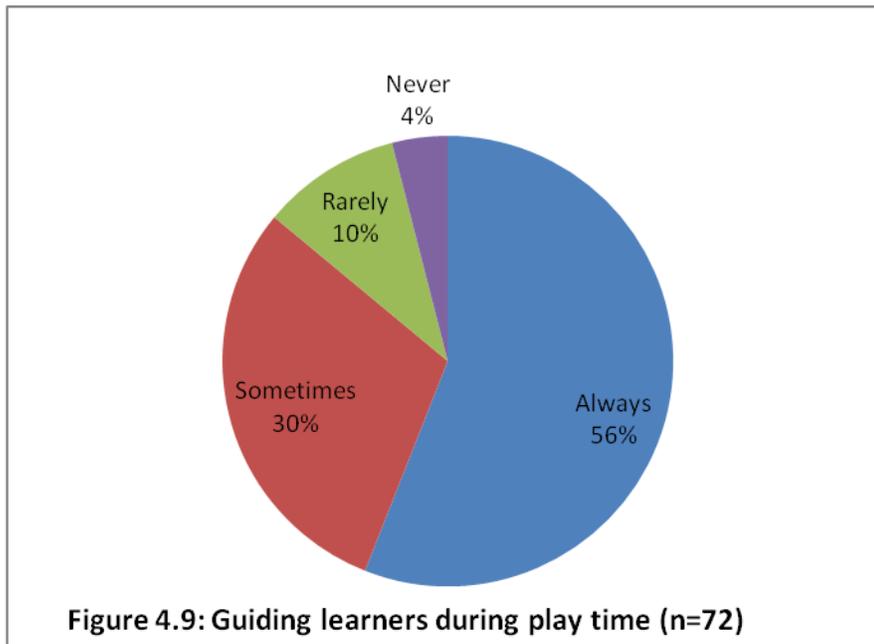
“Still too young to always choose and the activity is usually in line with the day’s theme.”

“They don’t do what they want; they need to follow the rules of the class.”

“Not enough space in the classrooms”

4.3.6 Guiding learners during play time

On this question the researcher wanted to establish whether or not educators guided their learners during play time. The findings are summarised in Figure 4.9.



According to the data shown in Figure 4.9, 56% of the respondents indicated that they ‘always’ guided learners during play time; 30% reported that they ‘sometimes’ guided learners during play time; 10% ‘rarely’ guide learners; and 4% ‘never’ guided learners during play time. On this item, the majority response fell under the educators who guided their learners during play time.

In elaborating their responses the educators reaffirmed that they guided their learners for the following reasons:

“I walk around and assist learners by offering encouragement.”

“I walk around all the time, facilitating, assisting, guiding, reaffirming rules.”

“They need to be guided, because if you don’t guide them you may not achieve your goals.”

“I provide games and ideas but also give the children the freedom to express themselves thoroughly.”

“I do, but most of the time I let them pursue what they like”

Nine educators reported not guiding learners during play time. A couple of reasons given for this were:

“I don’t guide them because it is a choice time.”

“It is their free choice play time.”

4.3.7 Using ideas from learners to enhance play activities

This item sought to find out whether or not educators used ideas from learners to enhance play activities. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.10.

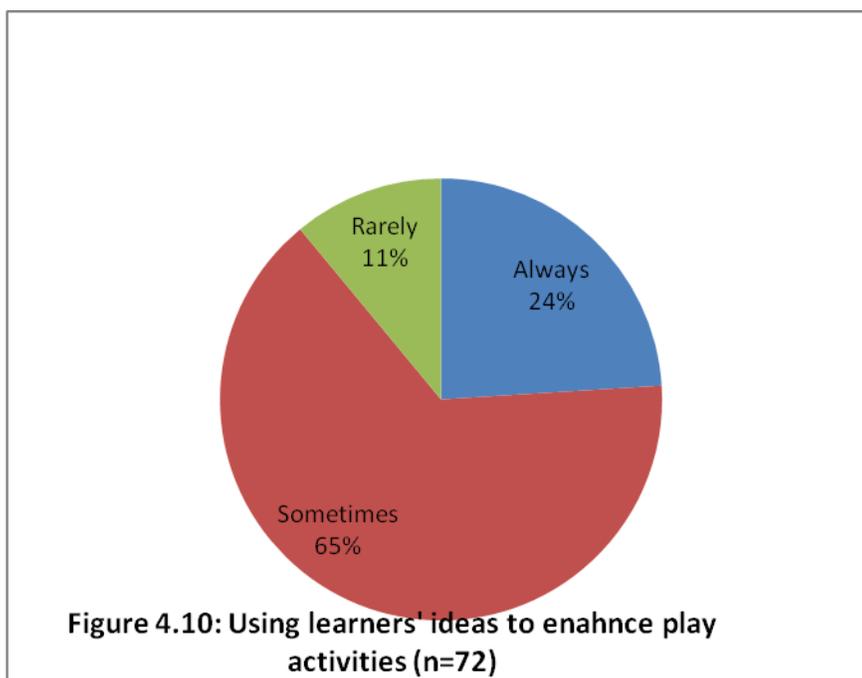


Figure 4.10 indicates that 65% of the educators ‘sometimes’ used learners’ ideas to enhance play activities; 24% indicated that they ‘always’ used ideas from learners to enhance play activities; 11% ‘rarely’ used learners’ ideas to enhance play activities. On this question, the majority responses fell under the educators who used their learners’ ideas to enhance play activities.

Some of the educators who reported using from learners' ideas to enhance play activities elaborated as follows:

"Sometimes, learners come up with good ideas which others can benefit from."

"Pick up ideas from other cultures, cultural games etc."

"Sometimes ideas are taken into consideration, because of large classes, it makes it hard to act out ideas of all learners."

"It is good to do that because you have to start from what they know, then you can continue."

"If a child brings up an interesting activity while playing, I will often use new ideas to incorporate into play activities."

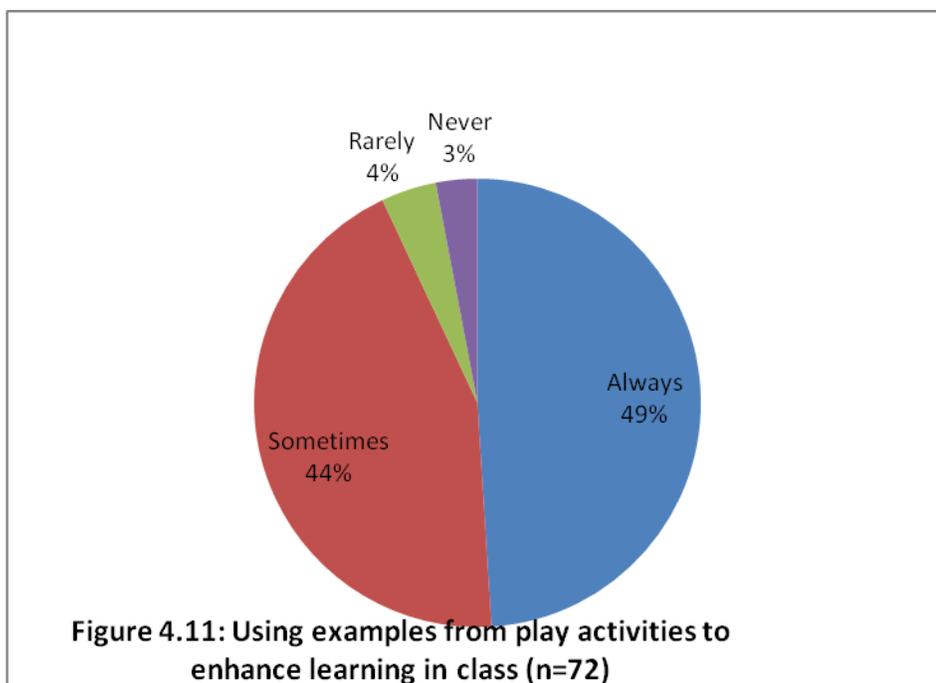
From the educators who reported not using learners' ideas to enhance play activities, the following were some of their reasons:

"They are still small and don't have many ideas."

"If we get a good idea and we can do it we will use the idea."

4.3.8 Using examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class

The information in Figure 4.11 illustrates whether or not educators use examples from play activities to help their learners understand concepts in class.



According to Figure 4.11, 49% of the respondents indicated that they ‘always’ used examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class; 44% reported that they ‘sometimes’ did so; 4% ‘rarely’ did so; and 3% ‘never’ did so. On this item, the popular responses fell under the educators who ‘always’ and ‘sometimes’ used examples from play activities to enhance learning in class.

The following elaborations were given:

“Yes, examples help because it can lead to their own experiences around their environment e.g. from the known to the unknown.”

“Maths concepts are easier understood through play e.g capacity/mass/lengths.”

“Children learn better, having examples of things they know or have seen.”

“It is important that play is highlighted, because through play much outcome are achieved.”

“Helps to enhance thinking and reasoning skills.”

“They learn very well if you make the lesson as a way of play than to make it very abstract for them.”

“When we did the dinosaur theme, I used the dinosaur hand puppets that they played with to do a lesson on brother- sister love etc.”

A few educators reported not using examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class. One cited the following reason for not doing so:

“I use DVD or cassettes so as to have more activities.”

4.3.9 Show the learners how to play so that they can model after you.

On this question the researcher sought to find out how educators demonstrated play so that learners could model after them. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.12.

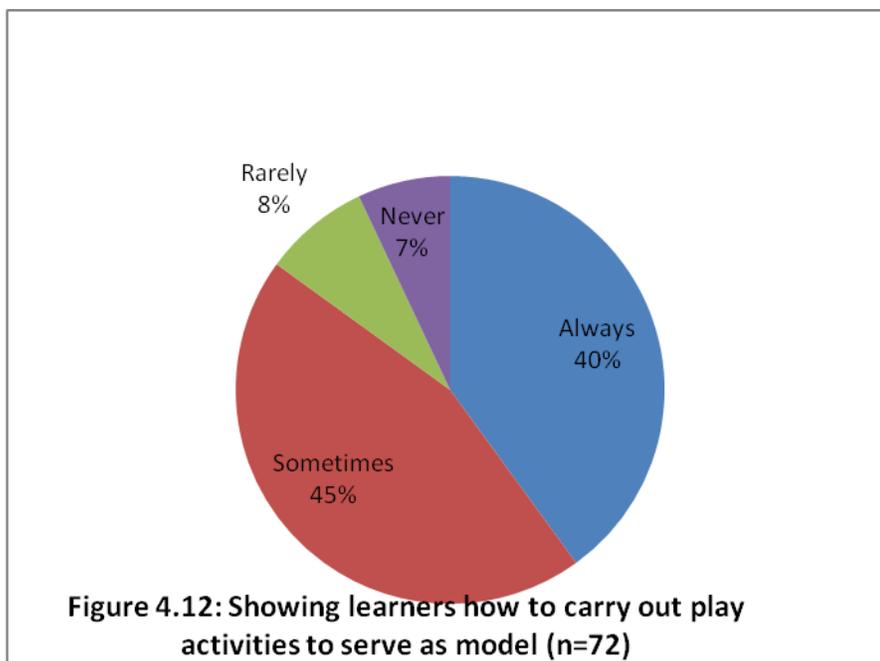


Figure 4.12 shows that 45% of the respondents ‘sometimes’ served as models by showing learners how to carry out play activities. 40% ‘always’ did so; 8% ‘rarely’ did so; and 7% of the respondents ‘never’ did so. The ‘sometimes’ and ‘always’ responses represented the majority responses, adding up to 85% while ‘rarely’ and ‘never’ were in minority, with a total response of 15%.

In elaborating their responses, some educators had the following to say:

“The educator should always lead in order to direct learners know and help them towards the expected goal.”

“Learners learn faster by imitating the teacher and gain confidence.”

“We are role models to children, so a lot of mediation is done by children. They try to copy.”

Some of the educators who did not show their learners how to carry out play activities to serve as models, gave the following reasons:

“They need to develop their own style themselves.”

“They need to develop their own identity.”

“They must develop themselves.”

4.3.10 Using guided questions to assist learners understand play activities

On this question, the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators used guided questions to assist learners understand play activities. The result is illustrated in Figure 4.13.

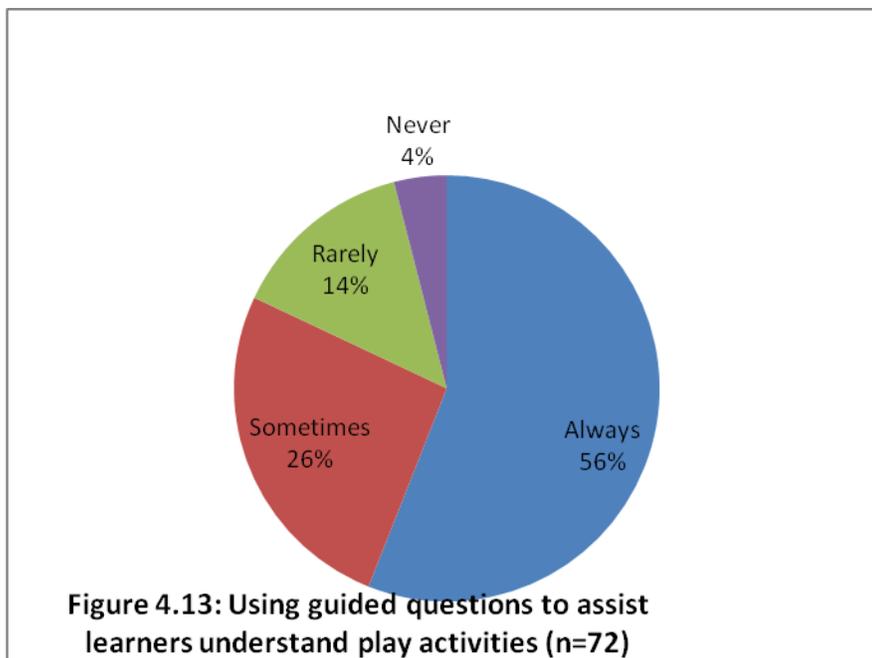


Figure 4.13 shows that 56% of the respondents ‘always’ used guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities; 26% of the respondents ‘sometimes’ did so; 14% ‘rarely’ did so; and; 4% ‘never’ did so.

Some of the educators who ‘sometimes’ and ‘always’ used guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities, said the following:

“Learners need to understand what they are doing and by asking questions you get to know the level of understanding.”

“Questions help the educator to see how much the learners know and help them towards the expected goal.”

“When play is used much achievements and outcomes must be achieved, so guided questions are important.”

From the educators who did not use guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities, the following reasons were given:

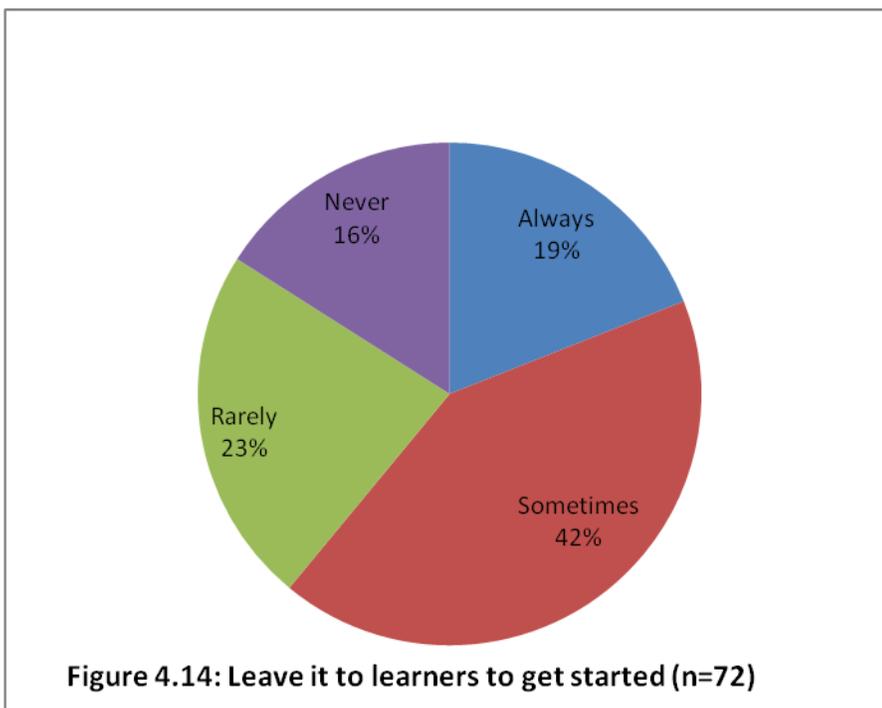
“Sometimes we just show them the right way and work against time.”

“They can ask any question that they want to ask from the educator.”

“I rarely use my imagination.”

4.3.11 Leaving it to the learners to get started on play activities

On this question the researcher wanted to find out whether or not the educators left it to the learners to get started at the beginning of their play activities. The findings are presented in Figure 4.14.



The information in Figure 4.14 illustrates that 42% of the respondents indicated that they ‘always’ left it to the learners to get started; 23% reported that they ‘rarely’ did so; and; 19% reported that they ‘always’ did so; and 16% said they ‘never’ did so. Thus, the majority response (61%) fell under the educators who left it to learners to get started.

In elaborating their responses some of the educators indicated that they didn’t leave it to the learners to get started for the following reasons:

“It is not good because it may waste a lot of time and may lead to disciplinary measures which were not supposed to be there.”

“If they are left alone they might hurt themselves or fall into hazards.”

“Help is always needed to guide learners in the right direction if not there will be problems, with discipline.”

Twenty- seven educators reported not leaving it to learners to get started and the following reasons were given:

“Learners need to be introduced to the activity and build on that.”

“When it is time I indicate to learners to get started. Routine is followed.”

“It is always needed to guide learners in the right direction if not there will be problems with discipline. No order.”

“Learners in Foundation Phase need to follow instructions. They cannot be left to do their own things. Educator to guide always.”

“It creates discipline problems.”

“It will become chaotic. Instructions are very important.”

Some educators indicated that they left it to the learners to get started for the following reasons:

“To test their knowledge and see if they can think and reason on their own”

“To check for curiosity likes and dislikes.”

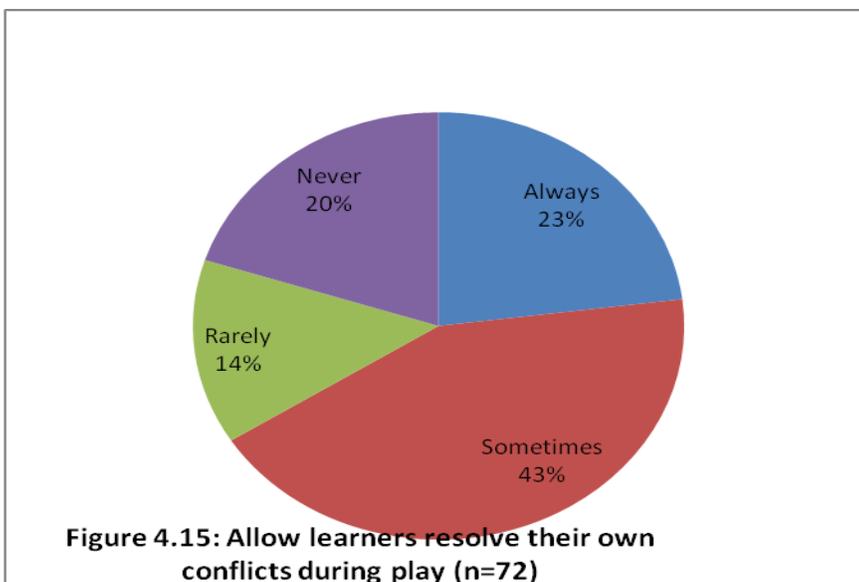
“For creative thinking, see how much learners know.”

“Children get comfortable, in their role and guidance is given thereafter.”

“So that I will be able to find out how they feel about the play and how they want to play it.”

4.3.12 Allowing learners resolve their conflicts during play

On this item the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators allowed learners to resolve their conflicts during play. The findings are represented in Figure 4.15.



According to the information in Figure 4.15, 43% of the respondents ‘sometimes’ allowed learners to resolve their conflicts during play; 23% ‘always’ did so; 20% contended that they ‘never’ did so; and 14% said they ‘rarely’ did so. These findings show that the ‘sometimes’ and ‘always’ response categories carried the majority responses, whereas ‘rarely’ and ‘never’ were in minority, with a combined loading of 34%.

In addition to the above information, the following couple of statements were presented to elaborate why the educators allowed learners to resolve their conflicts during play:

“Always support but sometimes conflict can be sorted out on its own.”

“They can resolve conflicts on their own to allow good decision making skills but I involve myself too.”

Some of the educators who did not allow learners to resolve their conflicts during play gave the following reasons:

“Too young, conflicts can end up in serious fights.”

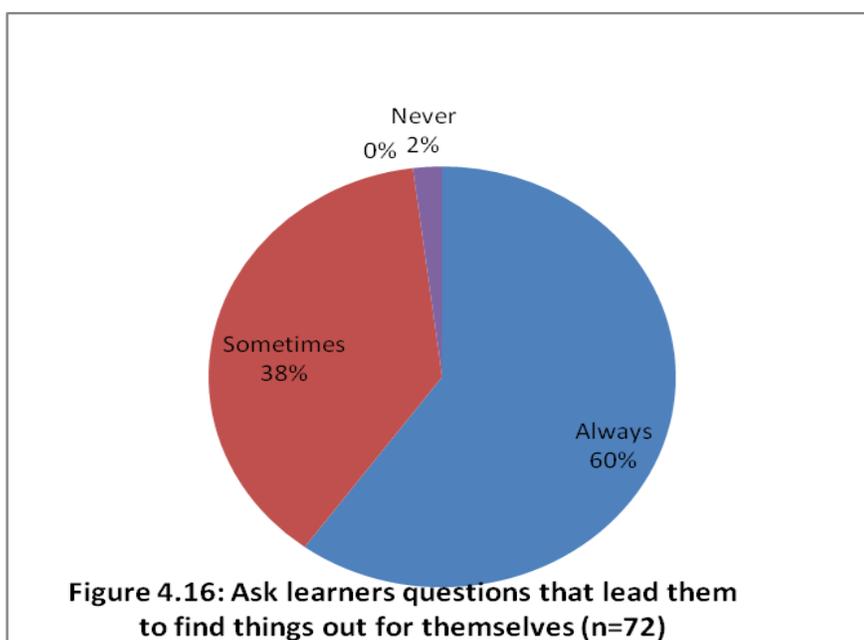
“I step in and try and solve for them. Difficult to stand and watch them as an outsider.”

“I usually call them to resolve it together.”

“They often feel offended if their conflicts are not attended to.”

4.3.13 Asking learners leading questions to allow them work things out for themselves.

The researcher wished to find out whether or not the educators asked learners questions that led them to finding things out for themselves. The findings are indicated in Figure 4.16.



The information in Figure 4.16 indicates that 60% of the respondents ‘always’ asked learners questions that led them to finding things out for themselves; 38% of the respondents ‘sometimes’ did so; 2% of the respondents ‘never’ did so. The ‘sometimes’ and ‘lways’ categories had the majority responses (98%), while ‘never’ had 2%.

In elaborating their responses, some of the educators reported that they asked learners questions that led them to finding things out for themselves for the following reasons:

“Always ask learners questions that lead them to find things out for themselves. They learn to explore their inner strengths and emotions.”

“To improve thinking skills. Improve concentration.”

“Yes, questions are a good brain exercise. Help learners to think by guiding them with well praised questions.”

“Sometimes, I encourage the children to explore and challenge, ideas and norms, as to learn things themselves.”

