

Participatory action research to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R

T Myburgh

 orcid.org/0000-0002-7388-3890

Dissertation accepted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree *Masters of Education in Special Needs* at the North-West University

Supervisor: Prof M Koen

Co-Supervisor: Dr I Payne-Van Staden

Graduation: May 2023

Student number: 33344175

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to all the children that I have had the privilege to teach and to all the future children that will be in my class. You motivate me to be the absolute best teacher that I can possibly be and you deserve nothing but the best.

I would like to thank my mom, Corné, and dad, Carel, for their support in multiple ways throughout this journey. Thank you for all the motivation and inspiration, words can't express my appreciation for you. I thank my husband, Morné, for all his support and love. Thank you for always encouraging and believing in me, this would have not been possible without your faith in me. With a support system like mine, anything is possible, no matter the circumstances.

To my mentors, Professor Mariëtte Koen and Doctor Isabel Payne Van-Staden, thank you for all the support and guidance you have given me throughout this study. Your patience and ability to guide are admirable and I appreciate all of your input.

My final word of appreciation goes to all the participants that made this study possible. Thank you for sharing your time and knowledge in order to make a success of this study.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to collaboratively work with Grade R teachers to gain insight into their experiences of the play-based approach in their classrooms and identify challenges they face when implementing the approach. The CAPS document (2011) clearly states that play should be the preferred teaching strategy in Grade R, but literature shows that play is being neglected and reduced in Grade R classrooms.

The theoretical framework that guided this study is that of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978). Throughout this study, the focus is on the benefits play has to offer for child development and the different types of play that need to be introduced to ensure that holistic development takes place. I chose to follow a qualitative research approach, because of the rich data it has to offer and how it gives the opportunity to work on a personal level with the participants. The paradigm most suited for this study was the critical transformative paradigm, because of its ability to change the way of thinking and to seek improvement and new ideas on the use of the play-based approach.

The PAR research design was used to answer the research questions during two cycles:

Primary question

How can PAR be used to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R classrooms?

Sub-questions

Cycle one

- *What are teachers' experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R?*

Cycle two

- *How can teachers improve their use of a play-based approach in Grade R?*
- *What guidelines can be derived from the findings to foster play-based learning in Grade R?*

It was challenging to identify participants to join this study, due to the COVID-19 regulations and all of its consequences that negatively impacted the process of my study. The first three independent schools that I identified in 2019 had to withdraw due to the financial and logistical burdens of COVID-19. The recruitment process had to start all over again and I obtained permission from the Department of Basic Education of Gauteng to recruit participants in public schools from February 2020. Six participants from two different primary schools in Pretoria were purposively selected. All meetings had to take place online due to the governmental lockdown regulations. The data-generating

techniques – which included recorded group discussions, visual methods, and field notes – allowed the research group to identify themes through thematic content analysis.

The three main themes that were identified through thematic content analysis included:

- Theme 1: Teachers experience the play-based approach as positive.
- Theme 2: Teachers experience challenges when implementing the play-based approach.
- Theme 3: Guidelines identified to foster the play-based approach.

The quality criteria of Herr and Anderson (2014) were used to ensure validity and trustworthiness and focused on outcome validity, process validity, democratic validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity.

The findings of the study showed that the play-based approach is experienced as a joyful teaching strategy by the children and teachers. The participants were aware of the benefits the play-based approach has to offer and support it as a holistic development strategy. Some challenges that the teachers experienced are a lack of knowledge and skills they and the parents have with the play-based approach, accompanied by the expectations the curriculum has with the available time and resources. It also became evident that formal work also plays a big role in Grade R classrooms even though the CAPS (2011) stated that play should be the main teaching strategy. The challenges identified in the data led us to develop guidelines in order to foster the play-based approach in Grade R. The guidelines included the collaboration with teachers and the DBE to expand their knowledge of the play-based approach, the implementation of different play resources and integrating different types of play in accordance with the CAPS (2011).

Keywords: CAPS, Grade R, Grade R teachers, holistic development, play, play-based approach, teaching strategy, Vygotsky's ZPD

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie was om saam met graad R-onderwysers te werk om insig te verkry in hul ervarings van die spelgebaseerde benadering (play-based approach) in hul klaskamers en om uitdagings te identifiseer wat hulle in die gesig staar wanneer hulle hierdie benadering implementeer. Die KABV-dokument (2011) (CAPS document) stel dit duidelik dat speel die voorkeuronderrigstrategie in graad R moet wees, maar die literatuur toon dat speel in graad R-klaskamers afgeskeep en verminder word.

Die teoretiese raamwerk wat hierdie studie gelei het, is dié van Vygotsky se Zone van Proksimale Ontwikkeling (1978) (zone of proximal development). Regdeur hierdie studie word daar gefokus op die voordele wat speel vir kinderonwikkeling kan bied en die verskillende tipes speel wat geïmplimenteer moet word om te verseker dat holistiese ontwikkeling plaasvind. Ek het gekies om 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering te volg, vanweë die ryk data wat dit bied en hoe dit die geleentheid bied om op 'n persoonlike vlak met die deelnemers te werk. Die paradigma wat die meeste geskik is vir hierdie studie was die kritiese transformatiewe paradigma, vanweë sy vermoë om die manier van dink te verander en om verbetering en nuwe idees oor die gebruik van die spelgebaseerde benadering te skep.

Die deelnemende aksie navorsing- of DAN-ontwerp (PAR design) is gebruik om die navorsingsvrae gedurende twee siklusse te beantwoord:

Primêre vraag

Hoe kan DAN gebruik word om spelgebaseerde onderrigstrategieë in graad R-klaskamers te bevorder?

Sub-vrae

Siklus een

- *Wat is onderwysers se ervarings van die gebruik van 'n spelgebaseerde benadering in graad R?*

Siklus twee

- *Hoe kan onderwysers hul gebruik van 'n spelgebaseerde benadering in graad R verbeter?*
- *Watter riglyne kan uit die bevindinge afgelei word om spelgebaseerde leer in graad R te bevorder?*

Dit was uitdagend om deelnemers te identifiseer om by hierdie studie aan te sluit, weens die COVID-19-regulasies en al die gevolge daarvan wat die proses van my studie negatief beïnvloed het. Die

eerste drie onafhanklike skole wat ek in 2019 geïdentifiseer het, moes onttrek weens die finansiële en logistieke laste van COVID-19. Die werwingsproses moes van voor af begin en ek het toestemming van die Departement van Basiese Onderwys van Gauteng gekry om vanaf Februarie 2020 deelnemers in openbare skole te werf. Ses deelnemers van twee verskillende laerskole in Pretoria is doelbewus gekies. Alle vergaderings moes aanlyn plaasvind weens die regering se inperkingsregulasies. Die datagenererende tegnieke – wat aangetekende groepsbesprekings, visuele metodes en veldnotas ingesluit het – het die navorsingsgroep in staat gestel om temas deur middel van tematiese inhoudontleding te identifiseer.

Die drie hooftemas wat deur tematiese inhoudontleding geïdentifiseer is, sluit in:

- Tema 1: Onderwysers ervaar die spelgebaseerde benadering as positief.
- Tema 2: Onderwysers ervaar uitdagings wanneer hulle die spelgebaseerde benadering implementeer.
- Tema 3: Riglyne is geïdentifiseer om die spelgebaseerde benadering te bevorder.

Die kwaliteitskriteria van Herr en Anderson (2014) is gebruik om geldigheid en betroubaarheid te verseker en het gefokus op uitkomstgeldigheid, prosesgeldigheid, demokratiese geldigheid, katalitiese geldigheid en dialogiese geldigheid.

Die bevindinge van die studie het getoon dat die spelgebaseerde benadering as 'n vreugdevolle onderrigstrategie deur die kinders en onderwysers ervaar word. Die deelnemers was bewus van die voordele wat die spelgebaseerde benadering bied en ondersteun dit as 'n holistiese ontwikkelingsstrategie. Sommige uitdagings wat die onderwysers ervaar het, is 'n gebrek aan kennis en vaardighede wat hulle en die ouers met die spelgebaseerde benadering het, gepaardgaande met die verwagtinge wat die kurrikulum met die beskikbare tyd en hulpbronne het. Dit het ook duidelik geword dat formele werk ook 'n groot rol in graad R-klaskamers speel al het die KABV (2011) gesê dat speel die hoofonderrigstrategie moet wees. Die uitdagings wat in die data geïdentifiseer is, het daartoe gelei dat ons riglyne ontwikkel het om die spelgebaseerde benadering in graad R te bevorder. Die riglyne het die samewerking met onderwysers en die DBO ingesluit om hul kennis van die spelgebaseerde benadering, die implementering van verskillende speel-hulpbronne en ook die integrasie van verskillende tipes speel in ooreenstemming met die KABV (2011) uit te brei.

Sleutelwoorde: Graad R, Graad R onderwyser, holistiese ontwikkeling, KABV, onderwys strategieë, speel, spelgebaseerde benadering, Vygotsky se ZPO

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS: Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements

DBE: Department of Basic Education

ECD: Early Childhood Development

PAR: Participatory Action Research

MRTEQ: Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications

NQF: National Qualifications Framework

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
OPSOMMING	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiv
CHAPTER ONE - BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW	1
1.1 Introduction and rationale for the study	1
1.2 Problem statement	4
1.3 Purpose of the study	5
1.3.1 Research questions	5
1.3.1.1 Primary question	5
1.3.1.2 Research sub-questions.....	5
1.4. Elucidation of concepts.....	6
1.4.1 Grade R teacher.....	6
1.4.2 Grade R.....	6
1.4.3 Play-based learning	6
1.4.4 Teaching strategies	6
1.5 Theoretical framework.....	7
1.6 Research methodology.....	8
1.6.1 Paradigm informing the study.....	8
1.6.2 Epistemological assumptions.....	9
1.6.3 Ontological assumptions.....	10
1.6.4 Axiological assumptions.....	10
1.7 Participatory action research (PAR) as research design.....	10

1.7.1 Cyclical process	11
1.7.2 Cycles in this study	12
1.8 Research methods	13
1.8.1 Site and recruitment of participants	13
1.9 Data generation.....	14
1.9.1 Recorded group discussions.....	14
1.9.2 Visual methods.....	15
1.9.3 Field notes.....	15
1.9.4 Reflective diaries.....	16
1.10 Data management	16
1.11 Data analysis	16
1.12 Quality criteria for PAR.....	17
1.13 Ethical considerations.....	18
1.14 Potential contribution of the study.....	18
1.15 Division of chapters	18
1.16 Summary	19
CHAPTER TWO - FOSTERING OF THE PLAY-BASED APPROACH IN THE GRADE R CLASSROOM.....	21
2.1 Introduction	21
2.2 What is play?	22
2.2.1 Types of play.....	23
2.3 The play-based approach	25
2.3.1 What is the play-based approach?.....	25
2.3.2 The importance of the play-based approach in Grade R	28
2.4 Theoretical framework.....	29
2.5 Advantages of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom.....	30
2.5.1 Cognitive and academic development.....	31
2.5.2 Physical development.....	32

2.5.3 Social and emotional development	33
2.6 Factors influencing play in the Grade R classroom.....	33
2.6.1 Teachers’ perceptions of play-based strategies.....	33
2.6.2 Misconceptions around play as a teaching strategy	34
2.6.3 Social context and diversity	35
2.6.4 Curricula and policies.....	36
2.6.5 Influence of COVID-19 on play	37
2.7 Summary	38
CHAPTER THREE - THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	39
3.1 Introduction	39
3.2 Purpose of research	39
3.2.1 Primary research question.....	40
3.2.2 Research sub-questions	40
3.3 Research methodology	40
3.3.1 Research paradigm	41
3.3.1.1 Epistemological assumptions.....	42
3.3.1.2 Ontological assumptions.....	42
3.3.1.3 Axiological assumptions.....	43
3.3.2 Research design.....	43
3.3.2.1 Cycle One of the research.....	45
3.3.2.2 Cycle Two of the research	46
3.4 Research methods	46
3.4.1 Site and recruitment	46
3.4.2 Data generation methods	48
3.4.2.1 Recorded group discussions.....	48
3.4.2.2 Visual methods.....	50
3.4.2.3 Field notes.....	51

3.5 Data analysis	52
3.6 Ensuring quality of the research process	54
3.7.1 Outcome validity	55
3.7.2 Process validity	55
3.7.3 Democratic validity	56
3.7.4 Catalytic validity	56
3.7.5 Dialogic validity	56
3.8 Ethical considerations.....	56
3.9 Summary	57
CHAPTER FOUR - DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM CYCLE ONE AND TWO.....	58
4.1 Introduction	58
4.2 The data generation methods implemented in Cycle One.....	59
4.3 Discussion and presentation of data from Cycle One.....	61
4.3.1 Theme 1: Teachers experience the play-based approach as positive	61
4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Enjoyable for teachers and children.....	62
4.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Holistic development of young children	65
4.3.2 Theme 2: Teachers experience challenges when implementing the play-based approach.	68
4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Lack of knowledge and skills	68
4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Expectations of the curriculum do not align with the available time and resources.....	70
4.4 Presentation of data from Cycle 2	72
4.4.1 Theme 3: Guidelines identified to foster the play-based approach.....	73
4.4.2 Subtheme 1: Collaboration with teachers and the DBE to expand knowledge about the play-based approach and improve time management	74
4.4.3 Subtheme 2: Implementing different play resources (Six Bricks).....	75
4.4.4 Sub-theme 3: Different types of play integrated with CAPS	78
4.4.4.1 Imaginative play	78

4.4.4.2 Constructive play.....	79
4.4.4.3 Outside play	79
4.4.4.4 Sensory play.....	80
4.5 Summary	81
CHAPTER FIVE - SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND	
CONCLUSIONS	83
5.1 Introduction	83
5.2 Summary of chapters.....	83
5.2.1 Chapter One: Background and overview.....	83
5.2.2 Chapter Two: Fostering the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom.....	83
5.2.3 Chapter Three: Theoretical discussion of research design and methodology	84
5.2.4 Chapter Four: Discussion of the research findings from Cycle One and Two	84
5.3 Answering the research questions.....	84
5.3.1 What are teachers’ experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R?	85
5.3.2 How can teachers improve their use of the play-based approach in Grade R?	85
5.3.3 What guidelines can be derived from the findings to foster play-based learning in Grade R?.....	86
5.4 Personal reflection	87
5.5 Limitations of the study.....	88
5.6 Conclusions	88
5.7 Contribution of the study	90
5.8 Guidelines to foster the play-based approach in Grade R	90
5.9 Suggestions for further study	90
5.10 Concluding remarks	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY	92
ANNEXURE A – LANGUAGE EDITOR.....	101
ANNEXURE B – CONSENT FORM: DBE.....	102
ANNEXURE C – Permission letter from School Principal	104
ANNEXURE D – Participant information and consent form	107
ANNEXURE E – Ethics approval	110

