JUNIOR AND INTERMEDIATE EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PLAY PEDAGOGY: INFORMING FUTURE POLICY CREATION & IMPLEMENTATION

JACQUELINE KELLY

A Master's Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Education

Graduate Program in Education
York University
Toronto, Ontario

August 2014

Abstract

Play-based instruction has become the guiding framework of Ontario's Full-Day Kindergarten curriculum; however, the benefits of playful learning have yet to be extended into higher elementary grades. Through semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study involves an investigation into twelve Junior (grades four to six) and Intermediate (grades seven and eight) teachers' perceptions of play pedagogy and its implementation into classroom practice. A grounded theory approach to data analysis uncovers a detailed depiction of teachers' local knowledge base and current cognitive schemas, from which recommendations for policy creation and implementation are conceived. As a Prospective Policy Analysis, this research strives to take into account Ontario's current educational context so as to minimize discrepancies between actual and desired results of a future play policy for grades four through eight.

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Play-based instruction is the guiding framework for Ontario teachers in the new Full Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program (Ontario Ministry of Education, Draft 2010). This framework is informed by decades of research suggesting "a strong link between play and learning for young children" (Ontario Ministry of Education, Draft 2010), and requires early childhood educators to implement play into daily classroom practice. The Ontario government's long-standing support of learning through play falls short in practice in that it dismisses students over the age of five years despite the conclusions of researchers who posit that play is an essential part of the learning process *throughout* life (Rieber, 1996). Play, according to the work of seminal play scholars, has prosperities that extend farther than the first years of schooling to benefit the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of humans at *every* age (Brown, 2009; Caplan & Caplan, 1973; Elkind, 2007; Fagen, 2011). Regardless of the government's oversight, professional agencies within the province recognize the reach of play's educational value. For example, the Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario (ETFO) states that "a province-wide policy needs to be developed that ensures every child has the right to learn through play in school" (Eden & Miller Grant, 2011). Having published this

comprehensive document advocating for the implementation of play-based learning in the Primary curriculum, the ETFO is in the process of building another campaign that promotes the inclusion of play in the Junior and Intermediate curriculum as well.

Statement of the Problem

Although the Junior and Intermediate years of schooling predominately remain "play's *terra incognita* (Fagen, 2011, p.90), research studies are slowly arising that investigate the use of playful mediums as effective tools with which to approach curriculum subjects in grades four through eight (Caswell, 2005; Chaille & Tian, 2005; Cruz & Murthy, 2006; Rea, Millican & Watson, 2000; Stone & Stone, 2005). With a promising theoretical foundation and a small but growing repertoire of instructional play technique studies, a research platform is forming beneath hopes of an inclusive play policy; however, research has overlooked an imperative facet of inquiry—namely, investigation into Junior and Intermediate practitioners' perceptions of play pedagogy and its implementation into classroom practice.

Although kindergarten and Primary teachers' perceptions of play pedagogy have been examined (McInnes, Howard, Miles & Crowley, 2011; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010), Junior and Intermediate educators' voices remain startlingly absent from the field. Making Junior and Intermediate teachers a subject, rather than an object, of pedagogical discourse works to intelligently inform the process of successful policy construction, implementation, and sustainability. As Smit (2003) commends, it is advantageous to consider and understand classroom

teachers' voices *prior* to the implementation of policy, instead of afterwards. The distinctive learning characteristics and classroom environment of grades four through eight make the perceptions of Junior and Intermediate educators highly unique and, as a result, a plethora of *original* knowledge on play pedagogy can be mined here.

Purpose

The purpose of this prospective policy analysis study was to uncover Junior and Intermediate teachers' perceptions of play and play pedagogy in order to inform the future creation and implementation of a play policy in upper grade elementary classrooms in Ontario. The study was fueled by the researcher's informed assumption that a play policy suitable for fourth to eighth grade classrooms will require essential revisions from that of a Primary play document.

Research Questions

Being in the early stages of creation, during which a play policy is only an intention and has not yet taken the form of concrete documentation, this prospective policy analysis (Patton, 2002) took the form of a constructivist inquiry. Without particular policy procedures or guidelines to discuss, this study aimed to capture the current realities of play and play pedagogy as uniquely constructed by Junior and Intermediate educators in Ontario, and the implications of those constructions for the creation and implementation of a future educational play policy (Patton, 2002). With a comprehensive picture of the contextual realities of front-line educators, specific procedures and guidelines can be developed that complement teachers' current

cognitive schemas so as to reduce resistances to, and challenges of, eventual policy implementation.

The principal question that drove the intent of the study was: What are teachers' perceptions of play and play pedagogy as related to their Junior and Intermediate classrooms? Subsequent aims included understanding play's intersection with school, learning, instruction, curriculum, assessment and educational reform as seen through the eyes of fourth through eighth grade educators. Through analysis of the data collected from the above research question, the summative pursuit of the study was to locate fundamental modifications for the creation of a Junior and Intermediate play policy that differ from the educational play reforms suited for kindergarten and Primary contexts. Ultimately, an analysis of the study's findings intended to answer the question: What differentiated approaches to the process of policy creation and implementation would catalyze effective transition of play into enacted instruction within upper grade elementary classrooms in Ontario?

Conceptual Framework

Through a constructivist lens, investigating the realities constructed by a group of informed and sophisticated constructors, and the implications of those constructions on their lives, is the primary pathway to understanding a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). The current study extended this conceptual stance into the realm of educational reform, and focused on harvesting the meanings, knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of Junior and Intermediate teachers in order to inform a future policy for the

upper elementary grades. The purpose of the investigation into front-line teachers' constructed realities of play and play pedagogy was fueled by Spillane, Reiser and Reimer's (2002) cognitive framework of policy implementation and, specifically, their description of the implementing agent as sense-maker. This cognitive perspective understands problems of implementation as stemming from policymakers lacking consideration of teachers' prior knowledge, values, beliefs and experiences that "may interfere with their ability to interpret and implement the reform in ways consistent with the designers intent" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 393). In other words, educators approach policy with pre-existing cognitive schemas which determine the parts of educational reform that are accepted, rejected, or misunderstood. As Smit (2003) points out, "educational policy is filtered and those parts that 'fit' with [teachers] personal perspectives and intuitions are selected" (p. 9). In this way, it is teachers' subjective comprehension and interpretation of policy that determines how the reform actualizes within the school system; therefore, it is essential that educators' perspectives are understood in-depth so as to ensure that educational policy is read as it is intended and, consequently, desired positive effects on learners are catalyzed. Revealing the phenomenon of play and play pedagogy from the perspectives of Junior and Intermediate educators, this study then uses its findings to offer recommendations on how barriers of effective implementation can be eased by wisely considering the cognitive conditions of the sense-makers during policy creation.

The use of a constructivist investigation to inform a prospective policy follows a backward mapping model to policy creation which allows for potential discrepancies between policy and practice to be addressed prior to implementation. According to Elmore (as cited in Dyer, 1999), a backward mapping approach begins with an investigation into "specific behavior at the lowest level of the implementation process that generates the need for a policy" (p. 48). A backward mapping, or bottom-up, investigation of educational policy implementation informs the process of knowledge mobilization in elementary schooling from the often overlooked perspective of the knowledge receiver, rather than the knowledge producer. In essence, the current study gathers information from the ground floor of Junior and Intermediate education and analyzes it to inform policy-makers of the features necessary in cultivating and sustaining a productive reform.

Adopting a constructivist paradigm, the current study aimed to reveal the authentic "truths" about play as determined by the constructed realities of Junior and Intermediate educators (Patton, 2002). This study held knowledge as contextually dependent and socially composed and, as a result, play was understood as taking on different meanings depending on the perceptions of various subcultures. As noted by psychologist Brian Sutton-Smith (1997), play is an ambiguous phenomenon; nevertheless, numerous academics have attempted to present the detailed features of play through intricate theory. In reality, play activities involve a wide and varying range of characteristics depending, for example, on the developmental level of the players and the environment in which the play is taking place (Wood & Attfield,

2005). So as to preserve the focus of this study on upper elementary grade educators' authentic conception of play, the investigation was not framed by a collection of pre-existing play theories. In accordance with a constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), it was thought to be more useful to *first* expose, through data collection, play's place within upper elementary grade teachers' cognitive schemas, and *then*, apply relevant theories during data analysis in order to support proposed findings. A review of the literature in Chapter 2 resists a discussion of various play concepts and, instead, offers a presentation of how play, in its various forms, has been found to complement Junior and Intermediate students' development and learning, in particular.

Limitations of the Study

In pursuit of depth and detail, the current study's qualitative methods forwent a large sample size and random sampling which would enhance generalizability arguments; however, sampling procedures aimed to gather participants whose "consensus" can be considered a credible "truth" of their larger sub-culture (Patton, 2002). Secondly, the inability for the study to be longitudinal in may have created a sense of unfamiliarity between the interview and interviewees, creating the potential that participants withhold or filter offered information. The possibility of limited candidness was countered by the conversational and informal nature of the interview that worked to establish a *reciprocal* rapport to blur unequal and discomforting power relations (Charmaz, 2006). Lastly, although the credibly of the data relied heavily on

the researchers' performance as a reliable instrument, data collection and analysis procedures were tested by proven methods of validity and trustworthiness as outlined by reputable grounded theory guides.

Significance of the Study

The current research painted an authentic and never-before-seen portrait of play and playful pedagogy from the internal constructions of Junior and Intermediate front-line educators. A deep understanding of teachers' perceptions is essential in informing the anticipated creation and implementation of a play policy into the upper elementary grade curriculum in the near future, as foreshadowed by the ETFO. Historically, teachers and schools appear to be disconnected policy receivers; however, it has been confirmed that a policy not informed by a local teacher knowledge base often results in strong resistance and unexpected outcomes (Smit, 2003). Since teachers respond to their own constructed perceptions of policy, and adopt only those parts of a document that "fit" with their own pre-existing worldviews, it is essential that policy-makers carefully and consciously chose the language, conceptualizations and ideas with which to present educational policy.

Beyond providing rich description of southern Ontario educators' current perceptions of play and play pedagogy, the study also offers suggestions of ways in which approaches to play reform must be renewed, through intelligent policy creation and implementation processes, to increase the likelihood that the future play policy will be properly adopted by teachers so as to produce the desired positive effects for

forth to eight grade students. With a track record of educational play reform that lacks in success (Eden & Millar Grant, 2011), tactful efforts must be made to ensure a future policy effort does not echo the failures of the past.

The successful reform of Junior and Intermediate education is a necessary focus of research. As Hagenauer and Hascher (2010) report, there is a decrease in learning enjoyment prevalent in the later elementary grades. According to Wang and Eccles (2013), student engagement declines significantly as learners' progress into the Junior and Intermediate years of school as a consequence of the nature of pedagogical environments; dangerously, disengagement in the upper elementary years has been proven to put students at risk of becoming high school dropouts. If Ontario is to continue on its desired path towards internationally record-breaking secondary school graduation rates in the coming years, motivation, engagement and enjoyment in fourth to eighth grade learning is a hitch that must be mended.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

While there exists no prior research that specifically addresses Junior and Intermediate teachers' perceptions of play and playful pedagogy, the literature reviewed below serves to frame the current study by presenting the connections between upper elementary grade education and existing theories of play, learning and education. While the forthcoming discussion resists a semantic debate surrounding the term play, play is discussed in its many forms, functions and features as they are relatable to research surrounding Junior and Intermediate learning, exclusively. The research review is comprised of four primary sections, three of which address the learning characteristics of young adolescents, the values of play for fourth to eight grade students, and how play has been used as a pathway to Junior and Intermediate subject-specific curricular goal attainment. The final section offers an overview of the research findings related to kindergarten and Primary educators' play perceptions and serves as a comparative framework with which to examine the current study's findings.

Characteristics of Junior and Intermediate Learners

Late childhood and early adolescence is a time of salient, eclectic, and unique cognitive, social, emotional, and physical maturation. Accordingly, particular considerations inform the learning process of students ages eight to thirteen. In order to circumvent the decrease in learning enjoyment prevalent in late elementary grades (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2010), research reveals that pedagogical approaches must acknowledge Junior and Intermediate learners' need for a varied, student-centered, active, meaningful, relevant, and cooperative curriculum that is congruent with appropriate advancement in executive functioning, social responsibility, and career development. The first section of this review of the literature illustrates the unique learning characteristics of Junior and Intermediate students that make their place within the elementary school system vastly different from their Primary counterparts.

Gardner (1983), in the company of many other seminal scholars, describes learning as an intuitive and universal human capacity involving a natural, ongoing, and active process of meaning construction. Regardless of learning's inclusiveness, however, Gardner (1983) positions each individual as possessing a repertoire of nine different modalities of intelligence towards which he/she holds unique inclinations and strengths in varying degrees. In particular, fluctuating cognitive, emotional, social, and physical intelligences make late childhood and early adolescence the most diverse period in the public school system (Powell, 2010). Accordingly, instructional methods for Junior and Intermediate learners must be highly varied so that students

may build on maturing forms of intelligence or draw on intellectual strengths to increase understanding of a topic.

In a similar way, the distinctive developmental needs of early adolescent learners fit favorably with a student-centered curriculum integration model that resituates subject matter into relevant, meaningful, and experiential contexts (Beane & Brodhagen, 2001). The importance of student centrality originates in Dewey's (1900) early ideas that young people learn by actively and creatively 'doing' projects, problems and performances, and then restructuring these experiences to integrate knowledge at a personal level. Within an integrative approach, meaningfulness and autonomy are intensified through students' collaborative role in creating a topic and method of inquiry in accordance with relevant personal and social knowledge, questions, and concerns. For Junior and Intermediate learners in particular, the opportunity to "explore connections to the world beyond school" (Ares & Gorrell, 2002, p. 268) via concrete and active exploration catalyzes deeper emotional engagement and motivation during learning (Erlandson & McVitters, 2001; Muir, 2001; Swafford & Bryan, 2000).

The social world with which Junior and Intermediate students interact on a daily basis also informs their cognitive learning process by establishing a framed schema upon which new knowledge is built (Sontag, 2009). In the electrically dominated age of the twenty-first century, constant exposure to digital media and connective technologies has sculpted how students receive information and how they learn. Specifically, Junior and Intermediate learners' daily experiences with digital

tools has created a cognitive-connectedness schema that allows students to see knowledge as constitutive parts of a whole, instead of separate pieces of independent information (Oblinger as cited in Sontag, 2009). Similarly, electronic technologies instill a social-connectedness schema that propels students to learn by "link[ing] up with others who have knowledge they need, and watching others who know how to do what they want to do" (Brown as cited in Sontag, 2009). The cooperative and collaborative nature of the social-connectedness learning style also fulfills Junior and Intermediate learners' desire for inclusion and belonging while providing a safe situation in which students learn from their most influential model—the peer group (Willis, 2007).

Not only do social experiences shape students' approach to future learning endeavors, the stage of cognitive development in which one operates also directs and frames effective learning pursuits. Junior and Intermediate learners often straddle the border between Piaget's concrete operational stage and the succeeding formal operational stage and, as a result, require learning endeavors that assist with this transitional jump (Brown & Canniff, 2007). During late childhood and early adolescence, the prefrontal cortex—home of executive functions such as inhibition, memory, and attention—is rapidly and fluidly developing (Wilson & Horch, 2002). Wilson and Horch (2002) reveal that, as synaptic pruning sculpts the learners' prefrontal brain, sensorimotor experiences and inquiry or problem-based learning activities are most appropriate in sufficiently strengthening higher-order cognitive skills. Active and experiential learning activities work to facilitate a connection

between the concrete and the abstract, which is essential for successful transition into the formal operation stage (Brown & Canniff, 2007). Simultaneously, more acute executive functions allow Junior and Intermediate students to become more adult-like in their organization and understanding of cognitive actions, until epistemological thought begins to manifest around age twelve or thirteen (Pillow, 2008). The sharpening of metacognitive ability increases students' capacity for self-reflection during learning experiences.

As Junior and Intermediate learners' higher-order cognitive capacities and metacognitive abilities mature, the executive function of self-regulation correspondingly advances. Junior and Intermediate students become exceedingly capable of consciously and intrinsically "controlling, directing and planning cognitions, emotions and behaviors" (McClelland & Cameron, 2011). For children in the later elementary grades, self-regulation involves anticipating hypothetical challenges and formulating strategies based on reasoning in order to achieve desired goal (Larson, 2011). As Junior and Intermediate learners gain a greater sense of personal agency through self-regulation, the roots of individual social responsibility are laid. The exploration of identity during late childhood and early adolescence propels students to consider moral commitments, views of the world, and relationships with others to construct an understanding of personal values and passions (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). With an established recognition of self-efficacy, Junior and Intermediate learners are capable of recognizing how these values and passions can be actualized within society. The intersection of goal-driven

self-regulation, realized social responsibility, and developing self-efficacy provides Junior and Intermediate learner with the basic tools needed to plan potential career paths. Junior and Intermediate learners' interest in discovering who they are and how they relate to the larger adult world makes career exploration a natural fit for students of this age group.