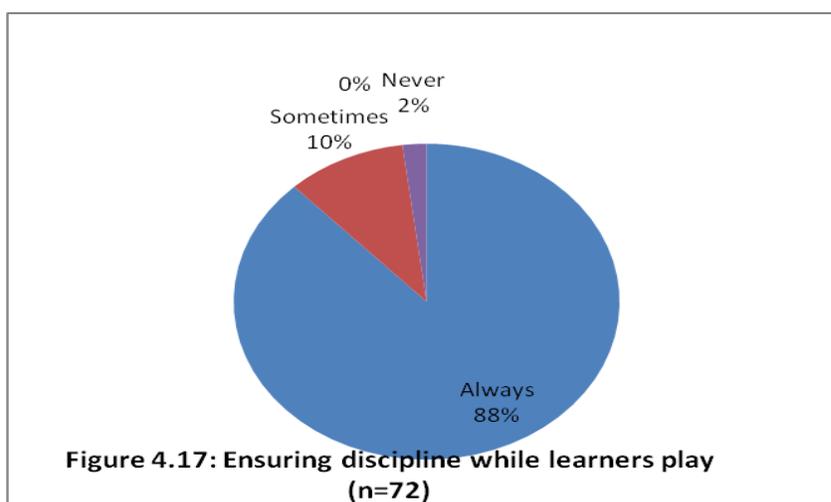
“By questioning it allows us to know their level of understanding.”

“They often understand things better if they have discovered things for themselves.”

One educator reported that s/he ‘never’ asked learners questions that lead them to finding things out for themselves, but gave no reasons for his/her answer.

4.3.14 Ensuring that discipline is maintained while learners play

On this question, the researcher sought to find out whether or not the educators ensured that discipline was maintained while learners played. The results are presented in Figure 4.17.



According to Figure 4.17, 88% of the respondents reported that they ‘always’ ensured that discipline was maintained while learners played; 10% reported that they ‘sometimes’ did so; and 2% reported ‘never’ doing so. On this question, the majority response is ‘always’, followed by ‘sometimes’, totalling 98%.

Elaborating on their responses, some educators explained that they ensured that discipline was maintained while learners played for the following reasons:

“Always good discipline will benefit good play.”

“Always, it’s important to be free and disciplined, order and control is important during play if not many accidents.”

“It won’t be successful if there is no discipline and as a teacher you will fail to achieve a certain goal.”

“Play should be orderly and well planned so that you don’t have to discipline your learners a lot.”

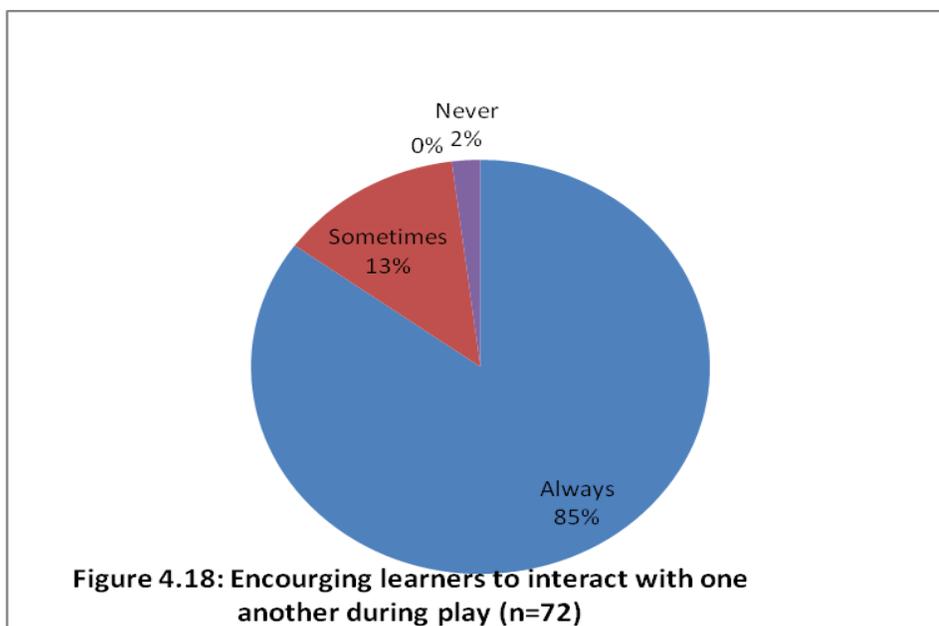
“Discipline is extremely important to assure all children get an equal opportunity to play and learn.”

However, the educator who reported not ensuring that discipline was maintained while learners played had the following reason:

“It is a waste of time to do that.”

4.3.15 Encouraging learners to interact with one another during play

On this item, the researcher wanted to find out whether or not educators encouraged learners to interact with one another during play. The findings on this item are indicated in Figure 4.18.



In Figure 4.18, 85% of the respondents indicated that they ‘always’ encouraged their learners to interact with one another during play; 13% said they ‘sometimes’ did so and 2% reported that they ‘never’ did so. The figure shows clearly that the ‘always’ and ‘sometimes’ response categories constituted the majority response.

In elaborating their responses, some of the educators who encouraged learners to interact with one another during play, gave the following reasons:

“To encourage learners to share ideas, opinions to get on with each other.”

“This develops social skills.”

“So that they can share ideas, learning to be a team player, learn to co-operate with each other.”

“Interaction is very important for social and emotional being.”

“Building friendship and trust among themselves is good and they can abstain/refrain from doing bad things.”

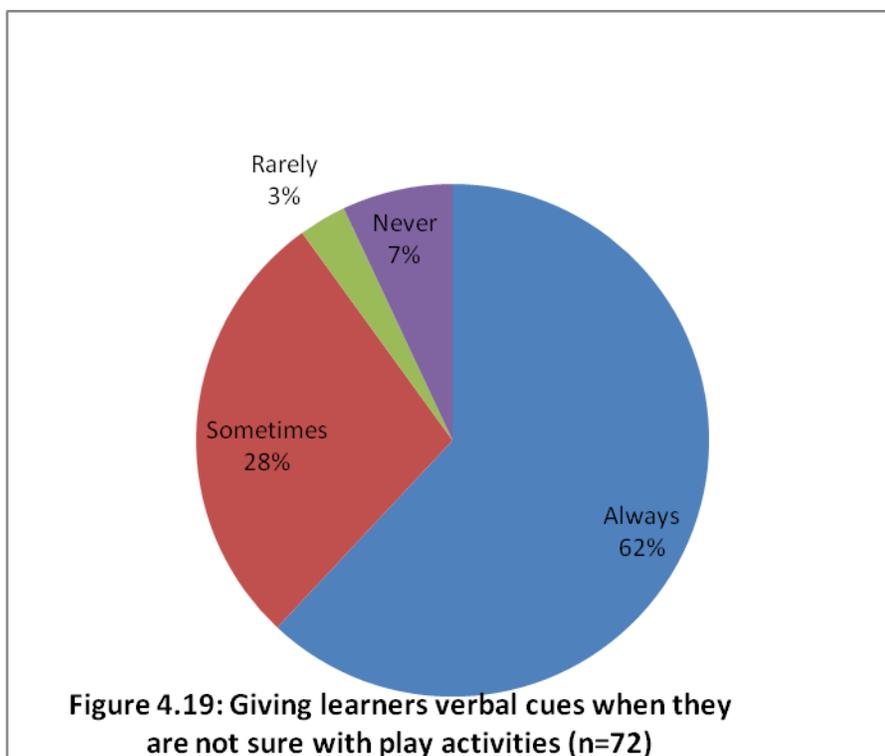
“Learners learn well if they share ideas with their peers because they understand each other.”

“They communicate, share and learn from each other.”

One educator who reported not encouraging learners to interact with one another during play, gave no reasons for doing so.

4.3.16 Giving learners verbal cues (hints) when not sure with play activities

On this item, the researcher sought to find out if the respondents gave learners verbal cues (hints) when they (the learners) were not sure with some play activities. The findings are indicated in Figure 4.19.



The information in Figure 4.19 shows that 62% of the respondents 'always' gave learners verbal cues when they were not sure with some aspects of certain play activities; 28% indicated that they 'sometimes' did so; 7% indicated that they 'never' did so and 3% indicated that they 'rarely' did so. Clearly, on this item the majority responses were 'always' and 'sometimes', amounting to 90%.

In elaborating their responses, the educators who reported that they gave learners verbal cues when they were not sure with play activities gave the following reasons:

"I give the children an opportunity to think and learn for themselves but I always help them if I see that they are struggling."

"So that learners will know what is expected of them."

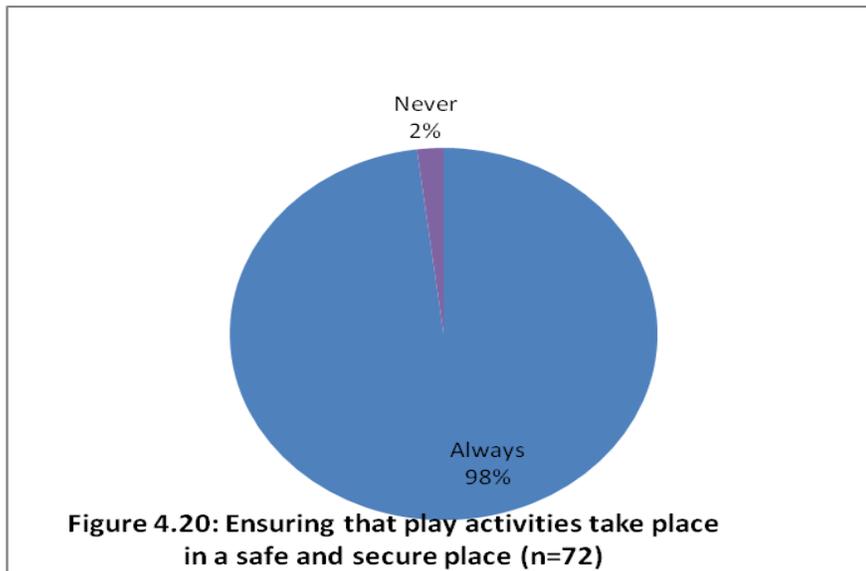
"So that they don't get frustrated."

"This encourages and motivates them."

The educators who indicated that they 'never' gave learners verbal cues (hints) when they were not sure with their play activities, gave no reasons for their answers.

4.3.17 Ensuring that play activities take place in a safe and secure place

Figure 4.20 illustrates the information on whether or not respondents ensured that play activities took place in a safe and secure place.



According to Figure 4.20, 98% of the respondents reported that they 'always' ensured that play activities took place in a safe and secure place, while 2% reported that they 'never' did so. On this question, the majority response was 'always'.

The educators who reported that they 'always' ensured that play activities took place in a safe and secure place, had the following to say in motivating their answers:

"Safety is of utmost importance. To prevent accidents to occur."

"It is very important that all activities are presented in a safe and secured environment, to ensure best conditions for learning."

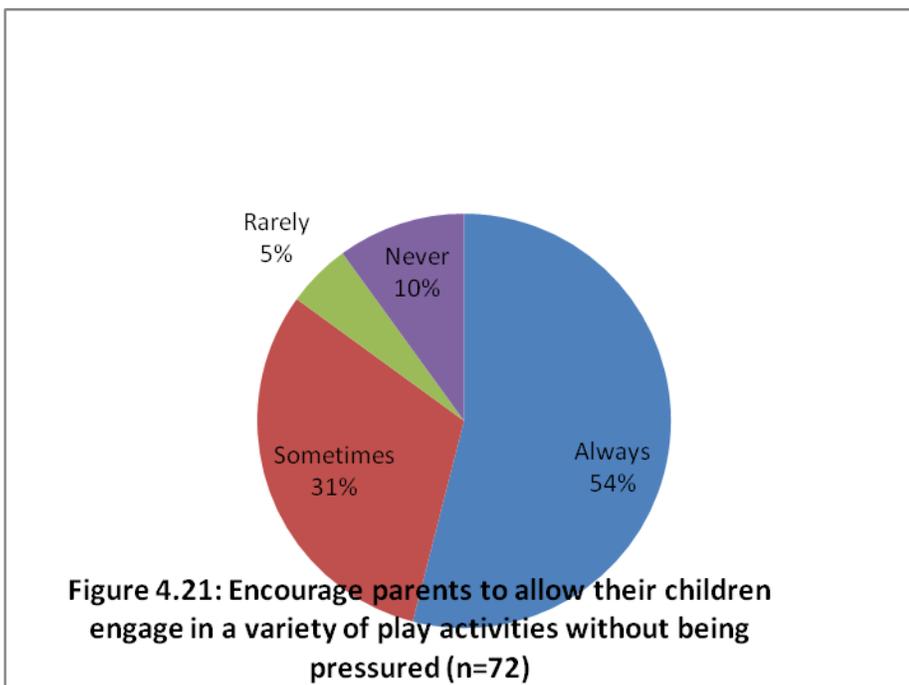
"Safety is the most important part that should be taken into consideration. Learners should not get injured."

"Play must be done in a very secured place, to avoid any injuries. It must be big and empty room."

One educator reported that s/he 'never' ensured that play activities took place in a safe and secure place, and gave no reason for his/her answer.

4.3.18 Encouraging parents to allow children to engage in a variety of play interests

On this item, the researcher wanted to find out whether or not the educators encouraged parents to allow children to engage in a variety of play interests at home. The findings are presented in Figure 4.21.



The information in this figure indicates that 54% of the respondents reported ‘always’ encouraging parents to allow their children to engage in a variety of play activities at home without being pressured; 31% reported that they ‘sometimes’ did so; 10% reported that they ‘never’ did so and 5% ‘rarely’ encouraged parents to allow their children engage in a variety of play activities without being pressured. The majority responses fell under ‘always’ followed by ‘sometimes’, giving an overall 85% affirmative response.

Some educators who reported that they encouraged parents to allow their children to engage in a variety of play interest without being pressured, gave the following reasons:

“Most of the parents in our school do not play a part in their children’s welfare.”

“Parents must encourage free play as well as parents must participate with their children and children enjoy that.”

Some of the educators who reported that they either ‘never’ or ‘rarely encouraged parents to allow their children to engage in a variety of activities without being pressured, gave the following reasons:

“We hardly ever see the parents.”

“Parents have different ways of thinking and lifestyle. They don’t have time for their children.”

“I have never really found a reason to.”

4.3.19 Summary table

Table 4.1 summarises the results presented above in Figures 4.7 to 4.21. This is done in order to enable the reader see all the responses to the structured items of the educators’ questionnaire on one page.

Table 4.1: Promotion of indoor and outdoor play (n=72)

ASPECT OF PROMOTING PLAY	ALWAYS (%)	SOMETIMES (%)	RARELY (%)	NEVER (%)
I allow the learners to pursue their own interests during indoor play.	19	71	8	02
I give the children freedom to choose the areas they want to work at.	20	53	14	13
I guide learners during play time.	56	30	10	04
I use ideas from learners to enhance play activities.	24	65	11	00
I use examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class.	49	44	04	03
I show the learners how to play so that they can model after me.	40	45	08	07
I use guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities.	56	26	14	04
At the beginning of play activities, I leave it to the learners to get started.	19	42	23	16
I let learners resolve their conflicts during play.	23	43	14	20
I ask learners questions that lead them to find things out for themselves.	60	38	00	02
I ensure that discipline is maintained while learners play.	88	10	00	02
I encourage learners to interact with one another during play.	85	13	00	02
I give the learners verbal cues (hints) when they are not sure with their play activities.	62	28	03	07
I ensure that play activities take place in a safe and secure place.	98	00	00	02
I encourage parents to allow children to engage in a variety of play interests without being pressured.	54	31	05	10

In order to simplify the response profile in Table 4.7, and for ease of comparison between the affirmative and non-affirmative responses, Table 4.2 presents condensed data of the above information enable arrived at by combining the ‘Always’ and ‘Sometimes’

columns, as the constituting the affirmative responses (YES), and the ‘Rarely’ and ‘Never’ responses as non affirmative responses (NO).

Table 4.2: Promotion of indoor and outdoor play (n=72)

ASPECT OF PROMOTING PLAY	YES (%)	NO (%)
I allow the learners to pursue their own interests during indoor play.	90	10
I give the children freedom to choose the areas they want to work at.	73	27
I guide learners during play time.	86	14
I use ideas from learners to enhance play activities.	89	11
I use examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class.	93	07
I show the learners how to play so that they can model after me.	85	15
I use guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities.	82	18
At the beginning of play activities, I leave it to the learners to get started.	61	39
I let learners resolve their conflicts during play.	66	34
I ask learners questions that lead them to find things out for themselves.	98	02
I ensure that discipline is maintained while learners play.	98	02
I encourage learners to interact with one another during play.	98	02
I give the learners verbal cues (hints) when they are not sure with their play activities.	90	10
I ensure that play activities take place in a safe and secure place.	98	02
I encourage parents to allow children to engage in a variety of play interests without being pressured.	85	15
AVERAGE	86	14

From this condensed table, it is clear that the affirmative responses far outweighed the negative responses to the statements in the questionnaire.

4.4 BENEFITS OF INDOOR AND OUTDOOR PLAY

The second research objective of this study sought to elicit, from the participating foundation phase educators, the play activities that they valued most – and the educational benefits they associated with such play activities. Thus, in presenting the results of this research objective, the specific play activities valued by the educators to be good and desirable for foundation phase learners are presented. This section is then followed by the espoused benefits associated with the named play activities, before presenting further elaborations on the specific benefits which were abstracted from literature and put to the respondents to respond to, as contained in the questionnaire for the educators.

4.4.1 PLAY ACTIVITIES VALUED BY FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS

The play activities which the educators thought were appropriate and good for foundation phase learners were identified as kneading; weaving; fantasy play; water play; *amagenda*; *umlabalaba*; other ‘catch and throw’ games / activities, climbing; balancing activities; creative activities; paper matching; story-telling; riddles (to improve their language use); language games – such as word and sentence games, puzzles, fine and gross motor activities; play that promotes cognitive (thinking) skills, motor skills and enhancement; memory games; plays which develop motor skills, concentrating on full body development; and plays that develop social skills – such as group work. Some of the above ‘activities’, as cited by the respondents, are general statements which could refer to a number of unnamed play activities. However, it may be important to briefly describe the three indigenous play activities named above, namely, *amagenda*, *umlabalaba* and *arigogo*, as well as the two most common ones among the more urban games: Dominoes and Ludo.

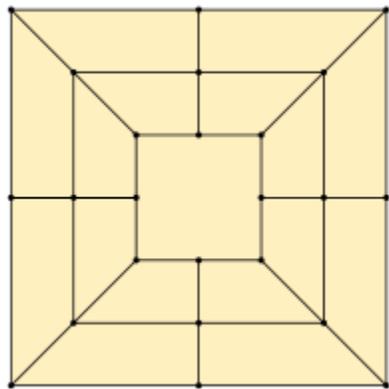
Amagenda

This game bears different names in different African communities, and is popularly played by girls. In Silozi (one of the Zambian languages), it is referred to as *kuyata*. This game may be played by one person as a pass-time activity, or competitively by two

or more people. In playing this game, a number of stones, or any small round objects, are placed in a shallow hole or circle drawn on the ground. The player throws a relatively bigger stone or round object in the air with one hand; while the eyes are fixated on the object that has been thrown in the air, the same hand removes one, or two, or three of the stones / round objects out of the hole / circle – to the outside of the hole / circle; or from outside the hole / circle into the hole / circle, before catching the stone / round object that was thrown in the air. So, basically, the transaction on the ground must be completed before the one stone / round object thrown in the air touches the ground. If the player fails to catch the thrown object before it reaches the ground, it is said that she has dropped it, and the game passes to the next person in line, to play. The tasks around the stones in the circle / hole (or outside the hole / circle) could be a subtraction, addition, multiplication or division activity. For instance, one may be required to place the stones / round objects from outside the circle / hole in pairs until they're all in the circle / hole, and then remove them three at a time until they are all outside the circle or hole.

Umlabalaba

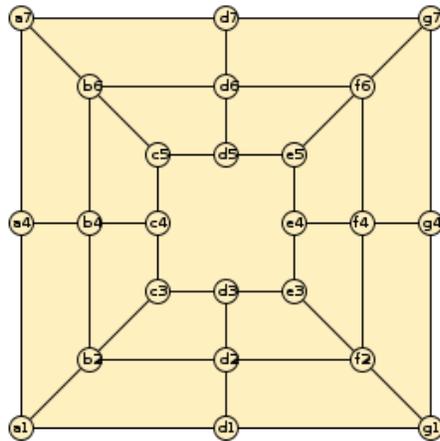
This game may be played by both girls and boys, although more popular among the boys and adult men. There are various play activities which go by this rather generic name. Essentially, *umlabalaba* is a board game:



This version of *umlabalaba* is described by Powe (2007) as having its origin as a ‘cattle capture’ game. The symbolism is that cattle were traditionally very important to the Zulu

people, and symbolised wealth and status. Thus, in this version of the game, two players play against each other. Each player starts with 12 tokens, called ‘cows’ and a clear ‘board’.

Each player alternatively places one ‘cow’ at a time in a hole or on a circle (‘junction’).



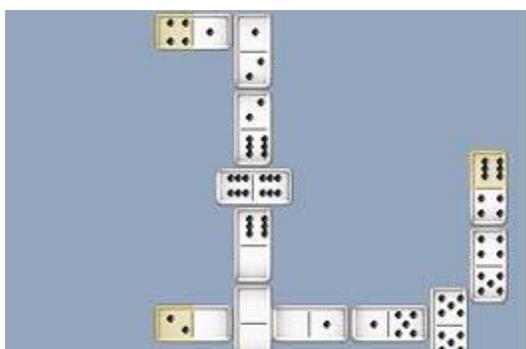
For each player, the aim is to create rows of three tokens, being vertical, diagonal or horizontal, consisting of ‘cows’ which may only be placed on unoccupied ‘junctions’. When each player’s 12 ‘cows’ have been placed on the ‘board’, they may be moved from one ‘junction’ to an unoccupied ‘junction’ adjacent to that ‘junction’. When a row of three tokens is achieved, then the player may remove (‘shoot’) one of the opponent’s ‘cows’. Once a ‘cow’ has been shot, it cannot be used in play again. When a player has lost all but three ‘cows’, he or she may move a ‘cow’ to any vacant ‘junction’ on the board with each subsequent move. In this game, you acquire or ‘shoot’ your opponent’s cows as you go along. The winner is the player who has ‘shot’ all but two of his or her opponent’s ‘cows’. Thus, the game is over when one of the players cannot move any more ‘cows’, or has lost all but two ‘cows’ on the board; the game ends in a draw when a player is down to three ‘cows’ and neither player is able to ‘shoot’ an opponent’s ‘cow’ within 10 moves.

Arigogo

This is a competitive game whereby a player throws a ball as far as she can, and starts running around the perimeter of squares drawn in the ground, while a member of the opposing team runs to collect the ball. As soon as the ball has been picked up, the runner stops and the number of rounds successfully completed around the ‘track’ is recorded. This is then compared to the number of runs made by an opposing player. The game may be played in teams or by individuals against one another.

Dominoes

There are various types of games that are played with dominoes. One of the most common versions among the children in the area where the research was conducted is known as *double-six* – played by 2 to 4 players. This is essentially, a card-matching game. In this version of the game, before play begins, all dominoes are turned facedown and mixed. Each player draws five dominoes and stands them on the edge before him/her so that his/her opponent cannot see his/her domino faces. The remaining dominoes, become the draw pile, play moves to the left. The backs of the dominoes in a set are indistinguishable, either blank or having some common design.



[Source: http://uk.games.yahoo.com/online-games/board/games_dominoes.html; accessed on December 22, 2011].

Each domino is divided into two parts, or ends, each containing a set of spots. A double domino contains matching ends (6-6, 5-5, etc), and the player who draws the highest

double domino places it in the table to begin the game. If no double was drawn, all dominoes are returned to the draw pile, reshuffled, and redrawn.

Once the game has started, the second player turns to match one of his/her dominoes to one end or side of the double drawn by the first player. For example, if the first domino played is a double four, the second player may add any one of his/her dominoes containing four spots on one end. The next player may play to the double four, or he/she may try to match the end of the second domino played at each turn; dominoes are placed length-wise rather than at right angles except in the case of a double, as shown in the above illustration, at any open end of a row. He/she must draw from the extra dominoes until he/she is able to do so. Should he/she draw the last domino and still not be able to play, he/she passes and then tries again on his/her next turn. A player must play a domino if he/she is able to do so. Doubles are always placed crosswise to the end they match, thereby giving two new directions in which to place dominoes. Play continues until one player has used all of his/her dominoes or until no one can play, if no further plays can be made, and all dominoes have been drawn, the player with no dominoes, or with the least number of points (spots) on his/her remaining dominoes, wins the round. He/she subtracts the total of his/her points from the total of each of his/her opponents' points and scores the balance of points from each. Rounds continue until one player scores 100 or more points. A particular group of players can also make and agree on their own rules for playing the game.

