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The Perspectives of Early Childhood College Faculty on the Role of Play

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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by

Susan Paula McKoy

MA, Concordia University, 2011

BS, Mercer University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Early Childhood and Care Education (ECCE) educators are expected to understand the role of play and implement play in their classrooms, but specific classes on the role of play at the college level are not offered. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty at a Southeastern state technical college teaching preservice teachers to determine their students' understanding of the role of play, the inclusion of play in their lesson plans, and how play is being implemented in their classrooms. The conceptual framework guiding the study was Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Young children construct their knowledge best through play, so having preservice teachers engaged in a course on the role of play could inform them how to effectively support, facilitate, and implement play in their classroom to create zones of proximal development as an age appropriate instructional strategy. The key research question guiding this study focused upon the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty about the role of play in the ECCE curriculum. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with a population of 12 full-time ECCE faculty from 6 technical colleges in the research state to develop an understanding of full-time ECCE faculty's perspectives about teaching the concept of play to preservice teachers. Data codes were analyzed for regularities, patterns, and themes. Themes that emerged were a Low Percentage of Play in Curriculum, Play is Learning & Development, Play is an Effective Instructional Strategy, and Play is Important in the ECCE environment. This study can inform positive social change by contributing to the literature, the field of early childhood, and, at the local level, by informing potential curriculum adjustments or other possible changes in the preparation of ECCE preservice teachers in the local setting.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Eddie, who would always be there to let me know that I could do this and that I need to take it easy and not stress, followed with a kiss on my forehead. A special shout-out to my adult children, Qiyamah and Qayyim who supported me 110 percent and always made me feel proud about what I was accomplishing, and that I was their “Super Mom”.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The role of play in early childhood is considered, by some, as the leading source of development across all domains of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). A play-based curriculum is advocated by early childhood professionals in many parts of the world and has been since Froebel developed the kindergarten model in 1837. He believed that play provided the foundation on which children could develop in an integrated and whole manner (Gordon & Browne, 2016). Other theorists and philosophers, such as Piaget (1962) and Dewey (1916), recognized the important role of activity and play in a child's life. This aspect of many early childhood curriculum models was compromised when *A Nation at Risk: The American – The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) was published. Since that time there has been an increasing focus on test scores and cognitive-based standards resulting in disagreements regarding the role of play in the classroom (Irvin, 2017; Ravitch, 2014; Wong, 2015; Wood, 2019). However, there is no question that play results in developmental benefits for children (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978).

According to Aras (2016) and Sherwood and Reifel (2010), there is not a consistent definition of play. Early childhood teachers' perspectives and implementation of play revealed that teachers could be uninvolved or be in command due to the various definitions of play (Aras, 2016; Weisberg, Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013). Play is an essential part of the cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development as children grow into adulthood (Anderson, Spainhower, & Shap, 2014; Ashbrook, 2017; Axelrob, 2014; Chapman-Stanton, 2015; Pica, 2010; Piescor, 2017; Trundle & Smith, 2017). However, it

is often taken for granted, eliminated in some schools today, and is replaced with all day academics (Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, & Almon, 2015; Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Ravitch, 2014; Scrabeck, 2020). Because of school policies and institutions focused on academic goals and mandated activities, time is frequently taken away from play or play-based teaching (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Kamarulzaman, 2015; Lynch, 2015).

When preservice teachers in higher education are offered coursework on the role of play, they can give children the reinforcement they need to enhance their developmental skills through play (Cheng, 2012; Jung & Jin, 2015; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). However, there is a problem when coursework on the role of play is not offered to preservice teachers or, when included, is not highlighted as an instructional strategy. Leggett and Newman (2017) and Smith (2012) explained that early childhood teacher educators (ECTE) need to be strategic in teaching preservice early childhood teachers the importance of the role of play in learning. There must be consistency in early childhood teacher education programs by providing courses that influence change among preservice teachers' traditional beliefs into constructivist beliefs that weave play into their practice for building knowledge (Isikoglu, 2008; Jung & Jin, 2015). Although the role of play in early childhood programs has been compromised, its importance has not diminished and is now more compelling because of academic pressures imposed (Lynch, 2015; Moyles, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Ravitch, 2014; Singer, 2015; Trundle & Smith, 2017; Wood, 2019).

The current compromise in early childhood on the role of play is a problem for early childhood teachers especially when there are college course limitations addressing the role of play. Technical colleges in a Southeastern state offer college courses that address the role of play in Early Childhood and Care Education (ECCE). After an informal review of a course catalog and syllabi at a local technical college, I found that there are 18 ECCE courses. However, only three courses targeted play, and none appeared to focus solely on the role of play as an instructional strategy for preservice teachers earning an ECCE Diploma or Associates of Science Degree in ECCE.

When teachers who are responsible for implementing developmentally appropriate programs for children where play is a basic tenant of the curriculum (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Jones, 2012; Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren & Rupiper, 2014; Ortlieb, 2010; Singer, 2015; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2018; Vygotsky, 1978) and it is unknown whether they are being instructed on this topic, there is a need to study the issue further. Teachers in early childhood classrooms are expected to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their early childhood classrooms (Bright from the Start Department of Early Care and Learning, 2019). Additionally, researchers have called for more research on the perspectives of Early Child Care faculty on the role of play (see Jung & Jin, 2015; Jung, Zhang, & Zhang, 2017; Sherwood & Reifel, 2013).

To address this problem, it is necessary to identify the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty at a Southeastern U.S. state technical college on teaching preservice teachers to understand the role of play, including play in their lesson plans, and

implementing play in their early childhood classrooms. There is a gap in practice in the literature because no research reviewed for this study examined technical college ECCE faculty's perspectives of teaching preservice teachers to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their classrooms. There is a gap in practice in the literature to examine technical college full-time ECCE faculty's perspective on the role of play. However, the literature review did discuss the need to examine 4-year college program faculty's perspectives on teaching preservice teachers to understand the role of play and implement play in their classroom (see Aras, 2016; Cheng, 2012; Edward & Mackenzie, 2013; Jung & Jin, 2014, 2015; Jung, Zhang & Zhang, 2017; Sherwood & Reifel, 2013; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010).

The outcomes of this research can inform both faculty and administrators alike whether the role of play is appropriately supported by coursework offered as a leading source in child development. Positive social change was reflected in preservice teachers' outcomes because of possible curriculum or other adjustments.

Given research studies, young children's growth across all domains of learning is best supported through play (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2018; Wood, 2014). Play allows children to grow into adults with the foundations for teamwork collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving that are needed in the job market today (Dzainudin, Yamat, & Yunus, 2018; Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014). Thus, it is important that preservice teachers learn about how play is connected to children's learning in the classroom as well as how to implement play and what that looks like as an instructional strategy. Play is critical in the role of child development because it

maximizes children's developmental growth and neurological potentials (Trundle & Smith, 2017; Rushton, Juola-Rushton & Larkin, 2010; Shamsi, 2015; Wood, 2014).

In this chapter, I provided both a background for and an introduction to this basic qualitative study on perspectives of Southeastern U.S. state technical college full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice teachers to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their classrooms. A brief overview is included of the important benefits of play and teacher's experience in higher education coursework in the role of play. The benefits of play and coursework on the role play has on the perspectives of full-time ECCE college faculty was discussed and was further explored in the literature review.

Chapter 1 includes the problem statement, research questions, the purpose of the study, and a conceptual framework. The nature of the study, including the methodology, definition of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the study, are outlined but was highlighted in more detail in Chapter 3.

Background

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of children's play indicates that play is an essential part of children's learning and development. It is through play that a zone of proximal development (ZPD) occurs whereby children can perform certain tasks independently but with the help of a more competent peer or adult can perform at a higher level. When teachers implement play in their classrooms, they create the availability for children to enter their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). With appropriate guidance and encouragement these teachers, or more competent peers, can guide children to do things they were unable to do

on their own. The concept of teachers assisting children in learning should reflect a collaboration of teachers and children moving to more challenging heights (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Marotz & Allen, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978)

Through play experiences, children can maximize their developmental and neurological potentials that affect their learning domains. Research on brain development showed that play assists children in developmental skills (Rushton et al., 2010; Shamsi, 2015; Trundle & Smith, 2017; Wood, 2014). Play allows children to grow into adults with the foundations for teamwork collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving that are needed in the job market today (Dzainudin et al., 2018; Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014).

Although play is essential in early childhood education, it is not a part of most early childhood curriculums (Axelrod, 2014; Scrabeck, 2020; Singer, 2015; Wood, 2014). Children can learn and develop language, cognitive, physical, and social-emotional skills through play essentials (Axelrod, 2014; Irvin, 2017; Singer, 2015; Wood, 2014). Pretend play gives children the opportunity to develop their cognition, creativity, imagination, optimism, and resilience, which is essential to their well-being (Pyle & Daniels, 2017; Wood, 2014). When teachers plan with children, play supports children's development and learning as a cultural existence (Axelrod, 2014; Singer, 2015; Wood, 2014). Children who experienced quality early childhood education that incorporated play with learning tend to have better-paying jobs and are less likely to commit crimes when they are adults. The Seminal High/Scope Perry Preschool Study (1962) longitudinal study concluded high-quality preschool programs for young children result in educational success and

lower crime rates as adults (Gilliam, 2014; Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014; Schweinhart, 2003; Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Gunn, 2016). In general, teachers that are knowledgeable about the role of play are able to assist children in developing their learning domains and brain develop, which can result in educational success and lower crime rates. However, in some cases teachers are discouraged from implementing play as a source to education (see Lynch, 2015; Scrabeck, 2020; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Ravitch, 2014).

Despite what is found in research, play continues to be compromised in classrooms (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Marotz & Allen, 2016; Scrabeck, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers are being influenced by administrators, school policies, standardized tests, and academic goals, which leave little time for play or play-based teaching (Lynch, 2015; Scrabeck, 2020; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Ravitch, 2014). One purpose of play pedagogy is for teachers to support young children as they play in a safe and challenging environment to fulfill their needs and interests (Singer, 2015). Teacher educators need to instruct preservice teachers and veteran teachers about the importance of "understanding the properties, personalities, processes, stages, and state of play" (Wood, 2014, p. 52), so they develop strategies to support the importance of play and developmentally appropriate practices through play in their classrooms (Walsh & Fallon, 2019; Wood, 2014).

There are different views on the perspectives of preservice teachers on play in ECCE. Teachers' perspectives of play vary from being child-directed to believing that play needs to be teacher-directed. Some teachers agree that children develop critical

thinking through play experiences and that teachers need to have a child-centered classroom (Kamarulzaman, 2015; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). The quality of play-based pedagogy raised concerns in China, where many people think play is irrelevant, although professional development on play is offered to in-service and preservice educators to implement in their classrooms. Teacher educators need to take away the conception of passing a set of given theories on to the preservice teachers to inform their practice and focus their attention more on the learning of the preservice teachers. Because of the Chinese belief that play is extraneous to children learning "there is a need for a collaborative research agenda linking pre-school teachers and teacher educators in the Colleges and Universities to work on the exemplified practice in the field" (Cheng, 2012, p 81). While in Finland, teachers' perspectives at the kindergarten and elementary levels on the daily use of play consisted of teachers distinguishing eight types of play and taking on the role of leaders and directors (Hyvonen, 2011). In addition to the information of teachers' thinking regarding playing as a learning form, it is important to encourage teachers and teacher educators to stress more on "understanding theoretical and practical bases for learning and forms of playing" (Hyvonen, 2011, p.16). In general, teachers and teacher educators view play in different ways due to their own perspectives, therefore preservice and in-service teachers may develop concepts of play that may not provide them with the understanding and connection of play in children's development.

It becomes difficult for some preservice and in-service teachers to understand the connections of play activities with content knowledge. Children's physical, cognitive,

language, social, and emotional skills can be developed through experiencing different types of play (Hamlin & Wisneski, 2012; Rentzou et al., 2019; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). Therefore, just understanding the importance of play is not enough. Teachers need to know what this looks like in the classroom and how they can implement this most effectively. Coursework offered at the technical colleges in the Southeastern United States. demonstrated that play in the lives of young children is addressed and important but utilizing play as an instructional strategy was not found in my review and there were no courses focused mainly on the role of play. Information about this was also limited in the current research literature (see Aras, 2016; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Jung et al., 2017; Lohmander & Samuelsson, 2015; Vera & Geneser, 2012).

Problem Statement

Teachers are required to implement play in their classrooms as an instructional strategy to enhance children's developmental skills yet there are college course limitations addressing the role of play (Cheng, 2012; Curtis, 2015; Engel, 2015; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). The problem is, while college courses that include the role of play exist, it is unknown what teachers' perspectives are on the inclusion of play as an instructional strategy in their lesson plans and implementation in the classroom (see Aras, 2016; Cheng, 2012; Edward & Mackenzie, 2013; Jung & Jin, 2014, 2015; Jung et al., 2017; Wood, 2014, 2019).

When ECCE teachers complete higher education coursework on the role of play, they should be more able to support children to enhance their language, cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills (Lynch, 2015; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010; Wood,

2014). Because of observation and assessment, teachers are supposed to be intentional in choosing strategies for supporting play. (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Lynch, 2015; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010; Wood, 2014). Teacher educators need to instruct preservice teachers and veteran teachers about the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their classrooms, so they can have the ability to implement play and other developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms (Wood, 2014). Understanding the essential role that play has in development across all domains of learning may compel teachers and curriculum developers to include play as an instructional strategy for meeting required standards. The outcomes of this research informed faculty members on whether the role of play is appropriately supported in their course offerings as a leading source in child development. Positive social change was reflected in preservice teachers' outcomes as a result of curriculum adjustments.

Research studies showed that children's growth and developmental domains are established through play (see Axelrod, 2014; Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014; Piescor, 2017; Singer, 2015). Therefore, it is important that preservice teachers learn about how play is a conduit for children's learning in the classroom. To understand why ECCE coursework does not focus directly on the role of play, additional information about teachers' perspectives needs to be researched, as this is an existing gap in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to understand the perspectives of Southeastern U.S. state technical college's full-time ECCE faculty, teaching preservice teachers through coursework, to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and

implement play in their classrooms. A basic qualitative study approach was applied to answer the research questions.

Research Question(s)

The central research question of this study was as follows:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of technical college's full-time ECCE faculty in a Southeastern U.S. state about the role of play in the ECCE curriculum?

The subquestions that followed this central question were:

1. What are the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty on current course content that supports preservice teachers' understanding of the role of play in their teaching practices?
2. What are the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty on the information provided in coursework that supports preservice teachers including play in their lesson plans?
3. What are the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty on ways coursework can support and facilitate teachers' implementation of play in early childhood classrooms?

Conceptual Framework (Qualitative)

The conceptual framework guiding the study was taken from Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and the idea that play leads development. According to Vygotsky, play enhances learning across all domains necessary for development. It is important that teachers do not ignore the essential role of play in their classroom curriculum (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky explained that "play creates a zone of proximal

development" (p. 102). At the lower end of this zone a child is functioning independently, but with the assistance of an adult or more able peer effectively scaffolding their play can move them to a higher level within this zone in their development. Through a variety of strategies, intended and unintended, adults and more competent peers offer an opportunity to move to a higher level in the child's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

In Vygotsky's (1978) discussion about play he recognized that the imaginary, a new thought process for preschool age children, allowed them to defer gratification through the creation of an illusion of reality. This allows children to work through situations in their lives which may not be directly accessible. They can resolve conflicts, be the grown-up, invent, experiment, and reach unrealizable desires. This imaginary is play for the preschooler – a new frontier (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) addressed the importance of play and knowledgeable adults and peers as mentors to children's development. Vygotsky's ideas have been used extensively in all aspects of ECCE. Curriculum approaches based on his theory provide details on the role of teachers that emerge because of development and learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018). Because play leads children's development, and children construct their knowledge best through play, having preservice teachers engaged in a course on the role of play could inform them how to effectively implement play in their classroom as an instructional strategy (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). A more detailed description of the conceptual framework was provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study is a basic qualitative study that obtains knowledge through interviews. Such a design provides an appropriate foundation to develop more understanding on a current issue that provides useful information and helps learn about the phenomenon, which strengthens the depth and richness of the research (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2016). In this research, I sought to understand the perspectives of faculty about the inclusion of the role of play in the technical college's curriculum. The bounds of the study were to explore these perspectives include full-time ECCE college faculty from six technical colleges out of 22 technical colleges within the same Southeastern U.S. state technical college system who are involved in influencing which courses are offered to ECCE students.

