

2017

The Relationship Between Parents' Value for Play and Kindergarteners' Mastery of the Alphabetic Principle

Tamala S. Findley
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>

 Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Tamala Findley

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Patricia Anderson, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Laura Onafowora, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Steve Wells, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2017

Abstract

The Relationship Between Parents' Value for Play and Kindergarteners' Mastery of the
Alphabetic Principle

by

Tamala Findley

MA, Walden University, 2011

BS, Wright State University, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

December, 2017

Abstract

Students who struggle with understanding the alphabetic principle often develop difficulties in reading. Play is known as a key element of early learning, but its perceived value among teachers and parents has declined over the years. This study investigated the relationship between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle. The theoretical foundation included the views of Montessori and Piaget, who believed that a classroom with a play-based environment encourages independent thinking and learning. The study's research questions concerned the relationship between 53 parents' levels of agreement about the value of play in two categories, play support and academic focus, and their currently enrolled kindergarten students' Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills alphabetic mastery levels. The outcome of this study revealed that a majority of the parents supported play, but there was not a significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle. The findings of this study clarify the connection between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle and suggest that lack of play opportunities may not be a factor in children's school success. Implications for positive social change derived from this study include general evidence of parents' support for play and the suggestion that a play-based kindergarten curriculum similar to that advocated by Piaget and Montessori might be supported by kindergarten parents.

The Relationship Between Parents' Value for Play and Kindergarteners' Mastery of the
Alphabetic Principle

by

Tamala Findley

MA, Walden University, 2011

BS, Wright State University, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

December, 2017

Dedication

To my devoted, loving, and supportive husband Lamar and two wonderful children A'mylah, and A'von.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my family and friends for motivating and believing in me. Your encouraging words kept me focused, motivated, and were the driving force for me to believe that this was possible.

I would also like to acknowledge my chair, Dr. Patricia Anderson, and co-chair, Dr. Laura Onafowora for their continuous support, counsel, and endurance as I earned my doctoral degree. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my URR board for reviewing my drafts and supporting my vision.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	iii
List of Figures	iv
Section 1: Introduction to the Study	1
Problem Statement	1
Nature of the Study	3
Background and Purpose of the Study	5
Theoretical Framework	7
Maria Montessori	7
Jean Piaget	8
Operational Definitions	11
Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations	11
Significance of the Study	12
Summary	13
Section 2: Literature Review	15
Characteristics of Play	15
The Power of Play	17
Parental Perceptions About Play	21
Understanding the Alphabetic Principle	22
Barriers to Understanding the Alphabetic Principle	24
Understanding the Alphabetic Principle Through Play	26
Literature Pertaining to the Method	26
Summary	27

Section 3: Research Method	29
Research Design and Approach	29
Setting and Sample	30
Instrumentation	30
Data Collection and Analysis.....	33
Protection of Participants	35
Summary	35
Section 4: Results.....	37
Findings.....	37
Play Support.....	40
Academic Focus.....	46
Results of the Correlational Analysis	48
Summary.....	51
Section 5: Discussion.....	52
Summary of the Study	52
Implications for Social Change.....	55
Recommendations for Future Study	56
Conclusion	57
References.....	58
Appendix A: Parent Invitation and Consent	68
Appendix B: Permission to Use the Survey.....	70
Appendix C: GKIDS Subtest	71

List of Tables

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Play Support, Academic Focus, and the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS) Measure37

Table 2. Students’ Level of Mastery of Foundational Reading Skills as Measured by the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills Instrument.....38

Table 3. Parents’ Reported Play Support in Order by Item Number44

Table 4. Parents’ Reported Play Support in Order by Mean46

Table 5. Parents’ Reported Academic Focus in Order by Mean48

Table 6. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Between Student Levels on the GKIDS Subtest and Parents’ Level of Agreement for Play Support and for Academic Focus 49

List of Figures

Figure 1. Parents' mean agreement for Play Support by GKIDS score level.....50

Figure 2. Parents' mean agreement for Academic Focus by GKIDS score level.....50

Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Mastery of the alphabetic principle is a key goal for children in the kindergarten year (Goldberg & Lederberg, 2015), meaning that they understand that a written letter of the alphabet corresponds to a particular speech sound (Lyon & Weiser, 2014). Some children enter kindergarten already having gained this mastery, but many children require instruction in the alphabetic principle in kindergarten (Goldstein et al., 2017). Such classroom instruction often includes teacher-led small and large group instruction in matching an object to its beginning sound, engaging in letter recognition and sound games, participating in finger play and songs that emphasize beginning letter sounds, and listening to stories read aloud that focus on the alphabetic principle (Neuman & Gambrell, 2015). Despite this instruction, each year some students fail to master the skill of understanding the alphabetic principle by the end of kindergarten (Goldstein et al., 2017). Mastery of the alphabetic principle has been shown to be essential for literacy development (Barac, Bialystok, Castro, & Sanchez, 2014) so finding the basis for the difference in children's readiness to learn this skill could be important in supporting children's school success.

Problem Statement

The problem that is the focus of this study is that little is known about the relationship between parents' views about the role of play in children's cognitive development and their children's mastery of the alphabetic principle. Gerdes, Durden, and Poppe (2013) explained that children aged 3 to 8 should have opportunities to gain understanding of academic concepts through play because play is an essential part of

their brain development. According to Gerdes et al. (2013), children in grades 1 through 3 spend fewer than 30 minutes a day in child initiated play during school time and spend four to six times longer on teacher-led math and reading instruction than on play. Lack of free play is a concern during the preschool years also, as preschool programs have become more focused on academic instruction (Nicholson, Bauer, & Woolley, 2016). According to some authorities, focus on academics in preschool is a response to parents' preference for accelerated reading instruction and less free play (Nicholson et al., 2016). Therefore, in this study I investigated parents' levels of agreement with regard to the role of play in children's cognitive development and the relationship between these levels of agreement and their children's mastery of the alphabetic principle. Parents' understanding of the value of play may account for the observed difference in kindergarten children's ability to master the alphabetic principle.

The alphabetic principle, a component of phonological awareness, is defined as the idea that individual letters with meaningless optical shapes must be linked to sounds, identified as phonemes (Lyon & Weiser, 2014). The connections between the 26 letters of the English alphabet and 44 English-language phonemes must be understood before a child can begin to decode, read, and write words (Lyon & Weiser, 2014). The rules for combining phonemes are referred to as the phonological component (Goldstein et al., 2017). Learning to read requires understanding of the phonological component of language begun through mastery of the alphabetic principle (Lyon & Weiser, 2014).

Sadoski, McTigue, and Paivio (2012) discussed the dual coding theory of the reading process. They saw that the first step of the cognitive process of reading occurs

with visual memory (Sadoski et al., 2012). The individual shapes, such as the arc in the letter c and the intersection of the letter x, produce the ability to identify a letter (Sadoski et al., 2012). However, Trezek and Hancock (2013) suggested that language related skills include the ability to use the structures of English and that code-related skills include the ability to understand print principles, phonological understanding, and developing the skill of identifying the alphabetic principle.

While direct instruction of the alphabetic principle can support literacy development, children's ability to think and to use language in everyday conversation depend upon play (Weisberg, Zosh, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013). Although play is critical to a child's development (Babuc, 2015), opposition to play exists. Nicholson et al. (2016) described how play has declined in the kindergarten classroom over the years. Kindergarten classrooms today are focused on academic standards and teachers are expected to engage in teacher led, whole group instruction for most of the school day (Nicholson et al., 2016). Babuc (2015) mentioned that some parents view play as an essential component for early development while other parents believe play has no developmental value. The problem that is the focus of this study is that little is known about the relationship between parents' views about the role of play in children's cognitive development and their children's mastery of the alphabetic principle.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery

of the alphabetic principle as determined through an achievement subtest administered in the school. I investigated two research questions:

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle?

H₀1: There is no statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

H_a1: There is a statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

RQ2: Is there a statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about their academic focus in lieu of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

H₀2: There is no statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about their academic focus in lieu of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

H_a2: There is a statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about their academic focus in lieu of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

A survey of parents was used to determine parents' levels of agreement on children's play, including their support for play and their focus on academic activities in

lieu of play. In addition, children's archived levels on a school-administered achievement subtest were used to determine the level of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

Background and Purpose of the Study

There is anecdotal evidence for the problem in the local context. During my most-recent year of teaching kindergarten, I assessed 22 students on identifying upper and lower case letters and the associated letter sounds using the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS) assessment. Six students were unable to recognize any of the 26 letters or initial sounds. Five students recognized five to 10 letters of the alphabet but were not able to recognize any letters-sounds. Six students recognized 11 to 20 letters of the alphabet but of those six students, two of them were unable to recognize any letter-sounds, one student was able to recognize one letter-sound, one student recognized six letter-sounds, and the other two students recognized 10 or more letter-sounds. Four students recognized 23 to 25 letters and of those students, one was able to recognize five associated letter-sounds, one student was able to recognize 12 letter-sounds, one student was able to recognize 14 letter-sounds, and one student was able to recognize 18 letter-sounds. Only one student recognized all 26 letters and associated letter-sounds.

Even after engaging in various alphabetic-based activities, some students continued to struggle with mastering the concept of the alphabetic principle. At the final assessment of last year, 59% of the students were able to identify all of the letters of the alphabet and the associated letter sounds, 14% of the students ended the school year being able to identify only half of the letters of the alphabet and the associated letter

sounds, and 27% of the students ended the school year only able to recognize five or fewer letters of the alphabet, and unable to identify any of the associated letter sounds. Out of the 59% of the students who were able to master the alphabetic principle concept, 38% of those students were able to read books on a beginning kindergarten level. According to Goldstein et al. (2017), early difficulty in language development in its various manifestations and as a result of various causes leads to increasing difficulties in school for these children and can interfere with their academic success.

Vygotsky (1934/1987) believed that play is the foundation for learning. The social aspect of play provides a foundation for thinking and imagination (Vygotsky, 1934/1987). The way a child manipulates and understands the function of an object reflects the child's view of the world (Vygotsky, 1934/1987). Although each interaction a child has is different, that difference adds unique information and skills to a child's learning experiences.

Weisberg et al. (2013) suggested play as a crucial component to the development of cognitive and social outcomes. These authors explained that the link between play and language outcomes is embedded in symbolic play, play-based social interaction, the amount of language input available, and the child-initiated quality of play. Lillard, Lerner et al. (2013) recognized play as a child's right. Lillard, Lerner et al. (2013) found that a group of 4-year-olds showed an increase in language ability after engaging in play for an hour each day over a 25-week period. This illustrates the belief of Lillard, Lerner et al. that play offers the necessary factors for optimal language growth. Parents, however, may not share this belief (Nicholson et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was to determine

the relationship between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and their focus on academic activities in lieu of play, and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle as determined through an achievement subtest administered in the school.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is comprised of the constructivist philosophies of Montessori and Piaget, which support children's learning through play. According to Nicholson et al. (2016), following implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), play in the classroom declined over the ensuing 15 years, with more focus placed on academics. In this section, I will present theories of Maria Montessori and Jean Piaget that promote the skills and dispositions linked to the mastery of the alphabetic principle and the role of play in achieving this mastery.