Ludo

Ludo is played much like Snakes and Ladders. It is a simple board game for two to four players, in which the players race their four tokens from start to finish according to dice rolls.



[Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ludo_Pieces.JPG; accessed on December 22, 2011]

Each player picks a set of counters and places them in the Starting Squares of the same colour. Take it in turns to throw. You must throw a 6 before you can move a piece onto the track. Every time you throw a six, you get another turn and you can move any One counter to the number shown on the dice.

If your counter lands on your opponents' they are knocked off and returned. If one your counters lands on top of another of your counters this forms a block. Your block cannot be passed by any of your opponents' pieces. Players in turn, race each other around the circuit to be the first to get all of their counters to the **HOME** base. When counters are knocked off they are returned to the starting square.

When a counter goes all the way round the board, it can enter the home column. To land in the **HOME** base, you must throw the exact number. The winner is the first player to get all four counters into the **HOME** base.

4.4.2 ASSOCIATED BENEFITS

The respondents explained that the above play activities developed the learners' fine motor skills and gross motor activities. Further, one respondent explained that, in particular, she associated *catch and throw* plays, such as in the case of *amagenda*, as quite important for developing children's "fine muscles, cognitive skills, motor skills and enhancement".

One respondent elaborated as follows:

“Motor skills- concentrate on full body development”

“Social skills activities- Group work”

“Cognitive skills- thinking games”

Overall, the respondents gave the following points as the educational benefits associated with play activities:

- (a) Learners become creative
- (b) Learners become active participants
- (c) They become open-minded
- (d) They initiate their learning
- (e) They become motivated
- (f) They learn to think critically
- (g) Concrete evidence develop motor skills
- (h) *Amagenda* and *umlabalaba* help a learner mostly in numeracy, measurement and in water play.
- (i) Slow learners benefit more in play they learn unaware for understanding.
- (j) Memorizing-healthy mind in a healthy body.
- (k) To help learners understand and interpret the language in playful manner
- (l) Hangman increases vocabulary
- (m) Hopscotch teaches them how to count.
- (n) Learners learn by seeing, and feeling actual staff.
- (o) Strengthening their fine and motor skills
- (p) Co-ordination of hand and eye.
- (q) Learners are exposed to various ideas, media.

One respondent summarised her responses by stating that “through these activities children acquire all the developmental areas which all children need which are: socially,

emotionally, cognitive, physically and personal”. Further, the educators contended that play for foundation phase learners was associated with the following benefits:

“Language development”

“cognitive development”

“socialisation and development of multicultural skills”

“physical development”

“development of general skills that are needed to excel in life”

“development of thinking and curiosity”

“ability to share ideas with peers”

“giving assistance to others”

“to be accurate and logical in life generally”

“relaxing while learning a lot”

“developing capacity to remember what they have learnt”

“getting to know each other better”

“learn to co-operate and work as a team”

“during group play, learners share ideas”, and

“play allows for holistic development of the child”.

Others responded as follows:

“It develops social skills, confidence and self-esteem in learners”.

“It improves language command”.

“Play allows the teacher to assess the child: to determine their levels of maturity, how they mix with others and see how they deal with conflict situations”.

“Play teaches them to have empathy”.

“Through play, learners learn and develop in a holistic way”.

“Play reduces stress, anxiety and fears”.

“Play prevents boredom”.

“Develops perceptual skills”.

“Promotes and facilitates co-operative learning”.

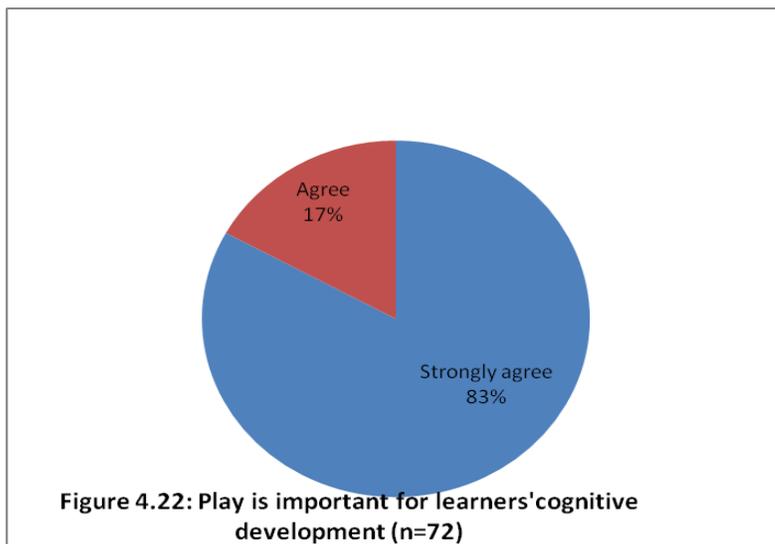
“Helps learners develop a variety of skills, e.g. listening, reading, comprehension, writing and understanding”.

4.4.3 RESPONSES FROM STRUCTURED SECTION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

In addition to the above qualitative responses, the participants were also asked to respond to a number of statements concerning possible benefits of play. The respondents' answers are summarised below under the indicated subheading, and illustrated in Figures 4.22 to 4.40. The information is both in the form of descriptive statistics (figures and summary tables), as well as qualitative descriptions elicited as part of the educators' elaborations and from the open-ended section of the questionnaire.

4.4.3.1 Importance of play in learners' cognitive development

A statement was put to the respondents with a view to soliciting their views regarding the importance of play in learners' cognitive development. Figure 4.22 illustrates the findings.



The information in the figure shows that 83% of the respondents ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement that play was important for learners’ cognitive development while 17% agreed. So, basically, all the respondents supported this statement.

In elaborating their answers, the educators had the following to say:

“It develops their sense of reasoning and imagination which also stimulates creativity.”

“Learners enhance their cognitive skills by thinking while enjoying themselves.”

“It develops the child’s brain to think for themselves find solutions and having fun gives them a good adrenalin wish to the brain.”

“The ability to think critically and solve-problems help in their growth.”

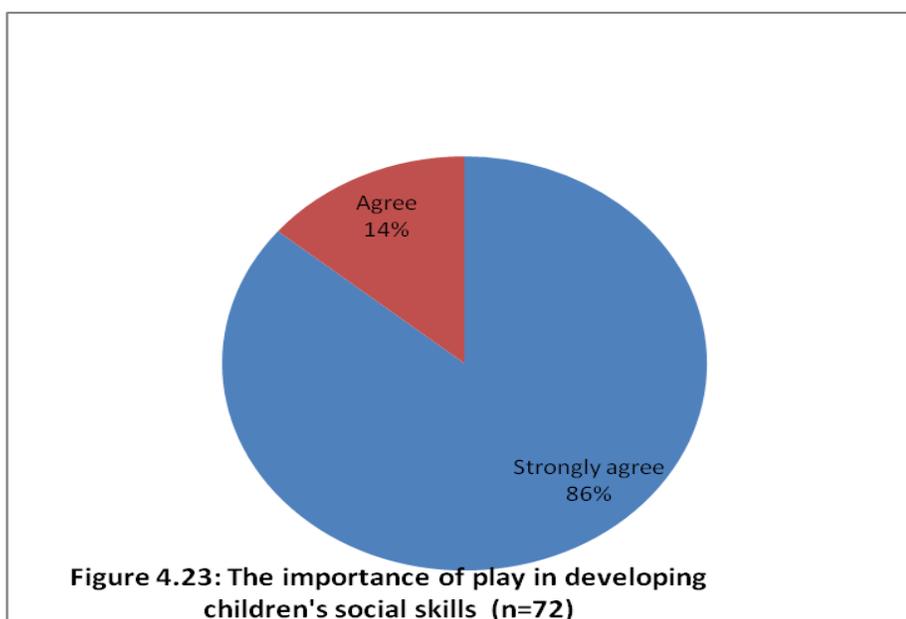
“It allows them to think critical and coherent.”

“Each person is unique. The IQ level is also different. So every learner must show how they perform their capabilities identified.”

“Improve their fine motor skills, reasoning and thinking.”

4.4.3.2 The importance of play in developing learners’ social skills.

The response profile regarding the importance of play in developing learners’ social skills is illustrated in Figure 4.23.



According to the information in Figure 4.23, 86% of the respondents indicated that they strongly agreed that play was important in developing children’s social skills; 14% agreed. Again, all the participants supported the statement.

The following elaborations were given by the respondents to support their answers:

“Children learn to interact and collaborate with each other in a positive way during play, helping strengthen their social skills.”

“They must understand there is a diversity in society. They must interact with all learners therefore developing socially.”

“Learners learn to socialize, communicate their ideas, appreciate certain things and develop new skills of communication they did not have.”

“They tolerate each other’s differences, they show empathy, sharing, helping, chatting with children whom they don’t sit with in class.”

“Interacting with peers allows them to deal with different situations in life.”

4.4.3.3 The importance of play in developing learners’ motor skills.

On this question, the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators thought play was important for developing children’s motor skills. The information is illustrated in Figure 4.24.

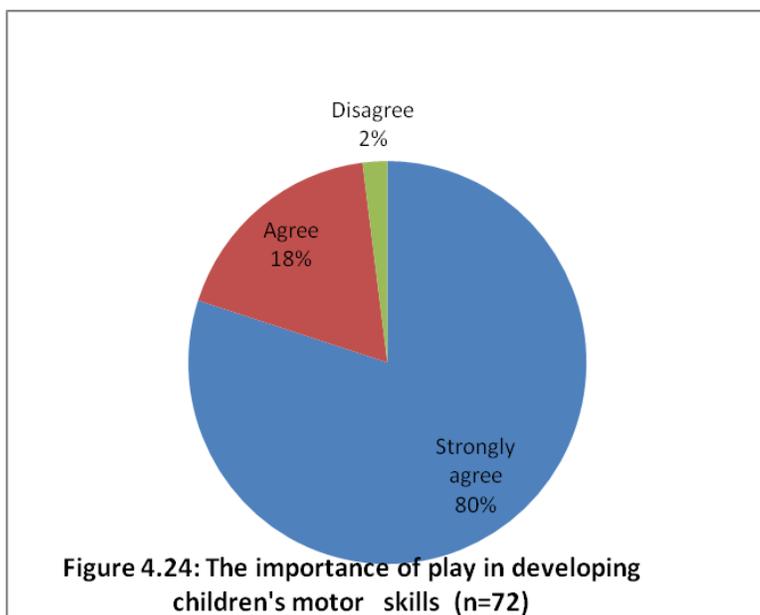


Figure 4.24 shows that 80% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that play was important for developing learners' motor skills; 18% agreed and 2% disagreed.

The following elaborations were given by those who agreed with the statement:

"A healthy body makes a healthy mind. Muscles get stronger."

"Learners develop their bodies as they play. They build up their muscles, and become healthier than those who don't play."

"Children will carry out movements developing parts/ whole body and move with co-ordination."

"It is very important because they learn to develop their bodies as they build up their muscles."

"Their fine and gross motor skills are enhanced through play."

"Develop their hand, eye-co-ordination."

"Gross and fine motor skills can be developed during activities like, sport, stretching, ball games."

There were no elaborations from the 2% who disagreed with the statement.

4.4.3.4 Development of language skills through play.

The researcher wanted to find out whether or not educators thought learners developed language skills through play. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.25.

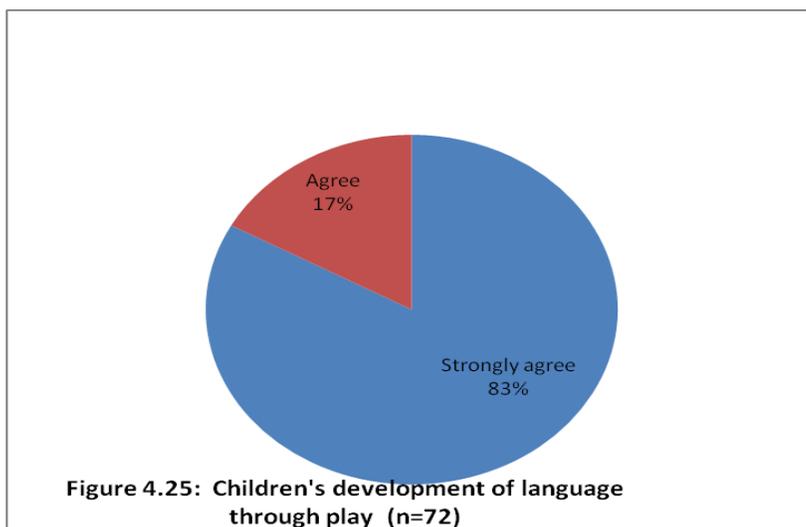


Figure 4.25 shows that 83% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that learners develop language skills through play; 17% of the respondents also agreed with the statement.

In elaborating their responses the educators explained as follows:

“They acquire a lot of vocabulary during play.”

“They communicate with other peers and explain rules and what they have done during play.”

“They learn dialogue that is not always taught in class.”

“Role-play and miming help with this. Dialogues encourage- talking, listening, conversation- all these activities bring out language skills.”

“Learners are free to chat during play. They become active participants unlike formal work in class.”

“They are able to communicate, answer questions and respond to instructions.”

“Learners learn good manners, like saying sorry to one another like learning to be patient to wait and say thank you if someone has helped him/her.”

“Children talk to each other during play this helps them develop language skills.”

4.4.3.5 Development of inter-personal skills.

On this question, the researcher wanted to establish whether or not the educators saw the importance of play in the development of inter-personal skills. The results are summarised in Figure 4.26.

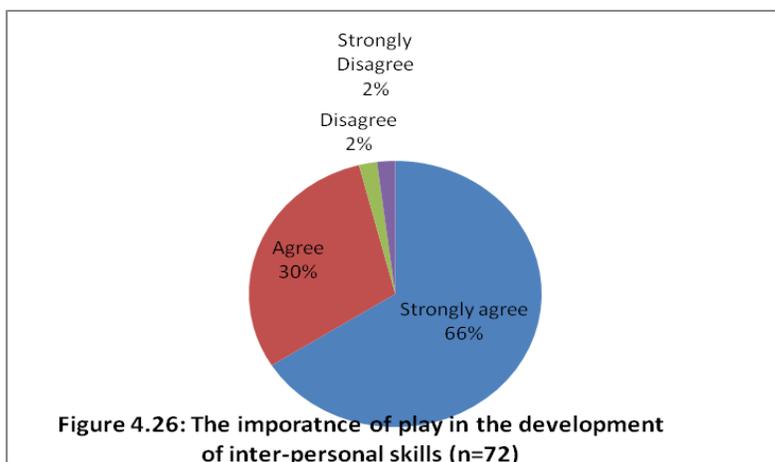


Figure 4.26 shows that 66% of the respondents strongly agreed that learners developed inter- personal skills through play, 30% agreed, 2% disagreed and another 2% strongly disagreed.

Some of the elaborations advanced by the respondents who agreed with the statement were the following:

“They learn to respect others, wait for their turns. They should be guided with discipline throughout the game.”

“They learn to deal with different situations and different personalities.”

“Yes, a form of calmness and relaxing is brought about in the learner’s inter-personal skills.”

“They learn to listen to others’ view- points- share, be patient, be co-operative.”

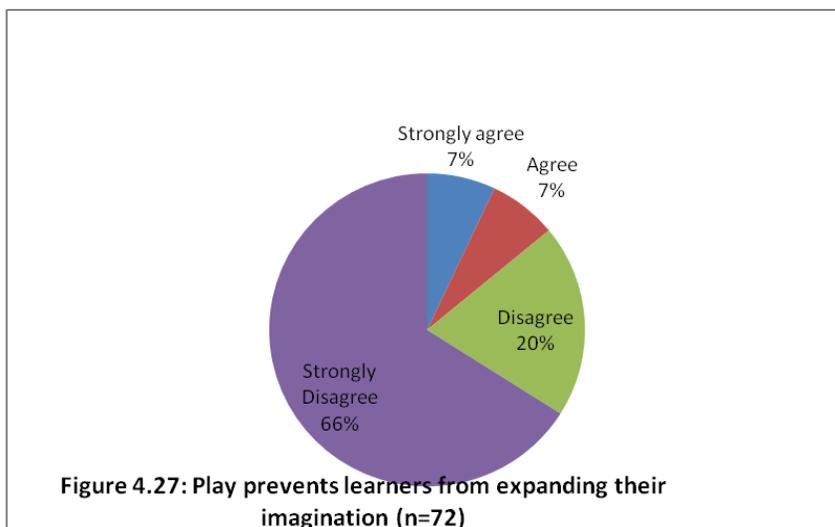
“They learn to give each a turn without dominating. Sharing also takes place.”

“Learners learn to wait for their turns for the game. They learn to respect one another. Learner should be guided with strong discipline throughout the game.”

“During play children are taught patience and the ability to be more tolerant of each other.”

4.4.3.6 Prevention of imagination by play

On this question, the researcher sought to find out whether the educators thought play prevented learners from expanding their imagination. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.27.



According to Figure 4.27, 66% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the expressed view that play prevented learners from expanding their imagination; 20% of the respondents disagreed, 7% agreed and another 7% strongly agreed with the statement.

The educators who disagreed with the statement that play prevented learners from expanding their imagination advanced the following elaborations:

“This type of play stimulates child’s imagination.”

“Imaginative play activities, helps to develop the child’s imagination.”

“It is only through play that their imagination expands. It gives them a wider imagination.”

“It allows learners to develop their own imagination.”

“Children have a good imagination that’s getting stronger through play.”

“It is only through play that their imagination expands it gives them a wider imagination.”

“Play allows them to explore.”

“It helps them accept who they are and what they can do.”

“Learners learn a lot as they play. They gain more knowledge.”

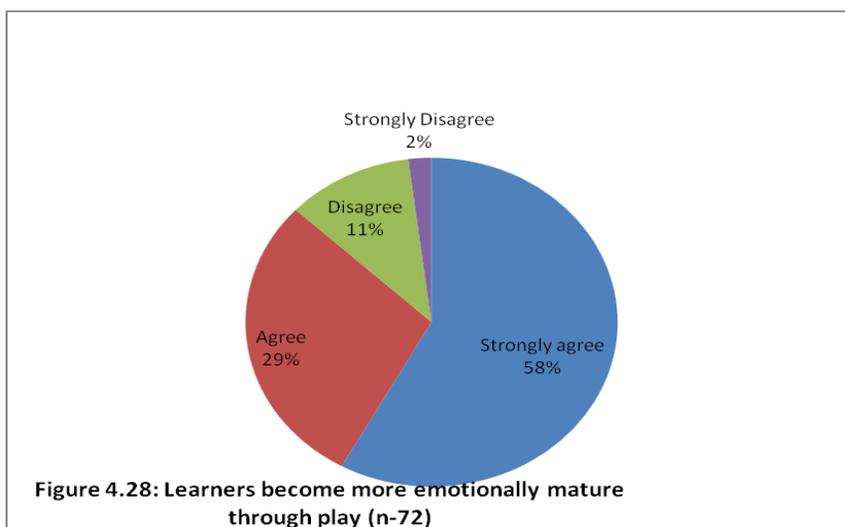
“These play activities stimulate the brain and enhances imagination.”

One educator who agreed with the statement gave the following elaborations :

“It prevents learners from expanding learners’ imagination.”

4.4.3.7 Development of emotional maturity.

On this question, the researcher wanted to find out from educators whether or not they held the view that learners became emotionally mature through play. The results are presented in Figure 4.28.



The information in figure 4.28 shows that 58% of the respondents strongly agreed that learners became more emotionally mature through play, 29% of the respondents agreed with the statement, 11% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed.

In elaborating their responses, the educators who agreed with the statement explained as follows:

“They show feelings when someone gets hurt.”

“Able to deal with conflict situations and takes others’ feelings into consideration.”

“Play trains learners to be leaders. They can learn to persevere for certain harsh situations.”

“They learn to control their emotions.”

“Learners will be able to handle conflict situations.”

“Learn to be independent and others’ feelings into consideration, and are able to deal with conflict situations.”

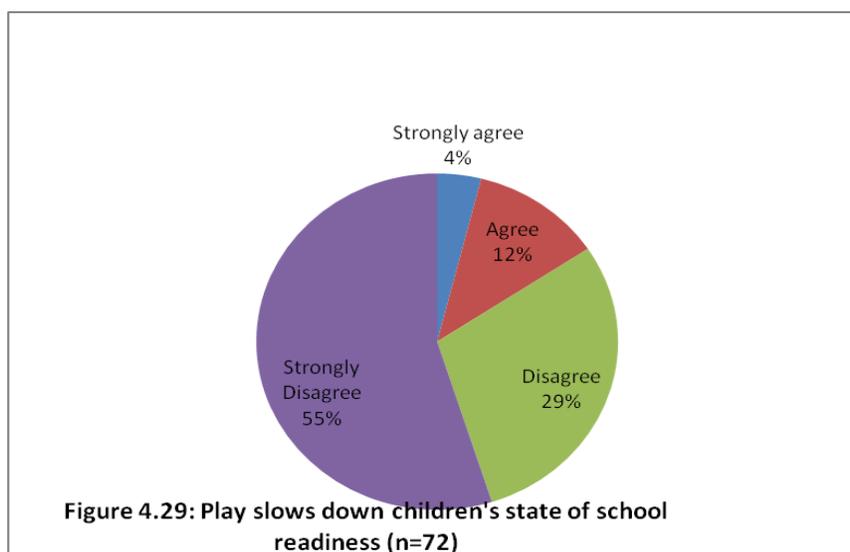
“They realise that someone else, may have a better idea.”

One of the educators who disagreed with the statement had the following to say:

“Too, young for that.”

4.4.3.8 Play slows down children’s state of school readiness.

On this item, the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators thought play slowed down children’s state of school readiness. The findings are illustrated in Figure 4.29.



According to Figure 4.29, 55% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the view that play slowed down children’s state of school readiness, 29% disagreed. However, 12% of the respondents agreed that play slowed down children’s state of school readiness and 4% strongly agreed.

The educators who disagreed with the above statement supported their position as follows:

“It improves school readiness.”

“Play promotes school readiness. They develop muscles of holding pens, thinking and become more independent.”

“We have numerous play activities at our Grade R in order to get learners to be ready for school (Grade 1).”

“It enhances all aspects of their development.”

“Play is the perfect way to prepare them, without them even knowing it.”

“Lots of concepts are learnt during play which are re-enforced during formal lessons.”

“It helps with school readiness. Like action songs.”

“It helps children to develop mentally, socially, emotionally and physically.”

“A child can have a good social play but not always be emotionally ready for school.”

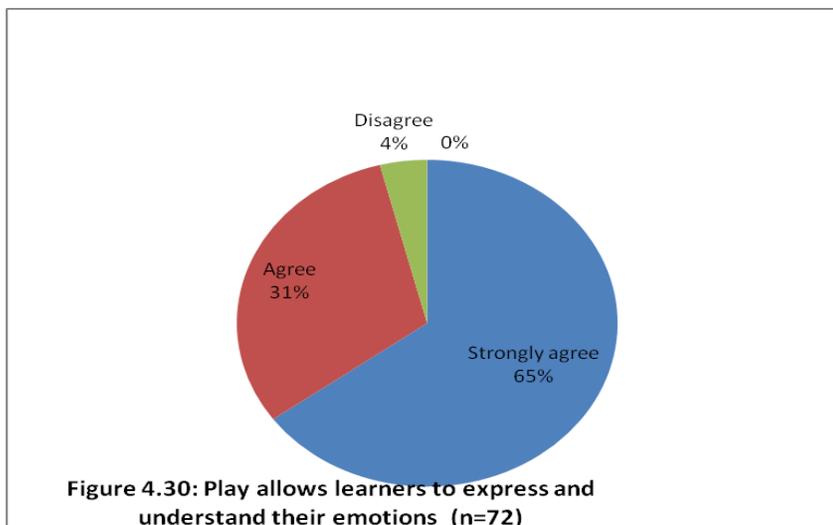
“If play is directed it can encourage readiness.”

“It enhances all aspect of their development.”

The educators who agreed with the statement that play slowed down children’s state of school readiness did not elaborate on their answer.

4.4.3.9 Play allows learners to express and understand their emotions.

On this question, the researcher wanted to establish whether or not educators thought play allowed learners to express and understand their emotions. The findings are illustrated in Figure 4.30.