It was appropriate in my research to use a basic qualitative study (see Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2016) as this allows a focus on a particular problem and supports the development of insight into ways to solve the problem (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2016). Qualitative research is consistent with understanding how faculty view, support and incorporate the role of play in their program, which is the primary focus of this study. In this basic qualitative study, my interest was to interview and examine the perspectives of Southeastern U.S. state technical college full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice teachers through coursework to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their classrooms. After an informal review of a course catalog and syllabi at a local Southeastern U.S. state technical college, it revealed that

there were 18 ECCE courses; however only three courses targeted play (see Appendix C). The lack of play in early childhood classrooms may be due to preservice teachers' skills based on what they do in preservice preparation. By providing play in college curriculums, preservice teachers may understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their classrooms.

Purposeful sampling was used in this study with a target population of 12 full-time ECCE faculty drawn from six technical colleges in a Southeastern U.S. state. These individuals provided useful information that helped clarify the value of coursework addressing the role of play in their overall curriculum offerings (see Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). The data collection included face-to-face interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted asking open-ended questions. A request was made to interview full-time ECCE faculty who teach any or some combination of the three courses that include play in their course description. Full-time faculty were individually interviewed. It was hoped to obtain faculty perspectives on the three courses taught in the curriculum regarding their views on the role of play in course offerings and how this information supports and facilitates the implementation of play in lesson plans and classrooms by preservice teachers. The interviews, with permission from each participant, was audio recorded and transcribed. Once the faculty's audio recordings and my field notes are transcribed, I began hand-coding procedures consisting of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and themes in the data (see Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2016; Yin, 2016). I searched through the data for regularities, patterns, as well as for topics in the data, and write down words and phrases

to represent those topics and patterns. The coding was organized into themes. It was important during this process to remain open to interpretation possibilities. Once this first cycle of coding was complete, I moved on to concept coding or analytical coding whereby a broader term was applied to identify specific themes. Here, ideas began to surface from the data. Axial coding was then applied whereby the identified category properties were connected to other identified categories and nature of the relationship was explained (see Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2016). The completed process provided a level of breadth and depth appropriate to answer the research questions in keeping with the purpose of this study.

Definitions

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): It is a framework or an approach to working with young children (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2019; Gestwicki, 2014). Through teachers' observations to get to know the children, they can enable children to reach challenging and achievable goals. Teaching practices consist of three components: "Age appropriateness, individual appropriateness, and appropriateness to social and cultural context of children's lives" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 44).

Domains of learning: "Various aspects of development, as physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional. They are interrelated although discussed separately" (Gestwicki, 2014, p. 440).

ECCE: This is the acronym for Early Childhood Care and Education. It is the course title used throughout Southeastern technical colleges, according to the site's

catalog. Early Childhood Care and Education is the teaching of young children up until the age of eight.

Preservice teacher: Someone enrolled in college that is taking courses in early childhood education and working toward teacher certification or degree to become an early childhood teacher (Curtis, 2015).

Technical College: An institution of further education, that provides a combination of educational and training programs, providing courses that includes information technology, applied sciences, engineering, agriculture, and secretarial skills (Technical College, 2020).

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): The ZPD is a time when children are functioning independently through play, but with the assistance of an adult or more able peer effectively scaffolding their play can move to a higher level in their development. When experienced adults encourage children by giving guidance, asking open-ended questions, giving hints, or subtle prompts, they are enhancing a child's opportunity to move to a higher level in their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

Assumptions

There were assumptions in this study. First, there was the assumption that full-time ECCE faculty answered the interview questions thoughtfully and honestly. Second, I assumed that full-time ECCE faculty acquire the same information on what is essential to include in the technical college's curriculum to support preservice teachers' understanding of the role of play in their teaching practices. Third, there was the assumption that full-time ECCE faculty agree that by teaching a specific coursework on

the role of play it will influence preservice teachers to implement play in their classrooms. These particular assumptions were important to note as these could influence the evidence and conclusions of the findings in this research (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Nkwake, 2013).

Scope and Delimitations

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty at Southeastern U.S. state technical college teaching preservice teachers through coursework to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plan, and implement play in their early childhood classrooms. The bounds of this study were six technical colleges in a Southeastern U.S. state where a large enough pool gathered to generate 12 ECCE participants that can be identified for collecting ample and rich data. Participants from the full-time ECCE faculty at four public technical colleges in a Southeastern state was asked to participate in the interview process. Volunteers were selected based on their role in a technical college with an ECCE program. ECCE participants chosen for this study were selected on the basis that they were involved in a certificate or degree granting ECCE program and taught any or some combination of the three courses that included play in their course description. It was difficult to generalize the findings from this research because the scope was limited in both number of ECCE participants and number of institutions involved.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the design and time constraints involved. This basic qualitative method limited the number of participants used to garner rich, thick

descriptions of phenomena rather than quantitative elements. This limited the possibility to generalize the findings to a larger population. In this study, I assumed that respondents were honest in their responses, but there was no guarantee that they were. Another limitation was that there was one person conducting the interviews and there might be some bias in the way the questions were asked at different times and places or as perceived by the participant.

Significance

The information gained from this study provided important insights regarding what Southeastern U.S. state technical college full-time ECCE faculty perceived about teaching preservice teachers through coursework to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their early childhood classrooms. Its furthered reveal what they believe was essential to include in technical college's curriculum to support preservice teachers' understanding of and the ability to implement the role of play in their teaching practices. This information advanced the knowledge in the field and contributed to the identified existing gap in the literature.

The findings provided propositions for developing a course specifically on the role of play to be added to the ECCE curriculum for preservice teachers. One of the problems regarding the role of play where it is integrated into other coursework is that focus was not on implementation of play but rather identification of play types and cursory environmental arrangements. Play, and arranging and provisioning environments, as an instructional strategy needs to be articulated and demonstrated so students know what this looks like in practice (see Aras, 2016; Cheng, 2012; Edward & Mackenzie,

2013; Jung & Jin, 2014, 2015; Jung et al., 2017; Wood, 2014, 2019). Just knowing about dramatic play, solitary play, parallel play, cooperative play, sensorimotor play, constructive play, and associative play, does not demonstrate how to implement it. I suspected that this is why play gets so separated from activities focused on academic tasks.

The information in this study supports meaningful discussions about the role of play in ECCE between faculty and preservice teachers. Such discussions contribute to a greater understanding about the role of play as a part of teaching practices, including play in lesson plans, and the development of strategies to implement appropriate play opportunities in the classrooms. Beyond the Southeastern United States. state, the information gathered in this study could influence future practices and curriculum for preservice training for teachers to include the role of play. The outcomes of the research informed faculty members whether the role of play is appropriately supported as a leading source in child development. Positive social change was reflected in preservice teachers' outcomes as a result of curriculum adjustments.

Summary

In this chapter I provided both a background for and an introduction to the proposed qualitative study of perspectives of Southeastern U.S. state technical college full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice teachers through coursework to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their early childhood classrooms. A brief overview of the important benefits of play and teachers' experience in higher education coursework in the role of play was presented. Other

elements of the study were also discussed and were expanded in Chapter 3 to include the research method, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. Chapter 2 contains an overview and review of the literature related to this topic which comes next.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Southeastern U.S. technical colleges focus on providing adults with the education they need to be productive and knowledgeable of the skills needed in the workforce. For preservice teachers attending those colleges for ECCE education classes, they are expected to obtain an ECCE Diploma or Associates of Science Degree in ECC Education, which equips them to function as an ECCE Assistant Teacher or ECCE Lead Teacher. Some of the requirements include preparing weekly lesson plans, implementing play, and interacting with the children in their classrooms. Technical colleges in a state in the Southeastern United States offer college courses that address the role of play in ECCE. However, an informal review of a course catalog and syllabi revealed that three out of 18 ECCE courses provides some focus on play, however there are no coursework that solely focuses on the role of play and does not include what this looks like as an instructional strategy for preservice teachers in the classroom .

The purpose of this research was to understand the perspectives of Southeastern U.S. state technical college full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice teachers through coursework about understanding the role of play, including play in their lesson plans, and implementing play in their early childhood classrooms. From my review of the literature there were no researchers discussing the need for technical college faculty's perspectives on teaching preservice teachers to understand the role of play, include it in their lesson plans, and implement play in their classroom. This provides a gap in the literature regarding the need for technical college faculty's perspective on the role of play. However, when doing my research, the literature review did discuss the need for 4-year

college programs faculty's perspective on teaching preservice teachers to understand the role of play and implement play in their classroom (see Jung & Jin, 2015; Jung et al., 2017; Sherwood & Reifel, 2013). I explored the phenomenon of technical college full-time ECCE college faculty perspectives of the coursework offered as it relates to the role of play.

In this literature review, I provided the reader with a further understanding of what is known about ECCE faculty's perspectives and support on the role of play, what influences teachers about the role of play, and how the role of play is embedded in college coursework. The literature review began with a section on Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD which forms the conceptual framework for the study. The major topics of the literature review include the theory on play, the role of play and brain development, play essentials, the lack of play, teachers' perspective of play, and preservice teachers' college coursework on the role of play. In addition to a review of current research, the contributions of seminal theorists were discussed. The literature review concluded with a summary and introduction to the next chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

Online databases were used to conduct the literature review. Among these were Walden University's multiple data base search engine, which includes Academic Search Complete, Education Source, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and ProQuest. Google Scholar was also used in my review. The following keywords were used in multiple combinations or paired individually to conduct search: *play, role of play, student teachers, teacher educators, colleges, college coursework, curriculum, academics, early*

childhood teachers, preservice teachers, perspectives, perceptions, early childhood, early childhood education, and *teaching. Play* was paired individually and in combination with *role, essential, brain development, perceptions, perspectives, college coursework, curriculum, children,* and *early childhood.*

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and the idea that play leads development. Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD often occurs naturally through play. It was important that I understand the faculty perspectives through this lens as interpreting and implementing curriculum for young children must reflect how they learn best and most effectively. In early childhood the main course through which knowledge building occurs is play. Vygotsky (1934, 1978) concluded that play "is the leading factor in development" (p. 101) and is a strong motivator of self-regulatory behavior. In general, the conceptual framework was based on Vygotsky's (1978) views on play. Therefore, it was important that preservice teachers understand the theory on play and to have knowledge of play in its many forms.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Theory on Play

Vygotsky (1978) referred to early childhood and considered make-believe, or dramatic, play essential to the means of developing mental and purposeful behaviors (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018). Children develop this as they realize that immediate gratification is not possible but can be met through the imaginary realm known as play. Thus, children begin fulfilling their desires through make believe – which helps decrease

the temper tantrums which often define toddler behaviors. As the toddler moves closer to the age of a preschooler, the roots of imagination take hold. The imaginary is not the sole or main feature of play but is an essential subcategory (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978).

Another important concept in Vygotsky's (1978) discussion of play is his idea of the ZPD. The ZPD is an area where there is a lower level, and an upper level of development and the difference between the two is the "zone" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). A child acting independently, often through play, enters the zone at the lower level, but with the help of a more knowledgeable other, which could be a teacher, parent, older sibling, or more competent peer, can reach a higher level (Vygotsky, 1978). However, the assistance, sometimes referred to as scaffolding (Bruner, 1974), should not be mistaken for teacher-directed activities (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018; Piescor, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978).

Children not only rely on the opportunities to learn to play from their older siblings or friends, but also from their teachers to model play. For teachers to implement play in their classrooms, they need to have knowledge of play in its many forms and know how to develop instructional strategies that utilize play as a conduit for learning. For preservice teachers, this information could come mainly through their coursework – if it is appropriately included. Elements of play are described in various courses, but it is important that strategies and appropriate scaffolding is provided to facilitate and increase children's learning through play (Peterson, Forsyth, & McIntyre, 2015).

Vygotsky (1978) had much to say about play and brain development. Although he lacked access to modern technology and science, his observations about this topic have not been refuted. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, along with many other researchers and research efforts, has brought science and technology into this thinking about brain development, very specifically; they are looking at the adult's role and those skills necessary for effectively scaffolding young children in their ongoing development (Center on the Development Child at Harvard University, 2011; Knapp & Morton, 2013; Roopnarine, 2012; Trundle & Smith, 2017). Opportunities within a child's ZPD occur naturally during play (Vygotsky, 1978). In general, teachers knowing the theory of play, may lead them to understand that by allowing children to execute their executive functions skills enhances the development of children's cognitive skills (see Center on the Development Child at Harvard University, 2011; Knapp & Morton, 2013; Roopnarine, 2012; Trundle & Smith, 2017).

Play and Brain Development

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2011), the skills to control impulses, stay focused, and strategize are not inherited when people are born. These skills can be developed through experiences that are provided beginning in infancy. The phrase "air traffic control mechanism" (Center on the Development Child at Harvard University, 2011, p. 1) is like the executive function center in the brain (Center on the Development Child at Harvard University, 2011; Knapp & Morton, 2013; Roopnarine, 2012; Trundle & Smith, 2017). Executive functions operate through three dimensions of "working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive or mental flexibility"

(Center on the Development Child at Harvard University, 2011, p. 2). Working memory allows us to store and manipulate information in the brain for short periods of time and regurgitate the information when needed. For Vygotsky (1978), memory in young children is thinking. Children remember the concrete elements of an authentic situation, the details, which are called to mind in like or familiar scenarios and often replicated in play (Center on the Development Child at Harvard University, 2011; Knapp & Morton, 2013; Roopnarine, 2012; Trundle & Smith, 2017).

For Vygotsky (1978), preschool age children recognize that immediate gratification is not always possible and, therefore, the invention of play comes about – "the imaginary, the illusory world in which unrealizable desires can be realized, and this world is what we call play" (p. 93). In early childhood education, children can develop cognitive dimensions of the brain when teachers allow children to use the executive functions skills they are developing (see Benson & Sabbagh, 2013; Blair, 2013; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011; Knapp & Morton, 2013; Trundle & Smith, 2017).

When teachers are scaffolding through a play-based curriculum, they are supporting children's executive function skills to allow the children to work independently (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). As children practice social play, or the imaginary, it is the base for them to exercise the development of executive function skills (Benson & Sabbagh, 2013). Therefore, once the teacher has assisted them, by setting the stage and orchestrating at various times during play which might mean standing back and observing, then children need to have opportunities to experiment, ideas, and demonstrate

those skills on their own (Benson & Sabbagh, 2013; Blair, 2013; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011; Knapp & Morton, 2013; Moyles, 2015; Piescor, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). Brain development shows that when young children play, they "best develop their working memory, pattern recognition, eye tracking, language and fine motor skills that they will need when learning to read and write" (Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014, p. 47). As children play, their brain is stimulated which enhances the development of learning domains and child growth (Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014).

Rushton (2011), Rushton et al. (2010), and Smith, Cowie, and Blades (2015) agreed that early childhood educators provide an important platform where children's brain development occurs. Because of the different studies from the field of neuroscience and cognitive psychology, educators are helping early childhood educators stay accurate in their training and knowledge about concrete, developmentally appropriate experiences that allow young children to learn best (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Hassinger-Das, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2017; Kostelnik, et al., 2014; Trundle & Smith, 2017). Through play early childhood educators, help children learn to "analyze, synthesize, and clarify information" (Rushton, 2011, p. 91). When early childhood educators implement play, that allows children to have their self-discoveries, make their own choices, experience positive stimulating environments to promote learning, explore their creativity, millions of neuro-pathways are forming and connecting within the child's brain (Hassinger-Das et al., 2017; Roopnarine, 2012; Rushton, 2011).