Maria Montessori

In the early 1900s, Montessori opened her first preschool based on her beliefs about young learners (Montessori & George, 1964). Montessori's belief was that all children can achieve every learning goal needed to be successful in their environment without teachers exerting force or exhausting every instructional method to teach a concept, so long as the children are able to freely explore the learning environment using their senses (Montessori, 1914). A child must be able to think independently without being interrupted (Montessori, 1949). According to Montessori (1949) a child's mind has the ability to grasp knowledge and children have the ability to teach themselves.

Montessori (1914) believed that children gain knowledge of language, abstract and critical thinking, mathematical skills, practical life skills, and self-discipline through movement and the use of their five senses. Montessori's (1914) goal of sensory education included activities that are hands-on and require children to use their senses to gain an understanding of natural concepts. According to Montessori, when children actively participate in the learning process of their education they gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of concepts related to core subjects (Montessori, 1914). Montessori (1912) believed that preschool education and peer interaction for children under the age of six is so essential to their developmental growth that she allowed children the freedom to choose in which activities to engage and with whom to interact. She felt that a child has the ability to teach another child in a way that a teacher does not (Montessori, 1912).

According to Montessori (1949), imagination and abstraction are two powers of the mind, which are essential parts of what the mind understands and perceives the world to be. These components are important for language development, since the ability to imagine a thought and use the abstract system of language to communicate that thought are foundational to the development of speaking, reading, and writing (Montessori, 1948). In addition to allowing for these developmental skills, Montessori also believed that a teacher should never address mistakes that are made in the processes of learning, since mistakes are the natural part of the learning process (Montessori, 1948).

Jean Piaget

Piaget (1928) believed being actively engaged in play is essential to a child's intelligence and understanding of concepts. His belief was that the child is a philosopher

who gains understanding of the world through experiencing it. Piaget (1928) identified the following four stages of cognitive development: (a) sensory-motor period, (b) preoperational stage, (c) concrete operations, and (d) formal operations.

The sensory motor period is the first stage of cognitive development; a child in this stage is from birth to two years old. During this stage senses, reflexes, and motor abilities quickly develop. According to Piaget (1928), the first display of intelligence is demonstrated when reflex movements become more developed, such as an infant reaching for a preferred toy over another. Infants gain an understanding of the world through perceptions and through objects that they have experienced directly. An infant is able to form original mental images as object permanence is developed by the end of the sensory-motor stage (Piaget, 1928).

The preoperational stage is Piaget's second stage of cognitive development; a child in this stage is two through seven years old. Piaget believed that a child in this stage is not developmentally able to think rationally and is wholly egocentric (Piaget, 1928). With the development of language, Piaget believed children are able to represent the world through mental images and symbols based on previous encounters. Despite gaining greater interest in objects and personal encounters, a child's perception of the world is entirely derived from their own point of view, according to Piaget. This stage is also known as the age of the curious mind, since children in preschool ask many questions, explore, and investigate the world around them. In the case where an explanation is not given, the child will create their own explanation (Piaget, 1928).

Concrete operations is the third stage of cognitive development, according to Piaget; a child in this stage is seven through 11 years old. This stage begins when a child is capable of accomplishing mental operations. Piaget described a mental operation as an action that is performed in the mind that allows children to think about previous actions that they have performed physically. The main component of this stage is children's ability to reverse what they think, which is essential for mathematical operations such as addition and subtraction (Piaget, 1928).

The stage of formal operations is Piaget's fourth and final stage of cognitive development. A child in this stage is 11 through 16 years old and can think about the future, abstract ideas, and hypothetical events. Piaget believed that this stage of development and the beginning stages of adolescence occur concurrently. The thinking process during this stage is more flexible and rational, which allows the individual to think of different ways to approach and solve a problem (Piaget, 1928).

Children in prekindergarten are in Piaget's second stage of cognitive development, the preoperational stage, in which children learn through engaging in activities (Piaget, 1928). Piaget believed that these interactions can be prompted by asking open-ended questions and creating situations in which students must respond using words (Piaget, 1928). Piaget explained that children learn about their world through active play and make sense of concepts by constructing their own views about previous experiences (Piaget, 1932).

The best learning takes place when the child is able to choose with what objects to interact and how to manipulate those objects (Lillard, 2012). Montessori's and Piaget's

ideas support this type of learning experience and support engagement in playful exploration as a gateway to the development of language.

Operational Definitions

Below are definitions of terms that are important to understanding components of this study.

Alphabetic principle: A component of phonological awareness that reading development requires as a foundational skill for early literacy development (Lyon & Weiser, 2014).

Child-initiated play: Play in which children's own interests, not the interests of adults, propels the action. (Weisberg et al., 2013).

Parent: For the purpose of this study, a parent is the adult who has responsibility for the daily well-being of a child and may include biological, adoptive, and foster parents, as well as legal guardians and others who fill this role informally.

Phonological awareness: An ability to identify letter sounds and rhymes and an ability to separate the parts of a word and understand the relationship between written and spoken language (Goldstein et al., 2017).

Phonemes: The letter sounds in spoken words, which make a difference in the meaning of the word. For example, changing the first initial sound in the word big from *b* to *w* changes the word from big to wig (Lyon & Weiser, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

I assumed that the parents participating in this study were honest in describing their level of agreement about their value of play and their academic focus. One

limitation of this study was its small sample size. This study was offered to 120 parents of kindergarten children, of whom 53 returned surveys. I also relied on the parents to remember to participate in the study and report their true level of agreement of the value of play.

The scope of this study was the relationship between two variables within parents' levels of agreement about the value of play, which are their *play support* and their *academic focus*, and those parents' kindergarten students' archived GKIDS levels of mastery on a subtest of a key literacy skill, the alphabetic principle. This study was delimited by its setting in a single public elementary school located in a single suburban area of the Southeastern United States. Parents of all kindergarten children enrolled in this school during the 2016-2017 school year were invited to participate, without exclusion, and parents of 53 children participated.

Significance of the Study

Several recent studies have established parents' ambivalence about the value of play. Warash, Root, and Devitto Doris (2017) used a survey with 38 mother-father pairs and determined that mothers value play more highly than do fathers as a mechanism for learning. Lux (2014) examined the value parents of preschool children ages three and older ascribed to 36 typical play activities and found also that mothers valued play activities more highly than did fathers but also that activities valued for their potential effect on social skill development were considered more important than activities valued for their effect on cognitive development. O'Gorman, Grove, and Ailwood (2012), in an Australian study of 26 parents of 5-year-old children (equivalent to the parents of

kindergarten children surveyed in the current study), found that play was acceptable in these children's "Prep" [kindergarten] classrooms but only to the extent that "real school" was not diminished. These attitudes towards play confirm the observation of Lynch (2015) who noted that kindergarten teachers feel pressured by parents to provide an academic focus with many paper-and-pencil tasks.

In this study I examined parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and their focus on academic activities in lieu of play in an effort to determine the relationship between parents' levels of agreement about play and their kindergarten students' mastery of the alphabetic principle. Gerdes et al. (2013) believed that when parents and teachers provide children with opportunities to engage in play, opportunities to develop cognitive skills, symbolic representation, oral language, and early literacy skills and concepts occur. As suggested by Montessori and Piaget, attention to play may expand the intellectual accomplishments of children and lead to their increased school success and subsequent positive social change. In addition, this study has potential to shape parents' and teachers' understanding of the importance of play in children's intellectual development, and so contribute to improvements in kindergarten expectations and practice.

Summary

Theorists Montessori (1914) and Piaget (1928) asserted that play is an important activity for early childhood students in developing language at the preoperational stage of development. The alphabetic principle is a prerequisite to language development and

critical for reading (Goldberg & Lederberg, 2015). Without this skill, children can face years of challenges in reading.

The variables for this study were parents' levels of agreement about the value of play in two categories, play support and academic focus, and those parents' kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle. This study offered the potential to provide teachers and parents with a better understanding of play in the classroom and play's role as a component of literacy development. Studies on play and studies on the alphabetic principle have been conducted by numerous researchers (Adams & Flear, 2016; LaForett & Mendez, 2017; Nicholson et al., 2016; Simge, 2016); however, no studies correlating parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle have been conducted. In Section 2, the literature review will include explanations of the power of play, the characteristics of play, understanding the alphabetic principle, barriers to understanding the alphabetic principle, and ways of understanding the alphabetic principle through play. In Section 3, I describe the method by which this study was conducted, with the results of the study presented in Section 4 and a discussion of those results in Section 5.

Section 2: Literature Review

In this study, I examined whether a statistically significant relationship existed between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and their focus on academic activities in lieu of play and their kindergarten students' mastery of the alphabetic principle. This study began with a review of literature.

Databases used to search the literature were Walden University's Thoreau: Multiple Database Search, EBSCOhost, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), ELSEVIER, and Google. Search terms included: *understanding the alphabetic principle, purposeful play in the classroom, parental perceptions about child-initiated play, significance of purposeful play for understanding the alphabetic principle, and criticism about purposeful play.*

This literature review includes explanations of the power of play, the characteristics of play, understanding the alphabetic principle, barriers to understanding the alphabetic principle, and ways of understanding the alphabetic principle through play. Information on the importance of play, benefits that a child gains by engaging in play, key components of the alphabetic principle, and the role play has on understanding the alphabetic principle are examined and reviewed.

Characteristics of Play

Peter Gray (2013) explained the characteristics of play to be self-chosen and self-directed, structured, imaginative, and involving an active mind. The most important concept of play is as an expression of freedom (Gray, 2013). A child may not always have a smile or display laughter while engaging in play, but play is always what the child

wants to do rather than what the child is required to do by another; this is what makes play self-chosen or self-directed (Gray, 2013). When a child feels free, the child will interact with others, explore the entire surroundings, dare to test limits, and be open to trying new things. (Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016).

Rules created during play must be approved by all individuals who are involved, and if someone does not approve, play gives an individual the freedom to quit at any time (Gray, 2013). Vygotsky (1933) explained that freedom to quit at any time is the only reason a child will accept the rules of a game. A person is no longer a player but a victim if not allowed the freedom to quit (Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016). This type of interaction often occurs when an adult engages in play with a child. Children are less likely to quit or disagree with any rules adults make due to a real or perceived requirement to obey authority figures. Play with adults might not be considered play at all if it is not self-chosen and self-directed (Gray, 2013).

The use of imagination and fantasy is another characteristic of play (Gray, 2013). Children use props and act out characters, creating a plot that resembles their real-world experiences (Gray, 2013). Gray (2013) gave an example of how a child uses imaginative thought to use a broom as a horse. Throughout this time of play a child can go in and out of character; for example, when engaged in imaginative play, the child is in what Gray (2013) calls “time in” and when the child stops to tie a shoe, the child is in “time out.”

The final characteristic of play is that play involves a person with an active mind, but who is never stressed or pressured (Gray, 2013). The freedom of play allows an

individual's mind to be alert and active during pretend play and games because there are no distractions of fear or intimidation (Gray, 2013).

King and Howard (2016) revealed structural, functional, and social factors that influence a child's choice to play with an adult or a child. The size and nature of the play space, the resources available to them, and the proximity to them of others at play all influenced their perception of the choices they enjoyed (King & Howard, 2016,).

