

6-30-2021

Impact of Educators' Considerations of Children's Perspectives on Language Development

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Impact of Educators' Considerations of Children's Perspectives on Language Development

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June 19, 2021

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Abstract

Many children are in a group setting for most of the day in early childhood programs with educators developing the programming and schedules (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). Research was analyzed to see if the lack of consideration of the children's interests and perspectives had an impact on language development during early childhood. Evidence showed that learning was enhanced when children were given the opportunity to make decisions and engage in meaningful activities of interest to the children (Breathnach, Danby, & O'Gorman, 2017; Kinkead-Clark, 2017; Pyle & Alaca, 2016). The research demonstrated that planning with the children, understanding the children's funds of knowledge and personal interests were essential aspects for educators to consider when creating an environment conducive for language development for young children (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges et al., 2011).

Keywords: children's perspective, vocabulary development, early childhood, curriculum, developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)

Chapter One: Introduction

Research findings demonstrated that educators in early childhood classrooms needed to juggle many responsibilities when using practices that demonstrated a high-quality education (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). While planning the curriculum and learning strategies for the class, the educator has considered many aspects of education including the environment, the developmental level of the group, and academic standards imposed by the district guidelines. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), sixty percent of children ages three to five are spending full days in childcare settings or home childcare programs because of both parents are employed full time, making the importance of using best practices magnified. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) cautioned against lessening the amount of time children engaged in play as children gained abilities during play that helped promote successful learning (2009). Encouraging children in preschool settings to engage in sustained and high-quality play activities, required the educators to provide an environment conducive to capturing and keeping the attention of the children. The themes or topics used within some early childhood classrooms may be part of a curriculum guide or are chosen by the teaching staff without any consideration given to what the interests of the children may be (Guirguis, 2018). The research has demonstrated that when the decision making in the classroom was done by the adults, and the children had little input considering schedules, types of activities, topics, or locations, the natural learning that takes place through play was limited (Guirguis, 2018).

Another area that educators need to consider when striving to provide a high-quality education for young children is the developmental level of the children. When educators use learning strategies that support the children's individual growth academically, physically,

socially, and emotionally, the children grow at a pace that is optimum for each child. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) described developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) to include the educator having a knowledge of children's individual interests and abilities. DAP refers to providing children with learning experiences that are challenging enough to encourage growth and development without causing the children to become frustrated. Using this information, educators create classroom environments with representation of individual interests. When using DAP, the educator engages children in planning, building on the children's school and home experiences. Through warm relationships, educators take time to have conversations with each child to better understand the individual. The role of choosing the topic is shared between child and teacher (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Research has shown that children not only developed at individual paces, but children needed to be able to relate to what is being taught if learning was to take place. Han, Moore, Vukelich and Buell (2010) claimed that activities needed to be done in meaningful ways for the children to have progression in vocabulary development. Han et al. (2010) stated that children's vocabularies were the beginning of literary skill development. The researchers also suggested adding to the children's vocabularies through storybook readings with additional activities that support the story before and after the readings using interactive reading methods and explanations of new words. The research finding demonstrated that when the story time was relevant and interesting to the children, the learning process was enhanced (Hans et al., 2010).

Copple and Bredekamp (2009) claimed that learning vocabulary could be a part of the classroom activities when conversations took place involving the children and educator. Whorrall and Cabell (2016) made suggestions for increasing vocabulary among children while in a preschool classroom setting, including allowing children lead conversations while having

snacks and during other non-teacher directed activities, with the teacher using open-ended questions to learn more about the interests of the children. Whorrall and Cabell (2016) encouraged educators to use the time when the children are in centers, to start conversations to understand what topics are of interest to the children. Dickinson, Freiberg, and Barnes (2013) found that 80 percent of the conversations were teacher topics when educators engaged the children during center time (as cited in Whorrall and Cabell, 2016). When children have the chance to freely engage in conversations with peers or teachers, the children were willing to engage in activities that promoted vocabulary development (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016).

Conclusion

Traditionally, research concerning early childhood has been conducted from the adult perspective (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). Educators and parents observed and gave the adults' perspectives of the children's development during early childhood. Educators needed to discover the children's perspectives of learning and play during school hours and at home if the children's interests were to be considered (Norling, 2014). Researchers approached learning about early childhood language development through a different lens than the adults surrounding the children, by trying to connect with the children directly to understand how the children felt about learning and play (Hedges & Cooper, 2016; Howe, 2016). Through the insight gained of how the children perceived the learning opportunities, researchers were able to better understand how to increase the language development with the children in the classroom setting (Hedges, 2014). The question that guided the research for this study examines, "In what ways can the early childhood educators' considerations of children's perspectives and interests impact language development?"

