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**Play in Chinese kindergartens:
teachers' perceptions and practices**

By

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Declaration

The work in this thesis was entirely developed and conducted by the author. I hereby declare that, all the materials contained in the thesis are my own work except where explicitly stated otherwise. This thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

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Abstract

Play is widely recognized as a natural ability and fundamental right of children. In educational settings, the idea of integrating play into early childhood education to promote children's learning and development has been continually advocated by researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. However, as play is a culturally situated concept, it may be understood differently by teachers within different social and cultural contexts in terms of its function and value to children's development and its relation with learning. Moreover, Chinese educational reform underlines play-based pedagogy in early childhood education. This raises questions about how play is interpreted by Chinese early childhood teachers as a vehicle for early learning and motivates the current study to locate play in a Chinese context to explore kindergarten teachers' understanding and execution of play in practice.

A qualitative design with in-depth, open-ended interviews, persistent classroom observation, and documentary review was employed. Twenty-four early childhood education practitioners, including three administrators, three interest class teachers and eighteen teachers, two from each of nine classes in three different Chinese kindergartens were interviewed and the interactions between the teachers and individual children were video-recorded during playtime. A number of relevant official policy documents, regulations and kindergarten curriculum plans were collected to offer context for the research. Data was analyzed by adopting content analysis and constant comparison.

The findings show that the teachers construct a notion of 'eduplay' in the kindergarten educational settings, which emphasizes more on the instrumental value than the intrinsic value of play. A combination of a cultural transmission/direct approach and an emergent/responsive approach is revealed in their practice. The teachers adopt diverse roles in play. Although didactic features are evident in teachers' role in play, the teachers show strong desire to play a 'whole teacher' role and establish a parallel relationship with children. They share a similar view that teachers' active involvement can contribute to children's

learning in play and they are more likely to exert their influence on children's play through direct intervention than play provision. Moreover, the findings reveal that the teacher-child interactions in play in this study are less likely to scaffold children's learning. There seems to be a tension between teachers' concerns of safety and children's intense involvement in play. Three main influences, including the influences from the cultural context, the influences from the institutional context, and the influences from the teachers' personal context were identified affecting the implementation of play in kindergarten practice.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the research

Play is regarded as a natural ability, a basic activity and a valuable means through which children learn (Smith, 2010; Macintyre, 2001; Moyles, 1991; 2010; Else, 2009; Nutbrown, 2006). The importance of play has been recognized by many researchers from different disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, neuro-physiology, and education. There is a broad consensus that “young children need to play in order to learn about themselves, their culture, roles and relationships” (Wood & Bennett, 1997, p.22). The Association for Childhood Education International advocates that play is essential for children of all ages, domains and cultures (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). It is a dynamic process, through which children actively explore the environment around them, communicate with others, master their emotions, control their actions and reflect the social and cultural context within which they live. Evidence from brain research shows that play helps children to develop the necessary neurological connections in brain that are critical to learning (Shore, 1997; Gopnik, et al., 1999; Jensen, 2000). Play has been considered as essential and has a powerful influence on children’s learning (Wood & Bennett, 1997; Bennett et al, 1997). The ideology of play-based learning has become a fundamental framework in early childhood education, based on the ideas of educationists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Dewey, Friedrich Froebel, and Margaret MacMillan. In educational settings, play reveals children’s current level of development, the potential, and needs of learning, and enables teachers to provide support accordingly (Papatheodorou, 2010). Moreover, play has been perceived as integral to high-quality provision and effective pedagogical practice (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004; Wood, 2007) in the early childhood education. The significance of integrating play into the kindergarten practice has been continually advocated by researchers, policy-makers and teachers (Wood & Attfield, 2005).

In addition to the educational value of play, it is also widely recognized that play is a fundamental right of children (Frost & Norquist, 2007). Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children in all parts of the world have the right “to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child” (United Nations, 1989). In line with this development, the kindergarten educational reforms in China which took place respectively in 1980s and 1990s have reiterated the importance of play in early childhood education. The new kindergarten reform that started in 2001 has emphasized that kindergartens should provide play as a basic activity, and that play is expected to “permeate all activities, in each and every aspect of the lives of kindergarten children” (National Educational Commission, 2001).

1.2 Status of play in Chinese early childhood education

In China, previous research has shown that the status of play in Chinese early childhood education has been developed, along with the early childhood education reforms during the past century (Zhu & Wang, 2005; Rao & Li, 2009). Between 1920 and 1930, Chinese kindergarten education was mainly copied from that of Japan. Child-centered philosophies and practices were advocated, and play was included as content in the kindergarten curriculum at that time. In the 1950s, “the Soviet model of early childhood education was adopted and the child-centered approach was replaced by a more teacher-directed, subject-based approach” (Rao & Li, 2009, p.100). In this approach, more attention was paid to teachers rather than children (Ding, 2003; Liu, 2004) and “play was ignored or used simply as one of the ways to engage young children’s interests in group lesson teaching” (Liu & Feng, 2005, p.96). In 1989, the Chinese Education Commission issued “*The Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice*”. Play was stated officially as a basic component of children’s learning, and a developmentally appropriate teaching approach in kindergarten for the first time. However, since the idea was grounded on European cultural society, it was not completely in accordance with Chinese cultural traditions. Consequently, it encountered some difficulties in practice. Later, in early childhood educational policy documents which issued respectively in 1990, 1996, and 2001, the importance of play in

kindergarten education has been emphasized (Rao & Li, 2009). As a result, play-based teaching and learning has been advocated as an important principle and pedagogy of early childhood education in China, and teachers have been encouraged to adopt it in kindergarten practice (Wong & Pang, 2002; Liu & Feng, 2005). Although this shows the official attitude to play, the views of play of Chinese early childhood practitioners and how the policy advocated play-based teaching and learning is realized in kindergarten practice are not clear yet. Research in this field is needed to explore the significance of play-based pedagogy for practitioners.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Although play-based learning has been advocated in official documents as a critical principle to guide early childhood education, as “there is no unified theoretical or pedagogical base to guide practice” (Wood & Bennett, 1997, p.22), the value of play to children’s development may be understood and interpreted by different early childhood practitioners in different ways.

Evidence from research in European and North American society indicated that notable gaps were identified between the rhetoric of play and the reality of play in practice. Researchers argued that play occupies an insecure place in early childhood curriculum (Bennett et al., 1997; Wood & Bennett, 1997; Badzis, 2003; Wood, 2010). For example, Wood’s study (2004) revealed that play in some British nurseries and reception classes tend to be limited in frequency, duration and quality. Ailwood (2003) indicated that play activities in some early childhood settings are repetitive, isolating, and recreational rather than educational. The picture presented from Miller and Almon (2009)’s research showed that in some American kindergartens, play time is about 30 minutes or less, and is replaced by a prescribed formal curriculum, which is expected to provide learning outcomes for national education assessments. It seems that ensuring good quality play in practice remains a significant challenge to practitioners in different educational contexts (Keating et al., 2000; Wood & Bennett, 2001; Rogers & Evans, 2008; Rogers, 2011).

Culture is a key element in determining how people in different nations view play (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010). “Play can be seen as an effect of culture and each culture sees play in a distinct way, and the reaction of adult to children’ play also varies” (Yumi, 2010, p.80). Although the rhetoric-reality gap of play has been found among early childhood teachers in European heritage educational settings, the perceptions and practice of early childhood practitioners concerning play in other cultural and educational contexts may be similar or different. This implies that research into play in different cultures is necessary to expand insights in this field. Although some research concerning teachers’ understanding and interpretation of play has been conducted in countries such as American, England, Ghana and Malaysia, very few studies have been carried out in the Chinese context on this issue. As the cultural value of China is deeply influenced by Confucianism, early childhood practitioners’ perspectives and practice may also be influenced by it. Teachers’ understanding of play may further influence children’s experiences in their classrooms (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2007). Therefore, a number of questions arise, such as what are the Chinese kindergarten teachers’ understandings of the value of play to children’s learning and development? How do kindergarten teachers put these understandings of play into practice? These questions will be addressed in this research.

Play is very important for young children’s learning and development, while adults’ support has a crucial role in developing children’s play and learning experiences (Manning-Morton & Thorp, 2004). As Drake (2009) pointed out, free play in an ill-equipped environment with little thought given to offer opportunities and support is not likely to lead to appropriately challenging learning experiences for children. For the highest quality of learning experiences to take place, children’s play needs to be planned carefully, and appropriately supported by teachers. Vygotsky (1978) and Smilansky (1990) emphasized the important role of adults in children’s play. Vygotsky argued that adults’ support is critical in achieving the learning potential of children’s play. Smilansky, meanwhile, stated that adults’ guidance in play can help children to develop the complexity of play, and thus lead to their holistic development. However, Wood (2010) and Moyles et al. (2002) revealed that teachers face difficulties in

their provision of children's play, in particular their role in play. These studies suggested a need to carry out more research on both teachers' perceptions of their role in play and the roles which they have in children's play.

In addition to teachers' roles in play, concerns have been expressed about teacher-child interactions in play. Teacher-child interactions in play have been seen as a critical element in achieving the learning potential of play, and in turn, teacher-child interactions can also reflect teachers' beliefs, values and perspectives of children's learning (Kontos, 1999; Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2009; Jingbo & Ericker, 2005). Research has revealed that the content, frequency, ways and talk of teacher-child interactions in play directly influence the quality of play and children's learning experience and development (Kontos, 1999; Harper & McCluskey, 2003; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). This implies that more study concerning teacher-child interactions in play is needed, especially in view of the fact that some research has shown that inappropriate teachers' interventions in play has been identified that undermined and negatively influenced children's learning in play (Rogers & Evans, 2008; Wood & Cook, 2009).

Moreover, evidence from research shows that the implementation of a quality play-based pedagogy in early childhood programs remains a challenge to practitioners. Researchers have identified some barriers which impede the realization of play in early childhood education practice (Cheng & Stimpson, 2004; Kagan, 1990; Wood, 2010; Bennett, et al., 1997; Wood & Bennett, 1997; Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2004; Wood & Attfield, 2005; Shen, 2008; Badzis, 2003; Rogers, 2000; 2011; Keating et al., 2000). Research also indicates that some practitioners and parents still have a bipolar construction of play and work which leads to their undervaluing of play (DeVries, 2001; Rogers and Evans, 2008). Other researchers reported that there are some influences in the school context, including the requirements of the school-based curriculum, available time, space and material for play, teacher-children ratio, the professional training of teachers for play, and the arrangement of a school day influence the play implementation. Bennett et al. (1997) have pointed out that the pressure and expectations from kindergarten stakeholders affect the

provision of play. Parents, administrators, and school inspectors tend to value tangible learning outcomes and attainments of children, rather than the learning process and experience. This research suggests a further need to identify influential aspects that affect early childhood educators when implementing play in a learning environment.

1.4 Research aims and significance

From the discussion above, it is clear that play is advocated and emphasized in Chinese early childhood education documents as a basic means in early childhood teaching and early years learning. However, the following questions arise. Under the Chinese curriculum reform which promotes child-centered early education and emphasizes play as a major means of learning, what are the teachers' understanding and interpretation of play? What is the teacher-child interaction like in play? What are the difficulties that teachers face when integrating play in kindergarten practice? Therefore, the key aim of this study is to provide insights into Chinese early childhood practitioners' perceptions and execution of play, teachers' roles and interactions with children in play, and the influential aspects of implementation of play in practice, in order to inform both theory and practice decisions relating to the facilitation of play-based pedagogy in Chinese early childhood education.

Firstly, it is my hope that by conducting the research in Chinese context, the current study will give the voice of Chinese early childhood practitioners concerning their understandings of play, provide their interpretations of play in kindergarten practice, and identify teachers' need of offering quality play to children to be heard by government and research communities.

Secondly, this study may provide insights and expand the discourse about play in the international early childhood educational field. The findings may theoretically enrich the knowledge of play-based pedagogy and early childhood education.

Thirdly, current research may lead to early childhood educators reflecting and rethinking their pedagogy and practice about play, arouse their interest in exploring better practice of play, and communicate their experience with colleagues more widely.

Fourthly, by identifying influences of implementing high-quality play, the research could offer some implications to stakeholders of early childhood education such as policy-makers, kindergarten administrators, and parents, to promote the quality of play in kindergarten, children's learning experiences and improve early childhood education programs.

Fifthly, by exploring the challenges that Chinese kindergarten teachers encounter in implementing play into practice, this research may be able to inform teachers' educational institutions and kindergarten administrators in China to improve the teacher training programs according to teachers' needs, and to prepare them to adopt play-based pedagogy in early childhood education. Findings are also expected to give some implications to kindergarten administrators to offer and improve in-service training of play implementation to teachers.

1.5 Definitions of terms

The main terms involved in this study may be defined as follows:

Play----- play is defined differently by different researchers. As it is perceived as a complex and ambiguous concept which covers a wide range of activities, it is necessary to devise a clear definition of play for the current study, before carrying out the research. Based on the definitions and forms of play discussed in the literature, play in the current study may be defined according to the following characteristics:

- (1) Play in this research does not refer to any single type of play. It contains all the activities that have the characteristics of being funny, playful, interesting, and enjoyable (Göncü et al., 2000).

- (2) Players are actively engaged in activity (Rubin et al., 1983; Smith & Vollstedt, 1985).
- (3) Play not only includes teacher-initiated, or arranged play activities but also includes children's free play (Rao & Li, 2009)
- (4) Play includes practical play, imaginative play, constructive play, and games with rules (Piaget, 1962).

Kindergarten-----In this study, kindergarten refers to a main type of early childhood educational center in China which provides both care and education for three to six or seven years old children (Rao & Li, 2009).

Perceptions-----In this study, the term perceptions refers to teachers' beliefs, understandings, perspectives, opinions, viewpoints, values and personal theories of play for young children in the kindergarten (Shen, 2008).

Practices-----The term practices refers to all the behaviours and actions of kindergarten teachers when providing education and care to children.

1.6 Outline and structure of the thesis

This thesis is composed of eight chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the influential literature about play in which the definitions, constructs, theories and value of play are presented and discussed. Following this, the chapter synthesizes and analyses the literature concerning relationships between play and early childhood education, play and children development, and play-based pedagogy to provide the theoretical framework for the current research. From this literature review, I have distilled the five research questions.

Chapter 3 describes the early childhood education context in China in which the current study takes place. Firstly, the historical context of Chinese early childhood education is reviewed. Then, the contemporary early childhood education system in China is introduced, including early childhood educational and administrative institutions, the general situation concerning kindergarten systems, and early childhood teachers' qualification and training.

This is followed by a discussion of educational reforms and the curriculum of Chinese early childhood education. The chapter continues to describe the one-child policy and its influence on early childhood education, and discusses the influence of cultural beliefs on early childhood education. Finally, the chapter draws attention to policy and legislation in Chinese early childhood education.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed justification of the methodological issues of the current study. It starts with a discussion of why and how the qualitative paradigm was chosen, the data collection methods, namely interviews, observation and documentary review. The chapter outlines the research process and particular procedures, including the detail of sampling, gaining permission from the participants, and gathering research data followed by presenting the data analysis. Finally, methodological issues of ethical consideration, language consideration, trustworthiness, reflection on the research methods and process are discussed.

Chapter 5 presents the interpretation and analysis of Chinese kindergarten teachers' perspectives of play. The findings are presented systematically, and according to the research questions. First of all, it offers the official interpretation of play in early childhood education policies and documents and teachers' view of it. Then, it provides the findings of how kindergarten teachers view play, and the relationship between play and child development. After that, teachers' reports on the implementation of play in kindergarten practice are discussed. Furthermore, teachers' viewpoints in terms of their involvement in children's play are interpreted. Finally, teachers' points of view about their interaction with children during play are provided.

Chapter 6 focuses on the observational findings of play implementation in the participant kindergartens' daily routines. It begins with the discussion of the play context in different kindergartens. Then, the chapter moves on to present the observed types, roles and proportions of play in kindergarten activities. The teachers' roles in play are discussed and presented. The chapter ends with a discussion of teacher-child interactions in play in practice.

Chapter 7 discusses some important issues concerning teachers' beliefs and the practice of play. It begins from an interpretation of teachers' understanding of play, reflected from their perceptions and practices, and then compares play in three different kindergarten contexts. The chapter then moves on to analyze the roles that teachers play in practice and the features of teacher-child interactions in play. This is followed by a discussion of the influences that affect the realization of play in kindergarten practice.

Chapter 8, the concluding chapter, summarizes the findings of this study, and then describes the implications and limitations of the research. It reviews the objectives that were outlined in chapter 1 and gives recommendations for future research in the area of play-based pedagogy.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The literature review provides a theoretical basis of research on play, presents the relationship between play and early childhood education, and reviews relevant studies in this field that have informed the framework of the current research. The chapter consists of four major sections. In the first and second sections, the definition of play and construct of play and work are presented. The third section discusses the function of play. The fourth section looks at the meaning of play in early childhood education, including the value of play to children's learning and development, and the pedagogy of play, the reality of play in early childhood educational practice, the role of teachers in children's play, teacher-child interactions in play, and aspects influencing play implementation in an early childhood education context. The fifth part introduces the focus and research questions of the current study, which are narrowed down by reviewing the related literature.

2.1 Definition of play

The definition of play has been contested since the nineteenth century. Researchers from different disciplines such as biology, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and education attempted to give a definition of play. As a result, play has been defined and theorized in many different ways (Fleer, 2009). For example, Fromberg (1992) stated that play is those activities which have the characteristics of being symbolic, meaningful, pleasure, voluntary and intrinsically motivated, rule-governed, and episodic. Saracho (1991) defined play based on the dispositions that players bring to activities (see Figure 2.1).

- ▲ Play is personally motivated by the satisfaction embedded in the activity and is not governed either by basic needs and drives or by social demands.
- ▲ Players are concerned with activities more than with goals.
- ▲ Play occurs with familiar objectives, or following the exploration of unfamiliar objects.
- ▲ Play activities can be non-literal.
- ▲ Play is free from rules imposed from the outside, and the rules that do exist can be modified by the players.
- ▲ Play requires the active engagement of the players.

Figure 2.1 Dispositions in Play

Göncü et al. (2000) pointed out that play is evident when there is a sense of playfulness and fun. Meckley (2002) suggested that play is characterized by events or activities that are child-chosen, child-invented, pretend, focus on the doing, controlled by the players, active involvement, and fun. Bergen (2009) listed four traits of play: fun, internal control, intrinsic motivation, and internal reality. Gray (2009) proposed five criteria of play which include “self-chosen and self-directed; intrinsically motivated; structured by mental rules; imaginative; produced in an active, alert, but unstressed frame of mind” (p.480). Elkind (2008) saw play as “a form of exercise for creative dispositions---for imagination, for curiosity, for fantasy” (p.1). These examples show a diversity of views of what defines play.

It is clear that these diverse definitions are significant attempts to conceptualize and interpret the nature of play in different ways. As “play is multifaceted, diverse, and complex, it resists easy definition” (Dyson, 2008, p.iv). From the literature, although functional, structural, criteria-based and continuum approaches are adopted to define and categorize play (Smith, 2010), due to the complexities, diversity, and ambiguous characteristics of play (Sutton-Smith, 2008), there is a lack of a consensus over the definition of play among researchers (Smith & Vollstedt, 1985; Saracho, 1991; Wood, & Attfield, 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999; Ailwood, 2003; Duncan & Lockwood, 2008; Fleer, 2009; Else, 2009; Wineberg & Chicquette, 2009).

As Fleer (2009) indicated, some activities and behaviours children engaged in could be seen as play by one researcher or not by another. The definitions of play which developed over

time have presented a rather complex picture. As Wood and Attfield (2005) stated that play is,

...infinitely varied and complex. Play represents cognitive, cultural, historical, social and physical interconnections, involving dialogue between reality and fantasy, between real and not real, between real worlds and play worlds, between past, present and future, between the logical and the absurd, between the known and the unknown, between the actual and the possible, between safety and risk, and between chaos and order (p. 7).

The above-mentioned definitions of play have been framed within a European heritage cultural context, while Chinese define play differently by using different language. Chinese use 'you' (游), 'xi' (戏), 'ao' (遨), 'xi' (嬉) interchangeably to refer to 'play' (Huang & Qing, 2006). All these words suggest that play is different from 'work' which is serious. 'You' and 'ao' emphasize activities which are frolicsome, 'xi' (戏) underlines activities which are funny, and 'xi' (嬉) stresses on self-entertainment. The original meaning of these words is related to actions or sports, which are characterized by 'yi'--- relaxing (Huang & Qing, 2006; Liu, 1999). Play is regarded as a kind of relaxing and entertaining activity that relates to sports, actions, and art. More importantly, it is considered as a frivolous and valueless activity (Liu, 1999; Ding, 2003). From these meanings, it appears that the challenge of defining play also exists in the Chinese context, as there is no consensus over the definition of play.

This literature suggests that defining play is not "simply a contemporary challenge, but rather something that has been with us as a profession for a long time" (Fleer, 2009, p.2). Wood and Attfield (2005) indicated that understanding play is a culturally situated process, because play is always influenced by wider social, historical and cultural contexts. The perceptions of play are closely related to cultural contexts, and the interpretation and value of play might vary in different cultures (Ahn, 2008). It suggests that play is a culturally and socially influenced concept. When understanding play, it is essential to take the specific social and cultural context into account (Saracho, 1991; Göncü et al., 2000; Wood, &

Attfield, 2005; Fler, 2009). Therefore, this research attempts to look at teachers' understanding of play in a Chinese context.

2.2 Play and work

Hendrick (1997) indicated that the construct of the "school child" during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to the separation of childhood from adulthood and play from work (cited in Ailwood, 2003, p.293). As child labour was prohibited by legislation in Britain and other European countries, childhood was defined as a particular phase of human development, and play was considered as the activity of children. Play is "a highly differentiated and separate activity --- an activity that separates children from the real, adult world" (Strandell, 2000, p.147). From Standell's view, when play is connected with children, play is something trivial, not rational or real. This concept of child's play "contributes to the separation of children from adult society" (Ailwood, 2003, p.292). Moreover, "creating the notion of play as the work of childhood has been one powerful regime through which early childhood has been produced and separated from adulthood" (Ailwood, 2003, p.293). It seems that a dichotomized conception of play and work can still be reflected in modern conception of childhood which constructs play as an important feature of childhood. As children are free from social responsibility, they do not work, play is considered to be primarily the activity of children (Wyness, 2012). Play is funny and relaxing, while work is the opposite of play which is serious and only adults engage in (Wyness, 2012; Rogers & Evans, 2008). Play, therefore, is connected to childhood and early childhood education. The advocating of using play in early childhood education can be traced back to Rousseau and Pestalozzi in the context of the Enlightenment and Romantic eras (Kagan, 1990; Ailwood, 2003; Smith, 2010). Rousseau cited by Hughes (2010) stressed the philosophy of "naturalism" (p.11) and a child-centered view which implies that "play is a natural expression of childhood that should be fostered" (Smith, 2010, p.22). Later, Froebel cited by Smith (2010) believed that play is an important means for children's learning and development. He first introduced play into the activities in his kindergarten for educational purposes. Nevertheless, he encouraged a positive evaluation of the educational significance of play which mainly

stresses on highly-structured play activities. This trend of using play for educational outcomes also develops within the contemporary kindergarten practice. As Rogers and Evans (2008) showed that there is “a paradox between the inherent value of play as an intrinsically motivated activity and free from adult-imposed demands in opposition to the obligatory nature of work and the emphasize of play for educational ends” (p.15-16). The notion of ‘school readiness’ greatly influenced the status of play in early childhood education (Ailwood, 2003). ‘Play with a purpose’ has not only been inscribed in the rhetoric of educational policy, but also stressed and featured through teaching practice (Rogers & Evans, 2008, p.14). According to Wood and Attfield (2005), this dichotomy between work and play means that “play lacks status and credibility, particularly in relation to children’s learning and tangible outcomes” (p.11). They argued that the polarization between work and play has evolved with diverse definitions of play and conflicting perspectives about its relationship with learning. In practice, “the division between play and work within the context of school is marked not simply by the ways in which play is often relegated to specific times and places, positioned in opposition to work, but also in the ways in which play, wherever it is enacted in school, is shaped by the contextual features that surround it” (Rogers & Evans, 2008, p.16).

2.3 Function of play

Historically, functions of play were explained by the classical and modern theories of play in different ways based on different rationales. For instance, influenced by Darwin’s evolution theories, Friedrich Schiller and Herbert Spencer cited by Ding (2003) saw play as a way to discharge excess energy. Their surplus energy theory claimed that animals and humans play when they have excess energy. In contrast, Moritz Lazarus (1883, as cited in Fleer, 2009) considered play as a means to restore human energy rather than discharging of surplus energy. Patrick cited by Saracho and Spodek (1995) expounded that play is the behavior through which human can relax from pressure which caused by strenuous work, and revitalize energy consumed during work. Groos (1898, as cited in Fleer, 2009) believed that play provides opportunities for animals to exercise the skills which they need for survival,

and it is a way through which children practice the skills they needed in adult life. He termed this as 'exercise' or 'practice' theory of play. Hall (1906) cited by Fler (2009) argued in his recapitulation theory that play is a means for children to rehearse the stages of human evolution.

The diversity of explanations of play can also be reflected from the modern theorization of play (Fler, 2009). For instance, Panksepp (2008) from a neuroscience perspectives, believed that "...joyous enthusiasm to engage playfully with others' is essential for the active construction of the social brain" (p.56). The psychoanalytic perspective of play, based on the work of Freud and advanced by Menninger and Erikson, explained that play offers an opportunity through which children can release their emotional tension in a harmless way and satisfy their desire that cannot be fulfilled in the reality (cited in Ding, 2003). Play therapists such as Homeyer and Tomlinson (2008) believed that "children's play is a symbolic expression of their world" (p.213). The arousal modulation theories of play, developed by Berlyne, Ellis, Hutt and Fein, suggested that play is the means by which children seek stimulation to maintain the desired arousal level of their central nervous system (Ding, 2003). Bateson (1972) elucidated in his meta-communication theory that play is evident when players frame events, through attitude, pretence, vocalization and other meta-communicative cues. He further argued that play impacts upon evolution of the individuals' descendants. It is "a form of plasticity" that individuals can acquire skills, experience, and understanding of the environment, and solve problems through it (Bateson, 2011, p.46). The cognitive developmental theory of play, proposed by Piaget (1962), suggests that play is a kind of assimilation process, through which children take new information from the outside world to fit into their already existing schema and play reflects children's cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) argued that play has a significant effect on children's development as it creates children's "zone of proximal development" in which "a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour, in play he is, as it were, a head above himself" (p.74). It is his view that a child liberates his or her thought in play from the immediate situational constraints in real world to the idea world. At the same time, play provides an opportunity for them to experience confidence and mastery (ibid).

Sutton-Smith (2008) argued that play, provides a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere in which children can learn to solve various problems. The flexible nature of play is significance to children's creative problem-solving.

These theories have "to some extent reflected the spirit of (their) times and in some way had some explanatory power at the time of (their) formulation" (Ellis, 1973, p.23). The development of the classic theories is of crucial significance in changing the traditional perspectives of play which had not taken play seriously for a long time. These classic theories of play mentioned earlier had built up a theoretical basis for contemporary perspectives of play. All these important works have facilitated researchers and educators who are interested in young children to construct their understanding of play, to explore and discuss the learning potential of play and adults' roles in achieving this potential (Fleer, 2009). These theories informed the current study's construction of a research framework.

2.4 Play in early childhood education

It seems that research and relevant literature concerning play and play-based learning have focused on the following aspects: early childhood practitioners', parents' and children's perceptions of play (see Badzis, 2003; Rogers & Evans, 2008; Dako-Gyeke, 2009; Papatheodorou, 2010; Rao & Li, 2009); the reality of play or play-based learning in practice (see Keating et al., 2000; Wood & Bennett, 2001; Wood & Attfield, 2005; Rogers & Evans, 2008; Rogers, 2011; Wood, 2004; 2007; 2010; Pramling-Samuelson & Fleer, 2009); adults' roles in children's play (see Rogers, 2000; Moyles et al., 2002; Wood & Attfield, 2005; Van Hoom, et al., 2003; Shen, 2008; Fleer, 2009); teacher-child interactions in play (see Jingbo & Elicker, 2005; Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2009; Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2009; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011); and influences that affect play implementation in the early childhood context (see Wood, 2007; Rogers & Evans, 2008; Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Shen, 2008; Wood, 2010).

Research has provided substantial evidence to support the role of play in lifelong learning and well-being, while play is typically valued in early childhood (Wood, 2007). Both classic and contemporary theories imply the significance of play in children's development. Over the past few decades research has documented that play has a critical role in the optimal growth, learning and development of children (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978; Else, 2009).

2.4.1 Play and child development

There is a wide range of literature, both theoretical and empirical, affirming the value and significance of play in young children's learning and development. Play is regarded as a valuable means through which children learn (Smith, 2010; Macintyre, 2001; Moyles, 1991; Else, 2009; Nutbrown, 2006). Evidence from research shows that high-quality play contributes to a wide range of positive outcomes for children in the cognitive, social, emotional and physical domains (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2003; Wood, 2004).

2.4.1.1 Perspectives of play and child development in European heritage culture

Piaget believed that play provides an opportunity for children to consolidate knowledge and skills that children already possess rather than promoting children to learn new information (Piaget, 1962). His perspective of cognitive development involves two important processes---assimilation and accommodation, introduced by him from biology to explain the instinctual mechanisms of human behaviour and thinking patterns (Piaget, 1983). Assimilation means taking new information from the outside world and fitting it into one's already existing schema, while accommodation refers to adjusting one's existing schema to fit in with the nature of the environment (Piaget, 1962). Piaget conceptualized play as a predominance of assimilation over accommodation (ibid). In Piaget's viewpoint, cited by Hughes (2010), play "is the incorporation of new intellectual material into already existing cognitive structures without a corresponding alteration of the structure themselves" (p.28).

According to Piaget (1983), children construct their own knowledge actively, and they move through four identifiable phases during this construct process. These stages include the sensorimotor stage from birth to two years, the pre-operational stage from two to seven years, the concrete operations stage from seven to eleven years and the stage of formal operations from eleven to fifteen years. Based on the cognitive development stages, Piaget described a developmental sequence in children's play accordingly. This sequence went from 'practice play', through 'symbolic play', to 'game with rules' during the childhood years (Piaget, 1962). From his perspectives, play can reflect children's intellectual development and development in turn leads play (ibid). Moreover, Piaget (1962) mentioned that play has two possible functional significances. For one thing, it may strengthen existing skills by repeated execution of known schemas with minor variations, for another, it can give children the sense of confidence and mastery. Piaget's perspectives elucidated the value of play in children's learning and development.

Besides, Vygotsky (1978) also explained his view on children's play. An important theoretical idea that Vygotsky argued is that play creates an imaginary situation through which children can separate their thoughts from actions and objects. According to Vygotsky (1978), under the age of three, children's thoughts are constrained by the actual visible things and real actions. They tend to focus on objects in their surroundings. As children develop, they need to get some support to get rid of these constraints. Play provides the support (ibid). Vygotsky (1967) argued that "whenever there is an imaginary situation in play there are rules, not rules which are formulated in advance and which change during the course of the game, but rules stemming from the imaginary situation" (p. 10). It is his view that in play, children adopt roles and rules which derive from characters in their life, such as parents, teachers and other social characters. These roles and rules related to the characters guide children's actions and their understanding of what cultural values, social recognized norms and behaviours is valued in the society they live.

From Vygotsky's (1978) viewpoint, play is an activity which creates the "Zone of Proximal

Development”. He defined the Zone of Proximal Development as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined through problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p.86). He argued that “as in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all the developmental tendencies in a condensed form; in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behavior” (Vygotsky, 1966: 16; cited in Fleer, 2009, p.7). Vygotsky valued play as the leading activity for young children, and stated that:

The play-development relationship can be compared with the instruction-development relationship, but play provides a background for changes in needs and in consciousness of a much wider nature. Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives---all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development (Vygotsky, 1967, cited in Bodrova & Leong, 2011, p.60-61)

Rooted in the belief that a child’s development cannot be fully understood without referring to the social-cultural and history setting in which it occurs, Vygotsky elucidated that

The social situation of development represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during the given period. It determines wholly and completely the forms and the path along which the child will acquire ever newer personality characteristics, drawing them from the social reality as from the basic source of development, the path along which the social becomes the individual. Thus, the first question we must answer in studying the dynamics of any age is to explain the social situation of development (Vygotsky, 1998, p.198).

Fleer (2009) commented that Vygotsky’s cultural-historical perspective “lays important

foundations for understanding play across cultures” (p.6).

An expanding research agenda indicated that play is beneficial to children’s overall development, and different forms of play promote different aspects of development for children. Research shows that play can develop children’s muscle system, manipulative skills and motor coordination (Athey,1984), promote their cognitive development (Singer & Singer, 1990; 2005), facilitate their social (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005) and emotional development (Singer & Singer, 1990; Hughes, 2010). Through play, children can express all parts of themselves, such as their feelings and thoughts, completely without reservation or fear (Landreth, 2002; Landreth, Homeyer, & Morrison, 2006); develop their cognition (Johnson,1990; Singer & Singer, 1990, 2005), support their creative thinking, and problem solving abilities (Vygotsky,1978) as well as underpin social and linguistic competence (Johnson, 2006; Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005; Trawick-Smith, 2006); help acquire the literacy skills (Christie, 2006; DeZutter, 2007) and cope with tensions and anxieties. Play can reflect a child’s developmental status, personality and well-being (Pellegrini & Boyd, 1993; Johnson, 2006).

Howard (2010) indicated that play offers children opportunities to develop gross and fine motor skills, to interact with others, to explore the properties of objects or to demonstrate problem-solving capacity. Smilansky (1990) carried out research on children’s dramatic play and socio-dramatic play in their cognitive and socio-emotional development. She found that dramatic and socio-dramatic play are important means which develop children’s mental, social and emotional skills. Jarvis and George (2010) indicated that rough-and-tumble play can improve children’s strength and dexterity, develop shared meanings and social interactions and offer opportunities for them to practice complex social skills which involves collaboration, cooperation and competition behaviours that characterize human adult societies. Coplan, Rubin and Findlay (2006) contended that social play allows children to acquire crucial social cognitive and interpersonal skills, such as understanding others’ perspectives and developing their cooperation, negotiation and conflict-resolving ability. Object play is believed to be valuable to children by Smith (2010) and Pellegrini et al.

(2007), since it can facilitate children's innovative problem-solving ability and creativity.

Meanwhile, some researchers considered that children's pretend play links to wide-ranging favorable outcomes, including language, literacy and imagination development (Harris, 2007), self-regulation (Bronson, 2001), ability to distinguish appearance from reality, social competence, and divergent thinking. For instance, Harris (2007) suggested that pretend play can develop children's imagination, while Carruthers (2002) also argued that pretend play in childhood contributes to creativity in adulthood. Similar results were found by Saracho (2002), who concluded that fantasy play or make-believe play can improve children's intellectual flexibility, which is a key ingredient in the creative process.

Play can serve different purposes across children's learning careers. It is valuable both for children's present and future learning. As Wood and Attfield (2005) have noted:

Play facilitates learning relevant processes such as rehearsing, practicing, repeating, imitating, exploring, discovering, revising, extending, combining, transforming, testing. And play contributes to the development of learning dispositions such as intrinsic motivation, engagement, perseverance, positive social interactions, self-esteem, self-confidence and 'can-do' orientations. Play thus contributes to mastery of learning (p.38).

Moyles (2005) claimed that play and learning are inextricably linked, the one often leading to the other. Broadhead (2010) also described a connection between children's play activities and many areas of learning and experience. Wood (2010) believed that play "creates imaginative, relational and interactive spaces, and enables children to develop and express their culture and identities" (p.12). Brooker (2010) pointed out that the idea of play enhancing learning is supported by considerable well-designed research, and now play is universally endorsed as both an important activity and a basic right for children in early childhood education.

The above discussion shows clearly that the values and importance of children's play have been highlighted and echoed by researchers. Play is increasingly recognized as an important means for children's learning and development, since it "embraced all the basic tenets of childhood pedagogy-----interaction, active learning, initiation, and choice" (Kagan, 1990, p.173). Researchers (e.g. Singer, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006; Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006) considered that play and learning are two interrelated phenomenon. They pointed out that play is an important part of the learning process (Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006). Teachers in the research conducted by Pramling-Samuelsson and Sheridan (2009) claimed that children play from what they have learnt, and learn from what they have played. Play and learning are integrated. According to Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson (2006), play and learning are dimensions that stimulate each other and could be seen as an indivisible entity which is a part of children's experiencing and helps them create an understanding of their surrounding world in both childhood and adulthood.

From the literature, it seems that researchers often considered the value of play from two different viewpoints. One is intrinsic value of play which emphasizes the experience within the process of play per se and involves the enjoyment play brings to players, and the other is instrumental value which lays stress upon the beneficial or learning outcomes which play can achieve (Powell, 2009), such as, learning a skill or a poem. However, the instrumental value of play is more likely to be emphasized in early childhood education than the intrinsic value. As de Jonghe (2001) stated, "when educators speak about play, it is mostly in this instrumental sense of play: play as a means to reach a further goal or learning result, not the inherent value of play" (p. 7). Wood (2007) pointed out that early childhood educational policy emphasizes an instrumental view of play which "creates some collision with established ideologies about children's freedom, choice and autonomy" (p.312).

2.4.1.2 Perspectives of play and child development in Chinese culture

The literature suggests that the value of play in early childhood education has been prevalent in European cultural settings. However, compared to the central tenet of play promoting children's learning, a different notion of play is presented in the Chinese context. Influenced

by the traditional Confucianism, Chinese tend to hold the opinion that play is a kind of barrier to children's formal learning. Play is seen as opposite to work. It is an activity which takes place for its own sake, without external constraint (Lau & Cheng, 2010).

The general idea of Confucianism

In order to explore how play is perceived in Chinese perspectives and the attitudes Chinese hold towards play, it is necessary to look into the culture that Chinese live within, for "culture influences the assumptions and expectations held by members of particular cultural groups" (David & Powell, 2005, p.242). Although Chinese culture is considered as a mixture of various elements from different cultures, philosophies and religions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, Confucianism has been identified as the most influential philosophy in China (Hsu, 2003, p.63). It has formed the core value of Chinese culture, and it continues to exert a powerful influence on the mind of Chinese (Tan, 2008).

Confucianism was proposed by Confucius who is recognized as the most influential philosopher and educationist in Chinese history. He suggested a series of thoughts which cover extensive fields of education, moral, social, politic and philosophy. The philosophy of Confucius has been developed by his followers and formed the main part of Chinese culture. However, due to his ideas covering such a wide range, it is impossible to deal with them all in this thesis. Therefore, only a few of the most important points are presented here.

In general, the main philosophy of Confucius revolved around the concepts of social relations, codes of behaviour, social peace and harmony. His primary goal is to build an 'ideal society' which is based on the virtuous rule of the ruler and the harmonious relations of the human. To realize this goal, Confucius argued, 'humanity (Ren)' and 'ritual (Li)' are essential. The former kind of virtue refers to the love, true feelings and empathy one has towards others while the latter refers to an ideal form of social norms which guides the pattern of proper and acceptable behaviours.

According to his idea of humanity and ritual, members of the Chinese society were divided

into categories and assigned a place in the social hierarchical relationships which he called 'three bonds'---ruler to minister, father to son, husband to wife. In this hierarchy of social relations, each role has clearly defined duties, ministers should be submissive to the king, children should be submissive to fathers, and wives should be submissive to husbands. Every individual should understand his or her place in the social order, and fulfill his or her part well. In this way, "a state of harmony which result from good social orderliness and customs can be attained" (Slingerland, 2008, p.119).

Confucianism and play

Confucian philosophy attaches great importance to education which is regarded as "guidance in the pursuit and realization of universal harmony and peace, including human harmony with the nature, society, others and oneself, and the harmony between different nations and cultures" (Jin & Dan, 2004, p.576). According to Confucianism, the purpose of education is to cultivate 'Junzi (gentlemen)' which refers to men with perfect moral virtues and behaviors, and this is also one of the ways to achieve social harmony. Confucius proposed the educational content called 'Six Arts'---ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and arithmetic through which men can be educated properly. The six arts are considered as the significant part of serious Confucian learning whereas play is regarded as relaxation and entertainment beyond serious learning (see Record of Ritual• Xue Ji, WGCPEH, 1989).

In line with Confucian value, self-cultivation is essential for becoming a 'Junzi (gentlemen)', and 'Jing' (quietness or meditation) is required in self-cultivation, therefore, "an ideal child is expected to have a sedate appearance and to have the characteristic of 'Jing'---the opposite of playful" (Bai, 2005). In other words, the image of an ideal child in Confucianism is a child who is quiet and dislikes play (Pan, 1994; Bai, 2005). This image is expressed as 'shao nian lao cheng' (young but mature). As Bai (2005) indicated, the characteristic of 'shao nian lao cheng' is "a quality that was highly respected in the Confucian images of a proper child" (p.10). In China, this image of child is highly advocated for Confucian believed that there is "an interconnection between a 'little adult' in childhood and a great scholar in adulthood"

(ibid). As a result, most exemplary children presented in Chinese primers produced from the Song dynasty and throughout the 19th century showed little trace of childish behaviors (ibid). A traditional Chinese literature “San zi jing” said that ‘勤有功，戏无益，戒之哉，宜勉力’ which means industrious learning leads to success, playing is not beneficial. All should take this as an admonition, all should be encouraged to exert thyself (WGCPEH, 1989). The characteristic of dislike of play has become a norm to guide children’s behavior through education and it has prevailed in early Chinese society even persisted into the modern times (Bai, 2005).

Furthermore, according to Confucianism, ‘a man who excels in study can follow an official career’ (Analects • Zi Zhang, WGCPEH, 1989) which means “success in education can lead to self-actualization and one can have the wisdom to become a sage in order to serve the public, which will in turn lead to personal fame and family wealth” (Wang, 2007, p.66). It suggested that children should engage in such pursuits, making this as one of the goals for their study, rather than ‘wan wu sang zhi’ (indulge in play and lose one’s ambitions) as this purpose could only be achieved by diligent effort, hard work, and practice. One of the main effective learning methods that Confucian advocated is memorization. He believed that this approach is very important especially in the early years study when the goal is simply to learn large portions of the inherited cultural traditions. As a result, rote learning is highly valued by him, rather than play (Wang & Mao, 1996).

As Li (2004) indicated, contemporary Chinese beliefs about learning and the education of children are profoundly influenced by Confucian views, which emphasize academic achievements and the traditional views of play and learning have a profound and sustained influence on Chinese early childhood education in the modern time (Bai, 2005). Researchers confirmed that most Confucian educators worried that play and a playful environment would distract children’s mind from formal learning (Huang & Qing, 2006; Bai, 2005). Contemporarily, play has been recognized related to physical development but separated from intellectual development (Sha, 1998). Pan (1994) also showed that affected by Confucianism, “physical activities and play were depreciated in favor of a strict curriculum

that valued a rigorous examination system...the mainstream of Chinese culture viewed play as the antithesis of work” (p. 36). This idea was echoed by Shen’s research (2008), she indicated that in traditional Chinese culture, play and learning are separated and play has no significance for learning. Therefore, play is not encouraged in Chinese cultural value (Huang & Qing, 2006) and the theory of ‘learning through play’ is often alien to a Chinese educational culture (Cheng, 2004). As Pang and Richey (2007) pointed out, some Chinese parents are confused about whether play is really a way to learn. Many parents are therefore less likely to appreciate that children can learn through play. Rather, they believe that children are motivated to learn the basic knowledge and skills they will need for success later in school learning. David and Powell (2005) says, in their study that as Chinese people consider play as non-intellectual, parents believe that teacher-directed formal activities are better for children’s learning than play.

The impact of Western views of play on Chinese perspectives of play

As “cultural contexts are dynamic and changing, thus, the ways in which a cultural group understands the place of young children and their play and decides how to provide for them changed over time” (David & Powell, 2005, p.243). The Chinese perspectives of play are the case in point, especially when Western educational theories including play theories were introduced into China. By reviewing the kindergarten educational reform in the past two decades in mainland China, Liu and Feng (2005) pointed out that the status of play in preschool education has been changed. A Soviet Union early childhood educational approach, which stresses subject-centred and teacher-directed teaching, was substituted by a child-centred approach and the ideas of “respecting children”, “active learning” and “play-based teaching and learning” were widely circulated. Now, play is increasingly recognized as “a vital component of developmentally appropriate approach in kindergarten” (p.96).

From the literature, it seems that traditionally, the Chinese were not firmly convinced by the idea that play is closely related to learning and children can learn through play as

Confucianism is deeply embedded in the Chinese value system. Rather, play was regarded as the opposite of work, and was undertaken only when work is completed (Pan, 1994). Adults have more power to decide whether children should play, when to intervene in their play, and which toy or material children should play with (Huang & Qing, 2006).

From the literature, it is not difficult to find a debate between the intrinsic value of play and play as a vehicle for learning. Some researchers argued that play has intrinsic value which is stressed in the early childhood curriculum (Wood, 2013). Other researchers, on the other hand, who saw play as a route through which areas of learning are delivered argued that play should be emphasized within a discourse of educational effectiveness in educational settings (Sylva et al. 2010). Although controversy continues between the intrinsic and instrumental value of play, there are some similarities and differences between the nature of instrumentalism in children's play in Chinese and Western contexts. Both similarities and differences lie in the relationship between play and work. In both the Chinese and Western contexts, traditionally, play was positioned in opposition to its counterpart, work. The division between play and work was seen in both cultures. However, what makes play in Chinese culture different from that in Western culture is that in a Chinese context, play is not only viewed as a reward for work, in terms of leisure, fun and relaxation, more importantly, play is also viewed as a barrier to work which needs to be controlled.

However, it seems that influenced by Western ideas of play during the process of early childhood educational reforms, the Chinese perceptions of play has gradually changed. Western early childhood educational ideology has impacted upon the traditional Chinese educational beliefs while still some of the "distinctive Chinese characteristics" has remained (Rao & Li, 2009, p.100). As researchers indicated that Chinese early childhood education has reflected a hybrid of three culture threads: traditional Chinese, Western, and Communist cultures (Wang & Spodek, 2000; Zhu & Wang 2005; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). Under these circumstances, both similarities and differences seem to exist in the nature of instrumental view of play. The Chinese and Western views both position play as essential to children's learning, as a developmentally appropriate practice and an important part of the learning

process. However, the Western perspectives of play highlight that play and learning are integrated. This view emphasizes an instrumental view of play as a means to cognitive, social, physical and emotional development. Compared to the Western views of play, the Chinese perspectives tend to see play as a means to reach a defined goal or learning result rather than valuing play as a learning means. From this viewpoint, play is explicitly educational as it is emphasized as leading towards the learning goals or outcomes in the curriculum.

2.4.1.3 Relevant research on teachers' perspectives of play

By reviewing the literature concerning teachers' perceptions of play, it appears that in general, preschool teachers regard play as a valuable activity, which is not only fun but full of opportunities for children's learning and development. For instance, by interviewing nine English reception class teachers on their thinking of teaching through play, Bennett et al.'s study (1997) indicated that the teachers strongly value children's play in their early development. They see play as a vehicle for learning through which children develop their self-confidence, motivation, self-esteem, a positive self-concept and a developmental appropriate learning method in which children interact with others on their own level and express their emotional, intellectual and social needs (p.33). Through a survey of 221 preschool and kindergarten teachers' beliefs about children's play in Ghana, Dako-Gyeke (2009) revealed that both preschool and kindergarten teachers in her study consider that play is a pleasurable and important activity with many learning and development benefits for children. Although teachers describe play differently, the characteristics of play they portray in their definitions are more similar than different, and no statistically significant differences in teachers' beliefs of play have been found when comparing their school level of teaching, years of teaching experience, and child development courses they have taken. After interviewing 30 preschool teachers, Badzis (2003) found that many Malaysian preschool teachers cannot express clearly the exact learning outcome brought by play to children in class teaching practice. In spite of recognizing the value, significance and role of play in children's development, there is always a notable difference in "their understanding between

the contribution of play to child development and play in relation to educational development of the children in classroom practice” (p.120). Papatheodorou’ study (2010) indicated that teachers not only see play as an important means for children’s learning and development, but also consider it as a positive way for them to “identify and determine a child’s current level of learning and development, recognize her or his potential for learning and development, identify the skills that the child needs to reach that potential, and determine the support required from adults and peers” (p.263).

Rogers and Evans (2008) noted that “to conceptualize play in early childhood education---as the free and expressive activity of the young, as a purposeful and instrumental activity, as a mechanism of cognitive development, or as a tool for learning in school (and these are not mutually exclusive categories) --- the division between play and work is omnipresent” (p.14). Evidence from research shows that binary constructions of play and work can be seen from early childhood teachers’ attitude and practice. According to Rogers’ research (2000), the teachers of England reception classes in her study perceive work as the polar opposite of play. Wood and Attfield (2005) also found that in the pre-school phase, play can be seen as preparatory to ‘real’ learning in ‘big school’ and not be taken as serious as work by parents. Some teachers believe that “work is the serious, rational business of life, while play is for leisure and fun” (Wood & Attfield, 2005, p.10). Ahn (2008) conducted a research on the play concept of ten Korean pre-service kindergarten teachers who enrolled in the Department of Early Childhood Education in a Korean teacher educational college. Through both individual and group interviews, she found that Korean pre-service kindergarten teachers have a conceptual conflict in the perceptions of general play and educational play. In her research, general play is considered by pre-service kindergarten teachers as the opposite concept to work or study, it is a fun, enjoyable, and spontaneous activity that children engaged in without concern for a specific outcome, while educational play is regarded as an ironical concept, since Korean pre-service kindergarten teachers think that learning occurs through working, not playing. Although teachers are trained by the teacher education program to teach children through play, they prefer a structured and pre-planned program for young children to a play-oriented program in reality for they do not believe the effect brought out

by play.

However, Frost et al. (2005) noted that children have their own ideas about the distinctions between work and play. Wood and Attfield (2005) found that children associate work with teacher-directed activity and some activities in which they are required to sit still. When they engaged in activities with teachers' instructions, children consider it as work; but when they are voluntarily selecting and directing their activities by themselves, they consider it to be play (Holmes, 1999; King, 1979). The pleasure derived from the activity is not necessarily an index of the difference between play and work (Cooney et al., 2000). Interestingly, Cooney et al. (2000) indicated that the children and teachers in their study show an unclear boundary between play and work. They express difficulty when categorizing their daily classroom activities as play or work. It seems that play and work are blurred from their perspectives.

Evidence from research reveals that variability exists in the beliefs of play in different cultures (Roopnarine, 2011). For example, Wu and Rao (2011) compared German and Chinese early childhood teachers' perceptions of play, learning and children's play behaviours. They found that German teachers distinguish free play and directed activities clearly, and they value free-play highly. The teachers perceive free play as children's self-learning without teachers' disturbing. While Chinese teachers do not consider children's play as free play, they always see play in relation to other games or academic activities, and they emphasize teachers' instruction in play to children's learning outcomes. Although the understanding of the value of play varies slightly across ethnic groups in United States, Canadian, European and Australian society which "becoming increasingly diverse", from the research conducted in those developed countries, it seems that "adults from European and European-heritage cultural group strongly endorse the belief that play assumes a significant role in children's intellectual and social development". In contrast, "in those non-European-heritage cultures, adults have the least favorable attitudes towards play" (Roopnarine, 2011, p.22). Research shows that Asian American parents emphasize more on the importance of learning compared to European American parents who stressed more on

the value of play to children's cognitive and individual development. Asian American parents believe that play is more beneficial to children's physical and social development than European American parents do (Farver et al.,1995).

Compared to the great number of research projects conducted in Europe and North America, very few studies have been carried out in China. Cheng (2000) employed a qualitative research method to explore a Taiwanese kindergarten teacher's perception of children's play. After observing and interviewing a Taiwanese kindergarten teacher---Mei-Ling, she revealed that Mei-Ling's perception of children's play contains the following three aspects: firstly, she views play as a means for improving children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. Secondly, according to Mei-Ling, child-directed play approach is the best way to meet individual needs and to provide an environment where children feel emotionally secure. Thirdly, child-directed play also provides good opportunities for teacher-child interactions, peer guidance, and autonomous learning. Shen (2008) also carried out a qualitative case study on a group of teachers in a Taiwan public kindergarten to find out their understanding of the meanings of children's play and their strategies to apply play in a school practice. By interviewing the participant teachers which consist of seven experienced teachers and four student-teachers, she discovered that all these teachers held a positive view of children's play, and agree upon the value of play in childhood development and learning. When conceptualizing play, teachers all made clear distinctions between play and work. Most of the teachers indicated that play carries no specific purpose and clearly differs from work because it is a matter of free choice. Shen (2008) found that "one and the same activity that was described as work in one classroom was considered play in another" (p.235). In addition, Rao and Li (2009) conducted a case study on teachers' beliefs and practices relate to play and learning in Chinese kindergartens in Shenzhen. After observing children's activities in kindergarten and interviewing their teachers and parents individually, they found that the kindergarten teachers and parents believed that the relationship between play and learning is very close, and they regarded play as the main vehicle for learning. They emphasized children "playing to learn" (p.114).

In China, the boundary between play and work also is evident in teachers' and parents' perceptions. Cheng and Stimpson (2004) found that play is subtly treated by Hong Kong kindergarten teachers as they believe free play with no learning intentions. It is a reward or a time for the children to relax after their work. It seems that the teachers in their study are unaware of the opportunities for learning embedded in play, and do not take up opportunities to scaffold children's learning during play. In a study of young children's and their families' and teachers' attitudes to play in China, Sha (1998) discovered that participants consider play separately from learning, they see play as a recreational rather than learning experience and treat play as a basic way of relaxation and rest beyond learning time. Dong (2009) also pointed out that Chinese parents tend to view play as a waste of time when more important 'work', which implies memorizing of knowledge and parroting of skills, could be done.

The literature implies that the concepts of play and work are constructed differently by early childhood practitioners and children in both European cultures and Chinese early childhood education. Teachers' view of play and work reflect their professional knowledge. However, although this rhetoric of play shares some similar meaning, the way in which play is implemented and permeated into teachers' provision of time, space and materials may differ. This point needs further exploration.

By reviewing the relevant literature, play emerged as an essential activity of childhood education, which was of great importance to children's physical, psychological, cognitive, social and emotional development, well-being and overall progression. Practitioners' understanding of the meaning and value of play to young children's development is crucial, as there is "a strong relationship between teachers' educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions and classroom practices" (Pajares, 1992, p. 326). Teachers' beliefs of play may directly impact on the implementation of play and influence children's learning and development in practice. However, the literature suggests that play has been understood differently within different social and cultural contexts in terms of its function and value to children's development and its relation with learning. For example, some educators from European society tend to emphasize that play promotes children's social development while

other practitioners from China are more likely to link play with physical development. As children's play varies according to economic, social and cultural contexts, different communities value and provide opportunities for children differently (Wood & Attfield, 2005; GÖncÜ & Gaskins, 2006; Rogers & Evans, 2008). The meaning of play is culturally situated, and tends to reflect what is valued within cultural communities (James, 1998, Roopnarine, 2011; Gaskins et al., 2006). It makes little sense to try and understand play without "reference to the context in which it occurs" and without consideration of "the social interactions and expectations that have influenced it" (Dockett & Fler, 2002, p.79). Thus, an understanding of play should take the specific social and cultural dimensions into account (Fler, 2009). Therefore, this motivates the current study to locate play in a Chinese context, to understand the meaning of play of Chinese kindergarten teachers.

2.4.2 Play and pedagogy

Although play is endorsed as a significant means to contributing to children's development and learning in a broad sense, integrating play in kindergarten pedagogy has proved difficult and problematic (Rogers & Evans, 2008; Synodi, 2010; Wood, 2004; 2010). As Wood (2004) indicated the pedagogy of play refers to "the ways in which early childhood professionals make provision for playful and play-based activities, how they design play or learning environments, and all the pedagogical techniques and strategies they use to support or enhance learning through play" (p.19). According to Synodi (2010), play in educational settings can be primarily developed in three different ways, including child-initiated play or free play, teacher-initiated or teacher-directed play and both teacher and children mutual directed play. Each form of play provides different development to children's learning. Child-initiated or free play refers to the activities in which children are allowed to explore freely, manipulate the materials they choose and cooperate with peers they want to play with. In this kind of play, children have power and control over their play (Wood & Attfield, 2005). The teacher-initiated play means that teachers prepare games or playful activities and use them as teaching opportunities (Synodi, 2010). In teacher-directed play, there are normally rules which are set and given by the teacher for children to follow in order to play

successfully. This type of play can help children consolidate and practice what they have been taught (Synodi, 2010). A mutually directed play, according to Synodi (2010), means that “both teachers and children share power over play and teachers involve in children’s free play in a non-disruptive way” (p.187). In this play approach, “teachers help children find ways to use materials creatively, negotiate with other children, solve problems that may arise while playing, so that their play becomes more complicated...(they) impart enthusiasm, so that children’s play continues” (ibid).

Miller and Almon (2009) suggested a continuum to describe kindergarten curriculum and pedagogical practice which integrated with play. The following chart (see figure 2.2) serves to provide framework of the kindergarten play pedagogical continuum.



Figure 2.2 The Kindergarten Continuum

According to Miller and Almon (2009), in a qualified kindergarten, play is neither chaotic nor squeezed to the margins by teacher-led highly structured activities. The two central methods of the continuum, namely the child-initiated play method and the playful focused learning method, should be highly advocated and developed in kindergarten education. It is their view that a balance should be made between “the child-initiated play in the presence of engaged teachers and more focused experiential learning guided by teachers” (p.44). This idea was echoed by Waters and Maynard (2010), who argued that in order to promote children’s development in an all-around way, a balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated activity needs to be maintained.

Wood (2004) identified three main types of play, which include (1) children having a free

choice of play materials and activities within a structured environment and are free to select their play partners/groups; (2) children free to play with teacher-selected materials prior to formal teacher-directed activities. Children choose what they want to do with the materials. Groups are selected by the teachers; (3) children are directed by the teachers to a succession of play-based activities throughout the day. Groups are selected by the teacher (p.22). Based on their observation and study of play, Rao and Li (2009) developed a typology of kindergarten activities in which four different categories of play-based learning were identified. These categories reflect the degree of teachers' involvement in play, and can be seen below. However, they did not make a clear distinction between type (a) and type (c).

- (a) Teacher leads and participates in games, activity, or play: This includes teacher planned, initiated, or arranged activities that may be part of the current teaching theme;
- (b) Teacher supports games, activities, or play: Teacher provides structure and supports activities that are initiated by children;
- (c) Child engages in games or activities chosen by the teacher: Child, either independently or with peers, engages in tasks and activities chosen by the teacher;
- (d) Child engages in free play: This is genuinely free-choice play, and children engage in solitary, parallel, or cooperative play (Rao & Li, 2009, p.108).

Wood (2010) defined two different kinds of approach of play-based pedagogy, namely a mixed pedagogical approach and an integrated pedagogical approach. As she stated, “in mixed approaches, adult-directed activities take centre stage in planning, assessment and feedback, and child-initiated activities, including play, are left at the margin of practice. In integrated approaches, adults are involved with children in planning for play and child-initiated activities, based on their observation and interactions” (p.12). Teachers make pedagogical decisions according to children's interests, choices, capacity and knowledge. She elucidated that in the integrated approach, learning and teaching are ‘a co-constructive process’ which takes place as the people, resources and activities in the setting interact with

each other. Moreover, as the pedagogy is integrated, it does not deny children the opportunity to benefit from teacher-directed play or activities (Wood, 2010; Synodi, 2010). Based on this point of view, Wood (2010) further suggested that two different pedagogical approaches are conceptualized, to indicate the pedagogical orientation links to play in practice. One is termed cultural transmission or directive approach while the other is emergent or responsive approach. The former approach, as Wood indicated, “privileges adults’ provision for and interpretations of play in line with defined educational outcomes, because they have to provide evidence of the benefits of play for the purpose of assessment, evaluation and accountability” (p.13). Learning within this approach is seen as children acquiring and accumulating knowledge, which is refined and socially approved and teachers tend to control the context and provision of play which including forms, time, resource and space. This approach according to Wood (2010) is more likely to lead to a dichotomy between work and play. In contrast, the emergent or responsive approach emphasizes both children learning through participating and teachers’ active “responding to children’s choices and interests and to their emerging knowledge, skills and understanding” (p.14). Learning is deemed to be a co-construction process between children and practitioners through interaction, rather than transmitting desired knowledge and culture from teachers to children.