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1:	The three major paradigm approaches.....	8
Table 2.1:	Types of play.....	24
Table 2.2:	Direct teacher involvement and indirect teacher involvement during play.....	26
Table 3.1:	Biographical information of the participants.....	48
Table 3.2:	Recorded group discussion sessions.....	49
Table 3.3:	Application of Herr and Anderson’s (2014) validity criteria.....	54
Table 4.1:	Data methods implemented in Cycle One.....	59
Table 4.2:	Themes and sub-themes identified in Cycle One.....	61
Table 4.3:	Data methods implemented in Cycle Two.....	72
Table 4.4:	Theme 3 and sub-themes identified in Cycle Two.....	73

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Representation of participatory action research phases.....	11
Figure 1.2: Cyclical process of Crane and O'Regan (2010).....	12
Figure 2.1: Grade R daily programme.....	23
Figure 3.1: Three pillars of PAR.....	44
Figure 3.2: The PAR research design.....	45
Figure 3.3: Tesch's data analysis steps.....	53
Figure 4.1: Themes and subthemes that emerged during Cycle One and Two.....	59
Figure 4.2: The cyclical process.....	60
Figure 4.3: Jungle Gym	64
Figure 4.4: Jungle Gym.....	64
Figure 4.5: Climbing frame.....	65
Figure 4.6: Zoob toys.....	66
Figure 4.7: Puzzle.....	67
Figure 4.8: Imaginative play area.....	79
Figure 4.9: Construction play area.....	79
Figure 4.10: Outside play area.....	80
Figure 4.11: Outside play area.....	80
Figure 4.12: Sensory play area.....	81

CHAPTER ONE - BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

“Play is the answer to how anything new comes about.” (Piaget, 1962)

1.1 Introduction and rationale for the study

Froebel (1782-1852), known as the “father of kindergartens,” believed that play is work for children and that they learn naturally through play (Ali et al., 2013). Experts in the field of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom agree that, effectively, implemented play-based activities holistically facilitate improvements for the child on the cognitive, physical and emotional levels (Lynch, 2015; Ali et al., 2013). According to Borisova (2018), several characteristics define play: it should be meaningful, joyful, actively engaging, frequently practised and socially interactive. Borisova (2018) mentions that children should be in control of the experiences they gain through play and be able to make their own decisions around it. Ali et al. (2013) claim that play is seen as a way of learning and creates many opportunities for children to interact with their world in different ways. They state that children regard play as part of their life and, by integrating play with learning, an effective approach is engendered to influence the way children see and think about the world. In this study, the term “play” will be interpreted as a spontaneous enjoyable activity in which the child can freely explore and make sense of their world, create new knowledge and socialize with others (cf. 2.2).

Lynch (2015) explains the positive influence that play has on the holistic development of the child by highlighting that it leads to improvements in mathematics, language and early literacy skills. She states that play helps children cooperate with others and improves their socio-emotional skills. Kessel (2018) recognises the importance of the play-based approach and claims that play should be viewed as a valuable medium in the preschool classroom, where it should be used to develop children on a social and academic level. According to Ogunyemi and Ragpot (2016), the integration of play into the preschool curriculum is of the utmost importance in light of the developmental benefits it presents to the child. Southcott (2013) confirms the findings of a study done by Miller and Almon (2009), which found that children participating in a play-based approach at the preschool level had an advantage over those who were less exposed to play: their reading and other cognitive skills were more developed.

According to the policy document White Paper 5 (DBE, 2001), the DBE shall ensure that Grade R programmes are both inclusive and integrated focusing on fostering children’s emotional, social, intellectual, physical, spiritual and moral development by using play as the primary vehicle for achieving this. The CAPS document (2011) also clearly states that learning in Grade R should be done through play and that the play-based approach is the main method of teaching. The Department

of Education Western Australia (Hesterman, 2018) emphasises the importance of play in cognitive and social-emotional growth for young children. They further propose that play and learning amount to a unified and integral process that leads to the holistic development of young children (Hesterman, 2018). The development of young children's different domains is interconnected, and development in one area can influence development in another (Zosh et al., 2017). For instance, the development of the physical domain lays the foundation for cognitive and social skills, according to Zosh et al. (2017), who explain that children's growth and development are complex and interconnected and cannot be broken down into separate components. According to Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek (2016), children will need the 6 Cs to be successful in education in the twenty-first century: collaboration, communication, content, critical thinking, creative innovation and confidence. Zosh et al. (2017) claim that these broad, dynamic and interconnected skills can be developed through playful learning experiences.

Despite the benefits of a play-based approach, teachers do not always hold it in a positive light. Borisova (2018) claims that some teachers are not adequately prepared or knowledgeable enough to use the play-based approach in their classrooms, further arguing that these teachers may think of learning materials only as workbooks and other academic resources. Consequently, they do not regard hands-on objects, such as a sandpit, water play area or sensory and motor development toys as similar learning materials that learners can use to explore and experience learning concepts hands-on. According to Izumi-Taylor et al. (2017), teachers' perceptions of the play-based approach are influenced by different factors, including the ways in which they interpret play, their awareness of play and how they understand the benefits of play for the learning process. Aronstam and Braund (2016) demonstrate that teachers often forget to take full advantage of the learning experience and opportunities that play presents in the classroom – being concerned that, because of its unpredictable outcomes, play is not a reliable method for achieving certain development stages. This entails that teachers' perceptions of the play-based approach are influenced by how they understand and interpret play (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2017)

According to Bodrova and Leong (2019), teachers that are aware of the importance of play are concerned that playtime has been reduced in schools. This implies that not everyone involved in the early years' curriculum understands the importance of incorporating play on a daily basis. Lynch (2015) agrees and points out that, despite the recognition by researchers and academics of the importance of play, the time devoted to it in preschools has been decreased in favour of an emphasis on academic activities. In a survey conducted in 1989 by the National Association of Elementary Schools, it was found that 96% of the surveyed school systems had at least one recess period (Kenneth & Smith, 2018). A decade later, another survey that focused on playtime in schools established that

only 70% of preschool classrooms had a recess period. This amounts to a decrease of 26% in playtime over just one decade.

A recent study shows that schools would buy textbooks and workbooks before they buy art supplies, dramatic play materials or sand and water tables, because academic learning has become a priority in preschool settings (Bowdon, 2015). By means of a survey conducted around the play-based approach in Grade R, Sjoerdsma (2016) demonstrates that only 7.69% of the participants agreed that children should have at least an hour of uninterrupted playtime. An even more worrying statistic shows that only 3.84% of the participants believed that learning happened best when children engage in play (Sjoerdsma, 2016). The results of these surveys highlight that, despite research results that indicate the benefits of play, the time allocated to play in the early years' curriculum is still being reduced to accommodate academic activities. Esterhuizen (2019) confirms that, in the South African context, playtime has decreased because both parents and children spend more time on electronic devices. In addition, parents feel that it is not safe for children to play without supervision (Esterhuizen, 2019). Carr and Luken (2014) explain that play is being replaced in preschools by academic activities such as test preparation, flashcards and other educational toys. This is because there is a general belief that these are needed to prepare children for success in academic tasks.

The use of play in the classroom is further influenced by the way parents view and perceive it as a learning approach. According to Kenneth and Smith (2018), parents are on the receiving end of carefully marketed information that suggests that, if they are good parents, they will allow their children to participate in a wide variety of academic activities and expose them to extra educational materials (things that distinctly do not include play). Peterson et al. (2017) found that parents defined play as a leisure activity rather than a learning activity. They further found that parents viewed it as something that could distract children from academic experiences. It seems as if parents are uneducated about the benefits of a play-based approach, and this impacts its effective implementation in the classroom. Peterson et al. (2017) explain that primary teachers are pressured by parents to follow a formal approach instead of implementing play activities, because the parents believe it will give their children a competitive edge.

Kenneth and Smith (2018) point out that play “is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child.” Yet, this birthright is taken away from many children for the sake of matters that, in most cases, could have been controlled if the right knowledge and information were dispersed (Peterson et al., 2017; Carr & Luken, 2014).

It is therefore clearly imperative that Grade R teachers should be educated about the benefits that the play-based approach has to offer. Teachers should be supported to create strategies to foster the play-

based approach in the Grade R classroom. It appears vital that they should be aware of the benefits that the play-based approach offers for the holistic development of young children (Lynch, 2015).

1.2 Problem statement

As demonstrated, a need exists for developing strategies that promote and foster the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom. According to the Minister of Education of South Africa, Angie Motshekga (DBE, 2021), play can be used as a powerful method to develop the cognitive, social, emotional and physical abilities of the child. The DBE (2011) declares in the Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS, 2011) that Grade R learners should only be exposed to informal learning activities and opportunities to play and explore their world under the guidance of their teacher. It states that formal assessment should be avoided, and that abilities and skills should be taught through integration and play (DBE, 2011).

However, despite all the research on the benefits of play and the policy guidelines (DBE, 2011), it appears as though teachers do not always devote sufficient time to implement it. Studies by Excell and Linington (2011) and Borisova (2018) found that teachers were not informed about how to implement the play-based approach. Work by Sjoerdsma (2016) demonstrates that not all teachers view play in the same way: for instance, some regard it to be important even while they do not understand the pedagogy centred on play. It appears as if more and more worksheets are being used to prepare Grade R children for Grade 1 (Borisova, 2018). Excell and Linington (2011) explain that, because of the increase in formal activities and worksheets in the Grade R classroom, implementing the play-based approach effectively and acknowledging the benefits of play in child development remain challenging in the foundation phase of education. These researchers suggest that Grade R teachers should participate in a professional development programme to inform and educate them about implementing an informal play approach.

Scholarly work reinforces the notion that a need exists to explore the lack of understanding about the value of play as a teaching strategy in the Grade R classroom (Borisova, 2018). Challenges that teachers experience when implementing the play-based approach should be identified to create strategies that empower them to foster the play-based approach in Grade R (Peterson et al., 2017). As a Grade One teacher, I have seen children enter Grade One from Grade R who are not ready for school. They struggle with skills such as problem solving and communicative and physical abilities. It seems as if some children are not emotionally, socially and cognitively developed to cope well because they did not get the necessary exposure to develop these skills.

It seems important to consider the likelihood that a lack of playtime and an increase of academic activities may be sources of this problem. The present study responds to the problem that arises when

play is replaced with formal learning activities by uninformed teachers. It does so by addressing the challenges that they experience when they implement the play-based approach. The response furthermore goes to the root of the matter, namely the teacher's perception and understanding of the play-based approach. Opportunity for change will be created by guiding and engaging teachers in their learning around the benefits of the play-based approach, and by co-creating strategies for implementation in the classroom so as to address the challenges that constrain the fostering of the approach.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The aim of this project is to use a PAR approach to work collaboratively with Grade R teachers, in order to obtain their knowledge about the play-based approach (cf. 3.2). This will be centred on identifying the challenges they face when it comes to using this approach, developing strategies to facilitate their implementation and evaluating the approach. In order to address this problem, the questions itemised below have guided the study:

1.3.1 Research questions

The questions itemised below have been used to guide the study throughout its different cycles.

1.3.1.1 Primary question

How can PAR be used to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R classrooms?

This primary research question engenders the secondary questions (sub-questions) itemised below.

1.3.1.2 Research sub-questions

To answer the main research question, the following sub-questions were identified:

Cycle one

- *What are teachers' experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R?*

Cycle two

- *How can teachers improve their use of a play-based approach in Grade R?*
- *What guidelines can be derived from the findings to foster play-based learning in Grade R?*

The objectives of the study are to investigate teachers' experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R, to explore how teachers could improve the use of a play-based approach and to identify guidelines that support Grade R teachers when using play-based learning.

1.4. Elucidation of concepts

The following key words are important for the present project. They are itemised in their various contexts below.

1.4.1 Grade R teacher

A Grade R teacher can be defined as the facilitator or educator of children between the ages of 5 and 6. According to Embury (2017), the minimum qualification required for practicing as a Grade R teacher is a diploma in Grade R teaching. Embury (2017) also mentions that the role of the Grade R teacher is to scaffold and mediate children's development process and prepare them for formal schooling. According to the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications policy document (MRTEQ, 2011), a Diploma in Grade R teaching is the minimum qualification to qualify to be a Grade R teacher which is equivalent to NQF level 6.

1.4.2 Grade R

Grade R is known as the recipient year: that is, it is the year before a child starts with formal schooling (Embury, 2017). The aim of Grade R is to develop school readiness. Embury (2017) mentions that the Grade R year is the most important of a child's preschool life precisely because it prepares them and lays the foundation for formal schooling. According to the MRTEQ policy document (2011), Grade R is the first year of formal schooling and the main focus is on learning through play developing number sense and literacy and physical coordination.

1.4.3 Play-based learning

Lynch (2015) defines the play-based learning as a teaching method by means of which the teacher can gently guide the learning activities that promote curricular development while maintaining the central concept of play. A play-based approach involves both child-centred and teacher-supported learning while playing. The play-based learning approach includes free play and guided play and can be implemented by using different types of play, such as sensory play, constructive play and imaginative play (DBE, 2011). In this study, the term "play" will be used to refer to a spontaneous, enjoyable act where a young child can freely explore his or her reality, create knowledge and make sense of the world (cf. 2.2).

1.4.4 Teaching strategies

Saputra (2014) describes a strategy as a generalised plan for a lesson that includes structure and planned objectives. A strategy is a combination of methods and creates conducive learning environments (Saputra, 2014). Sarode (2018) states that teaching strategies identify different available learning methods to ensure that the correct skills are developed in the most effective way

for the target group identified. In Grade R teaching, strategies are used to implement different methods to teach concepts and monitor development in young children by involving different theoretical perspectives and experiences (Barnard & Braund, 2016).

1.5 Theoretical framework

According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), the theoretical framework is one of the most important aspects of the research process and should dovetail with the topic, research questions and research design, while including concepts relevant to the study so as to make sense of the data that is generated. Swanson and Richard (2013) further claim that a theoretical framework is a structure that can hold and support the topic of the research study and can help describe why the research problem exists within the ambit of the topic (cf. 2.4). My thinking will be guided by the theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as expounded by Lev Vygotsky (1978).

