Spring 4-24-2015

Literacy-based Play and Emergent Comprehension of Kindergarten Students

Lina Ewell

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.umw.edu/student_research

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Ewell, Lina, "Literacy-based Play and Emergent Comprehension of Kindergarten Students" (2015). Student Research Submissions. 133.
https://scholar.umw.edu/student_research/133

This Education 530 Project is brought to you for free and open access by Eagle Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Research Submissions by an authorized administrator of Eagle Scholar. For more information, please contact archives@umw.edu.
Literacy-based Play and Emergent Comprehension of Kindergarten Students

Lina Ewell

University of Mary Washington
Abstract

Play is a very important element in a child’s literacy development. Play can provide meaningful experiences that promote literacy skills and strategies while also allowing opportunities for oral language development. In addition, students are given the opportunity for further exploration and discovery of both themselves and their surroundings. Learning is a social process and play, in turn, becomes a tool. My study contributes to previous research as I aim to gain a deeper understanding of how play affects literacy development. More specifically, I have examined how literacy-based play influences emergent comprehension skills of kindergarten students. The period of emergent comprehension is a crucial component towards a students’ literacy success. During this period, students gain exposure to necessary skills and strategies needed when entering into the world of reading. Through qualitative data collection, results indicate positive influences of literacy-based play on student application of comprehension skills and strategies.
Literacy-based Play and Emergent Comprehension in Kindergarten Students

When do students have time to play anymore? With the push to meet state reading requirements in the classroom, along with SMART goals and School Improvement Plans that are designed to raise student achievement, we see a lack of play in the early elementary school classroom. Play isn’t necessarily viewed as an academically directed activity but when children are involved in play, they enter a world where they gain a great deal of control, comfort, confidence, and satisfaction. Why should we limit these authentic experiences?

Play is a key element towards enriching a child’s literacy development. In the course of play, not only are students provided with settings that support literacy skills and strategies, but play also allows for students to take part in experiences that promote the development of oral language, as well as the opportunity for further examination and discovery of both themselves and their surroundings. More specifically, through literacy-based play, children are able to develop a relationship between their experiences and what they read.

Literacy development is a social process and through the engagement of play, children take part in experiences during which they develop skills closely associated with reading (Tsao, 2008). In this study, I will focus on the intersection of oral language practices and the development of comprehension skills. I will examine how literacy-based play influences emergent comprehension skills of kindergarten students. First, it is important to understand that the progression from nonreaders to readers is a critical time in a child’s literacy development. Mathews and Dooley (2009) define the term *emergent comprehension* as a “period when young children, prior to conventional reading, engage in meaningful experiences that stimulate the development and use of meaning-making strategies with potential to affect later reading comprehension” (p. 273). The early exposure of such strategies is essential when it comes to the
future development of a child’s literacy knowledge and skills, and these meaningful experiences can be provided through play.

Through the act of reading, readers bring their topical knowledge, previous experiences, learned strategies, and personally developed interests to the table. During the period of emergent comprehension, young children construct understandings of their world through personal interactions and the objects within their world (Mathews & Dooley, 2009). Providing early literacy experiences contributes greatly to a child’s foundational learning, and through literacy-based play, children still have the exposure to traditional print texts while developing a deeper understanding through social interactions. While students construct meaning through personal interactions, they gain a deeper understanding, which contributes to the foundation of comprehension development.

While students construct meaning through personal interactions, they gain a deeper understanding, which ultimately leads to enriched comprehension. Comprehension is essential towards literacy success. It is important to make meaning through expanding venues beyond books and print, and play is the perfect outlet in which to do so. McVicker (2007) supports the notion that a child’s active participation is essential to their literacy growth. The development of comprehension is influenced by cultural and social contexts. In our everyday lives, we engage in many activities that “promote literacy learning” (Miller, 1998). For example, comprehension is broadly expressed through gestures, physical movement, and verbal communication. For the purpose of this study, I will delve deeper into the relationship between comprehension and oral language. These processing systems needed for comprehension skills are developed during early life experiences (Mathews & Dooley, 2009). How do we provide such experiences in the classroom? Through s literacy-based play, students are provided with opportunities to exchange dialogue, which also contributes to the development of comprehension skills. Learning to read
relates similarly to the process of oral language development (Tsao, 2008). As Jalongo and Sobolak (2011) state, vocabulary learning is strongly supported through literacy-based play. During the early stages of language acquisition, oral language has the ability to predict literacy achievement. Reading development is supported through acting out stories that children have read or heard. Literacy-based play offers children a context to apply and use the skills and knowledge that they have already acquired (Miller, 1998). In order to integrate such skills and strategies, it is important to define the term literacy-based play.