The unique learning characteristics of students in grades four through eight, as discussed above, affect the benefits these pupils gain from the different instructional approaches taken within their classrooms. Interestingly, the features of *play* appear fitting for a group of Junior and Intermediate learners who favor flexible, active, self-directed, concrete, relative, and cooperative experiences. The following section outlines the ways in which play uniquely values learners in upper elementary grades.

The Value of Play for Junior and Intermediate Learning

As Fagen (2011) states, playing contributes to the development of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical abilities of players across *all* levels of development, not just in the early years of life; moreover, it is the ordered sum of these relationship skills, cognitive skills, feelings, physical abilities, and so forth (Haviland & Kahlbaugh, 1993) that forms one's identity. In this way, play in the classroom can be expected to offer expansive educational benefits and have significant influence on students' identify formation. The second section of this study's literature review considers relevant research supporting the value of a playful learning process for

Junior and Intermediate student, revealing how the unique characteristics of later elementary grade learners make playful instruction a valuable path to development.

Cognitive Domain

The cognitive growth that takes place during late childhood and early adolescence is unlike that of any other age because it involves the transition from concrete to formal operational functioning (Brown & Canniff, 2007), the two cognitive stages distinguished by Jean Piaget as pivotal in human development between seven to fifteen years old. As a result, the learning process must offer a link between concrete and abstract thinking that can propel students into more advanced executive functioning. In particular, play effectively fosters the advancement of problem solving, creativity, conceptual understanding, and memory from concrete to functional stages of cognition for Junior and Intermediate learners.

Play is capable of providing a space within which Junior and Intermediate learners, free from authoritative reign, attempt to solve problems on their own and create a cognitive framework that will inform future problem solving endeavors. Bruner and Sylva (1976), among others, have referred to play as a form of variation seeking that increases one's repertoire of responses to the environment, enhancing adaptive functioning skills for later problem solving pursuits. Moreover, play provides a space in which convergent and divergent thinking can be nourished to develop students' capacity for creative problem solving (Russ, 2003). In a similar way, Gee (2005) asserts that playing a well-designed game provides concrete experiences that are stored in memory and drawn upon for problem solving in new

situations. Gaming experiences are capable of providing a problem-solving schema that becomes an abstract blueprint that is used to "run simulations in their mind to prepare for new situations" (Gee, 2005, p. 21). The safety of a play space allows Junior and Intermediate learners to take risks and tread new possibilities, strengthening students' abstract problem solving processes for use in real-world settings.

Not only does play advance problem-solving skills, play also facilitates the development of creative ability by both mirroring and promoting the cognitive processes essential to advancing innovative functioning. By nature, free play is generative; it allows for unique risk-taking from which arise new and unseen ideas, inventions, and processes (Rea, Millican & Watson, 2000). It is the free and flexible nature of play that fosters experiences of divergent thinking, loosening the mind from a single cognitive set of associations to make room for new combinations of ideas (Russ, 2003). The broadening of response repertoires through cognitive flexibility helps to build a variety of durable, personal resources to inform future thought and behavior (Power, 2011). Play allows Junior and Intermediate students to push the boundaries of creativity to new heights, priming cognition for innovative thinking in spaces outside of play.

Play as an active learning experience also works to capture abstract conceptualizations and bring them into relative, concrete spaces in order to increase Junior and Intermediate learners' understanding. Play works to advance knowledge by allowing learners to reach beyond names, dates and labels to deeper meanings

(Wasserman, 1992). Wasserman (1992), informed by Dewey's (1900) thoughts on experiential learning, suggests that an active engagement with concrete materials is enriched by a reflective observation of the experience, and allows learners to more deeply internalize concepts and theoretical understandings into cognition for future application. Furthermore, concepts and ideas that are actively talked, explained and argued about between players increase students' levels of understanding (Willis, 2007). Playing with concepts, actively and engagingly, generates a top-down style of cognitive processing for Junior and Intermediate learners that works to facilitate movement from the concrete to the formal operational stage of thinking.

Likewise, active play heightens Junior and Intermediate learners' memory functions more effectively than the passive informational acquisition techniques of formal instruction. The supportive and social learning environment created in cooperative or group play more smoothly facilitates "passage of information from the intake areas into the memory storage regions of the brain" (Willis, 2007, p. 6). Moreover, Willis (2007) purports that the pleasurableness associated with play causes the brain to release the neurotransmitter dopamine, which functions to increase the cognitive processing of new information and its commitment to memory. Since metabolic brain activity accelerates during active constructive thinking, play facilitates multicenter brain communication that allows information to be processed and stored in multiple brain areas resulting in a redundancy which increases comprehension and memory abilities (Giedd et al., 1999). In a similar way, play offers the learner a positive engagement of multiple intellectual modalities,

stimulating numerous areas of the brain to heighten the longevity and recall ability of learned information (Willis, 2007). For Junior and Intermediate learners, a playful approach to knowledge and meaning provides the active, pleasurable, and multifaceted atmosphere required for premium memory storage.

Social Domain

As Gardner (1983) illustrates through his model of multiple intelligences, there are numerous domains of human capacity beyond cognition that require nourishment and development. In particular, the assembly of a sophisticated social intelligence comes to the forefront of importance for Junior and Intermediate leaners as they explore new relationships with themselves, others, and the world. Playing games and engaging in other playful activities enhance skills of negotiation and rule-following while fostering moral development and civic responsibility.

Since Junior and Intermediate students seek a connectedness to the world and others to gain feelings of acceptance and belonging, pleasurable experiences of collaborative play are highly appealing to older children and early adolescents (Beamon, 2001). Since play is a space outside of authoritarian control, Junior and Intermediate learners are left to autonomously exercise social interaction skills, self-regulation, and impulse control (Lancy & Grove, 2011). Particularly, play often requires meaningful social negotiation at both the interpersonal and intrapersonal level (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). Hromek and Roffrey (2009) assert that players must balance personal goals with those of others in order for dilemmas to resolve and play to be maintained. Moreover, the informal and formal rules inherent in play lead to

negotiation with the self and with others surrounding manipulation and conformity (Lancy & Grove, 2011). For Junior and Intermediate learners capable of sophisticated play, the demands for social adaptations will powerfully facilitate the development of social negotiation skills.

The social negotiation required of collaborative game play conjures a certain gamesmanship in players also associated with a social understanding of rules and norms (Lancy & Grove, 2011). According to Piaget (n.d.), the pleasure of game play "ceases to be muscular or egocentric, and becomes social" (p. 33) by the age of eight. Children in late childhood are primarily concerned with observing common rules and, as they attempt to achieve conformity and begin to better understand each other, true cooperative behavior commences (Piaget, n.d.). Piaget (n.d.) claims that as children move into early adolescence (ages eleven to twelve) they transition into the final stage of game play in which the rules themselves, and their complexities, become the players' primal interest. Within game play, Junior and Intermediate students experience a natural maturation of social understanding in which they come to see rules and norms as arbitrary and conventional.

As students begin to grasp the framework of social construction, moving away from egocentricity and towards the collective, play serves as an appropriate venue for cultivating moral values and civic responsibility. Bergen and Davis (2011) present play as an environment where moral behaviors are safely performed, results of moral actions are observed, dialogues of moral reasoning arise, moral emotions are explored, and moral hypotheses tested. As Junior and Intermediate learners come to

identify with a larger social context, and their moral place within it, they begin to perceive of a personal responsibility to the larger community. By extension, Caldwell and Witt (2011) assert that play provides youth the opportunity to develop social capital as players work towards a common goal. With newfound respect for the role of cooperation and the power of the collective, students are inspired to undertake group actions that can contribute to the community (Caldwell & Witt, 2011). Playful spaces foster a sense of individual and collective responsibility and power that prepares Junior and Intermediate students for informed, confident and active engagements with their society and fellow citizens.

Emotional Domain

As students in later elementary grades grapple with rapid cognitive, social, and physical transitions, play guides the practice of emotional regulation and understanding, and facilitates positive psychological adjustment. As playful spaces develop students' level of these emotional intelligences, the capacity to learn increases (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Despite the importance of emotional development, the domain is often discussed in overlap with play's impact on social adjustment. Nevertheless, the power of play to shape and refine emotional regulation is, although an aspect of socialization, also valuable in and of itself.

Hromek and Roffey (2009) suggest that the interactional nature of play makes it especially suitable for emotional learning. In order to play collaboratively and cooperatively, and to achieve desired goals, players must manage emotional reactions to frustration and potential injustices (Hromek & Roffey, 2009). The medium of play

is a highly adaptive activity in which students can rehearse emotional skills (Wilson & Ryan, 2002). In addition, Caldwell and Witt (2011) suggest that play offers a safe place to try out different roles and adopt varying perspectives different from one's own. Likewise, the group dynamics of play reveal the emotional complexities of human relationships, which is a particularly important topic during puberty (Caldwell & Witt, 2011). As a result, play heightens Junior and Intermediate students' feelings of empathy and expands their emotional repertoire.

The prominent use of play in medical therapy environments suggests its positive effects on a young person's psychological adjustment and well-being. Play is a medium that allows for Junior and Intermediate students to explore emotional difficulties in a creative and individually directed way on all levels of mental functioning (Wilson & Ryan, 2002), increasing the possibility that stress is resolved. Moreover, play provides the experience of flow, a state of consciousness that achieves intrinsic satisfaction and pleasure (Csikszentmihali, 1975). Accordingly, Caldwell and Witt (2011) purport that the happiest students are those that are more often engaged in flow-producing situations (that is, ludic or playful experiences). Since positive emotions have the capacity to broaden humans' ability to learn new things (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002), it is important that Junior and Intermediate students find emotional comfort and intrinsic happiness through play.

Physical Domain

Since active play inherently facilitates physical movement, play shares similar benefits for Junior and Intermediate students' as do other forms of physical activity.

From late childhood to early adolescents, humans undergo numerous psychical and cognitive changes, so much so that their bodies can become unknown and uncontrolled territory (Wiles & Bondi, 2001). As a result, play is an important medium through which stress can be relieved, concentration can be sharpened, motor skills can be adjusted, and health can be promoted.

In support of allocating sufficient time to recess, play, and physical education in schools, researchers have drawn attention to the ability of exercise to increase Junior and Intermediate learners' cognitive abilities and reduce emotional ailments. In particular, Hill et al. (2009) conclude that physical exercise throughout the school day benefits the cognitive performance of students ages eight to eleven, most notably concentration and attention. Furthermore, numerous studies have concluded that exercise works to reduce stress, anxiety and depression in people of any age, including late childhood and early adolescence (Motta et al., 2010).

The benefits of physical play for Junior and Intermediate learners also extend into the bodily realm. In order to feel adequate in the active world, Junior and Intermediate students must regain poise and co-ordination by practicing physical movement skills (Caplan & Caplan, 1973). Caplan and Caplan (1973) purport that active play and games create autonomous opportunities for students to master acute body control and fine motor skills, allowing them to adopt the more precise and systemized ways of moving that are expected of them. Moreover, in a society in which obesity has become an epidemic, exposing Junior and Intermediate students to the pleasures and joys of being physically active through joyful, playful experience

works to promote an active and healthy lifestyle throughout life (Mainella et al., 2011). The plentiful cognitive, social, emotional and psychical benefits play offers to Junior and Intermediate learners suggest that the play is an appropriate and effective medium with which to approach curriculum subjects in the later elementary grades.

Play and the Junior and Intermediate Curriculum

The third portion of the study's literature review discusses research on the interaction of play with various school subjects to reveal specific ways in which the use of play in the classroom can facilitate Junior and Intermediate students' educational success. Fromberg and Bergen (2006) suggest that educators can teach academic content through play-based strategies with effective results; in this line of thought, a variety of curricular subjects have been explored to uncover the potential of play implementation under the different umbrellas of knowledge and skills required by educational institutions.

Language Arts

Morgenstern (2009), in his publication *Playing with Books*, describes children's interactions with books as a play activity in and of itself. In a similar way, Batt (2010) purports that transforming writing into a playful activity can assist in explaining composition procedure, build students' writer identity, and challenge authoritative discourse. More specifically, McKean and Sudol (2002) offer empirical evidence that using dramatic play with Junior students as a rehearsal for a writing

activity helps to improve writing process and outcome. In a similar way, Emert (2010) guides seventh and eighth grade students through a playful aesthetic interaction with poetry in which learners perform artful elements of poems through bodily expression. In conveying the meaning of language through gestures, intermediate learners establish a personal connection to the writing that serves to enrich comprehension and appreciation of poetry writing (Emert, 2010). More popular is the use of games or word play in the language arts arena. Piaget (n.d) points out the conventional and arbitrary rules one follows while playing a game is similar to the intricate conventions of spelling and grammar.

Mathematics

Unlike instructional approaches to mathematics education that use drill work and emphasize abstract thinking, Caswell's (2005) study of middle school students nine to twelve years old illuminates how a play-based approach promotes divergent thinking and improves retention of conceptual knowledge. Students in this study show increased comprehension and creative problem solving driven by the intrinsic enjoyment and confidence the play situation conjured (Caswell, 2005); moreover, Caswell (2005) finds that the collaborative and open-ended nature of play allows the Junior and Intermediate students to "progress to more abstract levels of working and understanding mathematically" (Caswell, 2005, p. 223). Although mathematical play is normally the territory of primary grades, Holton, Ahmed, Williams and Hill (2001) promote the use of mathematical play for students of all ages. Open play situations allow students to make errors in a supportive environment, and give time for learners

to consider why some things will work and why other things will not (Holton et al., 2001).

Social Studies

The curriculum of social studies finds a natural fit with the cognitive and social values facilitated naturally through play, including thinking critically, communicating well, solving problems, making reflections, becoming socially responsible (Stone & Stone, 2005). Stone and Stone (2005) suggest that creating a number of play stations that actively explore subjects, such as anthropology, economics, geography, history, sociology and political science, allows Junior and Intermediate learners to apply abstract concepts to concrete experience, heightening students' understanding and retention. Role-playing particular events or phenomenon, such as assembly line practices, creates a simulation in which students vicariously experience the event, the emotions of its participants, and the associated decision-making and problem solving demands (Stone & Stone, 2005). Similarly, Cruz and Murthy (2006) claim that historical dramatic improvisation, sociodrama, first-hand characterization, or role-play help Junior students to tap into an inherent interest in historical events and the people that experienced them, making learning more relevant. In geography learning, play serves as a motivational and interesting means by which Junior and Intermediate learners apply geographic concepts, such as direction and physical and human characteristics, to a concrete play experience, fostering students comprehension (Mimbs, Heffington, & Herring-Mayo, 2005).

Science

The openness of play catalyzes vigorous hypothesis testing, aligning playful experience with the subject of science. Chaille and Tian (2005) affirm that playing with objects and materials that move, including one's own body, encourages "the kind of theory building that is essential for the construction of physical knowledge [or physics]" (p. 97). The staple categories of chemistry learning—construction and combinations—spontaneously occur through play as well (Chaille & Tian, 2005). Furthermore, outdoor play facilitates an ecological perspective-taking (Chaille & Britain, 2003), which fosters environmental values in Junior and Intermediate learners. In general, play engages the player in "observing, comparing, and exploring" (Morrison as cited in Chaille & Tain, 2005, p. 98), which are foundational processes of scientific learning. In a slightly different way, Corbitt and Carpenter (2006) determine that a motor-kinesthetic play activity is an effective tool for teaching the complex biological concepts of the nervous system to students' grades four to eight.

Visual Art

Latta (2002) speaks of aesthetic play as an "attunement to the creating process grounded in the act of making" (p. 3). Aesthetic play has cross-curricular power in the process of learning because of the reciprocal interaction and modification it facilitates between self and subject matter during meaning-making (Latta, 2002). As Latta (2002) suggests, the visual arts classroom is a natural environment in which to foster students' aesthetic play in order to prepare Junior and Intermediate's to

consciously engage with the learning process in other subject areas as well (Latta, 2002). Role-play is an effective medium through which Junior and Intermediate learners can become comfortable with aesthetic play through visual art. According to Venable (2001), meaningful role-play activities facilitate a better understanding of what issues influence arts success without boring students with dry preliminary discussions. On the other hand, Curran (2005) purports that outdoor play allows Junior and Intermediate artists to "shift thinking from product to process" (p. 110), making them capable of deeper learning through a delayed evaluation that sparks improvement rather than judgment.

Physical Education

Enjoyment of psychical education class has been documented as being on the decline in the Junior and Intermediate grades (Carlson, 1995). The isolation, embarrassment, and humiliation that unskilled students experience during gym class (Portman, 1995), which deter participation, can be reduced if activities are presented as pleasurable, leisurely play pursuits rather than formal, competitive drills. Furthermore, presenting physical exercise as a fun, enjoyable endeavor promotes the maintenance of a healthy and active lifestyle throughout one's lifespan. Providing opportunity for Junior and Intermediate learners to embody and value active living is essential, considering that "the number of overweight children and teens has doubled in the last twenty years" (Van Patten, 2005, p. 60). Furthermore, Davies (2010) discovers that player-centered sports instruction through playful simulation empowers students to take ownership of the learning process and, in turn, facilitates a deeper

interaction with key concepts and more readily accessible information during future game situations.