According to Figure 4.30, 65% of the respondents strongly agreed that play allowed learners to express and understand their emotions, 31% agreed, 4% disagreed.

In developing this further, the educators who agreed with the above statement supported their position as follows:

“During role-play they give vent their feelings.”

“They display feelings- happy, sad, cheating, playing, unfairly with others.”

“Certain play areas can let children express how they feel or what happens at home.”

“During play learners could display positive emotions when everything happens correctly, or display negative emotions if something goes wrong.”

“They learn to communicate with their play material and they learn how to handle the situations that surrounds them.”

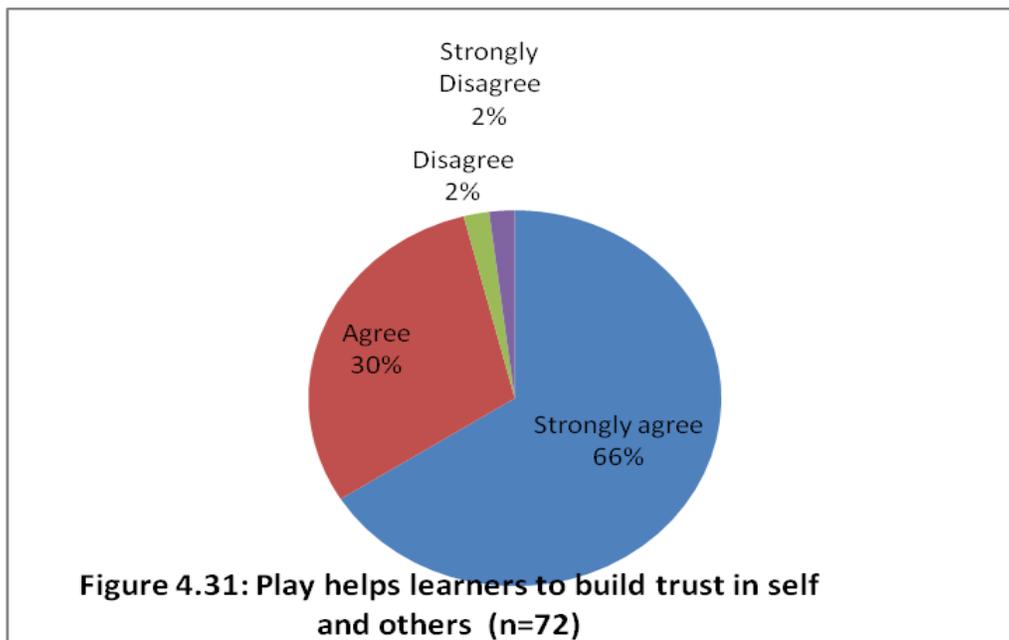
“They express their feelings.”

Altogether, three educators disagreed with the statement that play allowed learners to express and understand their emotions. In motivating her/his answer, one educator had the following to say:

“There are too young to understand their emotions.”

4.4.3.10 Helping learners to build trust in self and others .

On this question, the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators helped learners to build trust in self and others. The results are presented in Figure 4.31.



The figure shows that 66% of the respondents strongly agreed that play helped learners to build trust in self and others, 30% agreed, 2% disagreed and another 2% strongly disagreed.

In supporting their responses, the educators who agreed with the statement, had the following to say:

“It allows learners to work as a team.”

“They become self-confident.”

“Learners become aware of their emotions and of others.”

“Learners become confident of themselves and they understand who they are.”

“Respond to leadership skills within group play.”

“Team work and play develops self-confidence and self-worthy hence they can display trust in self and others.”

However, two educators who disagreed with the statement, did not motivate their answer.

4.4.3.11 Play prevent learners from developing initiative.

On this item, the researcher wanted to find out whether or not educators thought play prevented learners from developing initiative. The findings are illustrated in Figure 4.32.

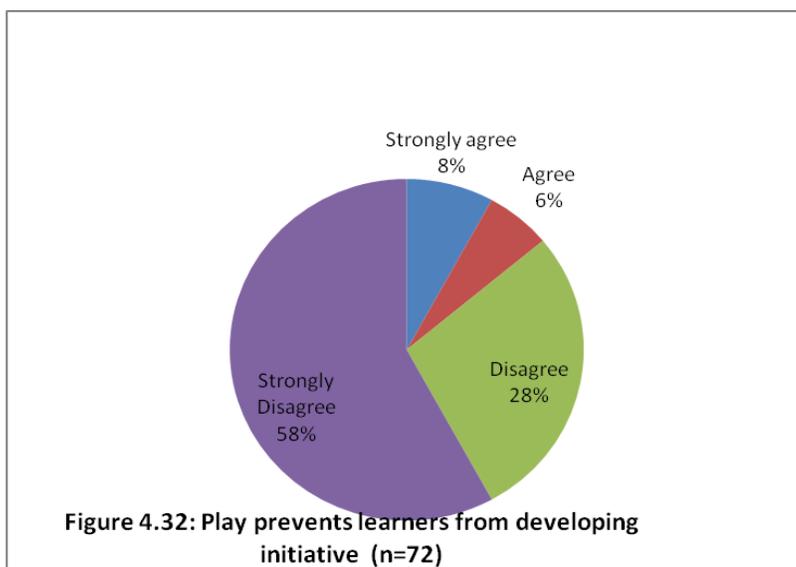


Figure 4.32 illustrates that 58% of the respondents strongly disagreed that play prevented learners from developing initiative, 28% disagreed with the statement, 8% strongly agreed, and 6% agreed that play prevented learners from developing initiative.

The respondents who disagreed with the above statement supported their position as follows:

“Play allows learners to think and develop different games.”

“Learners create their own rules and find their own solutions to problems when playing.”

“Play helps learners to be able to do new things that they did not know before.”

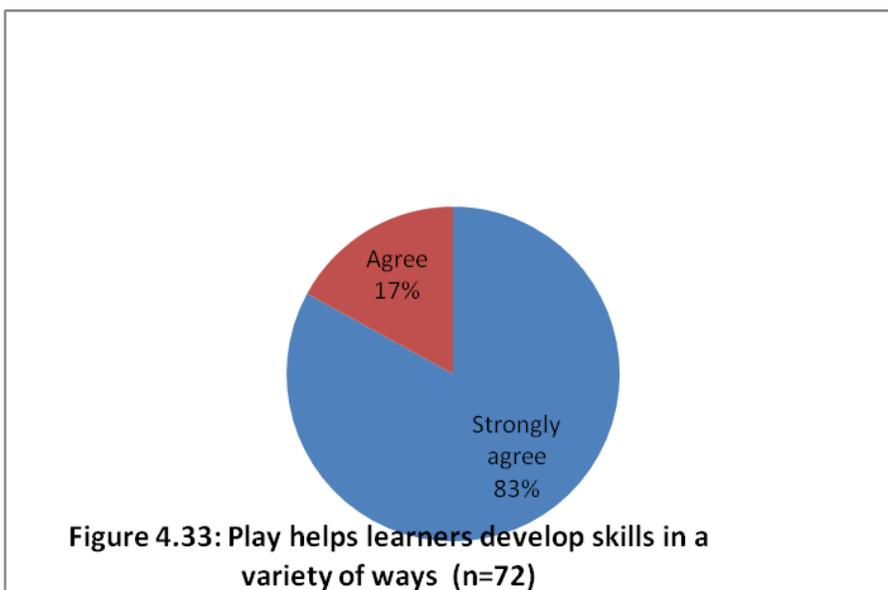
“Play allows children to give vent to their fears and what they don’t agree with in group play.”

“Play encourages initiative- motivates them to take a leading role.”

The educators who agreed with the statement gave no elaborations.

4.4.3.12 Helping learners develop skills in a variety of ways.

On this question, the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators thought learners developed skills in a variety of ways from play activities. The results are presented in Figure 4.33.



The information in Figure 4.33 illustrates that 83% of the respondents strongly agreed that play helped learners develop skills in a variety of ways; the remaining 17% agreed that play helped learners develop skills in a variety of ways. Thus, there was a 100% affirmative response on this item.

In elaborating their response, the educators reported as follows:

“They imitate role- models, physically, emotionally, and psychologically and they become stronger.”

“It allows some learners to carry out instructions and actions on their own without guidance.”

“Learners get to know new ways of communication, ways of socializing and ways of negotiations.”

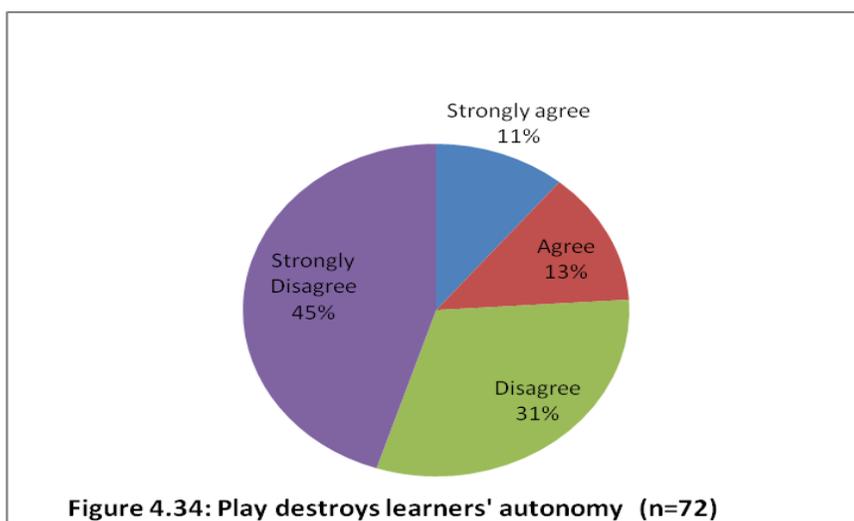
“Learn leadership, responsibility, accountability, etc.”

“Language development, social skills, emotional development is developed.”

“All aspects can be developed through play- physically, mental, and motor skills.”

4.4.3.13 Play destroys learners’ autonomy.

On this question, the researcher wanted to find out whether or not educators thought that play destroyed learners’ sense of autonomy. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.34.



According to figure, 45% of the respondents strongly disagreed that play destroyed learners’ autonomy, 31% disagreed, 13% agreed and 11% strongly disagreed.

The following statements represent the respondents’ motivations for their responses:

“Play develops the learners’ autonomy.”

“It develops leadership qualities.”

“Play gives children freedom of action.”

“Through play, learners develop leadership skills, how to interact with everybody- whether you are a leader or a follower.”

“They learn to control some feelings e.g. aggression. They also try to push themselves to be the best they can be.”

“No, they can be autonomous, but it needs a good educator to guide a learner towards being free.”

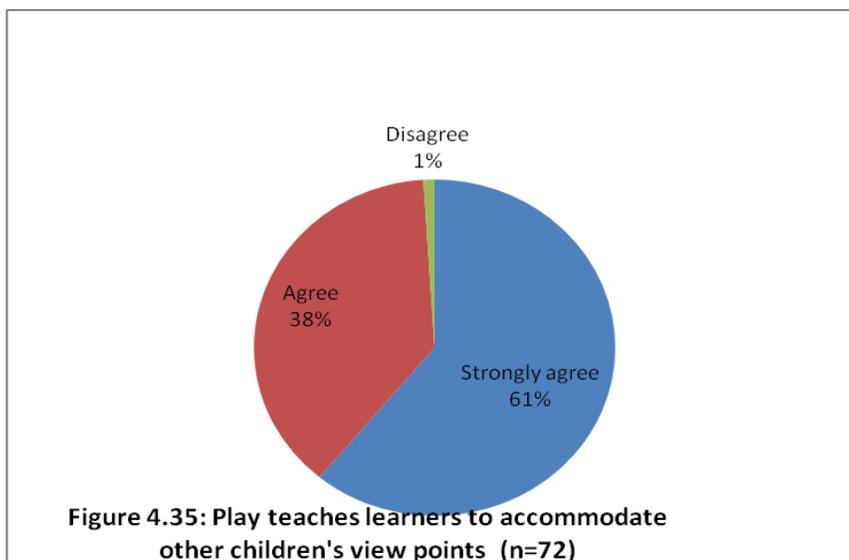
Altogether, fifteen educators agreed that play destroyed learners’ autonomy. Some of their explanations were:

“Learners withdraw into their shells if bullied and laughed at.”

“They learn to control some feelings e.g. aggression. They also try to push themselves to be the best they can be.”

4.4.3.14 Teaching learners to accommodate other children’s view points

On this item the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators taught learners to accommodate other children’s view points. The results are presented in Figure 4.35.



The information in Figure 4.35 shows that 61% of the respondents strongly agreed that play taught learners to accommodate other children’s view points, 38% agreed, and 1% disagreed.

In elaborating their responses, the following was said:

“Yes, because they take the opinion of each other when they are playing different activities. They teach each other how to play different activities.”

“They learn that other people have a different view of things.”

“They listen to peers during play.”

“They take turns and give each other chance.”

“Yes, they can learn to listen to others and take one another’s views seriously.”

“Yes, it gives them a chance to exchange opinions. To accept others.”

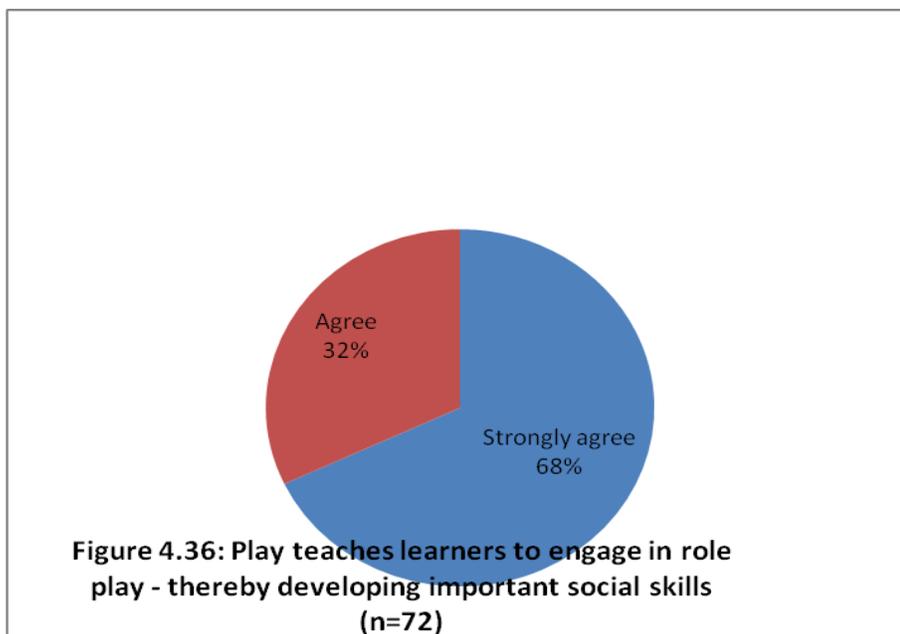
“They realise that someone else may have a better idea.”

“They listen to and share ideas with each other.”

One educator disagreed with the statement, but did not elaborate on his/her response.

4.4.3.15 Development of important social skills through role play

On this question, the researcher wanted to find out whether or not educators encouraged the development of important social skills through role-play. The findings are illustrated in Figure 4.36.



According to Figure 4.36, 68% of the respondents strongly agreed that play taught learners to engage in role play thereby developing important social skills; 32% agreed. All the respondents were in agreement on this item.

In their qualitative responses, the educators elaborated as follows:

“Learners vent out their true feelings.”

“It helps them to show out the character that they can imitate well.”

“Role- play , dialogue ,play acting – reveals different emotions.”

“They are easily frustrated when they do not achieve but when they achieve they show joy.”

“Learners are encouraged to open up and express their feelings and are better able to express themselves.”

“Yes, play is one form where all the learners’ true feelings are expressed.”

4.4.3.16 Play discourages learners from taking risks

On this item, the researcher wanted to find out whether or not educators thought play discouraged learners from taking risks. The findings are presented in Figure 4.37.

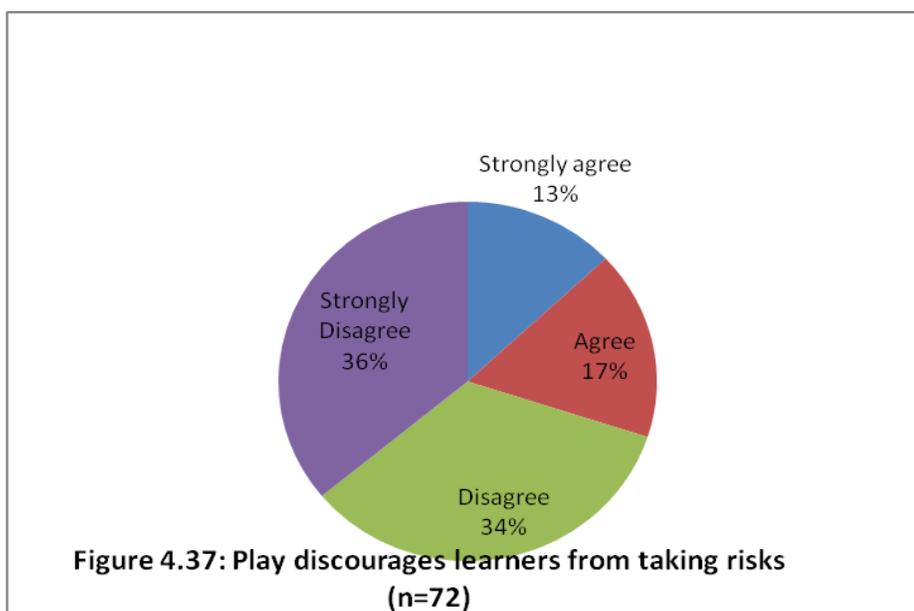


Figure 4.37 indicates that 36% of the respondents strongly disagreed that play discouraged learners from taking risks, 34% disagreed, giving a combined disagreement loading of 70%. There was a combined 30% agreement with the statement.

In elaborating their responses, the educators who disagreed with the statement that play discouraged learners from taking risks, gave the following reasons:

“Play, opens the mind of learners in a vast way- helps to explore.”

“It gives them more self- esteem and builds leadership.”

“Play encourages them to explore and take risks that they wouldn’t have taken normally.”

“Encourages them to take risk.”

“It encourages them to face any challenges that they are facing.”

“It is through play that learners realise their potentials.”

“It develops confidence which makes risk taking easier.”

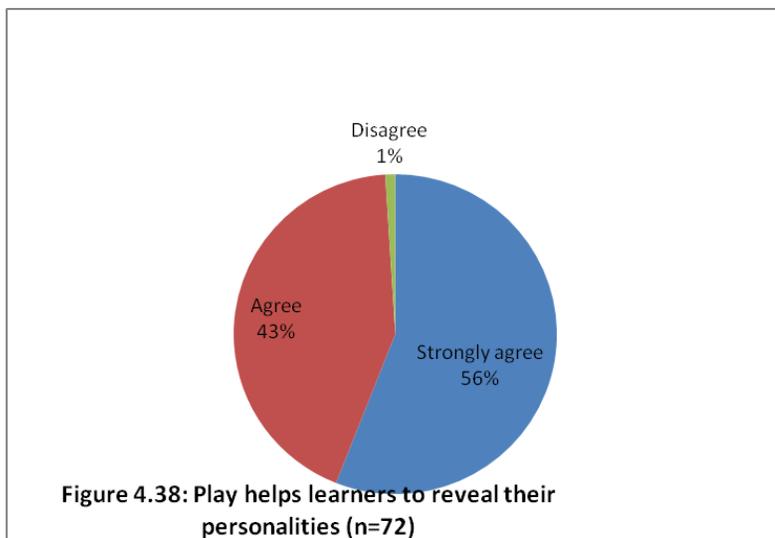
There were two comments which came from the educators who agreed with the statement that play discouraged learners from taking risks:

“Children are adventurous and want to try out new things.”

“They are dangers of taking risks.”

4.4.3.17 Helping learners to reveal their personalities

In this question the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators helped learners to reveal their personalities. The results are presented in Figure 4.38.



According to Figure 4.38, 56% of the respondents strongly agreed that play helped learners to reveal their personalities, 43% agreed, and 1% disagreed.

In elaborating their responses, the educators who agreed with the statement that play helped learners to reveal their personalities motivated their responses as follows:

“Learners are free to express themselves and are not afraid to express themselves.”

“During play you learn the true character and handles disappointments.”

“Some display leadership skills, positive attitudes, develop on an interest in aesthetics.”

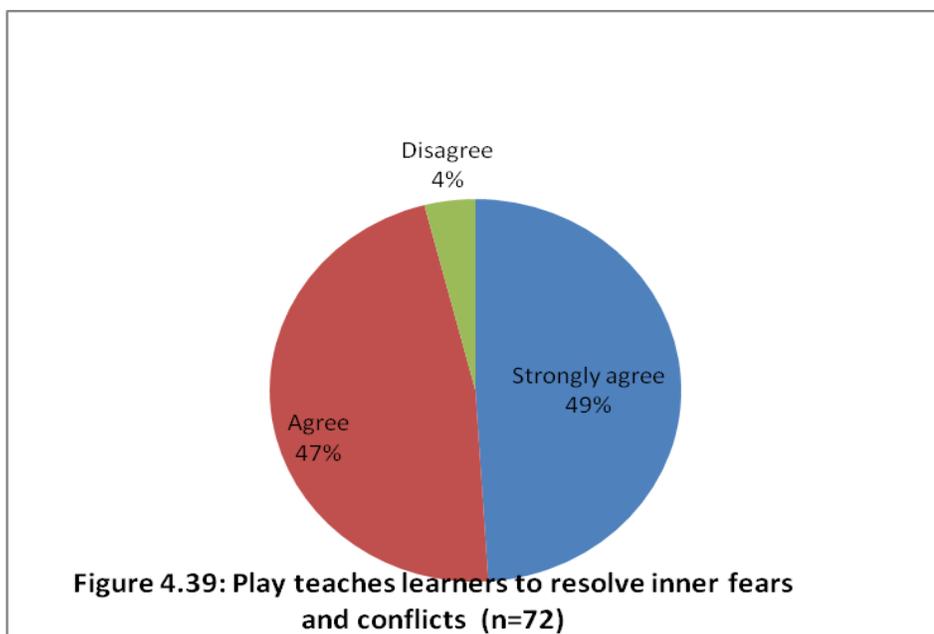
“Learners are not afraid to express themselves.”

“True expression can be revealed through play.”

There were no elaborations from the one respondent who disagreed with the statement.

4.4.3.18 Teaching learners to resolve inner fears and conflicts

On this question, the researcher wanted to find out whether or not educators thought play taught learners to resolve inner fears and conflicts during play time. The findings are presented in Figure 4.39.



The information illustrated in Figure 4.39 indicates that 49% of the respondents strongly agreed that play taught learners to resolve their inner fears and conflicts, 47% agreed, 4% disagreed.

From their qualitative responses, the educators who agreed with the statement supported their responses as follows:

“Through play, inner fears and outer conflicts can be solved. It helps to face the problems encountered.”

“Not all inner fears /conflicts can be conquered through play. Sometimes a child might need counselling or parental support.”

“This encourages learners to participate in activities.”

“This encourages learners to participate in the activities they watch other learners and want to achieve the same.”

“They are able to open up and face their fears and are therefore able to resolve their fears.”

“Yes, they discover their weak points and strong points.”

“Some plays relate to learners’ problem and get opportunity to reveal their problems.”

“Play allows children to give vent to their fears and what they don’t agree with in group play.”

The educators who disagreed with the statement gave no elaborations.