According to Bodrova and Leong (2019), Vygotsky developed his theory of the ZPD to conceptualise the relationship between development and learning. Vygotsky (1978) stated that a child's development occurs on two levels: the independent level, centred on what the child can do and achieve alone, and the assisted level, centred on what the child can reach with help. The developmental level of a child changes as he or she develops. Therefore, what the child achieves with help today, the child will be able to achieve independently tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1986). According to Vygotsky (as cited by Robson & Quinn, 2014), play is the source of development, and it creates the ZPD for young children. He states that the relationship between play and development should be compared to the relationship between teaching and development. This posits a direct link between a teacher's influence and a child's development, which is determined by how the teacher perceives certain teaching approaches as related to previous experience.

According to Fani and Ghaemi (2011), Vygotsky's ZPD describes how cognitive growth occurs in children comprising three different stages: first, tasks that the learner can do without assistance; second, tasks that learners can carry out with assistance; and third, tasks that learners cannot do with assistance. Excell (2011) explains the teacher's role in the ZPD and claims that he or she should understand each child's level of development in order to assist them in achieving a higher level of thinking and problem-solving.

Vygotsky (1978) stated that a teacher should explain, correct, inform and give an opportunity to a child to explain what he/she understands. This helps achieve the goal of solving a problem independently by using the previous assistance from the teacher to guide the child. Chapter Two of the present study further explores Vygotsky's (1978) idea that, during play, children imitate adult behaviour and practise their future roles and values. The chapter also examines the notion that

teachers should therefore make sure that all children have equal opportunities to learn through play. It is the teacher’s responsibility to create an environment for play to take place, as well as their role to expose learners to different contexts of play (cf. 2.4). This brings the research elements of the present project into focus.

1.6 Research methodology

Maree (2016) argues that research helps to extend our knowledge and understanding of issues and problems in the world. Mertens (2015) avers that research is a way of knowing or understanding a process or systematic inquiry, so as to collect and analyse information. Maree (2016) further claims that each approach has its own purpose for and way of collecting data.

In Chapter Three it is explained that a qualitative research approach has been implemented throughout this study (cf. 3.3.4). According to Maree (2016), qualitative research focuses on linguistic data that give meaning to the project, rather than numerical data that are of a statistical nature. Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon (2014) add that a qualitative approach helps to get a clear and rich description of the situation studied. PAR was used as the research design because it is seen as an approach that aims at taking action, addressing a problem and bringing about social change, as suggested by Higginbottom and Liamputtong (2015). According to Zuber-Skerritt and Wood (2015), a participatory methodology ensures that all participants collaborate to create social change. I therefore have opted for a participatory form, because I believe that a collaborative participatory research approach provides opportunities to improve the practice of play in the Grade R classroom.

1.6.1 Paradigm informing the study

Maree (2016) defines a paradigm as a set of assumptions or beliefs about reality and its influence on a particular worldview. Maree (2016) further explains that a paradigm addresses the nature of reality and the connection between the knower and what is known. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that what we think of the world represents a paradigm and that our actions have an influence on the manner in which we think about the world. According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), a paradigm is a basic belief system and theoretical framework that contains assumptions about ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology and methods (cf. 3.3.1.). Table 1.1 reflects the fundamental differences between the major approaches mainly used in education.

Table 1.1 The three major paradigm approaches (Fadhel, 2002; Morgan, 2007; Martens, 2015).

Approach	Beliefs
Positivist	This approach believes that theory is universal, that the context is not important and that knowledge is waiting to be discovered by researchers.

(Fadhel, 2002)	The belief is that the outcome of the research can be controlled and predicted by using the theory and it recruits an empirical or analytical approach. The researcher strives to create a comprehensive universal theory to explain human and social behaviour.
Interpretivist (Morgan, 2007)	Interpretivists believe that the world cannot be understood from an individual's outlook alone and that realities are multiple and socially constructed. The researcher and his participants interact with one another throughout the research process, and they believe that the context is vital to understand and interpret the knowledge gained.
Critical (Martens, 2015)	Critical theory treats the research process as an act of construction rather than discovery and regularly applies action research as a method. It examines individuals and their conditions in a situation, where the main focus is on empowering others and using participants' own knowledge to expand others' knowledge and develop their skills.

The paradigm used for this study is critically transformative (cf. 3.3.1). According to Wood (2020), a critical transformative paradigm includes a way of thinking that is always open for change or that seeks for improvements and new ideas. The teachers participating in this study used critically transformative thinking skills to identify challenges and develop strategies that could foster the play-based approach in Grade R. This paradigm is deemed suitable for the present purpose because it is expected that, during the research process, the teachers' views regarding the use of the play-based approach and implementing various strategies may change.

Maree (2016) claims in this vein that research should use appropriate methods and should be valid in a specific context, while this could be achieved by reflecting on epistemological, ontological and methodological aspects. In the next section these assumptions are discussed.

1.6.2 Epistemological assumptions

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2013), epistemology tells us more about ways of learning and knowing about the world around us. Ritchie and Lewis (2013) further claim that epistemology asks questions such as how we know what reality is and how we claim our knowledge about it. Gall et al. (2003) describe epistemology as the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and how we get hold of that knowledge and communicate it to others. In this study, the participants created their own knowledge by referring to their experiences and combining it with the experiences and perceptions of the other participants; i.e., a critically transformative paradigm was employed (cf. 3.3.1). The participants are actively involved in the contexts within which the research problem is conducted. They were in the best position to improve or change their own practice, given that their knowledge has been engendered by their experiences. Participants were allowed not only to generate new knowledge but to also be co-creators who shared knowledge through critical thinking and

reasoning when we collaboratively decided on what we knew about the reality of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom.

1.6.3 Ontological assumptions

According to Smith (2003), ontology is used as the term for the study of what might exist. As stated by Maree (2016), the three distinct ontological positions include realism, materialism and idealism. Teachers may have different realities and ideas about how they see themselves in the world. During the meetings of the present project, teachers collaboratively discussed the challenges they face during the implementation of the play-based approach and how they interact with it (cf. 3.3.1.2). By collaborating with each other and each other's different realities, mutual trust developed along with democratic relationships among participants. This study leans on the idealist position of ontology: according to Maree (2016), idealism acknowledges that reality is only knowable through what people think and the meanings we construct.

1.6.4 Axiological assumptions

Axiological assumptions include fundamental aspects based on the role of the researcher's own value and respect and, according to Wood (2020, p. 29), includes the greater-good values that the researcher regards as important. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), axiology centres on ethical matters that need to be reviewed when planning a research study. It involves the examining of the philosophical approach on the basis of which conclusions of value or correct decisions are made (3.3.1.3). It includes values of right and wrong behaviour relating to the research. These values are regarded as important for inclusion during the research process, certainly as they are found among participants and the data that is collected and also in how results are distributed.

1.7 Participatory action research (PAR) as research design

Wood (2019) explains that the research design of a study acts as the blueprint that needs to be followed by the researcher. The research design in any study should be fixed on the purpose and the nature of the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Maxwell (2013) confirms this idea and establishes that the research design should include the generation and analysis of data, structuring of the research questions and identifying possible validity threats, each of which influences the other (cf. 3.3.2). He further explains that a research design is an interconnected and flexible structure and, when created, the researcher should keep the following key components in mind (Maxwell, 2013):

- *Goals.* Why is the study worth doing and what problems do you want to address? What practices do you want to influence and are the results going to be important?

- *Conceptual framework.* What theories, paradigms and prior research results will lead your research? What literature and personal assumptions will you regard as important to understand the context of the study?
- *Research questions.* What do you want to understand about the participants or contexts that you are researching? Are the questions related to one another and do they capture what you want to know?
- *Methods.* What will you do to conduct the research? How will you collect and analyse the data? Keep the selection of participants, data generation methods and analysing strategies in mind.
- *Validity.* Is there a possibility that your findings could be wrong? Why should your results be accepted by others?

The above-mentioned components were kept in mind in the cyclical process as discussed in the following section.

1.7.1 Cyclical process

Higginbottom and Liamputtong (2015) consider PAR to be a democratic, liberating and life-enhancing qualitative method that features feelings and views and excludes manipulation. Huang (2010) argues that action research originated in 1950 with the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1950) and that the design is enjoying considerable attention in the educational and healthcare domains. I used PAR as research design because participants are actively involved in a cyclical and dynamic process (See Figure 1.1):

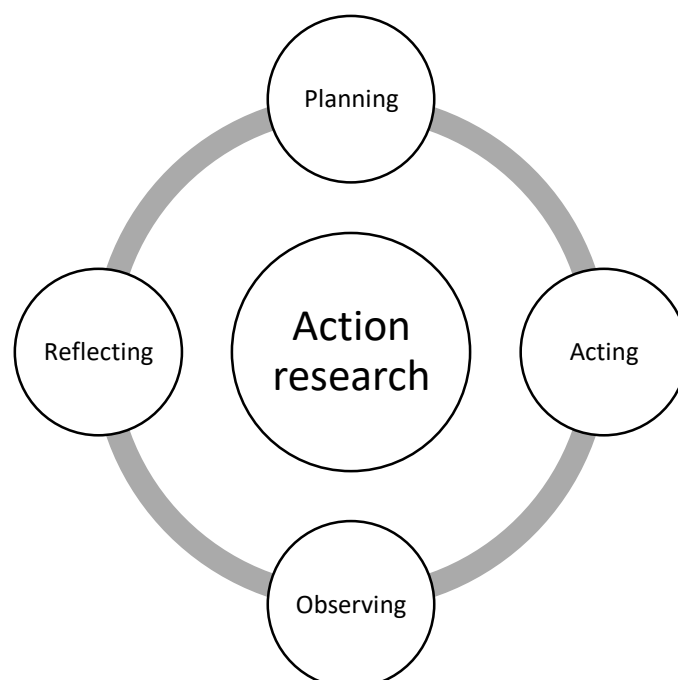


Figure 1.1 – Representation of participatory action research phases (Zuber-Skerrit & Wood, 2019)

Figure 1.1 reflects that PAR comprises different phases in a cyclical process (cf. 3.3.2), including action and research that incorporate four elements: observe, reflect, plan and act (Wood, 2020). Crane and O'Regan (2010) propose a useful fifth element namely sharing. In Figure 1.2 (Crane & O'Regan, 2010) it is depicted how the sharing element centres on building relationships not only between the participants, but also with the community and others who can benefit from the findings and suggestions:

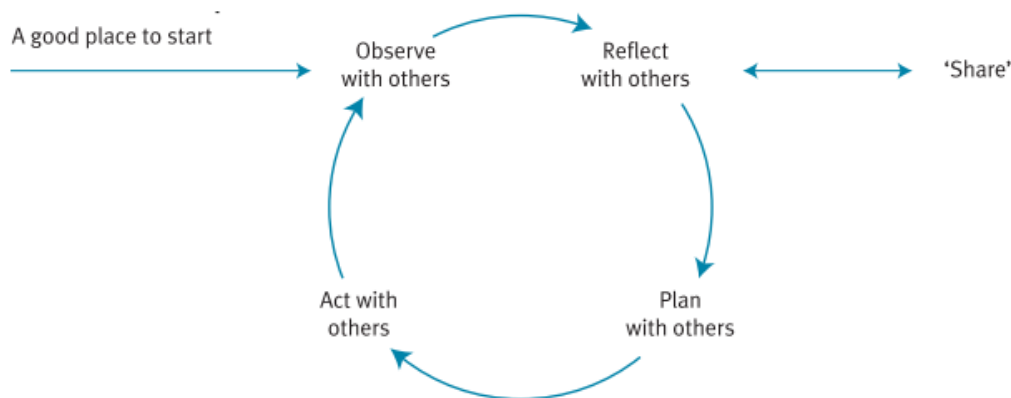


Figure 1.2 depicts that the sharing element does not find itself within the cyclical process but is located outside of it. The multiway arrows depict the fact that information should not only be shared with those participating in the research, but also with the community, which is not necessarily directly involved in the research. The sharing element refers to the informal sharing of generated knowledge and new understandings with all stakeholders and the public (Crane & O'Regan, 2010).

1.7.2 Cycles in this study

PAR consists of iterative cycles (cf. 3.3.2.1) to explore the experiences of the participants. In this study two cycles were used to investigate the knowledge of participants by actively involving them in the discussions.

Cycle 1 focused on a start-up relationship-building session where each participant introduced themselves and it also focused on a negotiation concerning how the research core group would be actively involved in the discussions (cf. 3.3.2.1). The first cycle focused on the following research question:

- What are teachers' experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R?

In section 3.4.2.1 the development of cycle 1 is explained.

Cycle 2 built on the discussions of the first cycle and reflected on the challenges teachers experienced when using play-based learning. During cycle 2 the following questions were addressed:

- How can teachers improve their use of the play-based approach in Grade R?
- What guidelines can be derived from the findings to foster the play-based approach in Grade R?

By answering these research questions and by combining the data collected from the two cycles, it was possible to identify strategies and guidelines to improve the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom (cf. Chapter 4).

1.8 Research methods

COVID-19 had a big impact on the recruitment of participants and data generation. In section 3.4.1 more detail is provided.

1.8.1 Site and recruitment of participants

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2013), participants are chosen with a certain purpose in mind and to represent a certain community according to a specific criterion. In this study, purposive sampling was used to recruit participants in accordance with the work of Maree (2016), who argues that purposive sampling is used when the researcher has a specific purpose in mind. The specific purpose of my study was to determine and examine different Grade R teachers' perceptions of the play-based approach, the challenges they experience while implementing it and their suggestions for fostering it in the Grade R classroom. Participants were therefore selected to deliver rich data. Robinson (2014) explains that, as part of purposive sampling, the researcher assumes that the participants have a certain level of theoretical knowledge about the topic and that they can deliver unique perspectives about the phenomenon.

It was quite challenging to identify participants to join this study, due to the COVID-19 regulations and all of its consequences that negatively impacted the process of my study. The first three independent schools (Schools A, B and C) that I identified in February 2019 had to withdraw after the first session due to the financial and logistical burdens of COVID-19. The recruitment process had to start all over again and I obtained permission from the Department of Education in Gauteng in October 2019 to start with the research from February 2020 (cf. 3.5). I purposefully selected six participants from two different primary schools in Pretoria. The schools include School D, where 3 participants were recruited, and School E, where the other 3 participants were identified.

