

Perceptions of Play
Among Educators in

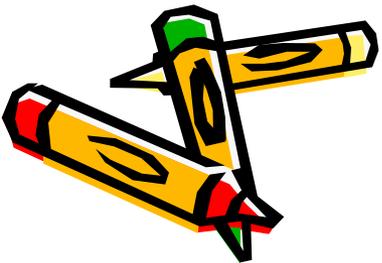
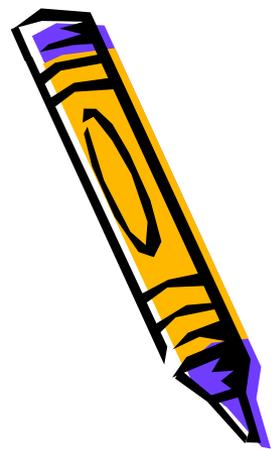
Shelley Smith
TASP May, 2006



Purpose of This Study

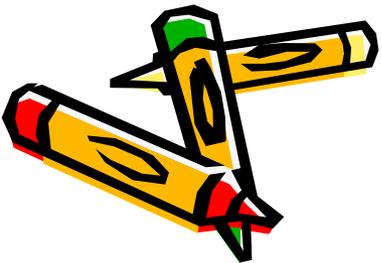
The purpose of this study is to:

- A) Explore educator's perceptions of play
- B) Determine how educators feel about play, particularly in Kindergarten and grade one
- C) Identify what ways educators can be assisted in using play in the classroom
- D) Uncover what barriers exist in providing play opportunities to children

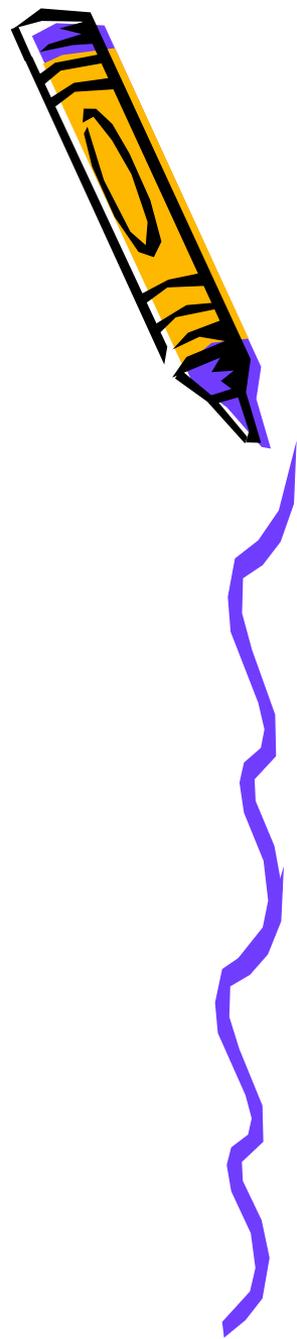


Importance of This Study

- The literature states that play supports early learning of pre-academic skills for primary aged children (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Pepler, 1987)
- However, the growing demands for teachers are pushing play to the outside of the curriculum (Bodrova and Leong, 2003)
- Questioning whether there is a critical assumption that play is valuable in the classroom in **ideology** or in **reality** is advantageous in the advancement of educational research

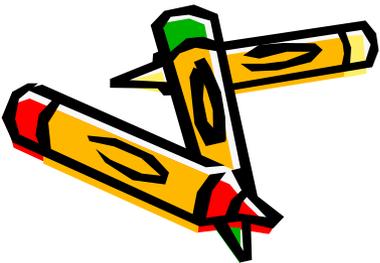


Historical Philosophers of Play



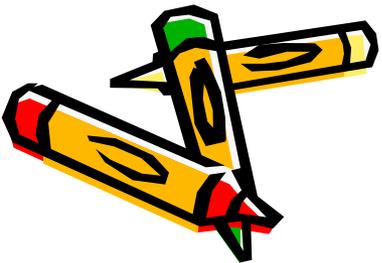
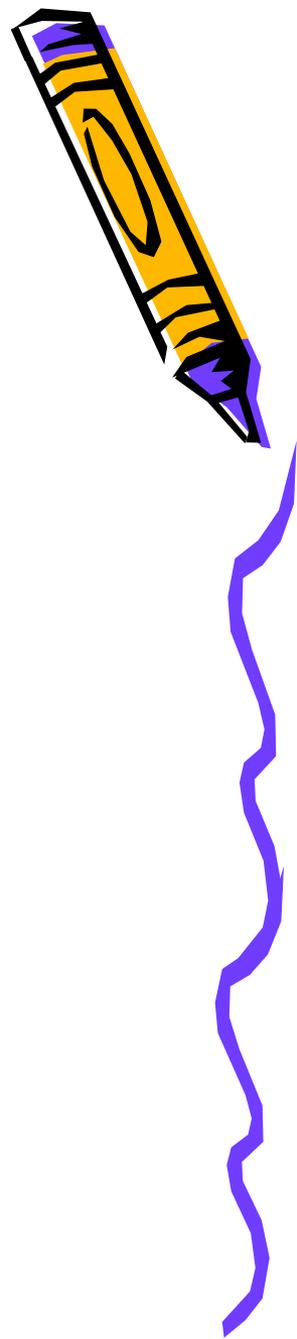
There are 6 popular philosophers of play:

- 1. Froebel
- 2. Montessori
- 3. Piaget
- 4. Vygotsky
- 5. Dewey
- 6. Gardener



Play Theories

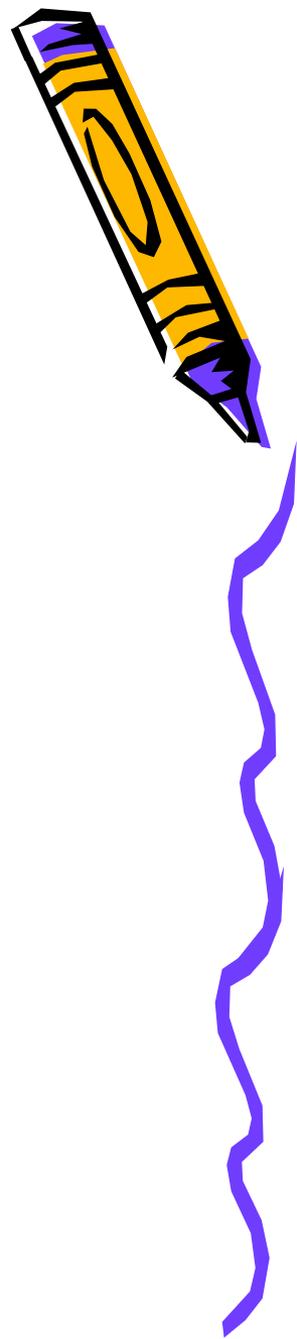
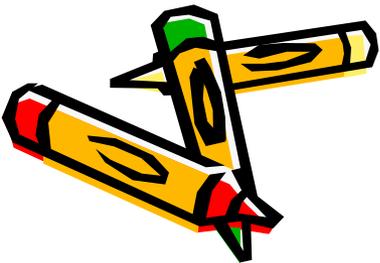
- 3 categories of play theories
 1. Classic
 2. Modern/dynamic
 3. Social / cognitive



Classical Theories (2)

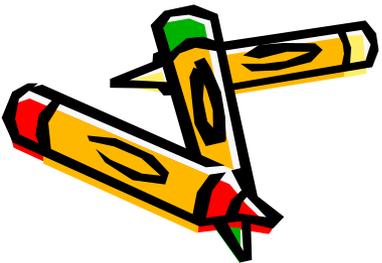
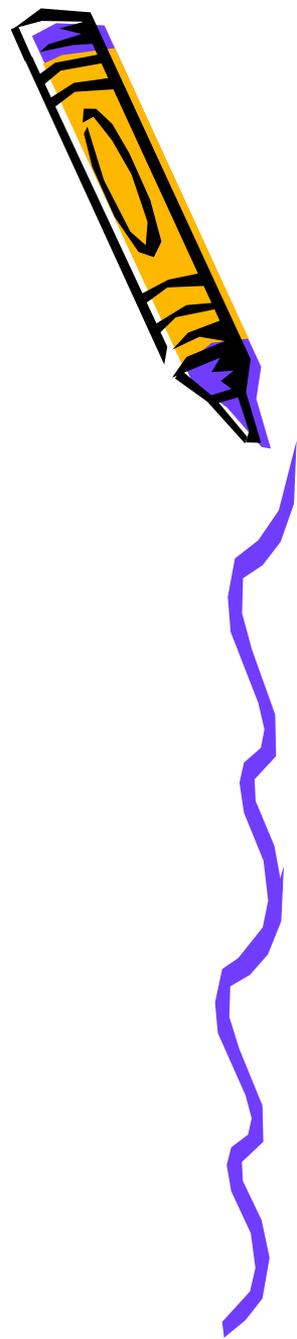
- Theorists were interested in explaining why play existed and what purpose play served
 - Classical theorists of play have often been describe as armchair theories of play as most theories were generated from reflections of the early philosophies of play rather than from play observation
- Schiller,
 - Spencer,
 - Lazarus,
 - Patrick
 - Hall,
 - Groos,
 - Schwartzman,
 - Huizinga and
 - Caillois

:



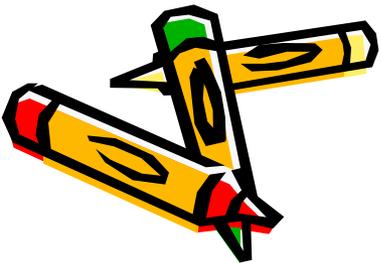
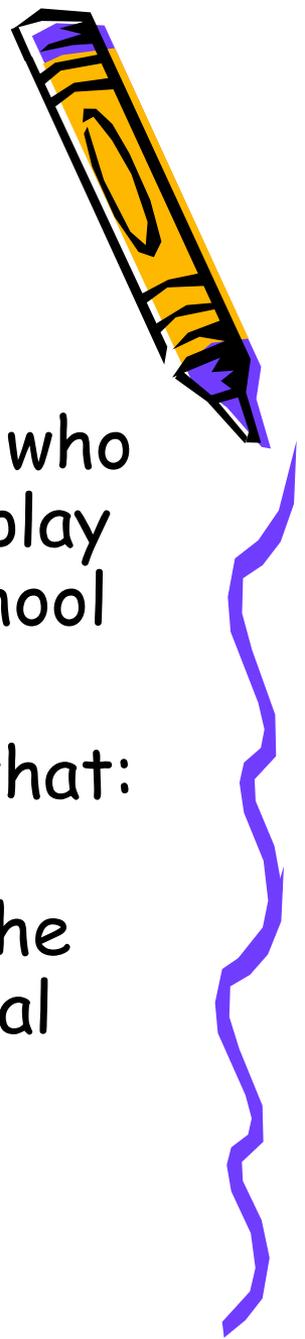
Modern / Dynamic Theorists

- Not only explain play's existence, but try to identify its functions
- Have also been referred to as dynamic theories and or contemporary theories
- Modern /Dynamic Theorists include :
 - Freud,
 - Erikson,
 - Murphy,
 - Berlyne
 - Ellis



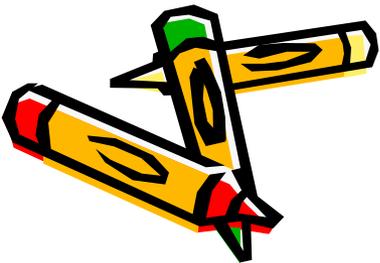
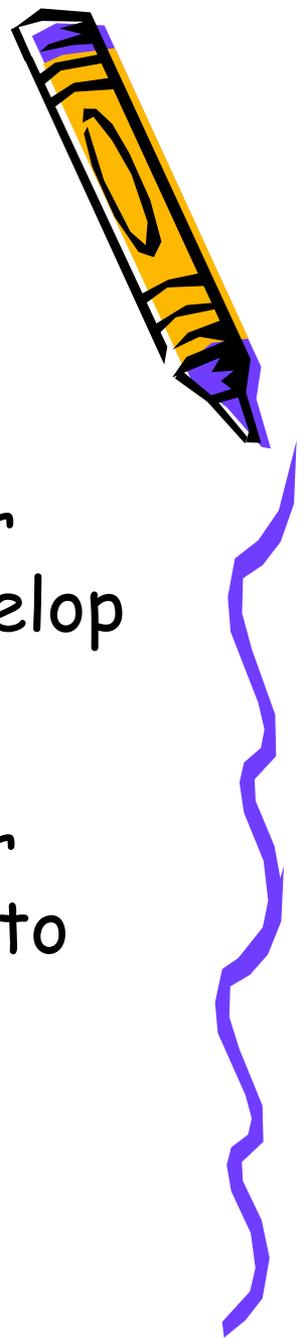
Ontario Curriculum Objectives