By creating an active, stimulating learning environment that engages the minds of children, educators and other adults set the stage where children can play and learn while they grow, strengthen neurological networks, and create more interconnecting dendrites (Hassinger-Das et al., 2017; Rushton, 2011; Rushton et al., 2010; Wood, 2014). Play is the essence of learning; therefore it is important that early childhood educators model and demonstrate positive attitudes to engage in play (Moyles, 2015). The teacher's actions are important because the child's neurological synapses "mirror" (Rushton et al., 2010, p. 355) the teacher's actions and reactions (Rushton, 2011; Rushton et al., 2010). Positive play interactions between the teacher and child produces brain connections that develops skills children would need to scaffold naturally (Wood, 2014).

Children can develop their "cognitive, linguistic, physical, psychological, and social-emotional development and well-being" (Wood, 2014, p. 48) from actively being involved in play, which connects to brain development. Through play, children could maximize developmental and neurological potentials that affect their physical, emotional, psychological, and social development (Rauf & Bakar, 2019; Wood, 2014). Pretend play gives children the opportunity to develop their cognitive, creativity, and interpersonal skills (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Play experiences allow scaffolding opportunities to occur naturally for "creativity, imagination, optimism, coping, resilience, and social emotional development essential to well-being" (Wood, 2014, p. 52). When teacher educators instruct preservice teachers and veteran teachers about the importance of understanding the properties, personalities, stages, and states of play; preservice teachers can have the ability to express the importance of play and developmentally appropriate practice in

their classrooms (Wood, 2014). Developing such skills in adults supports the current scientific research on brain development and the role of play (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2015; Yogman, Garner, Hutchinson, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2019). In general, as teachers implement positive play interactions with children and demonstrates developmentally appropriate practice, play becomes essential to children's growth and development (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2015; Yogman, Garner, Hutchinson, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2019).

Play Essentials

Involvement in child-directed play is essential to children's development. When teachers guide and provide materials for children to explore, children can direct their play by problem solving, which requires creative and critical thinking skills (Anderson et al., 2014; Pinchover, 2017). Play gives children the opportunity to come up with different ideas, perspectives, and opinions. Teachers can provide appropriate scaffolding to help children use skills they have learned and to resolve conflicts. Child-directed play also enriches math learning, enhances literacy, provides opportunities for decision-making, and helps develop self-regulation (Anderson et al, 2014; Incikabi, 2013; Pinchover, 2017).

When young children play, they are learning. By having a child-centered and developmentally appropriate environment, it is seen as a play curriculum; however a formal curriculum involves instruction and transmission of knowledge, which is teacher-centered (NAEYC, 2019; Singer, 2013). Play is an important aspect of a young child's life. Play and playfulness are an integral component of early childhood education (Singer,

2013; Yogman et al., 2018). Play pedagogy is when "teachers provide support for young children to play in a safe and challenging environment created to support children's needs and interests" (Singer, 2015, p. 33). Teachers know that the world could be overwhelming to young children, therefore when children are given opportunities to get involved in play, they can maintain confidence in this world (Singer, 2015). As teachers supports children play, they create an environment that encourages the development of language and communication (Goldstein & Randolph, 2017; Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012).

Teachers can engage children in challenging conversations through storybook reading and guided play to build on children's language development. Dramatic play influences language and vocabulary development, learning, logical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Goldstein & Randolph, 2017; Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012). When teachers participate in guided play it becomes essential in assisting the "children [to] incorporate literacy materials into their imaginative play" (Massey, 2013, p. 127). Massey (2013) discussed Vygotsky's view on how children develop an understanding of the world through the medium of play. Through guided play children are introduced to new vocabulary skills and can practice those skills through teacher scaffolding with adult-child interaction.

When children play, they can reflect on their home and culture through age-appropriate materials (Anderson et al., 2014). When teachers know what constitutes play in an early childhood classroom, they can encourage children's developmental skills in the areas of social and cognitive growth (Anderson et al., 2014). As children play, they explore, investigate, and solve problems, which fosters implicit learning to build growth

and intellectual development (Trundle & Smith, 2017). Children's play invokes scientific learning that could be both experiential and emergent. Children's play is an inherently part of what consists of "many of the skills and habits of scientific thinking" (Hamlin & Wisneski, 2012, p. 86). Although children's play experiences change as they grow, everyday children develop concepts intuitively through interactions in everyday experiences (Hamlin & Wisneski, 2012). When teachers encourage children to engage in materials around them, children build on their language, literacy, logic, and mathematics. They become observers, ask questions, and get involved in imaginative play (Trundle & Smith, 2017).

The imaginative elements of play seeps into science inquiry. Through science inquiry and play, children can solve problems, interpret data, gather, and share data, ask questions and plan investigations (Ashbrook, 2010; Leong & Bodrova, 2012; Trundle & Smith, 2017). Teachers can extend imaginative play in support of children's development by providing children with hands-on special equipment to work in different environments, invite a scientist, or use props to become a scientist themselves to show children that scientists work in many settings. For children to make meaning of what they are learning, they often use imaginative play as they interact in science and dramatic centers (Ashbrook, 2010; Leong & Bodrova, 2012; Trundle & Smith, 2017).

In primary schools, play and play-based learning is gradually being reduced, creating a need for play advocates, and teachers need supporters to include parents, teachers, administrators, and community representatives to support their role in play-based curriculums (Irvin, 2017; Wood, 2014). Preschool programs are starting to

experience the decrease of play. Although play is essential in early childhood education, it is not a part of most elementary schools (Axelrod, 2014; Chapman-Stanton, 2015). Through play essentials, children can learn and develop language, cognitive, physical, and social-emotional skills (Piescor, 2017). When teachers play with children, play supports children's development and learning as a cultural existence. When they implement a play-based curriculum that honors children's languages and cultural practices, they are supporting all children. The children learn from each other and teachers learn from the children and their cultural practices (Axelrod, 2014; Chapman-Stanton, 2015).

Through children's play, teachers can glimpse into the lives of children and see how they view themselves as members of society. Sociodramatic play helps children work together to create a fantasy world that allows them to blend their culture from home, school experiences, and languages (Axelrod, 2014; Chapman-Stanton, 2015). They are also successfully orchestrating domains of cognition, social-emotional, and sensory skills (Axelrod, 2014; Chapman-Stanton, 2015; Pica, 2010). It is critical that teachers understand how play could generate positive connections in children's growth and development. Children can incorporate their home culture and classroom experiences as they get involved in the sociodramatic play (Axelrod, 2014; Chapman-Stanton, 2015; Loizou, 2017). By encouraging play in a multicultural classroom, teachers can learn from the children and their cultural practices (Axelrod, 2014; Chapman-Stanton, 2015). As teachers learn about each child's culture and diversity through play, teachers generate

positive connections as they create play-base curriculum that benefits the child's wellbeing (Irvin, 2017; Jones, 2012; Loizou, 2017).

An emergent curriculum practice is self-directed and open-ended. The curriculum is developed from the play of children and teachers. An emergent curriculum relies on teacher's idea and central motivation (Irvin, 2017; Jones, 2012; Jones & Reynolds, 2011). By having a play-based environment, the emergent curriculum transpires from children at play. Early childhood educators can be flexible due to children having diverse strengths. Children can develop the knowledge to respect and show empathy to their peers (Irvin, 2017; Jones, 2012; Jones & Reynolds, 2011). In general, when teachers implement an emergent curriculum based on the diversity of children, children learn how to interact with their peers, solve problems, communicate, and be creative as they grow into productive adults (Irvin, 2017; Jones, 2012; Loizou, 2017).

High levels of unemployment among young adults are affecting the economy of many countries. According to what was revealed in a questionnaire from some US executives, that they believe there is a gap in critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration in people's job skills (Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Research such as the seminal Perry Preschool study revealed that when children experienced high-quality early childhood education, it benefits them when they become adults in having well-paid jobs and decreases involvement in criminal activities (Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014; Schweinhart, 2003; Yoshikawa et al., 2016).

Quality early childhood education comes from incorporating play with learning. When children are taught to negotiate, solve problems, share, and be creative, they are

developing characteristics, which are the foundation of teamwork needed for jobs in this new millennium (Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014; Yoshikawa et al., 2016). College educators and administrators know that play is essential to learning and early education enhances developmental skills that strengthen leaning for an entire lifetime (Grob-Zakhary & Bollington, 2014; Schweinhart, 2003; Yoshikawa et al., 2016).

Ortlieb (2010) and Undiyaundeye (2013) explained that play had been recognized in early childhood education and it is important to all children in different developmental stages. When children play, they become creative through open-ended explorations (Dzainudin et al., 2018). Through play, children develop cooperative learning skills, adaptive abilities, and critical thinking skills from solving problems, which allows them to cope with situations as they go through their lives (Dzainudin et al., 2018; Ortlieb, 2010; Undiyaundeye, 2013).

Research stated that play is essential in children developing their learning domains and growth. Play is a valuable time in children's life because it encourages children to continue as adults to live a healthy life (see Mangan, 2013; Wright & Stork, 2013). However, in other research, play is not being implemented in classroom resulting into a high focus on academic and low focus on play (see Margan, 2013; Peterson et al., 2015; Wright & Stork, 2013).

The Lack of Play

Play is becoming less important because in some cases it happens at the end of the day or when it seems there is nothing more important to do so it lessens teachers' focus on implementing play in their classrooms (Prairie, 2013). Former First Lady Michelle

Obama advocated for the nation's children to get physically moving to fight obesity. The art of play is becoming irrelevant in schools and homes. Therefore, the fun of play is decreasing in children's lives (Mangan, 2013). Educators can promote play by being involved in children's play, incorporate academics with play, teach children about healthy lifestyles, and implement diverse activities. Educators should involve parents and stakeholders in the cooperation and collaboration in creating activities to promote play in children's life (Irvin, 2017; Mangan, 2013; Wright & Stork, 2013). In general, play is an essential component in children's growth and development, however, the implementation of play is being reduced in schools, leaving teachers to only focus only on academic curriculum in their classrooms (Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Scrabeck, 2020).

In Canada and the United States, the implementation of play is being decreased in the classrooms. Mandated curriculum in Canadian schools influences the reduced use of play in the classroom. Teachers, early childhood educators, administrators, and consultants believe play should be implemented because it is critical to children's language and overall learning. They felt that through play "adult scaffolding is needed to support and extend children's learning" (Peterson et al., 2015, p. 42). According to Peterson et al. (2015) and Scrabeck (2020), all stakeholders within the educational system need to place a high priority on working to address the challenges that are placed on teachers to implement play in their classrooms.

Although children benefit from play with the involvement of teachers and parents, along with the combination of academics, teachers stated that they feel pressured to adopt a more academic curriculum, which results in loss of play in the classes. In the United

States, play is slowly being taken out of early childhood education (Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Scrabeck, 2020). Although teachers believe there is a need to prepare kindergarten children for first grade, they also believe that children from preschool are not prepared for kindergarten due to the lack of play demonstrated in the classrooms (Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010). Teachers feel that their school policies and institutions focus on academic goals and that their administrators and principals are not experienced in early childhood education (Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Ravitch, 2014).

Teachers are sometimes instructed to remove all play materials from kindergarten classrooms and are ordered what to teach. The focus on teaching academic skills through direct instruction is not leaving any time for child-centered, play-oriented, and constructivist approaches in the early childhood classrooms (Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010). It may become confusing to teachers about what to incorporate in a child-centered classroom, but do not know when they should intervene during play, which results in them just offering free play to young children. The teacher's role as an intentional teacher shifts to the supervisor during play with young children (Leggett, & Newman, 2017; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). The factors of the inclusion of "No Child Left Behind" (2001) standards, state, and district curriculum standards require teachers to have mandated activities; therefore, time is taken away from any play or play-based teaching. Teachers are being pressured into training children to be successful test takers due to the quest for accountability on the high-stakes standardized test (Ravitch, 2014). While according to the United Nations Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) Article 31, play should be

repositioned as a right and not traditionally as a privilege. By allowing play to be a right for children, it gives opportunities for teachers to implement play in all schools, while the traditional privilege is selective to who and when play is granted (Loizou, & Avgitidou, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2017; UNICEF, 2018). Therefore, there is a need for policies that assist teachers in implementing play-based teaching and reduce academic focus in kindergarten. (Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010; UNICEF, 2018).

According to Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, and Almon (2015), the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) state that kindergarten children should be reading books by the end of the school year, which leads to inappropriate classroom practices. The CCSS expectations are for all children regardless of their economical status. Carlsson-Paige et al. (2015) found that by incorporating play-based activities in the classrooms, teachers intentionally design language and literacy through open-ended questions, making suggestions, and providing follow-up activities for extending learning. Through play children are talking, listening, and building their social-emotional skills, unlike children that are mainly involved in direct instruction classrooms that need special education for social difficulties (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). Teachers struggle with sticking to standards knowing that the balance of academic learning and learning through play benefits children (Engel, 2015). Despite the disappearance of play in early childhood programs and it being replaced by academic activities and media, teachers think play is very important to children's development (Aras, 2016; Vu, Han, & Buell, 2015; Weisberg et al., 2013). Although teachers think play is important to children's development, teachers in the United States and other countries may have different

perspectives of play in regard to its connection to learning, implementing, and meaning (Hyvonen, 2011; Ortlieb, 2010; Sherwood & Reifel, 2013; Wood, 2019).

Teachers' Perspectives of Play

Many preservice and in-service teachers recognize the importance of play in learning; however, they find it difficult to understand the connection between play activities and learning and how they could incorporate play to enhance children's knowledge (Hamlin & Wisneski, 2012; Leggett, & Newman, 2017; Sherwood & Reifel, 2013). On the other hand, there are pre-primary-service teachers and teachers that support the inclusion of children's play and understand the connection between play. Therefore, they encourage play in children, which may influence the enhancement of children's learning and behavior in school (Shavega, van Tuijl, & Brugman, 2015).

Some teachers are not allowing play to occur during the instructional time because they believe that playing cannot be very "beneficial, productive, or meaningful" in the classroom (Sherwood & Reifel, 2013, p. 242). They believe that school is for learning. There are different concepts between work and play, therefore; they should not be intertwined with each other or, occurring at the same times (Ortlieb, 2010; Sherwood & Reifel, 2013; Wood, 2019). According to Ortlieb (2010), Undiyaundeye (2013), and Wood (2019), teachers must look at the role of play in education and the effects on the human being. They need to implement games, activities, and hands-on experiments to enhance children's leaning (Ortlieb, 2010; Undiyaundeye, 2013; Wood, 2019). A combination of solitary play, group play, and pretend play should be incorporated in the classroom, so children could learn accomplishments, failures, social-emotional, and cause

and effect (Hollingsworth, & Winter, 2013; Ortlieb, 2010; Undiyaundeye, 2013; Whitman, 2018). Play allows children to learn from one another, which is often more substantial than learning from the teacher (Ortlieb, 2010; Undiyaundeye, 2013; Whitman, 2018). When children are involved in play, they become excited and interested with what they learn, compared to old-fashioned methods of instruction that restrict children to sit and complete teacher-directed tasks all day long (Dickey, Castle, & Pryor, 2016: Ortlieb, 2010; Undiyaundeye, 2013).

A family, child care provider, made the connections between different types of play and science learning with children ages 18 months to three years old (Hamlin & Wisneski, 2012). Through functional or discovery play, the children were able to repeat actions over and over without any predetermined purpose. The provider realized that the children observed the effects of their actions on objects and came to understand the qualities of physical objects. While in symbolic play, the children articulated what they are doing and thinking while engaged in pretend play (Hamlin & Wisneski, 2012). The family child care provider realized that through play, children could explore and become scientific thinkers (Hamlin & Wisneski, 2012).