Research has shown that using a play-based curriculum that gave children agency in selecting themes of interest, the children have opportunity to explore, problem-solve through conflicts, and to use creativity in meaningful, high-level play (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). When educators use DAP in developing the curriculum (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009), taking into consideration how to make the material relevant and meaningful for the children (Han et al., 2010), educators provide the opportunity for a high-quality educational experience for young children. Educators using teaching strategies that create moments of interaction were taking the opportunity to build vocabulary and enhance the child's literacy development (Whorrall and Cabell, 2016). The future of programming in early childhood classrooms needs to consider the interests and the perspectives of the children involved in the learning experience. In Chapter Two, a review of research conducted with the perspectives of children being the source of information, is presented to support the importance of educator's understanding of children's perspectives and interests when developing curriculum and learning strategies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Hedges and Cooper (2016) stated that research about early childhood education had been conducted from the perspective of adults with little research centered on the children's perspective, and how the consideration of children's interests impacted the children's development. Kinkead-Clark (2017) claimed when the children had the opportunity to choose and make decisions, learning was meaningful and real for the children. The research demonstrated that learning how to gain an understanding of children's perspectives and the importance of how that knowledge effected the development of language skills was crucial for educators who desire to use best practices in early childhood education (Pyle & Alaca, 2016; Colliver & Fleeer, 2016).

Children's View of Play and Learning

To better understand how optimal learning can take place with children during early childhood, multiple researchers studied children using various techniques that involved gaining information from the children directly (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). The research demonstrated that trying to understand what is of importance and relevant to children required learning about the children's interests (Pyle & Alaca, 2016). Through the following reviewed studies, the researchers found that children have a perspective on play and learning activities that may not coincided with the educator's perspective of the same activities. Research indicated that children have perspectives on the value of asserting agency, how play and learning were individualistic, and what determined if the activity was enjoyable and fun to do.

Asserting Agency

When Canada implemented a new program for full-day kindergarten, the curriculum required a balance between play-based exploration and time for teacher-directed activities with

explicit instruction. To get a better understanding of children's perspective on play and learning, Pyle and Alaca (2016) did a qualitative study involving ten kindergarten classrooms with 134 children from ages three to six years in Ontario. After spending ten hours of observation in each classroom focusing on direct literacy instruction in small and large groups and times for play, the researchers used photographs from the classroom observations to interview the children about whether learning or play was occurring during the classroom activities. Two distinct categories emerged from the children's comments showing that children viewed play and learning connected in certain situations and in other areas, the children viewed play and learning as separate activities. After coding the various activities observed on the videos for variations of play and learning, the researchers combined the information from the children's perspectives to the researchers' observations to find commonalities and a greater understanding of how children viewed play and learning. In the five classrooms that had environments rich in different types of play with many resources, the children connected learning with play activities. The other five classrooms of children who did not connect play and learning, had fewer play resources and the play time was a period for children to have free choice with few options and little adult interaction. For the children who connected play and learning, collaborative play was exhibited with the children following strong interests in animals to create a veterinary clinic with the teacher's support by supplying additional objects that encouraged the imaginary play (Pyle & Alaca, 2016). Another teacher helped the children connect literacy skill development with play activities by letting children follow an interest fueled by community activities and design a haunted house within the classroom. The children in the five classrooms where learning and play were connected had opportunities to choose the theme of the play scenarios, and the teacher played the support role of supplying needed materials and encouraging the children into

including writing and vocabulary development through activities within the scenario. Through the teacher's decision to follow the children's interests, learning was interconnected with play (Pyle & Alaca, 2016).

In the classrooms with a disconnect between learning and play, the children viewed writing and reading as activities separate from play time (Pyle & Alaca, 2016). According to the children, literacy skill development took place when the teacher was leading an activity or during free reading time after lunch. The children felt that learning was an activity that teachers chose, and play was a time for the children to choose the activity. Without the opportunity to be involved in the decision during teacher-directed activities, the children did not consider the activity to be play. Pyle and Alaca's (2016) research showed how children's perspectives of learning and play are intertwined when children have agency to topics and themes.

Breathnach, Danby and O'Gorman (2017) also investigated how children in Australia perceived play after Australia changed the curriculum guidelines from a play-based curriculum to a program that excluded children from curriculum construction and lessened the opportunity for the children's agentic participation in classroom decisions. The ethnographic study took place in the first year of primary school in Queensland with twenty-five children who were four and one-half to five and one-half years. The researcher spent the initial visits to the classroom building relationships with the children participating only when invited by the children and gathering data when children communicated with the researcher. The researcher asked the children for guided tours of activity spaces and to share experiences through drawings. Video recordings were also taken of classroom activities and the researcher spent time with the participants asking questions about what was considered play and what was seen as work from the children's perspectives.

Breathnach et al. (2017) found that children perceived work as the activities that were led by the teacher. As Pyle and Alaca (2016) found in the Canadian research, Breathnach et al. (2017) demonstrated that the children considered play was any activity that the children chose and had the opportunity to assert agency. When the children were asked about whether reading and writing were work or play, the children's responses indicated that both activities were work because the teacher directed the learning time. When the children were involved in reading and writing activities during free play time, the activities were no longer considered work but were included as play activities. Having the ability to choose the activity determined whether play or work was occurring (Breathnach et al, 2017). The research demonstrated when teachers gave children agency over activities, the children's perspective of the activity changed and learning or work could be changed into play (Breathnach et al., 2017; Pyle & Alaca, 2016).

