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2005

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**Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**A TEACHER'S USE OF PLAY TO PROMOTE LITERACY LEARNING  
IN A PREKINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM SERVING CHILDREN  
FROM DIVERSE LANGUAGE BACKGROUNDS**

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by

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**DISSERTATION**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
the University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

The University of Texas at Austin

May, 2005

## **Dedication**

To the living God who guides me throughout the journey of my study and my life,

My wonderful parents and parents-in-law who give me continuous support,

My lovely husband, Jin who offers constant encouragement through my work, and

My son, David

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Stuart Reifel for his continuous support and suggestions as a professor and mentor during the writing of this dissertation. He has challenged me and inspired me to study with passion. I would also like to offer my appreciation to Dr. Diane Schallert and Dr. Joel Dworin for their insightful ideas and comments during the writing of the literature review on ESL children's literacy learning as a part of my dissertation. I also want to thank the other committee members, Dr. Elaine Danielson, for her warm and continuous encouragement, and Dr. Lisa Goldstein, for her valuable suggestions as she reviewed of my dissertation.

Moreover, I want to give many thanks to the prekindergarten teacher who let me interview and observe her classroom as a participant observer. In addition, I also would like to offer thanks to her lovely children with whom I spent time for my research.

I also owe a debt of special gratitude to my supportive family and friends in Christ who have given me love and strength to complete my dissertation. Thank you all for your support and encouragement that made this dissertation possible.

Kyunghee Moon

May 2005

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Publication No. \_\_\_\_\_

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2005

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This study looked at both a teacher’s beliefs about the role of play and that teacher’s use of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds. Although several researchers have explored children’s literacy development in a play context, there is little research on this topic for children from diverse language backgrounds. In order to explore the role of play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds, I used a qualitative research approach to collect data from interviews, informal conversations, observations, and self-reflexive notes. In this study, the teacher believed play could be an ideal medium for ESL children who did not speak English fluently. Play gave them a relaxed and comfortable environment to practice a new language, English, without worrying about making mistakes. She understood play as a “concrete,” “hands-on,” “fun,” and “manipulative” activity that provides a relaxed and

comfortable environment, becomes a good medium for integrated lessons, and gives a natural connection between the home language and English. She used play for a warm-up, games or tricks, integrated lessons, assessment, acting out characters, dramatic play, and block play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds.

This study revealed that when a teacher believes that play takes an important role in children's learning and development, she uses playful activities as potential teaching and learning mediums for ESL children's literacy learning and development. In addition, the result supported that each teacher may have a unique understanding or practical notion of play in literacy learning, and it may strongly affect his/her classroom practices.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will present a study on the role of play in literacy learning in a prekindergarten (pre-K) classroom serving children from diverse language backgrounds. It will address the importance of play in children's learning and development, how teachers think about play, and the use of play in their practice connecting with children's literacy learning. Then, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices will be discussed. Last, the reason that this study focuses on the population of children from diverse language backgrounds is also discussed. A qualitative study was conducted, collecting data from interviews, informal conversations, observations and self-reflexive notes on how a teacher understands the role of play and puts it into practice in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds in a pre-K classroom.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Since children's play depends largely on the play materials, equipment, and role models around them, study of the research about a teacher's understanding of the role of play and its practice would be meaningful not only for further teacher education but also for children's learning and development. Although several researchers have explored children's literacy development in a play context, little research exists on literacy learning serving children from diverse language

backgrounds in a play context. However, play also could be a good medium for children from diverse language backgrounds. Through play, children may learn language without worrying about making mistakes or failing. Play develops self-initiating autonomy, giving children a feeling of control. With these benefits, children could learn language and develop ideas naturally through play (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994).

In Bennett, Wood and Rogers' (1998) study, teachers describe play as a fun, enjoyable, natural, open-ended exploration that provides a context for developing skills and concepts, including language development and social interaction. Although there is a shared discourse about the value of play and its relationship to learning, teachers differ in the ways they organize the curriculum which, in turn, is influenced by their intentions for and assumptions about learning through play.

In addition, play is not only children's unique way of learning about their world, but also their way of learning about themselves, building on their knowledge and deepening their understanding through playful and enjoyable moments. Play gives learners intrinsic motivation, and personally relevant, meaningful, and appropriate experiences (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2005).

Early childhood educators and practitioners in the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) also state that

Play is an important vehicle for children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development....Play gives

children opportunities to understand the world, interact with others in social ways, express and control emotions, and develop their symbolic capabilities.... During play, a child can learn to deal with conflicts, and to gain a sense of competence (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 14-15).

In this sense, NAEYC supports child-initiated, teacher-supported play as an important domain of developmentally appropriate practice for children's learning and development.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky have had great impact on early childhood education and have provided theoretical support for the research regarding cognitive development in social contexts, including cognitive development in a play context (Weis, 1999; Roskos & Christie, 2001). Moreover, their theories can be extended to the connection between symbols in play, and signs and marks in writing to relate symbols in play and signs in literacy. Piaget (1962) viewed play as an imbalanced state where assimilation (the child incorporates new information into existing cognitive structures) dominates accommodation (the child modifies existing cognitive structures to match, imitate, or otherwise conform the reality of the physical world). In this process, children do not learn new skills through play, but practice and consolidate recently acquired skills (Piaget, 1962; Roskos & Christie, 2001). According to Piaget (1962), symbolic play involves the use of symbols to represent experiences. It becomes a medium for children to exercise symbolic schemes (Berk, 1994; Chang & Yawkey, 1998). In this view, the process of transforming one thing into another requires the ability to separate the signifier

(symbolizer) from the signified (symbolized) and which is congruent with Vygotsky's belief (Berk, 1994; Chang & Yawkey, 1998).

Vygotsky stated that a child is always behaving a head above himself during play, so play is a 'leading activity' for children of preschool and kindergarten age (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). This means that play provides the potential optimal context for the emergence and continued growth of the most important cognitive and social processes of young children. Play also promotes development within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the difference between what children can do by themselves and what children can do with a more knowledgeable person, and facilitates learning (Bodrova, Leong & Paynter, 1999).

Supporting play as a significant component in children's learning and development, recent research suggests that children's creative engagement with reading and writing activities through play has important implications for their literacy development (Neuman & Roskos, 1990). This research has been stimulated by the growing acceptance of emergent literacy where children learn about literacy at a very young age. In this vein, educators encourage literacy learning through play in classroom settings by providing materials, including theme-related print materials—for example putting menus, pencils, a note pad for food orders in a restaurant center as a dramatic play area--and teacher intervention through modeling and coaching to help children engage literacy through play (Christie, 1994). Morrow & Rand (1991) state that preschool and kindergarten children are likely to engage in more voluntary

literacy behaviors during free-play periods when literacy materials are introduced and teachers guide children to use those materials. The interactive nature of play in the literacy-enriched centers is particularly important for children who come to school with varying experiences in literacy (Neuman & Roskos, 1990).

International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) also support the view that

Children learn a lot reading from the labels, signs, and other kinds of print they see around them. Highly visible print labels on objects, signs, and bulletin boards in classrooms demonstrate the practical uses of written language. In environment rich with print, children incorporate literacy into their dramatic play using these communication tools to enhance the drama and realism of the pretend situation (1998, p. 4).

In addition, while children engage in play-based learning, this print-enriched environment may help teachers observe and assess children's comprehension and their use of storybook or written understanding of print direction as well as their emerging understanding of spelling and other written conventions (Klenk, 2001).

Along with the above studies, recently there has been an increased interest in the association between teacher thoughts and classroom practices. A study focusing on teachers' thinking, planning, and decision-making would contribute to understanding the teaching process and how it operates in the classroom. In order to gain insight into teachers' thought processes and practices, we need to consider contextual variations such as educational theory, curriculum issues, school administration, and teachers themselves (Clark & Peterson, 1986). For example,

based on the study of Elbaz (1981), a teacher's practical knowledge is not acquired randomly and abstractly, but rather learned, tested, and developed through field experiences. In addition, Elbaz's study provides a useful framework for reflecting on the research on teachers' implicit theories and the dynamic of those theories in use. In short, Clark and Peterson state that

...teachers do seem to hold implicit theories about their work and that these conceptual systems can be made more explicit through a variety of direct and indirect inquiry techniques....Teachers do have theories and belief systems that influence their perceptions, plans and actions (1986, pp. 291-292).

### **Purposes of the Study**

Although there have been studies about the role of play in literacy learning related to teachers' participation and their role, there is little research that explores the role of play in literacy learning and a teacher's understanding, practice and its relationship for children from diverse language backgrounds. However, more studies with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds would be interesting and important in terms of the growing population of these diverse children and their education in the United States and other countries.

My interests in the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds goes back to an earlier field study observing a boy who recently came from Korea and experienced adaptation problems in a kindergarten classroom in the United States in 2001. One of my findings from this study supported the theory that play may help children who have limited English

proficiency in terms of their learning and social development. In the beginning, the Korean boy was terrified by the new school environment, most likely due to his limited English abilities, but as time went by, he started to join classroom activities, such as solving puzzles, participating in dramatic play, and playing with wooden blocks in the classroom. He was able to join these play activities easily because he enjoyed playing with other children, using non-verbal strategies such as physical (body motions), facial (smiling) and sound (funny, silly voice) expression during playtime. Through playtimes, he also learned how to mingle with other children in the classroom. The more he was comfortable with his classmates and his teacher during playtime, the more he could concentrate on his learning during circle time. I concluded that if teachers could use play as a critical learning point to teach limited English-speaking children, teachers might help children more naturally and effectively. From this study, I developed the current research topic on the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds through a teacher's understanding of and practice of play in literacy learning. Research also shows that there are increasing populations of children who speak a language other than English in the United States. According to the 1990 U. S. census, over 6.3 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 years actually spoke a language other than English at home. Although there are increasing populations of these children from diverse language backgrounds, the research on second-language children's reading and writing is limited in scope and quantity (Garcia, 2000). Therefore,

examining how a typical prekindergarten teacher understands and uses children's play in literacy learning, serving children from diverse language backgrounds, will help expand research on teacher beliefs and practices and also has other implications about children from diverse language backgrounds. In addition, although other types of play exist, most studies of literacy learning in a play context are focused on dramatic play (also called symbolic, sociodramatic, pretend, imaginative, or make-believe play) as an ideal place for children's literacy learning, and it has been of most interest to literacy researchers (Yaden, Rowe & MacGillivray, 2000). However, this study will offer another opportunity to explore other types of play as well, to better understand children's literacy learning in a play context from a teacher's viewpoint and how her classroom practice serves children from diverse language backgrounds.

Research on the role of play in literacy learning has provided new insights about literacy learning. Play is a major part of young children's lives and an important context for literacy learning. For example, preschool children develop and refine motor skills, experience the joy of mastery, and develop and use basic academic skills such as counting, reading and writing while they engage in play. Play-based learning activities provide multiple ways for children to learn a variety of different skills and concepts. They allow children the opportunity to learn relevant skills and feel competent about their ability to learn in a comfortable and supportive environment (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002).

Some studies also demonstrate that children whose play activities are enriched with literacy props or interventions acquire a fuller understanding of print. Roskos & Neuman (1993) found that day-care teachers do facilitate literacy in a play context using characteristic behaviors and roles such as observer, participant, and trainer. Roskos and Neuman (1998) also observed that when teachers include literacy props such as books, markers, and signs in a dramatic play center, it increases print awareness and students engage in more literacy-related activities such as reading and writing. They also find that adult interventions to prompt the literacy routines are necessary (cited in Trawick-Smith & Picard, 2003). Moreover, according to Enz and Christie (1994), some experts believe that teachers should directly guide children during their play while others think that teachers should stand back and allow children time for discovery and independent play. In supporting teachers' active interventionist roles, Enz and Christie (1994) demonstrate that make-believe play and literacy activities tend to increase with teachers' active engagement (cited in Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). Bennett, Wood, and Rogers' (1997) study also notes that, in practice, teachers take a more interventionist role for teaching through play rather than emphasizing spontaneous learning as their theories would suggest. Thus, they integrate play into the curriculum with specific intent to guide literacy and math learning in play (Bennett, Wood, and Rogers, 1997).

Consequently, the relationship between teacher beliefs and actions is unclear. Along with the positive relationships between teacher beliefs and practices, negative

relationships between the two have been found because of the dynamics of parents, directors, state regulations, other children, and teachers themselves. As a result, many times teachers cannot implement their beliefs into their practice as they might want due to dynamics such as those (Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). So the inconsistency between beliefs and actions may be due to external constraints, not an internal mismatch between thinking and behaving.

This study used a qualitative research approach to describe a teacher's understanding and practice of play in literacy learning with children from diverse language backgrounds because more research is needed for this culturally and linguistically diverse group of children. The study explored three elements: how a teacher understood play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds, what her classroom practice was like related to the role of play in literacy learning and what the relationship and conflicts were between her understanding and practice. Data were collected from interviews, informal conversations, observations, and self-reflexive notes. Following are the research questions.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to describe a teacher's understanding and practice of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language

backgrounds in a preschool classroom. The research was guided by the following questions.

1. What does a teacher understand about the value of children's play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds?
2. How does a teacher use play in literacy learning with children from diverse language backgrounds in her classroom practice?
3. What are the general constraints of incorporating her curriculum into the lesson including using play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds?

### **Definition of Terms**

I began the study with a preliminary, “working” definition of terms about ‘understanding,’ ‘ESL literacy-related activities,’ and ‘play’ based on pre-existing studies and my beliefs, and these definitions are given below. However, in some cases, the definition of terms changed during the study as I observed my research subject.

### **Understanding**

Personalized general judgment about the meaning of a topic based on beliefs, assumption, and knowledge, including experience, images, values, and conceptions of teaching and learning (Tsui, 2003; Woods, 1996; Pajares, 1992).

### **ESL Literacy-related activities**

Activities that promote the development of oral language, writing, reading, and storytelling, including listening to cassette tapes, reading aloud, letter naming, writing journal, playing with puzzles about letters and sounds, story reading/telling for the students who speak languages other than English (Weis, 1999; Nielson & Monson, 1996).

### **Play**

In this study, the meanings of classroom play are explorative, manipulative, fun, and enjoyable activities including games or puzzles with pictures/words, constructive play, and dramatic play during circle time or center time in a classroom (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced my study on the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds. I presented different perspectives about the role of play from teachers, researchers, and theorists. Then, I addressed previous research about play and literacy learning. In addition, the relationship between teacher beliefs and practice was also mentioned. Finally, the purposes of the study, including the importance of more studies about children from

diverse language backgrounds were outlined, based on previous research about this population and an earlier field study. Lastly, terms to be used were defined.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter will review related studies on the role of play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds. First, I review studies about the role of play for young children in literacy learning. Second, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in early childhood education will be presented with focuses on children's play and language development. Since my research subject was a member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the organization that developed these guidelines, she may have understood or developed her beliefs about play and literacy learning reflecting NAEYC's guidelines. Therefore, presenting NAEYC guidelines might help us understand the origins of her beliefs or the application of her beliefs into practices. Third, I investigate the origins of combining children's play and literacy learning and review studies under the theoretical framework of emergent literacy along with children's symbolic play and literacy learning. Fourth, previous play and literacy research has focused on children's literacy learning in pretend/dramatic play, so literacy learning through pretend/dramatic play context will be examined in relation to the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky. Fifth, since there is little research on ESL literacy through play, I will present a general overview on ESL/bilingual children's literacy learning. Finally, the relationship between teacher beliefs/understandings

and their classroom practice, including studies of children from diverse language backgrounds, will be explored to support current research questions.

### **Role of Play for Children's Literacy Learning**

Play has a crucial role in children's optimal growth, learning, and development. Early childhood educators and practitioners have believed that play is a dynamic, active, and constructive behavior and an essential and integral part of all children's growth, development, and learning across all ages, domains, and cultures. Play is a dynamic process that develops and changes as it becomes more varied and complex. It is considered a major facilitator for learning and development across domains and reflects the social and cultural contexts in which children live (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). In order to understand the relationship of play to learning and development, teachers must be knowledgeable about the research bases and typical characteristics of play that may enhance all children's learning and development. From this, teachers may make proper decisions about providing opportunities and props for children to use in play.

In play, the focus is on exploring rather than on accomplishing predetermined ends or goals, so there are few pressures to produce correct answers or final products. Play thus creates a risk-free context in which children do not have to worry about messing up or doing things right. In this process, playing at writing and reading by scribbling, drawing while pretending to write, or pretending to read may

encourage children to explore various forms of writing and reading (McLane & McNamee, 1990). Young children spend much time and energy playing, so play can be connected with potential links to the development of literacy. For example, pretend play or symbolic play allows children to develop and refine their capacities to use symbols, to represent experience, and to construct imaginary worlds, leading to writing and reading.

Long (1997) describes the impact that play-based activities with friends have in providing a comfortable setting as well as a motivation for experimentation. Based on her study, an English-speaking child could acquire Icelandic with an understanding of grammatical structure, vocabulary, pronunciation, and appropriate usage of the target language enjoyably through a comfortable, purposeful, and supportive play environment. In addition, the play-based peer interactions were supportive not only for giving the opportunity to practice language but also to provide specific forms of support for language learning (Long, 1997).

Since children's play has an important role in their learning and development including literacy learning, in the next section, I would like to address what early childhood educators and practitioners who have developmental beliefs state about children's play and literacy learning. In addition, since my research subject was a member of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and knows about Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), it would be meaningful to review the good transition statement of their position.

### **Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)**

Early childhood educators and practitioners who support Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) state that “play is an important vehicle for children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development as well as a reflection of their development” in the NAEYC statement of their position (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 14). They also believe that children may enhance their social, emotional, and physical development through project work, play, small group learning experiences with real life tasks such as cooking or woodworking, and other appropriate practices.

In addition, they say that “play also provides a safe and highly motivating context within which children can learn a second language” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 110). They mention that the early childhood years are an optimal time to acquire a second language, noting that when children learn other languages before about age 12, they are more likely to speak those languages as native speakers do. They also maintain that the ideal conditions for learning a second language are similar to those for learning a first language, through developing trust and meaningful, comprehensible experiences (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

In relation to play and literacy learning, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) mentions that interactive, collaborative activities such as dramatic play and block play provide rich language-promoting opportunities. Children are involved in negotiating different perspectives and

imitating what adults do and say. They use language to establish roles, for the symbolic use of objects, and for other shared meaning (e.g. Let's pretend this block is the car phone) (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Dramatic play has great value for children's language, cognitive, and social development, so teachers actively foster and extend it through a variety of strategies. Teachers may provide various play props, both realistic materials such as cooking utensils or baby dolls and open-ended materials like blocks, so children may use them as different things according to play stories. Teachers' participation through modeling of pretended interactions and acting out adult roles help children develop more elaborated levels of language, literacy, and other learning through play (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Positive studies about Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) programs show that they appear to be related to overall positive benefits in terms of later levels of achievement and behavioral outcomes for elementary school students from varying backgrounds (Charlesworth et al., 1993). Charlesworth (1998) states that the DAP guidelines are not intended as a doctrine, but as a way of providing supportive environments for children.

However, critical voices about DAP note that people do not all have the same ideas, so "developmentally appropriate" practice should not always look the same. Simple categorical distinctions would fail to capture the multilingual, multicultural characters of many families and communities (Lubeck, 1998), so "instead of believing that values and understandings need to be shared and differences resolved,

educators might come to see that the different views and practices within a teaching community are themselves a resource” (Lubeck, 1998, p. 290). Genishi, Dyson, and Fassler (1994) also suggested that teachers should start to see learners from multiple perspectives grow and learn in developmentally appropriate settings by viewing children’s knowledge of diverse languages, dialects, and discourse patterns as a developmental “plus,” not a developmental deficiency.

So far, I have reviewed studies of the role of play in children’s learning/development, and have addressed educators or researchers who have developmental beliefs in children’s play and their literacy learning. In the next section, I will investigate the origin of combining children’s play and literacy learning. Since most studies of play and literacy learning are examined under the theoretical framework of emergent literacy, I will discuss emergent literacy along with children’s symbolic play and literacy learning.

### **Emergent (Early) Literacy**

In the emergent literacy perspective, literacy processes seem to be acquired interactively. It can be explained using three theoretical frameworks: (1) built on Chomsky’s theory (1965) young children are predisposed to learn language when children are immersed in contexts where they can use written language to communicate, (2) children are active cognitive processors under the Piagetian view of emergent literacy. Through assimilation and association, children will learn new

knowledge of how to read and write actively, and (3) children are actively engaged with literacy learning when there is enough social interaction with adults or more knowledgeable peers (Hiebert & Raphael, 1997).

The term, emergent literacy was coined by Marie Clay (1966) and came into currency in the mid-1980s. Emergent literacy is a new way of conceptualizing the development of reading and writing in preschool age children. In this perspective, written language is acquired through social interaction connected with everyday activities (Hall, 1987). Early literacy learning is promoted by print-rich environments, observation of others using literacy, social interaction with parents and peers during story reading and other literacy activities that give opportunities to engage in emergent forms of reading and writing in meaningful situations (Christie, 1994). The International Reading Association (IRA) & the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recently took a strong interventionist stand on fostering literacy in young children. They believe that goals and expectations for young children in reading and writing should be developmentally appropriate, that is “challenging but achievable, with sufficient adult support” (IRA & NAEYC, 1998, p.31). Since there is considerable diversity in children’s oral and written language experiences from birth through preschool, no one method or approach is most effective for all children. For children whose primary languages are other than English, studies have shown that a strong basis in a first language promotes school achievement in a second language (Cummins, 1979). ESL children

are more likely to become readers and writers of English when they are already familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in their primary language.

Children learn about reading from the labels, signs, and other kinds of print they see around them. Highly visible print labels on objects, signs, and bulletin boards in classrooms demonstrate the practical uses of written language (Lawhon & Cobb, 2002). In these print-enriched environments, children often incorporate literacy into their dramatic play, so play can be a good medium for young children's learning and development (Vukelich, 1994; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; IRA & NAEYC, 1998). Vygotsky also maintains that symbolic play, drawing, and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process of development of written language. Therefore, children may use these early symbolic activities to build literacy (McLane & McNamee, 1990).

Instead of asking whether children are ready to read or write, teachers can find out what children already know. As children explore writing, they may start to draw, representing objects. In time, they develop the understanding that the written symbols represent letters and words. Ultimately, they discover the alphabetic principle, that letters represent speech sounds. "Children's explorations of reading and writing gradually evolve into conventional reading and writing in which they use their overall background of experience, knowledge of language, knowledge of letter and sound relationships (phonics), store of memorized words and context" (Gunning, 2000, p. 26).

Since children can easily learn about reading from the labels, signs, and other kinds of print they see around them, visible print labels on objects, signs, and bulletin boards in classrooms can demonstrate to children the practical uses of written language under this emergent literacy perspective (Lawhon & Cobb, 2002). In these print-enriched environments, children often incorporate literacy into their dramatic play, so play can be a good medium for young children's learning and development (Vukelich, 1994; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; IRA & NAEYC, 1998). In this vein, in this section, I have summarized children's literacy learning from an emergent literacy perspective and presented possible connections between emergent literacy and play. Next, I am going to address theoretical frameworks of Piaget, Vygotsky and other supporting researchers that combine literacy concepts such as signs, print, writing, and symbols with play.

### **Symbolic Play and Literacy**

Both Piaget and Vygotsky have provided theoretical support for the research regarding cognitive development in a social context, which also includes cognitive development in a play context (Weis, 1999; Roskos & Christie, 2001). Moreover, their theories can be extended to give a connection and a relationship between symbols in play and signs in literacy. Therefore, I am going to review some studies using the framework of Piaget and Vygotsky in order to relate how to strengthen

play, increase oral language, encourage more symbolic thinking, and support the development of concepts of print and writing.

Piaget (1962) views play as an imbalanced state where assimilation (the child incorporates new information into existing cognitive structures) dominates over accommodation (the child modifies existing cognitive structures to match, imitate, or otherwise conform to the reality of the physical world). In this process, children do not learn new skills through play, but practice and consolidate recently acquired skills.

...the interface between play and literacy involves shared common mental processes associated with perceptual discrimination skills, representational abilities, and narrative competencies that not only advance play activity, but also have an important role in learning to read and write (Piaget, 1962; Roskos & Christie, 2001, p. 322).

According to Piaget (1962), symbolic play involves the use of symbols to represent experiences. It becomes a medium for children to exercise symbolic schemes (Berk, 1994; Chang & Yawkey, 1998). In this view, the process of transforming one thing into another requires the ability to separate the signifier (symbolizer) from the signified (symbolized), which is congruent with Vygotsky's belief (Berk, 1994; Chang & Yawkey, 1998).

Vygotsky states that a child is always behaving a head above himself during play, so play is a 'leading activity' for children of preschool and kindergarten age (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). This means that play provides the potential optimal context for the emergence and continued growth of the most important cognitive and

social processes of young children. Play also promotes development within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the difference between what children can do by themselves and what children can do with a more knowledgeable person, and scaffolds learning. Scaffolding was introduced by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) to describe the type of interaction that occurs within the ZPD (Bodrova, Leong & Paynter, 1999). Vygotsky (1978) argues that the manipulation of signs and symbols leads to the development of higher-order thinking. That is, the ability for logical memory, selective attention, decision making, and language comprehension result from experience in manipulating signs and symbols within a social context (Dixon-Krauss, 1996). According to Vygotsky,

The young child takes the first step toward concept formation when he puts together a number of objects in an unorganized congeries, or “heap,” in order to solve a problem that we adults would normally solve by forming a new concept. The heap...reveals a diffuse, undirected extension of the meaning of the sign (artificial word) to inherently unrelated objects linked by chance in the child’s perception (1986, p. 110).

Also Vygotsky states that, “symbolic representation in play is essentially a particular form of speech at an earlier stage, one which leads directly to written language” (1978, p. 111). He views symbolic play and writing as different moments but in an essentially unified process of development of written language (Christie, 1994). According to him, there are two symbols. One is a first-order symbol, which is directly denoting objects or actions and the other is a second-order symbol, which involves the creation of written signs for the spoken symbols of words. The written language of children develops as it shifts from drawing things to drawing words.

Understanding of written language is first affected through spoken language but written language becomes direct symbolism that is perceived in the same way as spoken language (Vygotsky, 1987). Through symbolic play, or the substitution of one object or action for another, preschool children come to separate meaning from specific objects and actions, so words eventually come to represent meaning (Pellegrini et.al., 1991).

Leong et.al. also believe that play helps children to develop symbolic representation. In play, children manipulate symbols to stand for the objects, so objects can be many things, which increases the use of non-specific props (Leong et. al., 1999). Pellegrini et.al. (1991) also support Vygotsky's theory that the ability to write words should be related to representational competence in play because both indicate children's ability to use signifiers to convey meaning. Vygotsky suggests that the ability to separate meaning from objects develops in symbolic play so that children come to use language to perform these play transformations. In this vein, symbolic play is related to children's ability to have written language (1978).

Both 'symbols' and 'signs' are modes of representation used in play and literacy. For example, in dramatic play, children play different roles in various situations, in their symbolic thought. These same processes are required in literacy activities like writing poems and stories. Using symbols in play is prerequisite to using signs in written or spoken language. In addition, in symbolic play, children practice language for communication, develop and practice literacy and vocabulary.

These close connections between symbolic play and literacy imply that symbolic play strengthens children's representational skills in literacy. Several of the above researchers assert that training in symbolic play fosters children's language development and related literacy concepts (Chang & Yawkey, 1998). In summary, Vygotsky states that understanding written language is first affected through spoken language but written language becomes direct symbolism that is perceived in the same way as spoken language (Vygotsky, 1978). In this process, teachers could encourage children to engage in symbolic representation leading into the realm of written representation during play. In addition, play promotes the development of underlying cognitive skills: the ability to learn deliberately, development of symbolic representation, oral language, and preparation for introducing content-related literacy skills and concepts (Leong et.al., 1999). Therefore, children's symbolic play may serve as a potential practical moment for the development of representational skills which can then extend to literacy concepts.

Based on the detailed theoretical understanding of the relationship between symbolic play and literacy concepts in this section, next I am going to review studies on literacy learning through play that have been done over the last ten to fifteen years. Since the origin of combining studies of literacy and play was focused on children's symbolic (pretend/dramatic) play and literacy learning or development, most studies were done with symbolic (pretend/dramatic) play as an ideal potential

place to increase literacy related activities, using Piaget or Vygotsky's philosophical background.

### **Play and Literacy**

Among the recent studies reviewed on literacy through play, I found two main philosophical backgrounds. One is a Piagetian approach and the other is a Vygotskian approach. Both emphasized the importance of literacy-enriched materials in a play area in order to help children's emergent literacy learning through play. However, although both approaches are focused on providing a rich literacy-related play environment for children while teachers help children to engage in literacy learning through play, the Vygotskian approach emphasized more the active role of teachers as facilitators, play partners, and organizers, taking from the interventionist perspective. To review this topic, I will explain these two main theoretical backgrounds on literacy and play and then examine related studies.

Interest and research have increased on the importance of the role of play in children's literacy development. Piaget and Vygotsky have greatly influenced the explanation of play development of young children. Piaget identifies play as critical in the development of symbolic skills. He proposes a continuum from egocentric language to adult conversation where the child passes through four states, which are egocentric talk, collective monologue, collaboration in action, and collaboration in thought (Sawyer, 1997). According to Piaget, children engage in pretend play

because they are not capable of immediate assimilation of the universe to experimental and logical thought. Piaget views pretend play as a developmental stage preceding the development of mature symbolic thought, when assimilation and accommodation operate in equilibrium. Play is characterized by the primacy of assimilation over accommodation so that the subject incorporates events and objects into existing mental structures (Nicolopoulou, 1993). For Piaget, symbolic play appears during the second year of life with the emergence of representation and language. 'Pretend play' is initially a solitary symbolic activity involving the use of unique symbols. In this pretend play, the child relives past experiences for the ego's own satisfaction, rather than for the ego's subordination to reality (Nicolopoulou, 1993). In sum, Piaget asserts that the development of play progresses from mainly individual processes and unique private symbols to social play and collective symbolism. Play derives from the child's mental structure and can be explained only by that structure. Play is a mode of activity that starts with the differentiation of assimilation from accommodation and emerges when assimilation can function on its own (Nicolopoulou, 1993).

Unlike Piaget, for Vygotsky (1978) play is always a social symbolic activity. Even when a young child plays alone, Vygotsky still considers this type of play to be social because the themes or episodes of play express sociocultural elements. He does not accept that the child is in the position of creating a conceptual world from scratch, rather that children need to appropriate the conceptual resources of the

preexisting cultural world, which are transmitted to them by parents, other adults, and peers. This transmission is accomplished through the use of language and communication (Nicolopoulou, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky argues that social interaction comes prior to the development of both thought and language, and that both thought and language are internalizations of interaction with physical objects and with other people (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, play is first social and then solitary. In this vein, teachers can facilitate, help, and guide cognitive development by entering the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to guide children to a higher level of thinking, allowing them to bridge social experiences with internal thoughts. In practice, this concept is demonstrated by activities structured for child achievement with adult assistance and collaboration. This collaborative guiding relationship is termed “scaffolding” (Berk and Winsler, 1995). In terms of child-teacher interactions, both children and teacher are actively involved to construct knowledge. Teachers would be viewed as resources to the children and mediators of introduction to the problems and processes of the socially constructed world. Their relationship would operate in various ways to create and support learning opportunities for children because teachers would not view children as sole constructors of their own knowledge, but instead would view themselves as important figures in helping children making meaning, given their greater knowledge and experience. Following are examples of studies on literacy through play.

Two studies found that literacy-enriched free play and dramatic play environments greatly increase the amount of time the children engage in literate behaviors. Child-initiated literacy events are maximized in a free-play setting and young children learn best when they choose their own activities (Nell, 2000; Strickland et al., 1990).

Morrow and Rand (1990) studied how play-centers can be enriched in the functional uses of print and the frequency and quality of literacy activities in the spontaneous play of 37 preschoolers. Although this study does not explicitly examine the adults' role, they find that teacher demonstration of literacy practices helps to extend and give meaning to children's reading and writing behaviors. One year later, a separate study found that preschool and kindergarten children are likely to engage in more voluntary literacy behaviors during free-play periods when literacy materials are introduced and teachers guide children to use those materials (Morrow & Rand, 1991). In their results, with adult support and guidance, children in literacy-enriched play centers participate in more literacy behaviors during free playtime than do children in thematic centers without adult guidance (Morrow & Rand, 1991; Rybczynski & Tory, 1995). In another example, Einarsdottir (1996) noted that the oldest children in Icelandic preschools benefit from working with print-enriched materials during play. The author suggests that Icelandic preschool teachers should enrich their dramatic play areas with literacy props and integrate print into their curriculum.

Teachers in kindergarten classrooms also create a literate environment to promote the children's literacy development. In Saracho's qualitative study, the teachers attempted to observe language and literacy in play development centers such as language rhythm, sequence games, and story writing, and spontaneous play in the learning centers such as mathematics center, block center, dramatic play center, and in the manipulative center, with picture dominoes and games. The results indicate that a language or literacy component can be integrated in the play activities of kindergarten children. In addition, play activities are used to promote inventing symbols and messages in children's writing (Saracho, 2001).

The interactive nature of play in the literacy-enriched centers is particularly important for children who come to school with varying experiences in literacy (Neuman & Roskos, 1990). Roskos & Neuman (1993) state that day-care teachers do facilitate literacy in play using characteristic behaviors and roles an observer, participant, and trainer. Saracho (2002)'s study also reports that teacher roles as monitor, facilitator, inquirer, extender, and decision-maker in the classrooms are continually constructing a literacy-play environment. In her study, writing centers, writing activities, and print labels for promoting both spoken and written language in English and Spanish are examined in the context of play (Saracho, 2002). Exposure and functional experiences with adults in print-enriched play settings may offer an important opportunity for young children to associate meaning with print better than peer scaffolding (Vukelich, 1994).

Klenk (2001) also agrees that the literacy-enriched play center is a context where young children can experiment with emergent writing, emergent reading, and storytelling. She emphasizes the importance of play-based literacy context not only for providing rich, authentic opportunities to learn print-related skills but also for giving a chance to assess children's comprehension and use of written language. In this vein, Goldhaber et al. (1996) suggest a tool, "environmental literacy scan," that teachers can use to assess whether their classrooms encourage literacy behaviors, and offer practical suggestions for optimizing the classroom environment as a context for emerging literacy development.

For ESL children's literacy learning through play, Kenner (1997) sets up a role-play area (home center) in the classroom, which would be a connection between the school environment and children's home literacy experiences. In this study, the role-play area is a site where children can act out a variety of situations with the help of props such as household furniture and cooking utensils as well as calendars, telephone directories, magazines, catalogues, writing paper, envelopes, notepads, and pens in their home languages (e.g. Spanish, Yoruba, Gujarati, Thai, Arabic, Tigrinya, Pilipino and Catonese). As a result, ESL children make many written responses during their play using these materials and props labeled in various languages that parents have brought to the nursery (Kenner, 1997). According to Silver (1999), play helps establish bonds of friendship, independence, and confidence for ESL fifth graders who cannot communicate well in English with other children. The findings

of this research also indicate that play context is an open-ended, risk-free, and comfortable environment for ESL children's peer teaching and learning, including literacy development.