Teacher's perspectives of play from other countries consisted of some Swedish preschools not focusing on play to promote learning despite the government decree regarding the preschool curriculum. Sweden's preschool curriculum is a socio-cultural and experience-based approach, in which "children are seen as active participants in their development and learning" (Lohmander & Samuelsson, 2015, p. 20). Their curricula are compiled of development, learning, and knowledge. Most preschool teachers were not

familiar with the revised curriculum teaching contents, such as science, due to their past education (Lohmander & Samuelsson, 2015). Other teachers avoid outside play or art activities, while others would not provide any teacher intervention that was engaging children in play despite the number of children in the classroom and when children's attention is directed towards leaning objects while promoting cognitive skill and communication, teachers were demonstrating their understanding of what it means to direct children (Lohmander & Samuelsson, 2015).

In Northern Finland, 14 teachers teaching in kindergarten and elementary levels were asked to describe their daily practice use of play (Hyvonen, 2011). They distinguished eight sorts of play, which were "educational, cheering, physical, pretend, authentic, traditional, free, and process play" (Hyvonen, 2011, p.7). When the teachers engaged in educational, cheering, and physical play, their roles were as leaders while the children were followers (Hyvonen, 2011). As teachers engage in pretend, authentic, traditional, and free play they were in the role of the allower and an observer (Hyvonen, 2011). In Israel, a kindergarten teacher stated that the expectation of young children is too high. There are concerns about students that read at a high level but lack in the areas of play that enhances social and emotional skills (Engel, 2015). It is believed that play is essential, and it is not just "fun" (Engel, 2015, p. 324). Therefore, the social interaction that children discover with their peers and teachers during play, children not only develop social emotional skills but also positive relationships amongst their peers and teachers (McDonald, 2018; Singer et al., 2014).

Children get more involved and longer in the level of play when teachers are more engaged in their play. When teachers sit near children in a structured social and physical environment, there is a stronger influence on play engagement amongst the children (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Pinchover, 2017; Singer, Nederend, Penninx, Tajik, & Boom, 2014). The teacher's role in play consisted of "the role of play manager and the role of play enhancer or playmate" (Singer et al., 2014, p. 1235). As the play manager, the teacher organizes the physical and social environment, in which the room is appealing within structure and objects. Teachers also provided "positive suggestions and warm involvement to build a teacher-child relationship that influences positive play behavior" (Singer et al., 2014, p. 1236). Singer et al. (2014) explained that "although teachers were able to demonstrate their involvement in small groups of children in two-sided interactions and to support peer play" (p. 1247), they also needed training in those areas.

Despite the pressures on teachers and children regarding deliverables on standards and high-stakes assessments, one teacher decided to implement play in her classroom by "bringing play and standards together: bring intention in crafting activities, identifying children's developmental needs, and assessing growth" (McDonald, 2018, p. 33). She discovered that with "child-directed initiatives and teacher-guided activities" (McDonald, 2018, p. 33) in a playful learning environment that promotes open-ended experiences children can meet or exceed standards.

In a study by Uygulama (2016), 75 randomly selected pre-school teachers came up with 26 metaphors and five categories about play concepts. The categories consisted of play as an educator, in which the teachers had 12 different metaphors. In the category,

play as an entertainer, there were seven different metaphors, and in the category of play as a tool for self-expression, the teachers had 13 different metaphors. In the category of play as a vital need, there were 11 different metaphors, and in play as a part of the children's life, some teachers had three different metaphors (Uygulama, 2016). The teachers' metaphors about play concept for preschoolers were composed of a range of different perspectives, therefore; the thoughts of pre-school teachers on play concept were important in the steps of "physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of children" (Uygulama, 2016, p. 373). Although the pre-school teachers had different metaphors for five categories about play concepts, their conclusive perspectives conclude that the implementation of play stimulates the development of children's learning domains (Uygulama, 2016).

A speech and language pathologist working in preschools for children with special needs uses play to expand children's communication skills. Children with special needs have the right to learn and play in a supportive, inclusive environment (Dowling, 2014; Shamsi, 2015). While at a private university in Klang Valley, two preservice teachers agreed that play promotes critical thinking amongst children (Kamarulzaman, 2015). Children learn to be critical thinkers as they are exposed to social skills, so it is important that teachers do not use teacher-centeredness, for this hinders children's critical thinking (Kamarulzaman, 2015). By interacting, conversing, and playing with children, it encourages them to become more engaging with people and developmentally appropriate materials. Play is an intentional intervention; therefore, opportunities are created for play, to provide time to scaffold learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018; Dowling, 2014;

Vygotsky, 1978). When children play, teachers can get important information on children's development during observations (Axelrod, 2014; Chapman-Stanton, 2015; Dowling, 2014; Jones & Reynolds, 2011). Teachers that were involved in coursework on the importance of play, it helped them observe aspects of play to enhance in the classroom (Jung & Jin, 2014; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). In general, teachers may have different perspectives on the role of play, however, if colleges offer coursework on the role of play, early childhood teacher educators would be able to provide preservice teachers with information on all aspects of play (Jung & Jin, 2014; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010).

Preservice Teachers and College Coursework on the Role of Play

Preservice teachers may believe that play is essential, but it is not essential to children's learning. Therefore, early childhood teacher educators need to provide help to preservice teachers on tackling their conflicting beliefs about play. By educating preservice teachers about how "play encourages academic learning, and how to assess children's learning during play," (Sherwood & Reifel, 2013, p. 279) it helps with the preservice teacher's beliefs about the role of play. When college educators and administrators offer a course that supports the teaching of play, it is important that preservice teachers are aware of changes in early childhood education and be prepared to provide high-quality teaching to young children by implementing play into their classroom (Lohmander & Samuelsson, 2015).

In 21 countries in the world, the implementation of play has been supporting the teaching in the learning of young children, however; across countries, there are concerns

about the quality of play-based pedagogy (Aronsram & Braund, 2015; Cheng, 2012). Hong Kong adopted "learning through play" (Cheng, 2012, p. 66) as a central principle for pre-primary teaching in 1986. Although there is a high percentage increase of in-service and preservice professional development, the government's quality assurance inspection reports are disappointing in the learning and teaching in primary teaching (Cheng, 2012). The reports described the learning and teaching in primary schools as "mostly teacher-centered that deviated from the government's recommended pedagogy" (Cheng, 2012, p. 66). The teaching culture of the Hong Kong pre-school education has taken the concept of play for granted (Cheng, 2012).

Teacher educators need to take away the conception of passing a set of given theories on to the preservice teachers to inform their practice and focus their attention more on the learning of the preservice teachers. Because of the belief that play is irrelevant in producing rewards is embedded in the Chinese psyche, "there is a need for a collaborative research agenda linking pre-school teachers and teacher educators in the Colleges and Universities to work on the exemplified practice in the field" (Cheng, 2012, p. 81). Although the Hong Kong government adopted learning through play as a central principle for pre-primary teaching, teacher educators from colleges and pre-school teachers need to come together with an understanding of the full potential of learning through play (Cheng, 2012).

While in a study of 104 teachers in Grade R classrooms in the Cape Peninsula, revealed that they had less knowledge on the role of play and were not sure of their role during informal play (Aronsram & Braund, 2015). Teachers need to understand different

forms of play and what play means to children. When children are involved in both structured and unstructured play in the classroom, teachers need to know how to provide positive opportunities for children to develop their learning skills (Aronsram & Braund, 2015). Therefore, for teachers to establish an understanding of play, Universities and ECCE colleges need to "provide more in-depth training to support the efficacy of incidental teaching moments that occur while children are playing" (Aronsram & Braund, 2015, p. 10). In general, teachers need to know different forms of play and how their positive interaction during children's play can affect children's development. Therefore, when ECCE colleges provide extensive training on play, teachers are able to gain the knowledge they need to implement in their classrooms (Aronsram & Braund, 2015).

In Turkey, early childhood preservice teachers at an education program, constructivism beliefs increased when enrolled in courses that change traditional beliefs by creating a constructivist-learning environment (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2013; Isikoglu, 2008). The implementation of play-related courses in early childhood teacher education programs influences teacher's beliefs in constructivism incorporates good teaching skills and scaffolding strategies (Isikoglu, 2008; Jung & Jin, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). Students that were further in the program and taken play-related courses upheld developmentally appropriate practices and child-centered concepts compared to those just starting an early childhood teacher education program or not enrolled in a teacher preparation program (Isikoglu, 2008; Jung & Jin, 2015). There must be consistency in early childhood teacher education programs when providing courses that influence

change among preservice teachers' traditional beliefs into constructivism beliefs, that implement play in their practice (Isikoglu, 2008; Jung & Jin, 2015).

Preservice teachers used the term play in different ways due to their influences that shaped their beliefs (Aras, 2016; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). When preservice teachers identified the same activities as play, they had a different reason for doing them. Some teachers implement play in their classrooms as an incentive to control the order of the classroom, "while others use it to support children's learning and development across different domains" (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010, p 322). Although the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) emphasize the importance of play and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) describes play in many forms, there are multiple and not singular definitions of play that exist (Aras, 2016; NAEYC, 2019; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010).

There is not a consistent meaning for play, therefore, "the absence of a universal understanding of play makes incorporating it into a theoretically aligned teacher education program challenging" (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010, p. 335). If teacher educators gather information from their preservice teachers, regarding their definition of play, teacher educators maybe able to address play in their teacher preparation programs. The gathering of information on the definition of play would include how programs, teacher educators, administrators, mentor teachers, and young children define play to approach the multiple understanding of play and to come to an agreement on the definition of play (Aras, 2016; Eberle, 2014; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). Despite the multiple definitions of play, teachers with high education and more experience in

ECCE were successful in giving children what they need to grow and develop (Ruokamo, 2017; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010).

To get better outcomes from children, there should be positive teacher-child interactions (Kangas, Siklander, Randolph, & Ruokamo, 2017; Sepulveda, Garza, & Morrison, 2011; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). The influences of professional development and higher education prepare teachers for interactions with preschool children at play. Teachers that had high education and high experience in early childhood education were "successful in providing children with the right amount of support" (Smith & Dziurgot, 2010, p. 124). When interacting with the children, they were able to implement play during observations and assessments, which encouraged them to create strategies to incorporate a child-center environment that enhances problem-solving, language development, and learning among the children (Axelrod, 2014; Chapman-Stanton, 2015; Dowling, 2014; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Kamarulzaman, 2015; Kangas, et al., 2017; Sepulveda et al., 2011; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010).

Teachers that experienced a low education/high experience and low education/low experience "lacked a foundation in child development and play theory" (Smith & Dziurgot, 2010, p. 125), provided either too little or too much guidance in play and focused on discipline. Teachers that had high education/high experience were involved in coursework on the importance of play, which helped them observe aspects of play to enhance in the classroom. (Jung & Jin, 2015; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). If colleges provide a course on play to preservice teachers, they are creating a framework for play intervention. Colleges are preparing preservice teachers to provide quality

teacher and child interactions and increase their understanding of observation and assessment to plan for the individual child in play (Sepulveda et al., 2011; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010).

In contrast to Smith and Dziurgot (2010); Jung and Jin (2014) found that freshman and sophomore "college students in early childhood education and child and family studies" (p. 358) had positive perceptions of play in early childhood education, unlike juniors and seniors. Although the college students viewed play in early childhood classrooms as important, they had different perceptions about the role of play in childhood learning and play as a curriculum (Jung & Jin, 2014, 2015).

When early childhood teacher educators (ECTE) are strategic in teaching preservice early childhood teachers of the importance of the role of play in learning. Students should demonstrate the notion of play in a professional manner and in multiple ways (Jung & Jin, 2015; Smith, 2012). As ECTE equip college students with the understandings and practices of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) along with strategies that link play to the learning desired for children it "will help secure the position of play within early childhood classrooms in the decades ahead" (Smith, 2012, p. 99).

When preservice teachers are taught the guidance to sustain play for children learning and active engagement with children in the play-based curriculum, they can create a play model that includes them being involved in children's play, empowering children to develop learning, guide, suggest, and extended play (Ridgway & Quinones, 2012). By creating a play model, preservice teachers can see themselves as leaders in

pedagogical play. They related theory to practice which is an important part to take in any undergraduate teacher education course (Ridgway & Quinones, 2012).

It was suggested that teacher educators demonstrate the same type of pedagogical practice such as, active learning to the preservice teacher so they could understand play-based activities that they could use in their classrooms (Curtis, 2015). By establishing activities and a playful learning environment, which promotes learning, preservice teachers recognized the importance of implementing play in their classrooms. They also recognized the importance of making learning fun, interesting, and motivating (Aras, 2016; Curtis, 2015; Jung, Zhang, & Zhang, 2017). Curtis (2015) explained that teacher educators should utilize the same pedagogy that they want students to use in their future classrooms. If preservice teachers perceive play as unimportant and possess ineffective beliefs on the role of play, they tend to follow the traditional practices in childhood education. However, if and when colleges provide a course on play to preservice teachers, and college educators develop coursework that strengthens the efficacy beliefs of students and builds their perceptions on play, students have the necessary knowledge to enter the work force (Aras, 2016; Jung, Zhang, & Zhang, 2017; Vu, et al., 2015).

Summary and Conclusions

The conceptual framework includes Vygotsky's theory of the role of play and the many forms of play to include the imaginary play as leading development and the ZPD. These concepts specifically support the central question that forms this study: What are the perspectives of technical college's full-time ECCE faculty in a Southeastern state about the role of play in ECCE curriculum? The literature review contains descriptions of

the major topics, which include the theory on play, the role of play connected to brain development, play essentials, the lack of play, teachers' perspective of play, and preservice teachers and college coursework on the role of play. The role of play is discussed and may have an important influence on full-time ECCE faculty beliefs regarding how the role of play is incorporated in the ECCE curriculum.

The literature indicated how the theory of play influences ECCE teachers. The role of play is a major influence on children's growth and development when teachers appropriately support the role of play in their classrooms. The influences of more competent others provide children a gateway to independence and higher levels of their ZPD (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Rogers and Sawyers (2010), children's play can be influenced by adults for "children's play is affected by their relationship with families, teachers, and peers and the way we treat children and our attitude toward play make a difference in children's play" (Rogers & Sawyers, 2010, p. 78).

Knowing how children's brain development could be related to play may provide faculty with information that explains the scope of children's development, which reflects what preservice teachers should know about the role of play. Because a child's brain is not fully developed when they are born, it is important that children be given the opportunity to enhance their learning domains through positive experiences (Levine & Munsch, 2014). The benefits of play provide children with brain simulations that enhance learning language skills, math concepts, science, social interactions, self-regulation, and developing their small and large motor skills. Play experiences can create a scaffold to

support children across all domains of learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018; Rushton, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, 2014).

Understanding how play could be essential to children's growth and development could influence the technical college faculty to incorporate a course on the role of play in their curriculum. Play is an integral part of the physical, mental, and social development of children and a major contributor to growing into healthy and well-balanced adults. An over emphasis on academic achievement puts play into the realm of being taken for granted, eliminated in some schools today, only to be replaced with out of context academics, and standardized tests (Nicolopoulou, 2010; Ravitch, 2014; Scrabeck, 2020). Play encourages the development of social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical skills. When children are involved with play, they build their social and emotional skills, which become an important part of their lives. (Scrabeck, 2020; Smith & Pellegrini, 2013).

Play has developmental benefits which might be immediate, long-term, or both, but somehow the exact role of play in learning is still debated (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). Teachers' perspectives of play vary in many aspects of their classrooms. For some teachers, play should be child-directed while for others play should be teacher-directed (Walsh & Fallon, 2019; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). Through a variety of personal and professional influences, preservice teachers use the term play differently and implement play in different ways (Aras, 2016; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). Although many teachers acknowledged the importance of play in learning, they find it difficult to understand how they could support children's learning through play (Hamlin & Wisneski, 2012). Because

of school policies and a focus on academic goals, mandated activities and time interferes with play or play-based teaching (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Kamarulzaman, 2015; Lynch, 2015).