Breathnach et al. (2017) stated the children viewed writing negatively when asked about writing in the next level of school. The children were prepared for having no play time and having writing be a part of teacher-directed learning. Taking away the act of allowing children make decisions changed the children's perspective of writing from an activity embedded in play to one that is done as work (Breathnach et al., 2017). The researchers observed children writing daily during the inside play activities and the children were engaged when writing had meaning, and the children chose to participate (Breathnach et al., 2017; Pyle & Alaca, 2016). Breathnach et al. (2017) observed the children had used the skill often to create signage to alert other children of boundaries and to announce the play scene being enacted. These examples were child-led and showed writing as part of play in the children's view. The children did not specify having a teacher present made the activity work, but the children's agentic opportunities dictated whether the activity was play or work. The research demonstrated that planning with children as

an essential part of classroom scheduling when children are to have agentic participation in curriculum development (Breathnach et al., 2017; Pyle & Alaca, 2016).

Individualistic Viewpoint

Colliver and Fleer (2016) stated that each child involved in a play scenario had ascribed a main rule or the meaning to the play. The research demonstrated that understanding the main rule for each child can be useful for the educator when attempting to enter the play scenario to scaffold learning opportunities for the child (Colliver & Fleer, 2016). Colliver and Fleer (2016) researched in urban Australia, children's perspective of learning through play by conducting a qualitative study through the videoing during play activities of 28 children who were between two and five years. Using the videos as prompts, the researchers interviewed the children to get the children's perspective on the learning occurring during the play episodes. The researchers had 772 comments from the children concerning the 683 episodes of play showing that children as young as two years what was learned during the play episodes.

Colliver and Fleer (2016) asserted the tendency for educators was to control play situations to meet curriculum standards. The research demonstrated that play was controlled by children, and adults can enter play episode only when the adults kept true to the main rule (Colliver & Fleer, 2016). When educators learned the main rule for the children, the educator can build on that information to add depth to the learning experience. The choices must remain the children's and the adult needed to adhere to the child developed rules. Vygotsky defined play as a situation developed from rules pertaining to an imaginary scenario (as cited in Colliver and Fleer (2016). Colliver and Fleer (2016) stated learning was the process of participation, rather than acquisition from the perspectives of the children. The research demonstrated understanding that children viewed learning as what happens during play was essential for educators when

planning activities to meet curriculum guidelines (Colliver & Fleer, 2016). The children's perspective of whether the activity was relevant to meet the main rule of play affected the learning aspect of play (Colliver & Fleer, 2016).

Duncan (2015) also found how individualistic children viewed play through a small research project conducted in Scotland with eight children ages four to four and a half years who met with the researcher during home visits. Each child was visited twice for 90 minutes each time with the children spending the time in free play, drawing, and in conversation with the researcher while photographs and video recordings documented the interactions. The qualitative study used social semiotics as the analytic approach to allow the researcher to interpret the children's representations gaining an understanding of the children's view of play. The children's drawings were inspired by what each child considered play and were to show a person playing. Duncan's (2015) results showed each child chose unique themes to describe play, and the common themes of social interaction and amusement were interwoven through all the children's descriptions. The study was a small sample of children, but the results showed how play is defined by each child in a way that is distinctive to that child. For example, one child drew a page of scribbles, wavy lines, and loops demonstrating the experience of playing with Play-Doh. For this child, play was the process of interacting with Play-Doh, and the researcher found through conversation with the child that the experience was spontaneous, much like the drawing and brought about an enjoyable experience. Another child described play by drawing a picture of a father and child drinking mugs of coffee representing time spent with a parent as play time. For this child, the drawing showed that the most important part of play was the social interaction. A third child drew an airplane depicting the family vacation taken to visit a grandparent. Duncan (2015) discussed how the experience of family time represented play for

the child. Colliver and Fleer (2016) showed the individualism of children's play through the children's use of rules while Duncan's (2015) small research project demonstrated how children each have a unique view of what constitutes play through the topic chosen as play events.

Pleasure Driven

Duncan's (2015) research showed that each child had a personal view of what constituted a play activity, and that all the children felt play involved amusement or pleasure. If educators are to understand children's perspectives, educators need to know when the children are having fun. Howe (2016) conducted a study in England of children transitioning from the Foundation Stage (children who are birth to five years) to the Key Stage One (children are ages five to seven). The focus of the curriculum in Key Stage One is content based and does not allow for a play-based curriculum as used in the Foundation Stage. Howe (2016) directed an eight-month study with eleven children through a Mosaic approach using observations and interviews with children, parents, and teachers, using the adults to further explain the data collected directly from the children. To understand the effect of the transition into the next level of schooling, the data was collected from the children at three different times during the school year. The children had a gradual lessening for opportunities for play and child-initiated activities as the year progressed. The children's responses through drawings and interviews showed dissatisfaction with the curriculum changes. Howe's data analysis found four main themes that the children were feeling through the transition, including play is a self-directed activity. Play was not only dependent on being self-directed according to Howe's findings, but children valued having time to pursue individual interests, foster friendships, and to have a time for relaxation without having to follow a teacher's directions. Howe (2016) argued that play is not just a tool to help younger children

learn, but that child-initiated, play-based activities have the potential to help children to learn with increased motivation and perseverance.