- In addition to play theories and theorists who identify the benefits of play, the role of play needs to be understood in the primary school context
- Ontario Ministry of Education identifies that:
 - there is a strong link between play and learning for young children, especially in the areas of problem solving, literacy and social skills



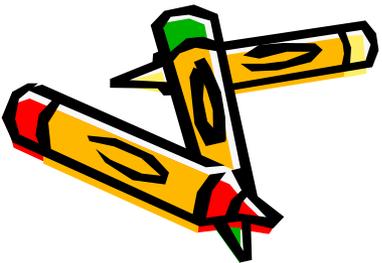
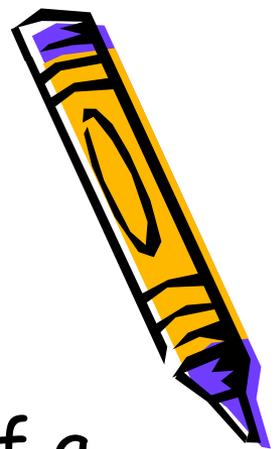
Ontario Curriculum Objectives (2)

- “play provides children with a medium to learn about themselves and explore their world. It is important that teachers develop an understanding of how children learn through play by observing and analyzing children’s play ... teachers should monitor play activities carefully and be available to assist with or extend the activities”
(Ontario Ministry of Education, 1975)



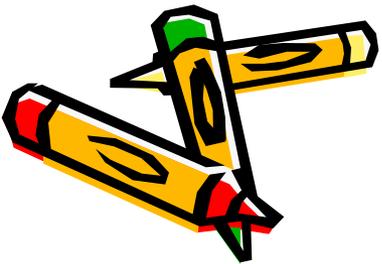
Research Methodology

- This study follows the characteristics of a qualitative study:
 - Creswell (1998) a qualitative study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon
 - Bogdan & Biklen (1998) state that phenomenological studies attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations.



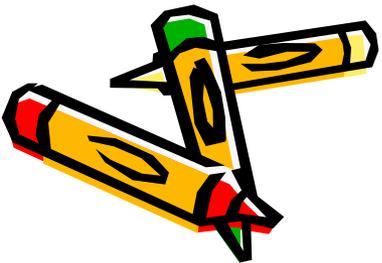
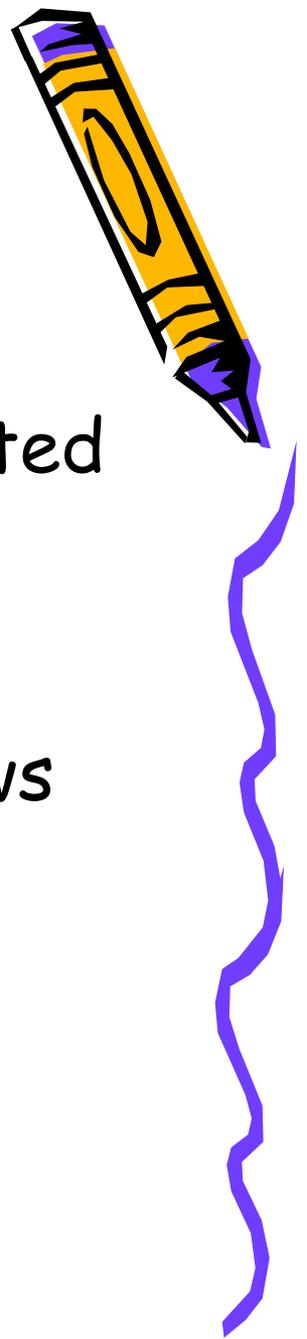
Research Methodology (2)

- cannot be classified as purely phenomenological, as I only included two samples from the pool of potential participants.



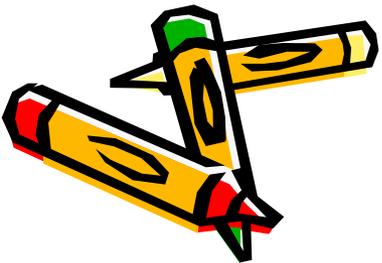
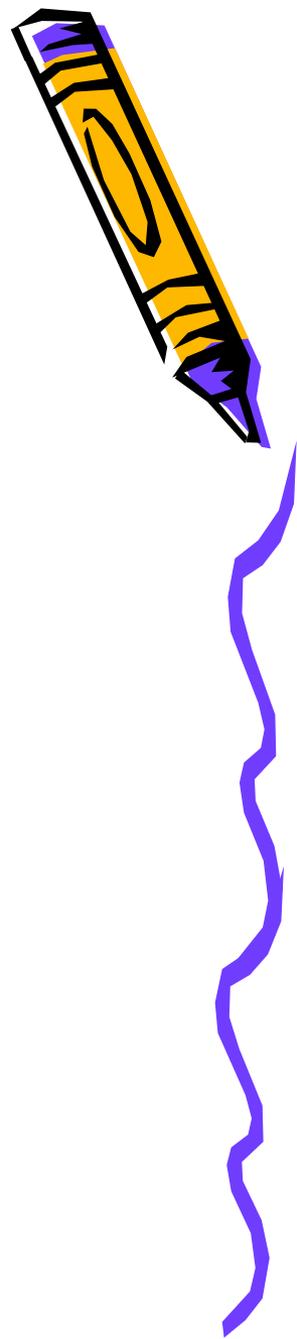
Data Collection