As it pertains to the present study, literacy-based play is defined through opportunities in which children are introduced to literacy concepts and skills while interacting with their peers in an organized but relaxed environment. The setting in which literacy-based play occurs will support an atmosphere in which the emergence of literacy can be manifested and explored (Tsao, 2008). More specifically, through storybook-based curricula, there is a balance between structured and unstructured play. Storybook-based curriculum, is defined through centers or areas of the classroom that include places for reading the story, dramatizing the story, and engaging in sensory and motor play (Tsao, 2008). These opportunities “build a bridge between play and language” while at the same time providing the chance to demonstrate student learning (Jalongo & Sobolak, 2011, p. 425). My study will contribute to previous research as I aim to gain a deeper understanding of how play affects literacy development.

**Literature Review**

**Establishing Literacy-based Play**

Literacy-based play encompasses the integration of the environment, curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Barone & Mallette, 2013). When implementing literacy-based play, The National Research Council (1998) concludes that in order to provide both language and
literacy development through such instruction, teachers should provide enough time and space for play in the classroom in addition to the needed material resources.

Saracho (2001) states that through play, young children engage in a diverse set of experiences. Studies have provided evidence that these experiences promote the development of literacy skills (Roskos & Christie, 2001; Saracho & Spodek, 2006; Miller, 1998; and Tsao, 2008). According to Paley (2004), the power of play can be used as a learning tool. Play is viewed as spontaneous dialogue that encompasses many different literacy dimensions. Role-playing and storytelling unfold when children are given the opportunity to explore their creative minds. Play allows children to use their previous knowledge and experiences to construct new meaning of the world around them. Such diverse interactions prepare the foundation for students to make connections from their personal to academic life.

Twentieth century developmental psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978), identified play activities as the center of young students’ zones of proximal development, where new knowledge is gained through social interactions. Play gives children the opportunity to think creatively as they are able to communicate their understanding in a variety of ways. Vygotsky believed that providing children with cultural tools for developing, thinking, and creating (1978) was more important than learning specific knowledge and skills. Learning is much more than mirroring. Instead, Vygotsky (1978) believed learning involved a process in which learners created their own representations of new information. The development of a child's learning ability is influenced by how cultural tools are used to understand the world around them. Vygotsky also argued that (1978), the most important cultural tool was language because language is a mechanism for thinking. When children play, they use dialogue to think out loud in order to communicate their knowledge and understanding.

**Literacy-based Play and the Role of the Teacher**
When creating experiences for students that promote social interactions, it is important to discuss the role the teacher. When integrating literacy materials into a child’s play, effective teacher participation is essential (Massey, 2013; Tsao 2008). When the physical presence of print and literacy object/tools are integrated into play areas, literacy interactions among children occur spontaneously (Barone & Mallette, 2013). However, in order to foster an environment that supports play and literacy development, teachers must understand their purpose in the classroom. When incorporating props, pictures, stories, or dialogue that are aimed towards helping children understand concepts, Saracho (2004) states that the teacher is taking on the role of a promoter. In regards to storybook reading, teachers may integrate the use of puppets, encourage discussions, or facilitate the act of role-playing, while incorporating thought provoking questions to promote student comprehension (Saracho, 2004). When the integration of physical props is presented simultaneously with a piece of text, students gain a familiarity with the materials and are able to make connections between the props and the story that is introduced.