The Power of Play

From the moment a child is born, play is an important source for brain development (Gerdes et al., 2013). Vygotsky (1934/1987) found that although play is not the predominate force in growth, it is the leading source during the preschool years. Gray (2013) said play is so essential that without it a child's spirit and mental health will suffer.

Lin and Yawkey (2013) discussed theories on the critical role play has on early childhood education and how a child's cognitive, socioemotional, and motor skills are enhanced and developed. Cevhar-Kalburan and Ivrendi (2015) expressed the role play has in a child's learning and development as absolutely necessary and insisted that play should not be taken away from a child's life.

Play naturally occurs during the early childhood years (LaForett & Mendez, 2017). Through play with others, children have the opportunity to develop and express language (LaForett & Mendez, 2017). Gray (2013) said that play and exploration are natural activities through which children educate themselves, which relates to the view of Gerdes et al., (2013) that providing opportunities to manipulate materials permits

children to gain a deeper understanding of ideas and concepts. When children play, they are actively involved in activities, which have been chosen by the children themselves because play is intrinsically motivating and does not need adult help or intervention Gerdes et al., (2013).

When children have the freedom to make their own play choices, based on their development and interests, authentic learning occurs (Nicholson et al., 2016). There are many ways to determine if the activity is child-driven or teacher-driven, but one way to make this distinction is by observing who is enjoying the purpose of the activity, the child or the teacher (Weisberg et al., 2013). When the adult controls the outcome of the environment, although the activity may be fun, it is not considered play (Weisberg et al., 2013).

Children who engage in at least one hour of play each day demonstrate an increase in language development compared to children who play less than one hour a day (Weisberg et al., 2013). Due to accountability demands of public education and associated acceleration of early childhood academic learning, play has been reduced or eliminated altogether from many children's school day (Kane, 2016; Lynch, 2015; Nor Puteh & Ali, 2013). Kane (2016) revealed this to be the case for 61% of early childhood students in the United States of America. Lynch (2015) suggested three factors for this shift: elimination in the 1960s of religious instruction in schools (which left a gap in the school schedule that was filled with more academic work), decline of standardized test scores noticed particularly in the period between 1960 and 1980, and increased concerns about achievement gaps, including negative comparisons with school achievement in

other nations, beginning in the 1980s. Nor Puteh and Ali (2013) revealed how difficult it is for educators, responsible for creating the curriculum, to highly recommend play as the central focus in an early childhood classroom due to the varied definitions of what play is.

Gray (2013) raised the question of how schools transformed from self-directed and joyful spaces to a place that leaves children feeling helpless, anxious, and depressed. Nicholson et al. (2016) suggested that initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) placed pressure on teachers and parents to equip children with educational tools that will lead to school readiness. Children's performance in school is compared to that of their peers, which creates shame when they perform below and pride when they perform better than others (Gray, 2013). Shame leads to children dropping out, misbehaving, bullying, and even drug use (Gray, 2013). Jackson (2009) found that even kindergarten children exhibited stress behaviors when they were deprived of play and required to perform activities unsuited to their level of development. Bassok, Latham, and Rorem (2016) compared kindergarten practices between 1998 and 2010 and found much greater emphasis on academic learning in the most recent years studied and greatly reduced emphasis on child-selected activities such as play.

John Dewey (1916) wrote that when children have the opportunity to engage in hands-on activities that allow them to use their natural impulses, these students enjoy school more and classroom management and learning become stress-free. Dewey (1902) argued that content presented to students must be relevant and connected to past experiences in order for children to develop new knowledge and for education to be most

effective. The learning environment should be centered on the child and the teacher and students should learn together by interacting with their environment (Dewey, 1902).

Dewey and Dewey (1915) expressed the importance of a teacher being an active member of the environment by assisting the child in responding to experiences that will influence an understanding of a specific concept, especially for students who are second language learners (Piker, 2013). Piker (2013) revealed that play shaped four Spanish speaking students' ability to interact with their peers and shaped their language development and their ability to master the English language.

Connections between experiences and concepts are made when students are given the opportunity to express what they have learned and when given the opportunity to engage in play (Gerdes et al., 2013). Through various forms of play, at home and in the classroom, a child gains the ability to develop socially, to increase problem solving skills, and to function as a member of society (Gray, 2013). Dymont and O'Connell (2013) revealed that play is an extension of what children learn in the classroom. Play has the power to allow students to use language learned, through daydreaming, reading, socially interacting with peers, and many other activities (Dymont & O'Connell, 2013).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children endorsed the importance of play and the benefits that children gain by engaging in purposeful play, including understanding and making sense of their world, personal and social development, development of symbolic and problem-solving abilities, and language development (Lillard, et al., 2012). In a classroom setting, Gerdes et al. (2013) described child-initiated play as "center time," "choice time," or "work time" and explained that

although these times are child-initiated, the experiences should be meaningful and an opportunity for a student to gain a deeper understanding of a concept. According to Weisberg et al. (2013), an educator can set up the environment, being sensitive to the needs of the children, and can subtly interact with students to help them gain the purpose of the activity without losing the sole purpose of offering a learning environment open to play and following the children's lead rather than taking over. For teachers, this means their teaching styles and classroom environment can either support or inhibit their students' learning every day (Gerdes et al., 2013).

Parental Perceptions About Play

Babuc (2015) described play as being a universal part of human lives, but revealed cultural differences in the perception parents have about play. Some parents perceive play as an essential component to child development while other parents perceive play as having no developmental value (Lin & Yawkey, 2013). The perceptions that parents have about play stem from deep-rooted memories of their childhood and the environment in which they live (Singh & Gupta, 2016).

Findings from research conducted by Singh and Gupta (2016) revealed that some mothers believe that the absence of play means the absence of learning. The same study revealed the perception that some parents have that play only distracts children from learning (Singh & Gupta, 2016). Dialogues Singh and Gupta had with parent participants indicated that education is the top priority and comes first, so parents permit their child to play only if time permits. Bassok et al. (2014) and Brown (2014) both argue that the

parental focus on academic skill learning comes from parents feeling socially pressured to view play as an unimportant source of development.

There are many different cultural beliefs between home and school about play. According to Yahya and Wood (2016), in New Zealand play is considered to be a way to express culture and language. Children's play in England is often regarded as uncontrolled and destructive behavior (Yahya & Wood, 2016). Yahya and Wood (2016) reported that while European American parents view play as an important means for early development, Asian parents place more importance on academic training rather than play. Lillard, Hopkins et al. (2013) reported that mothers residing in the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Portugal, and Argentina all agreed that their children participate in child initiated play, but mothers in 11 other countries did not report this.

Understanding the Alphabetic Principle

The alphabetic principle is the foundational support for a child's initial reading achievement (McGeown, Medford, & Moxon, 2013). McGeown et al. (2013) noted that children's letter-sound knowledge and other phonemic awareness skills predicted word identification in the early stages of reading, when they were taught in a systematic synthetic phonics approach. In addition, interacting with adults and other children in a social setting is crucial to early language development. This form of interaction is most essential for children during the early childhood years (McMillan, Walsh, & Gray, 2012). By the time a child is five or six years old, a child should be able to speak socially and engage socially, communicate needs, and use words to better understand their environment (Goldstein et al., 2017). The ability to use and understand oral language is

prerequisite to learning to read language (Meins, Fernyhough, Arnott, Leekam, & Rosnay, 2013).

Gilford (2013) suggested that children with inadequate language development by age three are unlikely to be as successful or as proficient in language development as their peers. However, children who are enrolled in a high quality preschool may gain the necessary skills to catch up and be successful (Gilford, 2013). Language development is the most important skill for a child's first five years of life and is the key to learning across all academic domains (McGee & Dail, 2013; Meins et al., 2013). McGee and Dail (2013) suggested that a child will continue to face difficulty throughout elementary school if mastery of the alphabetic principle is not learned by first grade. Meins et al. (2013) that maternal support of children's symbolic play can enhance cognitive and language development.

Before a person can learn to read, a person must understand the alphabetic principle of letter recognition, associate the letters with the appropriate sounds, and blend those sounds together to make words (Drouin, Horner, & Sondergeld, 2012; Goldberg & Lederberg, 2015; McGeown et al., 2013). The alphabetic principle is the foundational support for a child's initial reading achievement (McGeown et al., 2013). McGeown et al. (2013) noted that children's letter-sound knowledge and other phonemic awareness skills predicted word identification in the early stages of reading, when they were taught in a systematic synthetic phonics approach. Using a Rasch model, Drouin et al. (2012) revealed the difficulties children face with identifying the letter sound when naming the

letter. A child's inability to make a connection between the two often results in an inability to master the alphabetic principle (Goldberg & Lederberg, 2015)

Research suggests that some letters are easier to learn than others (Stahl, 2014). Reynolds, López-Velásquez, and Valentín (2017) believed letter properties determine how a child develops alphabet knowledge, which includes whether a letter is a consonant or a vowel, the location of a letter in the sequence of the alphabet, the articulation of the letter, and if the letter has more than one sound. Students must be able to identify the connection between letters and the associating sounds before they can demonstrate an understanding of the alphabetic principle. (Labat, Vallet, Magnan, & Ecalle, 2015). Researchers Kim and Petscher (2012) believed that a child's characteristics has an impact on alphabetic knowledge development, which includes focusing on the letters in a child's name, oral language, memory, print awareness, rapid naming, and phonemic processing. Also, the components of phonemic awareness have been studied to determine the various alphabet practices used to increase a child's understanding of the alphabetic principle (Pendergast, Bingham, & Patton-Terry, 2015).

Barriers to Understanding the Alphabetic Principle

Goldstein et al. (2017) asserted that the alphabetic principle is an essential skill for young children to acquire. When children fail to acquire this skill they are at risk for later reading difficulties (Goldstein et al., 2017). The majority of students who have reading difficulties in the third grade will continue to have those same difficulties in high school (Goldstein et al., 2017). Those reading difficulties could continue up to adulthood (Goldstein et al., 2017).

Students with the greatest risk are those children who enter school with limited exposure to the English language (Goldstein et al., 2017). These students have little to no understanding of concepts related to the alphabetic principle in English, the purpose of reading, and oral English language and verbal skills (Goldstein et al., 2017). These students may face environmental factors that other students do not, such as poor oral language development, a small number of books available at home, unsupportive parental attitudes, and poor parental models for reading (Cooper, 2014).

Family history is another factor that can put a student at risk of having difficulties with understanding the concept of the alphabetic principle and English language. According to Vernon-Feagons and Bratsch Hines (2013), when children are in a more orally stimulating environment, they are more likely to have enhanced language development.

In addition to the previously listed factors, the classroom environment is essential to learning key concepts. Pianta, Downer, and Hamre (2016) suggested that many students attend schools in classrooms not created to promote literacy and with teachers who are not adequately equipped with proper instructional materials or knowledge of the English language. The traditional early childhood curriculum was designed around pretend play because of the critical importance of play to children's development (Lillard, Hopkins et al., 2013). Al Otaiba, Allor, Werfel, and Clemens (2016) emphasized the importance of the teacher understanding the relationship between letter-sound correspondence. Only then can a child become a fluent and successful reader (Al Otaiba et al., 2016).