New Media Literacy and Technology

The changing societal demands of current culture involve a new type of digital media literacy that requires a more advanced knowledge of a larger variety of technological resources than any century before. Video game playing can be used to cultivate students' new literacy skills (Hsu & Wang, 2010). Just as gaming literacy begins with learning the symbols of the medium and how they function within the larger system, so too does media literacy (Hsu & Wang, 2010) Moreover, Hsu and Wang (2010) point out that the development and design of digital games in the classroom can enhance the programming skills, information-technology competencies, and critical thinking strategies needed in the twenty-first century workforce. Partington (2010) also suggests that computer game playing can be utilized to "scaffold critical, cultural, and creative ideas and concepts to make explicit what is implicit" (p. 85), developing students' media consumption skills for use in larger contexts.

While research on the implementation of play into Junior and Intermediate school subjects focuses on observable enacted practices, fewer investigations have been done into the way in which fourth through eighth grade educators' see and understand play and play practices through their own eyes and minds. Teachers' perceptions are indispensable when considering the existing knowledge of play and upper elementary educations' intersections; as a result, research on the views of

teachers as collected through interviews and surveys are outlined in the following section.

Teachers' Perceptions of Play & Instructional Action

As the Junior and Intermediate years of schooling predominately remain "play's terra incognita" (Fagen, 2011, p. 90), so does the area of research interested in later elementary grade teachers' perceptions of playful teaching and learning. The final segment of the literature review consults existing research on educators' perceptions of play, and its application to instructional practice, to establish a comparative framework with which to predict and examine findings of the current study.

Beyond first grade, constructivist inquiry into Junior and Intermediate teachers' perceptions of play and play pedagogy is limited to studies that discuss the function of regular games, and video games, in learning (Foster, 2010; Ray & Coulter, 2010). On the other hand, kindergarten and early primary grade teachers' feelings and beliefs towards play and play pedagogy have undergone thoughtful examination, revealing a difficulty in defining and conceptualizing play for pre-service early childhood educators (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010) and working early childhood teachers (Ranz-Smith, 2007) alike. In a similar way, McInnes et al. (2011) report that early years practitioners demonstrate confusion surrounding their role in classroom play and feel uncertain about the specific contextual cues students use to determine if an activity is or is not play; moreover, the study revealed that some early

childhood educators tended to "use other terminology to replace the word play in an attempt to avoid undervaluing children's activity" (p. 131).

According to Isenberg (1990), various research studies affirm that teachers' judgments are directly influenced by knowledge and beliefs which, in turn, determine classroom instruction; nevertheless, when it comes to play, research illuminates a mismatch between early childhood educators' perceptions of play and their executed pedagogies (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1997; Fromberg & Bergen, 2006; Moyles, 2010). For example, Ranz-Smith (2007) discovers that, although first-grade teachers hold beliefs that play is a valuable tool contributing to the growth and development of young learners, they maintain negative attitudes towards the behaviors commonly associated with play and, moreover, do not make corresponding provision for play-based learning in descriptions of their own classroom instruction. Similarly, an investigation into early childhood education reveals that, although kindergarten teachers see play as a valuable vehicle for curriculum learning opportunities, they feel unable to justify the use of play in the classroom because of external pressures and terminological stigmatization (Keating et al, 2000). Haney and Bissonnette (2011) purports that pre-service elementary teachers conceive of play as holding value in the social and emotional learning of their students, but view it as having a less significant effect on cognitive developments.

Although research has revealed that kindergarten teachers perceive play as having value for classroom instruction and the learning process (Howard, 2010; Lee, 2006; Moon & Reifel, 2008), there is a call for detailed investigation into why

teachers' beliefs are not transferring smoothly into their enacted classroom instruction. Ranz-Smith (2012) purposes that the marriage of kindergarten teachers' play perceptions and corresponding instructional action can be achieved by mobilizing knowledge of play's educational value through professional education, starting with pre-service programs. McInnes et al.'s (2011) study reveals that educators' understanding of the *value* of play is only one catalyst to instructional action; the clearer an early childhood practitioners' conceptualization of what play *is*, and what *role* they are to assume in playful instruction, the more a play-based approach appears in the teachers' enacted pedagogy. The trending disharmony of play and instructional action in the pedagogical practices of early childhood educators suggests the potential for a similar discrepancy in Junior and Intermediate contexts. The current study will examine upper elementary teachers' current constructed realities of play and play pedagogy with a goal of easing the predicted tensions between abstract idealization and concrete application a future play reform will face.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

As Smit (2003) confirms, an extensive awareness of the subjective world of those involved in the process is a necessary precondition for successful policy implementation; specifically, front-line educators' thoughts, assumptions, and beliefs "have powerful implications […] for the ways in which [curriculum] policy is translated into [curriculum] practice" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 54). To inform anticipated future policy creation in Ontario, the current prospective policy analysis study (Patton, 2002) pursues a deep understanding of Junior and Intermediate teachers' perceptions of play and playful pedagogy through a constructivist paradigm. As a result, the study's purpose lends itself to an interpretive *qualitative research methodology* that allows for the detailed thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and knowledge of teachers' to be captured from the personal and authentic perspectives of participants within specific educational contexts. A constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis uses a series of thematically organized theories to explain the phenomenon of play pedagogy according to the constructed realities of a group of Junior and Intermediate educators in southern Ontario.

The research question that guided this study was: What are teachers' perceptions of play and play pedagogy in relation to their Junior and Intermediate classrooms? The purpose of this study was to uncover fourth through eighth grade

teachers' perceptions of play and play pedagogy in order to inform the future creation and implementation of a play policy in upper grade elementary classrooms in Ontario. It examined the knowledge, values, beliefs and experiences of educators and, as a result of these current constructed realities, interpreted how and why teachers will make sense of a future play reform. Ultimately, an analysis of the study's findings intended to answer the question: What specific approaches to the process of policymaking would ease barriers of effective implementation of a play policy into upper grade elementary classrooms in Ontario?

Rationale

A review of the literature failed to find existing research revealing the perceptions of play and play pedagogy from the voices of educators currently instructing fourth through eighth grade in Ontario. Studies investigating play within a Junior and Intermediate classroom context are limited to quantitative approaches or qualitative observation techniques focused on students. Other than inquiries confined to the function of games in learning (Foster, 2010; Ray & Coulter, 2010), teacher perception studies on play feature participants that have been trained in, or currently teach, pre-school, kindergarten and Primary instruction. In order to inform policymaking based on a cognitive framework of implementation, existing knowledge structures of educators must be illuminated. According to Patton (2002), qualitative methods allow for a study to capture deep and detailed insight into people's personal perspectives and experiences. Unlike quantitative approaches, qualitative research

permits open-ended questions and studies a phenomenon within the context of a situation (Creswell, 2013). For these reasons, a qualitative inquiry was chosen.

Participants and Setting

Patton (2002) suggests that the purposeful selection of a small sample of study participants permits *in depth* inquiry and understanding of a phenomenon within qualitative research. Consequently, the current study adopted a sample pool of twelve teachers currently instructing fourth through eighth grade students within two different southern Ontario School Boards. Participants were selected via a purposeful chain sampling procedure (Patton 2002); a primary teacher (informant number one) from a local school board was consulted by the researcher via e-mail, provided a brief description of the study, and asked to suggest fellow Junior or Intermediate teachers from both within *and* outside of his/her institution who would be suitable for participation based on potential willingness, cooperation and credibility. The recommended teachers were then approached by the researcher via e-mail with a short proposal outlining the requirements/timeline of participation and the generalized purpose of the research. Of the teachers who agreed to participate, those who taught at schools different from that of the first informant were contacted by the researcher again via e-mail and asked to suggest fellow employees *within* their institution who would be suitable for participation. These additional recommended participants were then contacted in the same manner as the initial recommended teachers. A total of twelve of sixteen contacted educators agreed to partake in the interview process and

all twelve participants' interview data was used in final data analysis. The demographic statistics of participating teachers is found in Table 1. A sample of educators from four different schools within two School Boards was purposefully sought by the researcher to allow for the collection of data from different micro-contexts within a larger macro-context. The chosen School Boards represented a large and a small metropolitan area, constituting approximately 170 and 45 elementary schools, respectively.

In order to provide for the ethical protection of teachers participating in the study, each participant was presented with a consent form prior to interviewing that described the title, nature, purpose, procedures, risks, benefits and confidentiality of the research project (Appendix A). Participants were informed of their rights to choose freely whether or not to partake in the interview and of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion. To fully maintain the confidentiality of all participants and each school, teacher were labeled with letters (A-L) and schools by numbers (S1-S3). The list connecting each teacher's name to his/her coded label was kept in a locked file. Transcribed copies of the interviews were presented to the participants vie e-mail to check for accuracy. Data was secured and only accessed by the researcher. A year after the thesis defense, the audio recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

Table 1
Demographic Data of Participants

Participant ID	Grade Taught	Years of Teaching	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	School
A	7th	20	41-50	Male	Caucasian	S1
B	8th	24	41-50	Male	Caucasian	S1
C	6th	11	31-40	Female	Caucasian	S1
D	8th	10	31-40	Female	Caucasian	S2
E	7th	1	21-30	Female	Caucasian	S2
F	3rd/4th	9	51+	Male	Caucasian	S2
G	6th	3	41-50	Female	Caucasian	S2
H	7th/8th	13	31-40	Female	Caucasian	S3
I	4th/5th	15	41-50	Female	Caucasian	S3
J	4th/5th	15	41-50	Female	Caucasian	S3
K	7th	8	31-40	Female	Caucasian	S3
L	4th	18	41-50	Female	Caucasian	S3

Data Gathering Procedures

Qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to access another person, or group's, insider perspective or subjective world. Research data for this study was collected through a combined approach utilizing aspects of both individual "standardized open-ended interview" and "interview guide" techniques, as described by Patton (2002) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006). The current study prepared specific questions grouped under generalized themes; however, the researcher allowed for flexibility within the thematic inquiries in terms of the ordering,

rephrasing, and adding of questions, as appropriate. While the same lines of inquiry were pursued for each participant, the interviewer remained open to exploring and probing spontaneously arising areas of information that, although not originally anticipated, were found relevant to the participant and the study purpose. A combination of these two interview styles allowed for a conversation-like interaction that remained open to the emergence of new topics, yet also grounded inquiry on focused questions that serve to establish priorities and meet time limitations. Following this semi-structured format, the interviewer attempted to make questions flow as naturally as possible from one to another.

The in-depth interview questions focused on six general areas of inquiry, including: background and teaching philosophy; current pedagogy; conceptions of play; play and enacted instruction; curriculum and assessment; and, support and implementation (Appendix B). Inquiry categories are framed by a repertoire of academic theories that suggest:

a) educators' preexisting knowledge, attitudes, and behavior affect the response, the meaning, and the implementation of educational policy (Smit, 2003);
b) as well, teachers' current style of pedagogy forecasts their reactions to future educational change (McInnes et al., 2012; Moyles, 2010).
c) however, although teachers' actions are directed by the system of beliefs and principles that they currently hold (Clark & Peterson, 1986), there exists a mismatch between teachers' expressed pedagogical theories of play and

enacted instructional realities due to perceived external factors (Bennett et al., 1997; Fromberg & Bergen, 2006; Moyles, 2010);

d) in particular, teachers' instructional decisions are typically affected by anxieties around curriculum and assessment accountability (Comber & Nixon, 2009).

A combination of background, experience and behavior, opinion and value, feeling, knowledge, sensory, and background questions are used to access a holistic understanding of participants' conceptualizations (Patton, 2002). An interview/directed discussion was conducted in a comfortable and semi-formal style, at the participants' home schools, during a date and time of their convenience, and extending approximately one hour in length. All interviews were conducted within a three-week window during March 2013. Each interview began with the researcher thanking the participant for partaking in the study. The researcher also reminded each teacher that the interview was being audio-recorded for future transcription and that his/her name would not appear in future documents. All participants were asked to speak freely about any thoughts that presented themselves during the interview and to be unconcerned with diverging from original questions, if inclined. On occasion, the interviewer used detailed-oriented questions, subtle nonverbal gestures, elaboration, contrast and clarification probes to gain more information, more context, or more explanation from a response (Patton, 2002). The researcher often summarized responses that were lengthy or detailed back to the interviewee in order to verify intended meanings and messages.

Interviews were audio-recorded using iPhone's 'Voice Memos' application as well as a digital recording device. The researcher made personal observational notes during and following the interview, as necessary, which described initial interpretations. Audio recordings were held on the researcher's password protected iPhone, and a copy of the data was also uploaded onto the researcher's password-protected computer immediately following each interview. As well, the researcher's personal notes were stored in a secure, private location and a copy was saved electronically. Audio data were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word by the researcher directly following each interview and labeled by predetermined name and school codes. The transcriptions were saved electronically and also printed in hardcopy. In order to ensure accuracy of information, a member check was performed on each transcript before analysis began.

The researcher approached the participants and their offered information with a positive rapport and empathetic neutrality (Patton, 2002). Although the researcher and all participants held no previous relationship prior to the study, numerous contacts via e-mail prior to the interview date served to establish comfort and familiarity. The researcher was positioned as an outsider to the specific subcultures of each school, as well as to the subgroup of Ontario Elementary School educators; however, the researcher enjoyed insider status as someone who is knowledgeable on topics and concepts of southern Ontario's educational culture. This knowledge was gained from the researcher's recent experiences as a student of both a Masters of Education and a Bachelor of Education program within the province. Lack of

complete insider positionality may have affected participants' willingness to disclose information free of restraint; however, the researcher's shared understanding of educational terms and issues may have encouraged greater use of insider terminology and description in interviewee conversation.

Data Analysis Methods

As a prospective policy analysis using a constructivist conceptual framework, this study's methodology was framed by Dyer's (1999) theory of backwards-mapping. Dyer (1999) postulates that a policy should be formulated *after* a review of the implementation path, taking into account the current context into which the policy is being presented so as to minimize discrepancies between actual and desired results of the reform. Consequently, this exploratory study seeks to understand the constructed "truth" about play and play pedagogy in Junior and Intermediate educational environments as revealed through "consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors [of reality]" (Guba & Lincoln as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 96), and, thereafter, uncover implications for policy creation through a cognitive framework of implementation. To adequately explain the phenomenon, the current study selected a grounded theory approach to data analysis.

While Patton (2002) describes the process of grounded theory analysis as purely empirical, the current study adopted an interpretive definition of theory-making as described by Charmaz (2006). Under an interpretive approach, this study viewed theory as the researcher's imaginative conceptualization of the studied

phenomenon in order to understand participants constructed realities in abstract terms. In line with methods of constructivist grounded theory analysis, this study viewed the emergence of theory as resulting from the constant interplay between the data and the researcher's developing conceptualizations (Pigeon, 1996). Under a constructivist framework, the resulting theory was recognized as dependent upon the subjective interpretations of the researcher; nevertheless, this study ensured that theoretical sensitivity and interpretive rigor were upheld by: firstly, constantly comparing new data with emerging codes to ensure accuracy; secondly, preserving raw interview data throughout analysis to keep participants' voices present in the theoretical outcome; thirdly, interweaving influential literature throughout resulting theory to frame and support the researcher's interpretations (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006); and lastly, approaching all analysis with constant *reflexivity*, in continuous consideration of the way in which social background and assumptions affected data analysis (Patton, 2002). Specifically, the research recognized the ways in which her personal interests, preconceptions, and academic training shaped the coding processes, and made efforts to address and minimize these effects on data interpretation so as to sustain maximal credibility. For example, the researcher bracketed her own conceptualization of play and playful pedagogies as much as possible in order to maintain the authentic perceptions of study participants.

Following the verbatim transcription of all interview audio recordings, participant data underwent a continuous inductive coding, constant comparative, memo writing process as described by Charmaz (2006) to establish basic concepts,

uncover sophisticated categories, and build properties and interrelationships of those categories into theoretical explanations. Analysis began with line-by-line coding of interview transcriptions that kept the codes active and close to the data (Charmaz, 2006), then focused-coding made comparisons between data pieces to construct provisional categories. Next, the properties and dimensions of significant categories and subcategories were specified through axial coding. Participant quotations were grouped under categories and subcategories and examined for how they complimented, extended or denied one another. Concept maps and charts were used to logically organize the core ideas of, and relationships between, categories and subcategories. Throughout each stage of coding, the researcher engaged in constant memo-writing in order to define and analyze emerging ideas. Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access programs were utilized throughout the analysis of data to code, group, and memo. The validity and reliability of the researcher's analytical interpretations of the data was further tested using triangulation (multiple participants and school contexts), rich description, bracketing and inclusion of discrepant data (Creswell, 2013).