4.4.3.19 Development of self- confidence and self-esteem

On this item, the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators thought that play allowed learners to develop self-confidence and self-esteem. The results are presented in

Figure 4. 40

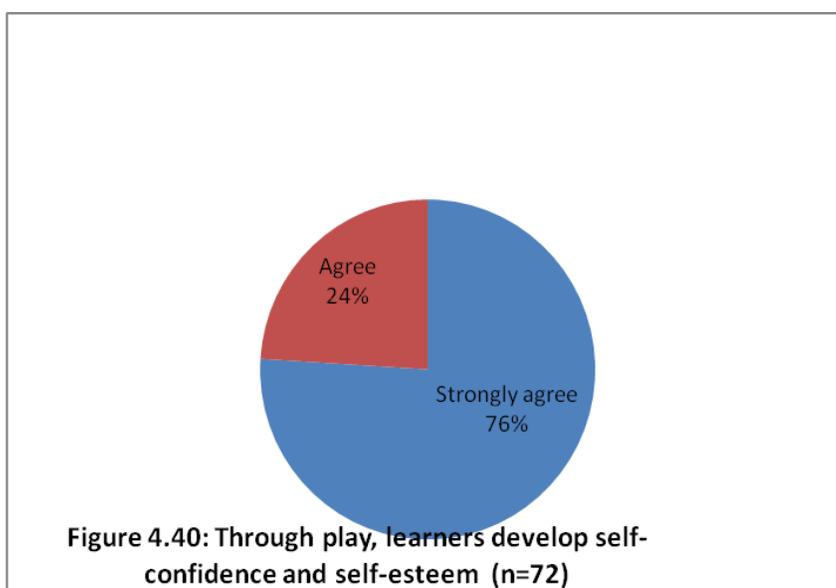


Figure 4.40 shows that 76% of the respondents strongly agreed with the position that through play, learners developed self- confidence and self-esteem, 24 % agreed. So, all the respondents supported this view.

In elaborating their responses, the educators had the following to say:

“Play activities develop learners’ self- confidence and self- worthy.”

“When they perform well during play they develop self-confidence and self-esteem is boosted.”

“Play allows children to develop in positive ways. It helps to build themselves.”

“Through play self-confidence is developed.”

4.4.4 GENERAL COMMENTS

The respondents were also requested to share with the researcher any further comments that they considered important regarding the benefits of play to learners in the foundation phase. The educators' responses were as follows:

“Plays should be given more time in the school curriculum timetable.”

“Play should be included on timetables.”

“Children should be exposed to plays for concrete concepts.”

“Play is the root to educational success.”

“Children like to play because they can't concentrate for long.”

“When they play, they are unaware that they are learning.”

“They enjoy while they learn.”

4.4.5 Summary tables

Table 4.3 presents a snap- shot summary of the above results, for quick reference.

Table 4.3: Benefits of play as seen by foundation phase educators (n=72)

ITEM DESCRIPTION	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Play is important for children's cognitive (mental) development. Play is important for children's cognitive (mental) development.
Play is important for developing children's social skills.	86	14	0	0	
Play is important for developing children's motor (manipulative) skills.	80	18	2	0	
Learners develop language skills through play.	83	17	0	0	
Learners develop inter-personal skills (such as being less aggressive) through play.	66	30	2	2	
Play prevents learners from expanding their imagination.	7	7	20	66	
Learners become more emotionally mature through play.	58	29	11	2	
Play slows down children's state of school readiness.	4	10	30	56	
Play allows learners to express and understand their emotions.	65	31	4	0	
Play helps learners to build trust in self and others.	66	30	2	2	
Play prevent learners from developing initiative.	8	6	28	58	
Play helps learners develop skills in a variety of ways.	83	17	0	0	
Play destroys learners' autonomy.	11	13	31	45	
Play teaches learners to accommodate other children's view points.	61	38	1	0	
Play teaches learners to act out different roles – such as anger, hostility, frustration and joy. This encourages the development of important social skills.	68	32	0	0	
Play discourages learners from	13	17	34	36	

taking risks.				
Play helps learners to reveal their personalities.	56	43	1	0
18. Play teaches learners to resolve inner fears and conflicts.	49	47	4	0
19. Learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem.	76	24	0	0

In order to simplify the response profile in Table 4.3 for ease of comparison between the affirmative and non-affirmative responses, Table 4.4 presents condensed data of the above information enable arrived at by combining the ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Agree’ columns, as the constituting the affirmative responses, and the ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’ responses as non-affirmative responses. Further, the loadings against items - i.e. the negatively-worded items in the questionnaire were reversed in order to re-align the meanings of the responses.

Table 4.4: Benefits of play as seen by foundation phase educators (n=72)

ITEM DESCRIPTION	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Play is important for children’s cognitive (mental) development.	100	00
Play is important for developing children’s social skills.	100	00
Play is important for developing children’s motor (manipulative) skills.	98	02
Learners develop language skills through play.	100	00
Learners develop inter-personal skills (such as being less aggressive) through play.	96	04
Play prevents learners from expanding their imagination*.	14	86
Learners become more emotionally mature through play.	87	13
Play slows down children’s state of school readiness*.	16	84
Play allows learners to express and understand their emotions.	96	04
Play helps learners to build trust in self and others.	96	04
Play prevent learners from developing initiative*.	14	84
Play helps learners develop skills in a variety of ways.	100	00
Play destroys learners’ autonomy*.	24	76
Play teaches learners to accommodate other children’s view points.	99	01

Play teaches learners to act out different roles – such as anger, hostility, frustration and joy. This encourages the development of important social skills.	100	00
Play discourages learners from taking risks*.	30	70
Play helps learners to reveal their personalities.	99	01
18. Play teaches learners to resolve inner fears and conflicts.	96	04
19. Learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem.	100	00
AVERAGE:	93	7

Note: that the asterisk designates the negative statements on which the loadings have been reversed for the averaging of responses to have the same meaning across all responses.

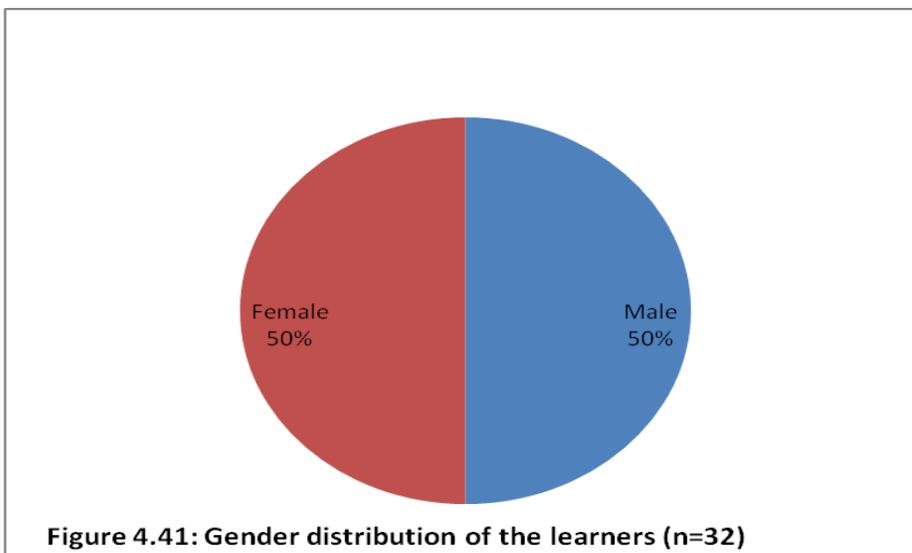
It is clear from this condensed table that the overwhelming response indicates that the respondents concurred with the statements in the questionnaire, which were derived from the literature.

4.5 PLAYACTIVITIES VALUED / LIKED MOST BY FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS, AS WELL AS ASSOCIATED EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

In order to answer the third research question, it was necessary to have a second research sample – that is, that of foundation phase learners. The section that follows presents the biographical characteristics of this second research sample.

4.5.1 Gender distribution

The gender distribution of the learner respondents is presented in Figure 4.41



The figure shows that there was an equal representation of gender among the learner participants.

4.5.2 Age distribution

The age distribution of respondents is presented in Figure 4.42.

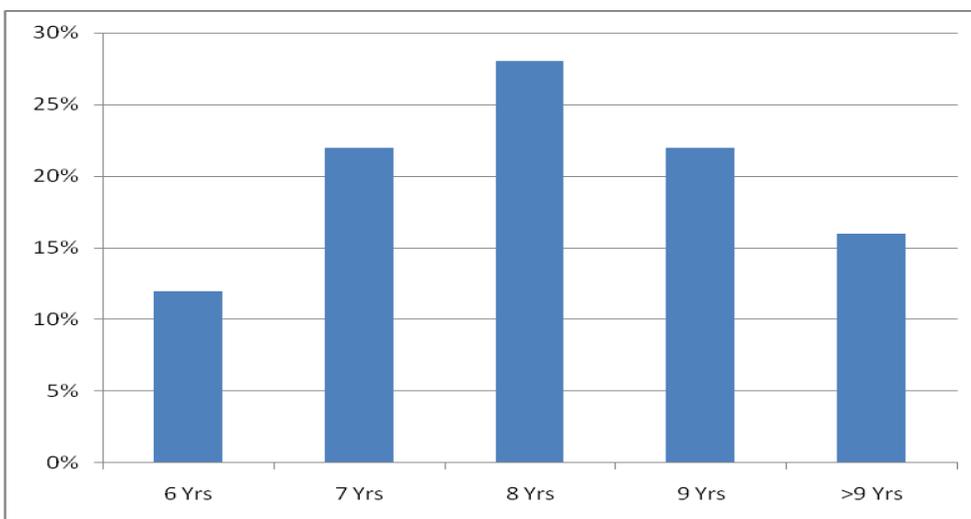
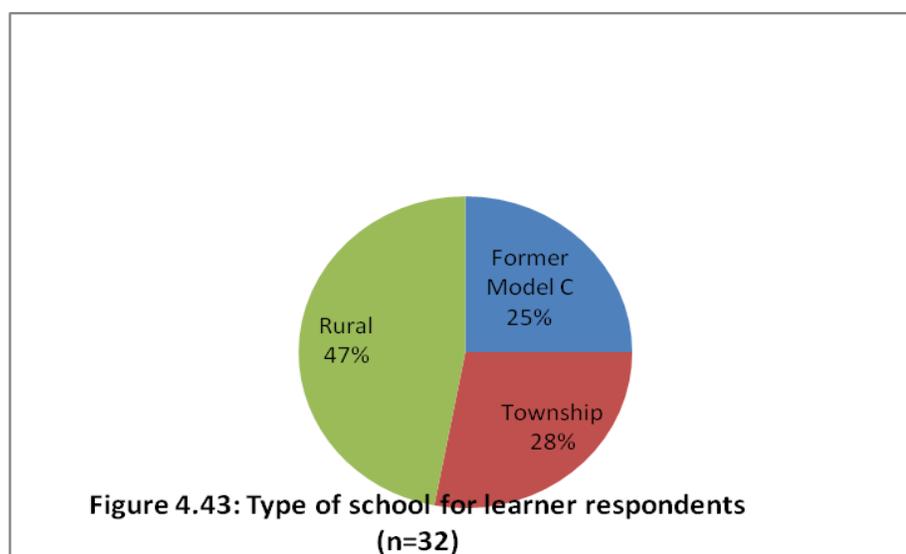


Figure 4.42: Age of learner participants (n=32)

According to Figure 4.42, 12% of the respondents were 6 years old, 22% were 7 years old, 28% were 8 years old, 22% nine years of age, 16% were above 9 years of age. The official school-going age for learners in the foundation phase (i.e. reception year to grade 3) is between six and nine, inclusive. However, in this case, 16% of the participants fell above nine years of age.

4.5.3 Types of schools

Figure 4. 43 presents the school types from which the participating learners were drawn.



The figure shows that the majority of the learners were drawn from rural schools (47%), followed almost equally by Township (28%) and Former Model C schools (25%).

4.5.4 Learner distribution by grade level

The information in Figure 4.44 shows the distribution of learner participants by grade level.

Figure 4.44 illustrates the information in Table 4.14.

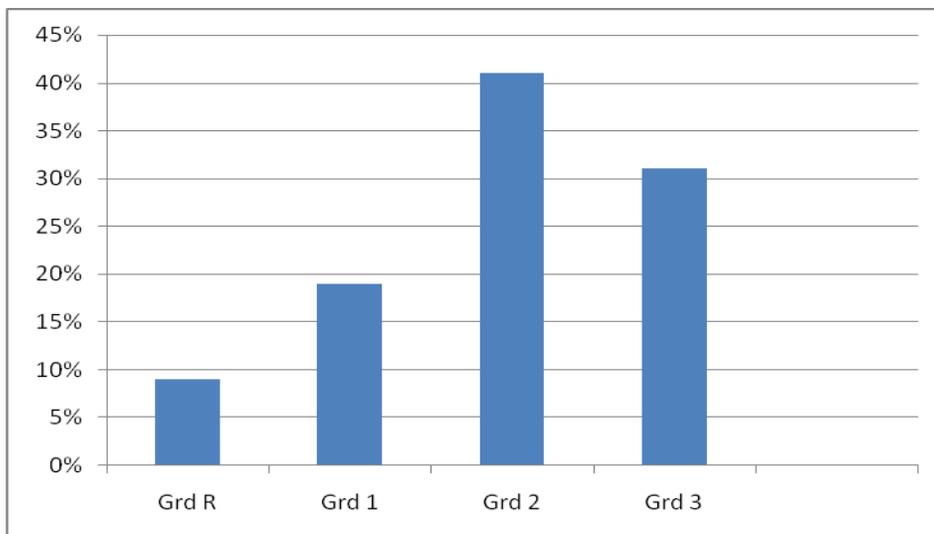


Figure 4.44: Grade levels of learner participants (n=32)

According to Figure 4.44, 9% of the participating learners came from the reception year; 19%, 41% and 31% came from Grades 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The biggest group came from Grade 2. Although the researcher intended to have interviews with only 18 learners, she ended up with a higher number because in two of the schools the host educators brought in more than the intended numbers, and the researcher thought it might not be strategic to turn some of the learners back.

4.5.5 Learners' most valued play activities

The third and final research question of this study sought to find out the play activities which were valued most by foundation phase learners, as well as the educational benefits they associated with such play activities.

As a group, the respondents reported that they liked playing with wire cars, hide and seek, wooden cars, soccer, dominoes, puzzles, snakes and ladders, water and sand, making necklaces, playing with wooden blocks, tyre racing, climbing on the jungle gym, colouring and painting. playing house, netball, tuck, dolls, blocks, laptops, playing games on touch, hockey, rugby, cycling, ski-boarding, ludo, rugby, athletics, *amagenda*, *arigogo*, hop scotch, *umlabalaba*.

In order to understand these results better, the researcher categorised the favourite play activities according to gender. The researcher was following a hunch that in the foundation phase, different play activities may appeal differently to the two sexes. Thus, the favourite play activities, as per gender, are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Categorisation of most valued plays by gender (n=32).

BOYS	COMMON PLAY ACTIVITIES	GIRLS
Rugby	Soccer and athletics	Hockey
Wire cars	Painting and drawing	Netball
Playing a game Domino	Playing with dolls (one boy)	
Tuck	Playing house	Arigogo (Hop Scotch)
Playing nurse	Cycling and playing with toys	Water and sand
Playing with dolls	Playing with swings	Board-Skating
Scratch games	Hide and seek	Making necklaces
Touch	Umlabalaba	Amagenda
Tyre racing	Swimming and colouring	Hoola loop
Ludo	Puzzles and blocks	Skipping
Wooden cars	Playing with clay	

4.5.3 Reasons for liking the plays.

In response to the question as to their reasons for liking the above play activities, they gave the following reasons:

“For fun”

“Pleasure”

“I just like It”

“I want to be a nurse when I grow up”

“Plays make me strong and fit”

“It makes me happy playing with my friends”

“It makes me think”

“I learn many things like plus and minus”

“I make different shapes with my clay”

“I like combing my doll’s hair”

“I like play with dolls because it reminds of my mother combing my hair”

“I learn how to count using stones, bottle tops”

“It is rare to get hurt in these plays”

“I want to earn money out of it”

“Skills of knowing to play soccer”

“It helps in counting, subtract, add, and multiply”

“It gives us strength”

“Running around”

4.5.6 Perceived benefits

The learner respondents associated the following benefits with the play activities in Table 4.5:

“To have knowledge of things.”

“It keeps me fit.”

“It is educative that we can learn more things such as drawing, using our fingers and kicking the ball to keep us fit”.

“To learn how to add.”

“To be able to paint.”

“To be able to make different shapes.”

“I can cut using a pair of scissors.”

“I can paste pictures.”

“I enjoy drawing.”

“I can name my parts of my body.”

“Eye- hand co-ordination.”

“To be famous and earn lot of money.”

“My mind will fresh after playing.”

“Tell stories using songs (e.g. head and shoulder, knees and toes).”

“Understanding time (clock games).”

“Snakes and ladder makes us understand addition and makes us think.”

“Market stand helps us to know change when we do shopping (using paper money).”

4.5.7 Learners’ perceived relationship of play to school work.

In addition to merely answering the research question, the researcher also wished to find out whether or not the foundation phase learners related play with school work. The learners responded as follows:

“Play enabled them to know how to write.”

“It enabled them to do their homework after playing.”

“It didn’t do anything for him(one child said this) to understand his schoolwork.”

“We are able to paint and colour our pictures well.”

“It enables us to name parts of our body.”

“We can measure ourselves.”

“We can add and minus using bottle tops.”

“Using sand we can make different pictures and shapes.”

“We can wash baby dolls using water.”

“We can jump, run and climb and we can hop.”

“We like playing with our friends.”

“We learn new vocabulary in plays that we can use even in class work.”

“We do sing play indoor games.”

“We cut and paste, clapping for our names.”

“We do picture matching and word matching.”

“The teacher takes us to the fire station to tell us what we should do when there is fire.”

“We make birthday charts and make family posters.”

As an extension of this question, the learners were asked more directly to say whether or not their teachers used play as part of classroom activities. They responded as follows:

“Their teacher used plays as part of their classroom activities because it was included in math activities; for example, during market stand we learnt how to deal

with money addition and subtracting.”

“The teacher gives us clay to make myself (putting eyes, nose, mouth, hands, hair, arms and legs.”

“The teacher uses water and sand when we are moulding.”

“We do indoor games and songs.”

“We sing by pointing to the parts of our bodies.”

“We mould and make different shapes.”

“We cut and paste, clapping for our names. Picture matching and word matching.”

“The teacher takes us to the fireman to tell us what we should do when there is fire.”

“Birthdays, family poster and counting games.”

“Listening to stories.”

4.5.8 Handling unfriendly playmates

Given that the literature suggested that one of the benefits of play was to develop children’s social skills, the learners were asked to explain how they handled unfriendly playmates. Their responses were as follows:

“We ignore them because they are making us sad.”

“I go and play with others because I don’t like fighting.”

“I stop playing with them.”

“I report them to the class teacher.”

As an extension of this question, the learners were asked more directly to say whether or not their teachers used play as part of classroom activities. They responded as follows;

“Their teacher used plays as part of their classroom activities because it was

included in math activities; for example, during market stand we learnt how to deal

with money addition and subtracting.”

“The teacher gives us clay to make myself (putting eyes, nose, mouth, hands, hair, arms and legs”.

“The teacher uses water and sand when we are moulding”.

“We do indoor games and songs”.

“We sing by pointing to the parts of our bodies”.

“We mould and make different shapes”.

“We cut and paste, clapping for our names. Picture matching and word matching.”

“The teacher takes us to the fireman to tell us what we should do when there is fire.”

“Birthdays, family poster and counting games.”

“Listening to stories.”

4.5.9 Summarising learners’ responses

Learners’ favourite play activities

The third and final research question of this study sought to find out the favourite play activities for the foundation phase learners, as well as the educational benefits which they associated with such play activities.

The study revealed that the play activities valued / liked most by the boys were: rugby, playing with wooden and wire cars, playing a game *domino*, tuck, scratch games, touch, tyre racing and ludo.

For the girls, their most favourite play activities were: hockey, netball, *arigogo*, water and sand, skate-boarding, making necklaces, *amagenda* and hoola loop and skipping.

There were also play activities which were liked by both girls and boys. These were: Soccer, athletics, painting, drawing, playing with dolls (one boy), playing house, hide and seek, *umlabalaba*, swimming, colouring, puzzles, blocks, play with clay and sliding.

The learner respondents associated the following benefits with the above play activities:

Having knowledge of things, keeping fit, learning more things such as drawing, using their fingers (dexterity), eye- hand co-ordination, understanding time (clock game), ability to make different shapes, learning how to add, ability to paint, as well as cutting using pairs of scissors.

The researcher also wished to find out whether or not the foundation phase learners related play with school work. The learners gave a number of examples, including the following:

“Play enabled us to know how to write.”

“We can do picture matching and word matching.”

“We make birthday charts and make family posters.”

Given that the literature suggested that one of the benefits of play was to develop children’s social skills. The learners were asked to explain how they handle unfriendly playmates. Their responses were very brief and two points were given:

“I ignore them because they make me sad.”

“I report him/her to the teacher.”

“I go and play with others because I don’t like fighting.”

4.6 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

On the first research question dealing with the promotion of play, the educator respondents reported that, with regard to numeracy, they made use of market stands and playing shop (using Rands, litres, and centimetres) to address various aspects of numeracy, including number patterns. Furthermore, they reported promoting numeracy through play activities involving bean bags – to promote counting; learners also used building blocks as counters; playing mathematics games – e.g., touching eyes, ears, knees and legs to promote counting in twos. Number games, flash cards and counting blocks were used to promote the creation of number patterns. Running using sacks, putting water in water bottles, using heavy and light objects, short and long objects were all strategies used to develop the concept of measurement. In addition, the learners also actively took part in number rhymes and songs which promoted the development of measurement concepts.

Plays were also used in the teaching / learning of literacy. The respondents reported a number of strategies – including story-telling, role-playing, rhymes and singing, as well as dialogue; learners taking turns in playing games; learners drawing pictures about song or rhymes; learners imitating animal sounds, word matching games and acting out stories; word games, phonic wheels, reading games; making letters with dough; alphabet story, such as Sammy snake, fireman Fred.

In promoting life skills through play, the educators reported using weaving, kneading and pretence play / role playing (e.g. mom and dad, baby, brother, and sister); matching different types of foods, charts, stories and story-telling (including happy and sad stories); activities around environmental management (e.g. collecting litter games); plays calling for help; painting, colouring, handwork (art and crafts); music (songs); thinking and reasoning games; plays involving rendering sympathy and empathy to others; poems- on how to cross the road.

Thus, from these results, as well as the qualitative responses presented earlier, the following findings may be reported:

That the educators constituting the research sample exhibited a very high level of awareness with regard to the importance of:

- (a) both indoor and outdoor play in foundation phase teaching and learning;**
- (b) integrating play with other instructional approaches and strategies for developing foundation phase learners' competencies in literacy, numeracy, life – and other aspects of cognitive, social, interpersonal, motor and language skills;**
- (c) a safe and secure physical environment for learners during both indoor and outdoor play;**
- (d) educators exercising oversight and supervisory duties during learners' play time, to ensure that no harm befalls the learners while they play; and**
- (e) parental involvement and awareness about the centrality of play as a vehicle for developing the various capabilities of foundation phase learners.**

On the second research question, the educator respondents reported that play was important: for children's cognitive (mental) development, developing children's social skills, developing children's motor (manipulative) skills; for developing language skills through play; enabling learners develop inter-personal skills (such as being less aggressive) through play; enabling learners expand their imagination; assisting learners to become more emotionally mature; enhancing children's state of school readiness; allowing learners to express and understand their emotions; helping learners to build trust in self and others; assisting learners to develop initiative; helping learners develop skills in a variety of ways; building and enhancing learners' autonomy and sense of self; teaching learners to accommodate other children's view points; teaching learners to act out different roles – such as anger, hostility, frustration and joy – thereby encouraging the development of important social skills; encouraging learners to take risks; helping learners to reveal their personalities; teaching learners to resolve inner fears and conflicts enabling learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem..

Putting the educators' qualitative and quantitative responses together, it may be said that the following findings constitute what the educators saw as the main benefits of play, for foundation phase learners:

- (a) The enhancement / consolidation of the children's school readiness;
- (b) The enhancement of learners' cognitive development, in its various manifestations – including imagination, initiative curiosity, and learner autonomy;
- (c) The promotion of the development of the learner's social skills – including self-confidence and self-esteem, trust in self and others, taking risks, the management of one's level of aggression, anger, hostility, joy, emotions;
- (d) Enabling the learner to discover his/her real personality – including confronting one's inner fears and conflicts;
- (e) Language development;
- (f) Motor skills development; and
- (g) The development of eye-hand coordination.