Although I have included several studies on play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds in each section of this literature review, little research has been done on this topic, so, in the next section, I will review previous studies of English as a Second Language (ESL)/bilingual children's literacy learning in general.

### **ESL/Bilingual Children's Literacy Learning**

There are increasing population of children who speak a language other than English in the United States. According to the 1990 U. S. census, over 6.3 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 years actually speak a language other than English at home, and among them, two-thirds are Spanish speakers (Garcia, 2000). Dworin (2003) states that "biliteracy is a term used to describe children's literate competencies in two languages, developed to varying degrees, either simultaneously or successively" (p. 29). Although there are increasing populations of these children from diverse language backgrounds, the research on second language children's reading and writing is limited in scope and quantity (Garcia, 2000). Traditional models of educating bilingual children in the U. S. have emphasized pull-out approaches so that ESL children may learn English to become proficient enough to

participate fully in typical classroom instruction. However, pull-out models are declining in popularity, and there has been increasing research indicating that children may learn a second language more effectively within the context of meaningful communication by fluent speakers (Schirmer, Casbon & Twiss, 1996). Students may gain a broad knowledge of the conventions and purposes of print naturally through interactions with others in a literate environment so that individuals become better readers and writers by being immersed in a literacy environment with others (Edelsky, 1986; Rigg, 1991).

Recent research has found that combining the four modes: listening, speaking, reading, and writing is more likely to positively enhance both literacy and oral language development (Fitzgerald, 1993). Teachers can foster children's native languages along with English even though teachers do not speak children's native languages. Once teachers decide to foster the spoken forms of both languages, they also should take responsibility for teaching the written forms of both languages (Schwarzer, Haywood, Lorenzen, 2003; Schirmer, Casbon & Twiss, 1996).

Researchers also report that young children are very much aware of the written language in their environment and they begin writing for meaning and communication long before they master oral language or are capable of reading (Perrotta, 1994). Therefore, teachers should provide a print-enriched environment from an early age for ESL children to interact with and learn from.

There also has been supportive research that maintaining students' first language development helps their second language development. If children do not have a strong base in their spoken and written native language, it would be a challenge to promote spoken and written English in school (Schirmer, Casbon & Twiss, 1996). Researchers also report that children who begin to learn a second language during the preschool years can be successful with continuing cognitive development in the first language. If children stop or slow down their cognitive development in the first language during preschool years, they perform poorly overall on school curriculum (Collier, 1995). Moreover, if children lose the first language at too young an age, sometimes it results in negative cognitive effects, as well as lost communication with parents. Children are likely to make rapid progress in second language learning when reading and writing are part of normal, daily classroom activities. According to Edelsky (1984), children can learn two separate languages without confusion. In addition, beginning ESL children can write before they speak English fluently because they can use their first language as a basis for their second language literacy learning (Huss, 1995). Krashen also says that children may apply knowledge from their first language literacy when they write in their second language (Perrotta, 1994).

The classroom can be an authentic language environment for children to learn both their first and second language. Having authentic communication usually involves more than one way of using language in children's real experience

including speaking, listening, reading, and writing all together. Since the processes of writing, reading, speaking, and listening in a second language are interrelated and interdependent, classroom teaching should be focused on meaningful language opportunities in meaningful contexts (Perrotta, 1994). As authentic examples in the classroom, Lindfors (1989) describes a 'show and tell' process that includes an 'author's chair' as a perfect opportunity for the ESL child. She indicates that a 'show and tell' activity may help children not only to convey their meanings through interactions, but also to understand expressions from others in the new language. In addition, she states that 'story time' and 'dialogue journal' in various situations with different activities in their second language can provide purposeful and creative classroom communication for children's language development (Lindfors, 1989).

Teaching English through content-area activities such as through math, science and social studies can provide students with the opportunity to use English in both the oral and written forms of the language.

Hudelson points out that

Students learn both content and language by being active, by doing things, by participating in activities directly related to specific content, and by using both oral and written language to carry out these activities. Language develops holistically, not in parts. Language develops through use, not through isolated practice (Lindfors, 1987). This is true in both a native and a second language (1989, pp. 139-140).

Hudelson also describes ESL children as individuals who come to the school with varying native languages, with different cultural backgrounds, and unique life experiences. Therefore, ESL children develop literacy at their own pace depending

on their unique personalities, varying social styles, and English ability, so some learners are more willing to take risks than others who prefer to use familiar patterns for a long time (Hudelson, 1989).

Teachers should look at ESL children's English learning as an integral process of negotiating knowledge, exchanging personal experiences and thought within authentic, meaning-making purposes (Ernst & Richard, 1995). Language minority students may take more risks to learn a new language when they feel confident and supported by peers and teachers. Cummins (1996) also states that the quality of teacher-student interactions and peer interactions can be more important to student success than using specific teaching methods (Garcia, 2000).

As a classroom practice, teachers can teach a second language to children through meaningful integrated lessons such as language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and these lessons are considered crucial to second language academic success. In addition, thematic lessons may help children develop both academic skills and learning strategies in each content area through in-depth problem solving. Since language minority students will learn best when lessons connect to their past experiences and cultures, teachers should sensitively choose themes or lessons that all students can be involved in cooperatively (Collier, 1995).

There are increasing populations of students from diverse language backgrounds who use a language other than English, so integrating ESL students into the regular classroom is not a new issue. Teachers should recognize the diversity as

a rich resource and respect each individual culture as a teaching method (Handscombe, 1989).

Based on the study of Schwarzer, Haywood & Lorenzen (2003), mainstream teachers may help children from diverse language backgrounds respect students' first language development along with their second language development, by including culturally relevant themes in their literacy curriculum, and by encouraging parents to bring magazines, coupons, newspapers, bottles, and other objects containing print in their native languages to teach real life experience.

So far, I have introduced the role of play in children's learning and development, including ESL literacy learning, addressing an emergent literacy perspective, connecting and presenting studies on play and literacy from Piaget and Vygotsky as the main theoretical frameworks. Since my study is focused on a teacher's understanding and practice of the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds, I will next review previous studies on teachers' beliefs, practices, and their relationships in order to support my research.

### **Teachers' Beliefs and Practices and Their Relationships**

In this section, I will review research on teachers' beliefs/cognition and the relationship between beliefs and practice, focusing on play in literacy learning including children from diverse language backgrounds.

Shulman (1986) states that the teacher should be not only a master of procedure but also of content and rationale, and is capable of explaining why something is done. Shulman emphasizes not only the importance of practicing and understanding the teacher's products, but also of communicating the reasons for professional decisions and actions to others. Therefore, researchers should more ask questions about the perspective of teacher development and teacher education because there is no real knowledge without theoretical understanding. Little attention has been focused on the structure and functions of teachers' beliefs about their roles, their students, the subject matter they teach, and the schools they work in, but more research needs to be conducted on this topic (Nespor, 1987).

The difficulty in studying teachers' beliefs has been caused by definition problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures (Pajares, 1992). Beliefs could be disguised under similar names such as "attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy" (Pajares, 1992, p. 309). Some critiques show that research on teacher thinking can be useful to teachers or teacher education since beliefs are the best indicators of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives. Teachers' beliefs would influence their perceptions and judgments, which affect their behavior in the classroom, and

understanding the belief structures of teachers is essential to improving their professional preparation and teaching practices (Pajares, 1992). Researchers demonstrate that beliefs influence knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task definition and selection, interpretation of course content, and comprehension monitoring (Pajares, 1992). The study of beliefs is critical to education because as Kagan (1992) concludes, “the more one reads studies of teacher belief, the more strongly one suspects that this piebald of personal knowledge lies at the very heart of teaching” (Pajares, 1992, p. 329).

According to Richardson et al. (1991), during reading comprehension instruction, teachers are in the process of changing their beliefs and practices but the changes in beliefs precede changes in practice. Unlike prior work on the relationship between classroom practices and beliefs in the area of reading that produced contradictory results, this study supports a strong positive relationship between teachers’ stated beliefs about the reading process and their classroom practices (Richardson, et al., 1991). Another study of teachers’ perceptions about second language learning revealed that although teachers do not explicitly state theories of communicative competence, their behavior and attitudes reveal notions that second language learning is much more than correct pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and speaking about the target language (Kleinsasser, 1993).

McMahon, Richmond & Reeves-Kazelskis (1998) examined the relationship between kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of literacy acquisition and children’s

literacy involvement and classroom materials. The results of this study strongly support the theory that kindergarten teachers' perceptions of literacy acquisition do affect children's involvement in literacy events, the quantity of classroom literacy materials, and the quality of classroom literacy materials. These findings agree with the growing body of research that has identified teachers' perceptions as having a critical impact on classroom practices. As an example, Saracho (2002) examines the roles of the teacher as play intervener in support of literacy learning. It shows how teachers extended their roles in relation to children's play to integrate their philosophy of emergent literacy in early childhood play environments. As teachers acquire knowledge and understanding of their roles, they apply the principles of literacy and early childhood education to practical situations (Saracho, 2002).

However, other studies also produced different results about the relationship between teachers' beliefs and actions. For example, Wilcox-Herzog (2002) studied the relationship between beliefs and behaviors for early childhood teachers. The results show that there is not a relationship between teachers' beliefs and actions. In addition, this study indicates that when teachers have more experience with children they are less sensitive and that holding an early childhood teaching certification is a positive predictor of high-level involvement in verbalizations. In order to measure teaching beliefs, this study uses a self-report questionnaire. These researchers mention that the relationship between beliefs and action is unclear and does not find absolute consistency.

Stipek and Byler (1997) find that many teachers feel they are unable to implement a program that is consistent with their beliefs because their actions may be hindered by external constraints such as administrators, parents, or other teachers, not because of an internal mismatch between thinking and behaving. Therefore, it is important to consider that teachers' beliefs and behaviors may not proceed in a linear fashion.

Based on the study of Elbaz (1981), a teacher's practical knowledge is not acquired randomly and abstractly, rather it is learned, tested, and developed through field experiences. In addition, this study provides a useful framework for thinking about the research on teachers' implicit theories and about the dynamic of those theories in use. In short, "teachers do seem to hold implicit theories about their work and that these conceptual systems can be made more explicit through a variety of direct and indirect inquiry techniques. In other words, teachers do have theories and belief systems that influence their perceptions, plans and actions" (Clark & Peterson, pp. 291-292, 1986). Moreover, Genishi et al. (1995) explored a first-grade teacher's theories regarding second-language learning and development, and they found that a teacher's theories can be conceptualized and reconceptualized over time in classroom practice. This study suggests that the creation and application of theories will occur in dynamic and interactive ways in particular contexts (Genishi et al., 1995).

Not many studies exist about teachers' beliefs and practices for non-native speakers of English although there is an increasing population for literacy instruction for non-native speakers of English. Johnson (1992) examined the relationship between ESL teachers' beliefs about second language learning and teaching and their instructional practice during literacy instruction for non-native speakers of English. The results indicate that literacy instruction is consistent with each teacher's theoretical beliefs. This supported previous research on the importance of teachers' theoretical beliefs on instructional practices within literacy contexts. It also maintains that the sources of ESL teachers' theoretical beliefs may come from the methodological approaches which are used in Johnson's study: the skill-based, rule-based, and function-based approaches that are prominent when teachers begin teaching ESL (Johnson, 1992). Another study by Johnson (1994) explores pre-service teachers' beliefs about second language learning and teaching and determines how their beliefs shape their perceptions of their own instructional practices.

In this section, I reviewed some studies about teachers' belief/cognition and their practices. Some research indicated that no relationship existed between teachers' beliefs and actions because it was hard to find clear consistency between beliefs and practice. But on the other hand, there was also research supporting a positive relationship between teacher perception and practice. These contradictory results make us re-think the teacher cognition and practice issues in education by encouraging more research on this topic through careful observation, considering

definition variations, differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures, and relations with internal and external constraints.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, first, I reviewed previous studies on the role of play in children's learning and development including literacy learning. I found that play greatly influences children's physical, cognitive, emotional learning and development. Play can create a comfortable learning environment for children by using reading and writing for real purposes, fostering children's awareness of the functionality of reading and writing, and providing children with many opportunities to use various forms of role play, and to draw, write, dance, and dramatize stories (Musthafa, 2001). Second, I summarized a view from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) regarding children's play and literacy. Because the teacher I studied was a member of NAEYC, her understandings and the development of her beliefs about play and literacy learning in part reflected NAEYC's guidelines. Therefore, presenting those guidelines helps us understand the origins of her beliefs or application of her beliefs into practices. In addition, both Piaget and Vygotsky provided theoretical supports for research regarding cognitive development in social context, also including cognitive development in a play context (Weis, 1999; Roskos & Christie, 2001). Their theories were extended to give a connection between

symbols in play, and a relationship between symbols in play and signs in literacy. In this vein, I reviewed studies using the framework of Piaget and Vygotsky in order to relate how to strengthen play, increase oral language, encourage more symbolic thinking, and support the development of concepts of print and writing. Moreover, during literacy learning through play, the teacher role was emphasized in actively modeling and facilitating children's behavior. Providing a print-enriched environment in play could also give more voluntary opportunities for young children to promote emergent literacy development. Last, I reviewed previous studies about ESL/bilingual children. Then, I addressed teachers' beliefs, practices and their relationships. In the next chapter, I will present my study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHOD**

In this chapter, I will describe methodological aspects of the current study on the role of play in literacy learning in a preschool classroom serving children from diverse language backgrounds. This chapter will include a rationale for a qualitative research study, introduce myself as a researcher and participants within a school setting, include data collection procedures as well as data analysis techniques, and explore the issue of trustworthiness for data credibility.

#### **A Qualitative Approach**

This study utilized a qualitative research method. Qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning in context and requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data. It is a method to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions that exist (Merriam, 1998). The main instrument in qualitative research is human, so all observations and analyses are filtered through human beings' worldviews, values, and perspectives. Moreover, this type of research's reality is not an objective entity, but rather encompasses multiple interpretations of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In other words, qualitative researchers interact with and talk with participants about their perceptions and admit the variety of perspectives, so they try not to reduce the multiple interpretations to a norm. Unlike quantitative research,

which identifies sets of variables or determines their relationship, qualitative research is more focused on the study of perceptions, attitudes and processes (Glesne, 1999).

As one of several qualitative research methods, a case study can be used to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning, including intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit and bounded system such as individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community (Merriam, 1998). In a naturalistic inquiry, data processing is a continuous ongoing activity successively focusing the study to make the meaningful emergence of the design possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A qualitative research method was used for this study. I visited a pre-K classroom and observed its teacher and her students. Data were collected by naturalistic observation and documentation of a preschool teacher and her children, including children from diverse language backgrounds, regarding the role of play in literacy learning. Also gathered as data were running records of conversation with the classroom teacher and students' engagement in literacy learning through play, intensive interviews about the teacher's understanding about play and literacy learning with follow-up questions after literacy-related play activities.

According to Wolcott (2001), "qualitative inquiry is more than method, and method is more than fieldwork techniques" (Wolcott, 2001, p. 93), so researchers should present readers with sufficient details about how they obtain the data and how they proceed with data analysis in their study (Wolcott, 2001). Following are the

details about my qualitative inquiry. I explain how I chose my participants, who my participants were, and what my role was as a participant observer, including data collection and data analysis procedures.

## **Settings**

### **The school**

The school was an elementary school, with pre-K to 5<sup>th</sup> graders. There were two pre-K classes. The sample for this study was a teacher in one of the Pre-K classes. The other pre-K class was taught by a Spanish-English bilingual teacher for Spanish-speaking students, so I chose as my observational classroom, the one that had a greater variety of ESL students, including a Korean population. This school had many international students from University housing, so it had one Korean teacher and one Chinese teacher. In pre-K, these bilingual teachers did not pull out students to teach their home languages but helped Korean or Chinese students to adjust in their classrooms, translating their language into English or vice versa.

### **The classroom**

The classroom was located in a portable outside of the main school building but it was spacious and connected with the other pre-K classroom and shared a restroom. Since Ms. Joyce had run a private pre-school before, she had lots of her own materials such as child-sized furniture, books, and chairs, and props for the

dramatic play areas. She brought these items from her home because the school did not provide enough of the furniture and materials she wanted to use. She liked to change her classroom often, rearranging furniture and materials, and she believed that the changing materials increase children's creativity which, to her, was an important characteristic of play. Basically, she kept a home center as one of the dramatic play areas; a manipulative center with letter puzzles, games, and small/big figures; library centers with books and two cushy chairs; an art center (it could be changed into other centers depending on the lessons, but usually it was used for paintings, stencils, and crafts); a block center (it was used for circle time and had a children's name mat on the floor); and a computer center (it was opened in the afternoon). Following are details about each center.

At one corner of the classroom was a home center which was one of the pretend play areas. This center contained one round table with four regular chairs and two highchairs for babies, a two-story storage cabinet for food, a toy oven toaster on the cabinet with several toy cooking utensils, and various colored human-figure dolls. In addition, it had a standing mirror, a toy micro-oven with baking utensils on the shelves, a tree-shaped standing hanger with four child-sized aprons, a toy sink with pots and pans, and a toy stove with two frying pans. Moreover, there were real but used items, such as a telephone, a cash register on the small rectangular table, and a children's cookbook on the baking utensil shelf. Finally, there were

children's cookbooks some of which contained real, usable Korean and Chinese recipes.

Across from the home center was a block center with a circle-time rug, where the alphabet and numbers were written along with children's names. Ms. Joyce used this place for every circle time to teach, give directions, or have a discussion with her students. Standing toy shelves separated this area from other centers and were organized with small/big wooden and plastic blocks including animals, human figures, mini-cars, and books.

In the art center, which was located near the sink for water painting, drawing, and various other crafts, there were pencils, crayons, color markers, glues, scissors, color papers, stencils, and smocks. This center was used in various ways depending on the situation, e.g., making something with Play-Dough, playing with cornstarch and water, and other drawings and crafts.

The library Ms. Joyce provided held a child-sized standing bookshelf and a cozy sofa with cushy bean bag chairs. She changed the books on the shelf often depending on her teaching theme. Kids used this area not only for reading books, but also for taking a rest or staying in a comfortable and cozy area to play teacher or doctor.

In the manipulative center were different kinds of puzzles, games written on alphabet letters and pictures with other materials for children to practice their gross

and fine motor skills, such as lining up toys using their fingers or sorting items by colors.

Near the window were five computers on a long table with child-sized chairs. Ms. Joyce wanted her children to be involved in the other centers including table work after morning circle time, so usually children could use this center in the afternoon.

### **Field Entry**

I volunteered to help children in a Pre-K classroom, which included students who spoke a language other than English, and I was there as a participant observer, having known a pre-K teacher, Ms. Joyce for over one and a half years. According to Glesne (1999), an ‘observer as a participant’ remains primarily an observer but has some interaction with study participants. In this sense, although I had a close relationship with the pre-K teacher and her students, I looked on my position as an assistant teacher, helper, or friend but I did not teach them or take an intervention for my study. The classroom teacher introduced me as a friend and sometimes she asked me to help children during lessons or activities.

### **Who I am as a researcher**

I have dreamed of being a teacher since I was five or six years old. My mother was a high school teacher and my father is a professor at a university. My

father is the fifth son among six sons in his family. According to my father, my grandfather, who died when my father was a high school student, was also a teacher at home for young children. My father used to tell me that my grandfather would be very proud of him because he is the only son doing the same kind of work as my grandfather. In these surroundings, to be a teacher seemed to be very natural to me. I even thought there were no jobs other than being a teacher.

Although I thought of being a teacher since I was a young child, it was not easy to find my role model through the school years. From preschool to high school, the school curriculum I encountered was focused on academic learning, devoted to the presentation of subject matter and knowledge based on memorization. Play was regarded as simply a relaxation activity to spend time and not to be bored. Most Korean teachers separated play from academic study/work, and they were proud of their strict academic teaching attitude toward their students to improve their learning skills. Unfortunately, teacher-directed strict knowledge based teaching seemed natural with the pupil-teacher ratio of 55-60 students to one teacher of my school years in Korea. I heard “Don’t play but study” from an early age, and since junior high school, most teachers focused on preparing students for taking standardized tests to enter the university. In this situation, both teachers and students seemed suppressed and lost most playful and relaxed teaching and learning moments at school. To make a balance between study/work and play/relaxed activity was not easy for both teachers and students.

However, I had a chance to meet Jungwoo (a pseudonym), who was a German language teacher at my high school. He was different than other teachers. I can never forget his first teaching in my classroom. German was the second foreign language in my high school. Students were excited and also a little bit anxious to take this course, because we had never learned German before high school. On the first day of German class, Jungwoo brought many toys hiding in his pocket. Whenever he introduced new German words, he showed us the toy objects. Although all the students were old enough not to play with toys any more, it was a fascinating class for all of us. Most of the other classes were teacher-directed lecture style classes without fun. However, he used many mnemonics and songs with a playful attitude to teach us German effectively. No matter the student's age, play-based curriculum seemed useful and helpful for the students who need to study in a relaxed and fun atmosphere. I still remember several of the German children's songs because I enjoyed the learning moment with memorable fun activities.

Jungwoo's teaching has influenced me to think about how to manage school curriculum and classroom settings under the pressure of strict and competitive school situation. He used play as a good medium in the classroom to relieve the tension between students' desires and teachers' structured teaching. Through this play-based teaching, he could give the impression to students that school was not only a preparing institution to go to college, but also still a fun place to learn. I would like to be a teacher like Jungwoo who provided relaxed, fun activities and studios

passion at the same time to the students, especially those who had repressed all their personal desires in order to prepare for standardized tests in my high school period.

Considering the influence that my parents as teachers and my ideal high school German teacher, Jungwoo, had on my life, I have prepared to be a teacher of young children. With my interest in teaching foreign languages, I took a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) certification emphasizing the elementary level in 1997. Although I took the certificate courses in Korea, all the faculty members were native English speakers who had come from the United States, except for one Korean computer professor because the program was affiliated with the University of Maryland at Baltimore. Through this certification, I learned about “Second language acquisition for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers,” “EFL methods for speaking, listening, reading & writing,” and “Cross cultural communication.” This program helped me to become familiar with native English speakers and their culture. In addition, it gave me a passion to study abroad in the United States.

In 1999, I entered the graduate school of the University of Texas, at Austin, majoring in Curriculum and Instruction. My interest in children’s play continued throughout my master’s program. I chose children’s classroom sand play as my master’s report topic and observed children aged 4-5 at a private preschool for more than 6 months. Through this qualitative research, I learned and confirmed the importance of the teacher role and participation during children’s classroom sand

play because children's dramatic themes or patterns would differ depending on what the teacher provided as props during their play. Because a teacher can play a critical role in children's learning and development, I developed my current research on a teacher's use of play to promote literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds as my doctoral dissertation. I have been interested in the population of the children from diverse language backgrounds because I have a son who was born in the United States and started to learn both Korean and English, and I myself am an ESL learner and researcher.

### **How I chose the school and the teacher, Ms. Joyce**

My connection with the school in which I spent more than one and half year's for my current research goes back to my internship period during my first year of doctoral program. I did my internship at an elementary school in Austin, Texas. As an intern, I helped three kindergarten teachers and played with their kids and tutored two kindergarten kids regularly in mathematics and literacy during the class. John (a pseudonym) who spoke English and Spanish was one of them. He was a challenging boy to teach because he was very active and did not concentrate on the task. After several tutoring sessions with him, I realized that he was smart and had a playful attitude with hands-on objects. I usually let John choose the hands-on object for teaching mathematics from the toy shelves, which were filled with blocks, toy dinosaurs, buttons, circle puzzles, etc. It reminded me of Jungwoo's play-based

teaching and I tried to apply that attitude to my tutoring moment with John. It was successful and made John able to concentrate on the task for more than 30 minutes. It was an amazing improvement because usually he could not concentrate on his work more than 10 minutes. My tutoring experience with John showed me again the positive influence of play as a good medium for children's learning and development. In addition, this made me develop current research on a teacher's use of play to promote literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds since there is little study on children's play and English as a Second Language (ESL) children's learning. In order to find a teacher who values children's play and ESL literacy learning, I visited the school where I had done my internship, and I asked for help from the principal who was already familiar with me. This is when I was introduced to Ms. Joyce from one of pre-K classes. She was well-known among Korean parents as a good teacher who understood ESL children and had special concerns for them. As an example, even though Ms. Joyce was a monolingual English speaker, her warm attitude toward ESL children made children think that she could understand and even speak in their home languages. She was very experienced teacher for preschool aged children and had taught at the current public school for four years. She also valued parents' participation in children's learning, so she asked parents to read books at home in the children's home language, and to volunteer as a translator or teacher assistant at school regularly. However, she never asked parents to donate money or purchase classroom items because she knew that

most of her students were from the University student housing or nearby homes in which children were not rich, as the school served children from the Salvation Army or Children's Shelter.

### **Who the ESL children and their parents were**

Ms. Joyce's class consisted of children who were native English speakers and children from diverse language backgrounds. Because my focus was on children from diverse language backgrounds, I would like to describe this population further. Most of the children from diverse language backgrounds lived in University student housing and their parents were graduate students at the University. Many of these parents stay in the United States for 2 to 5 years during their graduate study and then go back to their home countries. Other parents get jobs in the United States and then move to another state or area. Therefore, in this elementary school, there were many children with languages other than English spoken at home in pre-K through first or second grade class, and then the number of these children decreased after second grade.

At least one of the parents of these children had preparation to take and pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) to enter graduate school, so most of them were well educated. They could read and write English but their speaking and listening English abilities were often not developed

when they first arrived from their home countries. Especially when they were from Asia in countries in which English education has focused more on reading and writing, and as not much on speaking and listening. Usually, they were highly concerned about their children's education both at home and at school. For parents, learning English for themselves and teaching English to their children was important whether they were going back to their home countries after their study, or planned to stay in the United States because learning English was a big issue in their countries. In this mood, parents were eager to teach English to their children during their stay in the United States, but at the same time, they wanted them to keep their home languages so the children would make a smooth transition when they went back to their countries. Therefore, Ms. Joyce's advice on the first day of school that "if you speak your native language well, you can speak English well" was a good maxim for these parents.

Children from diverse language backgrounds could be categorized into big two groups. One group was children who had had some preschool experience in the United States before coming to this pre-K class and the other was children who had just arrived just from their home countries. Children in the first group were more active in class even at the beginning of the school because they could understand and speak English better and communicate better with the teacher than children who had first arrived from their home countries. In addition, these children could help the teacher and their friends in the class as translators or mediators. The other children

seemed to be more shy and reluctant because of their limitation in English at the beginning of the semester. However, as time went by, they adjusted well with the special help of their classroom teacher, with the help from the bilingual Korean or Chinese teacher in the school and with the help of other children.

Usually, children from diverse language backgrounds learned and absorbed English in a short time through the print-enriched environment, interactive social relationship among other friends, and the classroom teacher, Ms Joyce. Parents were amazed at their children's English improvement by the end of the school year compared to the beginning of the school. Some even, reported that their children already were corrected their wrong pronunciation or grammar in English.

## **Participants**

### **Students**

During my study, I observed one teacher's classroom for one and a half years. The first year, in spring 2003, the class consisted of 13 Korean students, 4 Chinese students, 1 Spanish-speaking student, 2 students from Pakistan and 2 English speakers among 22-24 students. The second complete year, there were 9 girls and 6 boys but it changed from week to week, varying from around 14 students to 20 students during the academic year 2003-2004. The changing number of students was due to children from the nearby Children's Shelter or Salvation Army, some of whom stayed in the classroom for transition times between 2 weeks and a

couple of months. Among the 14-20 students, in this classroom were 6 ESL students as well as 5 Korean and 1 Chinese students and 2-3 special needs children who needed help with speech and language. Most of them were between 4 and 5 years old.

### **The teacher, Ms. Joyce**

I chose a pre-K teacher and her students for my study. The teacher was a white, Anglo-American, native-English speaker. The teacher, Ms. Joyce (a pseudonym that she liked), had been teaching children aged 3-5 for 20 years. Before teaching at the current public school, she had 15-20 years experience in private preschool settings with children ranging in age from 18 months to 12 years, but primarily she taught three-through five-year-olds. She graduated with a business management degree, but she said that she never left the field of education. She ran a preschool and returned to college for her master's degree, but she became pregnant and decided to be a stay-at-home mom for a while. She then decided to return to teaching, so she applied for a program to attain her teaching certificate and then was hired by her current elementary school.

Although this was her fourth year of teaching at a public school, she had previously run a preschool, had been a graduate student, and was a member of the National Association of the Education for Young Children (NAEYC). She had been interested in second language learners since her first year of teaching in her current

public school, because the majority of the children in her class were ESL. She wanted to help children in her classroom and wanted to know more about this topic, so she attended workshops especially for teaching ESL students. In addition, she read books and checked out materials prior to passing the test for her ESL certification which was offered by the state board. Through this, she became familiar with the different theories and, thus, was up to date with the current philosophy. Moreover, she paid to attend workshops and then used the websites and resources provided by the speakers to find additional ideas.

She most valued children's cooperative learning with their peers and the expression of themselves either orally or in writing/drawing that revealed their ideas and thoughts. Providing a safe and nurturing environment was very important to her to help children explore, try new things, take risks, and express themselves, including children who came to the class from such stressful situations such as the Children's Shelter or Salvation Army. In addition, she believed that teachers should use and teach children with different materials based on children's learning styles. The curriculum she taught was based on pre-K guidelines from the state, which was divided into mathematics, science, language, early literacy, fine art, listening comprehension, and social studies. Ms. Joyce knew Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) as a member of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and followed pre-K curriculum guidelines from the school district for her current teaching. However, she knew how to negotiate her classroom

curriculum not only following the fixed guidelines, but also applying her own creative, well-organized curriculum based on her experience. She applied her own teaching methods based on her knowledge from workshops, theorists, and well-known curricula such as High-scope and Montessori. In addition, she spent more time on language and literacy development in her curriculum because of the number of English as Second Language (ESL) students in her classroom.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

#### **Data collection periods**

I collected my data for more than one and a half years between the spring semester of 2003 and the early fall semester of 2004. In the spring semester 2003, I got to know the teacher and the students in her classroom to identify some salient or recurrent themes or activities in order to develop my research questions about the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds. During that time, I collected data from interviews, informal conversations, scheduled observations, and self-reflexive notes with the teacher and her students, focusing on the teacher's general educational background and philosophies about children and their learning. In the following academic year from fall 2003 to spring 2004, I continually collected data with detailed interview sessions and consistent observations, informal conversations, and self-reflexive notes of the teacher and her

students on the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds.

In this study, I used multiple data sources including interviews with the teacher, classroom observations, field notes, and self-reflexive notes. I visited the classroom twice a week, usually on Tuesday and Thursday morning from 8:30-11:00 including lunch time in the spring and fall semesters, 2003 to become familiar with the classroom teacher and her students and to find salient phenomenon focused on the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds. In the following semester, I visited the classroom three times a week, usually on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings from 8:30-11:00 including lunch time in spring semester, 2004. I increased my visiting time based on my observation in Spring 2003 and Fall 2003 that children were more likely to be engaged in literacy-related activities since they were already familiar with the teacher and the classroom routines. In addition, their literacy ability actually improved compared to the beginning of the school year, based on my observations and interviews with the teacher. Therefore, I decided to add one more day to gather data in order not to miss valuable moments that would be related to my research questions. Interviews with the teacher and observations of her interaction with children focused on ESL students while they learned literacy through play were collected for data analysis.

Moreover, after my proposal defense meeting at the beginning of May 2004, I went to see the teacher in order to clarify and confirm information that was suggested by my committee members. During the summer vacation, I contacted the teacher several times via telephone, email, and letters to verify some classroom activities and determine whether she had any special intention for the ESL children.

### **Interview**

When we are interested in past events, interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or people's interpretations of them (Merriam, 1998). In order to know a teacher's understandings, past experiences, beliefs, and to check information about field notes of her practice, the interview process was used properly in this study. There were no rating scales of the interview format in this study. It was composed of open-ended and short-answer format questions. I interviewed the teacher first in spring semester, 2003 focusing on general information about her, her philosophy of children's education, her definitions of play and literacy. The second interview session was held at the end of the spring semester 2003 and focused on each literacy-based activity through play based on my observations. The third interview session was done at the beginning of the spring semester 2004 and focused on her understanding and practice of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds. As a part of the results, I found consistency between the first and the third interview sessions,

although there was almost one year's time difference. Most of the teacher's beliefs or general understandings about play, ESL literacy and ESL literacy through play were not changed easily; the teacher showed the same or similar responses based on each research question in this study. Usually interview sessions were done in the morning from 7:45-8:30 AM. before the class started, except for the first interview which was done at my home. Each interview session took several days or weeks to cover all my prepared questions and occasionally, I added several questions on the spot based on the teacher's answers, to clarify her answers or to ask further questions. Overall the interview sessions totaled about 6 hours, and all documents were audio-taped for later transcription.

### **Informal conversation**

I asked questions and wrote down informal conversations with the teacher before/during/after the center time, including lunch time or sometimes on the outside playground, in order to know her understanding and practice of play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds. The teacher in this study felt more comfortable answering in informal conversations than formal interview sessions, so I tried to ask or clarify much information through frequent informal conversations with her when she had free time or lunch time.

## **Observation**

I wrote running notes whenever I observed the teacher and children in her classroom regarding literacy related activities through play context including children from diverse language backgrounds. It included circle time, table-work time and center time activities from 8:30 to 10:30 in the morning before the children went to lunch. Observations may maximize the researcher's ability to catch motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, and customs of the researched subjects, so it allows the researcher to see the world as the researched subjects see it and to capture the ongoing phenomenon of the environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I visited the classroom twice a week usually on Tuesday and Thursday in the spring and fall semesters 2003 and three times a week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in the spring semester 2004 to see how a teacher practices her understanding of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds.

## **Self-reflexive notes**

I wrote a self-reflexive note whenever I had time to think about an issue or had concerns about the teacher from interviews, informal conversations, or classroom observations. These were in the form of a short memo but they were helpful as I thought over the teacher's understanding and classroom practices regarding literacy learning through play for children from diverse language backgrounds. Through this, I could develop more ideas for further interview

questions, write down my reflections, and reorganize categories for later data analysis (Goldstein, 1997).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

I did not intervene in order to see a particular teacher-student interaction or learning process because this study was done using naturalistic inquiry according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). I helped the pre-K teacher and her students as a participant observer, friend, and teacher. I began to analyze data from transcription of audiotaped interview sessions and field-notes from my classroom observations. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), data analysis involves a constant comparative method to analyze the data, which involves unitizing, categorizing, filling in patterns, and member check.

#### **Unitizing**

After a researcher reads through the interview transcripts and observation notes, the data can be broken down into smaller units of information that may stand alone as independent thoughts, which consist of a few words, a complete sentence, or an entire paragraph (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I read my data thoroughly from interview transcripts, observation notes, informal conversation notes, and self-reflexive notes in order to reduce to smaller units of information that might stand alone as independent idea (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Usually, it was a short paragraph including several key words or sentences or a description of a classroom event.

### **Categorizing**

A researcher may label the units and sort them into tentative categories under the same phenomenon and then develop category titles that describe category properties distinguishing each category from the others. When a new category emerges, a researcher compares it with the old categories and then decides whether to put it under the old titles or redefine the categories (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, first, I put unitizing information into a category I developed at the beginning, and then I moved back and forth between data and categories to determine if the data fit into the proper categories.

