

Dramatic Play and Social/Emotional Development

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Abstract

Play is often underestimated in its importance in the skills and lessons learned while engaged in play. It is considered a child's activity whose purpose is solely to help children dispose of copious amounts of energy and excitement. Although play is good for such purposes, for preschool age children, play also holds a much greater purpose, more specifically the engagement in dramatic play.

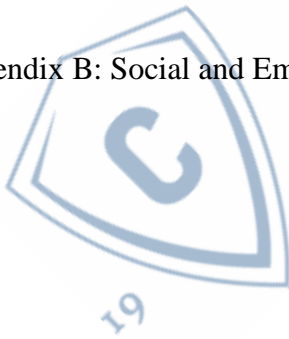
Dramatic play is the type of play in which students participate in pretend play, taking on the roles and interactions of those they observe in their environment. During dramatic play, children interact with their peers, learning how to appropriately interrelate and engage in various environments and situations. It is through this type of play children learn how to have successful social interactions, setting them up for achievement both in the classroom and out.

This action research analyzes how four preschool age children interact and behave during dramatic play time set aside within their classroom. More importantly, the action research analyzes the effect dramatic play has on the social and emotional development of preschool age children. The researcher instituted various dramatic play themes, props, materials, and scenes while observing how the four students responded to the materials available and interacted with their peers.

The researcher drew from her studies of the Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers textbook, literature research, her colleagues and experience within the preschool setting to accurately record observations and obtains data in regard to this research project. The results of the research help to further understand the role of dramatic play on the social and emotional development of preschool students.

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Action Research Proposal

Chapter One- Introduction

As they stir in their beds dreaming of candy, the favorite new toy they have begged their parents for, and of the fun they will have at grandma's house that night, they awaken to the sounds of little footsteps cascading toward their cozy oasis. These footsteps can only be those of their little brother or sister who awoke nearly an hour before them preparing the house for that day's fun. Mom and dad have already risen from their slumber by the same little footsteps and have also begun preparing for the day.

Mornings are rushed and chaotic. Older siblings have science projects due and secret Santa gifts to prepare, while the younger siblings struggle to dress themselves and brush their teeth. Mothers race around the house while having short snippets of conversation with their husbands before the men rush out the door, late for yet another meeting. As the children scarf down their breakfasts, the remaining items necessary for school are shoved into backpacks and final check-offs are said aloud:

"Lunch, check!"

"Homework, check!"

"Project, check!"

"Picture order, check!"

The children shove their dishes in the sink, and are shuttled into their second home, the minivan in the garage. Once inside, older brothers or sisters help younger siblings buckle in while exchanging funny faces and silly jokes, sweeping any extra goldfish or cheerios onto the

minivan floor. The shuttle departs, and children are dropped off one by one at their final destinations. Finally, mom pulls in to what has now become a familiar place, the local recreation center. This is the same place these children have taken ballet, cooking classes, and their favorite summer camps. Now it is the site of their preschool classroom.

Upon arriving, coats are hung on hooks in the hall, and students eagerly await the warm, welcoming smile from their teacher at the door. Now a few months into school, students have mastered the morning routine. Once the door has opened, students rush to find the nametag that has that familiar first letter. Once found they excitedly show their mom and dad as they are attempting to sign their children in for school that day, as the line forms behind them. Children then give their hugs and kisses as they race to their favorite toy on the carpet. Just like so many mornings before it, the children begin to play, greeting each other as new children arrive and inviting them to play “Batman” or “Fairies” or “Who Can Build the Tallest Lego Tower.” The children play, with small interruptions from their teachers to slow down or to speak nicely to their friends. As the minutes of the morning click on, the lucky student that day rings the bell. When the familiar chime of the bell rings, students know just what to do; time to clean up. The day has officially begun.

The setting of this action research project is a neighborhood recreation center located in a large suburban community outside a major city. According to the city’s informational site, the population reaches 86, 860, covering over 18.6 square miles, the sixth largest city in its state. (City of _____, 2010) The city is known for its attractive, well-planned neighborhoods as well as its inviting, family friendly atmosphere. With one of the largest shopping districts in the area, this city has a lot to offer its inhabitants, including dozens of churches of various denominations as well as over 100 parks spanning at least 1,000 acres. The

city contains over 30 miles of hiking trails, 25 miles of bike paths, and a park located within a half mile of every home within its city limits. The average household income of this city reaches 66,900, and is also the home to one of the world's largest athletic brands. The site for the action research project resides within these city limits and whose population directly reflects the population of the city itself.

The public school district that surrounds the action research project site is one of the largest in its state, with a total enrollment of 37,706 in 2009. ["Third" largest identifies the district.] The district includes 33 elementary schools, eight middle schools, five high schools, and four learning option schools. According to the school district's website, about 4,341 students qualify for special education services, which is 11.5% of the total enrollment. (_____ School District, 2009) The school district has 31% of its students on free and reduced lunch and a dropout rate of 2.8%. The school district is "nationally recognized for its high student and staff achievement, innovative programs, and many partnerships." (_____ School District, 2009) The district encompassing the site for the action research project is 39% Latino, with 91 different primary languages spoken at home. The SAT scores earned in 2009 surpassed the national average with a score of 1547 versus 1509. The district's main focus is "providing outstanding, challenging, educational opportunities for all its students in a safe, supportive, collaborative atmosphere." (_____ School District, 2009) The school district employs 2,361 teachers of its 4,188 total employees. Of these teachers, 79% hold a masters degree or higher and an average of 13 years of teaching experience. The school district described is very diverse and is representative of the site for the action research project.

The site for this action research project is a preschool within a recreation center. The recreation center is a part of a larger park and recreation district. The park and recreation district

was established in 1955 by a local physical education teacher and her colleagues. It is the largest park and recreation district in the state with over 50 square miles, serving over 200,000 residents. In its 54 year history, the district has grown to 200 park sites, 60 miles of trails, 1,300 acres of natural areas, eight swim centers, six recreation centers, all supported by local tax payers. The district has 179 full time employees, 33 part time employees, and 947 seasonal employees with an annual operating budget of \$40 million. The mission of the district is “to provide high-quality park and recreation facilities, programs, services, and natural areas that meet the needs of the diverse communities it serves.” (_____ Recreation District, 2010)

The recreation center which encompasses the action research project site within the park and recreation district has a long history of quality programs and service to its local neighborhood. The recreation center offers

- fitness and dance rooms,
- multi-purpose classrooms,
- gymnasium,
- gymnastics room,
- weight room,
- cardio room,
- instructional kitchen,
- an outdoor playground, and
- Preschool facilities.

There are various preschool options available to the recreation center’s patrons. In a less structured environment, there are preschool classes available to offer transitional assistance for

the parent and child, as well as an opportunity for the child to learn to be separated from their parents, while learning how to interact socially with his or her peers.

There are also more structured, academic programs available for those parents who want to prepare their children for kindergarten. The site for the action research project is a structured, highly academic preschool classroom that focuses on promoting the social and emotional growth of children while preparing them academically for kindergarten and the elementary school environment. The program strives to teach children through a balance of play and academic experiences, while learning to interact with their peers and engaging in activities which enhance fine motor skills, as well as number and letter recognition.

The parents of students at the preschool site are engaged and active parents, almost all with other children, both older and younger. The parents are diverse in their ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, and family structures and roles. Students at the action research project site come from various cultures including Russian, Nepali and South African, Japanese, Chinese, French, and Caucasian. Various religious beliefs are also present from Christian to Mormon to Judaism. Parents at the researcher's site also have diverse family roles. Some families have the more traditional family structure where the husband works and the wife stays at home. Others have switched roles, and the father stays at home, while the mother works. The site also contains families where parents both work, switching off work schedules so someone is always at home with the children.

The cost for the preschool program is \$150 a month. There is no tuition assistance available and payment is made on a per month basis. The preschool is nine months in duration. Both the children and parents involved in the preschool program are very kind people, active in

their children's lives. The preschool program provides a very warm and engaging place for parents to take their children in preparation for kindergarten. There is both a lead teacher and an assistant who run all aspects of the program, reporting to a preschool coordinator. The program has been run for many years and has a very positive reputation in the neighborhood.

The researcher is currently the assistant preschool teacher at the researcher's site. After attending college and graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, the researcher taught third grade for one year in a public school before pursuing other ventures. Now, looking to return to teaching, the researcher is pursuing a Masters in Educational Leadership as well as working as the Director of Extended Care at an elementary school. This action research project will focus on the researcher's classroom in the area of dramatic play and its importance to a child's growth. The researcher will use a specific program or method of thinking to enhance the use of dramatic play and its affect on children's social and academic future.



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Action Research Proposal

Chapter Two- The Issue

The idea of play within the preschool setting has always been well accepted if not expected. Children of preschool age are expected to play in order to express themselves, let out copious amounts of energy, and to be free of a more structured environment that often comes with adulthood. Although play is still an integral part of the preschool setting, the increases in academic standards have slowly begun to diminish the role of play within preschools. “Educators have always considered play to be a staple in early childhood classrooms. But the growing demands for teacher accountability and measurable outcomes for prekindergarten and kindergarten programs are pushing play to the periphery of the curriculum” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, pp.50-53). This is in large part due to the misinterpretation of the role of play within the preschool setting and the undeniable benefits it provides.

Within the researcher’s site, the lead teacher also finds this to be true. The researcher’s classroom is advertised as the most academic among the other preschool classrooms offered at the recreational facility. Therefore, those parents who choose the researcher’s classroom over the others expect higher academic standards and results from a more academically rigorous program. Although the advertisement is true, the perception of a more rigorous academic program differs between the teachers and some parents. Some parents have expressed concern their children are not bringing home challenging enough materials from school showcasing the academic standards the teachers are advertising. In order to explain the current curriculum, the researcher’s lead teacher reiterates the daily schedule and the areas where various types of learning takes place. The topic that undoubtedly arises is the significant time spent in dramatic play. The researcher’s

lead teacher consistently reminds parents of the importance of play in the classroom and its benefits to child development over time, especially in preparation for the elementary school classroom. “Teachers also tell us that they feel obligated to prove that play not only facilitates the development of social competencies but also promotes the learning of pre-academic skills and concepts” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, pp. 50-53). The researcher and the lead teacher inherit the same obligation from the parents and also from outside sources that compare the program to others in the area.

