

Choosing Toys that Matter: Which Toys are Most Effective in Helping Children Develop
Social-Emotional, Language, and Gross Motor Skills

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Approval Page

Choosing Toys that Matter: Which Toys are Most Effective in Helping Children Develop
Social-Emotional, Language, and Gross Motor Skills

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Abstract

When selecting toys for classrooms, teachers typically consider that children need a well-balanced assortment of toys to contribute to growth, development, and pleasure. Head Start, a program that began in 1965 is one of the many programs that utilizes play with toys to enhance children's learning and development. Today, Head Start's primary goal is to promote school readiness by providing education, health, and other social services to low-income preschool-aged children and their families. However, one of the issues that Head Start programs face is a lack of allowable costs for purchasing developmentally appropriate classroom toys and materials. This lack in allowable costs can lead to children not being exposed to cognitively stimulating toys and materials that promote early childhood developmental skills. Since teachers are considered experts in the field of education and are required to plan and implement learning practices that are connected to children's needs and interests, teacher's experienced and perceptions were examined about which toys contribute most to the social-emotional, language, and fine motor development of Head Start children in Jackson County, Mississippi. Six teachers employed by Jackson County Civic Action Agency responded to the invitation to participate in the study. Face to face interviews, and a demographic questionnaire were conducted to collect data regarding teacher's perception and experiences selecting developmentally appropriate toys. Research findings in this study were consistent with the literature related to toys that stimulate children's social-emotional, language, and fine-motor development. The two themes relevant to question 1 were dramatic play and Conscious Discipline. The five themes relevant to question two were real-world materials, Smart Boards, books, music, and talking to children-reiterating commands/responses. The four themes relevant to question three were handwriting, cutting with scissors, manipulatives, and modeling clay/playdough. The recommendation for application was

the development of a process to ensure both teachers and administrators have the ability to select and evaluate toy and material effectiveness in Head Start classrooms. Future research studies should include a larger number of Head Start Teachers, as well as different Head Start programs in different counties and states.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Toys are concrete objects that children can manipulate to carry out self-directed, meaningful and enjoyable play activities (Trawick-Smith, Wolff, Koschel, & Vallarelli, 2014). When selecting toys for classrooms, teachers typically consider that children need a well-balanced assortment of toys to contribute to growth, development, and pleasure (Silva, 2010). Researchers categorize toys as computer games, books, building materials, pretend play props, art material, and scientific exploration equipment (Trawick-Smith et al., 2014). Kottman (2011) categorizes toys using five categories: (1) family/nurturing toys, (2) scary toys, (3) aggressive toys, (4) expressive toys, and (5) pretend /fantasy toys. Each toy categorized by Kottman (2011) gives children the opportunity to express different feelings, emotions, and attitudes. Landreth (2012) proposes that there are only three categories of toys: (1) real life toys (2) acting out aggressive release toys, and (3) toys for creative expression and emotional release.

According to Landreth (2012), real life toys allow children to express their feelings. Utilizing aggressive release toys allows children to express anger, hostility, and frustration. Creative expression and emotional release toys allow children to be spontaneous and expressive. Creative expression and emotional release toys include emotion stones, better builder emotions, emotion-oes, and emotion magnet sets (Kaplan, 2015). These creative expression and emotion release toys allow children to reflect on emotions and understand and respond to the social needs of others. According to Elmore and Valli (2011), toys such as pretend play props and blocks can enhance social interactions. Research conducted by Silva (2010) found that toys also inspire feelings of ownership in children (Silva, 2010). Research efforts have also indicated that children who learn through play tend to use higher forms of language than children who do not learn through play (Han, et al., 2010). Toys are used to help children develop language skills

through play. These toys should allow for children's symbolic expressions; teachers and caregivers should not determine 'right' or 'wrong' ways to use these toys (Lee, Meany-Walen, Carlson, Carnes-Holt, & Ware, 2013). Toys that children use to develop language skills should be as simplistic as possible to allow children to determine their specific uses (Lee et al., 2013). A large percentage of classroom play in preschools includes playing with toys.

Head Start is one of the many programs that utilize play with toys to enhance children's learning and development. Head Start is a federally funded program established by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 as a part of the War on Poverty. The War on Poverty was the unofficial name for proposed legislation associated with the national poverty rate in 1965. Head Start began as a comprehensive community-based program that would help meet the needs of children and families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Research was conducted by a group of government-appointed child development experts; this research indicated a need to help disadvantaged individuals by compensating for inequality in social and economic conditions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Head Start was initially designed to eliminate poverty, and to provide preschool children from low-income families with a comprehensive program that would meet their psychological, social, emotional, nutritional, and medical needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Head Start's primary goal is to promote school readiness by providing education, health, and other social services to low-income preschool aged children and their families (Lee, Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

To ensure school readiness, children and teachers need to be provided with appropriate materials to use in the classroom (Guyton, 2011). The specific problem for Jackson County

Civic Action Committee is that Administrators are not aware of which toys are most effective in developing children's social, language, and fine motor skills since they spend minimal time in the classroom with children. This problem was addressed because federal subsidies received to fund Head Start programs are expected to have a positive effect on children's school readiness. However, the allowable cost for toys/materials is part of a cost pool which also funds other departments within Head Start programs. Allowable costs are used to fund component coordinator and staff salaries, costs associated with parental involvement, expenses related to program staff functions, and the costs of operation and maintenance of program component space, including utilities (Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start, 2010). Addressing this issue has helped JCCAC Head Start Administrators determine which toys are most effective in developing children's social, fine motor, and language skills, and has helped Jackson County Civic Action Administrators make data drive decisions concerning resource allocations within the allowable cost restriction for purchasing toys.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the case study research was to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences about which toys are most effective in developing children's social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. The findings from demographic surveys and teacher interviews assisted Jackson County Civic Action Committee, Inc. teachers and administrators in decision-making when acquiring developmentally appropriate toys for the classrooms at Jackson County Civic Action Committee, Inc, and assisted in data-driven decisions regarding resource allocations for toys. Additionally, findings assisted teachers and administrators in selecting and purchasing toys that are beneficial to the enhancement of children's growth and development. The findings of the research study also provided teachers with information to give to families

that will aid them in choosing toys that are beneficial to their children's growth and development in social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. Six female teachers employed by Jackson County Civic Action Agency participated in the study. During the study teachers were asked which toys they perceived are most effective in helping children develop social, fine motor, and language skills. Teachers were also asked about School Readiness and how play with toys that stimulate development facilitate School Readiness. The six female teachers were responsible for ensuring the developmental outcomes of children. All teachers participating in the study had a minimum of a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Early education programs that prepare children for kindergarten are the single most important thing that helps them graduate from high school, stay out of trouble with the law, and hold good jobs later in life (Poppe, 2010). In recent years, many of these programs have seen budget cuts due to the failure of government officials and citizens to see their importance. At the same time, Pre-K is still seen by many as an investment in the future (Poppe, 2010). A study by Poppe (2010) found that when states cut Pre-K program funding, they experienced increased future costs of state and local government and decreased future tax revenues so families get hurt immediately and in the long-term. Funding the many Pre-K programs around the United States, whether privately or by using government or state funds, will result in a positive impact on a range of social, health, and educational outcomes (Poppe, 2010).

Jackson County Civic Action Committee Head Start is one of the many Pre-K programs that set the foundation for academic, social, and emotional success for children. Jackson County Civic Action Committee serves approximately 677 children, primarily three to five years of age, at seven different centers throughout five cities in Jackson County (JCCAC, 2014). The

philosophy of education at Jackson County Civic Action Committee Head Start is based on three cornerstones. First, the agency believes that the child's parents are their first and most important teachers and that the agency's curriculum design and early implementation is only as strong as the meaningful involvement of parents in the process (JCCAC, 2014). Secondly, children learn optimally only when their health, nutrition, and mental health needs are first met. Therefore, a comprehensive service program for all children must be the baseline against which all program operations are compared (JCCAC, 2014). Finally, children are creative and curious seekers and constructors of knowledge with a tremendous capacity to explore and to make sense of their environment.

Promoting the school readiness of children is an important outcome in and of itself for improving the educational opportunities of children who come from economically disadvantaged families. However, limitations on allowable costs leave programs with minimal funds to ensure that children are exposed to cognitively stimulating materials and activities that promote child development (Johnson, Martin, & Brooks-Gunn, 2013). Trawick-Smith, Wolff, Koschel, and Vallarelli (2014) conducted a study that examined the effects of nine toys on the play of 60 three and four-year-old children. The toys used for the study were selected by teachers and parents as being developmentally beneficial for children in early childhood classrooms (Trawick-Smith et al., 2014). The results of the research indicated that toys make a difference in children's play, some of which prompt high quality play (Trawick-Smith, et al., 2014). High quality play is defined as play which is fun, engaging, and filled with opportunities to build social, cognitive, language, and gross and fine motor skills (NAEYC, 2014).

Trawick-Smith et al. (2014) found that careful thought and consideration must be taken when selecting toys for classrooms, because these toys have a great impact on children's

development. The research also indicated that teachers should offer families support when selecting cost-effective toys that support high quality play at home. Yet, Trawick-Smith et al. (2014) did not take into account the cost of the nine beneficial toys for preschools, and how funding affects the purchasing of developmentally appropriate toys for preschool children. Hence, there is a need to research which toys are most effective with helping children develop social-emotional, language, and gross motor skills. This research will help the JCCAC Head Start management team prioritize resource allocations for developmentally appropriate materials with allowable cost restrictions.

Nature of the Study

The research effort utilizes a case study approach to gain insight and understanding on perceptions about which toys are best to use in Head Start programs with limited agency funding in Jackson County Mississippi. The case study approach and research methods generated perceptions of Head Start teachers regarding which toys are best with limited funding for helping children develop language, fine motor, and social-emotional skills. A further benefit of this study includes exploring the links between teacher perception of toys, teacher's age, teacher's educational background, teaching experiences, and the teacher's experience selecting developmentally appropriate toys for children.

The qualitative case study approach was appropriate for the research effort as it attempted to derive a close, in-depth understanding and insightful appreciation of a single case that can result in new learning in a real world context (Yin, 2012). The qualitative case study approach allowed an in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of issues and efforts in classroom settings (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, & Sheikh, 2011). The use of the qualitative case study

approach was also beneficial because it created a continual flow of variables that is relevant, and that cannot be ignored (Yin, 2012).

Hence, during the research process, other variables became evident concerning the importance of toy selection, which can lead to additional research studies being conducted. In addition to creating a continual flow of variables, the case study also examined contextual conditions surrounding the case (Yin, 2012). For instance, since the research effort is being conducted in a specific Head Start agency, data about cultural, economic, social, and political conditions and trends could be counterpart components that affect funding, and that could be part of a later research effort (Yin, 2012). The qualitative case study approach allowed for the incorporation of various methods. For the research effort, survey and interview methods were used to gain insight and understanding of the various phenomena associated with the study (Cheng, 2014).

Initially, surveys were used to conduct the proposed study. Data gathered from surveys was collected using a paper questionnaire delivered in person to teachers who agreed to participate. The hand out data collection method was used to capitalize on the availability of the respondents and to ensure immediate feedback. Through using the hand out method, the researcher was able to convey the purpose and importance of the survey and answer any questions that the participants had face-to-face (Powell & Hermann, 2000). After all surveys were received, survey data was tabulated and entered into a spreadsheet. Frequency counts and percentage distribution associated with answers was the basic information used for the study. Data was double checked for data entry errors. Once frequency counts and percentage distribution tables were created, the researcher began to analyze the data by looking for patterns between survey responses and coded interview responses. All open-ended question responses

listed on the survey were analyzed for content, and verbatim responses were placed on a separate spreadsheet.

Interviews were used to collect data associated with teacher perception and toys. The use of toys, how they relate to specific developmental domains (Social-Emotional, Fine Motor, and Language) in the Head Start Framework, and which toys are best to use in Head Start programs with limited agency funding were referenced during the open-ended interview process. Data gathered via open-ended interview was used to independently identify emergent themes by following a multistep analysis that included: (1) three readings of each interview to establish overall understanding and general impression (2) identification of significant statements associated with toy selection (3) relating themes to demographic data while comparing within and across program beliefs about the incorporation of toys and materials in the classroom (4) member checking. Questions asked in each interview were dependent on the context of the interview, and responses varied depending on the teacher's experience and education. To guide the line of questioning in the interviews, a set of interview questions was created (see Appendix A for teacher questionnaire).

Since note taking was likely to disrupt the natural conversation that took place during the unstructured interview process, interviews with teachers were audio recorded (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). All information collected by audio recording was then transcribed into text. Once all data was transcribed into text, the researcher used the process of member checking (Simon & Goes, 2011). Through member checking, participants were provided with a summary of the transcribed interviews to allow them to correct any inaccuracies (Simon & Goes, 2011). The researcher then looked for patterns among transcribed data. Two criteria was specifically important to the interview analysis: similarity of the toys or materials considered important in

enhancing children's developmental growth associated with language, social-emotional, and fine motor skills, and how participants believed that funding allocated for the purchase of toys and materials affects their ability to ensure that children meet all school readiness/Head Start Framework requirements. Through completion of unstructured interviews, Head Start teachers assisted the researcher in ascertaining perspectives about challenges associated with teaching children without having adequate funding to purchase developmentally appropriate toys to facilitate learning.

Research Questions

Associated with the problem and purpose statement, the following research questions guided inquiry:

RQ1. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate social-emotional development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

RQ2. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate language development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

RQ3. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate fine motor development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Significance of the Study

Among the few studies that have explored the effect of toys on the play quality of preschool children, Trawick-Smith (2014) investigated how the effects of toys vary according to the novelty of the toy or the gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity of children playing with them. However, they did not specifically explore the teachers' perceptions about which toys are best to use in Head Start programs with limited agency funding. Meanwhile, Prochner (2011) examined the meaning of educational materials and how children learn and how best to teach

them with classroom materials. Prochner (2011) also did not look at teachers' perceptions about which toys are best to use in Head Start programs with limited agency funding. Given that play with toys is a profoundly important medium for learning and development in early childhood classrooms, the proposed study is significant because it will explore teachers' perceptions about selecting toys that are important in ensuring that individual children's developmental needs are met. Since a single set of toys cannot meet the developmental needs of all children in a classroom (Trawick-Smith et al., 2014), the study also provided information to JCCAC Head Start educators on the range of different toys that can help a child develop social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. Finally, the study yielded suggestions for methods that can be applied to selecting developmentally appropriate toys for early childhood classrooms. The research methods used in the study, such as interviews and surveys, provided to be fruitful ways to learn about teachers' perceptions when selecting developmentally appropriate toys. The research methods have the ability to help Head Start teachers and management staff implement cost effective change, by building links between teacher perception concerning the selection of toys and current program policies associated with selecting toys.

Definitions of Key Terms

Child Development Associate Credential. The most widely recognized credential in early childhood education and a key stepping stone on the path of career advancement in early childhood education; it is based on a core set of competency standards, which guide early care professionals as they work toward becoming qualified teachers of young children (Council for Professional Recognition, 2013).

Cost Pool. Allowable cost for developing and administering a Head Start program; these costs may be programmatic, developmental, or administrative (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014).

Emotional Development. Emotional Development is the process through which a person learns to experience emotions and express them in acceptable ways (Soto & Porter, 2013).

Fine Motor Skills. Fine Motor Skills are physical skills that promote eye-hand coordination and development of the small muscles of the wrists, hands, and fingers (Soto & Porter, 2013).

Funding. Grant money awarded directly to public or private non-profit organizations to expand access to high-quality, comprehensive services to low-income children and families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014).

Head Start. Head Start is a federally funded program established by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 as a part of the War on Poverty, which has a primary goal to promote school readiness by providing education, health, and other social services to low income preschool aged children and their families (Lee, Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2014).

Head Start Framework. The Head Start Framework is used as a guide for curriculum planning, to establish school readiness goals for children, and to monitor children's progress (Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start, 2010).

Language Development. Language Development is the process through which a person combines arbitrary symbols in conventional ways to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings (Zhou, 2014).

Play. Play is informal, pleasurable, and voluntary activity that has no practical objective or goal. Play can be categorized as solitary, parallel, and cooperative (Soto & Porter 2013).

Social Development. Social Development is the process through which a person changes from a self-centered infant into a socially, well-adjusted adult capable of living and working with others (Soto & Porter, 2013).

Summary

Researchers have previously examined a variety of factors that influence the quality of play in preschool settings. Yet, there has been little evidence-based research on the effectiveness of toys on social emotional, language, and fine motor skills development. Lack of evidence-based research leaves teachers with little empirical evidence to guide the important decisions that have to be made when choosing and incorporating developmentally appropriate toys into the classroom. A case study approach was used to gather and code data associated with teachers' perception and experiences with selecting effective toys that develop social-emotional, fine motor, and language skills. Teachers identified toys that have the ability to enhance the development of social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. The study will contribute to the literature specializing in the field of early childhood education by incorporating methods of choosing toys and assessing the effectiveness of toys on child development. The results will contribute to a better understanding of the impact of toys in child development specifically within the Jackson County Civic Action Committee Head Start classrooms. The results of the research effort will also add to the body of knowledge in the area of Head Start school readiness in relationship to choices teachers make when acquiring and purchasing toys for the classroom and classroom activities for Jackson County Civic Action Committee, Inc.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this case study was to examine Head Start teacher's perceptions and experiences of which toys are most effective use in developing children's social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. The researcher used various online databases to identify scholarly, peer reviewed resources related to early childhood theories, teacher educational attainment, teacher perception, kindergarten readiness, play in early childhood education, social-emotional development, language development, fine motor development, toys in early childhood, head start inception, demographic information about Jackson County Civic Action Committee, and early childhood standards of learning. The researcher provided a review and discussion of current research within the context of Head Start and early childhood education.