Due to COVID-19 and personal issues, one of the participants from School D had to withdraw from the study, which left me with only five participants. All the participants participated online, due to

the hard lockdown regulations. Group discussions with all participants took place during both cycles, but each school's discussion took place at a different time because of clashing schedules and the teaching responsibilities of the participants. Each group discussion lasted for 90 – 120 minutes, and each group had four discussions in total. Even though the sessions were limited, it lasted longer and included very experienced and knowledgeable participants. All the participants were female, and they were all occupied as Grade R teachers (cf. 3.5).

Criteria for the purposeful selection of participating teachers

- The participant should be an educationally qualified Grade R teacher in Gauteng at an independent or public pre-primary school.
- The participant must have at least two years of experience as a Grade R teacher.
- The teacher should be willing to participate in the different online cycles presented to collect and exchange knowledge.

1.9 Data generation

According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation has an impact on the quality of the study presented and can be attained by making use of different methods. Fusch and Ness (2015) further claim that triangulation plays an important role in data saturation and in the quality and reliability of the results. Heale and Forbes (2013) explain that the researcher should make use of triangulation, to explore the same phenomena from different angles, ensure the validity of the results and promote a more comprehensive understanding of each phenomenon. The researcher should make use of multiple methods to gather the data, to ensure that triangulation and data saturation are taking place and decrease limitations by comparing results from different perspectives (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Therefore, I used different data generation methods as discussed below to gather data. The methods include recorded group discussions, visual data generation, field notes and reflections.

1.9.1 Recorded group discussions

Seobi (2015) explains that recorded group discussions include the sharing of ideas and the construction of shared concepts about tasks with individuals in a group, which leads to collaborative action research. Recorded group discussions deliver rich descriptive data and provide opportunities to gather different opinions from different participants at the same time (Wood, 2020). Hendrics (2017) further states that group discussions are seen as a research method that collects data through interaction on a theme identified by the researcher and takes place typically comprising a group of four to six people (cf. 3.6.1.1). The group discussions were recorded so that all the details and information could be transcribed.

This method was used in all cycles to collect descriptive and detailed data, which ensured that participants built a relationship in order to collaboratively answer the research questions.

1.9.2 Visual methods

Wood (2020) explains that visual methodologies can unlock a deeper understanding of social reality. Wang and Burris (1997), the developers of Photovoice, state that its purpose is to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about problems in the community through group discussions that employ photographs. According to Sutton-Brown (2014), Photovoice involves a method that uses photographs and group work to reflect on people's daily lives. Sutton-Brown (2014) further claims that the researcher uses the photos to facilitate a conversation with the participants about the happenings in the photographs (cf. 3.4.2.2). We used Photovoice to collaboratively investigate the different challenges that teachers experience when implementing the play-based approach. Before the participants took photographs, I gave a prompt to the group: for instance, I asked teachers to take photos of something that represents challenges that are experienced when using the play-based approach. By using Photovoice, the different participants experienced the visual aspect of different challenges and reflected from different perspectives on what they experienced when engaging with a given image. The participants used their own cell phones to take the photographs and allowed the group to express, share and analyse their experiences of challenges. Ethical issues were respected, and no child took part in the research process. Therefore, no child was photographed. Only symbolic photos were taken to explain the play-based approach as viewed from their perspective.

1.9.3 Field notes

According to Maharaj (2016), taking field notes is an integral part of the documentation and analysis of qualitative research. Philippa and Lauderdale (2018) confirm this and state that field notes document important contextual information and that they have several functions. This include constructing a thick and rich description of the questions or problems being researched in the context in which these occur and giving the researcher the ability to refer to a certain remark or observation made by a participant (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Maharaj (2016) further explains that field notes provide non-textual or auditory information about observations around the participants' views or understandings and can give in-depth views of the studied context. Tsai et al. (2016) unpack the functions of the field note in qualitative research:

- It gives the researcher the opportunity to closely observe the environment and actions.
- It provides supplemental language-focused data.
- It documents data that includes all the senses, such as smells, sounds, and sights.
- It improves trustworthiness.

- It provides important context to inform data analysis.

Field notes were used when the participants implemented the strategies and reflected on the challenges to improve the play-based approach (cf. 3.4.2.3).

1.9.4 Reflective diaries

Written reflection has continued to grow as a means of studying experiences in education (Cameron & Allen, 2013). According to Zuber-Skerritt (2011), reflective diaries are sources of data consisting of subjective views that need to be triangulated with other views. The purpose of this method is to capture the development of new knowledge and make the researcher's knowledge and conclusions evident (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011). By keeping my own reflective diary, I monitored the progress of the study, which entailed the following processes (Hendricks, 2017):

- Providing an in-depth document of certain events that can be used in the results.
- Providing subjective perspectives of the actions that unfolded.
- Providing valuable windows into the participants' perspectives, ideas, and experiences around their situations, which include their voice and feelings.

I reflected on group discussions, Photovoice and fieldnotes and made entries in a reflective diary. This process allowed us as participants to think systematically about the process and informed our learning about the challenges and identification of strategies employed in the play-based approach.

1.10 Data management

All the data gathered during this study belong to all the participants and therefore these are stored in the form of MS Word and PDF documents on Google Drive for five years, while remaining freely accessible to all participants of the study. The information and data will be protected by using a password to access it on Google Drive. The participants can access the data at any stage on Google Drive for five years subsequent to the study, should they want to refer to it in order to educate and inform their colleagues or other teachers.

1.11 Data analysis

According to Basit (2003), the most complicated and crucial part of qualitative research is data analysis. The object of analysing qualitative data is to determine categories, relationships and assumptions engendered by the participants' perceptions. According to Maree (2016), content analysis can be seen as a systematic method for compressing many words into fewer content categories by using coding rules. Renz et al. (2018) describe that summative content analysis involves counting and comparisons of the words and phrases used by participants, which is then followed by interpretation of the context.

The research group used thematic content analysis to organise the data collected in the study by employing Tesch's steps (1990). It is explained in section 3.5 how the steps were applied.

1.12 Quality criteria for PAR

Baldissera (2012) emphasises that, to conduct action research, relationships between the researcher and people involved in the real world need to be structured and, therefore, participation should occur with extra care around the information shared by those with something to add (cf. 3.6). Herr and Anderson (2014) have generated general quality criteria, which make it possible to take extra care related to limited visions within the studied object. This is done by focusing on:

- Outcome validity
- Process validity
- Democratic validity
- Catalytic validity
- Dialogic validity

The first criterion for validity is the outcome or result. According to Herr and Anderson (2014), this is the extent to which the action took place and whether a resolution was found for the problem that initiated the intervention in the first place. The authors further state that the researcher should not only focus on the action research procedure but should also take action to ensure that good results are obtained from the participants (Herr & Anderson, 2014). The next criterion identified by Herr and Anderson (2014) is process validity, which includes the problems and challenges encountered during the intervention and how they are overcome to ensure continued learning (cf. 3.6). Process validity will ensure that the action research cyclical steps are implemented, making it possible to collect sufficient evidence and data to support any claims or suggestions by different participants, which will enable triangulation (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

These authors identify three more criteria, including democratisation, catalysis and dialogue. Herr and Anderson (2014) explain that democratisation is collaboration with all participants involved with the research problem, and that it centres on ensuring that all procedures adopted during the research process are fair and ethical to everyone involved. Catalysis is the criterion point which helps participants to be focused and energised, to be able to know reality and how to transform it so that they can strengthen and liberate a community (Herr & Anderson, 2014). The last criterion is dialogue, which ensures that the research collaborates with other researchers and reflects critically on the materials by maintaining correctness of explanations, interpretations and evaluation of the context.

Each of these criteria will be discussed fully in section 3.6.

1.13 Ethical considerations

According to Dudovskiy (2022), research ethics centre on not doing harm, not breaching confidentiality, not faking data, informed consent from participants, honesty and the right of a participant to withdraw from the project. All participants were informed about these considerations in the first cycle of the action research process (cf. 3.8). The ethical principles mentioned by Hartell and Bosman (2016), which include respect, trust and protection of participants, played a considerable role when collecting the data and presenting the findings. The participants signed a consent form to state that they were willing to participate in the study and that their information could be used in it. They were also notified that the different cycles would be recorded while their privacy would be protected, and that they could withdraw at any time.

The ethical clearance process of the North-West University (2019) has been followed and my training certificate of ethical clearance was obtained in June 2019 (see Annexure E). The DBE, Gauteng, also permitted me to conduct research in the selected schools (Annexure B). The documents reflected guidelines to ensure that, as a researcher, I am informed of the relevant ethical considerations and consequences. The participants' identities are kept anonymous, as I will only refer to them as participant A, B, C, D, E and F. The schools participating in the study also remain anonymous: they will be named schools D and E.

1.14 Potential contribution of the study

The knowledge and insights gained through this study contributed to changing the way in which the play-based approach is presented in the Grade R classroom. This change further brought about guidelines that could be implemented by Grade R teachers to foster the play-based approach and change and enhance their understanding of this approach. The theoretical contribution that this study aimed to make was to inform more teachers about the importance of the play-based approach and the advantages it offers for the development of young children. The practical contribution that this study aimed to make was to address the challenges teachers face in their classrooms when implementing the play-based approach. This was carried out by developing new strategies and solutions and improving teachers' use of the approach to enhance the development of children.

1.15 Division of chapters

CHAPTER ONE – BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

This chapter focuses on the background and problem statement of the study. It contains the research questions, aims and design. The theoretical framework from Vygotsky (1978) is discussed briefly and the research methods and ethical aspects are also mentioned.

CHAPTER TWO – FOSTERING OF THE PLAY-BASED APPROACH IN THE GRADE R CLASSROOM

The literature that is related to the play-based approach and how to implement it in the Grade R classroom is discussed in this chapter. It gives an in-depth description of what play is and how the play-based approach can be implemented in the Grade R classroom. The benefits of play to the development of the child will be discussed, as well as the challenges that teachers have to face when implementing the play-based approach. The theory of Vygotsky (1978) that supports this study is also focused on.

CHAPTER THREE – THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The methodology, research design and different methods being used in this study are discussed in this chapter. The focus is on the critical transformative paradigm and why PAR was the best research design to follow. Ethical considerations and trustworthiness of data are examined. The different data generation techniques are discussed and how it was implemented throughout this study.

CHAPTER FOUR – DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM CYCLE ONE AND TWO

This chapter discusses the findings and data collected from the first and second cycle by using thematic content analysis. The different themes and sub-themes identified through the data are discussed in depth according to the findings. Literature is used to support the findings and to explain the themes.

CHAPTER FIVE – SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings that emerged from this study are discussed in this chapter, research questions are answered, guidelines are presented, and suggestions for further study are made. My own personal reflection is discussed and focuses on how I have experienced the study and the use of the PAR method. The guidelines derived from the data are explained and questions for further study are suggested.

1.16 Summary

Chapter One presented the purpose of the study and the framework to be followed to successfully complete the study. It briefly mentioned the research design as well as the different data generation methods to be used. In Chapter Two, an in-depth literature review will be presented, and the reader will be informed about the what the play-based approach entails. Play will be described in more detail

and different types of play will be discussed. The focus will also be on the advantages and benefits that play has to offer and some of the challenges that teachers experience with the play-based approach will be considered.

CHAPTER TWO - FOSTERING OF THE PLAY-BASED APPROACH IN THE GRADE R CLASSROOM

“When children choose to play, they are not thinking ‘Now I am going to learn something from this activity.’ Yet their play creates powerful learning opportunities across all areas of development.

Development and learning are complex and holistic, and yet skills across all developmental domains can be encouraged through play” (Borisova, 2018, p. 8).

2.1 Introduction

As indicated, many researchers underline the importance of play in the developmental phases of the child and the advantages that play has to offer (Borisova, 2018; Lynch, 2015; Omar, 2013). These statements raise several questions regarding the implementation of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom, including whether Grade R teachers use this approach to its full potential (Borisova, 2018; Lynch, 2015; Omar, 2013). Pyle and Danniels (2017) point out that, despite the educational and developmental benefits of play in the classroom, teacher-directed academic instruction is still prominent in preschool. They further claim that teachers are uncertain of how to implement play as a teaching strategy and struggle to see play and learning as one. Lynch (2015) confirms this view and further explains that, due to the uncertainty and lack of experience among teachers around play-based teaching, strategies can lead to less play and more teacher-directed formal activities. It seems that, despite the connection between different researchers’ opinions about the importance of the play-based approach, the value of play is still not recognised.

Vygotsky (1986) is one of the leading theorists in play-based child development: researchers frequently refer to his important work on play and child development (cf. 1.5). Play can be used as a teaching and learning strategy to help children understand basic and scientific concepts. Vygotsky (1986) therefore rightly viewed play as the predominant activity in early childhood development (ECD). Pyle et al. (2017) affirm Vygotsky’s theory and explain that play is very important in ECD. They also identify a few practical challenges around the implementation of the play-based approach in Grade R classrooms. These challenges include prescribed curricular standards, parental influence and the integration of play and learning into one concept (Pyle et al., 2017). It seems as if the teachers’ knowledge and experience are not the only challenges that impede the implementation of play-based strategies in the Grade R classroom. It is therefore necessary to define play and then explore various challenges of implementing the play-based approach.

2.2 What is play?

Ample definitions exist for “play”. To create a suitable definition for the purposes of this study, I will refer to different authors’ and researchers’ perceptions of play and the play-based approach. Gray (2017) defines play as something done spontaneously for its own sake and emphasises that play does not have a purpose but instead conceives pleasure and joy that then leads to a stage of mastery. It can also be argued that play is a method for children to make sense of their world, giving them the opportunity to interact socially with others, to express and create emotions and to determine what they are capable of (Aronstam & Braund, 2016). Lester and Russel (2010) regard play as a behaviour that can be recognised by certain features that embody a unique way of living, i.e., a way of interpreting, feeling and acting in the world.

Play can be interpreted as an “as if” behaviour to be able to distinguish the relationship between reality and the real world (Lester & Russel, 2010). In this vein, Murriss and Verbeek (2014) suggest that play is an opportunity to change, build and create meaning. Other literature summarises the definition of play as a child-initiated and enjoyable activity, as well as something that creates a context where children can freely explore, test and create their own goals and rules for the different activities they take part in (Peterson et al., 2017). In this study, the term “play” refers to a spontaneous, enjoyable act in which the child can freely explore and make sense of their own world, create new knowledge, and socialise with others (cf. 1.4.3).