The difficult nature of the argument is the fact that the results are not as easily measured or as rapidly visible. Parents are used to a more traditional or concrete proof of learning through worksheets or projects, but it is harder to show progression or learning through play when nothing substantial can be taken home as proof on a daily basis. It is only over time that such results or behaviors will be evident, but the correlation will be hard to place. The benefits of dramatic play in the preschool setting do not diminish the substantial importance of a strong academic baseline. Students are still exposed to lessons in the core subject areas of reading, writing, and math, but the researcher and lead teacher feel increasing demands to subtract time from dramatic play to make room for more core subject area learning. The researcher and lead teacher understand the social and emotional benefits of dramatic play in the preschool setting among other essential developmental milestones.

Arguments regarding the necessity for the duration of time given to play have also risen within the researcher’s classroom. Some parents feel their children receive substantial play time at home or through “play dates”. Although the researcher would argue this type of play is of value, it is not the type of play offered within the preschool setting. Dramatic play within the preschool setting allows for children to carry out play themes with peers their own age. It is a

slightly structured environment, where the toys or props children can use are calculated by the teachers. Students also have the opportunity to discuss play time with their teacher to map out the type of play they will be experiencing that day. For instance, a student may want to play pirates, but needs guidance as to how to use the props to assist that student in his or her dramatic play. Also, teachers are available to intervene when necessary to encourage different types of play or to help resolve conflict or to encourage and congratulate. This type of play present in the researcher's classroom is the beneficial dramatic play that will help lead to the many developmental benchmarks children need at their age.

Due to the increasing academic demands from parents and the misinterpretation of play within the preschool setting, the researcher and lead teacher consistently clarify the essential developmental gains established through dramatic play in the classroom. In this action research project, the researcher will utilize dramatic play with the classroom to help answer the following question.

The question to be researched at the preschool is: "What effect will dramatic play have on the social and emotional development of preschool students?"

Literature Review

Dramatic play within the preschool setting fosters the social and emotional development of students through its various benefits. Dramatic play contributes to the development of pre-academic skills, improves students' ability to self-regulate their emotions and impulses, all through a well-structured program with appropriate teacher intervention. Social development refers to the interactions children have with those around them, their parents, other adults, peers, siblings, as well as instructors and teachers. Children begin to understand the roles people play

and the appropriate way to interact within those roles. These skills are learned through observation and practice, which often occurs through such skills builders as dramatic play.

Cultural-Historical Theory is the idea that child development is the result of the interactions between children and their social environment. These interactions include those with parents and teachers, playmates and classmates, and brothers and sisters. They also involve relationships with significant objects, such as books or toys, and culturally specific practices that children engage in the classroom, at home, and on the playground. Children are active partners in these interactions, constructing knowledge, skills, and attitudes and not just mirroring the world around them (Leong & Bodrova, 2001, p. 48).

Emotional development refers to a child's emotional competence. Children learn to be in tune to their own emotions as well as how to understand the emotions of others. Children learn how to understand their feelings and express them to others. Through emotional competency, children relate to others with greater sensitivity.

Research shows that children who engage in dramatic play tend to demonstrate more empathy toward others because they have tried out being someone else for a while. They have the skills to cooperate with peers, control impulses, and are less aggressive than children who do not engage in this type of play (Dodge, Colker, Heroman, 2002, p. 271).

Through dramatic play children can practice playing a role and the feelings and emotions that may be associated with that role. They are given the forum to relate to others; practicing a relationship they may actually carry out in reality later in life.

Dramatic play can take many forms depending on the classroom. The purpose of dramatic play is to encourage children to use their imaginations and creativity, while learning

lessons of friendship and kindness, curiosity, and helping to deepen their understanding of the world and how it works.

To engage in dramatic play with others, children have to negotiate roles, agree on a topic, and cooperate to portray different situations. They recreate life experiences and try to cope with their fears by acting out roles and situations that worry them (Dodge, Colker, Heroman, p. 271).

This type of play is essential to their social and emotional development. Although the term “play” is often considered one of leisure and fun, for children it is the arena which fosters invaluable learning that will greatly benefit them in their personal and academic lives. “Dramatic play is central to children’s healthy development and learning during the preschool years” (Dodge, Colker, Heroman, 2002, pp.271).

The concept of play has changed over the past half century. Imaginative, freelance play was more prevalent years ago. Children engaged in play with their neighborhood friends, roaming in packs with their siblings using only their imaginations to create that day’s new adventure. Today, there are great resources available to children. Children are involved in more sports leagues and dance lessons than ever before beginning at a much younger age. These activities provide great opportunities for children to relate to their peers and stay physically active, producing fine and gross motor skills. This type of play, regulated mostly by other adults, does not give children the opportunity to regulate themselves. Video games and television, although they have their place, provide the entertainment for many children. Children are not expected to create their own fun. Research has found over the past several decades, the lack of imaginative play has hindered the development of a critical, cognitive skill, executive function

(“Old Fashioned Play Builds Serious Skills”). Executive Function helps develop working memory, cognitive flexibility, and self-regulation (“Old Fashioned Play Builds Serious Skills”, 2010). Poor executive function can lead to increased dropout rates, drug use, and crime, whereas good executive function leads to greater success in school. The research proves the importance of imaginative play for children today. Children need to engage in play that is self-regulated with their peers. The skills and development acquired through this type of play is essential to a student’s academic and social success in school.

Self-Regulation

The development of self-regulation skills among children is imperative to a child’s success in school and beyond. Children must first learn to regulate their impulses and desires before a teacher can adequately and successfully administer a lesson that will be absorbed.

Self-regulation is a deep, internal mechanism that underlies mindful, intentional, and thoughtful behaviors of children. It is the capacity to control one’s impulses, both to stop doing something (even if one wants to continue doing it) and to start doing something (even if one doesn’t want to do it) (Bodrova & Leong, 2005, p. 54).

Through self-regulation, children learn to foresee the consequences of their actions and make better decisions. The ability to self-regulate leads to greater success in school. Children are able to sit still and listen for longer periods of time, which in turn allows for an increase in teacher instruction. Children who self-regulate have the ability to interact well with their peers by controlling their emotions and reactions and understanding the actions of others.

Children who do not acquire adequate self-regulation strategies have trouble in school. They are unable to sit still for long periods of time, they often have difficulty interacting with

their peers, and their academics suffer. Often students who do not have the ability to self-regulate are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). More and more children are being labeled and medicated to help control their behavior without first attempting to teach these children the self-regulation skills necessary to control their impulses. “These children are rarely taught effective strategies that would help them control themselves” (Bodrova & Leong, 2005, p. 54). These strategies can be taught. It is important for educators and parents to understand the importance of self-regulation and its affect on students throughout their academic careers.

Children learn self-regulation skills through play. Through play, children have the opportunity to practice self-regulation through pretend play and their interactions with their peers in the imaginary world they create. Rules are created by the children and regulated by the children. During dramatic or pretend play, children learn social skills and how to manage their emotions, practicing interactions with others. Self-regulation is often learned by regulating others, which is seen mostly through play. Children keep track of who is following the rules and how the play is facilitated.

There is a growing body of research that shows a link between play and the development of cognitive and social skills that are prerequisites for learning more complex concepts as children get older. For example, play is linked to growth in memory, self-regulation, oral language, and recognizing symbols. It has been linked to higher levels of school adjustment and increased social development. Play has also been linked to increased literacy skills and other areas of academic learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2005, p. 6).

Essentially, when children engage in meaningful play, they practice interactions and experiences they will have in real life. Children use play to model relationships they have seen and to understand the world around them. While engaged in this type of play, children learn the skills necessary to regulate their emotions and impulses, while mimicking and experiencing real life situations.

Research has shown the absence of dramatic play has led to a decrease in executive function, a critical cognitive skill. “Executive function has a number of different elements, but a central one is the ability to self-regulate. Kids with good self-regulation are able to control their emotions and behavior, resist impulses, and exert self-control and discipline” (“Old Fashioned Play Builds Serious Skills,” 2010). The type of play children participate in today does not develop the skills and functions of the brain as substantially as the type of play experienced in the past, which had greater influence on imagination and creativity. Today, children’s free play is too structured and planned by their parents or other adults. Toys have become the forefront of play for children, instead of greater emphasis on their creativity and imagination through the use of play items that are not simply takedowns of real life items. Parents are concerned today for children’s safety in play environments as well as an increase in worry on student achievement and a younger age. These factors have changed how children play. “A growing number of psychologists believe that these changes in what children do has also changed kids’ cognitive and emotional development” (“Old Fashioned Play Builds Serious Skills,” 2010). A study completed during the 1940’s asked three-, five-, and seven- year- olds to stand perfectly still without moving, among other exercises. The three- year- olds could not stand still, the five- year- olds stood still for about three minutes, and the seven- year- olds stood still as long as they were asked. The same survey completed in 2001 showed a different result. Today’s five- year- olds

performed as the three- year- olds did in the 40's and the seven- year- olds could barely reach the performance level of the five- year- olds of the past exercise (“Old Fashioned Play Builds Serious Skills”). This study showed a decline in a child’s ability to self-regulate, and a decrease in executive function. Researchers exhibited a direct correlation between these poor results and the change in play over the years. “It turns out all that time spent playing make-believe actually helped children develop a critical cognitive skill called executive function” (“Old Fashioned Play Builds Serious Skills”).

Self-regulation affects a child’s ability to learn. If a child cannot sit still, pay attention, and remember directions, then they will continue to fall behind in school. It is essential children learn these behaviors to be successful throughout their academic careers. “The cause of failure to learn academic skills may in fact be due to the children’s lack of self-regulation” (Bodrova & Leong, 2005, p. 54). Unfortunately, in many of today’s classrooms, children who are unable to self-regulate are often moved to other learning environments because they are disruptions to the rest of the students. Teachers are unable to continually divert his or her attention to the unruly child while the other children lose out on valuable instructional time. Due to the nature of the current academic system, children who cannot regulate themselves miss out on experiencing their education in a traditional academic environment, and often continue to have social ramifications for their behaviors. Self-regulation strategies begin to develop in the preschool setting. A child’s preschool environment is imperative to their future academic and social success. “Children, in order to adjust to a preschool setting and achieve, need to be able to regulate their emotions and behaviors. Self-regulation, the ability to control one’s emotions and behaviors, is key to social and academic success” (Leong, 2003, p. 18). Self-regulation has two parts, cognitive and social-emotional. Cognitive self-regulation is a child’s ability to regulate his

or her own behaviors and to think before the action. Social-emotional regulation refers to the child's ability to delay gratification, controlling his or her emotions, and understanding how others may perceive one's own actions (Leong, 2003, p. 16). The classroom environment has a great impact on these types of self-regulation. The skills and strategies necessary to learn self-regulation need to be taught, often through exercises such as dramatic play.