Understanding the Alphabetic Principle Through Play

Pendergast et al. (2015) explained that language is developed through a child's environment and non-English speaking students can gain language through their classroom environment. This is also true for students who come in the classroom with very little language development, which is the situation for many students in a kindergarten classroom. To gain an understanding of a child's background, teachers must carefully observe their students in the learning environment in order to intentionally plan engaging educational experiences that will develop new skills (Thomas, 2014). Goldstein et al. (2017) suggested the more that a teacher knows about a student's home language and language instruction, the better the teacher will be able to help students understand the alphabetic principle.

The types of play that have an impact on language development are activities which include free exploration, manipulating objects, make-believe play, and creative games (Neuman, 2015; Weisberg et al., 2013). Educators who provide a content-rich environment for students to engage independently promote skills for reading success, in addition to providing a differentiated stimulating learning experience for all learners (Neuman, 2015).

Literature Pertaining to the Method

Much research on play and the alphabetic principle have been quantitative studies (Gerdes et al., 2013, Remorini & Rende, 2014; Simge, 2016; Weldermariam, 2014; Yates & Marcelo, 2014). None of those studies used a correlational design. Gerdes et al. (2013) used an experimental case study approach to identify the amount of time kindergarten

students engaged in play. Remorini and Rende (2014) used an ethnographic approach to identify the ecological influences on play in two Argentinian communities. Simge (2016) investigated why outdoor play has not been fully implemented at early childhood facilities since early studies revealed the benefits of it. Weldermariam (2014) provides recommendations, based on research results, on ways to implement learning requirements without interrupting a child's natural ability to play. Yates and Marcelo (2014) investigated the relationship between how children play, a child's ability to adjust to the learning environment, and how teachers view their students' ability to adjust to the learning environment.

A correlational design allowed me to associate parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle. In this secondary analysis of these archival data, a Pearson's product moment correlation may be performed, because, as pointed out by Smith et al. (2010), in secondary analysis the value of the issue under study is more important than statistical considerations. This view is supported by Johnston (2014). This analysis will allow me to determine if there is a relationship between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play in academics and kindergarten students' mastery of the alphabetic principle.

Summary

Child initiated play encourages students to be independent learners and thinkers, which may increase learning, even in specific skill areas such as mastery of the alphabetic principle. As child-initiated play in preschool and kindergarten has declined in recent years, and is no longer regarded as an approach for learning, play is situated most

frequently at home, under the guidance of parents. However, parents may also be influenced by government policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) that have changed the standards and resources teachers use in the classroom, and may vary in their support of play at home. This study determined the strength of the relationship between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle. In the next section, I will describe the method by which I explored this relationship.

Section 3: Research Method

In this study I analyzed the levels of agreement of kindergarten parents with regard to their play support and academic focus and sought to discover how these levels of agreement were associated with children's mastery of the alphabetic principle. This quantitative study was conducted using a cross-sectional survey approach. A web-based questionnaire was provided to parents of children enrolled in a kindergarten program at a public elementary school in a suburban area in the southeastern United States. This survey provided the levels of agreement parents have about the value of play and about their academic focus, so those levels of agreement can be correlated to children's ability to master a specific academic skill, the alphabetic principle, as measured by the GKIDS assessment.

Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and their focus on academic activities in lieu of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle as determined through an achievement subtest administered in the school.

This approach allowed the relationship between children's learning and their parents' level of play support and academic focus to be explored and explained.

Creswell (2012) indicated that a survey design can be used to describe trends and to sample opinions. A qualitative research design was rejected because according to Creswell (2012) it is best used to address a research problem when the variables are not known (p. 16).

Setting and Sample

The setting of this study was a public elementary school located in a suburban area of Southeastern United States. I randomly chose a school in that school district. Convenience sampling was used in this study by offering the study to all parents with a child enrolled in the kindergarten program at the randomly selected school, and including all parents who responded to this invitation.

The population enrolled in the kindergarten program of at the selected elementary school was 120 students. Each family was invited to participate in this study. Each parent was given a consent form and those individuals who were willing and available to participate in this study were chosen as the participants for this study. Using the sample size calculator provided by Hulley, Cummings, Browner, Grady, and Newman (2013), a threshold of 0.05 and an expected minimal correlation of .38 requires 52 participants. There were 53 parents who participated in this study.

During a kindergarten open house held at the educational facility, families were provided with an introductory letter. The introductory letter included a brief biography of my academic and professional experience, the importance of their participation, the purpose of the study, a request to use their child's alphabet knowledge levels, assurance of confidentiality, and the estimated time required to take and return the survey.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in this study was the Parent Play Beliefs Scale (PPBS) (Fogle & Mendez, 2006). This survey questionnaire consisted of 21 closed-ended questions regarding parents' beliefs about their kindergarten child's experience with play

and their own opinions of play's value. There are two sections of the survey questionnaire, play support and academic focus, that addressed questions with choice options following a Likert-type scale of *disagree (1)*, *somewhat disagree (2)*, *neutral (3)*, *agree (4)*, and *strongly agree (5)*.

Fogle and Mendez (2006) created the PPBS in collaboration with Head Start parents and staff (p. 509). Validity of the instrument is supported by the following information. Prior to being used in a study, three experts in the field of child development with knowledge of the multidimensional domains of play beliefs were chosen to examine the comprehensiveness of the item pool in capturing parental perspectives and pre-academic questions. Discussions Fogle and Mendez (2006) had with parents were used to review the wording of the questions to ensure readability and clarity of all items and directions. Once those questions were examined, Fogle and Mendez conducted a pilot survey by sending the questionnaires home with the parents. Mendez gave me permission to use this survey in my study and to use it in a web-based format (see Appendix B). The survey was therefore entered into the online questionnaire tool from SurveyMonkey. Participants followed the survey link shared with them at the kindergarten open house to complete the 21 question survey questionnaire.

In addition, archived data generated by the English Language Arts: Reading Foundation subtest of GKIDS, administered to kindergarten children in the target school in fall 2016, were used. An overview of this subtest is presented in Appendix C. GKIDS is a yearlong performance-based assessment aligned to the state standards. The primary purpose of GKIDS is to provide continuous diagnostic information about kindergarten

students' developing skills in English language arts, math, science, social studies, personal/social development, and approaches to learning.

A committee of educators in Georgia are in the process of remeasuring the reliability and validity of the GKIDS assessment, which will be available in the summer of 2018. However, multiple studies were conducted to establish the reliability and validity of the GKIDS assessment. In the fall of 2016, the committee conducted an Inter-rater reliability study, and due to the high agreement rates of the participants, the reliability of the GKIDS was indicated. Although no validity data were reported, a similar instrument named WaKIDS was studied and measured against two other literacy assessments, Test of Phonological Awareness PLUS and the Test of Early Reading Ability, Third Edition, which revealed a strong correlation between student scores and the resembling assessments, establishing the validity of the instrument used (Soderberg et al., 2012).

According to the GKIDS Assessment and Instructional Guide, the purpose of this instrument is to guide instruction in a continuous process, suggesting that reliability and validity are self-referential and obtained student levels are of value only within the administering state and individual schools. The archived data used in this study were presented as levels of achievement from 1 to 5. I gained access to archived GKIDS levels after obtaining permission from the principal and parents.

Parents' surveys and students' academic levels were coded and analyzed through the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). Scores for the parents were obtained for the play support factor and the academic focus factor. According to

Fogle and Mendez (2006), their play support factor is indicative of a belief among parents that play is enjoyable for children and provides benefits for children's development.

Data Collection and Analysis

The quantitative survey data were collected using the online questionnaire and survey tool SurveyMonkey. The students' archived GKIDS mastery levels were collected using the school's existing student records. Each survey received a random number 1 through 53 and their child's mastery level was given a number to match the survey number. This step was taken as a measure to protect the participants. The collected data were compiled into an Excel spreadsheet and prepared for analysis using the SPSS statistical software tool.

The goal of correlational research was to illustrate the level of association between the identified variables (Creswell, 2012). I investigated two questions:

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle?

H_0 1: There is no statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

H_a 1: There is a statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

RQ2: Is there a statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about their academic focus in lieu of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

H₀2: There is no statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about their academic focus in lieu of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

H_a2: There is a statistically significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about their academic focus in lieu of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

With the use of the SPSS statistical tool, the data were collated to produce a correlation matrix. Once the correlation matrix table was created, I identified the degree of association as a positive linear relationship or a negative linear relationship. Mean survey responses to each of the 21 survey items were calculated, to provide a picture of parents' overall views about play and their academic focus. In addition, a mean "play agreement score" and a mean "academic focus score" were calculated for each parent by aggregating each parent's responses to the survey items. Parents' play agreement scores and academic focus scores were compared to the GKIDS score of corresponding kindergarten students using Pearson's product-moment correlation. The result revealed the strength of the relationship between parents' levels of agreement about the value play has for academics and for kindergarten students' levels on a test of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

Protection of Participants

I have been a kindergarten teacher for 10 years and a first grade teacher for two years and did not have a relationship with any of the parents who had a child enrolled in a kindergarten classroom. Parents were reassured that although I am a teacher in the school district, their survey responses were anonymized so that no connection would be made between parents' responses and their children's education.

The consent form to participate in this study (Appendix A) was included as part of the web-based survey so that completion of the survey constituted consent. For ethical protection, each GKIDS report received a number and the names on the reports were erased. Each parent received a survey, linked directly to their child's levels, to maintain the confidentiality of each participant. Data will be held in a locked file at my home for 5 years following the conclusion of this study, at which time both the consent forms and surveys will be destroyed.

This study conformed to guidelines of Walden University's Institutional Review Board. It was conducted under approval #0916160183123.

Summary

A quantitative research approach was selected for this study to investigate the relationship between 53 parents' levels of agreement about the influence play has on academics and kindergarten students' levels on a test of mastery of the alphabetic principle. The parent survey responses for this study were collected using the PPBS, consisting of 21 closed-ended questions regarding their beliefs about their kindergarten

child's play. Children's mastery of the alphabetic principle was derived from their GKIDS levels.

The next section of this study includes results from the survey given to participants of this study and the relationship between that and children's levels. The responses to the questions in the study reveal the opinions and views parents have about the value of play and the role it has on children understanding the alphabetic principle.

Section 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle as determined through the achievement test administered in the school. This quantitative study was designed to address two research questions seeking a correlation between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and their misgivings about play's academic influence and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle.

Findings

The PPBS was developed by Fogle and Mendez (2006) to determine parents' levels of agreement about children's play. In addition, children's levels on a school-scheduled achievement test were used to determine level of mastery of the alphabetic principle. The PPBS questionnaire consists of 21 closed-ended questions regarding parents' beliefs about their kindergarten child's experience with play and their own opinions of play's value. The PPBS assesses parents' levels of agreement in two areas, play support and academic focus. Item numbers 1-17 assess the play support factor and item numbers 18-21 assess the academic focus factor. Participants were asked to respond to the items using a Likert-type scale of disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. Each response was respectively coded as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. A total of 53 parents agreed to participate in the study.