Rodriguez-Carrillo, Merida-Serrano, and Gonzalez-Alfaya (2020) researched the quality of effective early childhood teachers from the perspective of the children, and found positive ways that educators influenced children. Rodriguez-Carillo et al. (2020) used a three-month qualitative phenomenological approach in the study, meaning that the researchers listened to and valued the opinions of the children. The 42 children ages four to six years, participating in the study were from Washington D.C., attending schools both in the inner city and the suburbs giving the study access to a diverse population. The results of the study by Rodriguez-Carillo et al. (2020) showed that children believed that the teachers are responsible for ensuring that children are happy while at school. When the children described teachers' behaviors that were positive, the experiences involved the children having fun with the teachers and friends. The children reflected further that having the teachers join as equal partners in play time was a positive attribute of an early childhood teacher. Rodriguez-Carillo et al. (2020) also found that the children wanted the teachers to be aware of the children's feelings and individual preferences. The research showed that the children saw the teacher's responsibility was to oversee the happiness of each child giving value to each child's culture (Rodriguez-Carillo et al., 2020).

Educators' Responses to Children's Perspectives

The research has demonstrated that educators need to know what the children find meaningful and encourage the children to engage in activities that strengthen literacy development (Kinkead-Clark, 2017). Beyond discovering the interests of each child, the research showed that educators have a responsibility to learn each child's fund of knowledge and family

background (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges, 2015; Hedges & Cooper, 2016; Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011). Being able to relate to the children on a personal level increased the opportunities for meaningful conversations for the children giving the educator the chance to scaffold learning experiences with each child. The research also claimed that literacy development increased when the environment was plentiful with rich print materials that were relevant to the children (Gerde, Goetsch, & Bingham, 2016). The educator's actions in response to the knowledge of children's interests determines whether the children receive ample experiences to increase vocabulary development (Lynch, 2011).

Connecting Home to Learning

An educator's understanding of a child's home environment and cultural background was found to be essential for educators who strive to relate to each child by encouraging the child to pursue personal interests (Chesworth, 2016). Takeuchi and Ahn (2019) investigated how children in the United States connected learning experiences at home, school, and in the community through the Families Learning Across Boundaries Project (FamLAB). A survey was given to 1,550 parents of children ages three to twelve years with the sample representing the U.S. in terms of race, geographic region, child age and gender, economic background, and family situation (single parent or dual parents). At approximately the same time as the parent survey, a survey was done of 600 pre-kindergarten through grade eight teachers with care taken to ensure the same geographic and socio-economic representation as the parent survey. The survey questions for both groups focused on identifying the interests of the children and how the adults in the child's life supported those interests. FamLAB was attempting to discover if families, teachers, and the communities offered opportunities for the bridging of learning connected to children's interests.

When speaking to the preschool teachers, FamLAB found that 78 percent of the teachers asked the children about activities done outside of school time, 58 percent read books to the children concerning the children's interests that were not directly connected to school topics, and 35 percent did any of the children's favorite activities with the children. Takeuchi and Ahn (2019) found that the community provided tools for parents and teachers to expand learning beyond the home and school such as libraries, community centers, and information offered on technological devices. The learning continues when the educators take the children's interests and build on that with another activity within the child's interests creating new chances for language development (Takeuchi & Ahn, 2019). The FamLAB report highlighted enrichment gaps due to children's access to extracurricular activities, but the report also showed opportunities were available to children with the variety of supportive staff who are engaged in promoting the children's learning.

As the FamLAB research demonstrated, children develop interests based on daily lived experiences with families, in the community, and because of family cultures. Hedges (2014) studied how funds of knowledge affected development of children's interests by studying children at two early childhood centers in New Zealand for 120 hours over six weeks doing participant observations generating fieldnotes and photographs demonstrating children's interests. Using additional conversations with the verbal children as context, the researcher then focused on one child who was four years named Sophia. Hedges (2014) claimed that knowing Sophia's fund of knowledge was useful to understanding Sophia's actions within the classroom. Sophia was a big sister from a family of Chinese immigrants who had both parents and grandparents living within the same home. The influence of the Chinese culture was seen by the educators and researcher, when Sophia showed strong interest in caring for the younger sibling

and when Sophia insisted on the fact that only the mothers care for the children. Sophia also related information about the grandfather and traditional Chinese cuisine. The researcher observed the educators supporting Sophia's funds of knowledge by cooking items like Sophia shared and expanding conversations with Sophia about experiences connected to family and culture. The researcher suggested to the educators to further the link between home and school for Sophia by inviting a family member to demonstrate activities described by Sophia. The educators were reported by Hedges (2014) to be hesitant to follow the suggestion because the family paid the educators to do the teaching. Research showed that bridging the partnership between home and school in education gave more opportunities to enhance learning and vocabulary development (Hedges, 2014).

Chesworth (2016) also encountered examples of children's funds of knowledge influencing decisions being made by children during classroom activities. Chesworth conducted a research study in England over eight months by filming five key children and play peers ages four to five, and then using the recorded material as conversation starters for interviewing the children, parents, siblings, and teachers to get an understanding of the children's perspectives during play activities. During one play scenario, the key child, Craig, was building a go-kart from wooden blocks and plastic crates that were available in the room. Craig and another child had experience with family of attending go-cart races and working in a garage. When a third child who did not share the funds of knowledge common to Craig and the other child, attempted to join the play, that child had difficulty following the play rules established by shared experiences. Chesworth (2016) reported that the educator did not fully understand the social interactions until the scenario was later explained by Craig and Craig's father. Knowing the children's funds of knowledge is useful for other children when trying to join into play, and for

educators to know how to expand the scenario and enter in with conversations acceptable to the key player.