The third and final research question sought to find out the play activities which were valued, or liked, most by foundation phase learners, as well as the educational benefits they associated with such play activities. The finding was that the foundation phase learners reported that they liked playing with wire cars, hide and seek, wooden cars, soccer, playing *domino* games, puzzles, snakes and ladders, with water and sand, making necklaces, playing with wooden blocks, tyre racing, climbing on the jungle gym, colouring and painting. playing house, netball, tuck, dolls, blocks, laptops, playing games on touch, hockey, rugby, cycling, ski-boarding, ludo, rugby, athletics, *amagenda*, *arigogo*, hop scotch, *umlabalaba*.

With regard to the major findings from the learners' responses, two stand out:

- That at foundation phase, many games are played across the two sexes – notwithstanding that some were likely exclusively by either sex; and

- **That, although some learners saw the educational value of the plays, especially those undertaken as part of classroom activities, most learners participated in plays, particularly outdoor plays, mainly for leisure and enjoyment.**

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the results of this study according to the research objectives and research questions. On the first research question, it is evident that the educators have displayed a high level of awareness regarding the promotion of play among their learners. Apart from coming up with various ways in which they reported facilitating play among the learners, they also scored quite high against the items to which they responded in the structured part of the questionnaire. The same response profile was also observed with regard to the second research question where they also demonstrated a high level of awareness about the benefits of play within the foundation phase. Similarly, this high level of awareness was also demonstrated by the observed high levels of concurrence with the statements in the questionnaire. It may also be said that the learners supported / corroborated the responses of their educators by indicating ways in which the educators integrated various play activities in the classroom. To this end, therefore, it may be said that this chapter has succeeded in presenting results that answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher presents the interpretation and discussion of the results that were presented in chapter four. The three main objectives of this study were to find out how educators promoted indoor and outdoor play among their learners; what educational benefits the educators associated with those play activities; how these play activities were

valued most by foundation phase learners and what educational benefits learners associated with those play activities.

The interpretation and discussion have been divided into sub-headings according to the themes that were investigated, and those that emerged in the study.

5.2 PROMOTION OF PLAY

The cluster of items falling under this heading was directed towards answering the first research question. The results are interpreted and discussed below.

In this section, the researcher presents the information related to how the foundation phase educators promoted indoor and outdoor play. The results presented below came from both the open-ended and semi-structured sections of the questionnaire, which were integrated around the themes suggested by the research questions. The first results presented, represent the educators' responses pertaining to how they promoted play with reference to Numeracy (Maths), Literacy and Life Skills, which constitute the three pillars of the foundation phase curriculum. The educators supplied both quantitative and qualitative data with respect of specific statements and questions dealing with the promotion of play. The quantitative data were presented in the form of descriptive statistics (diagrams and tables), while qualitative data were represented in the form of direct quotations.

On this research question, the researcher sought to find out whether or not and how, educators promoted play with the reference to numeracy. The presentation of the responses indicated that all the educators dealt with concepts in numeracy when they held market stands and in number patterns. They reported as follows:

Counting: used bean bags, played shop using Rands, litres, and centimetres. They also used building blocks as counters.

Creating patterns: used skipping ropes, (jump and touch head), number games, flash cards and counting blocks.

Measurement: sack racing; bottles of water; heavy or light, short and long objects; the learners actively took part in number rhymes and songs.

Counting games: The children played mathematical games such as touch eyes, ears, knees and legs when they were counting in twos. However, two of the respondents reported that they started numeracy classes by using stones and beans when it was time for numeracy; games like construction blocks, unifix blocks and mathematics games.

According to Spodek, *et a* (1991:198) children learn all sorts of things playing with blocks. They begin to use physical coordination and eye-hand coordination. Through these block building activities, children can learn many concepts - including mathematics concepts as they balance their structures. Such mathematical concepts may include informal measurements of length, area and volume since blocks are representational.

On this item, the researcher sought to find out how educators promoted play through literacy. The information presented in chapter four indicated that educators promoted play through literacy by story-telling, role-playing, rhymes and singing songs and dialogue and learners taking turns in playing games; learners drawing pictures about song or rhymes; learners imitating animal sounds; word matching games; acting out stories and dialogues; stepping stones word games; performing stories at a specific time; word games, phonic wheels, reading games; making letters with dough; communicating using language – including drawing and writing poems, days and months; alphabet story telling / recitals, such as Sammy snake, fireman Fred.

BabyClassroom (n.d.: 2) explains that experts agree that fostering strong oral language skills and literacy awareness in early years is more important than teaching letter sounds and word recognition. Songs, poems, stories, and age-appropriate videos all help foster the child's language development, but the best way to teach the child about language is simply by engaging her/him in meaningful conversation. This view is supported by Simpson (as quoted by BabyClassroom: 2) who contends as follows:

In play, children are using symbolic language. When they pretend that a block cylinder is a bottle of soda and they're going to drink from it, that's a symbol of something, and once children understand symbols, then they can start to

understand that letters stand for a word and that a printed word stands for something they understand.

BabyClassroom further postulates that “when children are exposed to a variety of interesting objects, they begin thinking about relationships like bigger and smaller, more and less, longer and shorter, heavier and lighter” (p. 2). In concurrence, De Witt and Booyesen (2007: 122) aver that play promotes the preschool child’s understanding of certain concepts. They illustrate this by explaining that through play the child, for instance, learns what the concepts of up and down, hard and soft, and big and small are. Thus, they further contend that play contributes to the child’s knowledge about construction, as well as promoting his/her creative abilities, understanding of sorting and classification, exploration and search for solutions and answers.

On this item, the researcher further investigated how educators promoted play through life skills. It has been reported in chapter four that they included play through life skills and they used the following methods: they were weaving, kneading; learners used charts and stories and sorting and matching all types of food; learners told stories about fresh foods; learners took part in activities around taking care of the environment, such as collecting litter games; role-playing, e.g. mom and dad, baby, brother, and sister; telling happy and sad stories; as well as learning / reciting poems on, for example, how to cross the road.

According to Gordon and Brown (2004: 122) the movement exploration done by children enhances children’s ability with regard to (a) problem solving, (b) exercise of divergent thinking, (c) responding at their own age and developmental level, (d) learning to cooperating with others, (e) becoming more aware of others’ viewpoints and ideas, (f) sharing, (g) the notion of taking turns, (h) being self-expressive, (i) being creative, (j) gaining confidence, (k) developing strong muscles, and (l) refining motor skills.

On the item related to whether or not educators allowed their learners to pursue their own interests during play, 90% of the respondents reported that they allowed learners to pursue their own interests and 10% of the respondents reported that they did not do so. Children develop their own dialogue – meaning that when children assume different roles

in play scenarios, they learn about real social interactions that they might not have experienced and they learn about their actions and emotions by using them on “demand” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). According to Puro (2010: 1) teachers should give learners a lot of options and allow them to make their own choices. Fox (2002: 19) supports this view by stating that “children learn best in an environment which allows them to explore, discover, and play ...” Bergen and Fromberg (2009:427) concur in their statement that “at any age, for an activity to count as play, it must be voluntary and self-organized”.

Thus, the results of this study, on this issue, agree with the literature.

On whether or not educators gave learners freedom to choose areas they wanted to work at, 73% of the respondents reported that they gave learners freedom to choose preferred play areas and 27% reported that did not do so. When children are given freedom to play with what they want and work at a place of their choice, this makes them feel very comfortable and able to correct each other when mistakes arise. In her four basic assumptions which serve as guiding premises to teachers; Emslie (2008) contends that learning should be an active, constructive process; that children learn by doing and learn as they construct their own understanding, based on their past experiences. Likewise, Althouse (1981:63) posits that the key thing is to allow the children the freedom to choose their own games, and roles they want to play, but that the rules must be simple.

Regarding whether or not educators guided their learners during play time, 86% of the respondents indicated that they did so. As a facilitator, it is necessary to guide learners during play time so that they are given props and guidance wherever necessary. Indeed, Spodek, et al (1991:198) advise that teachers ought to realise that a lot of support is needed, especially when rules have to be followed.

The researcher also sought to find out whether or not educators used ideas from learners to enhance play activities. The results indicated that the majority (89%) of the educators reported that they used ideas from learners to enhance play activities. Children’s contributions are very important because learners become motivated and feel encouraged that they have valid points which are valued by the educator. Learners have a lot of ideas gathered from their past experiences, peers and adults at home and elsewhere. It also

helps the educator to start the lesson from what the learners know to the unknown. Furthermore, Children learn better when you make the lesson as a way of play than making it very abstract. Using their ideas is one way to ensure that the lesson is pitched at the level of the learners. As Gordon and Browne (2004: 419-420) point out “a good teacher is one who capitalizes on the children’s thoughts and ideas”.

With regard to using examples from children during play activities to enhance learning, 93% of the respondents indicated that they did so. Children learn better when they see examples of things they know or have seen. This issue is related to the question from the open-ended section of the questionnaire which sought to establish the extent to which educators integrated play activities into their lessons.

On the question of educators demonstrating play so that learners could model after them, the majority of the respondents (85%) reported that they served as models by showing learners how to carry out play activities. Indeed, educators should always lead in order to direct learners and help them towards the expected goal. As Huybrecht (2010:1) points out, “there’s no better teacher than a good role model.” Learners learn faster by imitating the educator and through this, they gain confidence. As a result of role modelling, mediation is done by children as they try to copy what they see.

With regard to whether or not educators used guided questions to assist learners understand play activities, the majority’s response (82%) was that they did so. Learners need to understand what they are expected to do. Therefore, by asking guided questions the educator gets to know the level of the learners’ understanding. Questions enable educators to ascertain how much children already know. In turn, this will help the learners towards the expected goals - as Gordon and Brown (2004) point out, a good teacher asks questions and clarifies with children what is happening. In the same vein, Bredekamp (2005) sees the role of the educator during children’s play as that of an observer. In this regard, she avers as follows:

In the case of play, teachers must observe carefully to determine whether, when, how, and with whom to intervene. The roles of stage manager and co-player are

particularly important to ensure that mature socio-dramatic play develops and is sustained and that individual children who may need additional support to become more skilled players receive it. .. (Bredekamp,2005: 20).

Gordon and Browne (2004: 419-420) sum it all up very well by stating that a good teacher is “one who guides the play, and does not direct or dominate the situation or overwhelm children by participation.”

Another point related to whether or not the educators left it to the learners to get started at the beginning of their play activities. Here, 61% of the educators reported that they left it to learners to get started while 39% did not, implying that they assisted them from the beginning. Gordon and Brown (2004: 419-420) recommend leaving it to the learners to get started on play activities. They argue that learners need to learn by experimenting on, for instance, what it is like to be a nurse or a policeman; that way this gives learners an opportunity to acquire social skills; learn how to enter a group and be accepted by others; and work out the social give-and-take, which is the key to successful group interaction (Cohen & Stern, 1983: 219).

On allowing learners to resolve their conflicts during play, 66% of the respondents reported that they allowed learners resolve their own conflicts during play; 34% did not do so. According to BabyClassroom (n.d.) allowing learners to resolve issues on their own is very important, but one needs to step in once in a while to avoid physical violence. However, as children enter preschool years, they should be given more space to resolve conflicts among themselves Puro (2010). Gordon and Brown (2004) add by stating that a good teacher helps the children to verbalise their feelings as they work through conflicts. This is also related to another item which asked the educators to indicate whether or not asked learners questions that led them to finding things out for themselves. On this subsequent item, an overwhelming 98% of the respondents reported that they asked questions that led learners to finding things out for themselves. This was a good response rate because encouraging learners to find answers for themselves is a good way to help them explore their inner strengths and emotions. Further, it helps learners to think, by guiding them with well calculated questions, in addition to enabling the

educators to know the learners' level of thinking. Gordon and Brown, (2004) add that the teacher should expand the play potential by making statements and asking questions that lead to discovery and exploration.

On whether or not the educators ensured that discipline was maintained while learners played, 88% of the respondents reported that they did so. Discipline is an important aspect of teaching, training and coaching. It includes correcting unacceptable behaviour (Drescher, 1991). Discipline is important to ensure that all children get an equal opportunity to play and learn (Gordon & Brown, 2004). Thus, a good teacher should interpret his / her children's behaviour aloud, when necessary.

Another aspect of the study was to ascertain whether or not educators encouraged learners to interact with one another during play. This also drew an 85% favourable response rate, suggesting that the respondents encouraged learners to interact with one another during play. When children interact with one another they build friendships and trust among themselves. They also develop social skills. A good teacher encourages learners to interact with each other (Gordon & Brown, 2004).

In promoting play, the educators were asked to indicate whether or not they gave learners verbal cues when they (learners) were not sure with some play activities. To this, an overwhelming 90% of the respondents reported that they did so. It is important to give verbal cues to learners so that they know what is expected of them. According to Gordon and Brown (2004) a good teacher gives verbal cues to enable learners to follow through an idea.

With regard to ensuring that play activities take place in a safe and secure place, 98% of the respondents reported that they ensured that play activities took place in a safe and secure place. Safety is the most important part of children's play that should be taken into consideration. Learners should not get injured. They cannot play safely outside of their homes unless they are under close adult supervision and protection (Ginsburg, 2007).

Lastly, the researcher also sought to find out whether or not the educators encouraged parents to allow children to engage in a variety of play interests at home without being pressured. There was also an overwhelming (85%) positive response to this item. According to Ginsburg (2007:182-191) “teachers should encourage parents to allow children to explore a variety of interests in a balanced way, without feeling pressured to excel in each area.” However, it is important to note that “although adults may provide the space and objects with which their children play, during play children practice their power to self-direct, self-organize, exert self control, and negotiate with others” (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009: 428). The respondents’ views are, thus, supported by the literature on this subject.

Play is very important in the child’s life because, wherever the children are, their job is to play. Play helps the child to find out about him or herself and explore the world around him/her. The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) – quoted by Isenberg & Quisenberry (1988) posits that play is an essential and integral part of all children’s healthy growth, development, and learning across all ages, domains, and culture. This is so, given that play exacts a dynamic, active, and constructive behaviour from the participants (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 1988).

5.3 BENEFITS OF INDOOR AND OUTDOOR PLAY

The items falling under this heading were directed towards answering the second research question. The results are interpreted and discussed below.

A statement was put to the respondents with a view to soliciting their views regarding the importance of play in learners’ cognitive development. The results showed that 100% of the respondents agreed with the statement that play was important for learners’ cognitive development. Learners enhance their cognitive skills by thinking while enjoying themselves. It allows them to think and reason critically and coherently, as well as improve their fine motor skills. Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002: 33) contend that “constructivists believe that play is necessary for cognitive growth.” Vygotsky sees play as a medium through which cognitive development is facilitated, in the sense that not

only do children practise what they already know, but through play they also learn new things (Vandenberg, 1986). Children achieve affiliation through negotiating their play together; cognitive growth is achieved through, *inter alia*, “using puns, jokes, exaggerations, and other world play, [through which] they show knowledge of the world and gain power and delight in transforming that knowledge in incongruous ways” (Bergen & Fromberg, 2009: 428).

There was also 100% positive response regarding the importance of play in developing learners’ social skills. Learners learn to socialise, communicate their ideas with others, appreciate certain things and develop new skills of communication which they did not have previously. In this regard, Althouse (1981) contends that children share playthings with other children, and that they tend to solve conflicts with other children through verbalisation rather than physical aggression. This view is supported by de Witt (2009) who avers that through play a young child learns to approach the world from different perspectives, and discovers that different views of others are not necessarily wrong.

On the question regarding whether or not educators thought play was important for developing children’s motor skills, 98% of the respondents agreed with the statement that play was important for developing learners’ motor skills. Indeed, children develop their bodies as they play, build up their muscles, and become healthier than those who do not play. In the process, their fine and gross motor skills are also enhanced. As Gordon and Brown (2004) point out, basic motor skills develop in the early childhood years and form the foundation for movement and motor proficiency. By so doing, the movement exploration done by children during play enhances children’s ability with regard to refining motor skills (Gordon & Brown, 2004).

The researcher wanted to find out whether or not educators thought learners developed language skills through play. There was a 100% agreement with the statement. Through play children communicate with adults and peers, and are able to answer questions and respond to instructions. They become active participants. As Fromberg and Gullo (1992) contend, play enhances language development. This view is supported by

BabyClassroom (n.d.: 2) who state that “fostering strong oral language skills and literacy awareness in the early years is more important than teaching letter sounds and word recognition, songs, poems, stories all help foster child’s language development.”

On whether or not the educators saw the importance of play in the development of interpersonal skills, 96% of the respondents agreed that learners developed inter-personal skills through play. Indeed, children learn to respect others and wait for their turns without dominating the situation. Furthermore, they learn to listen to others’ view-points, share, be patient, and be co-operative. In this regard, Spodek, *et al* (1991: 190) observe that through play children learn to get along with one another, and discover that other children have points of view that are different from their own. Consequently, they learn to revise their views of the world and negotiate differences.

On the question of whether the educators thought play prevented learners from expanding their imagination, 86% of the respondents disagreed. This was one of the negative statements put before the respondents. Thus, by disagreeing with this statement, the educators affirmed the importance of play in expanding children’s imagination. Indeed, imaginative play activities help to develop the child’s imagination. It is mainly through play that their imagination expands. In fantasy play, for instance, children create their own objects according to their imagination - such as a child imagining him/herself as a bird and using his/her arms as wings (de Witt & Booyesen, 2007). This is also supported by Simpson (as quoted by BabyClassroom: n.d.: 2) by stating that in play, children are using symbolic language. When they pretend that a block cylinder is a bottle of soda and they are going to drink from it, that’s a symbol of something, and once children understand symbols, then they can start to understand that letters stand for a word and that a printed word stands for something they understand. By the same token, Frost (1992: 48) concurred by stating that “play is the vehicle for the development of imagination and intelligence, language, social skills, and perceptual-motor abilities in infants and young children”. Garvey (1977) adds by stating that play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, physical, cognitive and emotional strength. In this regard, therefore, Garvey sees play as being important to

healthy brain development and avers that, through play, children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them.

Another issue was whether or not educators held the view that learners became more emotionally mature through play. To this, 87% of the respondents agreed that learners became more emotionally mature through play. This finding is supported by literature, which contends that through play learners learn to be independent and consider others' feelings, particularly when dealing with conflict situations (Spodek, *et al.*, 1991:190).

On whether or not educators thought play slowed down children's state of school readiness, 84% of the respondent disagreed. This was another negative statement in the questionnaire, so by disagreeing with the statement, it could be said that the educators held the view that play promoted school readiness through inter alia, children developing muscles to hold pens; by thinking and becoming more independent. Lots of concepts are learnt during play which should be re-enforced during formal lessons. Play enhances all aspects of children's development – such as social, emotional, physical and cognitive (McInnes, 2011). In particular, the vital contribution that mature play makes in the enhancement of children's state of school readiness is in its promotion of 'self-regulation', which Shonkoff and Phillips (2000: 26) see as the "cornerstone of early childhood development that cuts across all domains of behaviour".

One other issue, the researcher wanted to establish was whether or not educators thought play allowed learners to express and understand their emotions. The results indicated a 96% agreement with the statement. During play learners display positive emotions when everything happens correctly, or display negative emotions if something goes wrong. Thus, play teaches the child to control his/her emotions. Children learn to communicate with their play mates and how to handle the situations around them. In concurrence, de Witt and Booyesen (2007:123) opine that through play children learn to express and understand their emotions; that play teaches the child to control his/her environment, which has great emotional value for him/her in the sense that the child uses his/her imagination and makes his/her own choices and decisions.

As an extension of the above, the researcher further sought to find out whether or not educators helped learners to build trust in self and others. The results yielded a 94% agreement with the statement. One aspect of building trust relates to team work and team spirit. It is generally understood that play allows learners to work as a team and become confident of themselves (Gordon & Brown, 2004). Further, Gordon and Brown (2004:419) see play as the cornerstone of learning with an understanding that it builds trust in self and others. In similar vein, Spodek, *et al* (1991: 190) observe that through play, young children learn to get along with one another. They also learn to share and cooperate.

A third negative statement in the questionnaire sought to elicit the educators' views as to whether or not they thought play prevented learners from developing initiative. On this item, 86% of the respondents disagreed, suggesting that in their opinion play encouraged initiative and motivated learners to take leading roles in situations - including creating their own rules and finding their own solutions to problems as they played. From the literature, Gordon and Browne (2004: 419), see play as the vehicle through which the child learns to take a different viewpoints on a matter; resolve inner fears and conflicts; build trust in self and others; reveal his/her personality; develop a sense of autonomy; take risks; act out anger, hostility, frustration, joy and other inner feelings; gain self-control; develop competence in a number of areas; and take initiative.

On the question regarding whether or not educators thought learners developed skills in a variety ways from play activities, there was a100% affirmative response. This comes from the many ways in which play is understood to manifest itself. In some cases, learners imitate role-models, and this may make them stronger - physically, emotionally and psychologically. In addition, such roles may develop their language and social skills, as well as enhance their emotional development. Furthermore, through play, children may get to know new ways of communication, socialising and negotiating- in addition to developing critical thinking and leadership skills (Tepperman,2007).

The fourth negative statement stated that play destroyed learners' sense of autonomy. On this item, 76% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. This was in concurrence with the literature which posits that through play, learners develop leadership skills and learn how to interact with one another, as well as learn to control their emotions Gordon and Brown (2004) enunciate the value of play for the young child's social development as offering the young child the opportunity to try on a variety of roles and personalities; allowing the child to learn co-operating and taking turns, giving the child an opportunity to lead and follow; and helping the child to verbalise his/her needs, among others.

De Witt and Booyesen (2007: 122) echo the above points and aver that, in particular, play promotes the preschool child's understanding of a number of concepts. This is in alignment with Vygotsky who sees play as a medium through which cognitive development is facilitated (Vandenberg, 1986). Likewise, Tsao (2008: 515) contends that the value of play is manifest in children's development of language and literacy skills which "are the core of children's experience and, apparently, children's literacy skills build from their knowledge of spoken language".

Regarding whether or not educators taught learners to accommodate other children's view points, an overwhelming 99% of the respondents agreed with the statement. Indeed, play teaches learners to listen to others and take one another's views seriously by inter alia acknowledging that other people have different views of things (Spodek, *et al.*, 1991). In this regard, Spodek, et al, opine as follows:

Through play, young children learn to get along with one another. They discover that other children have points of view that are different from their own. They learn to revise their views of the world and negotiate differences. They also learn to share and cooperate. Play also helps to extend children's physical skills. Through play, children learn to manipulate a variety of toys and use their bodies in novel situations, becoming skilful as they engage in play activities (p. 190).

In concurrence, Gordon and Brown (2004: 122) add that the movement exploration done by children enhances their ability with regard to (a) problem solving, (b) exercising divergent thinking, (c) responding at their own age and developmental level, (d) learning

to cooperating with others, (e) becoming more aware of others' view points and ideas, (f) sharing, (g) the notion of taking turns, (h) being self-expressive, (i) being creative, (j) gaining confidence, (k) developing strong muscles, and (l) refining motor skills.

On the question of whether or not educators encouraged the development of important social skills through role-play, 100% of the respondents agreed with the statement. Role-play, dialogue and play acting reveal different emotions through play, learners are encouraged to open up and express their feelings - thereby learning to better express themselves. Thus, Gordon and Brown (2004) opine that social development begins at birth, and that within the first few months the baby starts to smile and plays in response to a human voice. They further explain that children imitate what they see and adapt social expectations to their own personality. In addition, the family and caregivers, teachers, peers, and the community all contribute to children's social world and the values and attitudes that are developed (Gordon & Brown, 2004).

The fifth negative statement to which the educators were asked to respond stated that play discouraged learners from taking risks. In response, 70% of the educators disagreed with the statement, thereby suggesting that they saw play as encouraging learners to explore and take such risks as they wouldn't have taken in normal circumstances. Indeed, play encourages children to face any challenges that they may come across (Gordon & Brown, 2004: 419).

On the question of personality, the researcher sought to find out whether or not educators thought that play helped learners to reveal their personalities. On this, 99% of the respondents agreed with the statement. To this end, Fromberg (1990: 223) claims that play is the "ultimate integrator of human experience", meaning that when children play, they draw upon their past experiences of the things they have done, have seen others do, have read about, or seen on television, and that they use these experiences to build games, play scenarios, and engage in activities. Thus, through play learners display leadership skills, positive attitudes, develop an interest in aesthetics, and learn to handle disappointments.