Parents' survey and students' academic levels were coded and analyzed through the use of the SPSS. Scores for the parents were obtained for the play support factor and

the academic focus factor. According to Fogle and Mendez (2006), parents who score high on the play support factor tend to value play for its contributions to children's development, as well as for its enjoyableness. Parents whose scores indicate strong academic focus tend to value academic activities in lieu of play as contributors to children's development.

Findings for the total group analyses performed included descriptive statistics and calculations of Pearson product moment correlation coefficients to determine if there were any significant correlations. Table 1 shows parents' responses on the play support factor and the academic focus factor. The range of the responses on the play support scale for the sample was 28.00-85.00, with a mean of 71.69 ($SD = 11.62$). The range of responses for academic focus was 4.00-18.00, with a mean of 10.32 ($SD = 3.26$). In addition, students' levels on the GKIDS instrument are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Play Support, Academic Focus, and the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS) Measure

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Play support factor	53	28.00	85.00	71.6981	11.62654
Academic factor	53	4.00	18.00	10.3208	3.26269
Student levels	53	1.00	5.00	3.1887	1.20984

In order to get a general view of the students' level of mastery in reading skills, frequency data or instance at the time of testing, most (77.4%) of the children had reached the levels of: (a) Progressing (32.1%), or (b) Meets the Standards (34%) as measured by the GKIDS instrument (see Table 2). As seen in Table 2, only 6 (11.3%) of the students had exceeded the standards, while 15.2% had not yet demonstrated any level

of mastery of reading at the time of testing. The average level of mastery in reading skills was 3.19 with a standard deviation of 1.19, which meant that most of the students were making progress towards the development of skills that would help them master the alphabet principle. As stated earlier, patterns from the data showed that more students scored in the categories of progressing or meet the standards than in any of the other categories (see Table 2). Although some authorities treat Likert scale data as ordinal (Bishop & Herron, 2015), these data are frequently reported as interval (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Carifio & Perla, 2008). Knapp (1990) noted the difference of opinion among researchers surrounding this issue. Because this analysis is secondary, not primary, following Smith et al. (2010) and Johnson (2014), who asserted that the value of the issue under study in secondary analysis is more important than statistical considerations, I treated these data as interval and performed Pearson correlations.

Table 2

Students' Level of Mastery of Foundational Reading Skills as Measured by the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills Instrument

Levels of Mastery	Level	Number of Students	Percentage
Not Yet Demonstrated	1	8	15.1
Emerging	2	4	7.5
Progressing	3	17	32.1
Meets the Standard	4	18	34.0
Exceeds the Standard	5	6	11.3
TOTAL		53	100.0

In this study I set out to determine if there was a correlation between parents' responses on the PPBS and student mastery of the alphabetic principle as measured by

the GKIDS instrument (Fogle & Mendez, 2006). The PPBS measured parents' levels of agreement in two areas: play support (items 1-17) and academic focus (items 18-21).

Play Support

Responses of the parents with regard to play support indicated that the majority of the parents agreed (coded as 4) or strongly agreed (coded as 5) to the statements. Even though there was some variability among the participants' responses, the results showed that no significant correlations were revealed from the overall measure. Nonetheless, interesting observations were made about the samples' responses to the items that composed the play support factor. These findings are described below and are subsequently summarized in Table 3.

Item 1: Play can help my child develop better thinking abilities. Patterns from the parents' responses showed that the mean response (M) for this item was 4.19 with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.89. Responses to this item are presented in Table 3. Results showed that most of the parents either agreed or strongly agreed with this item. Conversely, responses showed that only 11.3% reported that they disagreed or somewhat disagreed with this item.

Item 2: Playing at home will help my child get ready for kindergarten. For the most part, parents' responses indicated that they perceived playing at home would help their children prepare for kindergarten ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.30$). The majority of the parents reported that they agreed (34%) or strongly agreed (28.3%) with this statement; a total of 62.3% (see Table 4). Only 11 of the participants (20.7%) indicated that they disagreed or somewhat disagreed with this statement.

Item 3: I teach my child social skills during play. Most of the parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they teach their children social skills during play, $M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.21$. Only a few of the parents stated that they disagreed or somewhat disagreed with this item.

Item 4: If I take time to play with my child, s/he will be better at playing with others. Responses from the parents on this item revealed a clear pattern, $M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.07$. The majority of the parents (84.9%) believed that taking time to play with their children would help them play better with others (i.e., develop social skills).

Item 5: Through play, my child develops new skills and abilities. Parents also indicated a high level of agreement with this item and not a large degree of deviation from this pattern ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .91$); 90.5% indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with it. Only three participants (5.7%) reported that they disagreed ($n = 2$) or somewhat disagreed with this item ($n = 1$).

Item 6: Playing at school will help my child get ready for kindergarten. Most of the parents agreed (45.3%) or strongly agreed with this item (32.1%). In terms of disagreement, only 11.3% of the parents indicated that they disagreed ($n = 5$) or somewhat disagreed with this item ($n = 1$). The mean response was 3.75 and the standard deviation 1.23.

Item 7: Play helps my child learn to express his or her feelings. In terms of play being able to help their children learn how to express their feelings, most of the participants reported a high level of agreement with this item ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .95$);

88.6% reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement; 10% of the parents reported that they disagreed ($n = 1$) or somewhat disagreed ($n = 4$).

Item 8: Play can improve my child's language and communication abilities.

Responses from the parents indicated a high level of agreement about play and the improvement of their child's language and communication abilities ($M = 4.17$, $SD = .77$). Specifically, when parents were asked directly if they thought play could improve their child's language and communication abilities, 90.5% said that they agreed or strongly agreed with this item.

Item 9: I can help my child learn to control his or her emotions during play.

Overall, parents indicated a high level agreement with this item ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .93$); 83% of the sample said that they agreed ($n = 26$) or strongly agreed ($n = 18$) with this statement.

Item 10: Play can help my child develop social skills. Another direct question asked the parents if they perceived play as an activity that would help their children develop social skills. In this instance, parents level of agreement was high ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .91$). The majority (90.5%) of the parents reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with this item. No parent strongly disagreed with this item.

Item 11: Playing together helps me build a good relationship with my child.

When parents were asked if they believed playing together helped them build good relationships with their children, there was a high level of agreement ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .72$). Over 92% reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Item 12: Playing with my child is one of my favorite things to do. The majority of the parents reported that they agreed or strongly agreed (92.4%) with this item ($M = 4.34$, $SD = .85$). One parent reported strong disagreement and two parents reported moderate disagreement for this item.

Item 13: I have a lot of fun with my child when we play together. When parents were asked to rate their level of agreement with this statement, their level of agreement was high ($M = 4.36$, $SD = .73$). Many parents (88.6%) indicated that they agreed (35.8%) or strongly agreed (52.8%). Furthermore, four parents were neutral (7.5%), one (1.9%) disagreed, and one (1.9%) somewhat disagreed.

Item 14: Play is a fun activity for my child. Almost the entire sample agreed that play was a fun activity for their child ($M = 4.49$, $SD = .60$). A total of 46 parents (86.8%) indicated that they agreed (28.3%) or strongly agreed (58.5%) with this item. Only one participant disagreed that play was a fun activity for the child.

Item 15: My child has a lot of fun when we play together. Almost all of the parents agreed or strongly agreed that their children had a lot of fun when they played together ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .60$). The majority of the parents (94.4%) indicated that they agreed (32.1%) or strongly agreed (62.3%) with this item. None of the participants disagreed.

Item 16: My child will get more out of play if I play with him or her. Parents in this sample somewhat agreed with this item ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.24$). Thirty-seven (69.8%) of the parents stated that they agreed or strongly agreed with this item, while 15.1% reported that they disagreed or somewhat disagreed with it.

Item 17: It is important for me to participate in play with my child. The level of agreement was high for this item ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.03$). Nearly all parents (84.9%) agreed (41.5%) or strongly agreed (43.4) with this statement. Results also showed that 15.1% of the parents indicated that they disagreed or somewhat disagreed. Means for all play support items are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Parents' Reported Play Support in Order by Item Number

Item	Focus	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	<i>Play can help my child develop better thinking abilities</i>	4.19	0.89
2	<i>Playing at home will help my child get ready for kindergarten.</i>	3.53	1.30
3	<i>I teach my child social skills during play.</i>	4.02	1.21
4	<i>If I take time to play with my child, s/he will be better at playing with others.</i>	4.28	1.07
5	<i>Through play, my child develops new skills and abilities.</i>	4.26	0.91
6	<i>Playing at school will help my child get ready for kindergarten</i>	3.75	1.23
7	<i>Play helps my child learn to express his or her feelings.</i>	4.08	0.95
8	<i>I can help my child learn to control his or her emotions during play</i>	4.17	0.77
9	<i>Play can improve my child's language and communication abilities</i>	4.08	0.93
10	<i>Play can help my child develop social skills</i>	4.26	0.91
11	<i>Playing together helps me build a good relationship with my child.</i>	4.53	0.72
12	<i>Playing with my child is one of my favorite things to do.</i>	4.34	0.85
13	<i>I have a lot of fun with my child when we play together</i>	4.36	0.73
14	<i>Play is a fun activity for my child.</i>	4.49	0.60
15	<i>My child has a lot of fun when we play together.</i>	4.53	0.60
16	<i>My child will get more out of play if I play with him or her.</i>	3.70	1.24
17	<i>It is important for me to participate in play with my child.</i>	4.13	1.03

$N = 53$

Means and standard deviations are fairly consistent across all items, with a high level of play support demonstrated in parents' survey responses. However, arranging items in order of mean, from highest to lowest, reveals additional patterns.

Fun as an outcome of or rationale for play garnered the most support among parents, with means well above 4.0/5.0. Standard deviations for items referencing fun are

among the smallest in this array, indicating not only strong appreciation for the enjoyment children find in play but consistency in this appreciation among nearly all parents.

General skill development, in social interactions, thinking, and language form the group of survey items that generated strong parent support. The means in these items (4.0 to 4.26) are smaller than means associated with fun and the standard deviations of these means are more diverse than those for questions about fun. But it appears clear that parents' view play as valuable not just for fun but also for real learning that occurs during play.

Three items generated the lowest mean support among these parents, with values less than 4.0. Two of these items refer to kindergarten readiness as an outcome of play and the third refers to the value of playing with a parent. These three items also registered the highest standard deviations of all the items, suggesting that parents may be more polarized on play's impact on readiness and on the value of parent-child play than the means suggest. These results are presented again in Table 4, but ordered by mean.