Newbury et al. (2015, pp. 8-17) state that, in countries such as Singapore, Washington and New Zealand, play is divided into two categories, namely child-directed play and teacher-directed play. According to Weisberg et al. (2013), child-directed play gives children opportunities to freely choose and engage in different activities that they themselves can direct. In contrast, Newbury et al. (2015) state that teacher-directed play is intentionally planned as activities that are presented by the teacher in order to afford children a learning opportunity – expecting the child to follow a certain set of rules.

In South Africa, we categorise play as free or structured (DBE, 2011), but these categories dovetail neatly with those of New Zealand (DBE, 2011). South Africa’s national curriculum for the foundation phase also suggests that free play is directed by children, adding that it can take place indoors or outdoors, while structured play is directed by teachers and the goals and skills to be involved are specified (DBE, 2011). Figure 2.1 depicts the Grade R daily programme created by the Department of Education (DBE) that is presented in the CAPS (2011) document for the foundation phase. It gives teachers a framework for how much time should be spent on different activities in the form of a daily programme (DBE, 2011):

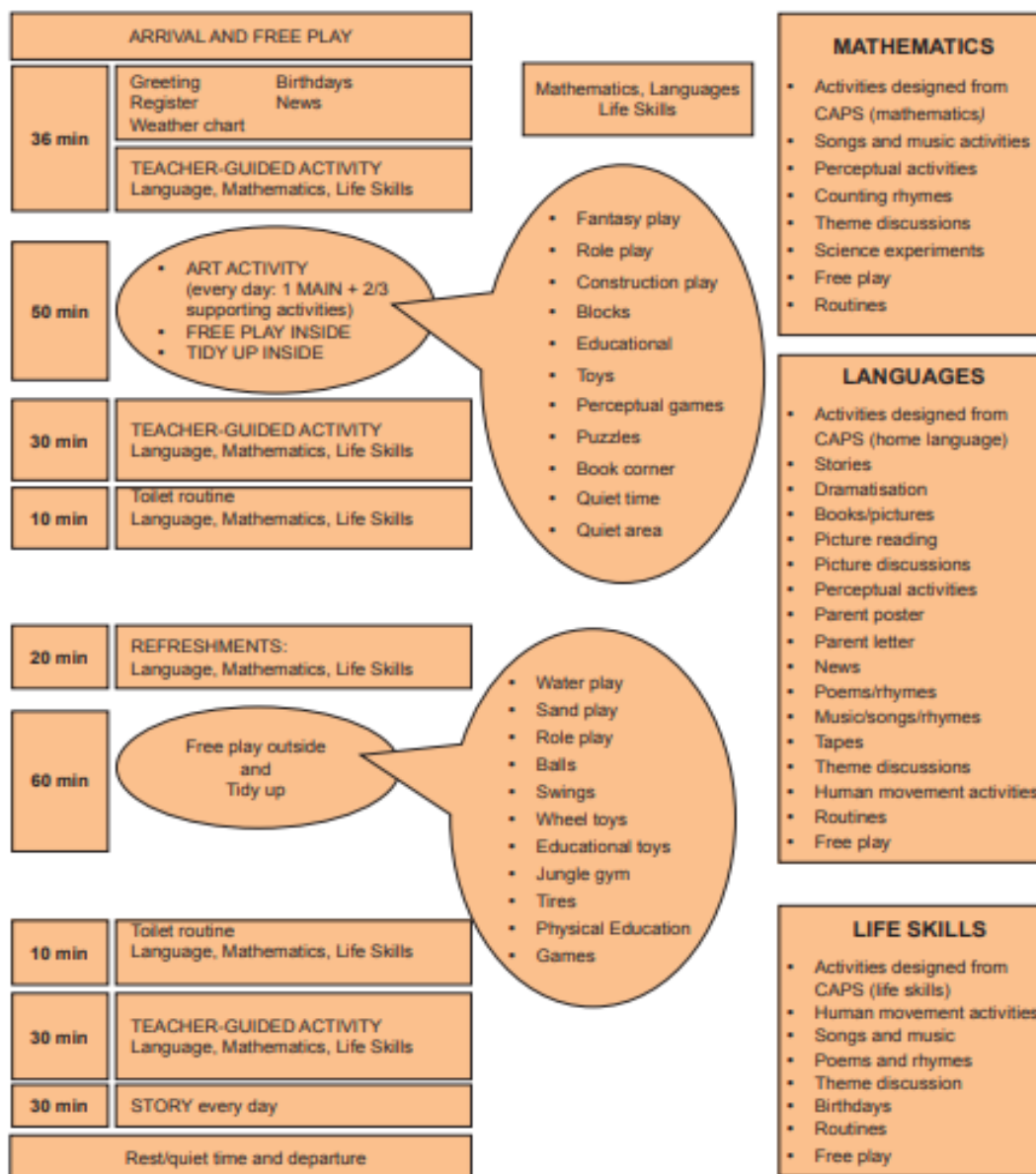


Figure 2.1: Grade R daily programme (DBE, 2011)

Figure 2.1 suggests an average of 120 minutes of free play activities per day and 90 minutes of structured activities, which include structured play. It seems as if the daily programme creates opportunities for play-based strategies to be implemented in different ways and around different skills and learning areas. Figure 2.1 also reflects different types of play that can be implemented in the Grade R classroom, such as role play, water play, physical free play and construction play. The policy document that should be followed, according to the DBE, clearly states that all the different types of play mentioned in Figure 2.1 should be included in the Grade R classroom and would benefit the child (DBE, 2011).

2.2.1 Types of play

As has already been explained, play is not only categorised as free play or guided play, but is also divided among different types of play. Free play can be defined as children choosing what they want to do, how they want to do it and when they want to stop (Homan, 2016). In contrast with guided

play, free play has no external goals or adult-imposed curriculum, while guided play involves adults in scaffolding play activities to lead the children to a learning goal (Weisberg & Zosh, 2018). A feature shared by free and guided play is that children should be able to freely choose their own actions during the play activity, whereas, in the case of guided play, the teacher should give guidance to reach the learning goal (Weisberg & Zosh, 2018). Free and guided approaches involve different types of play, such as imaginative and construction play, as shown in Table 2.1, which offers a synopsis of the different types of play.

Table 2.1: Types of play

Researcher	Type of play	Definition
Loizou (2016) DBE (2011)	Imaginative play	Imaginative play includes socio-dramatic and creative play, which further includes children being involved in role play drawing from different themes in real-life situations or their fantasy worlds. They use this type of play to create or make connections with experiences and their emotions. Examples are children taking on the imaginative role of a certain occupation like a doctor or a teacher or even children imagining they are a superhero.
Zhang et al. (2022) DBE (2011)	Constructive play	Constructive play includes using building blocks to create objects such as towers. This type of play relies on manipulating components and visualising a plan that develops mathematical, spatial and logical skills. An example is children creating objects out of building blocks to represent real-life objects such as a car or a building.
Weisberg et al. (2013) DBE (2011)	Word play	Word play consists of crib speech, children's spontaneous riffing on phrases and making rhymes. This type of play focuses on language, vocabulary and social skills. Examples are children learning rhymes or songs to develop language skills or children playing scrabble to expand vocabulary.
Sheridan (2017) DBE (2011)	Games with rules	Games with rules include board games and competitive or teamwork games that require sharing, taking turns and fair play. Board games include Scrabble, Pictionary, Maths Dice and Brain Box maths.
Bento & Dias (2017) DBE (2011)	Outside play	Outside play includes children learning through play and exploration, exercising their bodies and using their imagination outside with or without material and toys such as jungle gyms or tricycles. Examples are children playing touchers, racing against each other, riding tricycles and playing on jungle gyms.
Sheridan (2017)	Sensory play	Sensory play includes explorative and manipulative play, which involves the child exploring and

DBE (2011)	experiencing their environment through their senses. Examples are playing in a sand pit or water playing activities.
------------	--

Table 2.1 shows that different activities can be used in the different types of play, while each type of play also benefits and develops different types of skills or developmental areas (Esterhuizen, 2019). Figure 2.1 clearly indicates that the South African Grade R curriculum incorporates all these types of play in the daily programme. According to Esterhuizen (2019), sensory play explores and develops the different senses, while imaginative play demonstrates problem-solving skills, creativity and cognitive development. The two categories, free play and guided play, consist of these different types of play, which all form part of the play-based approach used as a teaching strategy in Grade R (DBE, 2011).

2.3 The play-based approach

The play-based approach centres on a learning space where children partake in learning activities through integrating intellectual, physical, moral and spiritual values by providing opportunities to play that lead to development and growth (Hesterman, 2018). It can be argued that the play-based approach includes the use of play activities that lead to the development of children. However, as in the case of play itself, multiple definitions exist about what exactly the play-based approach entails.

2.3.1 What is the play-based approach?

According to Aronstam and Braund (2016), the play-based approach is mainly focused on learning through play activities and developing different skills while playing (cf. 1.4.3). Ali et al. (2013) state that play comes naturally for children and, therefore, that the most effective way of developing a child's thinking skills is to follow a play-based approach. Lynch (2015) has established that the play-based approach is a teaching method where the teacher can gently guide learning and learning activities to promote curricular goals while maintaining the central concept of play. It seems as if all the definitions of the play-based approach mainly focus on gaining skills through play in an age-appropriate way, with some guidance from teachers.

The work of Ali et al. (2013) resonates with that of Southcott (2013), who explains that it is an imperative to integrate the play-based approach in the foundation phase curriculum, because the teaching style should consider the children's needs in an age-appropriate way. International evidence comparing schools that follow a play-based approach that is teacher-directed clearly shows that these play-based programmes develop a stronger foundation for learning in children (Ali et al., 2013). However, due to various uncertainties, some can see the role of the teacher during the implementation of the play-based approach as a challenge (Esterhuizen, 2019).

According to Esterhuizen (2019), the teacher should change roles as the situation unfolds from creating a play situation to challenging and directing the learners to adapt certain skills through play. The teacher’s involvement includes facilitating social interactions, posing open-ended questions and encouraging children to take part in different play activities (Pinchover, 2017). McAfee and Leong (2020) affirm this and stipulate that the teacher’s involvement in play activities can increase the frequency, duration and complexity of the children’s play activities.

The teacher’s role when implementing the play-based approach should therefore be taken into consideration: it can be divided into the components of direct and indirect involvement (Loizou, 2016). Indirect involvement of the teacher during play requires a degree of scaffolding and verbal encouragement and discussions (Tsai, 2015). In contrast, Loizou et al. (2019) describe direct teacher involvement during play as a strategy where the teacher promotes the development of cognitive, social, verbal and creative skills while participating actively. Esterhuizen (2019) states that teachers should change roles as the situation unfolds, moving from creating the play situation to choosing ways to be involved. In this manner, they should draw out all potential to learn during play but also just observe the challenges that arise during play activities. Table 2.2 below compares direct and indirect teacher involvement during play.

Table 2.2: Direct teacher involvement and indirect teacher involvement during play (Loizou, 2016).

Direct teacher involvement	Indirect teacher involvement by example in the South African context
Sets the scenario, for example a specific story or goal.	Suggests play choices that have to do with different scenarios. For example, setting up different fantasy play areas in the classroom where children can choose different scenarios, for instance through playing dress-up to representing different cultures in our country.
Divides roles by deciding what each child will be in the set scenario.	Restructures the environment and suggests materials to enrich scenarios. In the Grade R classroom, the teacher should give children the opportunity to engage with different materials such as blocks, tricycles, fantasy play materials and sensory materials. Uses educational materials that promote an understanding of the diversity in our country, such as cultural items representing different cultures.
Decides how the children should behave by referring to their roles.	Verbally encourages children to take on roles by referring to the different roles available, such as a leader or a more specific role, such

	as a doctor, a teacher, a police officer or a game warden protecting our country's wildlife.
Asks questions and gives information to guide children to reach a specific goal or developmental skill.	Provides space for children to develop a certain scenario. The teacher should ensure that the classroom or outside play area has enough space for the children to set a scenario – for instance, to perform different cultural experiences.
Uses rewards to influence play positively and to encourage play.	Asks or talks to children about their scenario without influencing their decisions to act in a certain way or take on a specific role, specifically focusing on our country's cultural diversity.
Reminds children of the rules.	Creates challenges within the children's scenarios by including different play materials and spaces that promote the integration of educational information about our country, such as our wildlife. Teachers will also help children learn to respect and implement rules in games, such as board game rules.
Moves children into different roles to enrich the scenario and solve different problems.	Plays with the children as co-players in a role the children have determined, without giving guidance and while only following the rules that children created by themselves for the game.

Table 2.2 reflects the different roles that teachers can take on when implementing the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom. Tsai (2015) makes it clear that teacher involvement is important, but that the teacher should not interfere too much with the play activity, because this could lead to a loss of interest among children. It seems as if the teacher's role can be positive or negative, and teachers should bear in mind that they could influence the learning of the children when implementing the play-based approach. According to Pinchover (2017), the teachers' understanding of their role during the play-based approach and of the strategy influence their perception of the approach to play. Esterhuizen (2019) therefore rightly views the teacher's role as a challenge when it comes to interpreting the play-based approach correctly. When the teacher realises the importance of the play-based approach and implements it correctly, the benefits for child development are undeniable (Hakkarainen et al., 2013).

2.3.2 The importance of the play-based approach in Grade R

According to Ali et al. (2018), the positive effects and benefits of following a play-based approach in a foundation phase classroom are undeniable, since they create ample opportunities for children to develop in every domain that is necessary to be considered ready for school. In contrast, Granone and Reikeras (2021) aver that some teachers regard play as important only for developing the social-emotional domain, while others only use it for academic learning purposes. Regardless of whether play is viewed as holistically developmental or only developmental within certain domains, one should consider the claim made by Carr and Luken (2014) that, despite the amount of research that highlights the importance of play and the strong arguments presented by experts in favour of it, the actual time spent on play continues to decrease. Carr and Luken (2014) examined the decrease of play and found that today's children play eight hours less per week than their counterparts of two decades ago (cf. 1.1).

Ali et al. (2018) explain the circumstances in which play should take place and state that a secure, safe and challenging environment that promotes play and development is the key to incorporating the play-based approach successfully in the Grade R classroom. Ali et al. (2018) further claim that equipment and resources also play an important role when implementing the play-based approach, since these should provide children with opportunities to explore and create in multiple imaginative ways. The International Play Association (2010) affirms this and considers the neglect of play to be a global issue, where excessive pressure for educational achievement replaces play.