It is essential for the teacher to take part in storybook reading in addition to promoting the use of the accompanying props. However, during the actual play, teachers should provide little to no student direction because as Saracho (2004) claims students are able to easily integrate the themes and elements from storybook readings into their play. Young children enjoy constructing their own personal meaning from text, which McVicker (2007) states is an important precursor to comprehension. In a less structured environment, students are given the opportunity to construct meaning and understanding, which according to Welsch (2008), is the most fundamental purpose of literacy. Play that is based upon story-book reading has the ability to foster the development of critical comprehension skills while simultaneously developing students’ love of stories and their abilities to connect to books on a personal level” (Heath,
Being able to instill a joy for reading contributes greatly towards a child’s intrinsic motivation of their future literacy development.

**Early Literacy: The Link between Oral language Development and Comprehension**

Kindergarten marks a foundational period in a child’s literacy development. According to Dooley & Mathews (2009), emergent comprehension transpires through a young child’s active engagement of experiences that stimulate the representation of meaning-making strategies. Comprehension has come to be viewed as the essence of reading, which is essential for achievement in school as well as success in the world (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Massey (2013) states that “early childhood teachers have an important responsibility to promote oral language development for the students in their classrooms” and “to meet this challenge; teachers must intentionally create a language-rich environment in which children become active participants in classroom dialogue” (p. 125). The purposeful language interactions during pretend play require students to use their developing verbal skills (Welsch, 2008).

From gaining surface or literal understanding of what was read, to further analyzing and synthesizing information in order to develop a deeper meaning, Cohen & Cowen (2011) state that there are many levels of comprehending text. Durkin (1993) defines reading comprehension as the occurrence of intentional and purposeful thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between the text and the reader. Previous research on literacy-based play during the stages of early literacy indicate that providing children the experience to participate in social interactions that offer practice for verbal and narrative skills, will contribute to their development of reading comprehension (Gentile & Hoot, 1983). Overall, literacy-based play represents “a richer method of monitoring students understanding of stories” and “moves beyond
the typical questions and simple retellings” (Welsch, 2008, p.145). An environment designed for literacy-based play provides a different way for children to develop comprehension strategies.

One significant form of literacy-based play that significantly benefits children’s vocabulary development is through storybook-based curriculum (Tsao, 2008). In a previous study conducted by Schisler, Joseph, Konrad, & Alber-Morgan (2010), oral retellings were found to be an efficient strategy towards the development of comprehension. Through the engagement of oral retellings, students have the opportunity to self-monitor their understanding of a text. This strategy holds students accountable for what they remember. Previous findings also indicate that oral retellings are a reliable way to evaluate a student’s comprehension of a text. The use of props provides children the opportunity to link real objects to the text and to provide concrete tools for story retelling and linking to world experiences. In regards to the methodological design, researchers controlled the amount of maximum time students were allowed to retell a piece of text.

Findings from a study conducted by Wasik & Bond (2006) show that children who were provided with opportunities for literacy development in an interactive environment “learned more book-related vocabulary compared with children who were exposed to just the books”. The incorporation of story props “helped the vocabulary words come alive for the children” as the props were “very interesting and inviting to the children”. By “coupling the storybook experience with opportunities to expand the learning through play,” students are able to remain actively engaged while simultaneously making connections to a piece of text (Massey, 2013, p. 129). Student directed interactions during literacy-based with the integration of literacy-based props, allow students the opportunity to “assume roles directly related to the characters, actions, setting, language, or any theme’s found in children’s literature” (Welsch, 2008, p. 139).
Literacy-based play provides an outlet for the exploration of many different literacy concepts and skills.

Storybook-based curriculum was designed to promote language and pre-literacy development for children 2-6 years old (Linder, 1999; Tsao, 2008). Through this model, students become familiar with traditional print and actively participate in activities that provide opportunities for cognitive, language, social, and motor development (Linder, 1999). This curriculum provides teachers with an entire school year of activities but unfortunately, this is not a realistic opportunity for all. Zeece (2008) argues the fact that a collection of book-related props, toys, or other materials used during literacy-based play “do not need to be elaborate or expensive to provide rich reading experiences. Commercially produced materials are not necessarily the only way to capture a child’s imagination” (p. 277). It is important to find economical ways to provide students with materials that help to create these rich experiences within the classroom setting. This is an essential component within the present study.