From the literature, it is clear that there are different ways identified by researchers to integrate play in kindergarten pedagogy. As Rogers and Evans (2008) indicated, “the pedagogy of play in school is characterized by complexity and diversity of practice, that it can be understood as the locus of interactions between the needs of the children and the needs of the teacher, between ideological and pragmatic imperatives, between spontaneous and intrinsically motivated actions of the child and the demands of a standardized and politicized curriculum” (p.17). The research mentioned above provides positive validation for a play-based approach in early childhood education. According to Wood (2010), “playful orientation to teaching and learning are characteristic of high-quality provision” (p.9). Although play-based pedagogy is highly advocated by both researchers and policy-makers, how teachers carry it out in classroom practice depends on and are influenced by their beliefs of play which may differentiate from one teacher to another, as well as the cultural and

school contexts where they live within. Therefore, to probe how and in what ways play is implemented in the Chinese classroom practice is one of the purposes of the current research.

2.4.3 Play in early childhood educational practice

It is believed that how teachers view the significance and value of play in terms of the children's learning process have a direct link with their application of play into classroom practice. According to Shen (2008), teachers' perceptions of play not only "guide their actions in the teaching process" but also help them to "devise the most effective methods for classroom success" (p.233). However, evidence from research show that although practitioners endorsed the value of play to children's learning and development, achieving good quality play in practice remains an enduring challenge across different social and cultural contexts (Bennett et al, 1997; Keating et al., 2000; Wood & Bennett, 2001; Rogers & Evans, 2008; Rogers, 2011). It seems that there are continuing tensions between the rhetoric and reality of play in educational settings (Wood, 2010).

Researchers have found that even if the benefits of play are recognized, early childhood practitioners do not always know how to plan for play, or understand how to support and interpret children's learning in play activities (Bennett et al., 1997; Moyles et al., 2002; Wood, 2007). As Wood (2004) indicated that in some English nurseries, play in practice has been limited in frequency, duration, and quality. Miller and Almon (2009) further explained that in a typical kindergarten day, children in some American full-day kindergartens, commonly spend about two to three hours per day in literacy and math instruction and taking or preparing for tests, while they spend 30 minutes or less in free play or 'choice time' (p.42). They reported that in many kindergarten classrooms, play or playful activities have been substituted by prescriptive curricula that directly link to national education standards and assessments (Miller & Almon, 2009). By analyzing the literature, Ailwood (2003) pointed out that evidence from research shows that play activities in many early childhood settings are "repetitive, often isolating and recreational rather than educational" (p.291).

Bennett et al. (1997) argued that there are some discrepancies between the rhetoric and reality of play in kindergarten since teachers' classroom practice conflicts with their theories of play to some extent. Theoretically, teachers do believe that they should provide opportunities for children to have choice and freedom in play, however practically, teachers organize play in a structured manner rather than let children play freely. Even though practitioners know the advantages of adults' participation in children's play, they feel confused about when and how to take part in it, especially in role-play, as they worry about that their involvement may spoil children's play (Bennett et al., 1997; Rogers, 2000). Results from the research of Badzis (2003) presented that in the Malaysian preschools in which her research took place, play is only adopted by a minority of teachers as a medium and foundation for children's learning while a majority of teachers still employ a didactic mode instead of play-based teaching method in their classroom practice. The time and material provided for children to play are quite limited. Moreover, many teachers do not step into children's play and guide them for further learning.

In China, similar conclusions are also reached from the relevant research. For instance, Cheng's (2001) research in Hong Kong kindergartens demonstrated that although teachers endorse play as a pedagogical means, they spend much time on academic work in their classroom, and no genuine play is observed across their teaching. Cheng and Stimpson (2004) later conducted a case study in Hong Kong of six kindergarten teachers who are in training to find out how these teachers realize play in the early childhood curriculum. Their research revealed that although play is advocated in a Hong Kong official education report since 1986 as an important tool to achieve the goals of early childhood education, and teachers universally recognize play as a suitable means for teaching and a central activity for children's learning. In kindergarten practice, there is a notable gap between "the practitioners' espoused intentions and their actions in classroom" as teachers encounter great difficulties in putting play into practice (p.171). Lau and Cheng's (2010) case study in Hong Kong also revealed that although play was advocated in the government educational policy, the kindergarten head and parents in their study had an ideological preference for a work-based

pedagogy rather than play-based pedagogy. Whereas the teacher in the research obscures the conception of 'real play' with 'learning through play', and she emphasizes the instrumental value of play and translates it by using a work-based pedagogy. They concluded that play in Hong Kong early childhood classroom is more a myth than reality. Cheng (2010) further carried out a case study in one of Hong Kong kindergartens. By interviewing a kindergarten teacher and observing her classroom practice, the research revealed that an eminent feature of the teacher, Beatrice's practice, is that she employs play to capture and revisit children's interests and joyful experiences. Wu and Rao's study (2011) showed that play in Hong Kong kindergarten serves as a reward for academic work and it is perceived as peripheral to academic learning. Teachers provide limited time and materials for play and children have limited choices over how they play. Rao and Li's research (2009) further revealed that on average, 65.5% of children's total activity time is spent on play-based learning. This number is as high as 70% in public kindergartens with good reputations, compared to 49% in average quality private kindergartens. It is their view that children engage in play-like activities throughout the day; however, "much of that time was spent engaging in activities that were arranged by the teacher. There was less time allocated to genuinely free play where the children could pursue their own interests" (p.114). Even though most of research showed a rhetoric-reality gap of play, Pramling-Samuelsson and Sheridan's (2009) study presented a different picture. They found that in their study, teachers offer children many opportunities for choice and encourage children to express their thoughts and feelings in play, as the freedom of expression is highly valued in the Swedish curriculum. In their observation, there is a harmony between teacher-directed activities and child-initiated activities.

From the literature, it seems that even where the value of play for young children's learning and development is widely recognized by practitioners in different societies, there are notable differences between teachers' interpretation of play in practice. Research demonstrates that early childhood practitioners face considerable challenges in translating play-based pedagogy into practice in the international early childhood field. They have difficulty in striking a balance between free play and formal teacher-led activity in early childhood programs especially when "children approach statutory school age and the

pressure for teachers to prepare children for formal schooling increases” (Rogers, 2011, p.10). The differences of teachers’ interpretation of play in practice provide the impetus for this study to explore Chinese kindergarten practitioners’ understanding of play and their interpretation of play in practice.

2.4.4 The roles of teachers in play

Vygotsky (1978) laid stress on the importance of the catalyst role of adults in the process of children’s learning and play. He argued that the realization of educational value and development of children’s play largely depends on the guidance of adults. His view of early childhood education suggested that it is necessary for adults to take active roles in children’s play if its learning potential is to be maximized. This view was echoed by Smilansky (1990), who also proposed that tutoring by adults and peers during children’s play through the forms of modeling, verbal guidance, thematic fantasy training, and imaginative play training can support the amount and complexity of children’s play and develop their social, cognitive and language skills. In Vygotsky’s (1978) view, play creates ‘the zone of proximal development’ and skillful teachers may identify the ZDP and lead children to develop towards their potential within it. Teachers need to know which roles they should play and how to interact with children to support their learning and development in play (Wood, & Attfield, 2005, p.97). However, Wood (2010) stated that even though a play-based pedagogy is advocated in preschools, early childhood practitioners continue to “struggle with their provision and, in particular, with their role” in play (p.10). Moyles et al. (2002) also indicated that teachers encountered difficulties in understanding their role in play. Wood and Attfield (2005) proposed eight important roles as a tenet that guides teachers’ behaviour in an integrated play pedagogical approach in detail. They suggested that the first role teachers should play is a “flexible planner” who plans for either child-initiated or teacher-initiated activities according to the dynamic flow of classroom activities, children’s age and abilities. Second, teachers are expected to act as skilled observers through which they can identify possible dangers and ensure safety, ensure that all children receive attention, be alert to problems, new patterns and themes in play, identify ways to support and extend play, identify opportunities for

challenge, learn about children's interaction, interests, dispositions, meaning and intentions, and inform later planning for individuals and groups. Third, teachers need to be good listeners who respect and engage with children emotionally, and be alert to children's different ways of communication. Fourth, teachers should be communicators who can communicate with children in many different ways, such as gesture, body language and facial expressions. Fifth, teachers are expected to infect children with enthusiasm. Sixth, teachers should supervise children's safety, access, equal opportunities, and well-being in play in terms of the physical, social and emotional environment. Seventh, teachers should be sensitive co-player who help children to become master player. Eighth, teachers are expected to be a researcher who has an enquiry-based approach to improve the quality of their provision (p.160-179).

Two main perspectives concerning teachers' role in children's play have been identified by reviewing a large body of relevant literature: intervention and non-intervention (Bennett et al.,1997). One of the main views held by many researchers is that due to play being defined as a voluntary, intrinsically motivated activity which is initiated by the child, teachers are expected not to intervene or only intervene at the gentlest level in children's play (Rogers, 2000). For example, Rao and Li (2009) have shown that as some early childhood teacher preparation programs value a constructivist perspective which believe children learn and construct knowledge by themselves, the concept of "developmentally appropriate practice" thus is interpreted by the teachers as unstructured play and minimal adult intervention (p.115). Bruce (1991) has pointed out that free-flow is essential to children through which their intellectual and creative capacities can be developed with only minimal teacher intervention. In her opinion, adult's role in children's free-flow play is like a catalyst. She indicated that "adults can join free flow play and participate in it.....can extend it through suggestions, conversations about it and by providing props, materials, space and time for it" (p.109). However, she also claims that if teachers "force a product out of free-flow play, they spoil it" (ibid). The idea that intervention may 'spoil' children's play has confused many teachers of understanding their appropriate role in play. Just as Rogers (2000) described:

On the one hand, they (teachers) are told that children, left to their own devices, engage in play of low cognitive challenge, and on the other they are warned that the wrong kind of involvement may lead to the wholesale destruction of children's play (p.74).

The idea of non-intervention advocates that play is the activity which is chosen and controlled by children themselves in terms of time, space and materials, it is better that teachers do not disturb them (Bennett et al.,1997). For example, Fleer et al. (2009) revealed that the Australia teachers in their study do not intervene in children's play, they actively take an observation role. The teachers use the environment, particularly the resources, for framing and planning children's play, but do not necessarily interrupt their play.

In contrast to the non-intervention role of teachers, many researchers recommend that it is essential for teachers to intervene in children's play for they are 'knowledgeable others' who can facilitate the realization of the potential value of play (eg. Vygotsky, 1978). In line with this opinion, teachers are expected to play several roles in children's play. The first is to act as a provider or supporter. As a provider, teachers should support children's play by providing resources, such as, time, space, materials and preparatory experiences (Reifel & Yeatman, 1993; Johnson et al., 1999). In order to be a supporter, teachers need the most fundamental skill---observation (Jones & Reynolds, 1992), through which teachers sense when is the most appropriate time to enter in children's play and when children need to be provided with extra time, space and materials for further exploration (Johnson et al., 1999). According to Reifel (1998), teachers' role in children's play is not "just arranging an environment then leaving children to play uninterrupted, nor entering their pretend with them and running the risk of taking over" (p.50). He further points out that it is teachers' responsibility to do the following:

Pretend with children at times to acknowledge you are like them and value what they are doing; pretend with them to expand meanings that they are selecting and experiencing; comment on their play meanings (during play and afterward) to

acknowledge their efforts and to add to their meanings; add or suggest materials that will prolong and expand meanings; ask questions to help clarify discrepancies between players' meanings; suggest words to players who appear to need support as they strive to relate with others; ask children to describe their play experiences after the fact, to clarify and consolidate their meanings.....and, if children are progressing on their own, stand back and let the play proceed and the children's powers grow (p.51).

Besides the role of provider and supporter, there are also a variety of roles teachers play and are identified by other researchers. For instance, Jones and Reynolds (1992) assorted six roles that act by teachers while in play practice: stage manager, mediator, player, scribe, assessor or communicator, and planner. In a study of nine British reception class teachers, Bennett et al. (1997) also defined three major roles of teachers in children's play: provider, observer, and participant whereas Neuman and Roskos (1993) carried out research on six teachers and label their behaviours in three types: onlooker, player, and leader. In a study of teachers' interaction with children in play, Enz and Christie (1997) classified six roles of teachers in children's play and analyzed the influence that different roles bring to children. They further concluded that the teachers' roles of stage-manager, co-player, and play leader have a positive effect on children's pretend play, while the roles of uninvolved, interviewer, and director tend to have negative impact on children's play. Their findings also showed that children's play can be affected by the degree of teacher's involvement. Johnson et al. (1999) proposed six roles for adults to act in children's play which array as a "continuum from minimal to maximal involvement: uninvolved, onlooker, stage manage, co-player, play leader, and direct or instructor" (p. 209). White, et al (2009) described the roles of the teachers in play in their study as 'guardians' of the children and facilitators. As a guardian, the teacher does not intervene in children' play unless she is invited to do so by the child. As a facilitator, the teacher "facilitates play through the provision of experiences, and by intentional teaching practices such as modeling, or scaffolding particular play experiences" (p.46).

In addition, researchers explored teachers' roles in a certain kind of play activities. For instance, Einarsdottir (1998) investigated teachers' roles in children's dramatic play in Icelandic preschools. Through questionnaire survey and observing teachers' behaviors during children's dramatic play, she found that for about 38% of the observed time, the observed teachers are absent in play area, and they are seldom involved in children's play. Teachers' behavior changes according to setting. Most of the teachers in the research construct their role as informal observer, and they are aware of their responsibilities in taking care of children, direct and join in play when necessary. The findings of Einarsdottir's (1998) study revealed that the participant teachers of the Icelandic preschool "have a rather passive or reserved role in children's dramatic play and that they are reluctant to participate in the play unless the initiative comes from the children" (p.87). Saracho (2002) explored five kindergarten teachers' roles in promoting literacy in play in a classroom. She found that teachers play seven different roles in facilitating children's literacy development in play. These roles include discussion leader, storyteller, examiner, instructional guide, informer, learning center monitor and decision-maker (p.33).

In a play-based curriculum which has been suggested by Van Hoom, et al. (2003), the role of adult is expected to intervene from very indirect to very direct. Van Hoom et al. (2003) put forward four tenets for teachers to guide children's play. Firstly, the teacher has to understand the children and develop appropriate play for them according to their experience and the material in the classroom. Secondly, the teacher has to observe children's play carefully and take notes every now and then so as to provide children with timely and better guidance. Thirdly, the teacher should interpret children's constructed meaning in terms of their play experience and further intervene appropriately in children's play. Fourthly, the teacher should create a suitable environment for play to take place. They specifically advance the fact that teachers' role in the play-based curriculum is to balance "spontaneous play, guided play, directed play and teacher-directed activities" (p. 3). Even if adults play an important role in children's play, it is necessary for them to encourage and help children discuss and make rules by themselves rather than offer adult-made rules for them.

There is very little research concerning teachers' role in children's play within a Chinese context. Through participated classroom observation in four different classes in a Taiwanese kindergarten, Shen (2008) identified seven teacher roles in children's play: onlooker, integrator, assessor, stage manager, play leader, co-player, and peacemaker. As an onlooker, the teacher stands aside and observes children's play without directly intervening; as an integrator, the teacher may turn emergent play into learning; as an assessor, the teacher may turn play into a form of assessment; as a stage manager, the teacher provides time, space, and materials for children. This stage manager role is very similar to the notion of provider defined by Bennett et al. (1997). As a play leader, the teacher uses play to enhance children's social competency; as a co-player, the teacher plays with children to build relationships and learn from them; as a peacemaker, the teacher not only helps children to solve conflicts, but more importantly, she may turn the children's conflicts into ways of learning. Moreover, in a similar research conducted in Taiwan, Cheng (2000) listed five roles for teacher acting in children's play: stage manager, mediator, task leader, supporter or information facilitator, communicator and planner.

To sum up the relevant literature, various roles of teachers in children's play have been found by researchers. The roles teachers played and identified by researchers most often include provider, observer, player, stage manager, and supporter. Many of them are interrelated rather than conflicted. "The roles that teachers undertake reflect their values, beliefs and philosophies, and teaching methods are influenced by social and cultural values" (Einarsdottir, 1998, p.90). By reviewing the literature, it is clear that the roles of teachers in children's play are crucial since they are the catalyst to realize the potential education value of play. However, it also raised the question of whether the roles of early childhood practitioners vary among cultures. Therefore, it is important and necessary for the current research to investigate what roles teachers play in children's play, and how they play these roles in Chinese kindergartens' practice.

2.4.5 Teacher-child interaction in play

Vygotsky (1978) believed that children's cognitive development is promoted and facilitated through interaction with more knowledgeable and capable individuals such as parents, teachers and peers. He attached great importance on the communication and interaction between teachers and children to children's construction of knowledge on many levels. Based on the Vygotskian perspectives, Wood and Attfield (2005) argued that teachers as more knowledgeable others can scaffold children's learning through play by "joint problem-solving" and "intersubjectivity" which means children and teachers "establish mutual understanding of motivation, abilities, goals, interests and dispositions" (p.94). McAuley and Jackson (1992) considered that the interactive relationship between adults and children is "the single most significant structure in which teachers and pupils find themselves in at school" (p. viii). Kontos (1999) indicated that teacher-child interaction is "a critical element of high quality early childhood education which lead to children's optimal development and early school success" (p.363). Researchers stated that the teacher-child interactions can not only reflect practitioners' beliefs, values and assumptions of children's learning and effective teaching technique, but also can reflect children's perspectives of teachers (Katz, 1993; Jingbo & Ericker, 2005). Pramling-Samuelsson and Sheridan (2009) also pointed out that teacher-child interaction is one of the core criteria for pedagogical quality. For instance, they stated that in preschools of high quality, teachers interact with the children in a democratic way.

This literature shows that the teacher-child interaction is one of critical processes in early childhood education. However, research relating to the quality of teacher-child interaction imply that it seems that many early childhood practitioners are not very clear about the appropriate ways that they need to interact with children to ensure good quality interactions, and many teacher-initiated interactions are documented inappropriate. For example, the study of Bennett, et al. (1997) revealed that the contents and frequency of teacher-child interaction during play period seems of low quality and "unlikely to provide the substance of high cognitive challenge" (p.7). Besides, File (1994) examined teacher-child interactions in play with typically developing children and children with special needs, her findings showed that teacher-child interactions in both group are less likely to support children's social play.

Researchers (Trawick-Smith, 1994; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011) expressed concern on teacher-initiated interactions in play which tend to limit children a prescribed way to play which may not meet children's interests, needs, and cultural traditions. Research on role-play in early childhood settings also showed the inappropriate interventions of teachers. Findings revealed that teacher-initiated interactions serve the purpose of providing adult instruction or control, but undermined or interrupted the play (Rogers & Evans, 2008; Wood & Cook, 2009).

There is evidence that the quality of teacher-child interactions impacts upon children's experience and early learning outcomes (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). Researchers have indicated that good-fit adult-child interactions in children's play can develop complex play abilities which enhance social, cognitive, and language development while inappropriate adult-initiated interactions can impede play behavior (Bennet, Wood, & Rogers, 1997; Trawick-Smith, 1994; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011). Wood and Attfield (2005) suggested tenets for teacher-child interactions which state that the interactions employed by practitioners should "simultaneously support and respond to children's needs and potential; support children's skills as player and learner; enrich the context of children's play; support children's own ideas and provide additional idea and stimuli; enable children to elaborate and develop their own themes; be responsive to the level of play development; and remain sensitive to the ideas that children are trying to express" (p.46).

When it comes to research on teacher-child interaction in children's play, researchers proposed different dimensions of interaction that influence children's learning and development. For example, Kontos and Wilcox-Herzog (1997) identified four dimensions of teacher-child interactions which affect children's cognitive, social, emotional and language development. The four dimensions include roles (e.g., socializing, encouraging play, monitoring for safety, managing misbehavior), sensitivity and detachment (e.g., warm and attentive, quick to comfort, detached/unresponsive or harsh, critical or quick to punish), involvement (e.g., intensity and responsibility of teachers, holding, hugging, providing comfort, interacting in play or prolonged conversation), and teacher talk (e.g., frequency, use

of directives, questioning, expression of feelings and attitudes). By examining the explicit and implicit dimensions of adult-child interactions in the context of a university-based childcare center, Kugelmass and Ross-Bernstein (2000) argued that child-referencing interactions characterize the interaction pattern in the classrooms. Child-referenced interaction, according to them, means that teachers are “guided by information about specific children” and interactions take place based on “on-the-spot decisions made in the context of specific activities” (p.22). They described three verbal patterns of this child-referenced interactions, namely, event-referencing, affirmation, and extension interactions and four nonverbal patterns which including body positioning, moving through space, expressing affect through body language and facial expressions, and touching and holding children (ibid). They finally indicated that teachers’ view of children’s conceptions of time and space are implicit dimensions of interactions (Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000, p.24).

Researchers have reported a variety of intentions of teacher-initiated interaction and child-initiated interactions, and features of teacher-child interactions in early childhood education (Jingbo & Elicker, 2005; Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2009; Waters & Maynard, 2010). For instance, through observation of eight groups of children’s behavior during play in preschools and primary school in Sweden, Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson (2009) identified five intention categories of child-initiated interactions which include getting help from the teacher, being acknowledged as competent persons, making the teachers aware of other children breaking rules, getting information about and confirmation of how things work, and involving teachers in play (p.77). Besides, by observing and analyzing the interactions that took place between 12 teachers and the children in their classes, Jingbo and Elicker (2005) revealed nine functional categories for teacher-initiated interactive behaviours and nine functional categories for child-initiated interactive behaviours. The nine categories of the intentions of teacher-initiated interactions include maintaining discipline, directing, taking care, comforting, asking questions, asking for help, playing, expressing feelings, asking for information. While the nine categories of the intentions of child-initiated interactions include asking direction, requesting, tattling, asking for attention, expressing ideas, inquiring about something, helping teachers, playing with

teachers, expressing experience. They further indicated that of all the teacher-initiated interactions, 48% carries a negative emotional tone, 40% a neutral emotional tone compared to 12% with a positive emotional tone. For child-initiated interactions, 56% of interactions display a confident emotional tone, 35% with peaceful emotional tone, and 9% with fearful emotional tone (p.137).

Tamburrini's study (1986) found that there are two main teacher-child interaction styles in children's play: extending style and redirecting style. Extending style refers to "when the teacher first determines the disposition of their purpose in play and then interacts with the children", while redirecting style means "when teachers use their own preconceptions and curriculum priorities to focus the children's concentration to some element in their play" (cited in Saracho, 1991, p.60). The former is often adopted as a means to help teacher create more ways to stimulate children to be more creative, make it less repetitive and easier to generate themes in play, while the latter is usually employed by teachers to guide children from play to other learning activities (Saracho, 1991). Jingbo and Elicker (2005) concluded that teacher-child interactions in their research can be classified into two major patterns: parallel and inclination. The parallel pattern refers to an equal relationship between teachers and children while the inclination pattern means teachers assuming more power and control over children. The inclination pattern is most common in the kindergarten classrooms that they observed. Kontos and Dunn (1993) revealed that most of the teacher-initiated verbal interactions in their study focus on setting limits and offering guidance while very few are divergent or elaborative interactions. According to them, the types of teacher-child interaction are influenced by different settings. The divergent or elaborative interactions are more likely to take place in a classroom featured by free-play and material-rich environment. They argued that the quality of verbal interaction between teacher and children in a classroom highly affects the quality of the early education program. Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot (2011) carried out a research on the fitness of teacher-child interaction in play. Their findings revealed that there are seven kinds of situations under which teachers initiate interactions to children in play, that include engagement, task completion or performance, thinking or constructing knowledge, social participation, social conflict, rules or routines,

and adult contact. They also found that teachers in their study show four different ways of interacting, direct interaction, indirect interaction, observation and no interaction. They concluded that “teachers often responded to children’s play with behaviors matching the level of support needed” (p.110). Kontos (1999) carried out a research on early childhood teachers’ roles and talk in children’s free play. Her findings indicated that teachers most frequently act as enhancer or playmate and stage manager. They are normally involved in children’s constructive and manipulative play. Teacher-initiated interactions most often focus on “statements supporting play with objects, practical or personal assistance, and questions supporting play with objects” (p.379). Kontos reached the conclusion that teachers change their role according to different activity settings and modify their talk by role and activity settings (ibid).

From the above-mentioned literature, it seems that the quality of teacher-child interactions in play is closely linked to the quality of early childhood practice. However, although a voluminous literature is available on the teacher-child interaction, no systematic research on teacher-child interactions in play has been found in Chinese context. Research is needed to inquire the reasons and features of teacher-child interactions to gain a better understanding of this process and thus provide support for teachers to improve their teaching practices. Based on this consideration, to explore teacher-child interactions in Chinese kindergartens is one of the main purposes of the current study.

2.4.6 Aspects influencing the implementation of play in early childhood context

It is generally acknowledged that play can provide rich contexts for children’s learning and development, yet evidence from research has demonstrated that the rhetoric concerning play is not realized in practice. Evidence from research shows that there are many aspects which influence the status of play in kindergarten practice. Researchers tend to discuss them in different ways, but some of their perspectives are overlapped. By reviewing the literature, it seems that the dimensions which affecting teachers’ employment of play in practice can be divided into three main levels: from cultural context, from institutional context, and from

teacher's personal context.

Influences from cultural context

The influences from a cultural context are more likely linked to teachers', parents' and kindergarten administrators' views of play and learning, the expectations of early childhood education from governors, policy-makers, parents, and school heads, and the wider social and cultural context. For example, Cheng and Stimpson (2004) illustrated that the Chinese didactic cultural context has a great influence on the process of Hong Kong teachers' understanding of teaching through play. They stated that influenced by the Chinese Confucianism, Hong Kong kindergarten teachers, in one way or another, still show a dichotomous conception of play and work. Kagan (1990) indicated that there are mainly three groups of barriers that hinder the employment of play in early childhood curriculum: attitudinal, structural, and functional barriers. Among them, attitudinal barriers are linked to the perception of the significance of play. According to Kagan (1990), when teachers or parents or administrators distrust the learning outcomes brought by play compared to formal learning activities, they tend to construct a dichotomy of play and work, thus influencing the implementation of play in practice. Rogers and Evans (2008) identified that traditional conceptual separation of work and play influenced play implementation in reality. Even though many teachers accept the concept that play is an important vehicle through which children's learning and development can be improved, there is still a bipolar construct that lead to a widely accepted mistrust of play (Atkin, 1991; Anning, 1991; Cheng & Stimpson, 2004). Some teachers still believe that play is for leisure and fun, whilst work is the serious business of life (Anning, 1991). Some of the early childhood practitioners still consider play as purposeless (DeVries, 2001). Despite play being regarded as a facilitator for learning, it "may not necessarily result in any tangible outcomes" (Bennett, et al. 1997, p.11). Wood (2010) considered the pressure from parents as an 'outside influence'. She argued that parents are unconvinced that playful activities are as effective as didactic ones in supporting children's acquisition of the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in later stages of schooling and in life. Because of this, teachers tend to undervalue play as the measurement of children's learning outcomes is mostly based on their acquired academic knowledge

(Frost & Norquist, 2007). Academic pressure from school readiness also restrains practitioners' provision of play and adults' participation in play (Keating et al., 2000). Early childhood practitioners are not inclined to adopt play as an effective tool to promote learning for they have to provide measurable outcomes of children's learning and attainment to parents, and the stakeholders (Bennett, et al. 1997; Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Therefore, in order to prepare for children's future study, most of their time has been occupied by learning the literacy, numbers and other skills, leaving little time for them to play (Gmitrova & Gmitrov, 2004).

Many researchers indicated that parental safety concern is an important element affecting teachers' provision and utilization of play in practice (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Lester & Russell, 2008; Wu & Rao, 2011). For example, Wu and Rao (2011) noted that parents' concerns about hygiene and safety influenced teachers' provision of play and the play patterns in practice. Teachers in Hong Kong kindergartens provide certain types of play activities in classroom, and avoid providing those play activities which they consider as risky play and those play activities in which children may get dirty easily (ibid). As parents see risk as something negative and something to avoid, teachers tend to adopt a risk aversion attitude when they arrange for play activities. The concern of safety leads to "greater restrictions being placed on children's independent activities, the growth of teachers controlled, structured play space" and activities (Little & Eager, 2010, p.498).

Influences from institutional context

The influences from an institutional context can be seen in the structure of the school or kindergarten settings, such as the demands of early childhood curriculum, the provision of time, the arrangement of daily routines and the teacher-children ratio, the available resources, facilities and space that provide for children's play and the possible opportunities for teachers' professional development concerning play-based teaching and learning.

Kagan (1990) named this structural barriers which related to the kindergarten curriculum,

distribution of time, space and materials, and teacher-child ratios. Kagan indicated that the space and material available in a kindergarten influence the forms and ways of play. For example, too few materials may impose restrictions on accessibility to children while too many materials may lead to fewer social games and ready-made materials may inhibit creativity. This view is echoed by other researchers (eg. Bennett et al.,1997; Badzis, 2003), who stated that the obstacle to utilizing play in an early education program is the limited resources in kindergarten, such as time, space and material. As Sandseter (2009) pointed out the features and qualities of the play environment which are provided by teachers influence the nature and experience of children's play. Kagan (1990) also termed the constraints that stem from the context of school in which play takes place as functional barriers, such as personnel and in-service training. The lack of sufficient personnel and appropriate in-service professional development results in teachers 'forgo[ing] play for easier and more controlled activities' (p.182).

Furthermore, Pramling-Samuelsson and Sheridan (2009) argued the national curriculum and school-based curriculum as influences in teachers' interpretations of the value of children's play when carrying out research in five Sweden preschools. Wood (2010) also stated that one of the two 'outside influences' that hinders practitioners' efforts to provide playful learning opportunities to children in the classroom is the top-down pressure of the primary school curriculum. It is the curriculum that continually infiltrates into teachers' practices. Shen (2008) conducted a study on qualities influencing teachers' beliefs and implementation of play by interviewing eleven Taiwan preschool teachers. Shen (2008) saw that there are primarily two different elements that influence the status of play in early childhood educational practice: intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The extrinsic factors includes school environment, teachers' professional development, supportive leaders and a cooperative administrative team, school-based curriculum and the support from the parents and the community (p.275).

Influences from teachers' personal context

Shen (2008) considered the childhood play experience of teachers themselves as an influential intrinsic factor for their implementation of play in early childhood curriculum. Shen's study revealed that the participant teachers' childhood play experiences and professional experience lead to their different degrees of attachment to play, which in turn influence their attitude toward play implementation. According to this research, the more playful the childhood experiences of the teachers, the greater their trust in the value of play and the more they are likely to utilize play in classroom practice. Wood and Attfield (2005) stated that one of the important dimension that influenced play implementation in reality is that the theories, values and beliefs of practitioners and their ability to build their personal knowledge and understanding through observation, discussion, reflection and ongoing professional development (p.118).

From the literature, it seems that practitioners face difficulties in putting play into practice. Aspects influencing teachers' perceptions and practice are complex, diverse, interrelated rather than separated. For instance, the study of Bennett et al. (1997) identified six qualities affecting teachers' abilities to put their theories into practice, which include (a) pressures and expectations from parents, colleagues, and school inspectors; (b) lack of time for adult involvement; (c) the structure of the school day; (d) downward pressure from the national curriculum, and the emphasis on literacy and numeracy; (e) space and resources; (f) high ratio of children to adults. In their research teachers all value play, however, substantially influenced by the expectations from parents and the national curriculum, they have to prioritize formal learning activities rather than playing. Moreover, as the teacher-child ratio is high, teachers feel it is very difficult to give every child the attention he or she needs, "particularly in school contexts where other demands impact upon how teachers spend their time" (Wood & Attfield, 2005, p.101). Badzis (2003) demonstrated seven categories of constraints that teachers faced in implementing play in Malaysia preschool classrooms. The categories include parents' attitude which stress academic learning rather than play; the teachers' knowledge and attitude towards play; time and over-loaded curriculum contents; management of children; lack of play materials and resources; preschool prospectus; and others' perceptions of play (p.118).

In Rogers' (2000) case study to investigate the relationship between the rhetoric and practice of play in the British reception classes, she indicated that there is a range of dilemmas and tensions which she conceptualized as 'conflict of interests' in implementation of play in reality. One main tension, as she argued, is that teachers' need to reconcile their beliefs of play and children's learning with the reality of the school context. The need of accountability to others drives teachers to present tangible learning outcomes to stakeholders and thus affects their provision of play in classroom. In addition, the status of play in reality is stems from a long-lasting view which considers play as an educational tool that should be integrated into formal curriculum to produce visible learning outcomes. This view is hardly compatible with the characteristics of play, which are voluntarily motivated by children. Rogers (2011) further argued that:

The coupling of play and pedagogy in early childhood education is problematic for several reasons: first because traditionally, the concept of play has been positioned in marked opposition to its apparently more worthwhile counterpart, work. The division between play and work characteristic of many early childhood classrooms may prevent the integration of play into pedagogical practice. Second, theorizing play as work may in fact obscure the ways in which play may become a technique of social control and a means of transmitting assumptions and beliefs regarding the nature and purpose of childhood: the child must work at being a child. Third, the pedagogisation of play seen in countries across the globe has meant that play has increasingly become an instrument for learning future competencies; emphasizing social realism rather than the transformative, mimetic and life-enhancing qualities of play (p.5).

It is apparent from the above literature that there are complex aspects that influence the application of play in kindergarten practice. Exploring the influences of implementation of play is beneficial to improve the quality of play-based learning and thus enhance the quality of early childhood education. Although research has demonstrated a number of dimensions

which affect the realization of play in practice, the voice of Chinese kindergarten teachers about their difficulties in implementing play is seldom heard. Therefore, to probe the aspects that influence Chinese kindergarten teachers' play-based practice becomes one of the research questions of the current research.

2.5 Research questions

By reviewing the relevant literature, it seems that an increasing number of researchers have paid great attention to children's play. They carried out research on play from different disciplines and different angles. However, few studies have investigated the relationship between teachers' beliefs and children's play in kindergartens (Wu & Rao, 2011).

Researchers (Zhu & Wang 2005; Zhu & Zhang, 2008) argued that Chinese early childhood education is developing within a hybrid cultural context, and shaped by traditional culture, communist culture and Western culture. The perspectives of play and status of play may be influenced by these three distinct cultural threads. Under such circumstances, how do teachers understand the meaning of play? What is the pedagogy of play in Chinese preschools? How do teachers integrate play in kindergarten practice? How do teachers perceive their role in play and how do they involve themselves in children's play and scaffold their learning in play? The answers to these questions are not yet clear. More research is needed to catch up with the updated social-political context of children and early childhood education which has become diverse, global and technological (Fleer, 2009).

In addition, much of the research has been framed in European heritage cultural, very few researchers carry out studies on children's play in Chinese context. Moreover, the extant research in China on this topic are merely conducted in Hong Kong and Taiwan, no systematic research has been developed in Chinese mainland. Even though Hong Kong, Taiwan and Chinese mainland share the similar traditional culture, there are still many differences in the status of economic and social development. These differences make it necessary for me to carry out a study in mainland China. Therefore, the current study intends

to address the following questions:

1. What are Chinese kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the value of play with respect to children's learning and development?
2. How is play implemented in kindergarten practice?
3. What is the teacher's role in children's play?
4. Why do Chinese kindergarten teachers interact with children in play?
5. What are the dimensions that affect the implementation of play in kindergarten practice?

The first question aims to explore Chinese kindergarten teachers' perspectives about the value and importance of play in children's learning and development. The second question intends to probe the ways in which play is implemented, the roles and types of play in classroom practices. The third question aims to explore teachers' roles in children's play. Question four aims to address why the teacher interacts with individual children in play, and individual children initiates interaction with the teacher, and to explore the features of teacher-child interactions in play. Finally, the fifth question aims to understand the reasons by which kindergarten teachers implement play in their teaching practice in certain ways, and aspects influencing their execution of play.

Chapter 3 Early childhood education context in China

“Teaching and playing take place in a historical context. They are social activities influenced by cultural values and beliefs, which change with time. The context in which teaching and play take place may constrain or support individuals’ actions, such as teachers’ actions, attitudes and understandings may transform the context” (Synodi, 2010, p.190). Since this research attempts to explore how Chinese kindergarten teachers perceive and realize play in their kindergarten teaching practice, it is necessary to provide some background information regarding the context of early childhood education system in China where this study is undertaken.

This chapter begins with the introduction to the historical context of Chinese early childhood education (3.1). It then moves on to a description of the contemporary Chinese early childhood education facilities and administrative institutions (3.2). This is followed by an introduction to the reform and curriculum of early childhood education (3.3), and the one-child policy (3.4), as well as the cultural beliefs which impact on early childhood education (3.5). The chapter ends with the introduction of the policy and legislation in Chinese early childhood education (3.6).

3.1 The historical context of early childhood education in China

In Imperial China, the education tradition did not include education for young children, but focused on “preparing individuals for the examinations needed to become government officials” (Spodek, 1989, p.32). Early childhood education programs were largely transplanted from Japan at the early twentieth century (Spodek, 1989). In 1903, the first kindergarten was established when 20 Japanese kindergarten teachers came to China to train Chinese kindergarten teachers. Later, American missionaries established Froebelian kindergartens in China. Following the 1911 revolution and after World War I, the Chinese resisted Japanese influences in educational and cultural affairs and started to learn more from American and European models of preschool education until the establishment of the

People's Republic of China in 1949. Then, the Chinese educational system changed greatly, the American kindergarten practice was abandoned, and the Soviet model of early childhood education was employed throughout the country (ibid). At that time, as McLoughlin et al. (1997) mentioned, educational forces have reflected the national agenda of love for country, people, labour, science and public property, in addition to the ancient Chinese virtues of hard work, bravery, respect and care for others.

However, the Cultural Revolution which took place from 1966 to 1976 had adversely impacted on the early childhood education development as many preschools were closed during that time and the training of kindergarten teachers stopped (Shi, 1999; Corter et al., 2006). As Corter et al. (2006) stated "the goals of preschool education were realigned so as to inculcate revolutionary fervor including the practice of military drills, the memorization of poems and quotations of Chairman Mao and almost all the teachers were displaced or forced to find other employment" (p.5). The quality of the early childhood education programs was eroded due to a focus on group expectations, guided by teacher-directed programs. Fostering play was viewed as overly focused on individual interests and was perceived to promote disorder (McLoughlin et al., 1997).

1979 was regarded as the turning point for Chinese early childhood education, as a national conference on nursery and kindergarten education was held in Beijing, in which a set of development policies and strategies were discussed and agreed in order to promote the quality of early childhood education after the serious stagnation and disorganization caused by the Cultural Revolution. As a result, the Ministry of Education enacted a nationally endorsed set of preschool teaching activities including physical activities, mathematics, language, social knowledge, music and art. However, although progressive changes were made since then, in some early childhood education programs, children still learn through structured and large group instruction, rather than through the ways which typify European and North American early childhood education programs (McLoughlin et al., 1997).

3.2 The contemporary context of early childhood education in China

In China, the government provides nine years of compulsory education to all children from grade one in primary school to grade three in middle school, which equates to level three in secondary school in England. Early childhood education serves children for the pre-primary years--- from birth to 6 or 7 years in terms of education and care. Despite it being regarded as a part of basic education, it is non-compulsory in nature. Children normally enter primary school at the age 6 or 7, although there are slight differences between regions. The government pays more attention to the 9-year compulsory education, and consequently invests more education budget on it, while only 1.3–1.4% of gross national education budget was allocated to early childhood education in the recent seventeen years (Zhu, 2009).

As different regions of China have an unbalanced socioeconomic development, varied geographic conditions, discrepant educational resources and diversified culture and language, the Chinese central government gives the autonomous right to local governments to administer and provide early childhood education. (Wong & Pang, 2002; Liu & Feng, 2005; Zhai & Gao, 2008; Zhu & Zhang; 2008). Due to the autonomous administration of early childhood education by local governments, the quality and development of early childhood education “vary across different provinces, counties, towns and even communities” (Zhai & Gao, 2008, p.130).

3.2.1 Early childhood educational and administrative institutions

Education and care of children are primarily provided by three different types of early childhood education institutions, these being nurseries, kindergartens and preprimary classes also known as ‘preschool classes’. Nurseries aim at providing care for children from birth to 3 years, either half-day or full day program. Kindergartens are in charge of providing care and educational preparation to children between 3 and 6 or 7 years, mainly full-day program. They also have part-time, boarding or hourly programs and boarding programs open 24 hours a day and five days a week (Li, 2006). Preprimary classes are normally attached to rural primary schools and serve children from 5, 6 or 7 years of age, normally one-year or

half-year full-day programs in the year prior to first grade (Zhu & Zhang, 2008; Zhao & Hu, 2008; Rao & Li, 2009). Beyond the main programs of nursery, kindergarten, and pre-primary, there is a variety of less formal programs for early childhood education (Corter et al., 2006), such as seasonal programs which usually open half-day for the working parents. Family childcare and mobile schools are also available in some areas of the country (Zhu & Zhang, 2008; Zhao & Hu, 2008).

Provision of formal early childhood education programs comes from a variety of sources, including local government, neighborhood committees or communities, enterprises and factories, government-licensed private individuals (Vaughan, 1993; Zhu & Wang, 2005; Zhai & Gao, 2008). The enterprises and factory funded kindergarten programs are usually located inside the enterprise or factory and serve children who are mostly from the employee's family at a low cost. After 1996, these programs were no longer limited to the workers' children, and extended their service to the local children (Li, 2006). The government-organized and supported childhood education programs usually give priority to children whose parents work for the government when enrolling. They charge low fees for their service. The community-run programs are usually located in the neighborhood, and enroll children from the nearby residents and with low charge (Zhai & Gao, 2008). The privately-owned early childhood education programs have been expanding in recent years (Zhu & Wang, 2005; Li, 2006; Pang & Richey, 2007), both in the urban and rural areas. A variety of programs were designed to cater for the requirements of parents of different social-economic backgrounds. They charge different fees according to their size, facilities and special curricula, but do not receive government funding and are not obligated to participate in quality rating programs. For example, in some developed areas, there are some well-equipped privately-owned kindergartens which are also known as international kindergartens or Montessori kindergartens, while in the rural areas, there are some poor-equipped private family-care programs (Hu & Szente, 2009). The expansion of privately-owned kindergartens made the early childhood education programs more available to all the children. These privately-owned programs have becoming an important part of the early childhood provision system.

The central government is in charge of the overall administration of early childhood education, and has developed general guidelines and policies for this. Corresponding local government bureaus are given the autonomy to develop and carry out their own detailed educational plans. (Wang & Pang 2002; Corter et al., 2006). Early childhood education is supervised and managed mainly by the Education Ministry, with cooperation from other ministries such as the Public Health Department. As nurseries cater for the needs of children aged between 0-3 years old, they are not considered to be educational institutions (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). Nurseries are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Health rather than educational authorities, while kindergartens and preprimary classes are under the supervision of the Department of Education. However, as nurseries have paid increasing attention to the education for infants and toddlers, the Department of Education has gradually taken responsibility for managing nurseries (Wong & Pang, 2002; Zhu & Zhang, 2008; Rao & Li, 2009).

According to the statistical report of Chinese Ministry of Education (2010), early childhood education has developed rapidly. Not only the amount of kindergarten and enrolled children have significantly increased, but also the numbers of staff members and gross enrolment ratio of preschool educational institution have risen markedly. In 2010, the number of children younger than the age of 7 years increased remarkably from 26.58 million in 2009 to 29.77 million. They enrolled in one of the 150.4 thousand preschool educational institutions, either kindergartens or pre-primary school classes. This was 12,200 more than the number of preschool educational institutions in 2009. The early childhood education staff members, which included teachers and principals, grew 0.178 million to 1.31 million in 2010. The gross enrolment ratio of preschool educational institution was 56.6%, which increased 5.7% compared to 2009 (MEC, 2010).

3.2.2 General state of kindergartens

In Chinese kindergartens, children are generally grouped according age. Government regulations in 1981 recommended three kind of groups: juniors (3 or 4-year-olds), middle (4 or 5-year-olds) and seniors (5 or 6-year-olds) (Cleverley, 1985). Each group typically has two teachers and a nurse (Vaughan, 1993). However, in some kindergarten classes, especially rural kindergartens, a class may have only one teacher with no nurse. According to *the Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice* which issued by the National Education Committee (the former Ministry of Education) in 1989, the maximum class size was regulated based on children's age. Generally, class size increases with age, ranging from 20 to 40 children. A junior class consists of 25 3-4 year old children, a middle class consists of 30 4-5 year old children, and a senior class consists of 35 5-6 year old children. The class size of mixed-age groups in some kindergartens also follows this guideline, but that of boarding programs is smaller (Li, 2006). However, in some areas, particularly rural areas, class sizes are larger than the prescribed ones, with only one teacher in each class (Zhu & Wang, 2005, p.61). The big group size and the high teacher-children ratio, as Corter et al. (2006) stated, partly led to whole group instruction being the typical norm of many kindergarten classes, although the active-learning, child-centred approach are espoused in curriculum documents.

Zhu and Wang (2005) reported that the majority of kindergartens run full-day programs. The children enter the kindergarten early in the morning and engage in different activities through a day, such as morning exercises, learning activities, games, outdoor play, afternoon nap and snacks. A few kindergartens have half-day programs, and "approximately 5-10% of kindergartens run boarding programs in which children arrive on Monday and are picked up by parents at Friday afternoon" (p.62). The boarding programs cater for the needs of working parents and are more prevalent in urban areas than in rural areas (Li, 2006).

As Vaughan (1993) pointed out, compared with kindergartens in American, the management of Chinese kindergarten classes stressed teacher-directed, total group instruction and all children were expected to do the same thing at the same time, and proceed at the same pace. He further elaborated that kindergartens paid more attention to children's academic work

rather than their creativity, individualism, emotional, social, and independence development. Most activities are guided by teachers, and very few opportunities are provided to children's self-selected tasks. Vaughan (1993) indicated that the teaching approaches and materials limit the opportunities for children's self-expression and pursuit of individual interests as activities are mostly teacher-directed than child-initiated and the materials necessary for unstructured or open-ended exploration are seldom available. In some kindergartens, children are expected to "give their complete attention to the teacher and participate fully, and respect for the teacher and prompt, unquestioning obedience". Teachers widely adopt "public correction and criticism" to discipline children's misbehavior and poor performance. They also extensively use "praising and recognizing to reinforce children's positive and good behavior" (Vaughan, 1993, p. 198).

3.2.3 Teachers' qualification and training

From 1950 to 1990, Chinese kindergarten teachers were primarily graduates from the normal school, a vocational school offering three years' training for graduates from junior middle school to become teachers (Zhu, 2009). At that time, the training emphasized teachers' skills in singing, dancing, playing organ or piano, drawing, physical exercise and story-telling, which are considered as essential skills for highly-qualified kindergarten teachers. Much less attention and effort have been paid to develop an understanding of pedagogical principles in many early childhood teacher programs. According to *The Law for Chinese Teachers* enacted in 1993, certified kindergarten teachers must have at least a 2-year college education which majored in early childhood education (Zhu & Wang, 2005).

Since 1990, the traditional kindergarten teachers' education system has undergone significant change, as Zhu (2009) stated that it transformed from "3 tiers (vocational normal school, junior college, and 4-year college) to 2 tiers (junior college and 4-year college)" (p.57). During the process, some normal schools updated to 3-year vocational colleges and others merged into nearby teachers colleges or normal universities that offer bachelor degrees. Beyond this formal education, there are various programs through which local

governments offer training for pre-service and in-service teachers, including distance education, self-teaching, and internet education programs. Consequently, many teachers have had three or more years of college education. This is particularly exemplified by teachers in some fast-developing areas (Zhu, 2009). As Corter et al. (2006) indicated, the expansion of teacher education into higher education has increased the number of highly qualified teachers. However, despite progress being made on kindergarten teachers' education, there are still a number of emerging issues. For instance, as Wong and Pang (2002) argue, there is a lack of assessment mechanism for the quality of teacher training programs and in-service training for new curriculum. Zhu and Wang (2005) indicated that the practical teaching training in pre-service teachers training programs is inadequate, and some mentors who work in the training programs do not have practical experience in kindergarten education. Moreover, they pointed out that there is a lack of training programs for teachers in rural areas.

According to the national statistics in 2008 there were in total 1,032,017 kindergarten principals and teachers (only including full-time teachers and principals) in China of which 0.1%, in terms of their highest educational qualification, have a post-graduate degree, 10.2% have an undergraduate degree, 47.2% have an associate bachelor (college diploma) degree, 39.1% were graduates of high school, and 3.4% were below high school graduates (CERN, 2008). Disparities were found at the level of teacher qualifications between rural and urban areas. For example, 54% of full-time teachers or principals in urban areas had an associate bachelor degree, and 30% of them were high school graduates. In rural areas, the numbers are almost reverse, with 34% full-time teachers or principals having an associate bachelor degree and 54% of them were high school graduates (CERN, 2008).

When reflecting on this situation, some weaknesses in pre-service training were reported by researchers. Zhu and Wang (2005) elaborated that the lacking of sufficient classroom practice training in the programs made students less well-prepared for kindergarten work. Besides, some faculty members lack practical kindergarten experience which limits the extent to which they can offer students help in applying theory into practice. Furthermore,

relevant programs are needed to offer pre-service training and in-service professional development for teachers in rural areas as they are less accessible to them. Finally, they indicated that those teachers who worked for a long time appeared too accustomed to a didactic teaching approach to absorb new pedagogies, adopt a child-directed approach and implement new curriculum.

3.3 Reform and curriculum of Chinese early childhood education

According to Zhu and Wang's research (2005), Chinese early childhood education experienced three major reforms in the past century. One took place between 1920s-1930s when a Japanese version of kindergarten education was adopted and a child-centred approach was emphasized. This reform advocated that teaching should be based on children's psychological development. The second reform occurred in 1950s after China was established as a communist country. The Chinese early childhood education system was reorganized according to the model of Soviet Union and their psychological and education theories. The child-centred approach was substituted by a teacher-centred theories and practice, and unified early childhood education curriculum contents was established, the subjects included physical education, language, science, drawing, handwork, music, and arithmetic. The reform suggested that teachers instruct children in purposeful and planned activities. A subject-based model of education was systematically implemented which stressed on learning outcomes, defined goals, and pedagogy. Due to limited educational resources and lack of teachers, the subject-based curriculum brought some advantages in improving the quality of early childhood education (Zhu & Wang, 2005).

The third reform started in 1980s when China carried out the open-up policy and it is on-going. The reform greatly modified traditional education concepts. Foreign educational theories from Dewey, Montessori, Bruner and especially Piaget and Vygotsky had been widely circulated (Zhu & Zhang, 2008) and have influenced on the educational ideas of Chinese educators. Through curriculum reform, the Chinese government expected the early childhood curriculum to "shift from an emphasis on the uniform curriculum standard to an emphasis on diversified and autonomous curriculum development and implementation" (Zhu,

2009, p.57). The reform also influenced and challenged the traditional methods of teacher education. However, despite new educational perspectives and philosophies being introduced to the early childhood practitioners, no major changes were found in their educational practices, largely due to practitioners being accustomed to the curriculum and teaching approach adapted from the Soviet model. They found it is difficult to understand the essence of child-centred theory or to apply this theory into practice (Zhu, 2009).

In 1981, the government issued *the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education*, which added aesthetics as a part of the core curriculum of kindergartens, in addition to the three basic areas: cognitive education, physical education, and moral education (Zhai & Gao, 2008). Policy-makers and scholars started to pay more attention to early childhood education. Their concerns involved improving the quality of teacher training, compiling curriculum manuals and textbooks for kindergartens, and conducting research on early childhood education (Wu, 1992). In 1989 the National Education Committee issued *the Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice* which presented progressive ideas and practices to Chinese early childhood educators, such as stressing child-centred activities, valuing individual differences, advocating play-based teaching and integrated curriculum and emphasizing the process of activities (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). However, the reform encountered difficulties, as some Western ideas were not fully compatible with traditional Chinese cultural values, thus making it difficult for practitioners to adjust (Wang & Mao, 1996). Moreover, the lack of adequate practical training led to difficulties for Chinese early childhood practitioners in implementing the regulations (Zhu & Wang, 2005; Zhu & Zhang, 2008). Some researchers argued that the gap between advocated pedagogy and actual kindergarten practice was closely related to the top-down nature of the kindergarten educational reform, which focused more on transforming educational ideas, but neglect creating the conditions to support these ideas (Liu & Feng, 2005).

Furthermore, traditional early childhood education in China faced both internal and external challenges from changing family structures and increased influence of foreign ideas and values (Vaughan, 1993). Under such circumstances, *the Statute of Kindergartens* was issued

in 1996 and it brought a variety of changes to early childhood education (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). For instance, four broad goals of early childhood education were presented in the *Statute* (Wong & Pang, 2002).

The first goal is to help children develop good habits and initial self-care skills. The second is to improve their socialization and moral education, emphasizing the development of emotions and good attitudes throughout daily activities. The third goal emphasizes the children's cognitive and language development, while taking into account their individual differences. The fourth goal focuses on developing the children's motor skill by teaching them physical exercises (Zhai & Gao, 2008, p.130).

This goal led to changes in the practitioners' perceptions of early education and learning. As Wong and Pang (2002) indicated, the educational emphasis shifted to cultivation of good habits, self-discipline, emotional control, and moral development of children. At the same time, policy makers, researchers and practitioners started to reflect and reform kindergarten practice by learning from others' approaches by visiting other countries to "observe and discuss practice, translating professional books or inviting foreign colleagues to provide training in China" (Powell & David, 2010, P.252)

A variety of curriculum approaches such as High Scope, Integrated Theme-based Curriculum, Project Approach, Reggio Emilia, and Montessori are being widely employed in Chinese kindergartens (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). However, some trials of implanting Reggio Emilia and Montessori programs have failed in the Chinese context, owing to constraints arising from teacher-children ratio, the quality of teachers, educational resources, parents' expectations, educational system, and the socio-cultural environment (Li & Li, 2003; Li, 2002). This has led to researchers' rethinking of localization and appropriateness of adopting foreign curriculum. Tobin (2007) suggested a cautious attitude towards the integration of European and American approaches into Chinese culture. Jiang and Deng (2008) also argued that Chinese early childhood education programs lack the 'China flavor', and more emphasis

should be placed on how to resolve practical problems in the kindergartens within domestic socio-cultural contexts before adopting foreign philosophies and curricula. Li's analysis (2002) further indicated that six qualities limited the success of implanting these programs, including the teacher-student ratio, the quality of the teacher, resources, parents' expectations, the educational system, and the socio-cultural environment. Taking these aspects into account, Zhu and Zhang (2008) advocated that early childhood curriculum reform should be sensitive to Chinese social ecology, culture, and some social problem-solving, and should match early childhood teachers' professional level.

It is obvious that, early childhood education in China is strongly influenced by socio-cultural development and changes. It reflects the Chinese culture value, the political system and impact of western cultures. As Zhu (2009) indicated that contemporary early childhood education is becoming "more diverse in its forms, funding sources, and educational approaches, and is aligning itself with the increasingly open and diversified society" (p.51).

3.4 One-child policy and early childhood education

The one-child policy has affected early childhood education and development in China. In order to reduce the overwhelming population density, China has issued a one-child-per-family policy throughout the nation. The one-child policy has been implemented since 1979 and it has had a positive influence on the Chinese population and family investment in education. For example, as the one-child policy effectively reduced the numbers of preschoolers, this makes it possible for each family to place greater investment into the care and education of the only child (Vaughan, 1993; Corter et al., 2006). Pang and Richey (2007) indicated that parents and grandparents put more money, time and energy into the only child's care and education. Chinese kindergarten teachers in Vaughan's (1993) research reported that children's school success was a major priority for parents, and they were more likely to criticize teachers easily if they felt their child had been treated unfairly or harshly. As a result of the only-child policy implementation, "early childhood educators, parents and others pay more attention to children's early education and development, not

only to children's language, intelligence and health development but also to emotional and social development and education, including communication, friendship maintenance, emotional expressions, de-confliction, facing changes and new environment adaptation" (Zhu, 2009, p.53).

However, although the one-child policy has positively affected family and early childhood education in some ways, many issues also emerged. For instance, one of the concerns is that as the only child is the center of attention at home, it is easy for the single child to become overindulged, self-centered and lazy (Rao & Li, 2009). This is considered to be the consequence of the '4-2-1 syndrome' which means four grandparents and two parents all focusing their attention, hopes, and ambitions on one child. Only children are usually called 'little emperors', 'little suns', or 'little princesses' in the family. Li (2001) indicated that the one-child policy led to parents caring excessively about children's life, and even helping them dress up, clean up and feeding them until they are as old as five or six years. Another concern is that as the majority of urban preschool children are only children, their parents worry about the lack of valuable opportunities for the single child's social interaction with siblings (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). Moreover, despite the only child attracting all the attention and love from the family members, as an only child, he or she faces great parental expectations in terms of academic achievement, which even starts in the early years (Hu & Szente, 2009).

3.5 Cultural beliefs and early childhood education

Early childhood education always "functions within a cultural context, and is in many respects, restricted by the traditions and vicissitudes of a culture" (Wang & Mao, 1996, p.143). Researchers pointed out that Chinese early childhood education reflects a hybrid of three distinct cultural threads---traditional culture, communist culture, and Western culture, which have combined and profoundly shaped Chinese people's lives and different aspects of Chinese early childhood education (Wang & Spodek, 2000; Zhu & Wang 2005; Zhu & Zhang, 2008).

3.5.1 Traditional Chinese culture

Traditional Chinese culture plays a critical role in shaping the perceptions and practice of early childhood education. It has “had a profound influence on the ideological and philosophical bases of the kindergarten, including the views of the young child, views of learning and development, and views of appropriate teacher-child relationships” (Zhu & Zhang, 2008, p.176).

Wang and Mao (1996) argued that there is a trend of worshipping tradition in China and it is still reflected in present Chinese education of young children when they are taught to recite long poems, stories, and classics smoothly by mechanical memorizing. Zhu and Zhang (2008) pointed out that Chinese tend to value drilling, memorizing and discipline rather than creativity, understanding and freedom. They further explained that in language development, when compared with American children who are taught to learn the rules and conventions of self-expression and free speech, Chinese children are expected to enunciate clearly, memorize and recite poems, and teachers still employ traditional teaching methods to teach children language. The worship of tradition also resulted in changing the basic and long-standing patterns of early childhood education, including kindergarten organizational structure, teaching strategies, and classroom rules (Wang & Mao, 1996).

Moreover, the characteristics and development of the Chinese education system, including early childhood education, have been greatly influenced by Confucianism (Wang & Mao, 1996, p.144). According to Confucianism, self-perfection is the highest purpose of individual life. Effortful learning is one of the main paths to achieve this goal. Education is an essential component of virtues. It was placed as a top priority over any other aspects of people’s life. As a result, parents in China, whether poor or rich, expect their children to have high academic achievement which is seen as the important way to success. It is assumed that high academic achievement will bring practical outcomes and rewards of social recognition, status, economic advantages and so forth (Li, 2004). Highly motivated by these ideas, parents enthusiastically urge and support their children to gain a good education and to

pursue academic success (Pang & Richey, 2007). As Hu and Szente (2009) noted, “pressure caused by such academic competition makes parents anxious about academic achievements as soon as their children reach pre-school age, and many parents request kindergartens to focus on academic subjects like mathematics and reading” (p.249). Although the developmentally appropriate curriculum based on play and child-centred approach is advocated by early childhood education guidelines, parents do not fully understand the benefits of it and teachers have difficulties implementing it in practice as they are used to adopting direct instructional teaching methods which stem from the cultural tradition (Zhu & Zhang, 2008).