Dramatic play in the preschool setting provides students within many developmental advantages necessary to later success in school. One of these advantages is the development of self-regulation, which has a strong correlation to academic and social success for children. Without quality self-regulation skills children are at a disadvantage, unable to affectively learn new information and maintain appropriate relationships with their peers. The researcher has shown the importance of self-regulation for student academic and social success exhibited through dramatic play and in the next section will discuss the following research related to the benefits dramatic play offers to pre-academic skills in the preschool environment.

Pre-Academic Skills

Dramatic play within the preschool setting contributes greatly to pre-academic skills that help establish a baseline of learning. When children engage in dramatic play, they utilize various academic skills to facilitate their play. For example, when children participate in a grocery store set up during dramatic play, they may use mathematic skills to count money or supplies. Children also use dramatic play as a time to problem solve, using higher level thinking skills to enhance cognitive development. Teachers are responsible for creating and continuously adjusting dramatic play areas to adhere to the academic skills necessary as a baseline for future learning. With each new setting or with new materials available, children create new environments and

situations that help develop pre-academic skills, such as creativity and language development, as exposure to concepts that will be more fully developed throughout elementary school. Research continues to show the significant gains dramatic play establishes in a young learner's academic career.

Jean Piaget (1962) and Lev Vygotsky (1978) were among the first to link play with cognitive development. In a comprehensive review of numerous studies on play, researchers found evidence that play contributes to advances in 'verbalization, vocabulary, language comprehension, attention span, imagination, concentration, impulse control, curiosity, problem-solving strategies, cooperation, empathy, and group participation' (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, p. 50).

Well-structured and meaningful play is shown to have a large impact on a child's learning and development. The many advances listed above are all pre-academic skills necessary to strong academic growth before a child is ready for higher level academic skills. The preschool years prepare children for their elementary years, most importantly through the act of dramatic play in a thoughtful preschool environment. Play is an excellent facilitator for teachers to use in order to create learning environments that contribute to such academic advances. Play offers various atmospheres or scenes that can help promote diverse learning opportunities.

Play gives children a venue to make sense of the world, and to practice, consolidate and externalize newly acquired skills. Play is personally meaningful and provides a context for children to structure their own interactions to meet their own unique needs...Sociodramatic play, pretend play that involves two or more children adopting

roles and playing out a script, involves representation, negotiation, perspective taking, and problem solving—the precursors to divergent thinking (Emfinger, 2009, p. 326).

Although research shows a strong connection between play and academic growth, play is slowly becoming less common in the preschool setting. Teachers and administrators are pressured to remove play to create time for more traditional forms of learning. Play is sometimes considered a waste of time, taking away from valuable learning opportunities; although research shows play only increases learning in the preschool setting. “Research on early learning and development shows that when children are properly supported in their play, the play does not take away from learning but contributes to it” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, p. 50). The academic benefits of dramatic play can be hard to assess. Showing results on recognition of letters or counting to 20 are easier to measure. Although difficult to measure, they are just as significant. Teachers understand the importance of the difficult task of exhibiting the developmental gains produced through play; otherwise play will continue to be challenged among parents and administrators. Unfortunately, children are pressured to learn faster and at a much younger age due to increased competition; although the new push for faster learning may produce the opposite results. “Many experts in child development link the increased pressure on young children and the decline of play to later school failure” (Schroeder, pp. 73). Producing preschool classrooms that are warm and welcoming, while still fostering the academic, social, and emotional growth of students is important to establishing a positive first school experience for young learners as a beginning to their academic careers. In order to do so, play must still be considered a valued learning tool for students in their early child development. “When children play, family life is enriched and children learn more deeply” (Schroeder, 2007, pp. 73). Play is essential for every child’s healthy development and key to the foundation of academic success.

Through teacher directed themes and situations, children participate in multi-level imaginative play that contributes to pre-academic skills necessary for success in school. Taking on imaginative situations and multiple roles children learn about social interactions, while learning about their own emotions. Engaging in themed play children learn to plan, negotiate, and solve problems. Play also contributes heavily to language development. As the level of play increases, children's vocabulary increases, mastering the practical use of language through various roles they play. Finally, play can be continued over a period of time. As children continue with a particular theme or type of play, they learn to expand on the situation and elaborate on their use of props and assigned roles (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, p. 50). It is imperative teachers use play as a facilitator for substantial academic gains. The researcher has shown the impact dramatic play has on the formation of pre-academic skills and in the next section will discuss the following research related to the essential role of teachers and strategies for quality and meaningful dramatic play.

Teacher's Role and Strategies

Teachers play an important role in a child's academic career. That academic career begins in the preschool classroom. Preschool teachers are children's first experience with school, forming their feelings and attitudes about school at a very early age. Dramatic play within the preschool setting is an essential period of the day. The teacher holds a direct role in how dramatic play time is run, what props are used, and what materials are available. The teacher is not only responsible for the set-up and organization of dramatic play, but also for the structure and quality of the play time. During dramatic play, the teacher must not only make observations about his or her students, but also intervene with discretion when necessary. The role of the teacher is to maintain a healthy and meaningful level of intervention during play. When the

teacher is too involved the spontaneity and child-directed nature of dramatic play is lost.

Although, when a teacher rarely intervenes, dramatic play can become monotonous and lose its excitement and benefit. The teacher must find a balance in intervention, giving support to his or her students to enhance the benefits of dramatic play.

Because the ability to engage in and sustain imaginative play is so central to children's development—particularly cognitive and social/emotional development—we recommend that teachers take an active role in teaching the skills to make-believe. Your role, as in all interest areas, is to observe what children do and individualize your response. Based on what you learn, you can interact with children and support their play (Dodge, Colker, Heroman, 2002, p. 282).

Observation during play gives teachers the information needed to further enhance that child's dramatic play and in turn furthering his or her development. Through observation, teachers are also able to show growth and improvements over time to share with parents and administrators. Teachers may also act as mediators during play. The teacher may need to intervene to help settle a dispute or to suggest materials or props to a student who is lost during dramatic play to help engage that child back into play. "Teachers could act as mediators, supporting children's interactions with materials as well as with other children" (Ashiabi, 2007, p. 204). It is important teachers understand their role as mediators and facilitators of dramatic play, remembering the objectives, but allowing play to remain child-centered and free form.

There are many strategies researchers and educators suggest using in order to enhance dramatic play to ensure optimal developmental gains. Each classroom should have curriculum objectives associated with dramatic play. This allows for teachers to use the objectives to

connect with the observations made during dramatic play, helping to show progress and strengths or weaknesses in certain areas. It may be beneficial to create a profile for each student, to compile observations of each child's skills and plans for improvement. The use of props and various objects is essential to a successful dramatic play area. These props can include both realistic looking props and props or objects that require more imagination, such as paper plates or toilet paper rolls. These materials are used to facilitate a child's imagination and creativity, providing them tools for themed or role plays. Often, teachers may need to model how to use certain props to help spark ideas. "Since high-level play involves children's knowledge of many roles and themes, you will need to introduce children to new settings and experiences" (Brodkin, 2003, p. 34). Teachers can exhibit these new experiences by expanding on field trips taken, showing a video, or inviting guest speakers. Giving children the opportunity to experience a new role or theme will enhance their dramatic play considerably. It allows children to practice new vocabulary associated with the theme or role and new social interactions. Another suggestion to create a valuable dramatic play area is through the creation of a rich dramatic play environment. This includes providing students with sufficient amount of time to carry out dramatic play, between a half hour and an hour. This gives children enough time to work through their roles and scenarios. It is also recommended that toys and props outside of the dramatic play center are available for use to work into their play. Dramatic play themes should also be carried out across all stations; the art table, the play dough station, the sensory table, as well as the literacy area. The consistency provides students with many different areas and outlets to fully engage and develop their themes and roles.

Teachers are what make dramatic play the important academic and developmental tool it is in the preschool classroom. The teacher's role is extensive yet sensitive. Dramatic play is at its

best when child-initiated and developed, yet the teacher must play an important role in ensuring the play is developing each child's social/emotional and cognitive growth to reach its full potential. This can be accomplished through the various strategies listed above and through the support of parents and administrators. The researcher has shown the important role teachers hold within dramatic play and will explore all aspects of play within the preschool setting in order to establish its importance to a child's social and emotional development.



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Action Research Proposal

Chapter Three- The Goal of the Action Research Project

This research project seeks to find out what effect dramatic play will have on the social and emotional development of preschool students. It is anticipated that 80% of the students will show at least a one point growth in all sections of the Social and Emotional Development scale developed through “The Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers” objectives.

Research has shown the importance of play on the development of children’s social, emotional, and cognitive growth, affecting them throughout their lives, especially in the classroom setting. “When children engage in dramatic play they deepen their understanding of the world and develop skills that will serve them throughout their lives” (Dodge, Colker, Heroman, 2002, p. 271). The benefits of play in the preschool setting is evident, yet current trends show play becoming extinct, replaced by higher academic standards. This trend is unfortunate, given the essential gains and imperative developmental skills dramatic play has on children at this young age and the effect it can have on their future academic success. Preschool teachers and administrators often feel pulled in different directions, understanding the importance of dramatic play, but also wanting to appease parents who hold high academic goals for their young children. Due to the competitive nature of the world today, parents are putting pressure on their children at much younger ages to learn more, faster; although research shows this comes at a cost.

Too little time for unstructured play leads to increased stress for children and parents, according to a clinical report issued in October by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Nevertheless, many parents and policy makers continue to believe that pressuring young

children to learn earlier and faster will help them succeed in school. In fact, it may have just the opposite effect (Schroeder, 2007, p. 73).

Research has shown a connection with lack of play in the early years of a child's life to academic and social struggles one in elementary school. The pressure to push children further than they are meant to go can have a negative impact on their healthy development. The benefits of well-structured dramatic play need to be communicated so parents, administrators, and teachers all understand the plethora of developmental gains children experience through play. The researcher hopes to implement meaningful and well-executed dramatic play within her preschool classroom to help resolve the misinterpretation of the purpose and benefit of dramatic play in the classroom setting.