Finally, prevailing themes were integrated into proposed theoretical categories in order to paint an explanatory picture of the phenomenon of play and play pedagogy as informed by the constructed "truths" of Junior and Intermediate educators in Ontario. Informed by Spillane et al.'s (2002) research on successful policy creation and implementation and its reliance on the considerations of teachers' current

cognitive framework, implications for policy makers and recommendations for future research were developed out of the arising themes.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This study aimed to elucidate the present place of play and play pedagogy within the current cognitive condition of a group of Ontario's upper elementary school educators. Under a constructivist paradigm, the "truth" of Junior and Intermediate teachers' constructed reality of play was found in the "consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors" (Patton, 2002, p. 96) that were this study's participants. As a result, the analysis of interview data did not prioritize comparative investigation *within* individual cases to locate cause-and-effect relationships; instead, the researcher's objective was to interpret the participants' shared realities by comparing significant categories as they appeared *across* cases. This emerging theory was grounded in consensual agreement among all, or the large majority, of participants; nevertheless, variations in perceptions were used to build the depth and scope of the theory. The presented findings aimed to be confirmable through researcher reflexivity, dependable through rigorous data collection and analysis processes, internally consistent through representation of varying views, and transferable through the presentation of similarities and differences in context (Gasson, 2004). Due to lack of time and resources, the current research consists of a single grounded theory study that produces substantive, rather than formal, findings which aim to serve as a stepping stone upon which further research can build.

The findings delineated below generate a theory that explains how and why Junior and Intermediate teachers' conceptualize play within the classroom and what environmental conditions they perceive as framing this play. Framed by guiding questions, the theory is presented through core categories that reflect the elements of the educators' cognitive schema in a related chain of elements. The theory posits that play within the upper elementary teachers' cognition is:

- pragmatically stigmatized
- disguised by institutionally recognize labels
- recognized by and valued in engagement and inclusion
- defined by a paradox of freedom and purpose
- famed by accountability
- reliant on student competence; catalyzed by teacher scaffolding of learning connections
- informed by concrete implementation.

Overall, the theory purports that the conceptual formation of play for Junior and Intermediate educators' is influenced by the unique context and conditions of the upper elementary environment in which they are immersed.

The Pragmatic Stigmatization of Play

The dictionary defines *stigma* as "an identifying mark or characteristic" (Merriam-Webster Online, n.d). For many years, play has been popularly and

academically characterized by many as the activity of young children; however, more recently, the term play has been specifically marked as belonging to the realm of early childhood education, as well. The Ontario Ministry of Education's implementation of play-based curriculum in all Kindergarten classes between 2010 and 2014 has carried with it numerous media messages emphasizing the benefits of play for young children. Although a successful campaign in its own right, the strongly founded connection between play and early childhood learning has stifled an equally important understanding of play – its place within the rest of the elementary school curriculum.

The cognitive schemas of Ontario's Junior and Intermediate educators' mirror this popular stigma, connecting the term play to the realm of young children and the pedagogies of lower elementary grades. For example, one participant describes the term as initiating a reflexive response: "As soon as you hear play, you think of little kids" (C 308)[1]. Similarly, other participants express an innate relationship between play and the educational practices of the kindergarten classroom, in particular: "You think of what kindergartens do with their play-based stuff" (B 110-111). As a result of play being characterized by features associated with Primary activities, play's legitimacy in relation to the learning behaviors of older students in strongly diminished; in other words, upper elementary grade educators' perceive the word play as being tainted in the educational world as one belonging exclusively to the Primary

[1] References to the current study's interview transcripts are cited using the identifying letter assigned to the participant (A to L as indicated in Table 1) followed by the line number(s) of the quotation (found in the participant's transcribed interview document).

programs: “I mean it’s not a term that I think is used often in education, especially with older grades. It’s more Primary” (D 134-135). Play’s strong association with early elementary grades reduces its legitimacy when used in reference to later years, making it inappropriate and unsuitable for the education of older students.

The stigmatic stamp that has been placed on educational play causes Junior and Intermediate teachers to understand the term as a label that fades out of semantic appropriateness based on the age of the subject. One participant observes, “as [students] get older I don’t think we often refer to it as play” (I 161). Upper elementary grade educators’ understanding of play as a terminology not fitting for older students is echoed in researchers’ use of the alternative words “games”, “sport”, “leisure” or “recreation” when discussing the learning and developmental benefits for players beyond primary age (Caldwell & Witt, 2011; Davies, 2010; Lancy & Grove, 2011). In particular, researchers in the field of classroom education have steered away from using the term play in dialogue with Junior and Intermediate teachers when investigating their perceptions of playful learning, choosing to speak about regular games or video games in particular (Foster, 2010; Ray & Coulter, 2010;). When the word play is used in reference to the middle years of schooling, it is most often a term imposed by the research rather than one utilized by the students or teachers themselves to talk about their own reality (Caswell, 2005; Chaille & Tian, 2005).

Teachers see a unique form of play existing in their Junior and Intermediate grades that departs from that of the Primary realm, making the traditional language of

play insufficient: [W]e move away from the typical idea of play in the older grades" (L 75-76). Play in the upper elementary years is understood as something unparalleled with the play that takes place in the lower elementary grades; as a result, teachers' believe that, "[i]t's hard to compare what play looks like here compared to in kindergarten or grade one" (H 82-83). It has been recognized by numerous scholars that the features of play transform alongside human development, just as Junior and Intermediate teachers' observe; however, Wood and Attfield (2005) suggest that the knowledge of *how* students' play progresses as they get older has not been adequately mobilized into elementary education. As a result, classroom play beyond early childhood is undermined. The current study reflects this hypothesis in upper grade teachers' continual uncertainties surrounding the use of the term play in relation to older learners.

While educators exhibit a level of comfort when discussing play in a generalized context, when asked about the role of play in the learning and development of grades four through eight, in particular, teachers' express an absence of clarity: "I think in the older grades, [the value of play] is maybe not as clear" (D 126-127). This perception is in contrast to that of Primary grade teachers who clearly recognize the value of play in classroom instruction and learning for their young students (Howard, 2010; Lee, 2006; Moon & Reifel, 2008; Ranz-Smith, 2007). Even though "[older grades] don't necessarily value [play] as much" (C 127), teachers do strongly believe that play "definitely holds an important role [in the Junior and Intermediate classroom]" (H 59). Unfortunately, a lack of clarity regarding the value

and role of play beyond Primary grades limits educators' ability to properly comprehend how play looks, feels and functions within the Junior and Intermediate classroom.

Due to the pragmatic stigma of the term, resistance to the use of the word play in pedagogical dialogue has left Junior and Intermediate educators without the language to discuss the phenomenon in relation to their own students and classrooms. Kindergarten teachers, prior to the Full-Day Kindergarten media messages on the value of play, similarly expressed an inability to use play in the classroom due to terminological stigmatization (Keating et al, 2000).[2] Upper elementary teachers recognize that the term needs to be released from its current stigmatization: "We need to not put it in terms of a Primary thing—it needs to be all throughout" (C 120-121). One participant warns that, before play can be comfortably discussed within Junior and Intermediate contexts, "[educators are] going to have to get over the stigma of the word play. It's the perception of 'what is play?'" (B 307-309). Participants feel that in order for play to be a useable term for upper elementary dialogue, the marked meaning of play as the activities of young children must be dissolved. The following section unravels the way in which Junior and Intermediate educators circumvent this stigma by disguising play under more accepted instructional labels.

[2] Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) is a program implemented into the Ontario public school system by the Ministry of Education, beginning in September 2010, which focuses on providing students with play-based learning opportunities under the guidance of an early learning team (kindergarten teachers together with early childhood educators). It will replace the pre-existing kindergarten program in *all* publically-run elementary schools in Ontario by the 2015-16 school year.

Disguising Play in Institutionalized Labels

Within the cognitive schemas of Junior and Intermediate educators, the term play belongs to Primary learning contexts and, therefore, is perceived as inaccurate and unacceptable language with which to describe legitimate behaviors within older grades. Upon reflection, all participating Junior and Intermediate teachers believe that their current enacted pedagogy involves play; however, they perceive their utilized play activities as being "intermediate form[s] of play" (G 339) to which they "wouldn't have given the label" (H 112). Teachers of grade four through eight discuss play as disguised in institutionally acceptable pedagogical approaches. For example, one participant expresses the way in which Junior and Intermediate pedagogical terminology tends to disguise play by resisting its explicit label and substituting alternative terminology: "It's not what I would call play. […] But those words that I attached with *play* were exploratory, doing what you want, and kind of hands-on" (L 143-149). Although Junior and Intermediate teachers' blame students' age for the required use of alternative vocabulary to describe play-like instructional experiences, past research has found that educators choose to use other terminology to replace the word play in attempts to avoid undervaluing the activity (McInnes et al., 2011).

The instructional modes that Junior and Intermediate educators' equate with play come from "a new pedagogy—a new way of thinking" (H 257) to which Ontario teachers have been recently introduced. Fourth through eighth grade educators attribute their familiarity with the pedagogical ideas that have been introduced by

their School Boards within the past half-decade. As indicated by the Ontario Ministry of Education website, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) has been implementing new initiatives and professional learning covering such topics as collaborative inquiry, school effectiveness and character development. For example, the Ministry's *Professional Learning Opportunities: Kindergarten to Grade 8 Summer Programs* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011) offered courses throughout their School Boards focusing on: inclusion as engagement; learning through problem-solving; differentiating instruction; critical literacy; technology; and, information accessibility. Participants with over ten years experience in the field describe their teaching philosophies as having undergone a transformation in recent years as a result of these provincial initiatives. A participant in her thirteenth year of teaching observed, "I know that a lot of us have really changed the way we teach in the last few years" (H 163).

Overall, influenced by the latest pedagogical initiatives implemented by the Ontario government, participants' predominately use five labels of instructional approaches to replace the term play as discussed within the Junior and Intermediate classroom: hands-on activities, cooperative pursuits, role-playing, student-led endeavors; and, open-ended investigations. Delineated below is a description of these five pedagogical labels and how they fit into the minds of upper grade elementary teachers as forms of play.

Hands-On Activities

Junior and Intermediate educators conceive hands-on activities to be a form of play within their classroom instruction. Specifically, upper elementary teachers recognize the use of manipulatives in Mathematics lessons to be a prioritized element of the recent pedagogical change initiative that has increased the presence of play within instruction "because the manipulatives are there and that's what we think of as play—those tangible items" (L 179-180). Junior and Intermediate teachers' conceptualization of manipulative use as a form of play echoes a similar identification of young children's movement of concrete objects (rods, blocks, etc.), often called symbolic or constructive play, as a touchstone type of play in early education (Uttal, 2003).

Cooperative Pursuits

Junior and Intermediate teachers recognize another significant pedagogical transition as being the movement from individual pursuits towards cooperative group activities within acted instruction. One participant reflects, "I think I've slowly, just in terms of the way I teach—I teach very differently now than I did a long time ago. […] It's very much kids working together" (I 178-183). Teachers of the upper elementary grades view collaborative instructional techniques as those in which students function as a team to pursue a common goal and, in turn, create an atmosphere of negotiation and peer support. Educators conceive of this group pursuit as being a form of play within their classrooms: "cooperative learning—I think of that as play" (A 373). The inclusion of cooperative learning approaches as play reflects

academic theories that define peer interaction and rule-following as play, such as Piaget's (n.d.) description of the social play that begins to develop in early adolescence. Like Piaget (n.d.), Junior and Intermediate teachers' perceive competitive games as a specific cooperative pursuit to be considered a form of play within the classroom as well. This structured social play is echoic of the collaborative and games with rules types of play that are common to earlier educational contexts.

Role-playing

The cross-curricular use of Dramatic Arts through "role-playing things, acting things out" (I 104) is recognized by Junior and Intermediate educators as a teaching method recently encouraged by pedagogical reform. Upper grade elementary teachers' perceive simulations of situations, performances of concepts and the impersonations of characters as types of upper elementary grade role-playing that equate to play. For example, one participant considers an instance of play within her classroom as being when her students were "role-playing the different roles that [Aboriginals] had in the community" (G 167-168) during a Social Studies unit. Viewing role-play within the classroom as instructional play aligns Junior and Intermediate teachers' conception of classroom play with a Vygotskian (1966) definition of symbolic play, often referred to as pretend or sociodramatic play in early educational settings. Vygotsky's (1966) idea of play purports that play always consists of roles, themes and stories through which players enact an understanding of society.

Student-led Instruction

Junior and Intermediate educators conceive one of the most significant changes in pedagogical practice to be the diffusion of teacher-directed instruction for the allowance of lessons that encompass more student-led components. One participant observes, "the pedagogy of education has changed over the years, where they are asking us now *not* to be the central focus of the lesson" (J 50-52). Upper elementary educators view student-centered learning as the opposite of conventional lecture-style information transmission; participants characterize student-led instruction as that involving students' choice of an activity, topic or approach. Junior and Intermediate teachers understand this rearrangement in instructional framing to allow for an increase in the appearance of play within the classroom: "I see [play] a lot more because [the School Board is] starting to push [student-led instruction] a little bit more, and get away from teacher-directed" (C 149-150). Overall, instruction is perceived by grade four through eight teachers to be play if the learning involves a relinquishing of power from the teacher at which time the focus of action or the authority of choice is transferred to the pupil. These ideas align with academic definitions of play that place self-government and self-choice as primary conditions of play (Fein, Rubin & Vandenberg, 1983), and with early childhood educators' perceptions of play in the classroom as being identified by pedagogical interactions emphasizing choice and control (McInnes et al., 2011).

Open Investigations

In direct connection with the play status given to student-directed instruction, Junior and Intermediate educators' perceive open-ended investigations of a topic, question, or problem during instruction to be play. Teachers of grades four through eight understand open-ended investigations as those activities that step away from the textbook and allow learning to become focused on the process of discovery. For example, participant C refers to a science experiment during which students openly investigate the concept of buoyancy as an example of play within her classroom. The equivocal relationship upper elementary educators' conceive between open-ended investigation within the classroom and play aligns with academic theories that define play as divergent thinking, creativity and problem-solving (Gee, 2005; Russ, 2003). This freedom for discovery during learning is reflective of the characteristics of exploratory play as is commonly discussed as a type of play in lower elementary grade contexts.

Junior and Intermediate teachers understand these specific pedagogical labels, whether standing alone or together, as approaches that constitute the existence of play within their upper elementary grade classrooms. All of the labels are new pedagogical techniques that Junior and Intermediate teachers' see as appropriate practices for effective teaching and learning in grades four through eight. While not explicitly associated with play in the current formal dialogue of Junior and Intermediate environments, an implicit connection exists between these implemented instructional methods and participants' preexisting cognitive conceptualization of

play as informed by popularized theories, allowing upper grade elementary teachers to recognize these specific pedagogical approaches as forms of play. In particular, the characteristics of the play forms that Junior and Intermediate teachers distinguish as existing within the classroom are reflective of the types of play spoken about in younger educational settings: symbolic or constructive play; collaborative play; games with rules; pretend or sociodramatic play; and, exploratory play. Regardless of the similarities of these traditional play types to the ones found in the forth through eighth grade classrooms, teachers' language cloaks the early childhood labels with terms that are fitting with the upper elementary years' context. The next section will address the optimal conditions these instructional methods catalyze that cause Junior and Intermediate educators to equate these pedagogical approaches with play.

Defending the Play Characteristics of Instructional Approaches

As exemplified in the data, play, in the cognitive schemas of Junior and Intermediate teachers, carries a pragmatic stigma that connects the term to young children and Primary grade activities; therefore, upper elementary grade educators' make reference to classroom play through alternative labels of institutionally acceptable pedagogical terminology. The instructional techniques that participants equate with play reveal the different forms of classroom behavior that compose upper elementary teachers' conceptualization of play, and the existing academic ideas about play with which their understanding aligns; however, *why* Junior and Intermediate educators see these particular instructional modes as play is defended as a matter of

participants' observed outcome. In other words, Junior and Intermediate teachers consider student-led instruction, hands-on activities, role-playing, cooperative learning and open investigation as play because of the high levels of engagement seen in students and, in turn, view these instructional methods as catalyzing inclusion within their classrooms.

The Marking of Student Engagement

Participants in the current study relate the recently implemented pedagogical approaches of student-led instruction, hands-on activities, role-playing, cooperative learning and open investigation to positive improvements in student engagement and, in this way, value the current educational transition towards these new approaches: "There's such a focus right now on student involvement […] and I'm really happy that is a trend in education right now" (G 285-288). It is the level of student engagement catalyzed by these newly implemented educational approaches that induces teachers to equate these instructional techniques with play. One participant points out that, "It doesn't have to be a giant baseball game in the class for it to be play—just engagement" (C 464-467). This participant's attention to the importance of engagement, and other participants' similarly expressed views, indicate that Junior and Intermediate teachers have located specific instructional methods as play primarily because of the resulting effects on student engagement. For example, Junior and Intermediate teachers' equate hands-on activities with play because of an existing cognitive connection between tactile manipulation of objects and student engagement. It is deduced then, that Junior and Intermediate educators'

conceptualize classroom play as a state of being engaged, and equate certain instructional approaches with play because they are structured by characteristics determined as likely to produce an engaged state of mind in students. As suggested by participants, those instructional approaches equated with play may not achieve engagement each and every time, but are still considered play (albeit failed attempts) because of a strong cognitive association between the pedagogical technique and the outcome of engagement as established through past experiences.