Another traditional cultural belief which stems from Confucianism is following authorities unquestioningly, which affects Chinese early childhood education. From this cultural belief, it is considered reasonable for children to obey to parents and teachers. Chinese children are expected to respect and be compliant towards adults. Parents and teachers are supposed to have the authority to tell children what to do no matter whether their perspectives are right or wrong and children are supposed to accept their guidance without objections. Therefore, instead of advocating an equal relationship between teachers and children, the traditions stress on the authority of teachers and the obedience of children. These traditions not only meant that many children do not have the opportunity to make their own choice and express their personal ideas freely, but also the neglect of children’s needs and an unequal teacher-children relationship (Wang & Mao, 1996).

Finally, the traditional culture of emphasizing ethical and moral self-cultivation also has a remarkable influence on early childhood education (Wang & Mao, 1996). Chinese attach great importance to self-cultivation in terms of ethical and moral perfection, while much less attention was paid to individuals’ subject value. According to Wang and Mao (1996), “Confucian scholars advocated modesty and encouraged friendly cooperation, giving priority to people’s relationships as a whole while suppressing the development of the individual’s personality” (p.145). Fu and Liu (1988) elaborated that the subject value of the learners can be recognized only through realizing their social values, and the purpose is to shape every

individual into a harmonious member of society. This traditional idea was reflected in the aims of Chinese early childhood education which stresses a single development criterion for all children, rather than helping individual children to achieve their potential, pursue personal happiness and encourage individuals to develop their unique personality. Therefore, children in kindergartens are expected to “comply with class rules and restrain their own needs and impulse” (Wang & Mao, 1996, p.146).

3.5.2 Communist culture

In addition to the influence that the traditional Chinese culture brings, some communist culture also exerts influence on early childhood education. As Tobin (1989) indicated, Chinese people are more group-oriented, or social unit-oriented, as opposed to individual-oriented. Wang and Mao (1996) also noted that Chinese tend to focus on collective benefits rather than individual needs. This cultural characteristic of Chinese was partially formed by the communist culture’s influence, which was prevalent throughout the country when the people’s public of China was founded in 1949. What needs to be mentioned here is that at that time, the Chinese Chairman Mao enforced a socialist curriculum in which all children were expected to “perform at high levels and in similar ways” (Deng et al., 2001, p.290).

The influence of communist culture is evident in some practical aspects of kindergarten education, such as organization, administration and curricular goals and contents (Zhu & Zhang, 2008). For instance, supported by the communist philosophy, during the Mao era, Chinese early childhood educators emphasized collectivism rather than individualism in terms of kindergarten organization. From the communist viewpoint, the concept of individualism was not acceptable, even in early childhood education. Individual differences, individual needs, individual choices and individual expression which characterize the current early childhood curriculum that aims to develop children’s individuality were neglected. As a result, “individual differences in curricula, teaching, and learning activities were not taken into consideration” (Hu & Szente, 2009, p.249) and kindergarten education aims reflected collectivism (Wang & Mao, 1996). Vaughan (1993) stated that the encouraging of group

rather than individual goals was evident in kindergarten practice, as “more lessons use cooperative interactions and teamwork in order to emphasize group rather than individual achievement” (p.198). “Extreme egalitarianism” which stems from the communist culture, “had dominated Chinese society and had resulted in neglect of individual differences” (Deng et al., 2001, p.290). This was also reflected in kindergarten daily organization, as emphasis was placed on teacher-directed total group instruction and children were organized to do the same activity at the same time and were expected to proceed at the same pace (Vaughan, 1993). As Vaughan (1993) described this kind of practice even happened when children went to the toilet in a group, as it was assumed that “it is good for children to learn to regulate their bodies and attune their rhythms to those of their classmates” (Tobin et al., 1989, p.105).

At the same time, influenced by the communist culture, in terms of kindergarten administration, more attention was paid to maintain social order and class discipline. For example, in group activities, children were expected to be “orderly, attentive, hard-working” and show “respect for the teacher and prompt, unquestioned obedience” (Vaughan, 1993, p.199). Early years practitioners used some techniques, such as “public correction and criticism”, to correct children when peer conflict or inattentive or disruptive behavior occurred (ibid). As a result of maintaining social order and class discipline, children appeared to “respect the teachers” and “obey class rules”, and worked as a team to “help others and solve disagreements constructively” (ibid). Moreover, affected by the communist culture, the early childhood education system emphasized a teacher-centered approach rather than child-centered pedagogy and teachers were trained to “instruct children in purposeful and planned activities” (Zhu & Wang, 2005, p.57).

In addition, the communist culture influenced early childhood curricula goals and contents. During the Mao era, the policy for educating children was aimed at preparing them to be “laborers both red and expert by combining proletarian politics with productive labor and socialist consciousness with moral, intellectual, and physical development” (Deng et al, 2001, p.290). Influenced by this communist viewpoint, the early childhood curricula specified unified content and schedules, and stressed the curricula goals of promoting children’s moral,

intellectual and physical development (Zhu & Wang, 2005, p.57). The goal of fostering respect and affection for the Chinese Communist Party which derived from the communist culture was also evident in some of the early childhood curriculum content, such as a popular children's song "I love Beijing Tian An Men Square", which was included in the early years music curriculum.

3.5.3 European and North American cultures

Cultural influence has changed over time. On the one hand, according to Zhu and Zhang (2008), since the post Mao era (1976–), the European-American culture has gradually and increasingly impacted on every aspect of Chinese society. It also powerfully affects early childhood education in many ways. "The progressive ideology regarding children, educational values and the curriculum has been a strong force in early childhood education reform in recent years" (p.176). On the other hand, the influence from both Chinese traditional culture and communist culture has receded ideologically (Li, 2007).

3.6 Policy and legislation in early childhood education

Since 1990, the Chinese government has set out various policies and exerted great legislative effort on early childhood education. For example, in 1990, the government signed *the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children* and *the Implementation of the World Declaration Action Plan on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children*. In the 1990s, *the Program Outline for Children's Development* was developed through which children's developmental goals were set, then pushed out and implemented by different levels of government departments and led to great progress in early childhood education (Zhu & Wang, 2005).

The Chinese Ministry of Education issued other influential guidelines and regulations, including the *Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice (trial version)* in 1989, *the Regulation for Kindergartens Management* in 1990, *the Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice* in 1996, *the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education Practice (trial version)* in 2001 and recently *The Guidelines of Child Development for 2012-2020*. These

documents, as Zhu (2009) pointed out, “provide the legal basis for ensuring legal rights and interests of kindergartens, clarifying the responsibilities and obligations assumed by the governments, societies, and relevant departments, and clarifying the administrative system with respect to responsibilities of local authorities and management at different levels” (p.52). More importantly, a cooperation system was established between multiple government departments, including the education department, health department, family planning department, women’s federation and so on, to support and improve the quality of early childhood education (Zhu, 2009). These actions suggest that the central government increasingly values early childhood education and pays more attention to enhance the quality of children’s lives and facilitate their healthy and holistic development.

Rapid changes and development have taken place in China in recent years in economic, social, and political areas. Despite the large amount of progress that has been made in the Chinese early childhood education field since the 1980s, challenges and issues also emerged along with this developing process. For example, there are increasing concerns and efforts in recent years to integrate nurseries and kindergartens, so as to offer both care and education to children from birth to six year old. Other issues such as early childhood education in rural and remote areas, early childhood curriculum reform, appropriation and localization of borrowed approach and curriculum, and teachers’ professional development attract researchers’ attention (Zhu & Zhang, 2008; Zhu, 2009).

Chapter 4 Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed justification of the methodological issues of the current study. Section 4.1 of this chapter offers the rationale for the research design, in which the selection of research strategies and data collection methods based on the research question is explained. Section 4.2 introduces the research procedure, including the pilot study, the sampling and describing the settings of the research, the field entry, the role of the researcher and data collection process. Section 4.3 and 4.4 focus on language and ethical considerations, while section 4.5 focuses on data analysis. After that, the trustworthiness of the research is discussed (4.6). Finally, the chapter ends with my methodological reflection on the research.

4.1 Research design

It is widely recognized that a research design is a logical plan, generated by the researcher after having engaged in a comprehensive decision-making process that involves at least three decisions: identifying the philosophical assumptions of the study; deciding strategies of inquiry; and selecting specific methods of data collection (Creswell, 2009). All these decisions are closely related and determined by the purpose of the research (Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, at the outset of my research project, it is necessary to get a clear idea of the research purposes.

The focus of my research is to explore teachers' perceptions and practices of play in Chinese kindergartens, including teachers' perspectives of the value of play to children's learning and development, their role and interaction with children in play and aspects which influence the implementation of play in practice. Based on the nature of the research, the study was designed as a qualitative piece of research within the interpretive paradigm. Three methods of data gathering, including interview, observation, and documentary research were combined in order to address the research questions. In the following sections, I attempt to justify the methodological approaches and methods which are chosen for the current study.

4.1.1 Justification of methodological stance

4.1.1.1 Theoretical basis of the research

The research design process, according to Creswell (2007; 2009) begins with ‘philosophical ideas’ that the researcher brings in when deciding to conduct a study. Philosophical ideas also have been termed by many other researchers as paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mertens, 1998); ontologies and epistemologies (Crotty, 1998); philosophical worldviews (Creswell, 2009) or broadly conceived research methodologies (Neuman, 2000) which all mean a set of beliefs that guide the research project (Guba, 1990; Creswell, 2007). Since the stance of these assumptions influences the design and conduct of the inquiry (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Creswell, 2007; 2009), it is essential for me to make it explicit before carrying out my study.

Researchers label different philosophical worldviews, among which two major worldviews are commonly listed in social research. They are positivism (or objectivist) and anti-positivism (or subjectivist) (Cohen et al., 2007). These philosophical ideas imply different ontological and epistemological perspectives, and the discrepancies between them lie in how social reality and generating knowledge in research is understood (Creswell, 2009; Cohen et al., 2007; Hartas, 2010). It is these theoretical assumptions that influence and guide researchers’ decision-making concerning research strategy and methods.

Positivism believes in the existence of an objective reality which can be discovered. This philosophical view sees social reality as independent and external to individuals, and the purpose of scientific research is to discover universal laws that govern the reality (Burrell & Morgan 1979, cited in Cohen et al., 2007). The research paradigm closely linked to positivism is a normative paradigm, which claims that human behavior should be investigated by using the methods of natural science. The normative paradigm “strives for objectivity, measurability, predictability, controllability, patterning, the construction of laws and rules of behavior, and the ascription of causality” (Cohen et al., 2007, p.26). Researchers who adopt a normative paradigm have displayed an interest in establishing a universal theory

which accounts for human and social behavior. In contrast to positivism, anti-positivism claims that social reality is a personal and humanly created reality, in which the subjective experience of individuals is stressed (ibid). Knowledge can be gained by understanding individuals' interpretation of their subjective meanings of the world in which they live. The research paradigm closely linked to anti-positivism is the interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes that social actors make meaning of their behaviors and actions (ibid). The central endeavor in the context of the interpretive paradigm is "to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.26). From an interpretive perspective, the aim of research is to understand human action (Schwandt, 2000). The researcher who takes an interpretive paradigm is interested in the meanings that an individual and a group ascribe to the social phenomenon. Thus, the meanings and interpretations of the participants are paramount to the researcher. In order to "retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated", the researcher makes efforts to get deep understanding of the person's worldview (Cohen et al., 2007, p.21).

The primary theoretical and epistemological basis of my research is anti-positivism, and specifically speaking, constructivism, which claims that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed, individuals construct their own meaning through interactions with the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is regarded as an appropriate stance for my study because the purpose of the current research is to understand kindergarten teachers' meanings of their experiences based on the Chinese cultural and social contexts. I believe that every kindergarten teacher has her own meaning of play, which is socially and culturally constructed. The meanings are diverse and can be better understood through interaction with the teachers. In the research, the reality can be co-constructed by interacting and dialogue with the participating kindergarten teachers. The research paradigm I plan to draw upon is the interpretive paradigm which "engages both the *hows* and that *whats* of social reality" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p.488). Since my research focuses on exploring Chinese kindergarten teachers' perceptions of play (*what*) and their implementation of play in practice (*how*), the interpretive paradigm is considered to be a suitable choice for me.

4.1.1.2 Inquiry approach

It is a widely held view that qualitative and quantitative approaches are the two research traditions in social research. Generally speaking, a quantitative approach is more likely to be situated within the theoretical basis of positivism and the normative paradigm, while a qualitative approach is often based on the philosophical views of anti-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The main distinction between these two approaches lies in the specific methods employed in collecting and analyzing data (Brannen, 1992). As Hammersley (1999) and Cohen et al. (2007) point out, in qualitative research, researchers tend to employ the human-as-instrument to gather qualitative data which are typically collected from purposive samples in natural settings. Data often analyzed inductively to understand the meanings of the participants and grounded theory is generated, rather than a priori theory testing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cohen et al., 2007). Meanwhile, in quantitative traditions, researchers are more likely to adopt pre-determined and standardized research tools to collect data which often derives from large representative samples and data is often analyzed deductively by using statistical procedures to test objective theories (Hammersley, 1999; Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Findings from quantitative research may ultimately be generalized to similar populations (Jacobs et al., 1999). In contrast to the characteristics of quantitative research which have been claimed by Silverman (2000) as “objective, hard, fixed, and abstract”, the main features of qualitative research have been seen as “subjective, soft, flexible, and grounded” (p.2). According to Creswell (2009), the quantitative approach is often adopted when the researcher needs to test objective theories, measure variables and examine the relationship among variables, while the qualitative approach is usually employed when the researcher plans to explore and understand the meanings which individuals or groups ascribe to a social phenomenon or problem.

However, both approaches to educational research have advantages and disadvantages. A main strength of quantitative research is that since the data are often from a large sample, findings are able to generalize and replicate, they are considered to be less biased and more

reliable (Silverman, 2000; Jacobs et al., 1999). However, an over-reliance on quantitative methods may lead to the neglect of “the social and cultural construction of the variables” (Silverman, 2000, p.6). Moreover, “the pursuit of measurable phenomena may lead to unperceived values creeping into research by simply taking on board highly problematic and unreliable concepts” (Silverman, 2000, p.7). As for qualitative research, some researchers criticize the fact that it is practised in casual and unsystematic ways (Mason, 2002), and due to “the small-scale exploratory nature of most qualitative studies, it is usually not possible to aggregate a sufficiently large body of data from a single study to conduct conventional statistical analyses” (Jacobs et al., 1999, p.718). However, the strengths of qualitative research should not be forgotten. A major merit of it is that since the research designs emerge over time, it is flexible in nature, which may encourage researchers’ innovation (Silverman, 2000) and is more likely to lead to the discovery of “new ideas and unanticipated occurrences” (Jacobs et al., 1999, p.718). Another advantage of qualitative research is that it allows researchers to explore understandings, experiences, perceptions, meanings, practices and processes in depth and in detail. More importantly, it has the capacity to connect context with explanation, to produce “very well-founded cross-contextual generalities rather than aspire to flimsy de-contextual finding” (Mason, 2002).

Since my research aims to explore kindergarten teachers’ experiences, perceptions, meanings, and practices in depth and detail, a qualitative approach is considered appropriate to achieve this purpose to provide rich, detailed, complete explanations of the particular context---China. According to the ‘fitness for purpose’ principle proposed by Cohen et al. (2007) which points out to locate research approach according to the research purposes, a qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm is chosen for the current study.

4.1.2 Methods of data collection

As the current study is designed as qualitative research, data-gathering instruments characteristic of qualitative research are emphasized. Cohen et al. (2007) and Creswell (2007) point out that in qualitative studies, researchers tend to use interviews, observations, narrative accounts and documents, diaries rather than surveys and experiments. Similarly, it

is Mason's (2002) view that researchers in qualitative research tend to collect data by combining observation with interview. Based on the questions and purpose of the current study, I decided to employ three instruments---interview, observation, and documents review to collect research data. In the following sections, I will discuss the suitability of these instruments in addressing my research questions.

4.1.2.1 Interview

Interviews are chosen as a main research method in order to investigate how play is perceived by kindergarten practitioners, in that it enables researchers to have access to interviewees' views, experiences, emotions, perceptions and meanings, and to get unique, non-standardized, personalized information in greater depth (Cohen et al., 2007). In the relevant studies of teachers' perceptions of play, researchers either make use of questionnaires (Dako-Gyeke, 2009) or interview (Badzis, 2003; Bennett et al., 1997; Rogers, 2000; Shen, 2008) to address the problem. According to Dako-Gyeke (2009), the reason that she selects the questionnaire rather than interview to gather information about teachers' beliefs concerning play is that questionnaires are not only efficient for describing the characteristics of a large population by collecting data from a larger size sample, but also an economical method. However, questionnaires also have some shortcomings. The main defect is that it sometimes leads to misunderstandings on the part of respondents, since the same questions may have different meanings for different people, and more importantly, the researcher cannot give timely explanations to the respondents when this problem occurs (Cohen et al., 2007). In contrast to the questionnaire, the interview is regarded as a higher response research method, and participants tend to be more involved, motivated and say more about the research in interviewing than using a questionnaire. Moreover, the interview allows researchers to ask difficult and open-ended questions and in an in-depth manner to understand how human beings view the world (Oppenheim, 1992; Fontana & Frey, 2000). Furthermore, the interview is considered as a suitable technique to use when carrying out intensive studies of a group of selected individuals (Merriam, 1998) and it is often deemed as the best available means for accessing participants' opinions, beliefs, values, views,

perceptions, understandings, interpretations and experiences (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Mason, 2002). It enables respondents to express their own opinions in their own terms. Because of the above-mentioned features, the interview is considered more appropriate than the questionnaire for my research. Thus, I decided to employ interviews to access teachers' views on the value of play, the effectiveness of play in achieving their teaching goals and their role in play; how they decide whether or not to be involved in play; and aspects that may influence their implementation of play. Nevertheless, the interview approach is time-consuming in terms of collecting and analyzing data. Moreover, it is prone to interviewer bias (Cohen et al., 2007). This shortcoming may be eliminated by combining it with other research tools (Yin, 2009; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I resolved to adopt interviews in conjunction with observation, so as to minimize bias and to offer a more holistic interpretation of play in Chinese kindergartens.

4.1.2.1.1 Relevant issues of interview

The first crucial decision about interviews is to decide which type of interview to use in the current study. There are different types of interview, defined by researchers according to different criteria in the literature, such as informal conversational interview, interview guide approaches, standardized open-ended interview, closed quantitative interview (Patton, 1990), group interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), structured interview, semi-structured interview, non-directive interview, focused interview (Gray, 2009), face-to-face interview, telephone interview, one-to-one interview, and group interview (Robson, 2002) etc.. These different types of interview are adapted to fit to the specific research purpose and can be employed at different stages of the same study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The purpose of my research is to understand teachers' views of play and their experience, and to explain how they apply play to kindergarten routines in certain ways. In order to achieve this, it was thought to be preferable for me to interview teachers first, to ascertain their personal perception of play before observing their actual practice. After the observation, I needed to interview the teachers again to obtain a deep understanding of their account for specific play-based practice. Compared to group interviews, a one-to-one interview would probably enable teachers to give sufficient personal explanations to their beliefs, experiences, and behavior.

Moreover, a face-to-face interview would probably make teachers feel comfortable in expressing their ideas through eye contact with the researcher, in contrast to a telephone interview. In addition, a less structured interview such as the open-ended or semi-structured interview would probably provide much more information and deeper interpretation of the ways in which teachers translate play in class teaching, rather than a highly structured interview.

Based on the research purpose of my study and the characteristics of different interviews, I decided to adopt three types of interview drawn on by Cheng (2001) in her case study of exploring Hong Kong early childhood practitioners' experience of the implementation of a play-based pedagogy. The three types of interview, namely pre-observation interview, stimulated recall interview, and post-observation interview (Cheng, 2001; Cheng & Stimpson, 2004) are all face-to-face individual interview. As Schon (1995) suggested, a teacher's personal practical knowledge is guided by his or her own theories-in-use or theory of actions. These theories can be revealed only through reflection and observation. Stimulated recall interview and post-observation interview have been considered to be effective to trigger reflection, as they "facilitate retrospective verbalization of thought processes that occur simultaneously with some recorded overt behavior" (Cheng & Stimpson, 2004, p.342). They are often utilized to "tap practitioners' decision-making in situations of teacher interaction with children in classrooms" (ibid). In this sense, the pre-observation interview allowed me to access kindergarten teachers' general ideas of play, while stimulated recall interview and post-observation interview enabled me to explore in great depth of teachers' personal theories of action through facilitating their reflection on action. Thus these three kinds of interview are considered suitable for my research.

Pre and post-observation interviews, as the names indicate, were conducted respectively before and after the observations of classroom practice with individual teachers. Stimulated recall interviews were carried out at two different times. Firstly, I resolved to conduct these as informal conversations with the observed-teacher immediately after I observed certain play activity in classroom, allowing the teacher to explain in some depth what took place in

the class. Secondly, I planned to interview teachers after each of them had watched certain audio-visual recorded play episode of classroom observation.

Among the above-mentioned interviews, the pre and post-observation interviews were designed as semi-structured ones, in which I was guided by a prepared list of exploring questions, but also had the opportunity to probe beyond the interview schedule (Merriam, 1998). This exercise enabled interviewees to express their viewpoints in a relatively open situation (Flick, 1998) and allowed me and interviewees to develop unexpected themes (Mason, 2002). The stimulated recall interview was designed in the form of a less structured interview, for it had great flexibility, and allowed interviewees to say what they wanted. It was assumed that through these interviews which would take place in sequence in different stages of the study, kindergarten teachers' views of play and the explanation behind their real practice of application of play could be understood in greater depth.

An interview schedule (see Appendix A and B) for the pre and post observation interviews and the stimulated recall interviews was designed to help me to organize my thoughts on questions and successfully go over the purpose of the study with the interviewee (Creswell, 2007). Interviews were recorded using audio recording equipment, with teachers' permission, as this enabled me to concentrate more on what was said, so as to maintain good eye contact with interviewees, to "capture a good deal of the interviewees' intonation, voice quality, hesitations, self-corrections" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p.199). Additionally, it could assist me to ensure the integrity of the data and to support further analysis (Merriam, 1998).

4.1.2.2 Observation

The second method I planned to use was observation because it was not enough merely to interview teachers about their views of play; I was also interested in observing the ways in which play is implemented, the different types of play, the teacher's role in play, and the teacher-child interactions during play in kindergarten practice. Observation was considered as a suitable means to collect data for the 2, 3, and 4 research questions, as it is a powerful

tool to catch the dynamic nature of play in classroom practice, such as actions and interactions, and thus provide a fuller picture of teachers' practice. Cohen et al. (2007) indicate that observation allows investigators to gather 'live' data, from naturally occurring real situations. By observing, researchers can "look directly at what is taking place in site rather than rely on second-hand account", so that more valid and authentic data are expected to generate than using mediated or inferential methods (p.396). Meanwhile, observation enables researchers to understand the context, to be open-ended and inductive, to be fresh for things that might be unconsciously missed and be taken for granted, to reveal things that participants might not be willing to talk about in interview situations, and more importantly, to go beyond perception-based data (ibid). Moreover, observation is a distinctive research tool to provide specific events, behaviors etc. which can be used as reference points for subsequent interviews (Merriam, 1998). Finally, data collected from observation of teachers' practice may provide a reality check with what the teachers say in interview, since Robson (2002) states that what people actually do may differ from what they say they do. Therefore, observation is interwoven with interview in order to corroborate the findings. However, there were possible difficulties of gaining access and negotiating entry (Bailey, 1994), so I planned to employ guided sampling strategy to solve the problem.

4.1.2.2.1 Relevant issues of observation

As for observation, it was thought to be better for me to make explicit the type of it I will employ and the role I will act in my research. As Cohen et al. (2007) state, there are two major types of observation: participant observation and non-participant observation. The former means observers completely engage in the very activities they set out to observe, while the latter means observers stand aside from the group activities they are investigating and function without interacting with the participants (Cohen et al., 2007; Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000). Cohen et al. (2007) further explain that "the type of observation undertaken by the researcher is associated with the type of setting in which the research take place" (p.259). Since my study aimed to understand teachers' work in the natural situations of the kindergarten, I initially decided to adopt non-participant observation, as I wanted to minimize the potential impact and interruption I might bring to the regular activities of the

classes. In so doing, I did not wish either to manipulate the situation, or to pose questions for the teachers, but to stand back to maintain social distance. However, as Adler and Adler (1994) argue, all research is some form of participant observation, since we cannot study the world without being part of it. Moreover, as I am the main instrument of data collection in the current research, subjectivity and interaction are assumed (Merriam, 1998). In addition, through participant observing, I was not only able to immerse myself in the classroom and culture context more deeply, but to have a better understanding of teachers' interpretation of the meaning of their behavior through interaction with them. Therefore, instead of employing non-participant observation, I decided to adopt participant observation after reconsideration.

As for my role in observation, I planned to adopt the role of observer as participant, which suggested by Gold (1958, cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p.397), that is, my observed activities will be known by the group; "participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer" (Merriam, 1998, p.101). I planned to interact casually with teachers and children, but closely enough to "establish an insider's identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership" (Adler & Adler, 1994, p.380). As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) more vividly stated, for the observer as participant, researchers carry with them an imaginary sign that they "hang over each subject and on every wall and tree" (p.93). Rossman and Rallis (1998) indicated that the most important contemporary use of this role is in classroom observational studies conducted by educational researchers. By adopting this role, it was deemed possible for me to access to a wide range of information (Merriam, 1998) from teachers, kindergarten administrators and children, and still maintain my identity as a researcher. Therefore, on the one hand, I planned to participate in teacher-directed play activities so as to observe teachers' and children's behaviors in play through intimate interaction with them and directly experience. On the other hand, I did not intend to participate in children's free flow play or children's free-chosen play activities. This allowed me to have sufficient time and energy to record teacher-child interactions as specifically as possible: for example, who initiates (teacher or child) the most interaction in play; what the contents of the interaction were; what the results of the interaction were; and

what the types of the interaction were.

I planned to conduct classroom observation of selected kindergarten classes, each for eight working days. Before the focused observations took place, I conducted general observations for the first three days and covered whole day time and activities. This exercise was intended to allow me to become familiar with the settings, the children, the teachers and the routine activities of the class. After I had become familiar with the routine of the kindergarten and the participants are comfortable with my presence (Lodico et al., 2006), I intended to carry out focused observations which concentrated on play activities of the classroom practice in the following five days. Each focused observation would last for two hours in the morning or afternoon (this would refer to the timetable of the observed class). The behaviors, conversations, settings and results of teacher-child interaction would then be recorded in detail.

The observation data were recorded in the form of field notes, that is, a written account of what the researcher observes in the field (Merriam, 1998; Lodico et al., 2006). Based on Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) viewpoint that the field notes aimed to provide a word-picture of the setting, people, actions, and conversations as observed, I decided to record the following information in field notes as completely as possible:

1. A description of the physical setting (including: physical environment, context, allocated space, objects, resources etc.);
2. A description of the participants (including: who, how many, their roles);
3. A description of activities (including: theme and types of activity, sequence of activities, duration of activity etc.);
4. A description of teacher-child interactions in play (including: interaction initiator, contents, results etc.);
5. A record of the conversation (including: contents of conversations);
6. A record of other information which relates to play activities.

Meanwhile, the audio-visual recorder was used to provide more comprehensive and detailed

material (Cohen et al., 2007) for further analysis. This was considered useful because many visual data may not be observed clearly and recorded in great detail by hand, and it may be difficult to write oral data in a timely and complete fashion in field notes. As Walsh et al. (2007) indicated, video could reveal the unnoticed detail of daily life. Moreover, the audio-visual recorded data can be reviewed repeatedly, thus, enables deep analysis. Finally, it was easy to store video data and copy it when necessary (Walsh et al., 2007).

4.1.2.3 Documents review

In addition to the above-mentioned techniques for data gathering, I also planned to study the relevant documents, regulations and curriculum plans to offer a relevant context for the research. According to Vygotsky's (1978) view, in order to understand an individual, it is essential for the researcher to understand the cultural-historical context in which the individual lives. It is the contexts that shape social relations, values and practices that have laid the foundations of what teachers pay attention to in their practices. The political and educational contexts of China are important dimensions in understanding the way play is positioned, advocated and realized within the early childhood profession. Therefore, in order to gain a clear and complete insight into the interpretation of play-based teaching at a policy level and the context of kindergarten teachers' practices, a number of official documents including policy statements, kindergarten education guidelines and regulations were collected and analyzed. In an attempt to explore the constraints that affect teachers' beliefs and practices towards play, a wide range of documents, such as kindergarten timetable, teachers' curriculum plans, children's learning assessment sheets, and teacher-parents communication booklets were also collected. However, a potential danger of the documentary research was that some of documents may be difficult to access. Moreover, documents were "situated products" (Prior, 2003, p.26). They "may be highly biased and selective, as they were not intended to be regarded as research data but were written for a different purpose, audience and context" (Cohen et al. 2007, p.201). Bearing this in mind, great attention was paid to collecting the main Chinese policy documents in early childhood education field to corroborate them with each other to contextualise the setting of play in

early education. Instead of offering a separate and detailed interpretation of the collected documents, I used them to contextualise the research, and to inform the later analysis of play-based practice in kindergartens. The contents from different documents provided the Chinese early childhood education context, as presented in Chapter 3 and the contents from the kindergarten-produced timetables and curriculum plans etc. context the settings of observed kindergartens that presented in Chapter 6. Other contents from the educational policies and regulations are presented at the beginning of the finding Chapter 5, to provide the Chinese official discourse of play in early childhood education.

4.2 Research process

4.2.1 Pilot study

The whole research process consisted of two stages. Before I conducted the main study, I carried out a pilot study. As Saldana and Wright (1996) suggested, “if time and resources permit, researchers may wish to consider whether a small-scale and short-term pilot study is worthwhile as a preparatory investigation before the actual project begins” (p.126). Moreover, Robson (2011) pointed out that a pilot study could help researchers to examine the suitability and applicability of data collecting methods and tools, thus helping them to refine their research design.

Therefore, I applied the pilot study to test the appropriateness of the research methods and data collecting techniques in reality. Firstly, by piloting the interview schedule, I aimed to identify ambiguities, omissions, redundant and irrelevant information of interview questions, and then to make amendments accordingly, so as to ensure the interview schedule which will be used in main study is unambiguous, clear and understandable. Secondly, I intended to examine the feasibility and operability of recording observation by using field notes and a video recorder. Thirdly, the pilot study was employed to inspire the coding system for data analysis (Saldana, 2003).

The pilot study was carried out from early December to the end of December 2010 in a privately-owned Chinese kindergarten in Guangzhou. There were two reasons for selecting this kindergarten. Firstly, it was an exemplary kindergarten in terms of advocating play-based teaching and learning. The kindergarten had been awarded the status of being exemplary by the Education Department of Guangdong Province, based on its size, quality of teachers, educational facilities and quality of teaching. Secondly, it was accessible to me. I selected three classes from three different age stages (kindergarten stage 1, 2 and 3) to conduct the research.

During the pilot study, three official documents were collected and analyzed, individual interviews were conducted with three teachers in charge of the selected three classes in the kindergarten, and observation was carried out in their classes. Audio-recorded interviews and video-recorded observation of interactions were transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed together with field notes. The interview and observation schedules were tested in the pilot study.

4.2.1.1 Learning from the pilot study

The interview was chosen as a main method for the study to provide in-depth information for research questions 1, 3 and 5. To a large extent, it was effective in providing information concerning teachers' perceptions of play, their role in play and explanation of their implementation of play. As the research was carried forward, a good relationship was established between the teachers and me. As a result, the participant teachers responded and interacted with me actively when we became familiar with each other. However, at the beginning of the research, when the pre-observation interview was carried out, teachers did not show their willingness to 'open up' to me, since we were not familiar with each other and mutual trust was not built up. This might influence the responses they gave me in the pre-observation interview. Thus, I considered that it would be better for me to try to establish a sense of trust before the interview carried out in the main study. Data from the interview indicated that teachers could easily understand the interview questions, but several questions needed to be extended according to different teachers' characteristics and teaching

experience. Therefore, I added some extended questions in the interview schedule to make it more effective to gain a comprehensive picture and deep understanding of teachers' view of play.

It was anticipated that observation would allow me to go beyond perception-based data and gather more authentic and specific data of play implementation in kindergarten classes. This method was revealing as it enabled me in witnessing teachers' specific actions, interactions and practice concerning play in kindergarten routines. However, as I am a stranger to the observed teachers and children, my presence was intrusive to some extent. Although I arranged one day to make the teachers and children familiar with me, one day was far from enough. The limited 'warm-up' time, indeed, might have brought about different behaviours from the teachers and children and threaten the ecological validity (Cohen et al., 2007). Thus, I considered that it would be more reasonable for me to spend several days in the observation field before the formal observation could be carried out. Data from the observation suggested that the activities observed could produce effective data for addressing the research questions 2, 3, 4 and 5, and the observation schedule was appropriate for me to gathering data of types and proportions of play in kindergarten activities. Using field notes and video recorder to record observation data was confirmed feasible in the pilot study.

By analyzing the data from the pilot study, the likely codes of teachers' roles in children's play, teacher-child interactions and barriers of teacher implementation of play were produced, and this inspired me to develop the code for the later main research.

4.2.2 Main study

The fieldwork of the main study was carried out during August 2011 to January 2012 in Guangzhou, China. In the following paragraphs, the sampling process and criteria, the settings in which the research was conducted, and the data gathering procedure will be discussed.

4.2.2.1 Population and sample

In qualitative research, sample decisions are normally made according to the research approach, questions, purposes and settings (Punch, 2009). As Punch (2009) argues, sampling in qualitative research is often purposive; at the same time, it should also be feasible in terms of time, money, access to people. Since I sought to obtain an in-depth picture of a group of teachers in Chinese kindergarten concerning their perspectives of play and how they realized play in practice, rather than to offer a statistically representative result of Chinese kindergarten teachers' perspective of play, purposive sampling was considered to be more suitable and informative. Based on the nature, purpose, time, resource, and accessibility of the current research, I decided to apply purposive sampling, and more specifically, stratified purposeful sampling which is a procedure by which the researcher identifies those informants who have some specific knowledge about the topic being investigated by using some criteria (Lodico et al., 2006), such as select schools in light of their funding categories.

According to Patton (1990), by employing purposeful sampling, it is possible to select information-rich cases to build up a sample that is satisfactory to specific research needs. For this research, 'information-rich cases' are those teachers of different Chinese kindergartens from whom I can learn a great deal about their perspectives of children's play and how they apply play to their teaching practices.

I applied a guided sampling strategy (Wellington, 2000) to make contact; that is, I asked a knowledgeable guide to suggest and direct me to the people or settings and help with access (Wellington, 2000). My previous mentor in the Institute of Education and Science of Hunan Normal University is a professor in Chinese preschool healthy education field, and is acquainted with many kindergarten principals, as she designs kindergarten food recipes for them. She was considered to be a knowledgeable guide for me to select and access to the research samples, and consequently, I sought her support. During the entry process, she helped me to access the kindergartens, and placed calls to the principals as an introduction.

The research was carried out in Guangzhou which was the capital city of Guangdong

Province in Southern China. As I come from Guangzhou, it was convenient for me to access the kindergartens. Additionally, Guangzhou is the third largest city in China, and its economy has developed very fast in recent years. It was hoped this research in Guangzhou could provide some insights into the beliefs and practices of early childhood teachers of a Chinese fast-developing area.

4.2.2.1.1 The kindergartens

It is necessary to point out that Chinese kindergartens are mainly managed by three kinds of funding resource: the government, private individuals, or local communities (Rao & Li, 2009). According to kindergarten size, teacher-staff ratio, quality of teaching, educational facilities and resource, Chinese kindergartens can be sub-divided into three different kinds, from the best to the standard: exemplary kindergartens at the provincial level, exemplary kindergartens at the municipal level and kindergartens at normal standard level. Exemplary kindergarten status is normally awarded by the Education Department of local government to those kindergartens which have relatively excellent education qualities and education resources through an inspection and approval system. Generally speaking, exemplary kindergartens at the provincial level are supposed to have better education quality and resources than exemplary kindergartens at the municipal level and standard kindergartens. They often charge higher fees than the standard kindergartens.

In order to ensure a range of variation in the sample, I determined to select three kindergartens according to their location, funding resources and assessment level. Thus the research sample included a government-owned kindergarten (public kindergarten), a community-run kindergarten, and a privately-owned kindergarten based on their representativeness and typicality. The first kindergarten was also a provincial exemplary kindergarten, while the second one was a municipal exemplary kindergarten, and the third kindergarten was a normal standard one. The fieldwork was carried out in three different kindergartens, distributed in three selected different districts of Guangzhou. This allowed me to compare the play perspectives and practice of teachers of different kindergartens and classes.

4.2.2.1.2 The classes

In the sample kindergartens, children are normally distributed into different classes according to their age. There are three different stages classes in kindergarten. Stage One (3-4 years old); Stage Two (4-5 years old); and Stage Three (5-6 years old). That is typical in China. Nine classes from three kindergartens were chosen to carry out classroom observations in this study. Three classes of different age stages (stage 1, 2, 3) were selected from each kindergarten.

4.2.2.1.3 The participants

Twenty-four kindergarten staff from three kindergartens, in which 18 were kindergarten teachers, 3 were interest class teachers, and the other 3 were kindergarten educational administrators participated in the current study. Six teachers from each kindergarten were chosen in terms of the type of classes they teach, as the key informants of the research. By interviewing the teachers, their understanding of the value of play to children's development and their opinion towards play-based teaching could be explored. I initially planned to interview two administrators from each of the three kindergartens; however, when I visited these kindergartens, I found that there were normally three administrators in a kindergarten, one was in charge of logistics work, one was responsible for overall and external work, and only one of them was in charge of teaching and teachers. Only the administrators in charge of kindergarten teaching were the ones I wanted to interview. By interviewing the administrators, the educational orientation of the kindergarten and the status of play in the kindergarten could be understood. More importantly, I thought that they were the key people linking the early childhood educational policies with the early years practitioners. Therefore, rather than interviewing six administrators as I had planned, I interviewed three educational administrators, one from each kindergarten. In addition, during the fieldwork, I found that two participating kindergartens had an interest class, which is a kind of class that meet parents' needs in offering children extra skills training programs, such as playing piano or doing mental arithmetic. Currently, these training programs are very popular and prevalent in Chinese kindergartens. Normally, the teachers who teach in these classes are professionals.

Some of them expressed interest in participating in my research. Moreover, their opinion of play was also important as their teaching constituted a significant part of kindergarten daily routines. How they perceive play may also influence children’s learning experience in the setting. Therefore, I added and interviewed three of them from two kindergartens.

All but two of the 24 participants were female. The two males were interest class teachers. 23 of the participants were Chinese, with only one interest class teacher being Irish. Ten participants were between 20 and 30 years, with three months to ten years of teaching experience in early childhood education, while fourteen participants were between 31 and 42 with 11 years to 23 years of prior experiences in early childhood education. As to their highest educational qualification, nine participants hold an associate degree (AD) while ten participants had a bachelor degree (BD), and five participants had finished the Qualified Kindergarten Teacher Education Course (KTEC) which was obtained after three years full-time kindergarten teacher training following secondary school. The participants’ profiles may be seen in the following table 4.1., 4.2 and 4.3.

Table 4.1 Participants’ Profile of Kindergarten Z

Participants from Kindergarten Z								
Class	ZK1		ZK2		ZK3		Administrator	Interest class
Teacher	AL	AW	AQ	AH	AP	AC	AZ	AT
Gender	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M
Age	40	21	31	21	31	23	36	25
Education	AD	KTEC	AD	KTEC	AD	AD	BD	AD
Years of teaching	12	2	11	8M	13	3	20	5

Table 4.2 Participants' Profile of Kindergarten M

Participants from Kindergarten M									
Class	MK1		MK2		MK3		Administrator	Interest class	
Teacher	BI	BO	BW	BL	BC	BY	BZ	BE	BT
Gender	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M
Age	30	35	28	25	42	24	33	26	24
Education	BD	AD	BD	AD	KTEC	BD	KTEC	BD	BD
Years of teaching	10	15	9	4	23	2	14	2M	2

Table 4.3 Participants' Profile of Kindergarten Y

Participants from Kindergarten Y							
Class	YK1		YK2		YK3		Administrator
Teacher	CH	CE	CO	CJ	CZ	CL	CY
Gender	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
Age	41	41	40	40	41	36	41
Education	BD	BD	KTEC	AD	AD	BD	BD
Years of teaching	23	23	22	20	22	17	21

4.2.2.2 Negotiating entry and gaining permission from participants

I contacted my previous Chinese mentor three months before I conducted the fieldwork and she agreed to help me to access to kindergartens. Then, I located my research samples in three districts in Guangzhou through searching the Guangzhou kindergarten distribution from the website of Guangzhou Education Bureau. District Y, T and P were selected based on their typicality in population structure, number of kindergartens, and economic situations. Following this, I made a list of target kindergartens which located in the three districts and contacted my previous mentor to provide me access to three of the kindergarten principals. They were regarded as 'gatekeepers' as they were able to access those teachers and classes I

really wished to access. However, two principals of the contacted kindergartens declined my request, and only one agreed. My mentor then contacted another professor who was her friend and was acquainted with some of the kindergarten principals on my list. He agreed to help me with access. Fortunately, the connection was successfully made through him. I contacted the other two principals by phone, and obtained their oral permission to carry out my study in their kindergartens.

During my initial visit to the kindergartens, I provided the nature of the research, details about the purposes and data collection methods of my study with the principals, and negotiated with them the most appropriate practice for my research. They helped me to inform the teachers of selected classes and administrators who were in charge of teaching and teachers, and give and collect written consents. I ensured the participating teachers that this study would not relate to the assessment of their teaching performance, and they were free to choose to take part in it or not. No teachers and administrators refused. After gaining permission from principals, teachers and administrators, I discussed with the principals a suitable way to gain parents' informed consent, as the research involves video recording of interactions between teachers and children in play. One principal arranged and helped me with the distribution of the written consent to parents and gained their permission. However, two other principals thought it was not appropriate to inform parents about the research in writing as this might lead to their unnecessary panic and they might worry that the children were part of a 'risky' experiment I was undertaking. They suggested that I should not inform parents in this way, since I was a stranger to them and we had not built trust. One principal suggested that rather than obtaining parents' written consents, it would be better to gain their oral permission through teachers' oral inquiry when parents picked up their children from kindergarten. More importantly, I was able to provide a detailed and timely explanation when parents got questions about the research. Therefore, the teachers of the observed classes helped me to introduce the purpose and process of the research to parents, and asked their oral permission, while I stood by the teacher to answer parents' questions and record and confirm parents' oral consents by ticking the name of their children on a list.

Following this, before carrying out formal observation in each class, on my initial meeting with the children of the observed class, I introduced myself and gave them oral explanation of the research. I explained that I would spend some time in the kindergarten watching them when they play, and record how they play for the purpose of writing a book about what was important to children when they play on their own and with their friends and how teachers join in or help them when playing. They gave me their permission by raising their hands. They also got the opportunity to ask me questions. Most children asked me about life in England, such as the weather and the color of the metro of England, as the teachers told them that I study in a university in Britain.

Finally, the parents of one child from a stage one class and five children from stage 2 and 3 classes declined to participate in my research. Therefore, I did not put them in my research, nor recorded them in the video.

4.2.2.3 The settings

The situation by which there are a variety of Chinese kindergartens which espouse different educational philosophies and pedagogies increased the difficulty of conducting the current study. I attempted to select the sampling kindergartens which could present different types of kindergarten in China. Due to time and accessibility, my research can only cover a few kindergartens, but they were to some extent typical of kindergartens in China.

Three kindergartens from different districts participated in the research. The profile of the kindergartens may be seen in table 4.4. Each classroom was staffed with a head teacher and an assistant teacher. Class size varied, ranging from 55 to 20 children. The children were aged 3-6 years old and all Chinese. All 9 classrooms of the three kindergartens were on a full-day, five-day-per-week schedule. Each classroom had at least 40 minutes of playtime daily as part of the regular schedule.

Table 4.4 Participating kindergartens' profile

	Kindergarten Z	Kindergarten M	Kindergarten Y
Location	District P	District T	District Y
Funding resource	Local community	Private owner	The government
Assessment level	Provincial Exemplary Kindergarten	Normal standard level	Municipal Exemplary kindergarten
Size	700 children	150 children	315 children

The nine classrooms from the three kindergartens were quite different, not only in terms of space distribution, but also the accessibility of resources for children. The general features of the kindergarten, the physical environment of the classroom, the staff and the pedagogies employed by the kindergartens are introduced below. It is important to notice that in these nine classes, although some children's artwork is adopted to decorate the classroom and corners, on the whole, the layout and the environment of the classroom is teacher planned and determined.

4.2.2.3.1 The kindergarten Z

Kindergarten Z was a community-run one, located in the downtown of P District of Guangzhou. It was situated in a residential area, with shops, stores, and streets nearby. In this kindergarten, there were 700 children, which were divided into 17 classes with the class size ranging from 35-55 children. The children were aged from 2 to 6 years old. The kindergarten was established in 1958, and rebuilt in 1992. It has been entitled a municipal exemplary kindergarten since 2004. The kindergarten provided a whole-day program for children of four different age stages, including Stage BB (2-3), Stage 1 (3-4), Stage 2 (4-5), Stage 3 (5-6). The children of this kindergarten were all from the neighborhood, and most of their parents were workers from various factories. A few were from individual business households, and a minority of them were the children of kindergarten staff. The kindergarten did not provide a school bus, and parents were responsible for dropping off and picking up their children.

The kindergarten was a purpose built three-storey building with a playground at the center. Fourteen of the 17 classes were assigned a different floor of the building. The other three stage 2 classes were arranged in the second floor of another building, on the other side of the street, as the three-storey building could not accommodate so many children. Each class had their own classroom, and all the children in the kindergarten shared five special classrooms, including a musical room, a dancing room, an instrument room, a painting room, and an auditorium. They also shared four playgrounds; one was in the center of the first floor, one was next to the front gate with a sand pit on the left side, one was next to the back gate with a climbing shelve and a running track on it, and the other one was on the building roof. All the children in the seventeen classes shared them in turn, according to a schedule made by the educational administrator. During my field observation, the five special classrooms were only used for formal teaching activities. Children played on the four playgrounds among which the roof one was used less frequently than the other three, as teachers thought it was risky for children to play there.

The classrooms

The three classrooms of kindergarten Z, in which my research carried out, were very similar. Each classroom was about 30-40 Ping, which equals 300-400 square feet, and consisted of a classroom and a toilet room. What made it different was that the classroom of stage 3 did not have a nap room. Most parts of the classroom were occupied by 28 tables and chairs for 55 children. Two children shared one table. The tables had multiple functions. The children had their breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack on the tables, as well as writing, drawing, doing origami, having group learning activities. The tables and chairs divided the room into two parts and three narrow aisle ways, leaving little margin spaces for the shelves of toys and books. There were two very limited spaces, named 'manipulative center' and 'painting center', at the back of the classroom. Each corner was labeled by a three-story shelf as a learning center, which I did not recognize without teachers' introduction. The toilet room was separated from the classroom by a wall. Children's paintings were exhibited on one wall of the classroom entrance.

The staff

The staff in this kindergarten were all from the local area, and teachers were qualified. All the head teachers had associate degree in early childhood education and were aged between 31 and 40 years old. The assistant teachers had two kinds of qualification; some had an associate degree in education while others had the qualification of Kindergarten Teacher Education Course. Their ages were between 21 and 27. One teacher had been given an awarded as an outstanding teacher of Guangzhou, and a further two teachers were awarded the status of outstanding teachers of the P district.

The educational pedagogy and features

As kindergarten Z was funded by the local community and managed by the local community committee, inevitably, the education it offered to children was required to meet the needs of the committee. The kindergarten provided a variety of interest classes for children who were expected to learn different knowledge and skills at the start of their life. For example, some parents wanted their child to learn certain skills such as playing the piano, dancing, drawing, doing mental arithmetic and speaking English. Although these classes charged extra fees, every child in this kindergarten attended at least one kind of interest class to learn certain skills. Some of the children attended as many as five or six interest classes in a school year. These classes were arranged mainly in the afternoon and overlapped with the outdoor playtime. Therefore, these children who attended the interest class lost their play time.

Kindergarten Z adopted a thematic approach, which attempted to integrate all learning around a theme in depth. Before each semester began, the head teachers designed several themes in advance according to a teaching reference book that was produced by one of the Normal Universities in China. Then, all the activities including formal teaching in five different disciplines and play or games were developed based on these themes. One theme lasted for a month. Besides formal group teaching activities, outdoor play was the main play activity for children, and this formed an integral part of the children's day. Teachers normally arranged for children to go outside twice a day, once in the morning and then in the afternoon, and only bad weather kept them indoors.

4.2.2.3.2 The kindergarten M

Kindergarten M was privately-owned, and was of relatively small size, and had a shorter history than kindergarten Z. It was established in 1997 and located in a residential area of district T in the Guangzhou city center. The kindergarten had 6 classes, with two classes for each age stages (stage 1, 2, and 3). The class size ranged from 20 to 30 children, in total 150 children aged 3-6 years old in the kindergarten. The programs in the kindergarten were designed based on Montessori educational philosophies and methods which emphasized that children explored the world and learned knowledge and practical life skills by freely working with the materials that teachers provided in an organized and orderly environment. As Montessori kindergartens in China were very popular and expensive, children in this kindergarten were mostly from wealthy families. Some of the parents were government officers, some were entrepreneurs, and others were teachers of the kindergarten. The kindergarten consisted of 6 classrooms, four playgrounds and a multi-function room, in which children had music and English classes. Two of the four playgrounds had playing equipment such as slides and a climbing jungle gym. Another two playgrounds were in place for sports races and exercise activities such as ball playing and rope skipping. Due to there being limited space for all the classes, the corridor next to the multi-function room was sometimes utilized as a playground for children to play in.

The classrooms

The three classrooms of Kindergarten M generally consisted of a large group learning space in the center for formal whole class teaching tasks, with several separated learning corners dispersed next to the walls of the room for children to work and play, and a toilet room was next to one of the learning corners. Materials were organized and labeled clearly and placed at a child level. The learning corner and play spaces were separated by shelves and carpets, and were mostly open, visible and communal for all the children of the class, while small enclosed role-play areas enabled children to hide, but there was no private area that allowed children to experience a degree of privacy. Some other play resource such as slide and climbing equipments, hoola-hoops, jump balls, tricycle etc. were not provided in each classroom but in the common places and shared by all the children in the kindergarten. Since resources were limited, the principal set up a schedule for the classes to take turn to play.

The staff

The staff in kindergarten M were mostly employed by the local Teacher Educational College years ago. All the head teachers were experienced teachers, aged between 28 and 42 and the assistant teachers were aged between 23 and 30. They had a bachelor's or associate degree in early childhood education, or qualification of Kindergarten Teacher Education Course, and all had attended Montessori methods training programs.

The educational pedagogy and features

Kindergarten M espoused a Montessori educational philosophy and approaches, which emphasized children's independence and freedom, and respected children's psychological development. It adopted an individual-oriented education mode. The focus of teachers' pedagogical work was to provide a prepared environment with a wide range of materials and options for children to explore and manipulate freely, in order to construct their own knowledge and offer help to children when needed. These educational approaches enabled children to enjoy freedom of access to bountiful resources and materials independently. The kindergarten also adopted the Orff music education and the immersion English teaching model to provide children with an effective setting for arts and language learning. Free play was integrated into children's daily life, especially during children's independent 'working time', when teachers were required to observe and take notes by the educational administrator.

4.2.2.3.3 The kindergarten Y

Kindergarten Y was a well-known government-owned kindergarten located in Y district in Guangzhou. It was built in 1911. It has been entitled as a provincial exemplary kindergarten since 1999 and awarded as Green Kindergarten in 2002. The kindergarten was the biggest one in the area of the three kindergartens, and had various facilities. It served 315 children, who were distributed in 11 classes with the class size between 25 and 37 children. The kindergarten charged very little fees from each child as it was a welfare one run by the

government. Due to the reputation and low tuition fees, there was always high demand for the places in the kindergarten.

The kindergarten had two four-storey buildings, with 11 classrooms distributed on different floors. Two large open areas between the two buildings served as playgrounds for all the children in the kindergarten. One big play structure was situated on the left side of one of the large open area, and four play equipments including two slides, a climbing shelve and a chain bridge were located on the other open area on the right. Although the playground was big, there was still a time schedule made by the administrator to inform teachers to organize children to take turns to play as the place served as a multi-function area. There was also a sand pit next to the kindergarten gate for children to play in.

The classrooms

The layout of the three classrooms of kindergarten Y was typical. Each classroom had a center group learning space which marked by children's tables and chairs, and several learning centers or corners separated by low-rise wood shelves were next to the wall of the classroom. Children were allowed to choose, work or play freely in these learning centers at a certain time in the day. Each classroom was equipped with a computer with a big touch screen on the wall, to assist teachers' teaching. Different kinds of children's drawing work were exhibited on both the classroom's inside and outside walls.

The staff

All of the staff in this kindergarten held early childhood education qualifications, bachelors, associate degrees in early childhood education, or qualification of Kindergarten Teacher Education Course. Most of the staff were aged around 40, leaving a few aged between 30 and 40. As the turnover of teachers was remarkably low in this kindergarten, in most classes, the same teachers of staff worked with the same class in all three years. Five teachers respectively were given an award for being outstanding or excellent teachers at the provincial and municipal level.

The educational pedagogy and features

Kindergarten Y adopted a learning center approach, which required teachers to design and

create several befitting learning centers according to children's level and progress in different stages for exploring and practicing. All the learning centers were developed according to five different disciplines, including health, language, society, science, and art. The five disciplines permeated and integrated with each other to promote children's emotion, attitude, ability, knowledge, and skills development. The educational approach employed in this kindergarten emphasized children's active participation and free exploration. The children were allowed to make choices freely in selecting the center they wished to play in. Teachers were expected to be responsible for not only transmitting knowledge to children, but also for facilitating children to learn knowledge by exploring.

4.2.2.4 The role of the researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is not only the primary instrument or medium through which the research is conducted, but also the interpreter who makes meaning of the data. The researcher's knowledge, values, emotion, and personal experience inevitably shaped his or her project in important ways (Hammersley, 2005). Rossman and Rallis (2003) argued that "data are filtered through the researcher's unique ways of seeing the world---his lens or worldview" (p.36), it is crucial for researcher to be reflective about his or her approach, knowledge, assumptions and bias during the research journey.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) pointed out that "there is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it. Put simply, a relationship always exists between the researcher and those being researched" (P.15). Rossman and Rallis (2003) also argued that "the personal biography of the researcher and the role she takes influence the research" (p.49). In this sense, it is primordial for the researcher to develop an acute sensitivity to her identity, cultural and social context, as well as the relationship with the researched in his or her work. Research is value relevant, but an overemphasis on neutrality and value-free alone may not be feasible, what is important to the research is that "we try to be aware of and vigilant about the baggage we carry into the inquiry" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.51). Delamont (1992) stated that the researcher is "constantly self-conscious about role,

interactions.....as long as qualitative researchers are reflexive, making all their purposes explicit, then the issues of reliability and validity are served” (p.8).

In this study, I adopted the role of both an insider and outsider. As I came from China and I myself used to be a kindergarten teacher in China for two years, I was a member of the same ethnic group as the participants. In this sense, I regarded myself as an insider. I understood the value and culture in Chinese social context. I knew the early childhood education system in China, the kindergartens and class composition, as well as the teachers’ daily life. This allowed me to generate constructs from my cultural knowledge to describe and explain the actions I observed and the words I heard in kindergarten and classes. However, Chen (2000) argued that in a sense, the ‘real insider’ does not exist, because when a researcher is conducting a study on the culture in which she lives, there is distance between her and the culture. Although I know the social value of China, I am an outsider of the participant kindergartens, a complete stranger to the teachers and children, and I am not a member of them. Thus, I do not understand the specific context, reasons and explanations for teachers’ belief and behavior. I can only construct knowledge by asking them questions, staying in the context and carefully observing their behaviours. Therefore, in this sense, I considered myself to be an outsider who entered the field, interacted with kindergarten practitioners and sought to understand their perceptions, feelings, and behavior fully and intimately.

Bearing the roles in mind, I became aware that reflexivity on my assumptions, biases, opinions, and prejudices was an ongoing task in this research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I attempted to set them aside temporarily, and accepted the fact that I was a stranger to the setting, and I sought to establish rapport with the participants, and continually reflected on our relationships during the research process.

Upon my initial meeting with the kindergarten principals, they expressed a warm welcome to me and hoped that this research could help them make improvements for their teaching practice. I also expressed my gratitude to them for providing good opportunities for me to conduct the research and to communicate and discuss problems with kindergarten colleagues.

On the next formal visit, a principal suggested to arrange a seminar for me and all the teachers in the kindergarten to discuss some of the practical questions of early years' education. I participated, listened, discussed, learned and most importantly, got familiar with the teachers through this chance of dialogue. All three principals kindly permitted me to buy lunch from the kindergarten refectories and arranged a room (conference room or computer room) for me to stay and have a break during children's naptime, as the kindergartens were far away from where I live. Therefore, during the fieldwork, I had more time to meet the teachers and interact with them. I also helped them with the classroom wall decorations. Through all these interactions, I was able to establish rapport with the participating teachers, and built my identity as a friend of theirs who knew early childhood education, had a passion for it, understood their work and was willing to listen to them whenever they shared opinions and stories, and help them when they needed.

Since the current research involved children, my relationship with them also needed to be carefully developed during the research process. I adopted the role of 'other adult' advocated by Christensen (2010, p.155). She suggested that:

'adults doing childhood research should present and performance themselves as an 'other'adult, one who is seriously interested in understanding how the social world looks from the children's perspective but without making a dubious attempt to be a child. Through this the researcher emerges first and foremost as a social person and secondly as a professional with distinctive and genuine purpose' (Christensen, 2010, p.155).

At my first meeting with the children of the observed class, I introduced myself as a guest who was studying in a university in Britain, and was visiting the kindergarten. I wanted to write a book about how children play with their peers and how the teachers were involved in, and helped them in their play. I brought a video camera to help me to do this. After I gained their permission to video record their play, I told them that "when you see me carrying this video camera, this means I am working, if you got a question or you want to talk to me, please wait a few minutes, I would like to talk with you after I have finished my recording

work” (field notes, on 13th Sep, 2011). During the observation period, I noticed that when a child wanted to talk to me while I was video recording, other children would remind him/her, “Candy (my English name) is working, you should not interrupt her.” (field notes, on 29th Sep, 2011). When I interacted with the children, I talked and acted in an adult way, rather than in a childish manner, which some researchers preferred. When participating in their activities, I did not get involved in “telling children off, solving conflicts among the children or protecting and looking after them” (Christensen, 2010. P.155). Gradually, my reactions to the children helped me to build my identity as an ‘other adult’ who was different from the adult role of a teacher, a member of staff or a parent.

4.2.2.5 Data gathering

The fieldwork lasted four months, and was conducted in nine classes of three kindergartens in sequence. Data collection process of each kindergarten could be divided into three stages. The time arrangement of the fieldwork could be seen in table 4.5 and stages of data collection of each kindergarten may be seen in table 4.6.