In addition, the researcher hopes to show growth in the social and emotional development of her students through the implementation of quality dramatic play. Due to the misinterpretation of the benefits of dramatic play within the preschool classroom, young learner's social and emotional development is at risk. Dramatic play offers the tools and time for children to develop skills necessary for success in life and in school. Among others is the important skill of self-regulation. Without the ability to control one's own emotions and behaviors, and the understanding of other's emotions and behaviors, a child will continually have difficulty in school as well as in life through his or her social interactions. Dramatic play provides children the opportunity to understand the world around them and develop the social and emotional skills necessary for a healthy developmentally appropriate life. The researcher hopes to use a successful method of dramatic play in order to show optimal social and emotional growth among her students.

Instruments for Gathering Data

In this study, the researcher will combine ongoing observations and informal student interviews, direct quotes and conversations with surveys to show improvement in student's social and emotional growth. At the beginning of the research study, student's social and emotional health will be assessed through a five-point scale survey using "The Creative Curriculum for Preschool" list of social and emotional objectives for early childhood education. "The Creative Curriculum for Preschool" textbook will be used to guide further observation and formation of dramatic play. The researcher will create an observation profile for each student in the class. These profiles will contain all observations, surveys, interviews, conversations, and any interventions made by the researcher for each child. Daily observations will be made during dramatic play, taking notes on who children play with, how they utilize dramatic play time, and the props available to them, always in consideration of the curriculum objectives for social and emotional development. The same survey will be given to students three times throughout the duration of the research study; once in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the study.

The researcher will also use "The Creative Curriculum for Preschool" list of dramatic play skills to assess each child's level of play, whether beginning or advanced. According to the measures listed within the textbook, the researcher will use these measures to evaluate each student within their observation profile on an informal basis depending on observations made.

Student interviews will also be conducted twice throughout the research study. Students will be interviewed at the start of the study and at the end. The researcher will use informal questioning to gauge each student's social and emotional development, using the curriculum objectives as a guide to questioning.

The researcher will also develop the dramatic play time and area. Utilizing the strategies and physical arrangement recommended by “The Creative Curriculum for Preschool”, the researcher will use the props, themes, length of time, and interactions suggested enhancing the social and emotional development of her students.



Action Research Proposal

Chapter Four- Action Plan

In this project the researcher asks what effect dramatic play has on the social and emotional development of preschool students.

Dramatic play at the researcher's site excites debate over the benefits and length of time dedicated to dramatic play over more rigorous academic learning. Due to the competitive nature of academics today, parents question the need for significant time spent in play within the classroom setting, and push for greater time devoted to higher academic standards and results. Administrators understand the importance of dramatic play within the preschool environment, but financially need to meet the needs and wishes of the parents paying for the service. The lead teacher at the researcher's site continues to promote the idea of dramatic play and the numerous benefits it provides children, especially in preparing them for elementary school.

Possible Solutions

In researching the developmental benefits of dramatic play within the preschool setting, the researcher considered different types of play, the affects of play on different socioeconomic groups, genders, and ethnicities, as well as the effect a lack of play has in early childhood education.

Different Types of Play

The term "play" constitutes many different images and definitions depending on the person asked. In our culture, the meaning and significance of play varies depending on the setting and reason for the play. When a twenty-five year old mentions a weekend full of play and

fun, he or she is not describing the same type of play a ten year old might engage in at the local park on the swing set. If one were to look up the definition of play he or she might find over 90 different uses and definitions of the one word. Therefore, when the word is used, the context of that word is undeniably important in order to derive meaning. Some definitions are as follows; to act the part in a dramatic performance, to perform, to engage in a game or competition, to employ, to stake or wager, to represent or imitate, to perform a musical instrument, to exercise or employ oneself in diversion, amusement or recreation, to do something in sport that is not taken seriously, to amuse oneself, to fool around, etc. These are among the countless definitions and versions of play one can engage in.

Researchers assert that play assumes several forms. One perspective describes play as an enjoyable, self-assuming activity, such as two children sitting in a sandbox pretending to make pies. Another perspective describes play as an activity, with an educational focus such as a child in a preschool environment investigating sharks as a part of project work (Youngquist, Pataray-Ching, 2004, p. 171).

Therefore, the type of play holds great significance when assigning developmental benefits and skills acquired. This holds true in the preschool classroom. Different types of play have different benefits at varying degrees.

For instance, children who engage in play at home with their sibling using realistic toys mimicking real life objects are deriving different benefits than children who are playing a little league baseball game carrying out coach's instructions. Each type of play has benefits to a child's growth and development, but all types of play are not equal. Therefore, it is important to remember the outcome desired from play. In an educational setting such as a preschool

classroom, a teacher may want to use play as a means to enhancing and developing a child's social and emotional growth as well as that child's problem-solving skills and cognitive ability. All types of play do not produce the same results. The researcher hopes to find a type of play that has a significant impact on each child's social and emotional development. The researcher believes different types of play have different benefits for children and are important for growth and development, but all types of play will not produce the results the researcher needs to reach her goal.

The Role of Socio-Economics, Gender, and Ethnicities

With each child that arrives in the classroom comes a unique situation and background. Each child has different home lives, different cultures, varying degrees of wealth or poverty, and parents who have different outlooks on their education. The behavior of each child encompasses all the different aspects of their life and experiences thus far. Before a teacher can adequately deliver a lesson, he or she must understand these differences among his or her students. A child's gender, socio-economic background, and his or her ethnicity can have a large impact on the way that child learns.

For instance, research has shown key differences in how boys and girls learn. Boys have been known to mature slower than girls, need more time for activity, lack strong penmanship skills, and are more competitive than girls, but are often better than girls in spatial visualization. On the other hand, girls are often able to sit still longer, have better penmanship, and they seek cooperation over competition, but may place greater importance on social interactions at an older age ("How Boys Learn," n.d.). Teachers must use these differences to their advantage, giving each child their best chance at success in the classroom. Many of these traits are seen through

play. It is important for teachers to offer all types of play situations and scenarios to all children despite their gender, to help provide children with an opportunity to learn about situations that may not come naturally to them or have experience with. Gender roles are often very evident during dramatic play time. Children tend to relate to their own gender, carrying out the roles of people who share their gender in real life. For example, boys tend to play fireman or construction worker, traditional male roles; while young girls often gravitate toward playing princess or teacher roles, traditionally female. In order to not assume traditionally biased gender roles, teachers should provide students with opportunities to explore all roles, no matter the stereotypes.

Socio-economic factors also affect how young children learn and express themselves through play. Instinctually, children recreate situations and interactions they witness in real life or through books, TV, and videos. Unfortunately, some children who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds struggle in school beginning at a very young age. In some cases, children are not getting enough sleep, eating healthfully, or seeing good role models in their neighborhoods. These factors contribute to difficulties that emerge in their early childhood education.

Psychologist Jane Healy said that Alliance's call to action is 'important for all children, but especially for those disadvantaged by inadequate living conditions, stressed parents, too much television, and violent neighborhoods. They, most of all, need a childhood of which they are being deprived (Schroeder, 2007, p. 73).

The call to action refers to the importance of play in the preschool setting and its affect on child development, especially those suffering from external circumstances. These children need

meaningful play to develop their social and emotional well-being despite some of their early negative experiences or interactions. Teachers have the opportunity to teach these skills through play to give disadvantaged children a chance to succeed in school.

Additionally, a child's ethnicity or cultural background has an impact on their success in school. In some cultures, education is extremely important and valued tremendously. Parents are very active in their children's education and push their children to succeed at a very early age. In other cultures, education is not stressed as heavily. Working at an early age and helping provide for the family is of greater value. These factors play a role in how well children perform throughout their academic careers. In early childhood education, teachers should take advantage of the cultural and ethnic differences within their classroom as a learning tool. It not only promotes acceptance and belonging, but it is a valuable tool in exposing children to different situations or ways of doing things. Utilizing these differences is especially easy through dramatic play. Teachers can use pictures of people from other cultures, tools or props used in other parts of the world, and unique themes and scenarios that children can use to facilitate their dramatic play. "Porter (1971) noted there is no exact age when racial awareness is present, but that it appears between ages three and four" (Ashiabi, 2007, p. 201). Preschool students are aware of the differences among them and often show interest in other cultures and beliefs. Teachers can use this curiosity as a method for higher learning.

The researcher believes socio-economics, gender roles, and cultural and ethnic differences are important aspects to the researcher's goal to be considered, although they are not the sole criteria necessary to the growth of her student's social and emotional development. The researcher will utilize these differences to enhance dramatic play among other criteria.

Absence of Dramatic Play

Unfortunately, in the world today, children are often expected to grow up faster than ever before. Parents foresee the benefits of excelling at an early age and push their children in the hopes of greater success in the future. Although high expectations and challenging children to go beyond what they think is possible is valuable and produces great results in some circumstances, it also comes at a cost to other developmentally appropriate activities. Some preschools today are adhering to the wishes of academically focused parents, raising their standards in a more academically rigorous program. Due to the length of time many preschoolers attend school, in order to raise the academic bar, other activities must be sacrificed. The first to go is often time dedicated to dramatic play. As mentioned above, dramatic play is often seen as time wasted among people who do not fully appreciate or understand the inherent benefits. Therefore, in the hope of producing higher academic results, dramatic play is lost.

There are benefits to higher academic standards among preschool teachers and administrators. Children at a very young age are able to take in vast amounts of information given the right setting and delivery. The information must also be developmentally appropriate, so their young minds are able to absorb the information. Promoting higher standards and pushing our young learners to do more than ever before can produce astonishing results, and for some children they are developmentally ready for more challenging work than their age may suggest. As a preschool teacher, understanding the capabilities of each child and challenging each child is part of the job. Therefore, preschools that have higher academic standards for those students who are prepared for more challenging work can be beneficial to those children; although, for children who are within the appropriate developmental range, such high standards may do just the opposite of the intended results.

Although the researcher understands the importance of higher academic standards through the absence of dramatic play with the preschool setting, she also believes the same results can be achieved through the implementation of dramatic play. The researcher agrees with the benefits of challenging young learners, but believes the absence of dramatic play will not help her reach her goal of developing her student's social and emotional development.

Summary

The researcher has reviewed three aspects of the preschool environment that are of great importance to the success of early childhood education, although none of the aspects listed above have the criteria necessary to enhance the social and emotional development of the student's at the researcher's site. The researcher has reviewed the use of dramatic play within the preschool setting. The researcher believes the implementation of dramatic play within her classroom will have a significant impact on the social and emotional development of her students.