During another example recorded by Chesworth (2016), two girls were celebrating a birthday at the table with play dough. Chesworth (2016) shared that the educator assumed that the girls were playing with play dough while the one girl's mother claimed that the girl was reconstructing a scene often seen at home with the girl assisting the mother with baking. The mother knew the child's background knowledge and understood the child's actions. When the teacher knows the child well enough to understand what drives a child's play activities, the teacher can take the opportunity to scaffold the scenario to a higher level of learning. Chesworth (2016) felt that the teachers in the study had some understanding of when the children's play reflected parts of home life, but the teachers did not use the information to understand the children's interest or to increase the complexity of play. Chesworth (2016) claimed that funds of knowledge could be used to strengthen curriculum decisions being made with the consideration of children's interests.

Chesworth (2016) showed that the educator's understanding of children's funds of knowledge is valuable tool when planning curriculum, Hedges, Cullen, and Jordan (2011) found that understanding children's funds of knowledge allowed educators to see deeper into children's true interests. During a qualitative study using participant observations in the children's natural settings over one year and interviews with parents and children together in homes, the researchers used ten teachers and 35 children in Auckland, New Zealand to gain a better understanding of how to have projects reflect the interests of the children. Hedges et al. (2011) confirmed that families were the main source of influence on the children's interests. Through daily activities at home such as cooking and entertaining friends, the research showed that the

children were often reconstructing the events at school, and Hedges et al. (2011) reported that often, the teachers did not make the connection of the play activity to a home activity, losing an opportunity for scaffolding language through conversation.

Hedges et al. (2011) also claimed that the parental beliefs on the importance of literacy influenced the vocabulary development of children concerning the funds of knowledge. One parent, as reported by Hedges et al. (2011) would identify birds with the child using adult language treating the boy as a capable learner. The influence on the children was seen beyond just the parents, to include other interests such as grandparents' occupations, leisure activities, and interests. The number of influences on the children's funds of knowledge discovered through the researchers' interviews and observations, highlighted the depth that educators need to go to get a true understanding of the interests of the children. Hedges et al. (2011) claimed that educators can not get a real picture of children's interests through classroom observations alone. Without a complete understanding of a child's funds of knowledge, the teacher did not know how extend conversations because the teacher was unable to make a connection between the child's family or community experiences and the classroom activity (Hedges et al., 2011).

Connecting each child's funds of knowledge to the curriculum can present challenges for educators as seen in the previous research. Hedges and Cooper (2016) researched how teachers could develop the interests of children by using the children's questions during the day to better understand what engages children finding another useful tool for connecting children's interests to curriculum. By using two early childhood centers in New Zealand, Hedges and Cooper conducted a qualitative study using extensive video and audio recordings of classroom activities involving children and teachers, teacher interviews, interviews with families and children, and interviews with four-year-old children near the end of project to add rigor to the data. Through

the study, the funds of knowledge influence on interests were established as an interview with a parent and grandparent explained the behavior of two toddlers who were willing to take risks and attempted to act like older children as seen on family outings. Other children reflected parental occupations through activities reconstructed during the school day such as cooking while playing in the sandbox mimicking the father who was a chef and the children who gravitated to musical activities like family members who were musicians. Beyond the influence of the children's funds of knowledge on determining the children's interests, Hedges and Cooper (2016) found that the questions that children presented showed the deeper interests that motivated behavior within the classroom. The researchers noted that adults need to listen carefully to children and use the information that is leading the children's inquiries to provide a curriculum that provides a way to recognize children's interests and extend the learning in meaningful ways. Hedges and Cooper (2016) stated that interests-based curriculum is way to motivate children and bring positive learning experiences to the classroom.

Making the Literacy Environment Meaningful

Research findings demonstrated that literacy development was enhanced when the educator provided an interest-based curriculum using the children's funds of knowledge and children's inquiries as sources for curriculum development (Hedges & Cooper, 2016; Chesworth, 2016). Educators can further the language development in other ways in the classroom including increasing the number of interactions between child and teacher. Larson, Barrett, and McConnell (2020) used Language Environment Analysis (LENA) technology to record and analyze the number of interactions between adult and child in home and school settings. The quantitative study of 35 children from low-income families in Minnesota found that families interacted with the children significantly more often than the teachers in the nationally accredited center did with

the child during the school day. Larson et al. (2020) stated that high-quality childcare can support language development in young children buffering the possibility of the lack of supportive language development in the home. With the results of the study showing that trained childcare professionals not interacting as often as the parents, teachers can expand on interactions between child and parent creating a positive language environment for the child and showing support for the parent (Larson et al., 2020).

Research found that creating a positive language environment meant looking at language development as not an isolated activity, but an ongoing process that wove through the interactions occurring all day within the preschool classroom (Norling, 2014). Norling (2014) studied how early childhood teachers approached language development in three different cities in Sweden through the method of focus group interviews comprised of two to six educators. The moderator ensured each participant was given opportunity to answer the question and being a group setting, the participants expanded on each other's ideas giving richer answers. Norling (2014) found that the development of language strategies focused on the encouragement to use language, building vocabulary, and understanding the language. The participatory teachers felt that listening to the children to show respect for the children's perspective was important for language development. Being an active listener, creating activities that promote verbal language development, and using open-ended questions were all strategies commonly used within the classroom (Norling, 2014). During play activities, the teachers stayed present and were involved by giving guidance to the children and helping with peer interactions. Giving the children support and encouragement through hugs, eye contact, and tone of voice were also tools that the educators found useful within the classroom. When children would share information about activities or events outside of school, the educators took the opportunity to scaffold the child's

language with the request for more information. For example, getting children to explain television shows that the children find interesting, encouraged language development using the child's perspective as the motivator (Norling, 2014).