The alignment of play with human affect resonates with Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) "flow experience" (p. 43), which recognizes play as a "merging of action and awareness" (p. 44) during which a person is fully engaged in a task. For Junior and Intermediate educators, the expected outcome of instructional activities aligned with play is a merging of student action and the *learning process*. Engagement, as an experience of "learning flow," is recognized by Junior and Intermediate educators through students' demonstrated feelings of ownership, enjoyment and/or interest in a learning task. These player conditions are a result of the existence of internal motivation in the student, which moves learning pursuits away from external pressures and creates a feeling of safety that ignites students' confidence and risk-taking. One participant describes the role of engagement and its conditions of intrinsic motivation, safety, confidence and risk taking, as the distinguishing element of play within instruction:

> Definitely engagement—everyone wants to go up and take a turn. Regardless of where they feel they are in the hierarchy of the class, I guess. They're eager to take a chance, like I said. They are more apt to take a risk when they see it as not just putting up your hand to give an answer (B 204-07).

This model of play holds similarities to Winnicott's understanding of play as the creation of *potential space* in which players see themselves as more capable than they are in other contexts, and act accordingly (Varga, 2011). The increased levels of intrinsic motivation, safety, confidence and risk-taking, and the observable conditions of engagement these psychological conditions create, are seen to be achievable through student-led instruction, hands-on activities, role-playing, cooperative learning and open investigation; correspondingly, Junior and Intermediate educators' align these new pedagogical modes with play.

A Value of Inclusion

The state of engagement, or 'learning flow,' by which Junior and Intermediate educators' define currently used instructional methods as play-like is especially valued for its ability to create an inclusive learning environment by reaching students not normally captured by traditional (non-play) instruction. Participants recognize "ensuring that everyone is involved" (K 278) and "all members of the group are participating equally" (G 189) as primary concerns when making instructional decisions. Upper elementary grade teachers perceive the instructional approaches equated with play to "level the playing field" (F 154) within the classroom by "reach[ing] kids that you wouldn't reach before" (B 383-383). One participant points out that, "[i]t's with the kids that reading is hard, writing is hard, that you see the big difference. There are some kids that will do well no matter what" (K 166-67). While grade four through eight teachers conceive that some students will achieve a type of

'learning flow' through any mode of instruction, instructional approaches deemed play-like by Junior and Intermediate teachers, such as the ones listed above, are uniquely appreciated for their ability to spread deeper, more meaningful learning experiences across a wider variety of students. Due to the fact that Junior and Intermediate learners are the most diverse population in the public school system (Powell, 2005), it is not surprising that an instructional approaches' ability to fairly serve a large group of students is so appreciated by educators of fourth through eighth grade children.

Junior and Intermediate educators believe that the instructional approaches equated with play increase learning inclusiveness because of their ability to catalyze differentiated instruction within the classroom. Differentiated instruction is described as an approach that has its focus on the varying needs of learners based on students' readiness levels, interest, and learning profiles (Tomlinson, 1999). Educators of the upper elementary grades recognize that play-like instruction provides students with varying and added cognitive avenues to meaningful learning and, in this way, is capable of increasing the number of students that simultaneously achieve 'learning flow.' Participants describe disengaged students to be the ones who benefit the most from play activities "because those students are usually the ones who need that other pathway to get to that end goal" (L 313-314). The power of play-like approaches to capture a wide variety of readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles all at once, and in turn create an environment of differentiated learning success stories, is where Junior and Intermediate educators find true value. These fourth through eighth grade

teachers' understanding of play as primarily valuing the cognitive development of their students differs from pre-service elementary teachers' belief that play holds greater benefits for students' social and emotional learning (Haney & Bissonette, 2011). In line with current participants' perceptions, however, the reviewed literature surrounding play's interaction with curricular subjects in Junior and Intermediate classrooms shows that cognitive abilities are predominately stated as the chief measure of play's success by researchers, other than in Physical Education contexts.

When deciding the status of an instructional approach or activity, upper elementary grade teachers' fail to consider students' understanding of the pedagogical method as play or not play. While early years practitioners take into account the contextual cues that their students use to recognize an experience as play (McInnes, 2011), Junior and Intermediate educators focus on outward observations of engagement to indicate play within the classroom. Fourth through eighth grade teachers' recognition of play in an educational context as completely different from the thinking of their pupils may be linked to their unique definition of play, as delineated in the following section.

The Paradox of Free and Purposeful Play

Sutton-Smith (1997) makes clear that play is an ambiguous phenomenon describable only through a collection of metaphors, and innately flexible depending on the defining subject and context. It is not surprising, due to the transforming nature of play conceptualizations, that play takes on a unique definition when

described by Junior and Intermediate educators and contextualized within an educational setting. Although play has been called the work of children, when used in reference to the activities beyond Primary age the term is thought to denote carefree leisure activities. Interestingly, Junior and Intermediate educators' conceptualization of play dilutes this common dichotomy, creating a unique understanding of the concept adapted for the upper elementary classroom that interestingly blends freedom and purpose.

In alignment with many traditional play theorists, the large majority of participants define play as involving free and divergent thinking and behaving. Junior and Intermediate educators see play as a space in which creativity and imagination flourish and structures and limits diminish. One participant explains, "[Play is] not being limited. Where do you want to take it?" (K 83-84); similarly, another teacher confidently states that "play is imaginative, creative […] doesn't have strict limitations" (H 57). This common understanding of play as self-governed and free from externally imposed rules (Fein, Rubin & Vandenberg, 1983) corresponds with the student-directed method of instruction that fourth through eighth grade teachers' associate with play. Despite the strong alignment of Junior and Intermediate educators' definition of play with qualities of freedom that typically cast it as the opposite of work, teachers simultaneously define play as being a catalyst of productive learning.

Although seemingly contradicting their ideas of the free and divergent nature of play they establish, Junior and Intermediate teachers concurrently define play in

the classroom as always having a clear outcome. In the minds of fourth through eighth grade teachers, play in the classroom is "not just play for play's sake" (D 493); instead, teachers of elementary students beyond the Primary years conceptualize play as always being a catalyst of content learning. When describing play in the classroom, one participant reflects, "[play] gets them engaged, yet they are still reviewing information and learning what they need to learn" (H 98-99). This 'learning flow' or engagement, which educators see as the mark of play-like instruction, is only viewed as legitimate if students are working towards an academic end. The mandatory academic purpose that fourth through eighth grade teachers place on play's definition may be connected to their perception that play's predominant value lies in cognitive development, as discussed earlier.

Within the minds of Junior and Intermediate teachers, play and learning can be synonymous within the classroom: [Play] has to be part of the learning or focused with the learning" (F 284). Traditionally, purposeful work and play were seen as not capable of coexisting, but fourth through eighth grade educators disagree. For educators of the upper elementary grades, play in the classroom is seen as a new form that balances between freedom and purpose, creating the idea that one can work *through* play; in fact, teachers suggest that play can actually increase the productivity and effectiveness of work, if the play is done properly. Junior and Intermediate educators recognize that the existence of a clear purpose or outcome does not relinquish students' perceived freedom:

> But play, I really do believe, is purposeful. That does not mean that [students] don't have freedom within the context that they're playing, because I believe

> not everything can be scripted—play should not be scripted but it should, again, be purposeful (G 97-8).

Interestingly, teachers of grades four through eight believe in play's capability to mask the drudgery of purposeful learning and maintain the benefits of perceived freedom traditionally associated with play. In other words, within the Junior and Intermediate classroom, "play is learning without knowing you're learning" (E.85).

Junior and Intermediate teachers' understanding of play as the concurrent existence of freedom and learning can be illuminated by examining the effects of purposeful play on fourth through eighth grade learners. According to Wing (1995), levels of external direction or guidance have little impact on the perceived playfulness of an activity for older students, compared to their younger counterparts. Instead, Wing (1995) determined that psychological content, such as pleasure and joy, has an increasing impact on students' experience of a task as play as they move into the upper elementary grades. Similarly, Parton (as cited in Xu, 2010) purports that, while young children's primitive functioning favours spontaneous and free play activities, play is cultivated through more purposeful endeavours as students' transition into the high school. Informed by Parton's (2010) and Wing's (1995) discoveries, it is not surprising that play is perceived by Junior and Intermediate teachers as capable of amalgamating the two dichotomous experiences of freedom and learning to form a productive and enjoyable state of being.

With an understanding of the unique conditions that foster feelings of play in Junior and Intermediate learners, a group of academics undertook the development of

an instructional method termed "serious play" (Mann, 1996; Rea, Millican & Watson, 2000; Wasserman, 1992) that holds great similarities to the dichotomous nature of play conceived by participants of the current study. Denying the popular definition of play as the antithesis of work, the method of serious play places educational instruction on a continuum between foolish fun and vapid drudgery and suggests that Junior and Intermediate pedagogy locate itself centrally. According to Rea et al. (2000), a serious play approach attains a flexible and sensitive combination of spontaneous and purposeful action within the learning process. The foundations of this innovative instructional approach, custom fit for fourth through eighth grade, proves to complement the pre-existing ideas of Junior and Intermediate educators and, as a result, illustrates great potential for successful classroom integration.

Although upper elementary grade educators understand a classroom setting to be a legitimate home of play, Junior and Intermediate teachers conceive that their "idea of play and [students'] idea of play are totally different" (J 448-449). This difference is attributed to the fact that Junior and Intermediate teachers believe "[students'] perception of play probably doesn't spill over into the classroom" (H 85). One participant's statement about play and student conceptualization illuminates an understanding of the impact of context on students' definition of play: "[students] wouldn't say it happens in a regular school day. They'd definitely say it happens at recess and it happens at gym times—very *specific* times of the week" (L 107-108). Teachers recognize that students' see play and work as polarized opposites, and do not allow students to see play as existing within an academic learning context.

Participants believe that "[a]nything not work related I think to [a student] is play" (E 166) and, as a result, play is not seen by students as a possible "tool to help them learn" (I 71-72).

Particularly, Junior and Intermediate teachers view "video games […] and playing games in the yard" (H 69-70) as the primary activities students associate with play; however, educators state that even when students recognize the incorporation of games into learning, the educational context clouds their perception of the activity as true play. When discussing the use of tag within a lesson, one participant perceives, "I don't think [students] would have seen it as playing. They would call it playing a game, but it's not the play part they see—they don't see it the same way [as me]" (C 322-324). Students' resistance to relate play with academic learning, as educators have, is seen as the primary reason for the conceptual discrepancy teachers' perceive between themselves and their pupils.

Upper elementary grade teachers' belief that students do not consider academic learning tasks to be play does not impact the educators' decision to label classroom activities as such. According to McInnes et al. (2009), differences between adult's and children's views of play conditions are common; however, it may be dangerous to not consider students' conceptualization of play when aiming to conjure its benefits within the classroom. Howard, Bellin, and Rees (2002) purport that it is essential to understand players' perceptions in order for educators' to more effectively exploit play and be capable of achieving the favorable learning outcomes that can be catalyzed by play . Even though upper grade elementary teachers perceive

students to be experiencing play during classroom instruction, without an explicit recognition of fourth through eighth grade pupils' thoughts and feelings it cannot be confirmed that play experiences truly exist.

Framing Play in the Accountability Matrix of Curriculum, Instructional Tradition and Assessment

Despite upper elementary teachers' perspective that play can serve as a useful vehicle in the classroom, educators recognize that their practical implementation of play is influenced by accountability pressures surrounding curricular requirements, academic learning styles and assessment measurement. In studies investigating the implementation of play into early childhood classrooms, it is common for educators to express fears of accountability as a barrier to enacting play-based instruction in the classroom; however, accountability distractions appear quite inflated in the minds of Junior and Intermediate teachers as they emphasize their obligation to explicit curriculum connection, maintenance of traditional academic routine, and sound evaluation methods.

Unfortunately, fourth through eighth grade educators fail to recognize play within itself as beneficial for their students; therefore, upper grade elementary teachers see play as a potential threat to accountability if curricular outcomes are not continuously considered in any learning engagement. Teachers of the upper elementary grades understand play, and its use as purposeful learning, as moving to more explicit and specific outcomes in the later elementary grades:

> I know when I started teaching grade one we have a designated time and we called it our free time and they could play with anything they wanted. But as the curriculum became more rigorous we just started to pull away from free time and incorporate it into out curriculum (J 137-141).

Junior and Intermediate teachers believe that, as the curriculum gets more demanding in later elementary grades, "you can't really justify free play anymore" (J 146). Instead, participants believe that "the curriculum itself, just having to get stuff done" (E 242) is a central influence during the making of instructional decisions; as a result, teachers' claim that play is only used in the classroom "if I felt the kids would benefit from it (…) and if it were more closely connected to curriculum content (D 249-251). Fourth through eighth grade educators express resistance surrounding classroom activities that they perceive as "taking away from curricular time" (D 263); however, play is conceived by upper elementary educators as justifiable when functioning as one of the "creative ways of delivering curriculum" (J 253-254). In other words, play's legitimacy is found in its function as an informal means to a formal end.

In order for play to be utilized within a lesson, Junior and Intermediate teachers' must perceive the play activity as lending itself to the required curricular subject matter. Junior and Intermediate educators view curricular areas that are fitting with manipulatives and hands-on tasks, namely Math and Science, to be more suitable for curricular learning through play. Other curricular areas in which play does not as naturally lend itself to the use of physical tools are seen as having content that is more difficult to master through play; interestingly, even subjects such as

Language Arts that intrinsically fit with the use of role-play, are not as commonly recognized by upper grade elementary teachers as fostering easy connections between play and learning. Since Junior and Intermediate teachers believe that "everything has to be curricular driven" (G 345), play is used as an instructional method only when the curricular expectations are perceived as being easily met through play form; if not, a traditional mode of direct knowledge transmission is chosen.

The curricular confinement felt by upper elementary grade teachers in the current study is not surprising given the preexisting trend of lower grade teachers' perceptions of classroom play. Prior to the reconfiguration of the kindergarten curriculum, Kagan (1990) indicated that curricular structure was a major barrier to the implementation of play into early childhood classrooms. In a similar way, Sutton-Smith's (1997) investigation into the perceptions of first grade teachers' also found that participants perceived curriculum expectations were a large barrier to the idea of learning through play, even in the primary grades where Junior and Intermediate teachers' believe there to be more room for informal activity.

Upper elementary grade teachers' perceptions of tension between play and the mandated curriculum are also aligned with the lack of reference to play, or play-like instruction, within the curricular documents themselves. A review of the *Mathematics, Science* and *Language Arts Ontario Curriculums: Grades 1-8* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), reveals that these Ministry of Education teaching doctrines do not directly suggest play as a means of implementing the curriculum at all. Even when using the institutional labels of "student-led", "manipulatives", "role-

play", "collaboration", and "open investigation" that Junior and Intermediate teachers' equate with play, results were slim: "role-play" as a possible pathway to learning appears six times in the Junior section of the Language Arts document and once in the Intermediate; "manipulatives" is included a single time in seventh grade Mathematics expectations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005); and "manipulating materials" is written once in the Grades 1-8 Achievement Chart at the beginning of the Science curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Since the documents that Junior and Intermediate teachers use to guide instruction make minimal reference to play-like approaches, it is left up to the classroom educators' themselves to forge the connection between curriculum expectations and play in order to legitimize their pedagogy—a daunting task for even the most innovative and experienced of teachers.

Upper elementary grade teachers' utilization of play as an instructional approach is also confined by felt pressures to maintain 'conventional' learning methods as the predominant form of pedagogy in the classroom. Junior and Intermediate educators are insistent that play should not rest as the primary mode of learning: "I don't want it to sound like it can go everywhere. I think it is best used sparingly and appropriately" (A 227-228). Teachers of fourth through eighth grade believe that play is an instructional approach that is only suitable within certain contexts and under specific conditions, and should be used under the wise direction of a skilled classroom teacher. Most importantly, Junior and Intermediate teachers conceive that traditional classroom instruction must always be preserved: "I think we are a pretty […] pro-play school. But again, there is a fine balance" (G 323-324).

Educators of the higher elementary grades fear that the use of too much play, to the detriment of more traditional approaches, will subtract from the development of students' essential academic competencies. One participant confesses, "I think the problem is we then worry about all this play. […] I think sometimes our fear is—is doing all this setting them up for high school?" (K 106-107). Not only do fourth through eighth grade teachers feel accountable for curricular achievement during the current school year, they are concerned with preparing their students for future educational endeavors that are assumed to not include play but rather require students' familiarity with traditional didactic approaches. The concern with maintaining instructional tradition fueled by the underlying pressure to prepare students for future schooling is a barrier to play's use in the classroom that is unique to the accountability anxieties of upper elementary grade teachers, replacing other fears felt by Primary teachers.