**Method**

**Participants**

The study took place in a school located in the Northern Virginia area. Participants were selected from a kindergarten classroom consisting of 11 girls and 11 boys. Their ages ranged from 5-6 years old. Six students were identified as English Language Learners and received additional services. 6 students were identified as Caucasian, 8 as were identified as Black, and 8 were identified as Hispanic. Out of the 22 students, a total of 10 students provided their full participation in the study. As a stipulation of the study, participants needed to give their assent as well as receive parental consent in order to participate.

**Procedure**
When integrating literacy-based play into the classroom, I adapted Serafini’s (2014) curricular framework, which is organized through three different phases. These phases are designed to create a shift in responsibility from teacher to student. The first phase is exposure. As a participant observer, I exposed students to a new book at the beginning of each week. Day 1 one would consist of a teacher read aloud without any integration of physical props. This gave students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the text. When appropriate, I would interject by asking questions during the reading or would facilitate small class discussions for the purpose of developing a better understanding of the text. I also incorporated comprehension questions into morning meeting that provided a smooth transition into many great discussions.

The second phase in Serafini’s (2014) curricular framework is exploration. On Day 2, as a participant observer, I read the text aloud for a second time, but this time, I integrated the story props. During the read aloud, I called on students to come to the front of the class to take part in a model exploration of the story props. Students participated in an interactive read aloud as they took on roles of certain characters within the text. Introducing the story props as part of whole group instruction provided a great opportunity for students to see how the props could be integrated into the telling of the story. Every student would get the chance to explore with the story props during Serafini’s third phase- engagement.

On Day 3, 4, and 5, students had the opportunity to engage in literacy-based play. Students had access to all of the story props that were placed inside of a “prop box” (See Figure 1). Opportunity for literacy-based play was integrated into rotating stations during reader’s workshop. Before the implementation of the literacy-based play station, students would participate at an author studies station where they were given a collection of books to read and look through from the author of the week (See Figure 2). Students, in groups of three or four, were allotted approximately 10 minutes of literacy-based play three times a week (See Figure 3).
I compiled field notes as I observed student engagement in literacy-based play. In addition, students were audio taped and their dialogue was later transcribed and coded for themes of comprehension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduce the story through a teacher read aloud. Ask questions during reading to help students develop a better understanding of the text.</td>
<td>Introduce story props while rereading the story through a teacher read aloud. Invite students to model the use of props.</td>
<td>Allow students to take part in literacy-based play during reader’s workshop centers. Students may use props located in the “prop box”.</td>
<td>Allow students to take part in literacy-based play during readers workshop centers. Students may use props located in the “prop box”.</td>
<td>Allow students to take part in literacy-based play during readers workshop centers. Students may use props located in the “prop box”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Materials**

The selection criterion for appropriate books and related story props intended for literacy-based play were adapted from Welsch (2008) and Zeece (2008). Books and selected story props must be age appropriate and inviting to children. It is important that books used for literacy-based play include interesting or relatable characters along with a strong story plot. It is also important to provide students with enough story props so that every student participating at the station has a prop to play with.

**Week One.** *The Duckling Gets a Cookie* by Mo Willems. This author was recommended by the classroom teacher and was incorporated into planned instruction as part of an author studies unit. This specific book was chosen because it was a great way to introduce the literacy-based play station. Props were simple yet engaging. Props included a stuffed animal duckling purchased at a bookstore, a stuffed animal pigeon purchased at a bookstore, two cookies that I made from cardboard and pompoms, and dialogue sticks made from laminated construction paper that were glued onto wooden sticks (See Figure 4).
Week Two. *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* by James Marshall. This author was recommended by the classroom teacher, integrated into planned instruction as part of an author studies unit, and also recommended by Welsch (2008). The presence of objects is an integral part of the plot and allow for many different story props. Props included three bowls (granulated in size) purchased at the dollar store, a container filled with cotton balls labeled “porridge” created with materials from home, three classroom chairs (granulated in size), and different colored towels borrowed from home (See Figure 5).