Emergent literacy skills are not only limited to verbal language development, but verbal language skills are affected by the learning of the printed word, and early childhood educators have the responsibility to provide an environment rich in print (Lynch, 2011). Lynch (2011) stated that three areas of print were the focus of the five teachers in the Canadian study done with educators of children ages three to four. Through teacher observations, researcher observations, and interviews with the teachers, Lynch (2011) found the educators promoted print literacy through book reading, writing engagement, and print displays within the room. The results varied between the teachers showing how teachers have autonomy on choosing teaching strategies within the classroom.

Lynch (2011) described that during the book reading activities, one teacher expressed how children interacted with each other describing the stories. Children asked the researcher to read books to the class showing that the children had developed an interest in books. Teachers also asked questions during reading times to encourage listening skills and promote cognitive function. Another teacher did not spend quality time reading to the children and many of the books in that classroom were without a plot to capture a child's interest. Children visited the book areas more often when an adult was there (Lynch, 2011). Lynch (2011) reported that the teachers had multiple teaching strategies for writing including practicing letter formation in a teacher-directed format. Another teacher integrated writing into circle time writing words the children used and writing was encouraged when the teachers wrote what the children dictated about pictures drawn by the children. A third teacher emphasized the printed word through work

sheets and practicing printing. Every teacher promoted printed name recognition and teaching the children to print names by self (Lynch 2011). The third area of promoting print literacy observed by Lynch (2011), was the use of print randomly throughout the room. The rooms contained alphabet and number charts, calendars, student birthday charts, and a writing table with supplies for free choice writing opportunities. One teacher labeled the centers within the room including parts of each center such as labels for all the objects in the science area. Another teacher who limited print within the drama area, claimed that play was the time to learn verbal language to not spend time with printed language (Lynch, 2011). Lynch (2011) stated that the study showed that print literacy has a role within the preschool classroom, but the early childhood educators missed opportunities to make the print meaningful for the children. Having materials available for the children that are authentic for learning, including items that may be part of the home life or community such as signage from local restaurants can promote emerging literacy skills in young children (Lynch, 2011). Limited scaffolding was also observed by the researcher, and professional development may prove to be helpful for the educators to understand how to make an environment rich in print material that is meaningful for the children (Lynch, 2011). Lynch (2011) described the need to support preschool teachers in gaining knowledge of early literacy development as an area of early childhood development that needs to be considered essential.

The importance of developing literacy skills in young children has been demonstrated through the studies done by Larson et al. (2020), Lynch (2011), and Norling (2014). Children responded when the learning was meaningful (Lynch, 2011 & Norling, 2014). Kinkead-Clark (2017) found that children valued literacy when the children could use literacy in everyday life. When Kinkead-Clark (2017) qualitatively observed and interviewed six randomly selected four

and five year old children on the Cayman Islands for a year, Kinkead-Clark was searching to understand how children view literacy and what makes literacy have value in a child's perspective. When interviewing the children, Kinkead-Clark (2017) found that being able to connect home and school was important for the children, and literacy made that process possible. The children also valued literacy for the empowering factor of getting to participate in church services and during devotions. Literacy unlocked areas previously not accessible to the children such as when a mother spelled a word to keep the child from understanding, but the child knew the word and saw the value of learning letters and how to read. Kinkead-Clark (2017). The children used personal experiences to relate stories through pictures and text. Using the information of the children's experiences, Kinkead-Clark expanded on the children's interests by finding books to read on the same topics. Kinkead-Clark (2017) observed that the children used significant moments to develop literacy skills like writing a song for a new baby niece as one girl did.

Research findings demonstrated that as the children developed literacy skills and became more confident, the children exhibited a greater value of literacy through a desire to use literacy in many forms (Kinkead-Clark, 2017). Literacy was powerful in the lives of the children giving the children the opportunity to make better connections with others and to gain a greater understanding of the world (Kinkead-Clark, 2017). Kinkead-Clark (2017) observed that the children thought of literacy as learning how to read and write, but the educator took the opportunity to turn literacy development into finding meaning within the world for the children. When the educator made the learning authentic for the children, literacy development was the outcome in the children (Kinkead-Clark, 2017).

Research Limitations

Hedges and Cooper (2017) addressed the limitation that research conducted from an adult perspective only had on learning the children's perspectives. The research studies conducted by Larson, Barrett, and McConnell (2020), Lynch (2011), Norling (2014), and Takeuchi and Ahn, (2019) were done from an adult perspective with no direct contribution from children. The researchers used adults' views of analyzing data collected from observations of children to understand children's perspectives.

Another limitation to the research studies centered on the gathering of information directly from the children. Before the researchers would interact with the children, the researchers would spend time with the children hoping to gain a comfort level for the children to be able to respond openly to interview questions. Each child has different comfort levels and gaining a trusting relationship in a short time could make gathering information about children's perspectives challenging. Breathnach et al. (2017) addressed the ethical component to researching with children keep all information confidential and the children comfortable with the proceedings.