Documentation

The researcher used various online search engines to identify scholarly, peer reviewed resources relevant to social-emotional, language, and fine motor development and developmentally appropriate toys. The search engines that were utilized include, Early Childhood Research & Practice, ERIC, EBSCOhost Education Research, and Sage online journal. Keywords and phrases such as early childhood, developmentally appropriate toys, social-emotional development, preschool development, language development, preschool toys, Head Start teacher perception, Head Start, fine motor development, and school readiness were used to conduct the search process.

Early Childhood Theories

Ecological systems theory. Head Start was founded based upon an ecological theory created by Bronfenbrenner. The ecological systems theory looks at children's development within the context of the system of relationships that form their environment (Morrison, 2014).

The principal components of the ecological system are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem (Morrison, 2014). Each system is a combination of people or places that have the ability to affect a child's development (Morrison, 2014). The microsystem is defined as the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by a developing person in a particular setting with particular physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief (Johnson, 2008). A child's microsystem is made up of family, school, peers, health services, and church groups. All of these factors have an impact on the child and are influenced by the child (Morrison, 2014). The school and the parent can impact each other, which then can have an influence on the child. The ecological systems theory focuses directly on the child and the components that influence the child. The system suggests that outside values as well as agencies that will not have contact with the child can also affect the child in a positive manner (Morrison, 2014). When strong links are apparent between all or most of the systems, positive child and adolescent development seem to be enhanced. As theorized by Bronfenbrenner, the parent is part of the microsystem and is one of the most prominent parts of a child's life (Morrison, 2014). Parental involvement can be defined in numerous ways such as home and school partnerships or parents as partners (Llyod-Smith & Baron, 2010). Parental involvement can also be defined in terms of the presence of the parent at school, communicating with teachers, or helping at home with homework (Young, Austin, and Growe, 2013). Research shows that parental involvement boosts a child's perceived level of competence and autonomy, offers a sense of security and connectedness, and helps to internalize the value of education and performance (Young et al., 2013).

There are also other benefits of parental involvement in a child's education. These benefits include improved student attendance, reduction in the student dropout rate, and increased motivation and performance (Buley, 2004). Just like the parent is influential to the child, the child is also influential to the parent. According to Plevyak (2003), students motivate their parents to be involved in their education. When students become interested in assignments or projects at school, their enthusiasm for learning is usually brought home. This excitement sparks the parent's interest in what is happening at school (Plevyak, 2003).

The mesosystem is the second level of the ecological systems theory. The mesosystem encompasses the linkages between the microsystems (Johnson, 2013). Specifically, the mesosystem refers to the home and the school environment. Parent and teacher communication concerning children's educational development can often create a dynamic that can directly and indirectly affect children. This in turn could have an effect on children's behavior and how they conduct themselves at school (Johnson, 2013).

The exosystem is the third level of the system that is composed of events, contingencies, decisions, and policies over which the developing person has no influence; hence money allotted for educational programs, as well as laws pertaining to education, can affect a child's influence on society (Morrison, 2014). Pre-kindergarten programs were introduced by government officials in the 1960s and were implemented to improve the school readiness of young children from low-income families (Nevil, 2008). According to Nevil (2008), Pre-K programs were thus created based on the premise that poverty severely restricts the capacity of many families and communities to adequately support the development of young children. They were created to provide a comprehensive child development program that works with families to improve children's health and nutrition as well as their social, emotional, and cognitive development. In

recent years, many preschool programs have seen budget cuts due to a lack of belief among government that the funding of these programs is critical. According to research, early education programs that prepare children for kindergarten are the single most important factor ensuring that individuals graduate from high school, stay out of trouble with the law, and hold good jobs later in life (Poppe, 2010). These early childhood education programs set a strong foundation of academic, social, and emotional skills, and promote a life-long desire for learning. They are a wise investment of time and money (Poppe, 2010).

The fourth level of the ecological systems theory is the macrosystem. The macrosystem can be defined as a social blueprint of a given culture, subculture, or broad social context that consists of the overarching values, beliefs, lifestyles, opportunities, and resources embedded within that context (Johnson, 2013). This system incorporates the cultural and social influences placed on the individual. Brahim and Sumantri (2010) believe that early childhood students should be taught first about the values rooted in their own culture and then the value systems of other cultures, norms, and religions. Through the incorporation of cultural, social, and economic beliefs into a school environment children, will be provided an opportunity to recognize direct and indirect differences and capitalize on strengths and weaknesses within the school family (Johnson, 2013).

The final level of the system is the chronosystem. This system represents a time-based dimension that affects the operation of all levels of these ecological systems (Johnson, 2013). The chronosystem encompasses major life transitions that can directly affect the growth and development of a child (Johnson, 2013). Concerning early childhood education, the chronosystem of a school can be represented by the development that occurs on a daily or annual basis. This development can include teachers, student body demographics, changes in the

educational curriculum, as well as length of school operation (Johnson, 2013). Thus, all parts of the Ecological Systems Theory play a significant role in understanding the importance that early childhood education plays in laying the foundation for all formal education. The ecological systems theory was based on the belief that children's development should consider the child, the family, and all contextual environments in which the child resides (Lee, Calkins, Shin, 2015).

Bank Street Approach-Developmental Interactive. Like the ecological systems theory, the developmental interactive approach plays a significant role in understanding the importance that early childhood education plays in laying the foundation for all formal education. Originally developed more than 70 years ago, the developmental interactive approach was theoretically based on the works of Piaget, Erikson, Dewey, and several others (Nager & Shaprio, 2000). The developmental interactive approach focuses on the whole child and his or her cognitive and physical development through an open curriculum that creates questions and encourages exploration of the surrounding environment (Nager & Shaprio, 2000). According to Walsh and Petty (2007) the developmental interactive approach is by far the most suitable and appropriate curriculum for children to learn by. It is inclusive of all unique and individual lifestyles and diverse cultures. This approach is often referred to as the Bank Street Approach, and its key element is that the teacher understands the importance of social development and the need of the student to be connected to all facets of life (Nager & Shaprio, 2000). The developmental interactive approach in practice includes an equal amount of time spent indoors and outdoors, an equal amount of time with children engaging in structured and non-structured activities, and a large amount of exposure to natural resources such as water, sand, and clay. (Nager & Shaprio, 2000). The children learning under this curriculum are inquisitive and permitted to question, explore, and navigate their way to an understanding fit to their individual needs and desires

(Nager & Shaprio, 2000). The role of the teacher in the developmental interactive approach is to assist in the structure of relationships by encouraging and helping negotiate connections between children and to assess and document the children's progress (Nager & Shaprio, 2000). The role of the children is emphasized through a theoretical framework that involves the whole child in different developmental areas of life and learning (Walsh & Petty, 2007). This role involves allowing the child to explore classroom materials and express his or her feelings (Walsh & Petty, 2007). The environment within the Developmental Interactive Approach encourages children on any ability to challenge themselves while maintaining current levels of physical, social, and emotional knowledge (Nager & Shaprio, 2000). The environment is centered on play and makes a large variety of materials and resources available to the children, allowing them to maximize use of their senses and investigative skills (Westminster Community College, 2015).

Montessori Method. Classroom environments play a major role in children's learning and development. The Montessori Method focuses on environment and interactions within the environment. Montessori's theory of child-centered learning gives children the opportunity to follow their own interests but also permits independent learning by instilling self-confidence (Ultanir, 2012). This theory of child-centered learning allows the child to work independently while the teacher designs the classroom environment to give the child the opportunity to concentrate on subjects that are of interest (Ultanir, 2012). Hence, the role of the child is to share what he has learned with others while reinforcing his own learning (Ultanir, 2012). Like in the Bank Street Approach also known as the developmental interaction approach to education, the parents, children, environment, and teachers play an important role in this theory. Within this model, the role of the parent is like that of the teacher; the parents are to be aware of the child's needs and to give them adequate space to learn (Lillard, 2013). The role of the

environment in the Montessori Method is to give the child a chance to learn from it. The classroom must contain materials that are designed so that if children make mistakes they can see them and correct them on their own (Lillard, 2013). Like the Bank Street Approach the Montessori Method allows for both structured and unstructured interactions to occur within the classroom (Johnson, 2013).

The Montessori Method of development allows children the freedom of choice and encourages peer learning interactions (Johnson, 2013). During peer learning interaction, children work on developing social, emotional, cognitive, language, fine motor, and gross motor skills through play with materials and toys (Lillard, 2013). Peer learning interactions require children to participate in activities that are constructive but sometimes limit the child's creative sense of self because of a variety of restrictions. Restrictions associated with play and the Montessori Method include: (a) playing freely with materials that have a symbolic purpose can interfere with children learning the particular purpose; (b) the Montessori method calls for a precise and orderly way in which to interact with materials, so if materials are not interacted with correctly, a sense of order can be disturbed; and (c) learning in this classroom requires an increased level of self-discipline since the use of the materials is limited and structured (Johnson, 2013). Moreover, restrictions associated with play cease to hinder children from learning and continuing with self-directed tasks (Johnson, 2013). Despite these limitations/restrictions, the Montessori Method plays a significant role in early childhood education. This theory instills in the child a valued sense of independence and self-worth; two essential socio-emotional skills that children can continue to use throughout their academic careers (Johnson, 2013).

Teacher Educational Attainment

The National Association for the Education of Young Children is a national organization that promotes early childhood excellence and school readiness. Programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) employ and support a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse needs and interests (NAEYC, 2014). In the 21st century, it is the responsibility of early childhood teachers to facilitate children's learning and readiness for kindergarten and to prepare them to succeed in school and throughout their lives (Sakai, Kipnis, & Whitebook, 2014). Teachers are also expected to decrease the educational gap between children from families with higher socioeconomic status (SES) and children from families with lower SES. While doing so, teachers are also expected to support the social emotional development of children and provide them with instructional support in math, literacy, and science (Sakai et al., 2014). Previous research has indicated that teachers who have higher qualifications, experience, and certification tend to provide children with higher-quality classroom experiences, which can lead to increased school readiness (Son, Kwon, Jeon, & Hoong, 2013). This research has led to advanced educational requirements for teachers. Links between school readiness, high-quality early childhood environments, and teacher's educational attainment have led to the requirement for teachers in publicly funded preschool programs and Head Start programs to hold area-specific degrees or certifications (Son, et al., 2013, & Whitebook, 2014). Since a primary goal of Head Start programs is to promote school readiness, Congress has mandated this increase in required educational attainment for Head Start teachers (Lee, Brooks-Gunn, Zhai, & Han, 2013). Head Start now requires that at least 50% of all teachers in a program have a bachelor's or advanced

degree in early childhood education, or a baccalaureate or advanced degree in another discipline with previous teaching experience (Son et al, 2013). Research has found that teachers with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education tend to provide children with higher quality early childhood experiences than teachers with less education and training in the area of early childhood education (Jung & Jin, 2014). Head Start also requires its teaching staff to participate in a minimum of 20 early childhood professional development hours annually. These requirements seem to have a positive effect on classroom teaching practices (Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start, 2010). Research suggests that teachers with formal training in early childhood education create a positive classroom environment that gives children the opportunity to experience high quality learning activities (Jin & Jung, 2014). Son et al, (2013) also noted that children whose teachers attended trainings and workshops and who participated in classroom coaching were more likely to use advanced language and materials that stimulate advanced language skills.

Teacher Perception

Since toys and materials are an integral part of early childhood environments, and since teachers typically select these toys, teachers must stay abreast of current theories of child development, learning principles, and curriculum content. Teachers are considered experts in the field of education and are required to establish relationships with children and their families. Teachers are also required to plan and implement learning practices that are connected to children's needs and interests (Leggett, 2013). Research suggests that early childhood teachers' perception of play with toys and materials in early childhood environments depends on the preparations that teachers received when they were students coupled with their own beliefs about play (Jung & Jin, 2014). What teachers believe about how children learn and what they believe

about the content that children should learn has the ability to affect how teachers implement play into early childhood classrooms (Lord, 2010). Since the implementation of new national and state educational contexts and the new challenges associated with ensuring that children meet all educational standards, many teachers have changed their perceptions about the importance of play with toys and materials in early childhood classrooms (Christie, Johnson, Wardle, 2005; Jin & Jung, 2014). This change in perception could be because of the mandates that ensure that children obtain set objectives or outcomes within a designated timeframe (Lord, 2010). Since the implementation of new educational contexts and standards, some teachers now view play with toys and materials as unimportant and ineffective for learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Jung & Jin, 2014). Moreover, other teachers insist that national and state educational standards lack the ability to consider children's learning styles and do not focus on the whole child. These teachers insist that curriculums should be play-based and reflect the social nature of learning (Lord, 2010). Teachers usually act alone when making decisions regarding the selection of developmentally appropriate toys. Teachers must analyze the needs of the children, scrutinize the knowledge they have accumulated, and find viable materials and toys that will aid in the teaching process (Koc, 2012). These choices, made by teachers, concerning skills and concepts that are imperative for children combined with teachers' beliefs about the importance of learning materials in the classroom environment directly influence early childhood practices (Sackes, 2013). Teachers are sometimes the first to notice the child's developmental needs; noticing these developmental needs assist with making necessary choices for classroom materials (Koc, 2012).

Play in Early Childhood Education

Play in early childhood education helps children learn and meet the demands of the kindergarten curriculum. Play is defined as informal, pleasurable, and voluntary activity that has

no practical objective or goal. Play can be categorized as solitary, parallel, and cooperative (Soto & Porter 2013). Gopnik and Walker (2013) also define play as a low risk, low cost form of exploratory learning that gives children the opportunity to engage in a variety of behaviors that can possibly become important in adulthood. Playing pays dividends by developing children's mental, physical, and social skills (Eberle, 2011). Ramani and Brownell (2013) believe that children's play with peers helps them learn new skills, motivate others to face new challenging situations, and assists one another in practicing existing abilities. Barnett (2012) believes that play is the way that children learn. Play helps children develop fine and gross motor skills, hand-eye coordination, social skills, and cognitive skills. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, play is a central component of developmentally appropriate practice and a vehicle for developing language, cognition, and social competence (Han, Moore, Vukelich, & Buell, 2010). Play is the best mode for learning and development (Izumi-Taylor, Samuelsson, and Rogers, 2010). When children play, it enhances skills and aptitudes and deepens children's talents and capacities by giving them opportunities to exercise them in concert (Eberle, 2011). Play has positive effects on a child's development of social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes, and is considered play a means to develop knowledge and as a tool to promote successful adaptation to classrooms environments (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2012). Early childhood educational research supports the role of play for young children as an important modality of learning and psychological development (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009).

Play in early childhood classrooms offers many important benefits, including opportunities for children to actively solve problems creatively, express themselves clearly, and engage in problem-solving, self-expression, imagination, individualism, socializing and bonding

with peers (Jung & Jin, 2014). Children use play to establish and perform their imagined and otherwise unrealistic desires (Moller, 2015). Play stimulates imagination, insight, communication, and the ability to cooperate with peers and solve social problems (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010). Play gives children the excuse to gather and mingle, it necessitates organization, requires agreement, and creates the common purpose of having (Eberle, 2011). While fostering communication, play also gives children the opportunity to express and regulate emotions, positive and negative, so that they can develop the capacity to feel, express, and think about emotions (Russ & Wallace, 2013). A survey, which asked for teacher perceptions of play, indicated that most teachers believe that play was a way that children explore, create, and understand the world and things in it (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010). Another teacher indicated that play gives children the opportunity to learn to interact with others and to develop certain developmental skills that they can use later in life and in their education (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010). Play is also beneficial in giving children the opportunity to experience the feelings of control, security, and mastery (Henricks, 2014). Research indicates that children who learn through play tend to use higher forms of language than children who do not (Han, et al., 2010). Play with peers is said to lead to an increase in social interactions and engagement (Myck-Wayne, 2010). During play, children have the opportunity to watch and imitate their peers during positive, constructive, playful interactions and also the ability to negotiate goals (Romani & Brownell, 2013). Play also gives children with disabilities the opportunity to engage in self-initiated pretend play for social and physical development (Myck-Wayne, 2010). Play gives children the opportunity to enrich their knowledge of the world through appropriate content offered in interesting and experiential ways by their teachers, including but not limited to reading books, storytelling, puppetry, music and the arts. It also encourages hands-on activities and

exploration of nature (Almon, 2013). During play, children have the chance to develop intensive intellectual and social skills while increasing physical skills (Plandowska, 2014).