Week Three. *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes. This author was recommended by the classroom teacher and was also integrated into planned instruction as part of an author studies unit. This specific book was chosen because the plot allows for the integration of multiple story props. This book also provided a more complex plot with a greater selection of characters for students to portray. Props included two child size buttoned shirts purchased at a thrift store, two clip on ties purchased at a thrift store, a purple purse purchased at a thrift store, two pairs of glasses (frames only) purchased at a dollar store, plastic gold coins purchased at a dollar store, a bag of cheese snacks (orange math unifix cubes) borrowed from the classroom, and photocopied letters from the story (See Figure 6).

Week Four. *A Birthday for a Cow!* by Jan Thomas. This book was recommended by Zeece (2008) who evaluates the importance of incorporating appropriate texts into literacy-based play. *A Birthday for Cow!* was also integrated into an author studies unit. This story provides students with relatable and real world props. Props include two child sized aprons, a whisk, a mixing spoon, a mixing bowl, candles, plastic eggs in an egg carton, a decorated Styrofoam cake, and a turnip made of felt (See Figure 7). All props were either borrowed from my home or hand-made.
Week Five. Arthur Writes A Story by Marc Brown. This book was selected because of the relatable plot and was integrated into an author studies unit. Props included a small table, a desk lamp, pencils and a pencil holder, a pad of paper, a stuffed animal elephant and a stuffed animal dog (See Figure 8). The stuffed animals were the only purchases made for this story.

**Results**

The data collected exemplified a variety of comprehension skills and strategies that students applied when taking part in literacy-based play. A common comprehension skill discovered over the five-week period was the identification of story structure. Observations and transcribed dialogue support the notion that students were quick to assign characters amongst each other, implement story props to create the setting, and interact together to convey plot. As shown in Table 1 and Table 3, story plot was demonstrated at times through oral retellings. In *The Duckling Gets a Cookie!* by Mo Willems and *A Birthday for Cow* by Jan Thomas, students exchanged many fragments of dialogue that were taken directly from the story. In addition to oral retellings, findings provide evidence of other comprehension skills and strategies that were demonstrated during literacy-based play. These include applications of cause and effect, organizing sequences of events, and summarizing main ideas.

Cause and effect supported through literacy-based play was found evident during the week of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (see Table 2). Through literacy-based play, students demonstrated the cause and effect of Goldilocks taking a short cut through the woods which led her to the Bears’ home, the porridge being too hot for the Bears to eat which resulted in them leaving their house, and Goldilocks sitting in Baby Bear’s chair then it to breaking into pieces. Ordering sequences of events supported through literacy-based play was found evident during the week of *A Birthday for Cow* by Jan Thomas (see Table 3). When combining the ingredients to make a birthday cake, students listed step-by-step directions of what to do. From the
beginning to the end, the sequences of events were taken directly from the story. Summarizing main ideas, supported through literacy-based play, was found evident during the week of Lilly’s *Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes (see Table 4) and the week of *Arthur Writes a Story* by Marc Brown (see Table 5). At times, students exchanged short dialogue that condensed important events of the story’s plot. For example, during the week of Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes, a student summarized nine pages of the story into two sentences (See Table 4).

Another finding that supports the influence of emergent comprehension during literacy-based play was the text-to-self connections made by a few of the students. During the week of *A Birthday for a Cow* by Jan Thomas, one student related to the story by talking about her own personal excitement of having a birthday (see Table 2). Students also acknowledged their connection to characters during the week of *Arthur Writes a Story* by Marc Brown by relating to the experiences of writing and sharing their own stories in class (see Table 5).

Findings also support the role of oral language as an important tool for play. Allowing students the opportunity to communicate and interact with each other through literacy-based play provided rich application of oral language skills. Observations and transcribed dialogue of literacy-based play help to support the ways in which students verbally communicate their thoughts and ideas with another. Oral language is enriched through the conversations and the verbalized connections through student interaction with peers. Students engage in an environment where they are able to learn from each other and at the same time, develop stronger oral language skills.