- Participants for this study were contacted through personal professional networks
- This study used a semi-structured interview design to conduct all interviews
- Each interview consisted of 12 semi-structured interview questions



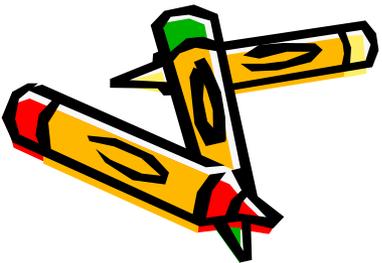
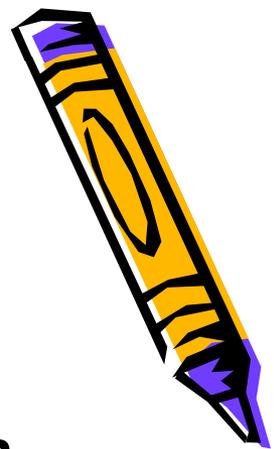
Participants

- 6 participants
 - 3 kindergarten teachers
 - Katie, Kathy, and Kathleen
 - 3 grade one teachers
 - Gina, Gloria and Grace



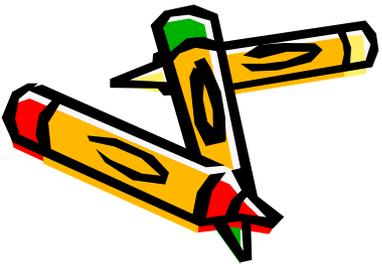
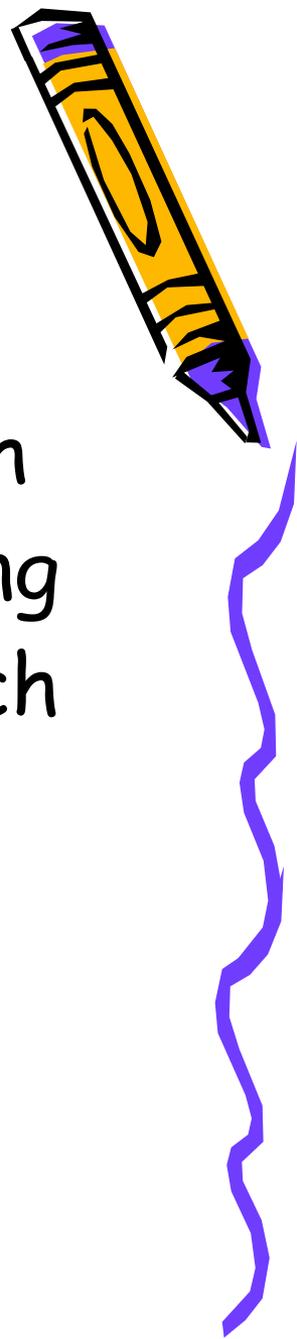
Data Analysis

- Successive approximation approach for analyzing data
- Raw data was recorded in a word processing document for open coding
- After the formation of categories axial coding commenced



Limitations

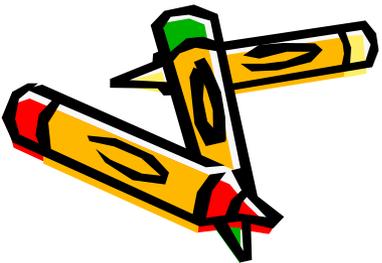
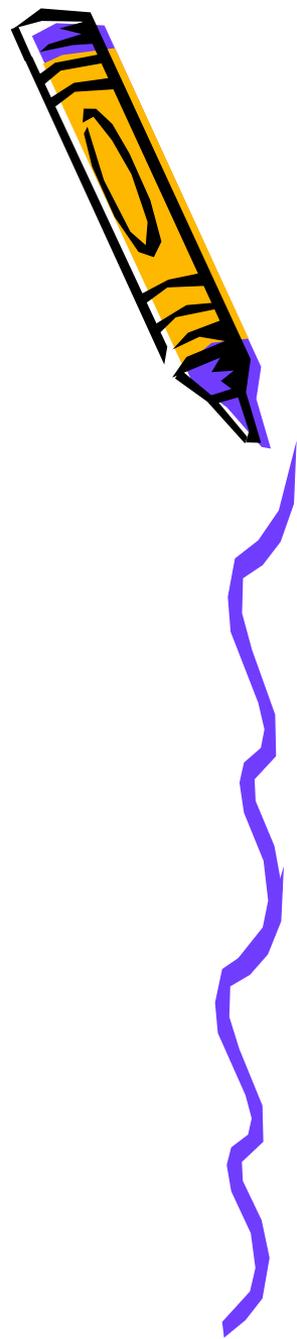
- The main limitation in this research study was a lack of time both during the interviews and the time in which the study had to be completed