Similar to their concerns with maintaining instructional tradition, Junior and Intermediate teachers' felt that play's incompatibility with customary evaluation methods is another barrier to comfortably using play in fourth through eighth grade classrooms. One participant confesses, "that's what I find is one of the hardest parts of it, is assessment, because it's not just paper/pencil anymore and I'm not just marking tests" (J. 209-110). Upper elementary teachers believe that play requires a more subjective assessment processes that demands a shift in their thinking: "It's not as clear cut as marking a test or an assignment, and I think it would require a lot of focus and attention" (D 432-433). Uncomfortable with an open and abstract form of

assessment, participants suggest that having a concrete and systemized process of how to evaluate play activities would increase their willingness to use play in the classroom.

Fourth through eighth grade teachers' recognize that the assessment of play, even if systematized, cannot be exactly like that of other more traditional instructional approaches. One participant explains, "it's not like 'you get an eighty-three percent on this' or 'you get an A plus'. [It's] kind of like a checkmark – 'you get this concept' or 'no, you don't and I need to approach it in a different way'" (C 348-350). Upper elementary grade educators name teacher observation and student self-reflection as the most suitable assessment approaches to pair with play. In this way, Junior and Intermediate educators' view the assessment of play to lend itself to a formative, rather than a summative, form that serves to advise current and future learning experiences (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Despite recognizing opportunities for formative assessment of play, educators' of grades four through eight suggest that traditional summative evaluation must still be conducted outside of the play as a way to concretely measure the learning of formal curricular content:

> [Assessment is] a balance. So for Science, I'm going to have a bit of play – I'm going to have interactive observations – and then I'm going to have a formal evaluation as well. I'm going to have tests, quizzes and other written projects. So I'm going to have a blend of things (G 448-451).

All Junior and Intermediate teachers emphasize the importance of exercising a combination of evaluative approaches in the classroom, some that can be achieved through play and some that cannot. Although upper elementary grade teachers believe

that play can be used to assess the development of curricular knowledge, they feel that summative evaluation is needed to verify curricular achievements; moreover, fourth through eighth grade educators consider it to be essential that students are versed in the form of traditional summative assessment measures of learning in order to find success in standardized testing and secondary grade schooling. One teacher suggests, "what I would use play for learning is for confidence in the subject area, not the actual performance [of knowledge production]" (G 467-468). In the minds of Junior and Intermediate educators, a familiarity with traditional assessment structures, just like customary instructional approaches, is directly connected with students' achievements in future educational endeavors.

In what has become known as the "age of accountability" in education, much research has found that standardized testing influences the narrowing of curriculum and instruction in elementary schooling (Franklin & Snow-Gerono, 2007). Specifically, Wohlwend (2009) found that high-stakes testing pressures affect the instructional decisions of early childhood teachers, having a negative impact on the presence of play-based learning within the classroom. Although the perceptions of Junior and Intermediate teachers in the current study aligns with commonly experienced testing pressures, upper grade elementary educators find the format, not necessarily the content, of standardized assessment to be the key impediment in the use of play in their instruction. Even if not currently teaching in a testing year, Junior and Intermediate teachers' concerns with preparing students for more standardized

testing environments, whether they be government-imposed assessment or future classroom evaluation, disturbs their comfortableness with classroom play.

With the matrix of accountability looming over them, teachers of fourth through eighth grades perceive the existence of play in the classroom as limited by realities of curriculum expectations, conventional learning methods and traditional assessment forms that have been engrained into the educational system. Concerns over student liability cause upper grade elementary educators' to restrict the presence of play in the classroom because of perceptions that play is incompatible with guiding government documents, future educational structures and future evaluative procedures. In relation to these accountability pressures, Junior and Intermediate teachers' believe that students must possess a certain aptitude for play if it is going to exist as a productive part of education at all.

Play's Reliance on Student Self-Regulation

Upper elementary grade educators see that students' experience of freedom, choice and control within a space are fundamental to classroom play while, simultaneously, requiring that play activities successfully facilitate formal learning. Teachers' recognize, however, that play does not naturally and easily meet both of these criteria at the same time; instead, upper grade educators strongly believe that classroom players must possess certain skills and be in a certain state of mind in order for play to properly actualize within their classrooms. Fourth through eighth grade teachers insist that students must exhibit a high degree of self-regulation for a task to

be considered appropriate classroom play, a characteristic that the educators consider to be generally underdeveloped in their Junior and Intermediate pupils.

Teachers of the Junior and Intermediate divisions view play as involving a certain kind of "focus" displayed by students that allows for an independent pursuit of curricular content learning. Without this focus, classroom play's essential feature of learning is thought to be lost, causing fourth through eighth grade teachers see an activity as losing its 'play' identity. One participant describes the connection between focus and play, saying, "[w]hen they're less focused and they don't necessarily see the outcome […] the play doesn't become as much about learning so much rather than just kind of moving" (C 250-253). According to Junior and Intermediate educators, players must "[see] what they're learning and understand how to express it" (G 456-457) in order to be involved in legitimate classroom play. As is evident in the words of the participants, the focus to which they refer does not just involve a concentration on the task at hand; instead, the specific type of focus described by fourth through eighth grade educators echoes the qualities of student self-regulation, defined by Zimmerman (2002) to involve learners' self-generated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are oriented towards attaining a goal.

Junior and Intermediate educators see that play decreases at times of the school day during which students are less focused and, therefore, activity is perceived to be more likely to result in breakdowns of focus, or self-regulation. Without students' eye on the purpose, upper elementary grade teachers' see play as dissolving into silliness. Junior and Intermediate teachers describe silliness as a state of play

void of student self-regulation towards a learning goal, and do not allow such activity to transpire within their classrooms: "I mean there's a fine line [between play and silliness]. Sometimes they can get a little silly, but they know that the activity will be pulled away and they won't do it again" (J 223-224). In the earlier years of schooling, classroom play is still seen as legitimate, or purposeful, even without having concretely measurable end goals towards which students self-direct (Bennett et al., 1997); however, upper elementary teachers, not recognizing the values of play beyond curricular learning, insist that the outcome must be formal and explicit.

In alignment with the perceptions of the current study's participants, Bodrova, Germeroth and Leong (2013) state that even early childhood learners' must possess self-regulation skills in order for play to lead to cognitive gains; the researchers draw on Vygotsky's work to explain that players require self-regulation in order to be capable of advancing within their zones of proximal development. Bodrova et al. (2013) also recognize a lack of self-regulation within students that they attributed to students' unfamiliarity with the conditions of play in an educational setting. In a similar way, Junior and Intermediate educators see students' minimal experience learning through play in their educational past as hindering their ability to do so in the upper elementary grades. Fourth through eighth grade teachers' perceive that "[play is] difficult for students because they are used to teacher-directed lessons" (B 167-168) and some get lost without the strong presence of authoritative guidance. One participant recalls that "[during a play activity] some followed and they listened and they gave suggestions while others found it very hard to not just get the answer, to be

able to do it" (D 235-236). With recognition of this dangerous lack of independent learning mediation, Junior and Intermediate teachers' perceive that their role within a classroom play environment is to scaffold players' self-regulation, opening students' eyes to the way in which free process and fixed ends can be bridged.

Facilitating Play by Scaffolding Learning Connections

Junior and Intermediate educators see play's amalgamation of freedom and prescribed learning outcomes as requiring mature self-regulation skills from players; however, fourth through eighth grade teachers also understand that play demands educators regulate their own roles within the classrooms in order to support students' play. The pedagogical changes implemented by the Ontario Ministry of Education over recent years have worked to transform educators' conceptualizations of students' place within instructional ventures, as well as teachers' own positions in relation to learners. As students come into a more self-regulatory role, upper grade elementary teachers view themselves as moving slightly to the periphery to allow for the effects of freedom to transpire in the classroom; nevertheless, Junior and Intermediate educators believe that the developing nature of students' self-efficacy requires teachers to serve as a scaffolding figure by mediating and sharing expected outcomes.

All Junior and Intermediate educators use the term "facilitator" in reference to their renewed place within the classroom under the modern pedagogical shift. As facilitators during classroom play, teachers of fourth through eighth grade view students as determiners of the process and themselves as mediators of the outcome.

One participant describes teachers' role in play as being "[j]ust to ensure that [students] know what the task is and they are focused on that, whatever way they get to it" (B 215-217). Influenced by feelings of accountability, upper grade elementary educators conceive that their essential job during student play is to ensure measurable learning does not give way to aimless enjoyment. One educator describes her position as arbitrator between fun and learning during classroom play, commenting,

> I think it's just to guide the students and to make sure that whatever the learning goal, or the outcome that you want, is happening—that it doesn't just become an experience where they're having fun, but that they're getting the concept (C 234-237).

Teachers' understand the amount of teacher mediation to depend on contextual and situational factors being appropriately adjusted via the educators' discretion: "Playing to learn works—but again, it has to be a little more teacher-directed depending on the environment and equipment you are using" (G 202-204). Overall, educators see their role in play instruction as existing on a malleable continuum that must move in accordance with shifting classroom environments.

Junior and Intermediate teachers' perceptions of their role within classroom play is reflective of a mixed framing instructional technique, which finds a middle ground that denies a fully student-centered, or fully teacher-centered pedagogy (Bernstein in McInnes, et al., 2011) and embraces a balanced degree of control between both parties. The mediating role that upper elementary grade educators describe as being suitable during the play process is similar to the duty Rea et al. (2000) allocates to teachers during serious play approaches, placing them as

"participatory leaders" who serve as available resources for direction while resisting dictating to students. On the other hand, the role of the teacher in earlier educational contexts is often seen as *either* outside of the flow or inside of the flow, exclusively (Hardley, 2002); this conceptualization ignores the middle ground that Junior and Intermediate teachers perceive themselves as adopting, which achieves an insider and outsider status, simultaneously.

By providing a balanced framework of control, fourth through eighth grade educators attempt to offer students enough freedom that discovery and creativity is not inhibited, yet enough structure that students' perceive the presence of rules and specific outcomes. Similarly, Wasserman (1992) describes teachers taking an objective role during middle school serious play pursuits. Junior and Intermediate teachers observe that, in reality, it can be a challenging feat as a teacher to maintain a balance between freedom and purpose in order to allow for play during instruction; however, fourth through eighth grade teachers recognize that a key to achieving this dichotomous experience is to not hide the learning goals but, in fact, make them transparent right from the beginning of instruction.

Teachers see that there is a fine line between classroom play and undesirable classroom behaviour and believe that the presence of clearly expressed goals is the defining ingredient between play and chaos: "Without proper expectations, though, [a task] can just be noise, it can *just* be noise" (G 239-240). In the Junior and Intermediate grades, teachers believe that "[j]ust having [students] go at it to play or get something done is a disaster" (E 166-167). To ensure instruction is always guided

by a clear purpose, teachers describe a process of backwards mapping to be the effective method of lesson planning: "I always start with the curriculum and then look at ways I can bring in play and other things to support that" (C 392-393). Wiggins and McTighe (1998) agree that this backwards design of instruction is the most effective pathway to purposeful and rich learning experiences.

Fourth through eighth grade teachers understand that, once facilitators themselves have a firm grasp on a task's learning goals, they are also responsible for explicitly sharing these expected outcomes with students as scaffolding tools to use during play. One participant illuminates facilitators' imperative role in play by stating, "[d]efinitely we start with a learning goal—so that beginning part—and making it really clear *why* [students] are doing it" (E 49-50). Junior and Intermediate educators believe that knowing the purpose of the task does not limit students' perceived freedom; in fact, teachers see that setting expectations increases players confidence and ownership in the task and heightens their self-regulation of the learning at hand. Another participant warns that, "without expectations, first of all [a task] is not purposeful and, secondly, that could actually hinder some children to fully participate because a lot of times they want to know what the expectations are because then they feel safe [playing]" (G 220-223). Specifically, students' understanding of expectations is perceived by the current study's participants as assisting in the development of self-regulated learning by allowing students to feel comfortable in independently taking risks, a skill upper elementary grade students are commonly seen to lack in educational settings. In this way, upper elementary grade

educators believe students' comprehension of a task's expectations to be indispensable to students' capability to play within the fourth through eighth grade classroom.

Junior and intermediate teachers' attribute their ideas about explicit communication of curricular goals as allowing for self-regulation during play to the Ontario Ministry of Education initiative called "Success Criteria" that allows students to "know exactly what they're striving for—what the goal is" (G 231-232). The *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) document describes Success Criteria to be the result of the collaborative construction of a task's curricular outcomes, created equally by teacher and students. By granting learners knowledge of what "successful attainment of the learning goals looks like" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.33), students are empowered to autonomously monitor pathways to outcome attainment. By sharing the Success Criteria, Junior and Intermediate teachers see the pleasurable balance between freedom and purpose as well as teacher and student direction, which in turn offers a highly suitable opening for legitimate classroom play to form.

Although upper elementary grade educators understand their newly acquired roles as facilitators and learning goal sharers to be highly supportive of play experiences within the classroom, they report that the pulls of accountability still highly influence their actions during instruction. Junior and Intermediate teachers comment that the pressure to always maintain purpose is stronger than the desire to maintain play. Participants of the current study admit that sometimes, when they

perceive students' self-regulation aptitudes to be failing, they realize that excessive structure has been asserted and the result is the demolishment of the activity as a play task. As these confessions illuminate, fourth through eighth grade teachers recognize a disconnect between *knowing* what they need to do in order to create the conditions for play within their classrooms and actually *doing* it, suggesting that there may exist a great discrepancy between front-line teachers' intentions and actions in implementing learning through play in the classroom (Cheng, 2001), as has been discovered in research on early childhood educators. Junior and Intermediate teachers conceive that a certain type of professional development, framed by concrete rather than abstract conceptualizations, may assist in mending the disconnect between intent and action.

Seeing is Believing: The Professional Development of Play

When introspecting about their own learning styles, Junior and Intermediate educators perceive themselves to be concrete creatures who respond best to practical applications over abstract theory. Particularly, teachers of the upper elementary grades label themselves as predominately visual learners: "You can give us all the wordings that you want, but like anything, I think most of us tend to be able to recognize and understand things a little bit more visually. Show me!" (B 424-427). The current study's participants claim that, "being able to see [play] and how it works [in the classroom]" (C 339) is an essential experience in catalyzing the enactment of play activities within their lessons. Junior and Intermediate teachers indicate that

they want to "see it works" (F 258) before comfortably and routinely enacting play in their daily pedagogies. In recognition that first-hand observation is not always possible, upper elementary grade educators also believe detailed written exemplars of play are necessary professional development tools that will catalyze their implementation of play; moreover, direct connections to curricular documents were often suggested by participants as mandatory so as play's place and function could be clearly recognized. Fourth through eighth grade educators' understanding of effective professional development as being real and contextualized aligns with researchers' conclusions that "concrete and familiar examples from one's own experience carry more weight in judgment and decision-making than does abstract information" (Nisbett & Ross as cited in Spillane et al., 2002). In this way, Junior and Intermediate teachers' perceive that they need to see play in action before they execute it in their classroom so as to ensure that they are doing it "right."

Similarly, Junior and Intermediate teachers believe that collaborating with fellow educators to discuss, observe, plan, and reflect on instructional practices is a professional development pathway that could also increase the comfortable use of play within the classroom. This educational practice of teacher partnerships is a common foundation of school cultures in recent years that has been used to support the implementation of other new pedagogical initiatives. As Spillane et al. (2002) confirm, teachers who socially enact policy by frequently deliberating with fellow educators undertook more fundamental changes in their instructional practices than those teachers who took an individualistic approach. Junior and Intermediate teachers

conceive that working collaboratively assists in a deeper and more meaningful understanding of policy. Overall, fourth through eighth grade educators are clear in their beliefs that a concrete and social approach to implementation is the most effective pathway to successful enactment of a play policy, allowing them to *see* how an abstract intention can fit within their own realities.

Like the discussed views on implementation, all of the perceptions of play delineated thematically above represent the shared realities of Junior and Intermediate teachers as a collective. As it is impossible to include all the details of each participant's unique beliefs and views, the selected themes are those determined to represent the shared "truths" of fourth through eighth grade teachers' constructed realities (Patton, 2002). Demographic and character features, such as age, experience, and background, did not substantially differentiate participants' perspectives on play and, in fact, remain unimportant due to the current study's purpose being to inform a single future policy serving upper grade elementary teachers in Ontario as a unified group.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

An investigation into the cognitive realities of twelve Junior and Intermediate Ontario teachers reveals a unique perception of play that both complements and extends preexisting research. In overview, upper grade elementary teacher's perceptions of play feature: a recognition of play's pragmatic stigmatization; a need to disguise play using institutionally appropriate labels; an external indication of play as engagement; an understanding of inclusiveness as play's valuable asset; an amalgamation of freedom and purpose in play's definition; pressures of accountability as barriers to play; students' role in play as self-regulating learners; teachers' role in play as scaffolding agents; and, successful implementation tools of play policy as concrete. Valuable in its discovery of teachers' play conceptualization within an educational context outside early years and Primary grades, the current study's findings illuminate the particular pre-existing cognitive conditions onto which a future fourth through eighth grade play policy will be placed.

