

**EXPLORING CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE MEANINGS OF PLAY AMONG  
KOREAN PRESERVICE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS**

A Dissertation

by

SOO YOUNG AHN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2008

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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Co-Chairs of Committee,	Dennie L. Smith Radhika Viruru
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**ABSTRACT**

Exploring Constructions of the Meanings of Play among Korean Preservice

Kindergarten Teachers. (December 2008)

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The purpose of this study was to explore what the word “play” means and implies for Korean preservice kindergarten teachers in an early childhood teacher education program. The research questions under investigation were: (1) How do Korean preservice teachers with an early childhood emphasis view play? (2) How do factors such as culture and education influence the constructing of these views? The participants were ten Korean preservice kindergarten teachers enrolled in the Department of Early Childhood Education in one teacher education college in Korea. The data for this study was collected through in-depth qualitative interviews both individual and group and other qualitative methods. The findings of this study showed that Korean preservice kindergarten teachers had a conceptual conflict in the perception of general play and educational play. General play was considered as a fun, enjoyable, and spontaneous activity that is engaged in without concern for a specific outcome. General play was also thought as the opposite concept to work or study. Educational play was regarded as an

ironical concept, since Korean preservice kindergarten teachers thought that learning occurs through working, not playing. Korean preservice kindergarten teachers theoretically advocated for the pedagogy of learning through play, just as they were taught in the teacher education program. However, Korean preservice kindergarten teachers did not agree with the practical effect of play on children's learning. Korean preservice kindergarten teachers were more supportive of a structured and pre-planned program for young children, believing that it resulted in better learning opportunities for children than a play-oriented program.

The findings of the study revealed that personal experiences with play, the kind of education of the preservice teachers themselves received in their teacher training program, and Korean culture had significant roles in influencing the participant preservice teachers' ideas on play. This study implies that interpretations of play as an educational tool vary from culture to culture. Further research is needed to more deeply understand how views and attitudes on play are created and enacted.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Seung-Jun,  
who always stands by me,  
and who gives me more love than I deserve.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Play is the work of the child” is a popularly cited expression in the field of early childhood education. However, defining play has been notoriously difficult among specialists because of its ambiguous and variable nature (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999; Scarlett, Naudeau, Saloni-Pasternak, & Ponte, 2005). Although there are many and varied definitions for play, most describe play as “intrinsically motivated,” “enjoyable,” “process-oriented,” “non-realistic” (Curtis, 1994; Wardle, 1987), and “self-chosen” activity (Jenvey & Jenvey, 2002; Johnson et al., 2005). However, some researchers suggest that developing criteria to define play is meaningless, because they do not always represent play’s paradoxical nature (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Therefore, current literature often characterizes play as a broad and complex activity, which is part of multiple frameworks, rather than converging upon one universal definition of play.

In spite of the complex and wide range of definitions of play, the idea that ‘play enhances children’s learning and development’ seems to be widely accepted among early childhood educators. Researchers agree with the notion that plays effectively helps children’s physical, social, emotional and cognitive developments (Ceglowski, 1997; Scarlett et al., 2005). Play has been linked to improvement of

understanding other perspectives (Bateson, 1955; Smith & Syddall, 1978) and coping with anxious and stressful situations (Christie & Johnson, 1983) as well as resilience (Russ, 1999). Researchers also report that, through participating in pretend play, children learn to cooperate with peers (Spivack & Shure, 1974) and develop positive peer relationships (Humphreys & Smith, 1987). Play has been found to enhance children's creative thinking (Bruner, 1972) and ability to solve problems (Christie & Johnson, 1983; Sylva, Bruner, & Genova, 1976). Play has also been related to children's language development (Pellegrini, 1980; Wall, Pickert, & Gibson, 1989) and children's motivation and inquiry skills for new understanding (Iverson, 1982). Further, some researchers regard play as a factor that can predict future achievement in school (Pellegrini, 1980). For example, Wolfgang, Standard, and Jones (2001) reported that there was a statistical relationship between 37 preschoolers' block play abilities and mathematics achievement at middle and high school levels.

Based on the strong belief of play's crucial influence to children's learning and development, play-centeredness has been an essential practice in early childhood education. According to Johnson et al. (2005), historically 'childhood,' 'play' and 'education' have been interconnected, especially from the period of enlightenment in the early 19th century. In the progressive era, the idea that 'children should be provided child-oriented practice' and 'play might have positive power for children' gradually began. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the idea of play-centeredness was "scientifically" supported by developmental psychologists and came to occupy the status of a taken-for-granted notion in formal early childhood educational settings. Modern

philosophers believe that all knowledge is considered as universal and predetermined one, which is produced only through scientific rationality (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). Especially Piaget's developmental constructivism reflects this modern perspective. Piaget (1962) assumes that all children pass through same stages from a low level to a more advanced level, which is predetermined. He also suggests the developmental stages of play which correspond to the level of cognitive development. In Piagetian view, play reflects children's cognitive abilities and, at the same time, it enhances their cognitive development through letting them practice their cognitive skills (Newman, Brody, & Beauchamp, 1996). Piaget's developmental theory has been used as a reference on what children are ready to learn, and, finally led to the creation of the notion of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Wood & Bennett, 1998). However, the idea of universal play has recently been criticized. Postmodern educators suggest that understandings of play need to be contextualized and not assumed to be the same for all children because play itself is an expression of culture and consequently the perception and enaction of play is closely related to cultural contexts (Curtis, 1994). Therefore, they believe that the interpretation and value of play as educational instrument might be varied in different cultures.

My interest in this issue started when I begun to realize myself believing westernized play theory as a universal reference. Without questioning, I believed play-based curriculum as the ideal practice for children, because that is what I had learned in my teacher education program and at graduate school for six years in Korea in the 1990's. Together with the notions of 'child-centeredness' and 'DAP', 'play-oriented

curriculum' has been taught as the right and best way to work with children in Korean teacher education program, although it has not been implemented properly in real practice. As was the case among many Korean early childhood educators in academic field, I simply assumed that the teachers did not understand play theories. However, I got to rethink what I learned and believed after I came to the United States and entered graduate school for my Ph.D. Having worked for three years as a graduate assistant for a professor in the undergraduate program, who taught courses focusing on early childhood education, I observed the content of the American preservice preschool teachers taught in their teacher training program. Apparently the courses also emphasized child-centeredness, DAP, play-based practice, encouraging role of teacher, children's interest, and integrated learning, just like the Korean teacher education program. This was surprising to me that the content for both Korean and American preservice teachers training was almost same. Although I never consciously thought about what I wanted to observe in the United States, I probably expected American teacher training program to deal with different theories than those taught in Korea. I came to realize that without any critical thinking I had learned western theories like as "Korean" although they were rooted in western values and perspectives. Looking back upon my acceptance of western theories allowed me to examine my blind belief on play theories constructed in western perspectives, which might be true only in Western contexts. The theme of this study began when I started to question on the universal idea of play-oriented curriculum for children's learning. As a Korean but educated in the United States allowed me to observe what I never realized before. Because my beliefs on play and children's learning were



constructed mostly based on what I learned in teacher education program in Korea, my inquiry naturally focused on Korean preservice kindergarten teacher education.

### **Background of the Problem: Korean Context**

Western concepts of early childhood education were introduced in Korea in the 1900's (Kwon, 2002). Theories and practices in Korean early childhood education were particularly influenced by American missionaries, because they worked hard to introduce their religious, cultural, and educational values to Korea during that time period. In addition, there was Japanese influence on Korean early education system and practices such as group activity and regulations because Korea was colonized by the Japanese from 1910 through 1945 (Bailey & Lee, 1992).

The notion of play-centeredness has been accepted with the introductions of Frobelian method of the 1920's and Dewey's progressive approach of the 1930's. The pedagogical philosophy to emphasize children's interests and their lived experiences had great attention of Korean teacher educators and reconstructed teacher training program toward more child-oriented. After gaining independence from the Japanese in 1945, overall educational systems were reformed to reflect the socio-cultural changes in country. The trend to care and educate young children in educational settings was strengthened. This also involved the adoption of more western ideas and values on children and education, which resulted in an increase in the number of kindergartens in Korea. The emphasis on education and the fast growth of industrialization in Korea, which saw more

women participation in workplace, contributed to the rapid development of early childhood education.

In the 1970's and the 1980's, Montessori method and Piagetian developmental theory attracted greater attention and has continued its influence to current practice in Korean kindergarten. From the 1980's the acceptance of western educational ideas has been actively done, because many Korean educators have received their graduate degrees in western countries and transplanted the dominant theories and practices to Korean teacher education program. Particularly, the notion of DAP was introduced in the 1990's and has created a powerful trend of child-initiated and play-based curriculum in Korea. However, the high increase in Korean early education based on adopting of western theories brought about a disharmony between theory and practice in kindergarten classroom. The notion of 'learning through play' is one of the representative examples of this discrepancy. Theoretically the notion of play-centeredness has been taught as the "right" way to educate children in Korean teacher education programs. However, play-centered practice has not been carried out properly in kindergarten classroom in Korea. While the consideration on specific contexts of Korea has not been done, many Korean kindergarten teachers have been easily blamed for the unsuccessful implementation of play-based curriculum. As an effort to understand why Korean early childhood education has experienced the dissonance of theory and practice in operation of learning through play for children, exploration of how Korean preservice kindergarten teachers construct their ideas and beliefs on children's play is needed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although the idea of play as a crucial part of early childhood educational systems has been widely discussed, research that explores how people directly involved with children construct the concept of play is less common. Existing research has focused on examining the relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices on play, based on the assumption that "play is always appropriate way of learning for children." In attempting to generalize on what teachers believe and do regarding play, the assumption has been considered as universal standard, restricting the possibilities of diverse values and practices of play. Therefore, it is needed to investigate the real meanings of play among adults who work with children on a daily basis through understanding of their lived experiences and their contexts. Furthermore, a body of current research on perceptions of play has worked with only inservice teachers as research subjects. The construction of theoretical and conceptual ideas on play held by teachers starts and develops during teacher training period. It is therefore important to understand how preservice teachers construct their own perspectives on play.

Another important aspect of this topic that requires to be explored is its culturally diverse perspectives on children's play. Because research on children's play has mainly done in Western contexts, cultural and ethnic differences of children's play have often been misinterpreted as deficiency or inferior (Johnson et al., 1999). Since the idea that 'play is appropriate way for children's learning' is rooted in Western culture, this idea has often troubled Asian teachers in early childhood classroom. Chang (2003) points out that the pedagogy of learning through play is not practically adopted in

Taiwanese early childhood programs, although Taiwanese educators have already accepted the importance of play in early childhood curriculum. In her study to understand the influence of contexts on children's play in Taiwan, she suggests to consider the contexts surrounding children, such as classroom, cultural, historical, and societal context. She discusses high value of education, traditional image of children as moldable clay, and exam-oriented educational system as the reasons that Taiwanese parents fail to understand the benefit of learning through play. Similarly in a case study investigating the understanding and implementation of play in the curriculum of two Hong Kong kindergarten teachers, Cheng (2001) found that there was an inconsistency between teachers' espoused theories and practice of play. On one hand participant teachers articulated play as a good means of teaching that provided 'exploration' and 'having real experiences.' On the other hand, the actual practice revealed that the teaching methods adopted by teachers were mainly didactic and teacher-dominated. She also suggests that cultural contexts in which play is perceived and used are the key elements in implementation of play. Although cross-cultural studies on children's play in Asian contexts have recently increased, there is limited research on Korean children's play.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this study, I explore what the word "play" means and implies for preservice kindergarten teachers in Korea. The purpose of the study is to investigate the Korean preservice kindergarten teachers' perceived meaning of children's play and also

to explore the ways that influence the construction of their views, mainly through in-depth interviews. The research questions of the present study are:

1. How do Korean preservice teachers with an early childhood emphasis view play?
2. How do the factors such as culture and education influence the construction of these views?

### **Significance of the Study**

The study would contribute to the body of research seeking to investigate the meaning of play held by people involved with childhood education. Due to limited research on preservice teachers' lived experiences on construction of children's play, this study would be the part of the effort to broaden better understanding on their construction of play, and, therefore, have the implications for teacher education programs. The study also meets the need to explore culturally diverse perspectives on teachers' perspectives on play. Especially there has been devoid of research on the views, attitudes, and perceptions of Korean preservice teachers. Therefore, the findings of the study may provide various interpretations and insights on children's play in educational settings.

### **Defining Terms**

1. **Korean preservice teachers in early childhood education / Korean preservice kindergarten teachers:** In this study 'Korean preservice teachers in early

childhood education’ or ‘Korean preservice kindergarten teachers’ means the students who were studying in early childhood teacher training program of Q Women’s College in Seoul, Korea. In Korea, ‘early childhood education’ refers to ‘kindergarten education’ for three- to five-year old children. In present study, the terms, ‘Korea’ and ‘Korean,’ mean ‘South Korea’ and ‘South Korean.’ Because Korean people call themselves as ‘Korean,’ not ‘South Korean,’ in daily conversations as well as in many academic publications, in this study the terms of Korea and Korean are used.

2. **Play:** The definitions of play in the dictionary mostly involve doing the enjoyable or experiencing things or activities for amusement (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1983). In early childhood education, however, play is generally defined “as active involvement in pleasurable activities that are freely chosen, intrinsically motivated, and carried out as if the activity were real, with a focus chosen on the process rather than on any particular product” (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983, cited in Slentz & Krogh, 2001, p. 5). In this study the term, play, includes both general and educational meanings of play.

3. **View (of play):** In this study the term ‘view’ includes the meanings of philosophy, knowledge, beliefs, perception, theory, attitudes, value, image, feeling, thinking, practical theory, personal theory, and implicit theory.

### **Assumption**

The study assumes that reality is being constructed, and does not objectively exist. The purpose of this study is to investigate the meanings of lived experience of

Korean preservice teachers on children's play. In other words, this study aims to understand uncertain, complex, multiple, subject, and socially constructed realities from the point of view of those who live in it. Knowledge is constantly changing as each individual or group gives a particular interpretation to it, reflecting distinctive localized needs and experiences (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Thus the finding of the study is not a "discovery of truth," but to explore one of many perspectives.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on Korean preservice teachers of early childhood program in one college in Korea, taking the course named 'Play for Children.' Therefore, the findings of this study are more likely to reflect a specific group's perspectives rather than representing general perspectives of Korean preservice teachers in early childhood education.

Since the researcher and the participants were native Korean, the interviews were conducted in Korean and the original texts of interview transcription were also written in Korean. Therefore, there is a possibility that translated texts might not exactly describe the participants' statements and ideas.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter I outlines a brief overview of the study, including purpose of the study and research questions. In Chapter II, literature review on both Western and Korean perspectives on play is provided. Also the introduction of Korean culture and

history of early childhood education in Korea is included. Chapter III outlines the methodology of the study. It also discusses the sites and sources selected for the study as well as the procedures of data collection and analysis. Chapter IV provides detailed description on the setting and the participants. It depicts the physical and cultural information on college and the program and individual overviews of the participants. Chapter V presents the findings of the study focusing on Korean preservice teachers' views and attitudes on children's play. Chapter VI also presents the findings of the study and the discussion on the contextual factors influencing on Korean preservice kindergarten teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs on play. Finally in Chapter VII, the conclusions and implications of the study are provided.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Western Perspectives on Play

In the field of early childhood education, play has been widely accepted as developmentally appropriate way for children's learning. Based on the belief that 'play effectively promote children's development,' play-centeredness has become a highly recommended practice in early childhood program (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In this section, the discussion on how western perspectives on play in early childhood education have been constructed is provided.

#### *Classical and Modern Theories of Play*

Classical theories of play from the 19th and early 20th centuries seek to the answers to the question of "why we play." Surplus energy theory and recreational theory can be seen as examples of theories that explain the functions of play as the mean of consuming energy. Surplus energy theory proposes that people play in order to eliminate any extra energy, when there is left over after consuming energy for survival (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Recreational theory also seeks the causes of play behaviors in the relation to energy. Opposite to surplus energy theory, it assumes that people play for restoring energy when they consume their energy by working and need to recharge it (Henniger, 2002). Although the influence of these theories of play may not be dominant in early childhood education, they offer an impression that play is the opposite concept of human behaviors for basic survival need, so to speak, "work." Classical play theories that consider the reasons of play behaviors as a means to learn about the outside world

have had more of an influence on the contemporary play theories. For example, practice theory suggests that children play to practice skills that are needed in future life (Slentz & Krogh, 2001). Practice theory advocated by Karl Groos has a similarity with constructivist theory in the aspect that play is regarded to enhance the children's intellectual performance. This cognitive developmental theory has profoundly dominated the contemporary early childhood education field, thus, has had a huge impact on the construction of current child- and play- oriented programs for children. Recapitulation theory suggested by G. Stanley Hall also regards children's play as being developed from lower to higher stages as do the advocates of practice theory (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Based on Darwin's theory of evolution, recapitulation theory explains that children's play develops as the order of human race's evolution, because individual progression follows the evolutionary process of humankind (Ranz-Smith, 2001). Recapitulation theory suggests that through dramatizing the humankind's progression in their play, children could remove dysfunctional instincts of earlier stages, which are not needed anymore in present age. Significantly, both of practice theory and recapitulation theory explain the origins of play behaviors as human being's instinct.

Modern theories of play have associated play's functions and roles to human development and learning. Modern theories of play can be divided into two major approaches that are the individual and the social views. Psychoanalytic theory developed by Freud's work is one of the major approaches of a psychological orientation that emphasizes the individual. Freud suggests that play plays important roles for children's emotional development. According to Freud, children can relieve their stress and negative

emotions from traumatic events through playing (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). In the process of repeating negative events, play enables to reduce children's discomfort and tensions and finally to make a cathartic effects. A clinical application of the psychoanalytic theory of play is play therapy, which is a treatment for children with emotional problems. Play therapists suggest that play allows children to explore their concerns, fears, and wishes in a safe environment and develop a sense of mastery (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). In play therapy, "a major function of play is the changing of what may be unmanageable in reality to manageable situations through symbolic representation that provides children with opportunities for learning to cope by engaging in self-directed exploration" (Landreth, 1996, p. 51). Arousal seeking theory developed by Berlyne (1969) and modified by Ellis (1973) also explains play as the individual development. They explains that play is occurred by the drive of central nervous system, which is needed to maintain the ideal level of arousal status. Play is considered as a stimulus seeking activity that provides children the chance to deal with play materials in diverse ways.

Piagetian study of individual development, which has been the most influential theory of child development and learning, is another psychological approach. Piaget assumes that human being's cognitive development advances in four developmental stages: the sensorimotor period, the preoperational period, the concrete operational period, and the formal operational period (Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Award, 2003). He also suggests three hierarchical stages of play that are corresponding to the intellectual development. From birth to two years old, the infant does sensorimotor play

that consists of repetitive physical activities. In the preoperational stage, from two to seven years old, the child enjoys make-believe or symbolic plays since the child becomes to be able to mentally represent and to pretend. The concrete operations stage lasts from seven to eleven years old. In this stage, the child not only uses symbols but can manipulate those symbols logically. Games with rules such as chess and card games emerge in the concrete period. Piaget (1962, 1963) theorizes that children acquire knowledge through the dual processes of assimilation and accommodation. In assimilation, children learn new information from their experiences and the information becomes incorporated into current understanding that has already been developed through prior experiences. In this process, this new information is not simply added to the existing knowledge but transformed by the children's thinking process in order to fit into the structure of thoughts. In the process of accommodation, children modify the structure of thinking when new information does not match with the existing knowledge. Piaget views play as the unbalance status of assimilation and accommodation. In his view, play facilitates children's learning through repeating and exercising new skills and concept in their play (Johnson et al., 2005).

In contrast to the psychological orientations toward play, an anthropological orientation toward play considers contextual influence on play. The works of Bateson and Vygotsky are strong examples of this orientation toward play. Meta-communication theory developed by Bateson suggests that children experience and learn meta-communication skills in their play. In make-believe play, children engage in different levels of interaction. Coming and going in two different worlds of imagination and

reality, children learn the ways of interactions in both imaginative and real identities of play objects, actions, and partners. Meta-communication theory stresses the influence of environments that play is occurred to the play experiences. Lev S. Vygotsky (1978) also emphasizes the importance of socio-cultural contexts in children's play and developments. He asserts that children create play episodes within their 'zone of proximal development'—the gap between the child's independent performance of a task and that which he can perform with a more skilled peer or adult's help— in which they may practice and extend their cognitive skills, particularly by transferring their play operations from the actual to the imaginative world. Through such representational activity in their play, Vygotsky suggests that children can perform and practice at levels that are more advanced developmentally than they might exhibit in real-world behaviors (Newman, 1996). Although psychological and cultural perspectives offer different interpretations of play, both conclude that play is significant to children's development. Further, both perspectives support the notion that children learn effectively through self-directed and intrinsically motivated play.

#### *Construction of Current Play Theory in Early Childhood Education*

Undoubtedly, all play theories reviewed above have contributed to the construction of current understanding of play in early childhood education. However, play has been a crucial part of early childhood education since the initial concept of the kindergarten was developed by Friedreich Frobel. Influenced by Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Frobel believed that play is essential process for children's learning. He invented play materials and provided educational curriculum for children, developing the

idea that children should be presented with the right materials and activities. The basic components of Frobelian kindergarten curriculum were the manipulation of sets of objects, the application of arts-and-crafts activities, and the children's participation in songs and games (Hoorn et al., 2003). Frobel's invention and use of his own materials and activities reflects his beliefs that using physical objects help children explore the properties of matter and understand the relationships in the universe and finally reconstruct their own ideas. Also the materials and activities designed by Frobel symbolizes the concept of unity in individual, God, and nature. Frobel believed understanding the concept of unity as the purpose of education.

Since Frobel's view of children and education was influenced by the ideas of Rousseau and Pestalozzi, I will briefly discuss their perspectives as the basic philosophical orientation for play theory. Early childhood education has been traditionally rooted in Rousseauian philosophy of nurturing young children, which is a romantic notion. In his book, *Emile*, Rousseau (1911) stated the importance of educating children without restrictions in nature and allowing them to unfold naturally through play and developing their senses. In his writing, he reasoned that education should reflect innate goodness and allow spontaneous interests and activities of children. Rousseau's ideas, often referred to as naturalism, are deeply embedded in current thought about early childhood education (Henniger, 2002).

Pestalozzi criticized cruel punishment and rote learning that were conducted in schools, advocating children's dignity, worth, and individuality (Weber, 1984). He devised materials and object lessons that developed the child's oral language and

sensory perception, which led from concrete to abstract concepts. Pestalozzi also developed educational concepts like group work, field trips, grade levels, ability grouping, and allowing for individual differences (Sarah & Witherspoon & Day, 1984). Although Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Frobel did not have exactly the same perspective on child and learning, their basic philosophies share the notion of child-centeredness, individuality of the child, and natural readiness, which are the elements of the core philosophy of today's child- and play-centered curriculum in early childhood education.

While child-centered instruction is conceptually located in the work of 18th and 19th centuries' philosophers, the works of Maria Montessori and John Dewey contributed to the educational practice of it (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Maria Montessori emphasized "doing activities" for children's learning. She developed educational methods which purpose was to help children obtain an understanding of the properties of objects and acquire specific skills by manipulating the objects (Henniger, 2002). Educators interested in Montessori methods traveled to Italy, and Montessori schools began to appear in the United States. Montessori methods were criticized for being overly structured, little creative features, which seemed less free and less a play form that we today consider (Hoorn et al., 2003). However, by using "manipulation of object" as educational instrument Montessori contributed the construction of the idea that play can be organized into school curriculum.

John Dewey's work has also influenced the modern development of play. John Dewey was the most influential educational philosopher in the United States in the early 20th century. The term "child-centered curriculum" was associated with the

progressive movement, which was led by Dewey while he established a laboratory school at the University of Chicago and tried to implement his educational theories in the school (Henniger, 2002). Dewey criticized rote learning and stressed active learning by children. He believed that kindergarten should stop depending on the religious philosophy of Froebel and adopt a more scientific and pragmatic approach (White & Coleman, 2000). Dewey also considered the realities of everyday life as the basis of all educational activities and emphasized children's interests, interactions, and play activities that contribute to their intellectual and social development.

As I earlier discussed, Piaget's works have had the most profound impact on the construction of today's early childhood theory and practice (Cannella, 1997; Henniger, 2002). Piaget is well known for his work of children's cognitive development to advance in progressive direction from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract. Piaget views the course of intellectual growth in terms of progressive changes in cognitive structures. Piaget (1962) suggests that all children pass these stages in the same order and this process is natural and predetermined. In other words, he stresses the role of maturation for children's understanding of world, supporting the idea that education for children should play the role encouraging the child's own capacity, not pushing them move to higher level that is not matched with psychological maturity. Piaget's work is associated with the term 'constructivism' since he believes that children construct their own knowledge through interaction with the environment. In terms of curriculum and programs for young children, Piaget's theory suggests that children should be given the freedom to play, experiment, and participate in guided learning



activities (White & Coleman, 2000). Piaget's developmental theory of play has served as an indicator of what learning experiences children are ready for, resulting in such concepts as developmentally appropriate practice and offers a scientific explanation for child development that justifies child- and play-centered instruction for children.

#### *Limitations of a Play-Centered Curriculum*

In early childhood education, it has been widely accepted that children should be given DAP that has been constructed based on child development theory (Ryan & Griesber, 2005). However, recently educators in early childhood education have questioned the modern beliefs that human beings develop in predetermined way and this universal law can be discovered through science (Burman, 1994). Postmodern researchers began to examine psychological and developmental knowledge through reconceptualizing taken-for-granted ideas in the field. The pedagogy of 'play-centeredness curriculum' is one of them.

Drawing on a post-structural perspective, researchers analyze psychological child development and point out three assumptions underlying it: (1) human being progresses from a less toward a more advanced status, (2) human development is moving in a predetermined manner, and (3) this natural, predetermined development is applicable to all human beings (Canella, 1997). As an immature and incompetent period, childhood has been positioned as a biologically predetermined stage on the path to full human status. Rationality is regarded as the universal mark of adulthood and childhood is considered to represent the period of apprenticeship for its 'natural' and 'normal'

development. Based on the hierarchical theories of development, the guidelines for children's have regulated what children should learn (Ryan & Griesber, 2005).

The problem with these ideas is that developmental psychology has reinforced privilege for dominant groups and justified social control of non-dominant groups including children and racially and socio-economically marginalized people (Boyden, 1990). This dominant modernist approach has placed children at the lowest and most inferior level of groups and based on this position educators have rationalized both judgment about and interventions for children (Cannella, 1997). For example, educators often label children who seem not to fit the 'normal' developmental process as deviants, inferiors, and neglected children and formulate and impose 'appropriate' interventions on them (Burman, 1996). This European and North American urban, middle-class belief of children and development have been promoted worldwide as a standardized universal model of childhood assumed to apply to all societies (Boyden, 1990).

Play-based instruction depends on the assumption that play is a universal human behavior with a linear and progressive direction. This idea approximates the notion of psychological child development that human beings are universally progressing in a naturally predetermined direction. Also current dominant theories of play-oriented instruction assume that learning occurs through using objects (Cannella, 1997). Under the assumption that play is an indicator for universal development, research has focused on examining the functions of children's play in their development and learning rather than on understanding play itself (Göncü, Tuermer, Jain, & Johnson,

1999). As a result, researchers have reported the correlation between children's play and developmental areas of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive ones (Ceglowski, 1997; Scarlett et al., 2005). Moreover, based on the findings of these studies, different play behaviors deviated from the accepted categories of developmental play in western societies have been interpreted as "abnormal," that need appropriate educational interventions (Göncü et al., 1999).