Table 4.5 Timetable of the fieldwork

Kindergarten	Fieldwork Duration	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Kindergarten Z	13/09/2011-26/10/2011	14/10-26/10/2011	29/09-13/10/2011	13/09-28/09/2011
Kindergarten M	08/11/2011-09/12/2011	30/11-09/12/2011	18/11-29/11/2011	08/11-17/11/2011
Kindergarten Y	14/12/2011 - 12/01/2012	14/12-22/12/2011	23/12-31/12/2012	04/01-12/01/2012

Table 4.6 Stages of data collection in three kindergartens

Stage	Strategies	Duration	Focus	Other methods
Class Z ---1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Pre-observation with the head teacher and assistant teacher ▲ General full day observation ▲ Field notes ▲ Informal conversations 	The first three days	Getting to know about the kindergarten, class routine, teachers and children	During the fieldwork in the three classes, individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews also were conducted with an educational administrator and one or two interest class teachers according to their convenience to understand their perceptions of play.
Class Z---2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Focus observation ▲ Field notes ▲ Stimulated recall interview ▲ Video-recording of play ▲ Informal conversations 	5 days	Focus observation of play activities; recording play activities using either field notes or video recorder; interviewing teachers after they watch video clips; collecting kindergarten and class documents	
Class Z---3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Post-observation interview 	4 days	Carried out follow up interview with teachers	
Class M---1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Pre-observation with the head teacher and assistant teacher ▲ General full day observation ▲ Field notes ▲ Informal conversation 		Getting to know about the class routine, teachers and children	
Class M---2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Focus observation ▲ Field notes ▲ Stimulated recall interview ▲ Video-recording ▲ Informal conversations 	5 days	Focus observation of play activities; recording play activities using either field notes or video recorder; interviewing teachers after they watch video clips; collecting class documents	
Class M---3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Post-observation interview 	4 days	Carried out follow up interview with teachers	
Class Y---1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Pre-observation with the head teacher and assistant teacher ▲ General full day observation ▲ Field notes ▲ Informal conversations 		Getting to know about the class routine, teachers and children	
Class Y---2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Focus observation ▲ Field notes ▲ Stimulated recall interview ▲ Video-recording of play ▲ Informal conversations 	5 days	Focus observation of play activities; recording play activities using either field notes or video recorder; interviewing teachers after they watch video clips; collecting class documents	

Class Y---3	▲ Post-observation interview	2 days	Carried out follow up interview with teachers	
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4.2.2.5.1 Pre-observation interviews

Before I carried out the formal observation of each of the nine classes, I conducted a pre-observation interview with the head teachers and the assistant teachers of the observed classes in order to attain a general understanding of their background information, teaching experience, teaching style, daily arrangement, class management, educational pedagogy and perception of play. Each interview lasted for about 40 minutes.

4.2.2.5.2 Class observations

The purpose of observation was threefold. The first aim was to find out about the arrangement of play in each class, and secondly, to explore teachers' roles and behaviors in play activities, while thirdly, this information was used to inspire follow-up stimulated-recall and post-observation interviews with the teachers I had observed in the classroom, to understand their deeper consideration of play.

Observation was carried out respectively in nine classes. Observation of one class lasted for an average of eight working days as planned, and covered the whole day programs except for children's meal, snack and rest time. In the first two or three days, I conducted general observation, which made me become familiar with the teachers, children, class schedule and the daily routine. Then, the formal observation took place in the following five working days, and focused on play activities. 18 teachers and the 9 classes they in charged were observed and the time allocated to play was recorded in my field notes. Teacher-child interactions during play were video-recorded.

During class observation, each participant teacher was video-recorded about 1.5 hours per day over a five working days period, as they interacted naturally with children in play activities. Camera recording took place both in the morning and afternoon, and recorded teacher-child interactions in different play activities with both teacher and children's

permission. This yielded about 15-20 video clips for each of nine classes, in total, 153 video clips of play were collected. However, due to there being many children in a class and the noise they made being disturbing, in some of the video episodes, children's talk was not quite clear, as the surrounding voices and background noises were captured by the video-recorder.

I also took field notes to record the settings, the time duration of play, conversations between teachers and children and their behavior. In some circumstances, I stood by to observe play activities and took immediate notes on my notebook. However, on other occasions, as I was invited by the teachers and children to join their activities, it was not feasible for me to record the detail on paper at that moment. Thus, while most of the observation field notes were put down immediately, some had to be written down from memory a short time later. Moreover, in order to record information that was as rich as possible, I brought a digital record pen with me, and spoke to it to record some of the data, such as the contexts of play when taking written notes was not feasible. I transcribed them into written notes when I returned home.

4.2.2.5.3 Stimulated recall interviews

The stimulated recall interviews were also carried out during the same period of observation with the purpose of exploring teachers' opinions and explanations of what I observed in classes in great depth. On the one hand, when I observed some activities which needed teachers to explain and provide further information, I conducted the stimulated recall interview with them in the form of informal conversations, which took about five to ten minutes for each. On the other hand, after I video recorded certain play activities and invited teachers to watch the video clip, I formally interviewed them to gain an explanation of the ways they interacted with the children. Each formal stimulated recall interview took about 40 minutes and to some extent, it was time-consuming for teachers to watch the video episode first and then have the interview. However, difficulties emerged in that some of the teachers had limited time for the formal stimulated recall interviews as they needed to arrange teaching activities and prepare materials for the next week. This situation was particularly

the case for teachers in Kindergarten Y. Therefore, I changed my strategy to interviewing them whenever they had time after each focused observation of play and when they still had a clear memory of their talk and behaviour in play.

4.2.2.5.4 Post-observation interviews

After I finished the observation of one class and prepared the general observation in another class, I conducted post-observation with teachers during the children's naptime. The interview with the administrators and interest class teachers also took place during the field observation. All of the interviews were conducted in a certain place of the kindergarten, such as in a classroom, in a musical room, or in a conference room, selected according to the availability when the interview was taking place.

The time for all three types of interview was negotiated with the participants in advance, and the location was selected according to their choice and convenience. Interviews were audio-recorded with their permission. All of them agreed to be recorded in the knowledge that they could withdraw at any time.

4.3 Language considerations

Translation is a significant challenge for research conducted in a source language other than English and the research process involves translation between languages (Esposito, 2001; Temple & Young, 2004; Choi et al., 2012). Translation is a process by which "the meaning and expression in one language (source) is tuned with the meaning of another (target) whether the medium is spoken, written or signed" (Crystal, 1991, p. 346). Translation issues may occur because not all concepts are universal, and not everything is translatable (Jones & Kay, 1992; Jagosh & Boudreau, 2009). For example, the challenge of language may emerge when research is carried out in a language that is not the researcher's first language. The researcher may have difficulties to understand the meaning of the language completely (Temple & Young, 2004; Choi et al., 2012). Moreover, translation issue may happen when equivalent meaning in the source language cannot be found in the target languages (Jagosh

& Boudreau, 2009; Esposito, 2001). In qualitative research, whether the data can be translated appropriately by the researcher may influence the understanding and interpretation of the data, and ultimately the final findings of the study (Twinn, 1997; Temple & Edwards, 2002; Temple & Young, 2004; Regmi et al., 2010). Therefore, when translating, it is important for the researcher to be aware of and understand the language issue, and adopt effective strategies to minimize the influence caused by misinterpreting of the source data (Regmi et al., 2010).

Translation issues are considered to be a significant concern for the current study, since the collected Mandarin research data needed to be translated into English. As Marshall and Rossman (2006) pointed out, “the issues associated with translating from one language into another are much more complex than transcribing because they involve more subtle issues of connotation and meaning... Thus the focus on generating accurate and meaningful data through translation process is paramount” (p.111). Rather than word-for-word translation, I translated the Chinese data into English by using meaning-based translation (Esposito, 2001) as the meaning of text could not be considered without the social cultural context embodied in the use of language (Jagosh & Boudreau, 2009; Temple & Edwards, 2002; Choi et al., 2012). Bearing this in mind, when translating the data, I constantly needed to make decisions about the cultural meanings the language carries and to evaluate the degree to which the terms and words in two different languages were equivalent.

All the data, except one interview with the Irish teacher, in the current study were collected in Mandarin Chinese, including various documents, teachers and administrators’ interviews, field notes and transcripts of video-recorded clips, as I was a native Chinese speaker who spoke Mandarin fluently. I interviewed 24, but one kindergarten teachers in Mandarin, and the Irish teacher was interviewed in English. In order to ensure the translated data as accurate as possible, I firstly transcribed the interviews and video clips in Chinese, and coded them. Then, the data were further analyzed and interpreted. After repeated and carefully analyzing, I translated some observation excerpts and interviews with teachers and administrators, from Chinese into English by using comparable terms and words and asked a Chinese professional

translator to check the accuracy of the translation. It was hoped that this would help me to limit potential problems with the translation. Finally, I quoted these translations in the thesis.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are an important element in all kinds of research practice, especially in educational research, as it studies human subjects (Wellington, 2000; Punch, 2005). As Orb et al. (2001) and Cohen et al. (2007) claimed, ethical issues may derive from the imbalance between the need of inquirers in pursuit of truth and the rights of participants to maintain privacy. However, ethical difficulties can be alleviated by awareness and using of well-established ethical principles (Orb et al., 2001). By carefully thinking about the research ethics, research can be enhanced (Lindsay, 2010).

First of all, I applied for ethical approval from the Institute of Education at Warwick University (see Appendix C) to carry out this research. According to BERA (2004), all participants in the research have the right to be informed about the aims and purposes of the study. Participants must understand and agree to their participation without any physical and psychological coercion. The second thing I needed to do was to gain informed consent from research participants. In the current study, permissions were sought from kindergarten principals, as they were the 'gatekeepers'. Also, informed consent was given to teachers and administrators for their agreement to participate (see Appendix D and E). Moreover, since the research involved children, their consent was also considered to be essential. Their informed consents were gained in two ways. Firstly, the consent were sought from parents (see Appendix F and G) either in writing or through oral enquiry in advance, as they were responsible for the children. Secondly, as parental consent was "not an adequate standard in light of the rights of the child" (UNICEF, 2002, p.5), oral explanation of the research was also given to children, to gain their assent.

During the research, I was sensitive to teachers' and children's responses to my presence in the classroom, and I took guidance from teachers regarding their views about my presence and the influence on the children. Before I video recorded the play activities, I asked

teachers' and children's permission for watching and recording. This exercise aimed to ensure that they were 'true volunteers' (Greig et al., 2007) who knew they had a choice concerning whether to participate in the research. Besides, I not only treated all participants fairly and with respect, but also, I did not ask them to discuss aspects of their lives that had nothing significantly to do with the research questions so as to respect their privacy. In addition, I investigated in initial conversations with the principals any ethical questions or guidelines that they followed in their work with the children and their families, and informed them of the ethical practice of my study. In case of divergence, I negotiated the most appropriate practice for my research.

Furthermore, I did not tell others such as children's peers, teachers and parents about the information children told me and asked me to keep secret, so as to ensure their confidentiality. I also carefully recorded and stored information in order to ensure the confidentiality. I did not put the informants' name and other identifying information in field notes and transcripts, and code was kept separate from the data to which they applied (Lindsay, 2010). Additionally, the identities of informants and kindergartens were anonymized by using pseudonyms in any report of the research and so the negative repercussions for participants in light of the outcomes of the study were minimized (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Creswell, 2009). By adopting these strategies, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were guaranteed.

4.5 Data analysis

As Robson (2011) indicated, in qualitative research, data analysis and interpretation should be started at an earlier stage rather than at the end of data collection. In the current study, the analysis of data began in the process of data collection, when ideas about possible analysis arose gradually. However, after having completed the fieldwork, I needed to make meaning of the data as a whole.

Four types of data were generated in the research, including audio-recording of interviews,

observation field notes, video-recorded clips of play and teacher-child interactions, and a variety of documents. The data analysis went through several phases. Firstly, all contents concerning play in the four kinds of documents, including six policy documents, three kindergarten documents, nine weekly teaching plans of nine classes, teacher-parents communication booklets were identified and gathered. Content analysis was used to analyze the text. Four criteria were used for evaluating the policy documents and the kindergarten documents and later for tracing the transmission of policy on play to teachers' interpretation of it. The criteria include the status of play, the provision of play, the contents of play and teachers' responsibility in play. Moreover, three sub-categories were developed under the category of teachers' responsibility for play. They are selecting, guiding, and supporting play. Whereas two categories which include the proportions and types of play were constructed for analyzing play in the class weekly teaching plans. Then, feedback concerning play mentioned in the teacher-parents' communication booklets were analyzed according to four codes, including children's performance in play in terms of physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Secondly, by listening to the audio-recorded interviews repeatedly, and making notes of important concepts and overlapped ideas, some irrelevant information of the interview data was reduced (Robson, 2002) according to the research questions. Following this step, I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim (see Appendix H) and read them repeatedly to make myself thoroughly familiar with the contents and enable the initial codes to emerge. Then, codes for analysis generated gradually. The codes were further expanded, decided, and refined carefully. The interview guide was applied as a framework for analyzing the interview data. The transcripts were then coded several times and were broken into parts to identify conceptual categories. Table 4.7 lists the abbreviation of data sources and code examples.

Table 4.7 Abbreviation of data source

Participants	Abbreviation	Type of data	Example
Government-owned kindergarten	YK	PRE (Pre-observation interview)	YK2-CO-PRE (Pre-observation interview with teacher CO from the stage 2 class of the public kindergarten)
Community-run kindergarten	ZK	STI (Stimulated recall interview)	ZK1-AL-STI (Stimulated recall interview with teacher AL from the stage 1 class of the community-run kindergarten)
Privately-owned kindergarten	MK	POS (post-observation interview)	MK3-BY-POS (post-observation interview with teacher BY from the stage 3 class of the private-owned kindergarten)
Stage 3 class	3	Clip-M2 (the second observational video clip in the morning)	YK2-clip-M12812 (the first video clip that is taken in the stage 2 class of the public kindergarten in the 28 th December morning)
Stage 2 class	2	Clip-A1 (the first observational video clip in the afternoon)	ZK3-clip-A22209 (the second video clip that is taken in the stage 3 class of the community-run kindergarten in the 22 nd September afternoon)
Stage 1 class	1	1909 (19 th September)	
Teacher	AP/BL/CH/BC/	3011 (30 th November)	

In the next phase of the analysis, I viewed the video clips of play activities, identified the teacher-child interactions and transcribed them all in Chinese verbatim (see Appendix I). The procedure of transcribing consisted of two steps. First and foremost, play activity contexts

and contents were described based on the video, and then checked and compared with the field notes (see Appendix J). This was followed by clearly transcribing the teacher-child interactions and their conversations and putting them into the contexts to offer a holistic picture.

I conducted the preliminary review (Heath et al., 2010) of the video-recordings to generate a catalogue of the data which described and listed the basic features of interactions of each recorded play episode (see Figure 4.1), such as when the play took place, the settings of it, the interactions occurred during the play, the initiator, contents and responses of interactions (see Appendix K). This provided useful clues when I returned to the data corpus to identify a particular interaction and make it easier for me to calculate the proportion of different interactions.

Teacher-child interactions					
Kindergarten Z/ Stage 3					
Monday 26/09/2011					
Teacher AP (15:39-16:08)					
Setting-game involving sports-play structure					
TCI-AP-Video clip--6					
No.	Child	Gender	Initiator	Content	Response
TI-1	DuDu	B	Teacher	Taking care	R
TI-2	Yin	B	Teacher	Comforting	R
TI-3	Qin	G	Teacher	Playing with child	R
CI-1	Yiyi	B	Child	Requesting	I/N

Figure 4.1 A preliminary catalogue of video data of teacher-child interaction

Transcripts of interviews and video clips, together with the field notes from the observation, were analyzed using a thematic coding approach and constant comparison, and taking a bottom up approach to generating sub-categories, categories and themes. After all the data were coded and labeled, the codes with the same label were grouped together to generate a theme. Different pieces of data were constantly compared with each other, to generate categories. Each category was again compared and contrasted in order to find any links

between them. Meanwhile, some numerical data from observation were calculated; frequencies of different roles and types of play and teacher-child interaction in play were established (see Appendix L), using statistic analysis. Data were compared across documents review, interview and observation to find their similarities and differences. Finally, I re-aggregated the data according to different research questions.

4.6 Trustworthiness

4.6.1 Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity originate in quantitative research, however, Lincoln and Guba (1999) suggested using trustworthiness as substituted criteria to evaluate qualitative research. They further stated that the trustworthiness of a qualitative research could be ensured by establishing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility for a substitute interpretation of internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1999) means that the researcher “seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue, or set of data which a piece of research provides can actually be sustained by the data” (Cohen et al., 2007, p.135). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985; 1999), the credibility of findings can be demonstrated by employing several strategies, including prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation of sources, methods, investigators and theories, peer debriefing and member checking. Cohen et al. (2007) also suggested that credibility in qualitative research can be ensured “by the reduction of observer effects by having the observers sample both widely and staying in the situation for such a long time that their presence is taken for granted” (p.136). Lodico et al. (2006) defined credibility as “whether the participants’ perceptions of the settings or events match up with the researcher’s portrayal of them in the research report” (p.273). They proposed several strategies including triangulation of sources, member checking, and providing detailed explanations of the research to support credibility in qualitative research.

In order to secure credibility, in the current study, I engaged in the field for four months and

carried out continual observation. I also established trust with the participants, learned kindergarten culture, provided data in detail and depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1999), and checked for misleading information which might stem from distortions introduced by myself and informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1999; Creswell, 2007). Moreover, I employed an immediate respondents' checking technique to establish credibility. In the interviews, I checked with the respondents that I had understood their response correctly, by repeating their answers and asking them "You just said...., do you mean.....?" Or "Do I understand you correctly?" This gave the respondent "an immediate opportunity to correct errors of fact and challenge what are perceived to be wrong interpretations" (Lincoln & Guba, 1999, p.418).

Confirmability is suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as "how can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer?" (p.290). They (ibid) recommended that triangulation across methods and reflexive journals to be useful in establishing confirmability. Therefore, in order to ensure the confirmability for this research, I tried my best in reflecting on my practice during the research and reducing possible personal biases. Moreover, Patton (2002) suggested that triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods and using several kinds of data. Thus, I adopted triangulation over data collection methods, which provided reliable and rich data that can be triangulated (Cohen et al, 2007). By adopting the triangulation technique, both credibility and confirmability were ensured (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 1999).

Dependability is considered to be a parallel term to reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1999). According to Hammersley (1992), "reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions" (p.67). A demonstration of credibility, as Lincoln and Guba (1999) stated, is sufficient to establish dependability. As I indicated above, I employed three strategies to establish the credibility of findings. These solutions can also help dealing with dependability equivalently.

The transferability can be made by the researcher “providing sufficient descriptive data to make the similarity judgments possible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1999, p.404). Therefore, I provided detailed, thick description in the written report to enable readers to make judgments regarding transferability (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 1999).

4.6.2 Triangulation

Triangulation, in its original sense, is a technique of physical measurement (Cohen et al., 2007); it was first borrowed in the social sciences to carry the meaning of using multiple ways and more than one source of information to clarify meaning and to verify the repeatability of an interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Stake, 2000). It is believed that a research that completely relies on a single method may easily lead to bias or a distorted picture of the investigated reality (Cohen et al., 2007). Triangulation is thus generally considered as a “powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research” (Campbell & Fiske, 1959, cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p.141) as it develops converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2009). This is an effective mode for improving the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1999).

In the current study, the combination of interview, observation, and documents review was a kind of methodological triangulation which aimed to provide a rich, more full picture of Chinese kindergarten teachers’ perceptions and practice of play. Moreover, the use of multiple sources, including a wide range of documents texts, audio-recorded interview data from three kinds of respondent and video-recorded data provided triangulation for the findings and interpretations.

4.7 Methodological reflections on the research

The current study employed a qualitative research approach, in which three methods---interview, observation and documentary review were adopted in order to explore kindergarten teachers’ perspectives concerning play and their implementation of play in practice in the China context. Three research methods yielded rich information to address the research questions. However, although many efforts were made in the research process, I

recognized that no research methodology had full capacity to ensure a panoramic and perfect picture. In reflecting on the whole journey of this research, some issues arising from the process, the challenges I encountered and the strategies I adopted to address them may give some implications for future research in the same, or relevant field.

The first reflection is about research methods. The use of a triangular techniques can help researchers reduce bias which may be caused by a reliance on a single method (Cohen et al., 2007). When triangulation is used in interpretation research, it is powerful in providing sufficient information to understand the complexity of human behaviors and social events (ibid). The methodological triangulation of combining three research tools in this research, to a large extent, offered a complex picture of the dynamic of kindergarten classroom life and helped to improve the trustworthiness of the findings. The interview enabled me to get a deep understanding of teachers' diversified perspectives concerning their interpretations of play, their experiences and personal accounts of different ways of implementation of play and their role and interactions with children in play. Observation allowed me to understand the social, physical and cultural contexts of the research, the relationships between me and the participants, and the interactions between teachers and the children. This therefore provided real data for me to compare teachers' professional knowledge and assumption of play-based pedagogy to their actual practice, while documentary review helped me to find how the government's attitude toward play is and how play is arranged and treated in early childhood educational practice.

However, there was also a weakness in the methods that influenced the research. The fieldwork of the current study took about 8 working days for observation in each of the nine kindergarten classes. The limited time for the classroom observation may influence the finding of types of play in kindergartens. In one of the interviews with an observed teacher (CJ), she suggested that prolonged observation might be helpful for me to observe all the different play activities in her class. Therefore, a prolonged engagement in the field would be suggested for future research to ensure dependability of the research findings. Besides, in this study, I only interviewed teachers and administrators; thus, only their view of play had

been presented. The perspectives of play of other actors such as children, parents and government officers had not been explored. Therefore, in future research, it is suggested that interviews with children, parents and government officers may have a better understanding of play from their perspectives.

The second reflection is about establishing my role as a researcher and building my relationship with kindergarten children when working in the field. As a research instrument of a qualitative study, I recognized how crucial the processes of negotiating my identity and establish rapport with the participants were to the success of a research. Christensen (2010) indicated that “the researcher’s engagement with the detail of social interaction and the implications of social representations forms part of the process of children’s genuine participation” (p.155). In my fieldwork with kindergarten teachers and children, I attempted to adopt neither the ‘child’ role (Lærke, 1998) nor the ‘least adult role’ (Mandell, 1991; Thorne, 1993) advocated by some researchers for the study of childhood. Rather, I tried my best to negotiate my role as an ‘other adult’ (Christensen, 2010) who distinguished from teachers, staffs and parents. For example, in my first encounter with some of the observed teachers, after I introduced myself, she would react by calling me ‘Teacher Yang’. I explained that I was not a teacher, and that I preferred her to call me by my name Candy. Further, I asked for her help in not introducing me as a teacher to the children. In the research process, on the one hand, I communicated frequently with the teachers and discussed the best way of my practice, but did not necessarily follow the class rules as children did. For example, I did not sit still on a chair or join a group of children in ‘learning corner time’, but might go around and watch children playing. On the other hand, when I interacted with children, instead of behaving as an authority who helped them to solve conflicts and looked after them, I made myself into a ‘quiet big friend’ to them. I listened to their talk, shared their happiness, and exchanged gifts with some of them as a friend.

However, I was sometimes in a dilemma, especially when I responded to child-initiated interactions which aimed to tell on peers. I recognized that every subtle response I gave to children during our interaction would inevitably influence the establishment of my role as an

‘other adult’ and impact on the ecological environment of the classroom. Bearing this in mind, I had to employ a strategy by suggesting that a child who came to me to ‘tell on someone’ should turn to the teacher for help. This kind of interaction repeated many times during the entire research process when I entered into a new class. However, once this kind of interaction occurred, children would not ask me for help and tell on again as they understood that I am not a teacher. In this way, I built up my researcher role in the kindergarten classroom and smoothed the data collection process. I would like to suggest that the ‘other adult’ role may be helpful for researchers who carry early childhood study to develop rapport and trust with the participants. It may also be useful for the researcher to reduce the reactivity effects (Shaughnessy et al., 2003) by which her or his presence would impact on the ecological environment of kindergarten classroom, and to be flexible in gathering data smoothly in future research.

The third reflection pertains to the use of video camera in the observation. As I used video camera in the research to help me record teacher-child interactions in play activities, I needed to establish trust with the participants and ensure they were cooperative and willing to be filmed, thus to ensure good quality of the collected data (Heath et al., 2010). During ‘warm up’ time, I discussed the issue of video-recording with the teachers and clarified my interests, which were to focus on their natural interactions with children, rather than assessing their practices, knowledge and procedures. The recording would only be used for the research, and “in no circumstances will the data be broadcast, appear on the web or be used for commercial gain” (Heath et al., 2010, p.17). More importantly, I told them that I would make a copy of the video episodes undertaken in their class for them, if they wished to have one. This exercise helped me to allay teachers’ concerns and develop the trust necessary for collecting video.

Furthermore, as Walsh et al. (2007) indicated, good research involves preparation and spending time in the field before beginning to video. It is necessary to allow the participants to get used to the video recorder’s presence. In order to do this, I introduced the camera to the children in the initial meeting with them by recording everyone’s smile and then showed

the recording to them. This exercise not only helped me to become more familiar with the children promptly and to make them accustomed to the presence of me with the camera, but also gave them a clear idea of what I am doing. Although during the later observation, some children showed curiosity in regards to the camera, they came to me and asked about the working of the camera. Some of them made faces and grinned to the lens, and behaved in a friendly and polite way rather than disturbing the recording. Walsh et al. (2007) indicated that the camcorder and the researcher can never become invisible, but that strategies can be used to erase the attraction and distraction of them. I found that being directly present, introducing the camera to children and operating it in front of them in the first meeting would help children to build an understanding of the relationship between the researcher and the camera, and speed the process of getting used to them. This may be useful for future research, which involves using a video recorder in fieldwork with young children. Moreover, it would help the researcher to minimise some possible distractions which the camera may generate.

The fourth reflection is about the strategies of research data collecting and analysis. From the literature, it is suggested (Cohen et al., 2007) that researchers may go back to respondents to check that their transcripts of interview have not been misinterpreted, in order to ensure the dependability of the research findings. However, as my research generated as many as 60 interviews with teachers and administrators, it was not feasible for me to employ the member checking strategy to confirm the information of interview after I transcribed them. With advice from my supervisors I adopted an immediate respondent validation technique instead for establishing dependability. In each interview, I confirmed frequently with the interviewee that I had understood their response correctly by retelling their earlier statements and answers. This strategy provided an effective, immediate opportunity for the respondents to check answers and confirm the interpretations which generated from our dialogues (Lincoln & Guba, 1999). I believe that the immediate respondents oral checking during interview may be useful for the similar research which involves a great amount of interview data.

Besides, during the class observation, I took field notes to record the settings, time duration of play, events, conversation between teachers and children and their behaviors. In some circumstances, I stood by to observe play activities and took immediate notes in my notebook. On other occasions, it was not possible for me to record everything immediately on a notebook. Some of information was written down from memory a short time later. However, in order to record information in as rich and timely a fashion as possible, I brought a digital recorder with me and spoke to it to record some of the data, such as the context and settings where taking written notes was not feasible. I transcribed them into written notes after finishing each day's observation. I would like to recommend that future research could use this strategy to help with recording observation data where it is not possible to take timely written notes.

A further reflection of the current research is that I planned to utilize the Nvivo package to help with the analysis of the interview and video transcripts of observations in order to compare the themes generated by using Nvivo with those from my manual handling, and to provide complementary themes to my manual analysis. However, considering the large amount of the data and the prerequisite of using Nvivo---all the data need to be translated from Chinese into English before input them into Nvivo which would inevitably take much more time than I can manage to translate and check, the package was not adopted in final data analysis process. Moreover, as Robert and Wilson (2002) pointed out, the researcher's manual handling of qualitative data often involves reflection and understanding, which allows him or her to develop a more thorough, flexible and detailed understanding of the data and to provide creative and deep interpretation which most computer software has difficult to handle. Therefore, manual analysis rather than electronic analysis was employed. It might be worthwhile trying to use software to analyze the qualitative data in similar studies in English language in order to offer supplementary analysis.

Chapter 5 Chinese kindergarten teachers' perspectives of play

The previous chapter discusses the methodology of the research. In this chapter, the official interpretation of play in early childhood education policies and documents, and kindergarten teachers' view of it will be presented in the first section (5.1). Then, teachers' perceptions of play are discussed. The teachers' views of children's play can be divided into three themes. These themes are linked and overlapped with each other rather than separated. The findings of kindergarten teachers' perceptions of play will be presented according to the three themes, including teachers' view of the relationship between play and child development (section 5.2); their opinion about integrating play in kindergarten practice (5.3); their ideas about the importance of involving in children's play and their interpretation of teacher-initiated and child-initiated interactions in play (5.4). Each theme contains several sub-categories that will reveal the teachers' integrated understanding of play.

5.1 Play in Chinese official policies and documents

Six policy documents were collected in this research, and the contents concerning play in the text were identified and gathered (see table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Play in different policy documents

Policy documents	Lead department	Contents regarding play
The Regulation for Kindergartens Management (RKM)	The State Education Commission	Play should be the basic activity in kindergarten for children.
The Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice (RKEP)	The State Education Commission	Early childhood teachers should respect children's willingness of making choices in play, encourage them to make toys, offer appropriate guide in play according to children's experience and interest, maintain their emotion, and promote their competence and personal holistic development.
The Guidelines for Kindergarten Education Practice (trial version) (GKEP)	The Ministry of Education	Caregivers should respect children's dignity and rights, respect the principle of children's learning and development, provide play as the basic activity in kindergartens, emphasize both care and education, pay attention to developmental difference between children, promote every child's personal development.

		Educational activity should be structured according to children’s learning and developmental levels. The contents of every learning areas should be integrated with each other, teaching children through play and daily life.
The Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (trial version) (PSKT)	The Ministry of Education	<p>Provision of play facilities should be based on children’s interests, needs, age and developmental objectives. It is necessary for early childhood practitioners to provide abundant and appropriate materials for play, support, guide, and promote children’s play, encourage children to make choice in play, including play contents, playmates and materials, support children to play actively and innovatively, and to enjoy the joy and contentment of play.</p> <p>Teachers should promote children’s physical, intellectual, language and social development through play.</p>
The Guide to the Learning and Development for 3-6 children (GLD3-6C)	The Ministry of Education	<p>Children’s learning should be based on play and daily life. More attention should be paid to play and everyday life. Teachers should provide enriching educational settings and arrange kindergarten daily routines appropriately to cater children’s needs by direct experiencing and operating.</p> <p>Play is beneficial to children’s social and physical development. Teachers should play with children outdoors frequently and encourage children to play games with peers.</p> <p>Kindergartens should provide opportunities for children’s free play, and encourage children to make their own choice in terms of play materials and playmates.</p> <p>Teachers should offer support when children are less competence in playing with peers.</p> <p>Teachers should provide ‘game with rules’ for children to play and let them learn to follow rules in play</p>
The Guide for Kindergarten Education Practice of Guangdong Province (GKEPGP)	The Education Department of Guangdong Province	<p>Early childhood practitioners should meet children’s needs of development, play, and learning, teach children through play and daily life in kindergartens..., provide a variety of play materials. Play as an important vehicle for children’s learning. Teachers should adopt play to make children learning in relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere.</p>

After analyzing these government documents, it was found that the importance of play in the early childhood education has been reiterated in the policy documents since the 1980s. In RKM and GKEP, play is defined as the basic activity in kindergartens and is recognized as beneficial to children's physical, social, emotional, linguistic, and intellectual development in PSKT and GLD3-6C. Play is considered as a developmentally appropriate practice in kindergarten. The RKEP and PSKT further indicated early childhood teachers' responsibilities in children's play, which include respecting children's choice in play, encouraging children to operate materials, offering appropriate help and guide, and promoting children's development through play. Moreover, children's freedom of choice regarding play materials, playmates, and contents and the provision of a variety of play materials are emphasized in RKEP, PSKT and GLD3-6C as important aspects of facilitating play-based learning. These documents advocated that teaching children through play and daily life are key approaches to promoting children's skills and personal development. Teachers are expected to provide play activities based on children's needs and developmental level, and integrate play with different learning subjects in a holistic manner to improve children's physical, cognitive, social abilities and promote children's active learning.

However, when the teachers were interviewed about their understanding of implementing the play-based pedagogy in kindergartens and preschools which were advocated in the early childhood educational policies and documents, most teachers indicated that 'teaching and learning through play' was seen as a general guide rather than a clear and practical structure. They stated that although play is generally recommended as a learning medium and teaching strategy which is suggested to be incorporated into different learning areas, detailed and specific guidance about the ways of implementing play-based teaching and learning has not been found in these documents. What the teachers understood was to try their best to adopt play in every activity in kindergarten life. Teacher BI's perspective is representative:

My understanding of play-based teaching and learning is to use play in kindergarten daily activities as much as possible to help children learning (MK1-BI-PRE).

However, all the teachers indicated that they have not received much information from both the official and kindergarten documents concerning specific ways of adopting the play-based teaching. The top-down requirement of implementation of play largely depends on their own interpretation in kindergarten practice. In the following section, how the kindergarten teachers perceive play will be discussed and presented.

5.2 Play and child development

5.2.1 Teachers' notions of play

In the pre-observation interview, all the participating teachers were asked to define play, and to illustrate the relationship between play and children's learning and development. My findings show that although the teachers expressed their perceptions of play in different ways, there was a high level of consensus---a shared notion regarding the nature of play amongst them (see Figure 5.1).

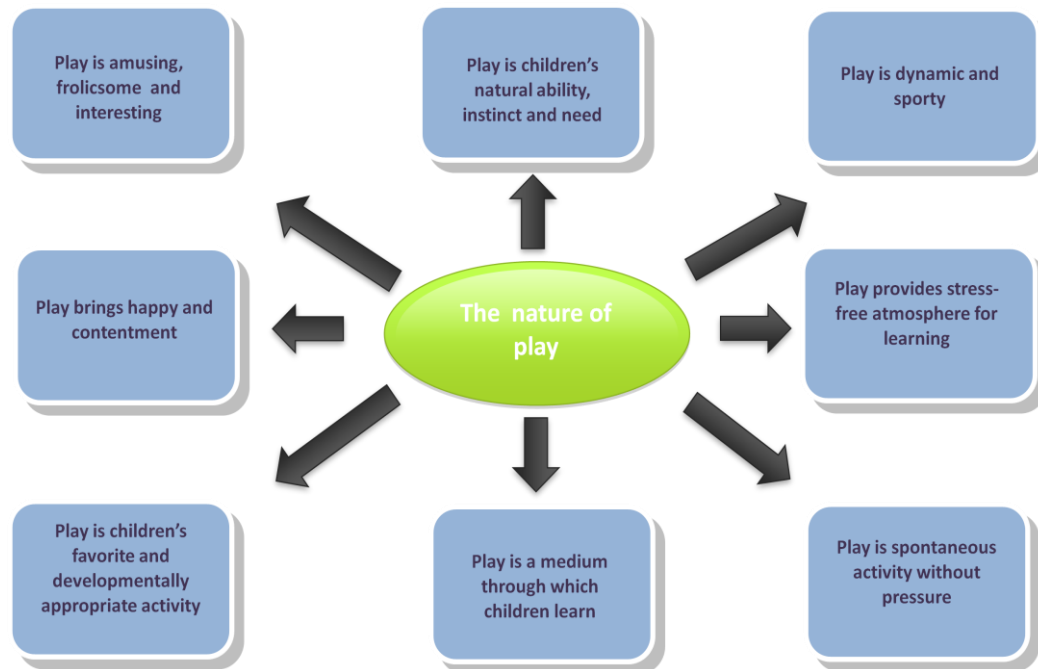


Figure 5.1 Teachers' notions of play

All the teachers considered play to be an essential part of early childhood education and an important vehicle through which children learn. It is their strongly held view that play is a

natural ability, instinct and need in children. They all believe that play is young children's favorite and developmentally appropriate activity. Excerpts from interview given below may reflect their understanding of play.

Play is children's natural ability. They play and learn. That is why we advocate learning through play in kindergartens (ZK3-AP-PRE).

Play is the activity which children like the most. Children are vivacious and active. They cannot always sit still, keep quiet, and learn quietly, they need play. Play is the activity which is suitable for children's age and developmental stage (ZK3-AC-PRE).

In kindergarten daily life, children should spend some time on play, unlike primary school where children learn by having lessons, here in kindergarten children learn by playing (MK2-BW-PRE).

Play is play, it is a natural instinct of children. They like play. Play is an important means of early childhood education (YK2-CO-PRE).

It is hard to say. I have never thought of the exact meaning of play. Play should be.....a means of learning (ZK2-AH-PRE).

Some teachers found it difficult to define play precisely in their own words. Instead, they described the features and nature of play and distinguished play from other activities. There is a unanimous view among teachers that play relates to a child's natural instinct. It is a means of learning for children which has the characteristics of being 'amusing', 'frolicsome', 'funny', 'happy' and 'interesting'. These features of play can bring children a range of positive feelings, such as, making children feel 'content' and 'happy'.

It is difficult to express.....I should say play is funny, happy, and interesting, children's every activity is play (MK1-BO-PRE).

No matter what---whether with rules or without rules, play brings happiness. It is amusing and interesting. When I integrate play into a specific activity, children feel contented and happy (YK2-CJ-PRE).

One teacher from the community-run kindergarten saw the characteristics of interesting, happy and funny as central to children's definition of play. She said:

Play is the activity that children always interested in. It is their favorite activity. For children, every activity that makes them feel funny, happy, they may perceive it as play. No matter tabletop play, construction play or role-play, funny and happy are central to play (ZK1-AL-PRE).

Some teachers distinguished play from formal learning. They asserted that compared to formal learning which may be 'boring' and 'stressful', play provides a 'relaxed', stress-free atmosphere which is the important reason that makes children enjoy it. This may be reflected in the following responses.

Unlike formal learning activities in which children should learn, read, bear the knowledge in mind, they feel more or less stressful, play is the activity that children do not feel nervous about, rather they feel relaxed and happy, it has a relaxed atmosphere (ZK1-AW-PRE).

Having lessons more or less brings pressure, while play brings happiness, children can enjoy themselves in it (MK2-BW-PRE).

Here, the two teachers provided a contrast between formal learning and play, and drew a distinction between the two. It seems that the traditional boundary between play and work is evident here from the two teachers' opinion. They perceived play as being a different

activity to learning and suggested that formal learning related to non-spontaneous learning and memorizing, while play related to spontaneous learning with fun. In general, all other teachers saw play and learning as closely interrelated. Two teachers, CH and CJ, from the government-owned kindergarten considered play to be equal to learning. Teacher CH stated that “play equals to learning, it is a process in which children learn without trace” (YK1-CH-PRE). The other teacher CJ expressed the same opinion by naming play as “masked learning” (YK2-CJ-PRE). They understood ‘learning through play’ as children learning knowledge unconsciously during playing.

Children play and have fun, meanwhile they can learn some basic skills, that is play or learning through playing (MK2-BW-PRE).

It seems that the view of play leads both to a good mood and positive psychological feelings, such as happy, relaxed and pleasant, and children enjoy themselves in play while learn knowledge easily without pressure, leading to some teachers’ consideration of play as an effective learning medium.

Based on children’s degree of freedom, attitudes and the outcomes of play, the teachers mainly conceptualized two different kinds of play. One is ‘pure play’ while the other could be defined as ‘edu-play’. Two out of eighteen teachers, teacher AH and AQ from the community-run kindergarten, defined children’s free play as ‘pure play’ since it involves children’s willingness and free choice without externally imposed demands. Pure play, according to their view, has no specific aims and intentions that reflect teachers’ expected goals and outcomes. In contrast, they defined work as teacher-initiated and guided activities which aim to transmit certain knowledge to children.

Play is the activity that children are willing to attend, they are free to choose, if they are requested by teachers, that is not play, play should be those activities children are willing and free to choose without external force (ZK2-AH-PRE).

Work is initiated and guided by teachers, and learning contents or knowledge should be passed to children through it (ZK2-AQ-PRE).

However, all other teachers did not construct children's play as free play; rather, they thought that play equals to work, and they related play with 'academic' activities. For instance, teacher AP from the community-run kindergarten expounded:

I think there is no difference between play and work, because children are also expected and requested to learn some knowledge in play. In almost every play, children should learn something, at least some simple knowledge. If the knowledge were relatively complicated, we would teach them in formal activities. However, we also set up academic purpose in their play (ZK3-AP-PRE).

All the other teachers from the privately-owned kindergarten echoed this idea. They believed that children's play should have educational purposes, rather than simply be fun. It seems that from their point of view, the bipolar conceptions of play and work have been blurred. A commonly held view of the teachers is that play and work are incorporated. More importantly, they believed that teachers' arrangement and guidance could transform work into play. If work was combined with some play elements, it would be vivid, attractive and play-like to children.

I believe the most important thing is how teachers guide children, if you speak in a playful tone, or you set up a playful setting which children feel interesting, then work does not make any difference from play. Children may feel it is play even if they are required to do some formal work (MK3-BC-PRE).

Interestingly, in the teachers' interviews, they were more likely to associate play with physical, outdoor or sporty activities than with indoor quiet, intellectual activities. They even

named this kind of activities 'big' play, while those activities with less body movements as 'small' play.

In fact, I feel play is a broad term, I think all the activities that involve children's movements should be regarded as play. In Montessori activities, children can choose the materials to manipulate. These activities are quiet, but they are not play, play is a kind of motional activity (MK2-BL-PRE).

Play is dynamic and motional activity, like gym, outdoor play (MK3-BY-PRE).

We arrange play activities in children's everyday life in kindergarten, We have 'big' play like outdoor play, physical activities.....(YK2-CJ-PRE).

5.2.2 Value and function of play

The value and function of play were considered to be important elements in understanding teachers' theory concerning play and play-based practice. All teachers were asked to explain and describe what play is and how play can contribute to children's development. My findings show that all the teachers valued play strongly in the early childhood educational settings as it helps children to develop a variety of skills, including physical, emotional and cognitive development, social interaction ability, imagination, creativity, thinking, confidence and language. They mentioned frequently two functions of play. First, play provides opportunities for children to explore, experience, practice and consolidate what they have learned. Second, play helps teachers to elicit children's interest in learning, attract their attention, deepen their understanding of knowledge, and achieve the objectives of curriculum.

Two teachers asserted that the significance of play was to promote children's holistic development, which included physical strength, cognitive ability, social interaction, language, emotional and other 'academic' development. Different types of play may

promote children's development in different aspects, but this largely depends on teachers' arrangements. As teacher AW and AL from the community-run kindergarten explained:

Play can facilitate development in every aspect of children, because play is designed according to different curriculum objectives. The contents of the curricula are different, and the aspects of development play can promote are different. I would say, play can promote children's holistic development (ZK1-AW-PRE).

I think play helps children to develop in all aspects, such as enhancing physical strength, developing mind, intellectuality and language ability. For example, when playing the roles of a story, children's language and confidence are developed, he/she would be acknowledged by peers and teachers, he/she would feel confident and proud (ZK1-AL-PRE).

In the accounts of most teachers that took part in the study, play contributes to children's physical and sports skills' development. This physical development includes the abilities to run, jump, climb, react, parry etc. The following teachers' quotations are representative:

Play develops children's physical strength and movement (MK3-BY-PRE).

If play involves jump, it can develop their jumping ability. For example, when children play a 'thieves and polices' game, it can develop their listening and run ability (MK2-BW-PRE).

For example, when we play the game 'Mr. Wolf', children need to run and to evade Mr. Wolf. Running and parrying are two kinds of physical abilities. This game can develop their physical dexterity (YK2-CO-PRE).

The main value of play is to improve children's physical development, such as running, jumping, climbing, agility, and reaction capacity. Play allows them to practice, mainly physical aspects (MK2-BL-PRE).

Five of the eighteen teachers believed that play improved children's interpersonal interaction skills, for instance, communication, collaboration, negotiation, and sharing. The excerpts below may show their view.

Play also enhances children collaborating and communicating with each other. When children play together, they need communicate with each other, so their interpersonal skills are developed (MK3-BY-PRE).

Children learned how to negotiate, communicate and collaborate with peers through playing (YK3-CL-PRE).

The idea that play can effectively relax and refresh children for the next bout of formal activity is held uniformly by the teachers. They explained that the main principle for their arrangement of play in kindergarten daily life is 'alternate work with recreation'. As they believe that play can help children relax from pressure caused by intensive work and revitalize their energy consumed during work, play is normally arranged between two formal activities.

Sometimes, if children spend the whole morning doing work or training, they would feel repressed and stressful. They need to relax. We arrange some play after a formal teaching activity, so children can refresh themselves and this would be beneficial to both their physical and psychological health (MK3-BC-PRE).

Some teachers expressed the view that play was valuable to children's emotions, imagination, thinking, memory, cognition and development of creativity. As play involves imagination, thinking, it enhances children's creativity, cognitive development. For example, teacher AC from the community-run kindergarten and teacher BO from the privately-owned kindergarten stated that,

Play involves imagination and communication. Children can think independently and add their imagination to it. This can help them to communicate with their friends, promote thinking (ZK3-AC-PRE).

Play develops children's imagination and creative thinking, and many other cognitive developments, like memory (MK1-BO-PRE).

Three other teachers stressed the function of play on children's emotional development. Because play relaxes children, and brings happiness while dissipates bad feelings, such as fear and anxiety, it is regarded as a psychological-health promoter, which enhances the health development of the emotions. In this sense, play is considered as having a cathartic function.

The first thing play develops is emotion. When playing, children always have fun and feel happy. These are pleasurable emotions (MK1-BO-PRE).

Play brings good emotions, makes them feel pleasant (YK1-CH-PRE).

It more or less helps children release pressure. Sometimes children release their fear in play (MK2-BL-PRE).

It was teachers' commonly held view that play could contribute many specific learning outcomes to children. This primarily depends on teachers' provision of different types and contents of play according to different curriculum requirements. It appears that what the

teachers emphasized was the learning outcomes which play can achieve, rather than children's experience in the process of play itself. Most teachers stated that children could learn cognitive and intellectual skills in play. They listed a number of specific knowledge and concepts that children can learn in play, such as the concepts of shapes, quantity and numbers. Their emphasis on learning outcomes of play implies that the teachers not only associate play with potential long-term benefits to children but also stress that play can lead to the short-term visible learning outcomes of children.

There is a wide range of learning outcomes of play, such as numbers, shapes, quantity, music, rhythm etc., children can learn different contents in the play we planned and organized for them (ZK2-AH-PRE).

It (play) helps them learn various concepts and skills, like categorizing and matching skills (MK3-BY-PRE).

When teachers reflected on the significance and importance of play, they talked more frequently about teacher-initiated, teacher-directed, or teacher-organized play than children's free play. Even though they believe that play reflects children's natural ability, it seems that they do not believe free play can contribute to children's learning and development to the same degree as teacher-initiated play. Therefore, they tend to value teacher-initiated and directed play rather than children's free play. As teacher AW from the community-run kindergarten indicated, "rather than purposeless, every play should be attached with defined purposes, children have no goals in play, but we should set up goals for them" (ZK1-AW-PRE) in order to "follow the educational guide to help children to fulfill learning objectives for different subjects" (MK2-BL-PRE). This idea is remarkably similar to the views of other teachers. This conveys the message that teachers believe that play could be more valuable only if with their guidance and support. More importantly, they believed that children's learning and development depended more on external teaching than on children's innately ability to learn. There appears to be a tension between teachers' theory of the value of free play and the value of their formal teaching to the requirements of the curricula.

Despite some teachers thinking that free play was valuable and could contribute to children's learning and development, most teachers attached much more importance to teacher-initiated and organized play to pursue and collect visible learning outcomes and accessible short-term attainment to meet the requirements from various stakeholders who request evidence of children's learning, including kindergarten administrators, parents and inspectors. In this section, the participating teachers' understanding of play is presented. In next section, I will present the teachers' view of play-based pedagogy in their teaching practice.

5.3 Play-based pedagogy

In order to understand how teachers implemented play-based pedagogy in practice, they were interviewed about the types of play in their practice and their arrangement of play in daily routines.

5.3.1 Integrating play in kindergarten daily routines

How did the teachers integrate play in kindergarten daily routine? To answer this question, teachers described their allocation of a typical kindergarten daytime and provision of play. They indicated that play was integrated into their daily routines in different forms and shown in the timetable by using different names, such as morning exercise, outdoor activities, learning corner time. Although these activities were named differently, they were in essence play activities.

From the teachers' report, it seems that play serves three main roles in the kindergarten daily routines---as independent parts, as a component of curricula, and as a time-filler. Teachers indicated that in a typical kindergarten day, play is primarily enacted in five forms, these being morning exercise, outdoor physical activity, free play, components of curriculum and connections between different activities. Amongst these play, morning exercise and outdoor physical activity were seen to be the independent parts, while three other forms of play were mainly play elements. The length of playtime in a day of each class is slightly different according to the age of the children in their classes. As teacher AW stated, the relationship

between children's age and their playtime was "the younger the children the longer playtime would be" (ZK1-AW-PRE).

5.3.1.1 Play as independent parts

Play was considered as an independent part which existed parallel with formal learning to offer children the opportunity to relax from stressful formal learning activities.

We play after the teaching activity in the morning, it is an independent one, because after a curriculum activity, children need to relax themselves both physically and psychologically. Normally, after 10am, we have an outdoor activity which is play. We let the children go out to have a walk, play with the slides, whatever, to make them relax. Because they already have two curricula, their attention and thoughts will be subject to stress. They need play to feel a sense of relief. We only request them to pay attention to follow teachers' rules and be safe (ZK1-AW-PRE).

Sometimes, play is an independent activity, like the one between the two learning activities in the morning (ZK2-AQ-PRE).

We have independent play, most of the time, it takes place in outdoor activity (ZK3-AC-PRE).

The majority of teachers regarded outdoor physical activities as 'big play' as it accounted for the main part of playtime in a day and children tended to get more physical movements in it. Most teachers revealed that an outdoor play took 20 to 30 minutes for children to play games or learn some physical skills. All teachers mentioned that there was a need to balance the time between sedentary academic task and motional play. This was also mentioned by all the kindergarten administrators, who indicated that it was reasonable and beneficial for children to do some physical exercise after a period of sitting and learning. The reason underpinning

the arrangement of outdoor play after finishing some formal learning was that “children tend to get tired in formal activities” and “need to refresh their mind for the next bout of learning” and “play offers alternative from quiet to motional activities” (YK2-CJ-PRE). This implies that teachers stress the relaxation function of play when allocating them after curriculum.

Teachers’ interviews revealed their attitude towards the proportion of relaxation play in daily activities. Several teachers felt that the playtime for children in kindergarten was not enough, and they expected more time for children experiencing freedom and releasing tension. For instance, teacher CH’s view is representative. As she explained:

For a child in a kindergarten, half-day time for play is not too much. Because children normally have two formal teaching activities in the morning, like language, mathematic or music curriculum in which children learning under pressure with many rules. The time for their free play was actually quite short. Sometimes, even in outdoor activities, we need to train them to learn some skills such as running, jumping which will be examined at the end of a semester. That means, the real play time is less than that on the timetable, with much teaching but not much time for playing, that is the conflict, children are more likely to feel under constraint and cannot release themselves (YK1-CH-PRE).

Another teacher from the same kindergarten echoed this idea, stating that,

Even though the schedule shows that children have two hours to play in a day, I feel it is not enough. Because some life preparation work takes up some of the playtime, such as changing their clothes before and after play, or making the bed before a nap. This has shortened the time for playing (YK2-CO-PRE).

Although kindergarten administrators indicated that they had designed and made efforts to keep a balance between curriculum and outdoor play, some teachers felt that there was never too much time to play outdoors.

5.3.1.2 Play as a component of curriculum

From the teachers' description, it seems that play is incorporated into the curriculum as a component. Play is planned or selected based on the contents of curriculum or the themes of learning which lasts for a month. Each play accounted for several minutes of a curriculum. For example, some teachers used music play in music teaching, role-play or language play in a language curriculum, and manipulative play in a science curriculum. The excerpts below illustrate this:

We combine play with curriculum, we have music play, rhythm play, intellectual play, and role-play. Selecting play depends on the contents of curriculum, we add the play after the educational administrator check our teaching plan. But it is normally a small part, only lasts for several minutes (ZK1-AW-PRE).

In every teaching activity or learning area, if it can add play, I will adopt play in it. I like to incorporate play in my teaching, mostly in music activities, sometimes in the social, science or language curriculum. Most of them are small play. A play does not last for long time, only few minutes (ZK1-AL-PRE).

I use play in my teaching to lead children into the curriculum (ZK3-AC-PRE).

We also have play in our teaching activities, it is not an independent part, is integrated with teaching (ZK2-AQ-PRE)

Every month we have a different theme. I select play according to this theme, and according to the defined learning objectives of our class. Sometimes, I choose music play, sometimes, language play or role-play (MK1-BI-PRE).

Play can be integrated with curriculum, no matter it is music, math or physical curriculum. Play is a component, it is related to the contents of the curriculum (YK2-CJ-PRE).

It is evident from teachers' interviews that play not only brings many benefits to children's learning, but is also an effective strategy of teachers' teaching. The significance teachers attached to play-based teaching in the educational settings reflects their emphasis on the instrumental value of play. All the teachers indicated that play was integrated into curricula to help their teaching. They believed that play was an effective tool for them to elicit children's interest of learning, to attract children's attention, enhance children's engagement, consolidate learning contents and achieve their curriculum objectives. For example, three teachers from different kindergartens mentioned that:

If you tell children, "let's play", you stress on play, they would be very happy and interested in the activity. If you just tell them, we are going to learn this, or to learn that, they would not have interest. Play can enhance their interest in learning and exploring (YK2-CO-PRE).

Sometimes, the effect of play is learning, sometimes is practice and consolidating. I adopt play to help with my teaching, to make children grasp the contents of the curriculum and to achieve my teaching goals (ZK2-AH-PRE).

Play elicits children's interests. You know, children are very young in our class, if I ask them to learn new words and sentences by reading, they would feel very boring, uninteresting. But if I teach them and practice the words by using play, they would learn the knowledge effectively and quickly (MK1-BI-PRE).

Many of the teachers indicated that using play in the curriculum can 'boost the atmosphere' and help children 'get rid of boring' or 'avoid insipidity'. For example, teacher BI from the privately-owned kindergarten said that,

We use play to enliven atmosphere, to consolidate and help them bear knowledge in mind (MK1-BI-PRE).

All teachers pointed out that they would like to incorporate play with formal teaching activities. Most of them felt that play has a positive effect in achieving the curriculum objectives. Only one teacher from the government-owned kindergarten hinted that play was not that effective in helping her fulfill the goals of teaching. As she said:

In teaching activities, we most often use our language to guide children. If you add a play in it, you should consider in advance whether the play relates to the contents of the curriculum. The duration of a typical kindergarten stage 2 curriculum is about 25 to 30 minutes, there are so many parts in it which already have been planned, we don't have enough time for playing in a curriculum. Only when we perceive a curriculum as a very important one, like an open curriculum for colleagues from other kindergartens, or a curriculum in an open day for parents, we will add play in the curriculum for them to inspect. Otherwise, we will not add play in curricula, because play cannot effectively help us to fulfill our teaching purposes (YK2-CO-PRE).

This idea also relates to the 'disadvantage' of play. Another teacher from the community-run kindergarten mentioned,

Sometimes, some play... seem too funny. When you let children play, you can hardly regain control, they are too excited to listen to what the teacher says. I think that is one of the disadvantages of play (ZK3-AP-PRE).

Although two teachers indicated the shortcomings of play, all the teachers acknowledged a close relationship between play, learning and the curriculum. The effectiveness of adopting play in formal activities to fulfill teaching objectives was strongly endorsed by them. It

appears that play serves different functions in different parts of different curricula. This may be seen in the teachers' interview below:

If it were rhythm or music activity, play would be arranged at the beginning as a lead-in part, it could inspire children's interest (YK1-CE-PRE).

Usually, after we teach children the knowledge and skills, we then let children play. Through playing, they could master and consolidate the learning contents (YK2-CO-PRE).

Sometimes I use play as a 'warm-up' at the start of the teaching activity, sometimes I use it at the end of a curriculum to review and consolidate learned knowledge. This depends on the needs of the curriculum (MK3-BY-PRE).

I use play at the later part of the teaching to examine whether children have mastered the knowledge. Play can reflect their degree of learning (MK2-BL-PRE).

Like in a music activity, children learn the skills and knowledge in the first part. Then we will practice these. Finally we will play to develop the activity to a climax and leave children with some interest for the next learning activity (YK2-CJ-PRE).

I prefer to incorporate play at the end of a curriculum activity, the main purpose of this is to consolidate children's learning and make it easy to organize and end up the activity. If I arrange play in the middle part of the curriculum activity, children would be too excited to sit down and listen to me, this may influence the following activity. Sometimes teachers can control the situation, but sometimes it is very hard to control. So, putting play at the final part would be better for the teacher to end the activity (ZK2-AH-PRE).

Some teachers justified their utilization of play in the middle of a curriculum as a means of making children understand the learning contents easily. For instance, teacher CE from the government-owned kindergarten described her experience of using play in the middle of a music curriculum to help children learn the words of a song easily.

We recently had a music activity. Children have been taught a song named 'Pull out the carrot'. One of the teaching goals of this curriculum is to learn the song. A difficulty of learning this song is that the words of the song are in sequence. For instance, the words go like that.....a grandma trying to pull out the carrot, a little girl followed behind the grandma to help her pull out the carrot, and then a little yellow dog, a little tabby cat, a little mouse come one after the other. They are in sequence. Children may have difficulties in remembering them. So, I adopted a role-play in the middle of the curriculum, to invite them to play these 'roles'---the little girl, the grandma, the little tabby cat.....So, by playing, children immediately remembered the sequence of the words clearly and accurately (YK1-CE-PRE).

From the interview, it is evident that almost all the teachers tend to integrate play into different parts of a curriculum. Their perspectives showed an emphasis on the instrumental value of play---using play to help them fulfill teaching objectives. This is reflected by their design of the curriculum and their integration of play in different parts of the curriculum (see Figure 5.2).

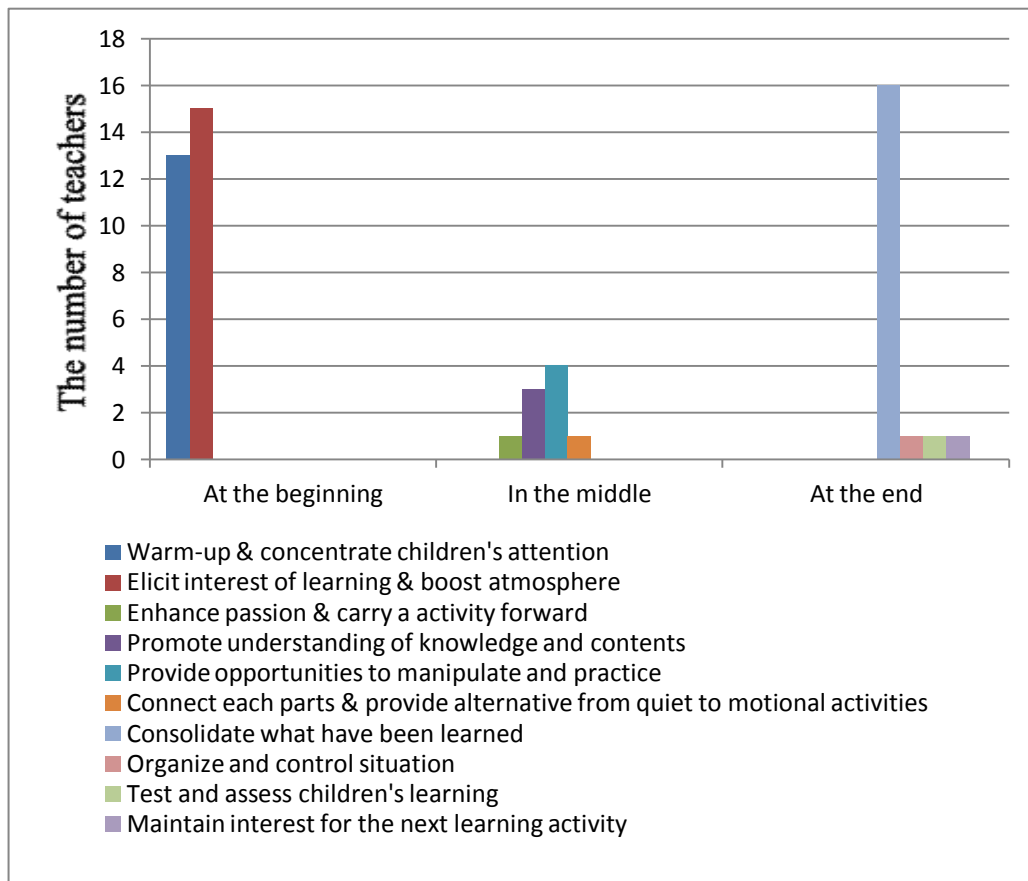


Figure 5.2 The purposes of integrating play in the curriculum

As can be seen from Figure 5.2, most teachers explained that they often adopted play at the beginning of a curriculum or at the end of a formal activity. The teachers who adopted play at the beginning of a curriculum aim to use play to inspire children’s learning interest, boost the atmosphere for learning, concentrate children’s attention and lead them into the curriculum contents. Whereas those teachers adopting play at the end of a curriculum intend to use play to provide opportunities for children to consolidate what they have learned, assess children’s learning in the curriculum, end the activity and maintain children’s interest for the next learning activity. Teachers who integrate play in the middle of a curriculum aim to provide opportunities for children to practice, to promote children’s understanding of the knowledge and contents, to link different parts of the curriculum, to enhance children’s passion and carry the activity forward.