Dramatic play in the preschool setting has many different facets to its implementation and ongoing maintenance. Dramatic play, as described by the authors of "The Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers", breaks down the barriers of reality and promotes imaginative and creative play necessary for development at an early age. Dramatic play offers development in all areas from social and emotional, to physical, cognitive, and language development. Through the use of dramatic play, children engage with other children, negotiating roles, picking a topic, cooperating in order to exhibit various situations often seen in real life. Through the recreation of these real world experiences, children are fostering their social and emotional growth. "For Example, a child who anticipates going to the hospital for an operation can pretend to be the doctor. By assuming this role, the child can switch from feeling out of control to being in

charge” (Dodge, Colker, Heroman, 2002, p. 271). Through dramatic play, children learn how to interact socially, as well as how to understand the feelings of others as well as their own.

Physically, children are developing small motor skills, practicing to button coats or dress their dolls. Children are also using hand-eye coordination while putting away props in their appropriate spots or holding a prop the correct way. While engaged in dramatic play, children are also developing strong cognition skills. “When they pretend, children create pictures in their minds about past experiences and the situations they imagine. These images are a form of abstract thinking” (Dodge, Colker, Heroman, p. 271). And lastly, when children engage with other children in dramatic play, they use language to plan out their play and explain situations or props to other students. Roles are established and scenarios are described. More concretely, reading and writing materials are also available for use during dramatic play to enhance the experience.

“The Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers” textbook lists curriculum objectives for each development area. Under each area are a list of situations a teacher may see during dramatic play, to help associate that action with a specific curriculum objective. For example, under social and emotional development, an objective states, “Shows ability to adjust to new situations” (Dodge, Colker, and Heroman, p. 272). To exhibit this objective a student may replay scenes of a mother leaving her baby to go to work, attempting to gain control of her fears of separation. Under each development and objective are examples of what each behavior may look like during dramatic play.

Through the “Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers” program, teachers can infuse content learning into dramatic play to enhance development in various content areas. To promote literacy development, teachers can introduce children to new props and roles, establishing new

vocabulary, reading stories in connection with the new role discussed. To develop mathematical concepts, the program suggests the promotion of number concepts and problem solving by asking questions during dramatic play such as, “How many plates do you need to put on the table?” Science concepts can be explored through the use of various tools; balances, scales, magnets, can openers, etc. Plants can also be used in the classroom to establish an understanding of life science, and weather can be discussed and utilized during dramatic play. The program suggests using maps on large and small scales as well as props used by different types of people to touch on social studies content knowledge. Dramatic play lends itself easily to infusing the arts into the period. Children can create puppet shows, making their own props out of various materials. And lastly, teachers can strengthen children’s knowledge of technology during dramatic play by including old cameras, calculators, phones, and other devices to increase familiarity. Dramatic play is an open forum of exploration, which given the right direction, can lead to great knowledge and development.

After reviewing the benefits and use of dramatic play within preschool, the researcher believes it is the perfect fit for her classroom, containing all aspects necessary to improve the social and emotional development of her students. The researcher will spend 12-18 weeks collecting data to determine the success of dramatic play on her student’s social and emotional development.

The Action Plan

In this action research project the researcher seeks to determine the effectiveness of dramatic play on the social and emotional development of her students. The following steps are required to carry out the action research project.

Building, Parent, and Lead Teacher Notification

Before beginning the action research project at the researcher's school site, she will first seek permission of her lead teacher then her building administrators. The action plan and timeline will be communicated. The researcher will also notify parents of her students of this action research project. It will be made clear student data will be used but that all personal information will be removed.

Pre-Assessment and Curriculum Mapping

Before beginning the program the researcher must first conduct a survey to establish the beginning point of the social and emotional health of her students. This initial survey will be used to guide the intervention strategies used when implementing dramatic play. The researcher will use the results to establish a beginning point in order to create a curriculum map for the 12-18 week period.

Action Plan Timeline

January:

- Complete Social and Emotional Development survey on each student, file in Observation Portfolios
- Begin 1st theme for dramatic play: Ocean Scene
- Make observations in Observation Portfolios using Dramatic Play Skills
- Record direct quotes and conversations
- Complete student interviews

February

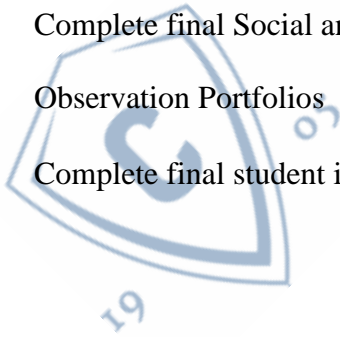
- Begin 2nd theme for dramatic play: Castle
- Make observations in Observation Portfolios using Dramatic Play Skills
- Record direct quotes and conversations

March

- Begin 3rd theme for dramatic play: Space Scene
- Complete 2nd Social and Emotional Development survey on each student, file in Observation Portfolios
- Make observations in Observation Portfolios using Dramatic Play Skills
- Record direct quotes and conversations

April

- Begin 4th theme for dramatic play: Birthday Party
- Make observations in Observation Portfolios using Dramatic Play Skills
- Record direct quotes and conversations
- Complete final Social and Emotional Development survey on each student, file in Observation Portfolios
- Complete final student interviews



Action Research Project

Chapter Five-Results and Next Steps

In January 2011, the researcher began her data collection in response to her action research question regarding the effect dramatic play will have on the social and emotional development of preschool students.

The researcher first began her research project by requesting the permission of both her lead teacher and preschool coordinator. Both provided their full support and permission to carry out the project. Upon request from her preschool coordinator, the researcher did not inform the parents or students of the action research project. After a discussion, the coordinator, researcher, and lead teacher agreed the action research project would not interfere with the usual operations of the classroom, but would only further develop and improve the current schedule and lessons. The coordinator and lead teacher were informed of the absence of any identifying information, including all names and personal information. A letter of agreement was written and signed by all parties. After discussing the research project with the researcher's advisor, the researcher and advisor agreed on scaling back the amount of children to be observed during the project. Instead of observing all 18 children, the researcher decided to choose four children to observe, a more manageable number producing more thorough observations. Two boys and two girls were chosen at random. This change made recording observations more manageable and focused. The researcher also improved the social and emotional survey to a social and emotional rubric based on "The Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers" objectives for social and emotional development. (Appendix A). The rubric outlined the social and emotional objectives as well as specific

behaviors represented underneath each objective. These observable behaviors allowed for more comprehensive and distinguishable scoring.

The researcher began the research project by administering an initial social and emotional rubric for each student being observed. Each student received a score in all seven objectives listed on the rubric. This rubric was used three times throughout the duration of the project.

The researcher incorporated three different dramatic play themes during the 12-week duration of the action research project. These themes included space, birthday party, and grocery store. Each theme included new props and materials, as well as visual aids.

Direct quotes and conversations were recorded while observations of the dramatic play were taken. Formal student interviews were not taken, but informal questioning occurred during the dramatic play time. Observations were recorded each day the students were present, that is, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of each school week. In order to keep student information private, the students' names were changed Dylan, Evan, Sarah, and Jane.

The researcher will now provide some background on each of the students selected for the research in order for the reader to have a better understanding of the culture, context and relationships of these students and their environment.

Students

Dylan was four years old turning five during the duration of this research project. Dylan is Caucasian with a mother and a father who are married. Dylan has a younger sister who is two years old. Dylan has been referred to extra services by the researcher's lead teacher due to his behavioral problems within the classroom. Dylan often has trouble controlling his emotions,

lashing out at his peers both verbally and physically. Dylan has a lot of energy and excitement while at school which can turn to aggression at times. Dylan is not currently receiving any extra services for his behavior problems at this time. He is very intelligent and has much excitement and curiosity for life and school.

Evan is five years old. He is the younger sibling of a seven year old brother. Evan is the son of a mother and a father who are married. Evan's mother works and his father stays at home with both him and his brother. Evan is Caucasian. He is very confident and happy while at school. Evan can misbehave when engaging with certain children, but otherwise strives to do well and interact appropriately with his peers.

Sarah is five years old. She is Caucasian and has a mother and father who are married. Sarah has one younger sister who is three years old. Sarah's mother stays at home with her and her sister and her father works. Sarah is a very agreeable and energetic child. She is happy and enthused about school. She has a great sense of humor and often is the only one laughing at the researcher and lead teacher's jokes. She is a natural leader and has many friends.

Jane was four years old turning five during the research project. Jane is the daughter of a married mother and father. Jane is Caucasian and has a younger brother who is two years old. Her mother stays at home with the children and her father works. Jane is a very mature child in many ways. She holds conversations with adults very well and enjoys engaging with adults. She is a content child, but often needs a bit of a push to engage more thoroughly in the preschool activities. She is very smart and is a good friend to her peers.

The researcher will now discuss the results from the first theme, space.

Results

Space Theme

The first theme of the action research project presented to the preschool students was space. This theme included a bulletin board within the dramatic play setting that included pictures of the planets in space, with their names and appropriate locations. The main attraction of the space theme included a “spaceship” made out of a large, cardboard box decorated with black paper, cut out windows, steering wheel, as well as a NASA and USA sign on the exterior. The researcher also created alien hats as an additional prop. At the conclusion of week one, the researcher completed the first social and emotional rubric as a baseline for further research. Below are results from the first rubric. A score of five means the student is proficient in that objective. A score of one means the child is struggling to reach that objective.

Social and Emotional Development Rubric #1				
	Dylan	Evan	Sarah	Jane
Shows ability to adjust to new situations	5	5	3	2
Stands up for rights	2	4	3	5
Respects and cares for classroom environment and materials	1	3	3	3
Plays well with other children	1	3	5	5
Recognizes feelings of others and responds appropriately	1	5	5	5
Shares and respects the rights of others	1	5	5	5
Using thinking skills to resolve conflicts	1	5	5	5

According to the first rubric, the children's scores varied between the seven different objectives. Students showed to be stronger in some areas and weaker in others. Dylan especially struggled with the last five objectives on the rubric. Each student's results were very unique and showed their differences in development. Dylan needs improvement in respecting classroom materials and environment as well as how he interacts with his peers and resolves conflicts. This is an area of great concern for Dylan. Dylan received a five for his ability to adjust to new situations because he shows great enthusiasm and understanding for new themes, always willing to try something new. Evan scored highly in many of the areas, but not as high in respecting the classroom materials and playing well with others. Evan is a very mature child, but also exhibits signs of authority over the other children to a negative degree. Sarah shows strong developmental gains across the rubric, but also has trouble respecting classroom materials and often does not engage with the new themes or materials, tending to rely on what is comfortable to her. Jane also does not engage with the new materials and lacks in creativity and imagination during dramatic play.