Post-structural researchers pointed that the westernized concepts of play that are not found as universal behaviors in all children of diverse cultures (Cannella, 1997; Curtis, 1994; Johnson et al., 1999). The examples of research on children's play in diverse cultures are found in the works of Schwartzman (1978) and Roopnarine, Johnson, and Hooper (1994). Schwartzman provided the examples of children's play in non-western societies such as Egypt and Kenya. She claimed that there were cultural differences in terms of subjects, contents, styles, and atmospheres of cross-cultural children's play. However, she suggested that these differences might be originated from the methodological problems of the studies rather than reflecting differences of children's play (Göncü et al., 1999). Roopnarine et al.'s (1994) recent ethnographical report describes diverse scenes of children's play in 8 different cultures including Indian, Taiwanese, Japanese, Polynesian, Puerto Rican, Italian, African, and Eskimo contexts. These studies demonstrate that developmental theories of play is one of several possible play theories rather than universal one, revealing that children in diverse contexts show different play behaviors that have been constructed by social norms, values and ideologies of group and class, sex, geographical and climate features, culture, and

history. For instances, the findings of Martini's study to observe Puerto Rican children's peer interactions shows that Puerto Rican children followed the rules of group to cope with the issues of safety, sharing, conflicts, and expression of feelings occurred in their play, while western children might be interested in fair judgment in conflict situation based on the cultural value to emphasize justice and individual's self respect. Also in Bloch and Walsh's study on African children's sexual differences in play and work, it was found that African children often participated in the activities that combine play and work together, while the idea to separate play and work for children is generally accepted in the west. The view that work can be a playful experience and that some play involves work is alien to the thinking of many in western society, although anthropologists have long suggested that there are many societies where there is no such distinction (Curtis, 1994).

Cross-cultural researchers have pointed that western ideas of play have been challenged, especially when they are introduced to countries with different educational systems, where people have different cultural values (Chang, 2003). Western culture is more likely to consider play as a means of learning whereas other cultures perceive work as the primary path to learning (Cooney & Sha, 1999). Roopnarine et al. (1994) point that the discussion on children's play has been done based on the studies of children and families in Western white, middle class cultural and social contexts. In order to earn more reasonable and understandable explanation on play, they suggest considering three socio-cultural elements that has environmental influences on children's play: (1) physical and social environment in which children's play occurs, (2) history that has

influenced the ways of individual's conceptualization of play, and (3) cultural and ideological beliefs related to the meanings of children's play. Similarly, in her study to analyze Taiwanese children's play in two kindergartens, Chang (2003) found that (1) classroom contexts that include physical, personal, social, and curricular ones, (2) cultural and historical contexts such as Chinese emphasis on academic achievement and traditional views on child, and (3) societal contexts like exam-oriented educational system in Taiwan influenced children's play behaviors and their rights to play in kindergarten classes. She demonstrates that "children's play is the product of the interactions of multiple factors embedded in different contexts (p.295)."

#### *Current Research on the Role of Teachers in Children's Play*

Research that has dealt with teacher-variable in children's play is divided into two areas: (1) teacher's roles and (2) teacher's beliefs and practices about children's play.

#### **Role of Teachers in Prompting Play**

Literature on teacher's role in children's play indicates a range of teacher's strategies to support play. In children's play, the teacher's basic role is to provide appropriate setting for child-initiated play and support their play (Davies, 1997). Griffin (1983) suggested the teacher's role to enrich children's play as setting the time, space, basic equipment, and props. Johnson et al. (1999) similarly noted that time, space, materials, and preparatory experiences should be provided by teachers for children's high quality play. Also observing children's play is primarily required as teacher's role. For example, Bodrova and Leong (1996), Johnson et al. (1999), Jone and Reynolds (1992), and Reifel and Yeatman (1993) agreed that observation is the most important

skill that is required for teachers in assisting children's play. It is widely accepted that observation of children's play allows teacher to understand children's interest and capacities, to provide needed information for smooth play progress, and to make timely interventions for children's better learning and development (Abbott, 1994; Hurst, 1994; Heaslip, 1994; Johnson et al., 1999). Planning observation of children's play and recording what they observe are recommended for teachers to modify the classroom environments and reflecting children's needs to curriculum (Billman & Sherman, 1996).

Research also indicates more direct intervention as teacher's role for children's play. Teachers might enrich children's play by promoting conversation with them such as answering to children's questions (Ceglowski, 1997). Also making appropriate questions and suggestions helps to make opportunities for language development and conceptual learning. Enhancing children's problem-solving abilities (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Kogan, 1983) and self-esteem (Bredekamp, 1987) is also considered as important role of teachers in children's play. Because play experiences with peer and adults contribute to children's learning on how to cooperate and get along with others, teacher's appropriate intervention on children's play might help to the socialization of children (New, 1992; Humphreys & Smith, 1987). Also teachers are allowed to participate in children's play in order to encourage exploration and social interactions (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992) and to guide children play safely and constructively (Hildebrand, 1990).

However, rather than teacher direction, availability and attention of teacher are stressed in mediator's role of teacher (Ceglowski, 1997). Some researchers further

suggest negative effects of teacher's intervention on children's play and development. For example, Christie and Wardle (1992) suggested that children should play without adult's intervention in free play. Jones and Reynolds (1992) also asserted that teachers should examine their interventions before interrupt children's play, because teachers' interrupting behaviors such as teaching rules and concepts might ruin children's play. Similarly Beck (1994) supported that teacher should avoid excessive and inappropriate interventions in children's play, since they inhibit children's play. Johnson et al. (1999) suggested that teachers should avoid direct instruction in children's play, which takes control of the play and consequently makes children passive. Researchers reported disruptive effects of teacher's intervention or presence in children's play as children's withdrawals of involvement and interaction with peers in socio-dramatic play (Pellegrini, 1984) and limit of children's expression of thought and use of language (Innocenti, Stowitschek, Rule, Killoran, Striefel, & Boswell, 1986).

Although researchers have shown slightly different attitudes on teacher's participation in children's play, the ideas that teacher's intervention should be very sensitive and appropriate for children's needs and interests (Davies, 1997) and teachers should follow children's leads in play are acceptedly discussed in current literature on children's play. Piaget's developmental theory has contributed the emphasis on child-initiated and play-based curriculum, because it assumes that children construct knowledge by themselves through concrete experiences with object (Ceglowski, 1997). This Piagetian interpretation on the function of play to enhance children's development

has contributed to the idea that teachers should be passive in children's play rather than imposing educational purposes (Davies, 1997).

### **Teachers' Beliefs and Practices of Play**

Research on teachers' perceptions of play seems to assume that teachers agree to the importance of play for children's developments and its applications in programs for children. Assuming teachers' positive attitudes on play's values for children, the body of research to deal with teacher-variable in children's play focuses on investigating the relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices on play. Some researchers have found the congruent relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices. For example, Spidell's (1985) study on preschool teachers' intervention in children's play shows that teachers' beliefs were congruent with their practices. Among three preschool teacher participants, two of them showed having beliefs in children's freedom to explore and experiment and in children's play involving teacher. They utilized instruction to encourage children's experimentation in classroom activities. One participant teacher having the belief about teacher's role in children's learning as focusing on children's play and letting them solve their own problems without teacher intervention provided materials and followed children's lead. In her study to investigate preschool teachers' beliefs and practices in outdoor play, Davies (1997) also suggested that teachers' practices were consistent with their beliefs. She interviewed 8 teachers and observed the behaviors of children and teachers. Davies found that teacher believed that children should be carefully supervised and that interventions of teachers should be minimized in children's play. She reported that this belief was congruent with teachers'



actual behaviors, such as providing play setting, carefully observing children's play, and intervening only when children's behaviors were inappropriate.

However, there are also research findings that show disharmony between teachers' beliefs and practices regarding play. Kemple (1996) found that early childhood teachers agreed to the need and importance of play but practically did not regularly assign playtime in curriculum. Bennett, Wood, & Rogers (1997) examined early childhood teachers' theories of play in relation to their classroom practice and found that teachers' practices contradicted their stated theories on some occasions. From analyzing classroom observation and interview, Bennett et al. (1997) concluded that the prevailing view among teachers was child-oriented, Piagetian, constructivist perspectives. Thus teachers believed that quality play allowed children to have choices and freedom. However, in practice, these same teachers provided many structured activities in their classroom. These conflicting results suggest that there is a considerable gap between theory and practice in utilizing play-based instruction.

Another branch of research examining teachers' beliefs on children's play focuses on comparing the perspectives of teachers to other group of people. Through interview or survey, researchers have investigated the perceptions of teachers, parents, and children on play, asking the definitions, functions, and values of play. For example, Rothlein and Brett (1987) used questionnaire to investigate the perceptions of teachers and parents on play. They found that parents regarded play as fun and creative activity and did not expect their children to play much in school, while teachers considered it as not only pleasant activity but also the opportunity for children's learning and cognitive

and social development. However, it was varied on how much teachers incorporate play into curriculum from “entire curriculum” to “only after working is finished.” In reviewing research on differences between children’s and teachers’ view of play, Ceglowski (1997) found that teachers believed that the activities which are fun and creative are play, including some academic work they presented in game form. However, children classified most of their school experiences as work because they did not differentiate play and work experiences by the amount of pleasure received while engaged in the activities. They characterized activities that are voluntary as play and did not consider the activities that were assigned by teachers as play. This result suggests that children and teachers do not agree in their understanding of play. Research investigating children’s perceptions of play has indicated that children have their own ideas on play. For example, in 1979 King studied children’s perceptions on work and play. King observed and recorded children’s activities and then interviewed individual children, asking them to classify their activities into working or playing. Interestingly, the finding showed that children did not differentiate between work and play by on the basis of enjoyment. Children defined the activities that they did voluntarily without adult’s directions as play. Similarly, a qualitative study conducted by Wing (1995) that investigated children’s perceptions on work and play showed that children did not consider playful but teacher-introduced activities as play. Instead, children had developed well categorized standards to distinguish between work and play activities, such as the involvement of the teacher, mental and physical labor required, and pleasure that occurred. Recent naturalistic studies conducted by Chapparo and Hooper (2002)

also indicated that children have individual categories to determine what is work and what is play. They included the kinds of activities, autonomy level, and children's specific meanings on the activities.

### **Korean Perspectives on Play**

In this section, for better understanding of Korean perspectives on children's play, the introduction of (1) Korean traditional values, (2) Korean early childhood education, and (3) Korean views and attitudes toward children's play are provided.

#### *Traditional Values in Korean Society*

Traditional culture of Korea holds belief structures that are very different from Western culture. Although Korean society has experienced rapid societal changes during the processes of industrialization and urbanization, Koreans have maintained many traditional values derived from a Confucian legacy. These Confucian values have been a major cultural influence in East Asian countries such as Korea, China, Taiwan, and Japan. Throughout Korean history, Confucianism has been the most striking and dominant cultural form, influencing government structures, educational systems, and individual thinking styles (Kwon, 2002).

One major distinguishing characteristic of Korean culture is its emphasis on group interests rather than on the individual. In Korean culture, notions of individual rights are restrained in order to maintain the harmony of the family, kinship group, and community (Kim & Choi, 1994; Kwon, 2002). Actually, in Confucian societies, individuals are not considered as independent entities. Koreans believe that all people

are linked to each other. Therefore, human relationships have been stressed in Korea (Bailey & Lee, 1992). This relational mode is the most important and fundamental unit of analysis on Korean Culture (Kim & Choi, 1994).

Another characteristic of Korean culture is the emphasis on hierarchical relationships. In a Confucian society, all human relationships are based on loyalty and obedience which are defined through hierarchies of status differences reflecting age, role, and gender. In Korean families, the greatest authority is granted to the oldest family members, who can exercise discipline and control over the young. In school, the hierarchical relationships are also often seen enacted between teachers and students. Traditionally, Korean teachers have great authority and are granted a place of honor. Thus, students tend not to resist their order or question their teaching. This hierarchical relationship between teacher and student leads to rote-learning memorization and teacher-dominated instruction through which students are expected to accept information from teachers. Additionally, students do not generally express their opinions, adopting a mostly passive stance in the classroom.

A third characteristic of Korean culture is the emphasis on academic achievement. In Korean culture, education is generally considered a way of cultivating a moral mind as well as maintaining the social order (Kim & Choi, 1994; Kwon, 2002). Furthermore, Koreans view their children's academic performance as an important indicator of family honor, not just as individual achievement. In the case of academic failure of children, many Koreans even believe that it brings shame on the family. Consequently, Korean parents place great emphasis on their children's academic

achievement. Korean parents often become highly involved in their children's schooling. They actively monitor and assist their children's school-related activities. This stress on academic achievement tends to result in a competitive atmosphere that exerts pressure even on preschool education (Kwon, 2002). According to Lee (1996), about 90 percent of kindergarteners were attending extra classes after school in the early 1990's. Kwon (2002) also reports that a nationwide survey in 2002 conducted by Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development showed that 86 percent of the 2,159 parents surveyed, answered that their children at preschool age took extra curricular lessons after school.

### *Early Childhood Education in Korea*

#### **History of Korean Early Childhood Education**

Before the existence of modern structured educational systems for young children, there was a village school called 'Seo-dang.' It existed in every small village in which a small group of pupils, primarily boys, from four years old to the teenage years, were taught Chinese classics. It was a private institution that was organized in the 10th century and continued until formal kindergartens were established (Ahn, 2001). The introduction of the first kindergarten was in 1897 and it actually was for Japanese children (Bailey & Lee, 1992; Ahn, 2001; Kwon, 2002). The first Kindergarten for Korean children began in 1909, but teachers were still Japanese because Korea did not have a kindergarten teacher training systems (Bailey & Lee, 1992).

In 1916, however, the Chung-Ang kindergarten was established utilizing only Korean teachers for Korean children (Kwon, 2002). According to Bailey and Lee (1992),

during the Japanese colonial period, especially in 1920s, the Froebelian method was introduced by Japanese educators and American missionaries. However, it was far from the original Froebelian approach, because it was imported through the perspectives of the Japanese and Americans. Japanese Froebelian method actually brought the notion of group activity (Kwon, 2002) and regulation (Bailey & Lee, 1992) into Korean early childhood practices. At the same time, American missionaries brought Christian influence on preschool practices through stressing Froebel's concept of God (Ahn, 2001).

In the 1930s, American missionaries introduced Dewey's progressive approach to education, which emphasized children's interests and their real life experiences (Kwon, 2002). It brought about the reconstruction of kindergarten practices and has continued its influence on present-day Korea. In 1945, Korea regained their country's independence, but experienced Korean War in 1950. In the 1950's the development of Kindergarten education was poorly progressed. The effort to reform early childhood education in Korea was gradually started in the 1960's.

After the National Kindergarten Curriculum was firstly established in 1969, kindergarten education began to develop both qualitatively and quantitatively. According to Kwon (2002), in the 1970's Montessori method was introduced and the idea that 'children learn independently and spontaneously' was accepted in Korea. Piagetian developmentalism and the notion of 'Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)' were also introduced in the 1980's and 1990's. As a result, child-centered and play-oriented practice has been widely accepted in the academic field of Korean early childhood education.

## **Changes in National Kindergarten Curriculum**

Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development formulates the National Kindergarten Curriculum for three to five year old children. The first National Kindergarten Curriculum was established in 1969 and has been revised five times in 1979, 1981, 1987, 1992, and 1997. The first and second versions of the National Kindergarten curriculum reflect the influences of progressive approaches that were introduced in the 1930s. The first curriculum in 1969 was an imitation of the Japanese kindergarten's curriculum (Bailey & Lee, 1992). The content of the first National Kindergarten Curriculum had five areas: health, social studies, science, language, and arts (Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 1999). In the second National Kindergarten curriculum revised in 1979, quite different terms were used for its content divisions: social and emotional skills development, cognitive development, linguistic development, and health / physical development. The use of the new term, 'development,' shows the new emphasis on cognitive development based on Piaget's developmental theory. Second National Kindergarten Curriculum apparently showed that Piagetian constructivism dominated the Korean early childhood education field. According to Lee (1996), the stress on cognitive development also led to widespread introduction of Montessori methods in 1970's. However, Montessori movement has brought to Korean preschool classrooms only Montessori materials rather than Montessori principles (Kwon, 2002).

The third and fourth National Kindergarten Curriculum in the 1980's showed the continuing influences of Piaget's theory and Deweyian progressive approaches. The

third and fourth curricula were divided into five developmental areas: physical, cognitive, linguistic, social awareness, and emotional (Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 1999). However, according to Lee (1996), these curricula had different characteristics from the previous curricula. The third curriculum contained more explicit Korean cultural values. For example, the third curriculum of 1981 included topics such as 'Korean Customs' and 'Korean Geography.' Also, these curricula stressed 'valuing national symbols and observing national ceremonies,' 'respecting Korean traditional customs,' and 'willingness to inherit and nurture our traditional customs' (Lee, 1996). The fourth curriculum in 1987 also emphasized Korean traditional culture.

The fifth National Kindergarten Curriculum in 1992 was similar to the previous curricula. It had five content areas: physical health, social relationships, expression, language, and inquiry (Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 1999). Although it did not use the term, 'development,' for its content areas, the fifth curriculum had a new content area, 'inquiry,' which also reflects Piaget's cognitive development model (Lee, 1996).

The central aim of the current National Kindergarten Curriculum is on children's whole development. This sixth curriculum was established in 1997 and is still in effect. According to Kwon (2002), the American notion of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), which was introduced in the 1990s, deeply influenced the current National Kindergarten Curriculum. She points out that this westernized notion of DAP has created a powerful trend which emphasizes a child-centered, play-oriented, and



integrated teaching approaches that stand in stark contrast to whole class teaching, use of authority, basic skill teaching, and work sheets.

DAP based on Piaget's developmental theory has become the dominant paradigm for Korean early childhood education. Lee (1996) and Kwon (2002) argue that this recent American influence on Korean early childhood education is mainly due to specialists of early childhood education who study in the U.S. and, later introduce their learning to Korean kindergarten practices. These specialists also introduce research trends, educational theories, and classroom practices from the American context (Kwon, 2002).

Reviewing changes of Korean National Kindergarten Curriculum revealed the deep influences of western ideas and values on the field of early childhood education in Korea. The central tension created by this rapid adoption of western ideas involves misapplication. For example, when Piaget's developmentalism had tremendous popularity in 1980's Korea, his 'conservation experiment' was often presented as an activity for cognitive development in kindergarten classrooms (Lee, 1996). To make matters worse, some western theories and practices have been indiscriminately imported and adopted without considering the appropriateness for a Korean context.

### **Development of Korean Kindergarten**

The main organization for early childhood education in Korea is called "You-Chee-Won" which means kindergarten. Usually three- to five-year old children can apply for either private or public kindergarten. Private kindergartens are run as private businesses, while public kindergartens are generally located within the public elementary

school (Lee, 1997). Both types of kindergartens are regulated by Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development and are supposed to have the same curriculum and the same school hours (Lee, 1997). However, the private kindergarten generally provides higher quality educational services (Bailey & Lee, 1992), because private kindergartens must compete with other kindergartens and to stay in business. During the 1980's, there was a tremendous increase in the numbers of kindergartens in Korea. Lee (1997) reports that there were only 794 kindergartens in Korea and 26 of them were public in 1979. The rate of children who attended preschool was around one percent in the 1970's. However, the number of Korean kindergarten increased to 8,943 in 1996. Of these, 4,377 were public kindergarten and 4,566 were private kindergarten. It is more than a ten fold increase in ten years. The rate of five-year old children's attendance in kindergarten increased 45 percent in 1996, and became 56 percent in 2007 (Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2007). In 1997, the rate of children who receive any sort of early education outside the home has reached 90 percent nationwide regardless of whether the children live in rural or urban areas (Lee, 1997).

This rapid explosion of Korean early education is due to several factors. First of all, the traditional emphasis on education and the excessively competitive atmosphere led to this rapid explosion of early education. In Korea, the final goal for all students is to enter a good university which will virtually guarantee good job. For that goal, one should perform excellent academic achievement in high school. For this performance, one also must work hard in middle school. These pressures to succeed reach all the way

down to preschoolers and even to toddlers. This academic oriented trend in Korea has accelerated the expansion of kindergartens.

Another factor involves a change in Korean society. In recent decades, rapid growth in industrialization in Korea has required more women's participation into workplace and produced more nuclear rather than extended families (Lee, 1997). Korean government has financially and legislatively supported this expansion of early education. Equal educational and employment opportunities for women also attract mothers to return to the job market, and the low birth rate allows parents to pay high tuition for education (Lee, 1997). In summary, Korean private kindergartens have operated in accordance with specific Korean demands, such as requirement of early academic achievement and need of day care services.

### **Teacher Training System in Korea**

To be a kindergarten teacher in Korea, one is required to have a teaching certificate, called the Regular Teacher II Licenses (Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2008). According to Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, Regular Teacher II Licenses could be acquired by the successful completion of training courses at early childhood education program at a four-year university or two, three-year college. As the revision of Higher Education Act in 2001, two-year programs have extended its course period to three years in order to enhance teacher professional development (Lee & Cho, 2004). As the result, among 84 colleges that had early childhood teacher training program in Korea, 73 colleges have changed their programs to three year system at the present time of 2002 (Lee & Cho,

2004). Passing the National Teacher Examination is another way to receive a Regular Teacher II Licenses. Regular Teacher I Licenses are given to those who hold Regular Teacher II Licenses and have completed the prescribed amount of on-the-job training in a minimum three years' teaching career (Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2008).

The curriculum for early childhood teacher education programs usually includes educational foundation courses as well as specialization courses (Bae, 2001; Bailey & Lee, 1992). The curriculum for early childhood teacher training for four-year programs typically require more general education courses and theoretical and philosophical courses than two- or three-year program (Lee, 1997). According to Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (2008), graduates of four-year universities and of two-year junior colleges are equally qualified kindergarten teachers.

Although the university curriculum varies to some degree from school to school, specialization courses in the four-year university curriculum most often involve the basic core courses such as 'Introduction to Early Childhood Education,' 'History of Early Childhood Education,' 'Curriculum for Early Childhood Education,' 'Philosophy of Early Childhood Education,' 'Psychology of child development,' and 'Theory and Practice of Play.' The courses on teaching method for children's developmental areas include 'Musical Education for Children,' 'Art Education for Children,' 'Movement Education for Children,' 'Literature for Children,' 'Language Education for Children,' 'Mathematics Education for Children,' 'Science Education for Children,' 'Social Education for Children,' 'Physical Education for Children,' and 'Computer Education

for Children.’ As for other courses, there are ‘Child Welfare,’ ‘Education of Exceptional Children,’ ‘Counseling for Children,’ ‘Management of Early Childhood Institutions,’ ‘Parents Education,’ and ‘Comparative Research on Early Childhood Education’ (Bae, 2001; Bailey & Lee, 1992). Early childhood teacher training programs in three-year colleges have similar courses to ones of four-year university program. However, three-year programs relatively focus on practical training than teaching theories, because the period of educational system is shorter than four-year programs.

### *Korean Children’s Play*

#### **History of Play in Korea**

It is popularly believed that Korean people have enjoyed singing and dancing from ancient times as a group. In Korea play before the 4th century was not distinguished from daily routines (Korean traditional play culture, 2000). Rather, Korean people enjoyed naturally formed group-activities that had both characteristics of play and work, entertainment and rituals, and ceremony and festivals (Lee, Hong, Cho, & Ohm, 2001). Community was formed by blood relationships and, thus, social stratum had not been differentiated yet. ‘Solidarity play’ was widespread, in which all members of community enjoy together without any limitations such as social status (Traditional plays in Korea, 2002). As agrarian society was established, traditional customs corresponding to times and seasons of the year were formed, which were fundamentally based on farming labor. One distinguishing characteristic of this type of play was that people enjoyed food, singing, and dancing without distinction of age and gender (Traditional plays in Korea, 2002). Through the age of the three Kingdoms from 4th

to 7th century—Goguryeo, Baek-jae, and Silla— national economy was rapidly developed and social classes were more differentiated. Play for unity was continuously conducted and developed to national ceremony in Goryeo Dynasty from 918 to 1392, which characteristic was changed to the prayer for peace and welfare in the country (Korean traditional play culture, 2000). During the Joseon Dynasty from 1392 through 1910, play became more personal and diverse (Lee et al., 2001). However, during this period, types of play broke into two categories: aristocratic and common. Typical types of play for the aristocratic class were creating poems, drawing pictures, and shooting, whereas common people still enjoyed group-play, such as farm music, mask dances, and playful ceremonies for the spirit of the terrain (Traditional plays in Korea, 2002). During the period under the rule of the Japanese from 1910 to 1945, Korean folk customs including collective play were prohibited, which required the participation of group of people and spirit of unity, since Japanese people carried out a deculturation policy (Korean traditional play culture, 2000). After independence from Japanese colonialism in 1945, Korea experienced rapid influx of western play culture which emphasized fun and amusement aspects of play.

### **Changes in Korean Children’s Play**

Traditional Korean plays for children have been handed down from generation to generation from ancient times. Traditional plays of Korean children are divided according to gender, age, religions, holidays, and seasons (Lee, 1997). For example, ‘Jae-gi-cha-gi’<sup>1</sup> is a game for boy, which is enjoyed in winter time, especially

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<sup>1</sup> A game using ‘Jae-ji’ that is a light object wrapped in paper or cloth. The player who kicks Jae-ji with a

on New Year's day. 'Yut'<sup>2</sup> is another holiday game, which is enjoyed by all family members on the first day of New Year. 'Yun-nali-gi'<sup>3</sup> and 'Pang-i-chi-gi'<sup>4</sup> are also Korean traditional plays that were usually done by boys in the past. Korean traditional play for young children usually involves group play (Lee et al., 2001; Lee & Lee, 1987). In past, young children played together in outside spaces such as a yard or an alley near their home. For example, children traditionally enjoyed 'Soom-ba-cok-gil'<sup>5</sup> and 'Jul-num-gi'<sup>6</sup> (Digital study of Korea, n.d.). Play materials were usually created from nature, such as stones and flowers (Lee et al., 2001). 'Gong-gi-nori,'<sup>7</sup> 'Nun-ssa-um'<sup>8</sup>, and 'Sil-ttu-gi'<sup>9</sup> were forms of play that used materials which might be easily found in yard or alleys. The beginning of these traditional forms of children's play is not known, but some guess that many of these forms of play date back centuries, since they were recorded in ancient literature in the 12th century (Digital study of Korea, n.d.).

I myself played many of traditional Korean games and enjoyed them during my childhood. I was born in 1975 in middle-class family of Seoul, Korea. In Korea, the 1970's were a time that early childhood education was started to be emphasized and

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foot more number of times wins the game.

<sup>2</sup> Yut involves four players or teams. Four sticks, flat on one side and curved on the other, are tossed in the air for each side's turn. The combination of flat and curved faces pointing upwards determines the number of spaces moved along a board. Landing on an intersection circle enables the side to take the shorter path. The first person/team to travel all the way around the board wins.

<sup>3</sup> Kite flying enjoyed by not only children but also adults, especially on Korean major holidays such as Ch'usok—Korean Thanksgiving Day—and the Lunar New Year. The traditional Korean kite is made with bamboo sticks and Korean paper.

<sup>4</sup> Spinning tops enjoyed by children all over the world. In Korea, tops were spun in an enclosed box, with points scored for various actions. Fighting tops where players try to knock their opponents' tops out of a designated area is also popular in Korea.