A significant reason for this problem is that adults lack awareness of the importance of play in children's development. Play has therefore been devalued and continues to be neglected by formal educational institutions that maintain the misguided view that learning is reserved for the classroom and that play should only take place in the playground (Hesterman, 2018). Esterhuizen (2019) argues that, in South Africa, it is unfortunate that not all teachers and curriculum developers regard play as important, but instead require children to focus on academic activities to the exclusion of play activities. This highlights that only some teachers introduce the play-based approach in the grade R classroom, which is related to their view and understanding of and experience with the play-based approach as a teaching strategy.

The separation of learning and play will affect the growth and development of children (Hesterman, 2018). I therefore argue that all Grade R teachers should introduce and promote the play-based approach. Singer (2015) mentions that all teachers should include the play-based approach, claiming that play and learning go hand in hand for young children, while the educational benefits of play are again undeniable. Singer (2012) further describes the child's experiences during play as intense positive emotions and sensory actions that lead to development, adding that the playfulness of

teachers prevents children from becoming overworked when they are simultaneously faced with strict rules and group discipline. Hannikainen et al. (2013) argue that the various benefits of play for young children are beyond doubt when one considers the acknowledgement it receives in a number of publications and empirical studies. Once again, this should encourage all Grade R teachers to include the play-based approach in their classrooms. Vygotsky (1978) also believed in the benefits of play and regarded the teacher's role as being imperative in enhancing and guiding the child's development (Sheridan, 2017).

2.4 Theoretical framework

In Chapter One (cf. 1.5) it is argued that a theoretical framework involves a specific theory that guides, scaffolds or structures research and findings (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). These researchers examine the functions of a theoretical framework and find them to include building a foundation, showing how new knowledge is formed and providing a reference point for the interpretation of findings (Swanson & Richard, 2013). Green (2014) confirms this when he points out that a researcher strengthens their study when using a theoretical framework, which enhances the credibility of the research process. In this research project, the theory modelled by Lev Vygotsky (1978) has been used as a blueprint to guide and provide a structure through which to define the philosophical, epistemological and methodological approaches that were adopted (cf. Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

The theorist Lev Vygotsky (1978) has established that play facilitates the cognitive development of children and that it plays a considerable role in their accomplishments. This emphasises the importance of fostering the play-based approach in Grade R classrooms (cf. Lester & Russel, 2010). Vygotsky (1978) identified the ZPD as the distance between a child's ability to independently solve a problem and the potential problem-solving developmental level of that child under the guidance of an adult or peer. Vygotsky (1978) argued that there is a difference in the execution of the ZPD process between a child assisted in problem-solving by an adult or peer and a child independently solving a problem while playing. Vygotsky (1978) further stated that, with the support of an adult or peer, one enters the ZPD process in a scaffolding manner, which addresses the child's existing level of knowledge compared to their capacity to learn new knowledge.

According to Wood et al. (1976), scaffolding does not change the task but, instead, makes it easier to complete by means of assistance. As the learner takes greater and greater responsibility to complete the task, assistance is gradually taken away. Therefore, fostering play-based strategies in Grade R classrooms, and giving teachers the role of a scaffolder, will facilitate achieving the full potential of a child's ZPD through play. Vygotsky (1977) indicated that the ZPD views play as the source of development, where it creates the ZPD, which makes an even stronger argument that play should be recognised as an integral part of teaching strategies in the Grade R classroom. He (1977) further stated

that play is the highest level of preschool development because it involves several different developmental areas.

The cultural-historical theory of play posed by Vygotsky (1978) stated that a child does not only practice what is already known to them when they play, but that they also learn new things through play by expanding their knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, in the Grade R classroom, where children interact with their peers in an imaginative play scenario, they will learn from one another's knowledge and each expand their own vocabulary and problem-solving skills. This idea again underlines the importance of implementing play-based strategies in the grade R classroom.

Vygotskians such as Bodrova and Leong (2019) argue that play influences development in several ways, including the creation of the ZPD of intellectual development, the separation of actions and objects, the facilitation of self-regulation development and the motivation of children to participate in activities. Vygotsky (1978) affirmed that children always act beyond their age and above their everyday behaviour when playing, because they have control over their emotions and can decide how to act in any situation – a process which leads to the creation of the ZPD. Relating Vygotsky's affirmations of the importance of play for the ZPD and the importance of nurturing the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom, it seems to me that children will not only grow emotionally and act on a more advanced age level, but they will also develop and expand existing and new cognitive knowledge.

Gulen and Baris (2021) adopt Vygotsky's views and describe play in terms of the ZPD as the child being a head taller than himself. If one could put the situation under a magnifying glass, play would contain all developmental tendencies in a condensed form. In and of itself, it is a major source of development. In this instance, introducing and fostering the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom are integrated with the theory of Vygotsky (1978), not least since Gulen and Baris (2021) also refer to play as the resource of development and the creator of the ZPD. Hakkarainen and Bredikyte (2008) agree and claim that the ZPD refers to the functions that have not yet been fully developed, but can be done through the inclusion of play. Vygotsky's approach is therefore the theory selected in this study, considering how it leads thought about and understanding of how one should research a play-based approach in the Grade R classroom. It facilitates the definition of concepts relevant to the study, as demonstrated above.

2.5 Advantages of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom

Vygotsky (1978) made it clear that play has an important role in the development of higher mental functions, while other research holds that play has multiple advantages in the development of the child (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). For instance, according to Zosh et al. (2017), the link between play

and foundational skills is undeniable, since it enhances cognitive abilities such as improved memory, self-regulation, oral language abilities, interpreting abstract thinking and social skills. Researchers such as Peterson et al. (2017) suggest that play is of the utmost importance to help children in their developmental stage, while the benefits of play for the cognitive, emotional, social and physical development of the child are irreplaceable. Ali et al. (2018) confirm this view, claiming that play is associated with the development of intellectual skills: when children play, they use their imagination, which requires a more complex form of thinking. By introducing play in the Grade R classroom, the child will get an opportunity to develop these skills and abilities without even noticing it. Cremin et al. (2015, pp. 404-419) have also established these advantages and further state that, when teachers implement the play-based approach, children engage with a variety of resources, ask different developmental questions and solve different types of problems.

Another advantage that play has for the Grade R classroom is the development of school readiness (de Jager, 2020). For a child to be considered school ready, a certain number of skills and abilities need to be developed and obtained in order for them to perform and adjust in a more formal academic classroom. According to de Jager (2020), the areas considered to be of importance for school readiness include physical and motor development, social and emotional skills, logical thinking skills, language development, cognitive development and general knowledge. All these areas can be developed and improved through play, and by implementing a play-based approach the child gets the opportunity to develop holistically (Ali et al., 2013).

As already mentioned, play facilitates the development of social skills and relationships. Therefore, playing in the Grade R classroom presents opportunities for children to interact with one another on a social level (Ali et al., 2018). These opportunities expose children to different feelings and emotions that they and their peers feel, which helps them to develop an understanding of how others feel and how to interact with different feelings and emotions. By implementing play-based strategies in the classroom, the teacher has the advantage of stepping in as scaffolder at any time of the activity, as soon as she thinks the child needs guidance. Alternatively, she may want to leave them to figure things out for themselves (O'Neill et al., 2012). Vygotsky (1967) stated that play is the leading source of development in the Grade R year (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). It can be argued that the advantages that play has to offer for the development of a child are holistic and occur in different developmental areas (Lunga et al., 2022). The different advantages of play in different developmental domains are therefore discussed in the following section.

2.5.1 Cognitive and academic development

Teaching strategies involving play have been demonstrated to improve children's reading and math scores as well as their working memory and cognitive flexibility (Weisberg et al., 2013). The

Department of Basic Education states in the CAPS (2011) document for Grade Rs that cognitive development can be achieved by playing different educational games, learning rhymes, imaginative play and outdoor play (DBE, 2011). Cognitive and academic development include different skills that need to be mastered, which include language development and vocabulary, math skills, shape knowledge and neurodynamic development.

Weisberg et al. (2013, pp. 39-54) state that play contains many of the ingredients necessary for optimal language development, such as presenting the opportunity for symbolic thinking and the representation of words and more formal language development. Language development should be based on the principles of integration and play (DBE, 2011). According to Han et al. (2015), children's vocabulary improves when playful learning is present because of children's social interactions with one another. The CAPS document of South Africa for Grade R regards the development of effective communication as an aim to be achieved in school, by using visual, symbolic or language skills (DBE, 2011).

Math skills and shape knowledge also form part of cognitive development and studies show that children naturally engage in math-related activities during play, so that it can be connected with achievements in math as well as the improvement of knowledge about shapes (Fisher et al., 2013). The CAPS document of South Africa for Grade R states that the play-based method should be used to develop the correct mathematical skills for investigating and solving problems and also to develop a love for maths (DBE, 2011). Brain development can be influenced positively when play is used as a learning strategy: It helps to achieve the programming of higher brain regions; therefore, neurodynamic and brain development are also regarded as advantages when play is introduced into the Grade R classroom (Singer, 2015). According to Krog (2010) movement is the most effective way for the brain to develop and through play, changes takes place with the neuron pathways. Krog (2010) further explains the importance of outdoor play activities which doesn't only develop the child's physical ability but it also gives opportunity for movement which helps in the creation of new neurons in the brain.

2.5.2 Physical development

The fine and gross motor skills that support physical coordination and growth are developed during play (Smith & Pellegrini, 2013). The Department of Basic Education of South Africa regards physical and motor development as a fundamental learning outcome in Grade R, stating that they can be achieved through play, movement, games and sport (DBE, 2011). Spatial skills are included in physical development and, according to Zhang et al. (2022), play, especially with blocks, improves and develops spatial skills. As play becomes more sophisticated, children give greater attention to colours, shapes and sizes. This introduces them to spatial concepts, which in turn facilitates their

development of representations of spatial relationships between objects in the physical world (Zhang et al., 2022). Space and shape are two of the content areas to be focused on in the South African Grade R classrooms when learning mathematical skills (DBE, 2011).

2.5.3 Social and emotional development

When children play, they develop important social skills, such as self-regulation, empathy and working together, which improves their emotional intelligence (Berk & Meyers, 2013). The Life Skills Curriculum Statement for Grade R in South Africa regards personal and social well-being as learning content areas. This includes social and emotional health and relationships with others (DBE, 2011). A child's emotional and social development is just as important as their physical and cognitive development. Therefore, children should gain far more exposure to play. It further seems that a play-based approach increases their motivation to attend school (Weisberg et al., 2013). The CAPS (2011) document for Grade R states that a traditional, formal-based learning programme that is structured should be avoided in Grade R (DBE, 2011).

Play therefore indeed offers many advantages for the holistic development of the child. To utilise these advantages when implementing the play-based approach, the Grade R teacher should take various factors that may influence its implementation into consideration (Hannikainen et al., 2013).

2.6 Factors influencing play in the Grade R classroom

Various factors influence the perception and implementation of the play-based approach. Hannikainen et al. (2013, pp. 165-171) state that, despite the positive influences of play, the lack of opportunities for play gives reason for concern. They argue that changes in cultural life lead to a society that emphasises academic knowledge and formal education above all other forms of knowledge, which culminates in the marginalisation and reduction of play in early educational settings (Hannikainen et al., 2013). These factors will now be discussed.

2.6.1 Teachers' perceptions of play-based strategies

According to Ali et al. (2013), teachers perceive play in terms of their understanding and awareness of how it benefits the child's development, while these perceptions influence the child's learning experiences. Teachers' perceptions of implementing the play-based approach differ: some regard it as being important and others want to move away from it altogether. According to a study done by Lynch (2015, pp. 347-370), a number of participant teachers wanted to know how to present play-based activities in a more scholarly or academic way, and some even stated that teachers who implemented the play-based approach were lazy. The study also found that teachers felt pressure about their available time and that they would rather use their playtime for academic activities. According to Lynch (2015), teachers even rename certain activities and areas in the classroom to

make them sound more academic and not playful, such as “developmental area” rather than “play area” and “sensory differentiation time” rather than “nap time.”

Fortunately, a study performed by Lynch (2015) presents some positive perceptions of the play-based approach, in that almost all of the participating teachers agreed that play benefits the child’s social development, while one participant also said that she believed children learn through play. These teachers were able to demonstrate the things that children had learned through play in their classrooms. Teachers in another study reinforced these findings, with most of them acknowledging that children develop through play, not only cognitively and physically, but also emotionally (Aronstam & Braund, 2016).

A study done by Fesseha and Pyle (2016) presents results that are somewhat similar to the study of Lynch (2015): They found that 91% of the participants revealed that play had always been a part of their classroom’s daily routine, but unfortunately only 19% of these participants regarded play as an exciting activity. One aspect that the two studies agree on is the problem of finding time for play: Fesseha and Pyle (2016) established that teachers found it difficult to make time to teach all the elements of the curriculum while including play in every activity. It seems as if teachers were aware of the play-based approach but unsure of what exactly it entailed, how to effectively implement it and what their role as the teacher should be when following a play-based approach.

2.6.2 Misconceptions around play as a teaching strategy

The sheer number of definitions of play complicates the effective implementation of a play-based approach. According to Ali et al. (2013), the lack of a common definition for play makes it difficult to give common recommendations to create and design a curriculum for a play-based approach. This difficulty could cause uncertainty with teachers about what exactly a play-based approach entails. In a similar vein, Fung and Cheng (2012) claim that teachers struggle to see how play can lead to learning because they only see it as a free-time activity. A UNICEF document (as cited by Borisova, 2018) states that a lack of understanding concerning the value of play and a perception that it as an academic method both constrain the integration of the play-based approach in Grade R.

Borisova (2018) discusses the factors that influence this and mentions that misconceptions about play among the parents or caregiver of children hold back the implementation of learning through play. They believe that play takes away opportunity from “true learning” and thus prefer a school to present more opportunities for academic learning, which once again emphasises the lack of knowledge about the benefits of play. Peterson et al. (2017) claim that parental demands force Grade R teachers to replace play-based activities with formal reading activities, because the parents believe that this will benefit their children academically. Lynch (2014) confirms this by mentioning that some teachers

regard the play-based approach as a threat to the academic development of learners. Some parents and teachers believe that play is a waste of time. Consequently, an increase in structured formal activities can be observed in schools around South Africa, which leads to a decrease of playtime (Esterhuizen, 2019). It can be argued that the misconception about the actual benefits of the play-based approach for children, teachers and parents alike can also lead to confusion among parents and communities.