### **Filling in patterns**

Next I examined the possible relationships among categories. I integrated categories, identified patterns, and made connections among the patterns. In this study, based on the data analysis of Lincoln & Guba (1985), I developed the following procedures for data analysis.

(1) Read and think over interview transcripts, informal conversation, classroom observations, and self-reflexive notes considering research questions.

(2) Make the data into the smallest units of information that might stand alone as independent thoughts, which could consist of a few key words, a sentence, or a paragraph.

(3) In this study, there were two big pieces of information: one was a teacher's philosophical understanding of the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds, and the other was her classroom practice regarding play in literacy learning. Therefore, first I tried to categorize units under the teacher's understandings based on the transcripts of interviews and informal conversations supported by field observation focusing on her beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge about play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds. As a result, the meanings she gave to play, to ESL literacy, and her values of play in ESL literacy were that play: (a) becomes an international language, (b) provides a relaxed and comfortable environment for children's learning, (c) helps with integrated lessons such as literacy, or math and play combined, (d) makes a natural connection between home language and target language (English), including her roles of play in ESL literacy. These four were defined as categories.

(4) After defining categories of this teacher's understandings of play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds, I created categories of her classroom practice regarding play in ESL literacy learning with the information on units derived from interview sessions and observation field notes. The categories of her classroom practice were: (a) use play as a warm-up, (b) use play as 'game' or

'trick', (c) use play for integrated lessons, (d) use play as an authentic assessment, (e) use play in acting out characters in a book, and (f) use spontaneous play for ESL literacy learning including dramatic play and block play.

(5) After I developed tentative categories and titles from the information I had collected, I consistently moved back and forth between data and categories to see if the data fit into the proper categories. Through this process, I could examine the relationship between the teacher's understanding and practice of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds which was directly connected with the third research question.

(6) As a result of my use of consistent comparative methods, the teacher's general constraints of incorporating her curriculum into the lesson, including using play in ESL literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds, emerged as two categories: (a) complexity of classroom dynamic: size of the classroom including having a moving population with different levels of students and teacher time management in each activity, and (b) administrative domain: shortage of school support. These were analyzed to answer the third research question.

(7) During and after analyzing the data into categories, I showed them to a peer debriefer, a graduate student in an education department and this researcher's colleague, who read interview transcripts and observation notes for data credibility.

## **Trustworthiness**

In order to make findings and interpretations of data collection more reliable in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) listed several procedures to establish trustworthiness. According to their criteria, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are included in trustworthiness. In this study, I used several strategies, which were prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member check to gain credibility for trustworthiness.

### **Prolonged engagement**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement means spending sufficient time at the research site in order to learn the context, minimize the misunderstanding and distortion of data, and to build trust between the researcher and respondents. The purpose of prolonged engagement is to broaden the scope of the research site to include multiple influences and mutual shapes such as developing trust, learning the culture, and contextual factors that affect the phenomenon being studied. In this study, I spent over three school semesters in a classroom in order to learn the teacher's understanding and classroom practice regarding the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds. Through this long observation and interviews with the teacher, I could see the overall scope of the classroom, the teacher, and her students.

### **Persistent observation**

Persistent observation helps the researcher to identify the characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and to focus on those elements in detail by observing long enough to identify salient issues and topics. It provides depth of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I found consistency in the teacher's understandings of the research topic from the first interview to the third interview as well as recurring salient classroom activities during the three semesters of observation.

### **Triangulation**

Researchers should have several different types of sources that can provide insights about the same events or relationships in order to check information that has been collected from different sources for consistency of evidence across sources of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In summary, triangulation is a process carried out with respect to data or items of information from multiple sources, methods, or investigators. In this study, I had multiple sources of data collection, including interviews, classroom observations, informal conversations, and self-reflexive notes.

### **Peer debriefing**

As one of the aspects of credibility, the peer debriefing process encourages the researcher engage in an extended discussion with a disinterested peer of findings,

conclusions, and analysis so as to explore and clarify meanings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, a graduate student in department from the college of education was my peer debriefer. She patiently listened to the current data collection procedures and interpretations to help me organize and reorganize themes under tentative categories to make the data more clear and concrete.

### **Member checks**

Member checking is a process carried out with respect to data constructions and could be directly related to the judgment of overall credibility through verifying constructions that are developing as a result of data collected and analyzed with the respondent groups. It involves sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, or the final report with research participants to make sure their ideas are accurately represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I constantly verified what the teacher said in formal interview sessions or classroom observations through having informal conversation, showing field notes or asking questions during/after interviews. In addition, I shared the findings and interpretations with the teacher, so the accuracy and revision of the data was examined.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the data collection procedures as well as the data analysis process. A qualitative research method was used to answer the research

questions of this study. A teacher who had about 20 years of teaching experience and an ESL certification and her all children, including children from diverse language backgrounds, in a pre-K classroom in an elementary school were the participants of this study. As data sources, interviews with the teacher, classroom observations, field notes and self-reflective notes were included. In addition, data analysis involved several steps of unitizing, categorizing, and filling in patterns based on Lincoln & Guba (1985). In order to establish trustworthiness, I used prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checks.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to describe a teacher's understanding and practice of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds in a preschool classroom. The research will be guided by the following questions.

1. What does a teacher understand about the value of children's play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds?
2. How does a teacher use play in literacy learning including children from diverse language backgrounds in her classroom practice?
3. What are the general constraints of incorporating her curriculum into the lesson including using play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds?

In the following sections, I will present my findings based on data analysis of interviews, informal conversations, observations, and self-reflexive notes. After listing the sections, I will organize my findings under each research question.

An outline of the sections follows:

The Teacher's Understanding of the Value of Children's Play

Her understanding of play

Her meanings of ESL literacy

*Her views of emergent (early) literacy*

*Her understanding of L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) literacy*

*emergence and her teaching attitudes*

Her values for play in ESL literacy learning

*Play becomes an international language*

*Play provides a relaxed and comfortable environment*

*Play helps with integrated lessons*

*Play makes a natural connection between home language and English*

Her different roles in the play associated with ESL literacy learning

#### The Teacher's Practice of Using Play in Her Classroom

Use play as a warm-up

*Use children's prior experiences*

*Understand and integrate children's emotions/feelings*

Use play as 'game' or 'trick'

*Name wall*

*Pocket word*

*Game project: how many letters are in your name?*

*The question box: 20 questions*

*Word games (card games) and HEART game (board game)*

Use play for integrated lessons

*Questions of the day*

*Use toy machines*

*Reading a book*

*Theme teaching*

*Recipe day*

Use play as an authentic assessment

*Learning letters by singing songs*

*Playing with letter puzzles*

*Role-playing a teacher to read a book*

Use play to act out characters in a book

*Reading a book and acting out a story, The Mitten*

*Reading a book and drawing and writing child's own story*

*Creating a story with flannel to act out characters*

Use spontaneous play for ESL literacy learning

*Dramatic play*

*Block play*

#### General Constraints of Incorporating Her Curriculum into the Lesson

Complexity of classroom dynamic

*Size of the classroom, different levels of students, and teacher time management*

Administrative domain

*Shortage of school support*

## **Presentation of Data Analysis**

Results are presented according to the preceding list of sections. The teacher's interview talk and children's talk will be shown in standard type, and actions and extra explanations will be in parentheses, and will include a date of the field notes. 'T' stands for the teacher, Ms. Joyce, 'I' stands for me, the researcher, 'C' stands for children including children from diverse language backgrounds, and other initials indicate children's names. Initials of children from diverse language backgrounds will be explained with parentheses, such as SB (Korean speaking child), J (Chinese speaking child).

### **The Teacher's Understanding of the Value of Children's Play**

#### **Her understanding of play**

About play, for me, if I see pre-K, it is kind of playful and play...it's using materials to explore and as they play and as they talk and they learn from each other...that's how they make it more concrete by saying it and by doing it.

Ms. Joyce regarded play as concrete, manipulative, hands-on activities for each learning center. She believed that children who have short attention spans would benefit and learn through these constant engagements with concrete and manipulative activities.

I want them to explore as much as possible and use hands-on materials as much as possible to learn concepts, because I know they have short attention spans and can't sit at the circle time for a long time.

She wanted her children to be engaged with lots of hands-on activities during center time and even circle time so she made the curriculum something visual and tangible to the children.

Play continues to be important to me and we know that children at this age have short attention spans and have different rates of grabbing developmental concepts, so we provide many learning centers and many activities...um...for them to interact on their level with concrete materials and hands-on materials. We learn through observation and listening to children when they teach each other and when they act on their own environment, so by doing that...it just helps them to learn and to tell friends to help them to incorporate meanings.

Since creativity was an important element for managing her class in a more meaningful and fun way, she tried to change and rotate classroom furniture, toys, and learning materials often to make them new and fresh.

I think play is creativity. I changed my classroom often. I do like to rotate books and switch materials. Just stretch their own play and what they are doing. If I see that they haven't gone to a center, I might in the afternoon, I sort of close off some centers and then they would go "I've not done puzzle for a while."

I like to change the room often...you would find if you rotate the materials, or take something away and put it in closet for three weeks and then bring it back out...or just twist the home center a little bit by adding new things...that the children become more engaged and interested and then spend longer time there.

Often, if I put something new out, the children notice right away. Sometimes, it's just a simple thing taken from the same materials putting them in a new basket or new position. And then they notice and love it again...they begin to use it...so change is important and rotating materials is important to me.

She believed that play would be the best way to learn by doing, creating, experiencing, and exploring the world. Sometimes, when she provided new props or toys during center time, she gave children enough time to find new items in the classroom, let them initiate conversation about the new toys, and let children figure them out through exploration. She also pointed out play could be an open-ended, self-discovery, and theme-based learning place for young children. Unlike study or work, play itself implies free choices, self-discovery, and no right or wrong answers, which can be connected with open-ended activities. Ms. Joyce liked to use play in her teaching because she found it a fun way to learn, a universal tool for children, and a good way to manage children's short attention spans.

Moreover, play meant to her creating a natural environment for peer learning and teaching. She valued play as social learning in a relaxed mode. While children talk, listen, and share stories through play, they may increase and stretch their vocabulary and express themselves, as well as foster their friendships.

I think they learn from each other, I think they learn in a relaxed environment. If you play alongside them, you can sort of stretch their play a little bit and give them some more ideas, but through play, you can learn about their own vocabulary and own understanding and they can act out the experiences that they had or wish they had. Providing them with props is the way that stretches their vocabulary and their play. But I really think that they learn how to express themselves and how to get along with their friends.

Since she valued play as a relaxed vehicle for children's language learning and development, she also provided related props to stretch their use of vocabulary and ideas with other friends.

## Summary

Ms. Joyce regarded play as concrete, manipulative, hands-on activities for each learning center. She believed that children who have short attention spans would benefit and learn through these playful activities. Since creativity was an important element for managing her class in a more meaningful and fun way, she tried to change and rotate classroom furniture, toys, and learning materials often to make them new and fresh. She also pointed out play could be an open-ended, self-discovery and theme-based learning place for young children. Moreover, play meant to her giving natural environment for peer learning and teaching. She valued play as a social learning place in a relaxed way. She believed children talked, listened, and shared stories through play, so they might increase and stretch to use their vocabulary and express themselves as well as their friendships.

### **Her meanings of ESL literacy**

#### ***Her views of emergent (early) literacy***

As she talked about 'emergent (early) literacy', she named listening to audio cassette tapes, reading out loud, reading stories, writing journals, and playing puzzles with letters and sound. She included listening and speaking skills as important connections for literacy development. Especially, she pointed out the effectiveness of peer tutoring for ESL children's literacy learning and teaching.

I: what do you include in 'early literacy'?

T: audio cassette, read out loud, story reading, journal writing and puzzles about letters and sounds. I think listening and speaking are very important and connected for literacy. Some ESL children are shy to say or write something by themselves, but when they are together, they learn best. They can be more out loud with their voices, so peer tutoring or learning is very important for them.

For her literacy curriculum, she tried to meet the pre-K guidelines about children's early literacy learning. She provided many big and small books including books on tape in the classroom because she wanted children to see and hear various voices of expression in language. Moreover, she regarded children's drawing as early writing, so she encouraged children to express themselves in different ways by drawing things such as dots, lines, and invented spelling and writing on their own.

Especially, for ESL children, she observed that they drew the same picture over and over until they felt confident enough to expand their knowledge or express their perspectives, so she helped them make their scribbling and marks more meaningful to express themselves better. According to Ms. Joyce, children's listening and speaking skills were important and connected to their literacy learning. She emphasized the children's verbal expression in English by listening to various voices of others including listening to their own voices. Moreover, different expressions of ESL children in different ways from scribbling and marking something on the paper to drawing their favorite pictures and writing invented spellings were all interconnected with literacy learning in English.

I: What are your views of emergent literacy (Early literacy) for young children?

T: Well, we try to meet the curriculum needs...by providing a wide range in a variety of learning for the children so that they can see and hear language expression in different ways. Some ideas we read aloud using our big book or small book and encourage children to respond to the story or notice something about characters in the story...so we read for different purposes to the children but I like for them to not only hear my voice but to hear their own voices so that I provide a lot of books on tape because I want them to hear a different perspective, and different voice, and we also encourage writing in a classroom and drawing, so they can express themselves and share their ideas with their friends.

Drawing...it starts out scribbling and just a mark on the paper means something to them...at first for the ESL students...it's hard to get them to express what the marks mean. And usually I found that they draw the same picture over and over again...and so getting them to expand on their knowledge and to explain to...what does this dot mean? Or what does this line mean? And why did you do like this...it is interesting to hear their perspective and then to sort of expand their perspective that next time they go to draw or write. Later, it would be connected with invented spelling and writing on their own. Some of them...take the risk to try to write a message or write a menu or write a story and write a word during their center time as well as during the journal time...so letting them express themselves in different ways, it's important.

Moreover, she believed that if she could put children's names everywhere, for example on their mat, cubby, the road where their work was displayed, the name wall and the carpet where they sit, they would take ownership of the room and be interested in writing their name. The more children were familiar with environmental print including their names in the classroom, the more they were interested in reading and writing letters, starting to write their names first. At the beginning of the year, even children who were not able to distinguish letters from numbers, when they were exposed to print-enriched environments, they could move their fingers from left to right, tried to read words or sentences on their clothes and in

the classroom. Ms. Joyce was excited to see their improvement during the year. In addition, she herself was a facilitator by providing each child's name at least seven times in her classroom in order to encourage children to be interested in print and have ownership of the classroom.

I: what academic growth or literacy behaviors do you see in children's play?

T: I see that they learn how to write their names, they learn how to read environmental prints, that they learn how to move their fingers from left to right and copying.

I: as you told me in the beginning of the year, maybe they didn't know letters and how to write them, but do you see any improvement from the beginning to now because this is almost at the end of the year.

T: yes, much improvement. At first, they cannot...some children...they cannot distinguish numbers from letters. I mean, it runs all together. Like one, five, c, a...it has the meaning but by modeling and doing charts and songs and books and running your fingers from left to right...using all the strategies that we learned in workshop, they can begin to read what's on their clothes and what's in their room.

It is kind of my rule and the rule that I heard is if you put their names in seven places in the room, they will begin to identify their own letters because the letters become personal to them. That's what we did at the beginning when they just came to class. They see their name on their mat and on the carpet where they sit. They take ownership of the room and they sit on their name everywhere and remember the room, then become interested in writing their names, and they become interested in words.

As an activity of early (emergent) literacy for ESL children, labeling each center both in English and the children's home languages was Ms. Joyce's goal. She emphasized the importance of each student's home language development because she thought home language development would help and connect with English language learning, so she respected each child's language and culture by putting the

Korean alphabet chart on the wall and Chinese/Korean books in the book center.

Ms. Joyce asked Korean and Chinese parents to label in their home language, giving them a list of labels for each center and wall activities such as calendar, window.

Ms. Joyce asked parents to do this with their children as a home project to help both of them.

My goal next year...and I have this goal this year too is to label each center in print. I have parents translating for me in Korean and Chinese a lot. If I have over 4 to 5 students in one language, I want to honor their language by putting their language charts in our classroom. Because I am finding that there are a few students who are reading beyond pre-K and kinder level in their home language and then a few are starting in reading in English as well.

Moreover, at each center and book shelf in the classroom, Ms. Joyce provided books for diverse language children. She provided Chinese, Korean, Polish and other countries' alphabets on the wall, newspapers or magazines in their home language, especially during the transition period at the beginning of the school year. By letting ESL children see their native language around their classroom such as at the home center or on the wall, these children would feel supported in using and learning their native languages along with English.

At the corner of one of the walls, there was a Korean alphabet chart, which seemed to be given by one of Korean children. Ms. Joyce valued children's first language development by respecting their culture as well as Target (English) language and culture. (Field notes: 3/3/03)

It has been found that linguistically and culturally diverse children including ESL children experience the most academic success when schools reinforce the children's cultural identity, promote the development of their first language, and

provide English instruction in meaningful context in relation to children's previous experiences (Cummins, 1981). Ms. Joyce also added that literacy learning should not be separated from other subjects, and provided a print-enriched environment in the math or science center. Based on her experiences, children would understand the meaning of words or sentences effectively in the authentic context while they read or learned new math or science concepts.

***Her understanding of L1 (first language) and L2 (second language) literacy emergence and her teaching attitudes***

Ms. Joyce knew the importance of keeping both languages for diverse language speaking children, so she encouraged ESL children to borrow Korean or Chinese books from the library or from the Korean or Chinese bilingual teachers because she believed that keeping Korean or Chinese would be very important to learning a new language, English. She also believed that children's first and second language should be improved at the same time because learning two languages would not interfere with each other, rather a transferring from one to the other would take place. She based her belief on the suggestion of theorists that a child would transfer knowledge from the first language to the second language without the loss of the first language. In this vein, she was supportive of the ESL children's native language development based on her experiences and learning as an ESL certified

teacher, and she knew the importance of first language development along with second language learning.

Moreover, sometimes, she asked the Korean bilingual teacher or the Chinese teacher to translate information into Korean or Chinese in order to display something in her classroom, which could make ESL children feel comfortable and honor their home languages.

I let ESL children borrow books in their home language from our library during the weekend. So, the Korean or Chinese teachers read books in their home language as often as possible. So, encourage them to keep their first language while they learn English. Sometimes, I have information translated into Korean and Chinese by a Korean bilingual teacher and a Chinese bilingual teacher. I believe that it honors the children to see their native language and makes them feel comfortable. Moreover, most of the theories suggest that a child will transfer their knowledge from the first language to the second language without the loss of the first language. Like building blocks, we build on what we already know. For example, a Korean child who is language delayed in his/her first language will have a harder time learning English because the foundation is not already there.

I: did you find any difference between native English-speaking children and ESL children? Do they have a different engagement in play and literacy?

T: I am finding that the children who have a strong language development in their own home language are making an easier transition into learning English as a second language. And the children who are still developing are having a harder time...[they are] acquiring English but at a slower rate.

From the beginning of the class, Ms. Joyce spoke English slowly and clearly and tried to use easier vocabularies for children from diverse language backgrounds. In addition, she used short sentences while she communicated with ESL children and broke difficult words down to easy words. Moreover, she used the Korean bilingual

teacher and a child whose English was better than other Korean students to help translate English to Korean during their communication.

In the beginning, I try to let a Korean bilingual teacher or another child in the class help translate what I said to the child's first language. I try to speak slowly, use gestures, get the child to trust me and to feel relaxed so they will take a risk and try to speak in English.

I had to slow my voice down and sort of shorten my sentences and make it simpler for them to model language.

Ms. Joyce also wanted her ESL children to be familiar with various forms of literacy and storybook readings. Although Ms. Joyce knew and had special concerns for ESL children, she did not explicitly differentiate her literacy teaching methods for ESL children and English-speaking children because she thought that it had to do more with personality. She emphasized the importance of the personality of each child according to who was shy or ready to take a risk to learn language.

I think it has more to do with personality because some ESL students are very outgoing. So, I've seen that they take a risk more readily. They just jump into that...even talking to their peers. They just try, copy, and then share...I have a boy that he is a little more reluctant, and I think his personality is a little more shy. But it has been wonderful to watch him blossom and make a good friend, and now he has really opened up. I am so proud of him for just feeling comfortable to take a risk. And I see him doing that in a large group or in a small group, in center time or with friends...it's wonderful. But native speakers as well do...I think I've seen the same as they develop languages as well. Personality has a lot to do with the risk they take in the classroom.

During an interview, Ms. Joyce showed me the pre-K guidelines about literacy including the section on ESL children. She said she tried to meet the guidelines respecting each child in her curriculum, pointing out several things to

emphasize also for the ESL children, such as using visual and concrete materials to teach English.

I: if you set down goals and objectives of literacy and play in your curriculum, what would those be? How does literacy fit in centers?

T: That's our language and literacy development. We get the goals in the curriculum that we have to teach from IPZ. They are our guidelines which are pre-K guidelines. And they include listening comprehension...how to follow directions, can you listen to a story for a different intent, or also we listen for different purposes to stories and we listen for rhyming words and opposite words and position words. It is also about our oral language, our verbal expression, so everything is sort of spelled out for us. In pre-K, if you notice, most of our guidelines say, "begin to."...And we do that because the pre-K people on staff have thought to keep it the same way because we know children of this age are developmentally growing in a different range. So, in order to honor that...someone is going to get the idea in the beginning of the year, "ready" but some another children might be having delays for their home environment or what other effectors might be affecting themselves. Most our guidelines say that "begins to" create, so it gets to use some time over the year to let everyone develop at their own rate, and also monitor that in left to right, top to bottom. We've seen that some children already have it...they are skimming, they are reading, and they are imitating in different centers. So, they are beginning to develop that skill.

However, on the other hand, she knew how to help her ESL children be involved in the class, such as calling their names to do some tasks, encouraging them to show their ideas, and even using them as role models for other ESL or native speakers.

Ms. Joyce was going to teach the concept of size: small, medium and large in a fun and playful way. She has a warm concern for ESL children, so she tries to call out their names and copy their idea and let them help others and use them as a role model. She always appreciates SH's new idea and encourages others to copy her idea by getting her permission. (Field notes: 12/11/03)

During naptime, I call each ESL child to tell me about the story or name words, so I could check them with picture cards which have picture and word. I make a copy of this and send it home for later practice.

The most important thing for my ESL students is to stop and frequently check for understanding and have small group instruction to help with understanding vocabulary and helping learn concepts

In addition, from the beginning of the school year, when ESL children did not know much English vocabulary, she called them during their naptime and showed them words with picture cards, and let children take them home for further practice with their parents. Through these frequent small group instructions, she could check whether ESL students understood certain vocabulary or new concepts.

### Summary

Ms. Joyce named listening to audio cassette tapes, reading out loud, reading stories, writing journals, playing puzzles with letters and sound as children's early literacy. She also mentioned that listening and speaking skills as important connections for literacy development. For her literacy curriculum, she tried to meet the pre-K guideline on children's early literacy learning by providing many big and small books including books on tape in the classroom for children to see and hear various voices of expression of language. Moreover, she regarded children's drawing as early writing, so she encouraged children to express themselves in different ways by drawing things such as dots, lines, and invented spelling and writing on their own. Especially, for ESL children, she observed that they drew the same picture over and over until they felt confident enough to expand their knowledge or express their perspectives, so she helped them to make their scribbling and marks meaningful to express themselves.

She thought that the more children were familiar with environmental prints including their names in the classroom, the more they were interested in reading and writing letters starting to write their names first. In this vein, she herself was a facilitator to provide each child's name at least seven times in her classroom in order to encourage children to have interests in prints and ownership of classroom.

As another activity of early (emergent) literacy for ESL children, labeling each center both in English and children's home language was Ms. Joyce's goal. She emphasized the importance of each student's home language development because she thought home language development would help and connect with English language learning, so she respected each child's language and culture.

From the beginning of the class, Ms. Joyce spoke English slowly and clearly and tried to use easy vocabularies for children from diverse language backgrounds. In addition, she used short sentences when she communicated with ESL children and broke down difficult words to easy words. Moreover, she wanted her ESL children to be familiar with various forms of literacy and storybook readings.

Although Ms. Joyce knew and had special concerns for ESL children, she did not explicitly differentiate her literacy teaching methods for ESL children and English-speaking children because she thought that literacy learning had to do more with personality. She was supportive of the ESL children's native language development based on her experiences and learning as an ESL certified teacher

knowing the importance of first language development along with second language learning.

### **Her values for play in ESL literacy learning**

Ms. Joyce valued children's play as an important medium for their learning and development, including literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds. First, she believed that play becomes an international language and a universal tool to communicate among children from diverse language backgrounds. Second, she noted that play provides a relaxed and comfortable environment for learning a new language. Third, she mentioned that play helps with integrated lessons such as literacy, math, or science through play. Last, she also believed that play makes a natural connection between home language and English. Following are specific examples of her values of play in ESL literacy learning.

#### ***Play becomes an international language***

Ms. Joyce believed that play is an international and a universal tool to communicate. She mentioned that children might engage in play activities in a stress-free environment and try a new language noting that they did not need to say a word in home center to play with each other. According to her, instead of speaking, children could play with action and motion, so their play itself was a language to express themselves in the classroom. Body language such as facial expressions with

actions were accepted and expanded to develop their later academic and social vocabulary development.

I: did you find any difference between native speaking children and ESL children regarding literacy learning through play?

T: their play is not different. That's what makes it so universal that we all play in the same way. I can watch them developmentally when they play in the block center and their writing and their drawing and master their skills.

T: Play is international...what country they are from...you don't need to speak. They just get in the home center and cook, cook, cook and serve each other. And set the table and dress up...and laugh at each other and that's what they did...as they quickly did that. First, they use...they rely on facial gesture and my facial gesture and my actions...so that they can follow along with the story or daily routines. However, we want them to expand their language...expand vocabulary...and we want to encourage them to learn academic vocabulary and social vocabulary.

Ms. Joyce pointed out that play was a good medium for both teacher and ESL children to communicate with each other through facial expression or body gestures. She also used play to expand or increase ESL children's vocabulary in their reading and writing. In addition, she even acted out the daily routines or some directions for ESL children at the beginning of the class, and it helped ESL children to follow and know what was next in their schedule.

I do often try to act out using gestures and facial expression, moving around to communicate with ESL children and use expression to relate to others and watch their facial expressions to check for understanding.

I: do you treat ESL children differently from others in your classroom?

T: yes, we have to work with them on their vocabulary. At first they are kind of relying on me, from my facial expressions and my gestures for the first couple of months...and then I kind of go over everything again because then they started to say, "oh, she is saying word, 'backpack', 'backpack'...I got it." So, it's kind of like you...you talk a lot to them at first and expose them

to the sounds of English. The thing is we have to go back and work on their vocabulary.

I: did you see any benefit for ESL children through this activity?

T: yes...yes...ESL children...we have to remember that at the beginning of the year, they can understand more through your gestures and they can understand more than they can give you back. But by setting up a prop for them to reenact the play. Then they can go and use either their home language, Korean or their English to pretend the story. When they don't understand me at the very beginning...I mean if they've just arrived from Korea or China or other countries, I just tell the parents and the bilingual teachers translate the direction into their home language: tell the child to hold Ms. Joyce's hands, watch Ms. Joyce...and she will show you either point you or act it out all day for you, so watch Ms. Joyce. So that's what they do. "What is she doing now?, where is she going?" and I have to act out "we are going to go eat, what to do" we just model everything over and over everyday and the children were so helpful to do so.

I do often try to act out using gestures and facial expression, moving around to communicate with ESL children and use expression to relate to others and watch their facial expressions to check for understanding.

She also pointed out that using play as an international language emphasizing acting-out skills was helpful for children from diverse language backgrounds when they had just arrived from Korea, China, or other counties and could not understand her and her language at the very beginning. Based on the interviews above, she used these gestures and facial expressions not only for communication with ESL children but also for checking their understanding of vocabulary and language use.

### ***Play provides a relaxed and comfortable environment***

Ms. Joyce thought that play was a natural way to practice new language and experiment with language and gesture. It could provide a relaxed and comfortable

environment for ESL children to try out new language skills because she knew that ESL children had to feel comfortable enough risk using a new language. She mentioned play as the best way that ESL children could practice their native language and the new language together because play could provide a natural setting for children to risk trying the new language and to hear their self-speech. She also emphasized the importance of a teacher's visual stimulation in acting out to help children follow lessons.

When we practice a new language, we need to hear our self-speak and we need to be able to take a risk to try. Sometimes, in the beginning, we need visual stimulation to see like they watch me and see me and...I act out more. To play is a natural way to practice language and to experiment with language and gesture. It's natural for a child to play and it's a way for them to practice things that they experience in their own life and in their own country. So, lots of practice is good for language. Listening and speech and phonological practices get them the skills they need to acquire new language so that they can be a reader and writer later.

Moreover, she knew how to use English-speaking children as role models to help ESL children in the beginning of the year. In that way, she believed that children would feel more comfortable saying or asking something in pretend play such as in the home center. She also mentioned that ideal peer tutoring would happen when there were enough native-speaking role models for ESL children, as happened this year.

This year it's been easier because we have more English models in the classroom. Last year, about 20 among 24 came ESL and that's not the model classroom, so this year is much better and with much quicker results.

I see that they learn how to write their names, they learn how to move their fingers from left to right and copying. I watch them practice reading to a

group and playing teachers in book centers and they were modeling how to hold a book. The teacher was turning the page and holding the book. You can see how they copy what you did in a playful way, so you can see that as I am looking for these skills I can see them doing that in different areas of the room in a playful way. So, if I don't see that happening for a child, then maybe I can help them with that in a center or choice because it doesn't have to be just in the writing center. It can be throughout the classroom and I think the best learning is the most integrated learning that they can do wherever they are and whatever their desire is.

And then it's wonderful because you have a couple of English speakers and Korean speakers and they switch from Korean to English. You know that they talk faster in their home language even at the beginning of the school, so they use Korean and then when an English speaker comes, they switch for her and then switch back to tell them, the person...give me back the dress...it's my turn. You have it long enough...and it's back to English, "O.K. now, it's your turn. Let's go to the party."

Ms. Joyce believed that play was a good medium for ESL children's learning through their peers in stress-free environments. From her perspective, ESL children would listen to and use vocabularies in order to communicate with their friends by sharing language and teaching each other, so they could learn language more effectively than a teacher could teach them. Pretending to be a teacher by holding books or pointing to letters with toy pointers was common in this classroom. Usually, two or more children were engaged in playing a teacher and through this, they not only practiced picture book reading, but also developed their social relationship and peer learning and teaching. She stated that ESL children would involve themselves more joyfully in literacy-related activities with their peers during pretend play, block play, or other playful activities.

I use play a lot, and I watch their play to see where they are developmentally...Like at first, they might never have been to school and don't have brothers and sisters like the Chinese girl. And so when she came, she was in solo play by herself...She moved quickly into parallel play but I watch for that in the beginning. I watch them practicing reading to a group and playing teachers in book centers and their modeling how to hold a book...The teacher was turning the page, and holding the book. You can see how they copy what you model in their play. They use write boards and attempt to write messages in a playful way.

We play games about reading, and they always love pictures with words. I have these little books that I purchased as centers for them by theme. And I will hold up those and say, "oh you can tell me what it says"...They love it. And "You can't trick us, we are so smart" they say. "We can read that whole book." "You can? Oh my goodness!" So they think they are reading what they want...they are picture book reading. Then, they are learning that that word there has meaning because I just told you the same day. So you are just helping them to identify talk and later as they learn letters and sounds and then they can start using invented spelling on their own...That's where we are right now.

Moreover, Ms. Joyce liked to play non-competitive games with the children so children were acting as one team to answer questions or read books. She encouraged children to engage in certain literacy activities while playing and working together cooperatively.

### ***Play helps with integrated lessons***

Ms. Joyce tried to use play for integrating lessons such as literacy through play, math and literacy through play, or science and literacy through play. She believed that children would learn better when the teacher could connect their prior experience in a meaningful context. Play could provide a non-stressful environment

for young children to learn new concepts or knowledge in a subject. In short, play would provide a natural invitation toward other subject learning in a fun way.

I like the way that lets children find new items to use for learning in a fun way. You know, children are ready to be involved or ready to learn whenever the learning and play are combined together...math, counting numbers, read and write letters or sequences. Yes, I like the way of incorporated learning, because kids can get knowledge easily when something is already familiar to them. For example, last semester, I brought my dog. My husband brought my dog to the class, so they have already touched his fur. I could remind them of the feeling of the touching the fur and of the animal lesson. Children will learn easily in a fun way doing activities such as touching ice, cotton, and matching games, which are fun activities to help children to learn math, science and literacy.

We reread a story several times and sometimes, I would be gathering what they would tell me about what happened. So, we reread the story several times. With the first reading, I just read it to them, and then we sequenced the story, and then we start to look at our sequence strip and remember. And just tell the story by looking at our strap of animals, and then we reread for play, and then we read for another intention. We used it for opposite words: hot/cold, the mitten was soft/hard. We did an activity with opposite word with that story. We did I think 4-5 activities. We did the math activities as well too...with some literature and math activities...as well as we did our science activities with building ice castle and snow and going to see snow.

Ms. Joyce pointed out that play could be an ideal teaching medium for integrating literacy into lessons in math and other subjects. According to her, children may be actively involved in their learning through play, which meant to her concrete, hands-on, and fun activities.

T: I like this idea [grocery shopping store] because it's integrated with math and literacy and also play. As math activity, children calculate money and sort fruits or vegetables by reading labels. Making a shopping list by looking at and reading books and copying the words is great. Today was more like...let them explore first. I will introduce more. (She is showing me two papers. One is a paper for the use of beauty shop on which is written, I want my hair: with pictures and words of curly, strait, pony tail, pigtails, braided,

other ideas? Children could mark on each hairstyle. The other paper is a schedule on which is written a customer's name, and available time.)

She said that literacy learning should not be separated from learning other subjects like math or science. Based on her experience, children would understand the meaning of words or sentences effectively in the authentic context of play, such as grocery shopping store, beauty shop, and doctor's office, while they read or learned new math or science concepts.

***Play makes a natural connection between home language and English***

It's wonderful because they are listening to English and practicing English but they are also using their Korean in their play too. We want to encourage them to use their home language and we don't want them to lose it. If you are strong in your home language we've noticed and we've seen it...if you are strong in your first language, the acquisition of the second language is easier and expands more quickly.

For ESL children, we know that they need lots of practice and play is the best way they can practice in their native language and the new language.

According to Ms. Joyce, ESL children used both English and their native tongue in their play, and she also encouraged students to keep and practice their home language. Moreover, she believed that the stronger children were in their home language, the easier it was to get the second language, a concept supported by previous research. As an example, she used several Korean children as English translators to help and communicate with other Korean children who did not speak English at all at the beginning of the year, and she could see the benefits to both sets of children.

And sometimes, you know the Korean children come in with different amounts of knowledge about English. So some of them can speak English or understand a little more and they help me to translate it. So once they become a translator...I think they pick up English even faster because they are having to think about it and then translating and then speaking back to me what that person just said. So they become fluent and more fluent...more quickly because they are helping me in the process. But you do have to work on their vocabulary and then later you work on their sentence structure because in Korean, the ending is different and there is a different sentence structure so we work on that.