<sup>5</sup> Hide-and-peek

<sup>6</sup> Skipping rope

<sup>7</sup> Jackstone played using five pebbles

<sup>8</sup> Snowball fights

<sup>9</sup> String figures or cat's cradle

many kindergartens were established. However, my childhood differed slightly from today's Korean children. Before I entered elementary school in 1982, I spent my childhood playing in the street. At that time, it was a very common scene in which various aged children would run and yell across the alleys. When I was a kindergartener in 1981, I spent hours by playing at home after kindergarten program. Because I had a working mother and an older brother who was an elementary school student, I had to return home alone by walking from the kindergarten after class, feed myself, and play with friends in and outside of the house without a guardian. Usually I skipped rope and role-played with my friends whom I met everyday. I remember that I actually did not have many toys to play with and consequently I enjoyed interpersonal interaction with friends such as verbal games. It is far from today's scene of Korean children's daily lives.

The societal changes in Korea such as rapid economic growth and development of informational technology have influenced children's play in aspect of play materials, types, and places. In high technology era, socio-cultural environment in which children could play with peers in nature has been gradually disappeared in Korea (Choi, 2002). Also the competitive mood and emphasis on academic achievement in Korean society have strengthened the tendency of decreasing play time for children. Many Korean children now go to specialized institutions after preschool classes in order to learn English, math, writing and reading, music, art, and sports. I have many nieces and nephews having experiences to attend these kinds of extra classes at preschool ages. Many of these specialized classes for preschoolers are sports and music classes but they become more academic oriented as children get older. In contrast to my childhood,



contemporary Korean children are likely to have limited choices about what, when, with whom, and how to play. Since almost all children attend specialized programs, they also need to create a “play schedule” to play with their friends. Consequently, the opportunities to free play has become less and less.

Added to this, Korean children spend more time watching TV and playing commercialized toys and computer games than in the past. They also have lots of structured toys that allow them to play alone, which include sets of puzzles and blocks, commercialized games, doll house sets, and various cartoon-characterized robots. Korean early childhood educators have shown their concerns decreasing opportunity of play in nature and enjoying traditional plays for today’s Korean children and popularization of expensive toys conspired with commercialism. As the effort to maintain Korean traditional plays for children, in 1993 Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development selected ten applicable ones for early childhood programs and suggested the practical use of them in classes (Lee et al., 2001).

### **Children’s Play in Korean Academic Field**

#### *Research on Children’s Play*

The idea of ‘play-based instruction’ for young children has been generally accepted and research on children’s play has been continuously conducted in Korean academic of early childhood education. Hwang (2006) analyzed the findings of 141 studies on children’s play, which have been published from 1995 through 2004 in six Korean academic journals in the area of early childhood education. She suggested that Korean play research focuses on cognitive play than social play for children. Especially,

the investigation on the relationship between dramatic play and children's developments was the most frequently done. For example, Lee (2001) investigated the long-term effects of teacher intervention in children's socio-dramatic play on their social skills and verbal abilities. As a result, Lee suggested that the group received teacher intervention showed higher level of language abilities and social skills such as emotional control, positive relationships with peers, and easier adaptation to kindergarten life than control group in five months later. Hwang also pointed that the trend of research on computer game, traditional plays, and outdoor plays started from the 1990's. In the 1990's, Korean informational technology rapidly developed and the use of computer was popularized in Korea. The age group to use computer became much younger even to children. Children's being exposed to TV, computer, and commercial toys resulted in decrease of traditional outdoor plays. Therefore, the trend of research on traditional play seems to reflect the social circumstances and values of those times in Korea. Hwang also found that, among 141 play studies that she analyzed, 108 ones were quantitative research, although qualitative research on play has gradually increased from the 2000's.

In order to see the increasing interest in play-based instruction in Korea, I searched Master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations dealing with children's play through Korean Assembly Digital Library. I limited my search to the keywords of 'early childhood education' and 'play.' In Korea, early childhood education applies three- to five-year old children before entering elementary school. I also excluded theses and dissertations from special education. The Korean Assembly Digital Library currently holds theses and dissertations done in Korea from 1945 through 2004.

Before 1980's, there were only two theses about children's play. Both of them were conducted in late 1970's, which were about "teaching dance in kindergarten" and "children's use of the playground." During the 1980's, the number of studies on play increased to 39. These studies focus on investigation of the relationships between play and child development. For examples, their titles are "Effect of pretend play on children's social development" and "The relationship between play participation and children's cognitive development." The trend of the play studies of the 1990's seemed similar to the studies of the 1980's. Research titles from the 1990's include "The role of play on children's communication skills" and "The relationship with parents and play behaviors." However, the number of play studies rapidly increased to 192 in the 1990's.

Looking at the studies about young children's play from 2000 to 2004, one might assume that there is a rising interest in play in the Korean academic field of early childhood education. During these four years, researchers produced 281 theses and dissertations concerning play. Research trends look similar to previous ones, examples including "The effect of traditional play methods on children's social behaviors" and "Teachers' attitudes and practices on play."

#### *Korean Teachers' Perspectives of Play*

Although there are few studies investigating teachers' perceptions on children's play, it is likely that Korean kindergarten teachers are considered having positive attitudes on play and believing its educational merits. For example, in his survey study to examine actual management of outdoor play time in Korean kindergartens and teachers' attitudes on it, Shin (2004) reported that almost all participated teachers

believed that outdoor play enhanced cognitive, creative, emotional, physical, social, and linguistic developments for children and provided the opportunities for learning and emotional security, strongly agreeing that outdoor play should be provided daily in the program.

Most studies concerning Korean kindergarten teachers' perceptions of children's play, which were conducted in Korea, are comparative studies to compare kindergarten teachers' perceptions of play to those of parents or teachers in other institutions such as day-care center and elementary schools. Also there are studies that compare the perceptions of play held by experienced versus preservice kindergarten teachers as well as private versus public kindergarten teachers. The findings of these studies also show that Korean kindergarten teachers highly agree with and support the idea that play as a very important and effective way to teach children. For example, Choi (2002), in her study comparing the understandings of educational values of play and its application in the curriculum between kindergarten and elementary teachers, found that kindergarten teachers were more supportive than elementary teachers to the idea that 'learning through play is appropriate for children.' 66 percent of kindergarten teachers responded that "play itself is learning," while 70 percent of elementary teachers thought that "play can help children's learning with teachers' intervention." Also 76 percent of kindergarten teachers answered "all activities occurred in kindergarten classroom are play" or "play is a large part of curriculum," while 53 percent of elementary school teachers thought that "play is needed only when introduce the task to children" or "play is separated from work and it occurs when play time is given to children." Similarly,

Kim (1998) conducted survey research on the different perceptions of play held by teachers of day care centers and parents. Kim concluded that teachers perceived the importance of play much more than parents. These findings indicate that teachers advocated the ideas that play should be integrated in all kindergarten activities. Also, teachers showed their beliefs on their roles in children's play as providing play opportunities and encouraging play. Park (2003) suggests a similar trend in teachers' belief in children's play. In a study of kindergarten teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward play, Park found that teachers believed that their role for children's play was to provide the appropriate circumstances for their play through teacher involvement.

However, these results might be limited because of methodology. All of the research cited above involved quantitative research methodologies that use questionnaires to examine teachers' perceptions of play and statistical analysis to interpret their answers. The instruments are all questionnaire that requires participants' responses presented by multiple choice or Likert-scales, which contains limited choices. For example, in Park's (2003) study, over 98 percent of teachers answered that they believe that "learning occurs through play." I checked the item in the questionnaire which asks teachers' belief in play and learning. I found that the question reads: "what is your belief about children's play and learning?" Only two choices to this prompt are "children's learning and play should be separated" and "children's learning is occurred through play." Within these limited choices, most teachers do not have choice but the latter one. I believe that Korean teachers might express more diverse and different ideas on play if they had more choices or extended, open-end opportunities. For example,

using a questionnaire, Kwon (2002) examined the Korean preschool educators' perceptions of a number of controversial issues such as developmentalism, children's intrinsic motivation, free play and structured play, attitudes towards 3Rs, and the role of teachers. Interestingly, Korean preschool educators seemed to support incompatible approaches. They generally agreed with the child-centered approach such as importance of children's intrinsic motivation and theory of children's developmental stages, which are central notions of western educational philosophy. However, they also supported the need for extrinsic motivation and worksheets, which are not considered appropriate practices in western educational field.

Another problematic aspect of these Korean investigations of play is the tendency to connect the notions of play-centered instruction with more educated, more developed, and superior ideas. For example, Park (2003) suggests that there was a difference found in the teachers based on their educational background and license. She concludes that the teachers who had a higher quality educated background thought that play contributes the development of whole child, while the teachers having less education indicated only children's social development as the central reason for play. Similarly, in a study on the differences between teachers' and parents' understandings of children's play, No (1999) found that the more learned teachers and parents had a better understanding about play. Shin, Yu, and Park (2004) also suggested that the more teaching experience and academic background teachers had, the stronger were their efficacy beliefs on play and it's management in practice and that there was a positive correlation between teachers' efficacy beliefs on play and play management in practice.

There is little research investigating Korean kindergarten teachers' perceptions of play without comparing to other groups. The lack of in-depth and independent examining of kindergarten teachers' perspectives on children's play reflects the contemporary trend in Korean academic field, which does not regard it as a matter needing investigation, because it is assumed that kindergarten teachers would be aware well and agree to the importance of play for children. Even though they are few, studies on teachers' beliefs and practices on play have reported that there has been a gap between them. In Ohm's survey (2004) investigating Korean kindergarten teachers' perceptions and practices on connection of play and curriculum, she found that almost all kindergarten teachers who were participated believed that play should be applied into curriculum. However, Ohm found that only 58.8 percent of the respondents answered that they actually connected play to curriculum in real practice. As the reasons for not performing play-connected curriculum, teachers responded parents' negative attitudes on play-connected curriculum, lack of time and knowledge for it, impossibility to connect play and curriculum, and its non-productive results. Kwon's (2002) study has some implications on the disharmony of theory and practice on play in Korean early childhood education. Kwon examined the influences of western theories on Korean preschool educators' perceptions toward appropriate teaching approach, daily practice in Korean kindergarten, and the kindergarten curriculum. Kwon found that teachers supported both ideas of child-, play-initiated instruction and didactic teaching methods. She interpreted the result as it reflected Korean teachers' reality that teachers are trained by learning western theories, and, at the same time, they should satisfy the needs of the Korean

social context. Through interviewing with teachers, she also found that Korean teachers use the National Kindergarten Curriculum as a guide, but they think it is too idyllic for real Korean kindergarten condition. Rather, these teachers answered, school policy and parental demands affect their lesson planning much more than the national curriculum. Kwon observed that classroom activities were definitely adult directed and that teaching approaches focused mostly on subject matter. This study definitely shows the discrepancies between Korean kindergarten teachers' beliefs and their practices, which I hope to explore further through this research.



### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to better understand the ways Korean preservice teachers in early childhood education view children's play. The study further explored the ways in which various contexts of Korea contribute to these views and perceptions. I will discuss the methodological approach for the study in this chapter. In a broad sense, the study belongs to the constructivist/naturalistic paradigm, as it focused on phenomena in their natural context and on the perspectives of the participants involved in shaping these phenomena. Researchers of qualitative, interpretive and naturalistic paradigms advocate that "what people know and believe to be true about the world is constructed-or made up- as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999 p.48). In other words, there are multiple, subjective, and changing realities that are neither objective nor are they considered universal truths. Qualitative researchers attempt to investigate these complex and constructed realities through the lens of those who live it and in it (Schram, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) provide the generic definition of qualitative research as follows: "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the word" (p. 3). Erickson (1986) classifies this type of research as "ethnographic, qualitative, participant observational, case study, symbolic interactionist, phenomenological, constructivist, or interpretive" (p. 119). The methods and approaches of qualitative research are also identified as "case study, politics and ethics, participatory inquiry, interviewing, participant observation, visual methods, and interpretive analysis" (Denzin

& Lincoln, 2005 p.2). In short, unlikely positivist research that aims to discover the order of the world and to construct generalization, naturalistic and constructivist inquiry seek to “understand how the world operates by studying that world through the perspectives of those participating in it” (Hatch, 1995 p. 122).

I investigated the meanings and lived experiences of a small group of preservice teacher student in early childhood education from the standpoint of exploring their understanding of the concept, “play.” The study focuses on what experience means for persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. I served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. I directly met and interacted with the participants and sought the meanings of phenomena from them. The primary method for data collection was qualitative interviews. Interviews targeted toward participants’ understandings of the meanings of lived experiences and the essence of a particular concept (Schram, 2003). However, the purpose of the study is not limited to examining only the Korean preservice teachers’ conceptions of play. Through exploring their views and perceptions of play, the study project seeks to understand the historical, social, and cultural contexts of Korea that have contributed to these views and perceptions process. Therefore, data collection focused on discovering cultural patterns in Korean preservice teachers’ perspectives, exploring the ways their views reflect the values, beliefs, customs, taboos, and other aspects that are typical of their culture. Also, it focuses on the ways Korean preservice teachers define reality and experience events in natural settings.

### **Myself as a Research Instrument**

As a researcher in this study, I have been the critical instrument for collecting data and interpreting them. Because my research was not conducted to search for the “objective truth” but focused on “exploring cultural ways in Korean preservice teachers’ perspectives,” in all stages of processing research, my subjectivities influenced my decisions. I believe that my judgments and decisions were made based on my background, personality, knowledge, and beliefs. In the analysis and interpretation of data, my conceptual and theoretical senses as well as the knowledge in Korean culture and Korean school system was used. Therefore, I should say that my research does not claim to be “objective.” According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), individual subjectivity is the strength that makes us who we are as persons and researchers. It is the basic essence of the story that we can tell, giving us the perspectives and insights. Therefore, in qualitative research, the researcher becomes the primary instrument and cannot be separated from the phenomenon investigated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Being Korean but educated in the United States influenced my selection of the topic of the study, the data collection, and interpretation. I was born and had lived for twenty four years in Seoul, the capital of Korea. Because my mother’s family had worked in the field of early childhood education, I naturally had an interest in this field and studied for six years, getting bachelor and master’s degrees. In Korea, I accepted what I learned without questioning and had what would be characterized as typical Korean views, because I had only experienced Korean culture and academic field. After getting a master’s degree in Seoul, I came to the United States and started my Ph.D.

program. Living seven years in the States let me learn culturally different life styles, thinking ways, and most importantly understanding being different. At the same time, this experience helped me know my own values and better understand my roots. This study started from the point when I questioned things that I never doubted. As Korean, I tried to see my own culture through different lenses.

As the critical instrument of the study, I am also aware that I am a novice qualitative researcher had not done much qualitative interviewing prior to this study. Because my experiences relating to qualitative interview were few, there may be limitations in data collection of the study. However, through the effort to make good relationships with the participants and to induce them share their genuine perspectives with me, I tried to recover my incompleteness in technical skills and strategies for qualitative interview.

### **Purposeful Sampling and Field Entry**

“Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p.61). Purposeful sampling was used for this study to make certain the sample was representative and informative on the research topic. For selecting preservice teachers to participate in this study, I searched ‘somewhat typical, but most importantly, information-rich’ sample, so that I could learn the most.

The criteria of selecting appropriate participants were the Korean preservice teachers (1) student in a three-year program of early childhood teachers’ college in

Korea, (2) taken basic core courses in the program, (3) experienced in observing or involved in real early childhood classes, and (4) willing to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the perspectives of Korean preservice teachers on play and to explore socio-cultural contexts that have influenced the construction of them. Because over 80 percent of kindergarten teachers in Korea are trained in two or three year courses, I decided to work with the preservice teachers in two- or three- year programs of college rather than four-year programs of university. This criterion was not to facilitate generalization of Korean preservice teacher's perspectives. Rather, the preservice teachers in two or three year program are likely to reflect Korean preservice teachers in early childhood education, so that I chose them who would provide maximum information. Recently, two year early childhood educational course of college have extended their program to three year course in Korea. Therefore, I finally selected preservice teachers in three year college program.

Preservice teachers in the program, who had not had enough theoretical and practical experiences in early childhood education field, such as freshmen, were considered not to be suitable for participation in this study. The students in early education program, who do not have enough experiences relating to children yet, are not differentiated from other college students who do not study education and, therefore, may not represent the group of preservice teachers in early childhood education.

In order to find an appropriate place and participants for this study, I had to find a college that had a three-year of early childhood teacher education program in Korea. In Korea, there were 110 colleges that offered three year early childhood program.

Among them, 6 colleges were located in Seoul and 21 colleges were placed in the adjacent areas to the capital district. I decided to contact with Q Women's College in Seoul, because Q Women's College is one of the popular colleges in Korea, especially for early childhood teacher education program. As Erickson (1986) said that the negotiation of entry for qualitative study begins with the first letter or telephone call to the site, I firstly sent emails to the professors of Q Women's College in Seoul, Korea, explaining what the study was about. Fortunately I received a positive answer from one professor. She willingly let me attend her class titled "Play for Young Children" and also suggested making a chance for me to ask her students to be interviewed.

During the process of attending the class, I naturally made contact prospective participants in the class. Also I was able to build rapport and have casual conversation with them. Most importantly, I was able to select participants who had more opportunities to think about 'play' than others who did not take that class, so that they would be likely to respond actively to the interviews. Through attending the class, I was able to understand what the participants learned and what were the issues regarding 'play' among the participants, and finally used the information to my interviews.

In the class, the professor gave me time to introduce myself and the research. I explained the purpose of the study and that I was looking for the interview participants. Later I sent emails to the class, asking them to be the participants for my study. Finally I received thirteen replies with all of them showing interest to participate in the study. Among thirteen students who were willing to join in the study, ten were finally included

for the participants of the research. Three students dropped out. One student had a sudden traffic accident and the two other students wanted to quit for private reasons.

## **Data Collection**

### *Interview*

Unstructured in-depth interviews was the main method of data collection in this study, which uses the researchers' guiding questions as a starting point, but are quite flexible to following the informants' leads. Many constructivists prefer to introduce the research topic or ask a couple of broad questions to the informants in their formal interviews and encourage them to talk about the topic without researchers' authority (Hatch, 2002). Although in-depth interviews are open to digressions following informants' perspectives, researchers also need to prepare guiding questions as a framework to work within. Therefore, the interview guide was developed through literature review focusing on the perception of play. Interview questions were developed from both quantitative and qualitative research (see Appendix A).

### **Preliminary Meeting**

I met the participants before starting interviews in order to inform them the purpose and format of the interviews. It was anticipated that the participants might be shy during the interviews, especially for "research." The preliminary meeting was very helpful in alleviating these feelings and facilitated for a smooth flow of the interviews.

I had an opportunity to meet the participants after class. I and the participants sat on the benches in the campus and had conversations on interviews about 20 minutes.

I again introduced myself and gave them a brief overview of the study. Also I encouraged them to ask questions concerning the research, the interviews, and about myself. Since they wanted to know about me, I was able to open myself up to their questions them during the conversations. I was able to access and use the class schedules to set up the first interview schedules. The initial conversations with the participants helped me to know their level of familiarity with research interview. Realizing that the participants were a bit nervous, I worked hard on making them feel comfortable with my presence. I also emphasized to them that the interviews were not conducted to test their knowledge on play theories or to judge their preparedness as teachers and that there were no right or wrong answers. They were also assured of confidentiality with regards to any information collected during the interviews.

### **Initial Individual Interview**

Prior to doing the interviews, I gave the participants the consent forms and got the permission to audio-record the conversations. Initial interviews were conducted one-to-one, because the background questions that asked about age, education, behaviors, experience, and the like often required personal answers. Background questions were pre-constructed and were asked to all participants. Individual interviews were considered a better way for building rapport between the investigator and the participants. Although some interviews started in little awkward mood, the participants eventually became comfortable as time went. The initial steps in the interview were meant to warm up the participants rather than deeply investigate their perceptions on play in first interviews.



In the first interviews, 'easier' questions such as descriptive ones were asked (See Appendix A). For example, they included: "Can you share your play experiences of your childhood?"; "Can you describe children's play in your field experience?" Since the questions asking knowledge and skill can be threatening (Patton, 1990), non-controversial ones were asked at first. Because each participant showed different responses even to the same question, the following questions arising from each conversation became different each other. For example, to the question of "can you describe children's play in your field experience?" one conversation flowed to the issue of 'play of today's children,' while the other conversation focused on the problem of 'management of play time in kindergarten.' Participants were allowed to digress as long as they discussed issues related to 'play.' The interviews gradually focused on understanding the participants' current beliefs and ideas regarding play in both general and educational perspectives.

Each of the participants was interviewed for 60-90 minutes. The first individual interviews were mainly conducted at the cafeteria in campus. Because the campus was small and had few places for conversations, the cafeteria seemed to be the only place for interviews. However, the cafeteria often became too crowded for tape-recording. When it was too busy, I and the participants moved to empty lecture rooms or library lounge.

### **Group Interview**

After the first round of individual interviews, I decided to do group interviews, because it would be more comfortable for some participants to express their

ideas for some issues. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), establishing a level of comfort with the interviewee leads to the most effective data being gathered. There were three groups that included three or four participants. Two groups had three and one group had four members. Because I decided to conduct group interview for getting more active responses from the participants, I let the participants group by themselves. Since the groups were made of closer classmates, the participants as groups seemed to feel more comfortable and to express their ideas without hesitation. As like in initial round of individual interviews, we used campus cafeteria and library lounge. In group interviews, most participants seemed to be comfortable with the investigator and the interview questions. Except in cases where schedules did not match the members of groups were not changed until the end of data collection. Because the participation level of each group was different, all three groups did not have same interviews in numbers and time period. The first group having three participants had only one time of group interviews because the group members relatively made shorter responses than other two groups. Only one session was held for this group, because the members were not very responsive. Therefore, the members of this group had more individual interviews later. The other three-member group had three sessions of interview. It was the most active group that produced various issues on play. The emerging questions from this group were used as the guiding questions to later interviews. The last group consisted of four participants interviewed two times. The group interviews were conducted for 60-90 minutes.

During the group interviews the participants provided rich ideas. While in individual interviews short answers often occurred, a flow of conversation became

longer in group interviews. From listening other's responses, the participants thought over new ideas and examined their own ideas. In group interviews, various ideas were emerged and prompted each other. Comparing to the individual interviews, the directions of group interviews were much more diverse. Group interviews provided a greater insight into both individual and group perceptions on play. The questions for group interviews were generated based on the former interviews. It allowed for flexibility of the interview process and motivated the participants to share their experiences in ways that related their experiences to the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). However, some of the participants seemed to withdraw their responses when their ideas were different from dominant opinion. Therefore, I tried to use both individual and group interviews according to the issues.

#### **Follow-Up Individual Interview**

During the entire interview process, probes focused on eliciting greater detail. Sometimes, the issues became controversial or requested honest responses from the participants. Therefore, I planned to conduct a follow-up individual interview again. The participants were encouraged to elaborate and provide any additional perspectives that would lead to a deeper understanding of the complexities on play. In follow-up interviews, I verified the transcriptions and the interpretations of their statements in earlier interviews. Sometimes, the participants corrected their statements and exposed their hidden ideas that were not matched to the earlier statements. Each participant had one up to three times of follow-up individual interviews. As individuals or group, the participants had interviews between three to five times. All interviews were audio-taped

by small recorder. Also I wrote new rising questions and ideas in small notes during all interviews. After each interview, I uploaded the voice file to my notebook. Then, saved audio-taped data was transcribed in Korean immediately. I made each interview transcription as a file with a number and participants' names. Also I added the summary of each interview, questions, and my own perspectives in each file.

#### *Supplementary Data Collection*

Attending in the class, "Play for Young Children," helped me to understand what the participants learned about play and to generate interview questions. Casual conversations –informal interviews— were often occurred between the formal interviews and in the class. First of all, casual conversations helped to build close relationships to the participants. Also informal conversation led smooth proceeding of formal interviews. I often had casual conversations with the participants about next interviews. Naturally the participants were informed and prepared for next interviews. It prevented participants' immediate answers that might not reflect their real ideas. When I caught meaningful hints or issues in the casual conversations with the participants, I wrote memos.

Document analysis was also used as a supplementary data collection and analysis method. A review of textbooks and printouts used in the class, syllabus, and essays provided useful information for the study. In addition, I reviewed personal records, such as participants' completed homework assignments and tests, which may reflect their perceptions and attitudes on play.

To acknowledge the complexity of personal histories and the tacit knowledge of participants, data collection methods includes detailed descriptions of situations and direct quotations from participants about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts.

### **Data Analysis**

Two approaches were used in analyzing data: inductive analysis and interpretive analysis. These two approaches are identified in Hatch (2002)'s qualitative analysis model. In the initial stages of analysis, inductive analysis was used and then interpretive analysis was conducted in later analyzing. According to Hatch, inductive analysis involves searching for specific patterns in data, then pulling them together, and finally drawing a meaningful conclusion about phenomena. Interpretive analysis, on the other hand, emphasizes more on interpretation. Hatch explains that all approaches for transforming qualitative data focus on description, analysis, and interpretation, but the balance among them is different in each approach.

#### *Inductive Analysis*

Data analysis was done concurrently with data collection. Immediately after each interview, the information collected was transcribed into Microsoft (MS) Word document in Korean. The memos from the interviews, the summary, impression, and other important aspects of the interviews were entered and saved in the MS Word file. The inductive analysis from Hatch's model was then used to analyze the data. Firstly I went through the transcripts, identifying analyzable units. This process is similar to the

process of “unitizing” in terms of Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Strauss & Corbin (1990), in which all the data is broken down into the smallest segments. Hatch calls it, ‘frames of analysis,’ which means “a segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information” (Tesch 1990 p. 116). From the individual interviews, key concepts such as ‘play is fun’, ‘children always play’, and ‘play is helpful’ were identified. As more interviews were conducted, the number of ‘frames of analysis’ increased.

The frames of analysis were sorted into domains that were the categories with meaning. The domains were organized based on semantic relationships. Hatch explained the kinds of domains, introducing Spradley (1979, p.111)’s identifications of nine semantic relationships: X is a kind of Y; X is place in Y; X is a result of Y; X is reason for doing Y; X is a place for doing Y; X is used for Y; X is a way to do Y; X is a step in Y; X is characteristic of Y. The examples of sorted domains that were created in this study include ‘doll play is a kind of play,’ ‘spontaneousness is a characteristic of play’, and ‘pleasure is a reason for doing play.’ Among the domains, I identified the salient ones and coded them. Examples of salient domains included ‘kinds of play,’ ‘characteristics of play,’ ‘functions of play,’ and ‘reasons of doing play.’ Using the list of coding domains, I returned to the data and coded the text. This process was useful in closely examining the data and identifying new domains. Finally I integrated domains and found patterns between them. Critical themes emerged across domains were identified and all processes were continued until the analysis was finished. All the inductive analysis was done and written in Korean. Documenting information in Korean

was useful in keeping the nuance of the participants' responses as the analysis progressed.

### *Interpretive Analysis*

In the process of doing inductive analysis, I needed to move into the interpretive dimension. While the descriptive analysis on what the participants thought about play was mainly done by inductive approach, more interpretive part on interaction of complex context around the participants and their perspectives on play required different approach of analyzing. For example, the discussion on the notion of 'learning through play,' it was found that the participants advocated for both 'child-initiated curriculum' and 'adult-structured instructions' that are not compatible with each other. These conflicting responses of the participants could not be analyzed through inductive analysis. Therefore, the process of Hatch's interpretive analysis was used. Actually Hatch recommends using interpretive approach after the researchers transform the data in descriptive and analytic way through a typological or inductive analysis.