Observations were also taken throughout the duration of the first theme on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during the entire thirty to forty minutes of dramatic play. These observations showed many consistencies among the children's behavior and the choices they make during dramatic play. Each child has a very unique personality and how they interact with and participate in themes exhibited during dramatic play.

Dylan was very intrigued by the first theme of the action research project. The spaceship was of great interest. Rules had to be established of how many students could be in the spaceship at a given time. The students all policed each other very well and handled this restriction calmly and fairly. Many of the observations taken regarding Dylan's behavior during dramatic play

during this initial theme included poor interactions with his peers. On January 14th, Dylan was upset with another student for bumping into him. After speaking with the other student, it was concluded it was an accident and not intentional. Dylan found this accident to be a personal offense and became very upset. This became a consistent observation throughout the duration of the action research project. Dylan tends to internalize the behaviors of his peers as personal attacks which results in a highly emotional response, sometimes very physical. On January 19th, Dylan placed himself voluntarily into time out because he found himself getting very frustrated with two other students who would not play with him. The other students response to the researcher was, "He (Dylan) always wants to fight with us and we don't feel like fighting." This shows the frustration other students often have in their interactions with Dylan. The researcher and the lead teacher began to notice a pattern of lying with Dylan regarding his social interactions and his own behaviors. On January 12th, Dylan lied about another student hitting him and later admitted to the lie often saying, "My brain made me do it". The researcher and lead teacher consistently began reminding Dylan that he is his brain and is responsible for his own actions. Throughout the duration of the space theme, Dylan struggled in his relations with his peers. He often showed aggressive behaviors with his friends, loud talking and yelling in their faces, which has been off putting to many of his peers. On January 26th, Dylan became very upset with a male friend for not building a tower the way he wanted it. Dylan often needs complete control and has trouble sharing with others. Close proximity and personal space is sometimes an issue for Dylan. Although he consistently speaks very loudly directly into his peers faces, he also doesn't like to be touched at times or be too close to his neighbors. On February 2nd, Dylan became very upset at another student for standing too close to him at the sensory table. "You are really squishing me", he yelled at the top of his lungs. On February 4th,

Dylan had an interaction with a male friend in which he wrecked his friend's train track he had built. Dylan felt that he had been tricked somehow by his friend and therefore ruined his track. "My mom says no one can be silly with me because it is house rules. I get really frustrated," Dylan proclaimed. He is a very smart boy and very aware of himself and his behavior but completely lacks control over his emotions. He gets extremely worked up, but can calm himself down relatively quickly. Dylan lacks self-regulation skills and this directly affects his relationships with his peers. His peers have begun to shy away from interacting with him due to his physical nature, loud voice, and his tendency to get himself and his peers in trouble. This is unfortunate to see.

Evan has a very strong imagination and really enjoys dramatic play time. He was very consistent in the materials and type of play he engaged in during dramatic play. Evan is very comfortable playing on his own and engaging in pretend play using his own props and materials, but he also engages with his peers, often the leader and delegator of roles and characters. On January 19th Evan chose the policeman costume, playing good guys and bad guys with his peers. He often chose this same costume throughout this first theme, no matter the type of pretend play he engaged in. On January 26th Evan chose the fireman outfit and was the fire captain, "captain of the house", as he called it. He is very confident in this leadership role, and delegates the other roles to his peers. On January 28th, he chose the very same costume and role. He plays well with his peers when they are willing to go along with his ideas, but can have conflicts with his peers when they want to input their own ideas or want to be the leaders themselves. On February 2nd, Evan played with the train and tracks. Another student wanted to join and Evan very kindly let him join and began showing this more shy and reserved student how he could build the track and what to do. This was very kind of Evan and showed his leadership role when interacting with his

peers. Evan was absent for several days during the first theme due to illness, but his strong leadership skills were very evident.

Sarah did not engage well with the space theme during dramatic play. Sarah is drawn to more girl oriented materials and games and therefore was not as interested in the space theme as much as her peers. She is very imaginative when she wants to be but can seem bored or unengaged at times. Sarah is often seen next to a teacher, wanting to help set up or have conversations with the teacher instead of engaging with her own peers or dramatic play. On January 14th, Sarah did engage in dramatic play with her peers playing ferries, but very quickly decided to color instead. The researcher has noted on this day her ability to play well with others. Sarah often likes to play the damsel in distress when engaging in dramatic play. On January 19th, she had a pretend gold necklace around her neck. The bad guys were chasing after her trying to retrieve the gold necklace. Sarah gives a very dramatic performance during this type of play. She enjoys being the center of attention and the one being chased. On January 12th she was observed carrying out the same role with another male student. On February 2nd, Sarah used the play dough as a tool for her dramatic play. She had jewels that the bad guys were trying to steal. "Oh my goodness, he is going to take the jewels"! Sarah also had an interaction with one of her peers on this day asking if they would be her friend. She is very open about her emotions and connection with her peers. She often attaches herself to one girlfriend for duration of time, rather than playing as a group with multiple peers.

Jane is very unique in her style of play. She doesn't often like to engage in pretend play, but often likes to take a back seat during this time of day. She is not the most creative or imaginative, but is very smart. She likes more realistic type play rather than pretending. Although this is true, she will engage in dramatic play from time to time. She tends to be more

comfortable and interested in playing with boys rather than girls. She often loses interests quickly, moving from task to task. On January 14th, the researcher observed Jane wondering around the room not interested in committing to a particular game or task. She settled into painting for a bit, moved on to playing fairies with her peers, then lost interest again and played in the spaceship as an astronaut for a time. This is often how Jane spends her dramatic play time, not fully developing pretend play with her peers, but engaging for short periods of time in various activities. On January 19th, she pretended to be an alien for a short period of time, before hanging around the lead teacher, then finally asking the teacher to read her a story. On January 12th, she did exhibit curiosity for the spaceship. “Will the rocket ship really fly away? But, where are the rockets? It’s just cardboard inside, right”? She is very intelligent and curious but would prefer talking over actually engaging. On January 31st she really engaged in a pretend school bus scene the children had created. She began making tickets for the bus, and delegating who should sit where. She got in an argument with another student but gave in to his wishes to keep the peace. She is not very argumentative or aggressive, but she will stand up for herself when she really cares about something. She is very independent and does not always go along with what others are doing.

The first theme provided thorough observations during dramatic play pertaining to the social and emotional development of students. The theme was engaging and exciting for the preschool students. It was interesting to see how differently each student responded to and interacted with the new theme and props. The social and emotional rubric provided baseline knowledge of how the students are developing. Each student is completely diverse and unique in their strengths and weaknesses. All of the students being observed had varying interests and tendencies during dramatic play. The consistency of the observations provided a general

knowledge of the developmental stage of each student. Dylan struggles with self-regulation and his interactions with his peers, Evan shows signs of a great leader but can be authoritative and bossy, Sarah is narrowly focused in her interests, and Jane lacks an interest in dramatic play and taking on new roles. Although this is true, each student has their strengths as well. Dylan is very smart and engages thoroughly in the new themes and materials, Evan plays well with his peers and independently and has a very strong imagination, Sarah takes her friendships seriously, and Jane asks many questions showing her curiosity for life. Further observations and varied themes will provide greater insight into the social and emotional development of these four preschool students.

Birthday Party Theme

The second theme introduced at the researcher’s site was a birthday party theme. This theme included all of the props and materials one might find at a birthday party including birthday hats, plates, napkins, cups, a tablecloth, as well as birthday invitations with envelopes. For decoration, large birthday party hats were pinned to the walls of the dramatic play area, a “Happy Birthday” sign hung on the bulletin board, and streamers decorate the remaining walls of the secluded area. This second theme was implemented during week five of the action research project on February 6th. Just as during the first theme, observations were taken on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during the 30 to 40 minutes of dramatic play time scheduled. On February 18th, the second social and emotional rubric was completed. The results are shown below. A score of a five continues to show proficiency in that objective, and a score of a one shows the student is still struggling to meet that objective.

Social and Emotional Development Rubric #2				
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	Dylan	Evan	Sarah	Jane
Shows ability to adjust to new situations	3	5	5	2
Stands up for rights	2	3	5	3
Respects and cares for classroom environment and materials	2	3	3	3
Plays well with other children	3	5	3	3
Recognizes feelings of others and responds appropriately	1	5	5	5
Shares and respects the rights of others	1	5	3	5
Using thinking skills to resolve conflicts	1	5	5	5

The second social and emotional rubric showed new results in some cases, and in others the students scored very similarly. The students again exhibited strong areas and weak areas. The new theme provided a fresh environment to further explore these strengths and weaknesses. Some students immediately reacted to the new theme and were excited to try out new materials and props while others resorted to their usual activities.

The birthday theme tended to be of more interest to the girls over the boys. Dylan did not react at all to the implementation of the new theme. On February 9th, the first day of the new theme, Dylan did participate slightly in the birthday theme when directed by his female peers. He was given invitations and told to be the mailman and deliver them to the rest of the class. Dylan carried out his orders. Dylan showed more interest in the science materials that were made available to the students. He continues to exhibit very high intelligence and knowledge of very advanced ideas for a boy his age. Although during the first theme Dylan exhibited a lot of difficulty having positive social interactions with his peers. On February 11th, Dylan showed

great improvements at the time, working very well with his peers. The researcher noticed Dylan chose different friends to engage with on this day, which had a lot to do with his ability to participate more positively in dramatic play. Like many of his peers, Dylan also shows a lack of appreciation and respect for the materials given to them during free choice. On February 14th, Dylan was seen throwing uncapped markers on the floor and leaving them there. Teacher intervention was required to help Dylan realize the importance of respecting the materials in his classroom. On this same day, Dylan had a difficult time interacting with his peers. His behavior was very aggressive, including loud outbursts, yelling at his friends, stepping on boxes, and feeling as though nothing was fair. The researcher had to pull Dylan aside to read him a story to calm him down and redirect his attention. The researcher has noticed that Dylan tends to have a lot of ups and downs while at school depending on his mood and what he engaged in prior to attending school. Although he shows great intelligence, he still struggles to control his impulses and emotions, often looking at situations as they did not happen. Although this is true, the researcher has written very positive comments about his interactions with his peers in the final few days of the second theme. Dylan was engaged in a board game with another student. This would normally be a difficult task for Dylan who often feels things are not fair. But, on February 16th, he played very well during the game, even apologizing when he accidentally took his friend's turn. "Sorry I moved for you, Ryan." This was encouraging to see.