Although colleges provide coursework in early childhood development, there is not a consistency in early childhood teacher education programs providing courses that influences change among preservice teachers' beliefs on implementing play in their classrooms (Aras, 2016; Isikoglu, 2008; Jung & Jin, 2015). Teacher educators rarely demonstrated the same pedagogy that they want students to use in their future classrooms, leaving preservice teachers not experiencing a play-base approach that could be beneficial to them as future teachers (Curtis, 2015). There are multiple definitions of play; therefore, a unified understanding of play becomes difficult for teacher education programs to align on the definition of play (Aras, 2016; Isikoglu, 2008; Jung & Jin, 2015; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010).

This study promoted positive social change in the field of early childhood education. The purpose of this research was to understand the perspectives of Southeastern state technical college's full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice through coursework to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in early childhood classrooms, which could also positively affect social change to help improve the educational outcomes for many children. There was little found in the literature addressing the lack of coursework offered, or even the topic of coursework on the role of play. To understand why technical colleges of unnamed Southeastern U.S. state ECCE coursework does not focus directly on the role of play,

additional information about ECCE faculty perspectives needs to be researched, as this was an existing gap in the literature.

In Chapter 3 the methodology was presented in detail, beginning with a description of the research design and tradition. There was a rationale for the selected basic qualitative study. A description of the purposeful selection of participants, the role of the researcher, data collection, analysis, and threats to quality were presented. The ethics and feasibility of the study were also explored in addition to issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this research was to understand the perspectives of Southeastern U.S. state technical college full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice teachers through coursework to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their early childhood classrooms. A basic qualitative approach was applied to answer the research questions. Research indicated that play is an essential part in children's growth and development and teachers that implement play in their classrooms provide children with the benefits of developing their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills (Lynch, 2015; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010; Wood, 2014). However, what was not clear was if these colleges were providing early childhood preservice teachers with courses on the role of play to develop their knowledge about the important role of play as an instructional strategy (see Aras, 2016; Curtis, 2015; Jung & Jin, 2014, 2015; Smith, 2012; Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). According to Jung et al. (2017), if colleges and college educators develop coursework that strengthens the efficacy beliefs of students and builds their perspectives on play, students may have the necessary knowledge to enter their field. When preservice teachers are educated about the explicit ways play encourages learning academic content, and assess children's learning during play they expand their understanding and appreciation of the role of play in learning and development, plus know the relevance of play in their early childhood classrooms (Sherwood & Reifel, 2013).

Jung and Jin (2015) discussed recommendations when designing college curriculum and play-related coursework to support future professionals in constructing

positive perspectives about play and enhancing integration of play integration. Also, Aras (2016) and Sherwood and Reifel, (2010) referenced the earlier study accounting for the composition of future professionals' perspectives of play, instructors can specifically focus on future professionals' perspectives about the importance of play as learning, and play as curriculum during their course teaching (Jung & Jin, 2015). My study addressed a gap in research and practice about course offering for preservice teachers addressing the role of play as an instructional strategy. The information provided by the ECCE participants helped clarify the value of coursework addressing the role of play and needed focus in their overall curriculum offerings.

Following is a review of the methodology of the study, beginning with a description of the research design and tradition. The rationale for selecting a basic qualitative study is offered. The description of the purposeful selection of participants, role of the researcher, data collection, analysis, and threats to quality are explained. The issues of ethics and feasibility are explored.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research question guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of a technical college's full-time ECCE faculty in a Southeastern U.S. state about the role of play in the ECCE curriculum?

The subquestions that followed this central question were as follows:

1. What are the perspectives of ECCE faculty on current course content that supports preservice teachers' understanding of the role of play in their teaching practices?

2. What are the perspectives of ECCE faculty on the information provided in coursework that supports preservice teachers including play in their lesson plans?

3. What are the perspectives of ECCE faculty on ways coursework supports and facilitates teachers' implementation of play in early childhood classrooms?

The primary focus of this basic qualitative study overall questions of how, what, and why were used to ask ECCE participants their perspectives on how they view, support, and incorporate the role of play in their program. Such questions favored a qualitative study approach particularly when the parameters were not distinct. Reliance on multiple sources of data was necessary to confirm the reliability and validity of basic qualitative study research (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). Interviews, observations, experiences, and other empirical evidence were used to answer the research questions. Qualitative research supported answers to how questions were sought in this doctoral study indicating its revelatory nature (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). In this basic qualitative study, the interest was in the perspectives full-time ECCE faculty in a Southeastern U.S. state technical college have about the role of play in course offerings and how faculty support this through the curriculum. The interest was not focused on patterns of behaviors involved (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016).

Another element of basic qualitative study includes the identification of intent (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016. In my research, I intended to focus on a specific problem (understanding how faculty view, support, and incorporate the role of play in their program) and find possible resolutions (for coursework to address

implementing the role of play as an instructional strategy). A basic qualitative study was how Creswell (2014), Creswell and Poth, (2018), and Yin (2016) identified this type of intent and the approach was appropriate for accomplishing the goals of my research.

Other research traditions were considered. However, narrative inquiry, phenomenology, and ethnography research were not an appropriate design for this research study. Narrative inquiry is a study based on detailed summarized descriptions of both personal and social accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of research gives a description of people's lives, which involves their experiences and interpretations of what they may have gone through (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018, Yin, 2016). According to the type of narrative inquiry, the data sources can range from in-depth personal interviews, personal narratives, and personal documents, such as diaries, journals, and letters which were not useful for answering my research questions. Phenomenological research is used to examine a person's interpretation of their experiences and tries to understand that person's experiences (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018, Yin, 2016). This type of research involves documentation and multiple in-depth interviews for data collection, in which the researcher tries to get a deeper subjective meaning of the person's experiences. Although known as the oldest form of qualitative research, ethnography research is used to investigate and describe the patterns of communities or cultures that influence the behaviors of people (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018, Yin, 2016). Ethnography research is conducted for a lengthy period in which observations are a major data source. It consists of analyzing documents, artifacts, and conducting formal and informal interviews (Creswell, 2014; Creswell &

Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). Such a design would not support the purpose of this study or allow me to seek answers to research questions.

Role of the Researcher (Qualitative and Mixed Methods)

The role of the researcher is to design and conduct the study, collect, and analyze data, evaluate, write up, and present the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After obtaining permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research, I also needed the approval from the Technical College System of the research state's six technical colleges. I was responsible for introducing myself and explaining the role I assumed for the duration of the study to the research state's six technical colleges. As an ECCE instructor at a technical college, my background helped with the trustworthiness of the ECCE participants of this study by establishing, credibility (participants' review data collected, and the researchers' interpretation), transferability (contexts occurs and interpretation of the data), confirmability (findings are based on participants' responses and not the researchers' bias), and dependability (study findings are consistent). I established a relationship with faculty by approaching them as a colleague first and researcher second. I am not an instructor at either institution nor do I know the teachers at the six technical colleges. This was fundamental to the success of the study because I was the primary data collector.

Once IRB approval has been granted, I made initial contact via email and telephone calls with applicable college officials to conduct the study as described below in the methodology section. After receiving permission to proceed with my research from technical college officials, I gathered a pool of potential participants from the ECCE

program director from each college. I identified the target population and contact potential ECCE participants via email and telephone calls. I provided information about the details of the study and what participation would involve. Those indicating a willingness to participate were asked for their contact information. They were asked to sign an informed consent form via email, by replying to the email, which contains information about confidentiality and the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. I also provided them with a signed form insuring that I maintain the confidentiality of their information and role in this study. I then scheduled interviews (time and place) with the ECCE participants.

Before the interviews, I identified a room or space, that was comfortable and provided confidentiality. I conducted face-to-face interviews by asking open-ended questions, using an audio recorder, and documenting notes. After gathering all the information from the interviews, I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews. Once the faculty's audio recordings and my field notes were transcribed, I began hand-coding procedures consisting of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and themes in the data. I searched through the data for regularities, patterns, as well as for topics in the data, and wrote down words and phrases to represent those topics and patterns. The coding was organized into themes. The initial coding was where I searched through the data for regularities, patterns, and topics the data cover. Once this first cycle of coding was completed, I moved on to concept coding whereby a broader term was applied to identify specific themes. Axial coding was then applied whereby the identified category

properties were connected to other identified categories, and the nature of the relationship were explained.

In addition to collecting and analyzing data, I addressed any ethical issues that might arise. In the meantime, I gathered all data, papers and digital (which was password protected), and stored them in a locked file cabinet in my home to which I have the sole access. My password-protected computer, to which I have sole access, was the only one I used throughout this study. This information remains secure for 5 years after which time I will destroy it by shredding any consumable materials and burning electronic devices. If necessary, Walden IRB and other appropriate officials were provided details to access such information through me before it is destroyed so I can maintain confidentiality as required.

ECCE full-time faculty from the technical college where I work were excluded from the study. In my criteria for selecting ECCE participants, adjuncts were not included as they do not have critical decision making on college coursework. These measures helped eliminate any potential bias or conflict of interest regarding relationships with participants of the study.

Methodology

My goal for this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of a target population of 12 full-time ECCE faculty drawn from six technical colleges in a Southeastern U.S. state. I pursued to identify their perspectives on the role of play through individual, semistructured interviews (Turner, 2010). The analysis of the data and results of the study provided a better understanding of what the perspectives are of

full-time ECCE faculty on teaching preservice teachers through coursework to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their early childhood classrooms.

Participant Selection (Qualitative)

Purposeful sampling was used in this study choosing a target population of 12 full-time ECCE faculty drawn from six technical colleges in the research state. The ECCE faculty was selected based in part on their credentials, experience, and who teach any or some combination of the three courses that include play in their course description. Each full-time faculty participating in the study held a Masters, Ed.D., or Ph.D. in ECCE or ECE. Another criterion for participant selection was the quality of the technical college where ECCE participants work. The quality of the six technical colleges that were chosen for my study is based on their accreditation which was granted by the Council on Occupational Education (COE), a national accreditation body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, and/or the Commission on Colleges (COC) of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), a regional accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The COC accredits all activities of degree-granting colleges which meet the accreditation criteria.

The ECCE participants in the study were selected from four geographical areas limited to one state. Once approved by IRB, the IRB approval letter, Technical College agreement letter, and request to conduct study form were submitted to the Technical College System to obtain the Technical College System's approval . After reviewing the required documents, it was anticipated that the Technical College System give the access

to request site approval for any of the 22 technical colleges in their system. Once approval was granted from the Technical College System, six technical colleges from within that system, that offered ECCE programs, were given an agreement letter and an approval form via email to conduct face-to-face interviews to ECCE participants. Six technical colleges from a Southeastern U.S. state were solicited for participation in the study through emails to program directors. The program directors of ECCE at the six technical colleges were asked to provide a list of qualified full-time faculty names and contact information who teach ECCE courses (Appendix A). Once a program director's permission was secured for participation through the Faculty Consortium for Early Childhood Care and Education Instructors for the Technical College System, consent letters for participation in the study were sent via email to the appropriate full-time ECCE faculty inviting their participation (Appendix B). Consent responses were sorted into *Yes* or *No*. From the *Yes (I Consent)* returns 12 ECCE participants were drawn at random (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The use of multiple cases to include one case from each site was chosen to strengthen the findings of the study. Including the use of multiple cases expands the significance of the results. Choosing ECCE participants from different colleges added diversity to the data through multiple perspectives. The target sample size of 12 ECCE participants with other data from six technical colleges provided data saturation, validity, and stability of the results. Having a smaller amount of data provides a manageable focused viewpoint, although a larger amount of data could present a broader perspective of an issue (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The target number of ECCE participants provided enough data for transcription to occur and to present and represent the perspectives of faculty while remaining small to provide an in-depth look at how their perspectives impact the implementation of a specific course on the role of play. This purposeful sampling strategy was also intended to provide a sample that was representative of high quality, experienced, and educated population of ECCE faculty. The rationale for this choice was to get the population of ECCE faculty most likely to accept the most contemporary research practices in the field. These individuals provided useful information that helped clarify the value of coursework addressing the role of play in their overall curriculum offerings (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Instrumentation (Qualitative)

When formulating interview questions to collect data, decisions were made about what data to collect, what type of data was generated, also creating hypotheses about what the answers to the interview questions might be. The data collection included semi-structured interviews with faculty to develop an understanding of full-time ECCE faculty's views on teaching preservice teachers through coursework to understand the role of play, how to include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their early childhood classrooms. Interviews were the primary method of data collection. These interview questions were developed based on the research questions and subquestions (Appendix B). Triangulation of data occurred by analyzing the research questions from multiple perspectives to increase the validity and reliability of the data. Every data collection source was aligned with the conceptual framework, specifically Vygotsky's

(1978) ideas that “play” leads development, the imaginary, and the ZPD, to ensure that there were no biases and personal influences of how the perspectives were portrayed. Questions were carefully worded, and there was no need for revision through the course of the study. Responses were audio recorded and I transcribed them verbatim immediately after each interview. (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). To facilitate the process of data collection, a protocol was used to structure the interviews as these were conducted.

Using open-ended research questions, semi-structured interviews that are audio recorded were carried out with ECCE participants that gave them the opportunity to be engaged in discussions and respond to questions more fully (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). These interviews were scheduled and conducted by me at a time and place convenient for the ECCE participants (Turner, 2010).

Saturation was another important consideration in research as failure to accomplish this can hinder the content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturation was considered met when new information was no longer surfacing through the data collection and triangulation process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). If saturation does not occur, the same procedures for participant selection and subsequent protocols were followed using additional colleges within the same system.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The primary data collection occurred during the semi-structured face-to-face interviews with each ECCE participant (Appendix B). The procedure for collecting data during these interviews began by reviewing the sent emailed consent letter with the

participant's "I Consent" reply to the email and by asking open-ended questions in a face-to-face interview at a scheduled time and place convenient for the ECCE participant. I identified a room or space that was comfortable and provided confidentiality for all interviews. During the interviews, an audio recorder was placed between me and interviewee along with pen and paper in case the audio recorder should fail or become unable to pick up the voice of the interviewee. However, audio equipment was tested before the formal interviews to ensure working condition. The initial interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. I used questions stemming from the central research questions and subquestions of the study and literature review. Questions were asked one at a time, staying on the topic, and being respectful of the time. Notes were taken along with recording the interview.

It was not necessary to conduct a second interview as a follow-up interview conducted after the initial interviews and completed transcriptions. The purpose of the second interview would have been to clarify questions developed from the initial interview. Follow-up interviews would have occurred either face-to-face or over the phone, as determined by the faculty. I would have taken notes during the interview. At the end of the interview, I debriefed participants explaining once again the purpose of the study, reminding them of their right to withdraw their consent, and offering to share study results.

Data Analysis Plan

The data was assessed through transcription from an audiotape, converting into text data. The interview session notes were typed, printed, and organized into

computerized file folders. I analyzed the data by hand, which involves coding procedures and memos to help manage and organize the data (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). I searched through the data for regularities, patterns, as well as for themes in the data, and wrote down words and phrases to represent those themes and patterns (Lodico et al., 2010; Saldana, 2016; Yin, 2016). Themes and patterns through coding and analysis provide guidance in interpreting the data and finding meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2016; Yin, 2016).

The data analysis began early in the study. Bogdan and Biklen (2007), Creswell (2014), Creswell and Poth (2018), and Saldana (2016) explained that data analysis and coding could begin with reading interview transcripts and transcribing interviews. It can begin as early as writing field notes during the interview process. The research questions were used to develop a set of organizing codes to pre-code data. This type of sorting was simply an organizational strategy to manage the data. Once data from field notes were transcribed, a hand coding process began. This included segmenting and labeling text identifying regularities and patterns (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2016; Yin, 2016). The initial coding, also referred to as open coding, was useful for organizing the data into themes. The next cycle of coding is referred to as concept coding or analytical coding. Themes were joined by broader terms and allowed ideas to begin to surface from the data. From this level of coding, I moved into axial coding whereby connections and the nature of these between code categories were sought (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2016; Yin, 2016).