Table 4

Parents' Reported Play Support in Order by Mean

Item	Focus	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
11	<i>Playing together helps me build a good relationship with my child.</i>	4.53	0.72
15	<i>My child has a lot of fun when we play together.</i>	4.53	0.60
14	<i>Play is a fun activity for my child.</i>	4.49	0.60
13	<i>I have a lot of fun with my child when we play together</i>	4.36	0.73
12	<i>Playing with my child is one of my favorite things to do.</i>	4.34	0.85
4	<i>If I take time to play with my child, s/he will be better at playing with others.</i>	4.28	1.07
5	<i>Through play, my child develops new skills and abilities.</i>	4.26	0.91
10	<i>Play can help my child develop social skills</i>	4.26	0.91
1	<i>Play can help my child develop better thinking abilities</i>	4.19	0.89
8	<i>I can help my child learn to control his or her emotions during play</i>	4.17	0.77
17	<i>It is important for me to participate in play with my child.</i>	4.13	1.03
7	<i>Play helps my child learn to express his or her feelings.</i>	4.08	0.95
9	<i>Play can improve my child's language and communication abilities</i>	4.08	0.93
3	<i>I teach my child social skills during play.</i>	4.02	1.21
6	<i>Playing at school will help my child get ready for kindergarten</i>	3.75	1.23
16	<i>My child will get more out of play if I play with him or her.</i>	3.70	1.24
2	<i>Playing at home will help my child get ready for kindergarten.</i>	3.53	1.30

N = 53

Based on these results and the fact that patterns in the data indicated high levels of agreement with the statements about play, it seems that the majority of the parents perceived play as being a significant part of a child's development and growth. Thus, it was determined that parents in this sample rated play support as an important factor for the children's cognitive, emotional and social development, but that it may not contribute strongly to kindergarten readiness.

Academic Focus

Four items on the PPBS assessed parents' level of agreement about the Academic Focus factor. Fogle and Mendez (2006) explained that parents who had high ratings in the academic focus factor were those who viewed play as not so relevant to the

development of their children's social and cognitive skills. The researchers also indicated that these parents are more likely to value academically oriented activities, for instance, reading, rather than playing. Responses to these items are presented individually below.

Item 18: I do not think my child learns important skills by playing. The pattern of the responses to this item indicated that there was a low level of agreement for this item ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.18$). In fact, the majority of the parents (73.6%) disagreed or somewhat disagreed that their children did not learn important skills by playing. Over 13% of the parents agreed or strongly agreed with this item and 13.2% were neutral about this item.

Item 19: Reading to my child is more worthwhile than playing with my child. Most of the parents (35.8%) responded neutrally for this item ($M = 3.17$; $SD = 1.24$). Similarly, 30.2% of the parents disagreed or somewhat disagreed, and 30.2% agreed or strongly agreed with this item.

Item 20: I would rather read to my child than play together. Most of the participants (60%) either disagreed or were neutral about this item ($M = 2.94$; $SD = 1.14$). However, 33.9% reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with this item.

Item 21: Playtime is not a high priority in my home. Participants reported a low level of agreement with this item ($M = 2.19$; $SD = 1.36$). In fact, most participants (64.1%) indicated that they disagreed or somewhat disagreed with this item. Findings for academic support items are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Parents' Reported Academic Focus in Order by Mean

Item	Focus	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
19	<i>Reading to my child is more worthwhile than playing with my child</i>	3.17	1.24
20	<i>I would rather read to my child than play together</i>	2.94	1.14
21	<i>Playtime is not a high priority in my home</i>	2.19	1.36
18	<i>I do not think my child learns important skills by playing</i>	1.96	1.18

N = 53

As can be seen from the patterns of the responses from the participants, parents who participated in this study perceived play as an important part of the children's cognitive, emotional and social development. Furthermore, while they valued an academic focus, their responses did not indicate that they would rather their children only focus on academics while learning. However, parents demonstrated more variation in their responses on academic focus items (average standard deviation of 1.23) than in play support items (average standard deviation of 0.93). Since the primary purpose of this study was to determine if there is a significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about play (i.e., both play support and academic focus) and their children's levels on the GKIDS measure, specific correlational analyses are presented next.

Results of the Correlational Analysis

The research questions that guided the development of this study asked if a relationship existed between children's level of mastery of the alphabetic principle and parents' level of agreement concerning the value of play (RQ1) and their misgivings about the value of play (RQ2). My intention was to discover if parents' levels of agreement concerning play's effect on children's learning might be related to their children's level of mastery of a key literacy skill.

As seen in Table 6, the correlational analyses were performed using the Pearson product moment correlation statistic on the two factors of the PPBS, that is, the play support factor and the academic focus factor, each compared to students' levels of mastery on the English Language Arts: Reading Foundation subtest of the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills measure (GKIDS). When the correlational analyses were performed, no significant correlations were revealed. Therefore, the null hypothesis for each research question was accepted. An additional correlation, between parents' level of agreement with regard to play support and f, also returned no significant relationship.

Table 6
Pearson Product Moment Correlation Between Student Levels on the GKIDS Subtest and Parents' Level of Agreement for Play Support and for Academic Focus

N=53

Variables	1	2	3
1. Student Levels GKIDS	--		
2. Play Support	-.047	--	
3. Academic Focus	.120	-.161	--

A monotonic relationship between variables of GKIDS levels of mastery and PPBS levels of agreement on play support and on academic focus was anticipated. However, a review of means and standard deviations on the PPBS and student GKIDS levels reveals interesting relationships between parents' support of play (Figure 1) and parents' focus on academics (Figure 2). Play support was lowest among parents whose children perform at the level *Meets the Standard*, and in general play support was more varied by GKIDS level than was academic focus.

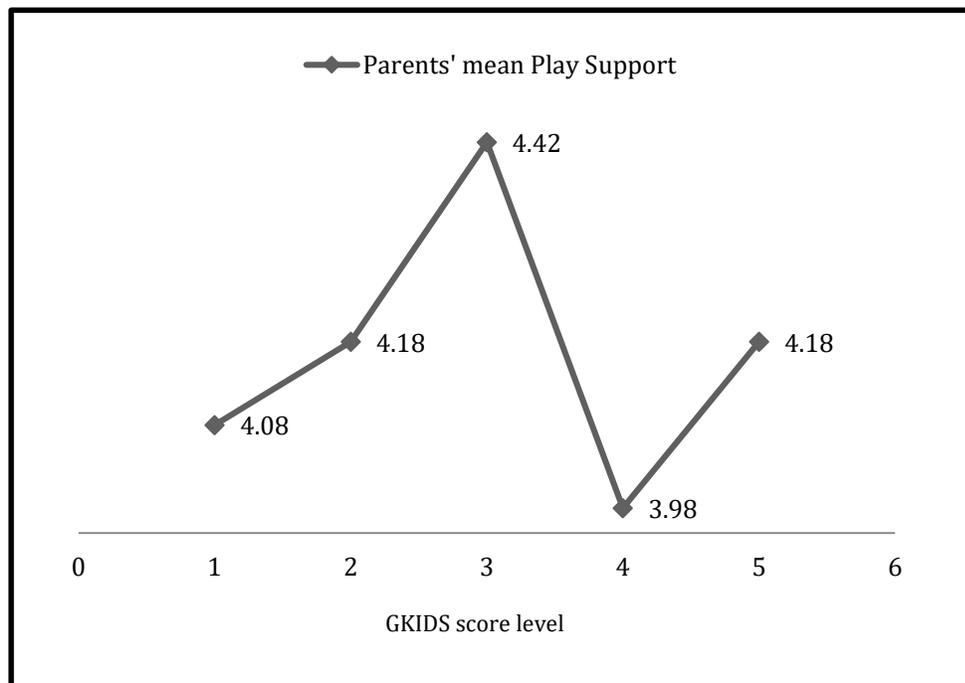


Figure 1. Parents' mean agreement for Play Support by GKIDS score level.

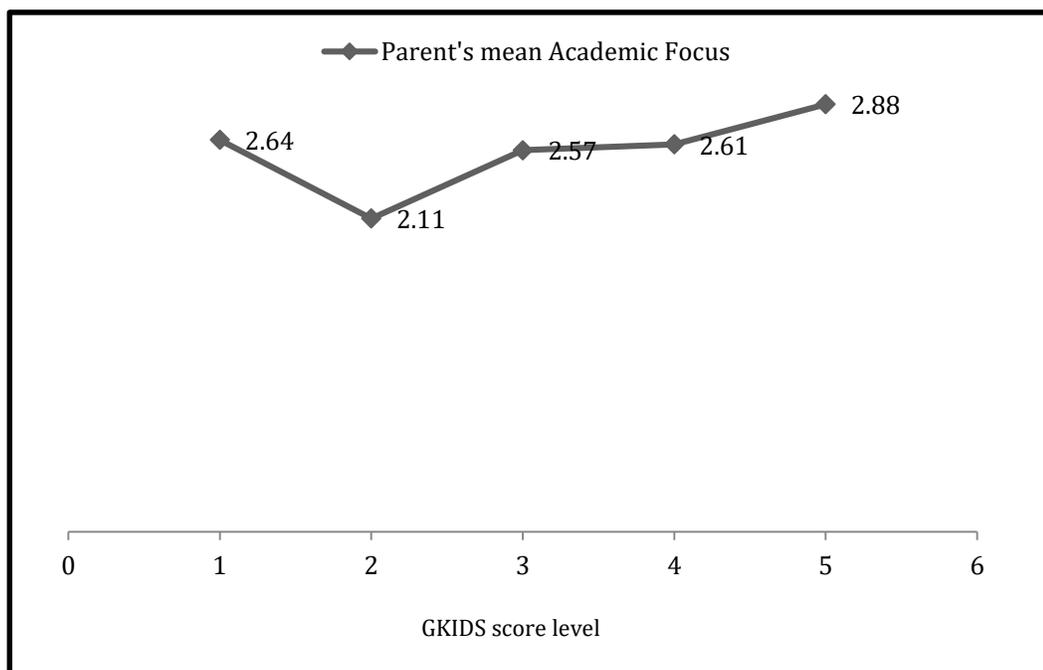


Figure 2. Parents' mean agreement for Academic Focus by GKIDS score level.

It would be interesting to learn if something distinguishes parents of children scoring at the *Meets the Standard* level from parents of children at other levels. It may be that these parents have worked hard to move their children to that level of achievement, and are less supportive of play, or it may be that these parents are less supportive of play because they wish for their children to move to the *Exceeds the Standard* level, or because of some other or no other reason. One fact remains from this analysis, which is that parent levels of agreement about play are unrelated to children's achievement of phonemic awareness as recorded by the GKIDS assessment.

Summary

While parents' responses to the PPBS suggested that most of the parents recognize that play is fun for children and perceive play as important for the development of children's social and cognitive skills, there was no significant correlation between the play support factor and students' levels on the GKIDS instrument. Similarly, there was no significant correlation between the academic focus factor and the students' levels on the GKIDS instrument.

I concluded that even though no significant correlations were revealed, important information was revealed by the participants' responses. The sample's responses showed that parents did value play and believed that their children could benefit socially, emotionally, and intellectually from playing with their peers and with their parents. A fuller discussion of the implications of this study is presented in Section 5.

Section 5: Discussion

This study was conducted to determine if there were significant relationships between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels of mastery of the alphabetic principle. The population for this study was 120 parents and kindergarten students who attended a public elementary school located in a suburban area of the Southeastern United States, with 53 parents and kindergarten students participating. Determining a relationship between the variables was intended to assist parents, teachers, and school administrators with instruction and curriculum practices and with their support for children's learning.

Levels of agreement parents expressed toward child-initiated play were measured using the PPBS survey instrument developed by Fogle and Mendez (2006) and organized by two factors: play support and academic focus. Students' level of mastery of the alphabetic principle was measured on the Reading Foundation subtest of the GKIDS instrument, a yearlong performance-based assessment aligned to the state standards.