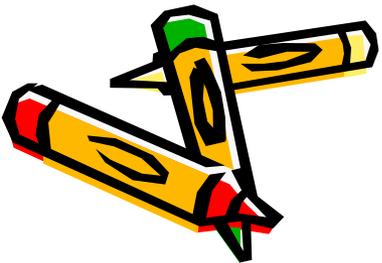
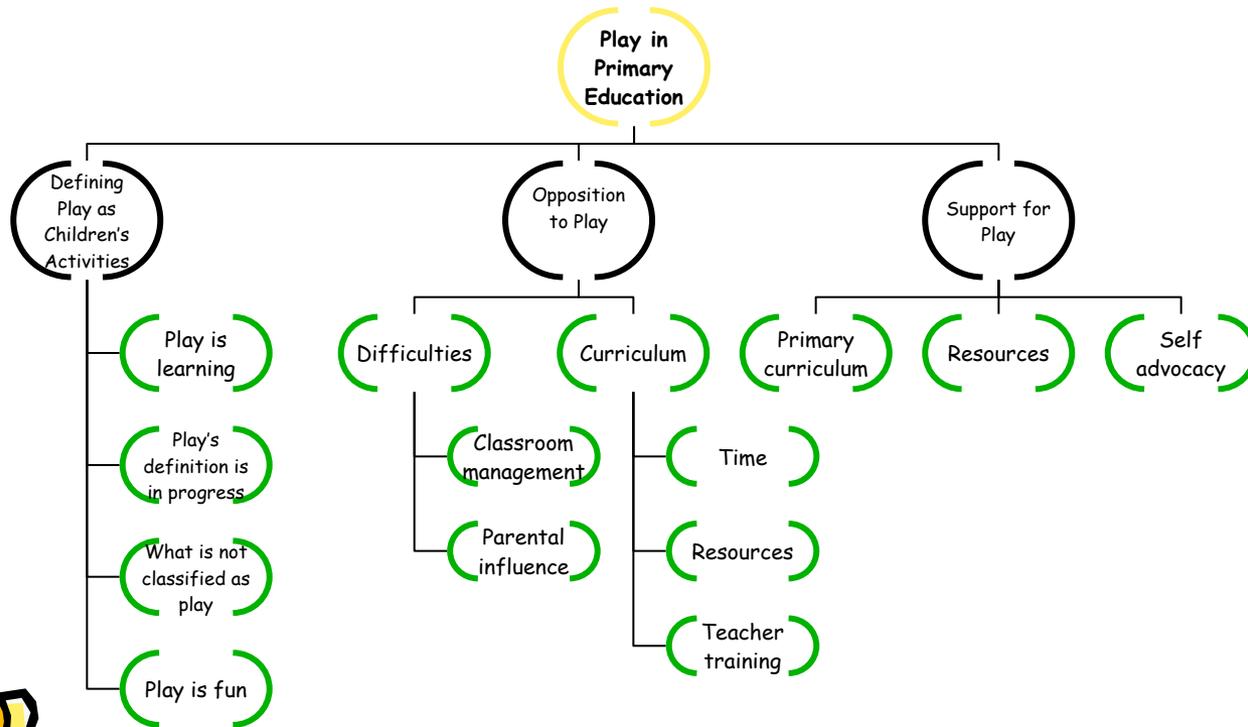
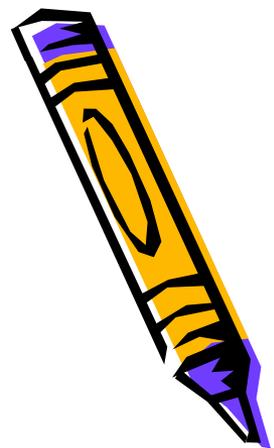
Research Findings

Three major themes emerged from the research findings. These themes include:

1. defining play as children's activities,
2. opposition to play,
3. support available for play in the classroom.



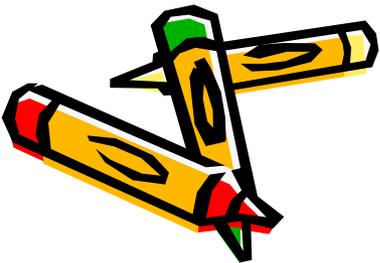
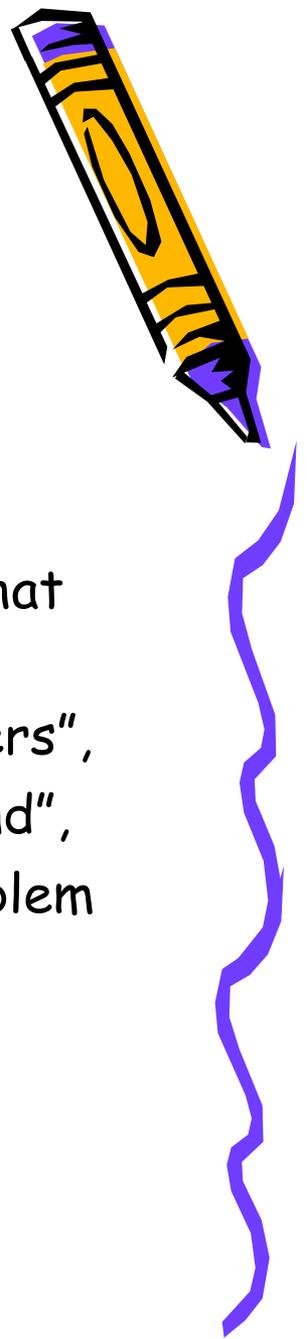
Diagram



Theme One:

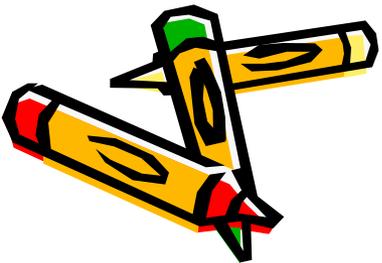
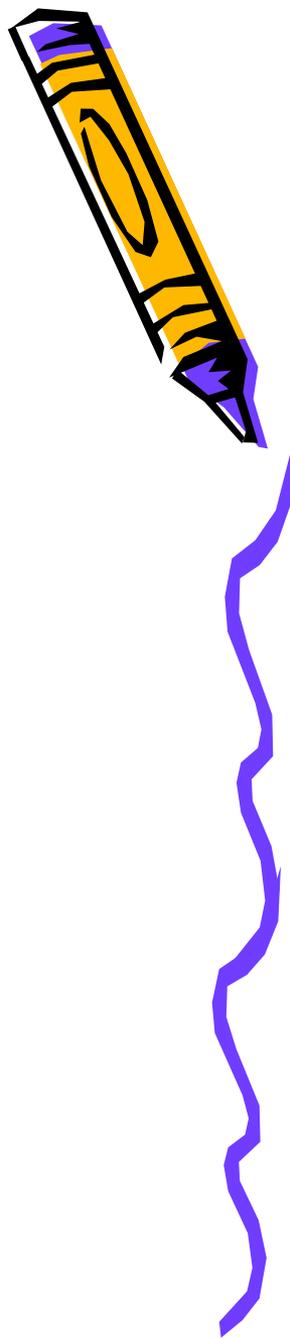
Defining play as children's activities

- This theme emerged from a main category in open coding identified as what play is.
- During the interview process participants were asked to define play, and were probed to explain how they would be able to recognize a child at play.
- "independent",
- "self guided",
- "freedom to choose what they play with",
- "involvement with others",
- "involves running around",
- "interactive" and "problem solving".