Trustworthiness

The interviews, with permission from each participant, were audio recorded and once completed were immediately transcribed. Participant's transcript review occurred when transcriptions were complete. When conducting the interviews, strategies were implemented to support appropriate rapport and trust with the ECCE participants (Creswell, 2012, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The ECCE participants were assured that confidentiality was maintained during and after the research. Although I am also a faculty member as an ECCE instructor for one of the technical colleges, I hold no position of authority to any of the faculty at any of the six selected college sites.

I created the interview questions (Appendix B), served as the interviewer, and conducted the coding and analysis, which might show weakness in the study. To address bias, I completed two coding sessions, which helped ensure there is consistency across codes (Lodico et al., 2010; Yin, 2016). Participants' transcript review helped ensure the accuracy of participants' responses. Limiting the data sources added to the viability of the study. Having too much data for the study could become unmanageable, and the study would not be completed in a reasonable amount of time (Creswell, 2012, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). There was a small sample size of 12 ECCE participants to provide a reasonable context for the basic qualitative study.

This qualitative study approach allowed insight into the perspectives of ECCE faculty in six Southeastern U.S. state technical colleges. The number of participants in the basic qualitative study was small, so I could gather in-depth data and provide descriptions

of themes and patterns within a specific context. This compromises transferability but enhances depth. Issues and strategies related to validity were addressed to ensure the accuracy of the findings of the study (Lodico et al., 2010; Yin, 2016). By asking the participants to review the transcripts of their interviews to make sure I understood their responses and captured their experiences accurately checked the dependability of my study. To avoid having my own experiences influence my analysis, I had my dissertation research committee review my findings as another check on my interpretation.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical responsibilities in this study started with the primary responsibility to safeguard and protect the ECCE participants in the study (Lodico et al., 2010; Yin, 2016). The well-being of the ECCE participants, the truthful portrayal of the data, and the protection of the data in this study are ethical issues that were addressed. Required documents with information regarding the procedure, possible benefits, and risks involved in the study were presented to the ECCE participants. The ECCE participants had a chance to ask questions to fully understand their participation in the study. I provided a full explanation on any matter expressed by ECCE participants. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without ramifications (Lodico et al., 2010; Yin, 2016).

All forms of paper documents and physical data were kept in a locked file cabinet to protect confidentiality. Transcribed interviews, field notes, and digital data from the study were kept on a flash drive. All were stored in the same locked file cabinet. My personal computer, which is password protected, was the only one used for the study. At

the end of a period of five years, all protected documents related to this study will be destroyed by me. The Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) is interested in reviewing the research questions and design involving ethical principles that consist of autonomy, beneficence, and justice. Therefore, the study did not start until the IRB reviewed the proposal and documents and granted approval to begin collecting data.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of Southeastern U.S. state technical college full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice teachers through coursework to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their early childhood classrooms. The data that was collected in this study was analyzed to get a better understanding of the perspectives of the research state technical college full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice teachers. Educated and experienced full-time ECCE faculty at six technical colleges in the research state were the participants in the study. They were interviewed face-to-face. Once I received Walden University IRB approval, I found 12 study participants who teach ECCE courses to preservice teachers. Chapter 4 presented the results from the analyses of the data collected. Chapter 5 included an analysis and interpretation of the results and possible implications for social change and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty at a Southeastern state technical college teaching preservice teachers to determine their students' understanding of the role of play, the inclusion of play in their lesson plans, and how play is being implemented in their classrooms. Twelve full-time ECCE faculty were interviewed. In this chapter, I restated the research questions and explained how each helped to guide the study. I described the setting, participant demographics, explained the process of data collection and analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. I also presented a description of the themes and patterns that emerged and the results of the research.

Research Questions

The following central research question guided my study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of technical college full-time ECCE faculty about the role of play in the ECCE curriculum?

The subquestions that followed this central question were the following:

1. What are the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty on current course content that supports preservice teachers' understanding of the role of play in their teaching practices?

2. What are the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty on the information provided in coursework that supports preservice teachers including play in their lesson plans?

3. What are the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty on ways coursework can support and facilitate teachers' implementation of play in early childhood classrooms?

Setting

As stated in Chapter 3, each participant was interviewed in their own environment. Each participant held a full-time ECCE faculty position at a Southeastern state technical college. Table 1 lists the pseudonym assigned to each participant, their gender, position title, institution region, and institution.

Table 1

Demographics of the Participants

Participants (Pseudonyms used)	Gender	Position Title	Technical College Region	Technical College
JR	Female	ECCE Program Director	Northeast	GT
KD	Female	ECCE Program Director	Southwest	AT
LP	Female	ECCE Faculty	Northwest	GAN
JP	Male	ECCE Program Director	Southern	SC
LG	Female	ECCE Program Director	Northeast	GAP
WP	Male	ECCE Faculty	Northwest	CT
KW	Female	ECCE Faculty	Southern	SC
DM	Female	ECCE Faculty	Southern	SC
HQ	Female	ECCE Faculty	Northwest	CT
RT	Male	ECCE Faculty	Northeast	GAP
SH	Female	ECCE Faculty	Southwest	AT
LT	Female	ECCE Faculty	Northeast	GAP

The table shows that there were 12 participants from six different technical colleges. Four of the 12 participants held the title of program director, and the remaining eight participants were faculty. All 12 participants had teaching positions. There were three males and nine females. I conducted a statewide search for participants, yet I received no responses from full-time faculty in the Southeastern parts of the research state.

Data Collection

Twelve full-time ECCE faculty were interviewed for this study once the Walden IRB approval (IRB #04-05-19-0451661) was obtained. The agreed upon number of participants that would encourage a collection of rich data for a basic qualitative study with interviews was 12. The State Technical College System (TCS) was contacted for permission to conduct the study. After receiving TCS's permission, I emailed several ECCE faculty my consent letter for participation in the study during the summer semester, in which I did not receive an adequate sample size (12) of full-time ECCE faculty to volunteer to participate. Therefore, I used purposeful sampling obtained from the college public directory and invited prospective participants via email. I received 12 faculty that consented to an interview. I contacted each faculty via email to schedule the interviews. It was critical when contacting potential participants that I explained the factors of the study to those individuals with whom I made contact, to ensure that they understood for what they were volunteering.

One-on-one interviews took place between June and December 2019 and ranged in length from 25-35 minutes. An interview protocol was used to ensure that interviews

were consistent (see Appendix B). Data were recorded on a personal audio recorder. As responses were reviewed and clarified with the participants, it was not necessary to conduct a second interview. Recordings were manually transcribed immediately following each interview, allowing me to acquire an initial sense of the data collected.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives of Southeastern U.S. state technical college full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice teachers through coursework to understand the role of play, include play in their lesson plans, and implement play in their early childhood classrooms. The data that was collected in this study was analyzed to get a better understanding of the perspectives of the research state technical college full-time ECCE faculty teaching preservice teachers. The primary research question that guided my study was as follows:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of technical college full-time ECCE faculty about the role of play in the ECCE curriculum?

All participant's interview transcripts were transcribed by me. The transcripts were then read for accuracy and re-read for preliminary coding. These documents were then loaded into the NVivo 12 Pro® software program. The software assisted me in the discovering trends, the identify patterns and connections, and helped me develop themes. The transcripts were loaded into the NVivo 12 Pro® program which assisted me to code, query, and model relationships from the data.

During a qualitative study data collection, coding, and analysis can occur at the same time. Each interview session was audio taped and then transcribed. Before each

interview, the purpose of the study was reviewed. The interview was audio recorded and the transcripts were completed. Then I reviewed the transcripts without attempting to look for themes and patterns. The transcripts were reviewed for accuracy before coding. The transcripts were reviewed again to begin the preliminary coding process. A line-by-line analysis was done, and meaningful words, phrases, or sentences were coded using descriptive category names and kept in a notebook for initial coding purposes. The transcripts were imported into the NVivo 12 Pro® program which assisted in the organization and coding of the data. The interview transcripts were imported as sources, with the final study having 12 interview transcripts. The data analysis included comparing, grouping, and reducing the data into queries, relationships, cases, and models. Categories of information were established for the study by creating nodes. The nodes or categories were determined by reviewing the interview questions. The four established categories were: Low Percentage of Play in Curriculum, Play is Learning & Development, Play is an effective instructional strategy, and Play is important in the ECCE environment (see Table 2).

Data analysis. The use of NVivo 12 Pro® software helped me in the organization and codding of the data. I classified and coded like data from recorded participant interviews. The software is an organizational tool that assisted me as I discovered trends, the identification of patterns and connections, and the development of themes. Use of the qualitative research software NVivo 12 Pro® established the foundation of the data analysis. The NVivo 12 Pro® software allowed the direct transfer of data from the

interview audio tapes, and the participant transcripts. A discussion of the contribution of the NVivo 12 Pro® in the analytical process is contained in the following summary.

Step 1: Ensure that the data for analysis are organized and prepared. The data holdings were reviewed and a record of the names, the dates of interviews, and receipt of each signed Informed Consent Form was confirmed. The audio tapes were transcribed and transferred into the NVivo 12Pro® database. The transcripts were analyzed for potential themes. Analysis of the transcripts helped to separate the data into common ideas, thoughts, or comments presented by the participants.

Step 2: Classification of data by major emphasis, competencies and skills activity, training, and education. The data from the interview questions were analyzed and imported into the NVivo 12 Pro® qualitative software. The NVivo 12 Pro® qualitative software was used by me to organize data and I coded and identified themes.

The transcribed interview-based data were coded by me further into nodes based on the commonality of topic discussed. The attributes were recorded for each case by classifying the node. The attribute values include gender, educational level, age group, years of experience and subjects taught. As an example, comments made by the participants concerning play as an integral part of learning development, play being a crucial part of the ECCE curriculum, were placed as a node in the software. All transcripts were reviewed as it related to the potential theme topics or nodes in the NVivo 12 Pro® software and interviewer comments were coded to the node. I analyzed each transcript when using the NVivo 12 Pro® software as an organizational tool. I was able

to identify common threads within participant's responses to the same interview questions.

Step 3: Analysis of the data. The first step in the analysis process using NVivo 12 Pro® was to identify any commonalities in the responses of the interviewees. I was responsible for transcribing all the interviews. I also read through each transcript before analysis. This preliminary analysis of the data provided some idea of the potential common threads to be analyzed.

I created approximately one hundred pages of transcribed data were obtained. Categories of information were established for the study by me creating nodes. The nodes were determined by reviewing the interview questions. The following four categories were established: Low Percentage of Play in ECCE curriculum, Play is Learning and Development, Play is an Effective Instructional Strategy, Play is important in the ECCE environment. Each interview transcript was analyzed multiple times to code its contents.

Summary reports were run for each category or node. The reports included the number of sources coded to see the themes occurring. Each node summary report was reviewed multiple times to identify subthemes. The references in each subtheme were counted to determine the order of magnitude of the themes and subthemes.

Step 4: Interpretation or meaning of the data. A discussion of the interpretation of the data and research findings developed with the aid of the NVivo 12 Pro® software were provided. The interpretations of findings and recommendations culled from the research were discussed in relation to the research question and research method. The use of NVivo 12 Pro® software ensured a thorough analysis of the qualitative data derived

from the interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and imported into NVivo 12 Pro® software. The preliminary analysis process involved coding the information using NVivo 12 Pro® software, in which I ensured a thorough analysis of the data retrieved from the interviews.

The NVivo 12 Pro® program is an organizational tool that helped me organize all the interview transcripts. The software assisted me in the discovery of trends, the identification of patterns and connections, and supported the development of themes. The imbedded NVivo 12 Pro® coding process helped to explore patterns, and review and revise observations and findings. The review of the interview transcripts and the testing of nodes (coded data) helped to formulate the four major themes identified during the research. The data collected, although subjective, provided a clearer understanding of the ECCE instructors' beliefs on the importance of play inside the classroom, curriculum and for the child.

Results

Participants were asked questions to identify their perspectives about the role of play in the ECCE curriculum. This section presents the results based on the primary research question that guided the study and described developing themes. Themes will be discussed in further detail.

RQ1: What are the perspectives of a technical college full-time ECCE faculty about the role of play in the ECCE curriculum?

The established themes for this study were: Low percentage of play in curriculum, Play is learning and development, Play is an effective instructional strategy, and Play is important in the ECCE environment, (see Figure 1).

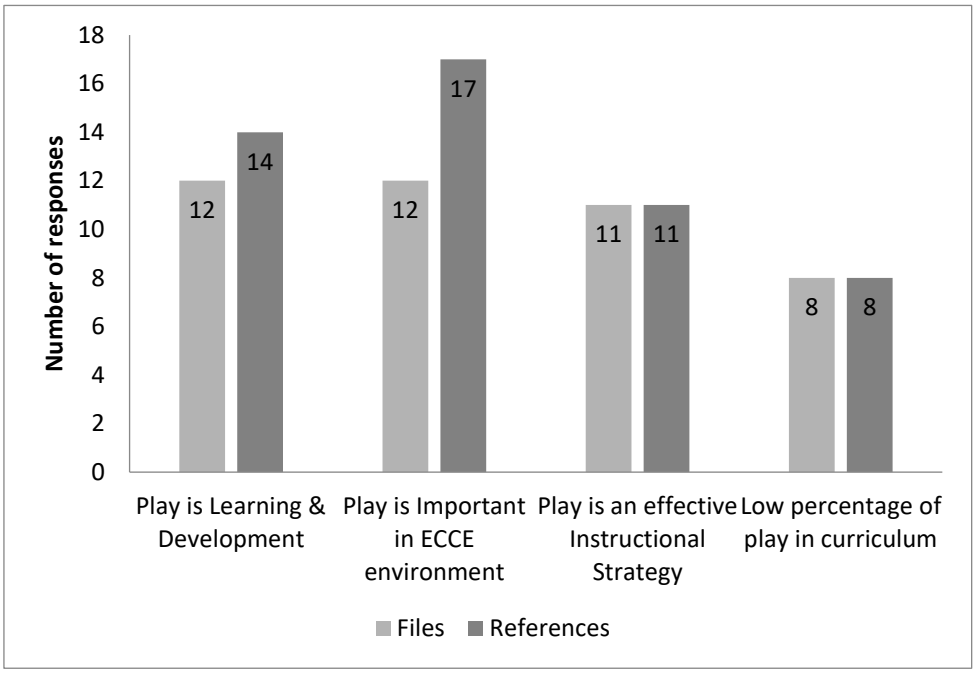

Figure 1. Established themes. *Note.* Number of responses representing interview answers that correlates to each established theme. Some participants provided the same response several times to different interview questions. The files represent the number of transcripts and the references demonstrate the number of times each theme was mentioned within the transcripts.

Low percentage of play in ECCE curriculum. Participants were questioned about what percentage of the overall course addressed the role of play. When asked the question, LT said, “I’ll say a good quarter to maybe a third, so 25 to 30% of the courses are really about play with real childhood education.” KW stated, “Probably 15 to 20% of

the class talks about play and we spend about two full class periods." JR said, "But I'll say maybe 15%." While RT stated, "Maybe 10% where it is very focused on it" and DM said, "It probably would be 10%," along with HQ stating, "I would say, 10%." Finally, LP said, "like 6%," and LG stated, "It would maybe be 5%, not a lot." In general, these faculty stated that although play may be mentioned in some coursework, there is a low percentage of play in ECCE curriculum. Faculty calculated the percentage rate raged from 6% to 30%, therefore they could not determine whether preservice teachers understood the role of play, the inclusion of play in their lesson plans, and how play is being implemented in their classrooms.

Play is learning and development. This theme was developed as a result of participants being asked three questions. First, within the courses they teach, is there any focus on the role of play. Second, in what ways do they see coursework supporting the implementation of the role of play by preservice teachers and third, what is their understanding about the role of play within the early childcare classroom.