5.3.1.3 Play as a time-filler

Several teachers named the play which involved the least amount of exercise ‘small play’. From their accounts, it was evident that except the physical, outdoor play and play in the curricula, they also adopted the ‘small’ play as a time-filler to penetrate into kindergarten daily routines. It could be finger play or language play and teachers often adopt the ‘small play’ whenever “there is spare time”, “children are waiting” (YK1-CH-PRE) or “in the interval between two activities” (MK2-BW-PRE). This may be seen in the following excerpts:

We play ‘small play’ when we have spare time, such as children are in a queue to wait the doctor check them one by one after they are back from the sleeping room. Then, we will play a fingers play or a small language play. This kind of play do not need to provide extra materials (YK1-CH-PRE).

Before and after mealtimes, we let children play table-top play. As they have just finished meal, quiet and small play would be good for their health rather than some play with fierce movements. Or we let them play these before parents pick them up in the afternoon. In so doing, we not only can communicate with parents but also do not need to worry about children’s safety (ZK2-AQ-PRE).

We arrange some small intellectual play for children in their short spare time. Only small play. When? After they tidy up when come back from outdoor activity, or have a rest, or waiting for the meal, or changing cloth (ZK1-AW-PRE).

Small play is simple play, children play it when they are sitting in a circle, waiting for the start of a curriculum, or waiting for meal (MK2-BW-PRE).

The kindergarten requires us to employ play-based teaching, so we try our best to adopt play in daily activities, like morning exercise, outdoor activities, formal

teaching, even in the intervals between each activities, we use 'small play' to help children review the knowledge they have learned (ZK1-AL-PRE).

From the teachers' explanation, it appears that they mainly adopt small play to keep children in order and occupied when children take turns to finish an activity. Due to the pragmatic needs of class organization and management, the teachers utilize play to fill children's waiting time and consolidate the knowledge they have learned.

5.3.2 Diverse types of play in daily routines

Further explanation given by the teachers reveals that a variety of play activities are implemented in their class practice according to different contents and materials, including folk play, manipulative play, language play, construction play, role-play, music play, science play, make-believe play, intellectual play, table-top play, fingers play, play with apparatus, play in different learning corners, competition and game involving sports. As one teacher said, "playing different play in different occasions" (YK3-CZ-PRE). Some teachers classified play as whole class play or collective play, group play and individual play based on the number of player. It appears that collective play is the most common play in three kindergartens as a majority of the teachers reported that they organized it frequently. For instance, teachers BL and teacher CJ stated:

We have individual play, collective play and group play, but a majority of play is collective one. You know, there are so many children in the class. We need to consider everyone (MK2-BL-PRE).

Most of the play is collective one as it can develop children's team spirit and collaborative ability (YK2-CJ-PRE).

Some teachers explained that they usually arrange group play when children's developmental level and ability is quite different in a specific domain, and there are not

enough materials for all the children to play at the same time. As teacher BL from the privately-owned kindergarten said:

If the ability of children are imbalanced, we would divide them into two groups. One is capable group and they play relatively complex games, the other is less capable group and they play simple games (MK2-BL-PRE).

Individual play, according to the teachers, usually takes place after lunch and snack when children finish eating at different speeds. All the teachers adopted the principle of ‘first eat first play’. In so doing, children who “eat fast can play first” (YK3-CL-PRE). Teachers use this as a strategy to urge those children who eat very slowly to finish their meal.

5.3.3 Teacher-initiated play and children-initiated play

All the teachers stated that they plan and organize play for children. It seems that teachers assumed more control and ownership of play than children did. When teachers were interviewed about how they considered children’s voice and choice in play, all of them asserted that they chose and made plans based on children’s needs and interests, and children had the freedom to make a choice in what they wanted to play. However, further communication reveals that although most teachers indicate that they respecting children’s needs and choice, play is more frequently planned depending on the teachers’ perspectives than the children’s. It seems that the teachers plan play based on what they think was important for children to learn and interesting for children to play. Children’s perspective of play was less likely to be reflected in teachers’ plan for play. Underlying this is the teachers’ belief that they are in a position to decide what is the best for children.

All the teachers commented that they planned for play activities in advance, in order to use play to help achieve the learning intentions and defined goals. This was particularly common in the play in curriculum and outdoor activities, while other ‘small play’ also need to be

planned to serve the broad intentions. For instance, teacher AL from the community-run kindergarten explained:

No, play is not random, I need to plan all the play in advance, normally I plan them a week in advance when I plan the curriculum for the next week. Sometimes I refer to the curriculum reference book. Sometimes, refer to other references or websites which offer various kinds of play. Sometimes I need to design play by myself according to our available resources. All the play are planned based on the theme and the teaching objectives of the current month, children's ability, and the resources that kindergarten currently can offer (ZK1-AL-PRE).

Four teachers stated that by recognizing the importance of respecting children's interest and hearing children's voice, they asked children's opinion before playing and then carried out play based on children's interest and choice. The choice often involves 'what to play', 'in what way to play', and 'who to play with'. This may be seen in the following extract:

I will ask children's views within the structure or range I selected, such as we play an animal game, I will ask them, by saying 'which animal do you want to play? Rabbits, dogs or lions?' I will ask their views. Sometimes before we play a game, I will ask them, in what way they want to play and they can also choose the peers they want to play with (ZK2-AQ-PRE).

Normally, I plan or design play first, and then I will ask children's views to see how they want to play. For example, I planned to play with the slide, before playing, I will ask their idea to find out in what way they want to play and then I will adjust it according to their willingness (MK3-BY-PRE).

In some physical games, children may articulate their own desire according to their interests. For instance, I initially planned to let them play with the jungle

gym, but some of them ask me 'Can I play the car? I would like to play it'. Sometimes I will, I should say most of the time I will respect their choice, but this is only common in physical play or games involving sports, we won't do this in other play (MK1-BI-PRE).

I always consider children's needs and interests before they play. I will ask them 'what do you want to play today?' to gain their idea. I would like to select outdoor play based on their perspectives. This accounts for about forty or fifty percent of the play-time (MK1-BO-PRE).

Eight teachers stated that they planned all the play in the daily routines, while six teachers mentioned that they planned half of the play activities a week in advance, and the other half of play was decided and adjusted flexibly according to children's interest and choices. However, although some teachers emphasized that children's voice with regard to play was important, it is evident from their further explanation that they only took children's view into consideration in limited play activities and children are allowed to make their choice within certain play activities such as after-meal and after-snack free play or learning corner play. The range of children's free choice includes the materials they want to play and the peers they want to play with. The following extract may illustrate this:

Well, I plan some play in the daily routines in advance, and other play was determined according to children's specific learning contents and progress (YK2-CJ-PRE).

Basically, play is designed and planned by us, especially play in curriculum and teaching activities. But children can choose what they want to play in some outdoor play activities within the arranged place. You know, we can't follow them everywhere, we have to make sure they are stay within our eyesight. Every class has a fixed outdoor play area. In this area, children can choose their play freely (ZK1-AW-PRE).

We have both teacher-planned play and children-selected play. Some games involving sports are chosen by children. They can also choose freely within the structure teachers set up, such as in learning corner play or in after-meal-free-play. They can choose to play with this material today and play with another toy tomorrow. They are free to make choice. But they cannot choose play in outdoor activity, because that is decided by all teachers according to the kindergarten arrangements and requirements (YK2-CO-PRE).

It appears that play can reflect children's interests and choices. However, it is evident from the interview with teachers that the choices of play more often were teacher-initiated rather than initiated by the children. Many constraints are placed on children's freedom of choice as they have to play within the range and environment that teachers created, and the time, space and resources teachers arranged for play. In this section, I have demonstrated the teachers' perspectives of their play-based pedagogy in practice. In the following section, I will present the teachers' perceptions of why and how they are involved in play, and interact with individual child during play.

5.4 Teachers' involvement and teacher-child interactions in play

All the participating teachers were asked to talk about their view of whether or not to become involved in children's play. The findings reveal that the majority of the teachers value their role and hold a positive attitude towards their involvement in play. Although a few teachers believed that children's exploring led to 'learning through play', most of the teachers attributed children's learning through play to their highly involvement. It appears that the teachers share a similar view, namely that their active involvement may enhance the quality of learning in play.

5.4.1 Purposes and ways of teachers' involvement in play

The teachers were asked to explain their intentions in involving themselves in play. They listed a variety of purposes that were interrelated and in line with their role in play. The intentions include reinforcing requirements and play rules; playing; eliminating possible safety danger; rectifying inappropriate behavior; solving conflicts; stimulating interest; boosting atmosphere; pushing play forward; improving teacher-child relationships; scaffolding learning by communicating, directing, offering help and guidance; supporting children's meaning-making in play; pulling play back to the right track.

Several teachers indicated that the main reason for their intervention in play was to reinforce requirements and play rules, and to ensure play going smoothly. In their opinion, every play should have rules which made play as a play. A few teachers stated that they imposed some requests to regulate children's behaviors, even in free play. For them, an important prerequisite for children to play successfully is every player understands and obeys the play rules. Thus, to make children compliant with play rules becomes an important responsibility of the teacher. Teacher AW stated that she had to become involved when "children play a game for the first time" as she needed to "make them understand and remember the rules" (ZK1-AW-PRE). Other teachers explained that when they found that some children were "not following the play rules or teachers' requirements" (MK2-BW-PRE), they would intervene in play directly to reiterate rules, or as a playmate to model the way of play for children. As teacher BL and BI mentioned:

When they do not follow the play rules, you know, they are children, they may not aware of that they should keep to the rules. I need to reiterate it to make them understand and obey it (MK2-BL-PRE).

Sometimes, children do not comply with my requirements in play, I will enter in as a playmate to model behaviors in order to help them have a better and clear understanding about the requirements (MK1-BI-PRE).

Interestingly, teacher CH pointed out that her purpose of involvement in play was to play and entertain herself. She explained that she felt very tired after a half-day's work, play was seen as a good way to relax herself and have fun. Therefore, "when children are playing, I would like to participate in to relax myself and have fun with them" (YK1-CH-PRE).

Safety is reported as the main concern of all the teachers as it is not only a principal responsibility of a kindergarten, but also a basic requirement from parents. All teachers stated that they paid much attention to ensure children's safety in play. They have to avoid any hurt caused by children themselves or by others. Thus eliminating possible danger and dealing with emergency and chaotic situation to avoid peril were claimed by the teachers and constituted a key intentions of their involvement in play. Teacher BW expounded her concern on safety in the excerpt below:

When the whole play situation is chaotic, children run in the classroom, chase each other, you know, that are very dangerous. Because we have so many children in the class, and there are many tables and chairs. They may clash their head with each other or clash the table and chairs. We are quite worried about this kind of situation, so it is necessary for us to intervene in play, take the situation into control, to dispel the possible danger by reorganizing the situation or warning children (MK2-BW-PRE).

Six teachers also mentioned that it was a common phenomenon that children had conflicts and engaged in misbehavior in play as they were very young. They may fight, bully, scramble for toys or materials. When this happens, teachers have to intervene into help children to mediate and solve conflicts, and rectify misbehaviors, in order to improve their social development. The following quotation of teacher AP from the community-run kindergarten may reflect this:

I will intervene in when the children have conflicts or misbehaviors, like fighting or scrambling for toys, or some other things he/she should not do. For instance,

when in outdoor play, children play next to a little pond, someone catches goldfish from it, this is not allowed. I will ask him/her 'what are you doing? Are you playing with the goldfish? Oh, no, you see, the fish will be injured!'(ZK3-AP-PRE)

All the teachers in this study believed that being interested is the most important element of play. A majority of them stressed that a successful play should be children-interested, every-player-engaged and the ambience should be active and dynamic. In such play, children are more likely to learn effectively while having fun. Four teachers reported that it was their responsibility to boost the atmosphere, stimulate children's interest and help children to develop play when they seemed to 'lose interest', be 'not excited' and not 'engaged' in play. They would adopt diverse strategies such as questioning, body language, and changing the way of play to enhance children's interest.

Three teachers stated that they became involved in play in order to communicate, interact with children 'intimately' through which they would build up a close relationship with them. They were concerned that in formal teaching activities, it was appropriate for them to keep a slight distance with children so as to be 'authoritative' and 'respected' teachers. But they believed that in play, it would be better for them to "be brisk", "friendly", "interact with children actively" and "behave like a big friend" (ZK3-AP-PRE) to establish a trust and emotional relationship with children. One teacher stated that she did not want to be an 'intimidating' teacher; she felt it was crucial to participate in play to "get closer with children" and "make them like you" (MK1-BI-PRE).

Another reason mentioned by several teachers concerning their involvement in play was to scaffold children's learning by communicating, directing, offering help and guidance and supporting with meaning making. These teachers emphasized that they tailored their involvement in play to the needs of children in a particular situation and at particular period of development. This highlights their belief that learning through play is resulted from their involvement rather than children's self-exploration in play. Five teachers' descriptions reveal

that this kind of involvement happens when teachers feel children do not play well, children ask for guidance or help, and present their completed work for teachers' comments. As teacher AQ noted:

When a child has finished his/her work very quickly, such as created an animal by using plastic blocks. He/ she will present it to me. I will ask him/her, by saying 'what is this?' 'how did you build it?' 'what does it eat?' By asking them questions, I can help them to make meaning of what they have made (ZK2-AQ-PRE).

Teacher AP elaborated her active involvement by asking questions and communicating with children:

I squat next to them and ask one of them, saying 'wow, what is this? It seems so funny! I know how to make xxx and xxx'. I will use some materials to make something and show it to them. I may also ask he/she 'you have made such a special one, how did you do this?' In this way, I inspire their interest by communicating with them to find our different and common skills (ZK3-AP-PRE).

Pulling play back to the right track is identified as a purpose for teachers' involvement in play from their accounts. One teacher said that when "children playing out of the planned track" or "deviating from the defined theme", she would be involved in play and "led children back to the planned track" (MK2-BL-PRE).

The teachers described diverse ways of becoming involved in play. They most frequently get involved in play by 'asking questions' to 'communicate', 'cooperate', 'lead' and 'provide guidance and help' to children. Another popular strategy adopted by the teachers to get involved in play is to "show their strong curiosity and interest" (MK1-BO-PRE). Moreover, the teachers entered into play by "competing with children" (ZK3-AP-PRE) and "acting as a

role in play” (YK3-CZ-PRE). It is their commonly shared view that with teachers’ involvement and interaction with children in play, the learning outcomes of play are more likely to be realized.

5.4.2 Intentions of child-initiated interactions

All the teachers were asked to describe their interactions with individual child and explain the intentions as to why they approached he/she and why the child turned to them for during play. From the teachers’ interpretations, it seems that the intentions of child-initiated interactions fall into eight different categories which including inviting teachers to play; drawing teachers’ attention; asking teachers’ permission, guidance and information; expressing ideas and suggestions; reporting something; asking teachers’ help; telling on someone break rules; expressing personal feelings.

One of the most frequently mentioned reason is children turning to teachers to ask for help. Their further explanation shows that this is happened when children “conflict with peers”, or “cannot manage something they planned to do on their own” (YK1-CE-PRE), or “encounter difficulties which could not be overcome by themselves” (MK1-BO-PRE), or even “cannot find someone to play with” (MK2-BL-PRE). This may be linked with teachers’ theory that they are considered by children as authoritative, powerful and capable persons in the class. Teacher AL said:

They (children) turn to me in different situations. This depends on the specific play contexts. Sometimes they face difficulties. For example, they conflict with other peers or playmates. Sometimes they need support or help in a certain skill, like using scissors to cut a paper. If they encounter difficulties that they could not solve by themselves, they would come to me (ZK1-AL-PRE).

Another purpose that teachers stated is that the child takes the initiative to invite the teacher to join in play. Several teachers reported that children liked to invite them to play and the teachers also regarded this as opportunities to establish a good relationship with children.

Therefore, they became involved in and involved with the children. Teacher BO's quotation is very representative:

They like playing with me. When I join in their play, they have more fun. Some children always like to ask me to participate in their play. I also want to make children like me, close to me. If they like me, it means I am a good teacher and parents may feel reassured and trust me. So whenever they invite me to play, I will join in as their playmate (MK1-BO-PRE).

A third reason for the child-initiated interaction interpreted by the teachers is to draw teachers' attention, acknowledgement, recognition and praise. Most teachers regarded this as a kind of children's nature. They believed that all children in a class wanted to gain adults' attention, recognition and be praised by teachers in their competence and capability and they did this in different ways. One teacher showed that a child usually "show the teacher his/her work or something he/she created" in order to "draw the teacher's attention and be acknowledged as a capable child" (YK2-CJ-PRE). Teacher BY stated that a child approached her to "get recognition and appreciation of his/her ability and well-performance in play" (MK3-BY-PRE).

Asking teachers' permission, guidance and information are stated by several teachers as a purpose of child-initiated interaction. Some teachers stated that as children knew that the teacher was the head of the class, they sought for the teacher's permission when they wanted to do something in the way they wish. This kind of interaction may not always relate to the play activity they are engaged in. This usually happens when a child wants to 'play with a peer in play', or 'use some materials which are not used in the current play' or 'play a certain role in a role-play'. Other teachers mentioned that a child might seek for teachers' confirmation when he/she was eager to find out something was right or wrong or make sure he/she was doing things correctly. Moreover, one teacher mentioned that children also inquire and ask questions when they do not understand some information said by the teacher.

Telling on other children who did not follow the rules is identified by some teachers as one of the purposes of child-initiated interactions. It is their view that if some children break the play rules or behave inappropriately, such as a child punching his/her peers, other children would make the teacher aware of this. Furthermore, the teachers mentioned four other purposes for children approaching them. These intentions include a child expressing ideas and suggestions, reporting something to the teacher, inquiring information and asking questions, and expressing his/her feeling to the teacher. For example, teacher CL from the government-owned kindergarten stated that some children came to her to propose a new way of playing.

Sometimes, children come to me in order to express their own ideas, make their own suggestions. For example, he may say 'teacher CL, we also can play in this way' or 'we can also play like this.....'. You know, they always wish to play in their way. The more fanciful the play, the more they like it. So whenever they get a new idea they will tell me' (YK3-CL-PRE).

Three teachers shared a similar point of view, namely that expressing feelings to the teacher was a purpose of child-initiated interaction. This is linked directly to children's emotional needs and it is more often as non-verbal interactions as children may use body language to deliver their feeling to the teacher. One teacher depicted:

Children like me very much. Sometimes they would like to come and express this to me. They just approach and hug me (MK1-BI-PRE).

Two other teachers said that when children found something very interesting or very serious, they would report to the teacher. This is particularly true when someone is injured.

5.4.3 Intentions of teacher-initiated interactions

Compared to the intentions of child-initiated interactions, there appear to be fewer intentions behind teacher-initiated interactions. According to teachers' views, interaction with an

individual child constituted a key part of their involvement in play. Six purposes of teacher-initiated interactions are identified from the interview which consist of playing with a child; managing a child's behaviour; praising and encouraging; asking for information; offering help; and directing and guiding.

The most popular reason that lies behind teacher-initiated interaction is to play with a child. Several teachers stated that playing with a child frequently happened in free play in which they were able to pay attention to each of the children and play with one of them based on her observation of the situation and his/her needs. Another intention mentioned by some teachers is to manage a child's behavior. They hinted that this kind of interaction was necessary for ensuring a safety environment for children to play and it happened when a child "shows inappropriate behaviours" (ZK1-AW-PRE) such as fighting with peers, influence others to play, "did not play", "hang around" (MK2-BL-PRE), and "just watch others play" (YK1-CE-PRE). This not only happens in teacher-initiated play but in free play as well. Praising and encouraging are identified by most teachers as one of the intentions of their interaction to children.

Two teachers also mentioned that asking for information was one of their purposes in initiating interaction to a child. This could be chatting with a child and it may not necessarily relate to improve learning in play. Some teachers stated that they initiated interactions to provide help to children while several other teachers described that they initiated interaction to individual child to directing and guiding children's play.

5.5 Summary

This chapter reveals teachers' perceptions of play in kindergarten from four aspects: teachers' view on the contents of play in relevant policy documents and their perceptions of relationship between play and child development, their report concerning play-based pedagogy in kindergarten daily routines, their explanation of why and how they involve in and interact with children in play.

The findings reveal that most teachers think the contents of play in early childhood education policies and documents are general rather than specific and they have not found detailed guidance in the documents to guide their practice in implementing play-based pedagogy.

The findings show that all the teachers see play as a natural need and an essential learning medium for children. There is a common emphasis on the interesting, happy, amusing, frolicsome, funny features of play which make it into children's favorite activity. The teachers strongly endorse the fact that in play, children enjoy themselves and learn knowledge and skills unconsciously. The findings show that most teachers appear to see play and work as integral and transformable. A prevalent view of the teachers is that play should be attached with educational purposes as children are always expected and requested to learn in play. It is evident from teachers' view that they are more likely to link play with outdoor, physical, sporty activities than with indoor, quiet and intellectual activities.

It is revealed from teachers' interviews that play serves three main roles in kindergarten daily routines. Firstly, the teachers use play as an independent activity to relax children after formal learning. Secondly, they adopt play as a component in the curricula to help them fulfill teaching objectives. Thirdly, teachers adopt play as a time-filler to keep children organized to help with class management. The teachers reported that they used a variety of types of play in their class practice according to monthly teaching theme, and the most common play they adopted is collective play. Although the teachers assert that they value children's interests and choice of play, their explanation reveals that the priority is given to teacher-initiated play rather than children-initiated play.

The findings show that the teachers highlight their involvement in enhancing children's learning in play. They become involved in play to reinforce requirements and play rules; play; eliminate possible safety danger; rectify children's inappropriate behavior, solve conflicts; stimulate interest, boost atmosphere and push play forward; improve teacher-child relationships; scaffold learning; offer help and guidance; support children's meaning-making in play; pull play back to the right track. They get involved in play through different ways

which including asking questions, showing curiosity and interest, competing with children, and acting as a role in play.

Eight intentions of child-initiated interactions are identified from teachers' interpretation. The intentions include inviting teachers to play; drawing teachers' attention; asking teachers' permission, guidance and information; asking teachers' help; expressing ideas and suggestions; reporting something; telling on someone break rules; expressing feelings. Six purposes of teacher-initiated interactions are identified from the interview, consisting of playing with a child; managing a child's behaviour; praising and encouraging; asking for information; offering help; and directing and guiding.

Chapter 6 The implementation of play in teachers' practice

How teachers applied play in kindergarten practice was revealed through the observations which I carried out in nine classes of the three kindergartens. In this chapter, I will present the findings of observation of play implementation in kindergarten classroom. This chapter starts with the play context in three different kindergartens (6.1). Then it moves to present the proportion, the roles and the types of play activities in class daily routines (6.2). This is followed by presenting teachers' roles in play (6.3) and teacher-child interactions in play (6.4). I draw on the data from classroom observations and interviews.

6.1 Play context in different kindergartens

The observed three kindergartens varied not only in funding resources and physical size, but also in the number of enrolled children and their educational approaches. They were selected not as representative of the kindergartens in China, but major early childhood centres in Guangzhou. In the following section, I will firstly present the context of each of the three kindergartens to create a context for presenting and discussing the findings.

As Rao and Li (2009) indicated, "children's play is affected by circumstances, including the physical environment, the material available (toys and books), peers, the psychological atmosphere, and the degree of structure in the day" (P.105). Therefore, I will begin with a depiction of the general context of the kindergartens, which is based on my observation of their physical environment, children's accessibility of play materials and the structure and organization of daily activities. This information enables me to contextualize the themes of the findings.

6.1.1 Play context in kindergarten Z

The layout of each of the three classes of the community-run kindergarten was very similar. The central part of the classroom was occupied by as many as 28 desks and 56 chairs, very little space was left for accommodating play materials and for children to play indoor. It was obvious that the table-based activities took priority over play activities because of the space

they occupied on the floor. The number of children in the classes varied from 35 to 55. The kindergarten administrator told me that it was difficult for the kindergarten to meet the provincial minimum requirements of space per child, as there were 700 children in it. The teachers of the three classes did not provide a separate private space for children to play individually and quietly in the classrooms. Children always played in groups which consisted of about 17 to 25 children for each. The classroom of the ZK3 was typical in this respect. In the classroom there were only two play corners. One was called 'manipulative center' and the other was called 'painting center'. They were labeled by two teacher-made cards, and no clear boundary was found between the centers and the table area. The arrangement of the tables and chairs, to some extent, influenced children's interaction and communication with peers, as their seats were fixed and they usually played with the peers sitting next to them.

The kindergarten offered four outdoor play areas with physical equipment or plastic climbing devices and certain play materials such as balls, hoola-hoops, tricycles and sand bags. However, as it recruited a great number of children who were distributed into 17 classes, the play resource available to children in each class was very limited. In order to ensure children's accessibility to play materials, the kindergarten educational administrator made a special schedule for playgrounds, play areas and materials in which specific place and time for each class to play were arranged. Thus, all the children in the 17 classes had to share the play materials and areas and use them in turn. As classrooms do not have enough space to play, four main outdoor play areas became children's major play space. Moreover, children in a class were normally divided into two groups and took turns to play with one kind of material. While a group of children was organized by a teacher to play, the other group of children was led by another teacher to learn academic knowledge or skills, and then they rotated. Every play or learning sessions lasted about 20 minutes. Each of the three classes only had a few plastic constructive play materials, which was far from enough to distribute to every child in the class and was seldom used by them during my observation. Two of the classes had several animal masks that the teachers made by hand for the children to play dramatic games. However, the children could not access these play material freely,

only with teachers' permission. In this sense, the physical environment in the community-run kindergarten indeed limited the extent of children's free-chosen play activities.

Each class was managed by four teachers, including a head teacher, two class teachers and an assistant teacher. It appeared that the relationship between the teachers and children, children and their peers were very close, because sometimes children actively invited the teachers to play with them and the teachers also actively joined in their play.

Observation in this kindergarten revealed that all three classes ran on a tight schedule, which can be seen in the following table (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Schedule of Kindergarten Z

Time period	Activities
7:45–8:10 a.m.	Greeting, morning check and morning exercise
8:10–8:45 a.m.	Breakfast and free play in the corners
8:45–9:20 a.m.	Teaching activities
9:20–9:50 a.m.	Class-break setting-up exercise
9:50–10:30 a.m.	Teaching activities
10:30–11:00 a.m.	Outdoor activities and play
11:00–12:00 p.m.	Lunch
12:00–2:30 p.m.	Rest
2:30–3:20 p.m.	Clean up and snack
3:20–3:50 p.m.	Teaching activities
3:50–4:20 p.m.	Outdoor activities
4:20–4:50 p.m.	Interest class activities or packing up and ready to go home
4:50–5:30 p.m.	Free play and farewell routine

The degree of structure in the kindergarten day was remarkable. A variety of structured activities spread throughout a day and the time had been cut into several short sections to arrange the activities. Children arrived at kindergarten and then were organized by teachers to do morning exercise until breakfast. This was followed by indoor free play, which usually turned to be children sitting on their chair and chatting with each other freely. After that, the children had two sessions of teaching activities and a class-break exercise in between. Before lunch, the main outdoor play activities took place. Children took a rest, cleaned up and had a snack. After that, they had a formal learning activity and an outdoor activity and then some

free play until departure with their parents. Observation also showed that the teachers rushed through a day to ensure all the prescribed teaching activities were carried out as they planned and all the children were organized properly. Due to the big class size, they had to manage all the children in order and keep an eye on them to avoid safety dangers. For instance, they asked all the children to queue up when went for outdoor play and returned.

From the arrangement of time for formal learning and playing in the schedule and my classroom observation, it seems that in kindergarten Z, learning and play are quite divided. In the sessions of teaching activities, the teachers usually had a curriculum for the children. Although play-based teaching is emphasized in the curriculum, the pedagogy was rather didactic than playful, as the teachers stood in front of the whole class and kept talking while children sit and listened. Play normally took place in the outdoor activities sessions, twice a day, one was in the morning and the other in the afternoon, served as an alternative after children had formal teaching. Children were organized by the teachers to go outside the classroom to play, which was usually related to bodily actions and movements. Although in terms of the schedule, there was time for children's free play in the corners, during my observation, no play took place at this time, and the corners turned to be several storage shelves with limited play materials in it. More importantly, children were not usually allowed to access material while teachers had the power to distribute them.

6.1.2 Play context in kindergarten M

In the privately-owned kindergarten, each of the three classrooms was divided into several parts, including a major group learning area and 4 or 5 learning corners, such as painting corner, Montessori corner, science corner, practical life corner and English corner. Each corner was labeled clearly and provided with a plenty of materials which children could reach easily. It seems that children's play in the corners is considered as important as the group learning activity. The learning corners were children's main indoor play areas, which were separated by shelves and allowed children to play both individually and with peers. Each class served 20-30 children. Therefore, they could access a range of play materials in

their own classroom. There were other four main outdoor play areas and a variety of physical play resources for all the children in the kindergarten to share, such as basketballs, plastic hoops, jump balls, and slides etc.. As the kindergarten only had 6 classes and 150 children in total, it was relatively easy for them to access the play resource. The physical environment, especially play material provision in the kindergarten enabled children to learn through playing.

Observation revealed that most teachers in this kindergarten strove to create a developmentally appropriate environment, in which they provided a great of opportunities for children to choose to play. Children could explore freely within teachers' defined range. This was particularly obvious in the MK3 class. However, children in MK2 class had less opportunity to play, for the teachers emphasized rules and order of the class, and they paid more attention to children's organized group sedentary learning activities than free-chosen play.

Table 6.2 Schedule of Kindergarten M

Time period	Activities
8:00–8:15 a.m.	Greeting, morning check
8:15–8:30 a.m.	Morning exercise
8:30–9:00 a.m.	Breakfast and free play
9:00–9:30 a.m.	Teaching activity
9:30–10:30 a.m.	Montessori activity
10:30–10:50 a.m.	Teaching activity
10:50–11:10 a.m.	Outdoor activity and play
11:10–11:25 a.m.	Washing hands and prepare for lunch
11:25–12:00 p.m.	Lunch
12:00–12:20 p.m.	After lunch walk
12:20–2:30 p.m.	Rest
2:30–3:30 p.m.	English activity
3:30–3:50 p.m.	Afternoon snack
3:50–4:30p.m.	Teaching activity
4:30–4:45 p.m.	Packing up and ready to go home
4:45–5:20 p.m.	Farewell routine and free play

As can be seen from Table 6.2, like the community-run kindergarten, the schedule of the privately-owned kindergarten was very tight. The kindergarten opened at 8:00 am and children left at 4:45pm. A series of activities took place after the children arrived. The children were organized by the teachers to do morning exercise and then have breakfast, followed by some free play activities before the formal teaching activities got under way. After finishing two sessions of teaching activities (one was Montessori activity and the other was one of the five learning contents including health, math and science, society, language, and arts), children were organized to play outdoors for 20 minutes. After having lunch and a rest, children then ate snacks and started their afternoon activities. Usually, they had a formal teaching activity and an afternoon outdoor play before parents picked them up.

The teachers in this kindergarten employed a modified version of the Montessori approach. It appears that play and work were closely integrated. Play normally took place during the time allocated for Montessori activities when children were allowed to make their own choices of manipulative activities and the teachers acted as a supportive role. The teachers believed that children learned through ‘working’, a word which means children’s self-manipulation with the materials teachers provided. Some teachers indicated that this kind of work was actually play. Play also took place in outdoor activity time. Some of the play was organized and used to help teachers achieve teaching objectives relevant to the current learning topic. In general, it seems that the teachers in kindergarten M adopt a play-based approach. They not only integrated play into their teaching activities, but also allocated free-exploring time for children in the Montessori sessions, although they also allocated teaching time in the Montessori activities.

6.1.3 Play context in kindergarten Y

The government-owned kindergarten had spacious classrooms and outdoor play areas. The physical environment of the three observed classrooms was very similar. The teachers designed the classrooms in such a way that play material was accessible and appropriate for children. In each classroom, the tables were in small groups in the centre, and five or six

learning corners which including language, art, science, math, reading and role-play were scattered next to the wall in the classrooms or in the corridor outside of the classrooms. A variety of materials were well-organized in these centers, and made them into the main indoor play areas. As in the YK1 class, the teachers prepared various big beads in different shapes and colours with many cotton string and wooden boards for children to design and create their own artworks, such as bracelets and paintings. The materials were continually enriched according to different themes of each month. Observation revealed that teachers offered many opportunities for children to play freely in the learning corners, especially after lunch and snacks. All these areas were open and bounded by low shelves, enabling children to play either alone or with peers, and encouraged them to interact and share with peers. The layouts of the classrooms reflected a wide range of play possibilities and teachers' educational theory which emphasized children's self-exploration and social interaction.

The kindergarten had two spacious outdoor play areas, with several sets of play equipment which were very accessible and attractive to children, such as slides, tunnels, bridges, climbing selves, and swing cars. Kindergarten also had a wide range of materials that were out of reach and stored in a storage room. All these play resources were shared by children of 11 classes. Therefore, they had to play in turn. In general, the physical environment in kindergarten Y was pleasant and accessible to children. Each class had three teachers, including a head teacher, a class teacher and an assistant teacher, and served 25-37 children.

Table 6.3 Schedule of Kindergarten Y

Time period	Activities
7:45–8:15 a.m.	Greeting, morning check (morning exercise for stage 2 & 3 classes)
8:15–9:00 a.m.	Breakfast and free play in the learning corners (8:15-breakfast for stage 2 & 3 classes; 8:45-morning exercise for stage 1 classes)
9:00–9:45 a.m.	Teaching activities
9:45–10:30 a.m.	Teaching activities
10:30–11:00 a.m.	Outdoor activity and play
11:00–11:15 a.m.	Before lunch activity
11:15–12:00 p.m.	Lunch and free play
12:00–2:30 p.m.	Rest
2:30–3:15 p.m.	Clean up and snack
3:15–3:50 p.m.	Teaching activity
3:50–4:20 p.m.	Outdoor activity
4:10–4:30 p.m.	Packing up and ready to go home
4:30–5:30 p.m.	Free play and farewell routine

As shown in Table 6.3, the schedule of daily activities was similar to the other two kindergartens. Children stayed in the kindergarten between 7:45 am to 5:30 pm and were organized by the teachers to follow the activities on the schedule. During the day, they usually had two outdoor play times, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon, and both took place after the formal teaching activities. Free play took place after the meal and snack when children who were eating fast could play first.

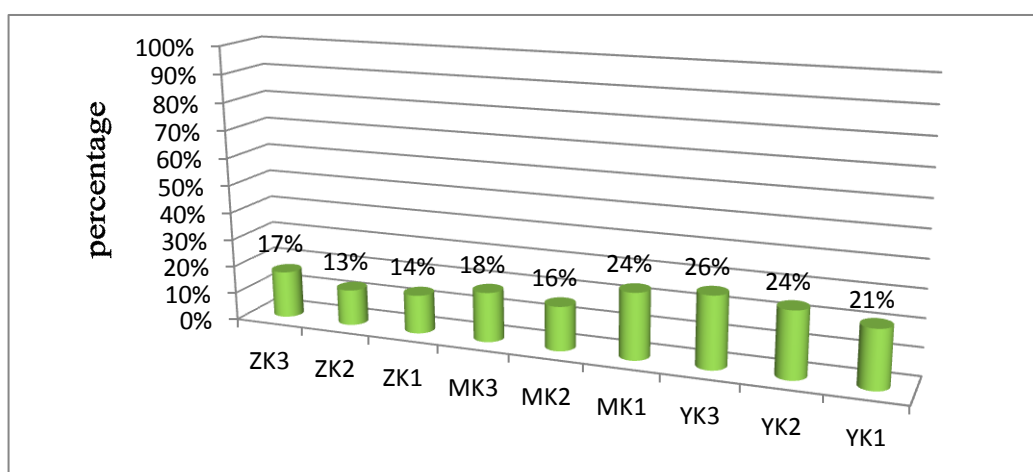
It appeared that the teachers in kindergarten Y employed a pedagogy which combined both play and learning. The distinction of play and work presented in the literature was not clear cut here in the teachers' practice. Although work usually took place at the time of teaching activities and play took place in the time for outdoor activities, play was also integrated into some teaching activities, which made them into play-based teaching activities. However, it was interesting to find that some activities named 'play' by the teachers turned out to be formal rather than playful. In a stage 3 class and a stage 1 class (the trial classes), children were allowed to explore different learning centers twice a week with the teachers walking around and offering help and support. The teachers referred to this activity as work time, but the terms play and work were used interchangeably.

6.2 Types, roles and proportion of play

The information provided above aimed to describe the context in which play took place. In this section, I will present the pictures of the specific ways that play took place in the classrooms, the types, roles or status of play in the kindergarten daily routines and proportion of play in a kindergarten day.

6.2.1 Proportion and roles of play

In the teachers' pre-observation interview, it appears that all teachers favored a play-based approach, yet in practice there are noticeable variations as to the extent to which they implemented play in kindergarten daily activities. By analyzing both the video recording clips and the observation field notes, the proportion of play in each class were calculated (see Figure 6.1).



*The proportion did not include meal, snacks and rest time.

Figure 6.1 Proportion of play in a kindergarten day of nine classes

For each class, the average proportion of play in a kindergarten day was calculated by using the total minutes of play observed in a week divided by the total minutes of five kindergarten days (this did not include meals, snacks and rest time). As shown in Figure 6.1, in general, play accounts for about one-fifth of the time of a typical kindergarten day. In the pre-observation interview, when the teachers were asked about activity arrangement and time provision for play in a kindergarten day, fifteen teachers reported that they arranged at

least 2 hours play activities for children. Two teachers mentioned that 70% of time or even more was used for play, and only one teacher from the private kindergarten said she usually arranges around 1.5 hours play for children. Observation reveals that in all the nine classes, the teachers provide a range of activities throughout the day in which play usually takes between an hour and 1.5 hours. It is obvious that children in the five classes (ZK3, ZK2, ZK1, MK3, MK2) play less than 20% of the time in a day. This is in particularly so in the community-run kindergarten, where about 15% of the time is accounted for playing. Among the nine classes, class YK3 have the highest proportion of play time (26%), followed by class MK1 (24%) and YK2 (24%) with the same proportion. Compared to their colleagues in the community-run and privately-owned kindergartens, the teachers in the government-owned kindergarten offered more opportunities for the children to play. This was especially true in the YK3 class in which children spend 26% of their time on playing.

However, no significant difference has been identified in the time provision of play in different stage classes (see Figure 6.2). Compared to the children in stage 1 and 3 classes, children in stage 2 classes spend the least amount of time for play, which accounts for 17.7%, 2% less than the time spend by children in stage 1 classes for play. While children in stage 3 classes have 20.3% of time for play, slightly more time than children in stage 2 classes (2.6%) and stage 1 classes (0.6%).

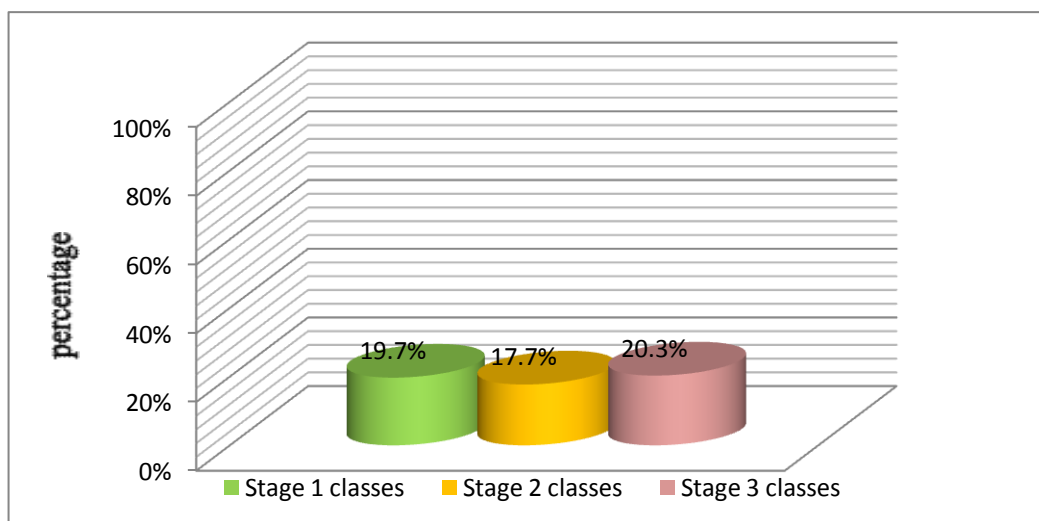


Figure 6.2 Proportion of play in three different stage classes

It seems that all teachers have a consensus that play is the basic activity in kindergartens, and that play needs to be included in all activities to engage children in play-based learning. However, the discrepancy between their reported time and actual time for play reveals that play is not adopted widely by the teachers in each and every activity. In the post-observation interview, some teachers explained the reasons:

If we can, we would arrange play as long as possible. To children, half-day of play is not too much, but we have practical problems. For example, in the outdoor activity time, we need to engage children to practice some physical skills, five basic skills, including run, jump, throw etc. which will be examined at the end of a semester to meet the kindergarten requirements. Therefore, their 'real' play time was limited. There is a conflict here. We need to consider both the teaching objectives and the opportunity for play, so we adopt some play in the teaching activities, like role-play, language play.....We also play in the 'after-meal' activities, but not last quite long (ZK2-AH-POS).

Like the above teacher AH who from the community-run kindergarten, teacher AQ the head teacher of a stage 2 class who has worked as kindergarten teacher for eleven years and teacher BL, a young teacher who has worked as a kindergarten teacher in the privately-owned kindergarten for four years talked about their consideration of play provision:

The major play activities are usually arranged in the outdoor activities period following the teaching curriculum, one is in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Each one lasts around 30 minutes. The time is set by the kindergarten, because all the classes share these playgrounds and play materials. We have to follow the schedule, otherwise, children may miss the outdoor activities as other class may occupy the play area or the play material.....but..... sometimes we cannot finish the curriculum on time. It is hard to say, that primarily depends on

children's progress. Sometimes, the curriculum needs to be extended, so this may influence the subsequent playtime (MK2-BL-POS).

Our kindergarten advocates play-based teaching, the more play the better. But sometimes, you know, we can hardly meet the ideal standard. You need to finish your teaching objectives first.....yes, we add some play in the teaching activities, but this kind of play is small play, or only accounts for a part of the curriculum. The kindergarten requests that we maximize play in every activity, when we cannot make it in curriculum, we will arrange some play in transition points of the day, such as when children finished their lunch (ZK2-AQ-POS).

As we can see from the teachers' interview, they wished to provide a play-based pedagogy which they saw as 'ideal standard'. However, they admitted that in practice, there was a dilemma between the time for the play and the time for learning. When this happened, teachers had to give priority to ensure the curriculum objectives were smoothly achieved and then made up play in other time. It may be seen from the teachers' statements above that although teachers knew that play was part of children's needs and an essential part of early childhood education, they felt hard to translate it as 'ideal' into the classroom practice, what they can do was to make play up later as much as they can. This is perhaps because curriculum or formal teaching were regarded as taking precedence over play in kindergarten practice, although kindergartens advocate a play-based approach and the teachers assert that play is significant to children.

Play provision and the ways in which play is managed relate to how teachers view play. Observation data shows that play is implemented mainly in three different times as different roles as the teachers reported. Firstly, it takes place in outdoor activities, either in the morning or afternoon. This is what teachers referred to as a 'set playtime'. The teachers usually arrange play between two sessions of teaching activities (see Table 6.1). In this sense, they employ play as an independent part that forms a parallel with formal teaching activities. Some teachers in the informal interview expounded that this arrangement was the result of a

consideration of ‘alternating work with play’, as the independent play was often related to physical movements and games involving sports. Some teachers regarded play activities as being able to function as an effective way to relax children and refresh them for the next bout of learning. Secondly, some teachers employed play in their formal teaching activities. This is what they interpreted as ‘play-based teaching’. They adopted play as a component or ingredient of the curriculum to help with fulfilling their defined teaching objectives. In practice, this kind of play largely depended on the specific curriculum contents, in which teachers feel certain kind of play can ‘fit’ and ‘add in’ to help with achieving objectives. Thirdly, play is also evident in some transition time, when children need to wait for their peers to enter into a subsequent activity, such as drinking, washing time, after-meal time and snacks time. It seems that play in this sense works as a time-filler or occupier, as some teachers used it whenever children have idle time.

6.2.2 Different types of play

There appear to be similarities between the play observed in the three kindergartens. Firstly, collective play is the most popular type of play in terms of the number of players. Some teachers in this study indicated that they use collective play to cultivate children’s team spirit and collaborative ability. This idea seems relate to Chinese culture which features a collectivist value, as Hofstede (2001) indicated, teachers from a collectivist culture tend to “deals with the student as part of an in-group, never as an isolated individual” (p.235). Another reason may relate to teachers’ pragmatic need to organize and manage a class with large number of children as all classes in the community-run kindergarten have large numbers of children. Collective play makes it easier for the teachers to manage the class. Secondly, although in the majority of classes I observed, children were accessible to a variety of play activities that teachers arranged to develop their knowledge, skills, and competencies, such as constructive play, manipulative play, role-play and dramatic play, physical play features more frequently than any other types of play.

6.2.2.1 Dominant physical play

The observation data reveals that in most classes, more than two-third of play activities are physical play or games involving sports. This was exemplified by teacher AP's class weekly plan of class ZK3 (See Table 6.4).

Table 6.4 The Forth Weekly Plan of ZK3 (19/09/2011-23/09/2011)

Time Activities	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Greeting & Morning exercise	Race of milk can --- at No.1 Play area on the 1st floor	Rhythmic exercise --- at No. 3 play area on the 1st floor	Walk on stilts---at the front garden	Pushing tyres--- at No.2 rear play ground	Playful pedals car--- at No. 3 play area on the 1st floor
Morning activities	1. Self-chosen activities in different corners	1. After-meal activity: go for a walk	1. Self-chosen activities in different corners	1. Self-chosen activities in different corners	1. After-meal activity: go for a walk
	2. Science: I am a little guardian of environmental protection (Teacher DH)	2. Language: The mice and the cat (Teacher AC)	2. Society: Hitting the susliks (Teacher DH)	2. Music: I am a seed (Teacher AC)	2. Math: Supporting the frontline (Teacher AP)
	3. Math: the King of counting (Teacher AP)	3. Society: safety in the classroom (Teacher DH)	3. Drawing and Painting: my self-portrait (Teacher AP)	3. English: fruit salad (Teacher CA)	3. Health: the safety of electricity (Teacher DH)
	4. Flag-raising ceremony	4. Physical play: stamping shadows --- at the front garden	4. Physical play: the king of poise --- at the front garden	4. Outdoor activity: drop the handkerchief --- at the No.2 play area on the 1st floor	4. Physical play: Cut the watermelon --- at the No.1 play area on the 1st floor
	5. Physical play: Brave warrior --- at the rear play ground				
Afternoon activities	6. Drawing and Painting: Dancing spots (Teacher AP)	5. PE: Bouncing star (Teacher CO)	5. Science: Vehicles on the road (Teacher DH)	5. Language: Cleaning the water (Teacher AC)	5. Music: How to go to your home (Teacher AC)
	7. Physical play: the barrier race --- at the front garden	6. Exploratory play: the space of thinking --- at the play street	6. Outdoor activities: Wooden man --- at the No.2 play area on the 1st floor	6. Game: I am the little Liu Xiang --- at the rear play ground	6. Outdoor activity: little architect --- at sand pit
	8. Happy reading	7. Dancing	7. Happy reading	7. Origami	7. Table-top activity

As we can see from the above weekly schedule, among the ten outdoor activities (highlighted in blue) in a week, six (highlighted in bold) are physical play or games involving sports. The high proportion of physical play is in accordance with teachers' strong perceptions that play can enhance children's physical strength and contribute to their physical skills and development. In the post-observation interview, some teachers mentioned the reasons why they adopt so much physical play.

This is because children like physical play! Another reason is that our kindergarten requires children to have a certain amount of exercise every day. Although it is not necessary for us to have physical play in every outdoor activities, in order to facilitate children's physical skills and motor development, we usually prefer to arrange physical play than other play in the outdoor activities (MK1-BI-POS).

Children need to develop some basic physical skills, such as climbing, run, jump etc. They also need to develop their gross motor skills and do exercise. Physical play is quite helpful in developing these aspects (MK1-BO-POS).

Sporty games always can boost the atmosphere and effectively maintain children's interest (ZK2-AQ-POS).

It seems that what the teachers explained is that play, in particular physical play and games involving sports are the primary vehicles for children's physical development. According to some teachers, the features of physical play and games involving sports, such as boisterous, interesting, group-playing make children interest in it. Thus, the teachers provide many physical play activities based on children's interests. The prevalence of physical play also relates to teachers' pragmatic needs in terms of class management. Physical play and games involving sports according to some teachers, are considered feasible and easy to organize, particularly for class with large number of children, as it does not necessarily need a lot of material provision.

However, it is noticed that role-play is not as popular as other kinds of play in most of the observed classes. During the observation, role-play did not frequently take place as would be typical in kindergarten classes, especially in the privately-owned kindergarten, I did not observe any role-play in class MK3. In another MK1 classroom, although the material provision for playing ‘small family’ was found, role-play that would take place in this area was very limited. This phenomenon was explored further in the post-observation interview and three teachers mentioned three reasons for the situation of the low proportion of role-play. The first reason they mentioned is that role-play is adopted and arranged according to monthly learning theme and contents. Besides, a teacher stated that the duration of my observation was too short to cover all of the role-play activities. Furthermore, some changes in the kindergarten administration system and the stage of children influenced the adoption of role-play. This may be seen from the interview excerpts of the teachers below.

Actually, we arranged role-play last month. As the theme of last month was ‘Safety Education in Everyday Life’, it was suitable for integrating role-play in it. However, the theme of this month is ‘Fire-fighting. The central aim is to learn the knowledge of fire-fighting, which has very few things to do with role-play. We usually select and arrange play according to the monthly themes and key points, which is also the kindergarten’s requirement. That is why you seldom saw role-play in your visiting to our class (MK1-BI-POS).

Role-play is mainly adopted in language and music teaching activities, but it happens that during your observation of our class in these two weeks we did not arranged these curriculum, so you may find only few role-play in our class (YK2-CJ-POS).

We used to have role-play, once per month, in the last Fridays of every month. All the children from different age classes in the kindergarten participated in the role-play. It is large scale cross-classes role-play. Children like it very much,

they act as different roles, and play the scenes of “fruit store”, “bank”, “super-market”, and “cinema” etc., all the scenes from our real life. However, at the beginning of this semester, our kindergarten got a new principal and my class upgraded to stage 3, therefore, we discontinue playing the role-play. As you can see, we now have so many different curriculum contents, no enough time to play it (MK3-BC-POS).

Role-play, the name that teachers use in Chinese kindergartens, is similar to Piaget’s term ‘socio-dramatic play’ which involves pretence, fantasy, and representation (Liu, 2009). In the literature, role-play is considered to bring a wide range of favorable outcomes to children, including developing children’s social skills, promoting language, intellectual development (Saracho, 2002), problem-solving ability, understanding of social surroundings, experiencing human relationship and improving social interactions (Kitson, 2010). In the pre-observation interviews, teachers’ theory of play reflected their belief in role-play as an ideal type of activity for developing social skills. Yet role-play is less prominent in the observation of the present study as teachers making little provision for it. Their explanation indicates that the type of play in their class is primarily decided and influenced by the teaching themes and the content of curriculum, the stage of children and other administrative changes.

6.2.2.2 Children’s free play vs. teacher-initiated play

When the teachers were asked about their preferred type of play in classroom practice in the pre-observation interview, they mentioned teacher-initiated play the most frequently. However, they recognized children’s free play as an ‘ought to’ type of play in kindergarten although they reported practical barriers to adopting a lot of free play. From the teachers’ interview, it appears that there is an implicit assumption that the proportion and extent of free play is one of the important indexes which early practitioners employ to assess a kindergarten’s teaching quality. Some teachers even indicated that children’s free play was genuine self-exploration. Meanwhile, it is also obvious from the interview that the teachers display a high level of agreement in regards to the value of teacher-initiated play. They considered it as an ideal context for children to learn effectively, according to their defined

goals. In observation, children's free play and teacher-initiated play were implemented in practice differently in the classes.

The observed play activities which the teachers named free play in most cases involved little teacher intervention or without intervention, and with few teachers' specific requirements of the learning outcomes. However, the play is more frequently initiated by teachers than by children. For example, in some cases, teachers categorized the activities in which they allocated already-prepared jigsaws to children and let them parallel play as free play. It appears that different teachers define children's free play differently.

In order to understand the exact concept of 'free play' from the teachers' perspectives, I showed them my video-recording of play clips and asked them to explain what kind of play in the video clips they categorized as free play and why. Traditionally, children's free play meant those activities which are spontaneous, voluntary, and free from external imposed rules. However, this concept in practice is as Rogers (2000) argued, reshaped in many subtle aspects by the organizational, structural characteristics of a class. Individual teachers interpreted the nature of freedom in play differently. The nature of free play that the teachers defined involved the following features, (1) children choose the way or materials of play by themselves; (2) children play without or with very few teachers' intervention; (3) children do not have teacher-imposed specific play objectives in mind. Here teachers' objectives of play and children's freedom of choice are key concepts. The degree of freedom primarily depends on the extent that children can choose. The extent of choice usually involves choosing play material, choosing the ways to play, choosing the peers to play with, and choosing the place to play at. However, the teachers' explanation showed that they did not consider another dimensions, that was, who initiated play. If children choose to play with certain materials with peers at a specific period of time within a teacher-initiated play, the teachers also defined it as children's free play.

According to the degree of children's freedom and the degree of teachers' participation in play, three types of play activities were identified from the classroom observation.

(1) Teacher-initiated play

This kind of play was found in all of the observed nine classes and prevails in the community-run kindergarten. In these classes, play was planned and designed by the teachers in advance with specific learning purposes which generated according to the teaching themes of a certain period. The teachers organized the play and sometimes participated in the play throughout the process. The whole process of play, such as provision of play materials, assigning cooperative teams or groups, setting up rules and directing the play development was strictly controlled by the teachers. Children had very limited freedom to explore and express themselves in the play. What they were allowed to do is to play according to the track and ways that the teacher already set up. This play usually takes place as an independent activity in the daily routine and constitutes a part of the curriculum. The video excerpt below gives an example of this type of play.

3:47 pm/ ZK3 class

Teacher AP assembles all the 52 children of the class ZK3 for an outdoor physical play. After children queued up at the entrance of the classroom, Teacher AP leads them to the playground in the front garden where playing apparatus have already been set up by teacher DH and AC. Teacher AP told me, she designed and arranged this play a week in advance, according to the current curriculum theme 'SOS Little Superman'. This play aims to develop children's skills of stride, jump, run and climbing.

At the beginning, teacher AP stands in the front of the children who are assigned into two equal groups (queue up in two lines) and explains the rules and ways of the play. The children are requested first to stride four barriers (four big plastic blocks) and run to the slide, then climb up to the slide shelf, finally slide down to the ground and run back to the queue from right side. The fastest group will win the game.

After teacher AP exemplified the whole play process by herself, children start to take turns to play while teacher AP, DH and AC stand aside and in charge of children in different parts of the queues.

The girl Hong runs quite fast. After sliding down, she forgets to go back to the queue from the right side, but runs in the middle of two queues.

Teacher AP notices this, she reminds Hong: Hong, go this way, go this way.

Hong runs back to the right side of the queue immediately.

The boy Yifan stands at the rear of the queue, it seems that he is too excited to

keep queuing in the line. It is not his turn, but he pushes himself to the front of the queue.

Teacher DH notices and reminds him: Don't push, Yifan, they (the children queue in front of him) have not gone yet. Just wait a minute.

Yifan stands back and waits.

Due to many children not following the game rules to go back to the queue from the right side, Teacher AP has to stand next to the slide, when a child slides down, she points to the right direction for him or her with her finger.

The game continues.

A Boy Yan stands in the queue and asks teacher AC who stands next to him: Teacher AC, I would like to compete with you! Would you like to compete with me?

Teacher AC smiles and says: All right! Let's compete!

She then joins in the queue and prepares to compete with Yan.

Children play the game several times and end it up when teacher AP claps her hands and stops them. They assemble and queue up again, and then go back to the classroom.

(ZK3-clip-A11909)

(2) Children-engaged play which is arranged by teachers

This type of play was also evident in the nine classes. In these classes, children were allowed to play either independently or with peers in the activities that is chosen and arranged by the teacher. The contents, the materials, the place, the time and duration of play are arranged by the teachers. Children were allowed to play freely with the allocated material and with few interventions from the teachers. In most cases, teachers distributed a range of materials within which children could make their own choice. However, sometimes the teachers only offer very limited materials for children to play with. In my observation in the ZK2 class, the teacher arranged a regular table-top play for children every day before parents pick them up. I observed in the play that each child only got five or six pieces of plastic bricks, which were too limited to create something. The following video clip may reflect this type of play.

11:38am/YK2 class

It is lunchtime. Children are eating. After five or six children finished their lunch and washed their hands successively, teacher CO organizes them moving their chairs out and sitting at the corridor where there is a row of tables next to the wall. Then she allocates three baskets of jigsaws for the children to share and play. There are several sets of jigsaws which are different in pattern, colors, and shapes, children choose one set of jigsaw freely and put it together either alone

or with peers. As more children finish their meal, they come out and join in the manipulative play.

11:55am, after all the children finished their lunch and played for a while, teacher CO asks children to tidy up and ends the play, then she leads children to change shoes and prepare for afternoon rest.

(YK2-clip-M32812)

(3) Children's free play

This kind of play was genuinely children's free activities, and it was evident in both the privately-owned and the government-owned kindergartens, but hardly found in the community-run kindergarten. In the classroom practice of the privately-owned and the government-owned kindergartens, children were given the freedom to make their own decision about what to play, where to play, how to play and whom to play with. The time and duration of play were arranged and controlled by the teachers. In the three classes of the privately-owned kindergarten, teachers provided regular free play sessions for children to engage themselves in. Children were exposed to a variety of play resources, distributed into several play areas, and they were allowed to rotate play with them. Some play resources were derived from practical life materials, such as flour, rice, different kind of beans, sieves, spoons, chopsticks, and some were manipulative materials that relate to math and science, like number cards, feather, stone and maps, books, while some materials were classic Montessori toys. In the three classes of the government-owned kindergarten, the teachers' interpretation of a learning-centered approach emphasized the need to provide children with a period of free exploration in developmental appropriate learning centres. A regular 30 minutes time was allocated for children to manipulate freely in these centres. The materials allocated often included bought toys, such as various colorful plastic cogs, blocks, cars, some teacher-hand-made 'learning materials', such as different forms of cards, different size of boxes, booklets, and some teacher-collected handicraft raw materials, like various beads, strings, board, conchs, shells etc..

From the observation, it is clear that the three types of play are not mutually exclusive categories. In the nine classes, some teachers stressed one type of play over others, while others employed all three types of play. In general, it appears that type one and type two play

are preferred by the teachers of the three classes in the community-run kindergarten. While all three types of play are employed by class MK3, MK2, YK1, YK2 and YK3, and the free play prevails in MK1.

However, after further analysis of the observation data, another three categories of play based on the teachers' intentions are also identified in the observation. They are instructional play, recreational play and managerial play.

Instructional play

Instructional play is that play designed and adopted by the teachers in order to achieve their defined curriculum objectives. This is usually set up by the teachers with specific curriculum intentions and educational goals. In devising the play, the teachers have a number of educational objectives and outcomes in mind, which may relate to understanding the meaning of a poetry, remembering some English words, or understanding the sequence of numbers. In fact, children participating in the play may or may not enhance their understanding of the poetry or the sequence of numbers, but these are some of the goals established by the teachers for the play. This kind of play is popular in all of the nine classes. In their classroom practice, teachers organize this kind of play, which is actually aimed at imparting knowledge and achieving their teaching goals---the nature of formal teaching activities, and they usually maintain control of the process. In most cases, teachers name this kind of play according to the educational contents it serves, such as 'Number Game', 'Music Game' and 'Language Game'. Although it is named a play, and it includes playful elements, it is instructional in nature, as the playful elements are not permitted to obscure prescriptive knowledge.