The educators were also asked to indicate whether or not play taught learners to resolve inner fears and conflicts during play time. In response, 96% agreed that play taught learners to resolve their inner fears and conflicts. Indeed, during play, learners are able to open up and face their fears and, accordingly, attempt to resolve them. Some plays relate to learners' problems and, thus, get revealed only when learners engage in certain plays. In this regard, Puro (2010:1) observes as follows:

Problem solving is also crucial for healthy social development, and children can only learn positive social skills by playing with others. Parents can help by offering little ones tools to navigate emotionally-charged areas like sharing and hurt feelings, then stepping back and allowing them to resolve issues on their own.

The last item sought to establish whether or not educators thought that play allowed learners to develop self-confidence and self-esteem. By and large, this was an extension of the previous item which focused on learners' ability to face and resolve their inner fears. On the present item, the results showed a 100% agreement with the position that, through play, learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem. In support of this view, Puro (2010:1) contends that play allows learners to develop in a number of positive ways – including in self-worth and self-confidence. Thus, Puro advises that when an adult joins in a child's play, the child should be allowed to take the lead. When parents or teachers respect children's imaginary plays and allow them to be in charge this provides them with an opportunity to develop a healthy self-esteem, and by entering the child's world on his/her terms, an adult helps nurture a long-enduring strong bond with the child (Puro, 2010: 1). Indeed, as Garvey (1977) points out, when play is allowed to be child driven, children practise decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue. Overall, therefore, it may be said that the research sample responded in ways that concurred with the views expressed in the literature, regarding the benefits of play for foundation phase learners.

5.4 PAY ACTIVITIES VALUED MOST BY FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS AND ASSOCIATED EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

On this third and final research question, the researcher sought to find out the play activities which were valued most by foundation phase learners, as well as the educational benefits they associated with such play activities.

As reported in the previous chapter, the play activities learners valued most included *amagenda*, *arigogo*, *umlabalaba*, hockey, netball, skate-boarding, rugby, soccer, athletics, tyre racing, ludo, dominoes, and skipping rope. The full list of play activities valued by the learners is provided in chapter four, Table 4.5.

Lever (1978: 471) reports that “boys’ play is more complex than girls’ play, as indexed by such attributes as role differentiation, interdependence between players, size of play group, explicitness of goals, number of rules, and team formation”. It was for this reason that the researcher presented the play activities valued most by boys and girls separately in Table 4.5. However, the researcher was struck by a fairly high number of plays that were commonly cited by both sexes. This shows that at the foundation phase, a number of plays are commonly enjoyed, perhaps equally, by both boys and girls. This is in contrast to Lever (1978: 481) who reported that “girls’ play and games are very different ... Boys experience face-to-face confrontations – often opposing a close friend – and must learn to depersonalize the attack. They must practice self-control and sportsmanship; in fact some of the boys in this study described the greatest lesson in team sports as learning to ‘keep your cool’... Girls have far less experience with interpersonal competition.” Nonetheless, Lever (1978: 481) is quick to observe that “that the sexes develop different social skills in childhood due to their play patterns is logical conjecture; that those social skills might carry over and influence their adult behaviour is pure speculation.” It is possible that this is the case for older boys and girls, but not supported by the findings of this study; or, perhaps, this differentiation occurs at a higher age than foundation phase.

For the purpose of discussing the play activities valued most by the learners, the researcher has adopted the four play-type classification of Smilansky (as quoted by de Witt & Booyesen, 1994: 130), which imply a cognitive hierarchy, and are seen as a basis for the child's cognitive development, namely, (a) functional play, (b) constructive play, (c) fantasy play, and (d) competitive play, with rules.

To Mildred Parten (Fox, 2002: 22), play may be categorised as connoting **onlooker behaviour, solitary independent, parallel, associative, and cooperative**. Emslie (2008: 4) describes five characteristics of play as **process orientation, intrinsically motivated, non-literal quality, experimentation with rules, and active engagement**. Foster (1930: 248) came up with a number of categories for play activities, as follows: **catching, throwing, kicking, chasing, fleeing, hiding, seeking, jumping, hopping, folk dances, informal dramatization, following directions, table games, very active play, sliding, rather inactive** – such as painting and sewing, and **group games**. Subsequently, Caillois (1958) came up with four categories of play activities, namely: (a) *Agôn* (Competitive), (b) *Alea* (Chance), (c) *Mimicry* (Simulative) and (d) *Ilinx* (Vertigo).

As already expounded in chapter 2, there are other ways in which play activities may be classified and categorized. For instance, Lehman and Witty (in Foster, 1930: 253) reported finding that the play activities engaged in most often by children between the ages of 8½ and 10½ involved (a) pleasurable body movements, usually rhythmical; (b) hiding and finding; (c) imitation of adults; (d) a relatively high degree of skill; (e) efforts at construction; (f) activities for enjoyment which depend primarily on sense organ stimulation; (g) tag games; and (h) singing and ring games.

Cass (1971: 33, 39) describes types of play in terms of **solitary, spectator, parallel play, associative** and **genuine cooperative play**, while Seefeldt and Barbour (1986: 256) describe three categories of play, based on the works of Piaget, as **practice play, symbolic play** and **games with rules**.

However, as stated above, in this discussion, the researcher has chosen Smilansky's classification, which should not be construed as being absolutely categorical. The classifications have been made from the point of view of stressing a particular attribute. It is within this context that the play activities valued most by foundation phase learners, as reflected in Table 4.15, are presented and discussed below.

Functional Play

From Table 4.5, the following play activities have been classified under this type of play: cycling (learning to ride a bicycle – i.e. pedalling and balancing), skipping rope (also under competitive play), doing colouring and painting, playing on swings (including tyre-swings), playing scratch games, wooden cars, wire cars, and other manipulative play – such as throwing a ball (netball), kicking the ball (soccer), catching the ball.

Ungerer and Sigman (1981: 320) define functional play as “the appropriate use of an object or the conventional association of two or more objects, such as a spoon to feed a doll, or placing a teacup on a saucer.” Thus, functional play deals with the mastery of repeated muscle movements, which are sometimes construed as ‘nonsocial’, ‘solitary’ or ‘sensorimotor’ movements (Rubin, 1982: 652). As such, at this level, the focus is on the mastery of the attendant physical movements by way of enhanced dexterity or good balance and coordination. The cognitive element is regarded to be low (Rubin, 1982). However, the notion of functional play as being imbedded mainly at the level of Piaget's sensorimotor stage of developed has, over the years, given way to the realisation that – at least in-so-far as play is concerned, the distinction between functional play and pretence play, for instance, may be quite thin, indeed. As Williams, Reddy and Costall (2001: 67) observe, Piaget “proposed that symbols emerge by means of a progressive differentiation between the ‘signifier’ (the actual object or action used by the child) and the ‘signified’ (the absent object or action being represented) which is mediated by a number of transitional behaviours). Williams, *et al* (2001: 67) report further that Vygotsky was also of a similar view, by portraying “the development of play as one involving a gradual separation of meaning from the object and of meaning from action.” This perspective is echoed by Althouse (1981: 46), who surmises that “play is important for intellectual

development, and that he (Piaget) sees it as the bridge between sensorimotor development and symbolic thought: a stick becomes a gun, a rope and snake.”

Contrary to the views of Piaget and Vygotsky, “a radical departure from previous assumptions of a gradual evolution from simple to progressively more elaborate play behaviours” has now emerged (Williams, *et al.*, 2001: 68). It is, therefore, a good finding of this study that the sampled children came up with a number of play activities under this category. From the above discussion, functional play is an extremely important part of the child’s development, particularly a foundation phase child. Certainly, as Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002: 34) observe, brain research “confirms that physical activity - moving, stretching, walking can actually enhance the learning process”. Thus, they further go ahead to recommend that primary age children need plenty of opportunities to move, and to engage in recreational activities – as normally availed to them during school recess, classroom breaks, group games, and physical education.

Constructive Play

Playing with clay, wood, paper, card boards, puzzles, building blocks, stringing beads, making necklaces, water and sand, have been classified as falling under constructive play. Constructive play affords the child to further develop and refine his/her motor skills. In this regard, Gordon and Browne (1989: 329) explain the value of play, in the physical development of the child, as follows:

It provides challenges, it requires active use of the body, it builds the child’s fine and gross motor skills, the child learns to gain control of his//her body, it allows for repetition and practice of skills, it refines eye-hand co-ordination, it develops the child’s self-awareness, it is an outlet for energy.

Indeed, children use fine and gross motor skills in their play – and by so-doing, they are developed further. It appears that a child’s motor skills are developed through both functional and constructive play – as de Witt and Booysen (2007:122) point out, “play contributes largely to the young child’s sensorimotor development – through activities

such as throwing the balls, lifting and carrying around objects, running around, climbing, and construction play.”

With reference to **sand** and **water**, Spodek, *et al* (1991) surmise that these materials are used quite often under constructive play, and can be used both indoors and outdoors. When it is indoors, they are usually put in a large bowl, set on a table or on a water table. When it is outdoors, it gives children much freedom since there is more space. This also makes it possible to use more sand or water. As such, outdoors children can play in a large sand box, or a sand pit, taking into account the height so that it is low enough for the children to reach. Children love playing with sand because they don't need a tool – just using their hands, they can feel it, mould it – and they can model damp sand. When necessary, tools such as pails, shovels, strainers, funnels, empty cans, and others, may also be used to give the children a lot more scope for what they can do with sand and water. Typically, “one of the major characteristics of young children's play is that whatever is in their environment can be used as play materials” (Bergen, 2008: 87). Thus, indoors or out, **water play** can be provided-with water made available in plastic tubs. In here, children can use hoses, funnels, plastic boats and other floating objects. Rules can be established for children who are using sand and water. For example, they may be instructed not to splash water on others, or wet themselves. Similarly, they may also be instructed not to throw sand at others. Children should be given plastic aprons, or any other protective clothing, to wear so that they do not mess themselves – or others (Spodek, *et al*, 1991: 197).

Fantasy / Symbolic Play

The play activities categorised under this play type were playing house, nurse, doctor, mother, father, fire fighter, playing with dolls.

De Witt and Booyesen (2007) view fantasy, or pretence, play as one of the forms of symbolic thought, as it enables the preschool child to bring the reality of the world into the sphere of interest in, and knowledge of, his/her own small world. De Witt and Booyesen also see symbolic play as an essential part of a child's language development.

In the same vein, Gordon & Browne (2004: 416) also contend that representation and symbolic thinking take on pretend roles and situations.

Referring to the work of Leslie, Williams, *et al* (2001: 68) report that Leslie argues that symbolic or pretence play “requires not only a first order representation of the pen as a rocket, for example, but also a second-order representation about this representation (a metarepresentation), namely, that the representation is not true.” Thus, in distinguishing between functional and fantasy or symbolic play, Williams, *et al.*, opine that functional play does not necessarily involve pretence, given that “the child may regard a toy cooker, for example, as a small, yet real cooker.”

During fantasy play, children react to each other socially. They think about what they are doing, or are going to do. They use language to talk to each other or to themselves and they very often respond emotionally to the play activity. The integration of all these different types of behaviours is key to the cognitive development of young children. This form of play is, therefore, quite sophisticated with regard to cognitive demand. Williams, *et al* (2001: 67-68), for instance, identify three major trends in the development of symbolic / pretence play: “*decontextualization*, which allows pretend play to occur with decreasing environmental support, *decentration*, where symbolic actions are freed from the child’s body, allowing the use of dolls and other people for expressing pretend actions and allowing the adoption of others’ actions; and *integration*, leading to sequentially and later hierarchically organised play.” Another way, attributable to Leslie, according to Williams, *et al* (2001: 68), sees symbolic play also as taking three forms: “object substitution, the attribution of false properties, and the attribution of presence to imaginary objects.”

De Witt and Booyen (2007:123) make the following observations regarding pretend play:

A preschooler imitates the social roles of others by putting her-/himself into someone else’s shoes. Such pretence play enhances the child’s empathy for others; s/he learns how to function in a group and how to be accepted.

Thus, according to Bergen (2002: 1):

Pretend play requires the ability to transform objects and actions symbolically; it is furthered by interactive social dialogue and negotiation; and it involves role taking, script knowledge, and improvisation. Many cognitive strategies are exhibited during pretence, such as joint planning, negotiation, problem solving, and goal seeking.

Certainly, fantasy or symbolic play brings together a number of skills and abilities. The foundation phase learners in this study were found to already be engaged in some form or other of fantasy / symbolic play. This is an important finding in that they stand to reap the benefits, enunciated above, that are associated with this form of play. As Verenikina, *et al* (2003: 2) observe, “while freely engaging in play children acquire the foundations of self reflection and abstract thinking, develop complex communication and metacommunication skills, learn to manage their emotions and explore the roles and rules of functioning in adult society.”

Competitive Play:

Climbing, cycling, board-skating, playing a game domino, playing hide and seek, skipping rope, swimming, athletics, skate-boarding, ludo, *umlabalaba* (and other board games), *arigogo*, snakes and ladders, *amagenda*, and hoola loop.

In particular, board games are mostly competitive and provide children with practice in basic skills of counting, adding, reading, writing, and concentration, as well as in problem solving and strategic thinking (Spodek, *et al*, 1991: 198). Certainly, this is the case with board games like *umlabalaba*, played as explained in the previous chapter. The same applies to the other play activities listed above. The benefits include the further development of the child’s fine and gross motor skills – such as eye-hand co-ordination, personality, imagination, self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem, self-control, autonomy; as well as many positive feelings like enjoyment, happiness, freedom, relaxation, excitement, and entertainment; an ability to appreciate different viewpoints on a matter, ability to resolve inner fears and conflicts, ability to build trust in self and

others, opportunity to reveal one's real personality, ability to take risks, ability to act out anger, hostility, frustration and joy, and ability to take initiative; building competence in a number of ways (Garvey, 1977; Frost, 1992; Gordon & Browne, 1989, 2004; de Witt & Booyesen, 2007; Tekin & Tekin, 2007). Although to a limited extent, and not expressed in these words, the learners demonstrated understanding of play as being associated with these benefits.

However, one more point that needs to be mentioned is that planned play activities need to be perceived as such by the learners themselves. This only happens when such play activities meet the learners' own conceptions of play. For instance, Wing (1995: 223) reports as follows regarding her study:

Young children perceived classroom activities in terms of what they considered to be work and what they considered to be play. Children identified many messages they received from the classroom context, their peers, and their teachers that contributed to their distinctions. Distinguishing elements included the obligatory nature of activities, the cognitive and physical effort required, the involvement and evaluation of the teacher, and the fun children experienced while engaged in activities. Children saw some activities as "in-between" work and play.

The importance of planning for authentic play activities for learners can, therefore, not be overemphasized.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined and discussed the results and findings of this study in detail. It has been gratifying to note that the majority of educators who participated in this study reported to be engaged in the various activities that promote play among their learners, in alignment with the literature reviewed. Similarly, the benefits that both the educators and their learners associated with the various play activities that the learners valued most, were also supported by the literature. Certainly, in contrast to passive entertainment, play builds active, healthy bodies (Garvey, 1977) – and this has been the dominant finding from the responses given by both participating educators and learners. Consequently, the

researcher is satisfied that with the necessary support given to both the educators and learners, play can make a significant contribution to the development of the learners. The biggest contribution this study has made is to establish that there is close alignment between the views of the participants and what the literature says. Thus, what remains is to ensure that the positive views held by both educators and learners are supported and actualised, in practice, through the provisioning of the necessary infrastructure and play materials – in all their manifestations.

CHAPTER 6

SYNTHESIS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a synthesis of the whole study, conclusion and recommendations.

6.2 AIMS

This study investigated the ways in which Foundation Phase educators promoted indoor and outdoor play for their learners; which play activities the foundation phase educators valued most and what educational benefits they associated with these play activities; and which play activities were valued most by foundation phase learners and the educational benefits they associated with these play activities.

6.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptually, this research drew from both theories of play and different perspectives of various writers and researchers.

6.3.1 Theories of Play

Historically, play has been seen as the main mode of education for young children, and this view “has underpinned early childhood programmes since the initial kindergarten developed by Froebel” (McInnes, 2011: 4). McInnes goes further and states that “this tradition has continued, albeit in different guises, through the work of pioneers in early childhood education such as Montessori” (p. 3). To this end, McInnes (2011: 4) avers that “within the realm of early childhood education play is viewed as essential for learning and development.”

Within the horizons of living memory, McInnes (2011) traces the theories of play back to the **surplus energy theory** which is credited to H. Spencer. According to this theory, play was seen as “a product of superfluous energy left over after all other basic needs have been met” (McInnes, 2011: 3). Thus, the purpose of play was merely to exhaust the excess energy which the children had, aplenty (Verenikina, *et al.*, 2003). This theory is credited for the introduction of break time and recess on the school timetable and school

year, respectively, on the basis that children needed ‘timeout’ to reduce their surplus energy. Children’s restlessness and short attention spans were taken as evidence for the need for break time and recess.

Then came the **renewal of energy theory** in terms of which play was meant to “alleviate boredom while the natural motor functions of the body are restored” (Verenikina, *et al*, 2003: 6-7). This was followed by the **recreation / relaxation theory** which took the view that play was “an activity which occurs after work in order to relax and build up further energy” (McInnes, 2011: 3).

The **practice for adulthood / recapitulation theory** of play was “one which saw the function of play as “cathartic” and posited that “through playing children acted out evolutionary stages”, against the pre-exercise theory of Groos which “explained play as an opportunity to practice adult activities and prepare for adult life” (McInnes, 2011: 3). Verenikina, *et al* (2003: 7) see this theory of play as focusing on the importance of affording children “opportunities to develop skills necessary for functioning as adults.” According to McInnes, although the above theories are generally referred to as “classical theories”, and may, thus, be seen as old theories, she avers that the types of play activities which undergirded these theoretical perspectives can still “be seen in children’s play today and many early years practitioners will justify play in the curriculum in this way” (McInnes, 2011: 3).

Subsequently, the **psychoanalytic theories** of Freud and Erikson have defined play “as providing a cathartic function enabling children to explore socially unacceptable and aggressive impulses in a safe context thereby gaining mastery over traumatic events” (McInnes, 2011: 3). As Verenikina, *et al* (2003: 7) point out, from the psychoanalytic theoretical point of view, “play reduces anxiety by giving children a sense of control over their world and an acceptable way to express forbidden impulses.”

On his part, Piaget’s theory of play, derived from his concepts of assimilation and adaptation, which were an extension of his work on intellectual development – thereby

reflecting levels of play in relation to corresponding levels of intellectual development (Verenikina, *et al.*, 2003; McInnes, 2011). Thus, Piaget's characterisation of play places his theory under cognitive theory. To this end, Verenikina, *et al* (2003: 7) posit that from Piaget's cognitive point of view, "play consolidates learning that has already taken place while allowing for the possibility of new learning in a relaxed atmosphere."

According to McInnes (2011: 3), "Berlyne's **arousal modulation theory of play** ... attempted to explain the relationship between internal motivation, exploration and play and significant work." According to Verenikina, *et al.*, (2003: 7) this theory sees play as serving the purpose of keeping "the body at an optimal state of arousal, relieving boredom and reducing uncertainty." They further explain that Bateson's **communication** and **meta-communication theories**, expounded in 1976, saw play as promoting the "ability to comprehend multiple layers of meaning", while Mead's **theory of self**, which was presented earlier, in 1934, envisioned play as centered on promoting the "sense of self in terms of personal identity and social relations with others" (Verenikina, *et al.*, 2003: 4).

Like Piaget, Vygotsky "also saw play in relation to intellectual development however, he emphasised pretend play and the importance of language and social interaction in play" (McInnes, 2011: 3). Indeed, as Verenikina, *et al.*, aver, Vygorsky's "**socio-cultural theory** views play as promoting "abstract thought by separating meaning from objects and actions." Further, this theoretical perspective contends that, through play, abstract thought is developed and enhanced by using actions and objects in symbolic ways – thereby providing for children to reach beyond their actual development in their cognition and self-regulation. In addition, it is envisaged that, through play, "children achieve a mental representation of social roles and the rules of society" (Verenikina, *et al.*, 2003: 7).

6.3.2 Perspectives of Various Writers and Researchers

Biersteker (2003: 4) sees ECE as a major contributing factor towards the emancipation of people from the shackles of poverty. In her own words, ECE "holds particular potential

for children living in poverty, as it can enhance their long-term capacity to participate fully in the realisation of their rights and abilities”. Accordingly, she further contends that exposing children to appropriate early stimulation, nutrition, health and care through a range of services has many benefits, which can reduce the need later for costly medical, remedial and welfare services. Beyond this, ECE is believed to have a positive and enduring effect on subsequent learning as a child progresses along the school grades. At the centre of good ECE programmes is play. In this regard, Sturgess (2003: 50) surmises that “recent research provides additional evidence of the strong connections between quality of play in preschool years and children’s readiness for school instruction”.

Literature from around the world points to the importance of play in ECE (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999). As Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002: 33) observe, “decades of research has documented that play has a crucial role in the optimal growth, learning, and development of children from infancy through adolescence”. In the same vein, Althouse (1981) posits that play is an active, self initiated and pleasurable activity. In her view, such an activity must be satisfying for it to qualify as play, and when the activity ceases to be satisfying, it also ceases to be play. This view is supported by Garvey (1977: 5) who gives a description of play as an activity which (a) is positively valued by the player, (b) is self-motivated, (c) is freely chosen, (d) is engaging, and (e) has certain systematic relations to what is not play. On her part, McInnes (2011: 4) observes that “play is valued worldwide and is viewed as a fundamental human right for all children as articulated in article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

Many of the characteristics of play that Garvey enunciates above are also echoed by Seefeldt and Barbour (1986: 251-252) who advance six characteristics of play as being (a) **intrinsically motivating** (b) **enjoyable** (c) **flexible** (d) **voluntary** (e) **non-literal**, and (f) **verbal**, (g) **mental**, or (h) **physical**. In being intrinsically motivated, this means that the play activity is not goal-directed; and play is enjoyable in the sense that the child takes pleasure in the activity, although the outward manifestation of this pleasure can vary. With regard to flexibility, this means that a play activity may vary from situation to situation, and from person to person. Play is voluntary in the sense that the individual chooses the activity that s/he wishes to engage in; it is non-literal in the sense that it may

be symbolic of real events or situations. Lastly, play qualifies as play when it is a **verbal, mental, or physical** activity.

De Witt (2009:132) posits that through play the young child learns to approach the world from different perspectives, and discovers that the different views of others are not necessarily wrong. A preschooler imitates the social roles of others by putting her/himself into someone else's shoes. Such *pretence play* enhances the child's empathy for others – as s/he learns how to function in a group and how to be accepted. Gordon and Brown (2004: 123) list a number of points illustrating the value of play for the young child's social development. On her part, Cass (1971: 33,39) defines children's social play from the developmental angle, as comprising **solitary play, spectator play, parallel play, associative play, and genuine cooperative play**. All these authors aver the importance of play in the development of the child.

From the individual's view point, play is an important phenomenon which finds expression in different ways, depending on each person's own experience (Tekin & Tekin, 2007). Different researchers have reported a number of positive effects of child's play on early childhood development such as, motivating and orientating children, as well as giving them opportunities to exercise free choice (Tekin & Tekin, 2007). In addition, child's play is seen as having a positive impact on the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of the child (Fromberg, 2002; Broadhead, 2004; Ginsburg, 2007). As such, play is perceived to be a cornerstone of development – in addition to being dynamic and a vital concept in early childhood learning in all cultures. Strickland, (2004) also sees play as a cornerstone of children's development – as children learn through play and interact with their peers, adults, friends and the environment they are in.

The educational importance of the above characterisations of play is that once teachers impose certain activities – which may neither be valued by the children nor are freely chosen by them, then such activities cease to fall under the realm of play. In Althouse's (1981:45) view, play comes about because “children are fascinated by their world from the moment they enter it”, and play is the vehicle through which they begin (and continue) to explore their surroundings. In this regard, it's important for adults, as people

upon whom the children depend for a responsive and enabling environment for development, to understand the value of play to children. Accordingly, every educator who works with young children should have a thorough knowledge of the child, in order to be in a position to determine the kinds of activities the children value – collectively and individually.

Commenting on the earlier years of a child's development, de Witt (2009:129) contends that play lays a good foundation for young pre-school learners, as they find themselves spending most of their time playing between the rituals and routines of their daily life. In this regard, de Witt further avers that children's play contributes a lot to the child's physical, cognitive, and emotional, development.