2.6.3 Social context and diversity

Another factor that influences the implementation of the play-based approach is the diversity of culture of early childhood learners in the classroom (Zosh et al., 2017). Huizinga (1938) was the first scholar to attempt an exact definition of play and the way it infuses and manifests itself in culture. Huizinga (1938) claimed that play influences all aspects of one's culture, including the arts, intellectual life and even politics. Given this interconnectedness, it can be argued that culture influences the amounts and types of play that children are exposed to. Gosso and Carvalho (2013) confirm this view, arguing that play is evident when there is a sense of playfulness and fun, while variations of this view should be taken into consideration when defining play across diverse cultures. In the South African context, Ogunyemi and Ragpot (2016) claim that not all children have similar early experiences with play – experiences that some disregard because they grow up in families that do not understand the importance of stimulating children holistically through playing and reading activities. These children's parents think that learning only starts when they enter school (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2016).

According to Peterson et al. (2017), play is influenced by the socio-economic status of a community's members. Their experiences and educational backgrounds determine whether they regard play as important for child development. Peterson et al. (2017), further state that uneducated community members will regard their child's academic development to be more important than play, which is seen as a leisure activity. Gosso and Carvalho (2013) confirm this and argue that we cannot simply assume that all communities value and provide comparable opportunities for children to play. They have noticed that, in different communities, the number of children who play differ along with the number of their play partners.

According to Solis et al. (2019) South Africa, in coming from an oppressed colonial educational system, faces different challenges to play effectively in the classroom and meet children's developmental needs. These challenges include South Africa's pronounced ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic diversity. The culture of the child should be taken in consideration when the play-based approach is used as a teaching strategy. Singer (2015) avers that the child must adapt to the cultural world into which they are born. She further mentions that play can help the child maintain

their confidence after failure, by including their culture in a playful manner through using routines, rituals, songs, dance and humour (Singer, 2015).

Vygotsky (1978) also mentions that in play, children have biological and cultural tools at their disposal to interact and develop, and therefore understanding the social context in which children play is particularly important. Vygotsky (1978) further argues that the child's social situation is determined by their society and cultural context, which leads to different interests and incentives with different development styles. Therefore, examining play is of the utmost importance. Singer (2015) quotes Huizinga's work and refers to play as a source of culture. Without play the vitality disappears from a culture.

According to UNESCO (2017), we cannot afford to misunderstand the importance of good quality education for young children – an education that includes growth, development and learning, not only in academic knowledge but also cultural knowledge. Hannikainen et al. (2013) confirm this, explaining that play is a valuable medium for children's participation in their cultural life, helping them learn to live together and incorporate basic cultural values, attitudes and abilities. It is noticeable that culture and diversity need to be considered when approaching a play-based approach, but the question arises as to where play fits into the early childhood curriculum.

2.6.4 Curricula and policies

Academic learning with measurable outcomes is a globally growing phenomenon in early childhood education, despite the fact that play is seen as a right for each child (Alcock, 2013). In contrast, Hunter and Walsh (2014) argue that recent research shows how a too-formal pedagogical approach is inappropriate for young children: Therefore, a considerable number of international early childhood curricula are now reformulated to be firmly grounded in the principles and values of a play-based approach. Educational policies in the UK and Ireland have been moving toward implementing a play-based teaching strategy in the early years of education (Hunter & Walsh, 2014). While European countries seem to be embracing the play-based approach, New Zealand's early childhood policy, curriculum and assessment document makes little or no mention of play, even despite the strong association between play activities and children's learning and development, as pointed out by Alcock (2013). Alcock (2013) believes this neglect of play is caused by its elusive nature and complexity and by the consequent difficulties around defining it as a teaching strategy.

According to Ogunyemi and Ragpot (2016), play can be viewed as a popular yet controversial term in early childhood education, especially in developing countries such as South Africa. Nonetheless, as has already been indicated, the CAPS document for Grade R states that formal-based learning programmes should be avoided in Grade R and that holistic development should take place through

play-based learning (DBE, 2011). The daily programme of Grade R classrooms in South Africa sets out the different play activities that should be incorporated every day (see Figure 2.1). While the CAPS document does provide opportunity for the play-based approach to take place in South Africa's Grade R classrooms, ECD programmes unfortunately still differ significantly among the different provinces (Aronstam & Braund, 2016). Aronstam and Braund (2016) explain that this inconsistency is due to a lack of resources and learning materials, minimal funding and poor-quality teacher training. In a report compiled by the Department of Education of the Eastern Cape, concern is raised about the standard of teaching and learning in Grade R classrooms, because the teaching programmes were found to be of poor quality (DBE, 2011).

Ogunyemi and Ragpot (2016) claim that it is a challenge to create a play-rich curriculum and environment for early education in South Africa, due to wrong perceptions about the value of play, incompetent teachers, inadequate funding and policy inconsistency. They claim that the government would need to go beyond policy formulation and legislation to address the challenges that stymie the effective implementation of a playful learning method (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2016). According to Setlhare et al. (2016), it is challenging to transition from a segregated apartheid education system where resources were divided unequally among different races to an inclusive school system. The authors focus on different challenges, including poor parenting skills and involvement, poverty and socio-economic influences such as violence and poor living conditions (Setlhare et al., 2016).

2.6.5 Influence of COVID-19 on play

COVID-19 undoubtedly influenced the availability of time that children could spend on effective play activities and, according to a study done by Moore et al. (2020), only 4.8% of children were meeting the recommended play and movement guidelines established for young children amidst the COVID-19 restrictions. Their study further claims that children spent less time outside and more time on screens and asleep, while parents' involvement and encouragement were also influenced. The authors state that COVID-19 had a direct impact on the movement and play behaviours of children, and this should be taken into consideration when it creating strategies that can prevent this problem during possible future pandemics (Moore et al., 2020). Murray (2020) emphasises that, due to the closure of many schools during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, at least forty million young children across the world lost the opportunity to benefit from a year of early childhood education. This will impact children's health, development and learning negatively, even more so in low-income countries (Murray, 2020).

Timmons et al. (2021) affirm this by arguing that there are reasons to be concerned about the short and long-term impact that the pandemic has had on children's development, because learning in the early years is primarily based on play, so as to develop social, emotional and cognitive aspects. The

importance of teachers' roles in the play-based approach cannot be overstated, because they should ideally understand the different ways in which children develop during play, and the spontaneous ways in which play activities unfold require teachers to encourage probe learning and curiosity as they occur (Timmons et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers are faced with a whole new challenge, which is to integrate the play-based method while meeting the curriculum's expectations effectively, but now through a remote learning programme.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has emphasised the importance of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom and focused on extant research to examine and substantiate various statements made by relevant scholars as well as the concomitant theoretical frameworks. Different definitions of play and play-based strategies were presented, leading to a discussion of the different factors that influence teachers' implementation of the play-based approach. On this basis, the chapter has argued that strategies need to be developed to minimise the factors that prevent effective play-based activities in the grade R classroom, and that it is necessary to explore the challenges that teachers face when implementing the play-based approach. This chapter has further established that the play-based approach faces numerous challenges, so that a number of factors should be taken into account when it is implemented in the Grade R classroom. Chapter Three will centre on the research methodology and design of the present study, focusing on the collaborative nature of the methodology that was chosen and why it is ideally suited to the purpose and scope of this study.

CHAPTER THREE - THEORETICAL DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“The participatory nature of PAR embodies a democratic approach to research in which participants work collaboratively in the co-generation of new knowledge to address a specific issue or problem”

(Jacobs, 2016, p. 48).

3.1 Introduction

My desire to ensure that all Grade R learners get the opportunity to develop to their full potential motivated me to embark on this study. In collaboration with Grade R teachers, I investigated how play-based learning could contribute to the holistic development of learners. I believe that the play-based approach is critical for developing Grade R learners to reach their full potential.

Chapter Two provided a literature review of play-based learning. The discussion focused on how it is presented and used in Grade R classrooms and how different types of play contribute to child development. I also explained how Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of ZPD influenced the way in which I approached the research topic and how it guided me to make sense of the data.

The present chapter builds on the ideas explored in Chapter One and focuses on the chosen research design and methodology as well as on considerations that ensure adherence to ethical best practices. Firstly, I will discuss the purpose of this study and explain how the research questions guided the project. The critical transformative paradigm will be discussed in detail to show how this paradigm guided the study, given the focus on transforming the participants’ thinking about the topic under investigation.

As suggested by Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon (2014), the PAR design enabled me to work collaboratively with participants to research and develop guidelines that can address the problem. The qualitative methodology adopted for this research project will be discussed together with all the necessary assumptions that influenced the study. I also discuss the data generation methods and how I employed them, and explain how I applied the quality criteria of Herr and Anderson (2014) to establish the validity of the research. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the measures taken to ensure ethical integrity throughout the entirety of this research study.

3.2 Purpose of research

The purpose of this study has been to work collaboratively with Grade R teachers to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R (cf. 1.2). Play-based learning is an important strategy in the early years of childhood because of its developmental benefits (Aronstam & Braund, 2015). Aronstam and Braund (2015) however indicate that much still has to be done to improve the quality of education in

Grade R. Their study on play learning programmes in South Africa found that only 12% of Grade R teachers in the Western Cape were properly qualified, while 88% required additional training and 23% had no training at all. Apart from the lack of qualified teachers, parental pressure, minimal funding and the lack of resources and learning materials also negatively influence the early education system in South Africa (cf. 2.6), which unavoidably affects children's education and development (Aronstam & Braund, 2015). The ETDP-SETA ECD development Sector Skills Plan (2019-2020) indicates that there is a dire need for professionally trained teachers. The recent ECD census (2022) recognises the importance of training teachers to improve the quality of education in children's early years. Minister Motshekga (DBE, 2022) has emphasised the importance of play-based learning in these early years as a key component of quality education.

In order to explore play in Grade R classrooms, the following research questions were formulated (cf. 1.3):

3.2.1 Primary research question

How can PAR be used to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R classrooms?

To engage this research question on a fuller scale, the following sub-questions were also formulated:

3.2.2 Research sub-questions

Cycle 1

- *What are teachers' experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R?*

Cycle 2

- *How can teachers improve their use of the play-based approach in Grade R?*
- *What guidelines can be derived from the findings to foster play-based learning in Grade R?*

These questions guided the research study to develop an understanding of teachers' experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R. Specifically, the question enabled them to share their knowledge and to identify challenges and successes that can serve as a basis to develop teaching strategies that can foster play-based learning in Grade R.

3.3 Research methodology

In Chapter One it is explained that research methodology refers to the understanding of the research process (Maree, 2016). He further explains that the research methodology is the path that researchers use to conduct their research (Maree, 2016). A qualitative research approach has been implemented throughout this study (cf. 1.6).

3.3.1 Research paradigm

The term ‘paradigm’ was first used by the philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1962) in connection with research outlooks or worldviews. He defined it as a framework accepted by a set of researchers that provides them with guidelines to conduct their research (cf. 1.6). According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), researchers should be aware of the elements of research paradigms, which include the ability to understand and form beliefs around the manner in which reality takes place (ontology), what there is to know about reality and how we can acquire this knowledge (epistemology). Apart from stating that a paradigm is a belief system based on assumptions about ontology and epistemology, they also point to the significance of methodology and methods in determining and being determined by paradigms (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

The paradigm that guided this study is of the critically transformative kind (cf. 1.6.1). Horkheimer (1982), one of the founders of critical theory, explains that this transformative paradigm seeks release so as to free human beings from the circumstances that trap them. Asghar (2013) elucidates these ideas and claims that critical theory challenges the status quo and seeks a stabilised and democratic society, particularly regarding problems around race, class, economy, education and religion. According to Wood (2019), a critical transformative paradigm includes a way of thinking that is always open to change or seeks improvements and new ideas. The teachers who participated in the present project used critical transformative thinking skills to develop strategies that could foster the play-based approach in Grade R. Horkheimer’s (1982) definition further suggests three criteria for a suitable critical theory:

- It must be illustrative of what is wrong with the present social reality.
- It must recognise the action required to change it.
- It must supply clear norms for criticism and transformation.

These criteria gave researchers the opportunity not only to explore the problem, but also to recognise and create strategies that could be implemented successfully in society and help correct the wrong (Asghar, 2013). These criteria for an adequate critical theory paradigm motivated me to apply the critical transformative approach in this study, meaning that teachers participating in the research used critical transformative thinking skills to identify challenges and develop strategies to foster the play-based learning approach in Grade R (cf. 1.6). The ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that make up a paradigm according to Asghar (2013), will be discussed in the following sections.

3.3.1.1 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemology can be described as the study of theories about the essence and range of knowledge, the assessment of knowledge and the study of knowledge (Baloyi-Mothibeli, 2018). In this study, the use of the PAR methodology ensured that knowledge was drawn from participants' experiences through working collaboratively on the research problem (cf. 1.6.2). Chilisa (2012) confirms that the PAR method can gather knowledge in different ways, but its central advantage is that the knowledge is socially constructed. According to Scotland (2012), critical epistemology is subjectivist and based on real-life occurrences and social ideas, which he claims are socially constructed around the influences of power relations within society.

The critical transformative paradigm led the participants to new ways of thinking about how they could implement the play-based approach to improve their teaching. Therefore, this study helped me to understand how the Grade R teachers experienced and understood the play-based approach and how they could contribute to fostering the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom. By following the epistemological assumptions as guided by critical theory, the participants had the opportunity to use their own experiences and knowledge to create and develop new knowledge in order to transform and empower others.

3.3.1.2 Ontological assumptions

Ontology is a branch of philosophy that helps us come to grips with the assumptions we make to believe that something is real. It is the philosophical study of the nature of existence or reality (Scotland, 2012). Zuber-Skerritt (2015) confirms this and states that ontology is focused on the researcher's assumptions about the nature of being and reality (cf. 1.6.3).

Action research expects the participants to recognise ontological principles that become standards for judging their actions and intentions (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015). According to Zuber-Skerritt et al. (2015), these ontological principles include democracy and respect and should always promote the quality of life. They further state that action research follows a diligent process of inquiry that aims to bring about ontological transformation in the participants, which is also known as the emancipatory outcome (Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015).