Ms. Joyce not only appreciated a playful environment in ESL children, but noticed the importance of expanding their vocabulary and working on sentence structure within a play context to further their writing.

Supporting their literacy through play, it is important to provide them with materials in the room, so that they could see print in a variety of ways. I found a Chinese newspaper in Houston and just saw the express of the child who speaks Chinese and her sharing the newspaper with her friends and I have some Korean menus in the restaurant right now.

In addition, she visited each child's home before school started to become familiar with the parents and children through play, conversation, and sharing stories and culture. She also went to visit each Korean family with the Korean bilingual teacher, so she could communicate with parents and children more easily. From this home visit, she brought some topics or related props in the home center (pretend play area) in her classroom. She used this experience to involve ESL children in the classroom naturally in the context of play, and to connect with literacy learning.

When you have parents encourage literacy at home, you can't see that in the school...I did go to everyone's home to see that in the beginning. I went on

home visits and that's one of the things I was looking for how was reading important at the home, literacy at home, do they play, what do they do.

I: I can tell that you take a really big role and encourage them to do more literacy...did you tell them or guide them how to help their children?

T: when I visited a home, if it wasn't an ESL student, I kind of hand a questionnaire for the parents that I developed about the children. And they gave them back, and then I wanted them to meet me but then I also told them that I was there to see that child and [told] the children that. I wanted to see their space. And the children were so excited to take me to their bedroom and one girl want me to dance with her, I had to wear costume and we were playing together. Another girl wanted to read a story to me...we played puzzles and did act out stories in her room.

Ms. Joyce could see the benefits of home visits before school this year, so she might do it again next year. This home visit made the first day of school more enjoyable for children and the environment more comfortable. In particular, ESL children who did not know much English in the beginning got extra support from the teacher who was already familiar with them.

I will always do that again. It was so enlightening to me. And then it made it easier the first day of school, because I said, "oh, SB had it in her house."...I just brought them into the conversation and their family right at the beginning when SB couldn't talk. I just used the examples from her house. I visited them before the class...the first week before they came to school and I tried to visit everyone. One family I did for two children...they played together a lot, so we did it at one house.

I took a Korean bilingual teacher with me, so she could translate and we did it together. It was funny though...the children they make eye contacts. And they wait for me and then they took my hands...the Korean bilingual teacher would stay and talk to the parents but I go out to play with the child and just I did alone bond with them. It was really good to make the first day of school enjoyable.

I noticed when I visited his home, he had a lot of dinosaurs and this was very special for him. It was a very big interest for him who had low language and

speech delay. But he was just talking and talking about dinosaurs because he was going to be an expert and I was able to say, “you know when I visited your home, how many dinosaurs did you have..., I think you have this one at home.” So we can compare what he had and what I had and then say, “you are an expert in dinosaurs because you have so many at home. Can you share information with your friends? If you can just talk and talk”...so I encourage him to be an expert to just share his knowledge with the rest of his friends.

T: One Korean girl was interested in dancing at her home visit...I tried to find ballet shoes to put in the home center for her. I bought materials that would serve her and set up the space to serve her needs. We were all kind of copying her in that center.

Ms. Joyce not only appreciated the benefits of a home visit, but also incorporated what she learned into her classroom. She placed props from her home visit in the pretend area which was the home center to encourage children’s play through their conversations and stories about the props. For Ms. Joyce, the home visit meaningfully bridged home culture and school. In addition, she could develop play themes which were already familiar or were favorites of the children in pretend play areas, so overall, it comforted and motivated children as they learned.

### Summary

First, Ms. Joyce believed that play was an international and a universal tool to communicate. She mentioned that children from diverse language backgrounds would feel easier trying a new language, English, as they engaged playful activities in a stress-free environment. She pointed out that play was a good medium for both teacher and ESL children to communicate with each other using facial expressions or body gestures. She also used play to expand or increase ESL children’s vocabulary

for their reading and writing. She even acted out the daily routines or directions for ESL children at the beginning of the class, which helped ESL children to know and follow their schedule.

Second, Ms. Joyce thought that play was a natural way to practice a new language and experiment with language and gesture. It could provide a relaxed and comfortable environment for ESL children to learn a new language because she knew that ESL children had to feel comfortable enough to risk using a new language. Moreover, she knew how to use English-speaking children as role models to help ESL children at the beginning of the year, so, children would feel more comfortable saying or asking something during pretend play from their peers in stress-free environments. From her perspective, ESL children might listen to and use vocabularies to communicate with their friends teaching each other while they played, and learning language more effectively than a teacher could teach them.

Third, Ms. Joyce used play for integrating lessons such as literacy through play, math and literacy through play, or science and literacy through play. She believed that children would learn better when the teacher could connect their prior experience in a meaningful context. According to her, children understood the meaning of words or sentences effectively in the authentic context of play such as grocery shopping store, beauty shop, and doctor's office while they read or learned new math or science concepts.

Last, according to Ms. Joyce, ESL children used both English and their native tongue in their play and she encouraged students to keep and practice their home language because she believed that the stronger children were in their home language, the easier it was to learn the second language. For example, she used several Korean children as English translators to communicate with other Korean children who did not speak English at all at the beginning of the year and which benefited both sets of children.

In addition, she visited each child's home before school started to become familiar with the children and their parents. Through this time of conversation, play, and sharing culture such as eating food together, they could develop their relationship and promise their cooperation during the school year. This home visit was helped to make the first day of school more comfortable and enjoyable for the children. ESL children who did not know much English in the beginning got extra support from a teacher who was already familiar with them, providing props obtained on her home visit in pretend play area where she encouraged children's play through their conversation and stories about the props. For her, the home visit experience was a meaningful bridge between home culture and school, and developed play themes in pretend play areas which were already familiar to the children.

### **Her different roles in the play associated with ESL literacy learning**

Ms. Joyce assumed the role of a provider, player, facilitator, helper, and monitor during children's literacy learning through play including children from diverse language backgrounds. Ms. Joyce knew how to scaffold ESL children's literacy development through play. In the beginning, she modeled it with step-by-step guidance and later, she reduced her scaffolding and played with them as a parallel player. At the end, she let children help each other to learn literacy through play.

T: well, my role is kind of facilitating play by setting up the environment and providing the props so that they can have an enriched environment to act out and to act upon the things they are given. So, I am providing hands-on materials and different choices of materials...I mean right now...later in the year, we have so much materials out. It's because at the very beginning, we teach them how to use materials and we help them to be independent to use materials and they change the use of materials, which is great. They expand their knowledge...sort it out and put it away on their own. So, just as a facilitator...to help them meet the objectives...they don't even know their meeting...they don't know there is this list of things that I want to look for. [She is showing me a pre-K guideline.]

T: you have purposes. Let children play and interact with their environment in order to achieve those purposes. However, I kind of monitor the play as well because if it's just play everyday, it's kind of...I want them to stretch their thinking and learning, so I don't want them to just play without purposes...so, purposeful play where the skills are involved. I am kind of monitoring...sometimes, I am just taking notes while children play. To me, play is very important because that's how they achieve the goals that I am setting like by doing, by playing and by acting on their environment.

She believed that her role was an active facilitator, not only observing ESL children's play but also digging in and becoming a part of their play for a moment.

And then she stepped out of their play for a while in order to let children go forward

but she liked to model as much as possible because she thought that modeling required great skill.

In addition, when she provided or introduced new materials in her class or play center, exploration was always first for children and then she guided them to go further.

I: so how did you introduce this material?

T: just show them how it works and then tell them I am going to leave that on the table. Today, we are going to do a couple of new things. I am going to have to walk around the room and show them. There is a new thing in the center. I won't show everything because I want something to be a surprise in order for them to tell me that they found it...Like for the girls, I put some new books in the home center today and I want them to find them out on their own. That's important and they use them more, it's like, "O.K. for the day, here we go", so sometimes I want them to find out and sometimes if I want to teach them how to use it properly, then I will help them later and play along side them.

About modeling or guidance, I see lunch time as a calm time, at the end of the day, we are back in a circle time and I kind of tell them, "oh, a new center is coming", so I kind of get them excited about it and I just sort of model. Like yesterday, I put out new puppets...new finger puppets and hand puppets. And I just showed them, this is the space where they are going to go, so there are like a clean up space and then you take them around the room but then they finish put them back here. I just kind of introduce it in a fun way. And you know to ask them sometimes, switch centers, rotate materials...those puzzles are out again...I put them up and take them out.

T: explorations are always first. Let them learn and let them tell a fact to me, I can see them where they are and then at the beginning of the year, explore, explore and explore and then know that I could make links over here. So at first let them explore with them and then show them to the different purposes that we can use this to make a pattern or you can make something and help and guide them for the next step that it helps their play become more purposeful. And you can see them developmentally where they are and what area you need to help them with to grow.

For Ms. Joyce, explorations were always the first step to learning and knowing new things in her class, especially at the beginning of the year. She provided something new to learn and checked developmentally where her children were and what she needed to do to help them grow. With this observation, she could guide them through the next steps in their play, which became more purposeful.

#### Summary

Ms. Joyce described her role as a provider, player, facilitator, helper, and monitor during children's literacy learning through play including children from diverse language backgrounds. For her, explorations were always the first step to learn and know new things in her class, especially at the beginning of the year. She provided something new to learn and checked to see where her children were developmentally and what she needed to do to help them grow in their literacy learning. With this observation, she could guide them to the next step in literacy learning through play.

### **The Teacher's Practice of Using Play in Her Classroom**

Generally, Ms. Joyce tried to follow the pre-K guidelines for curriculum planning and practice (Texas Education Agency, 1999). She provided various activities relating to literacy learning for all children including those from diverse language backgrounds. Following are descriptions of her practices in using play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds.

Most of the things that I planned used the guidelines in a playful way. The guidelines are from the state and local districts.

### **Use play as a warm-up**

Ms. Joyce used play as a helping tool to involve children in a new concept or learning. She preferred to encourage children to concentrate on literacy learning by approaching them in a relaxed manner. She knew how to open their minds and attract their interest, to eventually engage them in a certain task or work. Moreover, she knew how to transform children's bad moods or unwillingness to be in the classroom into a participatory mood by respecting and supporting their emotions in a playful way. She liked to change or rotate materials in her classroom often to please children and to provide something new and interesting for them to notice. Ms. Joyce preferred to provide new centers or materials to let children initiate and explore the materials, and then she guided children in using the materials when they questioned how it functioned.

### ***Use children's prior experiences***

Understanding children's prior experiences helped involve them in a literacy activity. Around Thanksgiving Day, children were making a paper turkey with colorful feathers and writing what they were thankful for on the feathers.

With the turkey...[I think], I can't remember what the goal was for that particular activity, but that was just a fun way to do our writing...if they can write for themselves, let them write. One boy who had a very high reading

level, he did all the work [reading] by himself, but also had to have us be the writer for him. We do that a lot like that so they can see their own words being expressed in a written form. And they know that the words that we write matched what they say...so that was an exercise to help them write what they're thankful for and let us help them write their message. About guidance, I think I did an example for them and sort of modeled for them. We talk about how we are thankful for our friends...sometimes, when we pass around the stuffed animals and each one of us has a talking turn...we've done that a lot of at the beginning of the year. "Which friend did you play with today? And then the children talk about their friends. "And what you were thankful for?" It was just a real open-ended idea and let them each have a talking turn with the stuffed animal. So by modeling it and doing my own, they are able to see what my group would be like. But, then we always say that it doesn't need to be like mine, make yours how you like. So each person can use different materials to make it. Some children copy exactly...for my friend and for me, but a lot of children just take off and do their own thing, so they are all original. Even though their intent might be the same, they are all different.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 11/25/03)

Ms. Joyce helps each child, understanding her/his prior experience to involve a literacy activity through this hands-on playful activity. As an art activity for Thanksgiving Day, children are writing, 'who would like to say thank you' on turkey feathers.

T: YS (Korean speaking child), who would you like to say thank you?

YS: I don't know.

T: maybe your mom?

YS: no

T: your daddy?

YS: no

T: aha...maybe princess? (with high voice tone)

YS: yes, sleeping beauty.

T: and?

YS: snow white

T: can you think about two more?

YS: Cinderella

T: good. Anybody?

YS: Ariel (with happy smiling)

T: I know YS, you love princesses. Do you want me to write it down or you want to try?

YS: you do it.

T: O.K. but I need your hand on my hand, so we can do it together as a team

Ms. Joyce tried to approach the child YS when she was not fully interested in participating in an activity. Ms. Joyce knew that YS liked princess stories and she used that interest to engage her in a writing activity in a playful way. In addition, Ms. Joyce emphasized the work as team work, so YS did not need to worry about making mistakes or not knowing how to write. Sometimes, ESL children did not catch what they were supposed to do after Ms. Joyce's direction, so she guided them by approaching each ESL child asking questions or encouraging them by understanding each child's characteristics or situation. She already knew that YS always talked about fairy tale stories, so Ms. Joyce played with and helped her to write names of princesses while she was making Thanksgiving feathers.

### *Understand and integrate children's emotions/feelings*

Classroom practice (Field notes: 2/9/04)

At the library center, SB (Korean speaking child) and YS (Korean speaking child) don't feel good today and they want to rest.

T: you can take a rest in the library sofa. You may bring your blankets and I can read books for you or you may read your library checkout-books.

YS: I don't feel good today. I am sick.

T: (pretending to write something on her hand and giving it to YS)

SH: Ms. Joyce, why don't you write really something on the paper and give it to her instead of pretending to write.

T: O.K. that's a good idea. I will write a prescription for YS. (She is writing, 'take a rest, drink lots of water and sleep.')

YS & SB: (hold a prescription from Ms. Joyce and try to read words)

Ms. Joyce did not ignore these children's bad moods. Instead, she tried to understand their feelings and invited them to read books while they rested on the floor with blankets and pillows. She knew how to support the children's emotions

and even used their bad moods in a learning activity by role playing a doctor. Play was a good medium to soothe the children's emotions and help involve them in a learning activity in a cozy atmosphere. She tried to use authentic context to teach some words or sentences (literacy) in a playful fun way. ESL children may understand situations and learn English better in a real context.

### Summary

Ms. Joyce used play as a helping tool to involve children in a new concept or learning. She preferred to encourage children to concentrate on literacy learning by approaching them in a relaxed manner. She knew how to attract their interest, so she could eventually engage them in tasks or work. Moreover, she knew how to transform children's bad moods into participatory moods by respecting and supporting their emotions in a playful way and she understood how to convert the bad mood into a learning activity by role playing. Play served as a good medium for soothing children's emotions and helping involve them in a learning activity in a supportive atmosphere. She also tried to use an authentic context to teach literacy in a playful fun way knowing that ESL children may learn English better in a real context.

### **Use play as 'game' or 'trick'**

We play games about reading and they always love pictures with words. I have these little books that I purchased as centers for them by theme. And I will hold up those and say, "oh you can tell me what it says"...They love it. And "You can't trick us, we are so smart" they say. "We can read that the

whole book.” “You can? Oh my goodness!” So they think they are reading from what they want and they are...picture reading. Then they are learning that that word there has meaning because I just told you the same day. So you’re just helping them to identify talk and later as they learn letters and sounds and then they can start using invented spelling on their own...That’s where we are right now.

Whenever Ms. Joyce introduced literacy-related activities, she liked to use a term, ‘game’ or ‘trick,’ to encourage children to concentrate on their learning in a joyful way. Even though she used worksheets to teach opposite words, she was saying, “this is an opposite word game,” so she treated the task more like play to attract the children. In addition, she made literacy games, such as HEART game, the question box, and question of the day from ideas she got at workshops or in magazines to teach literacy in a meaningful and authentic context by incorporating them with other subject matter such as math or science.

The opposite word game was a work sheet with pictures drawn on it about ‘in’ and ‘out.’ Teaching opposite words is one of our guidelines. Children should learn several categories and words. It’s a great book. I think that was around Valentines...It was a Valentine’s work sheet...It had two pictures like you said, flowers in the vase or out of the vase...And puppy is in the box or out of the box...There were four pictures for each opposite, so 8 pictures total. And the pictures were similar so they get them, sort them, and classify them. It gives them a chance to cut and glue and paste and sort in classify according to opposite words, so it meets several guidelines. While they were doing it, I can see...oh...who needs a little bit of help or who is getting it quickly. SB, a Korean girl...you know she loves opposite words. Sometimes, we use work sheets to extend the concept.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 1/12/04)

T: I will show you another game. It’s an opposite game. (She is holding a worksheet paper and explaining how to use it. You should sort between ‘in’ and ‘out.’ There are four pictures of a horse in the barn and a horse is out of the barn, a straw is in the cup and a straw is out of the cup, a flower is in the

vase and a flower is out of the vase, and a dog is in the box and out of the box.) You may cut and paste them on the paper and color them. I will put the game on that table.

Ms. Joyce liked to use the term ‘game’ during her literacy activities serving children from diverse language backgrounds. This made children look at the task not as an intimidating subject, but as an interesting game with which to be involved. She encouraged children to be engaged in their literacy learning in a playful mood. Even during cleaning up time, Ms. Joyce used the word, ‘game,’ “how long does it take? Are you ready? Now 10 minutes before 10. I am going to watch the clock.” Then she was also cleaning up toys with fast playful body motions. Following are specific examples of using play as a ‘trick’ or ‘game.’

### *Name wall*

Ms. Joyce knew the importance of environmental print for her children, so she tried to put these print-enriched materials everywhere in the classroom. For example, she used a name wall for children’s reading and writing activities putting their names and other friends’ names under each Alphabet letter on the wall. Recently, she had wanted to move this name wall down to the children’s eye level near the home center, so she could encourage children to play games and puzzles with their name cards.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/22/04)

T: good. This is not new, as B said, I put this game in the beginning of our class...One more thing, do you remember name wall over there? Now, it is behind of the home center, so you can attach name cards by yourself. As an

example, where should I put this? (She is holding a picture of monkey and word)

C: that's monkey...um put it under 'M'

T: Monkey, monkey, m, m, m.

The name wall was very important for Ms. Joyce to have in her classroom because children could use it for many purposes such as writing or copying their names in order to send a letter to a friend. Providing as much print enriched material in her classroom was motivated by her concern for children including children from diverse language backgrounds. For example, she encouraged children to read print in different ways throughout the centers, such as from messages, newsletters, advertisements and menus because she believed that children needed to explore different written messages through various playful fun ideas.

I am getting ready to move their 'name word' wall over because we have a new wall coming, but I was putting the writing kind of close to the children. And I remind them that there are different places in the room that they can find their friends' names. Like their words are displayed during the circle time, their names are on the carpet and their names are posted on the word wall to find the friends' names or ask their friends, "how do you spell your name?" They love making pictures for their friends if someone is not feeling well or has hurt finger. Let's make them a picture and write them a card...in that way, showing them that in writing. You can write for different purposes and you can write to get your idea across and you can write a message to a friend like a letter for a Valentine. Writing...you can read print in different ways throughout the centers and throughout the day...we read messages and newsletters and advertisements and menus. Print occurs throughout their day and throughout our life in different ways. That's just different ideas, and different fun and playful writing activities where they get to explore the written messages and practice writing.

Moreover, Ms. Joyce put the name wall in front of the home center (pretend play area), so children could assess it and play with it by themselves, and in addition, she could encourage children to practice expressing themselves in English.

### ***Pocket word***

Ms. Joyce liked to use various letter-picture card games to teach and to get feedback about children's knowledge of letters and words. For the ESL children, she tried to make lessons visual and concrete to teach reading and writing using play.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/22/04)

T: this is a game. I am gonna mix up the cards which have written a picture and its word. This is a letter pocket game. I picked a 'hat.' Where should I put it in the pocket? Starting with h..h..h..

C: (in Unison), 'H'

Classroom practice (Field notes: 4/28/04)

Ms. Joyce prepares written cards, 'S' for soaps, sunglasses, sunflowers and suitcases; T for tool box, television, ticket, tiger and teeth; and V for vulture, violin and Valentine with pictures backside and asks children to place cards showing the picture side. There are word card pockets sectioned by these 'S, T, and V.'

T: Let's do our game. I will pick up and show one written card and you will come to the front and sort the pictures under the each starting letter.

T: I choose this one (shows a card written, 'soap' without sound not showing a backside picture)

C: (raise their hands and saying) 'S'

T: who is going to help me to put it in the pocket? Jenny...would you?  
(Taking a turn to put the letter card in the pocket)

She played this pocket word game with children showing cards which had pictures on the back. To make the game more challenging, she did not show the picture side

of when she picked up each word card, but she helped children to read and name words giving picture clues whenever children did not know them well.

***Game project: how many letters are in your name?***

Ms. Joyce made a game out of ‘how many letters are in your name?’ using a paper box as a game project. Using each child’s name in a real game situation, she encouraged children to count the letters in their names, say the number of letters, read other friends’ names and organize their names according to the number of letters. This game was connected with both reading and writing activities in a practical way by using their names and comparing them with others.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 1/20/04)

T: where are you gonna find your name? If you want to find your name today, I am using this box. This is a game project. (She is holding a yellow paper box, which is written on ‘how many letters are in your name? On top of this paper box there are written, 2 letters, 3 letters, 4 letters, 5 letters, 6 letters, 7 letters and 8 letters.) I want RJ to think about your full name, Richardo. YS (Korean speaking child), do you want to be YS or Hannah? J (Chinese speaking child), do you want to be J or Belle?

SY (Korean speaking child): I have 6 letters

T: yes, count your name. Some of you already know and just look at the paper for counting...it’s good. Let’s read this chart. Can someone help me to read this chart?

C: (read the title of the game) how many letters are in your name?

T: S. would you go first? Here is your name paper (shows a name card) and how many letters are in your name? Can you tape it on this chart?

T: SH, how many?

SH (Korean speaking child): 5.

T: can you tape it?

SH: yes.

T: put your hand on my hand, we are a team, we can do it together, D.

B (Korean speaking child): why YS is Hannah?

T: she watches 'Barney show' at home and she likes the name, Hannah in the story, so she decided to go by Hannah.

T: I can see something is equal.

B: 5 letters and 6 letters are equal.

T: SB, can you come over to the chart and compare numbers?

SB (Korean speaking child): four friends have five letters in their names.

T: O.K. How many friends have 7 letters?

C: 6

T: let's count it. One, two, three...are you ready? Which column has the most friends? Which column has the least numbers?

C: 6 letters are the most and 2 letters are least.

SB: no, zero is lower than letter 2

T: good. How many letters are zero?

C: 3 letters and 8 letters in the chart.

T: in a minute, during center time, you will practice your upper and lower case letters in your name. Look! SY's name card. Capital letter, big letter, S and little letter oo and big letter Y and little letter oung, so you can trace your name until your name card into a rainbow name card with many color markers.

It was a game for both native-speaking and ESL children to investigate their own and their friends' names by looking at letters, counting letters, and comparing their names with others. They also could check the concept of 'zero' through this playful game project which was what Ms. Joyce wanted to teach them.

### ***The question box: 20 questions***

The question box: 20 questions was a literacy activity where Ms. Joyce encouraged children to create 20 questions to figure out what was inside of the box. It was a guessing game and also an integrated game that combined literacy and math skills. In the beginning, children including children from diverse language backgrounds were not able to form a question but after they played, 'The question box' several times, they naturally learned how to form a question and also how to

count to 20 to play this game. In addition, whenever children asked a question, Ms. Joyce used tally marks on the board to show how many questions had been asked and how many more could be asked which helped the children learn that numbers could be written in a different way.

It [play] helps language, literacy, and math skills because we do it in order to get them to combine two things at once. We are getting them to learn how to ask a question to find out some information, and also I am using a math technique to show tally marks to show how numbers can be written in a different way so they see tally marks. We are kind of combining two things at once and they love it, "oh, we are so close." They just love it. Sometimes I make a harder one so maybe I have to give them a clue, but they are really done so well. And once again, it's a turn taking technique so let everyone have a turn to ask a question and help each other. Listen to each other's question...sometimes, I make it connect to what we are doing like putting a dinosaur in there. And I think I used a stegosaurus and taught them a stegosaurus song. The other day, I used a clock. NT asked the last question, which was the 20<sup>th</sup>. She asked the right question to get the answer. So it's a great game that meets the guidelines.

#1 Classroom practice (Field notes: 2/3/04)

T: listen with your ears. (She is shaking a box) Can you hear?

SB (Korean speaking child): is it a puppy?

G: is it something we can use in the classroom?

B (Korean speaking child): is it a horse?

J (Chinese speaking child): is it these reading glasses?

SY (Korean speaking child): is it a dinosaur?

T: yes, it is a dinosaur. Which dinosaur is it?

RJ: is it raptor?

G: how about stegosaurus?

T: yes! You are right! The big dinosaur is coming (with husky and scary voice.) As you know, next week...on Tuesday, we are going to go to the dinosaur detective museum

T: are you going to close your eyes? (She brought lots of dinosaur figures.)

Boys and girls, I am going to put out these to the block center. Dinosaurs didn't live with us. I put all the books about dinosaurs in the block center, so you can look at these for habitat for dinosaurs and more...

T: Yesterday, they didn't know how to make a question. They said, it's my ballet shoes...or it's a bear...but today, oh...they are very smart. After I helped them how to make a question, they started to ask questions with the right form.

#2 Classroom practice (Field notes: 2/11/04)

T: are you ready for the 20 questions? Remember this is a tricky question.

C: (raise their hands)

SY (Korean speaking child): is it bones? No. (The Korean bilingual teacher marks tally marks on the white board)

B (Korean speaking child): is it heart paper?

T: yes.

SB (Korean speaking child): did you cut with white and black paper?

T: no, but it's a good question.

B: is it Valentine's paper?

T: yes.

G: does it have heart on the paper?

T: yes.

J (Chinese speaking child): is it Valentine's card?

T: yes. (saying, "choo", "choo", "choo" and "whick." "I am closing the gate." She is counting numbers with her fingers)

I: is it sparkling?

T: yes (with a high tone)

SB: is it Ms. Joyce's Valentine?

T: no.

SH (Korean speaking child): I think, it's me.

T: how do we ask it in a question?

SH: is it SH's Valentine's card?

T: yes.

#3 Classroom practice (Field notes: 4/2/04)

T: I have a trick for you. Eyes on the teacher and think about a question. Is it \_\_\_\_\_? You can ask me color, size, cost...there are two things.

J (Chinese speaking child): is it red?

B (Korean speaking child): is it brown?

T: yes.

G: is it blue?

T: no.

G: is it Easter egg?

T: no, not an Easter egg.

YS (Korean speaking child): is it pet food?

T: no.

SY (Korean speaking child): is it colorful? Rainbow? Mixed color?  
T: no.  
SH (Korean speaking child): is it going to be in our center today?  
T: it's a tricky question. Not in the center, but on the table. We will use it for today.  
SB (Korean speaking child): is it brown?  
T: yes.  
YS: is it a bag of something?  
T: yes, it is in a bag.  
G: is it a bag of toys in it?  
T: no, it is not a toy.  
J: is it sweater?  
T: no.  
S: is there two?  
T: yes, there are two.  
SY: is it treasure bag?  
T: no...how many questions can we ask?  
C: 5  
A: is it farm animals?  
RJ: is it marker?  
T: I think, I have to give you another clue.  
One bag has something brown in it and one bag has something white in it.  
We are going to use it after we read a book. (Finally, she shows one bag of brown beans and one bag of white beans)

Ms. Joyce wanted to teach the concept of questions and provide speaking and listening opportunities with others in a playful game format. She encouraged children including ESL children to practice asking questions and expressing themselves in English. According to her, 'the question of the box: 20 questions' was an interesting and effective game to help children form a question, guess and think about an object, and develop logic to ask further questions, remembering previous facts.

### *Word games*

Ms. Joyce provided various kinds of picture-word matching games with different materials in the manipulative center during center time which was play time. She believed that children would see a print and picture and then try match them. Through these playful and fun activities, children could learn letters or words naturally, understanding directionality, that prints went from left to right and top to bottom. Moreover, she wanted to use the word games in a noncompetitive way, so she worked with children as a team or in cooperative pair works. An example was 'HEART' game with letter dice made by Ms. Joyce based on a literacy workshop she had attended. It was a game where children could roll dice for a letter in order to make the word, ['H, E, A, R, T'.] Later, Ms. Joyce also used this game as a model to spell the word, 'heart' for them. She regarded this 'HEART' game as a great example of cooperative literacy games that children could learn and play together.

They put pictures and words together. They learn quickly that the picture matches the word. They are just for fun and playful activities. 'How do children see a print and a picture, and know that they go together.' And then you can check and see your child that...they run their fingers left to right and you see that they have directionality. They know that the print goes left to right and then know the print goes top to bottom. Now, I see some of the students playing teachers like, "be the teacher, we will do this together" and they play school with them. But usually they do pair-up and work together as well as a team. So it encourages them to practice what they've learned and do it in a fun way and then share with their friends. They share their ideas with their friends...playing games not in a competitive way.

Heart game: use play [game] not in a competitive way: it's not a winning game, it's a helping game with a letter dice. You can make a game competitive and you can make a game noncompetitive. I said, "it is not a winning game. It's helping game" because the Korean bilingual teacher was

finished this game first, now she can help me so just modeling them in a different way they use the game. It is a word game, it's spelling, rolling for a letter and the marking the letter. And after that I kind of glad to see that somebody wanted to spell 'heart' and I asked, "what do you think you can go to find that word in the room?" "Heart game" so they get the heart game out and use the game as the model to spell and I make several of them. I make several words like that and spelling boards such as sheep, farmer... with a cube. It is a great game. It's a cooperative game that they play together. Any kind of literacy game that is short and fun...we can play together.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 2/11/04)

Heart game: there is a big game board, on which 'HEART' is written on the top and the bottom. There are two dice. On each die, H, E, A, R, T, and Free are written.

T: let's play together. (The classroom aide is her partner to play the game. They are sitting across and the children are surrounding them. All the children are watching the game.) What does it say? What's the beginning sound like? H...Helmet, Hello Kitty, hate, hard, hug....

C: (repeat words starting with h) H...Helmet, Hello Kitty, hate, hard, hug....

T: I am gonna roll the cube. Thank you team. I have 'A' (she puts a coin on the letter, 'R' on the big board intentionally.)

C: no! that's not 'A', it's 'R'

T: everybody makes a sign with your hand, 'T' (She is modeling how to make 'T' with her hands.)

T: the other team finished first, but it's not a winning game, it's a helping game so we can finish this game together. S., will you roll for me?

C: (children are taking turns to roll the cube and they are ready to play the game by themselves.)

She used this game also as an assessment by letting children correct her errors during their play. In addition, she called this game not a winning game but a helping game, so ESL children may learn words through noncompetitive play in a non-threatening environment.

## Summary

Whenever Ms. Joyce introduced literacy-related activities, she used the term, ‘game’ or ‘trick,’ to encourage children to concentrate on their learning in a joyful way. Even though she used worksheets to teach opposite words, she called it “an opposite word game,” so she treated the task more like play to attract children. This made children look at the task not as an intimidating subject, but as an interesting game to be involved in. In addition, she made some literacy games, such as the HEART game and the question box, to teach literacy in a meaningful and authentic context by incorporating it with other subjects like math or science.

As another example, she used a name wall for children’s reading and writing activities, putting their names and other friends’ names under each Alphabet letter on the wall. She moved the name wall in front of the home center (pretend play area) and put it at the children’s eye level, to children could access it easily to practice and play with it by themselves. Providing many print-enriched materials was motivated by her concern for children including children from diverse language backgrounds.

Likewise, she used various letter-picture card games such as pocket words to teach and gain feedback about children’s knowledge of letters and words. For the ESL children, she tried to make lessons visual and concrete in order to teach reading and writing using play. She also made a game of ‘how many letters are in your name?’ from a paper box. Using each child’s name in a real game situation, she encouraged children to count their names, say the number of letters, read other

friends' names and organize their names according to the number of letters. ESL children could investigate their own and their friends' names by looking at letters, counting letters, and comparing their name with others. In addition, they could check the math concept of 'zero' in a playful literacy activity.

The question box was a literacy activity where Ms. Joyce encouraged children to form 20 questions to figure out what was inside of the box. It was a guessing game as well as an integrated game that combined literacy and math skills. She encouraged children including ESL children to practice asking questions and express what they wanted to say in English.

Ms. Joyce provided various kinds of picture-word matching games with different materials during center time. She believed that children would see a print and a picture and then try to match them. Through these playful and fun activities, children could learn letters or words naturally and the directionality that print went from left to right and top to bottom. Moreover, she wanted to use these word games not in a competitive way but as cooperative work, so she worked with children as a team.

She also used certain games as an assessment by letting children correct her errors during their play and called the game a helping game, so ESL children might learn words through non-competitive play within a non-threatening environment.

### **Use play for integrated lessons**

Ms. Joyce thought that children were ready to be involved whenever learning and play were combined with, for example, math, counting numbers, reading, or writing letters or sequences. She valued integrated learning not only for teaching subject matter but also for helping children obtain knowledge easily from something already familiar to them. For her, play was a good medium to teach literacy; literacy and math; literacy, math and science; as integrated lessons. Ms. Joyce liked to use play in a combined lesson, such as counting numbers, reading and writing letters or sequences.

I like the way that let children find new items to use for learning in a fun way. Children are ready to be involved, or ready to learn whenever the learning and play are combined together such as math, counting numbers, read and write letters or sequences. Yes, I like the way of incorporated learning because kids can get the knowledge easily when something is already familiar to them. For example, last semester, I brought my dog. My husband brought my dog to the class, so they have already touched his fur. I could remind them of the feeling of touching the fur and of the animal lesson. Children will learn easily in a fun way. Winter would be a good theme to teach about ice, cold, warm, fur...these words. Children will learn in a fun way doing activities such as touching ice, cotton, and matching games, which are fun activities to help children to learn math, science and literacy.

T: I like this idea [grocery shopping store] because it's integrated...math, and literacy, and also play. As a math activity, children calculate money and sort fruits or vegetables by reading labels. Making a shopping list by looking at and reading books and copying the words...it's great. Today was more like...let them explore first. I will introduce more. (Ms. Joyce is showing me two papers. One is a paper to use in beauty shop play on which is written, I want my hair (with pictures and words) curly, strait, pony tail, pigtails, braided, other ideas? Children could mark on each hairstyle. And the other paper is a schedule where children could write their names and reasons to visit the beauty shop.)

Moreover, she believed that children would learn easily in a fun way when their play was focused on a theme. Especially, she named a grocery store as pretend play which was a good example of integrated lessons, because it was a lesson that combined calculating money, sorting items, reading labels, making a shopping list, and reading and copying words in books.

***Question of the day: literacy and math through play***

Ms. Joyce used ‘Question of the day’ at least three times a week in the morning circle time. It was a game-like play activity where children could join in and learn a lesson by answering questions. In this activity, children read their names on clothespin, sorting the pins into information under ‘yes’ or ‘no’ heading using the clips like a bar graph. Basically, Ms. Joyce extended this play into counting numbers, sorting colors, using Ben diagram, and writing sentences.