**Discussion**

The statewide emphasis on standards-based education in public schools has brought much trepidation into our classrooms. Concerned educators feel as though the pressure to meet explicit expectations of curriculum content and instructional practices limit their ability to
provide more opportunities for meaningful and engaging learning experiences (Goldstein & Baum, 2014). Incidentally, that is what makes literacy-based play such an enriching and unique experience. Literacy-based play encompasses both the integration of curriculum content and application of instructional practices while at the same time provides students with meaningful and engaging learning opportunities.

The present study was prompted by a previous research study conducted by Welsch in 2008 that examined the effects of implementing book-related play into two preschool classrooms. My findings supported the notion that through book-related play, students were able to connect and interact with books both within and beyond the text. Criteria used to examine the influences of play as part of Welsch’s study were adapted from a much similar research study conducted by Kathleen Rosko in 1990. Results from Welsch’s study indicated that through book-related play, students made references to props, used characters names, engaged in reenactments, and showed evidence of narrative structure through planning and directing. It is important to note that these elements were all evident in the present study as well. However, the concept of literacy-based play discussed in the present study is distinguishable from prior studies as it expands upon previous findings by closely examining student application of specific comprehension skills and strategies influenced by play.

**Developing Effective Readers: The Role of Comprehension**

When looking at the bigger picture, it takes a lot of time, patience, effort, and practice to fully develop young children into effective readers. Effective readers must attain strong skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. With that in mind, comprehension alone is a multifaceted component consisting of various elements and for many, becomes the most difficult to skill to develop (Broek, Helder, and Karlsson, 2014). Bringing awareness to this issue is very important because the ability to understand, interpret, and connect
PLAY AND EMERGENT COMPREHENSION

Consequently, that is why it is crucial for students during the period of emergent comprehension to have purposeful exposure to many literacy tools as they prepare to enter into the world of reading. It is also important to ensure plenty of opportunities for student participation provided through a diverse set of meaningful experiences fueled towards the “development and use of meaning-making strategies with potential to affect later reading comprehension” (Mathews & Dooley, 2009, p. 273). Previous research supports the notion that reading comprehension and play both exemplify interactive processes (Dooley & Mathews, 2009). Previous studies also show that when reading comprehension and play coincide, they have the ability to form rich learning experiences within our classrooms (Saracho & Spodek, 2006). The present findings support this notion as well.

**Literacy-based Play and the Social World**

Literacy-based play fosters a safe, engaging, and meaningful environment. It provides an environment that allows students the opportunity to apply comprehension skills and strategies through the exploration of literature. Previous research findings support the notion that play “relates well to a child’s intellectual and social world” (Saracho, 2001). The triangulation of results within the present study support that during literacy-based play, students instinctively apply their knowledge of comprehension skills and strategies through social interactions with peers. In addition, these social interactions provided during literacy-based play offer students with meaningful settings that stimulate the application and development of oral language skills. Previous research conducted by Tracy Bradfield et. al (2014) support the notion that the development of oral language strongly contributes towards future literacy success. Literacy-based play encompasses a variety of enriching learning opportunities.
Janet Moyles states that “play empowers a child to be in tune with the whole self and the creative self” which is why children feel most comfort and confidence within a play setting (Moyles, 2010, p. 109). The integration of literacy-based play provides students with a purposeful opportunity for application of real world literacy tools while simultaneously creating a welcoming and enjoyable space for young students to explore the text, themselves, and the world around them. Effectively implementing literacy-based play into everyday instruction requires strategic planning, but as a result it should be simple, inexpensive, and easy to manage.

Finding Time For Literacy-based Play

School districts create curriculum maps and pacing guides which provide educators with information of when particular content standards should be taught and assessed throughout the year. In order to keep up with the rigorous curriculum timeline, the jam-packed daily schedule, and the many unexpected occurrences that take place in an average elementary school classroom, some may admit to being a bit skeptical when finding time for play. Previous research studies discuss the many ways in which to implement play into the classroom curriculum. Suggestions for implementation range from redesigning classrooms accommodate enough space for multiple play centers, recommending pre-packaged programs and materials, encouraging activities that require extreme parent involvement, and providing possible ways to modify daily classroom schedules (Miller, 1998; Linder, 1999; Paley, 2004; Tsao, 2008). Unfortunately, when considering factors such as space, time, and money, the plan for implementation becomes less practical.