The first step of interpretive analysis was to write my own perspectives, questions, and comments following each interview. In cases where participants' attitudes on 'learning through play' were not consistent, I noted my interpretations about it and used them in analysis. This included several possible reasons for the phenomenon, questions for later interview, and my own impressions gleaned from the experience. Then I read the data and reviewed my comments with a sense of whole. During this process the salient interpretations were revealed. For example, through interpretive analysis of dual attitude on learning through play, it was interpreted that the participants

theoretically supported the notion of ‘learning through play’ while they did not appreciate play’s role for children’s learning from the perspectives of teachers as administrators of kindergarten classroom. Using the interpretation, I reviewed the data and found the supportive views and challenging views for the learning through play. Together with the critical themes emerged in the inductive analysis, I organized the salient interpretations and wrote a draft summary.

For the entire processes of analysis, Korean language was used. From the processes of creating outline and writing the findings, English was used with the inclusion of translation from the transcripts that needed to be placed in texts. Cultural and linguistic difference between Korean and English made it a bit difficult to perfectly translate some Korean texts into English. For example, it was difficult to translate the text including the issue of Korean traditional plays to English, because there were no appropriate terms for them in the English vocabulary.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is one of the critical criteria for research because it is the answer of the question, “Are these findings sufficiently authentic that I may trust myself in acting on their implication?” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 p.205) It does not mean “generalizability” that refers “the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subject” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The concept of generalization is incompatible with Constructivist research that has the assumption, “there is no universal truth, but multiple and subjective realities.” The



findings of constructivist research are obtained by specific researchers in specific contexts, and, therefore, they cannot be the truths when the applications of the findings of certain constructivist research are done in other contexts. Therefore, I agree that the generalization of a constructivist research is a matter of readers' choice (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, researchers also have a responsibility to provide detailed and accurate information on the participants, settings, and the contexts of the research. Such information helps the readers in making decision on when to apply the results of research to other sites. Merriam (1995) suggests that researchers should provide thick descriptions, which allow the readers to be well informed. In chapter IV, I provide rich description on Korean context, the school settings, and the participants.

Validity which refers to authenticity and credibility of the research is established when the researcher represents the accurate features of phenomena researched. The question I asked myself is "how can the readers believe that findings of my study match the reality?" This question asks the validity of both process and result of data collection and analysis. In other words, it asks "the validity of that transcribed texts literally match what the participants said in the interviews" and "the validity of that investigator's interpretations of the transcriptions really represent the perspectives of the participants."

To deal with the validity threat, the most effective way is to address the details of data processing and to explain my potential bias in straightforward manner. For the accuracy of transcribed text, I replayed the recorded audio-tape for several times and wrote down all words into Microsoft Word file. Even deviated conversations from

the issues or casual chatting were all transcribed in order to remember the mood of the interview day. As pointed out earlier, the text was transit from Korean to English after the analysis was finished. If I translated transcriptions first and worked with English-translated texts in analyzing process, I believe that the chance of distorting data interpretation would be increased, because translated texts may exaggerate or reduce the original meanings. However, the validity threat caused from translation cannot be removed completely even though I analyzed original transcriptions. In the result sections, participants' direct quotations from interviews are provided in English. It is an unavoidable validity risk of this study, since the participants and the researcher of the study are Koreans, therefore, the process of translation is inevitable.

However, being Korean, I was in a better position to elevate the validity of the study. Because I, as the primary instrument for the data collection and analysis, understood the unique history and culture of the Korean contexts and was thus able to capture minor nuance, attitudes, mood, and feelings of the participants. In addition, my background as a preservice teacher in Korean early childhood education was helpful in understanding the realities of the participants' experiences and the meanings of them.

For developing believable analysis, I did not depend only on "what the participants said" in the interviews. I included the supplementary data from recorded nonverbal observation from classes and class documents into my analysis. Although interviewing was the main method for data collection, effort to reflect the participants' verbal and nonverbal responses in multiple sources may help to improve validity of the analysis. Member checking was also conducted for enhancing validity of the study.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is the most important technique for credibility of qualitative research. Since this study seeks to explore the “meanings” of play from Korean preservice teachers’ perspectives, not merely “what they say” about play, this step that the participants had a chance to indicate whether the reconstructions of the inquirer are recognizable is crucial. Following Erlandson et al. (1993)’s suggestion, I asked my participants for explanations or clarifications to immediately correct errors from interpretations at the end of each interview. Member checking was also conducted during the informal conversations with the participants. After transcribing of each interview, I brought the transcriptions to the participants in later interviews and let them correct their responses. Before submission of the final report, I mailed both English and Korean drafts to the participants for corrections and further opinions.

### **Ethics**

Ethical issues in qualitative research have been increasingly discussed, because qualitative research usually deals with informants’ personal belief and shares it to public. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest the ethical principles for qualitative research as follows: informants’ identities should be protected from embarrassment or harm; informants should be treated respectfully; informants should be informed about the research and their permission should be obtained prior to proceeding; the researchers should truly report the findings.

Approval for the study was granted by Texas A&M University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Additionally, the participants received and signed the written consent forms prior to data collecting (see Appendix B and C). To maintain the confidentiality of the participants and their responses, I used pseudonyms for the names of participants, college, and place. All materials related to the interviews were secured safely during the course of the study and after the completion of the study.

However, Graue and Walsh (1998) point that qualitative researchers should ask the permission that goes beyond consent forms, which permeates any respectful relationships among people. In addition to adhering to official steps for ethics, I ensured that there was respect and care for the participants in the study. First of all, the interview was conducted in an atmosphere that was friendly and pleasant for the participants. Usually Koreans politely treat others, especially if the other persons are older than themselves. Even when the age difference is only two or three years, Koreans are careful in their speech and respect older one's opinion. This Korean tradition sometimes leads "vertical relationships" between younger and older people and results that the younger ones withdraw their opinions against older ones.

Because I was older than the participants about ten years and studied in doctoral program focusing on early childhood education, they seemed to accept what I asked and might not show their honest opinion to me. Therefore, I tried to make them comfortable through treating them sincerely and encouraging them to talk about any problem with or unpleasantness with being in the study. As a way to get participants' straight ideas, I was open about my views. I shared my experiences and feelings as a

preservice teacher, including anxiety about being a teacher, trouble between theory and practice. Participants could feel sympathetic and become comfortable gradually. However, I was careful not to expose my pedagogical beliefs and criticism against Korean educational system too much to avoid my perspectives influencing participants' responses.

## CHAPTER IV

### SETTINGS AND PARTICIPANTS

#### Settings

Q Women's College was located in the west of K-Gu that is one of 25 Gu of Seoul. Seoul is the capital of Korea, covering an area of about 150000 acres (605.52 km<sup>2</sup>). It has high density of population of 10.28 million. It is divided into 25 'Gu' that would roughly be translated as 'district' in English. K-Gu has an area of 5900 acres. The resident population of K-Gu is 180 thousand, but there is also a transient population of 2 million. Therefore, K-Gu has a heavy traffic volume. However, public transportation such as buses and subway is highly developed so that people could move around in Seoul easily.

Since the establishment of Joseon Dynasty in 1392, K-Gu had been the center of business and culture of Korea. The major newspaper publishing companies and government agencies including city office, top court, and presidential residence place are in K-Gu. There are also various art organizations, galleries and cultural properties like ancient palaces. In 2001, K-Gu had 21 kindergartens, 14 elementary schools, 9 middle schools, 14 high schools, and 2 colleges, and 3 universities.

#### *Q Women's College*

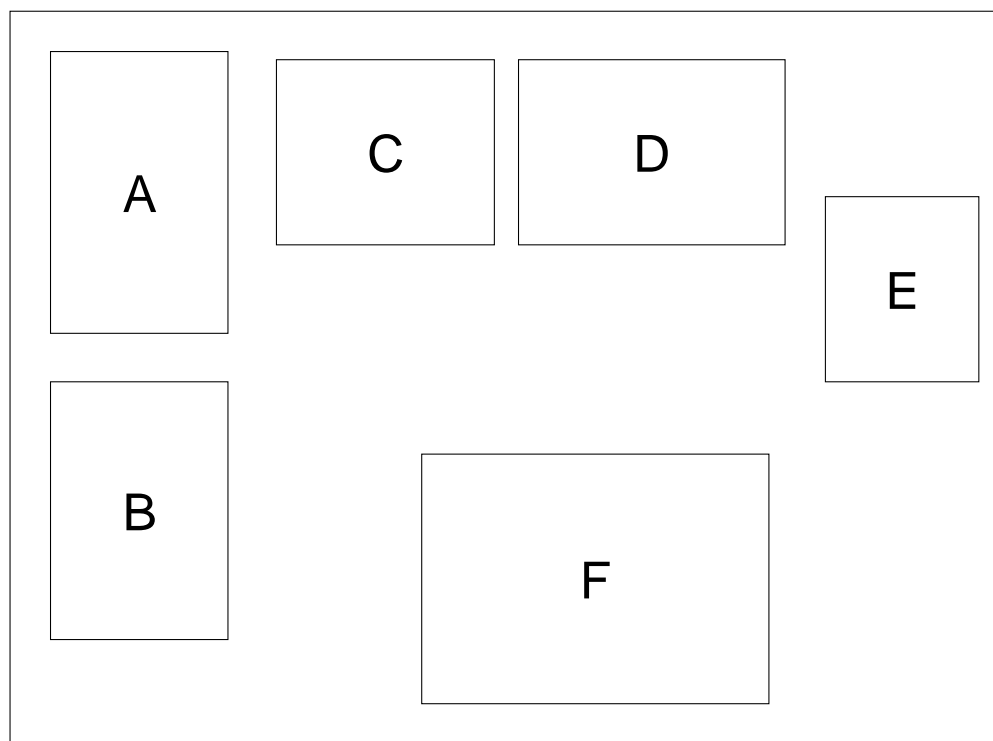
Q Women's College began its operations in 1978 with the governing Christian principles of "belief, hope, and love." Its Christian principles were the guiding force in the establishment of the college. According to a professor of the department of early childhood education, only Christians could be allowed to be faculty members of

the college in principle. The school's website continues to reflect an emphasis on Christian values and beliefs. The website mentions that their philosophy is based on ideas such 'Christian principles governed students' lives.' They also included honesty, diligence, and service in the school mottos. Their educational goal is to provide students with excellent technical skills in addition to sincerity and diligence and educated women leaders who actively served the country and society. Q Women's College has received financial subsidy from Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development from 1998 through the present time of 2006. Because of their superiority in specialized educational programs, it had been recognized as one of the top rank colleges in Korea.

To visit Q Women's College, I had to walk up through alleys, because it placed at hillside densely packed by small buildings. Although its neighborhood was near from the old urban area, around the campus was mixed of residential and small businesses districts consisted of old style houses, stores and cafeterias. Since Q Women's College shared its campus with R Girls' Middle and High schools, I often walked up those alleys with teenage girls wearing school uniforms when I had interviews. It was the common scene that the groups of girls talked and laughed loudly at snack bars or in front of small stationary stores. Around the campus, it was filled with female students from teenage through twenties.

However, middle, high schools and college used their own areas in the campus separately. At the main entrance—that all three schools shared—the pathways to each school divided: left for the high school, straight-left for the college, and straight

all the way to the end of the campus for the middle school. I could see the high school at left side from the main entrance because it placed very near from it. The college had 6 buildings that included library, memorial hall, lecture-halls, and faculties' offices. Building A had faculties' offices and student council (see Figure 1).



**Fig. 1.** Arrangement of Buildings of Q Women's College.

Building B had a cafeteria and lecture-halls for the humane studies including early childhood education. Building C was mainly used by the departments of food &



nutrition and computer information, because it had facilities like cookery and computing labs. Building D built in style of Renaissance architecture was the main building of the college that had language labs etc. Building E had also computing labs as well as presentation rooms and conference rooms. Building F was the library that was built in 2000.

#### *Department of Early Childhood Education*

The faculty and students in the department of early childhood education mainly used Buildings A and B (see Figure 1). Among four professors of the department, two of them had their offices at the Building A. The other two professors worked at Building C and E each. The classes for the department of early childhood education were mainly held at Building B and C. Each department had its own space at college buildings for the students' convenience. The department of early childhood education had a students' room, piano rooms, a mini lounge, and a multimedia room. The students' room was at the basement of Building B, which was used for storing department's materials and providing enough space to the students because they worked as a group to create kindergarten curriculum and teaching materials in their course work. The piano rooms and the mini lounge were at the basement floor of Building C. Because the program required students to register in a piano class as a core course in the first year, all students in the department of early childhood education used the piano room when they were the freshmen. The mini lounge was a small resting area that was next to the piano rooms. The library, building F, had the multimedia room at third floor. It provided the students various media related to the study. There was also used as an 'Integrated Education

Center for Disabled Infants' at library building, which developed and investigated programs for integration of disabled and multicultural children. Integrated education was one of the specialized programs of the college, which was directed by the department of early childhood education.

The Department of Early Childhood Education in Q Women's College was one of the popular teacher training programs for early childhood education in Korea. Until 2001, the early childhood program of Q Women's College was a two-year teacher training program. From 2002, the program has been changed to a three-year program. On February, 2005 the first graduate of the new three-year program was produced. The participants of this study were the second graduating students in the new three-year program.

### **Curriculum and Teacher Certificate**

The curriculum was broadly composed of liberal arts and major courses. Liberal arts courses were divided into three parts: compulsory, optional, and major related courses. Compulsory liberal art course was comprised of only one course, 'Understanding Christianity,' a required course for all students enrolled in Q Women's College. The credit for this course was two. For optional liberal art courses such as 'Basic Japanese,' 'Swimming,' and 'Understanding and Appreciation of Literature,' students should take 24 credits. Major related courses included 'Computer Office and Application' and 'Human Behavior and Social Environment.' The students were required to register eight credits for major related courses.

**Table 1.** Major Courses in Early Childhood Education Program

Courses	C	H	First Year				Second Year				Third Year			
			Spring		Fall		Spring		Fall		Spring		Fall	
			C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H	C	H
Child Development	3	3	3	3										
Early Childhood Education	3	3	3	3										
Music I	1	2	1	2										
Philosophies in ECE	2	2	2	2										
Welfare of Children	3	3			3	3								
Music II	1	2			1	2								
Literature for Young Children	3	3			3	3								
Art Education for Young Children	2	2			2	2								
Programs for Young Children	3	3			3	3								
Creative Craft	2	2					2	2						
Curriculum for ECE	2	2					2	2						
Piano	1	2					1	2						
Science Education	2	3					2	3						
Movement	2	2					2	2						
Mental	2	2					2	2						
Social Education	2	2					2	2						
Montesory Approach	3	3					3	3						
Multicultural Education	2	2					2	2						
Language Education I	2	2							2	2				
Music Education	2	2							2	2				
* Supervision	2	2							2	2				
* Special Needs	2	2							2	2				
Field (Day Care)	2	2							2	2				
Computer Education	2	2							2	2				
Puppet Performance	2	3							2	3				
Observation and Practice	3	3							3	3				
Math Education	2	2							2	2				
Language Education II	2	2									2	2		
Field I (Kindergarten)	2	2									2	2		
Mainstream Education	3	3									3	3		
Traditional Music and Play	2	2									2	2		
Counselor	2	2									2	2		
Cognitive Devel. and Edu.	2	2									2	2		
Play for Young Children	2	2									2	2		
Measurement of Children's Mind	2	2									2	2		
Workshop	2	3									2	3		3
Parent Education	3	3											3	2
Family Study	2	2											2	2
Child Study	2	2											2	2
Health Education	2	2											2	2
Management of EC Institute	2	2											2	2
Christian Education	2	2											2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>
Educational Philosophy & History	3	3	3	3										
Curriculum and Evaluation	2	2			2	2								
Theories & Practices in Education	3	3			3	3								
* Educational Technology	2	2					2	2						
* Educational Material	3	3							3	3				
Theories in Subject Matter	2	2									2	2		
Educational Psychology	3	3											3	3
Field II (Kindergarten)	2	2											2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>

\* Core courses

\*\* Courses required for the teaching certificate

C = Credit

H = Hours

Liberal arts courses were mainly offered during the first year. Overall students in the department of Early Childhood Education should register for 34 credits from the liberal arts courses in the three year program. Liberal courses were concentrated more in the freshman year: 24 credits for freshman, eight credits for sophomore, and two credits for junior. Major courses were divided into two parts: core courses and courses required for the teaching certificate. The detailed introduction for the major courses is shown in table 1. Total credits for core courses were 90. The credits for the courses required for the teaching certificate were 20. Therefore, totally students enrolled in early childhood education program should take 144 credits of liberal arts and major courses. Every year the department presents a 'Creative Arts Festival' that was a summary of what students have achieved during the three years of major field study. The department also held annual workshops and teaching instruments exhibitions for kindergarten teachers and directors as well as for early childhood education experts. In addition, they performed puppet shows and song contests for children annually. There was an overseas training program to visit the kindergarten attached to the sister school in Japan. After the completion of training courses, the Regular Teacher II certificate was given to students. The Department of Early Childhood Education in Q Women's College has produced about 80 kindergarten teachers every year.

### **The Course: Play for Young Children**

The participant preservice teachers were selected among the students who were attending the 'Play for Young Children' class. This course was generally recommended for third year students of the Department of Early Childhood Education in

Q Women's College, which provides theoretical knowledge and practical skills regarding play for young children. Since the purpose of this study was to investigate Korean preservice kindergarten teachers' conceptions of play, this course was considered a good site to select the participants in order to explore the ways preservice teachers construct their knowledge regarding play. I was able to attend this class and write down field notes, especially focusing on major issues on children's play and learning, which were discussed in every class. Through attending this class, I was able to build rapport with the participants and had the opportunity to understand general knowledge and educational ideologies that the participants have constructed regarding learning and teaching for young children, and further get the documents and records as a supplementary data.

#### *Interview Places*

Two major places for the interviews were the campus cafeteria and the lounge in library. The cafeteria was on the first floor of Building B (see Figure 1), which was the only one in the campus. The inside of the cafeteria reminded me of a cottage, since the tables and chairs shaped natural wood, not rectangular ones. In addition, comfortable sofas were provided along the walls. Since one wall of the east side was a glass, I usually sat at table in front of the glass wall, looking outside while waiting for the participants. During interviews, I and the participants always had some snacks or beverage. Although the voice was little echoed for recording since the cafeteria had a pretty spacious hall and high ceiling, it was an ideal place for comfortable interviews. However, because it often was crowded with college students, the interviews were

moved to other places for successful recording of the interviews. The library lounge was another place that was mainly used for the interviews. It was a small room that had four round tables and two vending machines. Like the cafeteria, the library lounge also had a lot of visitors who took rest or chatted with friends in their break time. Therefore, I scheduled the interviews in morning before the cafeteria and the lounge became crowded. When the interviews were scheduled in afternoon, I often used an empty lecture-room, a theater-room, outside benches, and even a practice room for the college cheering group as an interview place.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were ten preservice kindergarten teachers who were enrolled in the department of early childhood education in Q Women's College in Seoul, Korea. The participants were juniors, who were expected to graduate in eight months. The participants were selected among the volunteers who were attending a course, 'Play for Young Children' which was one of the core courses in the program.

In order to appreciate the depth of this study, a brief introduction to each participant is included. Each participant's reasons' for entering the teaching profession, views of education and children, and concerns for future teaching are provided. All identifiable information was removed and pseudonyms were used.

#### *Overview of Participants*

##### **Min-ji**

Min-ji was tall and wore eyeglasses. Because she always wore casual shirts and jeans, having black straight hair with even bang, I thought people might view her as

high school students. Min-ji thought that she had had many opportunities to be with children. First of all she had a brother who was eleven years younger than her. From the early teenage Min-ji had taken care of her brother and could have observed all processes of his growth. She believed that having a much younger brother let her keep interest on children.

Another source that she could contact with children was church. Min-ji had actively participated in programs and events in church since she was very young. Min-ji's church members were close with each other and even the children from various families got along together. In Min-ji's church, it was common for older children to take care of younger ones. Min-ji believed that this experience influenced her in making a decision to be a kindergarten teacher.

Min-ji dreamt of being a teacher since she entered the elementary school, but not a kindergarten teacher. She applied to the college of education for a four-year secondary school teachers program but failed to get admission. The following year, she repeated a college entrance exam but did not get a satisfying score again. This was why Min-Ji entered the department of early childhood education in Q Women's College. She was actually accepted to another university, but gave it up because they did not offer an education program. Since Min-ji repeated her college entrance exam, she was 22 years old and was one year older than other students.

Min-ji had taught young children under seven years old at church for two years. Including Min-ji, nine teachers took care of and taught around 50 children who were divided in two classes. She believed that she had learned a lot about children and

strategies to deal with them from the experience to teach in church. Min-ji learned that children were active thinkers from the experiences of teaching in church. She was often amazed by children's creative ideas. She also believed that children should be understood as respectful human beings.

...we, adults, have ignored their [children's] abilities and interests, I think. Especially parents require their kids have very high academic achievements. Actually, my mom sends my brother to several private institutes after school. The problem is, she never consider what he wants to do. I believe we should respect their [children's] needs and interests. We have to understand they are not the ones whom we can control.

Min-ji strongly voiced that we should support children to find and keep their own interests. She said, "if children in the early childhood period were crammed into academic tasks through teacher-directive way and did not have opportunity to do what they want, they would lose the ability to know their own needs and interests." For this reason, she thought that kindergarten teachers' roles were very important.

Teachers do not have to decorate their classrooms pretty. That's not important. We should build something interesting on the classroom environment, which may help children to explore their interests and curiosities. Also I think the interaction between teacher and children is crucial. I didn't mean that teacher should teach something directly to kids. Both providing interesting environment and appropriate verbal interactions should focus on inducing children's spontaneous exploration and participation.

Min-ji had a plan to take examination for admission into four-year teacher program in university. She also desired to continue her study and get a doctoral degree.

### **Young-sun**

Young-sun smiled and made eye contact with me all the time during the interviews. She was a delightfully interviewee and even tried to present different ideas.

Young-Sun was 34 years old and Catholic, having 5-year experiences as a teacher for



children in daycare center. For first 3 years, she worked with children under 6 years. Later, she taught the first to fourth graders in after school hours. According to Young-sun, the daycare center where she worked was significantly different from other common daycare centers. First of all, the relationship between teachers and children was “horizontal” rather than “vertical,” she noted. Unlike to common private kindergartens and daycares, the relation between superintendent and teachers was democratic, so that teachers were able to make more various ideas for the program. She also noted that the day schedule was not tight like common kindergartens. Thus Young-sun was able to “play with children rather than teach them.” She had deep bond with children in her class. The experience working in that daycare allowed Young-sun to think about how to work with children and changed her views on children.

Before, I loved children.. but...I didn't respect them. I thought teacher should give them [children] something educational. But I realized that the relationship with children should be interactive, not one-sided giving. To do that, teachers should be friends for them [children].

Young-sun agreed to Locke's naturalism on children and education. She believed that teachers should teach children in accordance with their natural characteristics. She strongly showed her positive opinion on unrestricted schedule for children in kindergarten and daycare center. Moreover, Young-sun thought that “just playing in natural environment would be perfect for learning” in early childhood period. She also went on a picnic with children instead of staying back in classroom, while she worked as a teacher. Young-sun strongly disagreed with the idea of teaching children academic things such as math, English, and letters in any educational institutions. Instead, she thought that children should learn how to express their ideas and feelings in

logical and reasonable ways. She also noted that harmonizing with other people was an important characteristic that children should learn in kindergarten. Young-sun planned to continue studying in graduate program in university.

### **Bo-young**

Bo-young's face was flushed when I greeted her. She was shy of being interviewed and seemed a little nervous. Her big brown eyes often rolled up and down as she talked very carefully. Although she did not actively lead the conversation, she clearly explained her ideas and feelings to my questions. She saw herself as quiet, introvert, and organized. Bo-young enjoyed reading books and magazines in a quiet mood. She also loved to write essay and diary. Making wrinkles on her nose, she additionally said that she did not like to have a noisy party with many people. Bo-young was a Christian and at the time of the interview, she was 21 years old. But she had not gone to church for a while. As a high school student, she wanted to study Korean literature in college and teach Korean literature teacher after graduating. However, she applied to the program for early childhood education because of her lower score in the college entrance exam than her expectation.

...I realized that I could not enter the college of Korean literature with my score. So I had to find another option. I felt quite comfortable with being a kindergarten teacher because it was my best friend's dream. I've heard about it a lot from her....however, after I entered the program, I could not adapt myself to it [the program] of ECE. I was embarrassed to present a simulation class or to play piano in front of the class... many other classmates had some experiences with young children such as teaching in church. But I didn't. So when I met little kids in teaching practice for the first time, I was frustrated. I didn't know how to deal with small kids.

Bo-young was a journalist in a school newspaper. Since she loved writing, this extracurricular work was something she had enjoyed doing. She had not decided her future career yet. The first option that Bo-young might choose was changing her major to Korean literature. Another option she had thought about was taking an examination for admission into a four-year program of early childhood studies, if she adhered to the field of ECE. She said that regardless of whether or not she eventually chose ECE, she would work as a kindergarten teacher for one or two years after graduation. She wanted to try the theories and practices from college on to real children in real classrooms.

Bo-young was determined when she answered my question about teacher's role and the purposes of ECE. She thought that early educational institutes should focus on fostering children's morality, creativity, and sociality. She said that "I think the basic roles of teachers are caring for children safely and providing encouraging environment to stimulate children's interests." She particularly objected to the traditional cramming system of education in Korea. Bo-young shared her experience with me, which she observed at one classroom of daycare center in her teaching practice.

I was shocked when I went to daycare for my teaching practice. The curriculum was focused on work-sheets. I mean, it was totally teacher-centered. Teachers never asked children's ideas. For example, in art activity, teacher showed children the model first. And children made their art work, following teacher's model. I realized the reality is totally different from the theories we've learned. We should respect children's interest and needs. I believe we should extend children's curiosity than teaching directly.

Bo-young believed that direct teaching was unacceptable even when the contents were "developmentally appropriate for children" and children enjoyed the activities, because she thought direct teaching hindered children's creative ideas.

**Ae-ra**

Due to that her schedule was changed, Ae-ra's first interview was rescheduled a week later than other participants. She apologized several times for rescheduling her interview. Ae-ra was 21 years old and did not have any religion. She answered without any hesitation when I asked how she decided to be a kindergarten teacher. She wanted to study international studies. However, her college entrance exam score was not sufficient to apply to the school of international studies. Therefore, she decided to apply to ECE since she also liked children.

I never envisioned myself as a kindergarten teacher although I liked children. Actually I didn't have any information about early childhood education at all. Now I realized that being a kindergarten teacher is quite difficult. I still doubt whether I can be a good teacher. There are too many requirements for kindergarten teachers, but the salary is very low. I think no one can work as a kindergarten teacher without a sense of duty.

She also complained about stereotypes leveled against kindergarten teachers as having a conservative appearance and behaviors. Ae-ra wanted to continue studying after completing her ECE program. But she had a plan to work as a kindergarten teacher after graduation because she had to work at least three years in order to support her younger brother who was preparing for entering college. Although Ae-ra had not decided how to continue her studies after three years of working, she was determined to make ECE as her "lifelong professional field." Ae-ra was outgoing and straightforward but also careful when she explained her views on children and teacher.