In this chapter I present a brief summary of the study and an interpretation of the findings. In addition, I discuss the relationship between the quantitative results and the literature. This chapter concludes with a description of the implications for social change and recommendations for actions and future studies.

Summary of the Study

Every year, students enter the kindergarten classroom on varied educational levels. Some students are able to demonstrate an understanding of the alphabetic principle by the end of the school year, while others struggle with this concept. Based on

the views of theorists Montessori and Piaget, child-initiated play provides students with the skills and dispositions necessary to master educational concepts such as the alphabetical principal.

The PPBS survey instrument consisted of two distinct sections. The first part of the survey, item numbers 1 to 17, contained questions designed to assess the play support factor. The second part of the survey, item numbers 18 to 21, contained questions designed to assess the academic focus factor. The two main areas provide depth of insight regarding parental support of play or academics.

Based on the findings from this study, I tested two research questions that asked if a significant relationship existed between parents' levels of agreement about the influence of play on academics and children's mastery of the alphabetic principle as measured by the GKIDS exam. There was no significant correlation between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and kindergarten students' levels on a test of mastery of the alphabetic principle. Although there was no significant correlation between the variables, there were key points discovered in the data.

The data revealed that overall parents are supportive of play with a majority of the parents choosing to agree or strongly agree with responses indicating play support. Enjoyment of play featured in parents' responses to the play focus survey items (items 11 through 15) that generated the greatest mean support (ranging from 4.34/5.00 to 4.53/5.00) and the least variation in responses (with standard deviations between 0.60 and 0.85). Play focus items generating slightly lower means (between 4.02 and 4.28) and with slightly greater degrees of variation (standard deviations between 0.77 and 1.21)

were concerned with social skill development that parents valued as an outcome of play. However, the statements “Playing at home will help my child get ready for kindergarten” ($M = 3.53/5.00$; $SD = 1.30$) and “Playing at school will help my child get ready for kindergarten” ($M = 3.75/5.00$; $SD = 1.23$) were valued among the least of the play support items by these parents. This discounting of the value of play as a factor in children’s cognitive development runs counter to the effect of play proposed by Piaget (1928) and Montessori (1949), and confirms the findings of previous researchers, such as Lin and Yawkey (2013), Lynch (2015), and O’Gorman, Grove, and Ailwood (2012), all of whom found parents ambivalent about the value of play in support of academic learning.

Parents valued playing with their children, as borne out by survey items 16 (“My child will get more out of play if I play with him or her”; $M=3.70$; $SD=1.24$) and 20 (“I would rather read to my child than play together”; $M=2.94$; $SD=1.14$). However, they also valued their role in more academic activities, such as reading with their children, as evidenced by item 20, just described, and item 19 (“Reading to my child is more worthwhile than playing with him or her”; $M=3.17$; $SD=1.24$). Parents’ value for their academic activities with children reflects the findings of Bassok, et al. (2014), Brown (2014), and Singh and Gupta (2016). These authors reported parents’ worry that play distracts from school learning and their feelings of social pressure to focus children on academics.

A modest connection emerged between student mastery level and parents’ play support. As the student’s mastery level rose from level 1 to level 3, parents’ reported p

support rose as well. As a general trend, the lower the mastery level, the lower the play means in this small sample. Interestingly, parent support for play was highest in families in which children achieved at the middle-most level (GKIDS level 3). More research with a larger sample is needed to determine if parents' value for play varies with children's achievement level, so that play is valued less for children who are struggling and for children who are achieving exceptionally well, and valued more for children whose achievement is in the middle range.

Implications for Social Change

The implications of this study include a greater understanding of parents' awareness of free play in maximizing early childhood learners' understanding of such academic tasks as mastering the alphabetic principle. Evidence from the study's play support results revealed that parents may not fully understand the importance of child-initiated play, as indicated by the following analysis. Items 2 and 6 asked parents their level of agreement about how play helps get their child ready for kindergarten, but one addressed play at home and the other item addressed play at school. Most of the parents on both items responded agree or strongly agree (see Table 4). However, the responses to the items under the academic focus were more mixed (average standard deviation of 1.23). This evidence suggests that although parents believe play prepares their child for kindergarten, there are mixed feelings about play being more important than academic focus. Sharing the results of the study along with statistical data may provide parents with a better understanding of the suggested amount of time children should play, free from adult interruption, and the benefits child-initiated play has on academic learning.

School districts may be able to use the results from the study as a starting point for research practices to determine effective ways to provide students with time to make free choices during the school day. Such district initiatives may include teacher participation in professional development sessions to become more aware about the benefits of child-initiated play.

Recommendations for Future Study

The following recommendations for further research are based on the findings from this study. First, since this study was limited to parents at one elementary school in a suburban area of Southeastern United States, increasing the sample size to include individuals from other elementary schools within the district and state may provide a broader range of responses to analyze. It would also add a different view point to the study if the survey were offered to the elementary teachers as well.

I would like to know about teachers' levels of agreement about the influence play has on academics to determine if there is a correlation between their scores and their students' levels of mastery. Engaging in this type of study would allow me to determine if teachers' awareness about play has a greater impact on student learning than parents' awareness about play.

I would like to conduct a follow-up study by providing parents with a workshop on the benefits of child-initiated play, then survey the parents again on their perception about play and academic focus immediately following the workshop. I could compare those results and the current results to see if their levels of agreement changed. Increasing

parents' awareness and valuing children's play as a contributor to cognitive development and academic success would be the goal of such a plan.

Conclusion

Play is an important source for brain development (Gerdes et al., 2013). However, due to accountability demands of public education and associated acceleration of early childhood academic learning, play has been reduced or eliminated altogether from many children's school day (Lynch, 2015).

The research questions addressed parents' levels of agreement about the value of play and sought to examine the relationship between those levels of agreement and students' mastery of the alphabetic principle. I selected a correlational design to determine if a relationship existed between parents' levels of agreement about the value of play, using the PPBS, and a kindergarten child's mastery of the alphabetic principle, as determined by the English Language Arts: Reading Foundation's subtest of the GKIDS. Fifty-three parents participated. Overall, the majority of the parents indicated a high level of agreement concerning the value of play, but a few parents did not agree that play has value as a source of academic development. Although no significant correlations were determined with this study, possible future research studies will provide further data for teacher development and parent education.

References

- Adams, M., & Flear, M. (2016). The relations between a "push-down" and "push-up" curriculum: A cultural-historical study of home-play pedagogy in the context of structured learning in international schools in Malaysia. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 17(3), 328-342. doi.org/10.1177/1463949116660955
- Al Otaiba, S. A., Allor, J., Werfel, K. L., & Clemens, N. (2016). Critical components of phonemic awareness instruction and intervention: Recommendations for teacher training and for future research. In Schiff R., & Joshi R. (Eds.) *Interventions in Learning Disabilities. Literacy Studies (Perspectives from Cognitive Neurosciences, Linguistics, Psychology and Education)*, Volume 13 (pp 9-27). New York, NY: Springer.
- Babuc, Z. (2015). Exploring parental perceptions and preferences about play: A case study in Erzurum. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 197(25), 2417-2424. doi 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.304
- Barac, R., Bialystok, E., Castro, D. C., & Sanchez, M. (2014). The cognitive development of young dual language learners: A critical review. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(4), 699-714. doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.02.003
- Bassok D., Latham S., & Rorem A. (2014). Is kindergarten the new first grade? The changing nature of kindergarten in the age of accountability. *EdPolicy Works Working Paper Series, No. 20*. doi.org/10.1177/2332858415616358

- Brown C. (2014). Conforming to reform: Teaching pre-kindergarten in a neoliberal early education system. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 13(3). Retrieved from <http://ecr.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/07/31/1476718X14538602.abstract>
- Cevher-Kalburan, N., & Ivrendi, A. (2016). Risky play and parenting styles. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 25(2), 355-366. doi:10.1007/s10826-015-0236-1
- Cooper, M. (2014). *Cut adrift: Families in insecure times*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Dewey, J. (1902). *The child and the curriculum*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Dewey, J., & Dewey, E. (1915). *Schools of tomorrow*. New York, NY: Dutton.
- Drouin, M., Horner, S., & Sondergeld, T. (2012). Alphabet knowledge in preschool: A Rasch model analysis. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 27, 543-554. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2011.12.008
- Dyment, J., & O'Connell, T. (2013). The impact of playground design on play choices and behaviors of pre-school children. *Children's Geographies*, 11(3), 263-280. doi:10.1080/14733285.2013.812272
- Fogle, L. & Mendez, J. L. (2006). Assessing the play beliefs of African American mothers with preschool children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21, 507-518. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2006.08.002

- Gerdes, J., Durden, T., & Poppe, L. (2013, June). *Play and learning in the primary years*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.
- Gilford, S. (2013). *Learning from Head Start: A teacher's guide to school readiness*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Goldberg, H., & Lederberg, A. (2015). Acquisition of the alphabetic principle in deaf and hard-of-hearing preschoolers: The role of phonology in letter-sound learning. *Reading & Writing*, 28(4), 509-525. doi:10.1007/s11145-014-9535-y
- Goldstein, H., Olszewski, A., Haring, C., Greenwood, C. R., McCune, L., Carta, J., Atwater, J., Guerrero, G., Schneider, N., McCarthy, T., & Kelley, E. S. (2017). Efficacy of a supplemental phonemic awareness curriculum to instruct preschoolers with delays in early literacy development. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 60, 89-103. doi:10.1044/2016
- Gray, P. (2013). The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Play*, 3(4), 443-463. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ985541.pdf>
- Hulley, S.B., Cummings, S.R., Browner, W.S., Grady, D., & Newman, T.B. (2013). *Designing clinical research: An epidemiologic approach* (4th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Jackson, L. A. (2009). Observing children's stress behaviors in a kindergarten classroom. *Early Childhood Research and Practice* 11(1). ISSN 1524-5039 Online.