LG stated,

> We talk about a little bit of how play integrates into early childcare curriculum and child development in terms of how children learn, and then infant toddler development, it's how infant toddler curriculum is. Children's play to a great extent, that's really it, I think.

RT stated, "I think the coursework is there to basically support it, but I don't think it is. It is hard for them to understand the role of play without actually playing."

SH said,

> I think all of the coursework hinges around the whole element of play as the work of children. I think to the extent that preservice teachers are able to get in touch with that and realize that play is really children's work. Support the child initiative, the child's own…. Have children navigate through their own play activities. Their work activities, to the extent that the teacher is able to do that determine the success of the student as well as the success of the child.

LT expressed,

> The way I look at play is that it's really the child's interests to the world of thinking and acting upon the environment. It's an inactive exploration and I think that the coursework should support this by showing perspective teachers how important this free exploration is for the children to have these opportunities and the importance of teacher's facilitation. It's facilitation by providing materials, and also provide a language that goes along with play, so the children would develop problem-solving and inquiry, and the ability to enter into some of their own creative expressions.

KD indicated,

> The role is allowing preservice teachers or students to have hands-on experience, so we give them scenarios. Each class incorporate play, how they incorporate play, again is the example of math and science, how the play is incorporated in math and science, again I have to use a class that I'm teaching.

JP said,

> I guess the biggest way that I see, we try to enforce them, that this is the children's job, especially when they start getting feedback from other people asking, why they keep seeing the children involved in play, and a child to show them how children actually are learning through play. Reiterating their lessons through play, they imitating life lessons; say I'm learning either at home or through us, they are playing, so play makes a synaptic connection, it's more firm and more real to them then just reading a book, or giving a lecture to them."

HQ stated, "I see those courses being supportive and leaning towards play."

JR mentioned,

> A higher quality classroom and center in school, is going to have more play. Young children learn better when they are hands-on actively engage in play. It may appear to the naked eye, untrained eye, that it is very unstructured, but a well-trained teacher with good management skills, it would be organized chaos to him or her. The children would be able to make those choices for themselves engage with the material, engage with their peers and learn many skills seamlessly without being sat down at a table to do drill and kill.

RT said,

> I put it as the number one thing, that you have to be creating an environment in which play is going to happen and I feel like that's when most learning is taken place. With the children, it is through their play oppose to direct instruction.

LP stated,

> I believe that play in the classroom can facilitate across all developmental domains. I see that language is affected, it goes hand in hand, when children are allowed to play, or they are encouraged to play, especially when they have their props, or they are prompted. In certain ways, math can also be developed in the curriculum through play when they're doing different things. But I also see the benefits of the social development especially from play. It is an opportunity for them to collaborate with other students, and to build relationships for the social realm, so that's opportunities for problem solve when children are playing, and for the physical domain/development.

LG declared,

> My understanding is that it should be paramount. Children have an intuitive sense about how they want to play and what they want to play, and what they want to play with and that we should let children lead in that area, in that domain.

WP stated, "My understanding is that play is the foundation of all learning and my understanding is not just in early childhood, but even in upper grades." KW said, "It's about the only way a child would learn anything and to introduce the concept, but if they don't go back into their own free play and practice that concept, then they're not going to get it." DM explained,

> So that's what I do try to use some of that, actually quite a bit of that. I do think play is a vital role, I think sometimes you do need to play with no criteria attached to it, but I do think there is a productive kind of play.

The perspectives of all twelve-faculty agreed that play is learning and development. According to faculty, play becomes the foundation of learning for early child care and well into upper grades. When play is integrated into early childcare curriculum children are able to explore and build on their learning domains. Play in the classroom facilitate all areas of developmental domains.

Play is an effective instructional strategy. Participants were questioned if they think that play is an effective instructional strategy and what could be done to improve current courses to help teachers understand and implement it effectively. JR said, "I believe play is a very effective instructional strategy." According to RT,

> The strategy will be, what are you doing to allow the children's play to occur and what are you doing to promote the play, and what are you doing to enhance the play. So, I feel like that is what the instructional strategy would be, supportive of play rather than of an instructional strategy for play, it's of play.

SH said,

> Yes, I think play is the core of all instructional strategy in the early childhood classroom. As I said earlier, play is helpful when children work through their own interpretation and understanding of the world, they live in. KD stated, "100%. If you understand young children play is the foundation."

LP explained,

> Yes, I think it is. I really feel like it is, if all of the instructors of the early childhood program or following the standards and the competencies, play would

> be covered, if we wanted to do anything in addition to that, perhaps we could add a mastering component in during practicum, that is what I would suggest.

JP stated,

> Yes, it is definitely an effective strategy because in play they are interacting with peers, they are developing social skills, they are learning the ability how to communicate appropriately, back and forth, taken leadership roles, and some are expanding their abilities, kind of bringing, maybe a shy child out that would not normally play with another child, but through imagination taking on a role of other people, it gives them the ability to develop this life skill of socialization skills, that they are skilled.

LG said, “Yes, I definitely think it is an effective strategy.” WP stated, “Yes, definitely an effective instructional strategy.” KW indicated, “I personally think play is about the only way to learn.” DM stated, “Yes, I think it is for instructional strategy.” HQ said, “so the answer to the first question is yes.”

In general, some faculty identified play as an effective instructional strategy. Three faculty expressed that they “definitely” think play is an effective strategy. While others explained, that with learning standards, competences, and instructional strategies that supports play can enhances children’s ability to understand the world they live in. When play is promoted children build imagination, develop leadership roles, language, social, and emotional skills (Pinchover, 2017; Trundle & Smith, 2017).

Play is important in the ECCE environment. Participants were questioned how important the role of play within an early childcare environment is. JR stated, “I think

play is extremely important within the role of early childhood and I think we do a very good job in the high-quality centers in the early education realm."

RT explained,

> I think if you don't have play, you're not going to be getting very good growth with the children. I look at it like, what happens if you don't have it. Because, I feel like it's going to be there if you allow it to happen, but if you don't allow it, then it will be detrimental to the growth and development of the child.

DM said, "I think that it is very important because I think that the environment; as I have taught the students, besides the teacher and a parent, the environment is their third teacher."

According to KD,

> It is extremely important, again children learn through play, so that environment has to incorporate learning experiences while they're playing, so they are gaining something, so they are always learning something while they're having fun, they understand it or the instructor understand.

LP said, "I would say it is very important." JP and WP had a similar view, stating, "It's very important." KW and HQ provided the same view and said, "Extremely important!" while LG said, "Super-duper important."

This theme, **play is important in the ECCE environment** was also developed from three other research questions. First, participants were questioned in what ways do they see coursework supporting the implementation of the role of play by preservice teachers. Second, participants were asked about their understanding of the role of play within the

early childcare classroom and third, they were questioned about how the role of play and academics connects in the early childcare classroom.

KD explained,

> So what we do is, even though it is online and they have scenarios that they have, and in doing scenarios it is a play-based scenario where you again is incorporating activity or experiences, we are going away from activities and experiences for young children is related to play, so if they are playing, how can you infuse math and science, if they are playing, how are you infusing creative activity, if they're playing, how you are infusing language and literacy into these experiences, so in every aspect they get the opportunity to use play into each class because that's the play-based experience, again we are also very familiar with the creative curriculum it is done in our childcare center on campus, so our students activities have to be incorporated or infused to include play into those experiences.

SH explained,

> By giving the child an opportunity to work. To give them opportunity to explore different ways of solving problems without judgment. One thing that I will always say is, play is instinctive urge to live fully in the moment and it is a liberty to work intensely and passionately at a task to bring personal joy and contentment. So, we don't think of play as really a cognitive activity, but it is. It is intensive and passionate work.

LT stated,

> My understanding of what it should be. We talk about play as being known as the work of a child, and it really is. The children zone of open-ended exploration of things that are put there in the environment of an early child care education classroom. I guess we look at play the work of a child as a very sensory activity, as if being able to, kind of a builder understanding of things, like you know how things smell, how they taste, what they do, and things like that. Later when we introduce language and the understanding of language, play becomes a more active exploration and the foundation for later thinking, problem-solving, and creative behavior, that's what it should be, I don't necessarily see that happening.

KD said,

> Oh, I am a 100%. I understand that play is the foundation. Learning through play is our foundation, so how could we give them experiences while they're playing, how they're learning while they are playing, and so we incorporate it in all of our classes. So, they are 100%. I understand that the ages and stages of the children's learning ability takes place while they're playing.

LP reiterated,

> I believe that play in the classroom can facilitate across all developmental domains. I see that language is affected, it goes hand in hand, when children are allowed to play, or they are encouraged to play, especially when they have their props, or they are prompted. In certain ways, math can also be developed in the curriculum through play when they're doing different things. But I also see the benefits of the social development especially from play. It is an opportunity for

> them to collaborate with other students, and to build relationships for the social realm, so that's opportunities for problem solve when children are playing, and for the physical domain/development.

JP said,

> Within the classroom with a young child the role of play takes on the biggest part of the day where we are always constantly asking them to tell us, what are they doing, why they are doing it, trying to make those real life connections to what they see around their environment, what they see in the classroom. We tried to make real-life experiences for them when they interact in the classroom. So, play in my opinion, is what makes the things and methods of what we are teaching them more concrete in their brain because they are able to connect it to what's goes on in their own home.

LP explained,

> Well, I think that we are having to be very careful today as educators to make sure that they have time for play, and you know that's based on lots of expectations of young children, which are pretty high. So, I think that sometimes early childhood teachers may fall into a trap where they feel like they have to really work hard to meet those expectations, which give barriers in which children had more opportunities to play then there will be a deeper understanding of the expectations in a more natural way. So, I mean, I think it is important. Do I feel like it's always provided, maybe, maybe not?

According to 10 of the 12 faculty, the importance of play in the ECCE environment was described as extremely important, very important, or important. Some faculty explained play as the work of children. Therefore, when play is incorporated or infused in the ECCE environment it becomes the foundation of learning, which can be facilitate across all developmental domains (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018; Rushton, 2011; Scrabeck, 2020).

Non-confirming Data

The primary research question that guided the study is RQ1: What are the perspectives of a technical college full-time ECCE faculty about the role of play in the ECCE curriculum? It is what established the categories of themes. Participant's interview transcripts were transcribed by me and loaded into the NVivo 12 Pro® software program to assist me in the discovery of trends, the identification of patterns and connections, and supported the development of themes. However, there were non-confirming data for the subquestions that followed the central question: What are the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty on current course content that supports preservice teachers' understanding of the role of play in their teaching practices? What are the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty on the information provided in coursework that supports preservice teachers including play in their lesson plans? What are the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty on ways coursework can support and facilitate teachers' implementation of play in early childhood classrooms? Those subquestions resulted in non-confirming data due to no central themes and patterns related to the subquestions in the study. Participants were inconsistent with their responses to those research subquestions. They were not in

agreement with which course or courses supported the implementation of play in classrooms, lesson plains, and preservice teachers' understanding of the role of play in their teaching practices. Table 2 lists the pseudonym assigned to each participant, their perspectives on interview questions regarding courses they teach.

Table 2

Subquestions with participant's responses

Participants (Pseudonyms used)	**Subquestion 1** Among the courses you currently teach, describe the course content related to what preservice teachers should know and understand about the role of play in children's learning and development?	**Subquestion 2** Among the courses you currently teach, describe the course content related to how preservice teachers should incorporate play in their lesson plans?	**Subquestion 3** Among the courses you currently teach, describe the course content related to how preservice teachers should implement play in an early childhood classroom?
JR	Course numbers 1101, 1103, 1105, 1112,	Course numbers 1112, 1113, 2115, 2116, 1121, 2240	Course numbers 1101, 1112, 2201, 2202
KD	Course number 2240	Course number 2116	Course number 2240
LP	Course numbers 1101, 1103, 1112, 2116	"I don't think that I have anything that ask them to incorporate play."	Course numbers 1101, 1103, 1112
JP	"I think they need to understand that play is an important part of the day and they don't need to be standing over the children with a lesson plan in their hands."	Course number 2203	Course numbers 1113, 2115
LG	"It's pretty limited."	"When you say lesson plans to students, they think it is rigid." Children should sit down and listen to the teacher teach.	Course number 2332

Table continues

Participants (Pseudonyms used)	**Subquestion 1** Among the courses you currently teach, describe the course content related to what preservice teachers should know and understand about the role of play in children's learning and development?	**Subquestion 2** Among the courses you currently teach, describe the course content related to how preservice teachers should incorporate play in their lesson plans?	**Subquestion 3** Among the courses you currently teach, describe the course content related to how preservice teachers should implement play in an early childhood classroom?
WP	Course number 1112	Course number 1112	Course number 1112
KW	Course numbers 1101, 1103	Course number 2116	Course numbers 1101, 2115, 2116
DM	Course numbers 1101, 1113	Course number 1101	Course number 1101
HQ	Course numbers 1103, 1105, 1112	Course numbers 1112, 1121, 2116	Course numbers 1121, 2203
RT	"Play is addressed in a variety of ways but not a core objective."	Course number 2116	Course number 1112
SH	Course number 1113	Course number 1103	Course number 2116
LT	Course numbers 1112, 1113, 2115, 2116,	Course numbers 1112, 1113, 2115, 2116	"We talk about implementing play in environmental design and then what materials we provide based on the appropriate practices."

Table 2 shows that WP was the only participant who concluded that ECCE 1112, Curriculum and Assessment course content relates to what preservice teachers should know and understand about the role of play in children's learning and development, how preservice teachers incorporate play in their lesson plans, and how they implement play in an early childhood classroom. All other participants (JR, KD, LP, JP, LG, KW, DM, HQ, RT, SH, and LT) were inconsistent on the conclusion of courses (Appendix C).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is all about establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and authenticity (Lodico et al., 2010; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Yin, 2016). To ensure credibility, an interview protocol and consistent interviews were administered. The interviews were conducted with the permission from each participant. Interviews were audio recorded and once completed; the interviews were immediately transcribed. Transcript review occurred when transcriptions were completed. Although I held a position at a technical college, I held no position of authority to any of the faculty at any of the technical colleges. I transcribed all participant interviews. The transcripts were reviewed without attempting to look for themes and patterns. The transcripts were reviewed for accuracy before coding and reviewed again to begin the preliminary coding process.

Transferability

Transferability is the level in which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts (Lodico et al., 2010; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Yin, 2016). I

used thick descriptions to ensure transferability within the research study's finding that provided a detailed picture of the perspectives of a Southeastern state's technical college full-time ECCE faculty on the role of play. The detailed descriptions conveyed the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of the participants, providing detailed accounts of their perspectives. I recorded the interviews to capture the essence of participant responses. After descriptions were individually recorded, I compiled and grouped together each description to identify major themes.