Evan was absent for the first couple days of the birthday theme, but when he returned on February 14th, he immediately engaged in the new materials. He put out all the plates and cups for a party with his friends. Although he engaged very well initially with the theme, when he was finished with the materials, he swept them to the floor, showing, as the other students have, a lack of respect for the classroom materials. The researcher has begun to notice that although

Evan is a strong leader, he often shows an overwhelming amount of confidence bordering on cockiness when engaging with his peers. He has a very strong sense of self that can sometimes come across as bossy and overbearing. On February 23rd, Evan played very well with his peers putting together a puzzle, but at times would speak very forcefully with his friends, “I know where it goes!” The researcher often noticed Evan using the phrase, “or I won’t be your friend!” He often uses this as a way to get what he wants in a game with his peers. On March 2nd, the researcher made a note regarding Evan’s confidence and assertiveness with his peers. The researcher wrote, “Evan stands up for himself and is very expressive and directive during play. He is the leader, organizing the play for his friends.” It is great to see such strong leadership skills from Evan, but Evan needs to work on being more encouraging of his peers, and less assertive.

Sarah continues to be very creative and imaginative during this second theme in dramatic play. Although she is excellent at this type of play and shows great ingenuity, she also does not show interest in new activities and materials, but tends to always resort back to her usual games and plays with many of the same materials. On February 14th, Sarah played dress up with a fellow female classmate. She definitely took charge and showed her peer how she wanted to play. “No, that’s not how you do it,” Sarah stated to her friend. She tends to always take the leadership role and is very confident in herself. On February 16th, Sarah engaged in dramatic play with another classmate, playing good guys and bad guys versus the boys. She used the birthday props in new ways, using the birthday party cups as a “jewel collector,” keeping it away from the boys. This shows her strong imagination and creativity. As stated during theme one, Sarah craves the teacher’s attention an interaction, often questioning what the teacher is doing and asking to help over engaging in play on her own. On March 2nd, the final day of the second

theme, she was playing well with her peers making a cookie factory with play dough. She continues to show great creativity and always tends to lean toward the more traditional female activities.

On the first day of the birthday party theme, Jane immediately raced over to the dramatic play area and began putting on the birthday hats, pretending to mail out invitations, and working with a group of students to organize a party. This is the most interaction with dramatic play Jane has shown since the research began. Throughout the duration of this second theme, Jane has shown very specific skills pertaining to her social and emotional development. On February 9th, although the researcher was happy to see her so engaged in the birthday party theme, Jane also showed a strong lack of appreciation and respect for the new materials. She was seen tossing the birthday hats and cups on the floor when she was done using the materials. As she became more accustomed to the theme, Jane showed less and less interest in the materials. The researcher continued to notice her propensity to play with her boy peers over the girls. On February 14th, Jane decided to play with two boy students in a game of bad guys versus good guys. In these situations, Jane often takes the backseat, following the boys lead. The researcher was happy to see Jane interact with a female classmate on February 16th. Jane and a female peer were playing at the play dough station. In this case, Jane also took her female peer's lead, and followed her instructions in how to make and mold her play dough. Jane seems comfortable in this role. On February 23rd, Jane was observed playing ferries with Sarah. Sarah was clearly the leader, directing Jane in her role, and Jane a willing participant in being directed. On the final day of the second theme, Jane continued to show a lack of interest and participating in the theme's props and materials, beyond the first day they were presented. She chose to play with another male student, completely ignoring the birthday theme materials.

The second theme provided further insight and knowledge into the social and emotional development of the students being researched. Some students engaged more enthusiastically into the birthday theme than others, but it was interesting to see the different ways each student sees the various props and materials and how they chose to utilize them. Dylan continued to exhibit great intelligence and curiosity during the second theme. He showed some improvements in his interactions with his peers, but had days where he struggled. He is very imaginative and enthusiastic about school, but his mood and behavior can have a large impact on his ability to successfully participate in dramatic play. Evan's confidence is a strong characteristic and wonderful to see him establish himself as a leader in the classroom, but his way of communicating with his peers and using his friendship with them as collateral is not a positive way to build rapport with his peers. Sarah's imagination allows for her to successfully participate in dramatic play. Although she exhibits signs of great creativity, she tends to always play the same types of activities, consistently engaging in the same roles and utilizing the same props. Jane showed more interest in dramatic play during the second theme. She continues to enjoy playing with boys rather than girls, and tends to follow rather than lead, more due to a lack of interest in leading than a lack of confidence. The third and final theme will provide further insight into the social and emotional development of the four researched students. More observations will be recorded, and the final social and emotional rubric will be completed.

Grocery Store Theme

The final theme for the action research project was a grocery store theme. This theme included props and materials such as a cash register, huge tub of pretend food, pretend money, and telephones. Also included in the dramatic play area at all times is a pretend refrigerator and stove, which allowed students the opportunity to use the pretend food in a kitchen setting as well.

The third theme began on March 6th, during week nine of the action research project.

Observations were taken on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of each week during the 30 to 40 minute dramatic play time. A third and final social and emotional rubric was completed on April 8th, the final day of observations. Below are the results of the final social and emotional rubric.

Social and Emotional Development Rubric #3				
	Dylan	Evan	Sarah	Jane
Shows ability to adjust to new situations	5	5	3	3
Stands up for rights	2	3	5	5
Respects and cares for classroom environment and materials	3	3	3	5
Plays well with other children	2	5	5	5
Recognizes feelings of others and responds appropriately	1	5	5	5
Shares and respects the rights of others	1	5	5	5
Using thinking skills to resolve conflicts	1	4	5	5

This final social and emotional rubric seemed to more closely align with the first rubric completed, but with some variations in scores. The students same strengths and weaknesses were exhibited during this final theme in varying degrees. Students tended to go through cycles in their behavior and attitude throughout the school year, and the researcher found this to be true of what was observed during dramatic play, as well.

The researcher and lead teacher made an adjustment to the structure of dramatic play at the start of the final theme. The researcher and her lead teacher found dramatic play was

becoming too chaotic and students would engage in the same activities each and every day, instead of trying new materials as well as interacting with different peers. The researcher and the lead teacher created stations during this free choice time period. The stations included a writing/paper station, the defined dramatic play area, play dough/sensory table, and the carpet area that included different toys at different times such as blocks, cars, doll house, and so on. The students were split up into even groups and were instructed to rotate through each station at even intervals. The students first began at the circle time meeting place. The lead teacher pulled sticks with their names on them. When the students heard their name they chose which station they would like to start. Once all the stations were full, students could begin their free choice time. The lead teacher and researcher set a timer, after about 10 minutes at each station, the timer would ring, and the students would rotate to the next station until they had played at each one. This new structure to our dramatic play/free choice time proved to be very successful. Students were now forced to engage with new peers. They also had the opportunity to interact with different materials at different stations and utilize different learning styles and types of creativity. The students responded very positively to the change and seemed to get more out of this time of their school day.

The students were excited to tackle the new theme and engage in the new props and materials available to them. The grocery store theme was something the students seemed very familiar with and new exactly how they were going to engage in the materials. As the students rotated through the dramatic play area, and throughout the other stations, they exhibited more signs of their social and emotional development through dramatic play.

Dylan has struggled throughout the entirety of this action research project in his ability to relate positively with his peers and control his impulses and emotions. The new structure of

dramatic play seemed most beneficial to him above all the other students. He was forced to interact with other peers, which tended to be smarter choices for him for more positive peer interactions. When he played with these other peers, he was better able to control his behavior and fewer incidents occurred. The peers he chose to engage with before made it difficult for him to exhibit positive behaviors. Although this is true, the researcher and lead teacher could not always control which students chose which stations as their starting location, and therefore, Dylan would at times be in a group of students with those same peers that tend to evoke the strongest emotions and behaviors from Dylan. This proved to the researcher the strong correlation between Dylan's behavior and who he chose to interact with during this dramatic play time. On March 14th, Dylan had an interaction with two female peers where he became frustrated. Dylan often feels things are unfair toward him and this causes a lot of anger for Dylan. In this incident, Dylan complained that Sarah was forcing him to play doctor and he did not want to. Sarah calmly explained that they were not forcing him to play; they were just playing it themselves. Dylan exclaimed, "Well, you are the boss of the kids, Sarah!" I thought it was interesting that Dylan viewed Sarah's role in the classroom this way. Dylan often over reacts to many situations and the other students have picked up on this behavior, often looking at him in shock or surprise during his outbursts. On March 30th, the researcher noted that the station rotation is a positive change for Dylan because it keeps his interest longer in activities, ultimately eliminating some poor behavior due to boredom. Dylan still struggles often controlling his impulses and his feeling of being personally attacked at times. He is extremely intelligent and very excited about learning and life, but his lack of self-regulation could cause some areas of concern for him as he ventures into elementary school.

On March 7th, the researcher wrote, “Evan ran straight to the pretend food, organizing it and beginning to delegate roles to other students.” Evan has always shown strong interest and engagement in dramatic play. He has a strong imagination and sense of self, and is often the leader, deciding how the play will be carried out. Evan was initially very interested and excited about the new theme. The researcher always finds it interesting when the theme will be set up so perfectly for a certain type of play, but the children will take it in a whole separate direction with their vast imaginations and creativity. For example, Evan and his peers began taking the pretend eggs and egg cartons and pretending they were baby chicks. Evan was telling the other children which eggs were okay to eat, and which were not. The other children very enthusiastically follow his lead. Evan, although can be bossy and overpowering at times, is very aware of what is fair, even when it means giving up a toy himself. On March 9th, at the writing station, Evan decided to make a belt made of paper as a “police belt.” He is very interested in police officers and fireman, often taking on these roles. Evan shows a strong sense of self and continues to be very confident and self-assured. These traits are great to see at such a young age, but he needs to be careful he is not unkind or overly bossy to other children.