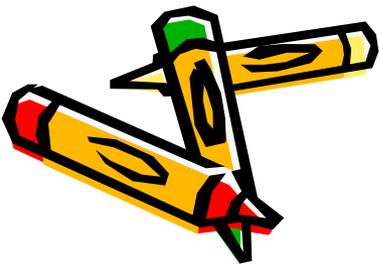
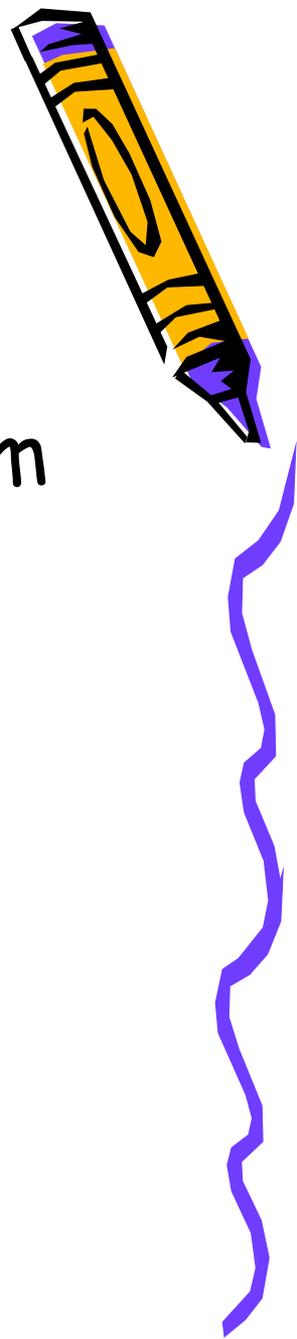
Theme One (2)

- four additional sub-themes emerged related to what play is, including;
- play is learning
- play is defined
- play is not and
- play is fun



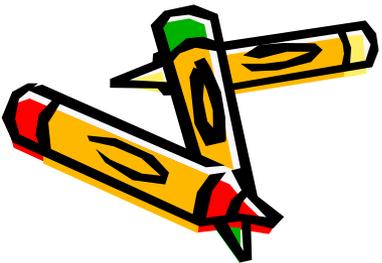
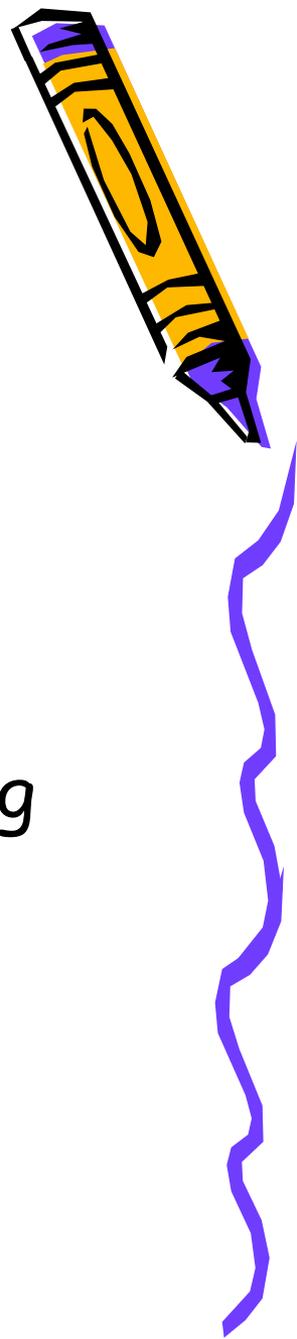
Theme Two: Opposition to play

- Opposition to play was derived from the open coding category of difficulties, curriculum, teacher education, parent/teacher involvement and availability of play



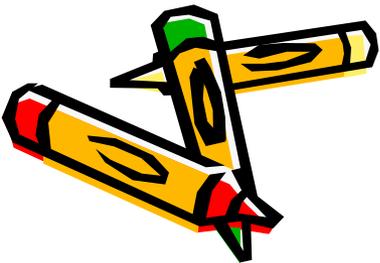
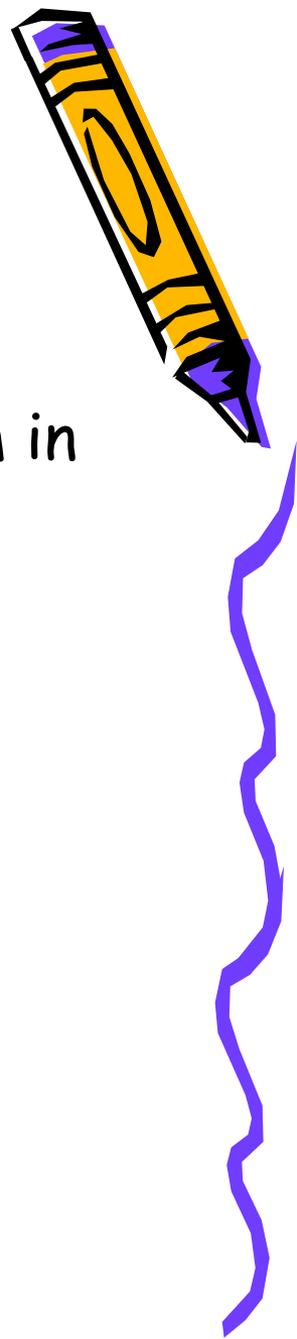
Theme Two: Opposition to play (2)

- Classroom Management
- Parental Influence
- Curriculum
- Time
- Classroom Resources
- Teacher Training



Theme Three: Support for play

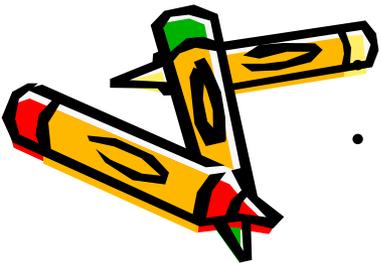
- This theme emerged after analyzing responses to what resources are available to teachers and how administrators and parents support play in primary classrooms
- Primary Curriculum in Support
- Resources
- Self Advocacy