The ‘Question of the day’ says, “Are you wearing red?” and we are going to answer yes or no, and then we are going to look at it as we graph using our clips like bar graphs. We are also going to see what it looks like using pie graphs, and then I am going to take that same information and I extend it and teach them how to use a Venn diagram. I am going to use red and blue hula hoops, and I am going to sort the children. If they are wearing red, I am going to sort them to one side, and then I am going to ask the people wearing blue to come to the other side. Naturally, I am hoping some of the children would be wearing red and blue and if they are not, I will switch to green and I have a green hula hoop over there. I want them to realize, “hey, I can’t be over here if you want me to be over there” and if they are wearing both I want them to come up with the idea (maybe they will or maybe I will have to guide them) that the people who are wearing both red and blue should be in the middle. And then we are going to look at where the hula hoops are and what that looks like, and we are going to sit down where we are and we are going to take our names. I am going to put them in the hula hoop to show the

Venn diagram. It is an integrated lesson with literacy, math concepts, and sorting through a game-like question as a fun activity.

#1 Classroom practice (Field notes: 2/27/04)

T: O.K. Now, for the 'question of the day.' Are you ready? The question is, 'Are you wearing red?' If you say yes, I will put the clothespin with your name on it on the left side of the board under 'Yes.' If you say no, I will put your clothespin in the right side of this board under 'No.'

T: C. Are you wearing red? J (Chinese speaking child), are you wearing red? (She is asking each child, putting the clothespin on the question board.

T: let's count them

T & C: one, two, three...ten. Ten friends are wearing 'Red.' Let's count red side. One, two...seven. Seven friends are not wearing 'Red.'

T: O.K. now we are gonna play a game today. If you said, 'yes,' please come over here and sit down on the mat...J. (Chinese speaking child), SB. (Korean speaking child), C., and S...I want you to stay together and hold this red hula-hoop.

SB, C, & S: (follow the direction and sit on the mat holding the red hula-hoop)

T: now, if you are not wearing 'Red,' come stay with Ms. Joyce and hold the 'blue' hula-hoop. Wait a minute. We need red here...blue over here then you, J., have red and blue...it's mixed up. What do you do?

J: I am saying that teacher, you can hold blue and red.

T: O.K. boys and girls...everybody, I want everybody to sit and make a big circle. Hold each other's hand. (She is distributing name cards on which children's names are written)

T: did everybody get one? This is called, 'Venn diagram.' We had children who were wearing red, blue, and red & blue...we are gonna put your name card in each red and blue circle. If you are wearing both blue and red, put it in the middle.

T: G., where would you go? Say why.

G: I will put my name in red because I am wearing red.

T: where are you gonna put your name? why did you put your name here?...SY (who is wearing neither red nor blue as a Korean speaking child), should we put your name in the blue circle?

SY: no

T: should we put your name in the red circle?

SY: no

T: then red and blue?

SY: no...out of Venn diagram.

SB: I want to put here (showing the space under the Venn diagram.)

T: but, you have red and blue, so you'd better put your name card in the middle.

T: boys and girls, let's count our names and let's write them down. Let's write them in red ink. (She is writing down the following sentences while she is speaking to them)

"3 friends are wearing red"

"4 friends are wearing blue"

"8 friends are wearing both red and blue"...

G: word space and period...

T: what do we say about SY?

C: out

SB: you can do...one out.

T: C., can you say it again?

C: one friend is not wearing red or blue.

T & C: word—space—word—space—word—period.

#2 Classroom practice (Field notes: 2/9/04)

Question of the day: there is a big paper written on 'Question of the day' and on top of the each side, there are written, 'No' in red and 'Yes' in blue. In addition, there are blue and red papers for later pie graph activity.

SH had a great idea about Hello Kitty.

T: can you turn it into a question? Do you like 'Hello Kitty'?

T: how many words can you hear? Here is our star pointer. (stick with a cushy star)

C: five words.

T: can you follow me? Do space, you space, like space, Hello space, and Kitty space and question mark, right?

C: (follow teachers.)

T: (asks the question, do you like Hello Kitty and mark how many children are in yes or in no putting their cloze name tags on each side of the paper. Children are answering with a piece of blue and red paper.) Everybody stand up with a piece of paper and get down on your knees. (She spreads children with blue and red papers on the floor by shaping a circle saying), let's count how many people said, no? (children say, five) Let's make sure we have five papers for 'No' how many people said, yes? (children say, six)

T: we are going to draw pie graph. SR (who is late today), do you like Hello kitty?

SR: yes, I like it.

SH (Korean speaking child): add on. It's seven now for yes.

T: SH, how did you do that?

SH: you had six in your head and then you add one more.

T: so, I need more what color?

C: blue

T: (making a pie graph and showing it to children.)

Ms. Joyce made a lesson visual by providing a yes, no chart and showing them a sentence, “Question of the day: Do you like Hello Kitty?” In addition, at the end, she connected this activity with writing sentences with the children participating under her guidance. According to her, ESL children may feel more comfortable trying the new language and new concepts such as a Ven Diagram or a pie graph by watching visualized lessons. It was not simply a game only for the literacy lesson, but was also related to math activity, using Ven Diagram, pie graph, and sorting. She was able to integrate literacy and math lessons together nicely in the context of play, so children could enjoy their learning more.

***Use toy machines such as alphabet frog doll or writing desk: literacy through play***

I love LeapFrog...they make the best ABC materials. Especially, for ESL children can hear the voice, ‘A’ (low pitch), ‘a’ (high pitch) in the froggy voice...it’s very unique and it’s so playful and it’s hands-on. They can do it one to one or with the friends. They are colorful and writing...I love their products. I brought two more...you can see. They [children] love their products and I do too. One is writing and the other is listening and they have different categories where they can learn to spell three letter words. If they know the letters, they are ready to run sound. Functions... With play, it...had many functions as one toy. Good for your money. It’s good for me...so many functions with one activity. It’s a little bit loud sometimes, but I don’t mind that because it’s so inviting.

Ms. Joyce liked to use Leapfrog ABC materials for children to play with and learn letters and words. She said that ESL children could hear in the voice different

tones of English, for example, ‘A’ (low pitch), ‘a’ (high pitch) in a froggy voice. According to her, children liked to use these materials to practice listening, reading, and writing by touching pads, or writing something on the pads because it was a unique, playful and hands-on activity. She also mentioned that this toy had various functions, making it quite inviting even though it was a little loud. She usually put these toys in her manipulative center but sometimes, she brought them to the worktables during center time to encourage children to use them.

***Reading a book: literacy and math through play***

Ms. Joyce read a book, Goldilocks and Three Bears and used playful facial expressions and body motions—a big body motion for papa bear, a small body motion for baby bear—and encouraged children to follow her. Children could learn the concept of size by playing a sorting activity of size: small/medium/big bears, beds and chairs during the picture book reading.

That was a perfect book, Goldilocks and Three Bears for helping to learn the math concept. Size...for pre-K, we learn small, medium and small, medium, big and they learned to classify into different sizes and that book just lends itself because everything comes into three, the chairs, beds, and porridges. Everything comes in sizes, small, medium and large. So we read the book, but often if I can involve the children, and let them help me act out or act out for them, then they understand it and they can make a connection quickly. And then we did a sorting activity where they had baggy full of their own materials...and they sort of bears, and the beds, and the chairs, and porridges into small, medium and large categories, so it’s just furthering the story, Goldilocks and Three Bears. Sometimes, you can find a right book and a right story that helps you teach particular concepts...that was just perfect one. I was teaching sizes and the relationship with small, medium and large. If

you can tie it to literature and integrate into the literature story with the math concept, it's just so much more playful and fun, so I really like to do that. I like to buy a lot of math books and a lot of the books that learn by themselves. I don't know you've noticed that that particular book had pictures so that the children...it was level one reader and it was a big book. They could go back to read it by themselves without much help by following the pictures and the story lines. So anytime you can integrate literacy, math, science, and social study all together. It helps me teach, and gives me main focus, and helps the lesson.

Ms. Joyce wanted to teach the concept of size: small, medium and large, and the concept of different voices: papa, mama, and baby from a picture book, so ESL children could participate in picture book reading in a fun and playful way and look at different sizes of beds, chairs, and porridges during reading. Moreover, she mentioned that it is important for teachers to provide the proper level of books for children's independent reading and suggested that big books might help children follow the pictures and the story lines easily by inviting them to go back and read books by themselves.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 12/11/03)

T: we are going to read a book, Goldilocks and Three Bears. This book is special. It has pictures instead of words, so you can help me to read this book. (There are three pictures of papa, mama, and baby bears instead of words on the first page). Whenever the teacher reads pictures of three bears along with written story, she encourages children to make their hands to show different size of papa, mama, and baby bears.

C: (following her directions laughing at each other).

T: (while the teacher reads a book, she acts out three bears using different voice and expressing emotion through playful body movement.)

T: the three bears come home and saying, someone's been eating my porridge...you think, they go to their room?

C: (children are raising their hands to talk about the story.)

T: you think they are scared of?

SB (Korean speaking child): I think, they will go to the living room.

G: I think, they will go to the bedroom

T: everybody, let's make an angry face and voice of papa bear together. Mama bear...she is worrying, baby bear is crying by saying that someone was sitting on my chair and...broke it. Here she is...Goldilocks woke up and saw three angry bears. She run and run and run...let's pretend she is running fast. She never came back.

T: you know what, did you notice of the right size of furniture: beds, chairs? Small chair for baby bear and medium size chair for mama bear... (She is holding a paper, which is divided with three areas: small, medium, and large) It's like a puzzle, look! Can you help me read small, medium and large? So, where should I put on the baby chair? Look at the mama bear, where does she go? I want SB to come and point out the small one...small porridge, small bed...I am going to mix them up and let you pick up the right size of porridge, bed, and chair to glue and attach on the paper. When you finish your sorting, please write your name and then you can color. Which size do you want to choose?

SH (Korean speaking child): (she is using a small lunch paper box to make a papa bear and his chair. She is attaching papa bear's lower body near the flipping side of the paper box.)

T: SH, you have a great idea, can you tell me why did you make it like that?

SH: because papa bear can lean on the chair...like a reclining chair.

Ms. Joyce was going to teach the concept of size: small, medium and large in a fun and playful way. She has a warm concern for ESL children, so she tries to call out their names and copy their ideas and let them help others and use them as a role model. She always appreciates on SH's new idea and encourage others to copy her idea by getting her permission. She said, SH's idea is always one step further than their peers...she is so smart.

Ms. Joyce had such a special concern for children from diverse language backgrounds that she called out their names, copied their ideas, getting permission from them, or let them be helpers/role models during a book reading using playful body motions and hands-on activities. The book, Goldilocks and Three Bears was

very inviting for ESL children to read by themselves because it was a picture book and was big in size. According to her, this lesson integrated literacy, math, science, and social study which helped her to teach and focus on the lesson.

***Theme teaching: literacy, math, and science through play***

To illustrate theme teaching integrating reading, sequencing, opposite words, story telling, and guessing all together for children including children from diverse language backgrounds, Ms. Joyce used playful hand-on activities. For example, after reading several stories such as The Hat and The Mitten several times, each time emphasizing a different aspect, she connected this story with other subject lessons such as math (counting animals) and science (building ice castle and snow) under a winter and snow theme. Ms. Joyce and the children talked about hibernation and animals' clothes (fur) to connect with a science lesson. And then they experimented with putting their hands in cold water to learn the feeling of cold while thinking about staying warm, comparing summer and winter. Likewise, she usually tried to put out props under the themes for each center. She said, "if you are reading a book about dinosaurs, you should have props available such as dinosaur figures, building materials, and books that could be used for further connections such as making a pattern of dinosaurs."

We reread the story several times and sometimes, I would be gathering what they told me what happen. So we reread the story several times and...with the first reading, I just read it to them, and then we sequenced the story and then we started to look at our sequence strip and remember...and just tell the

story by looking at our strip of animals, and then we reread for play and then we read for another intent...we used it for opposite words: hot/cold, "the mitten was soft/hard." We did an activity with opposite words from that story. We did I think 4-5 activities. She has a wonderful web-site and I sort of visited her web-site and then I got something that was from 'Mailbox Magazine' that quoted from the story. We did the math activities as well as...some literature and math activities...and as well we did our science activities with building ice castles and snow and going to see snow. She did another one, The Hat and several winter books that I read. We talked about hibernation and animals and the other books that we kind of said that animals don't wear clothes...it kind of went to the winter and snow theme and we were able to make several connections by the use of her stories, The Hat and The Mitten. I really like her stories. There are other stories...she usually...she makes the borders of the page and she tells what happens previously and what's still going on and what's next. So it's great to predict and see. They began to look at the side and borders to predict what happened next.

We did real object touching and playing in order to learn fur is soft, which was related with the theme, 'winter.' After, we read stories such as The Mitten and The Hat. I think that was kind of a science activity and a little experiment to teach them winter concepts that there was a story we read along with this that animals don't wear clothes and how long they stay hibernating in winter and they use their fur and fat so we kind of set up an experiment where they put their hands in cold water like...for people, what it feels like with cold water. And then I kind of tried to put fur and fat in one of the baggies, so they could see...hands-on experience...the hand is much warmer in that side and then we talked about what people need to stay warm in winter and then you can brainstorm about that. We did lots of activities around that. We did with some UT students...we took a whole bunch of clothing and we said...we are dressing two children...and then two children came up and we were dressing this person for winter and this person for summer. So we looked at each item and we went with the clothes and then by the end of dressing them we had someone dressed for summer and someone dressed for winter and anytime you can choose the contrast for the children. That helps them to sort or classify into groups and it's always great that you can tie it with literature/mathematics or literature/science...just more integrated and it helps them link the connection much more quickly. It is much more playful and it makes sense and it helps them to make a connection.

We can meet the guidelines and we can stretch it and integrate our math, language and literacy activities using themes. And it helps children make connections faster, so usually we are pretty thematic and use props and toys to further our ideas about themes. Themes or skills will be consistent while children play with props and toys. Following is a classroom example of a theme teaching, The Mitten story.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 1/12/04)

T: first, we will read a story, The Mitten by Jan Brett. I like the author very much. Her dream was writing and drawing books for children. Your job is looking at the animals checking which animal came first and second...let's count the animals before the story. On the cover, how many animals does it have?

C: 8

T: ...baba is knitting. Everyone, pretend to knit...keep knitting...(she is pretending to knit something)

T: who do you see first? Mole? Owl?

SB (Korean speaking child): when she go in there, she can't get out because she is so big.

T: you think, it will be stuck there?

YS (Korean speaking child): it is fun, if one hand is broken...

T: ...bear is bigger than fox. B, do you think, bear would try to go into the mitten or not?

B (Korean speaking child): he may go in.

T: (whenever she reads each animal's story, she pretends to mimic the animal's voice and situation with facial and body motion and children love it. Ms. Joyce's voice is getting louder and she is using with a lot of body motion when she reads the climax, "Chew" the mitten is up in the sky. Nikky found the mitten finally...chew...

C: giggling and laughing and following the last moment, 'chew'...

T: one mitten is big and one mitten is small. Everybody stretched the mitten and it got bigger. On the table, I put paper-masks of owl, mole, badger, hedgehog, rabbit, fox, and bear and mouse. We are gonna see who was the first animal in the very beginning to at the end. You may color, cut and put the animals in the paper band. Who is the second? Rabbit...who came last? Where was the mouse?

C: on bear's mouse

T: if you forget, you can look at the book here or ask your friend. Who was the first?...who was the last? If you have all the animals, let's count them.

C: one, two, three...eight.

SB: oh...mitten small, mitten big...opposite word!

SY (Korean speaking child): teacher, St. Claus gave me a rabbit toy.

T: do you want to bring it and show it to us?

T: I really like Jan Brett. She is a great artist and story maker and illustrator. I am going to use this paper which is from her web site. Just cut the animals and put them in the mitten...it's a fun activity for children. I like incorporated learning like play/math/literacy/story/guessing/sequences all together. Let ESL children get involved in telling a story, predicting and guessing through play...it's effective.

According to Ms. Joyce, cutting the animal papers and putting them into the mitten were a fun activity for children. In addition, she acted out several words or situations and encouraged children to follow her. She liked incorporating lessons of math, literacy, story telling, guessing, sequencing all together through play. She wanted ESL children to be involved in talking, predicting, and guessing about the story through play because she thought that it was an effective way for them to learn. While she read a story, she used demonstrations and models for ESL children in order to incorporate lessons such as math, literacy, guessing, and sequencing activities in a fun way.

***Recipe day: literacy and math through play***

Ms. Joyce started having a recipe day in the spring semester 2004, usually on Fridays. She wrote a recipe on a large piece of white paper and prepared ingredients according to the recipe. She regarded this activity as a playful hands-on activity, and children eagerly awaited the fun of Friday recipe time. Whenever she read a recipe, she showed actual ingredients and acted out motions to teach meanings of words or sentences. In addition, she integrated this playful activity with reading and math,

including counting numbers, reading words, and showing numbers with fingers.

Sometimes, she connected a story book reading to a recipe time, so she made her lesson more integrated and concrete. This also helped ESL children learn vocabulary of ingredients and understand recipe steps.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 4/2/04)

C: today is recipe day.

T: today is fun Friday and we have a new recipe today. It is 'Tens Tens Trail Mix' (Ms, Joyce showed hand motion, 10, 10...pointing each letters on the title.) It will be all one hundred! Let's read recipe together. (While she reads and points each words, she shows each items and pictures and put pictures into the pocket chart) 10 banana chips, 10 walnuts, 10 chocolate chips, 10 pretzels, 10 raisins, 10 peanut butter chips, 10 mixed fruits, 10 pumpkins seeds, 10 pieces of popcorns, 10 sunflower seeds. In the afternoon, we are going to cook...mix and shake it and eat!!!

Classroom practice (Field notes: 4/26/04)

T: today, we are going to read a book titled The Very Hungry Caterpillar.

SY (Korean speaking child): I have it. I have it in Korean with a story tape.

T: really, would you bring it, so everybody can share with it? Would you bring it by tomorrow?

T: ready? Watch my fingers. (She is pointing each word and sentence in a big book) Every body helps me to read...he ate...(Children are taking turns to read the book.)

YS (Korean speaking child): the caterpillar was so hungry.

T: who is the next reader? On Wednesday, he ate...

SY: I don't know (plums)...but he was still hungry.

T: plums.

S: on Friday, he ate 5 oranges

T: on Saturday, he ate through one piece of chocolate cake, one ice cream cone. After he ate everything, what happen?

SB (Korean speaking child): he had stomachache.

T: everybody, pretend to have a stomachache. Who is next reader...RJ?, N.?

N: now, he is not little caterpillar...he is fat caterpillar.

T: B, what's he doing in there, chrysalis? Pretend like our face is a leaf and let's make chrysalis with your hands. Afternoon is our recipe time. We are going to make a caterpillar with paper cups. (she brought a sample of paper cup caterpillar written on '1 apple', '2 pears', '3 bananas', '4 strawberries'...In our recipe card, I wrote how to put something in each cup.

One apple for the first cup, two pears for the second cup, three bananas for the third cup...one doughnut for the last cup instead of five oranges like in our book. I couldn't buy plums because they are out of season, so I have to change it. At your table today, I prepare colorful papers to make caterpillars. Whenever possible, Ms. Joyce wanted to encourage students and provide

books on tapes in ESL children's native language, and she believed that it would eventually connect with English literacy learning. Children liked this recipe day, so they looked forward to Fridays. It was a fun activity combining literacy--reading recipe ingredients, words and sentences--and math: counting ingredients with vivid demonstrations.

#### Summary

Ms. Joyce thought that children were ready to be involved whenever learning and play were combined with, for example, math, counting numbers, reading, or writing letters or sequences. She valued integrated learning not only for teaching subject matter but also for helping children obtain knowledge easily from something already familiar to them.

Moreover, she believed that children would learn easily in a fun way when their play was focused on a theme. Especially, she named a grocery store as pretend play which was a good example of integrated lessons, because it was a lesson that combined calculating money, sorting items, reading labels, making a shopping list, and reading and copying words of books.

Ms. Joyce used 'Question of the day' at least three times a week in the morning circle time. It was a game-like play activity where children could join in

and learn a lesson by answering questions. In this activity, children read their names on clothespin, sorting the pins into information under 'yes' or 'no' headings using the clips like a bar graph. Basically, she extended this play into counting numbers, sorting colors, using a Venn diagram/pie graph and writing sentences. According to her, ESL children might feel more comfortable trying the new language and new concept by watching these visualized lessons.

She also liked to use Leapfrog ABC materials to play with and learn letters and words. She said that ESL children could hear in the voice different tones of English in a froggy voice. According to her, children liked to use these materials to practice because it was a unique, playful and hands-on activity.

Children could learn the concept of size through a playful picture book reading. As Ms. Joyce taught the concept of size: small, medium and large, and the concept of different voices: papa, mama, and baby from a picture book, she let ESL children participate in the fun and playful reading and look at different sizes of beds, chairs and porridges.

Also, cutting paper animals and putting them into the mitten was a fun activity for children. Ms. Joyce liked linking lessons such as math, literacy, story telling, guessing, sequencing together through play. She wanted ESL children to be involved in talking, predicting, and guessing about the story through play because she thought that it was an effective learning tool. While she read a story, she used

demonstrations and models for ESL children in order to integrate lessons such as math, literacy, guessing and sequencing in a fun way.

Ms. Joyce began a recipe day in the spring semester, 2004. She wrote a recipe on a large piece of white paper and prepared ingredients ahead of time. She made this a playful hands-on time, so children anticipated the fun Friday recipe time. In addition, she integrated this playful activity with reading and math by counting numbers, reading words, and showing numbers with fingers. Sometimes, she connected a story book reading to a recipe time, so her lesson was more integrated and concrete, which helped her ESL children learn new vocabulary and understand recipe steps. Whenever possible, she wanted to encourage students and provided books on tape in ESL children's native language because she believed that it would eventually connect with English literacy learning.

### **Use play as an authentic assessment**

Ms. Joyce used songs or puzzles to evaluate which children knew or did not know their letters. Informal conversations with the children during their play gave her the opportunity to check how much each child understood their letters or other knowledge. She often used songs to teach words or phrases an activity which provided a comfortable environment for learning.

### ***Learning letters by singing songs***

Classroom practice (Field notes: 1/20/04)

T: this is a new song. Everybody, stand up and make a big circle. I am gonna put the alphabet letter cards on the floor. While we are marching singing a new song, when I point you, you should say the name of the letter, which you are holding of an alphabet letter card. Just take the letter close to you, O.K.? “we are marching around the alphabet, round the alphabet and where we stop, no one knows. Tell the name...now I’ve blown the whistle turn to the alphabet. When the teacher points to you, tell the teacher which letter you chose, tell the teacher which you chose...(part of the song)”

SB (Korean speaking child): J

SY (Korean speaking child): K

B (Korean speaking child): O

D: L (don’t know the letter, C)

T: can you say, c? let’s sing little bit faster...one more time.

T: We are using 90% of lower case letters, but children learn first upper case letters and many times, they are confused between them.

I: I liked your new ABC song...it was fun to watch them.

T: I liked it, too. It’s an old song but it is still working...you can use it as an assessment in a fun way whether who knows or who doesn’t know the letters.

Ms. Joyce prefers to provide new centers or materials in order to let children initiate and explore the materials first and then she guides them how to use it or encourages them to use it later. Especially, when children ask questions how it does function. She is passionate to provide lots of new activities. She evaluates her children as smart as high level...[children are] highly motivated to learn and smart.

Based on an informal conversation with Ms. Joyce, she stated that evaluation through informal questions and watching center time activities was useful and not threatening. Through games such as this, using songs and playful body motions, she could check whether ESL children knew alphabet letters.

### *Playing with letter puzzles*

Ms. Joyce used playing with letter puzzles as a way of assessing children’s knowledge of print and its directionality--left to right and top to bottom.

They put pictures and words together. They learn quickly that the picture matches the word. They are just fun and playful activities. 'How do children see a print and a picture, and know that they go together.' And then you can check and see your child that...they run their fingers left to right and you see that they have directionality. They know that the print goes left to right and then know the print goes top to bottom. And so it's a way to let them have fun with a literacy activity but you can sort of observe and assess them at the same time as you see them doing that and see that they are meeting the guidelines in a playful way.

She used letter puzzles with pictures to check whether children had basic reading knowledge. For her, it was a good chance to assess children's literacy development through a fun activity.

### ***Role-playing a teacher reading a book***

Ms. Joyce regarded picture book reading as a beginning stage of reading where children tried to copy what she did and said by looking at the pictures to make up their own story. Based on her observation of one girl, children may learn how to hold and read books and develop self-talk through role playing a teacher. In addition, this could be an informal assessment to find out if children knew basic knowledge about literacy.

Their picture reading...that's a kind of beginning stage. They remember some of the words or some of the phrases that I used. And they will copy that, and then they look at the picture to make up their own story. It's wonderful to see that they hold a book correctly so that friends can see it, and they turn pages just like a teacher, and they point to the words...and "oh, be ready to listen!"...you know, they kind of copy and mimic though. I observed a child the other day. She was reading a book by herself, reading out loud...which is a good strategy to hear your self-talk. And when you are learning a new language, that's wonderful because you can hear your self-

talk and can correct yourself like we do normally, but she was picture reading all by herself in the reading center and I just kind of eavesdropped on her story and didn't get too close because sometimes, when you get too close, they stop...because they get shy. She was very accurate about making a new story with pictures and picture reading. And her hand was following along at the bottom of the book but she wasn't matching word for word because we are just at the beginning of reading readiness skills...picture reading and turning pages...they are doing great.

She could watch children pretending to be teachers near the book center, and this allowed her to see how they held a book, turned the pages, and used the white board to write messages in a playful way. She could then help children's reading and writing along with checking their literacy learning.

I watch them practicing reading to a group and playing teachers in the book center and they were modeling how to hold a book. The teacher was turning the page and holding the book. You can see how they copy in their play what you model. They use a write board and attempt to write messages in a playful way, so you can see these skills. I can see them doing that in different areas of the room in a playful way. If I don't see that happening for a child then maybe I can help them with that in their center of choice because it doesn't have to be just in the writing center.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/10/04)

Library center: there are one comfortable sofa and two cushion-type sofas. J (Chinese speaking child), N and three Korean girls (SB, SY, YS) are reading books.

N: I am a teacher, and you (SY) are student

SY: I want to be teacher

N: no, I want to be.

SY: then, you are teacher and I am teacher.

N: O.K. I will go first. (Holding a book in her left hand and pointing letters with right index finger) Little puppy goes down to the street and sees many flowers...(she is not reading the same letters on the book, but she is making her own story according to the pictures with pointing her fingers left to right and top to bottom adding emotional voice)

SY: no, that's not the story, it's my turn

N: O.K. I will be right back

T: (coming to the center and watching them behind a book shelve) can you put the bears (two big size black bear dolls and one medium size white bear doll) back up, so they can read books while you are not here?

Pretending to be a teacher and reading books like their teacher, Ms. Joyce, were interesting and popular activities in this classroom. Through this play activity, Ms. Joyce could observe and assess how both native-speaking children and children from diverse language backgrounds were engaged in their book reading.

### Summary

Ms. Joyce used songs or puzzles to evaluate whether children knew or did not know their letters. During their day, she could check the extent to which each child understood letters or knowledge. Furthermore, she often used songs to teach words or phrases. She stated that evaluation through informal questions and watching center time activities was useful and non-threatening. She also used letter puzzles with pictures to see if children had basic reading knowledge.

Ms. Joyce regarded picture book reading as a beginning stage of reading where children tried to copy what she did and said by looking at the pictures and making up their own story. In addition, this served as an informal assessment of children to learn if they had basic knowledge about literacy.

She also could watch children's pretending to be teachers near the book center, noting how they held a book, turned the pages, and used the white board to write messages in a playful way. This enabled her to help children's reading and writing along with checking their literacy learning.

### **Use play to act out characters in a book**

Although Ms. Joyce did not differentiate her teaching methods explicitly between ESL children and native-speaking children, based on the interviews and observations of her classroom, she had a special concern for ESL children who did not understand and speak English fluently from the beginning of the year. She tried to act out such things as the daily schedule to clarify some words and sentences to communicate better with ESL children. In addition, whenever she read a book in a circle time, she read with a realistic voice, facial expression, and body motions, encouraging the children to follow her. Moreover, sometimes, she decided to act out a story as a skit with props so all could play together. By doing this, she could help children develop their own story before acting it out and learn social skills by taking turns being certain characters in a book. Children could read and speak some words or a sentence in a useful context to participate in a play.

### ***Reading a book and acting out a story, The Mitten by Jan Brett.***

According to Ms. Joyce, The Mitten was a good story to act out because of the sequence of happenings in the story, so children could make a sequence strip about which animal came first and which one was found in the mitten next. In that sense, children had to remember the order animals appeared. In addition, the story included new animals that the children had never seen such as badger or hedgehog, and new vocabulary like 'knitting.' She thought a skit with masks would be exciting

and useful for children from diverse language backgrounds because it visualized and integrated lessons such as sequencing a story, extending a story, and becoming a character through acting out a story.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 1/16/04)

T: first, we are gonna tell the story back. Then we are going to take a turn. Before we act out, we should look at the story. We are going to take a turn

SB (Korean speaking child): he loves mitten and animals go there...

T: (taking a body motion of jumping and playing) Does anyone remember his grandmother, Baba?

T: let's put our hands apart to make a big...like this (showing her hands apart)

T: (let children tell the story with their own words while she is holding the book and pointing pictures and words) Who is coming next?

SB: Mitten is flying into the sky.

T: who is the next?

C: badger...it's growing and stretching.

T: if you are a hedgehog, watch out prickles...it may poke you out...if you are rabbit, be careful about prickles.

B (Korean speaking child): do you remember why? Why animals were so afraid? Because they see the shiny sharp, golden and white teeth.

T: everybody wants to talk about bear

SB: mitten flies.

J (Chinese speaking child): the mouse is very small. We cannot make it because he is very busy.

T: what happens?

SH (Korean speaking child): when the mouse gets in, it's fitting. There was not an enough room for the mouse, so she was on the top of bear's nose.

C: this is the best part, funny...we love this part. (kids are laughing)

T: I think, the author, Jan Brett wants us to laugh, when the bear sneezes.

The mitten pops and fly...blew out of the mitten. They just flying everywhere. Owl, look! There is owl's feather. So, when we act it out can you remember how the owl does.

B: rabbit might be bumped into the tree.

T: at the end of the story, the mitten falls down. Look mitten-small, mitten-big.

Here are our props: blue hat for Nickki, orange blanket for Baba, animal masks with its name word. Who would like to be a Baba?

Children: not me, not me.

T: who want to be a mole?

C: everybody raises hands

T: it's hard to choose it. I am going to use name card, so I am not looking...I chose this. I want you to read the name of the animal character. (Ms. Joyce is asking each child whether she or he is accepting the role or not. If they say, yes, she gives them animal masks and if they say, no, she is asking them to wait for the next turn.)

T: achoo~. You have to scoop over to make a space for the bear. What does the bear? Ha-ha-choo and makes the mitten fly. Everybody is laughing and clapping. This is the way keeps your costume here. (She hangs up all animal masks. And children change the character and act it out again.)

Moreover, Ms. Joyce also used acting out the story with masks to enhance children's independent literacy learning. She encouraged children to practice by taking their favorite characters at anytime during the day after she had shown them how to use props such as masks and blanket. She liked to use this hands-on, independent, and playful activity where children could even take the characters home.

I: I remember when you and the children acted out a story, you had animal masks and children's name cards so they could choose characters and let them read each friend's name because you said, sometimes, they all wanted to be the one character. Would you explain this?

T: sometimes, I would say, "it's just too hard to choose your name, so I will pick a name randomly," but then I kind of always make sure that "I am gonna leave over here so if you didn't get a turn to be the character you want, it will be right here." For the mask, I was thinking of making it fit their face, but I didn't want that because then you have to cut the eyes too big, and use strings which they can't tie so I just used to clip onto their clothes, so they can be characters by just putting that on and so they can do it themselves. I wanted it to be hands-on and independent where they can go and get the character and take that home. We didn't have a large mitten, so we just used my blanket from my house and it worked. In the afternoon, they did it again and again...they really liked that so I was going to do it again...with other stories. I think I want to do more of that when I saw how many characters they can try on, so finding a right prop or those right characters.

I: when they acted out, did they say something?

T: yes, they tried to copy the story line but then they...for example, M sat in front of other children and turned pages of the book, "O.K. next, you come next badger," so they kind of copied the story line but they extended the story and dialogue to make their own interpretation...not mine or not hers (Jan Brett). But sometimes, if they didn't have enough children, they would be two characters, so you be the rabbit and you be the badger...so they move in and out of The Mitten to play each character if they didn't have enough turns. I thought 'that's a good strategy.' They did it all by themselves. They love the part when the mouse comes on the bear's nose and he gets tickled and sneezes and then everybody falls out, so that's the favorite part.

Most interestingly, children copied the story line in the beginning, but later they extended the story and developed dialogue of their own corresponding to the character they wanted to be and their own interpretation, which was neither Ms. Joyce's, nor the author's, Jan Brett.

### ***Reading a book and drawing and writing child's own story***

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/12/04)

Circle time: children are chatting.

T: Today is the last day before the spring break. It's a Friday...we are going to read a really funny story. The title is Mrs. McNosh Hangs Up Her Wash. (She is holding a big book) SB (Korean speaking child), don't tell the story please. She is going to be a page turner. SB and I...we are going to trick you. SB, would you be a page turner? If you know the story, please don't tell me yet.

"Each Monday at dawn  
Mrs. Nelly McNosh  
Brings out a barrel  
And does a big wash"

There is a picture of clothesline and clothespins in the book.

"She hangs up the shoes.  
She wings out the paper  
And hangs up the news...  
She hangs up removable teeth...  
She hangs up herself in a comfortable chair..."

SH (Korean speaking child): first, she clipped the chair and herself  
SY (Korean speaking child): birds can help Mrs. McNosh hang up.  
T: We are going to pretend to be like Mrs. McNosh. Here is your paper.  
Your first job is...what did she hang up first? Can you draw the clothes line  
on your paper first and draw your funny idea? And then can you write what  
did you draw?  
S: what is a funny thing...how about hang up our whole classroom?  
SH: how about ourself?  
YS (Korean speaking child): hang you (pointing Ms. Joyce)  
J (Chinese speaking child): how about hang up keys?  
B (Korean speaking child): how about dinosaurs?  
G: how about ginger bread man?  
T: O.K. I am going to go around each table and listen to your story.

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Each table: there are markers and white papers  
T: I am coming around you....  
Cr: (he drew a smiling face on the clothes line) I don't know what it is.  
T: who is this?  
Cr: me  
T: O.K. is it you with a big smile?

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T: what are you making sweetie?  
SH (Korean speaking child): my classroom.  
T: can you write 'classroom'?  
SH: (tries to write but hesitates it)  
T: classroom, classroom, what do you hear?  
SH: K  
T: two 'o'  
T: what did you hang up?  
S: a big chocolate chip cookie with two eyes is hanging up on the clothesline.  
T: great idea

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SB (Korean speaking child): (she was working by herself in home center  
table. She drew a house with chimney and wrote 'ZZZ' and KRS right to  
left.) I can write anything I want. Ms. Joyce doesn't help me but I can write  
anything I want.  
T: tell me about who is sleeping...who has this 'ZZZ'  
SB: Mrs. McNash 'ZZZ'...its her house. She is sleeping in her classroom.  
She will not wake up. 'Z' is coming out of chimney because she is sleeping.

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T: J. is next. What did you hang up?