...before I study ECE, I didn't know children have unbounded potentials. I believe children's minds are like blank sheets. I also believe they are kind of being innocent. So they can absorb everything they learn... I have to say that teachers should encourage and support children's innate abilities. But it's too

ideal theory. I mean, it's very difficult to support children passively until they learn something by themselves in real classroom. When I was in teaching practice in the kindergarten, I was troubled to catch the moment they needed me. I had no idea of how I could encourage them through verbal interaction.

Ae-ra felt a little burden to be a good teacher. But she thought that the teaching profession was quite attractive and worthy to a challenge. She wanted to be an "open-minded and fun teacher" and to teach children "good manners and caring minds for others." She also worried how to balance her educational beliefs and the requirements of parents to teach academic issues.

Ae-ra felt uncomfortable to teach letters and numbers to kindergartners but she agreed to teach them in kindergarten classes in order to satisfy parental enthusiasm on their children's academic achievement in society. Therefore, she thought that "teachers should create the educational environments in which children are exposed to the opportunities to learn numbers and letters naturally" if teaching academic stuffs is inevitable.

### **Nan-hee**

Nan-hee described herself as a "very easygoing person having positive attitude." She said that she had many different groups of friends and loved to maintain deep friendship with them. She also noted that she did not make strong opinion in groups, since she disliked confronting others. She always tried to adjust herself and satisfied with the situations given to her. She said, "I easily adapted to the program of early childhood education, although I did not want to study it firstly."

Before Nan-hee entered the program, she dreamed of being a photographer, because she thought this occupation would be well matched with her liberal and active

personality. However, she had to change her mind because she came to get lower score in her college entrance examination than she expected. Studying photographing required high scores which she did not have and thus gave it up. Instead, Nan-hee decided to apply to early childhood education, simply thinking “it would be fun.”

Nan-hee was 21 years old and Christian. She had experience in teaching children aged six to eight years olds at church for two years. Besides teaching children, she also had actively participated in other activities in church. For example, she had served as a church choir conductor. Nan-hee enjoyed singing a song, especially gospel songs. Nan-hee seemed to spend fairly much time at church. She responded to my questions using her teaching experience in church as references. She told me that she had a close relationship with the preacher’s family, so that she often played with their two young kids who were four and six year olds in that family. She said that she had special bond with these young children, because she had been with them since they were infants. Nan-hee believed that the opportunity of working with children in church had tremendously helped her to understand a teachers’ role.

She thought that early childhood teachers should be “friends” for children, not “authoritarian directors.” Nan-hee said that “the most important thing that teachers should do is letting children experience various things in very interesting ways”, since most activities in kindergarten would be the first experiences for children. “I think that children may think school as a fun place if they are taught in an interesting way,” she added.

Nan-hee had a plan to work as a kindergarten teacher after graduating. She was excited to teach children but worried about the hard work involved at the same time. In long term plan, she planned to be a kindergarten teacher in a public school, because it usually was not possible to work in private kindergarten after getting married.

### **Tae-hee**

Tae-hee did not talk much during interviews. She gave brief answers to the questions and ultimately her interview time was less than the average of interview time spent with the other participants. Tae-hee who was 30 years old was seven or eight years older than other students in the department of Early Childhood Education in Q Women's College.

She had the most various careers working with children. After Tae-hee graduated from the college, she worked at day care center for four years. Then she worked as a teacher at the private art institution for young children for one year. After that, she worked as a visiting tutor for one year. She said, "As I worked with children, I realized I needed to study more about them." She believed that it was the right decision to enter college again and study ECE. Before long, Tae-hee realized that she did not have enough knowledge on children and education.

...when I taught them [children], I believed I did a good job for them. But now I realize that I made a lot of mistakes when I interacted with children. I think my teaching style was not child-centered. I was also mentally exhausted to cope with other things rather than to be with children...such as the relationship with other teachers.

However, she remembered her experiences with children as precious and happy moments. Also Tae-hee thought that she could understand theories in the course much easier because of her experiences with children.

Tae-hee loved to do art activities with children because these activities allowed children to think and express their creative ideas. She said that she would do a lot of art work with children if she went back to children again. However, she did not decide about her career after graduation. She might go back to practical fields – especially kindergarten- or continue to study. The reason that she hesitated to work with children again was, she said, “concern” that she might treat children in “an inappropriate” way.

... I doubt myself on doing a better job if I return to children. Before, I just worked with them without concerns. Now I have learned more knowledge on children and how to teach them... I have some pressure on teaching them [children] as much as I learned. I am not confident to do the right things... such as appropriate interventions.

She still thought that she had to learn more on early childhood education.

Tae-hee believed that children should choose what they want to know and learn. She did not agree to teach children academic subjects such as math, Korean letters, and English, because they are “not age appropriate” and “accompany teacher-directed instruction.” She thought the reason to teach children these kinds of academic subjects in kindergarten was parents’ requests which the owners of kindergartens could not refuse.

### **Ji-hee**

During interviews, Ji-hee talked with a quiet voice, but expressed her ideas clearly. Since her older sister, Jung-hee, had worked as a kindergarten teacher, she had



some information on early childhood teacher program and occupation of kindergarten teacher. But Jung-hee did not support Ji-hee's decision of going to the ECE, because Jung-hee experienced difficulties as a kindergarten teacher. After graduating from the college, Jung-hee got a job in a kindergarten. She had taught her class for one year and got married. The next year, she could not be assigned as a homeroom teacher because of her marriage. "It was the sign of being dismissed," Ji-hee stated. Since Jung-hee did not have her class, she had to quit the kindergarten. Since Ji-hee knew this kind of difficulty from her sister's case, she planned to work as a kindergarten teacher for only three to five years after graduation. Then she would get married and continue to study.

She thought that the experience to teach children in church for two years made her more confident as a preservice kindergarten teacher. However, Ji-hee still doubted her ability and nature as a good teacher. The most concerning thing for her was "controlling the class."

I cannot control the class in church... I mean, teacher should always be nice to children. Then children become mean and out of control. I have no idea what to do.

Ji-hee felt that she often had been overwhelmed by "naughty" boys in the church class. She thought that her "lack of charisma" might be a disadvantage in her future teaching. As a teacher, she wanted to be a "good questioner." She believed that children learned by themselves if the adults around them encouraged their ideas by providing "appropriate" questions.

Ji-hee also believed that one of the major roles of kindergarten teacher was to create joyful environment in order that children felt comfortable in kindergarten. “To do so, we should use children’s interests, because children would be happy when their interests are reflected in the curriculum,” Ji-hee added. She gave an example her observation of one classroom in her teaching practice.

...when I went to \*\* kindergarten for my teaching practice, it had been raining for several days. Children’s interest was focused on rain. So the teacher decorated the role play area as a rainy day. For example, using the overhead projector, the teacher created “rain.” She also made raindrops of transparent plastic and hung them from the ceiling. I saw children were very interested in role play area and played more concentrated. That’s what I want to do when I become a teacher.

Ji-hee thought that early childhood education recently became more important, since traditional discipline at home gradually disappeared and the connection between family-members became weaker in Korean society. She also mentioned that people did not associate with their neighbors anymore. She thought that Korean children today were losing the opportunities to learn how to respect and harmonize with other people. Therefore, Ji-hee believed that the interactions with peer and teacher in kindergarten were very important for the children’ construction of basic social skills. She stressed the role of teachers in supporting children’s self-esteem and to teach about caring for others.

### **Do-sun**

Do-sun smiled all through the interviews. She was interested in my study and interviews. She treated me like an older sister and led the conversations. Do-sun was 22 years old and Catholic. She described herself as outgoing and straightforward person.

She repeated a college entrance exam. In her first trial to enter a college, she applied to the college of education for secondary school but failed. The next year Do-sun took the exam again, but unfortunately she did not get a satisfying score. That was why she decided to go into ECE. Do-sun also stated that “among the students who entered in ECE with their second trail of [college entrance] exam like me, I believe most of them had failed to get enough score for primary or secondary teaching [programs].” Although she did not have any experience with young children or any information about ECE, she decided to be a kindergarten teacher because she could “stay in Seoul, become a teacher anyway, and get a job easily.” However, she realized that there were many difficulties to be a kindergarten teacher than she expected.

Kindergarten teachers overwork and are underpaid. But they cannot complain about this issue... Although I have not become a teacher yet, I experienced this kind of problem. When I went to \*\* daycare center for my teaching practice, the center building was being remodeled. As you know, in teaching practice, the student teacher was supposed to observe the real classrooms and practice to teach real kids...but I was asked to carry the goods (burdens) in the classrooms to the storage. I couldn't refuse.

After Do-sun realized these kinds of problems in real field, she decided to study continuously rather than teaching in kindergarten. Although she was disappointed of being a kindergarten teacher, she liked to study ECE. To do so, she started to prepare for the examination for the admission into the four-year programs in universities. She worried about keen competition into these programs. However, if she might have a chance, she would try master and doctoral degrees.

Do-sun believed teachers should not move ahead of children. She said, “Teachers should observe children's interest and support them in order that children can

learn spontaneously.” She told me that her perspectives on child and education changed a lot after she learned ECE.

...everyone says earlier education is very crucial. I just agreed with it. So I thought teaching vocabulary and math to even one-year old baby is much better than doing nothing. But I learned that since developmental stages are already fixed from the birth, it is no use to teach something higher level than that child’s ability. So I think we don’t have to teach a lot of things to children. Teachers just assist the paces of children’s development.

### **Ha-min**

Ha-min was 21 years old and a Christian. She was tall and wore short skirt and bright makeup. We went around the campus to find a place for interview. The café in which we met was too crowded and noisy for recording our conversation. We therefore, decided to find a quiet place. Ha-min guided me to her practice room. She told me that she was a college cheerleader and that we might use the practice room for about an hour. She said that she “loves dancing and singing as well as art craft and playing musical instruments.”

She wanted to study other field than ECE—but she did not tell me what she wanted to study. Although she did not have any information about ECE, she believed that her cheerful personality and artistic talents were well matched to being a kindergarten teacher. However, after studying ECE for two years, she seriously considered changing her major. She thought that ECE teachers were unfairly treated.

When I first enter the department of ECE, I just thought that I could be a good teacher if I did my best. But as learned ECE, I realized teaching young children is really tough. Teachers should be able to know every child’s need, interest, and ability. Teachers should be very careful, because they can change children’s lives....there are too many duties but too low salaries. For example, primary school teachers get paid much better than kindergarten teachers. But

kindergarten teachers work much more than them. We are required to be sacrifice.

Ha-min had taught seventh and eighth graders in Church for two and half years. At intervals, she also had spent time with kindergarteners and she also played piano at Sunday services. Therefore, she “did not have any problem to deal with children in the real kindergarten classrooms.” However, before studied ECE, she “just cared children without any educational intends.” After she learned child and education, she said “I understood that children learn not only in the classrooms but also from everything in everywhere.” Therefore, she believed that teachers should only plan “child-centered curriculum” and observe children’s responses. She also stated that “teachers should follow children’s interest and encourage their potentials that they had from the birth.” However, Ha-min thought that it was not easy to apply her belief in real practice.

As I learned, I think children can learn by themselves. And teachers should only provide minimum assistance. But...it was quite difficult for me to catch children’s interests and support them. I know what I should do in theory. But I realized I had tried to teach directly something to children and help them more actively in my teaching practice.

Ha-min said that she was afraid to be a teacher, because she was not confident to be a good kindergarten teacher. She thought that she might work as a kindergarten teacher for couple of years after graduation, but not a long term eventual occupation.

### **So-jin**

So-jin was married and had one son who was 8 years old. She was 30 years old and Christian. Because of taking care of her son, So-jin was not able to work for a

while. When So-jin's son entered elementary school, she had more free time for herself and was comfortable to start something. Since she had interest in field of education for a long time, she decided to study "something related to education." She said that the experience of working with children in church motivated her to choose Early Childhood Education.

However, So-jin had concerns and doubts about her decision, after she joined the program. "First of all, I am not sure if I can be a good teacher," she said. She felt that "being early childhood teacher requires cheerful and energetic personality" which she did not have. So-jin saw herself as calm and shy which she thought was not an appropriate characteristic for a kindergarten teacher. She was also worried about her future career after graduation. Since married teachers were not considered for jobs in private kindergartens, So-jin thought that it was not going to be possible for her to be a teacher in private kindergartens. She decided she was going to take the examination for public kindergarten teacher employment, which required a lot of time for preparation. However, for a "studying mom," catching up with the course work itself had been a challenging task for her. Therefore, she gave up taking the examination. So-jin considered day-care centers as her option, which was easier to get a job than kindergarten.

So-jin believed that children were very capable beings. She said that she "agrees with Constructivism" which was a "dominant" perspective in Early Childhood Education as she "had been in the program." She thought that children "learn by themselves" and that teachers "just encourage" them. So-jin wanted to be a teacher who

cared for children's social and emotional developments rather than intellectual ones. Korean children were forced to focus on academic achievement by their parents and the competitive atmosphere in society, when they entered elementary school. She believed that in early childhood most important thing that children had to learn was building harmonious relationship with others.

### **Summary of Overviews of Participants**

Table 2 provides a summary of the participants' age, religion, experiences working with children, teaching placements, and plans after graduation. The average age of the participants was 24.3 years old. Eight participants were Christian and five of them had experience working with children at church. They all had similar field experiences. As a group, they observed the classrooms in kindergarten and day care center for twice each when they were freshmen.

In Spring semester of sophomore year, they visited private kindergartens or day care centers about ten times—once a week for two or three months—in order to observe the classrooms. In sophomore year, students were individually sent to the different places for field placement. In the fall semester of sophomore year, they went for field practice at the kindergartens or day care centers for four weeks. At this time, they had opportunities to take charge of a part of class schedule.

In the spring semester of junior year they went to the 4 weeks field practice again. They all observed and experienced teaching in real classrooms at kindergartens in this field practice. Finally they were expecting to do the last field placement in the fall semester of junior year to the same kindergartens where they went in spring.

**Table 2.** Summary of the Participant's Background Information

Name	Age	Religion	Teaching Career	Experiences with children	Plan after Graduation
Ae-ra	21	None	None		Firstly work as kindergarten teacher and later continue to study
Bo-young	21	Protestant	None		Firstly Work as kindergarten teacher and later continue to study at 4 year program or change the major
Do-sun	22	Catholic	None	Babysitting	Continue to study at 4 year program
Ha-min	21	Protestant	None	Teaching 7~8 <sup>th</sup> graders in church for 2 years	Change major
Ji-hee	21	Protestant	None	Teaching kindergartners in church for 2 years	Firstly work as kindergarten teacher and later continue to study
Min-ji	22	Protestant	None	Teaching kindergartners in church for 2 years / Having a 5 <sup>th</sup> grader brother	Continue to study at 4 year program
Nan-hee	21	Protestant	None	Teaching 1~2 <sup>nd</sup> graders in church for 2.5 years	Firstly work as kindergarten teacher and later continue to study
So-jin	30	Protestant	None	Teaching kindergartners in church for 10 months and having a son	Work as teacher in daycare
Tae-hee	30	None	Teaching for 4 years at day care / 1 year at art Institute / 2 years at Orda Institute		Not decided yet
Young-sun	34	Catholic	Teaching at day care for 3 years / After school program for 2 years		Not decided yet, but not going to be kindergarten teacher



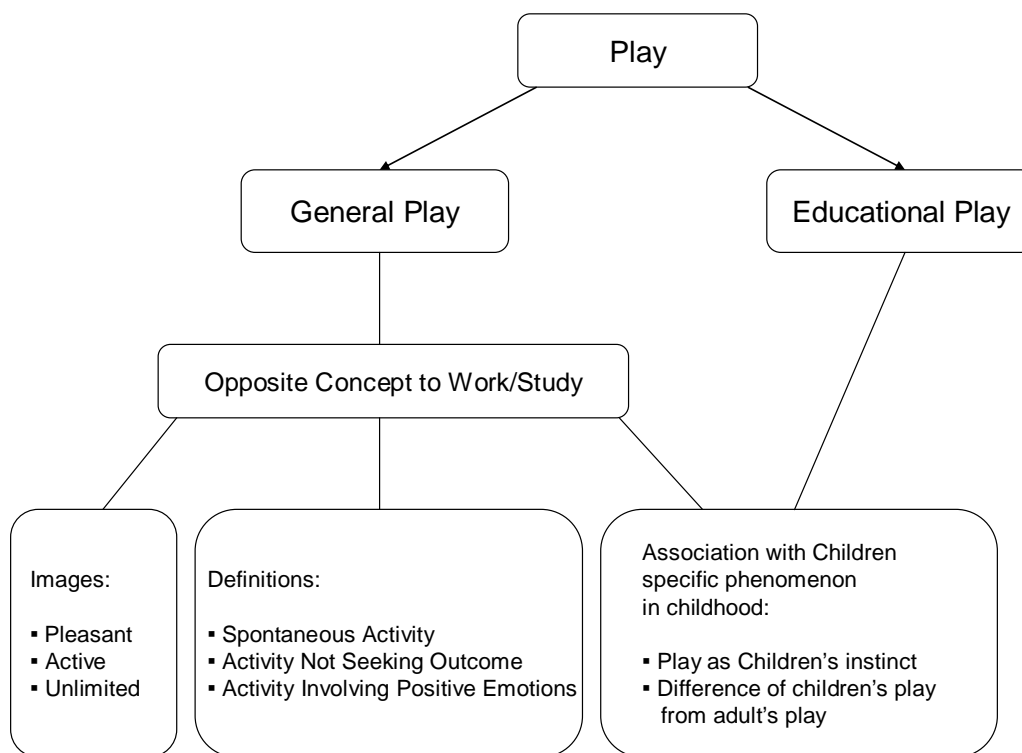
**CHAPTER V**  
**KOREAN PRESERVICE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON**  
**PLAY**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of play held by Korean preservice kindergarten teachers and to explore the ways that influence the construction of their perspectives on play. The research questions for the research purpose were (1) How do Korean preservice teachers with an early childhood emphasis view play? and (2) How do the factors such as culture and education influence the construction of these views? Two chapters present the discussions of findings of the study. Chapter V focuses on the findings of participants' views and attitudes on play. Chapter VI concentrates on the findings of the contextual factors that influence the construction of the participants' perspectives on play.

In chapter V, I will discuss the participants' perceptions on play, dividing into general and educational meanings, because there were these two dimensions in the participants' ideas on play. To simple questions such as "what do you think are the characteristics of play?" or "what is the first impression when you hear the word, play?" most of the participants tried to identify whether I asked about "general play" or "educational play for children." Although I tried not to divide these two concepts of play, the participants requested me to clarify what I meant. When the participants talked about "general play," they were likely to mean "something opposite to work or study." In contrast, for the "children's play," the participants significantly related it to educational meanings.

## General Meanings of Play

In this section, the findings of discussions on the general meanings of play held by the participants are provided. They include (1) images of play, (2) definitive factors of play, and (3) special characteristic of play that is associated to childhood (see Figure 2).



**Fig. 2.** Participants' Perceptions on General Play.

### *Images of play*

The word, “play,” was often used in the participants’ daily life and especially in the course, ‘Play for Young Children’. There were three common images that the participants had, when they were asked to think about play.

#### **Pleasure**

Seven out of ten participants thought of “pleasure” in their immediate responses to the word, play. Young-sun said, “I immediately had the feelings of happiness and joy when I heard the word, play.” For Tae-hee, “play is done for pleasure.” Similarly Bo-young, Nan-hee, and Ae-ra picked the positive emotional word, “enjoyment,” as the response to word, play. Do-sun also associated “excited feelings and having fun” when she thought on play. Apparently the positive emotions such as happiness, enjoyment, pleasure, and fun were the most common responses from the participants, when they simply thought about play.

#### **Activeness**

“Activeness” was another prominent response of the participants to play. Hammin and Ji-hee were thought of “running” as the impression of play. Some of the participants contrasted “playing” to “being static” for explaining their active impressions of play. For example, Nan-hee noted that “rest, doing nothing, is not a play, especially for children.” Tae-hee also mentioned the word, “rest,” to stress the dynamic characteristics of play. She said, “I cannot call it play if you take rest at home. Running and jumping outside are play.”

This image of play was also found when the participants talked about their

childhood play. Among 18 kinds of play in their childhood, only two sorts of play were indoor ones: doll play and reading books. Another two kinds of play might happen in- and out- doors: role plays and Gong-gi-nori.<sup>10</sup> 13 kinds of play were outdoor plays: Soom-ba-cok-gil<sup>11</sup>, Mu-gung-hwa-kochi-pee-u-seup-ni-da<sup>12</sup>, Go-mu-jul<sup>13</sup>, Freeze and free,<sup>14</sup> Da-bang-gu<sup>15</sup>, Sa-bang-chi-gi<sup>16</sup>, Mal-ttuk-bakki<sup>17</sup>, Ddang-dda-mukki<sup>18</sup>, Han-bal-ddui-gi<sup>19</sup>, Jul-num-gi<sup>20</sup>, running races, playing in playground.

### Unlimitedness

As an immediate and simple reaction to the word, play, the participants also were reminded of freedom. They seemed to view play as something unlimited and free. Ae-ra explained her imaginative scene, in which “children are freely playing in totally opened and free outdoor area.” Do-sun also said, “play is something that does not have restriction.” Similarly Tae-hee thought that people play for the feeling of freedom, because there was no pressure and stress in play. In the respect of the object of play,

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<sup>10</sup> Jackstone that is played using five pebbles

<sup>11</sup> Hide-and-peek

<sup>12</sup> During a tagger recites “Mu-gung-hwa-kochi-pee-u-seup-ni-da!” which means ‘The rose of Sharon bloomed!’, others players sneakily step to a tagger’s area and return to the starting line, trying not to be caught by a tagger. After a tagger recites the sentence and turns head to the players, they cannot move their bodies.

<sup>13</sup> “Go-mu-jul” means elastic string. It is a girl’s game played by either jumping back and forth, over a go-mu-jul, or stepping on it. Usually there are many songs for this game.

<sup>14</sup> A tag game

<sup>15</sup> A tag game

<sup>16</sup> Hopscotch game

<sup>17</sup> The players divided into two teams of horses and riders. Horse players band down in a line and riders ride on the backs of horse players. If the horse team falls down because of the weight, they become horses again. If the horse team succeeds to endure, the horses and riders of next round are decided through a game of ‘rock, paper, and scissors.’

<sup>18</sup> After drawing big rectangular on the ground, players draw their land in same size at the corners. If players snap a stone 3 times on the ground and returned safely to their land, they can broaden their land. The player who has largest land wins.

<sup>19</sup> From the starting line, players make a long jump. A tagger catches the closest player, standing inside of the line.

<sup>20</sup> Skipping rope

Min-ji said, “when children play, there is no limit. Everything can be a toy. Although they play without toys, they can play.” Although the participants’ responses were made in different angles – place, feeling, or objects for play – ‘something not fixed and unlimited’ was the common impression for play in the perspectives of the participants.

### *Defining Play*

During interviews, I tried to let participants think about the concept of play. As described above, they firstly talked about the immediate images on play: pleasure, activeness, and unlimitedness. I encouraged them continuously think over and over on what play is. In doing so, they tried several strategies to express the concepts of play that they had, such as listing specific activities that they considered as play and creating definitions of play. The interesting aspect was that they tried to define play by distinguishing it from other activities. For example, the participants contrasted play to “study” or “work” to define play. In order to explain the concept of play, six participants compared play to “homework” (Tae-hee) or “study” (Bo-young, Min-ji, Do-sun, Nan-hee, and Ae-ra). Also seven participants (Tae-hee, Young-sun, So-jin, Nan-hee, Bo-young, Ji-hee, and Ha-min) contrasted play to “work.” The participants finally mentioned three aspects as the definitive factors for play: play is (1) the activity by one’s own will, (2) non-purposive activity, and (3) activity involved with positive emotions.

### **Spontaneous Activity**

The participants thought that one of the most distinctive factors of play was spontaneousness. For example, So-jin compared play to work, saying that “play is occurred by one’s own will, while work is done by other’s will.” Similarly, Tae-hee said

that “not like play, there often are other’s demands in work.” Ha-min also stressed spontaneousness of the subjects in play. She said, “in terms of play, we don’t have to play if we don’t want. However, working is not the matter of choice.”

### **Activity Not Seeking Outcome**

The participants believed that play is not an activity seeking productive result. Do-sun thought that play and study are different in the respect of product. She said that “there are aims and plans in studying.” She continued that “in playing there is no aim or restriction.” Min-ji also thought that “studying is for achievement, while there is no intention to earn something in play.” However, she stressed that we could unintentionally “get something from play such as stress relief and enjoyment.” Interestingly, Ae-ra compared the kindergarten activities initiated by teacher and ones by children, saying that “in kindergarten, studying is done by teachers’ planning and suggestions. But I think playing is the activity occurred by children’s will that is not product-oriented.” She also pointed that we did not expect the results in children’s play, while we usually anticipate a certain achievement or a final product after educational activities were provided to children in kindergarten.

### **Activity Involving Positive Emotions**

Positive emotion involved in play was also another aspect that the participants counted as a definitive factor for play. As described earlier, pleasure was the first impression from the word, play, in the perspectives of Korean preservice kindergarten teachers. Tae-hee thought that “there should be happy feeling if a certain activity can be called a play.” Ji-hee also stressed that enjoyment occurred from play. “In

play, pleasant emotion is earned, while work often occurs without it [pleasant emotion],” she said. She thought that the reason that we could not usually gain happiness from work was its responsibility. She believed that “we cannot purely enjoy it, if it is a responsible work,” because there might be a burden. Min-ji, Do-sun, and Ae-ra similarly mentioned pleasant emotions as the important factor for defining play. Young-sun and So-jin contrasted negative emotions from the word, work, such as “boring” and “unpleasant” against the happy feelings involved in play.

The participants firstly thought that a certain activity might be qualified as ‘play’ when these three factors —spontaneousness, non-purposiveness, and involvement of pleasant emotions— were satisfied. However, as they discussed about what kind of activities could be considered as play, they realized that it was not easy to distinguish playing activities from other ones with these three standards. For example, Young-sun proposed another view, saying that “work can be done by my own will.” She also thought that “play can have purpose,” mentioning that “there is a purpose to build a castle, when children make a castle with blocks.” Therefore, I asked the participants to elaborate on this issue in a follow-up interviews. Although the word, play, was familiar to the participants, they had not seriously thought about the meanings of it. As the participants thought about playing activities and behaviors, the first two definitive factors —spontaneous and non-purposive activities— were not considered as indispensable conditions for play. However, the last factor — involving pleasant emotions— was still the most essential standard for playing activities in the views of the participants. In other words, the participants believed that play should always bring

about positive emotions of the subjects. I provide two quotations from the participants.

First example is from the group discussion of Young-sun, So-jin, and Tae-hee.

Young-sun: Last time, I said, work and play might be opposite each other. But now I think that sometimes they are not opposite...I mean they are often similar. For example, when I have to play with other people in a group such as having party, I don't feel any enjoyment but stress.

Tae-hee: I agree with Young-sun. Conversely, in doing a task in school or workplace, I gladly work hard with my own aim and plan, thinking future results. I would be really happy if it is something I want to do.

Young-sun: Well, I think the most important thing is whether I enjoy it or not.

So-jin: I also agree with the idea that play should give pleasure to the person who plays. But intuitively thinking, work is still opposite concept against play, for me.