Recreational play

Recreational play is the play that the teachers adopted to entertain or relax the children without any defined learning objectives. This type of play was observed in the classes ZK3, ZK2 and MK2, where the teachers themselves have quite playful personal characteristics and it is regarded as a shared happy experience. Once the teachers initiated it, the children would join in immediately without any hesitation. In most cases, the play was a very 'small' one,

usually lasting for only several minutes. The central feature of the play is that it is accompanied by rhythm and chants, which are repeated. The following video excerpt reflects this type of play.

10:23 am/ ZK2 class

The children of the ZK2 class have just finished a mathematic activity. Teacher AH is tidying up her teaching materials. Children are sitting on their chairs and taking a rest.

(Teacher AQ stands at the center of the classroom and asks)

AQ: Do you want to play?

Children: Yes! Yes! (sounds exciting)

AQ: Ok, let's play a clap-hands play. Let's play 'hit the paper'.

Children: Yeah!

(Teacher AQ claps her hands and plays some actions, and starts to sing the chant 'hit the paper')

AQ: Paper, paper, hit the paper.....

(Children follow the teacher gradually and start to clap hands while sing the chant. They clap hands in different direction according to the words in the chant.)

AQ:Up, up, up, down, down, down, left, left, left, right, right, right, front, front,front,back, back, back, gologolo one, gologolo two, gologolo three, ready to shoot the enemy.....

(At the end of the chant, children point to different directions and make gunshot sounds)

Children: Pang! pang! pang! (they seem very exciting about these words)

(The first round of play ends, and children are very happy, some of them dance and jump)

AQ: Was it fun?

Children: Yes, yes, play one more time!

AQ: Ok, let's play one more time.

They repeat the play several times until teacher AQ stops it.

(ZK2-clip-M13009)

The teachers who initiated this type of play were interviewed about their intentions. The key points they mentioned here is that to make children happy, play with them for fun, and get closer with children. As teacher AH stated in the stimulated-recall interview:

We often have two teaching activities in the morning, which aim to learn some knowledge and skills, if they (children) feel boring, you know, sometimes, the

activities are not quite interesting, I would use some play to make them happy, just to amuse them (ZK2-AH-STI).

Managerial play

Managerial play is the play that teachers adopted to organize and manage the class such as occupying children and organizing them in intervals between activities. This kind of play is evident in the classes ZK1, ZK2, MK1, MK2, and YK2 where children are very young and the class daily routines include a series of processes, such as drinking water, washing hands and going to toilet. It often takes place at the intervals between activities, especially when some children finished drinking, while others were drinking water. The play is similar in some aspects to recreational play, particularly in terms of the time duration and ways of play. However, it is noticed that play may or may not relate to the learning themes and it is, in some cases, initiated by the teachers randomly. Some teachers explained that their intentions of arranging this play was to reduce children's waiting time, organize them to avoid chaos and safety dangers, and assemble children for the next activity. From their explanation, it seems that this play serves as a pragmatic classroom management strategy.

Three types of play are observed in the teachers' classroom practices. Again, they are not mutually exclusive categories. It may be seen from the extent of popularity of the three types of play, that the teachers adopt play the most frequently for instructional purposes, such as helping children to achieve certain curriculum objectives which are often relate to cognitive development. This implies that the teachers give priority to the instrumental value of play in achieving learning objectives. In this part, I have presented the play context of each observed kindergarten, the proportion of play in the kindergarten daily life and the types of play found in the teachers' classroom practices. In next section, the analysis of teachers' roles in play will be presented.

6.3 The teacher's roles in play

All the teachers were asked to explain their roles in children's play. In response to this, the participating teachers described multiple roles they took in children's play using different

terms. Their description of their roles in play can be sorted into five main categories: planner, supporter, facilitator, supervisor and playmate. Teachers stated that they usually played different roles in play by changing from one role to another, rather than playing a single role in a play activity. However, from the observation, seven different roles adopted by the teachers were identified. The teacher's roles in play consist of play planner, supporter, organizer, facilitator, supervisor, playmate, and uninvolved role. Moreover, not all of the teachers adopted all seven roles in their practice. Some teachers preferred to play some of the roles, while other teachers were inclined to act as other roles. It is revealed that when the teachers adopted the roles of planner, supporter and supervisor, they were less, or indirectly involved in children's play, whereas when they acted in the role of organizer, facilitator and playmate, they were highly involved in play. It is evident that the teachers play these different roles according to different contexts and types of play. Some of the examples in which teachers adopt the roles of supporter, organizer, facilitator, supervisor, and playmate will be discussed respectively in the following paragraphs.

6.3.1 Planner

Interviews reveal that there is a prevalent view amongst teachers which stresses their role of the planner in play. All the teachers elaborated that in order to "achieve periodic teaching objectives" (ZK2-AQ-POS), they need to make plans for play. Important aspects of their role include planning the contents, ways and objectives of a play in advance, based on their "current teaching themes or topics" (MK1-BI-STI) and attaching specific learning objectives to some play. They may set ground rules, ways, and time duration for play and design the play according to the playground, available materials and most importantly, according to the developmental level of children in their class. Three teachers from the community-run kindergarten described their consideration of planning play:

Play is not random. No, we have to plan and prepare for it. It may change a little bit according to children's behaviours when we are playing. But most play is carried out as our plan and you cannot let it goes far beyond your expectation (ZK3-AP-STI).

At least half of the play is planned or designed in advance. Then we---three teachers of the class will communicate and discuss the play. We plan play according to our monthly theme, teaching objectives and the current developmental level of children in our class and the materials or props available in our kindergarten (ZK1-AL-STI).

In order to make children learn through play, we plan play in advance like planning for curriculum. You know, I am in charge of the disciplines of health, math and physical education in our class. I plan all the play relates to these subjects, normally a week before it takes place. I need to submit the plan to our administrator. If she feels that it is appropriate, we will play in the following week.....In this way, we can make play help us to fulfill our teaching objectives, and by planning, we become familiar with the details of play and have a clear idea of what to do first and what to do next (ZK3-AC-STI).

The teachers' informal interview revealed that by designing play, they integrate it with some educational purposes, and make play meaningful in promoting children's physical, cognitive and social development. When the teachers designed play, they already had the expected goals or outcomes of this in mind, even though sometimes those goals were vague.

The planner role was evident in observation, particularly, in instructional play and independent play as these two types of play were often attached with planned teaching goals. At the beginning of this type of play, the teachers usually explained and demonstrated specific methods and rules to children. The role of planner may be seen in the following video clips. The play was planned for stage 1 children aged about 3 years old.

10:20am/ ZK1 class

Teacher AL leads the children of the ZK1 class to the No. 2 playground on the ground floor. After all the play materials are set up by teacher AW, teacher AL starts to explain the ways and rules of the play she has planned.

(Teacher AL stands in the front of children's teams and says)

AL: We are going to play a game, it is named 'Little bunnies picking up mushrooms'. (teacher AL shows a head mask of little bunny) Little bunnies' mum is not at home today, so bunnies have to go outside and pick up mushrooms by themselves. However, on the way to the woods, there are many difficulties, bunnies have to overcome these difficulties and go to woods to pick mushrooms back.

Children: Yeah! Yeah!

AL: But how to do this? Children, you need to watch me to play first, and then you will know how to play. Now, watch me. (Teacher AL starts to demonstrate the ways of play)

A 'bunny' first jump over puddles (jump over two hula-hoops), and stride over stones (some plastic barriers), then go through bushes (a plastic arch) and pick up the mushrooms (mushroom cards) over there and finally run back to the teams.

AL: I will see which team spends the least time to pick up the most mushrooms! Understand?

Children: Yes!

AL: When we playing, no pushing, bunnies will start off one by one. And when you run back, please run on the right side and queue up again from the end of the team. Do you understand?

Children: Yes!

AL: OK! Are you ready? Go!

(ZK1-clip-M12010)

From the above example, we can see that rather than negotiating a series of rules and ways of play with children, the teacher designed and initiated the play, including the ways, rules, materials, and the whole play settings by herself, according to her perceptions of children's age, interest and developmental level. This planner role is found to be a primary and important aspect of the teacher's role in the community-run kindergarten and the privately-owned kindergarten, especially in independent and instructional play, in which teachers exert control throughout the play process. However, the teachers do not plan all play in detail. Some of the teachers stated that they usually planned details for the independent play in outdoor time and play in curriculum, and defined range for children's free-chosen play, while the play which served as a link between different activities were left to be flexible.

6.3.2 Supporter

Most teachers stated that their role involves the responsibilities to “prepare children with relevant experience” which are needed for play, and periodically “enrich and supply play resource and materials” according to different topic or themes (YK2-CO-STI). Several teachers mentioned that they needed to offer help when children encounter difficulties during play, and provide emotional support when children are unable to play independently. Some teachers mentioned that in order to ensure children learn through play, they designated play areas, “created environment or settings for play” (MK2-BW-PRE), took time to “prepare and provide a wide range of materials” (ZK1-AL-PRE), provide many opportunities for play and arrange them according to a current topic or theme. The teacher may stay out of children’s play, but take care of them, sometimes giving comments or encouraging children to play when they are unable to play by themselves. The following excerpt may illustrate this role.

10:12am/ ZK3 class

Children are playing a structured physical play on the playground with several pieces of equipment which are arranged by Teacher AP. They are taking turns to pass through a ‘grassland’ (a cushion) cross a ‘bridge’ (a balancing beam), climb and cross a ‘hill’ (a climbing shelf) and then go cross a ‘valley’ (six tyres).

It is a girl Dou’s turn to cross the ‘bridge’, she stands on the bridge and stops to move forward, and then crouched. Teacher AP sees this, comes over, one of her hand reaches out Dou’s hand, and says, “Are you scared? Come on! I know you are brave. Come on! Stand up, I am here, don’t worry”.

Dou holds teacher AP’s hand and stands up, then goes ahead to cross the balancing beam and jumps out happily at the end of it.

(ZK3-clip-M11909)

In the above example, the teacher sets up the setting for children, provides many materials such as cushion, balance beam, and tyres. When the child encounters difficulties, either physical or psychological difficulties, she offers support by encouraging and helps the girl to overcome it and continue to play. In another case, the teacher presented another aspect of a supporter role in play.

10:05am/YK2 class

All the children are playing a car driving game. Before the play begins, teacher CO has made the following dialogue with children:

CO: Have you ever been to some place in your father's car?

Children: Yes, yes, I went to a supermarket. I went to a

CO: Great! Who can tell me what should I do when a red traffic light is on?

Han: I know, I know, you should stop your car. My dad stops the car when the red light is on.

CO: Well done Han! Yes, when the red light is on, we have to stop our car. Who else can tell me how to do when a green traffic light is on?

Wei: Green light, go!

CO: Well done Wei! So if the green light is on, we can keep going forward. But how about a yellow light on?

Hui: When the yellow light on, you need to stop!

CO: Hui just said we should stop if a yellow light on, but I don't think we have to stop, anyone else can tell me?

Xin: You drive slowly when the yellow light on.

CO: Good boy Xin! Yes, when the yellow light on, we drive slowly. So, green light go, yellow light slow and red light stop. These are our traffic rules. Later, when you drive your car please comply with the traffic rules.

(YK2-clip-M12212)

As the example shows, acting as a supporter, teacher CO provides new information or reviews children's existing experience to equip them with the experience needed for play. The teacher initiated a discussion about the traffic rules and explained it before children played to support them in terms of knowledge and experience. In the stimulated-recall interview, some teachers elaborated important aspects of their supporter role. According to their view, adding new materials and props into children's learning corner periodically to provide a stimulation-rich environment for children's exploring and learning constitute the responsibilities of teacher's supporter role in play.

The teachers' role as supporter is evident in their classroom practice, especially in teacher AP, AL, BO, and CH's practice. Many teachers also emphasized the importance of providing support in different stages of play. Enz and Christie (1997) and Kontos (1999) termed a stage manager role which involves helping children to get ready to play, providing materials and giving suggestions of using them. Bennett et al. (1997) also named a provider

role to indicate that teachers provide a wide range of experience and regular time for children to play, make children become independent and exercise control in their own play. It seems that the supporter role that I indicate here has a similar meaning to the above-mentioned stage manager and provider roles. However, what makes it different from the role of ‘stage manager’ and ‘provider’ is that the teachers in the present study not only provide materials, resource, experience and regular time for play, but also offer psychological and emotional support during play, and more importantly, are less likely to guide and extend play.

6.3.3 Facilitator

According to the teachers’ perceptions, a central aspect of their role involves teaching children how to play, helping them understand the rules, helping children allocate play materials and roles, questioning them to stimulate and scaffold learning, thinking and imagination, involving children in play, discovering children’s innovative and creative way of playing and sharing and communicating it with other children, encouraging, leading and extending play. Several teachers named their role as facilitators. They either stay outside of play to “keep an eye on the progress and what has occurred”, or even enter into play to “offer suggestions to direct play” (YK1-CH-STI).

Teacher AL who has 12 years teaching experience stated that the extent to which she played the role of facilitator is related to the age of children in her class.

Unlike those children in stage 3 class, they can understand the rules of play very quickly, the children in my class are too young. After I told them how to play and explained the play rules, I need to help them to understand it, I need to reinforce it repeatedly. You know, I continually remind them about the rules and encourage them to play. You know, like giving praise of what they have made (ZK1-AL-PRE).

Similarly, teacher BC, a teacher with 23 years teaching experience, noted that her responsibilities of being a facilitator included helping children allocate roles and materials.

I need to lead them (children). The first thing I should do is to illustrate the requirements and rules of play. And then teach children how to play. I act as a facilitator to initiate discussion and then help allocate their roles and materials in play (MK3-BC-PRE).

Two teachers, teacher BL and BO from the privately-owned kindergarten, explained that they acted as facilitators to help children to understand their role and play rules clearly and scaffold children's learning by questioning them to make meaning in their play.

I am also a facilitator. If children are unclear about my requirements and the rules of play, I would demonstrate to them to help them get a better understanding of their role and behaviour (MK2-BL-PRE).

I observe, and then ask questions to stimulate children's learning. For example, when a child plays with plastic blocks in a constructive play, I will ask him 'what are you building?' I ask the child to make meaning of his work. He may say 'it is a car'. I will continue to ask 'what else does it look like?' In this way, I encourage him to talk about what he tries to create and make meaning of it. Next time, I may ask 'can you make it a little bit different from that one?' to evoke his thinking and imagination (MK1-BO-PRE).

Teacher CO from the government-owned kindergarten emphasized her role as a facilitator in the following example:

I won't let children play completely laissez-faire. They will stray from the play. I think it is appropriate for me to guide them to push play forward, sometimes to

extend play. At least I should ensure their play is not too excursive. Otherwise, it will be very difficult for me to regain control in play (YK2-CO-PRE).

Trying to identify children's creative or special way of playing and then presenting it to other children to inspire their thinking are important responsibilities of a facilitator role. For instance, the teacher AC from the community-run kindergarten elaborated:

When I find children play in an innovative, creative, and featured ways. You know, those ways of playing that are attractive to me. Then I show all these ways of playing to other children. To show them, say 'you see, he/ she play in this way, can you play in a different way? In this way, I inspire other children to think and develop their own way of playing. It is a kind of competition (ZK3-AC-PRE).

It appears that the teachers' desire to 'lead play', 'push play plot forward' ensures that children do not 'stray from play' and are 'not too excursive'. The words 'to control', to some extent reflects didactic elements in their theory of the facilitator role in play. This implies that teachers have defined direction and range for a play and they want to make sure that children play on their defined track and range rather than according to children's spontaneous interest. Moreover, scaffolding constitutes a key part of their role to enhance children's learning in play.

Observation reveals that the facilitator role is evident in teachers' practice, as entering into children's play helps them to become involved in play, introduce new ways to play in order to maintain children's interest and further develop their skills or abilities. However, compared to the role of supporter, the facilitator role helps children to develop and extend play. The responsibilities of the facilitator role may be seen from the following example from the observation.

3:16pm/YK1 class

It is afternoon snack time. Some children finished their snack and go into the learning corners to play freely. Three boys Feng, Jun and Wei are building flyovers collaboratively in the construction corner. Teacher CH is moving around to each corner to have a look of children's play progress. She heard some noise coming from the construction corner, and thus comes over to have a look. After she observes that children are building flyovers, she initiates the following dialogue.

CH: How is the work going on here? Have you finished the flyovers?

Jun: Not yet.

CH: Oh, not finished. But if the flyovers have not been finished, why there is a car on the flyover there?

Feng: I tell you, the flyovers have been finished and they have already opened to the public!

CH: They are working now, right? Ok. Could you tell me how can I get on the flyover from this road? (CH points the road)

Feng: You can go either this way or that way. (Feng indicates the directions)

CH: Thank you, I get it. Excuse me, I am afraid that your flyovers cannot open yet, you know why?

(Feng looks at teacher CH and shakes his head)

CH: You see, here and there, you have got so many building raw materials that have not been cleaned up, so it might be very dangerous if cars are coming. Please close the flyovers and clean up first! It is too dangerous.

After a few minutes, teacher CH comes over again.

CH: Have you cleaned up?

Wei: Almost!

CH: Let me see. Yes, much better now. But there is a drainage well over there and it is opened, how can you make the car drivers to notice that? Otherwise, they may fall into it.

Feng: We can have some signs here to warn them.

CH: Good idea! I think you have to do this immediately. Perhaps the signs could be put on two sides of the flyover entrance and exit.

The boys start to make the signs and teacher CH leaves.

(YK1-clip-A12112)

As can be seen from the video episode, by asking open-ended questions, giving suggestions, and inspiring children to think, the teacher CH acts as a facilitator to promote and extend children's constructive play. Observation shows that the teachers are more likely to play the facilitator role in the teacher-initiated play and instructional play and the children engaged play that arranged by teachers than in children's free play.

6.3.4 Supervisor

Supervising and ensuring play takes place smoothly is the most dominant aspect of the teachers' role in play. All the teachers mentioned that "keeping an eye on children's play" and "making sure they play on the right track" (YK2-CJ-PRE) are essential for the success of a play. Therefore, they often play a supervisor role in play. The central responsibilities of this role as they indicated, include maintaining discipline, managing children's behaviors, solving conflicts and disputes, identifying possible safety dangers and avoiding accidents, and making the necessary adjustment according to the flow of children's interests.

The majority of the teachers stressed that observation is essential for them to supervise children's behaviors and actions in play. By observing, teachers are able to interpret children's performance and evaluate children's developmental level so as to offer appropriate guidance and support according to children's needs during play. It is the teachers' viewpoint that the potential learning benefits of play could be maximized through their supervision which is based on observation. This may be seen from the extracts of teacher BY and BC below:

Observing is the basis for my supervision. Through observing in play, we can gain ideas about children's current status and developmental level, whether this play is appropriate for his /her development, and whether he/she like this material or toy. We need to offer guidance and support for children based on assessments like this. If the play is not matched with children's developmental level and needs, we have to change it and provide them with those activities that suitable for their developmental stage (MK3-BY-PRE).

After I introduce the play and rules, I will let them play freely. Then I will observe to see how they play, whether they can reach agreement when allocate the materials, whether they can solve problems by themselves or whether they need my help. I make the decision of intervention based on my observation (MK3-BC-STI).

Teacher BC from the privately-owned kindergarten explained that as a supervisor, she pays attention to what happens around the children in play and whether they need teacher's help.

When children play on their own, I observe their progress, to see whether I need to intervene or not. For instance, some children cannot reach an agreement when they distributing roles and materials. In this case, I need to observe what has actually happened, to see whether they need my help. If they do ask for my help, then I would enter into play and assist them to allocate roles and materials. But if they don't want me to intervene, I would stay back and keep an eye on it, let themselves solve problem by themselves (MK3-BC-PRE).

In contrast to the teachers who want to intervene in children's play, teacher AC from class 3 of the community-run kindergarten stated that she preferred a quiet supervisor role, which means that she may not actively enter and intervene in children's play, but quietly observe and maintain discipline. As she explained:

When children are playing, my role is being there to observe quietly, I will not interrupt or disturb them, rather I just let them play by themselves and I stay aside to watch how they play, how play develops. But at the same time, I will maintain discipline to ensure no one influence others (ZK3-AC-PRE).

Several teachers emphasized the importance of maintaining children's interest in play. As far as they are concerned, interest is the core element that influence the quality of children's learning in play. Thus, "observing children's interest flow in play" and making "necessary adjustments to mobilize children's interest" are key aspects of their supervisor role (YK3-CL-STI). As teacher AH, a young teacher with 8 months teaching experience, noted:

I observe their performance in play, to find whether or not they are happy and have fun, whether they are engaged in play. Furthermore, I observe

development and change in children's interest. You know, sometimes, I design a play which they are initially interested in, but after playing for a while, their interest may change. Sometimes, they lose interest in it. Therefore, I observe their interest and the atmosphere during play. If they are not quite involved in play and the atmosphere is boring, I should reflect on whether the play I designed is not interesting to them. I have to make prompt adjustments to mobilize their interest or end play immediately (ZK2-AH-PRE).

Unlike those teachers who stressed their supervisory role in terms of maintaining children's interest in play, teacher CE from the government-owned kindergarten considered the supervisor role from a behavior management aspect. She explained:

I supervise children in play, in order to make sure they are playing in a hygienic and safe way. My role is to go around and watch, just to make sure they do not show misbehaviour. You know, they easily make themselves dirty, conflict with peers, grab others' toy, hurt their peers, and I have to ensure there is not any potential safety danger which may cause accident during play (YK1-CE-PRE).

In the classroom observation, all the teachers played the supervisor role to a considerable degree. Based on their observation of children's performance, the teachers made decisions as to how to manage children's behavior to ensure play go smoothly. The video excerpt below may illustrate this role.

Excerpt 1

9:05am/YK1 class

Children are playing freely with a string-ball. It is a fabric ball with a string on it. Teacher CE is moving around and observing children's play, sometime she intervenes in and offers guidance to children.

Teacher CE finds that the girl Hong and the boy Feng stand very closely when they swinging the string-ball, she goes to them and reminds, "please keep a nice distance, so you won't hurt each other."

(YK1-clip-M12012)

Excerpt 2

3:15pm/YK2 class

Children are playing freely in a sand pit using various tools. Teacher CO stands outside of the sand pit and observes children's play. She watches a boy Han who is engrossing in digging a hole in the sand. Han is so concentrated on digging that he does not notice the sand is falling down on his clothes. Teacher CO goes to reminds him.

CO: Han, what are you doing?

Han does not say a word, and stands up to look at teacher CO.

CO: (Helps Han brush down the sand on his cloth) You don't need to throw the sand that high, you see, they are falling down on your clothes. Keep an eye on the sand and don't throw it into others' eyes.

Han nods and squats to go on playing.

(YK2-clip-A12212)

In the two examples, it is clear that the teachers act as a supervisor who watches children's play to find whether their behavior is appropriate and safe. It seems that they are quite sensitive to children's safety. For instance, when teacher CE noticed that the two children stood next to each other, she helped them to keep a proper distance to avoid physical harm. The teacher CO also offered help, and reminded the child to behave appropriately to maintain safety based on her observation. During observation, the role that teachers played most frequently was that of the supervisor, especially in children's free play. It appears that the teachers prefer to adopt this role than any other role in play. The big number of children in the class and the kindergarten's requirements for a safe environment for children require the teachers to pay great attention to children's behavior and safety.

In observation, children sometimes fought over materials and roles in play and the teacher worked as a supervisor to mediate the conflict by offering new accessories or by suggesting alternatives for disputed roles, and model the problem-solving abilities and interpersonal skills to children. This can be illustrated by the following observation excerpt.

10:26am/YK3 class

After teacher CZ explains play rules briefly, children start to play flying saucers in the outdoor playground. The flying saucers are made by soft fabric. Children are free to choose one from a basket and play either alone or with peers. Almost every child picks one flying saucer and starts to play.

Two boys, Han and Dun stand by the basket and both hold the same flying saucer tightly and scramble for it. Teacher CZ comes over, takes the flying saucer from them and says, “Don’t scramble, don’t scramble. Ok, tell me what is wrong?”

Han and Dun both like the only green flying saucer in the basket. Teacher CZ checks all the flying saucers which are left in the basket and says, “here we have red, purple, blue and many beautiful flying saucers. I know you both love this, this one is so special, because it is the only green one. Right?” Han and Dun look at her and say nothing. Teacher CZ continues saying “but you just think a moment, you spend so much time on scrambling it, waste your time for playing, don’t you? Why not to play it together? You two are good friends, aren’t you? Would you like to play it together?” Dun nods and says, “I’d like to.” But Han does not say a word, he bends down and picks an orange flying saucer from the basket and says, “Ok, I would like to play this one.” Teacher CZ nods and smiles.

(YK3-clip-M13012)

From the above example, it may be seen that the teacher plays a supervisory role to help the boys resolve their conflict over the flying saucer by reminding them of the possible choices in the basket and suggesting flexible thinking and ways to play. It was found from the observation, the teachers prefer persuading and helping children to solve problems to let children solve conflicts by themselves. This is perhaps because, as some teachers indicated in the stimulated-recall interview, they felt that children lacked social skills and they felt obliged to help and guide them.

6.3.5 Playmate

Both the teachers’ perceptions and practices indicate that they valued the playmate role highly. The findings reveal that to establish a close teacher-children relationship through playing, boost the atmosphere and children’s interest in play, model some actions and skills for children, and make children more involved in play are important intentions for teachers to play as a playmate. Some teachers such as teacher AP, BO, CH, CZ, CL, CJ indicated that

their playful personality led to their role as the playmate in children's play. Other teachers AW, AL, BI, BT, BE believed that playing with a child offers a good opportunity for them to "know the child", and "developing emotional communication" with he/she (MK-BT). Observation reveals that the teachers join in and play with children in different play settings and perceive their participation as a kind of support to children which could contribute to the quality of play.

Teacher BY explained that she joined in children's play to offer help for the less competent children and boost the atmosphere.

I like to join in their (children) play. I usually play with them as a playmate. My aim is to provide support for those less competent children. You know, children in different age may have a different developmental level. Some of them may face difficulties in play. So, I need to offer them help. When I play with them, their interest and the whole atmosphere can be boosted. Children are quite excited when playing with me. They like to challenge and compete with me (MK3-BY-PRE).

Teacher BC from the same kindergarten expressed her view about participating in children's play to have fun.

When children are playing quite well, I will participate in their play by adopting one of the roles within their make-believe play. For example, I pretend to be a customer in a restaurant. I feel we both have fun when I participate in their play (MK3-BC-PRE).

Teacher AP analyzed the reason why she joined in children's play. For one thing, her personality was quite playful. For another, she wanted to step back and provide the opportunity to let the children lead and control play by themselves. It is worthwhile presenting her quotation here:

You know, I am a playful person, I myself like play very much as children do. When I join in their play, I feel I am not an adult, and they are not young children, I think we are the same kind of people. I am playful person, and they are playful children....They sometimes have nice ideas which I don't have, so I need to listen to them. Why not? Sometimes I enter into their play and pretend I don't know how to play, let them teach me, lead and take control of the play. I am just a less competent playmate. It is not necessary for the teacher always to play the leading role, rather I prefer to provide more opportunities for children to express themselves (ZK3-AP-PRE).

Several teachers compared their role in formal teaching activities with their role in the play. As they stated that in formal teaching activities, their role was rather didactic which featured as 'strict' and 'authoritative', while a playmate role may require the teacher to be "a big friend", "be relaxed", "act like the children do" and "be equal with children" (ZK3-AP-STI). As teacher CJ and AQ stated that:

I don't want to play a didactic role all the time, that is the role I play in formal teaching activities. But in play, I act as a playmate or a friend more often. When I play with children in games, they are more happy (YK2-CJ-PRE).

I think it is very important for teachers to play with children, rather than to make children feel I am the teacher, the authority. There is a sense of distance, I need to build my identity as a playmate and as their friend (ZK2-AQ-PRE).

Some teachers held the view that they acted as a playmate in play in order to establish a closer relationship with the children. As they noted, to "shorten the distance between the teacher and the children" (MK2-BL-STI) and to improve "teacher-children emotional communication" (YK3-CZ-STI) were the main reasons for their participating in play. This may be seen in the extract below:

In play, I act as children's playmate, involved in and play with them. It enables me to develop emotional communication with them. You know, some children may feel I am strict and afraid to interact with me. When I play with them, I will take advantage of it to shorten the distance between us, to improve our teacher-children relationship, to let them know, I am not that strict, I am not only the teacher, but can be their friend as well (ZK3-AC-PRE).

It seems that the teachers have a strong desire to establish an identity as children's playmate and they make at least four meaning of the playmate role. Firstly, as a playmate, the teacher tends to present herself as equal to the children in terms of power. Moreover, the role of playmate helps the teacher to have emotional communication, which is less likely to take place between the teacher and the children in other activities. Furthermore, the playmate role gives a sense of security for children to communicate and interact with the teacher. Finally, the relationship between children and playmates tends to be closer than the relationship between the 'teacher' and the children. Therefore, the teachers need to adopt a playmate role to improve the teacher-children relationship.

A few teachers described other motivations for participating in children's play. The teacher CO mentioned that joining in children's play allowed her to maintain the rules of play. This can mean modeling particular actions to reinforce children's understanding of the rules. It is her opinion that a playmate role made her suggestions and advice more acceptable to the children. She elaborated that:

If I join in and play with them, when someone does not follow the play rules, I would remind he/she, he/she would listen to me, take my advice. This is not the case if I stand outside of the play, he/she may not be willing to accept my advice. In a play context, teachers use the role language to reinforce and maintain the rules of play, children will accept it more easily, both emotionally and psychologically (YK2-CO-PRE).

Two other teachers illustrated the view that a playmate role enabled them to make necessary change, to transform, direct and extend play. However, teacher BO from the privately-owned kindergarten expressed her dilemma when participating in children's play. On the one hand, she believed that the teacher's participating as a player can inspire children's thoughts and help them to develop the play. On the other hand, she wanted to preserve children's own ideas and improvisations. She was concerned that teacher's participation may interrupt children's play, distract their attention and more importantly, destroy their spontaneous creative ideas. As she explained:

Sometimes, I think my participation may help children to develop complicated play. For example, children play 'Mummies and Daddies', they are not quite clear about the things mammy and daddy respectively in charge of. I can join in and inspire them to know about what mammy does and what daddy does. I can provide help for them when they are unfamiliar with the themes of the play. But sometimes I don't want to join in, like when they playing very happy and having fun, I enter into play, they may suddenly forget their scene. You know, children's play is spontaneous and quite improvised. You cannot predict every detail. When I join in their play in the middle, it may interrupt and distract children's attention, or even worse, destroy their spontaneous creative ideas. I may ask their opinion before I join in, if they welcome me, I would participate. But if they don't, I would not participate. I think it would be better for me to participate when they invite me (MK1-BO-PRE).

In the classroom observation, it is evident that some teachers participate in children's play and interact with them actively. It appears that the teachers play as playmates of children primarily in three ways. Sometimes, they play with children as a partner. Sometimes, they act as one of the key roles in play. Sometimes, they are parallel players of children and play the same play and follow the play rules with children. This can be seen from the following clips.

Excerpt 1

9:39am/YK3 class

Children are organized by teacher CL to play games---‘cockfighting’ on the playground. The game needs two people to play together. After teacher CL introduces and demonstrates the way and rules of play, children start to play in pairs.

A girl Sisi does not find a partner and she is wandering. Teacher CL notices that and becomes a playmate immediately without saying a word. She comes towards Sisi and fights with her. Sisi fights back immediately. They hop and push each other without using hands. After a while, Sisi is out of strength as her feet touch the ground, and she loses the game. Teacher CL shows a winner gesture with her hands and cheers. It seems Sisi is not unhappy and she suddenly hugs teacher CL.

(YK3-clip-M10401)

Excerpt 2

9:41am/YK2 class

Teacher CJ plays a game ‘Mr. Wolf’ with all the children in the class. As children have played this game before, she does not introduce the rules at the beginning, instead, she pretends as a wolf and yawning.

CJ: I am going to sleep! (Mr.wolf’s word)

Children: (All the children follow her and walk forward consciously and pretend as ‘bunnies’) Mr. wolf, Mr. wolf, what is the time?

CJ: (stops) It’s three o’clock.

They continue going forward and repeat this.

Children: Mr. wolf, Mr. wolf, what is the time?

(YK2-clip-M12912)

Excerpt 3

10:05am/YK2 class

Children are playing a ‘car-driving’ game. Everyone drives a car on the defined range of a playground. Teacher CO also drives a car as every child does. They go in different directions and drive around the playground freely.

(YK2-clip-M12212)

As the clips show, the teachers join in and play with children in different ways according to different play and settings. Some teachers indicated in the informal interview that they perceived their participation in play as a kind of support to children. By joining in with play,

they could boost the atmosphere, improve teacher-child relationship and enhance the quality of play. As teacher AH mentioned,

I think my participation is a kind of support. When I feel it is an appropriate time, I will join in their play. You know, you cannot always stand aside and watch them play. Sometimes, you need to enter into their play. I feel when I join in, the atmosphere is boosted and children feel happy. They like to play with me (ZK2-AH-STI).

6.3.6 Organizer

An organizer role was evident in classroom observations. However, it was not mentioned by the teachers in the pre-observation interviews. This is perhaps because they assume the organizer role as the basic aspect of their role in kindergarten daily routines not merely in play. Therefore, it is too common to be recognized and mentioned. This role was exemplified by teacher AP, AQ, AL, BW, BL, BI, CJ and CL's practice in the observation, and was very popular in instructional play and managerial play, and even recreational play. Observation reveals that teachers play this role through the whole play process. They become the central role who takes control of play rather than children. Later, in the stimulated recall interview, most teachers construct this role by using similar terminology. It seems that this role closely relates to teachers' conception of 'eduplay' and their idea of how important their influence is on children's play.

As some teachers repeated the words 'organize' and 'lead children' in their interview, it seems that they were 'organizing' children throughout a whole kindergarten day. Thus, organizing children became a very common and natural behavior of their role as a kindergarten teacher, and they even forget to mention it intentionally. As an organizer, the teacher is in charge of arranging play, actively initiating and directing the play, and controlling the whole play process. Usually, a teacher starts by lining up children in the play area, introduces them to the play, and demonstrates how to play. The following video excerpt may illustrate this role.

3:55pm/ZK2 class

It is outdoor playtime in the afternoon. Teacher AQ requests children to line up in the classroom and they are going to have a play in the playground. After all the children queue up, teacher AQ begins to introduce the game.

AQ: Children, we are going to play a game, it is a new game, named 'Little duck buy food'. The little duck does not know how to buy food, so she asks you all to help her buy food. (AQ holds a small plastic basket in her hand) As you can see, there are many cards in this basket, what cards can you see? (AQ shows the cards)

Children: Orange.

AQ: Yes, we have orange cards. Remember clearly, later we will play with them. What else can you see? (AQ show other cards)

Children: Fish, fish! Shrimp!

AQ: Yes, fish and shrimp. Anything else?

Children: Dumpling!

AQ: En, dumpling. And what is this? (AQ show another card)

Children: Grapes!

AQ: Well done! So we have orange, fish, shrimp, dumpling and grapes. We will play with them. Now follow me and go down to the playground.

Children go down stairs one by one, and line up again on the playground. Teacher AQ explains the play and rules.

AQ: I am going to divide you into four teams, each team has an empty basket in front of you, and I will put all these cards over there in a hola-hoop on the floor. Every time, only one of you from each team goes to there to buy food according to my request. If I say 'please buy five oranges', you have to find five orange cards and bring them back into the basket, understand?

Children: Yes!

AQ: Ok! Now you line up as four teams! Team one line up after Wen, team two line up after Haiyan, Team three line up after Lin, and team four line up after Yu. You can choose to line up behind one of them. (AQ helps with assigning groups)

AQ: Ok, ok! Listen to me. After you buy food and put them back in the basket, you have to go to the end of the team to queue up again, and the next one should go and buy food. Are you clear?

Children: Yes.

AQ: Ready? Go!

The game starts and teacher AQ moves around to check whether children 'buy the food' according to her requests.

15 minutes later, teacher AQ pauses the play and calculates the numbers of food with children.

AQ: Wow, every team has bought so many food, and team one has bought the most food, team one wins!

Children of team one cheer: Yeah!

AQ: Let's praise them! Good, good, very very good! (teacher AQ and all the children thumbs-up)

AQ: Now, we play this game a bit differently. I would like to ask two of you from each team hand in hand, and go over there to buy food and come back all by hopping! It is more challenging now. Can you do that?

Children: Yes, yes.

The game continues. Teacher AQ goes around and gives instructions every here and there. 27 minutes later, she ends the game and summarizes "you all are well done in the game! Some of you can find the correct food very quickly, but I still find some children grasp more cards than I requested, you have to count before you go back, right? Some of you hopped very quickly and did not take good care of your partner. You need to hold hands and hop together, and partners need to cooperate properly, right? So next time, you should listen carefully of the play rules. Ok, now please line up and follow me to go back to the classroom".

(ZK2-clip-A11010)

It is obvious from the video clip above that the teacher AQ directs and guides the children from the beginning to the end of the play. Through the whole process, she organized the children in order, such as lining up to go to and return from the playground. The teacher AQ also set up play rules and introduced it to the children, and helped with assigning teams. After one round of play, she praised children for their good performance. Finally, at the end of the play, the teacher summarized the children's performance and gave comments and guidance to them.

It may be noticed that the teachers played this organizer role more frequently in the teachers-initiated play, the instructional play and the managerial play than in children's free play. Although they assert that play is children-centred activity, they make themselves as the central role in play rather than the children. However, from the teachers' practice, it is not difficult to find that compared to the other roles teachers played, such as playmate and supporter, the role of organizer contains some didactic elements, as the ownership of play belongs to the teachers rather than the children.

6.3.7 Uninvolved role

Although in the pre-observation interview, the teachers did not mention that they were not involved in children's play, in the observation, it was seen that several teachers played an uninvolved role, as they neither joined in play nor observed children's play; instead, they were engaged in preparing some paper work, such as monthly and weekly teaching plans, term work reviews, and materials which need to be distributed to parents. The uninvolved role was exemplified by the teachers who worked in the government-owned and the privately-owned kindergartens. Some teachers prepared the teaching materials for the next bout of formal teaching activities during children's free play. As one teacher explained the reason of why she did not become involved in or observe children's play in the stimulated recall interview.

We are going to climbing the Baiyun Mountain in next week, I have to inform all the parents about the details and requirements of this activity, so they can prepare for this. The children have just engaged in an after-meal free play which they are very familiar with. So I took this time to prepare the notice for the parents (YK2-CO-STI).

The reason for the discrepancy between the teachers' view and their practice of the uninvolved role perhaps is the dilemma in kindergarten reality. That is, as teachers CH told me in our interactions during the observation, they have so much paperwork to do that they have to squeeze in time to complete them. It seems that the requirement from the kindergarten on teachers' different kinds of paper work has placed them in a dilemma. However, the fact that teachers took time to complete their paper work during children's free play reveals that they do not value free play the same as teacher-initiated play for children's learning, and they do not value their involvement in free play the same as their role in teacher-initiated play and formal learning activity.

The findings of the observation show that the teachers from the three different kindergartens play the seven roles in various play settings. It seems that the teachers from different kindergartens prefer to play some of the roles to others, and the teachers in the same kindergarten play their role slightly differently. As the three kindergartens adopt different educational approaches, the teachers are requested to play different roles accordingly. For instance, the teachers from the community-run kindergarten are more likely to act as planner, supporter, organizer, supervisor, and playmate than as facilitator and the uninvolved role. The teachers from the privately-owned kindergarten play more frequently as planner, supporter, organizer, facilitator, supervisor and the uninvolved role than as playmate. The teachers from the government-owned kindergarten play all the seven roles in their practice. Similarities were found between the teachers' roles in play; that is, all the teachers from the three kindergartens act more often as planner, organizer, playmate and the most popular role of them is supervisor. Teachers' roles in play closely relate to the ways they interacted with children. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, I will present how teachers interact with the individual child in play.

6.4 Teacher-child interactions in play

During the observation, teacher-child interactions in play were recorded using a video camera. The interactions were then transcribed carefully to look for different categories. By analyzing the teachers' and children's explicit behaviors, such as talks, gestures and facial expression in their interactions, the intentions of both child-initiated and teacher-initiated interactions are identified and categorized. The diverse categories of teacher-child interactions during play will be presented in the following paragraphs by displaying the descriptions of observed examples and the descriptive statistics of the frequency and proportions of different interactional categories.

6.4.1 Interaction initiators and responses

The interactions observed could be categorized as teacher-initiated and child-initiated interactions, according to different interaction initiators. The intentions of teacher-initiated and child-initiated interactions varied considerably. As can be seen from the pie chart below,

the proportions of teacher-initiated and child-initiated interactions are quite different (see Figure 6.3).

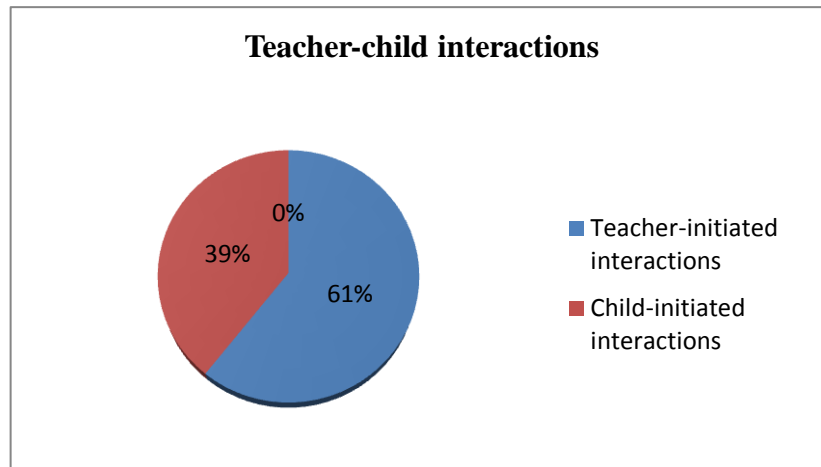


Figure 6.3 The proportions of teacher-initiated and child-initiated interactions

During the observation of the nine classes' play, 491 interactions in total were observed, of which 298 interactions were initiated by the teachers, and this accounted for 61% of the interactions, while 193 were child-initiated interactions, and this took up 39% of the interactions. This reveals that although both teachers and children experienced the play, the teachers initiated 22% more interactions than children did in play. Moreover, the teachers and children showed different responses to interactions. This may be seen from the chart below (see Figure 6.4).

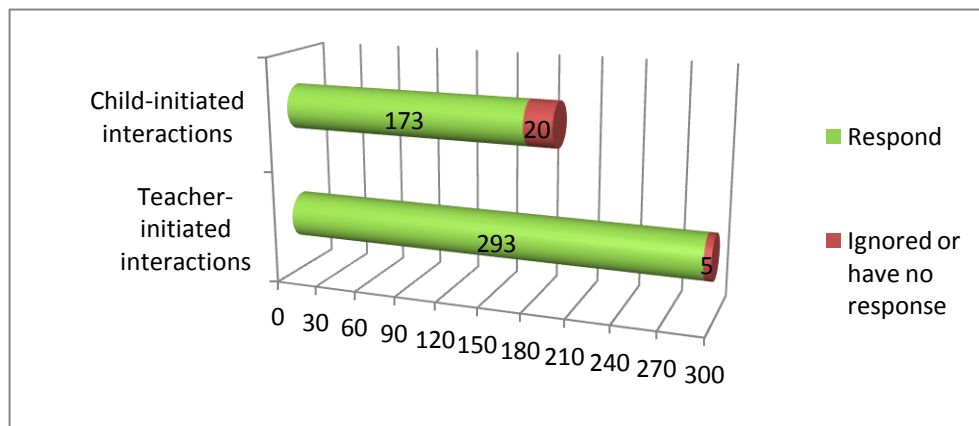


Figure 6.4 The proportions of responses of teachers and children to interactions

As the above bar chart shows, of all the 298 teacher-initiated interactions, children responded to 293 of them (98.4%), and ignored or had no response to 5 (1.6%) interactions, while in 193 child-initiated interactions, teachers responded to 173 of them (90%), ignored or had no response to 20 (10%) of them. Compared to the teachers, the children respond more actively to teacher-initiated interactions than the teachers, whereas the teachers are more likely to ignore or have no response to child-initiated interactions than the children. It seems that both teachers and children are sensitive to the interaction that takes place between them. In general, the proportions of both of their response are high. However, it appears that teachers are less sensitive to interactions than children.

6.4.2 Teacher-initiated interactions

Teacher-initiated interactions can be further described in nine main categories which illustrate the various reasons for teachers' involvement in children's play. Usually, a teacher initiates interaction with a child in order to 1) direct and guide the child's play and learning; 2) manage the child's behaviours; 3) take care of the child; 4) ask the child for help; 5) play with the child; 6) offer help and support to the child; 7) ask the child for information; 8) praise and encourage the child; and 9) comfort the child (see figure 6.5).

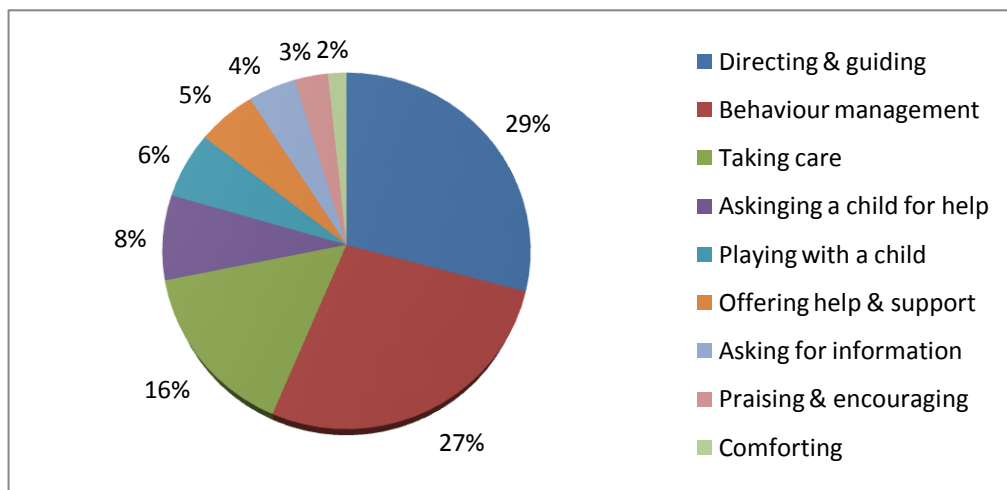


Figure 6.5 The proportions and intentions of teacher-initiated interactions

As is shown in the above chart, of all the nine kinds of teacher-initiated interactions, teachers initiate the most interactions (87 times) to direct and guide children's play. This accounts for

29%, almost one-third of all the interactions. The interactions teacher-initiated to manage children's behavior (81) is listed at the second place and takes up 27%. Taking care (46) and asking a child for help (23) are listed respectively at the third and fourth place which account for 16% and 8%. Teachers playing with a child (18) is listed at the fifth place and accounts for 6%, offering help and support (16) is listed at the sixth place and takes up 5%, while asking for information (13) and praising and encouraging (9) are listed at the seventh and eighth place which take up 4% and 3%. Comforting takes the least proportion in teacher-initiated interactions, and this only happened 5 times and accounts for 2%. It is obvious that directing and guiding a child's play, managing the child's behavior and taking care of a child are the main purposes of teacher-initiated interaction. Compared to six other intentions, these three intentions account for 72% of all the teacher-initiated interactions. I will present some excerpts from the observation in the following paragraphs, in order to illustrate each of these categories.

(1) Directing and guiding children's play and learning

In this kind of interaction, a teacher comes to a child and gives direct or indirect guidance, such as instructing a child to perform in specific ways in play or suggesting to him/her play options, and inspiring a child to extend his/her thinking and learning in play. This may be illustrated in the video clip below.

7:50am/ZK3 class

Children are organized by teacher AP to play a game called 'the king of balance'. They are divided into two teams to compete. Every child in two teams needs to hop through several hoola-hoops on the floor. When a child finishes his or her performance and returns to the team, he or she needs to clap hands with the next child to inform the child to start play. It is a girl Gong's turn, she starts off quickly and hops smoothly and goes back to the team and lines up directly. Teacher AP comes over and tells Gong: "hang on, hang on, you need to clap hands!" Gong looks at teacher AP and it seems she is confused. Teacher AP leads Gong and goes to Jia and guide, "you need to clap hands with Jia!" Gong suddenly realizes and smiles, she claps hand with Jia quickly, and Jia starts to hop.

(ZK3-clip-M12109)

(2) Behaviour management

In this kind of interaction, a teacher warns or redirects a child's behavior which she perceives to be inappropriate, such as when a child has rough or unsafe behavior or conflicts with peers or violates class rules and conventions. This may be illustrated in the video clip below.

3:07pm/ZK1 class

Children are playing a game 'Little flying fish'. Teacher AW allocates every child a 'little flying fish' which is made of plastic beverage water bottle, and gives them instructions to throw it forward as far as they can. Teacher AW says, "now raise your hand with the 'fish' like me, are you ready?" A boy Chen throws his 'fish' out before teacher AW says 'Go'. Teacher AW pauses playing, comes to Chen and takes his 'fish' and say, "you did not comply with the play rules, you need to wait and listen to my instructions, understand? If you do this again, I would not invite you to play anymore. Understand?" Chen looks at teacher AW and nods, and teacher AW returns the 'fish' to him.

(ZK1-clip-A21910)

(3) Taking care

In this kind of interaction, a teacher pays attention to a child's body situation and offers care to keep his/her body in a good condition, such as checking whether a child is sweating when playing, helping a child to take off their coat, rolling his/her sleeves, and putting a towel on his/her back when necessary. This may be illustrated in the video clip below.

11:35am/MK1 class

Children are playing freely on the slides and climbing shelves outside of the classroom. Teacher BI is walking round to keep an eye on them. She asks a boy Sun to come over "how many cloths do you wear today, do you feel hot? Are you sweating? " Sun say, "I wear five pieces of clothes." She checks and touches his back and says, "you are sweating, take off this jacket, and wait here, I am going to put a towel on your back."

(MK1-clip-M13011)

(4) Asking a child for help

In this kind of interaction, a teacher asks and involves a child to help her with play related tasks and class routines, such as distributing and collecting play materials before and after the play. This may be seen from the video excerpt below.

10:26am/YK3 class

Children are divided into two groups and led by two different teachers to play different games. One group of them plays flying saucers, and the other plays tires. At the beginning of the play, teacher CL says to a boy Lu “Please help me to distribute these partitions along this way!” she aims to define the range of the area within which children can roll their tires. Lu asks, “put them behind the pillars or in front of them?” teacher CL says “behind them.” Lu moves the partition cones and puts them into a line behind the pillars.

After 15 minutes of play, Teacher CZ says to a girl Hui, “Could you help me to ask teacher CL whether we interchange our play?” Hui goes to and asks teacher CL who is on the other side of the playground and comes back to teacher CZ and says, “teacher CL said we are not going to interchange our play.” Teacher CZ touches Hui’s head and says, “Thank you!”
(YK3-clip-M13012)

(5) Playing with a child

In this kind of interaction, a teacher actively invites a child to play or becomes a partner to play with a child. This may be illustrated in the video clip below.

4:05pm/ZK3 class

Children are playing freely in the sand pit using various tools and equipments. Teacher AP and AC are standing out of the sand pit and watching them play. A boy Yi is digging a hole by using a plastic spade. Teacher AP comes over and asks, “Can I play with you?” Yi nods. She uses a plastic rake and helps with digging. When the sand hole becomes deeper, teacher AP says to Yi, “let’s put the stick in it”. Yi puts the stick into the sand hole and says, “we bury it with sand and plant it”. Teacher AP smiles and says “ok”. Later, Yi sprinkles some sand slowly with the spade on the buried stick and says, “watering it, watering it.” Teacher AP acts the same as Yi does and asks, “Will it grow and sprout?” Yi nods and says, “Not yet, we need to water it every day.”
(ZK3-clip-A12309)

(6) Offering help and support

In this kind of interaction, a teacher actively offers her help when she find a child is facing difficulty physically or psychologically, showing frustration, or searching for additional play materials. This may be illustrated in the example below.

9:15am/ZK1 class

Teachers AL and AW lead all the children to walk and experience bare feet to cross the cobbled pathway and several tree stumps. A girl Wen stands up on a short tree stump, and tries to reach a higher tree stump, but she seems very scared, and stops. Teacher AL comes over and gives her a hand and says, “Step

on.” Wen holds teacher AL’s hand, steps on the following tree stumps smoothly, and jumps out from the last one.

(ZK1-clip-M11710)

(7) Asking for information

In this kind of interaction, a teacher usually asks questions to get information about a child’s intention of a behavior or chats with a child about his/her thinking and plan on something.

This may be illustrated in the example below.

10:05am/ZK1 class

Children are playing a teacher-initiated sporty game “Little turtles race”. They are crawling and racing in pairs on run tracks. Teacher AL stands at the starting line and gives instructions. The play is under way, a boy Yu runs towards teacher AL from the end of the track, teacher AL notices and asks, “Yu, what are you doing?” Yu stops, stands in the middle of the track and scratches his head, but says nothing. Teacher AL goes to him and asks again “what are you doing?” Yu answers, “I have not played yet”. Teacher AL says, “You have not played?” Yu nods. Teacher AL leads him to the starting line and says “ok, now it is your turn, come here”.

(ZK1-clip-M11910)

(8) Praising and encouraging

In this kind of interaction, a teacher usually offers praise or encouragement for a child’s performance or accomplishment in play without altering or directing play. This may be illustrated in the following video excerpt.

4:15pm/MK3 class

Children are engaging in a physical play with a set of plastic equipment which are arranged and set by teacher BC on the playground. They are playing one by one to walk on several narrow arch bridges and curving plastic blocks. A girl Xiao who is the youngest child in this class stands on a bridge, and jumps out to the ground successfully, teacher BC sees this and says to Xiao, “Wow, well done Xiao! You are so brave!” Xiao looks at teacher BC and smiles happily.

(MK3-clip-A41611)

(9) Comforting

In this kind of interaction, a teacher soothes a child when he/she is upset or experiences difficulties, such as a child falling over him/herself, or being hurt by something. This may be illustrated in the following video excerpt.

9:56am/YK3 class

Children are engaging in a game called 'cocks fighting'. They are playing with partners and teacher CL is walking around, watching children playing and sometimes joins in. A girl Qian falls over when she is playing with a boy Dun and she cries. Teacher CL goes to her, helps her stands up, touches her head gently and asks, "Are you ok? Does it hurt?" Qian does not say anything and keeps crying. Teacher CL says, "Let me see. It is ok. You will be fine. You are very brave, I know. I just saw you stood still and hopped very flexibly. You will be fine after I massage it. Let's take a rest". Qian wipes away her tears and goes with teacher CL to the other side of the playground.

(YK3-clip-M10501)

6.4.3 Child-initiated interactions

The child-initiated interactions can be described in eight categories which involve: 1) asking for a teacher's attention; 2) telling on someone who broke the class rules; 3) involving a teacher in play; 4) asking for a teacher's help; 5) stating and expressing his/her ideas; 6) requesting; 7) asking for information and permission; and 8) expressing his or her emotion. The percentage of different types of child-initiated interactions is shown in the following chart (see figure 6.6).

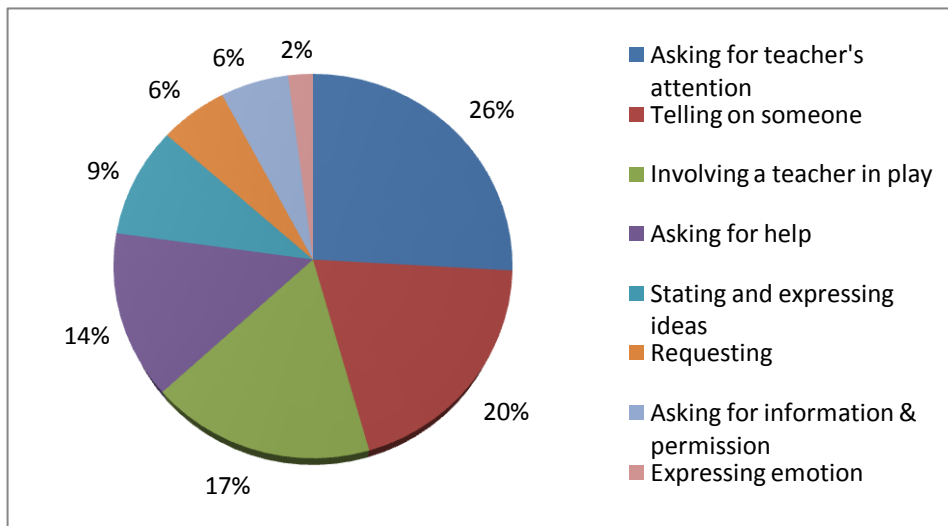


Figure 6.6 The proportions and intentions of child-initiated interactions

It is clear from the chart that of all the 193 child-initiated interactions, asking for teacher's attention (50) is the most common intention of child-initiated interactions and accounts for 26%. Telling on someone who broke the class conventions or play rules to a teacher (38) is also an important reason, and accounts for 20% of child-initiated interactions. This is

followed by the purpose of involving a teacher in play (34) which accounts for 17% of child-initiated interactions. 14% of the child-initiated interactions aim to ask for teachers' help (27) while 9% of that is to state and express ideas (18). 6% of child-initiated interactions aim to request (11) and another 6% aim to ask for information and permission from a teacher (11). Only 2% of the child-initiated interactions aim to express a child's emotion to the teacher (4). The figure shows that asking for a teacher's attention, telling on someone who broke the class conventions or play rules to a teacher, inviting a teacher to play and asking a teacher for help are the four primary purposes of the child-initiated interaction. This accounts for more than three-quarter of all the child-initiated interactions. I will demonstrate excerpts from the observation to illustrate each of these categories.

(1) Asking for teacher's attention

In this kind of interaction, a child usually creates some special ways to play to attract teacher's attention or shows achievement of play to a teacher to seek her praise or recognition. This may be seen in the observation excerpt below.

10:32am/MK1 class

Children are leading by teacher BI and playing basketball on the playground. After teacher BI demonstrates the way to play, children start to play by themselves and teacher BI watches them playing. A boy Liang comes to teacher BI with a basketball in his hands and says, "teacher BI, teacher BI, watch me!" He tosses the ball up and catches it successfully. Teacher BI says, "wow, well done Liang". Liang smiles and tries to do it again. A boy Wang comes over and says to the teacher, "teacher BI, I can toss it very high!" He starts to toss the ball and it is over his head and falls behind him. Teacher BI models to Wang and says, "Wang, you do like this, toss it up, not toss it back".

(MK1-clip-M13011)

(2) Telling on someone

In this kind of interaction, a child reports to a teacher that someone insults, aggresses him/her physically or verbally, or someone does not follow or transgresses the class or play rules. This may be seen in the observation excerpt below.

8:35am/MK2 class

It is children's breakfast time. Some children are eating. Some other children have finished their breakfast and started to play with plastic blocks in the

construction corner. Two girls Mei and Tian, and two boys Xuan and Chen are playing on the same table and sharing one basket of blocks. After a while, all the blocks in the basket have been taken by the four children.

Teacher BL passes by their table, the boy Xuan says to her, “Teacher BL, Mei occupies so many blocks, she is not willing to share with us”. Teacher BL says, “You need to ask her. I think she would share blocks with you if you ask her”. Xuan asks Mei but fails. He comes to teacher BL and says, “I have asked her, but she still does not willing to share with me”.

(MK2-clip-M12211)

(3) Involving a teacher in play

In this kind of interaction, a child usually invites or involves a teacher to join in play by asking or challenging her. This may be seen in the observation excerpt below.