- Johnston, M. P. (2014). Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, 3, 619- 626.
http://www.qqml.net/papers/September_2014_Issue/336QQML_Journal_2014_Johnston_Sept_619-626.pdf
- Kane, N. (2016). The play-learning binary: U.S. parents' perceptions on preschool play in a neoliberal age. *Children & Society*, 30(4), 290-301. doi:10.1111/chso.12140
- Kim, Y. & Petscher, Y. (2012). Language general and specific factors in letter acquisition: Considering child and letter characteristics in Korea. *Reading and Writing*, 26, 263-292. doi.org/10.1007/s11145-012-9367-6
- King, P., & Howard, J. (2016). Free choice or adaptable choice. *American Journal of Play*, 9(1), 56-70. Retrieved from
<http://www.journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/9-1-article-3-free-choice-or-adaptable-choice.pdf>
- Labat, H., Vallet, G., Magnan, A., & Ecalle, J. (2015). Facilitating effect of multisensory letter encoding on reading and spelling in 5-year-old children. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 29(3), 381-391. doi:10.1002/acp.3116
- LaForett, D. R., & Mendez, J. L. (2017). Children's engagement in play at home: A parent's role in supporting play opportunities during early childhood. *Early Child Development & Care*, 187(5/6), 910. doi:10.1080/03004430.2016.1223061
- Lillard, A. (2012). Preschool children's development in classic Montessori, supplemented Montessori, and conventional programs. *Journal of School Psychology*, 50, 379–401. doi 10.1016/j.jsp.2012.01.001

- Lillard, A. S., Lerner, M. D., Hopkins, E. J., Dore, R. A., Smith, E. D., & Palmquist, C. M. (2013). The impact of pretend play on children's development: A review of the evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, *139*(1), 1-34. doi:10.1037/a0029321
- Lillard, A. L., Hopkins, E. J., Dore, R. A., Palmquist, C. M., Lerner, M. D., & Smith, E. D. (2013). Concepts and theories, methods and reasons: Why do the children (pretend) play? Reply to Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2013); Bergen (2013); and Walker and Gopnik (2013). *Psychological Bulletin*, *139*(1), 49-52. doi:10.1037/a0030521
- Lin, Y., & Yawkey, T. D. (2013). Does play matter to parents? Taiwanese parents' perceptions of child's play. *Education*, *134*(2), 244-254. Retrieved from <http://www.projectinnovation.com/Education.html>
- Lynch, M. (2015). "More play, please": The perspective of kindergarten teachers on play in the classroom. *American Journal of Play* *7*, 347-70. Retrieved from <http://www.journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/7-3-article-more-play-please.pdf>
- Lyon, G.R. & Weiser, B. (2014). The state of the science in learning disabilities: Research impact on the field from 2001 to 2011. In H.L. Swanson, K.R. Harris, & S. Graham (Eds.), *Handbook of learning disabilities* (2nd ed., pp. 118-151). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- McGee, L. M., & Dail, A. (2013). At-risk preschool children: Establishing developmental ranges that suggest at-promise. *Reading Horizons*, *52*(2), 99-120. Retrieved from http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol52/iss2/2

- McGeown, S., Medford, E., & Moxon, G. (2013). Individual differences in children's reading and spelling strategies and the skills supporting strategy use. *Learning And Individual Differences, 28*, 75-81. doi:10.1016/j.lindif.2013.09.013
- McMillan, D. J., Walsh, G., & Gray, C. (2012). Changing mindsets: The benefits of implementing a professional development model in early childhood settings in Ireland. *Professional Development in Education, 3*(3), 395-410.
doi:10.1080/19415257.2011.637226
- Meins, E., Fernyhough, C., Arnott, B., Leekam, S. R., & Rosnay, M. (2013). Mind-mindedness and theory of mind: Mediating roles of language and perspectival symbolic play. *Child Development, 84*(5), 1777-1790. doi:10.1111/cdev.12061
- Montessori, M. (1912). *The Montessori method*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.
- Montessori, M. (1914). *Dr. Montessori's own handbook*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.
- Montessori, M. (1949). *The absorbent mind*. Oxford, England: Clio Press.
- Montessori, M., & George, A. E. (1964). *The Montessori method*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.
- Neuman, S. B. (2014). Content-rich instruction in preschool. *Educational Leadership, 72*(2), 36-40.
http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/oct14/vol72/num02/Content-Rich_Instruction_in_Preschool.aspx

- Neuman, S. B., & Gambrell, L. B. (2015). Editorial: Disruptive innovations in reading research and practice. *Reading Research Quarterly, 50*, 7-12.
doi:10.1002/rrq.93
- Nicholson, J., Bauer, A., & Woolley, R. (2016). Inserting child-initiated play into an American urban school district after a decade of scripted curricula: Complexities and progress. *American Journal of Play, 8*(2), 228-271.
<http://www.journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/8-2-article-inserting-child-initiated-play.pdf>
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425 (2002).
- Nor Puteh, S., & Ali, A. (2013). Preschool teachers' perceptions towards the use of play-based approach in language and literacy development for preschool. *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction, 10*, 79-98. Retrieved from
<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1137222.pdf>
- Pendergast, M., Bingham, G., & Patton-Terry, N. (2015). Examining the relationship between emergent literacy skills and invented spelling in prekindergarten Spanish-speaking dual language learners. *Early Education and Development, 26*(2), 264-285. doi:10.1080/10409289.2015.991083
- Piaget, J. (1928). *The child's conception of the world*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Pianta, R., Downer, J., & Hamre, B. (2016). Quality in early education classrooms: Definitions, gaps, and systems. *Future of Children, 26*(2), 119-137.

- Piker, R. A. (2013). Understanding influences of play on second language learning: A microethnographic view in one Head Start preschool classroom. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 11*(2), 184-200. doi:10.1177/1476718X12466219
- Raynolds, L. B., López-Velásquez, A., & Valentín, L. E. O. (2017). Exploring English and Spanish rhyme awareness and beginning sound segmentation skills in prekindergarten Spanish-speaking English learners. *Reading and Writing, 30*(4), 719-737. doi:10.1007/s11145-016-9696-y
- Remorini, C., & Rende, M. (2014). Play and child development. *Oriental Anthropologists, 14*(2), 241-266.
- Sadoski, M., McTigue, E. M., & Paivio, A. (2012). A dual coding theoretical model of decoding in reading: Subsuming the Laberge and Samuels model. *Reading Psychology, 33*(5), 465. doi:10.1080/02702711.2011.557330
- Simge, Y. (2016). Outdoor environment and outdoor activities in early childhood education. *Mersin Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi, 12*(1). doi:10.17860/efd.80851
- Singh, A., & Gupta, D. (2012). Contexts of childhood and play: Exploring parental perceptions. *Childhood 19*(2), 235-250. doi 10.1177/0907568211413941
- Smith, A. K., Ayanian, J. Z., Covinsky, K. E., Landon, B. E., McCarthy, E. P., Wee, C. C., & Steinman, M. A. (2010). Conducting high-value secondary dataset analysis: An introductory guide and resources. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 26*(8), 920-929. doi:10.1007/s11606-010-1621-5

- Soderberg, J., Stull, S., Cummings, K., Nolen, E., McCutchen, D., & Joseph, G. (2012). Inter-rater reliability and concurrent validity study of the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS). Retrieved October 3, 2017 from www.k12.wa.us/WaKIDS/pubdocs/WaKIDS_Report072613.pdf
- Stahl, K. K. (2014). New insights about letter learning. *Reading Teacher*, 68(4), 261-265. doi:10.1002/trtr.1320
- Thomas, M. (2014). Purposeful work through observation. *Montessori Life*, 26(3) 9.
- Trezek, B., & Hancock, G. (2013). Implementing instruction in the alphabetic principle within a sign bilingual setting. *Journal of Deaf Studies And Deaf Education*, 18(3), 391-408. doi:10.1093/deafed/ent016
- Vernon-Feagans, L., & Bratsch-Hines, M. E. (2013). Caregiver-child verbal interactions in child care: A buffer against poor language outcomes when maternal language input is less. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 28(4), 858-873. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.08.002
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1934/1987). *Thinking and speech*. (N. Minick, Trans). New York, NY: Plenum.
- Weldemariam, K. T. (2014). Cautionary tales on interrupting children's play: A study from Sweden. *Childhood Education*, 90(4), 265-271. doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2014.935692
- Weisberg, D., Zosh, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. (2013). Talking it up: Play, language development, and the role of adult support. *American Journal of Play*, (6)1. Retrieved from

<http://www.journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/6-1-article-talking-it-up.pdf>

- Yahya, R., & Wood, E. A. (2016). Play as third space between home and school: Bridging cultural discourses. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 15*(3), 305-322. doi:10.1177/1476718X15616833
- Yates, T. M., & Marcelo, A. K. (2014). Through race-colored glasses: Preschoolers' pretend play and teachers' ratings of preschooler adjustment. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 29*1-311. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.09.003

Appendix A: Parent Invitation and Consent

Play & the Alphabetic Principle

Parent/Guardians of currently enrolled kindergarten children are invited to take part in a research study about play and a child's understanding of letter and letter sound recognition. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Tamala Findley, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. I am also a first grade teacher; however, this study is separate from my role as a teacher.

Background Information:

The purpose of the study is to relate students' understanding of letter and letter sound recognition to the attitudes parents have toward child-initiated play.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, please answer each question listed below.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary and no one in the school and district will treat you or your child differently if you decide to participate or not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue. The potential benefits of this study is to better understand the role of play and its influence on understanding the alphabet and letter sound association.

Payment:

There will not be any form of compensation for participating in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential, your personal information will not be used for any purposes outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by being kept online, with me being the only individual to have access to the data. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may contact the researcher via email at tamala.findley@waldenu.edu . If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr Leilani Endicott, USA number 001-612-312-1210 or email IRB@waldenu.edu. She is the Walden University IRB representative who can discuss this with you.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By answering the questions below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

If you would like to have a copy of the consent form, you may print a copy of the consent form or request one be emailed to you from me at tamala.findley@waldenu.edu. All paper-based surveys have an additional consent form for you to keep for your records.

Thank you for participating in this study. If you have any comments that you would like to share about your ideas in relation to play, you may write it below. (Please do not disclose any names or personal information.)

Appendix B: Permission to Use the Survey

From: **Julia Smith**
Date: Friday, August 5, 2016
Subject: Need Permission
To: Tamala Findley

Hi.

Could you please use this email as verification that I grant permission for you to use this scale as a web-based measure in your research study? Thank you.

Dr Julia Mendez

> On Aug 4, 2016, at 10:26 PM, Tamala Findley <tamala.findley@waldenu.edu> wrote:

>

> Hello, my name is Tamala Findley and I requested permission to use your survey for my doctoral study. You granted me permission in October of 2015 and forwarded me the PPBS survey. I recently submitted my proposal to IRB and they requested that I seek permission to use it as a web-based survey. I am not going to change the questions or the scales, I just want to type it up on survey monkey for easier access for my participants to use.

>

> I am not sure if there is a certain form that is needed, but is there some way that you can type up a letter, with your contact information that states that I have permission to use your survey and use it as a web-based survey.

>

> Tamala Findley

Appendix C: GKIDS Subtest

English Language Arts: Reading Foundation

<p>ELAGSEKRF3: Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words. Demonstrate basic knowledge of one-to-one letter-sound correspondences for each consonant. Demonstrate basic knowledge of the long and short sounds for the five major vowels.</p>		
Performance Levels		Assessment Activities
Not Yet Demonstrated	The student does not produce correct sounds for consonants or vowels.	<p>(1) The teacher will have a list of consonants posted on chart paper. Lead the students to say the name of the consonant and the sound. The teacher will begin to lead the students in recognizing words and objects that begin with the same letter. Encourage students to demonstrate their knowledge of letter sounds as they write in their journals.</p> <p>(2) After reading a book aloud to the class, make a chart of the long and short vowel words heard in the book. Students will practice reading the words on the chart and identifying the long and short vowel sounds.</p>
Emerging	The student produces some correct sounds for consonants or vowels.	
Developing	The student produces correct sounds for most consonants and vowels.	
Demonstrating	The student consistently produces correct sounds for each consonant AND the long and short sounds for the five major vowels.	
Exceeds	The student consistently produces all consonant and vowel sounds (including the hard and soft sounds of "c" and "g" and the various sounds of "y").	

Retrieved from

https://lorpub.gadoe.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/49694/GKIDS_A-I_Guide_2017-18.pdf