Gender plays a role in the way that children play with each other and materials. According to Oncu and Unluer (2012), boys play rough games with other boys while girls tend to play more quietly. Boys' play is typically characterized by play with larger groups in less proximity to adults while girls' play with games and materials is generally characterized by smaller individualized play experiences with intimate groups in close proximity to adults. Boys tend to play with toys that involve running and throwing while girls tend to interact with classroom teachers and play with materials such as jump ropes; because of differences in cognitive development, girls tend to be more aware of potential models of their gender with whom to identify (Oncu & Unluer, 2012).

Social-Emotional Development

Social-emotional development can be influenced by play in an early childhood environment. Social development is the process through which a person changes from a self-centered infant into a socially, well-adjusted adult capable of living and working with others (Morrow, 2009). In the pursuit of social development, children's feelings and the relationships they build with others are imperative. Social development begins as early as infancy and progresses throughout adulthood (Morrow, 2009). As children in the early years mature, they begin to learn social skills from adults and their surroundings. Through play, children learn acceptable social skills that cannot be taught by any other means (Morrow, 2009). Play gives children the opportunity to mingle with peers, gather materials, and work on negotiation skills (Eberle, 2011). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2014), educators should be knowledgeable of the social and cultural contexts in which children

live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families. According to the Association for Childhood Education International (2010), play with other children gives children the opportunity to match their behavior with others and to take into account viewpoints that differ from their own. Dramatic play is a powerful way to encourage social development; during this form of play children accept roles, assign roles, and act roles out (ACEI, 2010). Through dramatic or pretend play, children practice social skills and understanding (ACEI, 2010). Play is an important part of developing language, cognitive, and social skills (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Social-emotional skills are a key area of development in the first few years of life. According to Hollingsworth and Winter (2013), strong social skills can contribute to emotional development, self-esteem, and school achievement. Children's ability to engage in pretend play with objects contributes to children's social development. The development of social skills plays a critical role in children's quality of life and lays the foundation for their success in school (Brown & Conroy, 2011). Social skills are important for children's positive peer interactions. These skills are developed from early engagement in turn-taking, cooperative interaction, and the ability to comfort peers who may be upset (Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013). Previous research indicates that social-emotional skills are more important than language, literacy, or early math skills (Kowalksi, Pretti-Krontezak, & Johnson, 2001; Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013). Previous research also indicates that girls tend to be more socially engaged in the classroom than boys their age (Oncu & Unluer, 2012). The development of social skills is important for children's development of friendships, their ability to adjust to situations in school, and their physical well-being (Hollingsworth & Winters, 2013). Through developing social skills, children also learn to receive information about themselves and others, learn to anticipate and interpret the emotional language produced by others, and become

more careful at the ways in which they communicate, which leads to the ability to self-regulate their emotions (Norel & Popa, 2015). Instructional practices such as using curricular materials, lessons, stories, puppets, and games to teach skills such as sharing and taking turns creates an environment where children are required to interact with a variety of other children and build social skills (Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013). Izumi-Taylor et al. (2013) believe that play with toys and materials helps children develop self-regulation skills and promotes language, cognition, and social competence. Roco (2004) and Norel and Popa (2015) insist that the role of the early childhood teachers is to help children learn how to identify and differentiate their personal feelings, learn how to express their feelings, learn how to develop empathy, learn to listen, and learn how to understand communication.

Language Development

Language development, just like social-emotional development, is an integral part of play in early childhood classrooms. During the early childhood years, children's learning expands as they learn to use language to describe their activities (Morrow, 2009). Language allows children to remember and recall things by name and to ask questions (Morrow, 2009). Language also gives children the opportunity to begin organizing their experiences, to classify, to notice order, and to speculate on the meaning of objects and events as well (Morrow, 2009). Play is essential to the development of language, especially if it is child-initiated and allows the child to have control of his or her own learning (Romani & Brownell, 2013). During the early childhood years, children learn to observe, remember, notice likenesses and differences, order, label, and classify objects (Morrow, 2009). Play with objects gives children the opportunity to express language and the opportunity to interact with people and materials that have the potential to construct their knowledge of the world (Romani & Brownell, 2013). Children also learn cause

and effect, how to make choices, and how to question and anticipate events. During the toddler stages of development, play gives children the opportunity to build a lifelong dictionary of words; it gives children the opportunity to mimic and experiment with the use and the sounds of words (Eberele, 2011). There are many theories associated with language and learning. These theories explain how children acquire language, and can assist educators in developing an environment that can promote language skills and development.

Language Development Theories. The nativist theory suggests that a child's language skills and capabilities are predetermined and that every child has an inborn capacity to learn a language (Christie, Enz, & Vukelich, 2011). The theory also suggests that children do not have to practice language, and that language skills depend on the maturation of the child (Christie et al., 2011). The behaviorist perspective is the opposite of the nativist theory. Behaviorists believe that the way a child is taught or molded by parents and the environment plays a dominant role in a child's language development (Christie, Enz, & Vukelich, 2011). Behaviorists believe that learning consists of two fundamental processes, classical conditioning and imitation (Christie et al., 2011). Behaviorists believe that it is the responsibility of the adult to provide a model of language for a child to imitate (Christie et al., 2011). Once a language is imitated, it is then enhanced by positive reinforcement from the parent or educator (Christie et al., 2011). The social interactionist perspective does not solely side with the nativist perspective or the behaviorist perspective. Instead, the social interactionist perspective believes that both perspectives have positive influences on a child's language acquisition (Morrow, 2009). The social interactionist perspective believes that children's environments play a significant role in the way that they acquire language and that children possess an innate predisposition to learning language (Christie, et al., 2011). The constructivist perspective believes that children are the

creators of language on the basis of an innate set of rules or underlying concepts (Morrow, 2009). According to constructivists, children construct language using rules and use errors as a means of learning (Christie et al., 2011).

Research shows that by the time children begin attending school they have had varied opportunities for talk in their lives with most of it being spontaneous and real life related (Morrow, 2009). For communication to take place, there must be a sender and a receiver. The sender needs language skills that allow him to send clear, accurate messages while the receiver needs language skills to interpret messages correctly (Morrow, 2009). Children's language expands when they are given the opportunity to use the language that they know and when adults model more complex language (Classroom Assessment Scoring Systems, 2011). Play with toys gives children the opportunity to engage in communication with peers, and to use language skills acquired within and outside of the classroom environment. Children participate in various kinds of play, such as purposeful and serendipitous play (Morrow, 2009). From infancy, children begin exploring and examining the world around them for the pleasure of seeing what happens; for example, they coo and then listen to the caregiver or parent to coo back (Morrow, 2009). At around age two, children begin to demonstrate symbolic use of objects (Morrow, 2009). By the ages of three through five, children begin to use one or more objects to stand for another object. This type of play causes pretend communication to occur, and is influential in developing socially useful linguistic skills (Morrow, 2009). Another type of communication that occurs during dramatic play is meta-communication. During meta-communication children step out of a role-play situation to clarify it or give direction and then return to the play (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 2009). During meta-communication, children also discuss the plot or the characters' action (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 2009).

During the preschool years, teachers help children learn to externalize emotional language and verbal language (Norel & Popa, 2015). Children must learn how to effectively communicate verbally and nonverbally with their peers to initiate a cooperative interaction, establish rules, and work through disagreements (Pellegrini, 2009; Ramani & Brownell, 2013). Teaching children how to converse is considered to be a means of knowledge-building and learning. Questioning is one of the most important strategies that teachers use to engage children in conversations (Meacham, Vukelich, Ham, & Buell, 2014). During socio-dramatic play in learning centers, teachers help support the oral language development of children (Combs, 2010). In socio-dramatic play, toys and materials are used to help children enact play roles appropriately and to assist in the development of language. The role of the teacher in socio-dramatic play is to create a language-rich environment with socio-dramatic play contexts (Meacham et al., 2014). Research indicates that teachers who used open-ended questions and incorporated toys and props into play settings encouraged children's utterances and provided children with positive models of language (Mecham et al., 2014). However, the study did not indicate which specific toys or props were used by teachers in the study to enhance language development of preschool children, and did not specify the allowable cost for each item. Hence, a need exists for additional research on toys and materials and how they affect children's language performance as an outcome measure; the need also exists for research on how specific toys and materials enhance language development across different play settings.

Fine Motor Development

Toys that enhance language skills also have the ability to enhance fine motor development. Establishing early patterns for a healthy lifestyle is important in enhancing physical and psychological well-being (Eliason & Jenkins, 2011). Body skill development is a

critical ingredient not only in physical and mental development but also in social and emotional development (Eliason & Jenkins, 2011). Exercising the body and knowing how it works promote good emotional health and ease social adjustment in the early years of development (Eliason & Jenkins, 2011). Research shows that children who are able to run, jump, throw, skip, and play with their peers are more likely to be open to friendship and to be involved in cooperative learning experiences (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2012). Early childhood educators must recognize that the inclusion of physical activities in the classroom curriculum is essential to the growth and development of children. During the early years, incorporating activities that focus on gross and fine motor skills helps children learn to control and trust their bodies (Soto & Porter, 2013). Fine motor skills are defined as small-muscle movements, namely those of the fingers; fine motor skills require visual perception and discrimination, motor ability, and the integration of the two (Dienehart & Manfra, 2013). Fine motor skills are physical skills that promote eye-hand coordination and development of the small muscles of the wrists, hands, and fingers (Soto & Porter, 2013). Fine motor skills are a prerequisite for many activities later in life and are a good predictor of a child's later academic outcomes (Memisevic & Hadzic, 2013). Eye-hand coordination and manipulation, learning memory, concentration, and mood all have a bearing on a child's academic success, and research shows that these skills are enhanced by physical activities (Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009). The development of these skills during infancy and childhood is dependent upon and influenced by the growth and maturity of the child (Venetsanou & Kambas, 2009). Like Head Start programs, other early childhood learning environments provide children with a variety of opportunities to engage in fine motor tasks. Numerous tasks that early childhood children take part in can be classified as requiring fine motor skills. Some of these tasks include placing pegs in holes, lacing, building with blocks, and

writing (Dienehart & Manfra, 2013). Eberle (2011) believes that tasks that train muscles such as finger-painting, using hands to explore nature, riding a bicycle, golfing, and skiing give children the opportunity to explore and engage in fine motor activities. Marr, Cermack, Cohn, and Henderson, (2003); Dienehart and Manfra, (2013) conducted observations of the fine motor engagement of children in Head Start programs. Children in these programs were observed using fine motor skills while participating in finger plays, art activities, manipulative play, learning center play, writing exercises, coloring exercises, cutting, and pasting (Marr et al, 2003; Dienhart & Manfra, 2013). Fine motor skills are also necessary for preschool children to complete everyday tasks such as dressing, eating, and holding objects (Memisevic & Hadzic, 2013). Marr et al (2003) and Dienhart and Manfra (2013) noted that 37% of the day in the early childhood classroom was spent using fine motor skills. Jackson County Civic Action Committee Head Start uses the Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R) to screen children within the first 45 days in the Head Start program. The ESI-R is an instrument that aims to address developmental, sensory, and behavioral concerns in visual-motor/adaptive, language, cognitive, and gross motor skills (Pearson Education Inc, 2015). A study conducted by Meisels, Marsden, Wiske, and Henderson (1997) concluded that certain assessment activities such as building a gate, drawing a person and copying five simple figures significantly predict a child's mathematical skills over time. Grissmer (2010) indicated that the aforementioned traits exhibited by a child are a strong predictor of academic success in later academia. Grissmer, Dienehart and Manfra (2013) also indicated that fine motor skills in preschoolers are important predictors of later academic achievement, particularly using a writing utensil. The development of fine motor skills is also related to environmental factors. According to Dienehart and Manfra (2013), parents who work with their children during preschool to develop fine motor writing

skills may also work with their children in early elementary school to excel academically. Alternately, many children who lack fine motor skills may have problems related to poor pre- and post-natal nutrition, which may have affected the central nervous system. Some of these children also live in poor urban areas and do not have access to toys that help with building fine motor skills like their higher class counterparts do (Venetsanou & Kambas, 2009). Research indicates that it is not the amount of fine motor activity that a child participates in but rather the type of fine motor activity that results in high academic performance (Venetsanou & Kambas, 2010). The more opportunities that children have to practice and develop fine motor skills, the more they develop their movements and refine their skills (Clelenad & Gallahue, 1993; Venetsanou & Kambas, 2009). Hence, there is the need for preschool programs that give children the opportunity to develop and practice these skills.

Toys in Early Childhood

Language development, social-emotional development, and fine motor development are three of the most important developmental domains that children should be exposed to. Child development occurs across these domains, and certain toys promote behaviors within these developmental domains (Guyton, 2011). According to Hollingsworth and Winter (2013) the use of meaningful and plentiful toys and materials to enhance and further facilitate children's play is an essential part of an early childhood classroom. It is essential that children are provided structure in the classroom environment and enough materials and toys are available to ensure the development of all children in the classroom (Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013). From birth through age 3, the brain growth of children occurs rapidly, therefore toys selected for early childhood classrooms must stimulate and enhance brain development (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014). As determined by Lee et al. (2013), toys should not have a predetermined purpose but

instead have numerous possibilities (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014). In many countries around the world, sticks, stones, and mud are commonly used as toys; however, many children in the United States play with commercially-manufactured toys (Trawick-Smith et al., 2014). During the preschool years, children enjoy making choices. They develop manipulation, learn about environmental concerns, health, and physical fitness, and are inspired by toys (Levin, 2013). Sutton-Smith's theory about classic toys indicates that children's toy choices are directly related to their culture and will reflect the histories, world views, values, and gender role assignment of a child's culture and family (Trawick-Smith et al., 2014). Play with toys allows children to learn negotiation, sharing, problem-solving, and how to work cooperatively with others (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010). When children are guided through play with toys and materials and have the opportunity to participate in focused construction and experimental activities, all developmental and learning needs can be met (Durham, 2015).

Toys also inspire and enrich play and draw peers together under a shared play theme (Pellegrini and Bjorklund, 2004; Mundy and Newell, 2007; Trawick-Smith et al, 2014). According to Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (2009), play with toys helps children to construct knowledge, develop social and emotional skills/needs, and acquire life skills. A single set of toys cannot meet the developmental needs of all children in a classroom. Children who have specific interests, developmental disabilities, or who are from different cultures require specific toys to inspire them (Trawick-Smith et al., 2014). According to TRUCE (2009) toys have limited play value when they: (a) can only be used in one way; (b) encourage all children to use toys in the same manner; (c) are limited to teaching children one specific developmental skill; (d) promote violence or stereotypes; (e) introduce academic concepts too early; or (f) replace creative play.

Toys for early childhood students can challenge and stimulate sequential development. To ensure that children's knowledge is challenged and stimulated, teachers must understand that all children do not enjoy the same play experiences with the same classroom toys and materials (Barnett, 2012). Gaining knowledge about children's play experiences is the first step in choosing the best toys for a child (Barnett, 2012). When children play with toys, the meaning of the objects change, as can children's perceptions and the uses of the toy (Moller, 2015). Toys are concrete objects that children can manipulate to carry out self-directed, meaningful, and enjoyable play activities (Trawick-Smith, Wolff, Koschel, & Vallarelli, 2014). Toys facilitate the process of play; they are not intended to result in a product (Trawick-Smith, Wolff, Koschel, & Vallarelli, 2014). Therefore, careful thought and consideration should go into selecting toys for preschool classrooms (Trawick-Smith, Wolff, Koschel, & Vallarelli, 2014). When selecting toys for classrooms, teachers typically consider that children need a well-balanced assortment of toys to contribute to growth, development, and pleasure ("Fun Play, Safe Play," 2010).

Toys should be as simplistic as possible to allow children to determine their specific uses (Lee, Meany-Walen, Carlson, Carnes-Holt, & Ware, 2013). When selecting toys, teachers must be thoughtful and ensure that all materials are intentional and promote learning in a dynamic environment (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014). According to Barnett (2012), toys should be sturdy, age appropriate, fun, and economical. Toys should be selected depending upon children's interests and approaches to learning (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014). Barnett (2012) also insists that toys should fit the strength and size of the child and that selecting toys should be determined by evaluating the child's developmental age, not his chronological age. Additionally, toys for children ages three through six should be: (a) materials that help children solve problems; (b) materials for building and pretending; (c) materials for children to be creative with; (d) picture

books; (e) various music accompanied by a CD player; (f) materials that help children develop gross and fine motor skills; and (g) materials that give children the opportunity to explore a variety of concepts on several levels.

However, NAEYC does not discuss the appropriateness of toys for children ages birth-three years. Despite NAEYC's lack of discussion about toy appropriateness for children ages birth-to three years, Shabazian and Li Soga (2014) indicated that toys selected for toddlers should give them the opportunity to manipulate, try, fail, rethink, try again, and succeed. These toys should also encourage exploration and feedback. Toys for children of all ages should also encourage active participation, be open-ended, be healthy, and be safe (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014).