Sarah also shows signs of leadership qualities during dramatic play. Although she does not demand the role, the other, especially female students, tend to just want to follow her lead. She is very creative and engaging and this is attractive to the other students who may not know how to engage as well with dramatic play. She also used the food supplies during this new theme to play with the eggs as baby chicks. She always takes on a very dramatic role, always the victim of a bad guy trying to steal her chicks away. On March 7th, she sent another student on an errand for more chicks, and that student delivered happily, returning and waiting for her next orders. On March 28th, Sarah was carrying out a similar dramatic situation, a male student came along and

asked Sarah what role he could have, and she delegated. She dictated how the scenario was going to play out, and the others happily followed along. Although Sarah enjoys dramatic play, she often is more interested in crafts and expressing herself artistically. She is always making a new creation for the researcher or lead teacher to hang on the wall. Sarah plays well with her peers and is very confident and well-respected by her peers. She is kind and caring to her friends and they look to her for the lead.

The new system of a station rotation has been a great addition for Jane. She is someone who often does not know where to go or what to play when it comes time for free choice. She tends to drift from one thing to the next, never really fully engaging in one activity. The station rotation has given Jane more focus and direction during this time, which she craves. She now engages more easily than before and seems more interested in the materials available. Jane is very smart and chatty, often deciding to share stories with the teachers rather than engage with her peers. The station rotation has given her the chance to be in one place and directed toward one activity at a time, allowing her more time to engage with different peers. Jane does not as easily dive into dramatic play situations. She is not as apt to take on a pretend role and carry it out. On March 7th, two students were playing bad guys and another female student tried to engage Jane in the game. This student says to Jane, "Look, they are bad guys!" Jane says, "I thought they were just playing in the dramatic play area." She is often more of an observer of dramatic play rather than engaging in it herself. She needs the direction and guidance of her peers to help her be more creative and engage in dramatic play. When directed and interested, she will take her peer's lead.

The final theme of this action research project provided very interesting insights into the student's tendencies and behaviors during dramatic play. Especially with the new

implementation of the stations, the students all responded very positively and showed new gains in many areas due to this more structured environment. This showed how important it is to set students up for success and give them the right tools and environment to reach their highest potential. Although the researcher observed very positive results from her students, many of the core strengths and weaknesses are still present in regard to their social and emotional development. Dylan still struggles with self-regulation and having positive interactions with his peers, but definitely showed great improvements when forced to interact with different peers. Evan has stayed very consistent in his development throughout the entirety of the project. He is very self-confident and a natural leader, but may alienate certain peers if he is unkind and not welcoming of all. Sarah is a positive leader almost by default from her peers. She is very engaging and well-respected by her peers. Jane is very smart and observant, but continues to need more direction and encouragement when it comes to engaging in dramatic play. She is not as comfortable taking on new roles and behaviors.

The students researched in this project exhibited the importance of engaging in dramatic play to enhance social and emotional development for future success in school and beyond. Each student had his or her own strengths and weaknesses and dramatic play did not solve some of the behavioral problems that may exist in some of the students researched. But, the importance of offering a forum for dramatic play is not to solve behavioral problems, but to provide students with the environment necessary to practice these skills and behaviors which everyone must learn to grow and mature. In this research study, dramatic play offered students the opportunity to express themselves, interact with their peers, experience various roles and behaviors they see exhibited in their lives, and to make sense of the world around them by carrying out what they see. Through these interactions and through teacher intervention and guidance, students continue

to work toward learning the appropriate behaviors and interactions necessary to be successful in the real world. The students in this study will continue to foster their social and emotional development through their experiences in elementary school, at home, on sports teams, and beyond. Dramatic play offered them just another opportunity to begin to carry out these skills and practice what is necessary of them in life.

Conclusions

After conducting the research, the researcher found dramatic play to be an essential developmental tool in the development of children's social and emotional health. Dramatic play offers countless opportunities for students to engage in situations that mirror those exhibited in real life. It is through these experiences children learn how to appropriately interact in real life and carry out real life relationships. Dramatic play offers an opportunity for students to practice these interactions and relationships and make sense of the world around them. As outlined in the social and emotional rubric based on the Creative Curriculum for Preschoolers textbook, students practice skills during dramatic play in order to reach these benchmarks; adjusting to new situations, standing up for oneself, respect of classroom and materials, playing well with others, recognizing the feelings of others, respecting other's rights, and using appropriate skills to resolve conflicts. Learning these behaviors is essential to a successful academic career and successful life. Dramatic play offers the beginning forum to practice and enhance these skills through teacher intervention and guidance.

Suggestions for Further Study

Upon completion of the action research project, the researcher learned there are still many other ways dramatic play can be organized and produced to create an optimal learning

environment for preschool students to help enhance their social and emotional development. As the researcher and lead teacher learned, simply reorganizing the structure of the dramatic play time can have a great impact on the children's success during dramatic play. The researcher also only implemented three themes she felt were interesting and applicable. It would be beneficial to see other themes carried out as well as the use of other materials and props available to the students. In addition, the researcher only studied four students in one preschool classroom environment. The researcher did not focus on the student's home life situation, their family order, or any other behavioral or environmental factors that would impact the student's social and emotional development. It would be beneficial to research one student more thoroughly and comprehensively to gain more insight on all aspects of that child's social and emotional development, at home, at school, at practice, and so on.



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Appendix A
Social and Emotional Development Rubric

Shows ability to adjust to new situations	Stands up for rights	Respects and cares for classroom environment and materials
<p>5- Student successfully transitions to new dramatic play theme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student utilizes new props - Student creates new play scenes involving new theme - Student engages in new roles 	<p>5- Student stands up for individual rights during play using his/her voice in a communicative manner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student uses appropriate words during times of conflict - Student uses teacher assistance to help avoid further conflict 	<p>5- Student utilizes play themes, props, and toys appropriately and with care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student asks permission before using certain materials - Student plays with toys appropriately and safely - Student cleans up messes and puts materials back in their assigned spots.
<p>3- Student transitions to new dramatic play theme but needs assistance and guidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student needs reminders to use new props and materials - Student needs reminders to create new scenes - Student engages in new roles on occasion 	<p>3- Student speaks up for rights but always need teacher assistance to do so</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student needs reminders to use appropriate words during times of conflict - Student does not always use the teacher as a resource 	<p>3- Student often cares for classroom environment and materials, but sometimes has trouble cleaning up after him/herself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student does not always ask permission before using materials - Student needs reminders to play with toys appropriately - Student needs reminders to clean up messes and putting materials back where they belong
<p>1- Student is unable to successfully transition to new dramatic play theme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student does not engage in new props or materials - Student is unable to create new play scenes using the new environment - Student does not take on new roles 	<p>1- Student does not stand up for individual rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student has trouble expressing feelings with peers and teachers - Student gives in to other students - Student takes on roles delegated to him or her instead of creating his/her own 	<p>1- Student shows no care for classroom environments, materials, or props</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student takes physical harm to materials, props, and environment - Student plays with toys inappropriately - Student leaves messes and does not clean up after him/herself

Plays well with other children	Recognizes feelings of others and responds appropriately	Shares and respects the rights of others	Uses thinking skills to resolve conflicts
<p>5- Student engages with his/her peers respectfully, sharing and listening.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student shares materials and props with others - Student listens to his/her peers - Student refrains from physical playing with friends 	<p>5- Student listens to peers and attempts to understand and relate to the feelings of others, showing empathy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student listens to feelings and emotions of others - Student stops a behavior that may be hurting another 	<p>5- Student shares materials and props and keeps hands to him/herself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student uses materials adequately, sharing with others - Student keep hands to him/herself, respecting personal space 	<p>5- Student thinks before acting, using appropriate reactions and communication skills while responding to conflicts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student responds appropriately to peers - Student uses a calm volume of voice while engaging in conflict - Student is able to express the issue clearly - Student uses teacher as a resource during conflict
<p>3- Student engages with peers but needs reminders to share and listen on occasion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student shares materials on occasion - Student needs reminders to listen to peers - Student can be physical at times 	<p>3- Student listens to peers often but often has trouble understanding or relating to others feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student sometimes listens to the feelings of others - Student can sometimes engage in hurtful behavior 	<p>3- Student often needs reminders to respect the rights of others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student needs reminders to share materials - Student sometimes invades others' personal space 	<p>3- Student needs reminders to think before acting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student often needs reminders to react appropriately to peers - Student sometimes uses a calm voice when in conflict - Student uses the teacher as a resource on occasion
<p>1- Student does not engage well with others, tending to play singularly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student does not share materials and props with others - Student has trouble listening to his/her peers - Student often engages in physical, inappropriate play with peers 	<p>1- Student does not listen to the feelings of others and has trouble relating to his/her peers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student does not understand the feelings or emotions of others - Student is unable to listen to the feelings of others - Student often engages in behavior that hurts others emotionally/physically 	<p>1- Student has troubling sharing feelings with others and does not respect the materials or feelings of others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student is unable to share feelings with others - Student often engages physically with others - Student does not respect the personal space or property of peers 	<p>1- Student does not think before acting, often unable to resolve conflict with peers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student engages physically or over emotionally to peers during conflict - Student uses a high volume of voice during conflict - Student is unable to express the issue clearly - Student does not use the teacher as a resource

Appendix B

Social and Emotional Development Rubrics

Social and Emotional Development Rubric #1				
	Dylan	Evan	Sarah	Jane
Shows ability to adjust to new situations	5	5	3	2
Stands up for rights	2	4	3	5
Respects and cares for classroom environment and materials	1	3	3	3
Plays well with other children	1	3	5	5
Recognizes feelings of others and responds appropriately	1	5	5	5
Shares and respects the rights of others	1	5	5	5
Using thinking skills to resolve conflicts	1	5	5	5

Social and Emotional Development Rubric #2				
	Dylan	Evan	Sarah	Jane
Shows ability to adjust to new situations	3	5	5	2
Stands up for rights	2	3	5	3
Respects and cares for classroom environment and materials	2	3	3	3
Plays well with other children	3	5	3	3
Recognizes feelings of others and responds appropriately	1	5	5	5
Shares and respects the rights of others	1	5	3	5

Using thinking skills to resolve conflicts	1	5	5	5
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Social and Emotional Development Rubric #3				
	Dylan	Evan	Sarah	Jane
Shows ability to adjust to new situations	5	5	3	3
Stands up for rights	2	3	5	5
Respects and cares for classroom environment and materials	3	3	3	5
Plays well with other children	2	5	5	5
Recognizes feelings of others and responds appropriately	1	5	5	5
Shares and respects the rights of others	1	5	5	5
Using thinking skills to resolve conflicts	1	4	5	5



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