In the present study, literacy-based play was implemented into a kindergarten classroom with complete practicality in mind. Preparation for data collection began in the middle of the school year, which meant that all routines and procedures had already been established. Teacher read-alouds, which were a pre-existing part of every morning, allowed time for teacher-led
exposure and exploration of the weekly story and accompanying prop box, the facilitation of meaningful whole-group discussions, and introduction or review of comprehension skills and strategies taken directly from the kindergarten pacing guide. The Language Arts block consisted of rotating literacy stations, which was a perfect place to integrate time for literacy-based play. During literacy rotations, the literacy-based play station became interchangeable with the pre-existing authors studies station creating minimal disruption to the flow of the daily schedule. Students adapted well to these changes. Due to inclement weather, many missed school days interfered with the five-week period of data collection. As a result, two prop boxes were introduced to students much earlier than planned. In these instances, students were invited to engage in literacy-based play after only the second teacher read-aloud first day of prop box exposure. These adjustments were made to ensure that students were able to participate in literacy-based play at least twice a week before introducing the next author, story, and accompanying prop box. Students were unaffected by these changes which helps to demonstrate the versatility within literacy-based play. Literacy-based play can be adjusted in order to fit the needs of any classroom environment.

**Conclusion**

Following the final week of data collection, I gathered the students together to facilitate a quick and informal reflection session. Students were eager to share their experiences at the literacy-based play station. One student said that he liked being able to set up the Bears’ home during the week of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* by James Marshall. Another student said that she loved *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes because Lilly was her favorite character and a final student mentioned his enjoyment of holding the talking bubbles above his head when becoming the characters from *The Duckling Gets A Cookie!*? by Mo Willems. When asked if there was anything a student wanted to change about their experience, only one student raised his
hand and suggested the addition of a calendar to the prop box for *A Birthday for Cow!* by Jan Thomas. This suggestion sparked a great implication for future research.

It may be interesting to examine the effects of allowing students to compile a list of their own story props. Having students take part in the creation and collection of story props could prompt new interpretations and connections to the text. Future research could also expand upon the present study by adapting literacy-based play for upper grade levels while promoting the application of more complex comprehension skills and strategies such as understanding point of view and identifying figurative language. A final implication for future research could closely examine the influences of the oral language component during literacy-based play on the learning development of English Language Learners in the classroom. The beauty of literacy-based play lies within its ability to provide students with engaging and meaningful experiences while supporting their development towards literacy success.
References


Literature Cited


Figure 1. Example Prop Box. This figure illustrates how prop boxes were presented to the students. Each prop box displayed the title and author of the story.

Figure 2. Author Studies Station. This figure illustrates the table used for the Author Studies station (left) along with the bin of selected books (right). As a new author was introduced each week, students were exposed to a new selection of books.
Figure 3. The Literacy-based Play Station. This figure illustrates the transition from the Author Studies station to the Literacy-based Play station. Interlocking maps were purchased from a dollar store for students to play on. The tables originally used for the Author Studies station were moved towards the wall and the prop box is shown next to the mat (upper left).
Figure 4. Story props for *Goldilocks and The Three Bears* by James Marshall.

Figure 5. Story props for *The Duckling Gets a Cookie!* by Mo Willems.
Figure 6. Story props for *A Birthday for Cow!* by Jan Thomas.