J (Chinese speaking child): this is person, bread, Ms. Joyce...water is coming down from the clothesline.

T: pretend to be hanged up on the clothesline saying, “you gotta let me down”...tell me about your Christmas tree here...

Ms. Joyce chose a funny book that could help children including ESL children, read and act out the story using repetitions. It was a fun and repetitive book to encourage (ESL) children to practice expressing themselves through drawing and writing. Children acted out like Mrs. McNash in the book by drawing what they wanted to hang up on the clothes lines and then wrote about what they were drawing. They were highly motivated to draw and write something and at the end, Ms. Joyce looked at and listened to the children sharing their stories with other classmates.

### *Creating a story with flannel to act out characters*

Ms. Joyce wanted to make her literacy lesson visual and interesting to the children including children from diverse language backgrounds. She encouraged children to participate by putting flannel on a board and by taking turns while they read a book, Jack and the Bean Stalk. In addition, her realistic playful voice as she acted out each character also attracted children to concentrate on listening and reading the book.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 4/2/04)

T: we are going to read a book, Jack and the Bean Stalk. We are going to plan to grow beans soon. Here is our story. (She puts black cloth board at front and distributes story character figures.) It's a flannel story. We need helpers to hold characters: Jack, beanstalk, giant, farmer, mother...the giant is so big, so RJ and S, can you hold it together? You have to listen carefully.

When I get to your part of story, you should come up here, right? (She is holding a book and showing the pictures and reading each sentence)

Jack's mother said, "we are so poor, so we have to sell our cow." We are going to put flannels from left to right. Who has jack in the cow? I will miss daisy [cow's name]. On the way to the market, Jack met a stranger. "Who is a stranger?" Somebody you don't know, right?

In this story, Jack met a farmer..."who has the farmer man?" The farmer said, I will give you five magic beans for your cow. Jack's mom was angry, five beans for the cow? She picked them up and threw them out. Does she believe magic beans?

C: no.

T: all through that night, the bean stalk grew, it grew, and it grew...YS, SB (Both Korean speaking children), G, S...come front and put all the bean stalks. Jack reached the top of the bean stalk and meet a giant castle. Pretend that you are Jack and climb...everybody, pretend its to huge. A woman saw Jack and said, my husband is so hungry. Fi, Fa, Fum. Watch out everybody. Here I come. 100 potatoes...100 chocolate chips. You can believe it. Let's pretend you are huge eater.

The giant is counting the coins but soon he started to sleep. Jack grabbed a bag of gold and came down to home. He wanted to go back to beanstalk. He climbed and climbed up to the castle. There were golden eggs from golden hens. He brought them to home. Jack climbed one more. Fee, Fi, Fum. (With the giant voice) Here I come. Giant eats 1 hundred...2 hundreds...3 hundreds strawberry short cake. There was a beautiful harp. The harp really liked the master. The giant woke up and it's you who stole my egg, gold... Jack run and run, "mother, bring me an ax". Jack chopped the beanstalks down and beanstalks are broken. With the gold, harp, and egg...Jack live with mother happily ever and ever.

T: here is our paper. Cut off the story and state from the left to the right. The numbers on bottom will help you. This is a sequence. When you get your picture, I will trick you with these 6 pieces of pictures. Did Jack have a beanstalk in the beginning of the story? Which goes first, this one or this one? (She is showing two pieces of paper from the story) If you make a mistake, you can take it off and do that again. Talk to your friend about the story and retell the story each other. It's like a picture book. I will come around and help you. If you don't remember well the story sequence, you may check the book we read.

T: they have to think the sequence, remember the story, retell the story to friend.

At table work: there are paper, scissors, crayons and the book.

T: (Talking to S.) look at the story. It is the giant chasing. Let's look back the story.

After acting out the story, Jack and the Bean Stalk, Ms. Joyce tried to teach the sequence of the story with the children remembering and retelling the story playfully.

She also tried to provide a bilingual environment for ESL children to let them hear and read their primary language in class. Since she was very close to the Korean bilingual teacher, she often asked her to read the Korean version of translated books that had the same content in English. For example, Ms. Joyce asked the Korean bilingual teacher to read Jack and the Bean Stalk in Korean with Korean speaking children using the same flannel she used in the lesson.

#### Summary

Although Ms. Joyce did not differentiate her teaching methods explicitly between ESL children's and native-speaking children, she did have a special concern for ESL children who did not understand and speak English fluently at the beginning of the year. She even tried to act out the daily schedule to clarify words and sentences to better communicate with ESL children. In addition, whenever she read a book in a circle time, she read a book, she used realistic voice, facial expressions, and body motions and encouraged other children to follow her. On some occasions, she decided to act out a story as a skit with props so all could play together. Thus, she could help children develop their own stories to act out and help them learn social skills by taking turns being certain characters in the book. Participating in a

play allowed children to read and speak words or sentences in a useful context. She also chose a funny book to help children including ESL children practice expressing themselves through drawing and writing, as they read and acted out the story using repetitions.

Ms. Joyce wanted to make her literacy lesson visual and interesting to the children including children from diverse language backgrounds. She encouraged children to participate in putting characters on flannel board, by taking turns as they read a book, Jack and the Bean Stalk. In addition, the realistic playful voice she used in acting out each character also helped children concentrate on listening to and reading the book. She also tried to provide a bilingual environment for ESL children, so she wanted them to hear and read their primary language in the lesson.

### **Use spontaneous play for ESL literacy learning**

Pretend play and block play areas were reinforced for children's literacy learning by providing pencils, papers, books, and markers in Ms. Joyce's classroom. She valued children's spontaneous and exploratory play as much as structured play for teaching integrated lessons in pretend play and block play areas.

So what I do is sort of place markers, pens and pencils and papers and tape in the centers for them to write stories, and draw stories. In the block center, they love to draw what's happening and tape it on their building. We will close by to their building to explain what's happening. I put papers and markers in home center, block center and listening center like listen to your story and then can you draw your favorite character and listening center to kind of adding on each center. "Can you tell me about it? Or can you write

about it? What did you think about it? What's your opinion?" So, asking them to explain themselves and let them listen to themselves talk.

She knew how to make questions or suggestions to encourage children to read or write something during their spontaneous play, so children could connect their literacy learning naturally in their play situation.

### *Dramatic play*

Most pretend play occurred in the dramatic play areas such as the home center, beauty shop, Asian restaurant, grocery store, or doctor's office. Ms. Joyce maintained the home center all the time in her classroom although she changed or added to it with props creating other themes such as beauty shop, Asian restaurant, grocery store, or doctor's office.

#### *Home center*

Classroom practice (Field notes: 1/20/04)

There were two or three telephones with telephone books and other books, papers with markers, several wall papers which were written, "I use words when I am angry...I say please and thank you..." In addition, there were toy home utensils, foods, electronic utensils and furniture.

Ms. Joyce provided several books: Cinderella, Bambi, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White and other Disney books. She thought it would be good for children to try to read books because these books are so popular and even translated into many languages. Especially, for ESL children, they may be familiar with the story from the movies or reading in their language. Two ESL girls and one English speaker are looking at the pictures and try to make a story...like a picture reading.

In the home center, Ms. Joyce provided books such as Cinderella, Bambi, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White and other Disney books because she thought it would

be good for children to try to read books because these books are so popular. In particular, ESL children might be familiar with the stories from the movies or from reading them in their home languages.

*Asian restaurant*

Ms. Joyce provided lots of props in the home center so it could be changed into an Asian restaurant, including a Korean menu, clothes, a Japanese kimono and Chinese newspapers. She respected her Korean and Chinese students' culture and let them have ownership of the classroom by having their language and clothes somewhere in the center. Since Ms. Joyce regarded children's speaking and listening as important as reading and writing, this dramatic play center was an ideal center to teach literacy through play. Ms. Joyce was especially considerate in providing lots of culturally related props, such as Korean, Chinese, and Japanese clothes and newspapers, and literacy-related materials such as books and pens in this center, so children including children from diverse language backgrounds could learn emergent reading and writing naturally through play.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 1/27/04)

Today is the first day of opening an Asian restaurant. Ms. Joyce brings all the props from her home such as chopsticks, bowls, wall papers, Chinese newspaper, Korean menu, Korean traditional clothes (Hanbok), Kimono, dishes, vase, tea pot and she decorates the home center with Korean, Chinese, and Japanese pictures or arts. In addition, she puts the puppet center furniture near this center which has a white board, so children can write something on it.

T: remember, new center is coming to our home center. It's Korean, Chinese, and Japanese and Vietnamese...it's kind of Asian restaurant. If you

are in that center, you can play to be a waiter or waitress by asking to people, “May I take your order?” and if you are a customer, you may say, “Yes, I would like to have...” or what else they can say? “What would you drink?” or “is everything O.K.?” or “do you want some desserts? “That would be great!”...Do you eat chocolate cake at restaurant? Can you name...what is a name of a Korean food?

SH (Korean speaking child): Bulgogi, beans, pork Bulgogi

T: maybe Korean Sushi...

SY (Korean speaking child): that’s Kimbob

T: raise your hand, if you like Sushi.

C: (several children raise their hands)

J (Chinese speaking child): I like Chinese rice.

T: oh, you like Chinese rice...that’s good.

SH: I think, Korean rice is stickier than Chinese rice. We are trying to have Korean food for two days and Chinese food for two days.

T: I will talk to you about warning. Usually, I do not put the glasses. If I see anyone being rough with the glass, I will take back to home because it’s very dangerous and delicate.

G: even my mom drops the glass.

B (Korean speaking child): don’t touch glass. It will cut you.

T: but...watch what I can do. If I go to restaurant center, (She pretends to cook rice in the wok. Rice ball is made of cotton ball. She is pretending to pick a cotton ball with her chopsticks and saying, “is this real rice?” “No (children answered)” “we just pretend, right? I think now, we are ready to play in that center. One more thing, four friends can be the center at a time. What if there are four friends already in that center before me? What should I do? You may ask, “Can I have a turn?” or you can write your name on the waiting list.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 2/27/04)

Home center: there is a sign, ‘No MSNSHR’ (monster) on the one of cooking shelves in home center which is changed into Asian restaurant where full of Chinese bowls and chopsticks, clothes, Chinese newspaper, Korean menu, wall papers and other toy food and cooking utensils are.

T: in pre-K, we use writing for different purposes but that activity was to show in playful way, And then in home center, the girls were acting out and they were making all the blankets out and I kind of called them they said, “the monster is coming...the monster is coming, should we make a sign to tell them keep out?” so they did, “yes...yes” so they grabbed paper and said, “no...no...no” and one girl wrote, no monster...she used invented spelling and they taped up the signs everywhere to keep the monsters out. It was a

powerful message to the monsters.

One girl wrote, 'No, Monster, No' to let others know that the monster was coming to the center while children were playing

Ms. Joyce encouraged children to write their story while they played in the

Asian restaurant area, so children were interested in writing something on the paper or on the white board and helping their friends to write letters. Moreover, she regarded children's drawing as early writing, so children engaged in writing or drawing something to express themselves or communicate with others. In this playful mood, children including children from diverse language backgrounds could practice speaking, listening, reading and writing both in English and in their first language with other speakers.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/22/04)

J (Chinese speaking child), SR, SB (Korean speaking child) and SY (Korean speaking child) are playing in the center. They are shouting, "Fire in the house!"

T: oh really? What are you gonna do?

J: oh my baby (holding a baby doll)

SY: monster is in the house and there is fire again. I called 911 to call firefighter

SR: (She is writing 'fire' and 'monster' on the white board which is at the corner of the center.) 'No FR' (fire) 'MoNSHR' (Monster)

SY: monster? It's D (ter)

SB: (she is drawing a door of house with her Korean name on top and marking X on the whole picture.) because of fire, you cannot get in the house. You should go to another house. Teacher! Where can I put the sign?

T: maybe, you can put it on our door, so you will not forget it later.

Ms. Joyce not only provided a literacy-enriched environment for children, but also participated in their play and guided them, carefully observing and giving

direction whenever they needed her. This was also consistent with her role in play in literacy learning as a provider, facilitator, helper, and participant.

*Beauty shop*

In this area, there are wigs, shampoos, mirrors, combs, toy hair dryers, nail polish machines, a telephone with a memo pad, pens, light, a set of hair pins, and bands and rollers, and toy make-up tools.

Ms. Joyce provided this beauty shop because girls had long wanted such a center to play make-up and hairstyles. She volunteered to be a customer and guided them in using the tools to roll hairs, brush hairs, and polish nails. In addition, she added pens, pencils, papers and magazines in this center, so children used these literacy-related materials for their play. Especially, she encouraged children's literacy learning by providing appointment sheets and check sheets with pictures of hairstyles.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/22/04)

Ms. Joyce goes to beauty shop, which is the right next to the grocery shopping store. S. is trying to use a roller but he doesn't seem to know how to use it.

T: watch me, you put hair inside and roll it up until it makes curls.

Ms. Joyce goes to beauty shop.

T: do you know how to use this? This is my favorite. This is a nail polish. Put your hands here and then nail polish (Ms. Joyce puts her hands on the toy machine)

S: can I put this on your hair? (S. is pretending to be a hair dresser and putting a blond color wig to Ms. Joyce)

T: thank you S. Oh, I love that color. (She is sitting on a chair wearing a wig)

SY (Korean speaking child): I am going to hold this mirror for you.

J (Chinese speaking child): I am going to nail polish.

A: I will do make-up...lipsticks...

S: I don't know, how I can make a pony tail.

J: oh, I know.

(J and SR are making two pony tails on Ms. Joyce's hair...it looks like a pigtail)

T: who is going to be next? You may write a waiting list or put your name on your appointment paper

C: SB (Korean speaking child), and then SY (Korean speaking child)...

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/29/04)

There are still the beauty shop and the grocery shopping store as an extension of the home center. On each table, there are papers, scissors and glues.

Beauty shop: there is a scheduling paper, which are written available time and customers' names, memos, pencils and markers. All the props are labeled with a name tag, such as lamp, telephone...

Beauty shop:

J (Chinese speaking child): I'll be there at 10:30, O.K.?

Ax: (she is writing something on a memo book) 10:30?

T: raise your hand if you want to say something about the new center?

J (Chinese speaking child): I like those brushes in beauty shop.

T: S, what did you want to have?

S: I don't see money in the grocery store.

T: C. has all money as a cashier...so, we need some purse or wallet for money.

SY (Korean speaking child): I love clips.

Ms. Joyce participated in this beauty shop as a leader showing children how to use the tools, and she also took a role as a customer, helping children to engage in beauty shop play along with writing on the paper. Moreover, whenever she had time, she asked children what else they needed or wanted as props, so she could provide more materials in the centers.

### *Grocery store*

There are carts, lots of different plastic vegetables and fruits which are all labeled with small papers, a cashier register with money and calculator, papers with

pencil in a basket to use as a shopping list, aprons, home center furniture such as refrigerator, sink, and table. In addition, there are lots of clothes and shoes for selling. Several children are putting vegetables and fruits in a paper bag and bringing them to the cashier; C., S., and YS (Korean speaking child) are interested in pulling carts. Moreover, on the selves with the vegetables and fruits, there are books: A Chef, To Market to Market, Baby Food, Growing Vegetable Soup, Orange, Fruits, Vegetables, Kimchi and Chinese Cooking.

Ms. Joyce set up the grocery store as a dramatic play area next to the home center, so children were moving between the home center and the grocery store. For example, children role-played a family and went grocery shopping like their mom or dad did. She also provided literacy-enriched props such as markers, pencils, papers for the grocery shopping list, magazines, flyers, coupons, books, and toy money and guided them in using these materials, reading flyers or writing shopping lists. Since, she had a special concern for ESL children, she provided several books that were related to children from diverse language backgrounds, such as Kimchi (Korean traditional food) and Chinese Cooking, thus letting ESL children feel free to read books and share their knowledge of their food with other friends. In addition, labeling and sorting each grocery item helped children recognize and copy words. Children were excited to work as a cashier, to choose items and put them into a cart while they read and practiced words and sentences.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/22/04)

SH (Korean speaking child): Ms. Joyce, you know, there is a person who is taking care of carts and helping a cashier all the time at grocery store.

T: you want to be that person? You can do it.

SH: (nodding her head and going to the carts)

A: (coming to Ms. Joyce in grocery shopping center brushing on her hair)

T: you look beautiful. You rolled your hair and make-up

T: A. you can make a shopping list and then shop.

A: (trying to write something but she couldn't, so asking to Ms. Joyce) How can I write onion?

T: o, o, o, what do you hear?

A: o?

T: yes, nion, nion, nion, what do you hear?

A: n?

(A. was looking at a book and finding out an onion picture and word, and then copying it for her shopping list with other words, "ONION, turNip, BeetRoot, watermelon, tomato...and her name, A.)

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A: (she is writing onion with Ms. Joyce's help) how can I write tomatoes?

T: you know what, if you can look at the word in the books, especially, vegetable or fruit books, it says about the words and pictures. (She is bringing a vegetable book from the selves.)

T: (looking at C and saying) C, put the apron on you, so everybody can understand that you are working as a cashier.

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Ms. Joyce comes to grocery shopping store and asks to C. is sitting as a cashier.

T: how do you do  $85 + 75$ ? First, where is 85?

C: (pushing 8 and 5 on the calculator)

T: how do you do 75? Where is 75?

C: here (pushing 7 and 5 on the calculator)

J: how do you open this?

T: it says 'open', 'on/off' (pointing the buttons on the calculator)

Ms. Joyce observed and helped each student while he or she was engaged in the pretend play area. She encouraged them to find and read letters and numbers when they took the role of cashiers. Children including children from diverse

language backgrounds learn basic and new skills of mathematics naturally while they play.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/29/04)

Grocery shopping center: there are several local grocery shopping advertisement papers near cashier with papers and pencils for making a shopping list.

SH (Korean speaking child): can I be your friend? I need some eggs. Ms. Joyce, there is no more eggs.

T: (working at the different center) can you share the eggs? It's new to our center. Who is going to be a checker...in cash registration today? Playing with money is in the pink purse.

SH: there is no money (shows the pink purse to the teacher)

T: ask C to open the cashier

T: (goes to the grocery shopping center) where is my coin, credit card and money...?

Here we go (opens cashier.) Go get a purse and put some money. (she is finding money paper and provided it)

Sean: (counting money) \$10, \$100, \$50, \$500...

SH: (putting many toy vegetables and fruits in the paper bag and carrying it to the N )

N: give me your card

SH: I don't have a card but pretend to give you.

T: (she is watching their play in grocery shopping center)

SH: I am the mom and you are all sisters and cat and baby.

YS (Korean speaking child): (pretending to eat tomato) meow, meow...

SB (Korean speaking child): (pretending to eat cucumber) yam, yam...

SY (Korean speaking child): (pretending to eat carrot) I am eating.

(All Korean girls are sitting at the table in grocery shopping center and chatting in Korean)

T: how many eggs?

N: we are out of it.

T: I bet, it's Easter.

Alyx: there is smog in the grocery shopping store.

SB: (pretending to cry)

YS: meow, meow...

SY, SH: we are making a cake (based on the story about the little red hen)

N: there is a fire in grocery store. Get out of from grocery shopping center.

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SY is sharing a shopping list with me. It says, WAEMLN (watermelon), TOMADO (tomato)

Children were busy reading and copying words from books or newspapers while they played in this center. In this grocery store area, Ms. Joyce provided lots of props and materials. Children were engaged in family role play and counting/calculating numbers with the cash register. Ms. Joyce's role was observer and provider.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 4/7/04)

T: you know what...Mr. Brett wrote a letter for us with this vegetables and fruits [toys]. Remember, we sent a letter to his classroom. He wrote a letter back...Dear Ms. Joyce class...he said...he pretended to be a farmer. I am an organic farmer. I grew vegetables and fruits. So, would like to do business with me if I am willing to profit with you?...now, we need to write a letter back him. What should we write?

C: Dear Mr. Brett.

SY (Korean speaking child): thank you for the vegetables.

SH (Korean speaking child): thank you for the notes

T: are we going to sell them in our grocery shopping center?

C: we will sell the vegetables in the grocery store.

T: now, he is the farmer. Should we give back some money? He said, are we giving back half? Which means...if this tomato is 10 cents, half of them will be 5 cents, so we should give him back 5 cents, right? We will give you half of the profit [Money].

T: today, we are going to write down price today. Look, \$1, \$10, \$100...what is this saying \$1? 1c/, 2c/,3c/...

B (Korean speaking child): how about infinite dollars?

T: then...I am writing (she is pretending to write number, '0' everywhere)...still writing.

Ms. Joyce loved this grocery store as a dramatic play area because she could teach and extend integrated lessons of reading books/letters, writing/copying words, using calculators/money, and teaching social studies all together. She also tried to provide culturally diverse props for each dramatic center, providing books, clothes, and cooking utensils.

### *Doctor's office*

There are real patients' and doctors' gowns from previous parents of students, surgery caps, doctor's kits which include toy pistol, thermometer, blood pressure measurement, stethoscope, and succors. There are also Band Aid boxes, medicine chest basics, telephones, pencils, calendar, schedule books, toy surgeon bear, toy patient bear and papers on which are written patient's name, age, date, reason for visit along with a prescription paper. On the wall are several labeled pictures of an Asian male/female doctor, dentist, nurse, ophthalmologist. There are books, such as The Hospital Book, Nurse Book, Roger Goes to the Doctor, and Doctor Dan.

Ms. Joyce participated in the children's hospital play by taking a role as a doctor because no one wanted to be a doctor. She modeled how to make an appointment and how to write the patients' names and appointment time while they played. Decorating the doctor's office area with pictures, of Asian and African male/female doctors was a considerate step to help children recognize different races and gender naturally through the teacher's culturally respectful concerns for her ESL children and others.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 4/14/04)

Three children are approaching to Ms. Joyce and saying holding a baby doll, "our baby has a broken leg"

T: who can be a doctor? SB (Korean speaking child), can you be a doctor?

RJ, could you be a doctor?

C: (nodding head as a sign of no.)

T: O.K. I will be the doctor. Call me. There is a phone. Who is going to be the nurse? You are the mommy A. (A. is pretending to call to the doctor.)

T: hello

A: my baby got broken leg.

T: let's check the time schedule. Can you come here right now. Can you drive her over here? What's the baby's name?

A: Melody

T: O.K. Melody at 10:00 o'clock. (She is writing on the post-it with a blue marker) I will be right back. I have another patient. (She is leaving the center for a while and came back) My name is Joyce. How can I help you? Let's work together. Let's do all together. Mother, can you help me to take off her clothes? I want to give her a shot. Mother, can you hold baby gently here, arm? Here is the cast (She is bringing a rolling paper from the sink) Let's start to wrap right here. Nurse J. (Chinese speaking child), can you help me to wrap? Melody is stopping crying now. She feels better. (Ms. Joyce is bringing doctor cloth paper and put it on her chest)

Ms. Joyce encouraged children to engage in this center as she assumed the role of a doctor. She wanted to connect literacy learning and play naturally, so she put a schedule book, markers, and extra papers in the area.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 3/10/04)

SB (Korean speaking child) who was playing at the home center is approaching to Ms. Joyce in the library center.

SB: I have a very sharp needle.

T: are you a doctor, SB?

SB: No, I am a nurse.

T: you have to write it down on the paper because I am going to call you.

SB: (is taking a paper and is ready to write something)

T: I am going to call the nurse and make an appointment for my baby today. What time should I come?

SB: 11 o'clock.

T: I will bring my baby because my baby is sick (holding a baby doll from the home center)

SB: (is writing a note for her patient...11...001...0001...00001...000001... and giving a shot to a baby)

T: are you giving a shot to the baby? Is it making him feel better? Is the baby O.K.? Did you take and use the thermometer to take the temperature under the tongue or under the arm?

SY (Korean speaking child): this is the baby. Our baby.

(S. is coming to them YS. SY. SB. who speak Korean.)

T: this is our baby. He is sick.  
S: can I play with you? Can I join you?  
T: yes. Will you be a doctor?

Ms. Joyce participated in this center as a doctor and as the play leader; she knew how to nicely involve a reluctant boy in this play. This center is an illustration of how a teacher can foster children's literacy learning through dramatic play by properly providing literacy-related props in a play context.

### ***Block play***

Ms. Joyce thought block play would be very important for children not only for their gross motor and fine motor skills, but also to watch and check their developmental progress. Moreover, it would help further their math and language skills depending on how teachers used blocks in their class. Since Ms. Joyce believed in the importance of block play for young children, she set up various blocks with human and animal figures, and included literacy-related materials such as post-its, memos, papers, pens, markers, pens and books. She encouraged children to look at pictures in a book or draw or write a story about what they had built or what they thought, thus letting them have a chance to express themselves or explain what happened to them.

I can't remember the title but I can quote the book that I was reading about this, that outside activities or block center activities are going to work on gross motor and fine motor skills. They love block center because we look for their developmental process in block center. And by watching them, you can see where they are developmentally. Because they begin to stack in a variety of ways and they begin to make tower blocks and close-up blocks and

you can watch where they are developmentally and it helps further their math skills and language skills, so it helps in a variety of ways.

Drawing and writing a note and taping or attaching a post-it on each center.

T: (block center near the book shelf: ex. Dinosaur books): “Could you write what you are building or can you draw/write your story, to let me know what’s happening here? If you want to know more about your favorite dinosaurs, please look at books, and you may use them to read and check the information about each dinosaur and copy their habitats and names. Where do they live? What does it look like?”

I gave them post-it notes, and markers, and tapes, and put different papers close by. In block center, I told them, “I don’t know what you are building and somebody else wants to come and play with you. What is the story and what’s going on here?” and then they were saying so many things, so I asked them, “can you write that down and show me where the bridges and tornado were?” And there was a volcano...and there was so much going on. But they used invented spelling and they wrote the words. And a boy who can read already at a higher level wrote, “Be ware!” and then there was a swimming pool. And a volcano, and tornado, and a big storm was coming. One boy couldn’t write but he drew a picture of a giant block which was going to fall down. So he drew a picture of what would happen if someone walked by and...children just told me the whole story and I took a photograph of it to save for later.

Block play seemed very important to Ms. Joyce not only for encouraging children’s fine/gross motor skills but also for their story telling and writing. She provided literacy-related materials such as post-its, papers, and pencils for children to express their story by drawing pictures, and writing words and sentences. Block play was used as a place to write with the teacher’s guidance about what children were building or what was going on in their story.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 2/27/04)

Block center: Ms. Joyce provided various dinosaur books and pencils and papers in a basket.

T: how would you build it with the block? Please open the book, so others can see it and copy it.

(SB & B who speak Korean are building something with wooden blocks.)

RJ: (he is copying the words from the book)

T: (saying to SH & B) you can write a note so we can notice what you are building.

Block center: there are various kinds of blocks such as big square wooden blocks, small colorful Lego blocks...with lots of animals and human figures...including several books to read while children play with blocks. Gross motor skills could be directly related with writing such as holding pencils. In the block center...I love the block center. I have a lot of props to change regularly but it can be used for fine motor or gross motor skills...we had, like you say,...small dinosaurs and micro objects and macro...big objects for their role playing. They use the small...they can match the small and large blocks together or they can explore when they use that big block to set up a space. And then they use a small box in a variety of ways, too. But the Lego blocks help their fine motor skills and the gross actions...top to bottom and...out to in...so, we grow in certain ways. The gross motor skills help us to refine our fine motor skills.

Block center

Ms. Joyce provided markers and pencils with small memo papers in this center to encourage children to draw or write what they are building or what's going on here or 'what's your story about building blocks'?

T: what are you building or what have you been building? (She encourages children to write/draw something to label what they build or make standing in the block center)

Children draw and write, TRNADO (tornado), Water, EOST (ghost) with pictures.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 2/3/04)

Block center: near the wooden blocks there are colorful markers and papers. Three boys (G., S., I) and B (Korean speaking child) are building castles and some other buildings. Sy joins. The teacher also comes to this center saying, "could you write your story? Can you do it for me to know what's going on in this center?"

B (Korean speaking child): this is bad guy and this is good guy.

T: show me how the bad guy looks. How does the good guy look? Can you write 'bad guy,' so I can read it? Can you spell it? Can you stretch the word, 'Baaad guy?'

Sy: I can hear (bad) 'd' and (guy) 'g.'

B: (try to write bad guy)

T: (left center)

B: (drawing a good guy) I just want to draw the picture. Look, G. bad guy will die because a good guy has sharp hands.

I: (drawing and writing 'ClouDS')

Sy: (writing 'BeWare')

Children attached their story writing memos on the blocks or somewhere in the block center.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 4/19/04)

Block center: B is playing and building something and trying to write something on his mitten book.

T: what did you draw, B?

B (Korean speaking child): I draw a robot. It is his house.

T: you can write a sentence; this is a robot's house.

B: this is a clock. The big robot can go this way. The small robot goes this way.

T: does he have a name?

B: his name is Spanish. Latto. (He is explaining with sound and motion about the robot) he has weapons. He is digging and slapping.

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B: (holding dinosaurs' figures) it's sharp. Be careful. Two sharps...

T: do you know the name of that dinosaur?

B: no.

T: you may read dinosaur books on the book shelves and find it out.

B: O.K.

On the circle time mat, there are wooden blocks, puzzles, and human/animal figures.

There is also a set of alphabet paper roads for car racing that Ms. Joyce made for her students. On the each letter, there are connected dots for tracing with a mini-car.

I, RJ, Na, & S are playing with mini cars by tracing letters.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 5/5/04)

In the block center, several boys: B, G, Sy are playing with mini cars on alphabet letter roads...L, A, I, P, A, X.

B (Korean speaking child): let's pretend this guy is racing.

G: B, this is not the end. This is 'Z'

G: R...this is R.

B: (he is still moving mini-car) it's coming.

Ms. Joyce believed that ESL children could learn effectively when teachers provided many hands-on activities and concrete objects and examples, so she added literacy-related materials such as human, and animal figures, and books in the block

play area. In addition, she made alphabet-shaped roads for children to play on, so children traced these roads with mini-cars while they talked with friends.

### Summary

Dramatic play and block play areas were enhanced for children's literacy learning by providing pencils, papers, books, and markers. Ms. Joyce valued children's spontaneous and exploratory play as much as structured play for teaching integrated lessons in dramatic play and block play. She knew how to question or make suggestions to encourage children to read or write something during their spontaneous play, so children connected their literacy learning in the play situation naturally. Most pretend play occurred at the dramatic play center such as in the home center, beauty shop, Asian restaurant, grocery store, or doctor's office.

In the home center, Ms. Joyce provided several popular or Disney books because she thought it would be good for children to read books that were so popular and are even translated into many languages. Moreover, ESL children might be familiar with this Disney story from the movies or book readings in their home languages.

She also provided lots of props in the home center so it could be changed into an Asian restaurant, including a Korean menu, clothes, a Japanese kimono, and Chinese newspapers. She was especially considerate in providing lots of culturally related props, such as Korean, Chinese, and Japanese clothes and newspapers, and literacy-related materials such as books and pens in this center, so children including

children from diverse language backgrounds could learn emergent reading and writing naturally through play. Ms. Joyce encouraged children to write their story while they played in the Asian restaurant center, so children were interested in writing something on the paper or on the white board helping other friends to write letters. In the center, she regarded children's drawing as early writing, so children engaged in writing or drawing something to express or communicate with others. In this playful mood, children including children from diverse language backgrounds could practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing not only in English but also in their first language with other speakers.

She also provided the beauty shop as a pretend play area because girls had wanted such a center to play make-up and hairstyles. She volunteered to be a customer and guided them in using the tools to roll hair, brush hair, and polish nails. In addition, she added literacy-related materials for children's play and encouraged their literacy learning by providing appointment sheets and check sheets with pictures of hairstyles. Whenever she had time, she asked children what else they needed or wanted as props, so she could provide more materials in the centers.

She set up the grocery store as a dramatic play area next to the home center, so children were moving between the home center and the grocery store. For example, children role-playing a family and went grocery shopping like their mom or dad did. She also provided literacy-enriched props and guided them in using these materials, reading flyers or writing shopping lists. Moreover, she had a special

concern for ESL children and provided several books that were related to children from diverse language backgrounds, such as Kimchi (Korean traditional food) and Chinese Cooking, thus letting ESL children feel free to read books and share their knowledge of their food with other friends. In addition, labeling and sorting each grocery item helped children recognize and copy words. Children were excited to work as a cashier, to choose items and put them into a cart while they read and practiced words and sentences. Ms. Joyce loved this grocery store as a dramatic play area because it enabled her to teach and extend integrated lessons.

She participated in children's hospital play as a doctor because none of the children wanted to pretend to be a doctor. She modeled how to make an appointment and write patients' names and appointment times. She decorated the doctor's office area with pictures of Asian and African male/female doctors, a small step to help children recognize different races and genders naturally through the respect she demonstrated.

Ms. Joyce thought block play was important for children's gross motor and fine motor skills, as well as for her to check their developmental progress. Moreover, it would help further their math and language skills. She set up various blocks with human and animal figures along with literacy-related materials. She encouraged children to look at pictures in a book or draw or write a story about what they had built or what they thought to let them express themselves. She also believed that ESL children could learn effectively when teachers provided many

hands-on activities and concrete objects and examples, so she added numerous literacy-related materials in the block center.

### **General Constraints of Incorporating Her Curriculum into the Lesson**

#### **Complexity of classroom dynamic**

##### *Size of the classroom, different levels of students, and teacher time management*

Overall, Ms. Joyce valued the importance of play in her classroom practice not only for ESL literacy learning but also for other subject matter including outside play. In addition, her literacy-related play activities were purposeful, integrated, and structured, supporting her general concept of play as a creative, hands-on, concrete, and fun.

However, although she had positive beliefs about using play in ESL literacy, sometimes the complexity of the classroom dynamic interfered with her intent, so she could not implement her curriculum or put into practice her beliefs. The most important problem was the number of children in the classroom. In addition, several children needed special care in terms of speech and language development. These were critical constraints on putting her understanding into practice.

I: Are there any pressures from your class of students, other grades, environment, or school staff that you can't practice what you have planned as a curriculum?

T: I think the biggest obstacle for planning and implementing curriculum is that you have so many students who have a wide variety of needs. And for example, this year, I have several special needs students who have speech and language delays or developmental delays. Due to the students and due to

the things that I can't describe that are more private. For example, one child cannot recognize any letters, shapes, and colors. They have never been read to, so their development is delayed significantly, but then we have all the way up to a pre-K child who can read on a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level, so it's a very wide range of development and trying to meet each person's needs and it is biggest challenge.

It doesn't work for pre-K and...it just can't be teacher directive, it needs to be more hands-on and children directive, so the only thing I really work on is I just try to get them around and visit everyone. We have so many children start and there are lots of changes this year..."how many children are coming in and out?"...it's so hard to start because numbers get high...you know up to 20 children and then low. Ideally 14-16 is the best, but when the numbers go high, it's hard to get around to each one. But you can't. It's impossible. I try to take some notes on each child and watch them. That's my biggest frustration that I can't be in every center, every moment, which is just impossible. But throughout the day, I try to visit each child even on the playground with my lunch. To make contact with each child and help them to get to the next spot.

Moreover, based on my observation, although she set up ESL literacy-related play activities in play centers such as the grocery store or beauty shop, including pencils, books, and papers, children did not actively connect their play with literacy learning unless she guided and engaged with them.