Dependability

Dependability involves participants evaluating the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study to verify the data collected from participants of the study (Lodico et al., 2010; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Yin, 2016). At the end of the interview responses were reviewed and clarified with the participants, therefore, it was not necessary to conduct a second interview. By asking the participants to review the transcripts of their interviews to make sure I understood their responses and captured their experiences accurately checks the dependability of my study. Audio recording of my interviews and establishing structed interview conditions, ensured transparency in the research process. Triangulation of data occurred by analyzing the research question from multiple perspectives from faculty to increase the validity and reliability of the data (Creswell, 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability is establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are clear in which the research study could be confirmed by other researchers (Lodico et al.,

2010; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Yin, 2016). To assure confirmability, the findings are based on the faculty's responses and not my bias. An audit trail of detailed descriptions of the research process from data collection to reporting findings, confirming that the data reported are based on participants' responses was completed. A line-by-line analysis was done, and meaningful words, phrases, and sentences were coded using descriptive category names and kept in a notebook for initial coding purposes.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to understand the perspectives of Southeastern U.S. state technical colleges full-time ECCE faculty, teaching preservice teachers through coursework, to understand the role of play, including play in their lesson plans, and implementing play in their classrooms. Twelve full-time ECCE faculty were interviewed to acquire insights into their perspectives on the role of play. Summarization and interpretation of the data according to the data analysis technique assisted in presenting quality findings. Data were coded and separated into four established categories: Low percentage of play in curriculum, Play is learning and development, Play is an effective instructional strategy, and Play is important in the ECCE environment. Faculty estimated low percentages addressing the role of play in overall courses. Participants agreed that play is learning and not all coursework supports the implementation of the role of play therefore, for some preservice teachers it is hard to understand implementing the role of play in their teaching practices, classrooms, and lesson plans. All participants agreed that play is an effective instructional strategy and they understood that play is important in ECCE environment. There were non-confirming

data for the subquestions, which resulted from not obtaining central themes in the study. Participants were not in agreement with which course or courses supported the implementation of play in classrooms, lesson plains, and preservice teachers' understanding of the role of play in their teaching practices. Chapter 5 contains my conclusions and interpretation of findings, implication for social change, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty at a Southeastern state technical college teaching preservice teachers to determine their students' understanding of the role of play, the inclusion of play in their lesson plans, and how play is being implemented in their classrooms. Such a design provides an appropriate foundation to develop more understanding on a current issue that provides useful information and helps learn about the phenomenon, which strengthens the depth and richness of the research (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2016). Twelve full-time faculty were interviewed to acquire insights into their perspectives on the role of play. All participants' interview transcripts were transcribed, the transcripts were imported into the NVivo 12 Pro® program which assisted in the organization and coding of the data. Like data from recorded participant interviews were classified and coded. Themes were developed from discovered trends, identification of patterns and connections. Data were examined and sorted, and four major themes were established: Low percentage of play in curriculum, Play is learning and development, Play is an effective instructional strategy, and Play is important in the ECCE environment. The participants' comments identify commonalities in their interviews, which formulated the established categories of themes. This chapter includes my interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Interpretation of the Findings

I used a conceptual framework that was based on Vygotsky's (1978ZPD and the idea that play leads development. Vygotsky (1934, 1978) concluded that play "is the leading factor in development" (p. 101) and is a strong motivator of self-regulatory behavior. According to Vygotsky, play enhances learning across all domains necessary for development. It is important that teachers do not ignore the essential role of play in their classroom curriculum (Vygotsky, 1978). At the lower end of the ZPD is when a child is functioning independently, but with the assistance of an adult or more able peer effectively scaffolding their play can move them to a higher level within this zone in their development. Through a variety of strategies, intended and unintended, adults and more competent peers offer an opportunity to move to a higher level in the child's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky addressed the importance of play and knowledgeable adults and peers as mentors to children's development. Vygotsky's ideas have been used extensively in all aspects of ECCE. Curriculum approaches based on his theory provide details on the role of teachers that emerge because of development and learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2015, 2018).

Faculty in this study acknowledged that play is learning and development, play is an effective instructional strategy, and play is important in ECCE environment; however, the amount of play infused within coursework was found to be in the low percentiles, which makes it difficult for them to determine if preservice teachers really understand the role of play in learning and development, lesson plans, and in their classroom environments. Faculty described many factors relating to each theme. First, faculty

expressed that play is learning, that young children learn better with hand-on activities, that play is children's work, and children learn better when they are provided with the right materials that could prompt their play. WP said, "that play is the foundation of all learning." Second, faculty agreed that play is an effective instructional strategy especially when children are given opportunities to interact with each other. Third, faculty expressed that play is important in an ECCE environment, so when play is implemented in the classroom it facilitates developmental domains among children and without play there would not be much growth with children. Within the findings of the study, faculty stated that although play may be mentioned in some coursework, there is a low percentage of play in ECCE curriculum. Faculty calculated the percentage rate ranged from 6% to 30%, therefore they could not determine whether preservice teachers understood the role of play, the inclusion of play in their lesson plans, and how play is being implemented in their classrooms. LT expressed that although a learning domain, such as language is introduced to preservice teachers with the evidence of how play should be implemented and how play influences thinking, problem solving, and creativity; LT did not see preservice teachers implementing play in its fullest form. RT mentioned that the coursework is basically there to support play, but it is hard for preservice teachers to understand the role of play without actually being involved in play.

These findings on the lack of coursework offered on the role of play are consistent with the literature, which demonstrated that play in the lives of young children is addressed and important, but using play as an instructional strategy was not found and there were no courses focused mainly on the role of play (see Aras, 2016; Jones &

Reynolds, 2011; Jung et al., 2017; Lohmander & Samuelsson, 2015; Vera & Geneser, 2012). At the same time, faculty believed that play is an effective instructional strategy. One unexpected discrepant case of the study was that faculty concluded that preservice teachers need more direct interactions with children in order to experience implementing play in their classroom environment and develop lesson plans. However, the findings were disconfirmed when KD explained that the role of play is incorporated in just about all the classes and by the end of the course all their students are able to implement play in a childcare environment and create a lesson plan that incorporates play. When asked, what could be done to improve current courses to help preservice teachers understand and implement it effectively, KD stated, "I'm going to be a little biased, we pretty much got that nailed down here." According to Lohmander and Samuelsson (2015), when college educators and administrators offer a course that supports the teaching of play, it is important that preservice teachers are aware of changes in early childhood education and be prepared to provide high-quality teaching to young children by implementing play into their classroom. If teacher educators gather information from their preservice teachers, regarding their definition of play, teacher educators maybe able to address play in their teacher preparation programs. The gathering of information on the definition of play would include how programs, teacher educators, administrators, mentor teachers, and young children define play to approach the multiple understanding of play and to come to an agreement on the definition of play (Aras, 2016; Eberle, 2014; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010).

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study included the design, time constraints, transcript review, potentially compromising trustworthiness although no individuals offered clarification of the data. This basic qualitative method limits the number of participants to garner rich, thick descriptions of phenomena. This limits the possibility to generalize the findings to a larger population (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Yin, 2016). First, the participants were from a very specific sample population from four Southeastern state technical colleges; however, when data collection started during the Summer semester, a limited amount of full-time faculty were available. Therefore, I used purposive sampling resulting from the college's public directory and invited prospective participants via email from the Fall semester as well, to continue my data collection. There is a total of 22 technical colleges in the Southeastern state that offers ECCE courses and only six technical colleges provided volunteers to participate in the study.

Another limitation was that most of the interviews were conducted over the telephone. One faculty interview took place outside of a coffeeshop in my car due to the unexpected noise in the coffeeshop, another faculty interview took place in a private area of a restaurant, while the remaining 10 faculty requested to be interviewed on their office phone in their private office. Although I could not see the participants to garner their emotions from their body language, I was able to record through speaker phone their laughter, word choice, or long pauses. I shared a similar position to the participants, which poses a possibility for bias as I collected all of the interview data. I am an ECCE instructor at one of the technical colleges. I held no position of authority to any of the

faculty at any of the technical colleges. In order to limit bias during interviews, I read the interview questions as they were written and previously approved by my committee. I did not influence the participants by adding extra commentary and not to qualify their responses with my opinions or experiences. When transcribing the interviews, I wrote what the participants stated. If I was unclear at the time of the interview, I asked the participants for clarity on their statements.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research are grounded on the strengths and limitations of this study. Teachers know that the world could be overwhelming to young children, therefore when teachers give children the opportunity to get involved in play, children can maintain confidence in this world (Singer, 2015). Play gives children the opportunity to come up with different ideas, perspectives, and opinions. Teachers can provide appropriate scaffolding to help children use skills they have learned and to resolve conflicts. Child-directed play also enriches math learning, enhances literacy, provides opportunities for decision-making, helps develop self-regulation, and problem-solving skills (Anderson et al, 2014; Incikabi, 2013; Pinchover, 2017; Scrabeck, 2020). I recommend that this study be replicated in different regions of the United State to understand the perspectives of early childhood faculty working at technical colleges on the role of play. A replication or number of study replications in different regions would help to determine the strength of the findings I gathered and may add other early childhood faculty perspectives missing from the present study.

I also suggest that this study be replicated in technical colleges where both faculty and *preservice* teachers are able to provide their perspectives. Attitudes towards understanding the role of play in learning and development, lesson plans, and classrooms may be different from faculty's perspectives than preservice teacher's perspectives. Evidence gathered in this study suggested that there is a low percentage of play in the curriculum, play is learning and development, play is an effective instructional strategy, and play is important in the ECCE environment. The perspectives of preservice teachers may provide the similar or different points of view.

Implications

Results in this study indicated that early childhood faculty who work at technical colleges may need to have an added course that solely focuses on the role of play to teach preservice teachers. The course content may provide preservice teachers with the knowledge of understanding about the role of play in children's learning and development, how they should incorporate play in their lesson plans, and how they should implement play in an early childhood classroom. Because there may be resistance to increasing courses for instructors to teach within semesters, the course on the role of play might be implemented as a mandatory course by the Technical College System as an early childhood requisite.

It is recommended that all technical colleges have an early childcare center, so preservice teachers can engage with children as they practice what they learned about the role of play in children's learning and development from a specific course on the role of play. Preservice teachers would be able to implement their knowledge of the role of play

in their lesson plans and classroom environment. This recommendation is based on the research of Chapman-Stanton, (2015) who asserted that when teachers interact with the children, they are able to implement play during observations and assessments, which encouraged them to create strategies to incorporate a child-center environment that enhances problem-solving, language development, and learning among the children.

This study presents implications for positive social change. It suggests that if early childhood faculty at a two-year technical college were required to instruct a course specifically on the role of play to preservice teachers, preservice teachers would be able to increase their knowledge about the important role of play in children's learning and development, and how to incorporate play in lesson plans and classroom environments. When preservice teachers are equipped with the knowledge of the role of play, children will benefit by enhancing their language, physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. The results of this study suggest that there must be more strategies on the importance of play that two-year technical colleges could and should offer in their early childhood courses to enhance preservice teachers' knowledge about the role of play and all of those efforts may result in positive outcomes for children.

Conclusion

This study can inform positive social change by making a contribution to the literature, the field of early childhood, and at the local level by informing potential curriculum adjustments or order other possible changes in the preparation of ECCE preservice teachers in the local setting. By educating preservice teachers about how "play encourages academic learning, and how to assess children's learning during play,"

(Sherwood & Reifel, 2013, p. 279) it helps with the preservice teacher's beliefs about the role of play. When college educators and administrators offer a course that supports the teaching of play, preservice teachers are aware and prepared to provide high-quality teaching to young children by implementing play into their classroom (Lohmander & Samuelsson, 2015). This study of full-time ECCE faculty at a Southeastern U. S. state technical college teaching preservice teachers revealed four significant themes: Low percentage of play in ECCE curriculum, Play is learning and development, Play is an effective instructional strategy, and Play is important in ECCE environment. These four established themes were the factors that played a role in faculty perspectives about the role of play in the ECCE curriculum. The establishment of a course specifically on the role of play added to technical college's ECCE curriculum and including an early child care center at each technical college were recommended as a method for creating positive social change. By equipping preservice teachers with the knowledge and experience of incorporating the role of play, play become essential to children's growth and development.

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Appendix A: Study Permission Request Letter:

Dear Technical College System Coordinator,

My name is Susan McKoy. I am currently an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Instructor at a Technical College. I am also a doctoral student with Walden University and am currently working on my dissertation. The focus of my study is on the perspectives of full-time ECCE faculty about the role of play in course offerings.

The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to contact full-time ECCE faculty at six technical colleges who might be willing to participate in this strictly voluntary study. The program director of ECCE at the six technical colleges will be asked to provide a list of qualified full-time faculty and their contact information who teach ECCE courses. Only full-time ECCE faculty will be asked to participate. Participation will consist of 10 to 12 individuals selected to participate in a face-to-face interview. Each interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes at the technical college or a location determined by the interviewee. The interviews will be conducted before or after college classes. The ECCE participants will not be interfered in any way with their instructional or office duties. The ECCE participants have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Consent letters will be emailed to each participant and returned to me via email with their "I Consent" reply. The confidentiality of all responses will be upheld.

A qualitative study approach will be used to garner the perspectives of technical college ECCE faculty about the role of play in course offerings and how the role of play

is relayed to preservice teachers. There are no foreseeable risks or costs to the participant. A summary of the study after its completion will be given to you and the ECCE participants who choose to receive one.

Your permission and support to contact full-time ECCE faculty is necessary for me to conduct this research is sincerely appreciated. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, please contact me, Susan McKoy, by telephone, or email.

Appendix B: Interview Questions for ECCE Faculty

Name: _____
Address: _____
_____
Email Address: _____
Telephone#: _____

1. Please list your current position: _____
2. What ECCE course/s do you teach?
   1) _____
   2) _____
   3) _____
   4) _____
   5) _____
   6) _____

3. Within the courses you teach, is there any focus on the role of play?
   □ Yes □ No
   Please describe: _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. About what percentage of the overall course addresses the role of play?
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

5. In what ways do you see coursework supporting the implementation of the role of play by preservice teachers? _____

6. What is your understanding about the role of play within the early childcare classroom?

7. How important is the role of play within the early childcare environment?

8. How does the role of play and academics connect in the early childcare classroom?

   Could you provide an example?

9. In what way do you think play leads development?

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_____

10. When early child care teachers facilitate children's play, how does this lead to the development of children's imagination?

_____
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_____

11. How do you think early child care teachers' facilitation of children's play is related to the ZPD?

_____
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_____

12. Among the courses you currently teach, describe the course content related to what preservice teachers should know and understand about the role of play in children's learning and development?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

13. What instruction do you provide preservice teachers about the role of play in children's learning and development?

_____
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_____
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_____

14. What else can you share about what future ECCE teachers should know about the role of play in early childhood and how might it be implemented in the courses you teach?

_____
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_____
_____

15. Among the courses you currently teach, describe the course content related to how preservice teachers should incorporate play in their lesson plans?

_____
_____
_____
_____

16. What instruction do you provide preservice teachers on incorporating play into lesson plans?

_____
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17. What else can you share about what future ECCE teachers should know about the role of play in lesson plans in the courses you teach?

_____
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_____

18. Among the courses you currently teach, describe the course content related to how preservice teachers should implement play in an early childhood classroom?

_____
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_____

19. What instruction do you provide preservice teachers on implementing play in their early childhood classrooms?

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20. What else can you share about what future ECCE teachers should know about the implementation of the role of play in the courses you teach?

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21. What are your feelings on preservice teachers having the opportunity to develop the appropriate skills to implement play in their classroom? How can this be done?

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_____

22. Do you think that play is an effective instructional strategy? What could be done to improve current courses to help teachers understand and implement it effectively?

_____
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_____

Appendix C: ECCE Curriculum Coursework

Technical College System

1. ECCE 1103 - Child Growth and Development (target play)
2. ECCE 1113 - Creative Activities for Children (target play)
3. ECCE 2352 - Designing Programs and Environments for School Age Children and Youth (target play)
4. ECCE 1105 – Health, Safety and Nutrition
5. ECCE 2330 - Infant/Toddler Development
6. ECCE 2201 - Exceptionalities
7. ECCE 2332 - Infant/Toddler Group Care and Curriculum
8. ECCE 1101 - Introduction to Early Childhood Care and Education
9. ECCE 1112 - Curriculum and Assessment
10. ECCE 2202 - Social Issues and Family Involvement
11. ECCE 2203 – Guidance for Class Management
12. ECCE 1121 - Early Childhood Care and Education Practicum
13. ECCE 2240 - Early Childhood Care and Education Internship
14. ECCE 2310 - Paraprofessional Methods and Materials
15. ECCE 2115 - Language and Literacy
16. ECCE 2116 – Math and Science
17. ECCE 2360 - Classroom Strategies for Exceptional Children
18. ECCE 2362 - Exploring Your Role in the Exceptional Environment