Figure 7. Story props for *Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes.
Figure 8. Story props for *Arthur Writes a Story* by Marc Brown.
Table 1

*Week One: A Duckling Gets a Cookie!? by Mo Willems*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehension Skill/Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story Structure</td>
<td>Student A: I’m going to be this one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student B: I’ll have this one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student C: I’ll get the cookie. With no nuts first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Retell</td>
<td>Student A: Hello, may I please have a cookie?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thank you. Your turn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student B: Hey, where did you get that cookie?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student A: I asked for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student B: You got it from asking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student A: Politely.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Comprehension skills and strategies were composed from a Kindergarten Language Arts Curriculum Pacing Guide provided by the district of where I conducted my action research.
Table 2

*Week Two: Goldilocks and the Three Bears retold by James Marshall*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehension Skill/Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Story Structure**         | Student A: I want to be Goldilocks first.  
Student B: I’ll be the Mama Bear.  
Student C: I’ll be the Papa Bear. I can be the Baby Bear too.  
Student A: Let’s put the porridge into the bowls.  
Student B: We got to make the Bears bed, too. |
| **Cause and Effect**         | Student A: I’m going to go get some berries. Oh, there’s a shortcut! La, la, la, la, la, Where am I?  
Student A: Ouch! The porridge is too hot. Let’s go outside so the porridge can cool.  
Student A: Oh, here are bowls of porridge. I want to eat the big one first. Oh, this one is way too hot. The next one is way too cold but here is the little one and it just right.  
Student A: I’m going to sit in this chair. Oh no! It broke into smithereens! |
| **Sequence of Events**       | Student A: After you eat the porridge, then you try the big bed, the middle, and then you try that one.  
Student B: And then we come home and find you. |

Note. Comprehension skills and strategies were composed from a Kindergarten Language Arts Curriculum Pacing Guide provided by the district of where I conducted my action research.
### Week Three: *A Birthday for Cow! by Jan Thomas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehension Skill/Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Story Structure**         | Student A: Pig and Mouse are going to make the best birthday cake ever!  
Student B: Who is going to be Cow? You can help, Amy (pseudonym). You are cow.  
Student C: No, Cow doesn’t help.  
Student A: Amy (pseudonym), you can’t help because you’re Cow.  

Student A: You’re not playing your part, you need to be Duck.  

Student A: I’m Mouse and you’re Pig.  

Student A: You don’t like being Duck!? Duck is funny.  
Student B: I’m going to be Cow.  |
| **Oral Retell**              | Student A: It’s Cow’s Birthday!  
Student B: Come on let’s go! We’re going to make a cake.  

Student A: A turnip!  
Student B: No Duck! Not a turnip!  

Student A: Can a turnip decorate it?  
Student B: No, Duck! Candles go in Duck!  |
| **Sequence of Events**       | Student A: We need to get the mixing bowl. Then we put the flour, then we put the sugar, and then put the eggs.  |
| **Making Connections**       | Student A: I was excited when it was my birthday.  

Student A: Here is the recipe book. We need to see how we make the cake.  |

*Note. Comprehension skills and strategies were composed from a Kindergarten Language Arts Curriculum Pacing Guide provided by the district of where I conducted my action research.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehension Skill/Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Story Structure**         | Student A: You’re the teacher, Mr. Slinger.  
                             | Student B: I want to be Lilly.  
                             | Student C: I am the classmate.  
                             | Student A: It’s sharing time!  
                             | Student B: Pretend you took [my purse] away. |
| **Summarize**               | Student A: I gave Mr. Slinger a bad note! I gave Mr. Slinger a bad note!  
                             | Student B: Make it better by writing him a nice note and bring a snack for him. |

Note. Comprehension skills and strategies were composed from a Kindergarten Language Arts Curriculum Pacing Guide provided by the district of where I conducted my action research.
Table 5  

*Week Five: *Arthur Writes a Story* by Marc Brown*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehension Skill/Strategy</th>
<th>Sample Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Story Structure** | Student A: No one has the puppy yet. The puppy is just running around the house.  
Student A: I want to be Arthur.  
Student B: I’m going to be D.W. |
| **Summarize** | Student A: Alex (pseudonym), get the book for me. How I got my puppy, Pal. I’m going to write it all down.  
Student A: Now we have to share our stories to the class. |
| **Making Connections** | Student A: We can make up our own story.  
Student A: We’re going to write on it. We can actually write on it. It’s real paper, like when we write in our journals. |

Note. Comprehension skills and strategies were composed from a Kindergarten Language Arts Curriculum Pacing Guide provided by the district of where I conducted my action research.