Although Ms. Joyce is involved in children's play in each center by asking questions, making suggestions, and answering questions, today she does not guide how to use papers or memos in order to make a shopping list or book an appointment for the beauty shop in pretend play areas. She did it before, so today she just lets them practice without her intervention. Some of the children are involved in writing a shopping list or writing an appointment at a beauty shop but many other children are just enjoying their pretend play by taking a role. I think, literacy related activities through play could happen more often when it is guided and structured by a teacher. (*Self-reflexive notes*)

Last, one of her roles was managing her whole classroom and talking with visitors such as special teachers or the principal, which sometimes prevented her from taking proper care of each child's needs in each center.

Classroom practice (Field notes: 4/12/04)

At home center as a dramatic play area, there are literacy related materials such as advertisements, markers, pencils, note books, and small books. SY, J, Sr, S are playing together going back and forth from home center to beauty shop (another dramatic center). Ms. Joyce is managing her classroom going around each center.

SY (Korean speaking child): raise your hand, if you like to have banana.

Coffee? (Shows a recipe to Sr, J, S from a book)

SY: I am going to be the mom

J (Chinese speaking child): I am going to be big sister

S: I am going to be big brother

SR: I am going to be big sister

J: I've never be the biggest. I want to be the twins.

T: twins are always two. If three children are born on the same day, that's triplets. You all three can be triplets (pointing J, S, Sr)

CH: (who is in the block center) Ms. Joyce! Come here!

T: (goes to the block center)

S: (moves to the beauty shop and plays a hairdresser calling J.) J, you got a turn.

Although Ms. Joyce took an active role as a role model, helper, or participant in children's literacy learning in the context of play, sometimes, she could not actively guide the literacy and play activities not because she did not want to, but because she was busy doing other jobs in the class. As a result, there was less of a clear connection between the use of play in literacy learning and provided props, so children just engaged in pretend play and taking roles.

## Summary

Overall, Ms. Joyce valued the importance of play in her classroom practice not only for ESL literacy learning but also other subjects matters including outside play. In addition, her literacy-related play activities were purposeful, integrated and structured play supporting her general meaning of play as creative, hands-on, concrete and fun way of learning.

However, although she had positive beliefs about using play in ESL literacy, sometimes, the complexity of classroom dynamic interfered and prevented her from implementing her curriculum. Basically, too many children in a classroom were the biggest problem, and additionally she had several special needs children. These were critical constraints. Although she set up ESL literacy-related play activities in each center, children were not actively involved in the activities unless the teacher guided and engaged with them. Because one of her roles was also managing her whole classroom and talking with visitors such as special teachers or the principal, sometimes, she was unable to take good care of each child's needs in all the centers.

### **Administrative domain**

#### ***Shortage of school support***

The school did not provide enough props or materials in the classroom for either ESL literacy learning through play or other children's learning activities. Ms. Joyce had to spend her own money even to buy chairs, tables, books, markers, and

pencils. She was very frustrated by this lack of support from the school. As part of the basic teaching curriculum, the school gave her the pre-K guidelines, with several puzzles for lessons which were not enough to do what she wanted in her class.

Whenever she implemented activities from the workshops she attended, she had to provide props or materials at her own expense. Although she wanted to do this more often to benefit the children, personal financial constraints often prevented it.

So, providing a variety of materials is sometimes hard to do because you are not getting any extra money. It's frustrating as a teacher because there is no money to provide the props and materials, so you are kind of asking, and begging, and borrowing. Therefore, I don't have enough props for them or just simple materials like markers and pencils, as well as books for them to express themselves.

And then as far as the school, for me, the biggest problem is that they don't provide money or materials for the classroom. That's been my big struggle. How you deal with the budget cut and how you get the materials that you need for your classroom are big struggles for me. At home, my husband doesn't appreciate that because I spend my own money. It's hard for me to balance and to reuse materials I have. My biggest weakness is books, and I buy books and want more books in the classroom. That's a big thing for me. Getting the right materials is the big struggle.

Ms. Joyce liked to attend workshops and after the workshops, she tried to practice new games or strategies in her class. She also had a special interest in children from diverse language backgrounds, so she wanted to learn more about how to help and teach ESL children. However, sometimes she was unable to attend workshops she wanted to because the fees had to come out of her own funds, with no school support. This frustrated her and discouraged her from learning new methods for her students. However, her passion for attending workshops and learning useful

techniques for her classroom continued even in the summer session, so she tried to find the money to attend whenever she could.

I have attended workshops especially for teaching ESL students. I read books and checked out materials prior to taking the test. I was very interested in second language learners because the first year I came to this school, the majority of the children in my class were ESL. So, I became familiar with the different theories because I wanted to be up to date with the current philosophy. I paid to attend workshops and then used the websites and resources provided from the speaker to find additional ideas. The school also allows us to go to training provided by AISD. My problem is there are not any additional funds provided so once again I end up purchasing materials on my own.

I: so, for the workshop, do you have to pay for that?

T: some of them I do. There is a workshop coming up in March. It's \$170 per day. I've asked the Korean teacher and the Chinese teacher, and all three want to go together because it's an ESL workshop. I have an interest in learning more how to help the ESL children in my class, so I would like to go even if I have to pay my own way and take the day off. Sometimes, they pay for things but right now, we have budget restraints so we have to pay for a lot of it ourselves. Like last summer, I went to a workshop which was free to attend, but it was in Dallas so I had to pay hotels and gasoline, and you don't always get reimbursed for that. But I like to go to workshops, and read, and learn new techniques.

I: I can tell you that many activities which you have provided in your classroom are based on the workshop you went to.

T: I really like to do that and the Korean bilingual teacher also wants to do that, so it's good because we are friends and go together. You learn so many ideas in one day but you forget. Questions come up, like, "how did they use it again? Or did you copy that?" so we share ideas a lot and share our questions. You can't do everything. That's what I learned. You just can't do all of them. You can't...you can't. You don't have the money at times, or energy, but just do a few things and do them well...it motivates you to take a next step.

I: you told me that even if you want to do something, the school does not provide any money for materials for children's play but I still can see your own efforts. Could you explain just a little bit more in that direction? So all the USA public schools do not support pre-K with money?

T: the pre-K department does not provide materials after you receive your first set of materials, but we have some resources to check out of our school library, math center, science materials, and literacy library. You are given, it's called 'Kit,' which are certain supplies for the year, and they give you supplies like tables, chairs...mainly some furniture, and then they gave me a few manipulatives...maybe five puzzles...not very much. And then they will give you art supplies. You have to order that through the district but I asked them every year and I filled out forms for grant money but I haven't gotten any yet.

Ms. Joyce had a recipe day on Fridays. She bought ingredients for the children's hands-on materials for the lesson, and children loved to read a recipe and follow directions to make something. However, it was a burden for her to buy all ingredients for over 15 students every Friday.

I: should you also provide snacks?

T: yes, I have to buy myself but this year the parents are doing better by providing snacks...volunteering, and we have a sign-up sheet. But on Friday, I am trying to do a cooking activity...for example, a banana split. I wrote down the recipe for them, so they could see how the recipe looks like writing and read the recipe as they made the banana split, and they loved it. And then I wanted to do it every Friday...write a recipe, and I want them to read a map, read the newspaper and...so the writing occurs in various forms. So, recipe is helping them look at how you use language, such as one cup, one slice, or half of cup and teaspoon. They loved it and then they had a great time...one scoop of banana and one scoop of strawberry and one scoop of chocolate. So I can't imagine not having things in the classroom to teach...especially for pre-K, when they need hands-on, you know they need materials. I spend lots of money.

I: Because you have provided lots of classroom materials at your own expense, and have other things from your previous working experience in a private school, I see that you still have many props and materials to use. Could you give me an example of how you can't provide materials because of the shortage of money? I don't easily recognize the shortage.

T: last year, I wanted to have more writing things but I didn't have white box boards or chalk boards or clip boards. And during that summer, when group supply time hit, I just decided to buy the word wall and picture word wall. This year, I won't start the year without it. I won't do that, because I felt bad

that one of my students from two years ago came in and said, “oh, you should have had this one when we were here.” I felt terrible. I was like...it was not that I didn’t want to...it was like I couldn’t afford to buy everything, all I wanted, so I made a list and I went through several catalogs and shopped sales and shopped garage sales for props. I made a list of literacy materials. I kind of divided it up into literacy, and into math, and into science...and I made kind of wish list and I spent 4000 dollars...it’s a lot. You know I spent all that last year for the books. They don’t understand these costs...my principal doesn’t either...he has a hard time asking the business department for money which I understand but...there are other projects going on at our school where the money goes that used to go to the teachers, so I didn’t get a lot of money. But now, I am so happy...because I have those things and take good care of the children and share the materials with my friend, the Korean bilingual teacher. Because I have fewer children this year...I had planned on having 24 again but now I have 16, so I can give 8 [materials for the children] to her class.

This shortage of school support not only made Ms. Joyce feel bad that she could not put her plans into practice, but also she pitied previous students who did not have the opportunity to use certain literacy-related materials. Thus, she decided to purchase what she needed for the classroom even though she did not get enough money from the school this year. Eventually, though, it would be too much of a burden and made it difficult to put her curriculum into practice.

#### Summary

The school did not provide enough money for props or materials not only for ESL literacy learning through play but also for other children’s learning activities in the classroom. Therefore, Ms. Joyce had to spend her own money to buy additional furniture and basic classroom supplies such as books, markers, and pencils, and she was very discouraged because of the minimal support from the school. For example,

when she had a recipe day on Fridays, she had to buy ingredients for over 15 students to use. Implementing activities from workshops she attended also required expenditure of her own funds.

Ms. Joyce liked attending workshops and putting into practice in her classroom what she had learned. Because of her special interest in children from diverse language backgrounds, she wanted to learn more about how to help and teach ESL children. However, often she could not attend workshops because she received no monetary support from the school. Although this frustrated her, she had a passion for learning new methods motivated her to attend workshops in the summer whenever possible.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented my data analysis guided by my three research questions on the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds. My data were organized into three parts. The first question was how Ms. Joyce understood of the values of play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds. In order to answer this point, I organized data into her meanings of play, her meanings of ESL literacy, her values of play in ESL literacy, and her roles in ESL literacy through play.

The second question was how Ms. Joyce used play in literacy learning in her classroom practice for children from diverse language backgrounds. The data

revealed that Ms. Joyce used play in her classroom as a warm-up to understand children's prior experiences and to help involve them in a literacy activity, and in doing so she understood their emotions/feelings and integrated them into literacy learning through play. In addition, she used play as a 'game' or 'trick' through activities such as a name wall, pocket word, game project (e.g., how many letters are in your name, the question box: 20 questions, and word games). She also used play for integrated lessons such as questions of the day, toy machines, reading a book, theme teaching, and recipe day. Moreover, she used play as an authentic assessment through songs, puzzles, and role-play. In practice, using play to act out characters in a book was a common activity during circle time. Last, spontaneous play such as dramatic play and block play with literacy-enriched props also encouraged children's literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds.

Analysis of the third question examined what were general constraints of incorporating her curriculum into the lesson including using play in ESL literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds. According to Ms. Joyce, the size of the classroom including an unstable student population with different levels of students and teacher time management in each activity were the most challenging factors. Moreover, the shortage of school support was also critical in preventing her from putting into the curriculum she planned.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, first, I will briefly summarize the findings of this study and then relate them to previous research and interpret them, under two headings: 1) general findings from this study and 2) specific findings. Then I will address implications of the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds for teachers, parents, ESL researchers and play researchers. Finally, I will summarize the limitations of this study and make recommendations for future research.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study is to describe a teacher's understanding and practice of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds in a pre-K classroom in order to examine the role of play in literacy learning. The research is guided by the following questions.

1. What does a teacher understand about the value of children's play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds?
2. How does a teacher use play in literacy learning including children from diverse language backgrounds in her classroom practice?

3. What are the general constraints of incorporating her curriculum into the lesson including using play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds?

Following is a summary of the findings, guided by my three research questions.

### **The teacher's understanding of the value of play**

The answer to this question appears to be that Ms. Joyce believes that play is a concrete, creative, fun activity for children's learning and development. She also believes that play can help kids with short attention spans and may provide natural peer learning and teaching context through children's social interaction. About ESL literacy, she values emergent literacy learning, providing literacy-enriched materials in her classroom along with emphasizing children's native language development. Her values of play in ESL literacy are that play: 1) becomes an international language, 2) provides a relaxed and comfortable environment for children's learning, 3) helps with integrated lessons such as literacy, math through play together, and 4) makes a natural connection between home language and target language (English). Last, in terms of her roles, she described herself as a provider, player, facilitator, helper, and monitor in ESL literacy through play.

### **The teacher's practice of using play in her classroom**

Evidence from this study provides the following answer to the question. In Ms. Joyce's classroom practice, she used play as a warm-up in terms of helping and understanding children through their prior experiences to become involved in a

literacy activity, and to understand their emotions/feelings and to integrate them into literacy learning through play. In addition, she used play as ‘game’ or ‘trick’ through activities such as a name wall, pocket word, and game projects. She also used play for integrated lessons such as questions of the day, theme teaching, and recipe day. Moreover, she used play as an authentic assessment through songs, puzzles, and role-play. Last, spontaneous play such as dramatic play, and block play with literacy-enriched props such as books, papers, pencils, newspapers, and post-its are seen as encouraging children’s literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds.

### **General constraints of incorporating her curriculum into the lesson**

The answer to the third question from the analysis of a teacher’s constraints of implementing her understanding into practice follows. First, according to Ms. Joyce, the size of the classroom including having a shifting population with different levels of students, and the management of her time in each activity are the most challenging factors preventing her from putting her plans into practice. For example, although she sets up ESL literacy-related play activities in the pretend play area, children do not become actively involved in the activities unless the teacher guides and engages with them. One of her roles is also managing her whole classroom and talking with visitors, such as special teachers or the principal, which does not always allow her to take good care of each child’s needs in all centers at the same time.

Second, shortage of school support is also critical in restricting practice in her classroom. She is very frustrated when the school does not support her by providing enough props or materials not only for ESL literacy learning through play but also for other children's learning activities in the classroom. Ms. Joyce has to spend her own money to buy even chairs, tables, books, markers, and pencils. In addition, she likes to attend workshops, and after workshops, she tries to put into practice new games or strategies for her children including ESL children. However, sometimes, she cannot attend the workshops she wants to because she has to pay most of the fees herself with no support from the school. This frustrates and discourages her from learning new methods for her students.

### **Findings of the Study Related to Previous Research**

#### **General findings: comparing data on Ms. Joyce with existing research**

General findings of this study are consistent with much previous research, and are discussed in detail in the following sections. First, I will introduce Ms. Joyce's understandings and practices of play, literacy, and play in literacy learning. Second, I will present my findings of her beliefs and practices of the connection between the child's first language and the second language, and then third, her role of play in literacy learning will be discussed. Last, I will present her practice of play, such as dramatic play or block play, for children from diverse language backgrounds.

*Ms. Joyce's understandings and practices of play, literacy, and play in literacy learning*

Ms. Joyce believes that play provides a social learning environment and a natural environment for peer learning and teaching. Her belief is that children talk, listen, and share stories through play, so they may increase and stretch their vocabularies and express themselves as well as their friendships. In her practice, pretending to be a teacher holding books or pointing at letters with toy pointers are common in her classroom. She concludes that ESL children involve themselves more joyfully in literacy-related activities with their peers while they are in pretend play, block play, or other playful activities. Since Ms. Joyce is an experienced teacher who has ESL students with other native English-speaking children in her class, from this study, teachers may learn the importance of peer learning and teaching among students in a joyful atmosphere such as pretend play, block play or other playful activities.

According to Silver (1999), play helps establish bonds of friendship, independence, and confidence for ESL children who cannot communicate well in English with other children. The findings of Silver's research also support the notion that play is an open-ended, risk-free, and comfortable environment for ESL children's peer teaching and learning which is consistent with the current study. Therefore, teachers could think about and use play as a proper medium for ESL children's learning and communication among peers and teachers. Long (1997)

describes also how play-based activities with friends provide a comfortable setting as well as a motivation for experimentation. Based on her study, a native English-speaking child can acquire Icelandic with an understanding of grammatical structure, vocabulary, pronunciation, and appropriate usage of the target language enjoyably through a comfortable, purposeful, and supportive play environment. In addition, the play-based peer interactions are supportive not only for giving the opportunity to practice language but also for providing specific forms of support for language learning. Ms. Joyce does not specifically mention that ESL children can acquire an understanding of grammatical structure, vocabulary, pronunciation, and proper usage of English through play-based activities with friends. However, she agrees that children, including ESL children, will benefit from these play-based activities with friends in the use of their vocabulary, the expression of themselves, and the development of their friendships, so teachers could reflect their language lesson and apply play-based activities for children's language learning.

According to Ms. Joyce's understanding about literacy learning, children's scribbling, drawing pictures, marking something on the paper, and writing invented spellings are all examples of children's early literacy. She believes that these different modes are all interconnected with literacy learning in English. She also mentions that the more children are familiar with environmental print, including their names in the classroom, the more they are interested in reading and writing letters, starting with writing their names. She observes that ESL children, especially, draw

or express the same pictures over and over until they feel confident to expand their knowledge or express their perspectives, so she helps them make their scribbling and marks meaningful. From this, teachers can help ESL students learn literacy, providing rich environmental print including their names, and encouraging them to scribble, draw, or mark something over and over until they feel confident enough to expand their knowledge or express their perspectives. In her practice, she provides environmental print everywhere in the classroom such as on the mat, cubby, carpet, wall, and centers where their work is displayed.

There have been continuous debates over philosophical differences and conflicting opinions advanced concerning the best ways to teach young children to read. The debate is often presented as one of ‘whole language methods’ versus ‘phonics/code-oriented approaches.’ Based on the article of Quick (1998), the 1987 version of the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) guidelines support that

...children should be immersed in an environment rich in oral and print, and that opportunities should be provided for children to construct their own knowledge of print and reading...skills should be taught in meaningful contexts to individual children on an as-needed basis (Quick, 1998, pp. 257-258).

This article also mentions that both DAP and whole language methods share similar beliefs that emphasize respecting individual children’s differences, providing concrete, meaningful, and relevant activities, and assessing children’s errors as important and diagnostic in literacy learning. In addition, those beliefs are consistent

with the concepts and theories of DAP and the whole language, but many times are not seen in teachers' practices.

Based on the findings of this study, Ms. Joyce's understandings and practices of early literacy are consistent with the view that "teachers do not view whole language beliefs and phonics instruction as a dichotomy, but rather as complementary that phonics instruction was imbedded within an emergent literacy perspective" (Quick, 1998, p. 264). Ms. Joyce emphasizes not only the importance of providing a literacy-enriched environment for children's interests and voluntarily engagements in early literacy, but also she values teaching word spellings in an appropriate context. She likes to combine theories or strategies to create her own methods to teach children, so that she balances the use of good points of each theory or method. She agrees that playing at writing and reading by scribbling, drawing, pretending to write, or pretending to read may encourage children to explore various forms of writing and reading. She also supports the idea that children learn a lot about reading from the labels, signs, and other kinds of print they see around them. Overall, her practice agrees with Lawhon and Cobb (2002) that highly visible print labels on objects, signs, and bulletin boards in classrooms demonstrate the practical uses of written language.

Ms. Joyce also believes that listening and speaking skills are directly connected with children's literacy learning, so teachers should teach all skills together. In her practice, she provides many big and small books including books on

tape in each center because she wants children to see and hear various voices of expression of language from themselves and others. In addition, she encourages children to listen to and share their story verbally and lets them try to draw or write what they want to express. Recent research is also consistent with her view that activities combining the four modes-- listening, speaking, reading, and writing-- are more likely to positively enhance both literacy and oral language development (Fitzgerald, 1993). In addition, having authentic communication usually involves more than one way of using language, which includes speaking, listening, reading, and writing all together in children's real experience. For example, Ms. Joyce uses the pretend play area as a real experience place where children can practice their language through both oral and written communication. She agrees with Perrotta (1994)'s premise that since the processes of writing, reading, speaking, and listening in a second language are interrelated and interdependent, classroom teaching should be focused on meaningful language opportunities in meaningful contexts. From this, teachers may reflect ESL children's literacy learning including speaking and listening abilities during pretend play as an authentic learning context to practice all types of language learning such as speaking, listening, reading and writing all together.

The role of play in literacy learning is discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

Ms. Joyce states that play becomes an international language. She believes that play is a universal tool for children to learn and explore. She also points out that play is a good medium for both teacher and ESL children to communicate with each other through facial expressions and body gestures. In her practice, she acts out daily routines or directions to follow and lets children know what's next in their schedule. In addition, play as acting out is used after reading a book to help children, including children from diverse language backgrounds, to clarify some words or sentences in order to communicate. She reads a book with a realistic voice, facial expressions, and body motions, encouraging children to follow her. In this process, she always remembers her ESL population and tries to provide a version of their primary language with the same book in English if it is possible.

The study of Truscott & Watts-Taffe (2003) is also supportive of Ms. Joyce's view that teachers may use a variety of verbal and nonverbal cues during literacy instruction serving children from diverse language backgrounds. Teachers may change their pitch and volume to stress character voice, use exaggerated intonation for key words, and use facial expressions or gestures during a storybook reading. From this, teachers could help ESL children communicate and learn language through acting out such things as realistic voice, facial expression, and body motions including controlling their pitch and volume to stress key words and expressions.

Ms. Joyce believes that play provides relaxed and comfortable learning environments for ESL children to try out new language because she knows that ESL children have to feel comfortable enough to risk using a new language. In her practice, she uses play as a good medium for soothing children's emotions and helping them to be involved in learning activity in a supportive atmosphere.

She agrees that teachers should look at ESL children's English learning as an integral process of negotiating knowledge, exchanging personal experiences and thought with authentic, meaning-making purposes. In this vein, language minority students would be more likely to risk learning a new language when they feel confident and supported by peers and teachers (Ernst & Richard, 1995). Cummins (1996) also mentions that the quality of teacher-student interactions and peer interactions could be more important to student success than using specific teaching methods (Garcia, 2000).

Based on Ms. Joyce's understandings and classroom practices, play helps to create integrated lessons such as literacy, science, math through play, which involves to her concrete, hands-on, or fun activities. She names the grocery shopping store as a good example of a lesson in an authentic context integrating calculating money, sorting items, reading labels, making a shopping list, and copying words in books. In addition, question of the day, playing with Leapfrog toys, reading books, theme teaching, and recipe day are examples of how she integrated play into lessons. Since Ms. Joyce defines play as something related with concrete, hands-on or fun

activities, sometimes her practice of play for integrated lesson does not quite fit the definition of play from other theorists. However, she uses her own definition of play in her practice to promote ESL children's literacy learning, so question of the day, playing with Leapfrog toys, reading books, theme teaching, and recipe day are examples of how she integrated play into her lessons.

Supporting the current findings, Hudelson (1989) suggested that teaching English through content-area activities such as math, science, and social studies may provide students with the opportunity to use English in both oral and written forms.

Hudelson (1989) points out that

Students learn both content and language by being active, by doing things, by participating in activities directly related to specific content and by using both oral and written language to carry out these activities. Language develops holistically, not in parts. Language develops through use, not through isolated practice (Lindfors, 1987). This is true in both a native and a second language (pp. 139-140).

As a classroom practice, Hudelson also suggests that teachers can teach a second language to children through meaningful integrated lessons such as language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and these lessons are considered crucial to second language academic success (Hudelson, 1989). This is consistent with Ms. Joyce's understanding and practice of the role of play in integrated lessons including children's literacy learning.

In addition, other research supports Ms. Joyce's beliefs that thematic lessons may help children develop both academic skills and learning strategies in each content area through an in-depth problem-solving approach. Since language

minority students would learn best when lessons connect to their past experiences and cultures, teachers should be sensitive and choose themes or lessons that all students can be involved in cooperatively (Collier, 1995).

In her practice, play is used as an informal assessment to determine whether children have a basic knowledge of literacy, observing activities such as singing a song, playing a puzzle/game, observing how to hold a book and turn the pages, and writing messages in a playful way. Ms. Joyce stated in an informal conversation that evaluation through informal questions and watching center time activities is useful and not threatening. Although she uses playtime as a non-threatening informal assessment of children to check their basic knowledge of literacy, in her practice she does not make a written record of these informal conversations in order to later provide specific literacy lessons for each child. However, to use play as an informal assessment of children's literacy knowledge, she should have more specific and concrete plans to evaluate and relate her lessons to individual children.

Klenk (2001) states that the literacy-enriched play center is a context where young children could experiment with emergent writing, emergent reading, and storytelling. Ms. Joyce agrees with Klenk (2001), emphasizing the importance of a play-based literacy context not only for providing rich, authentic opportunities to learn print-related skills but also for giving the teacher a chance to assess their comprehension and use of written language. Supporting the current findings, Goldhaber et al. (1996) found that teachers may use play-based literacy learning

through a tool, “environmental literacy scan” in their practice, which can be used to check whether teachers encourage literacy behaviors in the classroom. That study also offers practical suggestions for optimizing the classroom environment as a context for emergent literacy development. In this study, Ms. Joyce does not use any formal chart to check environmental literacy development in her classroom but teachers’ use of a self-check on whether their classroom environment is suitable for effective emergent literacy learning of (ESL) children would be a practical tool.

***Her connection between the child’s first language and the second language***

Ms. Joyce emphasizes the importance of the first language development in order to teach English to children from diverse language backgrounds. In her practice, she provides a Korean Menu, Chinese newspapers, books in other languages in pretend play areas, encouraging children to read, copy, and talk with friends. In addition, based on interviews, she says that she asks Korean parents to read Korean books during the weekend, emphasizing that ‘if you can speak Korean well, you can speak English, too.’

Following is supporting research with which Ms. Joyce appears to agree. There has been supportive research that maintaining students’ first language development would help their second language development. If children do not have a strong native language base in their spoken and written language, it would be a challenge to promote spoken and written English in school (Schirmer, Casbon &

Twiss, 1996). Researchers also report that children who begin to learn a second language during the preschool years can be successful with continuing cognitive development in the first language. If children stop or slow down their cognitive development in the first language during preschool years, they may perform poorly overall on school curriculum (Collier, 1995).

In addition, Ms. Joyce does not see much difference between methods of teaching ESL children and teaching others because she thinks learning has to do more with personality. Since she thinks like this, in her practice she does not treat ESL children differently when she teaches literacy through play, although she shows a special concern for them by providing lessons that are more visual, acted out, and concrete. She agrees that ESL children are individuals who come to the school with varying native languages, with different cultural backgrounds, and unique life experiences. Therefore, ESL children develop literacy at their own pace depending on their unique personalities, varying social styles, and English ability, so some learners are more willing to take risks than others who prefer to use familiar patterns for a long time (Hudelson, 1989).

Ms. Joyce believes that play makes a natural connection between the home language and target language. She tries to label each center both in English and the child's home language in order to respect and help children from diverse language backgrounds to make a connection between English learning and their primary language. In her practice, she asks parents with children from diverse language

backgrounds to label each center in their first language as a home project. Although Ms. Joyce tries to label each center both in English and the child's home language, Korean and Chinese are the main foreign languages among a few other languages of the children in her class. However, classroom teachers should respect each ESL child's language or unique culture even if there is only one ESL child in a classroom. In addition, many times teachers make a mistake and consider Asian children (Korean, Chinese or Japanese) as one culture group, but teachers should be sensitive enough to understand each child's unique cultural situation even within the same culture.

In addition, Ms. Joyce encourages children to keep and practice both English and their home language in their play. As an example, she uses several Korean children as English translators to help and communicate with other Korean children who do not speak English at all at the beginning of the year, and she sees benefits for both groups of children.

Ms. Joyce agrees with the research that children whose primary languages are other than English show a strong basis in a first language which promotes school achievement in a second language (Cummins, 1979). ESL children are more likely to become readers and writers of English when they are already familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in their primary language.

As an example of ESL children's literacy through play, Kenner (1997) sets up the role-play area ('home center') in the classroom, which creates a connection

between school environment and children's home literacy experiences. In this study, the role-play area is a site where children act out a variety of situations with the help of props such as household furniture and cooking utensils and even calendars, telephone directories, magazines, catalogues, writing paper, envelopes, notepads, and pens in their home languages (e.g. Spanish, Yoruba, Gujarati, Thai, Arabic, Tigrinya, Philipino and Cantonese). As a result, ESL children make many written responses during their play using these materials in various languages with the support of parents who bring props to the nursery (Kenner, 1997). In Ms. Joyce's home center, she encourages children to bring some props such as cake mix boxes or cereal boxes even if children do not use them at home, but she does not explicitly ask parents to bring props like Kenner does. However, she also provides many props in the home center as well as literacy-related props such as pens, pencils, small papers for memos, Chinese, Korean, and Disney books. As a result, it encourages ESL children to use both oral/written languages in learning English while they play with other friends.

According to Schwarzer, Haywood & Lorenzen (2003), mainstream teachers may help children from diverse language backgrounds respect students' first language development along with their second language development by including culturally relevant themes in their literacy curriculum, and encouraging parents to bring magazines, coupons, newspapers, bottles, and other objects containing print to teach real life experience in their native languages. Therefore, teachers could learn

that although Ms. Joyce does not encourage parents to bring literacy-related props to school, overall, she agrees with the previous study that teachers may help children from diverse language backgrounds respect their first language development along with the second language learning by including culturally relevant themes in their literacy curriculum.

***The teacher's different roles in the play associated with ESL literacy learning***

When discussing the teacher's role, Ms. Joyce describes herself as a provider, player, facilitator, and monitor during children's literacy learning through play including children from diverse language backgrounds. She believes that explorations are always the first steps to learning and knowing new things and progress to the next step in literacy learning through play. In her practice, based on my observation, although she sets up ESL literacy-related play activities in play centers such as the grocery store or beauty shop with pencils, books, and papers, children do not actively connect their play with literacy learning unless she guides and engages with them. However, since her role also focuses on managing her whole classroom and talking with visitors such as special teachers or the principal, sometimes she is unable to simultaneously care for each child's needs in literacy-related play centers.

Previous research studies about teacher roles during children's literacy learning through play bear out my observation. Bennett, Wood, and Rogers' (1998)

study reports that in practice teachers take more interventionist roles in teaching through play, rather than emphasizing spontaneous learning as their theory would suggest, so they integrate play into the curriculum with specific intentions to guide literacy or math learning in play. In short, their study found that in classroom practice play is more structured by teachers than their theories of play as free, spontaneous, and choice oriented. Morrow & Rand (1991) also found that preschool and kindergarten children are likely to engage in more voluntary literacy behaviors during free-play periods when literacy materials are introduced and teachers guide children to use those materials. Another study revealed that with adult support and guidance, children in literacy-enriched play centers participate in more literacy behaviors during free playtime than do children in thematic centers without adult guidance (Morrow & Rand, 1991; Rybczynski & Tory, 1995). Roskos & Neuman (1993) state that day-care teachers do facilitate literacy in play using characteristic behaviors and roles in the play context, for example, as observers, participants, and trainers. Saracho's (2001) study also found that the teacher assumes roles as monitor, facilitator, inquirer, extender, and decision-maker in the classroom while continually constructing a literacy-play environment. Although the current study presents teacher roles as a part of its findings in literacy learning through play, the results are consistent with previous research that teachers' active involvement and guidance are very important in facilitating children's literacy behaviors during their play. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to engage actively in ESL children's

literacy learning as providers, play partners, facilitators, or monitors during their play.

***Her spontaneous play such as dramatic play or block play***

As an ideal context for practicing integrated lessons, in Ms. Joyce's classroom children's dramatic play is reinforced for children's literacy learning including children from diverse language backgrounds by providing pencils, papers, books, and markers. Ms. Joyce keeps the home center in her classroom all year because she thinks it is a good place for soothing children's emotions and solving their problems through play. Asian restaurant, beauty shop, grocery shop, doctor's office are examples of her dramatic play areas. In addition, Ms. Joyce provides several books or newspapers with ESL children's home languages in these centers, so ESL children feel free to read books and share their knowledge of their food with other friends.

This is consistent with previous research that early literacy learning is promoted by a print-rich environment, observation of others using literacy, social interaction with parents and peers during story reading and other literacy activities that give opportunities to engage in emergent forms of reading and writing in meaningful situations (Roskos & Neuman, 1993). Ms. Joyce also agrees that young children spend much time and energy playing, so play can be connected with potential links to the development of literacy. For example, pretend play or symbolic

play allows children to develop and refine their capacities to use symbols, to represent experience, and to construct imaginary worlds into writing and reading (McLane & McNamee, 1990). In this print-enriched environment, children often incorporate literacy into their dramatic play, so play can be a good medium for young children's learning and development (Vukelich, 1994; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; IRA & NAEYC, 1998). In addition, she supports by her understanding and practice that literacy-enriched free play and dramatic play environment greatly increase the amount of time children engage in literate behaviors, emphasizing the value of play for short attention span kids (Nell, 2000; Strickland et al., 1990).

Therefore, this study may give support to evidence that dramatic play areas with literacy-related props can be good mediums not only for typical children's literacy learning, but also for children from diverse language backgrounds.

In addition, Ms. Joyce regards block play as important not only for children's gross motor and fine motor skill development, but also as an ideal place for ESL children's literacy learning, providing many hands-on activities, concrete objects, and examples in this center. Goldhaber, Lipson, Sortino and Daniels (1996) also suggest and demonstrate how teachers can arrange a block play area with literacy-enriched materials for native English-speaking children in a kindergarten. In their study, a teacher uses labels to indicate which block shapes children may hold, adding a basket with index cards, masking tape and pencils. In addition, a teacher invites

and encourages children to create signs and labels for their structures, so later children can refer to and share drawings of what they build.

In classroom practice, Ms. Joyce sets up various blocks with many human and animal figures including literacy-related materials such as post-its, memos, papers, pens, markers, and books. She encourages children to look at pictures in a book or draw, copy, or write a story about what they have built or what they think to give children a chance to express themselves or explain what is happening to them. From this study, teachers may learn that a literacy-enriched block play area can be also a meaningful place for literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds.

### **Specific findings**

Findings about Ms. Joyce as a unique teacher with specific beliefs and practices

Some of the more specific findings of this study also confirm findings of previous research studies and are discussed in the following sections. First, I will address Ms. Joyce's definition, type, and notion of play, and then second, I will discuss previous studies about literacy learning in the play context. Third, I will talk about the influence of her membership in the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as it relates to the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). Last, I will provide a discussion of the relationship between her

beliefs and practices, focusing on the general constraints of implementing her curriculum into classroom practice including using play in literacy learning.

First, according to Ms. Joyce's beliefs, play is concrete, manipulative, fun, hands-on, and creative activity. In addition, it provides open-ended, self-discovery and theme-based teaching for children's learning and development. In her practice she often changes her classroom and asks children to figure out what is new or what has been changed. She regards all her concrete, manipulative, and hands-on classroom activities as play, including games and puzzles during circle time and center time. In that sense, she regards a hands-on activity as play, a fun activity as play, a manipulative activity as play, so her practice of play is broader than her understanding of play. In particular, Ms. Joyce uses play in the form of games or "tricks" in her classroom to encourage children to concentrate on their learning in a fun way. In her practice, she uses a term, *game*, in many classroom activities such as the name wall, pocket wall, the question box: 20 questions, and word games. Moreover, she emphasizes cooperative games like the "HEART game" so that children may help each other to learn letters while they play together.