Toys are categorized as computer games, books, building materials, pretend play props, art materials, and scientific exploration equipment (Trawick-Smith et al., 2014). According to Vukovic (2010), computers and televisions have replaced traditional toys as categorized by Trawick-Smith. Kottman (2011) categorizes toys using five categories (1) family/nurturing toys (2) scary toys (3) aggressive toys (4) expressive toys, and (5) pretend /fantasy toys. Each toy categorized by Kottman (2011) gives children the opportunity to express different feelings, emotions, and attitudes. Vukovic (2010) believes toys that give children the opportunity to express feelings always hide some symbol or message under their visual appearance. Unlike Kottman, Landreth (2012) proposed that there are only three categories of toys: (1) real life toys (2) acting out aggressive release toys, and (3) toys for creative expression and emotional release. According to Landreth (2012), real life toys allow for children to express their feelings. Acting out aggressive release toys allow children to express anger, hostility, and frustrations. Creative expression and emotional release toys allow for children to be spontaneous and expressive.

Overall, all categories of toys have the ability to contribute to a child's growth, development, and pleasure (Trawick-Smith et. al, 2014). Previous research has examined a variety of factors that influence children's development in preschools, yet there has been little research on the effects of toys on children's development (Trawick-Smith et al., 2014). Trawick-Smith et al. (2014) conducted a study that examined the effects of nine toys on the play of 60 three- and four-year-old children. The study invited nominations of toys from parents and teachers. Nominated toys were thought to be developmentally beneficial to preschool children. The toys were studied as they were being used by 60 children of diverse ages and backgrounds. As the 60 children played with toys, their experience was video recorded for 12 separate 20-minute periods during free play time in a preschool classroom. Each toy was scored during the recorded play sequence using the Play Quality with Toys (PQT) instrument. This instrument is an eight-item five-point observation rubric that was created by researchers during a previous study on toys. The rubric was used to score the quality of children's play with toys. While children used the toys, researchers assigned a score of one to five for each videoed segment. Analysis of the scores indicated that toys make a difference in children's play and that some toys prompt high quality play. Although Trawick et al. (2014) researched developmentally appropriate toys, the cost of the nine beneficial toys for preschool children was not taken into account. The study also did not take into account how allowable costs affect the purchasing of developmentally appropriate toys for preschool children. Hence, there is still a need for research examining how prioritizing the toys most effective in developing JCCAC Head Start program participants' skills can contribute to data-driven decision regarding resource allocations.

Head Start Inception

Head Start is one of the many programs that utilizes play with toys to enhance children's learning and development. According to the Children's Defense fund (2010) many children live in poverty in the 14 Southern United States. In 2008, 7.5 million children under the age of five resided in these states. Poverty tends to present stressors that could affect children's growth and development due to strained parental support, lack of learning opportunities, and a limited supply of toys or materials (Epinosa, 2010). According to Li et al. (2011), much of the achievement gap observed in economically disadvantaged children is present when they enter primary school and can be attributed to a lack of preschool program experience. Economically disadvantaged children are at risk of school failure and struggle with the development of cognitive, social, and behavioral skills (Bowman, 2010; Edelman & Grace, 2010; Collins, 2012). Since its inception in 1965, Head Start has served children from disadvantaged environments, particularly those exposed to a range of early childhood adversities, and has provided comprehensive support services to three- and four-year-old children and their families (Woolfenden, Goldfeld, Raman, Eapen, Kemp, & Williams, 2013).

One of the primary goals of Head Start programs is to promote school readiness (Lee et al., 2013). The federal government spent over \$7.9 billion and served nearly one million children through Head Start programs during 2012 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Head Start is not an entitlement and is limited by the availability of slots. As Head Start was designed to serve low-income families, prospective Head Start families are mandated to show proof of income when enrolling children to ensure their need of the program (Lee et al., 2013; Kim, 2013). Children who enter Head Start programs have higher risk factors for social-emotional issues stemming from poverty, being raised in single-parent household, or

being raised by parents with fewer years of parental education (Lee et al., 2015). Head start aims to increase children's social competence by targeting certain developmental aspects that can help children prepare for a formal school experience (Kim, 2013). Head Start provides children with higher risk factors with activities and materials that facilitate cognitive, social, and emotional skills; the program also allocates resources for health services, nutritional services, and other social services (Lee et al., 2013). Many children who attend Head Start programs are more likely to have less educated parents or come from broken homes; these children are mostly white, black, and Hispanic (Kim,2013). Research conducted by Kim (2013) also indicated that white and black children who attend Head Start programs are more likely to have a single-parent household or to live with non-biological parents than their peers.

In the state of Mississippi, Head Start programs were initially implemented as a democratic tool to engage the community through education. Other sources suggest that Head Start began as a child welfare campaign that sought to address issues of low IQ scores and reevaluations of intelligence (Hale, 2012). According to Levin (2013) the first discussion about organizing Head Start programs in Mississippi began in March of 1965. This discussion began after President Johnson increased the war on poverty fund. In the summer of 1965 Head Start in Mississippi was organized by black communities as an independent system of education that would provide a more liberal education than provided by the state and that would specifically meet the needs of the black community (Hale, 2012). However, according to the 2010 Head Start Program Information Report, 36 percent of Head Start participants were of Hispanic or Latino origin, 40 percent were white, 29 percent were black, 11 percent identified as other, eight percent were bi-racial or multi-racial, and six percent were Alaska Native, Asian, or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Ewen,2012). In the 1960s Early Childhood programs were rarely

available for children in Mississippi. Many now-available programs have interpreted federal guidelines to expand educational opportunities for children in their surrounding communities. Based on data gathered in the JCCAC community assessment, there are approximately 9800 children 0-4 years of age in Jackson County (JCCAC, 2014). Applying the 15 percent poverty rate, at least 1400 children are also income-eligible for Head Start programs. The latest figures from the Mississippi Department of Health Vital Records for 2013 indicate 148 live births to teens 10-19; all would qualify for Early Head Start (JCCAC, 2014).

While affordable childcare slots are available throughout the county and in the most heavily populated areas, their quality is lacking. Most daycare providers meet the minimum requirements established by the state childcare licensing bureau. However, due to the high cost of care, most are unable to provide infant care, maintain adequate teacher-child ratios, hire credentialed teaching staff to improve the quality of care, or maintain and upgrade facilities (JCCAC, 2014). Those childcare programs offering the highest quality care have long waiting lists and weekly rates that are out of reach for low-income families, hence there is a need for Head Start programs.

Jackson County Civic Action Committee Inc. is one of the many community action agencies that was created to have a lasting impact on children and their families (Hale, 2012). Partner agencies work with JCCAC and other Head Start programs to provide physical, health, and medical attention to children and their families. Head Start programs also guarantee children two hot meals per day, and arrange for medical examinations and follow-up treatment (Hale, 2012).

Jackson County Civic Action Committee

Head Start's primary goal is to promote school readiness by providing education, health, and other social services to low-income preschool-aged children and their families (Lee, Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2014). In the fiscal year 2007, there were 1,604 Head Start grantees in the United States. Mississippi is home to 17 of the 1,604 Head Start grantees (NAEYC, 2014). Jackson County Civic Action Committee ("JCCAC") Head Start is one of those 17 Head Start grantees, serving 717 local children throughout Jackson County (JCCAC, 2014). JCCAC Head Start promotes school readiness for young children of low-income families (JCCAC, 2014). JCCAC Head Start uses the Head Start framework which is a set of developmental outcomes for children ages infant to five. The Head Start framework is referenced for curriculum planning, to establish school readiness goals for children, and to monitor children's progress (Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start, 2010). JCCAC provides service to Jackson County, Mississippi, the fifth largest county by population in the state of Mississippi (JCCAC, 2014). According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014), Mississippi has a 35% poverty rate, the highest in the country, and 50% of the children in Mississippi have never attended a preschool program. JCCAC Head Start is one of many Community Action Partnership agencies that was founded as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty (Lee, Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2014). The War on Poverty created the now-defunct Office of Economic Opportunity which founded programs such as Head Start, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), Job Corps, as well as community action programs (JCCAC, 2014). The sole purpose of community action agencies is to empower the poor in an effort to decrease poverty. These programs are predominately volunteer-based and funded through the Community Service Block Grant Program (JCCAC, 2014). JCCAC Head

Start promotes school readiness for young children of low-income families and has formed partnerships with area school districts to implement valuable school readiness programs (JCCAC, 2014).

JCCAC Head Start uses the Head Start Framework for curriculum planning to establish school readiness goals for children and to monitor children's progress (Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start, 2010). Jackson County Civic Action also utilizes Teaching Strategies Gold as a school readiness tool to ensure the learning and development of all children in the program (JCCAC, 2015). Teaching Strategies Gold is an online system that assesses children's development and growth. The implementation of the Teaching Strategies Gold system offers teachers activities that stimulate literacy, scientific exploration, and the development of language and math skills, as well as the child's social, emotional and physical development (Teaching Strategies, 2015). JCCAC also implements other materials into the classroom to ensure school readiness of its children. All classrooms are equipped with HATCH Computers. HATCH Computers give children the opportunity to independently engage in core math and literacy concepts and to automatically move through scaffolding levels (JCCAC, 2015). The computer system also monitors each child's progress each time he or she logs in so that teachers can quickly and easily understand the diverse needs of every child in the classroom (JCCAC, 2015). According to JCCAC (2015), the program also utilizes other materials in the classroom that help children develop social-emotional skills, such as Conscious Discipline which leads teachers, providers, schools, and programs through a process that promotes permanent behavior changes in both teachers and children. JCCAC also has established a School Readiness Plan that aligns with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework and standards set forth by the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (JCCAC, 2015).

The School Readiness Plan allows the program to implement core strategies such as the following: (a) aggregating and analyzing child-level assessment data at least three times per year and using that data in combination with other program data to determine the program's progress toward meeting its goals; (b) informing parents and the community of results and directing continuous improvement related to curriculum, instruction, professional development, program design and other program decisions; (c) providing early learning coaching to staff across program options and settings; (d) establishing individualized wellness plans that promote healthy development for every child; (e) ensuring a parent partnership and engagement process that promotes an understanding of each child's progress, provides support, and encourages learning and leadership; (f) providing ongoing communication with local schools to exchange information about children and programs and to align services for early learning, health and family engagement; and (f) creating a learning community among staff to promote innovation, continuous improvement, and integrated services across education, family services and health services (JCCAC, 2015). This plan helps promote development in the early years and aligns with the Head Start framework and other core and state curriculum standards.

Early Childhood Education

To remain economically competitive, children must be assured a strong, early childhood educational foundation because of its benefit to later school and societal success. However, research has shown that preschoolers from low income families are not receiving the quality of early childhood education experiences that they need to succeed academically (Winterbottom & Piasta, 2012). Research also shows that high quality early childhood programs tend to provide children with better cognitive and language skills and higher rates of attendance and employment in later life (McDonald, 2009). The United States government introduced pre-K programs in the

1960s to improve school readiness among young children from low-income families (Nevin, 2008). Pre-K programs were created with the belief that poverty severely restricts the capacity of many families and communities to adequately support the development of young children (Nevin, 2008). Nevin (2008) also suggested that a comprehensive child development program that works with families to improve children's health, nutrition, and social, emotional, and cognitive development was needed. In recent years, many of these programs have seen budget cuts due to the failure of government officials and citizens to believe that the funding of these programs is important or that it has a significant impact on the cognitive, social-emotional, health, or parenting practices of participants (Burke & Muhlhausen, 2013). A study conducted by Bierman, Nix, Henrichs, Domitrovich, Gest, Welsh and Gill (2014) was conducted to compare the kindergarten outcomes of children who experience Head Start enriched programs with children who participated in other preschool programs. This study used three intervention components designed to enrich language and literacy skills to evaluate 44 schools in stratified locations across three counties in Pennsylvania. The three intervention components were an interactive reading program, curriculum and lesson plans that evaluated social-emotional skills, and take home material for parents (Bierman et al., 2014). These three intervention components were selected based on prior research indicating their potential effects on the pace of children's academic and social-emotional skill acquisition after beginning school (Bierman, et al., 2014). Results from the study indicated that there was no difference between program qualities. However, Poppe (2010) believes that Pre-K is an investment in the future; when states cut Pre-K program funding it increase the future costs of state and local government and decrease future tax revenues, so families get hurt now and in the future. According to research, early education programs that prepare children for kindergarten are the single most important factor that enable

them to graduate from high school, stay out of trouble with the law, and hold good jobs later in life (Poppe, 2010). Pre-K programs set the foundation for academic, social and emotional skills and the life-long desire to learn (Poppe, 2010). Unlike Burke and Muhlhausen, many researchers believe that money spent on Pre-K programs is a wise investment and a good use of time. Funding of the many Pre-K programs around the United States, whether privately or with government or state funds, creates a positive impact on a range of social, health, and educational outcomes (Poppe, 2010).

Moreover, in hope to impact the education of children, former president George Bush developed the No Child Left Behind act of 2001. The No Child Left Behind act provided grants to school districts and preschool programs to promote children's understanding of letters, letter sounds and the blending of sounds and words. This initiative was created to ensure that nearly 10 million preschoolers are ready for kindergarten (Winterbottom & Piasta, 2012). This act was also implemented to bridge the educational gap between social classes, to hold states accountable for ways in which children are evaluated and assessed, and to prepare children so that they can better serve society in the future. Other agencies like the National Association for the Education of Young Children have proposed and implemented accountability standards for young children as well (Epstein, 2007; Collins, 2012).

Standards of Learning-The Head Start Framework

According to Morrison (2014), responsibility for setting the preschool curriculum is being taken over by state departments of education through the implementation of standards -- statements of what preschoolers should know and be able to do. Standards-based assessments are used to measure the amount of information that students have learned over a course of time. Preschool children entering kindergarten face increasing pressures to meet expectations

expressed in these standards (Recchia & Bentley, 2013). In the state of Maryland, data assessments and data collection are key standards in pre-kindergarten. Data collection enables state and county officials to determine the need for such programs. In Maryland there are a few standards for assessments; these standards do not warrant any major problem for educators. The only standard with a possible issue would be finding the time to conduct formal assessments for every child three times a year within a certain time frame.

In the state of Virginia, students are required to participate in Standards of Learning (“SOL”) testing. The SOL, set forth by the state of Virginia, outline educational goals and timeframes for teachers and students (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). The SOL focus on four major areas that include Math, Science, English, and Social Studies. Kindergarten through twelfth grade students are required to pass every SOL assessment plus make a passing grade in their current classes to receive a diploma (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). The Virginia Department of Education (2013) recently designed minimum standards for consensus of children’s learning, acquisition of knowledge, and participation in meaningful learning experiences. These standards are linked to indicators of success for children entering kindergarten, are aligned with the Virginia Kindergarten Standards of Learning, and are a means of ensuring that teachers incorporate the use of developmentally appropriate lessons and materials in their classrooms (Virginia Department of Education, 2013).

Similarly, Pennsylvania also uses standards to assess children’s successes and the incorporation of lessons and materials into classroom environments. In many Pennsylvania early childhood centers, assessments through the Keystone STARS program are conducted. The Keystone STARS program uses the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011). This rating scale assesses the quality of early

childhood environments including the use of space, materials, and experiences, including the daily schedule and supervision, to further children's development. It is now one of the most widely used instruments for a global assessment of the early childhood classroom that examines the structural quality of early childhood programs (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011).

Like Pennsylvania, Mississippi also uses ECERS as a way to ensure quality early childhood programs. Research suggest that high quality early childhood programs can have a positive effect on improving children's cognitive, academic, and social skills (Carrier, 2010). Most of the achievement gap observed in economically disadvantaged children begins during the early years and can be largely attributed to child care/preschool experiences from birth to age five (Li et al. 2011). The Quality Rating and Improvement System was established to identify and reward high quality child care programs across the nation. These programs focus on the importance of class size, staff education and training, safe and clean learning environments, and classrooms that are equipped with developmentally appropriate materials to stimulate learning (NAEYC, 2010). McDonald (2010) found that children enrolled in low quality programs seem to experience negative influence in their social-emotional development and that poor children who were enrolled in high quality programs made improvements in these areas. The QRI system encourages the continuous quality of these programs and works to ensure that programs are evaluated, observed, recognized, and rewarded for being quality programs.

Mississippi has also adopted standards of learning. These standards were developed to correlate to the common core and are based on National Standards for Early Childhood Education (House, Benton, Green, Oakley, Lemonis, 2013). The implementation of state standards and guidelines has been identified by NAEYC as an opportunity for incorporating

developmentally appropriate practices into early childhood classrooms that focus on the whole child (Durham, 2015). According to House et al., (2013) children's learning is facilitated if they have access to developmentally appropriate materials and activities that give them the opportunity to explore, reason, question, and experiment. The standards define what tasks preschool children should be able to complete and understand (House et al., 2013). These standards align with the 11 domains of the Head Start framework that all Head Start programs should address. The 11 domains allow children to take part in a broad range of learning experiences that will give them the opportunity to develop and succeed (Nemeth, 2010). The Head Start framework has emphasized the central importance of children's learning through the attainment of school readiness skills (Dermott, Rikoon, & Fantuzzo, 2013).