Another example is from the group discussion of Nan-hee, Bo-young, and Ji-hee. They discussed about "reading books," with the effort to understand the meanings of play activities.

Bo-young: I personally think reading books is play, because I like it.

Nan-hee: Well... for me, reading books is not play. It's close to work.

Ji-hee: I think that reading books may be work or play. If children read book with interest, it's play. But when you read the textbooks to prepare an exam, it's study or work.

Bo-young: Important thing is one's previous concept on reading books. Since I was young it[reading books] was enjoyable thing for me, I still feel it[reading books] as play, although sometimes reading books can be work.

Both conversations show that the participants commonly agreed to the idea that play should be enjoyable to the person who does play. In second discussion, it is also observed that the previous experiences and perceptions on certain activity might be another factor to define play for the participants.

### *Specific Phenomena in Childhood*

The participants were reminded of their childhood play and visualized children's running and jumping as the images of play. There was an apparent tendency



that the participants assumed children as the subject of play. The participants believed that play was a specific phenomenon in childhood. They thought that adults' play was different from that of children. For example, Do-sun said, "when I heard the word, play, I thought children. I feel real play is not for adults." Tae-hee also said that she could not think children without play. She added that younger human beings play more than older ones.

### **Play as Children's Instincts**

The participants believed that children play because of their natural instincts. So-jin thought that "children have something in their inside and it makes children play." She believed that the driving force making children play was "just instinct." Do-sun similarly thought that "children play without purposes" and "this is the way they [children] are." Nan-hee also believed that "children do not have specific reasons to play," since she thought that play was natural behavior for children.

The participants also thought that children spent most of their time for play in daily life. Some participants further thought that children's all behaviors might be considered as play. For example, Nan-hee said, "there is no specific play time for children, because they play all the time." Tae-hee also thought that "children play for 24 hours a day and every movement they make is play."

### **Differences between Children's Play and Adults' Play**

According to the participants, children's play is different from adults' one in the respects of its purposes, kinds, and attitudes. They said that there was no purpose in children's play, while adults' play had apparent purposes. Ha-min believed that

children's play was motivated by interest, while the motivation of adult's play was their intention. For the specific purposes of plays, Nan-hee thought that adults played for social relationships, while children play for enjoyment. Young-sun similarly said that adults participated in play, although they did not want to play because of keeping good relationship with the members of social group. In this respect, "in adults play, pleasure might be absent, which was essential in children's play," she added. So-jin clearly showed her opinion on different purposes of play for children and adults. She believed that adults play was for reducing the stresses and finally regaining energy for life. In So-jin's view, "adult's play is supportive activity for healthy life, which is not a major activity, while children's play is their life itself." According to the participants, since adults played for certain purposes, they usually made plans for play in terms of place, time, playmates, and what they were going to do. For example, Ji-hee thought that children played improvisatorially but adults planned for playing such as setting dates and places. In similar aspect, Nan-hee said that children could play in any place and anytime while adults fix the schedule with friends to go somewhere for playing.

The participants also pointed that the sorts and attitudes of play for children and adults were different. According to the participants, unlike to children's play, juveniles' and adults' play meant some sports such as basketball and soccer (Tae-hee), hobbies (Tae-hee), computer games (Tae-hee), taking rest (So-jin, Nan-hee), social events such as having parties (Bo-young) and cultural activities like watching movies or performances. From the participants' perspectives, adult's play had wide range of activities from "doing nothing" to "managing social life," while children's plays meant

to playing with toys or doing active outdoor plays. The participants listed children's plays as follows: reading books, puzzles, running and jumping, block, outdoor play, computer game & TV, Video, role play, play doll, and art.

The participants also perceived children's plays as 'active,' 'fun,' and 'concentrated' activities, comparing to adults' one. For example, Young-sun said that "children are really absorbed in their play, because they really want to do. However, in many cases we [adults] just participate in play without real enthusiasm." Bo-young also noted that "children are easily absorbed in their play. They play with concentrated manner."

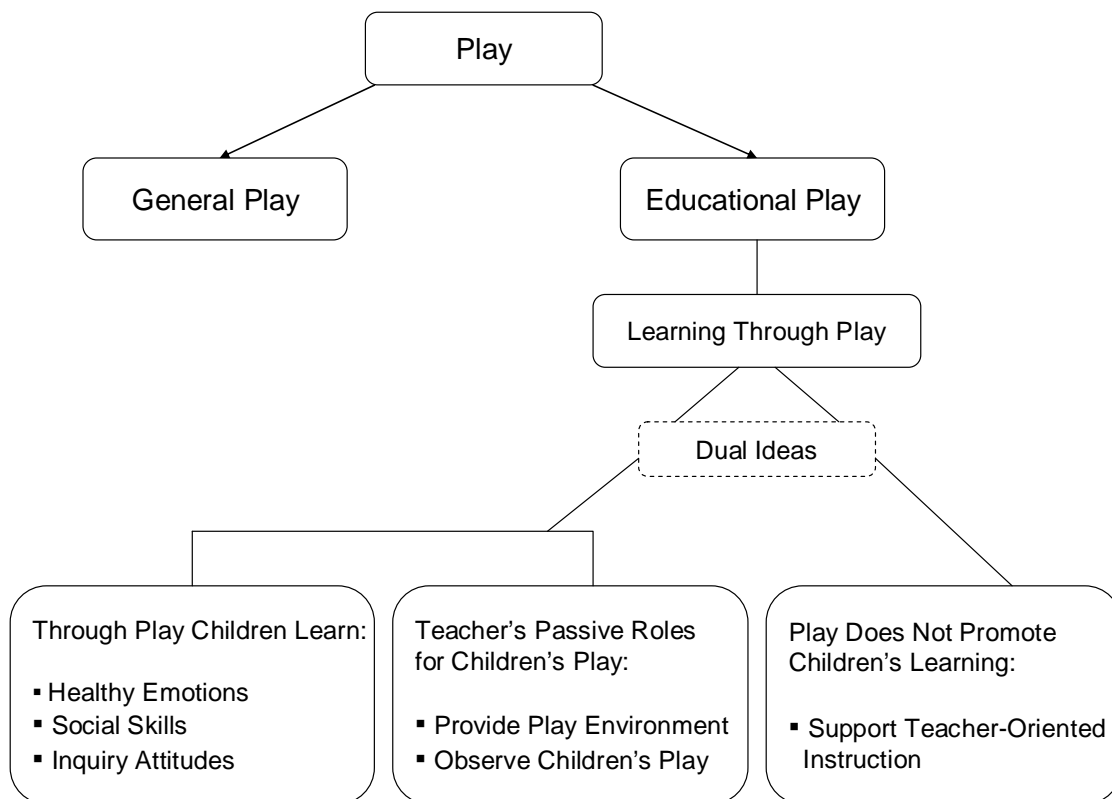
### **Educational Meanings of Play**

As future kindergarten teachers, the participants shared their beliefs and ideas on educational influences of play on children and the application of play into curriculum. In following section, the discussion of findings on three issues, (1) play's effects on children, (2) teacher's roles in children's play, and (3) play in early childhood curriculum, are presented (see Figure 3).

#### *Educational Effects of Play*

To the issue of play's influences on children, the participants focused on developmental effects. The participants believed that all kinds of play were helpful for children's learning and development. Bo-young thought that "most play is instructive for children since it [most play] involves children's interests." Tae-hee also said that "all

play is helpful for children except aggressive ones, because it [all play] let children have various experiences.” Similarly, Ha-min said that “all play is good for children.”



**Fig. 3.** Participants' Perceptions on Educational Play.

She thought that “through play, children learn the world and how to deal with others.” Therefore, she believed that there was no bad play, although it seemed like little

bit aggressive. The participants thought that children should be provided many play opportunities as long as they were safe. The participants especially noted that play was the most ideal way for children's learning, because play was considered as "developmentally appropriate" for children (Bo-young, Tae-hee). For example, Min-ji thought that in children's play such as block play, they could learn numbers and shapes. She stressed that "they could learn in very natural and appropriate ways." Min-ji also thought that children could have verbal interactions with other children when they played with peers, so that linguistic development would be promoted. Bo-young similarly emphasized that "in appropriate ways" children could learn basic concepts and knowledge through play. She used the example of house role play in which children might naturally learn sex roles. The participants mentioned various effects of play on children's learning and development. Among them, three most prominent responses that the participants indicated as play's desirable influences on children's development are discussed in following section: supporting positive emotions, assisting social skills, and prompting inquiry.

### **Supporting Healthy Emotions**

The participants thought that play helped children to have positive feelings on themselves. Ae-ra said that "children earn feeling of achievement through play." She recalled how children always proudly said to teacher that "I did it!" when they finished making something in her teaching practice. "Children would have confidence after they completed what they wanted to do," she added. Ae-ra also thought that children could manage stress through naturally expressing it in play, because "in play situation, children

can express their ideas without any restriction.” Similar to Ae-ra’s idea, Do-sun thought that children could reduce stress, because play produced “good and healthy feelings.” In this respect, she believed that play could be a vital power for children. Ha-min and So-jin also believed that play promoted the feeling of achievement and confidence. In her teaching practice, Ha-min often observed that children were very proud of themselves after they played with paints and drew a picture with different colors. So-jin believed that play provided the opportunities to practice and it helped children be confident.

### **Assisting Social Skills**

The participants believed that play influenced children’s social competence. For examples, Do-sun thought that play helped children to learn how to make relationship with other people, since it allowed them to experience diverse roles. Ji-hee also said that children learned the way of making friends through playing together. Bo-young agreed to the idea that play influenced children’s social ability, saying “if a child lost play opportunities in his childhood, he would not know how to play and make relationship with others in future.”

Further, the participants related play to children’s personality and even future life. Nan-hee thought that there was the correlation between children’s personalities and kinds of play they did, saying that “a quiet child usually participates in quiet play.” She also believed that a child who played actively with many friends would become an active leader in society. Ha-min also believed that experiences of playing with others allowed one to have positive personality and to make good relationship with others. She thought that this effect of play on individual’s personality would finally influence one’s

job and career in future. The participants strongly believed play would assist children's construction of social skills and that this influence even long lasted when they became adults (Young-sun, Min-ji, Ji-hee).

### **Prompting Inquiry**

The participants thought that play was a tool of inquiry for children. They believed that play could stimulate children's interest and finally allow them to learn knowledge and skills in voluntary ways. For examples, Ha-min thought that children could experience various things and effectively earn knowledge through playing, since play activities were done by children's own will.

Ji-hee also highly evaluated play's educational functions. She thought that children's cognitive and linguistic developments could be promoted through play. Ji-hee took "playing games" as an example. She said that children learned the rules of games through verbal interactions of adults or peers. Because "the game was very interesting for children, they gladly learned the logic of the game and kept the rules," she explained. She added that children naturally learned how to observe and explore through play, because they should observe how others play or treat play materials in order to understand the rules of a certain play. Nan-hee strongly agreed to the idea that play supported children's learning. She provided the example of the five years old boy who was the son of the preacher in her church.

Recently, he is absorbed in General, Yi Sun Shin.<sup>21</sup> So, all of his plays are related to General Yi, such as drawing and crafting him[General Yi] or the Geobuk-seon<sup>22</sup>. I realize that children learn a lot through playing. When I saw his

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<sup>21</sup> The great admiral in Joseon Dynasty

<sup>22</sup> Turtle shaped ship that was contrived by General Yi

drawing of Turtle Ship, I was really surprised because of its great details. He has much more knowledge on Lee Soon Shin and Turtle ship than me.

### *Passive Teachers in Children's Play*

The participants answered that teacher's role for children's play was to facilitate their play. They believed that teachers could support children's play through providing play materials, observing children's play, and interacting with children.

### **Providing Play Environment**

The participants thought that "providing play materials and environment" was one of the most important teacher's roles in children's play (So-jin, Ji-hee, Do-sun, Min-ji, Ha-min, Young-sun). Ji-hee noted that the play materials for children should be various. She thought that it made children's play "deeper" and finally led children to "better learning." "According to the subject of the curriculum, I will prepare rich and charming environment for children," Ji-hee added. Do-sun stressed providing "unstructured" materials for children's play. She said, "I hate structured toys that block children's creativity." Young-sun also wanted to provide natural and unstructured materials for children in her future teaching. She said that she would make play materials together with children rather than provide commercial toys to them. Min-ji thought that teachers should create and provide interesting environment that might enhance children's play. She believed that teacher's role was to support children to play what they really wanted.

### **Observing Children's Play**

The participants considered observation of children's play as the second role of teacher in children's play. Young-sun believed that the role of observer was the most



important teacher's role in children's play. Bo-young, Tae-hee, Nan-hee, Min-ji, So-jin also stressed the importance of teacher's observation in children's play. For the reason to observe children's play, Min-ji said that teachers could understand children's interests and needs through observing their play. So-jin also thought that teachers could reflect children's interests showed in their play into planning curriculum. The participants answered that another reason for teachers' observation of children's play was to catch an appropriate moments for interventions.

### **Interventions of Teacher**

Basically, the participants believed that teachers should be very careful in intervention of children's play. There were two situations that the participants thought "appropriate" for intervention on children's play: when children played unsafely (Nan-hee, Bo-young) and when their plays were not progressed well (Nan-hee) such as children did not know the rules of a certain game (Bo-young).

The participants thought that teacher might ruin children's play if teacher intervened at inappropriate situations. Actually they showed very negative attitudes toward teachers' intervention and direct participation in children's play. Compared to their ideas on teachers' general roles, they stressed indirect and passive roles of teachers in children's play. This idea is well shown in the statements of Bo-young and Ha-min.

Unneeded intervention should be avoided. Only when it is really needed, teachers can make interventions. To do that, first of all, observation is important, and then appropriate facilitating can be input for advanced development. Teachers should not do active or direct intervention, because it usually does not consider children's interest (Bo-young).

I think I have experience to disturb one girl's play in my teaching practice. It was free play time and I was anxious to interact with children. I got near to one

girl who was playing in the role-play area. I asked her to play together. However, she was very shy and went to reading section. Maybe I ruined her dramatic play (Ha-min).

Although all participants agreed that teacher should not intervene children's play except "appropriate" moments, they seemed to have some difficulties on how to find those "appropriate" situations that needed teachers' interventions. Young-sun simply answered that "if a teacher observed children's play, she [a teacher] would know it [right situation needed intervention]." Since Young-sun had six years of teaching experiences, she might be better to catch the moments for intervention than other participants.

Most participants felt difficulties to catch "the right moment needed intervention." For examples, So-jin said that she was not confident to catch the perfect moment for intervention as well as enhancing children's play through intervention. Ae-ra also expressed her concern on doing "right" interventions in children's play.

Ae-ra: Teacher should do various roles in children's play....to just observe, to encourage, or to promote their play. According to the conditions, teacher should choose what to do.

Researcher: How would you decide what to do?

Ae-ra: That's a problem. I may observe children's play and then I will decide what to do. However, I experienced to fail to catch the appropriate situations in teaching practice. My judgment for interaction with children to facilitate play is often wrong. In that case, adult's intervention is a disturbance.

Only two participants showed affirmative attitude toward on teachers' active participation in children's play. Nan-hee said that "it is also good that teacher plays actively with children." Tae-hee also thought that she would participate in children's play as a playmate, not as a passive observer.

### **Conflict between Passive Stance and Influencing Power of Teacher**

All participants agreed to the teachers' passive roles in children's play such as providing various play materials and environments and observing children's play. However, they also thought that teachers should develop children's play. Moreover, some of them believed that teachers could change children's play dramatically. I would say that there was a conflict in participants' minds in terms of teachers' passive role versus teachers' influencing power on children's play. For example, Ji-hee said that "play can become an "educationally valued" activity, if teacher's verbal interactions are accompanied." Reversely speaking, without teachers' verbal intervention, children's play might not be educationally valued, according to Ji-hee. For me, it was quite ironical that the participants highly emphasized teachers' passive participation on children's play but had tendency to lead their play to 'higher" level at the same time. For example, Tae-hee thought that teacher should develop children's play through verbal interaction. However, she also stressed that teacher should not actively participate in children's play, because teacher's participation might lead loss of children's interests. Similarly Min-ji advocated for both perspectives. She said that "unneeded intervention should be averted" and "teacher's interventions could facilitate children's play dramatically."

Some participants uncovered their opinions that strongly agree to the idea of powerful influences of teachers for children's play and their learning. Ji-hee said that "according to teachers' intervention children's play can be change, because it [teachers' intervention] can change what they [children] think." This idea is also shown well in the following statement of Ae-ra.

..appropriate interventions are important in order that children's play progresses to the right direction. I will change children's play toward right direction, if they play wrong. To do that, I think teacher's intuition and instinct should be used.

In short, the participants thought that teachers should be passive in children's play, providing play materials and environment and observing their play. Teacher's interventions were generally considered as "should be avoided" except when children did unsafe or one repeating play. However, it was revealed that the participants believed teacher's powerful influence to promote children's play at the same time.

### *Play in Kindergarten*

In Korean kindergarten curriculum, two times of free play were usually included in daily schedule: outdoor play and free-choice-activity times. In outdoor play time, under the supervision of teacher, children played in playground of kindergarten, in which children could enjoy riding slides, seesaws, and swings as well as playing hide-and-seek or house play with sand etc. In free-choice-activity time, among various play areas such as language, block, dramatic play, manipulation, music, science, art, reading books, and so on, children could choose the area that they wanted and play. Teacher usually supervised children's play for safety or helped children's writing and art activities. While outdoor play was sometimes skipped because of bad weather or tight schedule, free-choice-activity time was given to children without skipping.

As the "play in kindergarten," most participants firstly considered "free play" time that was given to children in kindergarten curriculum. For example, Young-sun and Bo-young said that in kindergarten situation, children played at outdoor play and free-choice-activity times. Ae-ra also thought that "children can play only at the given time in

kindergarten.” She mentioned dramatic and block plays as children’s play in kindergarten. The other participants also listed the activities of free play times as play in kindergarten: dramatic (Ji-hee, Tae-hee, Nan-hee, Young-sun, Do-sun, Bo-young), block (Ji-hee, Tae-hee, Young-sun, Do-sun), reading books (Bo-young), manipulating (Min-ji) and outdoor (Nan-hee, Do-sun) plays.

Firstly the participants thought of free play as the play in kindergarten. However, as the participants started to think on which activities we could call play in kindergarten, they seemed to be confused. Some Korean preservice kindergarten teachers in this study thought that all activities that occurred in kindergarten were play. For example, Young-sun said that “in kindergarten classrooms, all is play.” Nan-hee also thought that “all things happened in kindergarten classrooms are play.” She added that teacher-planned activities could be play, if children enjoyed them with interest. Ji-hee said, “for example, discussion time could be play not studying, if children enjoyed it.” However, the other participants thought that not all activities in kindergarten might be play. Do-sun said, “I don’t think all activities in kindergarten are play.” She believed that children could learn most effectively through play, but in real practice “learning through play” might not occur easily. So-jin thought that “kindergarten should be the place in which children can play freely.” She continued, “however, in real classroom play is not the major activity.”

### **Free Play in Kindergarten**

Because most of the participants firstly considered “free play” as “children’s play in kindergarten,” in this section the discussion on how the participants thought on

free play in kindergarten is provided. I asked them two questions: (1) How do you think about free play in kindergarten? (2) Imagine if the curriculum did not have free play time in kindergarten. What do you think? All participants thought that free play was absolutely needed for the kindergarten schedule, because it allowed children have pleasure and consume extra energy.

### *Providing Enjoyment*

The participants thought that free play was very important in kindergarten curriculum because children enjoyed it. Do-sun simply said that free play was needed for children's enjoyment. Young-sun said that free play time was essential in curriculum because children much loved it than teacher-planned activities. Similarly, Ha-min thought that children would be bored if they were not given free play in kindergarten." She continued that "although other activities are interesting, many of them are teacher-directed and, therefore, not fun as much as free play." The idea that "play gives children pleasure" has been repeated from the beginning of the interviews to the end, as the most important function of play.

Only few participants associated "effective way of learning" to free play, as the reason that free play was needed in kindergarten curriculum. Ji-hee was the only participant who thought that absence of free play would allow children to have less chance to learn by themselves. Min-ji and Bo-young also said that free play was needed for children's learning, but they did not think that free play itself enhanced children's learning. They thought that free play indirectly influenced children's learning through playing a supplementary role for teacher-initiated curriculum. For example, they said

that teacher could reflect children's interest observed in free play to planning curriculum and use free play to keep children's interest on teacher-oriented activities.

### *Consuming Extra Energy*

The most frequent response from the participants was that free play was needed to consume children's energy. For example, Young-hee said that free play was needed for children's enjoyment. According to her, children can freely express their emotion and relieve their stress. Similarly, Nan-hee thought that free play – especially outdoor play – was necessarily important for children's energy consuming.

Interestingly, some participants answered that children should consume energy through free play for different reason. They focused on children's "calm-down" status after they did enough free play. For example, Ae-ra said, "if we did not have free play time, they [children] cannot concentrate on the class." So-jin similarly explained the reason that free play was needed,

Children want to play what they want... If we did not give them [children] free play time, they [children] are going to be really distracted. Professor M said that children become very quiet and make good attention on teacher's class after playing outside. So free playing is essential for the smooth schedule in kindergarten.

### **Dual Attitude toward Play**

The responses of the participants about play as the effective way of learning were not consistent through interviews. When they simply discussed about education play for children, they emphasized play's promoting roles for children's whole development and effective learning. However, when they pictured play in kindergarten

situation from the perspective of teacher, they appreciated play not for the way of learning.

### *Educationally Meaningless Play*

As described above, two major reasons for needing free play in kindergarten were providing enjoyment for children and consuming children's excessive energy, from the views of the participants. I continued to encourage the participants express their hidden ideas and attitudes toward on free play in kindergarten, giving them the question of why we needed free play in kindergarten although free play at home might satisfy these two major reasons. All participants said that there were differences in free play of kindergarten and home. They especially stressed diverse peer group and toys in kindergarten. They also emphasized teacher's feedback and rules in kindergarten play, which were considered "educationally better" for children. For examples, Ji-hee said, "because today's children do not have many siblings, they don't have someone to play with at home." She believed that "children can make high-quality play at kindergarten because there are many friends." Tae-hee also emphasized the larger number of friends and more various play materials in kindergarten. Nan-hee thought that teacher's feedback—verbal interactions—in kindergarten play could enrich children's play unlike playing at home. Min-ji and Ae-ra thought that play at kindergarten had more educational functions, because children could learn the rules in kindergarten play. Bo-young also stressed "teacher's interaction to support and even to develop children's play." She even said,

Play is an educational way. I mean, education should be done like play. Also play should be an education. Free play after school is meaningless. 'Play



whatever they [children] want to do' and 'free play in kindergarten' are totally different. In kindergarten play, we guide children to plan what they play in free play time before doing play. Then they [children] play what they planned. After play time is finished, we let them [children] reflect their play. Through these activities, children learn much more.

But some participants did not make clear reasons of why they thought that free play was essential in kindergarten. For example, Ha-min said that she did not have any idea about that. She just felt that we might need free play in our kindergarten, because it had been existed for long time.

#### *Difficulties of Teaching through Play*

Since all participants strongly agreed to the idea that children could effectively and appropriately learn when they play, I asked them to imagine the kindergarten program that had more free play time and schedule that went after children's interest rather than prefixed plans. Because the participants had continuously showed strongly positive attitudes to the notions of "learning through play," I expected that the participants would make favorable answers if I abstractly asked "what do you think about play-oriented curriculum?" Instead, I encouraged them concretely imagine to work with children as teachers in play-oriented kindergarten in order to earn genuine responses from the participants.

To my request, the participants thought of 'Waldkindergarten' and 'Classroom without toys' which they learned in the course. According to the participants, just one week before starting interviews with me, in the course named, 'Human's behaviors and Social change,' the participants watched the movie about 'Waldkindergarten' in Germany, which was a kindergarten in forest. The participants

explained that the teachers and children in Waldkindergarten had learned together in the forest, exploring natural environments and enjoying unstructured activities.

‘Classroom without toys’ was the experimental class in Chung-Ang kindergarten that was a subsidiary of Chung-Ang University in Seoul, Korea. It was produced as a documentary and shown on TV as a special educational program in Korean Children’s day. In the experimental class, teachers cleared away all commercial materials including toys and observed how children reacted. According to the participants, firstly children were confused and could not play. Later, they started to do verbal play and make play materials by themselves. Finally they more did cooperative play without commercial or structured toys. The participants seemed to picture of what teachers and children did in Waldkindergarten and Chung-Ang kindergarten in films, when I asked them to think about kindergarten program that had more flexible and play-oriented schedule. Eight participants expressed their ideas on it.

Interestingly only two participants —Nan-hee and Young-sun— appreciated this kind of kindergarten program. They were consistent in expressing their positive attitude on “learning through play” for children and its application in kindergarten program. Nan-hee thought that an unstructured program allowing more freedom to children would be really good for children. She definitely wanted to be a teacher if she could find this kind of kindergarten. However, she thought that it would be almost impossible in Korea, because parents would not understand play-centeredness curriculum. Young-sun also thought that unstructured curriculum having more free plays time following children’s interest would be much better for children. In the class, she

watched the video tape on Waldkindergarten in Germany and read a journal written by the person who visited there. She was really fascinated by the ways children experienced and learned in Waldkindergarten. Because Young-sun had already experienced to teach children in child-centeredness program, she might prefer this kind of program than traditional ones.

The other six participants also answered that they had positive attitude toward more play-oriented programs for kindergarten. However, they did not want to be teachers in this kind of kindergarten. Min-ji thought that theoretically play was the best way for children's learning. However, she considered that "systemic instruction" was more important for their learning. She thought that preplanned curriculum allowed teachers more prepared. Ha-min and Ji-hee also believed that teacher-initiated curriculum was better for children's learning, although they did not disagree to the notion of learning through play. Ha-min felt that play-oriented curriculum was "not verified" as high quality kindergarten program, which might "have a risk to go wrong way." Ji-hee also thought that "play-oriented curriculum was very difficult to manage" for teacher. She believed that teacher-planned curriculum that had "clear purpose and plan" should be the main way for children's learning. Thus, she considered play as a supplementary tool for structured curriculum. In terms of children's learning, the participants seemed to regard teacher-oriented instruction as better way than play-centered one.

The participants also thought that play-oriented curriculum would require more labor for teachers. For example, Tae-hee did not want to work in more play-

centered kindergarten, because it would require “too much for teacher.” She said that it required higher qualifying and physically stronger teacher than traditional teacher-initiated curriculum. Bo-young also said that she was not confident, because it would be difficult for her to teach children through playing. Instead, she said that she was already prepared as a teacher for how to lead children to her plan under the pre-planned situation. Do-sun criticized the notion of learning through play. She said that it was “too ideal” in Korean kindergarten that was regarded as “school” in which “teachers should teach something” for children. She also believed that systemic and carefully planned instruction was important for children’s learning. The participants clearly showed the dual idea on play, especially “learning through play.” As learned, they believed that ‘play is the best way for children’s learning and development.’ However, from the viewpoint of the responsible administrator of class, they practically did not appreciate play much.