Her definition of play and naming of play as a game or trick are based on her own understanding about play rather than any scholarly definition of play. For example, Sutton-Smith (1997) addresses play in scholarship and practice under seven rhetorics: power (in sports), identity (in group), fate (in gambling), frivolity (in nonsense), progress (learning/development), imaginary (in fantasy), and self (in

leisure) in his book, The Ambiguity of Play (1997). He explores the definition in scholarship of play from various forms of play. In his book, play has very broad definitions ranging from biology, anthropology, and nonsense play to pretend and games, because he sees play as a scientific notion and discourse to be studied in its broadest meanings and not focused only on educational philosophy (Reifel, 1999). However, since Ms. Joyce's play definition has been focused on children's learning and development, her definition of play can be compared to one of Sutton-Smith's rhetorics, play as progress in that "play's function is to contribute to juvenile growth, particularly conventional moral, physical, affective, social and cognitive socialization" (Sutton-Smith, 1999, p. 152). In this vein, Ms. Joyce's definition of play as concrete, manipulative, fun, hands-on, and creative activity, especially including games or trick is very different from the definition of play of theorists like Sutton-Smith (1999, 1997). In addition, this is not like the research that creates the progress rhetoric. Ms. Joyce's view of play as progress is very different from other play researchers who have usually focused on the study of children's pretend, symbolic, or make-believe play for their learning and development. Therefore, from this study of a teacher, other researchers may want to think about the view or definition of play as progress not only regarding children's pretend play, but also other types of play such as concrete, manipulative, fun, hands-on, and creative activities, including games. As Sutton-Smith (1999) states, "The problem of finding a useful general definition of play is difficult in a field divided between different

disciplines each claiming that its own kind of play is the one that is central to the phenomenon” (p. 149). In addition, Sutton-Smith considers that cultural meaning validates the existence of the seven rhetorics of play by “criteria of coherence that can be used to affirm their presence” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p.15). He presents as criteria for play the following features: cultural attitudes, advocates, distinctiveness of play and players, affinity of disciplines, a “matching” of advocates, subject matter, hegemony over the players and competitors, disciplines, and play definitions by those experiencing play with intrinsic or extrinsic play functions (Reifel, 1999; Sutton-Smith, 1997). However, Ms. Joyce did not include cultural meaning in her definition of play either in her understanding or her practice. She used play with her own definition of literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds, in which she used play in various forms in her own unique way: play as warm-up, game/trick, integrated lessons, assessment, acting out characters in books with other types of children’s spontaneous dramatic and block play.

An interesting point is that, overall, these understandings of play were reflected in her practices in literacy learning in her classroom serving children from diverse language backgrounds. This is supportive of previous research that “what teachers do or do not do is strongly influenced by how they define language proficiency and their understanding of second language development” (Truscott & Watts-Taffe, 2003, p. 194). Bennett, Wood, and Rogers’ (1998) study in teaching through play also reports that each teacher has his/her own unique philosophy about

play that is reflected in classroom practice, and this seemed to be the case with Ms. Joyce. In their study, the authors describe three teachers among nine--Jenny, Eve, and Gina--who have theories and practices about play that differ from their philosophies, experiences, and constraints. For example, Jenny, an experienced teacher, approaches play as a modified High/Scope curriculum and uses it for its rich possibilities for intellectual, social, and emotional learning and thinking through children's making connections, experiments, practicing skills, interacting with other people within the environment, excluding super-hero play, such as Batman. Eve sees play as what children want it to be, so it includes a variety of forms such as children's arts/crafts, games, solitary behavior, reading, imitating, and so on. She says that play is essential for the intellectual growth and social adjustment of the child because language plays a central role in imitation, discussion, general verbalization, and problem-solving. In her practice, she emphasizes play-based curriculum in her classroom, providing sand, water, bricks, dressing-up, and imaginative play. Gina, a novice teacher sees play as a learning medium and focuses on free play where she believes that real learning occurs. She also believes that play allows children to have freedom and choice for their enjoyment and learning.

In short, although these three teachers from the Bennett et. al. study and Ms. Joyce seemed to have several common understandings of play, these were not the same because each teacher practiced her own notions of play in different practical ways. Although they all agreed that play is a good medium for children's learning

and development, their notions of play were different and unique. For example, Ms. Joyce understood play as concrete, manipulative, fun, hands-on, and creative activities and focused on using play as warm-up, game/trick, integrated lessons, and assessment. However, in the Bennett study, Jenny emphasized play as a modified High/Scope curriculum and used it for rich possibilities for intellectual, social, and emotional learning, so she excluded super-hero play. Eve, in the same study, defined play as what children wanted it to be, so it contained a variety of forms including children's arts/crafts, games, solitary behavior, reading, and imitating. In addition, Gina in Bennett's study saw play as a learning medium and focused on more free play where she believed the real learning occurs.

Moreover, these different practical ways were influenced by their intentions or assumptions about learning through play (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 1998). Therefore, a teacher may have a unique understanding about a topic or concept, and it may strongly affect her classroom practices within her own educational rhetorics of play (Reifel, 1999). In addition, there is evidence that a teacher's understanding/belief matches consistently with her practice.

Second, previous play research with literacy learning has focused heavily on how children's dramatic play is connected to literacy learning with the provision of literacy-related props such as pencils, papers, and books and markers with/without thematic materials such as papers for doctor's appointment, prescription, or patient's record (e.g., a doctor's office) (e.g., Roskos & Neuman, 1993; Christie & Enz, 1992;

Morrow & Rand, 1991). Another study by Saracho (2001) examines teachers' perceptions of their roles to promote literacy learning during the children's play periods in a kindergarten classroom of Spanish-speaking children. However, throughout the study, children's play periods were not clearly defined, but only mentioned as "children in each class had the opportunity to select among various activities in different learning centers during play time" (Saracho, 2001, p.21). From her statement and her findings, we can infer that teachers used children's center time as their play time. Therefore, her study presents play as a time spent in centers, not a practical notion of each teacher's definition of play. However, based on the current study, each teacher may have a unique understanding of play or playfulness and it may be strongly reflected in her/his practice in various forms. In this vein, each teacher's knowledge or practical notions of play could be much broader and varied than simply play as a time spent in centers. One more point about Saracho's (2001) study is that although the study indicates that data analysis is strongly based on previous research (e.g., Neuman & Roskos, 1992), in her study, children are not observed engaging in spontaneous play, as is seen in other previous play-literacy research. Therefore, we may learn from the present study that the way a teacher uses play in various situations conforms to his/her preconceived concept of play in literary learning.

About notions of play, there would be a difference between what teachers call play and do about play, including cultural notions of play and developmental notions

of play. For example, in terms of the uses of play theory, Ms. Joyce believes that play is concrete, manipulative, fun, hands-on, and creative activity, including games or trick. She also emphasized the importance of children's self-exploration through materials first, which is partly like a theory of Piaget including play as concrete, manipulative, hands-on activities and games. However, even though she was supportive of Piaget in her understanding of play, in her practice, she uses games and rules at a much earlier age (age 4-5) and stage than Piaget would recommend (age 7-11). In addition, whenever she uses play in literacy learning, she takes a strong interventionist role supporting Vygotsky's theory that uses play as warm-up, game/trick, integrated lessons, assessment, and acting out characters in books with dramatic and block play. Therefore, Ms. Joyce's use of play theory does not belong to any one specific kind, but it has a much broader meaning, because her understanding and practice of play seem to come more likely from her classroom practice than a theory.

As another example, during the 1980s, literacy-enriched play research was much based on the use of Piagetian theory that teachers should provide various literacy-related materials such as pencils, markers, or notepads for play-related reading and writing activities. However, during and after the 1990s, research has shifted to social aspects with Vygotsky's theory emphasizing the combination of a literacy-enriched environment and teacher scaffolding as a significant enhancement for literacy learning during play (Roskos & Christie, 2001).

Therefore, teachers may use multiple theories of play from previous researchers, theorists, and their own practices in order to create their own theory of understanding and practice of play in literacy learning. In this vein, no one theory can provide enough points to be responsive to the individual and cultural variation of each unique classroom context (Genishi, Dubetz & Focarino, 1995).

Third, because my research subject, Ms. Joyce, was a member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the organization that develops Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) guidelines, she may have understood or developed her beliefs about play and literacy learning reflecting these guidelines. Therefore, presenting NAEYC guidelines, and comparing them to her beliefs and practice about play may help us understand where her beliefs come from and how she applies her beliefs into practices.

Early childhood educators and practitioners who support Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) state that “play is an important vehicle for children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development as well as a reflection of their development” in the NAEYC statement of their position (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 14). In addition, they say that “play also provides a safe and highly motivating context within which children can learn a second language” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 110). They maintain that the ideal conditions for learning a second language are similar to those for learning a first language, through developing trust and meaningful, comprehensible experiences (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

In relation to play and literacy learning, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) mentions that interactive, collaborative activities such as dramatic play and block play provide rich language-promoting opportunities. Children use language to establish roles, for the symbolic use of objects, and for other shared meaning (e.g. Let's pretend this block is the car phone) (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). According to them, dramatic play has great value for children's language, cognitive, and social development, so teachers should actively foster and extend it through a variety of strategies. Teachers may provide various play props, both realistic materials such as cooking utensils or baby dolls and open-ended materials like blocks, so children may use them as different things according to play stories.

Although DAP guidelines mention that play is an ideal condition for children's learning and development including children from diverse language backgrounds, their notions of play in literacy learning are only limited to children's pretend play or block play. However, from this study, Ms. Joyce's understanding and use of play in literacy learning includes not only these two areas of children's play, but also various other playful activities such as pretending to be a teacher holding books, pointing at letters with toy pointers, or games/tricks.

In addition, although DAP guidelines state that play would provide a safe and highly motivating context for children who are learning a second language, it is hard

to generalize about the whole ESL population with only a few sentences in their statement, not considering deeply each child's uniqueness and language learning.

In short, overall, Ms. Joyce's previous membership in NAEYC partly influences her beliefs and practices in terms of play, literacy learning, and classroom practices such as pretend play and block play, and supports DAP guidelines. However, the current study indicates that a teacher's use of play to promote literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds can be much more specific as well as broader than represented by her NAEYC membership influence, including her own experience with ESL children, and other ESL theories based on her ESL certification. Therefore, early childhood educators and practitioners who support Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) should rethink and revise DAP guidelines about ESL children's play and literacy learning, considering teachers' various notions of play with their practices and their knowledge of theories of play respecting each child's unique culture and language difference.

Last, based on my findings about relationships between her understanding and practice, most of Ms. Joyce's classroom practices are consistent with her understanding of play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds. As a result, her interests in play led her to make her curriculum more concrete, creative, and fun in the literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds.

Additional previous research confirms that teachers have theories and belief systems that influence their perception, planning and practices (Clark & Peterson, 1986). The findings of the current study are in concert with Elbaz' (1981) findings that a teacher's practical knowledge is not acquired randomly and abstractly, rather it is learned, tested, and developed through field experiences. In addition, the Elbaz study provides a useful framework for thinking about research on teachers' implicit theories and about the dynamic of those theories in use.

...teachers do seem to hold implicit theories about their work and that these conceptual systems can be made more explicit through a variety of direct and indirect inquiry techniques....Teachers do have theories and belief systems that influence their perceptions, plans and actions (Clark & Peterson, 1986, pp. 291-292).

The relationship between Ms. Joyce's understanding and practice is consistent with the theory that teachers' beliefs influence their perceptions and judgments, which affect their behavior in the classroom, or that understanding the belief structures of teachers is essential to improving their professional preparation and teaching practices (Pajares, 1992). Researchers have demonstrated that beliefs influence knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task definition and selection, interpretation of course content, and comprehension monitoring (Pajares, 1992).

In regarding to classroom practice, McMahon et al. (1998) examined the relationship between kindergarten teachers' perceptions of literacy acquisition and children's literacy involvement and classroom materials. The results strongly suggest that kindergarten teachers' perceptions of literacy acquisition do affect

children's involvement in literacy events, the quantity of classroom literacy materials, and the quality of classroom literacy materials. These findings support the growing body of research that identifies teachers' perceptions as having a critical impact on classroom practices. Saracho's (2001) study of the roles of the teacher as play intervener in the support of literacy learning is another example of how teachers extend their roles in relation to children's play to integrate their philosophy of emergent literacy in early childhood play environments. As teachers acquire knowledge and understanding of their roles, they apply the principles of literacy and early childhood education to practical situations (Saracho, 2001).

There are also studies regarding ESL teachers' beliefs and practices for children from diverse language backgrounds. As an example, Johnson (1992) examines the relationship between ESL teachers' beliefs about second language learning and teaching and their instructional practice during literacy instruction for non-native speakers of English. As a result, literacy instruction was found to be consistent with each teacher's theoretical beliefs. Her results are consistent with the current findings emphasizing the importance of teachers' theoretical beliefs on instructional practices within literacy contexts. Johnson confirms also that the sources of ESL teachers' theoretical beliefs may come from the methodological approaches revealed in her study: the skill-based, rule-based, and function-based approaches that are prominent when teachers begin teaching ESL (Johnson, 1992).

Although Ms. Joyce's understanding of the role of play in literacy learning matches her classroom practices through various playful activities and moments, several difficulties arise in implementing Ms. Joyce's beliefs into her practices. First, too many students in a classroom is the biggest impediment. Second are various learning levels among children, including several who needed special care in terms of speech and language development. These became critical constraints that prevented her from putting her understanding into practice. Third, a shortage of school support made it hard for Ms. Joyce to practice what she planned in her curriculum including literacy learning with children from diverse language backgrounds. Ms. Joyce had to spend her own money to buy such items as chairs, tables, books, markers, and pencils. Even if she had special concerns for children from diverse language backgrounds and wanted to attend workshops and purchase learning materials, sometimes she could not afford to spend her own money, and this frustrated her.

In short, most of her constraints occurred not from an internal mismatch between her understanding of the role of play in literacy learning and its practice, but from the external constraints of too many students at different levels and lack of school support. Stipek and Byler (1997) also point out that many teachers feel they are unable to implement a program consistent with their beliefs because their ability to do so is restrained by external constraints such as administrators, parents, or other teachers, not an internal mismatch between thinking and behaving. Therefore, it is

important to reiterate that many times teachers do not put their beliefs into practice as they wish not because of an inconsistency between their thinking and behaving, but due to external constraints (Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). This leads to the conclusion that administrators should be sensitive to and supportive of the quality of school education by respecting and providing for teachers' needs in a timely way.

### **Implications of the Study**

From examining a teacher's understanding and classroom practice, the findings of this study on a teacher's use of play to promote literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds have several implications for teachers, parents, ESL researchers, and play researchers.

#### **For teachers**

This study explores a teacher's understanding and practice of the role of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds in a pre-K classroom. According to Ms. Joyce, the primary participant in this study, play can be an ideal tool to communicate with children and teachers, not only providing students' learning and development but also giving them emotional soothing and comfort. In this process, a teacher may provide in centers literacy-related props such as books, magazines, papers, pens, and pencils respecting children's unique cultures. In this study, a teacher implements a culturally-relevant curriculum taking a small

step from putting children's different language charts, clothes, foods, and books in each center to teaching their unique cultures while children listen, talk, read, and write through play.

Along with providing culturally relevant literacy-related props, teachers can also help children from diverse language backgrounds take a role as a participant and role-model. Ms. Joyce likes to let children explore materials first in centers or activities, but she does not hesitate to participate as a partner in a book center, pretend play area, or block center. She is willing to help and understand each child's characteristics and emotion and get into their literacy learning in playful manner. She takes a role as a doctor, hair shop customer, and grocery shopper in dramatic play. Moreover, she loves to act out each word, sentence, or character during book readings in order to help children from diverse language backgrounds understand each situation.

In Saracho's (2001) study of teachers' perceptions of their roles in promoting literacy in the context of play in a Spanish-speaking kindergarten, teacher roles are identified and described as monitoring, facilitating, interacting, inquiring about, initiating, and extending children's play as well as engaging children in discussion and making decisions during eight-week literacy intervention play (Saracho, 2001). Her study reveals that kindergarten teachers are more directive in their literacy-related play instruction, providing many teacher-directive literacy activities and directing the children to the different learning centers rather than giving the children

the opportunity to participate in the learning centers of their choice within what teachers perceive as a play context, which is providing various activities in different learning centers as formal lessons during play time which is center time. However, in the current study, the definition of play of a preschool teacher, which includes children's spontaneous play such as dramatic play and block play as well as various literacy-related learning activities such as using play as warm-up, games or tricks, integrated lessons, assessment, acting out characters in books, is practiced based on Ms. Joyce's understanding of play. Although Saracho's study is different from the current study in terms of a different definition of teacher-perceived concepts about play and a population of children who speak Spanish and get most instruction in Spanish at kindergarten, both studies illustrate that a teacher takes an active role in order to help children engage in literacy learning through play. Based on my observation, in Ms. Joyce's practice, although she sets up ESL literacy-related play activities in play centers with pencils, books and papers, children do not actively connect their play with literacy learning unless she guides and engages with them. However, because other roles demand her time, she cannot always attend to each child's needs in all the centers.

Moreover, in reviewing studies about literacy through play in recent years, I can find two main philosophical backgrounds among the studies. One is the Piagetian approach and the other is the Vygotskian approach. Both emphasize the importance of literacy-enriched materials in play areas in order to help children's

emergent literacy learning through play. However, although both approaches are focused on providing a rich literacy-related play environment for children while teachers help children to engage in literacy learning through play, the Vygotskian approach emphasizes more the active role of teachers such as facilitators, play partners, and organizers taking from an interventionist perspective. In support of this view, in their article, Morrow & Rand (1991) report that preschool and kindergarten children are likely to engage in more voluntary literacy behaviors with adult support and guidance during free-play periods when literacy materials are introduced and teachers guide children to use those materials than do children in thematic centers without adult guidance. Roskos & Neuman (1993) also state that day-care teachers do facilitate literacy in play using characteristic behaviors and roles as an observer, participant, and trainer (Roskos & Neuman, 1993). Therefore, this study confirms that teachers should take an active role as a provider, observer, role-model, and participant in children's literacy learning through play in order to encourage more active engagement or connection between children's play and literacy.

Last, teachers as evaluators may check and assess children's learning and development in a comfortable environment. In the context of children's play, teachers may ask questions or observe whether children do or do not know letters during activities such as singing songs, watching puzzles, or pretending to be a teacher. In this study, Ms. Joyce finds that evaluation through informal questions and watching center time activities is useful and non-threatening. She also watches

children's play such as playing to be a teacher near the book center and this lets her check how they hold a book, turn the pages, and use white board to write messages in a playful way. Through this, she helps children's reading and writing along with checking their literacy abilities. Therefore, teachers can use play as an informal assessment to check children's basic literacy knowledge.

### **For parents**

Parents can be wonderful partners, providers, and experts for their children's education along with teachers. In particular, the parents of children from diverse language backgrounds are experts and great resources in the individual child's language and culture. In this study, several Korean, Chinese, and Spanish children used a language other than English. Ms. Joyce often asks parents to translate English into their home language or bring something representing their culture, and she celebrates their holidays such as Chinese New Year and Cinco de Mayo.

Parents can provide books, magazines, food containers, or language charts in their home language for children's literacy learning through play, specifically in dramatic play area or, for that matter, anywhere in the classroom such as on the wall or mat. Consistent with the study by Schwarzer, Haywood & Lorenzen (2003), mainstream teachers may help children from diverse language backgrounds respect those students' first language development along with their second language development by including culturally relevant themes in their literacy curriculum, and

encouraging parents to bring magazines, coupons, newspapers, bottles, and other objects containing print to teach real life experience in their native languages. As another example of parents' participation, Kenner (1997) sets up the role-play area (home center) in the classroom as a connection between the school environment and children's home literacy experiences. In Kenner's study, the role-play area is a place where children act out a variety of situations with the help of props such as household furniture and cooking utensils, and even with calendars, telephone directories, magazines, catalogues, writing paper, envelopes, notepads, and pens in their home languages (e.g. Spanish, Yoruba, Gujarati, Thai, Arabic, Tigrinya, Pilipino and Cantonese). As a result, ESL children make many written responses during their play using these materials in the various written languages that have been brought to the nursery by the parents (Kenner, 1997).

Therefore, previous research and the current research show that with parents' support and participation, children from diverse language backgrounds may feel more comfortable through play trying the new language, English, along with continuing to practice their home language.

### **For ESL researchers**

From this study of a prekindergarten teacher, ESL researchers may learn how children's play takes an important role as a potential teaching and learning medium for their literacy learning and development. Although there has been increasing

research on children's play and literacy learning, there is little research on ESL children's literacy learning through a play context. However, Ms. Joyce's description about play in this study shows that play can be an ideal medium for ESL children who do not speak English fluently by creating a relaxed and comfortable environment for them to practice a new language without worrying about making mistakes and failing. Ms. Joyce perceives play as concrete, hands-on, fun, and manipulative activities, providing a relaxed and comfortable environment, becoming a good medium for integrated lessons and a natural connection between the home language and target language. She uses play as warm-up, games or tricks, integrated lessons, assessment, acting out characters in a book including dramatic play and block play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds.

Although there have been suggestions and assumptions that using play such as drama or pretend play in literacy learning would benefit children from diverse language backgrounds, and although previous research has found that "English reading and writing development process are essentially similar for both English learners and native English speakers" (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001, p. 149), not many ESL researchers have studied play in ESL learning for children from diverse language backgrounds. However, the present study suggests the possibility that connecting ESL literacy through play demonstrates a teacher's understanding and practice of play in literacy learning serving children from diverse language backgrounds as she uses various playful activities and dramatic and block play.

Obviously, this is the way Ms. Joyce understands play within her developmental beliefs and uses it in her practice in numerous ways. Reifel (1999) states that “too much of developmental literature uses the term, play, as if its meaning were transparent, or as a catchall for a variety of play-like activities...such transparency creates obvious problems when we try to make play research a foundation for educational practice” (pp. 207-208). Therefore, ESL researchers may start to understand the role of children’s play in their learning and development from previous studies of play, developing their own concept of play and practice in ESL learning for children from diverse language backgrounds.

In addition, one finding of this study is consistent with the emergent literacy perspective that children may learn reading and writing from lists, notes, letters, storybooks, road signs, labels, and magazines when they are immersed in environmental print. In this vein, the children’s dramatic play center is introduced as an ideal ESL literacy learning context for children from diverse language backgrounds (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). Although little research addresses the emergent English development of English learners who have not received literacy instruction in their primary language, ESL researchers believe that ESL learners will develop emergent literacy similar to native English speakers (Hudelson, 1984). Thus, findings of the current study about literacy learning through play under emergent literacy including dramatic play and block play would also apply to children from diverse language backgrounds. In another example, Whitmore and

Crowell (1994) as ESL teacher and researcher also suggest the role of play in children's literacy learning at school as fascinating future research in their book, Inventing a Classroom (Whitmore & Crowell, 1994).

Moreover, most of the previous research on ESL children in play contexts has been done in Canada and United Kingdom, leaving room for much more ESL research in play contexts in the United States. Since this study showed that a teacher's active participation and guidance are expected to encourage children's literacy learning through play, ESL researchers should be knowledgeable about the Vygotskian theory and perspective on children's social learning and development connecting with play and literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds. Therefore, in order to understand the relationship of play to learning and development, ESL teachers must be knowledgeable about the research bases and typical characteristics of play that may enhance all children's learning and development. From this, teachers may make proper decisions about providing opportunities for children to play and appropriate props. ESL researchers may need to understand and take into account children's play in their learning and development and conduct more research on this topic.

### **For play researchers**

Educators have believed that play has a crucial role in children's optimal growth, learning, and development. Play is a dynamic process that develops and

changes as it becomes more varied and complex. It is considered a major facilitator for learning and development and reflects the social and cultural contexts where children live (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002).

In this study, how a pre-K teacher, who believes play is a concrete, hands-on, fun, and manipulative activity, uses play to promote literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds is explored. She mentions her role as a provider, facilitator, and playmate in children's literacy learning in the context of play. In practice, she tries to provide literacy-related props considering children from diverse language backgrounds based on visits to each student's home, her knowledge of diverse cultures, and her prior experience of having ESL children in her classroom. She provides books about different countries' foods and various Disney books since these are internationally popular stories. From this study, play researchers may consider conducting more research on how to provide culturally relevant props for children's learning and development in a play context serving children from diverse language backgrounds. According to Moon (2000), children's spontaneous play themes are limited by the characteristics of provided figures during children's classroom sand play. In addition, children's social pretend themes in peer culture also differ depending on their play situation (Moon, 2000). Since teachers' providing materials in play contexts is critical in developing play themes and stories, play researchers should examine more closely the choosing or providing of culturally relevant literacy props in play context for children's literacy learning. Such research

could encompass not only classroom teachers, but also parents of children from diverse language backgrounds, and the value of using home visits, such as those done by Ms. Joyce to connect props or themes in the classroom play context. In this process, playing at writing and reading by scribbling, drawing, pretending to write, or pretending to read may encourage children to explore various forms of writing and reading (McLane & McNamee, 1990). Young children spend much time and energy playing, so play can be a potential link to the development of literacy.

Second, previous play research with literacy learning has focused heavily on how children's dramatic play is connected to literacy learning with the provision of literacy-related props such as pencils, papers, and books and markers with/without thematic materials such as papers for doctor's appointment, prescription, or patients' record (e.g., a doctor's office) (e.g., Roskos & Neuman, 1993; Christie & Enz, 1992; Morrow & Rand, 1991). Saracho's (2001) study discussed earlier in this chapter, states that data analysis is strongly based on previous research (e.g., Neuman & Roskos, 1992), but in her study, children are not observed engaging in spontaneous play, as is seen in other previous play-literacy research.

Therefore, play researchers may learn from the present study that the way a teacher uses play in various situations conforms to his/her perceived concept of play in literary learning. In this vein, play researchers should explore more deeply the various types or definitions of play in literacy learning. They could ask questions about how children's literacy knowledge can be different across play settings and

over time, and what teachers' practical notions of play are, questions also suggested by Roskos and Christie (2001) and Reifel (1999).

Last, considering practical implications, Korat, Bahar & Snapir (2002) conclude in their study of sociodramatic play as an opportunity for literacy development that observed one teacher in Israel, learning through play is well known and accepted by teachers and researchers. However, they also report that the practical idea of playing with language in both oral and written forms during dramatic play is not common (Korat, Bahar & Snapir, 2002). Therefore, based on previous research of play with literacy learning as well as the current study, play researchers should examine various contexts of play with literacy learning in order to provide possible practical classroom lessons about this topic.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was done with a single participant who is a typical pre-K teacher having an ESL certification. Although I provide detailed descriptions of data, I cannot generalize my findings to all pre-K classrooms for children from diverse language backgrounds. However, my study may be meaningful to others who are interested in how play can take a role in literacy learning in settings that include an ESL population, since there is little research on this topic.

One of my challenges from one single participant occurred in the last phase of data collection. Although most of my data came previously from over six hours

of interviews and one and one-half years' observation in one classroom, verifying certain information became necessary at the end. Contacting the teacher was difficult because it was her summer break, and she was attending several workshops, taking a family vacation, and moving and renovating her classroom. For three months, I was frustrated and could not understand her attitude toward me given our previous relationship. However, when she finally responded to my phone calls, she made excuses, apologized, and promised to help me finish my research.

Glesne (1999) talks about 'rapport' as a process of interactions between researcher and researched that could be rejected at any time by research participants. She also states that when rapport exists, it will be seen in the willingness of researched people to allow access to the parts of their lives of interest to researchers (Glesne, 1999). As I waited several months for Ms. Joyce's response, I learned that trust and rapport in fieldwork are not simply a matter of niceness and a mutually rewarding relationship, rather it is necessary to establish trust and to maintain it throughout the process of the study (Erickson, 1986).

Another limitation is that although I attempted to capture the teacher's understandings and practices through detailed interview procedures and a long-term observation in the field, it was impossible to be certain about all of her implicit understandings about a topic. In addition, overall, my observations during this study were conducted during the morning session from 8:30 to 11:00 including lunchtime, so I might have missed afternoon activities that related to my study.

Last, like other qualitative researches, another limitation may be the influence of my own personal beliefs and theories about children's play and literacy learning including a teacher's instruction. My research lens might have influenced the whole process of this study so that, sometimes, I might have ignored relevant or irrelevant aspects of the teacher's understandings and practices.

### **Recommendations of the Study**

This research was conducted with a typical prekindergarten teacher who is monolingual and has ESL certification. The study is focused on the role of play in literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds and the teacher's understanding and practice of play in literacy learning including an ESL population.

According to previous research, traditional models of educating bilingual children in the U. S. have emphasized pull-out approaches for ESL children to learn and become proficient in English so that they can participate fully in their typical classroom instruction. However, pull-out models are declining in popularity and there has been increasing research that children may learn a second language more effectively within the context of meaningful communication by fluent speakers (Schirmer, Casbon & Twiss, 1996). Although this study is done with a detailed description of one teacher's understanding and practice of play in literacy learning, her practice did not clearly differentiate between native-speaking and ESL children. That is because it is conducted in a typical pre-K classroom, not a pull-out ESL

program. However, conducting more research on this topic with general or ESL teachers comparing a general classroom setting and a pull-out ESL program would be meaningful and interesting along with research involving different groups of children who differ in language, ethnic group, gender, and socioeconomic status.

### **Conclusions**

This study examines a prekindergarten teacher's understanding and practice of play to promote literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds. Each teacher's knowledge or practical notions of play could be much broader than certain spontaneous play such as dramatic play, block play or simply play as a time spent in centers. Therefore, play researchers should explore more the various types, notions or definitions of play in literacy learning by asking questions about how children's literacy knowledge can be different across play settings and over time, and what teachers' practical notions of play are, questions also suggested by Roskos & Christie (2001) and Reifel (1999).

Second, overall, Ms. Joyce's previous membership in NAEYC partly influences her beliefs and practices in terms of play, literacy learning, and classroom practices such as pretend play and block play, and supports DAP guidelines. However, the current study indicates that a teacher's use of play to promote literacy learning for children from diverse language backgrounds would be much more specific and broader than the influence of her NAEYC membership might indicate,

including her own experience with ESL children, and other ESL theories based on her ESL certification. Therefore, early childhood educators and practitioners who support Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) should rethink and revise DAP guidelines about ESL children's play and literacy learning, considering teachers' various notions of play with their practices and their knowledge of theories of play respecting each child's unique culture and language difference.

Third, studies on teachers' beliefs/understandings have been meaningful and important because it is essential for teachers to improve their professional preparation and teaching practices, and their perceptions affect their behaviors in the classroom. The study of beliefs is critical to education because previous researchers have demonstrated that beliefs influence knowledge acquisition and interpretation, task definition and selection, interpretation of course content, and comprehension monitoring (Pajares, 1992). In this vein, studies have shown that teacher beliefs, practices, and their relationships are complex and dynamic with variations in result and context, noting that teachers' practices are strongly influenced by their definition and understanding of a topic. The current study also confirms that teachers may not always be able to implement their understanding into practice, not because of an internal mismatch between their beliefs and practices, but often because of external complications such as teachers' own time management or administrative constraints related to school support. This leads to the conclusion that administrators should be sensitive to and supportive of the quality of school education by respecting and

providing for teachers' needs in a timely way. Since teachers' classroom practices are critically influenced by their beliefs /understandings, conducting more research on teachers' beliefs, practices, and their relationships, comparing between and within internal and external complications would be meaningful and interesting along with studying children of various language, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic groups.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Sample interview questions**

1. Would you introduce yourself? How long have you been a teacher?
2. What is your educational background?
3. Can you describe children in your classroom in terms of ethnicity, gender, and age?
4. Would you describe a literacy area in your classroom?
5. What are your views of emergent literacy (Early literacy) for young children?
6. What does 'play' mean to you?
7. Can you tell me about the types of play you provide in your classroom?
8. How/what do you think children learn through play based on the views of your knowledge, experience and belief?
9. What do you assess during play?
10. What do you think about English as a Second Language (ESL) children's literacy development? Do you see any difference between ESL children and native English speaking children's engagement in play and literacy learning?
11. Can you tell me about your role in (ESL) literacy learning through play? How do you model for children?
12. What would be the constraints of using play in ESL literacy learning in your classroom?

13. What is your intention in doing each of the following activities? How do you make children use the materials in each center? [How do you guide them to use it? by verbal explanation? or demonstration? or active participation? How do you like each activity?]

Would you answer for each activity the following questions in terms of

- (a) How do you use play in (ESL) literacy learning?
- (b) What is your intention for each activity?
- (c) How do you guide them to use it?
- (d) How do ESL children experience literacy learning while they play in these activities?

## Appendix B

### Consent Form for Teachers

Title of the study: A teacher's understanding and practice of the role of play in English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy development in a preschool classroom

You are invited to participate in a study of the role of play in English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy development. My name is Kyunghye Moon and I am a graduate student at The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Curriculum and Instruction. This study is related with a directed research course as a part of my Ph. D. program. I am asking for permission to include you in this study because I would like to know a teacher's understanding and practice of the role of the play in English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy development in a preschool classroom. I expect to have one teacher and ten ESL students as participants in the study.

If you allow you to participate, I will observe you and your classroom when you engage in children's ESL literacy through play. I may interview you and record running notes of your child when he or she involves literacy development through play.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your response will not be linked to your name in any written or verbal report of this research project.

Your decision to allow you to participate will not affect your present or future relationship with The University of Texas at Austin or Mathews Elementary school. If you have any questions about the study, please ask me. If you have any questions later, call me at 512-499-0141. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, call Professor Clarke Burnham, Chair of the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants at 232-4383.

You may keep this copy of this consent form.

You are making a decision about allowing you to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow you to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for you to participate in the study, simply tell me. You may discontinue your participation at any time.

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Printed Name of a teacher

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Signature of a teacher

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Date

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Signature of investigator

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Date

## **Appendix C**

### **Consent Form for Children**

Title of the study: A teacher's understanding and practice of the role of play in English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy development in a preschool classroom

Your child is invited to participate in a study of the role of play in English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy development. My name is Kyunghhee Moon and I am a graduate student at The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Curriculum and Instruction. This study is related with a directed research course as a part of my Ph. D. program. I am asking for permission to include your child in this study because I would like to know how ESL children could learn English as their second language through classroom play. I expect to have ten participants in the study.

If you allow your child to participate, I will observe and record running notes of your child when he or she involves literacy development through play. My study will focus on a teacher's understanding and practice of the role of play in ESL literacy development, so I am not going to interrupt your child's play or literacy learning, but simply observe him or her in order to know how ESL children could learn English through play.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your child will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. His or her response will not be linked to his or her name or your name in any written or verbal report of this research project.

Your decision to allow your child to participate will not affect your or his or her present or future relationship with The University of Texas at Austin or Mathews Elementary school. If you have any questions about the study, please ask me. If you have any questions later, call me at 512-499-0141. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's participation in this study, call Professor Clarke Burnham, Chair of the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants at 232-4383. You may keep this copy of this consent form.

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow him or her to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study, simply tell me. You may discontinue his or her participation at any time.

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Printed Name of child

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Signature of Parents or Legal Guardian

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Signature of investigator

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Date

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Date

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