To sum up, Wesley (as quoted by Brierley, 1994: 71) states that “he who plays as a boy will play as a man”. In this regard, Wesley contends that exploration and play help the child's brain to develop by improving his/her language, intellect and physical skills – thereby paving the way to the child's development.

6.4 RESEARCH METHODS

This study was based on the “mixed methods” (blended) research paradigm – which Johnson, *et al* (2007: 113) define as “an approach to knowledge (theory and practice) that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints (always including the standpoints of qualitative and quantitative research)”. Earlier, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) saw mixed methods research as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study or set of related studies.

The **case study** research design was used to collect data from foundation phase learners, as they were not yet at a stage that enabled paper-and-pencil techniques of data collection – such as completing questionnaires. The educators' questionnaire comprised both structured and non-structured sections, so the data / information collected were analysed

both quantitatively and qualitatively. This followed the modalities of a survey research design. Quantitative data were analysed by the use of Microsoft Office Excel. The information collected from the interviews with the learners was analysed qualitatively. Altogether, seventy-two (72) and thirty-two (32) foundation phase educators and learners, respectively, participated in the study. These were drawn from former Model C; township and rural schools.

Data were collected by way of two instruments: (a) a researcher-designed educators' questionnaire, to assist her answer the first two research questions, and (b) an interview schedule for foundation phase learners.

6.5 RESULTS

The results are summarised below according to each research question.

6.5.1 Promotion of Play

On the first research question dealing with the promotion of play, the educator respondents reported that, with regard to numeracy, they made use of market stands and playing shop (using Rands, litres, and centimetres) to address various aspects of numeracy, including number patterns. Furthermore, they reported promoting numeracy through play activities involving bean bags – to promote counting; learners were also asked to use building blocks as counters; playing mathematics games – e.g., touching eyes, ears, knees and legs to promote counting in pairs/twos. Number games, flash cards and counting blocks were used to promote the creation of number patterns. Running using sacks, putting water in water bottles, using heavy and light objects, short and long objects were all strategies used to develop the concept of measurement. In addition, the learners also actively took part in number rhymes and songs which promoted the development of measurement concepts.

Plays were also used in the teaching / learning of literacy. The respondents reported a number of strategies – including story-telling, role-playing, rhymes and singing, as well as dialogue; learners taking turns in playing games; learners drawing pictures about song

or rhymes; learners imitating animal sounds, word matching games and acting out stories; word games, phonic wheels, reading games; making letters with dough; alphabet story, such as Sammy snake, fireman Fred.

In promoting life skills through play, the educators reported using weaving, kneading and pretence play / role playing (e.g. mom and dad, baby, brother, and sister); matching different types of foods, charts, stories and story-telling (including happy and sad stories); activities around environmental management (e.g. collecting litter games); plays calling for help; painting, colouring, handwork (art and crafts); music (songs); thinking and reasoning games; plays involving rendering sympathy and empathy to others; poems - on how to cross the road”.

From the structured section of the questionnaire, the educators gave the following response profile: that they allowed learners to pursue their own interests during indoor play (90%); gave the children freedom to choose the areas they want to work at (73%); guided learners during play time (86%); used ideas from learners to enhance play activities (89%); used examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class (93%); showed the learners how to play so that they could model after them (85%); used guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities (82%); left it to the learners to get started at the beginning of play activities (61%); let learners resolve their conflicts during play (66%); asked learners questions that led them to finding things out for themselves (98%); ensured that discipline was maintained while learners played (98%); encouraged learners to interact with one another during play (98%); gave learners verbal cues (hints) when they were not sure with their play activities (90%); ensured that play activities take place in a safe and secure place (98); encouraged parents to allow children to engage in a variety of play interests without being pressured (85%). Overall, the average affirmative response to the variety of statements was (86%).

It is clear from this response profile that the affirmative responses far outweighed the negative responses to the statements in the questionnaire. This means that the research sample reported that they promoted play among their learners in line with the various ways that the literature espouses.

6.5.2 Educational Benefits of Play

The second research question sought to elicit, from the participating foundation phase educators, the play activities that they valued most – and the educational benefits they associated with such play activities.

The play activities which the educators thought were appropriate and good for foundation phase learners were identified as kneading; weaving; fantasy play; water play; *amagenda*; *umlabalaba*; *arigogo*, ‘catch and throw’ games / activities; climbing; balancing activities; creative activities; paper matching; story-telling; riddles (to improve their language use); language games – such as word and sentence games, puzzles, fine and gross motor activities; play that promotes cognitive (thinking) skills, motor skill development and enhancement; memory games; plays which develop motor skills, concentrating on full body development; and plays that develop social skills – such as group work. Some of the above ‘activities’, as cited by the respondents, are general statements which could refer to a number of unnamed play activities.

With regard to associated educational benefits, the respondents explained that the above play activities developed the learners’ social skills – through group work (promotes and facilitates co-operative learning); cognitive skills – through thinking games; fine and gross motor skills – that, in particular, *catch and throw* plays were associated with developing children’s fine muscles, eye – hand coordination, cognitive skills, motor skill development and enhancement.

Overall, the respondents contended that the various play activities carried the following educational benefits – which learners became: creative; active participants; open-minded; initiators of their own learning; motivated. The other benefits were that learners were enabled to learn to think critically and logically; they developed motor skills; that play activities, such as *amagenda* and *umlabalaba* helped learners improve their numeracy skills, as well as hand-eye coordination (particularly *amagenda*); that slow learners benefited more from play, as they learned things ‘unawares’ (learning while relaxed); that play improved memory, confidence, self-esteem, language command, and enhanced

curiosity; that play helped learners to understand and interpret the language in a playful manner; that ‘hangman’ helped learners increase their vocabulary; that ‘hopscotch’ taught learners to count; that play helped learners to learn “by seeing and feeling actual stuff”. One respondent simply stated that through play, children underwent “social, emotional, cognitive, physical and personal” development. Others surmised that play allowed for the holistic development of the child; reduced stress, anxiety and fears; prevented boredom; developed perceptual skills; helped learners develop a variety of skills, e.g. listening, reading, comprehension, writing and understanding.

From the structured part of the questionnaire, the educator respondents reported that play was important: for children’s cognitive (mental) development (100%), developing children’s social skills (100%), developing children’s motor (manipulative) skills (98%); developing language skills (100%); enabling learners develop inter-personal skills (such as being less aggressive) (96%); enabling learners expand their imagination (86%); assisting learners to become more emotionally mature (87%); enhancing children’s state of school readiness (84%); allowing learners to express and understand their emotions (96%); helping learners to build trust in self and others (96%); assisting learners to develop initiative (86%); helping learners develop skills in a variety of ways (100%); building and enhancing learners’ autonomy and sense of self (76%); teaching learners to accommodate other children’s view points (99%); teaching learners to act out different roles – such as anger, hostility, frustration and joy – thereby encouraging the development of important social skills (100%); encouraging learners to take risks (60%); helping learners to reveal their personalities (99%); teaching learners to resolve inner fears and conflicts (96%); enabling learners to develop self-confidence and self-esteem (100%). The average affirmative response was 93%.

6.5.3 Play Activities Valued Most by Learners, and Associated Educational Benefits

The third and final research question sought to find out the play activities which were valued, or liked, most by foundation phase learners, as well as the educational benefits they associated with such play activities.

As a group, the respondents reported that they liked playing with wire cars, hide and seek, wooden cars, soccer, playing *domino* games, puzzles, snakes and ladders, with water and sand, making necklaces, playing with wooden blocks, tyre racing, climbing on the jungle gym, colouring and painting. playing house, netball, tuck, dolls, blocks, laptops, playing games on touch, hockey, rugby, cycling, ski-boarding, ludo, rugby, athletics, *amagenda*, *arigogo*, hop scotch, *umlabalaba*.

In order to understand these results better, the researcher categorised the favourite play activities according to gender – following a hunch that in the foundation phase, different play activities may appeal differently to the two sexes. Accordingly, the study revealed that the play activities valued / liked most by the boys were: rugby, playing with wooden and wire cars, playing a game *domino*, tuck, scratch games, touch, tyre racing and ludo. For the girls, their most favorite play activities were: hockey, netball, *arigogo*, water and sand, ski-boarding, making necklaces, *amagenda* and hoola loop and skipping. There were also play activities which were liked by both girls and boys. These were: soccer, athletics, painting, drawing, playing with dolls (one boy), playing house, hide and seek, *umlabalaba*, swimming, colouring, puzzles, blocks, play with clay and sliding.

The learner respondents associated the following benefits with their favourite play activities: having knowledge of things, keeping fit, learning more things such as drawing, using their fingers (dexterity), eye-hand co-ordination, understanding time (clock game), ability to make different shapes, learning how to add, ability to paint, as well as cutting using pairs of scissors.

The discussion of the results of this study showed that the findings fell in line with the conceptual framework and the literature review. On the first research question, the educators displayed a high level of awareness regarding the promotion of play among their learners, much in line with the literature. The same response profile was observed with regard to the second research question where they also demonstrated a high level of awareness about the benefits of play within the foundation phase. Similarly, the learners supported / corroborated the responses of their educators by indicating ways in which the

educators integrated various play activities as part of classroom activities to promote learning.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a synthesis of the entire study, starting with the aims and research questions. This was followed by a brief overview of the conceptual framework and literature upon which this study was based. The methodology was also briefly summarised, followed by the results to the research question. As such, it is the sincere belief of the researcher that this study was well conceptualised, and executed. Certainly, the researcher is convinced that, within the scope of this study and the limitations outlined in chapter 1, the research questions have been addressed satisfactorily. She hopes that from the recommendations provided below, classroom practitioners, curriculum planners and advisers, as well as other researchers will find something useful from this study.

6.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing of the findings of this study, the researcher wishes to make the following recommendations – both for the consideration of classroom practitioners, educational managers and fellow researchers:

- 1.0 This study dealt with self-report data, it is important that in subsequent research, attention be made to actual classroom observations to document the extent to which foundation phase educators actually promote play, as part of their deliberate teaching strategies.
- 2.0 This study was conducted in only two school wards within one education circuit. It is important to widen the scope of this study in subsequent research in order to have a sense of the generalisability of the findings reported here.
- 3.0 The finding that many games are liked / valued by both sexes opens up the possibilities of allowing both boys and girls participate in a variety of these play activities. Certainly, it is important to ensure that boys and girls learn from a very early age that they are both capable of achieving the same things. This could

- encourage, particularly girls, to grow up with the disposition to enter areas of work that have traditionally been the preserve of males, and vice versa. In particular, pretence play could be handled in such a manner that boys and girls play roles that encourage the development of attitudes that discourage sex-stereotyping.
- 4.0 It is important for various line managers within the Department of Basic Education to continue supporting the educators in their attempts and practices of promoting play, and integrating it, as part of their instructional strategies. The fact that they (the educators) reported promoting play in their work, as well as espouse the educational benefits of play as articulated in the literature, suggests that the ground is fertile for further re-enforcement and enhancement. Thus, subject advisers, schools principals and heads of department all have a role to play in supporting the educators perform at a high level.
- 5.0 From on-site observations, it was quite evident that disparities existed in the provisioning of infra-structure among the participating schools – especially with regard to outdoor plays. This matter needs to be addressed by DBE authorities. The observation came from casual observations, as it was not directly investigated. However, although it fell outside the scope of this study, it is closely associated with the quality of play learners may experience within a given school environment. As such, it is a matter that could be taken up by future researchers in on the topic – encompassing both indoor and outdoor play.
- 6.0 This study has further revealed the specific play activities liked / valued most by foundation phase learners. It is important for both educational officials and schools authorities, at the various levels, to take advantage of these plays and maximise on the learning possibilities that they provide – with particular importance placed on the indigenous games which do not require any capital injection to be played. In this study, the indigenous plays liked / valued most were *amagenda*, *umlabalaba* and *arigogo*.

7.0 It is recommended that both initial teacher education programmes, and continuing teacher development activities, emphasise the importance of play in foundation phase teaching and learning.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE ON 'PLAY' IN THE RECEPTION YEAR

(TO BE COMPLETED BY FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS)

INSTRUCTIONS: This study is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Zululand, towards a Masters degree in Curriculum Studies. Participation is voluntary. However, *I depend on your participation to make this project a success.* All responses

will be handled with utmost confidentiality, and will not prejudice the respondents in any way.

The statements in Sections B and C are designed to seek the views of Foundation Phase educators regarding the ways in which they promote indoor and outdoor play, as well as what they consider to be the benefits of play for learners in the Foundation Phase. Please, read the statements below and answer them to the best of your knowledge. In order to obtain valid and reliable information, please, be as honest as possible in your responses. There is no right or wrong answer, and your responses will only be used for the purpose of this study. The answers you will provide will remain confidential and no name will be mentioned. In responding to the statements, please, place a tick [✓] in the spaces provided. Equally importantly, please, elaborate on each of your responses.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1. Gender:

Male	
Female	

2. Age (Years):

20 - 29	
30 - 39	
40 - 49	
50+	

3. Marital Status

Single	
Married	
Separated	
Divorced	

4. Type of School

Former Model C	
Private	
Township	
Rural	

5. Highest Professional Qualification

Primary Teachers Certificate	
Primary Teachers Diploma	
Advanced Certificate in Education	
Diploma in Education	
Bachelor of Education	
Master of Education	
Other (Specify:)	

6. Years of Teaching Experience in the Foundation Phase:

0 - 3	
4-6	
7-10	
11 - 15	
16+	

SECTION B: WAYS IN WHICH FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS PROMOTE INDOOR AND OUTDOOR PLAY

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<p style="text-align: center;">Item Description</p> <p>During indoor play, I allow the children to pursue their own interests.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>During indoor play, I give the children freedom to choose the areas they want to work at.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I guide learners during play time.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				

<p>I use ideas from learners to enhance play activities.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I use examples from play activities to help learners understand concepts in class.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I show the learners how to play so that they can model after me.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I use guided questions to assist learners understand their play activities.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>At the beginning of play activities, I leave it to the learners to get started.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I let learners resolve their conflicts during play.</p>				

<p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I ask learners questions that lead them to find things out for themselves.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I ensure that discipline is maintained while learners play.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I encourage learners to interact with one another during play.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I give the learners verbal cues (hints) when they are not sure with their play activities.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I ensure that play activities take place in a safe and secure place.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>I encourage parents to allow children to engage in a variety of play interests without being</p>				

pressured. Please, elaborate:				
---	--	--	--	--

SECTION C: BENEFITS OF PLAY AS SEEN BY FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS.

Item Description	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Play is important for children's cognitive (mental) development. Please, elaborate:				
Play is important for developing children's social skills. Please, elaborate:				
Play is important for developing children's motor (manipulative) skills. Please, elaborate:				
Learners develop language skills through play.				

<p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Learners develop inter-personal skills (such as being less aggressive) through play.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play prevents learners from expanding their imagination.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Learners become more emotionally mature through play.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play slows down children's state of school readiness.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play allows learners to express and understand their emotions.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play helps learners to build trust in self and</p>				

<p>others.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play prevents learners from developing initiative.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play helps learners develop skills in a variety of ways.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play destroys learners' autonomy.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play teaches learners to accommodate other children's view points.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play teaches learners to act out different roles – such as anger, hostility, frustration and joy. This encourages the development of important social skills.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				

<p>Play discourages learners from taking risks.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play helps learners to reveal their personalities.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>Play teaches learners to resolve inner fears and conflicts.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				
<p>36. Learners develop self-confidence and self-esteem.</p> <p>Please, elaborate:</p>				

SECTION D: OPEN-ENDED

This section consists of two Parts – 1 and 2. The first part focuses on the promotion, while Part 2 deals with the perceived benefits of play. Please, use the spaces provided for your responses.

Part 1: Promotion of Play

My school provides for **indoor** plays for Foundation Phase learners.

Please, elaborate:

My school provides for **outdoor** plays for Foundation Phase learners.

Please, elaborate:

How do you include play in the curriculum for:

numeracy?

.....
.....

literacy?

.....
.....

life skills?

.....
.....

How do you select activities for indoor play?

.....

What materials do you use for indoor play?

.....
.....

What materials do you use for outdoor play?

.....

.....
What help do you give the children during:

indoor play?

.....
.....
outdoor play?

.....
.....
How do you accommodate outdoor activities in the children’s timetable?

.....
.....
Please, inform the researcher of any further comments that you may consider important to the researcher regarding promotion of play in the Foundation Phase.

.....
.....
Part 2: Benefits of Play

Which play activities do you value the most for Foundation Phase learners?

.....
.....
Are there any **educational** benefits that you attach to, or associate with, these play activities?

.....
.....
Are there any **other** benefits that you attach to, or associate with, these play activities?

.....
.....

Please, inform the researcher of any further comments that you may consider important to the researcher regarding the benefits of play in the Foundation Phase.

.....
.....

I am very grateful for your time and contributions towards the success of this project.

Mrs. Grace Imenda

UNIZULU STUDENT

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE ON ‘PLAY’ IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE

(INTERVIEW WITH SELECTED FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS)

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Please, answer the following by ticking the box that corresponds to your answer.

1. Gender:

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Age (Years):

5	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	<input type="checkbox"/>
>9	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Grade:

R	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Type of School

Former Model C	<input type="checkbox"/>
Private	<input type="checkbox"/>
Township	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION B: BENEFITS OF PLAY ACTIVITIES AS SEEN BY FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS

(Focused-Group Interviews)

What are your favourite plays?

Why do you like them?

What do you benefit from these plays – if at all?

Please, elaborate:

Do plays help you understand school work in any way?

Please, elaborate:

Does your teacher use plays as part of your classroom activities?

Please, elaborate:

What do you do with children who do not play nicely with you?

Please, elaborate:

Is there anything you would like to say about play – at home or school?

I am very grateful for your time and contributions towards the success of this project.

Mrs.Grace Imenda

UNIZULU STUDENT

APPENDIX C

P.O Box 101604

Meerensee 3901

RICHARDS BAY

2nd June, 2011

The Head of Department: Education

Pietermaritzburg

KWAZULU NATAL

Dear Dr. NSP Sishi

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE EMPANGENI DISTRICT

I am a Master of Education student at the University of Zululand, under the supervision of Dr. ME Khuzwayo. I have now reached the stage where I am required to conduct my field study, which will involve administering questionnaires to Foundation Phase educators, as well as conduct focused-group interviews with Foundation Phase learners. The title of dissertation is: The Promotion and Benefits of Play in the Foundation Phase. Draft copies of the proposed data collection instruments are enclosed for your perusal and reference.

I am writing to request your permission to approach the schools that will constitute the research sample for the purpose of conducting this research. Altogether, I intend to reach out to about 80 educators and 20 learners in about 15 schools in the Empangeni District. I pledge to abide by any conditions that you may wish me to comply with.

Yours truly,

Mrs Grace Imenda

Mobile: 0723686068

E-mail: graceimenda@yahoo.com

APPENDIX D

PO Box 101604

MEERENSEE 3901

12 July, 2011

EMPANGENI EDUCATION DISTRICT MANAGER

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am presently registered for an M.Ed Degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zululand. As part of this programme, I am required field-based research on a topic as approved by the Senate of the University. My study is entitled: "The Promotion and Benefits of Play in the Foundation Phase", to be conducted under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Mamsi E. Khuzwayo.

I am writing to request access to some of the schools in your district, in order to carry out an investigation regarding the above topic. I wish to administer a questionnaire to Foundation Phase educators and carry out focused-group interviews with learners in the same phase from selected schools.

You are assured that the study will not in any way interfere with the normal running of the school. The educators will be requested to complete the questionnaire in their spare time, and special times will be arranged for the focused-group interviews. Copies of the questionnaire and interview schedule are attached for your perusal. I hope they'll meet your approval. Throughout the study, and in the report that will follow, the principles of anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly observed. Should you deem it necessary, I undertake to favour your office with a copy of the dissertation reporting the findings of this investigation.

Your permission to conduct research in the district will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Grace M. Imenda

APPENDIX E

PO Box 101604

MEERENSEE 3901

12 July, 2011

THE CIRCUIT MANAGER

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am presently registered for an M.Ed Degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zululand. As part of this programme, I am required to undertake field-based research on a topic as approved by the Senate of the University. My study is entitled: "The Promotion and Benefits of Play in the Foundation Phase", to be conducted under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Mamsi E. Khuzwayo.

I am writing to request access to some of the schools in your circuit, in order to carry out an investigation regarding the above topic. I wish to administer a questionnaire to Foundation Phase educators and carry out focused-group interviews with learners from the same Phase in selected schools.

You are assured that the study will not in any way interfere with the normal running of the school. The educators will be requested to complete the questionnaire in their spare time, and special times will be arranged for the focused-group interviews. Copies of the questionnaire and interview schedule are attached for your perusal. I hope they'll meet your approval. Throughout the study, and in the report that will follow, the principles of anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly observed. Should you deem it necessary, I undertake to favour your office with a copy of the dissertation reporting the findings of this investigation.

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

Yours faithfully

Mrs Grace M. Imenda

APPENDIX F

PO Box 101604

MEERENSEE 3901

12 July, 2011

THE WARD MANAGER

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am presently registered for an M.Ed Degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zululand. As part of this programme, I am required to undertake field-based research on a topic as approved by the Senate of the University. My study is entitled: “The Promotion and Benefits of Play in the Foundation Phase”, to be conducted under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Mamsi E. Khuzwayo.

I am writing to request access to some of the schools in your ward, in order to carry out an investigation regarding the above-mentioned topic. I wish to administer a questionnaire to Foundation Phase educators and carry out focused-group interviews with learners from the same Phase in selected schools.

You are assured that the study will not in any way interfere with the normal running of the school. The educators will be requested to complete the questionnaire in their spare time, and special times will be arranged for the focused-group interviews. Copies of the questionnaire and interview schedule are attached for your perusal. I hope they’ll meet your approval. Throughout the study, and in the report that will follow, the principles of anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly observed. Should you deem it necessary, I undertake to favour your office with a copy of the dissertation reporting the findings of this investigation.

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

Yours faithfully

Mrs Grace M. Imenda

APPENDIX G

PO Box 101604

MEERENSEE 3901

12 July, 2011

THE PRINCIPAL

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am presently registered for an M.Ed Degree in the Faculty of Education at the University of Zululand. As part of this programme, I am required to undertake field-based research on a topic as approved by the Senate of the University. My study is entitled: “The Promotion and Benefits of Play in the Foundation Phase”, to be conducted under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Mamsi E. Khuzwayo.

I am writing to request access to your school, in order to carry out an investigation regarding the above-mentioned topic. I wish to administer a questionnaire to Foundation Phase educators and carry out focused-group interviews with learners from the same Phase in selected schools.

You are assured that the study will not in any way interfere with the normal running of the school. The educators will be requested to complete the questionnaire in their spare time, and special times will be arranged for the focused-group interviews. Copies of the questionnaire and interview schedule are attached for your perusal. I hope they’ll meet your approval. Throughout the study, and in the report that will follow, the principles of anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly observed. Should you deem it necessary, I undertake to favour your office with a copy of the dissertation reporting the findings of this investigation.

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

Yours faithfully

Mrs Grace M. Imenda

APPENDIX H

P.O. BOX 101604

MEERENSEE 3901

12 July, 2011

THE RESPONDENT

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

I am presently engaged in a research project towards my Master of Education Degree at the University of Zululand under the supervision of Dr. Mamsi E. Khuzwayo. The research focuses on the promotion and benefits of play in the Foundation Phase, and is being conducted within the Empangeni Education District.

I am writing to request your consent, as a resource person, to participant in this study. Your participation will be voluntary, and it will be within your right to withdraw from participation at any stage of the investigation, should you feel that your rights are being violated, or for whatever reason you may have. However, as in many studies of this kind, the success of this study will depend on your participation, without which nothing will be achieved.

Please, be assured that, should you agree to take part in the study, throughout the study, and in the report that will follow, the principles of anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly observed. You'll, therefore, not be prejudiced in any way as a result of your participation in the study. However, the valuable information that you may share with me will have the potential to contribute significantly towards improving education in the Foundation Phase.

In anticipation, thank you for your kind consideration.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Grace M. Imenda

=====

REPLY SLIP

Dear Mrs Imenda

I hereby give my consent, as a resource person, to participate in your study on the promotion and benefits of play in the Foundation Phase.

Names

Signature

Date