The Head Start framework was based on the National Education Goals Panel's definition of ready to learn. This framework essentially defines the unique ways that children learn in the classroom instead of defining academic or social outcomes that come from the process (Dermott et al, 2013). According to the Nation Education Goals Panel, which is an independent executive branch agency of the federal government charged with monitoring national and state progress toward the National Education Goals, "ready to learn" consisted of five dimensions: cognitive and general knowledge, literacy and language, physical health and well-being, social and emotional development, and approaches to learning (Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start, 2010). Recchia and Bentley (2013) describe children being ready to learn as a construct built on children's acquisition of certain developmental skills, such as learning rote skills (letters & numbers); they assert that these skills do not represent actual kindergarten readiness or the guarantee of academic success. Galinsky (2010) believes that in order to be school ready, all children should possess listening skills, persistence, and the abilities to think

flexibly, take risks, apply past knowledge, and question and pose problems. The guiding educational framework of the Head Start program emphasizes a child's early approach to learning as an indicator of successful attainment of school readiness skills (McDermott, Rikoon & Fantuzzo, 2013). Since the inception of the initial Head Start framework a new framework has been introduced to Head Start agencies as of June 30, 2015. The new Head Start Framework was designed to represent the continuum of early education from birth to age five. It was revised in an effort to help Head Start programs create and impact stimulating classroom learning experiences for children of all ages (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Centers, 2015).

Summary

Head Start programs aim to increase social competence by targeting certain developmental aspects that can help children prepare for a formal school experience (Kim, 2013). These programs provide high-risk children with activities and materials that facilitate cognitive, social and emotional skills. The program also allocates resources for health, nutrition, and other social services (Lee et al., 2013). Parents of children who attend Head Start programs or other public or private preschool early childhood programs are beginning to lean on early childhood teachers to prepare their children for their first academic endeavors, since kindergarten is becoming a requirement in most states (Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel, 2012). Since parents are dependent on early childhood teachers to prepare their children for kindergarten, teachers must be attuned to information concerning theories of child development, learning principles, and curriculum content.

Head Start teachers are also required to use knowledge gained from theories and to establish relationships with children and their families (Leggett, 2013). Head Start teachers must plan and implement learning practices that are connected to children's needs and interests

(Leggett, 2013). The Ecological Systems Theory, Bank Street Approach, and Montessori Method are just a few of the many early childhood theories that guide the developmentally appropriate classroom practices that Head Start teachers use. However, not only must teachers consider the implementation of theoretical concepts in the classroom, but they are also faced with the task of ensuring that all children meet objectives and outcomes associated with national and state standards.

Standards-based assessments are used to measure the amount of information that students have learned over a course of time. Preschool children entering kindergarten face increasing pressures to meet expectations set forth by state and national standards (Recchia & Bentley, 2013). The implementation of state standards and guidelines has been identified by NAEYC as an opportunity for incorporating into early childhood classrooms developmentally appropriate practices that focus on the whole child (Durham, 2015). Moreover, research suggests that some teachers disagree with NAEYC's viewpoint and insist that national and state educational standards lack the ability to consider children's learning styles and do not focus on the whole child; instead these teachers insist that curriculums should be play-based and reflect the social nature of learning (Lord, 2010). Since the implementation of new educational contexts and standards, some teachers now view play with toys and materials as unimportant and ineffective for learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Jung & Jin, 2014). House et al, (2013) suggest that children's learning is facilitated by access to developmentally appropriate materials and activities that give them the opportunity to explore, reason, question, and experiment.

Research has previously examined a variety of factors that influence the quality of play in preschool settings, while state and national standards have defined what developmental milestones children should accomplish while in early childhood settings (House et al., 2014).

Yet, there has been little evidence-based research on the types of toys that impact the development of children in early childhood settings. Lack of evidence-based research leaves teachers with little empirical evidence to guide the important decisions that have to be made when choosing and incorporating developmentally appropriate toys into the classroom. Children need access to carefully-selected, developmentally-appropriate toys and classroom materials to assure that they obtain a strong educational foundation during their early childhood because of its benefit to later school and societal success (Winterbottom & Piasta, 2012).

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of the case study research was to examine teachers' perceptions and experience about which toys are most effective in the JCCAC Head Start programs to help make appropriate data-driven decisions for resource allocations. To ensure school readiness, children and teachers need to be provided with appropriate materials to use in the classroom (Guyton, 2011). The specific problem for Jackson County Civic Action Committee teachers is that the limitations on allowable costs for purchasing developmentally appropriate classroom toys and materials can lead to a lack of exposure to cognitively stimulating toys and materials, and consequently a failure to promote early childhood developmental skills. This problem needed to be addressed because federal subsidies received to fund Head Start programs are expected to have a positive effect on children's school readiness. However, the allowable cost for toys/materials is part of a cost pool which also funds other departments within Head Start programs. Allowable costs are used to fund component coordinator and staff salaries, costs associated with parental involvement, expenses related to program staff functions, and the costs of operation and maintenance of program component space, including utilities (Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start, 2010). Limited research has been conducted on how allowable costs for purchasing toys and materials effects children's educational outcomes in head start. Lack of allowable costs leaves programs with minimal funds to ensure children are exposed to cognitively stimulating materials and activities that engage children in ways that promote child development (Johnson, Martin, & Brooks-Gunn, 2013). The following research questions will provide a reliable framework for this case study:

RQ1. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate social-emotional development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

RQ2. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate language development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

RQ3. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate social-emotional development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

The research effort will utilize a qualitative case study approach to gain insight and understanding on teacher's perception about which toys are best to use in Head Start programs with limited funding. The case study effort will focus on three Head Start centers located in Jackson County Mississippi which employ 21 Head Start teachers. The researcher will use instruments designed by Hatcher et al. (2012) to provide information on teacher's perception about which toys are best to use in Head Start Programs with limited funding. The researcher will use two phases to conduct the interview and coding process, and will transcribe all recorded data into text and use member checking.

Research Methodology and Design

The researcher utilized a qualitative single case study approach. The qualitative single case study approach was appropriate for the research effort as it derived a close, in-depth understanding and insightful appreciation of the issues that Jackson County Civic Action Committee, Inc. teachers endure when selecting developmentally appropriate toys that resulted in new learning in a real world context (Yin, 2012). The qualitative case study approach allowed an in-depth, multi-faceted exploration of current issues associated with selecting toys and efforts that teachers make to ensure that they are developmentally appropriate (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, & Sheikh, 2011). The use of the qualitative case study approach was also beneficial because it created a continual flow of variables that are relevant and that cannot be ignored (Yin, 2012). Teachers are required to select developmentally appropriate toys for

children, and are responsible for ensuring that children's developmental needs are met within the classroom. Hence, during the research process, other variables became evident concerning the importance of toy selection, which may lead to additional research studies being conducted.

The qualitative case study approach allowed for the incorporation of various methods. For the research effort, survey and interview methods were used to gain insight and understanding on the various phenomena associated with teacher perception and selecting toys (Cheng, 2014). The research effort utilized by the researcher incorporated multiple sources of data collection as a way to help ensure internal validity with the expectation that the data collected from different sources will lead to similar conclusions (Crowe et al., 2011).

Population and Sample

The researcher conducted a case study effort that focused on three Head Start centers located in Jackson County. Jackson County Head Start centers serve approximately 677 children, primarily 3 to 5 years of age, at seven different centers throughout five cities in Jackson County (JCCAC, 2014). Head Start centers provide comprehensive services to enrolled children and their families including health, nutrition, social, and other services determined to be necessary by family needs assessments, in addition to educational and cognitive development services (Administration for Children and Families Office of Head Start, 2010). All three centers that were a part of the study serve children aged three to five years, using developmentally-appropriate, play-based approaches as described by the Head Start framework. Center A was a small, Head Start center in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Center A employs five full-time degreed teachers and five assistant teachers. Total program enrollment is 96 children ages three to five. Center B was a larger Head Start center in Gautier, Mississippi. Program B employs six full-time degreed teachers and six assistant teachers. Total program enrollment is 120 children ages

three to five. Center C was the largest Head Start center in Jackson County which was located in Pascagoula, Mississippi. Center C employed 10 full-time degreed teachers and 10 assistant teachers. Total program enrollment was 176 children ages six months to five years. All Centers served children from families with incomes below federal poverty guidelines, but all may reserve 10% of classroom slots for families who have income above the poverty guidelines (ECKLC, 2014).

This study employed convenience sampling to attain Head Start teachers at Pascagoula Head Start Center, Gautier Head Start Center, and Ocean Springs Head Start Center. Participants for the study were chosen on the basis of their proximity to the researcher. By evaluating the distributed surveys, the researcher selected Head Start teachers that met the criteria of availability, strong theoretical knowledge of early childhood education, and who spent most of their time in the classroom observing children's play.

The researcher used convenience sampling to conduct the study. Convenience sampling allowed the researcher to achieve the desired sample size of six Head Start Teachers as well as to gather useful information that would not be possible using probability sampling, which would require teachers to be picked randomly without regard for location or program (Nastasi, 2004). Convenience samples rely on data that is easily accessible, and from participants who agree to participate; in this case teachers at Pascagoula Head Start, Gautier Head Start, and Ocean Springs Head Start. The researcher needed convenient access to Head Start teachers who met the criteria of the study. Thus, random sampling was not used, as with this sampling method; every member of the population had some chance of being selected (Price, 2013). Purposive sampling also was not used because the researcher was not able to cover the full range of perspective of all Jackson County Civic Action Head Start teachers. Eliminating purposive sampling eliminated the

perception of coercion, undue influence and bias, due to the researcher previous having a relationship with a percentage of the Head Start teaching population. Since the aim of convenience sampling was easy access, the researcher was able to acquire access to all Head Start teachers at Pascagoula Head Start, Gautier Head Start, and Ocean Springs Head Start due to working for the same organization. Participants were sent recruitment information via email, and had the opportunity to respond to the research via email if they wanted to participate in the study.

Moreover, the researcher was able to explore the research problem involving teachers' perceptions about which toys are best to use in Head Start programs with limited agency funding. The researcher sought information from teachers about their perceptions and experience about social emotional, language, and fine motor toys that are best to use in Head Start program with limited agency funding.

Materials/Instrumentation

Initially, interview questions for this study were designed by Hatcher et al. (2012), and were used to provide information on school readiness. Three early childhood professionals who are experts in the field of early childhood education reviewed the items for content validity. The early childhood professionals suggested the questions be edited to fit the research study, and to provide insight to teacher's classroom experiences. The three edits were adopted, which led to five research questions being utilized. Since a survey instrument was not available at the time of the search, it was decided to construct the survey instrument. This effort was guided by the research questions and educational literature review. Initially, 10 items were developed by the researcher for the survey; these items were then reviewed by an editor. Three early childhood professionals, experts in the field, reviewed the items for content validity. Wording of the survey

was revised and a suggestion to decrease the number of survey questions to eight was adopted. The items were cross-checked with researcher ratings, and the eight items were retained to measure experiences selecting developmentally-appropriate toys. The instruments for this study are a teacher demographic survey (see Appendix B for teacher demographic survey) and a five-item teacher interview (see Appendix A for five item teacher questionnaire).

Phase One: Demographics Survey. In the first phase, the entire teaching population at Pascagoula Center, Gautier Center, and Ocean Springs Center were invited to participate in a survey. Twenty-one female teachers were asked to participate in the demographic survey (see Appendix B for teacher demographic survey). Respondents in the study were asked to provide demographic information including age, teaching experience, educational level, and experience in selecting developmentally appropriate toys to use in the classroom. Participants indicated their answers by circling the correct letter that corresponds with their choice.

Phase Two: Interviews. In the second phase, based on their response from the demographic survey, six female teachers were chosen and asked to take part in a series of open-ended, in-person interviews (see Appendix A for five-item teacher questionnaire). The researcher used convenience sampling to conduct the study. Convenience sampling allowed the researcher to achieve the desired sample size of six Head Start Teachers as well as to gather useful information that would not be possible using probability sampling, which would require teachers to be picked randomly without regard for location or program (Nastasi, 2004). Convenience samples rely on data that is easily accessible, and from participants who agree to participate; in this case teachers at Pascagoula Head Start, Gautier Head Start, and Ocean Springs Head Start. The researcher needed convenient access to Head Start teachers who met the criteria

of the study. Thus, random sampling was not used, as with this sampling method; every member of the population had some chance of being selected (Price, 2013). Since the aim of convenience sampling was easy access, the researcher was able to acquire access to all Head Start teachers at Pascagoula Head Start, Gautier Head Start, and Ocean Springs Head Start due to working for the same organization. Participants in the interview process were compensated \$5 for their time and receive a book for their classroom. Participants in the study were informed that the research effort was focused on what toys in Head Start classrooms teachers believe are most effective in helping children develop skills associated with the Head Start Framework. Teachers were informed of the researcher's interest in their perception about toys and toy features that are most effective in helping children develop social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. Teachers were assured of confidentiality. Before the study began, teachers were required to sign a consent signaling their willingness to participate in the study. A signature from the Education Manager and the Center Operations Specialists were also be obtained before commencing the study (see Appendix D for informed consent). All interviews were scheduled to occur at the end of day after children were no longer present, and in a location feasible for the participants. Interviews were scheduled for an average of 30 minutes but varied in time.

Study Procedures

The collection of data was performed using face-to-face interviews and a demographic questionnaire from six Head Start teachers. Participant responses were neither anonymous nor confidential; participant selected pseudonyms were utilized to identify participants. Participants were sent recruitment information via email, and had the opportunity to respond to the research via email if they wanted to participate in the study. Data gathered via open-ended interview was used to independently identify emergent themes by following a multistep analysis that included:

(1) transcribing audio recorded data into text (2) three readings of each interview to establish overall understanding and general impression (3) identification of significant statements associated with toy selection (4) relating themes to demographic data while comparing within and across program beliefs about the incorporation of toys and materials in the classroom (5) member checking. Participant responses to the interview questions were collected by audio recording and once the interview was completed, responses were transcribed into text; once all data were transcribed into text, the researcher completed three readings of all responses to gain an understanding of participant's experiences. The interview responses were emailed to all participants, and the process of member checking was used. Through member checking, participants were provided with a transcript of the transcribed interviews via email to allow them to correct any inaccuracies. Participants did not identify any inaccuracies associated with the data.

Table 1

Time Frame and Data Collection Activities in a Case Study Research Effort to Examine Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences Associated with Toys that are Most Effective to Use in Head Start Programs with Limited Funding

Month/Phase	In-Depth Study
	<i>Sample Size N=21</i>
	<i>N=6</i>
December	(1) Select centers and samples
April	(2) Administer survey (3) Begin initial interviews
April	(4) Review demographic surveys (5) Complete initial interviews (6) Debrief initial interviews (7) Conduct member-checking process
May	(8) Conduct Member Checking Process

- (9) Complete coding of interview data
 - (10) Conduct member checking of coded themes
-

Data Collection and Analysis

Phase one: Survey. Survey data was collected using a paper questionnaire delivered in person to teachers who agreed to participate. The hand-out data collection method was used to capitalize on the availability of the respondents and to ensure immediate feedback. Through using the hand out method, the researcher had the ability to convey the purpose and importance of the survey and answer any questions that the participants had face-to-face (Powell & Hermann, 2000). After all surveys were received, survey data was tabulated and entered into a spreadsheet. Frequency counts and percentage distributions associated with answers were the basic information used for the study. Data were double checked for data entry errors. Once frequency counts and percentage distribution tables were created, the researcher will began to analyze the data by looking for patterns between survey responses and coded interview responses. All open-ended question responses listed on the survey were analyzed for content and verbatim responses were placed on a separate spreadsheet.

Phase Two: Interviews. The use of toys, how they relate to specific developmental domains (Social-Emotional, Fine Motor, and Language) in the Head Start framework, and which toys were deemed to be most effective in developing skills listed in the Head Start framework were referenced during the open-ended interview process. Data gathered via open-ended interview were used to independently identify emergent themes through a multistep analysis that included: (1) three readings of each interview to establish overall understanding and general impression, (2) identification of significant statements associated with toy selection, (3) relating

of themes to demographic data while comparing within and across program beliefs about the incorporation of toys and materials in the classroom, and (4) member checking. Questions asked in each interview were dependent on the context of the interview, and responses varied depending on teachers' experience and education. To guide the line of questioning in the interviews, a set of interview questions was created (see Appendix A for five-item teacher questionnaire).