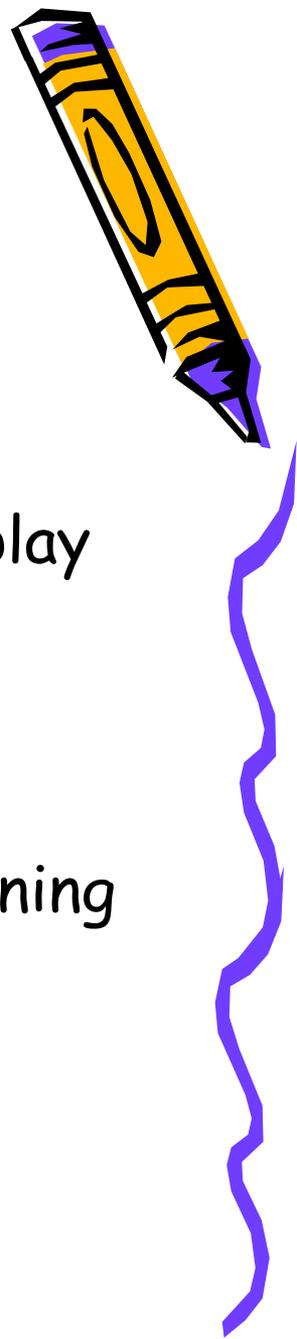


Comparisons of Kindergarten and Grade One Teacher's Perspectives

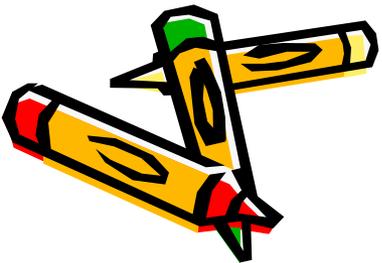
- Finally, there were several notable differences between views expressed by the kindergarten teachers and views expressed by the grade one teachers.
- These differences were analyzed as part of the selective coding process.
 - Length of the interview
 - time devoted to the interviews
 - defining play
 - opposition to play in the classroom



Discussion and Recommendations

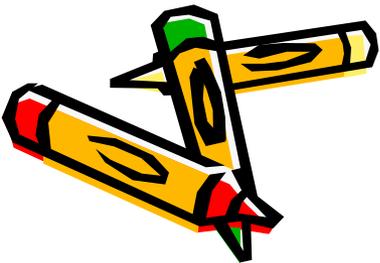


- Defining Play
 - lack of a definition clearly indicating what play is and what play is not contributes to a confusion among educators
 - the ambiguity of a formal definition of play contributes to weakness and difficulty defining and framing play Lofdahl (2005)

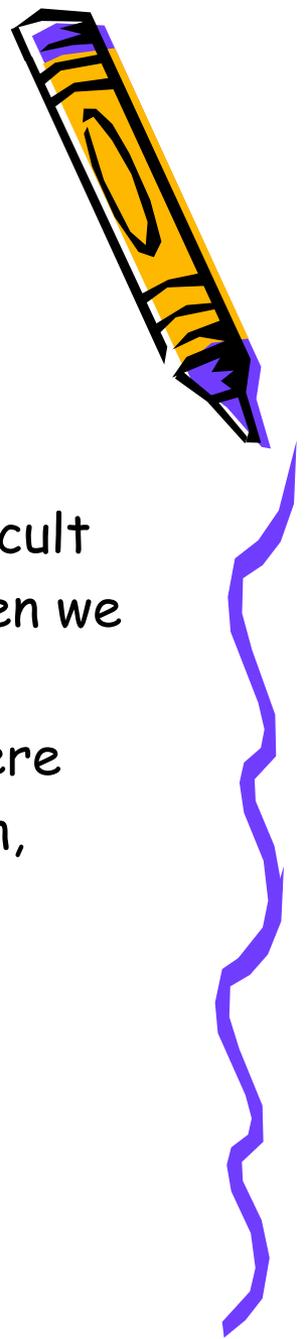


Discussion and Recommendations (2)

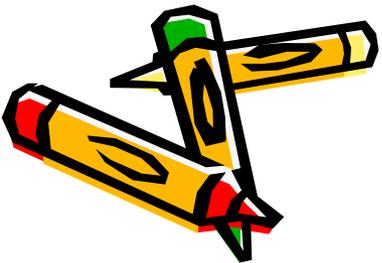
- What is Not Classified as Play
 - Participants from this study indicated that play is not anything violent
 - Critics argue against conceptualizations of play defined only in positive terms, since play hovers between chaos and harmony (Schwartzman, 1987). Play is not always "good"; it can be aggressive.



Discussion and Recommendations



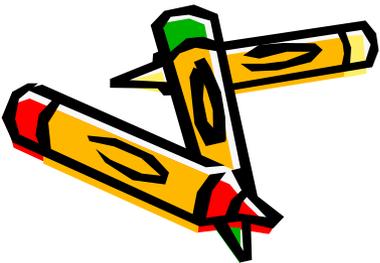
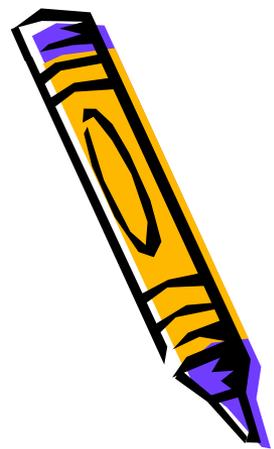
- Play is Fun
 - Educators in this study found that play was difficult to define, yet the attitude “we would know it when we see it” was present
 - While differences exist among the research, there are four main characteristics intrinsic motivation,
 - active engagement,
 - involvement of non-literal behaviour and
 - pleasure (Smith & Smith, 2000)