#### *Real Meanings of ‘Learning through Play’*

Theoretically the participants highly praised the educational functions of play. However, they were not much favorable to the application of play when they considered real kindergarten curriculum as future teachers. I felt that it was needed to clarify the participants’ concept of “learning through play” in real kindergarten classroom. Thus, I asked the participants to think about kindergarten routines and listed all activities that were implemented in kindergarten. Then the participants identified any situation in which learning through play occurred. The participants seemed to divide kindergarten activities into 3 categories: (1) playing, (2) studying, and (3) learning through play. Free

play not involving teacher's instructions was considered as "playing," the first category, by the participants. Outdoor play and free-choice-activities such as block, role, and sand plays were included in this category. As the second category, "studying," the participants thought worksheets and the activities provided by part-time specialized instructors who taught English, math, science and the like. The participants tended to consider that the activities or programs provided by the teacher whose major was not early childhood education, as "studying," not "learning through play."

The other activities using story, song, music, art, poem, movement and scientific experiments that were conducted in large or small groups by teachers' instructions were thought as the activities of "learning through play," the third category. It was interesting that the notion of "learning through play" was interpreted as a certain type of activity, not as a way of learning. The participants seemed to simply consider most of activities in kindergarten as "playing" or "learning through playing." However, as the interviews progressed, they seriously thought about the real meanings of those activities in kindergarten and realized that they had accepted the idea that all activities in kindergarten were supposed to be "learning through playing" without any critical reflection or examination. To understand the real standards for "learning through playing" activities in the participants' minds, I continuously encouraged Korean preservice teachers to think over on the concept of learning through playing in kindergarten. As the result, the most important standard that they decided a certain activity in kindergarten as learning through playing was "involving interest." Following conversation is from the interview with Min-jee, which shows her emphasis on interest

of the concept of learning through play. It also shows her conceptual confusion between playing, studying, and learning through play.

Min-jee: outdoor play and free play time is made of “playing activities.” The other activities such as story time and working with materials in small groups are... they are focused on cognitive development. So they may not be play activities for children. Maybe contain little meaning of studying for them [children]...not playing. Scientific experiment too..

Researcher: then, what do you think these kinds of activities are?

Min-ji: Just activity. It’s an activity. They [children] might feel it as an activity.

Researcher: What is the “activity”? What do you think the definitions of “activity” are?

Min-ji: it cannot become a play...because play is something that I really want to do and that I can do freely. Also I can quit it if I want to stop. But the activities in kindergarten are not the matter of children’s choice. They [children] should finish the activities although when they don’t want it, since we want to teach something through them [activities]. However, I cannot call it [activity] “studying.” The idea of studying is something like worksheets... it [activity] is not like a worksheet. I think it [activity]’s not playing neither studying. I may say it is the way children learn something with pleasure.

Researcher: I see. How does “learning something with pleasure” occur? Have you ever seen it? How was it?

Min-ji: Well... it focuses on children’s interest. If children had interest on a certain activity, it can be considered as so [learning something with pleasure].

Researcher: I see. So do you think it can be called “learning through playing”?

Min-ji: ...well.. as you know, actually many times we use the term “learning through playing” for it. I thought so too. But during I talked with you, I felt something is not logical. Although work or study is pleasant, it cannot be a play. So learning through playing is kind of weird concept...

Throughout the interviews, the participants have mentioned “pleasure” occurred by doing play as the most important standard of play. For example, for the images of play, the participants firstly associated pleasure. As the definitive factor for play, they also mentioned involvement of pleasure. In the discussion of educational effects of play, the participants pointed that play provided pleasure to children and relieved their stress. Finally, as the reason for importance of free play in kindergarten,

the participants stressed the play's role to provide pleasure for children in tight schedule of kindergarten. Thus, the participants seemed to perceive a certain activity as "play" or "play-like" one if the condition of "involving pleasure" was satisfied. In this aspect, the participants regarded that teacher-initiated curriculum was conducted as the way of "learning through play" because it was progressed in "interesting ways." So-jin discussed on this conceptual connection between 'learning through play' and 'activities provoking children's interests,' as follows.

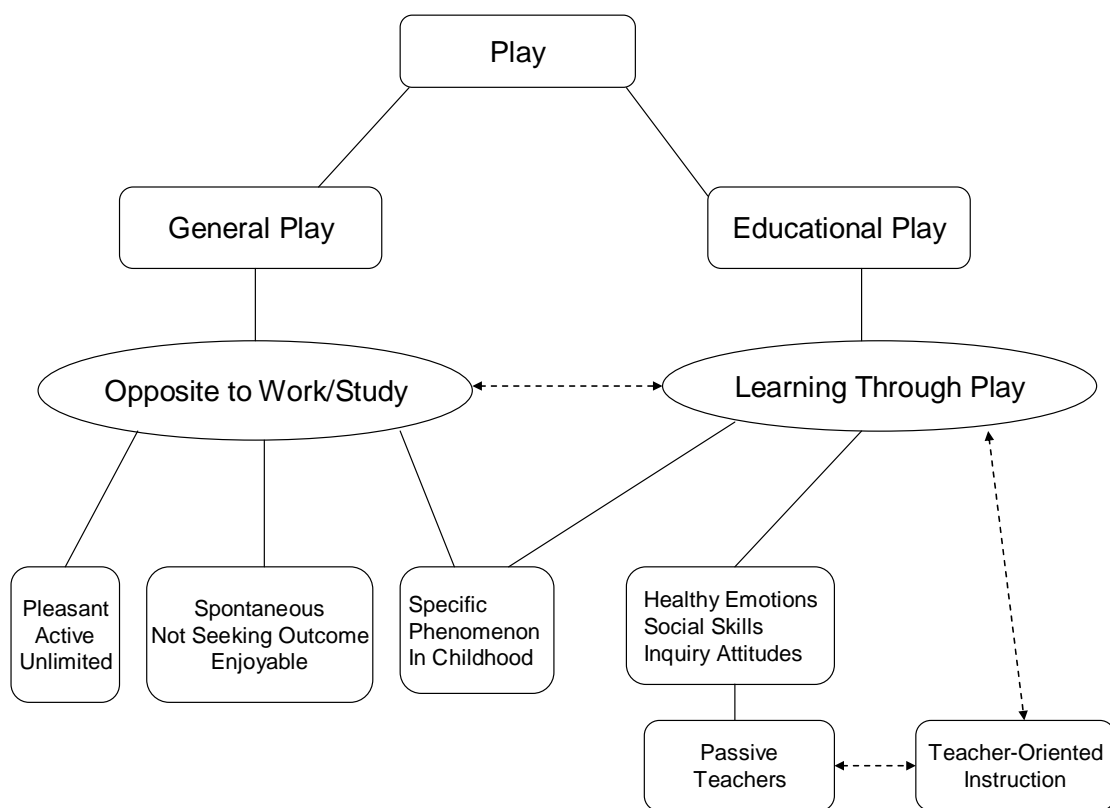
Most activities in kindergarten are considered as learning through playing. We learned so. Of course, we, teachers, try to conduct these activities in interesting and pleasant ways for children. But I think they are not "learning through playing." Rather, I would call it "studying with interest." I mean, from the perspective of teacher, we teach something, using children's interest.

As shown in the conversation of Min-ji and the researcher, the participants experienced confusions on the concept of learning through play as the interviews progressed. Firstly, they simply responded that 'learning through play' was occurred when children played freely, because children voluntarily explored and learned something in the process of playing. However, as the discussion progressed, it was revealed that the participants appreciated children's play, not because of its effect on children's learning, but because of its functions to consume children's energy and provide pleasure to them. Moreover, when the concept of 'learning through play' was applied to the real class, the participants more credited teacher-involved activities than free play for children's learning. Because the participants practically distinguished play and learning, they had difficulties to apply the concept of 'learning through play' into real kindergarten curriculum. As the effort to define this concept in practice, the

participants regarded teacher-involved activities as ‘learning through play’ as long as they were conducted in interesting way for children.

### Chapter Summary

The findings of this study show that the participants distinguished general and educational plays as they conceptualized play (see Figure 4).



**Fig. 4.** Participants' Views on Play.



In general meanings the participants regarded play as the opposite concept of work or study, associating play to pleasure, activeness, and unlimitedness. They also defined play as the non-purposeful, spontaneous, and enjoyable activity. Korean preservice kindergarten teachers of this study thought positive emotions occurred through play as the most important essence in general play. They believed that play was the natural and specific phenomenon and developmental stage in childhood, which was apparently different from adult's play. In the area of educational play, the participants emphasized the notion of 'learning through play' and passive roles of teachers. As they learned in the program, they responded that play could enhance children's healthy emotions, social skills and inquiring attitudes. In order to support children's learning through play, the participants advocated for teachers' passive roles such as provider of play materials and observer of children's play.

However, they had concerns to apply play-oriented instruction to curriculum and support children with passive stance in real classroom. Rather, they highly supported teacher-centered curriculum for children's learning when they pictured their own class and teaching in future. Finally the findings show that the participants theoretically accepted the notion of 'learning through play' but they did not really appreciate its practical effect for children's learning.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONTEXTS THAT AFFECT KOREAN PRESERVICE KINDERGARTEN**

#### **TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN'S PLAY**

The purpose of this study was to understand Korean preservice kindergarten teachers' perceptions and explore the ways that affect their perspectives on children's play. In chapter V, the findings of the views and perceptions on play held by the participants were discussed. In chapter VI, the discussions about the contexts that influenced the construction of the participants' views and perceptions on play are provided. Through analyzing interviews with the participants, it was found that the participants responded to various issues on play, based on five sources: personal play experiences, play theories, the ideology of the program and professors, knowledge from teaching practices, and Korean values on education. These five factors work together rather than individually in influencing Korean preservice teachers' construction of perspectives on play.

#### **Personal Play Experiences**

Korean kindergarten preservice teachers in this study thought of play as pleasant activity that is essential for human life. It seemed that the participants' own pleasant experiences of play in their childhood had much influence on their positive attitude about play. 9 of 10 participants mentioned their memories on childhood play, when they expressed their positive feelings and attitudes on play. For examples, Youngsun said,

I immediately had the feelings of happiness and joy when I heard the word, play. I have three older sisters. I did doll play a lot with them. They [older sisters] also made paper dolls for me... The moments of playing with my sisters are very strong memories for me.. Yes, they were really precious memories for me.

Min-ji also enthusiastically shared her childhood plays with me. She seemed very happy when she talked about her childhood play memories.

On a new year's day, all cousins played Yut<sup>23</sup> or board game. The most pleasant play for me was a doll play. I still remember my doll that could open and close her eyes. My father bought it [doll] for me. It was really popular doll at that time. My father was a really good daddy. He could do SeSeSe<sup>24</sup>. He often went to the lake with us [Min-ji and her brother] by riding bikes. The most precious memory is that all family members did Supermario<sup>25</sup> game together. It allowed us [her family] to be together a lot.

The participants thus seemed to remember details of play episodes in their childhood with friends and family in great detail. They often laughed and were surprised when they found that they played very similar games in childhood. The participants also compared present and past childhood plays through reflecting their own childhood plays.

Do-sun: Because my father is the oldest son in my family, all relatives come together to my house on holidays. When I was young, I played board games or hide-and-peek with my cousins. But these days, my nephews and nieces sit in front of the computer all day long. I never saw them play something else.

Ha-min: Today's kids don't know how to spin a top. I spun a top a lot when I was a kid. I learned how to wind a string and to throw a top. These days there is a toy named "Top-blade," an automatic top turning around by pushing a button.

Min-ji: But I was so surprised when I saw that children did Coca Cola<sup>26</sup> in church. I did the exact play when I was very young. I agree that the plays of

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<sup>23</sup> Yut involves 4 players or teams. Four sticks, flat on one side and curved on the other, are tossed in the air for each side's turn. The combination of flat and curved faces pointing upwards determines the number of spaces moved along a board. Landing on an intersection circle enables the side to take the shorter path. The first person/team to travel all the way around the board wins.

<sup>24</sup> A kind of clapping game

<sup>25</sup> A kind of computer game

<sup>26</sup> A kind of clapping game

today's children are totally different from ones of us. But few of them may be still same.

The participants discussed the changes of places, time, partners, and materials for children's play from the past to the present. The participants said that "today's children did not have time to play because they spent most of time to study" (Bo-young). In past—when the participants were young children— "children played outside all day long with siblings and friends, playing with natural materials" (Bo-young). When the participants were young there were not much toys, while these days lots of commercial play materials and computer games poured out. Also "playing outside became more and more dangerous because of increasing traffic and crime targeting children" (Nan-hee; Ji-hee). They explained that all these reasons had strengthened the tendency for children to prefer "indoor" (Nan-hee; Ae-ra) and "independent play without peer interactions" (Ji-hee) as well as "playing with commercial toys and computer games" (Ji-hee; Nan-hee; Ae-ra). The participants seemed to highly evaluate the idea that free-play in outside was valuable for young children, because they thought free-play in their childhood gave them precious memories as well as the opportunities to enjoy the feelings of unlimited freedom. They expressed their concerns on lack of play opportunities for today's children unlike them (Ae-ra; Ha-min; Do-sun; Nan-hee; Bo-young; Tae-hee; So-jin).

### **Play Theories**

To some degree all participants depended on the theories that they learned in the program when they discussed about children's play in interviews. 7 of 10 participants directly stated that the construction of their views and perceptions might be

significantly influenced by theories learned in program. Do-sun and Nan-hee simply said that learned theories in the program had an influence on their idea on play. Bo-young said that “the courses of the program might influence a lot to the construction of my views on children and play.” She vividly remembered the first course that she took in her freshman year. “It [the course] was named ‘Introduction of Early Childhood Education.’ I realized I knew nothing on children. That course really helped me to understand children and education,” she added. Young-sun who had 5 years of teaching experiences also thought that her pedagogical beliefs had been fairly influenced by theories. Young-sun thought that she had accepted “the ideas of many educators such as Piaget, Frobel, Montessori, Dewey, Vygotsky, and Gardner.” She believed that Locke’s idea on children and education was best matched to her philosophical and pedagogical belief. So-jin reviewed her responses in interviews and said that her idea on play had been influenced by “Constructivism and child-centeredness theory.” Among several theories that she learned, she thought that the notions of Piaget and Vygotski had the biggest portion in her pedagogical stance. Min-ji also felt what she learned in the program was very powerful on the construction of her ideas about play.

Although most participants thought that the theories had had the strong influence on their construction of perceptions on play, they criticized monotonousness of theories that they had learned. For example, Do-sun complained that “theories are too boring, because they repeated same thing.” Ae-ra similarly said that “we have learned same thing again and again.... For example, in every course, we heard children learn by themselves. We, teachers, are asked to help their spontaneous development. However, I

do not learn how to assist them in real classroom.” According to the participants, because all course works advocated for only constructivists’ notions in same voice, they were not interesting than practical courses. Ae-ra thought that the courses teaching practical skills were much helpful for preservice teachers than theoretical courses. She appreciated a course in which she could “learn how to cope with real problematic situations.” So-jin also thought that “theories are taught same in everywhere, while practical skills are all different according to the instructors.” As the most impressive course, she pointed out “the course taught by an instructor having a long teaching experience in kindergarten.” Because the instructor shared her own practical strategies, So-jin was really satisfied by that course. Although the participants much depended on theories for their construction of play, they seemed to think that play theories were superficial for real teaching.

### **Ideology of the Program and Faculty**

As well as the learned theories in the program, the ideology of the program was also a strong factor that might have influenced the construction of the participants’ views and perceptions on children’s play. As I described in chapter IV, Q women’s college was a Christian school that stressed to have belief, hope, and love, and to be honest and diligent. These Christian faiths would influence the program’s atmosphere to emphasize teacher’s altruism and sacrifice. All five professors in the department of early childhood education were Christian. Not only Christian faiths of the faculties but also their pedagogical beliefs seemed influential for the construction of the preservice

teachers' educational beliefs. Korean preservice teachers in this study directly said that the influence of professors' philosophy was enormous on the construction of their ideas on education and children. For example, Ae-ra thought that the instructor of that course was much more important than course itself, because she experienced to agree and follow one instructor's pedagogy. So-jin also agreed to the importance of professors' pedagogical beliefs and competency, since it had huge impact on preservice teachers' perspectives on education.

The interviews of three professors (M, N, O) in the program revealed that they emphasized that (1) teachers should have altruistic mind and (2) verbal interaction skills. They also stressed (3) cultivating children's social skills as the most important purpose for early childhood education. Interestingly, the participants also mentioned these three aspects as the most important roles for kindergarten teacher. It may reflect the powerful influence of the faculties' educational beliefs to the ones of preservice teachers.

#### *Altruistic Teacher*

Korean preservice kindergarten teachers in this study believed that teachers should have altruistic mind for children's well-being and happiness in kindergarten. The participants thought the primary role of teacher in any type of institutions for young children was to love them. For example, Young-sun said that teacher should become "a warm and emotionally supportive" for children. Because many Korean mothers worked these days, Nan-hee thought that teachers in kindergarten should take care of children like their mothers. She believed that this caring role was much more important than

teaching letters and numbers. Tae-hee also emphasized altruistic teacher such as “listening children carefully, being cheerful although when tired, smiling a lot, loving kids and often expressing it to them.”

The stress on warm and caring role of teacher was also found in the interviews of the faculties. For example, professor M said, “Being an early childhood teacher should start from loving human beings.” She emphasized that “teacher should truly love children like mother.” Professor N similarly advocated that early childhood teacher should be altruistic.

I always tell it to my students that teacher for young children should not work for money, but for self-satisfaction to be with lovely kids. I believe only persons who really love this occupation and children should become kindergarten teachers. I often tell them [the students], “if you worked loosely, it would disgrace our program and me. Be diligent and work hard”

The faculties strongly stressed “warm, like mother, truly love children, caring, embracing, and body contact.” However, the participants felt burden, because it was not easy to change their personalities. For example, So-jin felt that her introspectiveness was not appropriate as an early childhood teacher. Although she tried to be cheerful and sweet to children, she felt that it was impossible to change her character.

#### *Verbal Interaction Skills*

The faculties of the program considered verbal interaction as a very important skill for early childhood teacher. Professor O worried about her students’ abilities to verbally interact with children, because she thought that verbal interaction was the most important teaching skill for enhancing children’s developments. Professor N also said,



“in order to teach in constructivist way, most important thing is making questions. According to the questions made by teacher, children can learn effectively or nothing.”

As I described in chapter V, this stress on verbal interaction skill was also found in the responses of the participants. They believed that teachers should evoke children’s interest and support their learning through providing appropriate verbal interactions. However, the participants felt difficulties on how to intervene appropriately in children’s play. For example, Do-sun thought that one of the most important roles of teacher was make verbal interaction with children. She, however, experienced difficulty to successfully make it with real children in her teaching practice. Ae-ra and Ha-min also realized that making right and timely feedback for children was very difficult in real classroom. They worried about “how much they could help children’s learning and development through appropriate verbal interactions.” Bo-young and So-jin also had pressure on giving right feedbacks to children. So-jin wanted to learn practical skills in course work, which might be helpfully used in real classrooms. She said, “we have heard that we have to make divergent questions arousing children’s various ideas. But what are the divergent questions? I want to see how to make real questions, not just theories. I want to be prepared.”

#### *Promoting Social Competency*

Another distinctive feature of pedagogical beliefs held by the faculties and the preservice teachers of this study was the stress on enhancing children’s social skills. All participants considered cultivating sociality as the fundamental goal in early childhood education. For example, Young-sun thought that learning relationships with

others was one of the most important things for 4 and 5 year old children. She emphasized that kindergarten teachers should teach children how to express their own opinions and feelings to others. Tae-hee also mentioned that “caring and respecting others and good manners for seniors” should be taught in kindergarten. Nan-hee and Hamin similarly emphasized to teach children social skills in kindergarten, such as caring and respecting others, having good manners and sense of responsibility. As the reason to stress social skills in kindergarten period, So-jin thought that “this age is very important to cultivate whole child.” Tae-hee, Nan-hee, and Young-sun also regarded the kindergarten age as perfect period to teach basic life skills.

Compared to this emphasis of social skills, the participants rarely mentioned children’s cognitive development. Especially they strongly disagreed to teach children numbers, letters, and English. For linguistic development, the participants believed that helping children speak logically with clear pronunciation (Tae-hee) and letting children experience letters in interesting ways (So-jin) were enough in kindergarten. For scientific and mathematical areas, the participants also thought that experiencing numbers (So-jin), scientific phenomena and principals such as observing flowers or doing water experiment (Ji-hee) would be appropriate in kindergarten program.

This tendency was also found in the views of the faculties in program. Professor M strongly believed that “the ultimate purpose of kindergarten education is cultivating social skills.” She taught her students that emotional and social competence was the most important one, which should be preceded all other developmental areas. Professor M criticized prevalent atmosphere to require academic achievement for young

children in Korea. Especially she was opposed to teach literacy and English in Kindergarten, just as the participants did.

### **Teaching Practice**

Korean preservice teachers who participated in this study were the students in third year of the program. They had been trained through learning theories and practicing in fields for real teaching in very next year. As described in Chapter IV, the participants had already several opportunities to work with children. They finished practical training in real kindergarten or daycare several times. Also half of them had taught children in church. Moreover, 2 participants already had experiences to work as teachers for young children. 1 participant had her own child. These experiences with children were another significant factor for constructing their views and perceptions on children's play.

#### *Specific Knowledge on Children's Play*

Along with the personal play experiences, direct observation of children's play in the places of teaching practice or of neighborhood was important source to collect knowledge of children's play for the participants. However, the analysis of the participants' responses reveals that the participants depended on their observation in teaching place, only when they listed the specific examples of children's play. In other words, as the responses to the issue of 'what children play,' they depended on their observation of teaching practice. But to the issues of 'why children play' or 'how play functions,' the participants rather depended on theories.

For example, based on the observation of her own son, So-jin listed “watching TV, doing computer games, or playing outside playground” as children’s play. Tae-hee also depended on her observation in her teaching experiences and said, “block and role plays are representative kindergarten plays.” She also used her personal observation of her niece, saying that “recently, children seem to watch TV or enjoy games a lot.” Similarly Do-sun listed “block play, imaginary play and art activities for plays in kindergarten” as she observed in teaching practice. Do-sun added that “today’s children play with computer too much,” based on the observation of her cousins in family gatherings. For Ji-hee, block and role plays were the most common plays for children. She explained the reason that she thought so, as “most children enjoy those [block and role] plays in teaching practice and consequently I become to observe them [block and role plays] the most.”

#### *Confirming the Limitations of Theories*

Korean preservice kindergarten teachers of this study used their experiences to observe children’s play in kindergarten, daycare, home, and church in order to confirm theories that they learned in the program. They often said that “as I learned in the program, children do this thing.” For example Ae-ra said,

As we learned in the program, children’s play develops. As they get older, the leaders and outsiders appear. Play becomes more purposive. I observed this difference of play between the classes for three, four, and five years old.

She believed the idea that play evolves in developing ways from lower to higher stages, which was suggested by Piaget. Ae-ra was often amazed when she realized that children’s development seemed to match with theories. Min-ji also agreed

to the idea of “development of children’s play,” comparing theories and practices. Min-ji said,

I learned that play develops from solitary play to cooperative play. I was so surprised that children really play in that way in kindergarten. When I worked with three year olds, I saw they played alone. But in 5 year old class, they played with peers.

So-jin who had one son mentioned a specific theory to support her idea on children’s play. She observed that her son had a lot of energy even after he played all day. So she agreed to the idea of “surplus theory of play” that suggested that children play for energy consuming, rather than restoring energy.

However, the participants also pointed that there was the gap between learned theories and real practices. They observed that the practices of kindergarten were often inconsistent with what they had learned in the college. For example, So-jin carefully criticized teacher-centered curriculum that she observed in her teaching placement. She said, “according to what I learned, the themes should be flexible and follow children’s interests. However, they were decided by teacher’s pre-plan in real classroom.” Bo-young was disappointed to the teacher- and worksheet-centered practices in real class when she went to her teaching practice in daycare. As the reason of this discrepancy between theory and practice, Ae-ra pointed out “overheated early education in Korean society.” Her mentor teacher in teaching placement told her that kindergarten teachers could not resist parental request. Ae-ra understood teachers’ dilemma and anticipated that she would face same problem when she became a kindergarten teacher. She thought that she “will also teach letters and numbers,” even though it was not theoretically appreciated. Nan-hee also thought that what she learned in the program might be too

ideal and unrealistic for real teaching. She especially talked about recent trend to teach English in kindergartens, which seemed to be inevitable in reality but not recommended in theory. She said, “all professors in the program are opposed to teach English for children, while all kindergarten have hired special English teachers.” She thought that she could not refuse teaching English if she was a teacher, but she “might feel guilty.” Through teaching practice, the participants indirectly experienced and accepted the discrepancy between theory and reality.

### **Korean Society**

#### *Stress on Academic Achievement*

The analysis of data shows that the emphasis on academic achievement from the early age in Korean society has influenced the participants' perception of play and its application on education. Firstly, it seemed to fortify the image of play that the participants had, which evokes early childhood. As Kwon (2002) points out, the stress on academic achievement for children has been strong in Korea. Many Korean children are sent to the various specialized institutions after class by their parents. This parental pressure becomes stronger as their children get older. Especially from the middle childhood —third or fourth grades— many Korean children have “study-oriented lives” until entering college. Relatively younger children who have not entered the elementary school have more time to play than older children in Korea. This fact strengthened the participants' idea that “play is especially for children in early childhood.” Actually, the participants thought that play was not the activity for older children and juveniles.

I think teenagers cannot enjoy real play. As you know it's because they should spend most time for studying. I don't have memory to play without concern during my high school period. [I did] Just take some rest and solve stress from studying. These days even second, third graders don't have time to play. But I guess it is the only story in Korea (Ae-ra).

Logically thinking, people of all age range enjoy playing. But the period from middle childhood to until before entering college, we cannot play much. I also didn't have time to play in that period, even though I wasn't a good student. So I cannot explain the concept of play for juveniles (Bo-young)

Second, the emphasis on academic achievement has also influenced the beliefs of the participants on “what we teach in kindergarten class.” As discussed earlier, Korean preservice kindergarten teachers of this study did not agree to provide academic oriented curriculum for children. As they learned in college program, they believed child-centered and play-oriented curriculum should be provided in kindergarten. However, the participants answered that they might not refuse to teach children in teacher-directed way, because of parental request. Min-ji and Ae-ra thought that in reality teachers did not have enough autonomy but should teach what parents and kindergarten principals wanted. Do-sun explained why Korean early childhood teachers could not refuse parental request as below.

Frankly speaking, it's O.K in western countries. If I was a western teacher, I would say, “Yes, play is best. Our children play all day long in kindergarten.” But in Korea it's absolutely impossible! If the parents heard their kids are playing in kindergarten, they would strongly complain on it (Do-sun).

The emphasis on academic achievement in Korea has strengthened the general image that “play is only for young children.” However, in real kindergarten practice, this emphasis hinders the performance of play-oriented curriculum, because it exerts downward even on kindergarten class.

*Traditional Views of a Teacher*

Throughout interviews, the participants expressed their concerns about being a teacher. They thought that being a democratic teacher and providing child-centered curriculum for children would not be easy. Traditionally Korean teachers have great authority and honor, as shown in Korean proverb saying, “Do not even step on the teacher’s shadow.” In Korean culture, teachers directly provide knowledge and information and students accept them. This Korean traditional value on the relationship between teacher and student was found in the participants’ perspectives. For example, Nan-hee said, “Although I have learned [that] teacher should become like a friend for children, I often found myself authoritative in church class.” She thought that it would be opposed to the notion of early childhood education if a teacher showed the “dignity and authority” as a teacher. However, Nan-hee believed that teacher needed to be rigorous in some degree, saying that “children cannot be controlled when a teacher is always nice. Sometimes, I become so upset because of ill-mannered kids.” Similarly Ha-min said,

I know [that] children learn by themselves, and [that] teachers should provide minimum intervention for them. However, when I interacted with children in teaching practice, I felt that my passive assistance was not enough. I wanted to give something to them [children]. I felt [that] I had to teach something.