Since note-taking was likely to disrupt the natural conversation that took place during the unstructured interview process, interviews with teachers was audio recorded (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). All information collected by audio recording was then transcribed into text; once all data were transcribed into text, the researcher used the process of member checking (Simon & Goes, 2011). Through member checking, participants were provided with a transcript of the transcribed interviews to allow them to correct any inaccuracies (Simon & Goes, 2011). . All interview responses were then imported into NVivo 11 and organized by the research questions. Nvivo 11 was used to identify, code, categorize, and analyze all participant responses. A simple word frequency query was conducted to gain brief understanding about participant statements. Coding reports were then generated utilized NVivo 11. The coding reports identified relevant themes, responses similar to the identified themes, and the frequency of the responses. The responses that emerged were then triangulated by comparing the responses six-participant responses to the literature, and utilized the demographic surveys to compare participant experiences with the interview responses. The process of triangulation assisted with confirming the credibility and increasing the validity of study findings (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). The themes that emerged from the coding report were also emailed to participants for additional member checking; the participants agreed that all

identified themes were adequate and creditable. The researcher then looked for patterns among transcribed data. Two criteria were specifically important to the interview analysis: (a) the similarity of the toys or materials considered important in enhancing children's developmental growth associated with socio-emotional, language, and fine motor skills, and (b) how participants believe that funding allocated for the purchase of toys and materials affects their ability to ensure that children meet all school readiness/Head Start framework requirements. Through completion of unstructured interviews, Head Start teachers assisted the researcher in ascertaining perspectives about challenges associated with teaching children without having adequate funding to purchase developmentally appropriate toys to facilitate learning.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, was assumed that all Jackson County Civic Action Committee Head Start teachers had experience selecting developmentally appropriate toys. It was also assumed that Jackson County Civic Action Committee Head Start teachers would accurately reflect on their lived experiences concerning the importance of selecting developmentally appropriate toys for Head Start children as they engage in the interview process. With voluntary teacher participation, there was no guarantee that an unbiased sample would be produced. Although the teachers work in different centers, they are all employed by the same Head Start agency.

Limitations

Although it was desirable to have a randomly selected sample from the population of all early childhood education programs in Jackson County, the current study was conducted on three Head Start Centers in Jackson County. Additionally, the findings of this study were limited to the analysis of data collected from a single Head Start program. Perhaps, collecting and

analyzing data from Head Start programs in different areas of the United States would yield different findings. Finally, it should be noted that this study was conducted using the perceptions of Head Start teachers. Therefore, their responses were based solely on their experiences in Head Start classrooms. Head Start teachers possibly responded to the open-ended interview questions differently than would public or private Pre-K teachers who have unlimited funding available for the purchase of toys and classroom materials.

Delimitations

A delimitation this study faced is that it was conducted in Jackson County Mississippi, followed Mississippi Early Learning Standards, and was for Jackson County Civic Action Committee educators. Not all early childhood centers in all states have standards that align with the Common Core and the Head Start Framework. The study was narrowed to concentrate on the perception of Jackson County Civic Action Committee Head Start teachers that were highly qualified, had at least a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, and were experienced in selecting developmentally appropriate toys. The decision to use three early childhood centers was a matter of accessibility and location. It would have been desirable to examine teachers and children playing with toys/materials in early childhood classrooms with no mandates, ethical assurance issues, or time constraints. However, such research did not lend itself to the timeframe, and further the changes to the aforementioned factors did not appear to be coming about in the near future.

Ethical Assurances

To comply with the requirements for ethical assurances, an application for endorsement was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Northcentral University requires researchers to discuss privacy and confidentiality policies associated with the research process.

The anonymity or confidentiality of participants was essential and was discussed with participants before commencing the open-ended interview process. Permission to record the interview, as well as the option to select an alternative pseudonym to shield participant and center identity was addressed (see Appendix D for informed consent). The convention of confidentiality was primarily upheld as a means of protecting research participants from harm (Kaiser, 2010). Northcentral University also requires researchers to obtain the consent and assent of research participants. Informed consent requires participants to be competent to understand information and be free of intimidation and coercion so that participation is voluntary (Gibelman & Gelman, 2001). Informed consent should also give participants information about the audience for research, be ongoing, and offer different options associated with confidentiality (Kaiser, 2010). Informing participants of the audience for research and confidentiality options gives them the opportunity to make informed decisions about participating. Consent protects participants from exploitation and is permission for research to take place (Gibelman & Gelman, 2001). Approval to interview teachers was requested and obtained from the Education Manager of Jackson County Civic Action Agency Head Start, and Center Operations Specialist for each site. Teachers were provided with a standard consent letter to participate in the interview process. The level of harm associated with the interview process was seen to be minimal since questions were not sensitive and did not probe social or psychological issues that could potentially result in damage. To ensure data was secured, paper forms were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home for 7 years. Electronic data were encrypted and then uploaded to a cloud server for 7 years. All paper documents will be shredded, and electronic documents will be deleted after 7 years.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher clarified the methods employed within this research study. The researcher provided information on the design, population, sample, instruments utilized to gather data, data collection, limitations, delimitations, and ethical assurances. Justification for the manner in which the research design was most beneficial for investigating the lived experiences of Jackson County Head Start teachers who had the responsibility of selecting developmentally appropriate toys in early childhood settings was provided. As a result of implementing this case study, the researcher was able to expand on existing research relative to understanding teacher's perceptions about the best developmentally appropriate toys and toy features that can be incorporated into Head Start classrooms at Jackson County Civic Action Committee Head Start and how allowable costs affect the purchasing of these toys.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of the case study research was to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences about which toys were most effective in developing children's social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. Six Head Start teachers employed by Jackson County Civic Action Committee, located in Jackson County, Mississippi were included in this study. Each of the teachers completed a demographic questionnaire and participated in a face-to-face interview. All interviews were audio recorded, and member checking was used to ensure that the themes, which emerged from the face-to-face interviews, reflected the perception of all interviewed Head Start teachers accurately. The results and the evaluation of these findings pertained to the three questions that guided inquiry. The following three research questions were intended to gain insight and understanding on perceptions about which toys were best to use in Head Start programs with limited agency funding in Jackson County Mississippi.

RQ1. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate social-emotional development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

RQ2. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate language development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

RQ3. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate fine motor development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

This chapter presents findings associated with perceptions of Head Start teachers regarding which toys are best with limited funding for helping children develop language, fine motor, and social-emotional skills. The chapter includes an introduction, recruitment data specifications for participants, findings of the study based on face-to-face interview responses of six Head Start teachers, evaluation of the findings, a conclusion.

Trustworthiness of the Data

The collections of data were performed using face-to-face interviews and a demographic questionnaire from six Head Start teachers. Participant responses were neither anonymous nor confidential; participant selected pseudonyms were utilized to identify participants. Participants were sent recruitment information via email and had the opportunity to respond to the research via email if they wanted to participate in the study.

Data gathered via open-ended interview were used to independently identify emergent themes by following a multistep analysis that included: (1) transcribing audio recorded data into text, (2) three readings of each interview to establish overall understanding and general impression, (3) identification of significant statements associated with toy selection, (4) relating themes to demographic data while comparing within and across program beliefs about the incorporation of toys and materials in the classroom, and (5) member checking. Participant responses to the interview questions were collected by audio recording, and once the interview was completed, responses were transcribed into text; once all data were transcribed into text, the researcher completed three readings of all responses to gain an understanding of participant's experiences. The interview responses were emailed to all participants, and the process of member checking was used. Through member checking, participants were provided with a transcript of the transcribed interviews via email to allow them to correct any inaccuracies. Participants did not identify any inaccuracies associated with the data. All interview responses were then imported into NVivo 11 and organized by the research questions. Nvivo 11 was used to identify, code, categorize, and analyze all participant responses. A simple word frequency query was conducted to gain brief understanding about participant statements. Coding reports were then generated utilized NVivo 11. The coding reports identified relevant themes, responses

similar to the identified themes, and the frequency of the responses. The responses that emerged were then triangulated by comparing the six-participant responses to the literature, and utilizing the demographic surveys to compare participant experiences with the interview responses. The process of triangulation assisted with confirming the credibility and increasing the validity of study findings (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). The themes that emerged from the coding report were also emailed to participants for additional member checking; the participants agreed that all identified themes were adequate and creditable.

Results

The themes that emerged from the coding report were also emailed to participants for additional member checking; the participants agreed that all identified themes were adequate and creditable. Two themes emerged from research question 1; five themes emerged from research question 2; and four themes from research question 3. The following results section is organized by the three research questions.

Research Question 1. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate social-emotional development were most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Two themes related to research question 1 emerged:

- Dramatic play; and
- Conscious Discipline.

Table 2 shows which toys/materials were identified by Head Start teachers as having the most potential to stimulate the social-emotional development of children, and were most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding.

Table 2

Head Start Teachers Perception about Toys that Stimulate Social-Emotional Development of Children

Participants	Social-Emotional Toys/Materials
# 21, # 1991, #1913, #7	Dramatic Play
#40, #49, # 7	Conscious Discipline

Theme 1. Dramatic Play. Two Head Start teachers believed that the dramatic play area can be beneficial in helping children enhance their social-emotional skills. Participant 21 believed that social-emotional skills could be taught to children by placing certain items in the dramatic play area. Children can be taught how to recognize emotions utilizing the dolls that have different emotions on their face. Teachers can enhance children's learning in the dramatic play area by letting children discover the dolls and pretending to talk to the dolls. For example, teachers can ask children, "why is the baby so sad," "what can we do to help the baby feel better," "why does this baby look mad." Participant 21 stated that children love these types of interactions. Participant 7 also believed that utilizing dolls in the dramatic play area could enhance children's social-emotional development. I would play with it; I would demonstrate how to play with them. Participant 7 stated, "most of the time when children are playing in dramatic play, I try to play with them." "I pat the baby on the back and talk to the children about what the baby is doing." It is the belief of Participant 7 that these interactions assist children in developing social-emotional skills.

Theme 2. Conscious Discipline. Three Head Start teachers perceived the Conscious

Discipline curriculum as an essential material that can be utilized to enhance children's social-emotional skills. Participant 49 believed that Conscious Discipline helps children with their emotions and feelings. Participant 49 expressed that children learn how to share and get along in their environment by participating in certain activities. Participant 49 stated, "I like to utilize Conscious Discipline and Teaching Strategies Gold; we get on the rug and ask the children what kind of faces we are making, and how the faces make them feel." Participant 49 indicated that she talks about feelings with the children and creates art activities utilizing paper plates to make faces associated with how the children are feeling. Participant 40 also indicated that she utilizes Conscious Discipline in her classroom. Participant 40 learned to use the techniques of the pretzel, star, balloon, and the drain to help with classroom behaviors and to assist children with social-emotional development. Participant 40 also mentioned that the classroom has a safe place where children can go to get themselves together and then they are brought back into the group. Participant 7 utilized a technique in her classroom similar to the safe place; it is a designated quiet zone. Participant 7 stated, "children go to this area if they need to be by themselves." Participant 7 also shared the technique of wishing friends well. However, when discussing Conscious Discipline Participant 21 indicated that her classrooms do not have a soft space or a safe place, and believed that the incorporation of this area into the classroom would give children a place to calm down when they feel overwhelmed.

Research Question 2. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate language development were most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Five themes related to research question 2 emerged:

- Real-world materials;
- Smart Boards;
- Books;
- Music; and
- Talking to Children-reiterating commands/responses.

Table 3 shows which toys/materials were identified by Head Start teachers' as having the most potential to stimulate language development of children, and were most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding.

Table 3

Head Start Teachers Perception about Toys that Stimulate Language Development of Children

Participants	Language Toys/Materials
#21, #1913, #1991, #40	Real World Materials
#40	Smart Boards
# 7, # 40	Books
#40	Music
#21, #1913, #1991, #49	Talking to Children-Reiterating commands/responses

Theme 1. Real-world materials. Three Head Start teachers identified real world materials as toys that stimulated language development and as toys that were most effective in Head Start program with limited funding. Each Head Start teacher expressed the importance of having real world materials in the classroom, and how these materials could assist children with developing language skills. Participant 21 expressed concerns regarding the lack of real world

materials currently located in her classroom but indicated that she takes the time to find things at the second-hand stores and brings those items to be utilized in the classroom.

Natural Objects. Participant 21 stated that the classroom should contain many natural objects, natural colors, and should contain items that allow very open ended playing. Some of these items would include pinecones, leaves, sticks, rocks, crayons, wood, and blocks that are cut out of tree limbs. Participant 21 indicated that toys should not be plastic and too colorful and that items should be cloth and contain real patterns that can be utilized to teach children. While speaking about natural objects, Participant 21 described the ideal classroom environment containing woven baskets instead of plastic containers, wooden tables instead of plastic, sound gardens, and utilizing an outdoor curriculum. Participant 21 added that the program has plenty of toys, but the program needs to invest more in realistic objects. Participant 1913 believed that classroom material should be neutral for all children and that children with ADD and OCD should be taken into consideration when selecting the quantity and color of items. Participant 1991 shared similar thoughts about the need for natural materials inside the classroom, as well as the need to limit over stimulating colors when selecting toys that can stimulate social-emotional development. Participant 40 believed that it is the teacher's responsibility to bring real life materials into the classroom. Participant 49 and Participant 7 did not mention the inclusion of natural materials into the classroom.

Theme 2. Smart Boards. One Head Start teacher identified Smart Boards as a material that stimulated language development and as a material that was most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding. Participant 40 stated that the Smart Board could be used to teacher children literacy and math skills. For children to be able to use Smart Boards in the classroom, the Head Start program would have to fix the Smart Boards current located in the

classrooms. Participant 40 stated that the only time that children have access to the smart board now is when they attend the Pre-K Launch pad, which is a program that aims to assist preschool programs in ensuring children are school ready.

Theme 3. Books. All six Head Start teachers perceived books as a material that stimulated language development. Specifically, Participant 7 and Participant 40 discussed that the program was recently provided books by a resource and referral agency. These books were said to be developmentally appropriate and are used during all hours of the day to provide children opportunity to learn language and literacy skills.

Theme 4. Music. One Head Start teacher perceived music as a material that can be used to enhance children's language skills. Participant 40 stated that in her classrooms children are introduced to different music that teaches the children words. Children were also introduced to a new nursery rhyme each month. Participant 40 had each child participate in a morning activity where the children get a chance to introduce themselves to their peers and utilize language skills.

Theme 5. Talking to Children. Five Head Start teachers perceived talking to children as a way to enhance children's language development. Participant 21 indicated that what works with enhancing children's language skills is "taking to kids." "Having things you would see in a normal world, real items- real pots, and pans real toaster, real curlers; these times can be used to engage in a real conversation with children." Participant 1991 believed that talking to children while they are playing in the dramatic play area, art area, and in blocks builds children's language skills. Participant 1991 believed, "once children get in those areas and start playing with each other it requires them to communicate; if they want a toy they have to ask for it." "Creating opportunities for play is how we get children to be social with each other, this builds language skills." Participant 1913 discussed the strategies that she used to assist children with

building language skills. Participant 1913 talked to children, and explained what needs to be done to make things run smoothly. Participant 1913 then stepped away to see what the children have learned and to see if the techniques she has shared with the children are working.

Participant 1913 stated, "it is important to reiterate the things you say to children, you have to tell them first, and then continue repeating it until the children grasp the concept. Participant 1913 likes to provide children with the words to use to build language skills. For example, "can we share with these, I think it's enough for the both of us," "when you are done, can I play with them." Participant 49 also utilized the technique that Participant 1913 used in her classroom and empathized that she teaches children the proper way to say things and to express their feelings to their peers. She believed that this helps children with enhancing language skills. Participant 49 discussed how her class holds conversations during breakfast, lunch, and arrival time, and how these conversations assist children with developing language skills. Participant 49 said, "children had the opportunity to learn new words by listening to and talking with their peers."

Research Question 3. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate fine motor development were most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Four themes related to research question 3 emerged:

- Handwriting;
- Cutting with scissors;
- Manipulatives; and
- Modeling clay/playdough.

Table 4 shows which toys/materials were identified by Head Start teachers' as having the most potential to stimulate the fine-motor development of children, and were most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding.

Table 4

Head Start Teachers Perception about Toys that Stimulate Fine Motor Development of Children

Participants	Fine Motor Toys/Materials
#21, #1991, #40	Handwriting
#21, #1913, #49	Cutting with Scissors
#21, #7, #49, #1913	Manipulatives
#21, #49	Modeling Clay/playdough

Theme 1. Handwriting. Three Head Start teachers considered handwriting as a way to enhance children's fine motor skills. Participant 21 liked to provide children with short and long pencils. When discussing handwriting Participant 21 stated, "that small child have an issue with using fat pencils to write." "It would be like us writing with a pencil two feet tall; it's very unwilling for them." Participant 21 believed that golf pencils tend to provide smaller children more support when it comes to handwriting. Participant 1991 also discussed writing and how important it is for children to utilize appropriately sized pencils to enhance fine motor skills. However, Participant 40 did not see pencil size as an issue in her classroom; instead, she believed that children should have the opportunity to utilize ditto sheets and lined paper to enhance fine motor skills. Ditto sheets are copied worksheets that the program asks teachers to refrain from using. Participant 40 thought, "completing ditto sheets will get children ready for kindergarten since children are going to be required to complete worksheet once they enter into the Kindergarten environment."

Theme 2. Cutting with Scissors. Three Head Start teachers perceived cutting with Scissors as a way to enhance children's fine motor skills. Participant 21 makes lines on paper or just provides children with construction paper to cut. Participant 21 emphasized the use of construction paper because she stated, "it's thicker and easier for children to cut." Participant 1913 also provided children construction paper, so that they can use scissors to enhance fine motor skills. Participant 1913 likes to provide children a line to see if children can keep fingers and hand movements controlled going from top to bottom and from left to right. Participant 49 also believed that cutting with scissors assist with developing children's fine motor skills.