Another limitation to seven of the research studies reviewed was that the studies were conducted by one person. The studies may have had multiple researchers gathering information, but seven of the studies had one person doing the research documentation. Having multiple researchers on a project can lend to greater objectivity. Many of the studies also had a small number of children interviewed or observed. When relationships with the children must be considered could explain the small number of participants. Having little data for comparison reasons can be limiting when attempting to generalize.

Conclusion

The research findings reviewed in Chapter Two demonstrated how children gave value to play and learning when the children were allowed the opportunity to assert agency within the activity (Pyle & Alaca, 2016). The children in the classrooms where teachers and children collaborated to create environments of play, described play as being connected to learning (Pyle & Alaca, 2016). Breathnach et al. (2017) stated that children perceived play to be any activity that included the opportunity to assert agency, while work was all teacher-directed activities, even though both activities involved reading and writing. The research findings concluded that teacher's planning with the children can identify possibilities to support the children's agentic participation within the classroom giving support for consideration of children's perspectives in motivating and engaging the children in activities (Breathnach et al., 2017).

The research in multiple studies supported the concept of children's perspectives towards play activities, included rules designed by the children involved (Colliver & Flear, 2016). Knowing the rules established by the children involved in the play, is essential for adults to validate before entering play with the children (Colliver & Flear, 2016). When attempting to meet curriculum guidelines, Colliver & Flear (2016) stated that the research supported children needed activities to be relevant and within the rules of play for learning to be included. According to Duncan (2015), each child had a personal view of play that expressed the child's interests, supporting the relevancy of the activity for the child. The research also demonstrated that children valued the pleasurable aspect of play, increasing the children's motivation and perseverance in a play-based learning activity (Duncan, 2015; Howe, 2016; Rodriguez-Carrillo et al., 2020).

The research of Tsuchi and Ahn (2019) exhibited the connection of language development with the interests of the child in the classroom, at home, and in the community. When educators used a child's funds of knowledge, the research showed that the learning of literacy skills was enhanced (Hedges, 2014; Chesworth, 2016; Hedges et al., 2011). The research demonstrated that educators could learn of the children's interests through careful attention to the inquiries of the children during daily conversations (Hedges and Cooper, 2016). Hedges and Cooper (2016) stated that interest-based curriculum was a method for motivating children bringing positive learning experiences to the classroom.

The research demonstrated that creating a positive language environment meant looking at language development as a continuous process throughout the day (Norling, 2014). Lynch (2011) stated that educators promoted literacy when the environment included book readings, writing opportunities, and print displays within the classroom that were all done in manner considered meaningful to the children. The research by Kinkead-Clark (2017) demonstrated that meaningful learning took place when the children could use the literacy skills in everyday activities. The children were motivated to learn literacy skills because the skills provided for the children opportunities to engage in activities previously not accessible to the children (Kinkead-Clark, 2017).

Using research methods that connected directly with the children to understand the children's perspectives on learning and play within the school day, the researchers found that children had clear expectations of how play was to involve asserting agency (Breathnach et al., 2017; Pyle & Alaca, 2016), reflect the interests of the children (Colliver & Flear, 2016; Duncan, 2015), and give pleasure to the children involved (Howe, 2016). The research demonstrated that the use of the children's funds of knowledge was a useful tool for developing an interest-based

curriculum to enhance the literacy development of the children (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges, 2014). Hedges and Cooper (2016) stated that developing a curriculum with a foundation in the children's interests was a strong motivator for the children to learn. The research indicated that providing an environment rich in literacy opportunities that the children found meaningful, had a positive effect on language development (Lynch, 2011; Norling, 2014). In Chapter Three, a discussion of the research results, implications for educators, and possibilities for future studies are presented.

Chapter Three: Discussion

Chapter Three explains insights into the effect on language development when educators consider the perspectives of children. Using the information from the previous research, applications are suggested for ways to increase language development by educators using the knowledge gained when children's perspectives are part of the educators' teaching strategy. The possibilities of research related to the topics of children's perspectives and language development are also shared for future consideration.

Insights

Educators have the responsibility to observe children as individuals (Coppole & Bredekamp, 2009). The research has demonstrated that children have unique perspectives about what makes learning in a play-based activity meaningful and interesting (Duncan, 2015; Kinkead-Clark, 2017). Children also viewed learning favorably when given the opportunity to have control of the activity, stating that learning activities were fun when embedded into chosen play experiences (Breathnach, Danby, & O'Gorman, 2017; Pyle & Alaca, 2016). Educators have the responsibility to show respect for children's play through the act of gaining permission to join and by adhering to the children's rules of play (Colliver & Fleer, 2016). Giving the children the opportunity to have control and to be able to follow personal interests, was seen as important to the children when considering learning experiences in a school setting (Breathnach, Danby, & O'Gorman, 2017; Colliver & Fleer, 2016; Pyle & Alaca, 2016). For learning opportunities that encourage language development, educators need to gain a strong understanding of each child in the classroom through the acquisition of the children's funds of knowledge and personal interests (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges, 2015; Hedges & Cooper, 2016; Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011). Educators aware of children's backgrounds and interests can expand on conversations, build

vocabulary, scaffold learning opportunities during play scenarios, and provide learning experiences that are meaningful to the children. The research demonstrated that educators need to do more than observe children during play to discover what is important from the perspective of the children (Norling, 2014). Norling stated that educators needed to listen carefully to children's questions to understand the interests within each child (2014). Another insight gained from studying children's perspectives included the importance of letting children participate in activities considered enjoyable (Howe, 2016; Rodriguez-Carrillo, Merida-Serrano, & Gonzalez-Alfaya, 2020). Language development was increased when children viewed the activities as fun and relevant to life (Kinkead-Clark, 2017).