The importance of these upper elementary grade teachers' perceptions of play to Ontario policy makers is illuminated by Spillane et al.'s (2002) theory of educational policy implementation. According to Spillane et al. (2002), policy messages are not static ideas that are transmitted into teachers' minds and classrooms unaltered; instead, "implementing agents construct the meaning of a policy message

and their own behavior, and how this process leads or does not lead to […] changes in both understanding and behavior" (p. 392). This thinking suggests that the current study's findings are valuable in their ability to inform the production of policy documents and implementation processes, increasing chances that intended educational change is achieved. The following recommendations recognize that educational reform is not only a matter of shifting front-line educators' beliefs to fit policy objectives, but that it is also imperative that policy makers offer documentation and implementation that complement policy receivers' existing realities so as to decrease the conceptual and practical barriers to policy success; as a result, Junior and Intermediate educators' shared cognitive understandings, revealed through the current study on play, directly inform the implications for policy makers outlined below.

Implications for Policy Makers

Introduce a Definition of Playfulness

The socio-cultural environment by which Junior and Intermediate educators' cognitive framework are influenced has placed on the term play a stigmatic meaning restricting it from being comfortably placed within educational contexts beyond the Primary grades. Play in a new Junior and Intermediate policy must take on an alternative meaning that separates it from its identification with young children in order for it to comfortably enter the dialogue of upper elementary grade divisions as a legitimate instructional approach. While in younger elementary grades play and

learning are two related but separate things, a policy for Junior and Intermediate classrooms must see playfulness as learning itself. Moyles (2010) suggests that conceiving play as an internal attitude of minds, referred to as playfulness, is the most helpful way of "thinking about this elusive concept and providing a theoretical basis for implementing a play-based curriculum" (p. 34). Introducing a refined label that gives Junior and Intermediate divisions their own name and definition for classroom play should serve to calm anxieties surrounding play's perceived ambiguity.

Playfulness, as the term to denote a new facet of pedagogy that enhances learning for students beyond age eight, should have similarities in definition to Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) flow experience. Drawing on features which upper grade elementary teachers already use to distinguish an activity as play, playfulness should be described as a learning flow during which students gain access to internal pleasures fostered by engagement in an activity that is governed by freely accepted, uncontradictory external structure within which the player feels a balance between the task's challenge and his or her own mastery (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Policy makers should also utilize the pre-established pedagogical methods with which Junior and Intermediate educators are already familiar, such as manipulative use and role-play, as the foundations from which to build a concrete understanding of playfulness in instruction methods. Playfulness should not be connected to an exclusive list of activities or task characteristics but, instead, should be recognized as a student experience that can appear within an infinite number of learning approaches. Although it is essential that a policy document on Junior and Intermediate play

differentiate the pedagogical approach from that of child's play, it is also important to create this new idea of play in alignment with upper elementary grade teachers' current perceptions since new knowledge is processed through preexisting frames and radical transformation of cognition is unlikely (Spillane et al., 2002). Using familiar ideas about play but rearranging them in a new light should be the approach taken in naming and defining the foundational concept within a new Junior and Intermediate play policy.

Shift Focus to Students' Experiences of Playfulness

Even though attempting to maintain similarities to preexisting notions of play is important, the use of a definition of playfulness in a new policy requires a slight alteration in upper elementary teachers' cognitive frameworks surrounding beliefs about students' conceptualizations of play. While Junior and Intermediate educators currently see pupils as incapable of recognizing play as existing in an academic learning context, playfulness' focus towards the internal feelings of the players requires that the instructional method of play become an openly discussed topic in fourth through eighth grade classrooms. In order to effectively exploit playfulness in instruction, upper grade elementary teachers must truly understand the way in which playful affect is cultivated within students, from students' own perspectives (Howard et al., 2002). Instead of relying solely on their own external observations to recognize playfulness, a Junior and Intermediate play policy should require that teachers' have open dialogue with their students about playfulness and the experience of it within the classroom. To open the minds of fourth through eighth grade teachers to the idea that

students can see playfulness as existing within the walls of the classroom, first-hands student accounts must be used to disrupt teachers' current cognitive frame and make room for a new view of students' true conceptualizations of play (Spillane et al., 2002).

Having classroom educators talk to students about playfulness not only informs Junior and Intermediate teachers' best practices, it also works to increase pupils' comfort with achieving playfulness in educational contexts. When students feel that they can be playful within an environment, playfulness is likely to occur more often and more authentically. In order to be the best players they can be, students must be able to see playfulness as legitimate in the context of education and purposeful learning (Bennett et al., 1997). In this way, open dialogue between Junior and Intermediate teachers and students about playfulness realigns both populations' cognitive realities to make more room for effective and powerful playful experiences within the classroom.

Use Methods of Serious Play

While play in the early years and Primary contexts fits with a policy that sets its focus on "spontaneous, feely chosen, satisfying and self-directed [action]" (Eden & Millar Grant, 2011), the unique conditions of Junior and Intermediate educational environments requires a policy that dilutes the fixation on freedom and, instead, opens up playfulness as also allowing for the presence of structure. Informed by the current study's findings that upper elementary grade teachers in Ontario only consider play in the classroom as legitimate only when play is used for working towards a

clear academic purpose, the methods surrounding the use of playfulness in instruction must correspondingly maintain the importance of outcome in order to be successfully adopted into the cognitive framework of these educators. The instructional methods of "serious play" (Mann, 1996; Rea, Millican & Watson, 2000; Wasserman, 1992) that have been developed by a group of academic researchers over the past couple of decades should be used as a basis from which policy makers can present the concrete approaches to playfulness within fourth through eighth grade. Like the requirements Junior and Intermediate teachers have for the use of play in their classrooms, serious play methods aim to offer students enough freedom that discovery and creativity is not inhibited, yet enough structure that students' perceive a presence of rules and specific outcome (Wasserman, 1992).

Denying the popular definition of play as the antithesis of work, a feature that greatly contributes to hesitations and anxieties surrounding play in the upper elementary years, the approach of serious play places educational instruction on a continuum between foolish fun and vapid drudgery, suggesting that Junior and Intermediate pedagogy locate itself centrally. According to Rea et al. (2000), playfulness is cultivated by a flexible combination of spontaneous and purposeful action within the learning process; moreover, serious play requires a more social learning environment and a cross-curricular form of instruction that meets the unique needs of fourth through eighth grade students. Not restricted to any set of activities or tasks, the instructional approach can take on a numerous forms limited only by the creativity of the teacher. Fittingly, serious play neatly aligns with many of the

pedagogical philosophies that have been at the forefront of recent Ontario Ministry of Education initiatives, including holistic development, formative assessment, constructivist discovery, and critical inquiry. Since implementing agents are likely to make connections with their prior experiences when encountering new ideas about their work through policy (Spillane et al., 2002), it is useful to present methods of enacting playfulness that will not be contradictory to what upper grade elementary teachers already know. Familiar with the possibilities of these new instructional ideologies, a Junior and Intermediate play policy must forge the connection between such pedagogy and its ability to conjure playfulness through serious play.

Pair Playfulness with Success Criteria

To support teachers' comfortable enactment with playfulness as an instructional method, a Junior and Intermediate play policy must couple concrete strategies with playfulness. While play is often spoken about as self-*directed* venture in early years and Primary contexts, an upper elementary grade policy must differentiate playfulness as a process that is not entirely free of explicit expectations, and must position it as a self-*regulated* learning endeavor instead. Due to the Ontario Ministry of Education's introduction of the new assessment document *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), fourth through eighth grade teachers have already made room in their cognitive frame for the concept of catalyzing self-regulated learning through the use of Success Criteria. As a result, policy makers must draw on implementers' prior knowledge to develop connections with new practices of self-regulation in playfulness. Since teachers' notice and attend to

familiar ideas in policy over and above the unfamiliar (Spillane et al., 2002), a new play policy should utilize Success Criteria to concretely illustrate the way in which a free yet purposeful playfulness can be offered through activities and tasks; in turn, Junior and Intermediate teachers will have a recognizable tool that can provide the comfort needed to deeply enact the policy within their classrooms.

Maintain and Expand the Value of Playfulness

Ontario educators of fourth through eighth grades perceive play in the classroom to be valuable in its ability to create an inclusive instructional environment, offering differentiated pathways to learning for students. The significance placed on play's value to students' cognitive development in the current minds of Junior and Intermediate teachers requires that a play policy recognize curricular learning as the primary worth of playfulness, as well. Policy makers should concretely reinforce this cognitive value by offering exemplars that explicitly connect curriculum expectations to detailed accounts of playfulness in the classroom. For example, a contextualized story outlining the way in which physical movement as play successfully achieves a fourth grade Social Studies expectation or role-play deepens seventh grade students' conceptualization of a concept within the Science curriculum, will offer upper elementary grade teachers explicit testimony that cognitive learning and play do have a strong connection. Since Junior and Intermediate educators' view curricular learning as the cornerstone of instructional legitimacy, playfulness must be primarily valued in policy as being a successful pathway to specific outcomes so as to maintain

the positive self-image (Spillane et al., 2002) of the teachers who implement it and, correspondingly, enhance the likelihood of policy success.

While conserving the value of cognitive development, policy makers should also illustrate how the benefits of playfulness to Junior and Intermediate students extend into the realms of social, emotional and physical improvements, as well. Ensuring upper elementary grade educators understand that what they were doing before was not wrong (Spillane et al., 2002), the policy should work to open up their cognitive frame to accept that, alongside cognitive learning, playfulness' worth is also recognizable in other facets of student development. Revealing relevant and powerful research on the dynamic value of play for Junior and Intermediate learners, much like is outlined in the current study's literature review, can serve to illuminate the multiple ways in which playfulness can be legitimized in the fourth through eighth grade classroom.

In using the current study's findings and Spillane et al.'s (2002) theories of educational policy implementation to consider the best approaches to a Junior and Intermediate play policy, it is suggested that policy makers use a definition of playfulness, shift the focus to students' experience, use serious play techniques, provide Success Criteria as a supporting tool, and confirm the cognitive value of play while also expanding its worth into other domains. In structuring a new fourth through eighth grade play policy around these suggestions, and other carefully considered choices, it is thought that successful and accurate understanding, acceptance and enactment of the policy will be possible. While the current study

strives to beam a slice of light onto the future policy, more research is needed to substantially support the prospective educational initiative.

Recommendations for Future Research

Bringing a policy on play into the Junior and Intermediate divisions of Ontario education is a progressive plan that has yet to find much attention. Research on all features of play and implementation for this unique age group and educational context would be beneficial. Specifically, a more expansive examination into fourth through eighth grade Ontario educators' perspectives is required to support and extend the current findings; moreover, the current study raises a number of areas in which further investigation would be beneficial and influential to a future play initiative.

Firstly, research into eight to thirteen year old players' definitions of their own play experiences is needed in order to understand how playfulness can most effectively be cultivated and understood in the upper elementary grades. First-hand perspectives gained through one-on-one interviews can shed light onto students' conceptualizations of play within educational contexts and be shared with educators and policy makers to inform successful educational change. Most research into play and education, across all age groups, involves observation of players rather than dialogue with them. The topic of play must be broached in open dialogue with Junior and Intermediate players in order to give students' a voice within academic research and the classroom.

Secondly, research involving classroom observation is needed to complement the additional inquiries into fourth through eighth grade teachers' perceptions of play. As is foreshadowed by investigations in educational contexts involving younger students, it is possible that Junior and Intermediate educators' expressed understandings and beliefs are not reflected in their enacted pedagogies. In order to discover if and why this discrepancy does or does not exist in Junior and Intermediate environments as well, exploration of teachers' perceptions as well as the corresponding instructional realities of their classrooms is required.

Finally, play and its connection to assessment is a highly uncharted territory in which research must be conducted in order to support a play policy meant for older students. Although academic inquiry into formative assessment and its uses has grown over the past decade, the connection of this method to play is a topic that has not seen much attention; furthermore, how formative assessment connects to students' achievements in traditional and standardized evaluations also requires research so as to ease the accountability anxieties that upper elementary grade teachers' currently experience. Along with formative assessment procedures, the world of educational research is in need of results that show a connection between the use of Success Criteria and self-regulation, specifically during instructional methods of playfulness.

As research into play in Junior and Intermediate educational contexts expands and deepens, more information to inform and support a prospective policy on fourth through eighth grade play will increase the chances of successful instructional

change. Researchers must always keep in mind the unique nature of upper elementary grade teachers and students, and resists the placement of younger year's play norms onto analysis of older grades. If supported by future research and careful considerations by policy makers, the current study's findings suggest that an innovative play policy can find its intended place within the enacted pedagogies of Junior and Intermediate teachers in Ontario.

References

Ares, N., & Gorrell, J. (2002). Middle school students' understanding of meaningful learning and engaging classroom activities. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 16*(2), 263-277.

Beane, J., & Brodhagen, B. (2001). Teaching in middle schools. In V. Henderson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (pp. 1157-1174). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Beamon, G. W. (2001). *Teaching with adolescent learning in mind.* Glenview, IL: Skylight Professional Development.

Bennett, N., Wood, L., & Rogers, S. (1997). *Teaching through play: Teachers' thinking and classroom practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bergen, D., & Davis, D. (2011). Influences of technology-related playful activity and thought on moral development. *American Journal of Play, 4*(1), 80-99.

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education, 5*(1), 7-71.

Bordrova, E., Germeroth, C., & Leong, D. J. (2013). Play and self-regulation: Lessons from Vygotsky. *American Journal of Play, 6*(1), 111-123.

Brown, D. F., & Canniff, M. (2007). Designing curricular experiences that promote young adolescent cognitive growth. *Middle School Journal, 39*(1), 16-23.

Brown, S.L. (2009). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul.* New York: Penguin Group.

Bruner, J., Jolly, A., & Sylva, K. (Eds.) (1976). *Play: Its role in development and evolution*. New York: Penguin Books.

Caldwell, L. L., & Witt, P. A. (2011). Leisure, recreation and play from a developmental context. *New Directions for Youth Development, 130*, 13-27.

Carlson, T. B. (1995). We hate gym: Student alienation from physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 14*(4), 467-477.

Caplan, F., & Caplan, T. (1973). *The power of play*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday.

Caswell, R. (2005). The value of play to enhance mathematical learning in the middle years of schooling. In P. Clarkson, A. Downton, D. Gronn, M. Horne, A. McDonough, R. Pierce, & A. Roche (Eds.)., *Conference Proceedings of the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australia* (pp. 217-224). Melbourne, Australia.

Chaille, C., & Britain, L. (2003). *The young child as a scientist: A constructionist approach to early childhood science education.* New York: Allyn & Bacon.

Chaille, C., & Tian, X. (2005). Science and outdoor play in the elementary grades. In K. G. Burriss & B. F. Boyd (Eds.), *Outdoor learning and play ages 8-12* (pp. 95-100). Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.

Cheng, D. P. (2001). Difficulties of Hong Kong teachers' understanding and implementation of 'play' in the curriculum. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*, 857-869.

Clark, C. M., & Peterson, P. L. (1986). Teachers' thought processes. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 255-296). New York: Macmillan.

Corbitt, C., & Carpenter, M. (2006). The nervous system game. *Science and Children, 43*(6), 26-29.

Comber, B., & Nixon, H. (2009). Teachers work and pedagogy in an era of accountability. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 30*(3), 333-345.

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and reserch design: Choosing amoung five traditions* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cruz, B. C., & Murthy, S. A. (2006). Breathing life into history: Using role-playing to engage students. *Social Studies and the Young Learner, 19*(1), 4-8.

Csikszentmhalyi, M. (1975). Play and intrinsic rewards. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 15*(3), 41-63.

Curran, J. (2005). Arts and the out-of-doors. In K. G. Burriss & B. F. Boyd (Eds.). *Outdoor learning and play ages 8-12* (pp. 109-112). Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.

Davies, N. (2010). Player-centered coaching: Enhancing player game sense. *A Journal for Psychical and Sport Educators, 24*(2), 24-28.

Dewey, J. (1900). *The school and society.* Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Dyer, C. (1999). Researching the implementation of educational policy: A backwards mapping approach. *Comparative Education, 35*(1), 45-61.

Erlandson, C., & McVitters, J. (2001). Students' voices in integrative curriculum. *Middle School Journal, 33*(2), 2-36.

Eden, S., & Millar Grant, J. (2011). *Primarily play: Engaging primary learners through play.* Toronto, ON: Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO).

Elkind, D. (2007). *The power of play: Learning what comes naturally.* Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press.

Ellis, M.J. (1973). *Why do people play?* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Emert, T. (2010). Talking to, talking about, talking with: Language arts students in conversation with poetic text. *English Journal, 99*(5), 67-73.