Opposition to Play

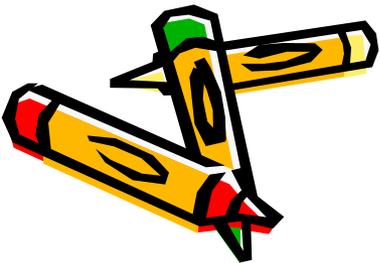
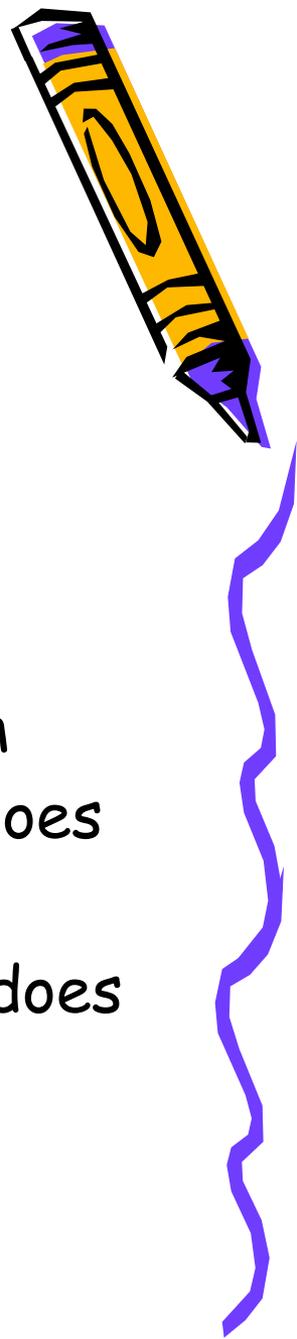
- Difficulties

- Weinger stated that play is the work of the child, neither as simple nor as pointless as most adults seem to believe
- We too frequently and mistakenly believe curriculum to be the sole subject matter suitable in schools.
- There is mounting evidence that learning occurs naturally during children's play (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002)



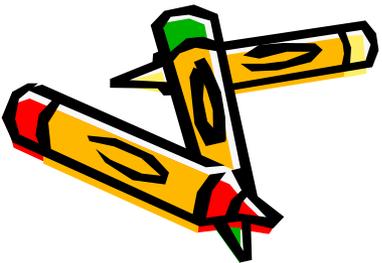
Support for Play in the Curriculum

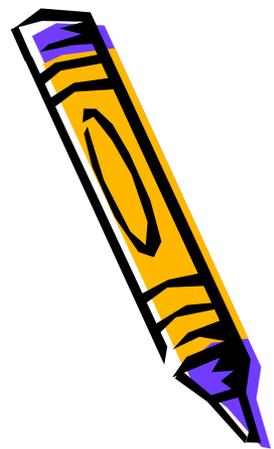
- Kindergarten teachers from this study agreed that the kindergarten curriculum supports the use of play in the classroom
- The curriculum for grades one to eight does not explicitly state that play should be included. However, The Arts curriculum does state that:





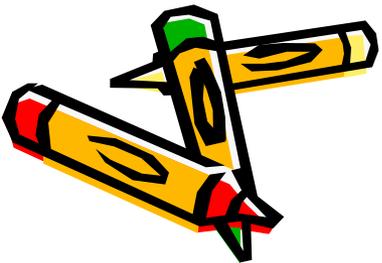
- focus not on materials but rather time available for planning
- There is a lack of scholarly data relating to how many resources educators feel are available to them
- providing more play resources will clearly lead to improved if not more play opportunities for children in their "free" recess time
- Educators also indicated that training would help support their efforts to provide quality programs in the classroom





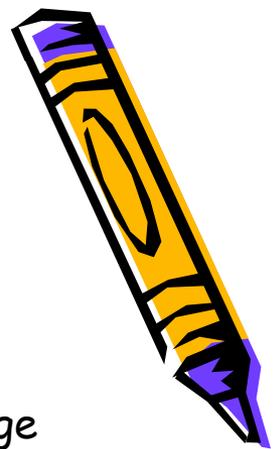
- ## Self Advocacy

- communication can be viewed as self advocacy or giving students a voice; as many of the participants in this study identified
- preschool children communicate with each other during play Garvey (1977)
- Garvey suggested that there are different types of communication that take place during play described as the here and now



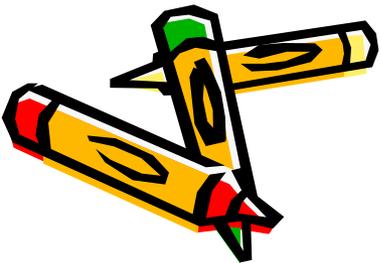
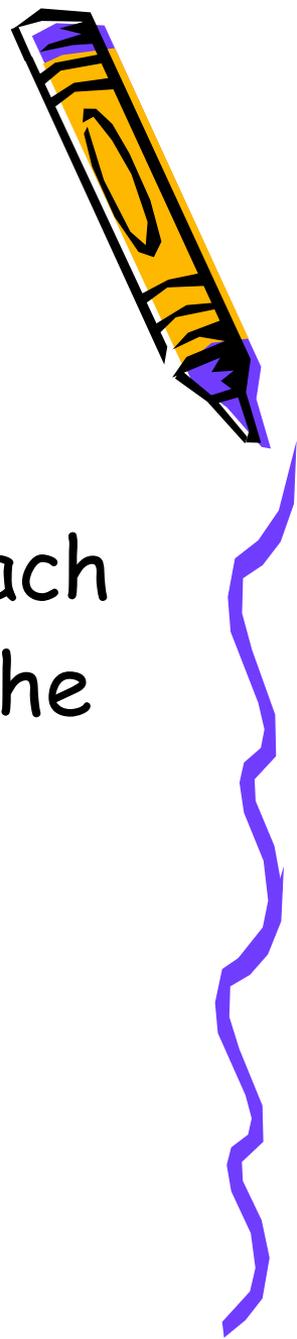
Recommendations

- Schwartzman (1978) cautioned researchers about attempts to define, or classify play because often attempts to classify play result in a reduction of play among children
- in order for educators to identify play when it happens, a working definition is required
- To amend this inadequacy of defining play, the following would be required from the Ontario Ministry of Education:
 - Clear, and consistent language describing what play is
 - Documents for teachers indicating what play opportunities should exist in kindergarten classrooms. Specifically including how long children should have to engage in free play daily



Opposition to Play

- Visitations from program coordinators at the beginning of each year, and periodically throughout the year, to assist teachers



Future Research

- Do children perceive school play as play?
- With the proper resources and training will educators experiment with play in their classrooms or will they rely on pencil and paper tasks?
- Can the play experience for Canadian children be enhanced by the programs the government offers for them?