3:22pm/ZK3 class

Children are playing a sporty game which initiated and organized by teacher AP. It is a kind of obstacle race. In this play, children need to run and cross several big obstacles in the way. They are divided in two teams to compete. The play is taking place, a boy Gao says to teacher AP who stands on his right side, “teacher AP, teacher AP, I want to compete with you!” Teacher AP confirms with him, “you want to race with me?” Gao says, “Yes!” Teacher AP accepts his challenge and says, “all right, come on, let’s compete!” They stand at the starting line and get ready to compete.

(ZK3-clip-A12209)

(4) Asking for teachers’ help

In this kind of interaction, a child asks a teacher for help when he/she encounters difficulties or frustration in using play materials or finding a partner, or completing a task, or other problems that he/she cannot solve by him/herself, such as taking off pullover. This may be seen in the observation excerpt below.

10:26am/YK2 class

Children are playing freely on the playground. They can choose to play with slides, tunnels, bridges, and other equipments within the range that teacher CO defined. Teacher CO and CJ stand on two sides of the playground and watch children playing. A girl Le comes to teacher CO and says, “Teacher CO, I cannot take my dress off, could you please help me?” She hunches her back up, and teacher CO helps her zip the dress and take it off.

(YK2-clip-M12812)

(5) Stating and expressing ideas

In this kind of interaction, a child usually expresses or describes to a teacher about some experience he/she had before which is quite impressive, or tells a teacher his/her personal ideas and feelings about something, or states something that have happened but may not necessarily relate to the play activity. This may be seen in the observation excerpt below.

9:05am/YK1 class

Children are playing with the swing ball which is a kind of fabric ball attached with a string on it. Teacher CE demonstrates several ways to play the ball, and she inspires children to find different ways to play with it. A girl Rui comes to teacher CE and shows her way of playing with the ball and says, “teacher CE, you see, we can play like this.” She holds the end of the string and throws the ball towards the ground and then lifts the string again. Teacher CE imitates Rui’s way of playing and says, “Oh, Rui plays like this, throw the ball and then lift the string.” Rui continues to say to Teacher CE, “I have a ball very similar to this ball. It is without a string and I played it in the Garden of our residential area with my friend Mimi. We played in this way”. Rui shows the way of playing.

(YK1-clip-M12012)

(6) Requesting

In this kind of interaction, a child usually expresses his/her willingness to the teacher such as he wanted to play or not, or requests to play a specific role in a play. This may be seen in the observation excerpt below.

10:10am/YK2 class

Children are playing a ‘car-driving’ game. They ‘drive’ their car around and teacher CO stands in the center of the playground with three lights in her hands and acts as a traffic police. When she shows a red light, the children stop their car, when she shows a green light, the children go on driving and when she showing a yellow light, the children drive slowly. After playing for a while, a boy Lun goes to teacher CO and says, “I would like to be the traffic police and in charge of the lights.” Teacher CO says, “Ok. Now you are the traffic police. Remember to carry out the traffic rules!” she hands the lights over to Lun and leaves.

(YK2-clip-M12212)

(7) Asking for information and permission

In this kind of interaction, a child asks a teacher in order to confirm that he/she is doing the right thing, or get the teacher's permission to do something. This may be seen in the observation excerpt below.

3:56am/MK3 class

Children are playing on slides and climbing selves at the outside playground. Teacher BY walks around and observes their play. A girl Cai comes over and asks, "teacher BY, can we play with the seesaws today?" teacher BY nods and says, "yes". Cai continues to ask, "I have just seen Dao stands on one of the seesaw, I want to do this too, can I stands on it?" teacher BY says "Yes, you could do this if you want to."

(MK3-clip-M21411)

(8) Expressing emotion

In this kind of interaction, a child initiates warmth and physical contact with a teacher or tells the teacher that he/she likes her in order to express their love to the teacher, such as, hug a teacher. This may be seen in the observation excerpt below.

3:35am/YK2 class

Children are playing with the sand, teacher CO stands aside and watches them playing. A girl Yue comes over with something in her hands. She puts the thing in teacher CO's hands and says, "this is for you". Teacher CO says "thank you!" she uncovers her hands and finds several tiny stones, she asks Yue "what is this?" Yue says, "They are diamonds". Teacher CO asks "Why do you give me diamonds?" Yue smiles and says "because I like you very much!"

(YK2-clip-A12912)

6.4.4 Analysis of teacher-child interactions in play

The teacher-child interactions to some extent reflect teachers' focus and emphasis in working with children. It seems that the teachers assume more power in the teacher-child relationship, as they actively initiate as many as 61% interactions, compared to 39% initiate by the children. Among all the teacher-initiated interactions, children respond 98.4% of them, and only ignore or have no response to 1.6% of teacher-initiated interactions. As for the teachers, they respond 90% of child-initiated interactions and ignore or have no response to 10% of child-initiated interactions. This perhaps because children normally regard the

teacher as an authoritative person, they are more likely to listen carefully and give responses when a teacher comes to them.

When teachers interacted with children, they often assumed a leading role as the interactions were much more frequently started from the teacher's agenda, rather than the child's agenda. Many teachers in the current research stated that they thought their involvement in children's play were more likely to help children to achieve in their learning than children's self-exploration without teachers' involvement. Therefore, they initiated most interactions to guide and direct children to learn according to their assumption of necessity. Some teachers indicated that they assessed children's learning outcomes and curriculum contents from play, in particular, the teacher-initiated play and children engaged play that selected and arranged by the teachers. It seems that what the teachers valued here was children achieving the outcomes they expected in knowledge and skills, rather than the playful experience and exploring children enjoyed.

When it comes to the children, it seems that in child-initiated interactions, children show a strong desire to be considered as competent individuals by the teachers, as they initiated the most interaction in asking for teachers' attention. This is quite common in all the observed classes. Children attract the teachers' attention in different ways, but always related to the wish to be acknowledged as a 'capable' individual. The observation data implies that the teachers also show their understanding of children's need in this aspect, as they give children positive responses to all the child-initiated interactions that aim to ask for teachers' attention. Moreover, the teachers also actively initiated interaction to praise and encourage children in play.

It is noted that children often try to make the teachers aware of someone who does not follow the class conventions or play rules by telling on them. They want to make the teachers understand that they know the right things to do by informing teachers when peers do not keep to the rules. However, the teachers' responses to this interaction show that they do not want to hear this from the children. The data shows that among 20 children-initiated

interactions which aimed at telling on someone, teachers ignore and have no response to 9 of them.

The observation reveals that children understand the multiple roles of the teachers in play. On the one hand, the children consider the teachers to be authoritative and more capable people, they initiate many interactions to ask for help, support, information, and permission from the teachers. On the other hand, children tend to regard teachers as potential playmates as they actively initiate interactions to invite and involve teachers in play. The teachers also show their willingness to play with the children, as they not only responded to children's invitation but also actively initiated interactions to play with them. However, some teachers indicated their dilemmas here, that is, they wish they could play with individual child frequently, but at the same time, they have to be responsible for all the children. This may be the reason for initiating fewer interactions in playing with children than in guiding and taking care of them in play. Moreover, it seems that the emotional communication is not obvious in teacher-child interaction, as only 2 % of child-initiated interactions is to express emotions. The teachers do not show explicit behavior in this aspect.

6.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the data from the observation, stimulated-recall, and pre- and post-observation interviews. In this chapter, the pictures of play in three Chinese kindergartens are depicted as offering both descriptive statistic of the proportion of play and detailed qualitative descriptions. The findings show that in three kindergartens, in general, play accounts for about one-fifth of the time of a typical kindergarten day. Play serves mainly three different roles in practice as the teachers reported: an independent part, a component of curriculum, and a time-filler. Among all the play activities observed in the nine classes, physical play and games involving sports feature more frequently than any other types of play, while role-play is not as popular as other kinds of play. Three types of play activities are identified from the classroom observation based on the degree of children's freedom and the degree of teachers' participation. They are teachers-initiated play, children engaged in play which is arranged by teachers, and children's free play. Another

three categories of play are also evident in the observation, based on the teachers' intentions of employing them. These are instructional play, recreational play and managerial play.

Seven different roles adopted by the observed teachers in play are identified which include play planner, supporter, organizer, facilitator, supervisor, playmate, and uninvolved role. The teachers play these different roles according to different contexts and types of play. During play, the teachers initiate more interactions than individual children do and they ignore or have no response to the child-initiated interactions than children do to the teacher-initiated interactions. Nine intentions are identified to explain the purposes of teacher-initiated interactions, including directing and guiding a child's play and learning; managing a child's behaviours; taking care of a child; asking a child for help; playing with a child; offering help and support; asking for information; praising and encouraging a child; and comforting a child. Eight intentions of child-initiated interactions are also identified, which include asking for a teacher's attention; telling on someone who broke rules; involving a teacher in play; asking a teacher's for help; stating and expressing personal ideas; requesting; asking for information and permission; and expressing one's emotion.

In teacher-child interactions, it seems that the teachers assume more power in teacher-child relationships and show a strong desire to guide and direct children's learning directly in play, manage children's behavior to control risk and ensure children's physical safety. Meanwhile, children show a strong desire to be considered as competent individuals and they want to make the teachers understand that they know the right things to do. They also show an understanding of the multiple roles of teachers in play. However, the emotional communication is not obvious in teacher-child interactions in play.

Chapter 7 Discussion

Chapter 5 and chapter 6 aimed to present a full picture of the findings of both teachers' perspectives and the practice of play in kindergartens. It raises several questions which concern teachers' understanding of play (7.1), the role of play in different kindergartens' context (7.2), teachers' roles in play (7.3), features of teacher-child interactions (7.4) and the aspects that influence teachers' implementation of play (7.5). These questions will now be discussed in this chapter.

7.1 The understanding of play reflected from teachers' perceptions and practices

Teachers' understanding of the value and function of play to children's development are reflected both in their interviews and practice. A remarkable consistency is found in their perceptions of play which can be conceptualized as 'eduplay' in terms of the features and value of play.

7.1.1 Teachers' construct of play as 'eduplay'

In literature, play is distinguished from work and considered as 'the child's world' which matches to children's needs and interests, whereas work is regarded as the opposite of play, which is serious activity rather than enjoyable and interesting (Bennett et al., 1997; Strandell, 2000; Rogers & Evans, 2008). However, unlike the bipolar construct of play and work that is pervasive in some of the literature (see Table 7.1), the teachers in this study define the features of play in the kindergarten differently (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.1 Bipolar constructs of play and work

Play	Work
Enjoyable	Onerous
Child-initiated	Teacher-initiated
Child-directed	Teacher-directed
Independent	Dependent
Children know what they need	Teacher know what they need
Appropriate	Sometimes inappropriate
Incidental	Planned
Unplanned developments	Intended learning outcomes
Active learning mode	Passive learning mode
Collaborative teacher role	Didactic teacher role
Socio-affective outcomes	Cognitive outcomes

(Bennett et al., 1997, p.52)

As Table 7.1 shows, the traditional concept of play and work reflects dichotomizing features. Play and work are constructed as opposites. Play is considered as being fun and enjoyable, whereas work is serious and onerous. Play is drive by children’s instinct, thus it is more likely to be children-initiated activity in which children are independent players who know what they need. In contrast, work is usually initiated and controlled by teachers who interpret children’s need and direct their learning according to teachers’ agenda. Due to the characteristics of enjoyable and intrinsic motivation, play is related to quality learning which takes place incidentally and brings unplanned developments while some of the learning outcomes brought by work may not always be quality learning as they start from teachers’ understanding of what is deemed valuable to children. Children learn actively according to their own agenda in play, as they are the center of play, while teachers more often have a peripheral and collaborative role in play, as opposed to a didactic role in work. As play is fun and enjoyable, it is more likely to bring about a positive affective experience to children than work which aims to pursue cognitive outcomes defined by teachers.

However, compared to the dichotomized concept of play and work, Chinese teachers in the current research blur the boundaries between play and work and their definition of play can be argued as ‘eduplay’. The nature of ‘eduplay’ can be characterized as an activity that is primarily initiated by the teacher rather than children and it has the feature of being funny and playful, but with external imposed expectations and rules. The characteristics of play in

the literature such as intrinsic motivation, self-chosen and self-direct are not perceived by the teachers in this research as key aspects of play (see table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Chinese teachers' construct of 'eduplay'

Enjoyable
Teacher-initiated
Teacher-directed or child-directed
Independent and dependent
Teachers know what children need
Sometimes inappropriate
Planned
Intended learning outcomes and unplanned developments
Active and passive learning mode
Didactic and collaborative teacher role
Cognitive and physical development

As can be seen from table 7.2, all the teachers perceive play as an enjoyable activity and children's natural ability. The characteristics of play include 'amusing', 'frolicsome', 'funny', and 'interesting'. These features lead children to a series of positive psychological feelings, such as making children feel 'content' and 'happy'. In classroom practice, the teacher initiates most play activities in which either children or teachers can direct learning. On the one hand, children are independent players within free play activities and the range teachers define for play. On the other hand, their play is more likely to be planned by teachers according to their agenda, as teachers believe that they know what the children need. However, it may be seen from the teachers' interviews that sometimes play is inappropriate, and children are not interested in the play teachers planned as teachers 'have to change the ways of play' when children 'lose interest in it'. Most teachers believe that quality learning is more likely to be attributed to teacher-initiated play which attached with intended learning outcomes, at the same time, it is also possible for unplanned developments. Therefore, they adopt far more teacher-initiated play than children-initiated play. Children usually explore actively in free play, at the same time they are always taught by the teachers about 'how to play' in teacher-initiated play. This implies that both active and passive modes of learning are evident in play. The key aspects of teachers' role in play indentified in both the teachers' description and practice show that teachers pay attention to 'plan play in advance', 'lead

play', 'keep an eye on the progress', 'maintain discipline', 'manage children's behaviours', 'ensure play on the right track', 'join in play', 'offer help and support', 'play with children' etc. Their accounts reveal the elements of both didactic and collaborative role in play. In practice, play is integrated more frequently with physical activities which aim to develop children's physical strength and sports skills. At the same time, play is integrated in different curricula by all the teachers to help them fulfill defined teaching objectives which usually related to cognitive developments. This implies the teachers tend to employ play for cognitive and physical outcomes. It is obvious that the characteristics of eduplay present and include some of the traditional features of both play and work identified in the literature. This research argues that Chinese teachers' understanding of play can be conceptualized as 'eduplay', in which the traditional distinction between play and work seems to be blurred, largely in the participating teachers' belief and practice.

7.1.2 Instrumental value of play is emphasized

The study suggests that the prevalence of 'eduplay' in Chinese kindergartens reflects the fact that the teachers give more weight to instrumental value, rather than the intrinsic value of play. According to Powell (2009), the value of play includes intrinsic value, and instrumental value, the former "related to children's right to play for its own sake" while the latter refers to the beneficial outcomes which play brought to children (p.37). The findings reveal that all the teachers emphasize the academic outcomes of play rather than the process of play itself. It seems that they implement a play-based pedagogy in which play is integrated in formal curricula in different parts for different purposes. For instance, teachers explained that they adopted play at the beginning of a curriculum to elicit children's interest in learning, in the middle of a curriculum to provide opportunities to practice and promote understanding, at end of the curriculum to consolidate what children have learned. All these practices aim to help to achieve the intended learning outcomes, while ignoring the intrinsic value of play that offers opportunities for children to explore and experience freely, cultivate their self-discipline and master their control. The teachers in this research highlight the instrumental value of play, which privileges the learning of knowledge, training of certain

skills that are the external goals play can achieve rather than emphasizing children's right of play, and experience and exploring embedded in play itself.

As Wood (2007) indicated, the policy recommendations of integrated curriculum and play-based pedagogy “tend to reify instrumental views of play which creates some collision with established ideologies about children's freedom, choice and autonomy” (p.312). When reflecting on the assessment criteria of good quality play, teachers pointed out that the most crucial indicator was whether play brought or fulfilled specific academic outcomes. This finding resonates with Powell and David's research (2010) in Chinese kindergartens. As they indicated, Chinese teachers “use children's natural tendency to play as a motivator to engage them in playful but teacher-directed class activities” and these activities are expected to “lead to specific learning outcomes” (p.251). In this sense, play has become a tool that teachers use or design to elicit children's motivation and interest in learning, practice and consolidate the learning contents, and help with achieving specific teaching objectives. This finding is consistent with other research which explores the interpretation of play in early childhood education policy and practitioners' perspectives (de Jonghe, 2001; Wood, 2007; Rao & Li, 2009). The research of Wu and Rao (2011) also revealed a similar result when they compare the conceptions of play between Chinese and German teachers. They indicated that Chinese teachers usually refer to play with academic activity. However, as Liu (2009) argued that in this sense, play is less likely to develop children's creativity, and becomes a teacher-initiated performance. Liu further stated that in a knowledge-oriented education mode, play is not ‘genuine play’ as it is not initiated by children. Sutton-Smith (1997) indicated that emphasizing the instrumental value of play tends to obscure the ways in which children use play for their own affairs of power, how they construct personal and shared meaning, and how they establish multiple roles and identity. It is important to note that external control from adults over children's play may affect children's play characteristics (Slentz & Krogh, 2001) which exactly make meanings to children's learning. The presence of ‘eduplay’ may partly arise because of the influence of the Chinese traditional Confucian values which emphasize academic achievement and outcomes.

7.1.3 Multiple function of play

The findings show that play is valued strongly by all teachers in both interviews and observations. All the teachers see play as a developmentally appropriate activity for children, and believe that play can contribute to children's learning and development. The developmental functions of play identified in the literature which included promoting children's physical, emotional, cognitive and social development are all mentioned by the teachers in this research. As the teachers believe that play promotes children's holistic development, in their practice, they adopt play in different learning activities to promote children's development in different aspects. Besides, the revelatory function is also evident in the current research as the teachers identify children's developmental level, needs and interest and provide play according to this based on their observation of children's behaviours in play. However, the findings reveal that the teachers' practices focus more on the 'practice' and 'recreation' function of play than other functions of play such as discharging excess energy (Schiller, cited in Sayeed & Guerin, 2000), or mirroring the biological evolution of human (Hall, cited in Fleer, 2009) or releasing children's fear and anxieties (Freud, cited in Ding, 2003). According to Lazarus (cited in Fleer, 2009), humans' energy is burned off after rigorous work, and play is a kind of activity through which humans can release the pressure caused by strenuous work and refresh the energy consumed during work. The teachers' interpretation of play in classroom practice confirms this theory, as they usually arrange play between two formal learning activities. Their explanation indicates that this arrangement of play is based on the principle of 'alternate work with recreation' as they believe work brings pressure while play relaxes children from the pressure caused by work and refreshes them for next bout of work. The dominant proportion of physical play in kindergarten practice also reflects teachers' emphasis on the recreation function of play. The learning function of play argued by Piaget which believes play has the learning function of assimilating new material to existing structures is reflected in the teachers' interpretation of play in both the interviews and observations. In their practice, most teachers adopt play in the middle or at the end of their teaching to provide opportunities for children to 'practice' and 'consolidate' knowledge to assimilate what they have been

taught. Moreover, findings reveal that play has a class management function in kindergarten practice, as most teachers employ play as a time-filler in the intervals between different activities, to occupy children and help teachers organize and manage the class.

This study argues that play serves multiple functions, including a recreation function, learning function, developmental function, revelatory function, therapeutic function, and class management function in kindergarten practice. Among them, two main functions---learning function and recreation function are emphasized by the teachers. This finding is in accordance with Rogers (2000)'s research in English reception classes. She argued that multiple functions of play are found in the early years classrooms including developmental and revelatory function, therapeutic function, transitional function, recreation function, pragmatic function, and learning function. However, compared to Rogers' study, the transitional functions of play are not reflected in the current study. The therapeutic function of play was well documented in the literature, especially highlighted by psychoanalytic perspectives in the work of Freud, Menninger and Erikson etc (Ding, 2003). From their view, it is argued that play offers a cathartic experience for children in which their fear and anxieties can be dissipated by playing. Through playing, children can avoid the constraints imposed by the real world outside, and develop their personality fully. However, this view is less stressed in the teachers' interpretation of play in this research, as only three teachers mentioned this. Furthermore, the transitional function of play that serves in the process of children's transition from one environment to another (Fabian & Dunlop, 2010), for example, kindergarten to primary school, is not evident in teachers' interpretation.

7.2 Play in three different kindergarten contexts

In general, a play-based pedagogy is advocated in all three kindergartens. It is interpreted and integrated with learning by teachers in a variety of forms in practice. The findings show slightly different pictures of play in three different kindergartens. These differences can not only be seen in the daily arrangement of play, types of play, children's accessibility of play materials, but also in teachers' utilization of play, their role in play and teacher-child interaction in play (see Table 7.3).

Table 7.3 Play in three different kindergartens

	Community-run kindergarten	Privately-owned kindergarten	Government-owned kindergarten
Play arrangement	Integrated in curriculum; Between formal teaching activities;	Integrated in curriculum; Between formal teaching activities; Intervals between different activities	Integrated in curriculum; Between formal teaching activities; Intervals between different activities
Types of play	Teacher-initiated play; Children engaged in play which is arranged by teachers; Instructional play Recreational play	Teacher-initiated play; Children engaged in play which is arranged by teachers; Children's free play; Instructional play Recreational play Managerial play	Teacher-initiated play; Children engaged in play which is arranged by teachers; Children's free play; Instructional play Recreational play Managerial play
Accessibility of play materials	Children cannot access play materials freely	Children gain access to a wide range of play materials	Children gain access to a wide range of play materials
Role of play	As a learning medium; As a recreational and relax activity;	As a learning medium; As a recreational and relax activity; As a class management strategy;	As a learning medium; As a recreational and relax activity; As a class management strategy;
Teachers' role in play	Planner; Supporter; Organizer; Playmate; Supervisor;	Planner; Supporter; Organizer; Facilitator; Supervisor; Playmate; Uninvolved role;	Planner; Supporter; Organizer; Facilitator; Supervisor; Playmate; Uninvolved role;
Teacher-initiated interaction	Directing and guiding; Managing behavior; Taking care; Playing with a child; Offering help and support; Asking for information; Praising and encouraging	Directing and guiding; Managing behavior; Taking care; Asking a child for help; Playing with a child; Offering help and support; Praising and encouraging; Comforting	Directing and guiding; Managing behavior; Taking care; Asking a child for help; Playing with a child; Offering help and support; Asking for information; Praising and encouraging; Comforting

In the community-run kindergarten, due to a majority of children's family socio-economic backgrounds as workers and a few as individual business households, parents tend to pay more attention to their children's skill and knowledge acquisition. The activities in the kindergarten are more likely to be arranged by the teachers to deliver knowledge to children. Therefore, in practice, the teachers usually integrated play in different curricula as a learning medium to help them fulfill learning goals while they also arrange play as a recreational activity to make children relax. The big class size, ranging from 35-55, in this kindergarten led teachers to initiate collective play and let children engage in play that is arranged by teachers rather than letting children play freely. The limited play provision includes allotted playgrounds, big play equipment, play materials which to a large extent influenced the types and proportions of different kinds of play. The teaching modes of the teachers tend to be didactic as they prefer to act as planner, supporter, and organizer in children's play. This may be partly due to the low level of qualification and training of the teachers compared to their colleagues in the privately-owned kindergarten and the government-owned kindergarten. During play, they tend to interact with the individual child to direct and guide play, manage behavior, take care of the children, offer help and support, praise and encouragement, to ask for information and play with the children. They are less likely to ask a child for help and comfort a child.

The socio-economic status of the children from the privately-owned kindergarten includes government officers and entrepreneurs whom were mostly wealthy families. The parents here tend to be demanding with respect to their children's learning. Therefore, the teachers in this kindergarten integrated play as a learning medium in different curricula to help them fulfill teaching goals, arranged play as a recreational activity to make children relax, and organize play in intervals between different activities to manage the class. The class size in the privately-owned kindergarten is relatively small compared to the community-run and the government-owned kindergartens while play resources are relatively rich, and this allows the children to gain access to a wide range of play materials. Since this kindergarten adopts a Montessorian pedagogy which advocates that children explore and play freely within a well-prepared environment provided by the teachers, the teachers initiated play, making

children engage in play which is arranged by them and allowing the children to play freely. Moreover, due to the kindergarten espousal of the Montessorian education philosophy, their teaching approaches are less likely to be didactic than the colleagues in the community-run kindergarten. During play, they prefer to interact with the individual child in directing and guiding play, in managing behavior, in taking care of the children, offering help and support, praising and encouraging, and comforting children, asking children for help and playing with the children. They are less likely to ask a child for information.

The socio-economic backgrounds of the children from the government-owned kindergarten were mainly government officers and public servants' families, and the parents tended to have higher expectations for their children's learning than the parents in the privately-owned kindergarten. Therefore, the teachers in this kindergarten integrated play as a learning medium in different curricula to help them fulfill teaching goals, arranged play as a recreational activity to make children relax, and organize play in intervals between different activities to manage the class. Although the class size in this kindergarten is relatively big, due to its funding from the government, it is provided with a variety of materials and resources in both indoor and outdoor play areas. Teachers can organize different kinds of play for children to play together, in groups and as individuals. As the kindergarten employs a learning center approach which emphasizes both teacher-initiated play activities and children's free play within teacher arranged environment, the teachers make efforts to balance teacher-initiated play and children's free play in their practices. As the teachers of this kindergarten have higher qualifications than those in the community-run and the privately-owned kindergarten, they are more aware of the need to establish a parallel relationship with children than colleagues in the other two kindergartens.

General pictures of play in the three kindergartens are offered above, details of the factors influence teachers' practice will be discussed in section 7.5.2.

7.2.1 Educational culture orientation

The findings suggest that the features of play in three kindergartens show the different cultural orientation of their education. It appears that the cultural transmission/directive approach is prevalent in the community-run kindergarten whereas both the cultural transmission/directive approach and the emergent/responsive approach are evident in both the privately-owned and government-owned kindergartens. A cultural transmission/directive approach is conceptualized by Wood (2010) as an educational culture orientation in which education is seen as “a process of enculturation” (p.13). According to this approach, the role of the teacher is to “transmit knowledge, skills and understanding that are deemed valuable to children in the immediate and long terms” (ibid). This approach emphasizes “play as educational practice---a means of learning, progress and achievement, including preparatory skill training” (ibid). In this approach, practitioners tend to “control what forms of play are allowed, and how much ownership and control children have, but with limitations on time, resources and space” (ibid). Moreover, this approach “privileges adults’ provision for and interpretations of play in line with defined educational outcomes, because they have to provide evidence of the benefits of play for the purposes of assessment, evaluation and accountability” (ibid). In contrast, the emergent/responsive approach emphasizes “learning by interacting and co-constructing with other social active agents in social and cultural world rather than transmit socially approved knowledge from teachers to the children” (Wood, 2010, p.14). It focuses on “teachers’ provision of play and teachers’ response to children’s choice and interests, and their emerging knowledge, skills and understanding” (ibid).

As we can see from Table 7.3, the observation shows that in the community-run kindergarten, the teachers arrange play in the curriculum and between formal teaching activities. Two main types of play are adopted by the teachers, teacher-initiated play and children engaged in play which is arranged by teachers and the former is far more than the latter. Play is usually employed as an instructional tool to help children learn specific knowledge and help the teacher achieve defined teaching goals. This is in line with the cultural transmission/directive approach. Play also serves as a recreational activity to provide children with a break from formal learning. The roles that the teachers played and the interactions teacher-initiated reflect a high level of control over the provision and progress of

play. Children are not allowed to access play materials freely and initiate play. All these practices reflect the cultural transmission/directive orientation. Therefore, this research argues that the teachers from the community-run kindergarten employ a “mixed pedagogy approach” in which “teacher-directed activities take centre stage while children-initiated activities are left at the margins of practice” and their practices show a cultural transmission/directive orientation (Wood, 2010, p.12).

Compared to the community-run kindergarten, the teachers in privately-owned and government-owned kindergartens not only arrange play in the curriculum as a learning medium, between formal teaching activities as a recreation activity, but also arrange play in intervals between different activities as a class management strategy. The integration of play into the curriculum to achieve learning outcomes also features teachers’ practice and reflects the elements of a cultural transmission/directive approach. In contrast to their colleagues in the community-run kindergarten, the teachers not only provide teacher-initiated play and children engaged in play, as arranged by teachers, but provide free play in which children can access a wide range of materials and explore, engage and interact with teachers to construct their understanding of the world. The teachers in these two kindergartens also make an effort to provide rich materials for children to play with. This is in accordance with the emergent/responsive approach suggested by Wood (2010). Moreover, in play, the teachers play seven different roles, especially the facilitator role, through which they exert influence and promote children’s learning through play. Therefore, this study argues that teachers from the privately-owned and government-owned kindergartens show an educational culture orientation which combines both the cultural transmission/directive orientation and the emergent/responsive orientation.

7.3 Teachers’ roles in play

It is evident from the observation that the teachers play more roles in play than they report. The teachers indicated that they acted as planners, supporters, facilitators, supervisors and playmates in play. However, in their practice, they adopted the role of planner, supporter, facilitator, supervisor, playmate, organizer and uninvolved role. There is similarity between

the role they perceived and adopted in terms of the contribution they intend to make to the children's activity. That is, all the teachers from the three kindergartens prefer, and act more often as planners, supporters, organizers, supervisors, playmates, and facilitators in play, while less frequently as the uninvolved role.

7.3.1 From a didactic role to a 'whole teacher' role

From the above-mentioned roles that the teachers perceived and employed in children's play, it is not difficult to find that in general, teachers' roles still present some didactic features. Through detailed planning, organizing, facilitating, and supervising, teachers exercise their control in children's play. They pay attention to teaching children how to play, make sure children play according to their defined track, use play to fulfill specific teaching objectives. In their practice, most play is teacher-initiated, and children are less likely to be empowered to play freely by themselves.

Although didactic features are evident in the observation, teachers' strong desire and effort of playing the playmate role reveal that they are committed to making changes to the current teacher-children relationship to establish a more parallel relationship with children. According to Jingbo and Elicker (2005), teacher-child relationships can be sorted into two major patterns, inclination relationship and parallel relationship. The former refers to an unequal relationship, in which teachers have more power and control over children, while the latter means that teachers and children assume an equal relationship and share power and control in their interaction. Jingbo and Elicker (2005) indicated that the inclination pattern constitutes the most common and typical teacher-child relationship in Chinese kindergarten classrooms. My research shows that the inclination teacher-child relationship is still seen in some of the teachers' practice. However, most teachers indicate that they are increasingly aware of the importance of a parallel teacher-children relationship and make an effort to establish it in their practice.

Another issue highlighted by the teachers in the current research is that they seem quite demanding concerning their role in play. It seems that the playmate role is a desirable role of

all the teachers, as they all valued it highly in the interview and they played it frequently in practice to establish a close relationship with children. However, from the teachers' view, the role of playmate and the role of teacher are not integrated. Rather, they are two extremes of a continuum. It is the teachers' perceptions that as a teacher, she needs to be strict and authoritative which in order to be equal with children, while as a playmate, the teacher is a friend who enjoys playing and tends to be equal and have close emotional communication and interaction with the children. It seems that they defined a range for a 'whole teacher' which place the role of playmate at one end of a continuum, while the role of teacher is at the other end of the continuum. Therefore, this research argues that the participating teachers constructed the range of an ideal 'whole teacher' role which covers the role of playmate at one end of a continuum to the role of teacher at the other end of the continuum and other roles, including planner, supporter, organizer, facilitator and supervisor in the middle of the continuum.

7.3.2 Teachers influence play by direct intervention than play provision

My findings show that teachers are more likely to exert their influence on children's play through direct intervention than play provision. The interview in the current study reveals that all teachers believed that play could lead to effective learning only with their guidance and support. It also shows that the teachers believed that children's learning and development depend more on external teaching than on children's innate pattern of learning. Therefore, in the teachers' practice, they became involved in children's play frequently to 'teach children to play', 'remind them about rules', 'suggest new ways to play', 'direct' or 'lead' children to make sure they are not deviate from the play and 'on the right track'. Although many teachers mentioned that in order to make children 'learn through play', they carefully design and provide a variety of material for them to play and keep enriching the resource of play according to different learning themes, the observation reveals that the teachers' intervention in play takes place to a considerable degree and it is more likely to affect children's learning than the play provision. Therefore, this research argues that the teachers' influence on children's play is more frequently reflected through direct intervention than play provision. This finding is contrary to Roger's research (2000), which

indicated that the British reception class teachers in her research emphasized provision than participation and their influence was manifested in setting contexts than in direct intervention.

7.4 The features of teacher-child interactions

The findings demonstrate that there is considerable consensus between teachers' descriptions of the intentions of both child-initiated interactions in play and those that actually happened in practice. However, the purposes of teacher-initiated interactions that the teachers reported in their interview are slightly different from those observed in classroom practice. In their interview, no teacher mentioned they initiate interactions to take care of children which in practice, accounts for 16% of teacher-initiated interactions. This is perhaps because the teachers assume that taking care of children is a basic aspect of their responsibility as a kindergarten teacher and it goes without saying. More importantly, as they know that my research is about play-based teaching and learning, they may consider that taking care is not an educational practice which relates to teaching and learning. Therefore, they did not talk about taking care of children in the pre-observation interview, but naturally, they take care of children in their practice.

7.4.1 Teacher-child interaction in play is less likely to scaffold learning

Scaffolding is a term advocated by Bruner (1996) to describe the critical support and quality guidance which children receive in their interaction with parents, teachers and competent others as they move towards new knowledge, skills, concepts or levels of understanding. It is considered that supportive adult interaction may scaffold children's learning process (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996; Anning & Edward, 1999). Observation of this study reveals that 29% of interactions that teachers initiated aim at directing and guiding children's play and learning, and 5% aim at offering help and support. However, in spite of the proportion of interactions that teachers devote to directing, guiding, and offering help to children during play, the video transcripts reveal that the interactions between individual teacher and individual child usually take several turns, and teachers preferred to guide children directly,

such as giving them direct instructions or information as to what to do and to learn, rather than questioning, challenging, inspiring and communicating with children, letting them explore freely and giving them room to fortify their competence. Moreover, other interactions (66%) focus on managing behaviour; taking care; asking for help; playing; asking for information; praising, encouraging; and comforting which do not necessarily relate to play and learning. It seems that these kind of teacher-initiated interactions are less likely to be considered as quality guidance which may effectively scaffold children's learning in play. Therefore, this research argues that teacher-child interactions in play in the participating Chinese kindergartens are less likely to scaffold children's learning. This finding is consistent with the Kontos' research (1999) which examines kindergarten teachers' talk in children's free play in the United States.

7.4.2 A tension between teachers' concerns and children's intense involvement in play

Observation reveals that teachers initiate interactions to take care of children, maintain discipline and remind children to pay attention to their safety during play. This kind of interaction took place randomly and very frequently in practice. However, it seems that the teachers paid so much attention to avoiding accidents and protecting children from safety dangers that they remarkably limited and hindered children's exploration and freedom which were key aspects of learning through play. According to Bruce (2010), children are active agents who learn through exploring and experimenting freely in their play, and they need adults to be informed advocates to promote and protect their free-flow play. The teachers assumed that as kindergarten teachers, they are committed to ensure as much as possible, every child's physical safety. Examples of this were found in all the observed classes, especially in the class MK2 of the privately-owned kindergarten. It was obvious that all the teachers emphasized the safety of children in every activity in the kindergarten, something which certainly also led to their control of children's behavior when they thought it was unsafe in this way or another. As Little et al (2008; 2011) argued, teachers' safety concerns raised issues of the impact that risk control measures may bring to children's well-being and the potential that it may have to limit children's opportunities for development which may be fostered through positive risk-taking. Although risk control strategies may ensure children's

safety in the short-term, they may lead to children's inactivity and lack of confidence in the long-term (Little & Wyver, 2008).

The current research reveals that the teachers appear to over-emphasize children's safety and are over-protective on children's bodies, which greatly disrupted children's engagement in play. The observation shows that teachers' main concerns in play involve taking care of children's body and health, controlling risk and ensuring physical safety. These are not necessarily related to play per se. Furthermore, in these interactions, teachers keep interrupting and disturbing children when they are engrossed in playing. However, teachers' concerns and behaviors seem to some extent to conflict with children's willingness of being engaged in play without being disturbed. The observation showed that some children were reluctant to move from their self-exploring when the teacher asked them to check their clothes (whether they are sweating). Moreover, in the observation, it is evident that the teacher stopped children's play when she thought that it might lead to a mess of children's bodies and clothes. In this sense, it seems that some of teacher-initiated interactions are less appropriate, and may influence the quality of play. The current research suggests that there seems to be a tension between teachers' concerns of children's safety and health and children's intense involvement in play. This finding resonates with the research conducted by other researchers (see Rogers and Evans, 2008; Wood and Cook, 2009) who also argued that some inappropriate teachers' interventions were evident in role-play in early childhood settings, which aimed at providing adult instruction or control, but have undermined or interrupted the play.

7.5 Aspects influencing the implementation of play

When the teachers were asked to reflect on the way they integrated play into their classrooms and elaborate the aspects that influence their implementation of play in practice, their explanation combined with the administrators' interviews revealed that there are multiple aspects influencing the implementation of play in kindergarten practice. The influential aspects can be sorted into the following categories.

7.5.1 Influences from cultural context

Understanding play is a culturally situated process, as play is embedded in wider social, historical and cultural contexts (Wood & Attfield, 2005). People's perspectives of play are shaped by the cultural contexts within which they live, and different cultural communities vary in their interpretation and perspectives of play and the significance they attach to play in educational settings (Ahn, 2008; Fler, 2009). This research was carried out with early childhood practitioners in three different kindergartens in China. It seems that their understanding of play and attitude towards play were inevitably influenced by the Chinese cultural context. The influences from the cultural context consist of two main aspects, that is, the Chinese traditional culture and parents' expectations and requirements which stem from it.

Chinese traditional culture

Although in the interviews, many teachers stressed that they saw play as a learning medium through which children learn, in the observation, a large proportion of physical play was arranged by all the teachers as recreational activities between or after formal teaching activities to relax and reward children. Moreover, in the interviews, many teachers indicated that they thought play not only can promote children's social, emotional development, but also facilitate physical and cognitive development. In practice, most teachers preferred organizing physical play or games involving sports for children to other types of play. As teacher BY explained why she arranged outdoor physical play for children:

They need to relax for a while after they have an English lesson (MK3-BY-POS).

This is echoed by many teachers, such as BC, AL, AQ, CE, CO, and CL. They all explained the purpose of arranging play between formal teachings as 'alternating work with play'. It seems that their perspective of play and attitude towards play can reflect the influence from Chinese traditional culture. Confucianism considered play as a kind of recreation and reward for hard work (Zhu & Zhang, 2008; Huang & Qing, 2006), and play is more often linked to

physical activities rather than intellectual activities (Liu, 2009). The high proportion of physical play observed in different classes over any other type of play, was arranged by the teachers in the morning or afternoon between or after formal teaching activities may provide evidence for this influence.

Besides, in both interviews and observations, the teachers and administrators placed more emphasis on the instrumental value of play, to ensure visible teaching and learning outcomes rather than highlighting the intrinsic value brought by children's freely play experience per se. This seems to be deeply influenced by the traditional Chinese culture of Confucianism, which prescribes an emphasis on the young children's academic learning and gives play an inferior status. According to Confucianism, gaining academic achievement is a key way of leading to an individual's success and it is a crucial purpose of education (Li, 2004). Academic achievement, therefore, is highly valued by all social members in Chinese society including educational practitioners, administrators and parents and different levels of education institutes including kindergartens. Rooted in such a Confucianism cultural system which stresses learning outcomes, the teachers and administrators feel obliged to present excellent learning outcomes of children to the stakeholders. For example, in the observation, I noted that in the 'kindergarten-to-family' booklets, which used to bridge and make communication between the teachers and parents, most of the content is relate to informing and reporting children's academic learning to parents with some information about daily life and cultivating good habits, but no information about play. Teachers' explanations in the post-interview also indicated that they are required by the administrators to do so. Consequently, they adopt play as an instrument to help bring desirable learning outcomes rather than letting children play voluntarily without defined academic requirements. Therefore, this study argues that the perception of play as recreation and reward for work, and the pursuit of academic achievements in Chinese traditional culture made the teachers construct play as 'eduplay' and affected the ways they implement play in practice. This is in line with the findings of other research in China (Pan, 1994; Sha, 1998; Cheng & Stimpson, 2004; Rao & Li, 2009).

Parental expectations and requirements

All the teachers indicated that parental expectations and requirements were the key elements that affected their arrangement of play in the daily routine, in particular, the parents' expectation of tangible learning outcomes and their requirement for children's safety. Most teachers explained that they felt under pressure, as some parents assessed their teaching competence and the educational quality of the kindergarten by evaluating the tangible learning outcomes of the children. As teacher BL from the privately-owned kindergarten pointed out, teachers in her class arranged play to help with producing visible learning outcomes to meet parents' requirements:

We arrange children's play and our teaching according to parents' requirements. Try our best to ensure children learned knowledge and skills to meet the parents' expectation. We need to adopt play to help us achieve the teaching objectives, because if children just play, the parents cannot see the learning outcomes, if they cannot, they might feel that you did not teach the children. Only if you present some visible learning outcomes will they believe children have learned something in the kindergarten. So we need to arrange play which related to chants, poems and some other activities that can produce works or outcomes, children can recite the poems and show their works to the parents (MK2-BL-POS).

This was echoed by many other teachers who stated that parents stressed academic outcomes of children. Teacher AQ from the community-run kindergarten said that:

When children come back home, parents usually ask about 'what did you learn today?' 'Did you learn chants?' 'Did you learn English words?' etc. but they seldom ask 'what did you play today?' 'Did you have a good day?' 'Did you play with your friends?' They usually check what the children have learned in kindergarten (ZK2-AQ-POS).

It appears that parents' expectations of children's academic learning achievements also derives from the traditional value of Chinese culture (See 7.5.1). This led to teachers' need to provide accountability to parents. This research argues that the parental expectation of children's learning outcomes influence the types of play and teachers' attitude towards play. This finding is echoed by the research of Bennett et al. (1997) in British reception classes and other research which is carried out in the United States (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Rogers, 2000; Frost & Norquist, 2007; Wood, 2010).

Furthermore, the extent of the similarities in the teachers' responses on the most influential factor of their practice of play is remarkable. To all the teachers, the parents' concern of children's safety is the most influential aspect that affects their practice of play. Some teachers indicated that parents place too much emphasis on children's safety which not only limited their decision-making on play, but also limited children as well. One teacher elaborated:

Sometimes children fall down, being scratched or get some minor wounds during play. This is quite normal. However, parents will feel unhappy and they are always very nervous about this because each couple only has one child. Due to this reason, we feel very afraid of letting children play freely, particularly those teachers who are considered as being inexperienced. The administrators of the kindergarten impose restrictions on us and the colleagues remind each other. Even though we know this is not good for children, we have no other way but to adhere to the principles in the kindergarten (ZK2-AQ-POS).

The Irish teacher who taught English in the privately-owned kindergarten echoed this, stating:

The main obstacle is safety. This is a real barrier for me, especially at this stage. Because I have some really actively running games in my teaching. Every single

day, one child would either fall down or run into each other, or hurt their face. Each time in the play, there might be a child who injured him or herself, I think well... the Chinese people in general are really worried about the children hurting themselves, and I think it is too much, you need to let children run by themselves sometimes, to play freely.They (parents) are really so afraid, and this is a major difference between China and the Europe, you know, the 'one child syndrome', parents and grandparents gave them too much attention, that influenced the kindergarten (MK-BE).

This is also confirmed by the findings of the teachers' role and the contents of teacher-child interactions in play I mentioned in chapter 6. During play, teachers monitored children's safety and initiated 16% of interaction to take care of children. In observation of both the privately-owned and government-owned kindergartens, the teachers organized small play as time-fillers in the intervals between different activities during the day. This, according to their explanation, is also a kind of strategy to occupy and organize children in order to eliminate possible safety dangers caused by chaotic situations.

It seems that the parents' concern for children's academic achievements and safety also relate to the one-child policy in China. As (Zhu, 2009) pointed out, the implementation of the one-child policy leads to the '4-2-1 syndrome' in which four grandparents and two parents all focusing their attention, hopes, and ambitions on one child. Because of this, the only child is more likely to be cherished, spoiled and over-protected (Pang & Richey, 2007; Li, 2001) meanwhile the only child also tends to face great expectations from parents and grandparents in terms of academic achievement, which starts in the early years (Hu & Szente, 2009). Therefore, in order to cater for parents' requirements of children's physical safety and academic achievements, the teachers need to maintain discipline, take care of children and manage their behavior to eliminate the potential safety dangers while providing visible learning outcomes for parents.

This study argues that the parents' concerns, especially the requirements on children's safety in the kindergarten influence the types, the ways of play and teachers' roles and teacher-child interactions in play. This is in line with the findings of other research in this field (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Lester & Russell, 2008; Wu & Rao, 2011; Little & Eager, 2010).

7.5.2 Influences from institutional context

The influences from the institutional context consist of three main elements, the kindergarten's espoused educational philosophy and approach, the provision of play including time, materials and resource, and class size.

Kindergarten espoused educational philosophy and approach

In Chapter 6, the picture of play in the three different kindergartens was presented. It appears that play is realized in practice in slightly different ways in three kindergartens. In the community-run kindergarten, teachers tend to organize children all the time, and more play is teacher-initiated than children's free play. In the privately-owned kindergarten, children's free play was evident even though teachers initiated much of the play. Children in this kindergarten are more likely to be allowed to explore freely. In the government-owned kindergarten, teacher-initiated play and children's free play tend to be balanced. This may be connected with the educational philosophy and approach each kindergarten espoused.

In the community-run kindergarten, most teachers believe that children are more likely to learn from external teaching than innate pattern of learning and the teacher is the one responsible for delivering knowledge and skills to the children. Therefore, in practice, they preferred initiating play by themselves than letting the children initiate play. During play, they organized the whole process rather than let children explore freely. The teachers adopt a thematic approach in which they arrange all learning content according to monthly themes in advance. The play activities thus are developed according to the themes and curriculum. Therefore, the periodic themes, to a large extent, determine the content of play. For instance, teacher AL mentioned:

The contents of play primarily depend on our teaching themes of each month. For example, our teaching theme for this month is 'Talented Little Chef'. So, we will select the play for this month around 'chef', such as making dumplings or cakes or pizzas by using play dough (ZK1-AL-POS).

Whereas in the privately-owned kindergarten, the teachers think that children have the ability to learn by exploring and experiencing. The responsibility for the teachers is to provide a stimulus-rich environment which has various materials for children to manipulate. Therefore, in practice, they adopted a Montessori education approach which emphasizes children's freedom and advocates children's learning by self-exploration. Free play is applied in the kindergarten as a constituent part of the daily routine. As the administrator of this kindergarten said,

Our kindergarten uses a Montessori education approach, we value children's play, as you can see, in every class, we provide a variety of materials for children to play freely (MK-BZ).

In the government-owned kindergarten, the teachers tend to believe that children not only learn from external teaching, but also learn by self-exploration and manipulation with materials. They believe that it is the teachers' responsibility to teach children with knowledge while providing different materials in different learning corners for children to manipulate by themselves. Therefore, in practice, the teachers not only provide teacher-initiated play, but also let children play freely within teachers arranged environment. They employed a learning-centers approach, which also emphasized children's learning by free exploring and manipulating. Thus, it is clear that the educational philosophy and approach employed by different kindergartens influence teachers' understanding of play, and determine the forms of play and the ways teachers integrate play in kindergarten routines. This is in line with the findings of research conducted by Pramling-Samuelsson and Sheridan in Swedish preschools (2009).

Provision of time, materials and resources for play

This research demonstrated that the observed playtime is less than that reported by the teachers. This was explained by some teachers as a dilemma between the reality and the ideal situation they wished. Many teachers mentioned that provision of playtime was one of the aspects that affected their execution of play in daily routines. During the observation, some teachers did not implement play according to their plan. When they were asked in the post-observation interview, they explained that a tight schedule increased difficulty for them to ensure playtime. As one of the teachers said:

We normally implement the activities according to our plan, but sometimes, you know, our schedule was quite tight, some curriculum activities could not finished in time, leaving no time to play. Every section of time was filled with activities, if the former activity could not be finished in time, it would occupy time for the following activities (MK2-BW-POS).

This seems to be a common constraint for teachers to implement play because the daily schedules of all the three kindergartens are quite tight (see Table 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3). Many teachers indicated the need to catch up with the schedule which was divided into many short sections during a kindergarten day and fully occupied by different activities. Once an activity was not finished in time, it would influence the activity after it. This influenced the time for play especially for children's free play. Moreover, the time for play sometimes may be shortened or even occupied by other events or activities. For example, as teacher BW mentioned:

You know, this week we had a 'parents' open day', we got many things to prepare, this may also influence and squash the time for playing (MK2-BW-POS).

Upcoming big events in the kindergarten, like ‘parents’ open day’ or ‘visiting by colleagues from other kindergartens’, or ‘festival performance’ usually take teachers and children’s time which may be the time for play for preparation. In the observation, children in MK1, MK2, and MK3 spent some of their outdoor playtime making drawings and handcrafts to decorate the kindergarten aisles for the ‘parents’ open day’. Some other teachers also reported that play materials the kindergarten can provide confined their implementation of play. As one teacher stated in regards to the reason why children seldom had manipulative play in her class:

We do not have enough manipulative material for them to play, as you can see, we only have very few blocks in our class, every child can hardly be allocated one piece of block. So I would rather like to organize children to have a race or competition, these types of play requires few materials (ZK3-AP-POS).

Many teachers reported that the level of resources available for play within the kindergarten was an important aspect that affected play implementation. The resource includes playgrounds, big play equipments and play materials. All the three kindergartens have a schedule set out by the administrator to arrange specific playtime and area for each classes. Children from different classes need to take turns to use the playgrounds and big play equipments. This is a big issue particularly in the community-run kindergarten. However, due to the tight time schedule and limited resource of play, some classes may miss their turn for play if any class goes over their allotted time within the planned schedule. For instance, some teachers said that sometimes other classes may be using the materials that she planned to use in children’s play, then she had to change the play provisionally. Therefore, this research argues that the provision of time, materials and resource for play in the kindergarten influences the types and arrangement of play. This is in line with the findings of Kagan’s research (1990) and Badzis’ study (2003).

Class size

Class size is identified as a critical constraint for teachers in implementing play, particularly in the community-run kindergarten and the government-owned kindergarten. Some teachers felt under pressure to teach as many as 37 or even 52 children in a class through a whole day time. Some teachers stated that they “felt exhausted every day after work” as “there were so many children” (ZK2-AQ-POS) in their class and they “kept tense nerves all day in order to remain in charge of children’s learning, playing, and daily life” (ZK1-AW-POS). It seems that the big class size also results in high ratios of children to teachers which became a pragmatic challenge for the teachers and influenced the types and role of play in kindergarten life. For instance, the teachers from the community-run kindergarten usually initiate collective play for children than free play as this made it easier to manage the class. When teacher AP was asked about the reason for organizing a high proportion of collective play, she said that

There are 55 children in our class. Four teachers are divided into two groups to in charge of them. We have to organize collective play, because it is not feasible for us to arrange free play. Free play makes us very difficult to ensure all the children in our eyesight (ZK3-AC-POS).

Even though they understand that it is necessary for them to provide a variety of materials and many opportunities for children to play freely, the pragmatic need of managing a class with a large number of children and ensuring all children’s safety made them give priority to collective play. Compared to the class size in the community-run kindergarten, the class size in the privately-owned kindergarten is relatively small, and this enables the teachers to organize different forms of play for children to play together, in groups or as individuals. Collective play, group play and free play were evident in this kindergarten. Teacher BO’s explanation is representative, she stated:

As our class is stage 1, we have 20 children in our class. To me, this class size is reasonable to arranged different kinds of play. Group play or free play, because

three teachers (BI, BO and an assistant teacher), about 7 children for each teacher to in charge (MK1-BO-POS).

It is obvious that types of play are influenced by the class size as the teachers with large numbers of children in a class need to prioritise class size when organizing, selecting and designing the play, thus making it suitable for many children to play together. This is in line with the findings of other research in early childhood education in Britain (Bennett et al., 1997; Wood & Attfield, 2005).

7.5.3 Influences from teachers' personal context

Teachers' personal characteristics are also considered as an important dimension that influences their application of play. In the interviews, several teachers indicated that their personal characteristics had something to do with the play that took place in their classes. Some teachers regarded themselves as the type of 'playful' people who 'liked play', they tended to select and design play activities which they thought were funny, playful, interesting, and sportive, and to join in play or initiate interactions to play with the children. For instance, teacher CZ from the government-owned kindergarten elaborated her reason for playing games with children:

I think this is because of my personality. I feel myself is quite bright and cheerful. I like challenge. So I would like to arrange some games involving sports in outdoor activities. When I joining in their play, they feel happy and I also feel happy (YK3-CZ-POS).

Compared to these 'playful' teachers, other teachers stated they preferred "quiet play activities to noisy" ones (ZK2-AQ-POS). They "liked orderly class environment" (MK2-BW-POS), and they preferred "organizing children to play together", "stay aside to monitor children's play" and "correct their misbehavior" (MK2-BL-POS). Therefore, in practice, these teachers arrange more constructive and manipulative play than games

involving sports. It is clear from these examples, that the teachers' personality influences their arrangement of different types of play in practice.

Moreover, it seems that teachers' personal experience and training also have an influence on their implementation of play in practice. In the observation, it was found that some teachers have a preference for arranging different kinds of play. For example, teachers AW, AH, BW, CJ preferred selecting music play in their teaching, while teachers BE and CL preferred adopting physical games in their teaching activities. Teachers CE, CH, AQ used language play frequently in their teaching, and teacher BO liked organizing block play a lot. When they were interviewed about the reasons behind this, some of them mentioned:

I had the training program of playing blocks in P Institute, so I usually let children in our class play this blocks (MK1-BO-POS).

I used to be a dancing teacher in another kindergarten for three years before I came here, so I do like to adopt music play in my teaching (MK2-BW-POS).

Actually, my major is physical education rather than early childhood education. I know more about playing physical games (MK-BE).

I attended early childhood education course in G University where I had some training in organizing language activities, so I prefer using language games in my teaching (YK1-CH-POS).

It appears that teachers' personal experience, including both previous working experience and training experience affect their decision-making in selecting the type of play in their teaching activities. Therefore, this study argues that the personal characteristics and experiences of the teachers in three kindergartens are more likely to influence the types of play, teacher's role and teacher-child interactions in play. This is in line with the findings of Shen's study in a Taiwan kindergarten (2008).

7.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed questions raised in the data analysis process related to the five research questions, including teachers' understanding of play reflected from their perceptions and practices, the play-based pedagogy in different kindergartens' context, teachers' roles in play, the features of teacher-child interactions and the aspects influencing teachers' implementation of play.

The findings show that the participating teachers in the current study construct a conception of 'eduplay' in both their perspectives and classroom practice. They tend to emphasize the instrumental value of play in their practice. The findings reveal that play-based pedagogy is advocated in all three kindergartens in slightly different ways. The findings reveal that the teachers' role in play is changing from a didactic role to a 'whole teacher' role and they exert their influence on children's play by direct intervention rather than play provision. The findings show that teacher-child interaction in play in this study is less likely to scaffold children's learning. Furthermore, there seems to be a tension between teachers' concerns for safety and children's engagement in play. Three main influences are identified that affect the implementation of play in practice. They are influences from the cultural context, influences from the institutional context and influences from teachers' personal context.

In the next chapter, I will summarise all the findings, and discuss the implication and limitation of this research, as well as offering recommendations for future research in a similar field.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This chapter offers a full conclusion to the whole process of the current study. It starts with a brief review of the research process. This is followed by a presentation of the research findings discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7 in answering the research questions raised in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Then, it moves to the implications brought about by the research findings and the limitations of this research. Finally, recommendations will be offered to inspire future research in similar fields.

8.1 Brief review of the research process

The aim of this study was to obtain an understanding of how Chinese early childhood teachers and other practitioners viewed play and how they turned their perspectives on play into kindergarten practice. The study was carried out by employing a qualitative research approach which combined interview, observation, and documentary research, in order to provide a comprehensive picture. Throughout the research, pre-observation interviews with 18 kindergarten teachers from nine different classes in three Chinese kindergartens provided a general understanding of the sample teachers' view of play. Observation conducted in the teachers' classes revealed their diverse interpretation of play-based pedagogy. Stimulated-recall interviews which took place throughout the classroom observation and post-observation interviews which were conducted after the observations offered a rich resource for a deep understanding of both teachers' perspectives and practices. Interviews with 6 other practitioners that included 3 kindergarten administrators and 3 interest class teachers provided further data connected to their concerns about integrating play into kindergarten educational practice. Reviewing the relevant documents of play which included government policy documents and documents produced by kindergarten and teachers demonstrated a multiply layered understanding of the significance of play.

A pilot study was conducted before the main fieldwork. This helped me to examine and improve the research instruments and pave the way for the main study. In the research

process, ethical issues were given careful thought. Before the fieldwork was carried out in the kindergartens, all the participants were informed about the purposes and synopsis of the research, and ethical issues were discussed with kindergarten principals and teachers to ensure appropriate practice in the fieldwork.

Triangulation was achieved by adopting different research methods. A variety of research data were gathered, and this enabled me not only to gain a comprehensive picture of the perceptions and interpretations of play of early childhood practitioners in different kindergarten contexts, but also allowed me to acquire the concerns and influential aspects of teachers' implementation of play in practice.

8.2 Conclusion of each research question

This section presents the main findings of each of the research questions raised in chapter 1 and chapter 2.

Chinese kindergarten teachers' perceptions of play

Research findings show that the participating Chinese teachers' perceptions of play can be argued as being 'eduplay', which is teacher-initiated play activity that has the characteristics of being funny, interesting, and playful, but at the same time has defined learning objectives. They believe that play can facilitate children's holistic development which including physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. In their perspectives and practice, they emphasize the instrumental value of play than the intrinsic value of play, and they are more likely to stress the value of play in improving physical and cognitive development than promoting social and emotional development. The teachers' perspectives and practices demonstrate that play has multiple functions in the kindergarten educational settings. They have a recreational function, learning function, developmental function, revelatory function, therapeutic function, and class management function.

The implementation of play in Chinese kindergarten teachers' practice

The findings reveal that play-based pedagogy is advocated in all three kindergartens in slightly different ways. Collective play is the most popular type of play in all of the three kindergartens. It seems that in the community-run kindergarten, a cultural transmission/directive approach is prevalent whereas in both the privately-owned and government-owned kindergartens, a combination of a cultural transmission/direct approach and an emergent/responsive approach is pervasive. The findings demonstrate that play is integrated into kindergarten practice in mainly three ways. Firstly, it is adopted as an independent part that runs parallel with formal learning activities. Secondly, play is integrated as a component into different curricula. Thirdly, play is employed as a time-filler in intervals between different activities. Three types of play are evident in the classrooms based on teachers' intentions of adopting it, that including instructional play, recreational play and managerial play. Three main roles of play in classroom practice are found, that is, play as a learning medium, play as a recreational and relax activity, and play as a class management strategy. Moreover, physical play or games involving sports are the most popular play in all three kindergartens, compared to any other kinds of play.

The teacher's role in children's play

The findings reveal that the teachers adopt diverse roles in play: that is, the role of planner, supporter, organizer, supervisor, playmate, facilitator and uninvolved role. As a planner, the teacher plans and prepares for play according to periodic learning themes and developmental level of children. As a supporter, the teacher provides children with various play materials, props and relevant experience and offers children help and emotional support in playing. As an organizer, the teacher leads and directs children about the ways of play and allocates roles and materials in play. As a supervisor, the teacher maintains discipline, manages children's behavior, takes care of children and ensures their safety. As a playmate, the teacher joins in children's play to boost children's interest and enhance the atmosphere to establish a close teacher-child relationship. As a facilitator, the teacher involves children in play, communicates and questions children to scaffold their learning, thinking and imagination and extends play. As an uninvolved role, the teacher prepares and does other things that are not necessarily relevant to play. Findings demonstrate that the teachers play these different

roles according to different contexts and types of play, and all the teachers from the three kindergartens prefer and act more often as planner, supporter, organizer, supervisor, playmate, and facilitator in play while less frequently as the uninvolved role. Although didactic features are evident in teachers' role in play, they show a strong desire to play a 'whole teacher' role and establish a parallel relationship with children. Findings show that teachers are more likely to exert their influence on children's play through direct intervention than play provision.