Fagen, R. N. (2011) Play and development. In A. D. Pellegrini (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the development of play* (pp. 83-100). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Fein, G., Rubin, K.H., & Vandenberg, B. (1983). Play. In E.M. Hetherington (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Socialization, personality and social development* (4th Ed., pp. 693-774). *New* York: Wiley.

Foster, J. M. (2010). *Teacher perceptions on the use of gaming with special education students.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 3404341).

Franklin, C. A., & Snow-Gerono, J. L. (2007). Perceptions of teaching in an environment of standardized testing: Voices from the field. *The Researcher, 21*(1), 2-12.

Fredrick, B. L., & Joiner, T. (2002). Positive emotions trigger upward spiral toward emotional well-being. *Psychological Science, 13*(2), 172-175.

Fromberg, D. P., & Bergen, D. (2006). *Play from birth to twelve: Contexts, perspectives and meanings.* New York: Routledge.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frame of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Gasson, S. (2004). Rigor in grounded theory research: An interpretive perspective on generating theory from qualitative field studies. In M. Whitman & A. Woszccynski (Eds.) *The handbook of information systems research* (pp. 79-102). Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing.

Gee, J. P. (2005). Learning by design: Good video games as learning machines. *E-Learning, 2*(1), 5-16.

Giedd, J., Blumenthal, J., Jeffries, N., Castllanos, F., Liu, H., Zikdenbos, et al. (1999). Brain development during childhood and adolescence: A longitudinal MRI study. *Natural Neuroscience, 2*, 861-863.

Hagenauer, G., & Hascher, T. (2010). Learning enjoyment in early adolescence. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 16*(6), 495-516.

Haney, M., & Bissonnette, V. (2011). Teachers' perceptions about the use of play to facilitate development and teacher prosocial skills. *Creative Education, 2*(1), 41-46.

Hardley, E. (2002). Playful disruptions. *Early years: Journal of International Research and Development, 22*(1), 9-17.

Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in a postmodern age.* Toronto: OISE Press.

Haviland, J. M., & Kahlbaugh, P. (1993). Emotion and identity. In M. Lewis & J. M. Haviland (Eds.), *Handbook of Emotions* (pp. 327-340). New York: The Guildford Press.

Hesse-Biber, S. N. & Leavy, P. (2006). *The practice of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hill, L., Williams, J. H. G., Aucott, L., Milne, J., Thomson, J., Greig, J., Munro, V., & Mon-Hromeh, R., & Roffey, S. (2009). Promoting social and emotional learning with games: "It's fun and we learn things". *Simulation and Gaming, 40*(5), 626-644.

Holton, D. D., Ahmed, A., Williams, H., & Hill, C. (2001). On the importance of mathematical play. *International Journal of Mathematical Education in Science and Technology, 32*(2), 401-415.

Howard, J. (2010). Early years practitioners' perceptions of play: An exploration of theoretical understanding, planning and involvement, confidence and barriers to practice. *Educational and Child Psychology, 27*(4), 78-100.

Howard, J., Bellin, W., & Rees, V. (2002). *Eliciting children's perceptions of play and exploiting playfulness to maximize learning in the early years classroom*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Educational Research Association, University of Exeter (pp. 4-12). Retrieved from www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/0002574.htm.

Hromek, R., & Roffrey, S. (2009). Promoting social and emotional learning with games: "It's fun and we learn things". *Simulation and Gaming, 40*(5), 626-644.

Hsu, H., & Wang, S. (2010). Using gaming literacy to cultivate new literacies. *Simulation and Gaming, 41*(3), 1314-1319.

Isenberg, J. P. (1990). Teachers' thinking and beliefs and classroom practice. *Childhood Education, 66*, 322-327.

Kajan, S.L. (1990). Children's play: The journey from theory to practice. In E.S. Klugman & S. Smilansky (Eds.), *Children's play and learning: Perspectives and policy implications* (pp. 173-187). New York: Teachers College Press.

Keating, I., Fabian, H., Jordan, P., Mavers, D., & Roberts, J. (2000). 'Well, I've not done any work today. I don't know why I came to school': Perceptions of play in the reception class. *Educational Studies, 26*(4), 437-454.

Lancy, D. F., & Grove, M. A. (2011). Marbels and Machiavelli: The role of game play in children's social development. *American Journal of Play, 3*(4), 489-499.

Latta, A. M. (2002). Seeing fragility's presence: The power of aesthetic play in teaching and learning. *Faculty Publication: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education*. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/teachlern

factpub/6.

Larson, R. W. (2011). Adolescents' conscious processes of developing regulation: Learning to appraise challenges. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 133,* 87-97.

Lee, J. S. (2006). Preschool teachers' shared beliefs about appropriate pedagogy for 4-year-olds. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 33*(6), 433-441.

Lillard, A. S. (1993). Pretend play skills and the child's theory of mind. *Child Development, 64*(2), 348-371.

Mainella, F. P., Agate, J. R., & Clark, B. S. (2011). Outdoor-based play and reconnection to nature: A neglected pathway to positive youth development. *New Directions for Youth Development, 130*, 89-104.

Mann, D. (1996).Serious Play. *Teachers College Record, 97*(3), 446-469.

McClelland, M. M., & Cameron, C. E. (2011). Self-regulation and academic achievement in elementary school children. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 133*, 26-44.

McInnes, K., Howard, J., Miles, G., & Crowley, K. (2011). Differences in practitioners' understanding of play and how this influences pedagogy and children's perceptions of play. *Early Years, 31*(2), 121-133.

McKean, B. & Sudol, P. (2002). Drama and language arts: Will drama improve student writing. *Youth Theatre Journal, 16*(1), 28-37.

Mills, J., Bonner, A., & Francis, K. (2006). The development of constructivist grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(1), 1-10.

Mimbs, J. C., Heffington, D., & Herring-Mayo, L. (2005). Geography: Fieldwork and curriculum in the out-of-doors. In K. G. Burriss & B. F. Boyd (Eds.), *Outdoor learning and play ages 8-12* (pp. 113-116). Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.

Moon, K., & Reifel, S. (2008). Play and literacy learning in diverse language pre-kindergarten classroom. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 9*(1), 49-65.

Morgenstern, J. (2009). *Playing with books: A study of the reader as child.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

Moyles, J. (Ed.). (2010). *Thinking about play: Developing a reflective approach*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Motta, R. W., Kuligowski, J. M., Marino, D. M. (2010). The role of exercise in reducing childhood and adolescent PTSD, anxiety, and depression. NASP *Comminique, 38*(6).

Muir, M. (2001). What engages underachieving students? *Middle School Journal, 33*(2), 37-43.

Nachmanovitch, S. (1990). *Freeplay*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2010). *Growing success: Assessment, evaluation, and reporting in Ontario schools grades 1-12* (1st ed.). Retrieved from www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growsuccess.pdf.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2010-11). *The Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program* (Draft version). Retrieved from www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/kindergarten_english_june3.pdf.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2006). *The Ontario curriculum grades 1-8: Language.* Retrieved from www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/language18currb.pdf.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2005). *The Ontario curriculum grades 1-8: Mathematics.* Retrieved from www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/math18curr.pdf.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2007). *The Ontario curriculum grades 1-8: Science and Technology.* Retrieved from www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/scientec18currb.pdf.

Ontario Ministry of Education (2011). *Professional learning opportunities: Kindergarten to grade 8 summer programs.* Retrieved from www.edu.gov.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/SummerPrograms2011.pdf.

Partington, A. (2010). Game literacy, gaming cultures, and media education. *English Teaching Practice and Critique, 9I*(1), 73-86.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Piaget, J. (n.d.). *The moral development of the child.* [M. Gabain, Trans]. Glencoe, Illinois: Retrieved from www.archine.org/details/moraljudgementoft005613mbp.

Pigeon, N. (1996). Grounded theory: Theoretical background. In T. E. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences* (pp. 75-85). Leicester, UK: British Psychological Society.

Pillow, B. H. (2008). Development of children's understanding of cognitive activities. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology, 169*(4), 297-321.

Portman, P. A. (1995). Who is having fun in physical education class? Experiences of sixth-grade students in elementary and middle schools. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 14*(4), 445-453.

Powell, S. D. (2010). *Introduction to middle school* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Power, P. (2011). Playing with ideas. The affective dynamics of creative play. *American Journal of Play, 3*(3), 288-323.

Ranz-Smith, D. J. (2007). Teacher perception of play: In leaving no child behind are teachers leaving childhood behind? *Early Education and Development, 18*(2), 271-303.

Ranz-Smith, D. J. (2012). Explicating the place of play: Resolving dilemmas of research-to-practice. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 33,* 85-101.

Ray, B., & Coulter, G. A. (2010). Perceptions of the value of digital mini-games: Implications for middle school classrooms. *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education, 26*(3), 92-100.

Rea, D., Millican, K. P., & Watson, S. W. (2000). The serious benefits of fun in the classroom. *The Middle School Journal, 31*(4), 23-28.

Rieber, L. P. (1996). Seriously considering play: Designing interactive learning environments based on the blending of microworlds, simulations, and games. *Educational Technology Research & Development, 44(2),* 43-58.

Russ, S. W. (2003). Play and creativity: Developmental issues. *Scandinavian Journal of Education Research, 47*(3), 291-303.

Sherwood, S.A.S., & Reifel, S. (2010). The multiple meanings of play: Exploring preservice teachers' beliefs about a central element of early childhood education. J*ournal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 31*, 322-343.

Smit, B. (2003). Can qualitative research inform policy implementation? Evidence and arguments from a developing country context. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 4*(3), 1-5. Retrieved from www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fgs/article/view/678.

Sontag, M. (2009). A learning theory for 21st-century students. *Innovate, 5*(4). Retrieved from http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=524.

Streubert, H. J., & Carpenter, D. R. (1999). *Qualitative* Smit, B. (2005). Teachers, local knowledge, and policy implementation: A qualitative policy-practice inquiry. *Education & Urban Society*, *37*(3), 292-306.

Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research, 72*(3), 387-431.

Stigma. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster online dictionary* (11th ed.). Retrieved from www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stigma.

Stone, W. M., & Stone, S. J. (2005). Social studies in the outdoors? You've got to be kidding! In K. G. Burriss & B. F. Boyd (Eds.), *Outdoor learning and play ages 8-12* (pp. 101-108). Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.

Sutton Smith, B. (1997). *The ambiguity of play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Swafford, J., & Bryan, J. K. (2000). Instructional strategies for promoting conceptual change: Supporting middle school students. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, *16*(2), 139-161.

Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Uttal, D. H. (2003). On the relation between play and symbolic thought: The case of mathematics manipulatives. In O. Saracho. & B. Spodek (Eds.)., *Contemporary perspectives on play in early childhood education* (pp. 97-114). Scottsdale, AZ: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Van Patten, S. R. (2005). Deserted playgrounds: The importance of recess and outdoor play. In K. G. Burriss & B. F. Boyd (Eds.), *Outdoor learning and play ages 8-12* (pp. 57-61). Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.

Varga, S. (2011). Winnicott, symbolic play, and other minds. *Philosophical Psychology*, *24*(5), 625-637.

Venable, B. B. (2001). Using role-play to teach and learn aesthetics. *Art Education, 54*(1), 47-51.

Vygotsky, L. (1966). Play and it's [sic] role in the mental development of the child. *Voprosy psikhologii, 6.* The Psychology E-book Collection. [C.Mulholland, Trans]. Retrieved from www.all-about-psychology.com/support-files/play-and-its-role-in-the-mental-development-of-the-child.pdf.

Wang, M., & Eccles, J.S. (2013). School context, achievement motivation, and academic engagement: A longitudinal study of school engagement using a multidimensional perspective. *Learning and Instruction, 28,* 12-23.

Wassermann, S. (1992). Serious play in the classroom. *Childhood Education, 68*(3), 133-139.

Wiggins, G. P., & McTight, J. (2005). *Understanding by design.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wiles, J., & Bondi, J. (2001). *The new American middle school: Educating preadolescents in an era of change.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Willis, J. (2007). Cooperative learning is a brain turn-on. *Middle School Journal*, *38*(4), 4-13.

Wilson, K. & Ryan, V. C. (2002). Play therapy with emotionally damaged adolescents. *Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties, 7*(3), 178-192.

Wilson, L. M., & Horch, H. W. (2002). Implications of brain research for teaching young adolescents. *Middle School Journal, 34*(1), 57-61.

Wing, L. A. (1995). Play is not the work of the child: Young children's perceptions of work and play. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 10,* 223-247.

Wohlwend, K. E. (2009). Squeezed, stretched, and stuck: Teachers, play-based learning, and no-nonsese times. In G. M. Boldt, P. M. Salvio, & P. Taubman (Eds.), *Classroom life in the age of accountability* (pp. 8-16). New York: Bank Street College.

Wood, E. & Attfield, J. (2005). *Play, learning and the early childhood curriculum* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Wray-Lake, L., & Syvertsen, A. K. (2011). The developmental roots of social responsibility in childhood and adolescence. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 134,* 11-25.

Xu, Y. (2010). Children's social play sequence: Parten's classic theory revisited. *Early Childhood Development and Care, 180*(4), 489-498.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory into Practice, 41*(2), 64-70.

Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Building academic success through social and emotional learning: What does the research say?* New York: Teachers College Press.

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Research Study: ***Junior & Intermediate Educators' Perceptions of Play***
Researcher: **Jacqueline Kelly**
In partial fulfillment of a **Master's Degree** in Language, Culture & Teaching at **York University**

E-mail: jacqueline_kelly @edu.yorku.ca
Telephone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

*The current research pursues an in-depth exploration of junior and intermediate educators' experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and feelings surrounding the topics of teaching, learning, and play***.**

As a participant in the study, you are asked to meet with the researcher for a **one to two hour directed discussion**, at a place and time of your convenience (outside of school hours). You are also asked to attend a one-hour **follow-up** meeting to clarify and confirm information gathered from the initial discussion.

- You will not be subjected to **serious risk or discomfort** during participation.
- Your participation in the study is **completely voluntary** and you can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.
- Your identity, and the identity of the school at which you teach, will remain **confidential** to the fullest extent possible by law. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your name or school's name will not be used in any report. All data will be destroyed a year after the thesis defense.
- The information that you offer during participation is hoped to **inform future educational developments** in the Ontario Elementary School System. Findings will be presented in the researcher's thesis document and, potentially, in additional academic publications or presentations.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the starts of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about the process or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics: 5th Floor - York Research Tower, York University. Phone: 416-736-5814. E-mail: ore@yorku.ca

I, _____ , consent to participate in the above research study conducted by Jacqueline Kelly in partial fulfillment of a Master's Degree in Language, Culture, and Teaching. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicated my consent.

Signature _____ Date _____
Participant
Signature _____ Date _____
Principle Investigator

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

** The following questions will be used as a template to guide the exploration of each topic heading, and may not be followed word for word. Unnecessary questions will be omitted according to sufficiency of information offered by the interviewee within his/her prior responses. The researcher will act as a reflexive conversational partner, keeping the conversation on track and catalyzing depth, expansion and prominent secondary information from the participant when appropriate.**	
Background & Teaching Philosophy	
	Why did you choose to become a teacher?
	Starting with your pre-service education, tell me about your journey as an educator.
	Finish this sentence: The purpose of school is …
Current Pedagogy	
	If I were to walk into your classroom during a typical lesson, what would I see?
	Talk about the elements you include in your lessons that you believe facilitate student learning.
Conceptions of Play	
	Give me your definition of "play"? (characteristics, activities, etc.).
	What role do you think play holds in learning and development?
	In particular, what do you know about the value of play for junior/intermediate learners?
	What do you think "play" means to your students?
Play & Enacted Instruction	
	Finish this sentence: The role of play within school is …
	If I talk about *playful* learning, what would you envision that to look like?
	Can you recall times in the past that you have used play in your teaching? Why did it work / not work?
	How do/would you feel about incorporating playful learning into your daily instruction?
	What is the role of the teacher in playful learning? What is the role of the student?
	Tell me about the times during your school day when it would be easy to incorporate play. When would it be difficult?
Support & Implementation	
	Tell me about any courses, professional development training, or other information sources you have been exposed to that have informed your knowledge of play.
	If you needed guidance on using play in your instruction, where would you turn?
	How do you think the parents of your students would feel about play in the classroom? What about fellow teachers?

	What are the fears, uncertainties or pressures that might deter you from using play within the classroom? What would encourage you?
Formal Curriculum & Assessment	
	If you were told to make a lesson plan that had to target specific junior/intermediate curricular goals while using play, would that be easy or hard for you? Why/why not?
	What aspects of the curriculum could be enhanced by play? Any that would be hindered?
	How would you feel if play became a required curricular policy that you had to incorporate into daily lessons?
	When using playful learning approaches, what methods or techniques would you use for assessment? (of knowledge/understanding, thinking, communication, application)
	Would playful learning approaches allow for the formative assessment practices required of the new assessment document? Why / why not?
	How would incorporating play into instruction affect student's performance on traditional summative assessment?

*** Demographical information that does not arise within the interview will be obtained afterwards (eg. age, grade(s) currently teaching, number of years in profession, etc.**