Theme 3. Manipulatives. Three Head Start teachers considered manipulatives as toys that can be utilized to enhance children's fine motor development. Participant 21 likes to use small legos in her classroom. Participant 21 believed that "small legos give children the opportunity to manipulate small objects." When discussing the use of Legos in the classroom, Participant 21 discussed how the items could be choking hazards for three-year-old children, and how it is important for teachers to know their children and how oral the children are. Participants 7 and Participant 49 believed that lacing cards and puzzles are essential toys for assisting children in developing fine motor skills. When utilizing lacing cards, children are required to using controlled hand movements to place the string into holes. Puzzles require children to use refined hand and finger movements to place pieces in designated areas.

Theme 4. Modeling Clay/Playdough. Two Head Start teachers thought that modeling clay/playdough was an essential material that can be utilized to enhance children's fine motor skills. Participant 49 believes that modeling clay is beneficial because it requires children to have to use small muscle movement to manipulate the clay. Participant 21 considered playdough an essential material because "it strengthens the children's fingers."

Evaluation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teachers' perceptions and experience about which toys are most effective in the JCCAC Head Start programs to help make appropriate data-driven decisions for resource allocations. Three research questions were developed to explore opinions about developmentally appropriate toys and materials. Eleven themes emerged from utilizing the demographic questionnaire and face-to-face interviews of six Head Start teachers who participated in this study.

Research Question 1: According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate social-emotional development were most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Two themes related to research question 1 that emerged:

- Dramatic play; and
- Conscious Discipline.

Research Question 1 allowed the researcher to gain insight into teacher's perception and experiences with selecting effective and developmentally appropriate social-emotional toys for Head Start children. Two themes emerged from the research question. The first theme, dramatic play, is consistent with Jun & Jin (2014) who found that play in early childhood classrooms offers many important benefits, including opportunities for children to actively solve problems creatively, express themselves clearly, and engage in problem-solving, self-expression, imagination, individualism, socializing and bonding with peers (Jung & Jin, 2014). The second theme, conscious discipline also related to the literature and was consistent with Kaplan (2015), which found that utilizing aggressive release toys allows children to express anger, hostility, and frustration. Creative expression and emotional release toys allow children to be spontaneous and

expressive. Creative expression and emotional release toys include emotion stones, better builder emotions, emotion-oes, and emotion magnet sets (Kaplan, 2015). These creative expression and emotion release toys allow children to reflect on emotions and understand and respond to the social needs of others. Three of the six participants mentioned the importance of Conscious Discipline materials, while the other three participants referenced the importance of children having access to dramatic play items.

Research Question 2. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate language development were most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Five themes related to research question 2 that emerged:

- Real-world materials;
- Smart Boards;
- Books;
- Music; and
- Talking to Children-reiterating commands/responses.

The third theme that emerged was real world materials. Four out of six participants identified play with real word materials as a way to stimulate children's language development. This theme was consistent with Romani and Brownell's theory of play. Play is essential to the development of language, especially if it is child-initiated and allows the child to have control of his or her learning (Romani & Brownell, 2013). The fourth theme that emerged was the use of Smart Boards. Only one out of the six teachers identified Smart Boards as a toy that can enhance children's language development. Even though computer games were categorized as a toy by Trawick-Smith (2014), prior research has not been conducted on the importance of certain educational computer equipment such as the Smart Board, and how its' use enhances children's language development. During the early childhood years, children learn to observe, remember,

notice likenesses and differences, order, label, and classify objects (Morrow, 2009). The fifth theme that emerged was books. Two out of six teachers identified books as a toy or material that enhances children's language development. In addition, three of the six participants referenced books when discussing the new testing requirements of Pre-Kindergarten children, but refrained from going into detail about the importance of books and how they can be utilized to enhance children's language development.

The sixth theme that emerged was music. Theme six was consistent with Almon (2013) who found that play with music gives children the opportunity to enrich their knowledge of the world through appropriate content offered in interesting and experiential ways by their teachers. Only one of the six participants cited music as a toy that enhanced children's language skills. The seventh theme that emerged was talking to children-reiterating commands/responses. All six participants felt that talking to children was a requirement for all early childhood professionals, and should be the number one way to enhance children's language skills in an early childhood environment. This belief was consistent with research conducted by Romani and Brownell (2013), which stated that play with objects gives children the opportunity to express language and the opportunity to interact with people and materials that have the potential to construct their knowledge of the world (Romani & Brownell, 2013). Children also learn cause and effect, how to make choices, and how to question and anticipate events. Instructional practices such as using curricular materials, lessons, stories, puppets, and games to teach skills such as sharing and taking turns creates an environment where children are required to interact with a variety of other children and build social skills (Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013).

Additionally, findings from previous studies about toys concluded that toys should be as simplistic as possible to allow children to determine their specific uses (Lee, Meany-Walen,

Carlson, Carnes-Holt, & Ware, 2013). When selecting toys, teachers must be thoughtful, ensure that all materials are intentional, and promote learning in a dynamic environment (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014). According to Barnett (2012), toys should be sturdy, age-appropriate, fun, and economical. Toys should be selected depending upon children's interests and approaches to learning (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014). According to Landreth (2012), real life toys allow children to express their feelings.

Research Question 3. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate fine motor development were most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Four themes related to research question 3 that emerged:

- Handwriting;
- Cutting with scissors;
- Manipulatives; and
- Modeling clay/playdough.

The eighth theme that emerged was handwriting. This theme was consistent with research conducted by Dienhart and Manfra (2013), which found that numerous tasks that early childhood children take part in can be classified as requiring fine motor skills. Some of these tasks include placing pegs in holes, lacing, building with blocks, and writing (Dienhart & Manfra, 2013). Marr, Cermack, Cohn, and Henderson, (2003); Dienhart and Manfra, (2013) conducted observations of the fine motor engagement of children in Head Start programs. Children in these programs were observed using fine motor skills while participating in finger plays, art activities, manipulative play, learning center play, writing exercises, coloring exercises, cutting, and pasting (Marr et al, 2003; Dienhart & Manfra, 2013). Fine motor skills are also necessary for preschool children to complete everyday tasks such as dressing, eating, and holding objects

(Memisevic & Hadzic, 2013). However, themes nine, ten, and eleven were not identified in previous research as toys or materials that can be utilized to enhance children's fine motor development. Instead, research conducted by Eberle (2013) found that tasks that train muscles such as finger-painting, using hands to explore nature, riding a bicycle, golfing, and skiing give children the opportunity to explore and engage in fine motor activities.

The findings from the study benefit the field of early childhood education as it indicated real world perceptions and experiences of Head Start teachers when it involves selecting developmentally appropriate toys and materials for children in Jackson County Mississippi. Previously there was no research conducted, and this study seeks to assist administrators and educators in promoting awareness of toys and materials that are most effective in enhancing children's social-emotional, language, and fine-motor development. By understanding, teacher's perception administrators will be more informed when it comes to selecting and purchasing toys that are beneficial to the enhancement of children's growth and development. Teachers will also be more informed about information that can be provided to families that will aid them in choosing toys that are beneficial to their children's growth and development in social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills.

Summary

The researcher investigated teachers' case study examined teachers' perceptions and experiences about which toys are most effective in developing children's social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. Six Head Start teachers employed by Jackson County Civic Action Committee, located in Jackson County, Mississippi were included in this study. The study was guided by three research questions associated with selecting developmentally appropriate toys and materials for children. Eleven themes emerged from the research questions.

All participants indicated the first theme, dramatic play toys as essential for enhancing children's social-emotional development. A majority of the participant's comments also indicated the second theme, Conscious Discipline as an essential material to enhance children's social-emotional development. Previous research associated with toys that have the potential to enhance children's social-emotional development (Kaplan, 2015) are consistent with the research and indicate the importance of social emotional toys that allow children to express their feelings. All interviews were audio recorded, and member checking was used to ensure that the themes that emerged from the face-to-face interviews accurately reflected the perception of all interviewed Head Start teachers.

Real word materials, Smart Boards, Books, Music, and talking to children were highlighted as the five themes associated with research questions two. Prior studies suggest that when selecting toys, teachers must be thoughtful and ensure that all materials are intentional and promote learning in a dynamic environment (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014). All toys selected by teachers were mentioned in previous research (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014; Romani & Brownell, 2013; Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013; Lee, Meany-Walen, Carlson, Carnes-Holt, & Ware, 2013), and are deemed intentional and have the ability to enhance children's language development. Four of the participants had a concern that children did not have enough access to real-world materials in their classrooms and the responsibility they felt to ensure that children were provided with access to these items. All participants believed that themes eight and nine were essential for children to learn fine motor skills. These findings were consistent with previous research (Marr et al, 2003; Dienhart & Manfra, 2013) associated with children developing fine motor skills. Previous research conducted by Eberle (2013), referenced additional activities that have the ability to enhance children's fine motor development. The participants did not mention

these items during the research process. Themes nine, ten, and eleven were also not mentioned in previous research. Participant's responses have the ability to help Head Start teachers and management staff implement cost-effective change, by building links between teacher perception concerning the selection of toys and current program policies associated with selecting toys. The results of the research effort will also add to the body of knowledge in the area of Head Start school readiness in relationship to choices teachers make when acquiring and purchasing toys for the classroom and classroom activities for Jackson County Civic Action Committee, Inc.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Head Start is one of the many programs that utilize play with toys to enhance children's learning and development. To ensure that children's knowledge is challenged and stimulated, teachers must understand that all children do not enjoy the same play experiences with the same classroom toys and materials. Head Start teachers are responsible for assisting children in enhancing their developmental skills. Thus, the purpose of the case study research was to examine teachers' perceptions and experience about which toys were most effective in the Jackson County Civic Action Committee (JCCAC) Head Start programs. To ensure school readiness, children and teachers need to be provided with appropriate materials to use in the classroom (Guyton, 2011). The specific problem for JCCAC teachers was that the limitations on allowable costs for purchasing developmentally appropriate classroom toys and materials can lead to a lack of exposure to cognitively stimulating toys and materials, and consequently a failure to promote early childhood developmental skills. This problem needed to be addressed because federal subsidies received to fund Head Start programs are expected to have a positive effect on children's school readiness. The researcher utilized a qualitative case study approach. The qualitative case study approach was appropriate for the research effort as it derived a close, in-depth understanding and insightful appreciation of the issues that Jackson County Civic Action Committee, Inc. teachers endure when selecting developmentally appropriate toys that resulted in new learning in a real world context (Yin, 2012). Face-to-face interviews and demographic questionnaires with 6 Head Start teachers working in Head Start centers in Jackson County, Mississippi were the source of the research data. In addition, the researcher also employed a computer software program known as the NVivo 11 to identify, code, categorize and

analyze all participant responses. From the data analysis, 11 content themes, aligned with the following research questions, emerged.

RQ1. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate social-emotional development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

RQ2. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate language development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

RQ3. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate fine motor development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Participant's responses to the research questions help Head Start teachers and management staff implement cost-effective change by building links between teacher perception concerning the selection of toys and current program policies associated with selecting toys. The results of the research effort will also add to the body of knowledge in the area of Head Start school readiness in relationship to choices teachers make when acquiring and purchasing toys for the classroom and classroom activities for Jackson County Civic Action Committee, Inc. The findings of this study were limited to the analysis of data collected from a single Head Start program. It should be noted that this study was being conducted using the perceptions of Head Start teachers. Therefore, their responses were based solely on their experiences in Head Start classrooms. Head Start teachers possibly responded to the open-ended interview questions differently than would public or private Pre-K teachers who have unlimited funding available for the purchase of toys and classroom materials.

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss implications of each research question, and recommendations for practical and future research. A summary of the study will conclude the chapter.

Implications

Research Question 1. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate social-emotional development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Two themes related to research question 1 that emerged are as follows:

- Dramatic play.
- Conscious Discipline.

Two Head Start teachers believed that the dramatic play area can be beneficial in helping children enhance their social-emotional skills. The first theme, dramatic play, is consistent with Jun & Jin (2014) who found that play in early childhood classrooms offers many important benefits, including opportunities for children to actively solve problems creatively, express themselves clearly, and engage in problem-solving, self-expression, imagination, individualism, socializing and bonding with peers. Eberle (2011) stated that play gives children the opportunity to mingle with peers, gather materials, and work on negotiation skills. Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) (2010) noted that dramatic play is a powerful way to encourage social development; during this form of play children accept roles, assign roles, and act roles out. Through the two themes that emerged from research question 1 and interviews with teachers, it can be concluded that although children have access to a plethora of toys and materials, instructional practices such as using curricular materials, lessons, stories, puppets, and games to teach skills such as sharing and taking turns creates an environment where children are required to interact with a variety of other children and build social skills (Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013). Therefore, Head Start administrators should take into account the classroom

materials needed to stimulate children's social-emotional development. The second theme, Conscious Discipline, also related to the literature and was consistent with Kaplan (2015), which found that utilizing aggressive release toys allows children to express anger, hostility, and frustration. Three Head Start teachers perceived the Conscious Discipline curriculum as an essential curriculum that can be utilized to enhance children's social-emotional skills. Head Start teachers believed that they could enhance children's learning in dramatic play by letting children discover emotion release toys and pretending to let children talk to toys. Creative expression and emotional release toys include emotion stones, better builder emotions, emotion-oes, and emotion magnet sets (Kaplan, 2015). These creative expression and emotion release toys allow children to reflect on emotions and understand and respond to the social needs of others. Head Start teachers believed that children can be taught how to recognize emotions utilizing dolls that have different emotions on their face.

Head Start teachers believed that play with dramatic play toys and conscious discipline material are beneficial in stimulating a child's social-emotional development because the toys and materials require children to talk about their feelings, negotiate with their peers, and identify their emotions. These two themes are the product of Head Start teacher's experiences and perceptions about toys that have the ability to stimulate children's social-emotional development. The findings also coincide with the chapter 2 review of the literature. Kaplan (2015) found that creative expression and emotion release toys allow children to reflect on emotions and understand and respond to the social needs of others. Head Start teacher's perceptions and experiences selecting toys that stimulate children's social-emotional development is essential and the first step to ensuring children have access to developmentally appropriate classroom materials.

Research Question 2. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate language development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Five themes related to research question 2 that emerged are as follows:

- Real-world materials.
- Smart Boards.
- Books.
- Music.
- Talking to Children and reiterating commands/responses.

The third theme that emerged in the study was real world materials. Four out of six participants identified play with real world materials as a way to stimulate children's language development. This theme is consistent with Romani and Brownell's theory of play. Play is essential to the development of language, especially if it is child-initiated and allows the child to have control of his or her learning (Romani & Brownell, 2013). Heads Start teachers expressed the importance of having real world materials in the classroom, and how these materials can assist all children, including children with disabilities with developing language skills. This is consistent with Myck-Wayne (2010) that insisted that play gives children with disabilities the opportunity to engage in self-initiated pretend play for social and physical development. The fourth theme that emerged was the use of Smart Boards. Only one out of the six teachers identified Smart Boards as a toy that can enhance children's language development. Even though computer games were categorized as a toy by Trawick-Smith (2014), prior research has not been conducted on the importance of certain educational computer equipment such as the Smart Board, and how its' use enhances children's language development. During the early childhood

years, children learn to observe, remember, notice likenesses and differences, order, label, and classify objects (Morrow, 2009). The fifth theme that emerged was books. Two out of six teachers identified books as toys or materials that enhance children's language development. In addition, three of the six participants referenced books when discussing the new testing requirements of Pre-Kindergarten children, but refrained from going into detail about the importance of books and how they can be utilized to enhance children's language development. The sixth theme that emerged was music. Theme six was consistent with Almon (2013) who found that play with music gives children the opportunity to enrich their knowledge of the world through appropriate content offered in interesting and experiential ways by their teachers. Only one of the six participants cited music as a toy that enhanced children's language skills. The seventh theme that emerged was talking to children--reiterating commands/responses. All six participants felt that talking to children was a requirement for all early childhood professionals, and should be the number one way to enhance children's language skills in an early childhood environment. This belief is consistent with research conducted by Romani and Brownell (2013), which states that play with objects gives children the opportunity to express language and the opportunity to interact with people and materials that have the potential to construct their knowledge of the world (Romani & Brownell, 2013). Children also learn cause and effect, how to make choices, and how to question and anticipate events. Instructional practices such as using curricular materials, lessons, stories, puppets, and games to teach skills such as sharing and taking turns creates an environment where children are required to interact with a variety of other children and build social skills (Hollingsworth & Winter, 2013).

Additionally, findings from previous studies about toys concluded that toys should be as simplistic as possible to allow children to determine their specific uses (Lee, Meany-Walen,

Carlson, Carnes-Holt, & Ware, 2013). When selecting toys, teachers must be thoughtful, ensure that all materials are intentional, and promote learning in a dynamic environment (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014). According to Barnett (2012), toys should be sturdy, age-appropriate, fun, and economical. Toys should be selected depending upon children's interests and approaches to learning (Shabazian & Li Soga, 2014). According to Landreth (2012), real life toys allow children to express their feelings.