Ha-min felt that her tendency to teach children directly was wrong, because she learned teacher-directed teaching was not appropriate for children. As the reason that the participants had difficulties to conduct child-centeredness curriculum, So-jin pointed out lack of experiences to learn through student-oriented way, saying as below.



Theory says, teacher should not teach them [children] directly. Then.. I don't know what to do... I have grown up in the system of cramming of education. As a student I have observed and experienced only this kind of teacher-directed instruction. I know the meaning of the word, child-centered. But I don't know what it really means in real classroom.

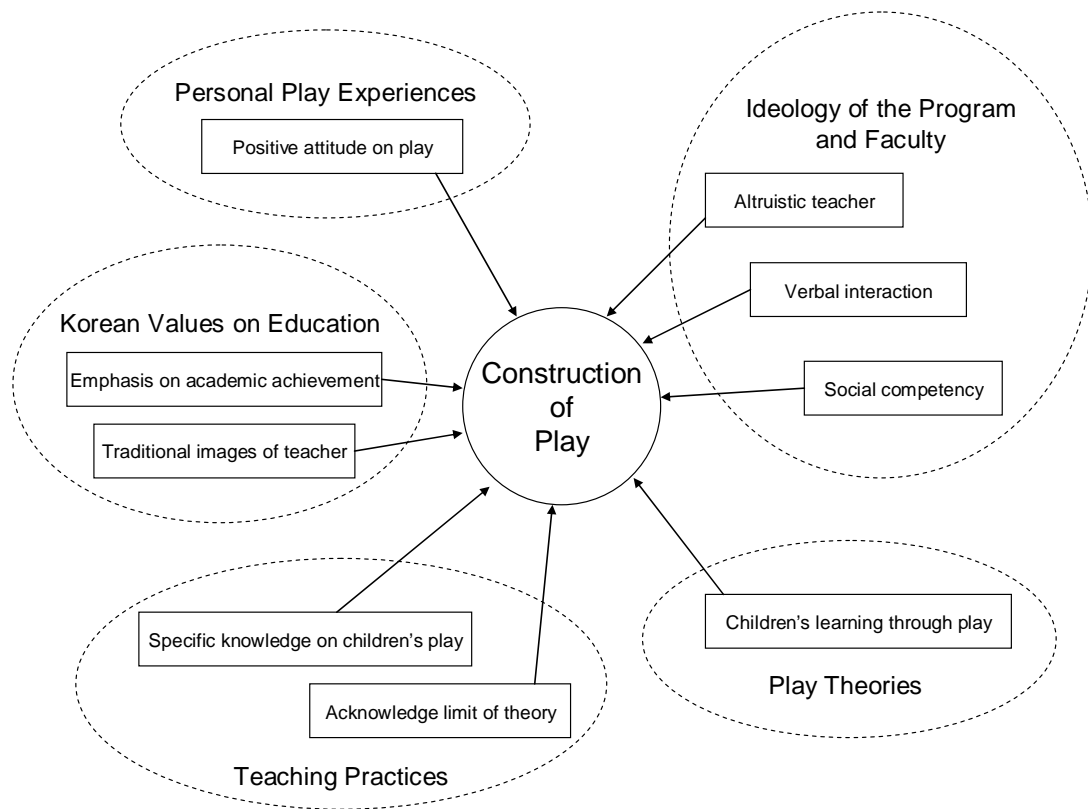
As So-jin mentioned, these participants had not experienced child- and play-centered curriculum, and, therefore, instruction of “learning through play” for children might be difficult to understand in practical terms. Actually most of the participants disclosed their concerns on lack of their confidence to conduct play-oriented curriculum. Authoritative image of Korean teacher, traditional teacher-directed curriculum, and the participants' lack of experience to learn through play would be the reasons that the participants felt difficulties to apply play to curriculum.

### **Chapter Summary**

Korean preservice kindergarten teachers of this study had constructed their views and perceptions of play based on (1) personal play experiences, (2) play theories, (3) the ideology of the program and faculties, (4) knowledge from teaching practices, and (5) Korean values on education (see Figure 5). It was found that the personal play experiences of their childhood had influenced the construction of positive attitudes on play. Based on their pleasant memories of childhood play, the participants seemed to regard pleasure as the most important feature of play.

Ideology of the program and faculty had also considerable influence on the participants' perspective about play. Before the participants entered the college, only factor that had influenced their construction of concept of play was personal experiences

related on play. However, since they entered the program and had learned the study of early childhood education, philosophy of the college, pedagogical beliefs of the faculties, and knowledge from theories and teaching practices had contributed to construct their new perspectives about play.



**Fig. 5.** Influential Factors on the Participants' Construction of Play.

Among them, theoretical knowledge was the most powerful factor that the participants depended on when they discussed about play during interviews. However,

the knowledge from teaching practice did not espouse theories. In teaching practice, most participants observed that their mentor teachers led class and directly gave lessons to children, which was not compatible with the learned theories. Through the experiences of teaching practice, the participants became aware of the disharmony in theory and practice and, moreover, regarded theory as “armchair guideline.”

Korean values on education were also one of the critical factors that had influenced the construction of the perspectives about play held by Korean preservice kindergarten teachers of this study. First, the emphasis on academic achievement had strengthened the image of play that ‘play is the monopoly of young children’ as well as the inclining tendency toward academic-oriented curriculum in kindergarten. Second, traditional image of Korean teacher influenced the participants’ teaching style and attitude toward play. Korean teachers have been highly respected and authoritative, not having horizontal position to student. Add to this, the fact that the participants themselves had not experienced to learn from student-oriented curriculum also has hindered to understand play- and child- centered curriculum and supportive roles of teacher.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the views of Korean preservice teachers on play in early childhood education and further explore the contexts that contribute to these views and perceptions. The two research questions of the study were:

1. How do Korean preservice teachers with an early childhood emphasis view play?
2. How do the factors such as culture and education influence the construction of these views?

The data for this study was collected for three months in summer of 2005 through interviews with ten Korean preservice kindergarten teachers as individuals and as a group. The participants were enrolled in the department of Early Childhood Education in Q Women's College. Additionally data was collected through informal conversations, document analysis, and participant observation in the college, and interviews with faculty members at college.

Data analysis was conducted using Hatch (2002)'s model including both an inductive and an interpretive framework. This chapter aims at drawing some conclusions from the study focusing particularly on the two research questions under investigation and then suggest some possible implications of the study.

## Conclusions and Discussions

### *Korean Preservice Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Play*

The first research question was “How do Korean preservice teachers in early childhood education program view play?” The findings of the study show that there were two dimensions in the participants’ views on play: general and educational play. The construction of general play seemed to be influenced by what and how the participants played in their childhood. The participants intuitively thought of play as a pleasant, active, and free activity that was an opposite concept to study or work, based on their own childhood play experiences. They also defined play as a spontaneous activity involving positive emotions, which does not seek outcomes. Participants repeatedly mentioned “pleasure” as the reason and result of play in general meanings. They significantly associated play with children. The findings suggest that the participants believed that play was a natural phenomenon as well as developmental stage in childhood, which was different from adult’s play. In short, the participants regarded play, in general meanings, as simply ‘a fun, enjoyable, and spontaneous children’s activity that is engaged in without concern for a specific outcome.’

After entering the early childhood teacher training program, the participants came to accept the new idea that “play is the most appropriate and essential way for children’s learning.” Educational play was regarded as a different conceptual activity than general play. While general play was considered as conceptually the opposite of work or study, educational play was seen by the participants as a concept combining play with learning. This conceptual conflict between general and educational play

seemed to produce disequilibrium in the participants' attitudes towards play. The participants' superficial responses about learning through play were positive. They agreed that play could effectively help children's learning and, therefore, teachers should support children's play and follow their lead. Theoretically the participants advocated for child-centered and play-oriented ways for children's learning.

However, the participants showed different attitudes on 'learning through play' when they practically imagined classroom routine of kindergarten from the teacher's perspectives. They still appreciated play's effect in promoting children's healthy emotions and social skills. However, they were more supportive of a structured and pre-planned instruction for better learning of children than play-oriented one. The participants believed that free play without adults' scaffolding or feedback was educationally meaningless. Some participants even said that play would indirectly help children's learning because it allowed children to consume their extra energy and concentrate on main structured-activities in kindergarten.

Since the participants were attending the course 'Play for Young Children,' they had often heard and used the expression, 'learning through play.' However, the participants never seriously considered what this expression really meant in a real kindergarten classroom before the interviews. The study was an opportunity for them to think about the notion of learning through play. In the process of identifying the real meaning of learning through play, the participants had difficulties matching its conceptual definition with practical activities in real life situations. Some participants concluded that 'learning through play' was an unreasonable concept because they

thought that ‘playing’ and ‘learning’ could not be combined. They seemed to consider play and learning separately. Other participants matched teacher initiated structured activities to the idea of learning through play, because those activities provided children “pleasure” and, at the same time, enabled them to “learn.” However, participants still thought that the expression, “learning through play,” was an ironical concept. Thus, one participant finally created a new expression for “teacher-initiated but enjoyable activity in kindergarten curriculum” as “studying with interests” instead of “learning through play.” It shows again the participants’ tendency to consider play and learning independently. The participants thought of “learning through play” as a different category from play, as it had a specific outcome. Theoretically the participants accepted the idea of learning through play because they learned this idea as the “right” way to educate children in their teacher education program. However, the findings reveal that most participants did not go much beyond this theoretical agreement.

#### *Contexts Influencing the Views of Korean Preservice Kindergarten Teachers*

The second research question of the study was “what are the roles of culture and education in constructing the views of Korean preservice teachers in early childhood education program?” The study found that both cultural and educational contexts played influential roles in the construction of the participants’ views on play. The findings of the study show that personal experiences with play, education in the teacher education program, and Korean culture significantly influenced the participants’ ideas of play.

Participants’ personal experiences of play and education in childhood influenced the construction of their positive attitudes toward play. Although the

participants were generally required to study hard in their school days, they were given enough opportunities to freely play. Based on the participants' memories of playing with peers and siblings, the participants seemed to consider play as a pleasant and important activity that should occur in childhood. However, the participants had been educated through a highly structured school curriculum. They were taught by authoritative teachers who directly gave lessons to students. These personal experiences had important influence on the construction of the participants' positive attitudes on play. On the other hand, the experience created tensions in their understanding of 'learning through play' and accepting the idea of teachers' assuming a passive role in children's learning.

Education was another influential context in the participants' construction of play. The findings of the study revealed that the participants' teacher education program played a most influential role in their perception of educational play. There were several different aspects of the teacher education program that were particularly relevant in this regard. These include the theoretical and practical knowledge on play from their coursework and their teaching placements, the culture of the teacher training program, and teacher educators' pedagogical beliefs on education, children, and play. Most of the participants depended on play theories that were learned in the program when they discussed play in the interviews. They theoretically agreed with the pedagogy of learning through play and the accompanying passive roles of the teacher as an appropriate pedagogical framework. However, the participants' experiences in their field placements led them to question the play theories, because the real life practices in Korean



kindergarten were not aligned with what play theories suggested. Most of the participants said that their mentor teachers used the whole class to teach and even work sheets. They also observed parental requests for teaching academic contents in kindergarten, which were embraced by the kindergarten administrators. According to the participants, private kindergarten in Korea could not but provide academic contents taught by specialized instructors in a structured curriculum, because parents preferred kindergarten having more academic programs. In light of the practical knowledge and information they encountered in their field placements, the participants criticized existing play theories and seemed to develop their personal theories about play and its application to early childhood curriculum.

Cultural contexts of Korean society—this includes the prevalent emphasis on academic achievement, established traditional images of teachers, and highly structured school curriculum— also influenced the participants' views on play and learning. The emphasis on academic achievement in Korean society seemed to be at the root of prevalent practices of structured instruction in kindergarten which decreased children's opportunities to play. These realistic conditions that surrounded children's play influenced the participants' beliefs and attitudes about play. Participants believed that play was important work for children, and thus that children should be given time to play. However, the participants thought that providing play opportunities to children was not the responsibility of the kindergarten teacher. From the participants' perspectives, teacher-planned instruction would more effectively help children's learning than play-initiated one. It was interesting to note however that except for some prominent

characteristics which seemed to originate from Korean traditional culture, many parts of Korean cultural contexts were a hybrid of various cultures. Like in many other industrialized and urbanized countries, the participants have lived in a culturally “globalized” context, so that in many cases it was impossible to distinguish “original” Korean culture from westernized one.

### **Implications and Suggestions**

#### *Implications for Teacher Education Program*

The findings of the study show that the participants supported both teacher-directed curriculum and play, believing both have a valuable place in children’s lives. However, they did not always see play as having a place in the early childhood education classroom. Based on what they learned in their teacher education program, the participants theoretically advocated for the pedagogy of learning through play and encouraging the development of the whole child. However, their experiences in field placements led them to question the practical value of such theories, as in those contexts, play-oriented instruction seemed inappropriate for actual kindergarten classroom in Korea. Instead of supporting children’s spontaneous development, the realistic roles kindergarten teachers were expected to play were to safely take care of children and lead them to follow a planned curriculum. The pedagogical beliefs of the teacher training program on the other hand emphasized additional roles for teachers. The participants were required to be warm and devoted teachers, reflecting the Christian ideology of many of the faculty members in the college, who emphasized teachers’ sacrifice and a

spirit of service. The college faculties were in general strongly critical of kindergarten teachers who gave up their educational beliefs and taught highly structured lessons in kindergarten.

The inconsistency between their theoretical frameworks they encountered within their college program and the world outside of it seemed not only to cause confusion among the participants but also undermined their beliefs in themselves as competent future teachers. The participants expressed their feelings of being unprepared for their future teaching role, because they were required to perform various duties that were often in disharmony with each other. The participants already felt guilty although they were not teachers yet, because they thought that they could not follow what they learned in their teacher training program. They particularly felt uncomfortable with the fact that they would have to implement a structured academic curriculum because of the requests from parents and administrators of private kindergarten.

To move forward in a successful direction, it would seem important that Korean early childhood educators reexamine westernized theories and make an effort to understand the practical realities in the kindergarten classrooms. Further, teacher education programs should attempt to introduce preservice teachers to diverse play theories that reflect a range of cultural values.

#### *Implications for Play Theories*

#### **Critical Examination of Play Theory**

In the past two decades, many Korean early childhood educators studied and received graduate degrees in western countries, especially in the United States (Kwon,

2002). They have introduced what they learned in Western contexts to Korea. In the 1980s, Piagetian developmental theory was introduced and still is the basis for early childhood theories and practice in Korea. In the 1990s, the pedagogy of 'Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)' was introduced and became a dominant reference point in Korean early childhood education, resulting in the declaration of 'child-centered' and 'play-oriented' curriculum as a 'standard practice.' DAP has deeply influenced the foundation of Korean National Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines that defines "workbooks, worksheets, whole class teaching, use of authority, and emphasis on basic skills as inappropriate practices" (Kwon, 2002 p.155). However, those structured activities have lasted for many years as traditional Korean ways of teaching and disciplining children, which cannot be eliminated by "illuminating" teachers. It is an overt reality that play-oriented practices have failed to be accepted at a grass roots level in Korean kindergarten classrooms. Also there are different opinions on rote learning, based on the fact that many Asian students who generally construct their knowledge and skills through didactic learning show high level of academic achievements (Smith, 1994).

The findings from this study suggest that the introduction of certain theories or practices into different contexts may not produce successful results when the consideration of the specific characteristics of the targeted contexts is not done. Play is considered separate from learning in Korea. Even the participants who had been taught the "right" theories and practices were confused by the idea of 'learning through play.' The question of 'why play-oriented practices have not been effectively implemented in Korean kindergartens' has usually been answered by blaming Korean teachers and

Korean educational situations. Korean teachers and educators have been identified as the source of the problem, whereas the appropriateness of implementation of Western theories and practices into Korean contexts has for the most part gone unrecognized.

The effort to critically examine the ideas of the universal validity of play as a method of learning has already started in Western philosophies. However, it has been not activated yet in Korea, although “qualitative research” has recently attracted incredible attentions from Korean early childhood educators. The results of this study underline the different values and meanings that Western and Korean teachers hold about play and thus support the need for a critical examination of westernized play theories. An unquestioning belief in play theory, which was clearly evident in the participants’ teacher education program, needs to be re-evaluated. In addition, Korean educators who study in western countries need to be cautious when they introduce what they learn into Korean academics.

### **Play Theory Constructed from Real Practice**

The findings of the study suggest that implementing theory without consideration of specific contexts can cause more confusion than progress. Research exploring how contextual factors influence children’s play has found that “children’s play is the product of the multiple factors embedded in different contexts” (Chang, 2003 p. 295). In addition to classroom contexts such as physical constraints and teacher influences, socio-cultural contexts need to be analyzed. In Korea, there are many cultural, historical, and societal factors that should be considered for the construction of play theory, which are totally different from Western contexts. Some examples are the exam-

oriented education system in Korea, parental pressures for academic achievement, traditional didactic ways of teaching and learning, and specific administrative characteristics of Korean kindergarten. This is not to suggest that these aspects are or ought to be impervious to reexamination themselves. In Korea, the exam-oriented atmosphere has become even more rigorous than before and has started to impact young children. It appears to be a problematic trend, which needs to be addressed. However, a thorough consideration of the Korean context should be kept in mind, to better understand the current discrepancy between theory and practice. In particular, the construction of knowledge from actual experiences is critically important while developing guidelines relating to play. Theories based on what and how Korean children typically play should form the basis for developing guidelines for play in classrooms. It would appear that Korean teachers occupy a unique role in the educational system in that they can closely observe and understand Korean children's behaviors and needs. As such they can play a connecting role between the academic and practical parts of the field, because they are uniquely acquainted with the curriculum of teacher education programs in college, systems of kindergarten, and parental requests. Classroom action research would be the best place from which to begin this effort. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), classroom action research "typically involves....data collection by teachers with a view to teachers making judgments about how to improve their own practices" (p.561). Teachers' interpretations, judgments, and actions on real practices play the primary roles in approach of classroom action research. It would appear that it is only through engaging the knowledge of classroom teachers that the field of early

childhood education will be able to construct appropriate theories about children's play in Korea.

### **Reflection of Children's Views**

In the study, one of the reasons cited by the participants for wanting to include play in their classrooms was that it "lets children learn in interesting ways." However, the effort to understand what children really feel and think about play-oriented practice in educational programs has rarely been tried in Korea. The review of western literature has indicated that children have complex and developed ideas on play and play-based curriculum than adults assume. For example, the findings of King's (1979) study shows that children did not distinguish work and play with the amount of enjoyment involved. Similarly, Wing (1995) found that children did not consider playful but teacher-introduced practices as play. Research investigating children's perceptions of play has suggested that, instead of depending on how much the task is pleasant, children use various standards such as level of autonomy, physical and social environment, required labor, and personal meanings attributed to the activities in order to determine play and work. Although these studies were conducted in western contexts, they do encourage us to believe that children have well developed and complex ideas on play than adults assume, which is an idea that can enrich research in other cultural contexts as well. Children usually do not have choice on what they learn in formal education in Korean. Although Korean kindergartens have advocated child-centeredness for their curriculum, most of them are far from being child-centered. Teacher-dominated and academic oriented lessons are often labeled as play as it is assumed that since the

children enjoyed the lesson, it was play. It bears investigation as to how this distinction between enjoyment and play plays out in Korean contexts.

### *Implications for Research*

This study describes ten Korean preservice kindergarten teachers' views, attitudes, and knowledge on play and the factors that have influenced the construction of their perspectives. The present study contributes to the growing body of research seeking to investigate the meanings of play held by people working with children, especially preservice teachers. Also the study underlines the need to explore culturally diverse perspectives on children's play. However, there has been little research on the views, attitudes, and perceptions of play held by children and parents from diverse contexts. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate the construction of play from the perspectives of children and parents from various international perspectives. Particular attention needs to be directed towards the role of play in formal educational settings.

The findings of this study show that pedagogies held by the faculty and the culture of teacher education programs have a strong influence not only on preservice teachers' views of play but also on their overall beliefs about children and education. Further research, thus, is needed to critically examine dominant theoretical perspectives on play and its development within academia, and how those views can be reconciled with the realities of children's lives. Finally, as discussed earlier, action research from real classrooms is needed to construct theories about play that reflect the realities of children growing up in academic oriented, highly competitive societies.



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## APPENDIX A

### EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS

#### 1. Background Questions

- Tell me about your educational background.
- Why have you decided to be a kindergarten teacher?
- Did you have any experiences working with children? When? How long? What do you think about those experiences?
- For the kindergarten children, what is most important for them to learn? Why?
- What are your views of children and teachers?
- In your opinion, what kinds of skills do kindergarten children have to learn?
- What are the teachers' roles in kindergarten?

#### 2. Questions for exploring views and perceptions on play

##### (1) Definitions, types, range of children's play

- What is the first impression when you hear the word "play"?
- How or when can you tell a child is playing?
- List children's typical play.
- What children do at play?
- Imagine the children's play at home (or kindergarten). What do you think it would be like?
- Looking back on your own childhood, what kinds of play did you play? Other than

play, what kind of activities did you do when you were a preschool age child?

(2) Functions or values of children's play

- Why do children play?
- Tell me some kinds of play that you think useful or harmful for children.
- What does play do (affect) to child's life?
- Based on what you said so far, how do you define play?

(3) Teacher's role in children's play

- Imagine that you were a kindergarten teacher. What are your plans regarding children's play? How did you come to think so?
- If you were un/satisfied with watching children's plays, what kind of scenes would be like? In what ways would you (as a teacher) participate (or do not participate) in children's play?

3. Questions for exploring the ways Korean preservice kindergarten teachers construct their perspectives on play

- What courses influenced you the most? Why and how?
- What factors influenced your beliefs on play?



## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM (ENGLISH)

#### (EXPLORING CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE MEANINGS OF PLAY AMONG KOREAN PRESERVICE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS)

I am invited to participate in an educational research study that will explore the views on play held by Korean preservice teachers in early childhood education. I was selected to be a possible participant because I am enrolled in a college program for the early childhood teacher training.

I understand that a total of 10 people have been asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to examine the views and perceptions of play held by Korean preservice teachers in early childhood education through the qualitative interviews. The principal investigator is Ms. Soo Young Ahn, working her Ph.D. dissertation under the advisement of Dr. Radhika Viruru of Texas A&M University.

If I agree to be in this study, I will be asked to be interviewed to allow the instructor to investigate my ideas and opinions about play. I understand that the interview will only take 60minutes and my responses in the interview will be audio-taped by the principal investigator, Ms. Soo Young Ahn. I understand there will be no benefits or risks occurred while participating in this project.

I understand that the data I submitted to the researcher will be confidential and the records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking me to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely at 2101 Harvey Mitchell Parkway #66, College Station, TX 77840. Only Ms. Soo Young Ahn and Dr. Viruru will have access to the records. I understand that the taped-records will be retained for 3 years and kept by Ms. Soo Young Ahn. After 3 years of data collection, the taped-records will be destroyed. If I decide to participate, I am free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make me uncomfortable. With any questions about this study, I can withdraw at any time without my relations with the university, job, benefits, etc., being affected. I can contact Ms. Soo Young Ahn by one of the following: Tel: (214) 235-8322; E-mail: asy@neo.tamu.edu; and Mailing: 2101 Harvey Mitchell Parkway #66, College Station, TX 77840, USA. Or Dr. Radhika Viruru by one of the following: Tel: (979) 845-8252; E-Mail: viruru@tamu.edu; and Mailing: 350 EDCT MS 4232, College Station, TX 77843-4232, USA.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related questions or problems regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the institutional Review Board through Ms. Angelia Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067 (irb@tamu.edu OR araines@vprmail.tamu.edu).

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form. By signing this document, I consent to participate in this study.

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Signature of the Subject

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Date

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Signature of Principal Investigator

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Date

## APPENDIX C

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM (KOREAN)

## 인터뷰 동의서

## (한국예비유아교사들이 구성하는 놀이의 의미에 관한 질적 연구)

나는 한국 예비 유아교사의 놀이에 대한 인식과 태도를 알아보는 연구에 연구대상으로서 참여할 것을 제안 받았습니다. 왜냐하면 나는 유치원 교사를 양성하는 유아교육학과에 재학중인 대학생으로서 이 연구의 연구대상자로 적합하기 때문입니다. 나는 총 10 명의 연구대상이 이 연구에 참여한다는 것을 알고 있습니다. 나는, 이 연구의 목적이 질적 인터뷰를 통해서 한국 예비 유아교사가 놀이에 대해 어떠한 견해를 가지고 있는지를 알아보려는 것이라는 것을 인지하고 있으며, 이 연구는 Texas A&M 대학에서 Dr. Radhika Viruru 교수의 지도를 받고 있는 안수영의 박사학위 논문을 위한 것이라는 것을 알고 있습니다.

내가 이 연구에 참여하기로 동의하면 나는 놀이에 대한 나의 생각과 의견을 알아보는 인터뷰에 응하게 될 것입니다. 이 인터뷰는 60 분이 걸리며 연구자에 의해 녹음 될 것을 알고 있습니다. 또한 내가 이 연구에 참여함으로써 나에게 어떤 이익이나 불이익도 생기지 않을 것을 알고 있습니다.

인터뷰 자료는 연구가 끝날 때까지 (약 3년) 연구자에 의해 소중히 보관될 것이며 연구자 이외의 다른 어떤 사람에게도 유출되지 않을 것을 알고 있습니다. 인터뷰 자료는 연구목적 이외에는 절대로 사용되지 않으며, 어떤 형태로든 이 인터뷰로 인해 개인정보가 누출되지 않을 것입니다. 또한 연구가 끝남과 동시에 (약 3년 후) 인터뷰 자료는 연구자에 의해 소멸될 것을 알고 있습니다.

나는 언제든지 연구에 대한 참여를 거부할 수 있으며, 이는 나의 학점이나 성적에 아무런 불이익을 주지 않는다는 것을 알고 있습니다. 나는 연구에 관해 의문점이 있을 시에는, 연구자인 안수영이나 (Soo Young Ahn by one of the following: Tel: (214) 235-8322; E-mail: asy@neo.tamu.edu; and Mailing: 2400 Central Park In. #1707, College Station, TX 77840, USA.) 지도교수인 Dr. Radhika Viruru (by one of the following: Tel: (979) 845-8252; E-Mail: viruru@tamu.edu; and Mailing: 350 EDCT MS 4232, College Station, TX 77843-4232, US)에게 언제든지 문의할 수 있음을 알고 있습니다.

이 연구는 Texas A&M 대학의 Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in Research 에서 검증 받았으며, 연구 대상자와 관련된 의문점이나 문제점이 있을 시에는 Institutional Review Board 의 Ms. Angelia Raines 에게 문의할 수 있음을 알고 있습니다 (Ms. Angelia Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067 (irb@tamu.edu 또는 araines@vprmail.tamu.edu).

나는 연구 참여에 관한 모든 문서화된 설명을 제공 받았으며 의문점에 관해서는 충분한 설명을 듣고 이해하였습니다. 나는 이 동의서의 사본을 제공 받았으며, 서명을 함으로써 자발적으로 이 연구에 참여할 것에 동의합니다.

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 연구대상자의 서명

날짜

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 연구자의 서명

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