Applications

Letting the children have a voice in classroom activities shows the children that the educator cares about the children's perspective (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). Children can participate in curriculum planning through class meetings and informal conversations with the teacher about what makes an activity fun and interesting (Kinkead-Clark, 2017). When the children play, the educator can ask the children for suggestions for needed materials giving the children control over the play experience. Relinquishing control of parts of the schedule can also support the children's need for agency (Pyle & Alaca, 2016). Through collaborative decision making between children and teachers, the children's voices are heard, language skills are practiced, and the children gain experience in how to make decisions collectively (Breathnach et al., 2017; Pyle & Alaca, 2016).

The educators' responsibility to understand the children's perspectives extends beyond the classroom to the children's experiences in the home and community (Hedges et al., 2011). The educators need to have an awareness of the children's funds of knowledge, which requires a

relationship with the children's families. Through activities with families such as open houses, career sharing days, or other family involvement opportunities, educators can build relationships with the families, gaining a greater understanding of the children's cultures, family backgrounds, and interests (Hedges, 2014). Having the information about the children will help the educators have a deeper understanding of the children, allowing the educators to expand on the children's interests and scaffold the learning opportunities in ways meaningful to the children (Chesworth, 2016).

When the educators have a clear understanding of the children's perspectives and interests, the educator has the responsibility to provide an environment supporting the children's interests (Howe, 2016). The educators need to be intentional with observations and listening to the conversations of the children (Norling, 2014). Providing props for play begins the process of supporting the children's interests. Being willing to shift the plans to accommodate new ideas of the children is essential when engaging children in learning opportunities that support language development. When the children are involved in fun and interesting play, the children will be willing participants in learning that is taking place through conversations with peers and teachers (Norling, 2014), through the writing activities embedded within the scenario (Lynch, 2011), and through discussions about the play done during group meetings (Kinkead-Clark, 2017). When children have a voice in the classroom agenda, teachers and children will find the language development process enhanced (Kinkead-Clark, 2017).

Future Studies

The research has documented the value of educators' understanding of children's funds of knowledge (Hedges et al., 2011). Studies are needed to further understand the implications of how children's individual funds of knowledge can be supported without excluding other children

during play. Each child enters the classroom with knowledge gained from previous experiences that are unique to the child. When children join in play scenarios, the children use personal knowledge to form the rules of play and when the previous knowledge is not common to all the children, the rules of play may prohibit a child with little knowledge about the play scenario from entering the play. More research is needed to show how educators can show respect to all individuals in the classroom without showing bias towards a few through the support of specific interests.

The importance of the relationship between educators and children became apparent in the study by Rodriguez-Carrillo, Merida-Serrano, and Gonzalez-Alfaya (2020). Gaining a better understanding of how the relationship between the child and educator affects language development in young children would be helpful for additional consideration of the children's perspectives. Studies are needed to understand whether the type of relationship between the child and adult, such as the caregiver being nurturing and affectionate or task-oriented towards the child has an impact on children's language development.

Larson, Barrett, and McConnell (2020) stated that the number of interactions between adult and child influenced language development, which prompted the need for additional research that studies the impact of class size on the language development in young children. While studying research that considered the children's perspectives, the challenge of getting to know each child on an intimate level became clear. Knowing the impact that adult to child ratios can have on the early stages of language development in young children is important to understand, if early childhood educators want to participate in programs supporting best practices for language development.

Conclusion

The educator has more responsibilities to the children in the classroom than meeting the standards set in the curriculum guide. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) stated three core considerations in developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), which included a thorough knowledge of child development, an understanding of children's developmental levels as well as strengths, interests, and preferences, and knowing the social and cultural contexts that the children bring into the classroom from family and community influences (2009). The educator needs to connect the curriculum standards to each child in the class by understanding what the children find interesting and worthy to explore. The research supported the need for educators to understand the children's perspectives within the routines of the classroom days (Chesworth, 2016) and to use the children's funds of knowledge to support language development through play-based activities and conversations (Hedges, 2014). When educators considered children's interests and shared the responsibility for making decisions with the children, the children showed increased perseverance and motivation to learn (Howe, 2016). Kinkead-Clark (2017) demonstrated the importance of connecting learning to the children's lives. In the study when the children found relevance and meaning in the lessons, the children were engaged (Kinkead-Clark, 2017). Being able to scaffold play experiences to higher levels of language development or to extend conversations with children due to the educator's knowledge of the children's backgrounds, interests, and family influences is essential and only possible, when the educator understands the children's perspectives. Montessori claimed that "...the goal of early childhood education should be to activate the child's own natural desire to learn," (as cited in Takeuchi, L., Vaala, S., & Ahn, J. (2019), p.47). The research findings concluded that educators need to take the time to understand what will activate that natural desire

in children through a strong relationship built on learning and respecting the children's perspectives and interests. When that relationship is fostered, partnerships can be formed that lead to positive impacts on the children's language development (Norling, 2014).

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