Head Start teachers believed that real word materials, Smart Board, books, music, and talking to children are effective at stimulating children's language development. The findings are consistent with the literature in chapter 2; play with toys gives children the opportunity to engage in communication with peers, and to use language skills acquired within and outside of the classroom environment. Children's language expands when they are given the opportunity to use the language that they know and when adults model more complex language (Classroom Assessment Scoring Systems, 2011). From the responses of Head Start teachers, play with real world materials and talking to children were two of the most effective ways to stimulate children's language development. Research indicates that teachers who used open-ended questions and incorporated toys and props into play settings encouraged children's utterances and provided children with positive models of language (Mecham et al., 2014). Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to create a language-rich environment with socio-dramatic play contexts (Mecham et al., 2014). Since previous studies have not indicated which specific toys or props were used by teachers to enhance language development of preschool children, future researchers can use the current findings as a guide to exploring the experiences and perceptions of Head Start teacher about the effectiveness of toys that stimulate social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills.

Research Question 3. According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, which toys that stimulate fine motor development are most effective in Head Start programs with limited funding?

Four themes related to research question 3 that emerged are as follows:

- Handwriting.
- Cutting with scissors.
- Manipulatives.
- Modeling clay/playdough.

The eighth theme that emerged is handwriting. This theme was consistent with research conducted by Dienhart and Manfra (2013), which found that numerous tasks that early childhood children take part in can be classified as requiring fine motor skills. Some of these tasks include placing pegs in holes, lacing, building with blocks, and writing (Dienhart & Manfra, 2013). Marr, Cermack, Cohn, and Henderson (2003) and Dienhart and Manfra (2013) conducted observations of the fine motor engagement of children in Head Start programs. Children in these programs were observed using fine motor skills while participating in finger plays, art activities, manipulative play, learning center play, writing exercises, coloring exercises, cutting, and pasting (Marr et al, 2003; Dienhart & Manfra, 2013). Fine motor skills are also necessary for preschool children to complete everyday tasks such as dressing, eating, and holding objects (Memisevic & Hadzic, 2013). However, even though identified by Head Start teachers as effective toys that assist children in enhancing their fine motor skills, themes nine, ten, and eleven were not identified in previous research as toys or materials that can be utilized to enhance children's fine motor development.

In regards to perceptions associated with toys that stimulate fine motor development, Head Start teachers believed that toys and materials that require the use of hands and fingers are most effective in helping children develop fine motor skills. Consistent with the research of the literature in chapter 2, Eberle (2011) believes that tasks that train muscles such as finger-painting, using hands to explore nature, riding a bicycle, golfing, and skiing give children the opportunity to explore and engage in fine motor activities. Teachers believed that children must utilize materials of the appropriate size to assist in fine motor development. This is also consistent with the research in chapter 2. Barnett (2012) noted that toys should fit the strength and size of the child and that selecting toys should be determined by evaluating the child's developmental age, not his chronological age. Therefore an implication of the findings would be for the Head Start program to ensure that toys and materials are purchased based on the child's developmental age, not chronological age. The incorporation of developmentally appropriate materials into children's play provides the potential to construct children's knowledge of the world (Romani & Brownell, 2013).

Recommendations for Future Research

As a recommendation for further research, studies should include a larger number of Head Start teachers as well as different Head Start programs in different counties and states. In the future, researchers should consider evaluating different types of preschool programs, including the perceptions and experiences of public preschool teachers, private preschool teachers, daycare teachers, family child care teachers, and Early Head Start teachers. The inclusion of additional preschool teachers from different programs would validate the findings associated with toys that are most effective at stimulating children's social-emotional, language, and fine-motor development. Future research should also focus on a larger population of Head

Start teachers. By completing the study with a larger population of Head Start teachers, the researcher will have a greater understanding of teachers' experiences and perceptions associated with selecting developmentally appropriate toys and materials. Future studies should also seek to identify toys and materials that stimulate children's gross motor and cognitive development skills, which are also beneficial to children's school readiness. Future research should include case studies of individual Head Start teachers, and how the teachers use toys in their classrooms to enhance children's early childhood development skills. Qualitative research on the use of toys in the classroom should include face-to-face interviews and classroom observations. During the classroom observations, the researcher should document the effects of playing with toys on children's early childhood development skills. The researcher should also document the frequency of play with the toys, and the duration of the play. The results of this qualitative case study would provide additional support to teachers and administrators associated with the toys that have the ability to enhance children's early childhood development skills. Future research should also examine the school readiness outcomes of classrooms with toys selected by teachers versus toys selected by administrators. Future research should also examine the difference between the uses of teacher selected toys on school readiness in Head Start programs versus public school pre-k programs. The results of this quantitative research would provide educational administrators insight into the importance of play with toys in early childhood classrooms. Additionally, future research should be conducted on themes nine, ten, and eleven to further examine their effectiveness in enhancing children's fine motor development since there was no previous research associated with the themes before the completion of the study. Future research should also address the use of educational computer equipment such as Smart Boards in Head Start classrooms and how using the equipment enhances children's language development.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of the research, the participants identified effective toys and materials that are beneficial in stimulating children's social-emotional, language, and fine-motor development, with the most discussion surrounding the use of materials that are developmentally appropriate for each child. Therefore, the first recommendation for practice is for administrators to allocate funding for the purchase of toys based on a child's developmental age, not chronological age. The literature review cited the importance of evaluating children, and selecting classrooms toys and materials based on the child's size, strength, and developmental age, not chronological age (Barnett, 2012). Participants reported that if children had more access to developmentally appropriate materials, children would be more likely to play with materials; as a result, this lead to more children meeting school readiness requirements.

The last recommendation for practice was the development of a process to ensure that both teachers and administrators have the ability to select and evaluate toy and material effectiveness in Head Start classrooms. This would ensure that both teachers and administrators are knowledgeable about the toys and materials being utilized in the classroom. This recommendation coincides with the literature in chapter 2. To ensure that children's knowledge is challenged and stimulated, teachers must understand that all children do not enjoy the same play experiences with the same classroom toys and materials (Barnett, 2012). Barnett noted that gaining knowledge about children's play experiences is the first step in choosing the best toys for a child. This process would address teacher's dissatisfaction with the toys that are currently being selected for use in Head Start classrooms and would require administrators and teachers to communicate about the ineffectiveness and effectiveness of each toy, and the ability of the toys to assist toward meeting school readiness goals and requirements.

Conclusions

The specific problem for Jackson County Civic Action Committee teachers was that the limitations on allowable costs for purchasing developmentally appropriate classroom toys and materials can lead to a lack of exposure to cognitively stimulating toys and materials, and consequently a failure to promote early childhood developmental skills. The purpose of the case study research was to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences about which toys are most effective in developing children's social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. The study data was collected by conducting face-to-face interviews and by collecting a demographic questionnaire. Data gathered via open-ended interview was used to independently identify emergent themes by following a multistep analysis that included: (1) transcribing audio recorded data into text, (2) three readings of each interview to establish overall understanding and general impression, (3) identification of significant statements associated with toy selection, (4) relating themes to demographic data while comparing within and across program beliefs about the incorporation of toys and materials in the classroom, and (5) member checking. Participant responses to the interview questions were collected by audio recording, and once the interview was completed, responses were transcribed into text; once all data were transcribed into text, the researcher completed three readings of all responses to gain an understanding of participant's experiences. Limitations to this study included the possibility of Head Start teachers possibly responding to the open-ended interview questions differently than would public or private Pre-K teachers who have unlimited funding available for the purchase of toys and classroom materials. Additionally, the findings of this study were limited to the analysis of data collected from a single Head Start program located in Jackson County Mississippi.

The researcher found that participants identified similar toys and materials that were identified in a review of the literature. Eleven themes emerged from the three research questions. The two themes relevant to question 1 were dramatic play and Conscious Discipline. The five themes relevant to question two were real-world materials, Smart Boards, books, music, and talking to children-reiterating commands/responses. The four themes relevant to question three were handwriting, cutting with scissors, manipulatives, and modeling clay/playdough. Based on the findings, the researcher was able to identify which toys and materials were most effective in stimulating children's social-emotional, language, and fine motor development. Based on the findings, recommendations for practice and recommendations for future research were identified based on the themes that emerged from the research questions.

Recommendations for future research include the incorporation of case studies of individual Head Start teachers, and how the teachers use toys in their classrooms to enhance children's early childhood development skills. The results of this qualitative case study would provide additional support to teachers and administrators associated with the toys that have the ability to enhance children's early childhood development skills. Future research should also examine the school readiness outcomes of classrooms with toys selected by teachers versus toys selected by administrators. Future research should also examine the difference between the uses of teacher selected toys on school readiness in Head Start programs versus public school pre-k programs. The results of this quantitative research would provide educational administrators insight into the importance of play with toys in early childhood classrooms. The first recommendation for practice is for administrators to allocate funding for the purchase of toys based on a child's developmental age, not chronological age. The last recommendation for practice was the development of a process that ensures both teachers and administrators have the

ability to select and evaluate toy and material effectiveness in Head Start classrooms. These recommendations have the potential to lead to establishing a process to assist administrators and teachers when it comes to selecting developmentally appropriate toys for Head Start children in Jackson County, Mississippi.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questions Asked of Teachers

1. In what ways do you believe your teaching and your preschool program prepare children for kindergarten?
Follow up: Is there anything about kindergarten readiness that you feel your program is not providing?
2. Which toys and materials do you believe are most effective in helping children develop language skills?
3. Which toys and materials do you believe are most effective in helping children develop social-emotional skills?
4. Which toys and materials do you believe are most effective in helping children develop fine motor skills?
5. What kind of information do you use to evaluate children concerning readiness? Can you give an example? Do you use toys and materials for these evaluations? Can you give an example?

Prompts to be used during the interview

- What do you mean by...?
- Tell me more about....
- Repetition or restatement of questions

Hatcher, B., Nuner, J., & Paulsel, J. (2012). Kindergarten readiness and preschools: Teachers' and parents' beliefs within and across programs. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 14(2). Retrieved from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v14n2/hatcher.html>

Appendix B: Teacher Demographic Survey

TEACHER # _____

Teacher Demographic Survey

Please answer the following questions about yourself and your experiences. This personal information is for research purposes only. It will be seen only by me and kept strictly confidential.

Are you _____?

Male Female

What is your age?

21-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41+

What is your highest level of education?

CDA Associates Degree Bachelor's Degree or Higher

What major is associated with your education?

Child Development Early Childhood Education Other: Specify _____ N/A

How many total years of preschool teaching experience do you have?

1-3 4-7 8-12 13-17 18+

Do you have experience selecting developmentally appropriate toys for classrooms? (those who answer no will be eliminated from the survey process)

Yes or no

How many years' experience do you have selecting developmentally appropriate toys for children.

1-5 6-11 12-17 18-23 24+

Have you had any training associated with selecting developmentally appropriate toys for children?

Yes no

If yes, what was the name of the training and was it beneficial? _____

Please ensure that you have answered all the items on the survey. Thanks for your help and support!

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Introduction:

My name is Nitara Jenkins. I am a doctoral student at Northcentral University in Arizona. I am conducting a research study on teacher's perceptions and experiences about toys that help children develop skills associated with the Head Start Framework. I am completing this research as part of my doctoral degree. I invite you to participate.

Activities:

If you participate in this research, you will be asked to:

1. Meet with me for an interview. This should take up to 20 minutes.
2. Complete an eight-item questionnaire. This should take up to 15 minutes.
3. Complete the member checking process. Participants will be provided with a transcript of the transcribed interview to allow them to correct any inaccuracies. The member checking process should take up to 15 minutes.

Eligibility:

You are eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. Are a Head Start Teacher
2. Are an employee of Jackson County Civic Action Agency, and are employed at either Pascagoula Center, Gautier Center, Gautier Elementary or Ocean Springs Center.
3. Have an earned Associates Degree or higher in Early Childhood Education or Child Development.
4. Have a CDA Credential.

You are not eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. Do not have a CDA Credential or Degree in Child Development or Early Childhood Education.
2. Are a Head Start Teacher Assistant
3. Are employed at either Jefferson Center, First Steps, Vancleave Center, or Kreole Elementary.
4. Are not an active employee of Jackson County Civic Action Agency.

I hope to include 21 participants in this research.

Risks:

There are minimal risks in this study. Some possible risks include: loss of time to complete work requirements, and the ability for someone to be able to potentially recognize your responses to interview questions when direct quotes are used.

To decrease the impact of these risks, you can: skip any interview or questionnaire question you do not want to answer. You may also stop participating in the study at any time.

Benefits:

If you decide to participate, there are no direct benefits to you.

The potential benefits to others are: The results of the research effort may add to the body of knowledge in the area of Head Start school readiness in relationships to choices teachers make when acquiring and purchasing toys for the classroom and classroom activities for Jackson County Civic Action Committee, Inc.

Confidentiality:

The information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent allowable by law. Some steps I will take to keep your identity confidential are: I will use a fake name (Pseudonym) to identify your interview and questionnaire answers. I will keep your real name separate from your answers.

The people who will have access to your information are: me, my dissertation chair, and my dissertation committee members.

The Institutional Review Board may also review my research and view your information.

I will secure your information with these steps: the audiotapes and consent forms will be locked in a cabinet in a locked office. The computer files will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office.

I will keep your data for 7 years. Then, I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data.

Compensation:

To thank you for your willingness to participate in the interview process, you will be given a \$5 gift card and a gift to be utilized in your classroom (a book and a puzzle).

Audiotaping:

I would like to use a voice recorder to record your responses. You can still participate if you do not wish to be recorded.

Please sign here if I can record you: _____

Contact Information:

If you have questions for me, you can contact me at: N.Jenkins8277@email.ncu.edu , or, 228-313-0176.

My dissertation chair's name is Dr. Melanie Shaw. She works at Northcentral University and is supervising me on the research. You can contact her at: MShaw@ncu.edu, or, 618-698-3280

If you have questions about your rights in the research, or if a problem has occurred, or if you are injured during your participation, please contact the Institutional Review Board at: irb@ncu.edu or 1-888-327-2877 ext 8014.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, or if you stop participation after you start, there will be no penalty to you. You will not lose any benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature:

A signature indicates your understanding of this consent form. You will be given a copy of the form for your information.

Participant Signature

Printed Name

Date

Researcher Signature

Printed Name

Date

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

As you know, I am conducting a study about which toys are most effective in helping children develop social emotional, language, and gross motor skills. This study will provide administrators with information about which toys are most effective in developing children's social, language, and fine motor skills. This information will be beneficial to administrators since they spend minimal time in the classroom with children. The study will also provide teachers with information to give to families that will aid them in choosing toys that are beneficial to their children's growth and development in social-emotional, language, and fine motor skills. I will be interviewing a sample of those most directly involved in providing learning opportunities to children. Your responses will be kept confidential: nothing you say will be attributed to you personally or to your work site.

1. Although I have some familiarity with the responsibilities as a teacher, in our interview, I would like to get a better sense of the details of your work with children.

- a. What age group are you currently teaching?
- b. Have you always taught at this level?
- d. How long have you been teaching?

2. Describe your overall responsibilities as a Head Start Teacher. Of all the functions for which you are responsible for as a Head Start Teacher, which ones have been the most rewarding?

[Ask as appropriate, given responses to the first question.]

3. You've mentioned your most important responsibilities as a Head Start Teacher, now I would like to ask you in greater detail about some of those activities

a. Could you briefly describe the ways you believe your teaching and your preschool program prepare children for kindergarten?

PROBES:

Is there anything about kindergarten readiness that you feel your program is not providing?

Is there anything about kindergarten readiness that you feel that you are not providing?

If yes: — what resource do you feel you/your program can provide to ensure that children are better prepared for Kindergarten?

If no: proceed to next question.

4. Can you briefly describe the kind of information you use to evaluate children concerning readiness? Can you give an example? Do you use toys and materials for these evaluations? Can you give an example?

a. Can you briefly describe which toys you believe are most effective in helping children develop language skills?

PROBE:

Suppose a child is not interested in playing with the toys/materials that you mentioned. How do you respond, why? How do you ensure that the child is getting enough exposure to toys and materials that help enhance their language skills?

b. Can you briefly describe which toys and materials you believe are most effective in helping children develop social-emotional skills?

PROBE:

Suppose a child is not interested in playing with the toys/materials that you mentioned. How do you respond, why? How do you ensure that the child is getting enough exposure to toys and materials that help enhance their social-emotional skills?

c. Can you briefly describe which toys and materials you believe are most effective in helping children develop fine motor skills?

PROBE:

Suppose a child is not interested in playing with the toys/materials that you mentioned. How do you respond, why? How do you ensure that the child is getting enough exposure to toys and materials that help enhance their fine motor skills?

5. Finally, a last question. Please describe the toys/materials that would be utilized by children in an ideal classroom? I am interested in you describing toys/materials that currently are not being providing by Jackson County Civic Action Committee and how these toys/materials can enhance children's social emotional skills, language skills, and fine motor skills.