Teacher-child interactions in play in Chinese kindergartens

With regard to teacher-child interaction in play, the findings reveal that teachers initiate more interactions than individual children do, and they are more likely to ignore or have no response to child-initiated interactions than children do to the teacher-initiated interactions. Nine intentions are identified to explain the purposes of teacher-initiated interactions, including directing and guiding a child's play and learning; managing a child's behaviours; taking care of a child; asking a child for help; playing with a child; offering help and support; asking for information; praising and encouraging a child; and comforting a child. Eight intentions of child-initiated interactions are also identified, which include asking for teacher's attention; telling on someone who broke rules; involving a teacher in play; asking a teacher for help; stating and expressing personal ideas; requesting; asking for information and permission; and expressing one's emotion.

Findings show that the teachers assume more power in the teacher-child relationship. They prefer to give children instructions directly rather than by questioning, challenging and communicating with children to fortify their competence. They pay great attention to taking care of children's body and health, ensuring their physical safety and risk control. However, the findings reveal that the teacher-child interaction in play in this study is less likely to scaffold children's learning. Furthermore, there seems to be a tension between teachers' concerns of safety and health and children's intense involvement in play.

Aspects influence the implementation of play in Chinese kindergartens' routines

Pertaining to the aspects that influence the implementation of play, the findings reveal that three main influences are the influences from cultural context, the influences from the institutional context, and the influences from the teachers' personal context which all affect the implementation of play in kindergarten practice. Findings show that two aspects --- the Chinese traditional culture and parents' expectations and requirements on children's learning outcomes which stem from the cultural context made the teachers construct play as 'eduplay' and affected the ways they implement play in practice. Moreover, the findings reveal that the influences from the institutional context consist of three main elements, the kindergarten's espoused educational philosophy and approach, the provision of play, and class size. The educational philosophy and approach employed by different kindergartens shape the forms of play. The provision of time, materials and resources of play in the kindergarten determines the types of play. The class size influences the types and arrangement of play. Finally, the findings indicate that the teachers' personal characteristics and experiences influence the types of play, teacher's role and teacher-child interactions in play.

8.3 Implications of the research

This research attempted to understand kindergarten teachers' perspectives of play and the interpretation of play in educational practice within a Chinese context. Findings from the current study may offer implications for research and practice in the early childhood field, both domestically and internationally. Findings may also provide implications for teachers' preparation programs, policy-makers, administrators and practitioners.

8.3.1 Implication for kindergarten teachers' preparation programs

According to Wood (2007), an integrated play approach requires considerable knowledge and expertise, which in turns emphasizes the significance of professional knowledge of practitioners in their preparation programs. The findings of the current study may provide some implications for early childhood teachers' institutes or preparation programs to deal with the potential gaps in their teacher training programs. Some teachers in the research reported a lack of relevant training of play-based teaching in their pre-service training

program and they expect more opportunities for them to understand and practice play-based pedagogy in the pre-service courses. For example, practical field-based trainings of integrating diverse play in kindergarten daily routines would be beneficial for them.

8.3.2 Implication for policy-makers

As Wood (2010) pointed out, the nature of early childhood policies tend to influence practitioners' interpretation of them. A 'straitjacket-like' policy tends to constrain teachers' practice of play, while a broad policy may lead to inappropriate interpretations of play in practice. The findings of this study may be helpful in arousing policy-makers in the Chinese early childhood educational field to rethink the appropriateness of the relevant policy frameworks for teachers' implementation of play-based pedagogy, and to make necessary improvements to the relevant early childhood educational policies, documents and guidelines according to the status quo of teachers' practice. For example, on the one hand, policy-makers can make the policy guidelines more clear and specific, and offer detailed requirements, which can be easily assessed, to guide teachers in implementing quality play-based teaching. On the other hand, policy-makers can also make the relevant documents be practical and flexible for teachers to make necessary changes according to their specific teaching settings.

8.3.3 Implication for kindergarten administrators

Moreover, the findings may be helpful to kindergarten administrators in order to obtain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions and practice of play-based pedagogy. It may influence the administrators to provide teachers with in-service training opportunities that concern play for their professional development. For instance, regularizing opportunities for on-site demonstrating or learning between colleagues would be beneficial for teachers to communicate and learn from each other's work. Furthermore, the findings may be useful to trigger the administrators to reflect on the current status of play in their kindergarten practice and to develop appropriate educational approaches and strategies which balance parental requirements in terms of children's learning achievement and safety and children's interests, freedom, and autonomy in play. More specifically, organizing systematic workshops for

parents to disseminate the value and significance of play to children's learning and development would be beneficial for them to have a better understanding of play and establish reasonable expectations on their children's learning. This in turn may help teachers to diminish the pressure which arises from parents' requirements concerning academic achievement. In addition, the findings may be helpful for informing administrators to rearrange and manage materials and times for play.

8.3.4 Implication for practitioners

Finally, the findings may be useful in arousing early childhood practitioners' reflections on their current practice of play to support children's learning and development, including the appropriateness of the ways they incorporate play in kindergarten daily routines, their role and their interactions with children in play. It may also lead teachers to make conscious and necessary adjustments of their practice of play to maximize the learning potential of play to children.

8.4 Limitations of the research

Although the current research offers new interpretations of Chinese early childhood practitioners' perspectives and practice of play, I am aware of the fact that not every piece of research is perfect, and by reflecting on the whole research process, I recognize that there are some limitations that exist in this study.

The first limitation of the research comes from my personal experience. As I used to be a kindergarten teacher in China, my personal experience and understanding of early childhood education may influence my role as a researcher and my interpretation of research findings. As Hammersley (2005) indicated, a researcher's knowledge, value, emotion and personal experience shapes his or her research in important ways. Data were analysed and interpreted through the unique lens of the researcher (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Although I was fully aware of this and I have tried to be reflective during the research process, it is difficult to say that the findings exclude any of my personal view or bias. Therefore, the findings can only be seen as my interpretation of early childhood teachers' perspective and practice of play in

Chinese kindergartens.

What needs to be recognized here is that this research was only carried out in three Chinese kindergartens in the urban area in Guangdong province. However, China is a country with a vast territory. Due to the unbalanced socioeconomic development, varied geographic conditions and discrepant educational resources between different regions of China and diversified culture and language throughout the country, as well as autonomous administration of early childhood education by local governments, the quality and development of early childhood education vary across different provinces, counties, towns and even communities (Zhai & Gao, 2008). There are still rural places where the kindergartens or preschools are poorly-equipped in terms of educational resource and teachers. Considering the accessibility and feasibility of this research, as well as the constraints of time and finance of the researcher, the final sample is limited to three kindergartens which are qualified and advocate play in their practice in the urban areas in a specific region of China. Therefore, because of the limitation of the sampling, the findings will not be representative of the overall situation of play in early childhood education in the country, but in the three participating kindergartens. The findings might be more significant if the sample had covered a variety of kindergartens and preschools across the provinces, counties, towns and ethnic groups.

It also has to be acknowledged that in this research, the interviews were conducted with 24 early childhood practitioners which were made up of class head teachers, interest class teachers and administrators. I did not carry out interviews with children to explore their perspectives and needs in play. Children's voices were absent. The early childhood educational system is a sophisticated system which involves not only practitioners, but also children, parents, and policy-makers. These different social actors may have different perspectives of play which are important, and may influence the practice of play in an early childhood institute. As a result of the limitation of time and accessibility of the interviewees, the final decision of the interviewees was made to only focus on teachers who were from different classes, and administrators, but exclude parents, children and policy-makers.

Therefore, it is considered that the findings might be more comprehensive if children's voices about play within a kindergarten setting were explored, and if the interviewees reflected a wider range of stakeholders of the early childhood education.

Moreover, due to limitations of time of the researcher, the observation was carried out in each of nine classes of the three kindergartens for eight working days. The limited time for observation may influence the types of play that can be observed and influence the findings. A prolonged persistent observation might be better for future research.

Finally, limitations may also exist in the language translation process in the research, as the data in the current study were gathered and analyzed in Chinese, and some of interviewees' quotations and field notes of observation in the thesis were translated from Chinese to English during the writing up process. All translation was conducted by myself, with a double check of the translation carried out a friend who works as a professional translator. However, although she checked the translations for me, the difference between our interpretations may lead to some subtle difference in the translation.

8.5 Recommendations for further research

Although increasing attention is paid by researchers to the topic of play, "play remains a complex and problematic field for researchers and practitioners" (Wood, 2007, p.312). Based on the current research, I would like to suggest possible directions for future research in this field.

Firstly, even though the current study investigated early childhood practitioners' understanding and interpretation of play, it does not explore other important stakeholders' perspectives of play, for example, the views of play of parents, policy-makers, academic researchers, or health professionals which will be of great importance, particularly the views of children (Howard, 2010). As Clark (2010) suggested, young children can play an active role in participating in early childhood education and it is necessary to listen to their views

and experiences in early learning settings. Therefore, research on children's perspectives of their needs, preferences in play and their views of play provision by using the "Mosaic approach" (Clark & Moss, 2011, p.13) are recommended.

Secondly, the findings of this research indicated that parental concern for children's physical safety influenced the teachers' arrangement of play and their role and interaction with children in play. However, how do parents assess risk in play and how do children interpret risk in play? Is there any difference between parents, teachers, and children's understandings of risk in play? These questions are not clear yet, and need further exploration. Therefore, I would like to suggest this as possible future research area.

Thirdly, as play underpins early childhood education, it is advocated as an important way for children's learning. It is necessary for early childhood practitioners to assess its effectiveness for children's educational achievement. However, how to assess the educational progress brought by play and what characterizes good-quality play? These questions may be worth further exploration.

Fourthly, as this research explored play in a broad sense, future research which focuses on specific type of play may be needed to provide important information for the pragmatic use of play in kindergarten daily routines. For example, what influences teachers' decision-making on integrating different types of play in curriculum? Moreover, due to the limitation of time, the current study only explored teacher-child interactions in play, for future research, the study of the interactions between individual children during play is recommended.

8.6 Concluding remarks

Play is considered to be an important and appropriate means for young children's education in early childhood settings. The features of play and teachers' interpretation of play in different early childhood educational institutes may vary. The current study employed a

qualitative approach, which combined interview, observation, and documentary review to explore kindergarten teachers' perceptions of play and their implementation of play in practice in the Chinese context. It aimed to provide the voice of the Chinese early childhood practitioners concerning play. Through analyzing the data, it is found that although initially play is not considered as a way of learning in Chinese traditional culture, and 'learning through play' is a phrase that was introduced from European cultural society, the Chinese kindergarten teachers have constructed a shared notion of 'eduplay' within the Chinese context. It seems that the value and significance of play have been recognized by the teachers and administrators and that play-based pedagogy has been interpreted differently in their educational practice. Although the teachers have faced diverse challenges in implementing play in practice, they have made efforts and adopted different roles to ensure children learn through play.

However, rather than offering comprehensive answers to the research questions or make judgments on the teachers' implementation of play-based pedagogy in different early childhood settings, the central purpose of this research is to inspire early childhood stakeholders' rethinking on play, then promote their understanding of play, and facilitate children's learning through play by their joining forces. It is hoped that this will help somewhat in ensuring that our children learn happily in a playful childhood!

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Appendix A

Semi-structured Teacher Interview Schedule

Pre-observation interview of teachers

1. Personal information

- How long have you been a kindergarten teacher? Do you mind telling me your age?
- What did you do before you were a kindergarten teacher?
- What is your highest academic degree obtained?
- Which class of children are you in charge of? What is the age of children in your classroom?
- How many children are there in your class?
- Are you in charge of any feature activities? (music/ dancing/ drawing/ chess/ language/ sports etc.)

2. Daily arrangement

- How do you arrange children's daily activities in your class?
- How would you describe the play activity in your class?
- What are the types of play in children's daily activities? When and where it takes place?
- How long it lasts? How often it takes place?

3. Perceptions of play and play-based teaching

- In your opinion, how do children learn?
- What do you think 'play' means to children? How do you define play? What is your view in 'learning through play'?
- What is your view of the relationship between play and children's development? What can play help children to develop? Could you please give some examples to explain how children learn through play?
- What is the role of play in your teaching activities? (relaxation/ recreation/ practice etc.)
- What do you think about the "play-based teaching and learning" mentioned in *the Regulations on Kindergarten Education Practice*? Do you think implementation of play-based learning is feasible in practice?
- In your view, are there any difficulties putting them into practice? If so, what is it?
- How do you think the effect of play in helping you achieve the teaching goals?
- How do you define a successful play or a play-based teaching activity?
- What are the features of a successful play or a play-based teaching activity?

4. Implementation of play in practice

- How do you use play in your classroom practice?
- What are you doing when children carry out free-choice play?
- In your view, is there any difference of your participation in play and in formal teaching activities?
- How do you support children's play?

5. Teacher's roles in children's play

- What roles do you expect teachers to play in children's play? Can you explain them?
- How do you describe your role in children's play? Can you give examples to explain your role in children's play?

6. Teacher's involvement in play

- When and how do you involve in children's play?
- How do you know when it is necessary to involve in?

Stimulated recall interview of teachers

- I have noticed that you....when children play, could you explain what did you think at that moment? Why did you
- When organizing the xxx play, what is your expectation? What is the aim of the play?
- In your class time table, play activities usually arranged after, why do you arrange them in this way?
- In this video, when xxx come to you to....., you told him...., what did you think at that moment?
- Do you think this play has helped you in achieving the anticipated goal? If play it again, what do you want to improve?

(These questions are listed as examples; the specific questions in practice will be revised based on the results of observations.)

Post-observation interview of teachers

- What kind of training do you have in becoming a kindergarten teacher?
- Have you received any training concerning the integration of play in early childhood curriculum? If so, what are they? How do you think the usefulness of the training?
- Would you like to have some training in relate to play-based teaching? What kind of training do you expect?
- Have you encountered any difficulty in your implementation of play in practice? If so, what are they?
- What aspects do you think will affect your decision-making regarding using play? What is the difficulty you think that influenced your application of play in practice most?

- In your view, how do parents think about children's play? Do you think parents would encourage children play a lot in kindergarten? What do you think that parents concern most? Why? What is the influence this has brought in implementing the play-based pedagogy?
- Is there any conflict between the official teaching goals and children's need of play? If so, how do you balance them? What strategies you have used?
- How do administrators in your kindergarten encourage the play-based pedagogy?

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Schedule (Chinese)

教师访谈提纲

观察前访谈:

1. 教师个人信息

您从事幼儿教师工作多久了? (方便透露一下您的年龄吗?)

您在担任幼儿教师以前从事什么工作?

您的最后学历是?

您负责哪个年龄班的幼儿? 您所在的班级有多少幼儿?

您有没有承担特色活动教学? (音乐/舞蹈/美术/棋类/双语/体育/其它)

2. 日常活动的安排

您怎样安排幼儿的一日活动?

您怎样描述您所在班级的游戏活动?

您班级的幼儿一日活动中有哪些不同类型的游戏? 一般是什么时间开展这些游戏? 在什么地点开展?

每个游戏一般持续多长时间? 多久开展一次?

3. 关于游戏及以游戏为基础的教学

在您看来, 幼儿怎样学习, 获得知识?

您觉得对幼儿来说‘游戏’是什么? 您怎样定义游戏? 您怎样理解‘玩中学’?

您怎样看待游戏与儿童发展的关系? 您认为游戏能促进幼儿哪些方面的发展? 能举例说明一下游戏是如何促进幼儿这些方面发展的吗? 幼儿如何从玩中学?

游戏在您的教学活动当中的角色和地位是怎样的? (娱乐/调节/练习)

您怎样看待《幼儿园教育指导纲要(试行)》当中提出的以游戏为基础的教育学贯穿于幼儿一日活动? 您认为这个在实践中可行吗?

在您看来, 要在教学实践当中执行它们有难度吗? 如果有, 有哪些困难?

您怎样看待游戏在帮助您达到教学目标中的效果？

4. 游戏的执行

您怎样在教学实践中采用游戏？

幼儿在自由游戏的时候，您一般在干什么？

您认为，参与游戏跟参与集体教学活动有什么不同吗？

您怎样支持幼儿的游戏？

5. 教师在幼儿游戏中的角色

您觉得教师应当在幼儿的游戏中扮演什么角色？您可以详细说明一下这个角色吗？

您这样看待您在幼儿的游戏中充当的角色？可以举例说明一下您扮演的这个/些角色吗？

6. 教师参与或介入幼儿的游戏

您一般是什么时候参与或介入幼儿的游戏？怎样参与/介入？

您是怎样知道什么时候该参与/介入幼儿的游戏，什么时候不该参与/介入他们的游戏呢？

刺激反思访谈：

1.我注意到当幼儿玩……时，您……，您能说说当时您是怎样考虑的吗？您为什么……？

2.您能谈一谈在开展 xxx 游戏活动时，您有什么期待吗？您开展这个游戏的目的是什么？

3.在您班级的活动安排表中，游戏通常安排在……，您为什么这样安排游戏活动，而不是采用其他形式呢？

4.在刚才这段视频中，当 xxx 小朋友走过来跟您说……的时候，您对他/她说……，您当时是在考虑什么？

5.您认为这个游戏帮助您完成预期的目标了吗？如果再玩一次，您想从哪些方面进行改善？

观察后访谈：

- 1.您在成为幼儿教师之前接受了哪些培训?
- 2.您有接受过任何关于将游戏运用到幼儿教育课程中的相关培训吗?如果有,是哪些培训?您觉得这些培训有用吗?
- 3.您想接受关于'以游戏为基础教学'这方面的培训吗?您期待哪种培训?
- 4.您在教学实践中开展游戏时遇到过困难吗?如果有,是什么样的困难?
- 5.您认为哪些因素影响你关于开展游戏的决策?影响最大的是什么因素?
- 6.您认为幼儿的父母是怎样看待幼儿游戏的?您觉得幼儿家长们会提倡幼儿在幼儿园总是开展游戏吗?您认为幼儿的父母最关注的是什么?为什么?这些对您采用'玩中学'的教学有什么影响?
- 7.您觉得在上级要求的教学目标和幼儿开展游戏的需求之间有冲突吗?如果有,您怎样平衡它们?您采用了哪些策略?
- 8.您所在的幼儿园领导怎样提倡采用游戏为基础的教学?

Appendix C

Application for ethical approval

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
**Institute of
EDUCATION**

**Application for Ethical Approval for Research Degrees
(MA by research, MPhil/PhD, EdD)**

Name of student

MA By research	EdD	PhD ✓
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Yanjuan Yang

Project title

Play in Chinese kindergartens: teachers' perceptions and practices

Supervisor

Dr. Michael Wyness
Prof. Pia Christensen

Funding Body (if relevant)

Please ensure you have read the Guidance for the Ethical Conduct of Research available in the handbook

Methodology
Please outline the methodology e.g. observation, individual interviews, focus groups, group testing etc.

This is a qualitative piece of research comprising three methods. They are documentary research, individual interviews of kindergarten teachers and administrators, observation and video-recording of classes in kindergarten.

Participants
Please specify all participants in the research including ages of children and young people where appropriate. Also specify if any participants are vulnerable e.g. children; as a result of learning disability.

Three kindergartens in the city Guangzhou in China. Eighteen Chinese kindergarten teachers, six kindergarten administrators and all the children in the nine observed classes (aged 3-6). If the classes including children with learning difficulties they will be included in my research.

Respect for participants' rights and dignity
How will the fundamental rights and dignity of participants be respected, e.g. confidentiality, respect of cultural and religious values?

In order to ensure the confidentiality and respect participants' right, I am going to state clearly in the consent forms that participating in this study are totally confidential and voluntary. Participants have the right to withdraw their consent or discontinue participation at any time if they wish to do so. Besides, as I come from China and I understand the Chinese cultural values, I will act according to the Chinese cultural principles to offer the highest level of respect to all participants to optimize their active engagement and develop a rapport with them.

Privacy and confidentiality

How will confidentiality be assured? Please address all aspects of research including protection of data records, thesis, reports/papers that might arise from the study.

I will carefully record and store data to ensure the confidentiality. I will not put the informant's name and other identifying information in field notes and transcripts, and code will be kept separate from the data. Furthermore, the identities of informants and kindergartens will be anonymized by using pseudonyms in my doctoral thesis and publication of the research.

Consent - will prior informed consent be obtained?

- from participants? ✓ Yes/No from others? ✓ Yes/No

- explain how this will be obtained. If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason:

Firstly, permission to carry out the research will be sought from kindergarten principals in writing. Secondly, informed consent will be given to teachers and administrators for their agreement of participation. However, since the participant children are too young to give informed consent by themselves, the consent from parents and teachers are considered essential. Thus, teachers and parents of the observed classes will be fully informed and their permission will be sought in advance in writing, as they are responsible for the children. Finally, oral explanation will be given to children of the observed classes explaining that I will spend time in the kindergarten to watch them when they play, and record how they play for the purpose of writing a book about what is important to children when they play on their own and with their friends and how teachers join in or help them when playing.

- will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status?

Yes, the information of the student will be provided in all the consent forms for teachers, administrators and parents.

Competence

How will you ensure that all methods used are undertaken with the necessary competence?

I have attended the research skill-training programme of the Foundation Research Methods and Advanced Research Methods through which I have learned how to design, conduct, analyze and report of the research. Besides, I also carried out a pilot study on December 2010 to test my main research methods and instruments for the study. These experiences together with the supervision I received will ensure the necessary competence for the current research. ✓

Protection of participants

How will participants' safety and well-being be safeguarded?

In order to safeguard participants' safety and well-being, teachers' or parents' informed consent will be ensured. Furthermore, I will not interfere in formal teaching activities to minimize the interruption I might bring to the regular activities of the classes. Meanwhile, during the observation, I will be sensitive in my work with and observation of the children's play to ensure that both the children and the teacher feel content and relaxed in my presence. I will respect teachers and children's view and decision if they are unwilling to be observed or recorded during an activity. ✓

Child protection

Will a CRB check be needed? Yes/No ✓ (If yes, please attach a copy.)

Addressing dilemmas

Even well planned research can produce ethical dilemmas. How will you address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in your research?

Ethical dilemmas may rise from the conflict between the researcher to gain information and the participants to protect privacy in study. Therefore, in order to respect the privacy of participants, I will not ask them to discuss aspects of their lives that have nothing significantly to do with the research question. Moreover, I will treat all participants fairly and with respect. In addition, I will investigate in initial conversations with the principals any ethical questions or guidelines that they follow in their work with the children and their families and inform them the ethical practice of my study. In case of any divergence, I will negotiate the most appropriate practice for my research. Throughout the study I will discuss ethical dilemmas with my supervisors when such situations arise to ensure that best practice is adhered to. ✓

Misuse of research

How will you seek to ensure that the research and the evidence resulting from it are not misused?

The research data will be carefully stored by using password protected computer files, only the researcher can access to them and the data will be used for research purpose only. ✓

Support for research participants

What action is proposed if sensitive issues are raised or a participant becomes upset?

If a participant becomes upset, for instance, a teacher is upset to answer the interview question; I will respect her right to skip the question or discontinue the interview rather than insisting that she/he answers the question.

Integrity

How will you ensure that your research and its reporting are honest, fair and respectful to others?

Firstly, data will be carefully recorded by using multiple methods to ensure the accuracy. Secondly, reporting of findings is based on honest and full interpretation of the data rather than false and partial interpretation. Finally, the report of this study will not relate to the assessment of teachers' teaching performance.

What agreement has been made for the attribution of authorship by yourself and your supervisor(s) of any reports or publications?

Any work to come out of the Thesis will be attributed to me as the author. If my supervisors write outputs from this research together with me, I will be the first author. If I write single authored articles I will acknowledge their contribution to my work in an acknowledgement.

Other issues?

Please specify other issues not discussed above, if any, and how you will address them.

Signed

Research student

Date: 1st February 2011

Supervisor

Date:

8th February 2011

14th Feb 2011

Action

Please submit to the Research Office (Louisa Hopkins, room WE132)

Action taken

Approved

Approved with modification or conditions – see below

Action deferred. Please supply additional information or clarification – see below

Name *G. Winters*

Date *15/2/11*

Signature



Stamped

Notes of Action

Appendix D

Teacher informed consent

Dear teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research study, the purpose of which is to better understanding play-based teaching and learning in kindergarten. You will be videoed and audio recorded during play activities in your classroom. And you will also be asked to participate in interviews, which are discussion about play activities in your classroom. The interviews may take place before and after play activities and each may last for around an hour. All interviews will be audio recorded for further analysis. All the audio-visual recording and interview data will only be used for research or educational purposes.

Participation in this study will not be linked to the assessment of your teaching performance and will not impact on your professional career. Please note that your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. All information of the study will be kept strictly confidential and only the researcher has the right to access to them. Your identity will remain confidential in all published and written data resulting from the study. This follows the ethical guidelines of the University of Warwick (<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/rss/services/ethics/statement/>).

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me by the means provided below. If you are willing to participate in this research, please complete the attached form. I am grateful for your support.

Yours sincerely

Researcher:

Yanjuan Yang

132-266-666-89 (Mobile)

Email: yangyanjuan0817@gmail.com

Teacher consent form

I have read and understood the information mentioned above and I am willing / I am not willing (please cross out the one that does not apply) to participate in the study being conducted by Yanjuan Yang at xxx kindergarten.

I understand that the research study will involve interviews, audio recording and video recording of my classroom activities. I also understand that my identity will remain confidential and I can withdraw from the research at any time.

Signed: _____
Printed name: _____
Date: _____

The informed consent of kindergarten teachers is modified from the models of Forero (2001 cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) and Chang (2009).

Teacher informed consent (Chinese)

教师通知书

亲爱的老师，

您好！

现正式邀请您参与本人计划进行的一项教育研究。本次研究旨在更好的理解幼儿园中游戏活动的开展。如果您同意参与，您及您所在班级幼儿开展游戏活动的过程将被录影存档作为本次研究的资料。您还将被邀请接受本人的访谈，探讨您所在班级的游戏活动开展情况。所有的访谈内容经过您的同意后将录音存档。所有收集的影音资料只供教育与研究所用。

本项研究不涉及对您的教学活动进行评估，也不会影响您的职业发展。您的参与完全基于自愿原则，您随时可以中止参与，不用承担任何后果。本次研究收集的所有资料将被严格保密，只有本人才能接触到这些资料。您的身份与个人信息同样将在所有的研究相关报告中严格保密。上述所有内容均遵守并符合英国华威大学研究中的伦理道德规定。（详细规定请参见 <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/rss/services/ethics/statement/>）

如果您对本研究有任何疑问，请随时随意通过以下方式与我联系。如果您愿意参与本研究，请填写好下面的同意书附表。衷心的感谢您的支持与帮助！祝您工作顺利，生活美满！

研究员：杨彦涓

英国华威大学教育系博士研究生

联系电话：1322666689

电子邮箱：yangyanjuan0817@gmail.com

教师同意书

我已阅读并理解上述通知书中的内容，我愿意 不愿意 （请在您选中的选项上打√）参与由研究员杨彦涓开展的研究。

我理解本次研究将涉及访谈，及我所在班级的游戏活动的录音录影；我的身份和个人信息将被严格保密；我随时可以终止参与。

个人签名： _____

日期： _____

Appendix F

Parent informed consent

Dear parent,

I am writing to seek your consent for your child to be involved in a study related to play that I am going to carry out at xxx kindergarten.

This research focuses on the exploration and understanding of play-based teaching and learning in kindergarten. It will involve video and audio recording of play activities in your children's classroom (approximately sixteen hours). The teacher and children will be recorded as they talk and interact during play activities. Children will not be asked to do any special activities or to do anything differently.

As part of an ethical approach to this study I assure you that:

- Children will be completing their everyday learning activities in the usual way, the study will not interfere with children's learning;
- Individual children will not be identified or named;
- Your child will not be assessed or tested;
- You may withdraw your child at any time from the study, if you decide to withdraw your child from the project, then recordings that show your child will not be used;
- All the audio-visual recording will only be used for research or educational purposes;
- You may ask to see and view any recordings that record your child;
- This follows the ethical guidelines of the University of Warwick.
(<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/rss/services/ethics/statement/>)

Thank you for considering this. If you wish to speak to me further about this research, please feel free to contact me by the means provided below, or speak to me when I am visiting your child's kindergarten.

If you are willing to let your child participate in this research, please complete the attached form and return it to your child's class teacher by [date]. I am grateful for your support.

Yours sincerely

Researcher:

Yanjuan Yang

132-266-666-89 (Mobile)

Email: yangyanjuan0817@gmail.com

Parent consent form

I have read and understood the information mentioned above and I am willing / I am not willing (please cross out the one that does not apply) for my child [child's name] to participate in the

study being conducted by Yanjuan Yang at xxx kindergarten.

I understand that the identity of my child will remain confidential and I may withdraw my child from the study at any time.

Signed: _____

Printed name: _____

Relationship to child: _____

Date: _____

The informed consent for parents is adapted from the models of Davidson (Davidson, cited in Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) and Chang (2009).

家长通知书

亲爱的家长，

您好！

现正式寻求您的意见，同意您的孩子参与本人计划在祈福新村英语实验幼儿园进行的一项教育研究。本次研究旨在探讨幼儿园中基于游戏的教与学。您孩子所在的幼儿园及班级教师已同意参与。您孩子所在班级教师与幼儿开展游戏活动的过程，教师与幼儿在游戏互动中的互动将被录影存档作为本次研究的资料。（此研究活动共 10 小时，每次 2 小时）您的孩子不会被要求进行任何特别或特殊的活动。

为了保护您孩子的利益，本人做出如下保证：

- 您的孩子每天将照常开展学习活动，本研究不会干扰他（她）的日常学习和生活；
- 研究中不会提到个体幼儿的名字；
- 您的孩子不会被评估与测试；
- 您随时可以终止您孩子的参与，一旦您终止参与，凡是有关您孩子的影音资料将不会被使用；
- 所有收集的影音资料只供教育与研究所用；
- 您可以要求观看有关您孩子的录音录影资料；
- 上述所有内容均遵守并符合英国华威大学研究中的伦理道德规定。（详细规定请参见 <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/rss/services/ethics/statement/>）

如果您希望对本研究做进一步了解，请随时随意通过以下方式与我联系，或在本人到访幼儿园时与我沟通。如果您愿意让您的孩子参与本研究，请填写好下面的同意书附表并于 _____ 日前交还给孩子所在班级教师。衷心的感谢您的支持与帮助！祝您工作顺利，合家欢乐！

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家长同意书

我已阅读并理解上述通知书中的内容，我 愿意 不愿意 （请在您选中的选项上打√）我的孩子 _____ （您孩子的姓名）参与由研究员杨彦涓开展的研究。

我理解我孩子的身份和个人信息将被严格保密；我随时可以终止他（她）的参与。

个人签名： _____

日期： _____

Appendix H

Excerpt of interview transcription

Pre-observation interview

INT: 除了正规的集体教学活动之外, 您所在的小班有没有安排一些游戏活动呢?

CE: 嗯, 有时候有, 户外活动的时候, 要是把我们班这节课的任务完成了, 就可以自己再完一些游戏, 让他们(小朋友)开心一下! 是自己掺进去。

INT: 都有些什么类型的游戏?

CE: 嗯, 双语游戏, 民间游戏, 如果离园之前一般是玩一些音乐游戏, 或者语言的游戏, 智力的游戏, 手指游戏。要分场合, 场合不一样就玩不一样的游戏。

INT: 您说的场合是指?

CE: 上午的游戏时间主要是户外活动, 一般大半节课都是学习技能技巧, 或者练习技能技巧, 然后剩余的一小部分, 要是他们中途枯燥了, 有些技能, 你知道, 很枯燥无味的。就掺一些小游戏进去。这些游戏一般都是双语或者民间的游戏。比如老鹰抓小鸡, Mr Wolf, Apple, Apple, Orange, London Bridge, Fish, Fish, where you are。到下午的时候, 就会玩音乐游戏, 语言游戏, 或者离园之前玩桌面游戏。他们玩这些游戏要比玩其它游戏安静很多。

INT: 幼儿园里游戏活动的安排一般占多少时间?

CE: 嗯, 主要看年龄段。游戏在小, 中, 大班的时间不一样。因为我们是小班, 小朋友年龄很小, 所以游戏活动要比中大班多。

INT: 一天当中, 小朋友的游戏时间有多少?

CE: 每天最起码有一个半小时吧。

INT: 通常一个游戏持续多长时间?

CE: 一般 15 到 20 分钟差不多。因为是小班, 小朋友 3 到 4 岁, 他们的注意力通常只能集中 15-20 分钟。

INT: 在您的理解中, 一日活动中游戏占多少比例比较合适?

CE: 我觉得最好是一半一半吧!

INT: 一半? 为什么呢?

CE: 这个是我个人的观点。因为游戏是小朋友生活中最重要的一个组成部分, 尤其是年龄很小的小朋友。他们就是在玩的时候学习。游戏能发展他们的创造力和想象力, 还有与人分享的能力, 因为有的游戏需要他们一起玩。小朋友成天喜欢幻想一些东西, 所以他们对游戏这种形式感兴趣。只要你跟小朋友说, 小朋友, 我们今天玩游戏, 你要强调是玩游戏, 他们就很开心, 对活动很感兴趣。你要是跟他们说今天我们来学习这个, 或者那个, 他们就不会感兴趣。游戏能激发他们学习和探索的兴趣。

INT: 您能举例说明一下游戏怎样促进幼儿的发展吗?

CE: 比如我们玩 Mr. Wolf 的游戏, 小朋友需要跑, 躲开老狼, 跑和躲闪就是两种不同的技能, 这个游戏能发展小朋友的反应能力, 身体的敏捷性。

INT: 您喜欢在您的集体教学活动中采用游戏吗?

CE: 喜欢, 我喜欢采用游戏。

INT: 为什么呢?

CE: 因为如果我在教学或者课程里面结合了游戏, 学习效果通常要比不结合游戏好, 游戏可以帮助我让小朋友比较容易达到我想要的那种教学效果。

INT: 您能举例说说它怎样帮您达到教学效果吗?

CE: 我们最近上了一个音乐活动,叫拔萝卜。这个教学活动其中的一个教学目标就是学会拔萝卜这首歌。这首歌的其中一个难点就是它的歌词有个顺序。比方说,这个歌词是这样的,一个老婆婆去拔萝卜,一个小妹妹在老婆婆的后面帮忙拔萝卜,然后就是一个小黄狗,一个小花猫,和一只小老鼠,一个接一个,一系列的顺序,小朋友可能会记不住,所以我就采用了一个角色游戏放到活动中间,请他们来扮演这些歌曲中的“角色”,请她当小妹妹,她当老婆婆,他当小花狗,她当小花猫,这样,通过游戏,他们一下子就把歌词里面人物的顺序记得很清楚。

INT: 当您在教学活动中融入游戏时,您会将它放在哪个部分?

CE: 如果是语言活动,我会将游戏放在活动的最前面,作为一个导入。

INT: 为什么用它做导入呢?

CE: 因为这样能够吸引小朋友的注意力,引发他们学习的兴趣。有时我也把游戏放到教学活动中间帮助小朋友学习知识,比如刚才说的,学习一首歌曲,通过游戏来帮他们记忆歌词。

INT: 您觉得采用游戏在您的教学活动中有什么弊端吗?

CE: 游戏有时很难控制,一玩游戏,小朋友就会很兴奋,情况会变得很乱,以致老师很难重新控制局面,无法收拾,很难把小朋友的注意力再集中到你的课程上面。

Stimulated recall interview

INT: 我注意到今天您组织小朋友玩“大风吹”这个游戏,玩了很多次,每一个活动的开头和结尾都玩这个游戏。您为什么这样处理呢?

CE: 其实,我们之前玩过这个游戏,小朋友特别喜欢。我发现平时你让他们做这个,做那个,他们会不听使唤,你一说大风吹,他们马上就听话了,所以,当我向他们提出要求要做什么的时候,我就采用这个游戏,他们就能更容易的达到我提出的要求,而且很高兴的完成。

INT: 今天这个方法很有意思。

CE: 对,今天他们能按照这个程序去做,也达到我要的东西,他们也开心。之前我每天真的喉咙喊得很痛,我也没有发现这个这么好的办法。

在邀请 CE 看过我拍摄的下午的游戏片段后,我们开始了下面这一小段访谈:

INT: 我注意到今天下午的户外活动时,“老鹰捉小鸡”的游戏玩了5分钟就结束了,为什么不多玩一会呢?

CE: 今天玩那个老鹰捉小鸡,(停顿)其实我们班的小朋友还是不太适合玩老鹰捉小鸡这个游戏。因为小朋友手部发展还没有完成。他们抓不住,很多人玩着玩着,就拉不紧前面小朋友的衣服了,很多小朋友都摔在地上了。你看,最后玩的时候,他们连我都松开了,然后跑掉了。这是很危险的。所以,后来我终止了这个游戏。

INT: 我发现您的班级开展游戏活动的时间一般是在小朋友上完英语课以后,午餐之前,下午是安排在吃完午点后,您能不能说说为什么这样安排呢?为什么没有安排在其他时段?

CE: 好的。游戏通常是在户外活动时间开展。英文课后和午点后是幼儿园规定的每天的户外活动时间,每天要保证1个小时运动量。上午的10点半到11点,下午的3点半到4点是规定的必须的户外活动时间。上午小朋友经过英文课就差不多累了,

所以就去户外玩一会放松一下。在进午餐前有一定的运动量，可能会吃得更好。下午起床后，首先要补充能量，吃过午点，然后带他们出去玩。

Post-observation interview

INT: 您有没有接受过将游戏运用到幼儿园一日生活中的相关培训?

CE: 没有过这方面的培训。就是凭自己的个人经验开展游戏。

INT: 您需要这方面的培训吗?

CE: 需要，最好是关于游戏的实践培训。

INT: 您期待哪些内容的游戏方面的培训?

CE: 比方说如何将游戏渗透到幼儿的一日生活各个活动当中。或者在什么活动中掺入什么游戏的相关指导。

INT: 哪些因素会影响您是否采用游戏的决策?

CE: 我觉得最主要的是安全。安全这方面的因素影响我，影响我会拘束自己，拘束小朋友。家长最怕孩子在幼儿园出现安全问题。最主要，最主要还是安全方面的因素。我们还真不敢带小朋友到外面去躲猫猫。很怕! 场地很大，你一不留神，他可能就摔了，或者就出现其他意外。家长太在意这些东西了。这个导致我不敢开展游戏，也导致现在有很多老师都不敢太放手让小朋友玩。

INT: 您觉得家长关心的是什么?

CE: 他们一般都会关心幼儿在生活上、学习上遇到了什么问题。他们不太理解游戏也可以学到东西。有个家长说，我的孩子在幼儿园一个字都没学到。其实，小班不会写字很正常，大班才会写。有的家长认为来幼儿园就是玩，一味玩，就没有学到什么东西。有的小朋友学到了，只是不一定会说。小朋友可能经常回去说，CE老师今天带我们玩 xxx 游戏了，不会说我今天学到了什么。

English Translation

Pre-observation interview

INT: Have you arranged any play activities except the formal teaching in daily activities?

CE: Yes, I have arranged play. For example, if I achieved the teaching goal of a certain curriculum, I will add some play in the outdoor activity for children to have fun.

INT: What kind of play?

CE: We have bilingual games, traditional folk play. We usually play musical games, or language games or finger games before children leave the kindergarten. It depends on settings. We play different games at different times.

INT: What do you mean by "different time"?

CE: Play in the morning usually takes place in outdoor activity. Children need to attend the formal curriculum to learn knowledge and skills in the morning. If they feel uninteresting, you know, some of the curriculum are dull, I will organize some play, for instance, the traditional folk play, such as 'The eagle and the chicken', 'Mr. Wolf', 'Apple, apple, orange', 'London Bridge', or 'Fish, fish, where you are' etc. at the end of the curriculum. In the afternoon, I will arrange musical games, language games or

table-top play before children go home. Children are quieter when playing these games than in other play.

INT: What is the proportion of time of play in a typical day?

CE: It depends on children's age stages. The proportion of playtime is quite different in different stage of classes. As our class belongs to stage 1, children are very young, so they have more playtime than that of stage 2 and stage 3.

INT: How much time do the children have for play in your class?

CE: At least 1.5 hours in a day.

INT: Usually, how long a play lasts?

CE: A play lasts for 15 to 20 minutes normally, because our class is stage 1, the age of children is from 3 to 4. Their attention normally can concentrate for 15-20 minutes.

INT: In your opinion, how much time is appropriate for play in a day?

CE: I think it is better to have a half-day time for play.

INT: Half a day? Why?

CE: This is my personal view. I think play is the most important part of children's life, especially very young children. They learn while playing. Play can facilitate their creativity and imagination, and develop their ability of sharing because some games need children playing together. You know, children always like imagining, so they are very interested in play. If you said to children, "children, let's play", you stress on play, they will be very happy and interest in the activity. If you just tell them, we are going to learn this, or to learn that, they will not have interest. Play can inspire their interest of learning and exploring.

INT: Could you please give some examples to explain how play facilitate children's development?

CE: For example, when we play the game 'Mr. Worf', children need to run and to evade Mr. Worf, running and evading are two kinds of ability, this game can develop their physical dexterity.

INT: Do you like to use play in your formal teaching activity?

CE: Yes. I like to use play.

INT: Why?

CE: Well. If I incorporate play in my teaching or curriculum, normally, the outcome of the curriculum is better than I did not use it. It can help me to make children achieve my anticipated teaching effects easily.

INT: Could you please give some examples to explain how play helps you to achieve teaching effects?

CE: Recently, I have organized a music activity which is called 'Pull out the carrot'. One of the teaching goals of this curriculum is to learn the song---'Pull out the carrot'. A difficulty of learning this song is that the words of this song are in sequence. For instance, the words goes like, a grandma trying to pull out the carrot, a little girl followed behind the grandma to help her pull out the carrot, and then a little yellow dog, a little tabby cat, and a little mouse come one after the other. They are in sequence. Children may have difficulties in remembering the words correctly. So, I adopted a role-play in the middle of the curriculum, to invite children to play these 'roles' in the song---the little girl, the grandma, the little tabby cat..... For instance, inviting a girl to

play the little girl, another girl to play the grandma, a child to play the little dog, another one to play the little cat etc.. So, by playing, children immediately remembered the sequence of the words clearly and accurately.

INT: When incorporating play in your curriculum, which part do you put it?

CE: If the activity is a language curriculum, I will put play at the beginning of the class as a 'lead-in.

INT: Why?

CE: Because this can attract children's attention and inspire their interest of learning. Sometimes I also put play in the middle of the curriculum to help children learn knowledge, just as I mentioned before, to help them remember words of a song.

INT: Do you think play has any shortcomings when you use it in your formal teaching?

CE: Yeah, play sometimes is hard to control. You know, when playing, children are very excited. The situation may become chaotic. It is quite difficult to get the situation under control again, and to re-attract children's attention to your curriculum.

Stimulated interview

INT: I noted that you organized the play ---'Big Wind Blowing' many times today. You almost put it at the beginning and the end of every activities. Could you please explain why you arrange it in this way?

CE: Actually, we have played this game before, you know, children like it very much. And I found that when I asked children to do this, or to do that, sometimes they did not act accordingly. However, if I used the playful language in the game 'Big Wind Blowing', they would act instantly according to my instructions. So, I use this play when I need children to act as I asked. It is easier for them to follow instructions in the play and they feel very happy.

INT: This method is very interesting.

CE: Yeah, children are very happy to follow my instructions today and achieve what I expected, and I am very happy too. You know, my throat was very sore due to the need to repeat instructions many times in a day, I have not found the magic of this method until today.

After CE was invited to watch the video episode I took in the afternoon, we have the following dialogue:

INT: I also noted that during the outdoor activity in the afternoon, the game 'The eagle and the chicken' only lasted for five minutes, why not play it a little bit longer?

CE: The play 'The eagle and the chicken',In fact, this game is not appropriate for the children in our class to play, because the motor coordination of their hands has not been fully developed yet. They are not able to hold peer's cloth tightly during the play. So, you saw, many children fell over. Later, they even released their hands on me and ran away. This was very dangerous. So, I discontinued this play.

INT: I noted that in your class play usually is arranged after the English teaching activity while before lunch, and in the afternoon, it is arranged after snack time. Could you

explain why you arrange play in these periods of time rather than in other time?

CE: Well, play often is organized in outdoor activity which is usually scheduled by the kindergarten after the English teaching activity in the morning and the snack time in the afternoon to ensure children have one hour exercise. In other words, from 10:30am to 11am in the morning, and from 3:30pm to 4pm in the afternoon are fixed times for children's outdoor play. In the morning, after the English lesson, children may feel tired, so we let them play outdoors to relax themselves. They may eat better at lunch after doing certain amount of exercise. In the afternoon, after their nap, they need to replenish energy first, so we take them to play outdoors after they have some snacks.

Post-observation interview

INT: Have you received any training concerning the integration of play in kindergarten daily practice?

CE: Not yet. I integrated play based on my personal experience.

INT: Would you like to have some training related to play-based teaching?

CE: Yes, it would be better for me to have some practical training related to play.

INT: What kind of training do you expect?

CE: Well, such as those training concerning how to permeate play in every kindergarten activities, or those training providing some guidance for us to use different kinds of play in different curricula.

INT: What are the aspects that influenced your application of play in practice?

CE: I think the main influence is safety. This is a real barrier for me. It not only limited my decision-making on play, but also limited children as well. You know, parents are worried about that their children may be injured or hurt in the kindergarten. To me, the most influential factor is safety. We (teachers in the kindergarten) are afraid of taking children outside of classroom to play 'Hide and seek'. Very afraid of this. You know, the ground is big, a child may accidentally fall over, or has other accidents. Parents are over-care about things like this. This makes me feel afraid of implementing play and leads to other teachers feel afraid to let children play freely.

INT: In your opinion, what do parents concern?

CE: They usually concern about whether children encountered difficulties in kindergarten life and learning. They are not quite understand 'learning through play'. One parent said, my child has not learned a Chinese character in kindergarten yet. Actually, it is quite normal that children in stage 1 class cannot write Chinese characters, children in stage 3 may be able to write. Some parents think that children play in kindergarten. All play no learning. You know, sometimes, children may not necessary to say even though they have learned something in kindergarten. They may say that teacher CE took us to play xxx, rather than reporting what they have learned for today.

Appendix I

Excerpt of video transcription

Setting: It is outdoor playtime in the afternoon. Teacher AQ requests children to line up in the classroom and they are going to have a play in the playground. After all the children queue up, teacher AQ begins to introduce the game.

Class: ZK2

Time: 3.55pm

AQ: Children, we are going to play a game, it is a new game, named 'Little duck buy food'. The little duck does not know how to buy food, so she asks you all to help her buy food. (AQ holds a small plastic basket in her hand) As you can see, there are many cards in this basket, what cards can you see? (AQ shows the cards)

CH: Orange.

AQ: Yes, we have orange cards. Remember clearly, later we will play with them. What else can you see? (AQ show other cards)

CH: Fish, fish! Shrimp!

AQ: Yes, fish and shrimp. Anything else?

CH: Dumpling!

AQ: En, dumpling. And what is this? (AQ show another card)

CH: Grapes!

AQ: Well done! So we have orange, fish, shrimp, dumpling and grapes. We will play with them. Now follow me and go down to the playground.

Children go down stairs one by one, and line up again on the playground. Teacher AQ explains the play and rules.

AQ: I am going to divide you into four teams, each team has an empty basket in front of you, and I will put all these cards over there in a hola-hoop on the floor. Every time, only one of you from each team goes to there to buy food according to my request. If I say 'please buy five oranges', you have to find five orange cards and bring them back into the basket, understand?

CH: Yes!

AQ: Ok! Now you line up as four teams! Team one line up after Wen, team two line up after Haiyan, Team three line up after Lin, and team four line up after Yu. You can choose to line up behind one of them. (AQ helps with assigning groups)

AQ: Ok, ok! Listen to me. After you buy food and put them back in the basket, you have to go to the end of the team to queue up again, and the next one should go and buy food. Are you clear?

CH: Yes.

AQ: Ready? Go!

The game starts and teacher AQ moves around to check whether children 'buy the food' according to her requests.

15 minutes later, teacher AQ pauses the play and calculates the numbers of food with children.

AQ: Wow, every team has bought so many food, and team one has bought the most food, team one wins!

Children of team one cheer: Yeah!

AQ: Let's praise them! Good, good, very very good! (teacher AQ and all the children thumbs-up)

AQ: Now, we play this game a bit differently. I would like to ask two of you from each team hand in hand, and go over there to buy food and come back all by hopping! It is more challenging now. Can you do that?

CH: Yes, yes.

The game continues. Teacher AQ goes around and gives instructions every here and there. 27 minutes later, she ends the game and summarizes "you all are well done in the game! Some of you can find the correct food very quickly, but I still find some children grasp more cards than I requested, you have to count before you go back, right? Some of you hopped very quickly and did not take good care of your partner. You need to hold hands and hop together, and partners need to cooperate properly, right? So next time, you should listen carefully of the play rules. Ok, now please line up and follow me to go back to the classroom".

Appendix J

Excerpt of field notes

观察班级： MK3

观察时间： 09/11/2011

BC 老师告诉我，MK3 班采用蒙台梭利教学法，通常情况下（指没有其它活动占用时间的时候），每天上午从 9 点到 10 点，班上的孩子们会开展一小时的蒙氏操作。在这段时间里，每个孩子可以自由选择一项“工作”，在划分好的教室里的“工作区域”，包括美术区，感官区，数学区，科学区，日常生活区，进行单独“工作”，或和其他小伙伴一起合作“工作”。蒙氏活动结束后，就会有一个主体活动，这个活动是五大领域活动中的一个，（艺术、科学、语言、社会、健康）。每天的这个时段，活动都是不同的，从星期一到星期五，都安排了固定的相应的活动。这个活动结束后，就是孩子们上午的户外活动时间。

8:40，已经有大部分孩子吃完了早餐。他们送还餐具后就自主的在教师的不同活动区拿取操作材料，开始自由游戏。五个区域里有各种柜、架摆放活动材料。MK3 班上的活动材料非常丰富，每个孩子可以单独操作一套不同的材料。虽然同一套材料并没有很多数量，但是孩子们很少争抢，他们会拿自己感兴趣的，不一样的材料来操作。BC 老师告诉我，这些材料一大部分是幼儿园购买的，其中很多是蒙氏操作材料。还有一些是老师们在平时的生活中发现的，认为有意思的，孩子们会感兴趣的，方便操作的小玩具或生活材料。老师们会购买回来，随时增添到各个活动区域中。这些材料我发现有面粉，大米，豆类，筛子，碗，海绵，贝壳，胡萝卜，核桃，镊子，喷水瓶，抹布，锁头，钥匙，鸡蛋搅拌器，勺子，夹子等等很多有意思的材料。另外还有一些材料是老师和孩子们一起动手制作的，也放置在活动区域中给大家反复使用。班上的孩子们很习惯的在吃完餐后自行拿取材料，单独或结伴游戏。区域中的物品绝大部分都摆放在孩子们能够取到的位置，方便他们取放。剪刀被老师收放在有柜门的柜子里，这些柜子一般存放的是老师们的物品，平常孩子们一般不允许去开启。当我问及原因，BY 老师说，她们担心孩子们自由拿取剪刀会不安全，容易割伤自己或同伴，所以将剪刀收到柜子里。

我询问 BY 老师：这些是区域自选游戏吗？

BY：这些其实不是游戏，是餐后活动。是让孩子们用餐后自己看书或者下棋。我们通常将这些安静的活动放在餐后，点心后，游戏通常是在户外活动的时候玩。

下午的英语课上，孩子们玩了很多游戏，他们似乎早已玩过这些游戏，已经熟悉了游戏的玩法。但玩起来的时候，依然兴趣浓厚。英语课后，BY 老师组织了一个语言活动——认识反义词。这个活动结束后，孩子们并没有如期的开展游戏，而是帮老师粘贴照片，布置教室外的走廊。当我访谈 BY 问及原因时，她说：“这个星期四，我们幼儿园有一个‘家长开放日’，孩子们的家长会到幼儿园观看一日生活学习情况。所以，我们现在忙着准备一些照片布置在走廊上展示给他们看，照片太多了，每个孩子帮忙把自己的照片粘好，我们就会省很多时间。”

我：是不是幼儿园有大事件的时候，会占用一些游戏时间来做准备？

BY：对啊，孩子们也需要参与到大事件的准备中来。比如，有时候有其他幼儿园同事到我们幼儿园来参观交流，我们也会让孩子们参与环境布置，这样可能会占用一点游戏时间。

Appendix K

Categories of analyzing teacher-child interactions

Categories of interactions initiated by the teacher

Directing and guiding children's play and learning (DI)	The teacher comes to a child and gives direct or indirect guidance, such as instructing a child to perform in specific ways in play or suggesting him/her about play options, and inspiring a child to extend his/her thinking and learning in play.
Behaviour management (BM)	The teacher warns or redirects a child's behavior which she perceives to be inappropriate, such as when a child has rough or unsafe behavior or conflicts with peers or violates class rules and conventions.
Taking care (TC)	The teacher pays attention to a child's body situation and offers care to keep his/her body in a good condition, such as checking whether a child is sweating when playing, helping a child to take off their coat, rolling his/her sleeves, and putting a towel on his/her back when necessary.
Asking for help (AH)	The teacher asks and involves a child to help her with play related tasks and class routines, such as distributing and collecting play materials before and after the play.
Playing with a child (PC)	The teacher actively invites a child to play or becomes a partner to play with a child.
Offering help and support (HS)	The teacher actively offers him/her help when she find a child is facing difficulty physically or psychologically, showing frustration, or searching for additional play materials.
Asking for information (AI)	The teacher usually asks questions to get information about a child's intention of a behavior or chats with a child about his/her thinking and plan on something.
Praising and encouraging (PE)	The teacher usually offers praise or encouragement for a child's performance or accomplishment in play without altering or directing play.
Comforting (CO)	The teacher soothes a child when he/she is upset or experiences difficulties, such as a child falling over him/herself, or being hurt by something.

Categories of interactions initiated by the child

Asking for attention (AA)	A child usually creates some special ways to play to attract teacher's attention or shows achievement of play to a teacher to seek her praise or recognition.
Telling on someone	A child reports to a teacher that someone insults, aggresses him/her physically or verbally, or someone does not follow or transgresses the class

(TO)	or play rules. The child expects the teacher to manage or punish the other child.
Involving a teacher in play (IP)	A child usually invites or involves a teacher to join in play by asking or challenging her/him.
Asking for teachers' help (AH)	A child asks a teacher for help when he/she encounters difficulties or frustration in using play materials or finding a partner, or completing a task, or other problems that he/she cannot solve by him or herself, such as taking off pullover.
Stating and expressing ideas (SE)	A child usually expresses or describes to a teacher about some experience he/she had before which is quite impressive, or tells a teacher his/her personal ideas and feelings about something, or states something that have happened but may not necessarily relate to the play activity.
Requesting (RQ)	A child usually expresses his/her willingness to the teacher such as he wanted to play or not, or requests to play a specific role in a play.
Asking for information and permission (AP)	A child asks a teacher in order to confirm that he/she is doing the right thing, or get the teacher's permission to do something.
Expressing emotion (EE)	A child initiates warmth and physical contact with a teacher or tells the teacher that he/she likes her in order to express their love to the teacher, such as, hug a teacher.

Responses to interactions

Respond (R)	The interaction-initiator's intention was responded by the other. For example, if the teacher asked a boy to put a book on the shelf and the boy nodded and put the book on the shelf, this was coded as "respond".
Ignored /Non-respond (I/N)	The interaction-initiator's intention was ignored or non-responded by the other. For example, if a girl asked 'Where do I put this book?', and the teacher have no response to this, it was coded as "ignored/non-respond".

(The categories are partly adapted from Jingbo & Ericker, 2005.)

Appendix L

Analysis of teacher-child interactions in play in ZK3

Class	Setting	Initiator	No.	Content	Response
ZK3	919-1-TO-IP-SG	T	1-1	HS -1	R-1
		T	2-2	DI-1	R-2
		T	3-3	HS-2	R-3
		T	4-4	BM-1	R-4
		C	1-1	AT-1	R-1
		C	2-2	SE-1	R-2
	919-2-TO-IP-SG	T	1-5	BM-2	R-5
		T	2-6	BM-3	R-6
		T	3-7	BM-4	R-7
		T	4-8	DI-2	R-8
		T	5-9	BM-5	R-9
		C	1-3	IP- 1	R-3
		C	2-4	IP- 2	R-4
	920-1-TO-RP-PP	T	1-10	DI-3	R-10
		T	2-11	DI-4	R-11
		T	3-12	BM-6	R-12
		C	1-5	AA-1	R-5
		C	2-6	SE-2	I/N-C1
		C	3-7	RQ-1	I/N-C2
		C	4-8	RQ-2	I/N-C3
		C	5-9	TO-1	R-6
		C	6-10	AA-2	R-7
	920-2-CPT-IP-INP	T	1-13	HS-3	R-13
		T	2-14	HS-4	R-14
		T	3-15	DI-5	R-15
		T	4-16	HS-5	R-16
		C	1-11	AT-2	R-8
	921-1-CPT-IP-PP	T	1-17	HS-6	R-17
		T	2-18	BM-7	R-18
		T	3-19	DI-6	R-19
		T	4-20	BM-8	R-20
		T	5-21	BM-9	R-21
		T	6-22	TC-1	R-22
		T	7-23	HS-7	R-23
		T	8-24	DI-7	R-24
	921-2-TO-IP-SG	T	1-25	BM-10	R-25
		T	2-26	PE-1	R-26
		T	3-27	PC-1	R-27

		T	4-28	HS-8	R-28
		T	5-29	DI-8	R-29
		T	6-30	TC-2	R-30
		T	7-31	AH- 1	R-31
		T	8-32	AH- 2	R-32
	921-3-CPT-REP-PP	T	1-33	TC-3	R-33
		T	2-34	TC-4	I/N-T1
		T	3-35	PC-2	R-34
		C	1-12	SE-3	R-9
		C	2-13	IP- 3	R-10
		C	3-14	AA-3	R-11
	922-1-TO-REP-SG	T	1-36	BM-11	R-35
		T	2-37	TC-5	I/N-T2
		T	3-38	DI-9	R-36
		T	4-39	BM-12	R-37
		T	5-40	TC-6	R-38
		T	6-41	TC-7	R-39
	922-2-TO-IP-SG	T	1-42	TC-8	R-40
		T	2-43	AH-3	R-41
		T	3-44	AH-4	R-42
		T	4-45	AI-1	R-43
		T	5-46	CO-1	R-44
		C	1-15	AP-1	R-12
		C	2-16	IP-4	R-13
		C	3-17	IP-5	R-14
	923-1-TO-REP-SG	T	1-47	DI-10	R-45
	923-2-CPT-REP-CP	T	1-48	PC-3	R-46
		T	2-49	PC-4	R-47
		C	1-18	IP-6	R-15
		C	2-19	AA-4	R-16
		C	3-20	IP-7	R-17
		C	4-21	AA-5	R-18
	926-1-TO-REP-SG	T	1-50	TC-9	R-48
		T	2-51	CO-2	R-49
		T	3-52	PC-5	R-50
		C	1-22	IP-8	R-19
	927-1-CPT-REP-MP	C	1-23	AP-2	R-20
		C	2-24	IP-9	R-21

	927-2-TO-REP-SG	T	1-53	AI-2	R-51
	928-1-CPT-IP-INP	T	1-54	HS-9	R-52
		T	2-55	AI-3	R-53
		C	1-25	RQ-3	R-22
		C	2-26	AT-3	R-23
		C	3-27	TO-2	I/N-C4
	928-2-TO-IP-SG	T	1-56	HS-10	R-54
		T	2-57	AI-4	R-55
		T	3-58	PE-2	R-56
		T	4-59	PC-6	R-57
		T	5-60	PC-7	R-58
		C	1-28	AA-6	I/N-C5
In total		T	60	DI--- 10 BM--- 12 TC---9 AH---4 PC---7 HS---10 AI---4 PE---2 CO---2	R---58 I/N---2
		C	28	AA---6 TO---2 IP---9 AT--- 3 SE---3 RQ---3 AP---2	R---23 I/N---5