The ontological assumptions of a critical transformative paradigm are socially constructed, leading to the entertainment of multiple realities, and these can therefore be changed (Mertens, 2010). The Grade R teachers' perceptions of the reality of experiencing the play-based approach could be changed through their collective voice during the data generation process. Transformative research gives the participants the opportunity to raise their voices and state beliefs, which leads to an agenda

for change with a view to improving their situation (Mertens, 2010). In this study, the participants had the chance to form their own opinions about the play-based approach and the challenges of implementing it. They collaboratively worked on the development of strategies and guidelines to ultimately help foster and improve the play-based approach in Grade R and change the way in which it should be implemented.

3.3.1.3 Axiological assumptions

Axiology has to do with assumptions about beliefs, values and worldviews that underpin and determine our actions (Wood, 2019). Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, pp. 26-42) affirm this and state that axiology is one of the four elements that primarily compromise the basic assumptions, views, norms and values of the chosen paradigm. Axiological assumptions mainly focus on the ethical issues that need to be considered during the research process. They facilitate evaluating and understanding concepts of right and wrong and influence decision-making accordingly (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Through answering these questions within the present study, guidance will be provided around ethical considerations (cf. 3.8). The axiological assumptions of the present project were influenced by the criteria given by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017). I constantly kept these ideas in mind to ensure the safety and well-being of the participants. The specific values that I kept in mind during the study were trustworthiness, empathy and equality between myself as the researcher and the participants (cf. 1.12).

3.3.2 Research design

Action research is one of the leading methodologies used in the critical theory paradigm, due to its emancipatory worldview, transformative abilities and empowerment of participants and their communities (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). I chose a participatory and collaborative format for this research, as I believed that such an approach would provide the opportunity to improve the practice of play in the Grade R classroom. In the following sections, I discuss the research paradigm that informed this study and the PAR design that was implemented (cf. 1.6).

Participatory action research (PAR) is a genre of action research that includes people who are actively involved in a specific situation because they are considered to be in the best position to decide how to shape theory and practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). According to Crane and O'Regan (2010), there are a few elements that summarise the key features of PAR (cf. 1.7.1):

- Research involves participants who are most affected by what is to be changed or improved.
- Participants are granted the opportunity to identify questions, answer them and decide about what actions to take.
- The research works collaboratively with no hierarchical order among those involved.

Maxwell (2013) argues that these different components form an integrated and interactive whole, where each component influences the other. Wood (2019) further explains that participants are actively involved in the research process, using their knowledge collaboratively to learn and develop. Figure 3.1 depicts the way in which the three pillars of PAR fit into one another to form the genre:



Figure 3.1 Three pillars of PAR (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019).

This figure illustrates that participants are actively involved throughout the research process, collaboratively working together with the researcher. PAR gave the co-researchers in this study the opportunity to be actively involved throughout the research process by integrating their experiences, which engendered the creation of new knowledge and skills around the phenomenon of the play-based approach (cf. 1.7.1).

The extraordinary feature of PAR is that the participant who is actively involved in the identified problematic situation can both ask and answer research questions (Kemmis et al., 2014). It is important to note that the people most affected by the identified problem or situation should be involved in the research process for it to be regarded as participatory. This study included Grade R teachers as participants, due to the fact that they were actively involved in implementing the play-based approach and their knowledge and experiences made them ideal for its purpose.

In the present project, PAR involved a cyclical, participatory, systematic, dynamic, developmental and critical process where the teachers and I met regularly to discuss issues and share ideas on the play-based approach. I, as a postgraduate student, collaborated with the participants in two cycles to explore the ways in which they use strategies to foster the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom. The research design of this study consisted of the following two cycles (cf. 1.7.1):

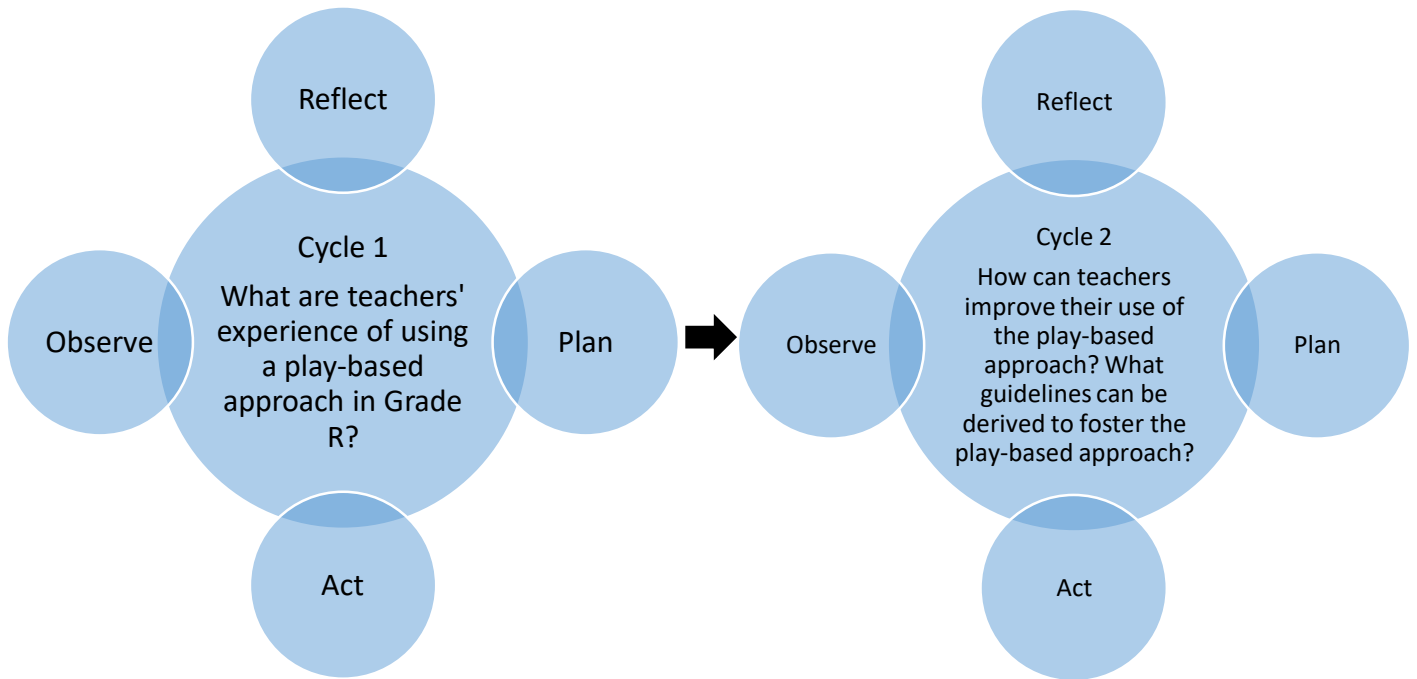


Figure 3.2 The PAR research design

As outlined in the schematic figure above and explained in Chapter One, PAR is a cyclical process that includes planning, action, observation and reflection (figure 1.1) which leads to the informal sharing of the knowledge that is generated. The following sections will explain how these four phases were integrated into the two cycles of the study.

3.3.2.1 Cycle One of the research

In PAR there are iterative cycles of planning, action, observing and reflection (cf. Figure 1.1). The aim of the first cycle was to collaboratively work with the participants to understand what teachers' experiences were when implementing the play-based learning approach and to identify the challenges that they encountered (cf. 1.7.1). The first cycle included relationship-building activities to make sure that the core research group would be actively involved in the discussions and that the relationship adhered to three important ethical principles, namely respect, beneficence and trust.

The participants used their experiences in the implementation of the play-based approach as a valid source of knowledge during this cycle and provided valuable points that engendered the development of the second cycle, while also finding answers to the first research question:

- *What are teachers' experiences of using a play-based learning approach in Grade R?*

The second cycle emanated from the findings of the first cycle.

3.3.2.2 Cycle Two of the research

The aim of the second cycle was to collaboratively develop strategies that would help teachers overcome the challenges in their classrooms that prevented them from successfully implementing the play-based approach to learning. The participants and I worked together to examine their experiences in the daily Grade R classroom, identify the most common challenges and develop guidelines that would improve their use of the play-based approach. This cycle answered the second set of research questions (cf. 1.7.2):

- *How can teachers improve their use of play-based learning in Grade R?*
- *What guidelines can be derived from the findings to foster play-based learning in Grade R?*

Having discussed the research paradigm and design, the following section will focus on the research methods used to recruit participants and generate data.

3.4 Research methods

The research site, recruitment of participants and data generation strategies are discussed in this section. I also highlight how COVID-19 impacted my study. The lockdown regulations did not only force me to make use of online sessions, but the participants also faced numerous challenges that led to withdrawal and emotional strain.

3.4.1 Site and recruitment

At the beginning of my study, I identified my the school where I teach as the site where all of the research discussions would take place. Due to the COVID-19 regulations and the concomitant health regulations, the data had to be collected via online platforms and no face-to-face contact sessions were permitted. Zoom was used as the primary platform for discussions (cf. 1.8.1). COVID-19 and the impact it had on social contact, financial factors and school calendars made the process much more difficult. I identified three independent preschools in February 2019 that were willing to partake in my study. These schools, schools A, B and C were also in Pretoria. They are run independently of the DBE and therefore are much smaller and financially more dependent on parents and donations from the surrounding community. These schools were originally houses that were converted into pre-schools and therefore the space is limited and the number of children they can take in is also restricted. We started with cycle 1 and completed the first relationship building session. But, after the first hard lockdown, teachers were retrenched due to the pandemic's financial impact. Some of the participants explained that they do not have the physical and emotional ability to partake in the research due to the pandemic's attack on their self-esteem and mental health. The ethical agreement gave the

participants permission to withdraw at any time and therefore my recruitment process started all over again.

With being obliged to restart the recruitment process and I also had to re-apply for ethical clearance from the Department of Basic Education Gauteng in October 2019 for permission to conduct research in two new schools in Pretoria. I obtained permission to start my data generation in February 2020 and I then purposefully selected six participants from two different primary schools in the Pretoria area, School D and E. Both of these schools are economically and physically quite similar. School D has 5 Grade R classes and School E has 4 Grade R classes, all containing between 20 and 25 learners. Both are public schools and therefore the Department of Education is involved in determining the curriculum and managing the financial decisions. Even though I didn't know the participants personally, I identified a gatekeeper to help with the recruitment of the participants.

The schools that participated in the study were School D and E, where 3 participants were recruited at both schools. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons one of School D's participants had to withdraw, which left my study with a total of 5 participants.

The type of data I sought required a knowledgeable person who could explain their daily experiences around the topic and understand the terminology being used. Therefore, I opted to identify my participants by means of purposive sampling in order to gather the data (cf. 1.8.1). Purposive sampling refers to the recruitment of participants with a specific purpose in mind (1.8.1). The research group ultimately included me as the facilitator and five participating Grade R teachers. The latter were divided into two groups, one comprising three teachers and the other only two teachers, after one of the participants withdrew from the study. Both groups participated in all cycles of the research process. The two groups participated separately in group discussions, due to the difficulties of synchronising the schedules and responsibilities of all the participants along with my own. Both groups attended four sessions: two in cycle one and two in cycle two, where the duration of each session was 90 - 120 minutes. Even though the sessions were limited, each session lasted longer and consisted of experienced and knowledgeable participants.

The criteria I used to purposively recruit participants included the following (cf. 1.8.1):

- The co-researcher should be a Grade R teacher in Gauteng at an independent or public pre-primary school, with a teaching qualification.
- The co-researcher should have at least two years of experience as a Grade R teacher.
- The participant should be willing to participate in the different online cycles presented to collect and exchange knowledge.

Table 3.1: Biographical information of the participants

Participant code	Occupation	Gender of participant	Group
PA	Teacher	Female	1
PB	Teacher	Female	1
PC	Teacher	Female	Withdrew during cycle 2
PD	Teacher	Female	2
PE	Teacher	Female	2
PF	Teacher	Female	2

This table reflects important details about the participants in this study, who used different generation methods to gather data in order to collaboratively answer the research questions.

3.4.2 Data generation methods

The data generation methods mentioned in Chapter One will be discussed in detail (cf. 1.9). According to Bryman (2016), researchers use qualitative data generation methods when in-depth data are required that will elucidate the manner in which participants experience their world. Bryman (2016) formulates a few useful questions that the researcher should ask himself or herself to determine which data generations methods should be used:

- What kinds of action should take place in order to collect data?
- What are the circumstances to the daily life reality in the data generation process?
- How should I conduct myself in order to collect the data?

These questions led me to use the data generation methods briefly unpacked below.

3.4.2.1 Recorded group discussions

Recorded group discussions are group meetings where informed people interact and communicate about selected themes (Goldkuhl, 2019). Goldkuhl (2019) states that it can be seen as a special group interview that gives participants the opportunity to express themselves in terms of their own views as well as the views of others (cf 1.9.1). Bryman (2016) confirms this and notes that the group session consists of the participants but also a facilitator, usually the researcher, who leads the conversation

and guides the formulation of questions. In this study, I acted as the facilitator and led the conversations. A group discussion has a direct relationship with the reality of the discussed theme, due to the fact that the group includes knowledgeable participants, whether they gather the knowledge from personal experiences or broader knowledge about the topic (Nyumba et al., 2018).

Table 3.2 Recorded group discussion sessions

Recorded group discussions			
Cycle one		Cycle two	
Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2
First group discussion, introduction and discussion, and explanation of first data generation method. (First and second week in June.)	First group discussion, introduction and discussion, and explanation of first data generation method. (First and second week in June.)	First group discussion, talking about the research questions, discussing the field notes to be written. (Third and fourth week in July.)	First group discussion, talking about the research questions, discussing the field notes to be written. (Third and fourth week in July.)
Photovoice activity at their schools. (Third and Fourth week in June.)	Photovoice activity at their schools. (Third and Fourth week in June.)	Field notes activity. (First week in August.)	Field notes activity. (First week in August.)
Second group discussion, focusing on the Photovoice activity which led to the second cycle's research question. (First and second week in July.)	Second group discussion, focusing on the Photovoice activity which led to the second cycle's research question. (First and second week in July.)	Second group discussion, focusing on the field notes and last research question. (Second and third week in August.)	Second group discussion, focusing on the field notes and last research question. (Second and third week in August.)

Table 3.2 above sets out the different group discussions that took place in cycles with the different groups.

Cycle One began with a group discussion through Zoom (cf. 1.7.2), introducing the participants to one another, discussing and highlighting the ethical aspects and shortly discussing the theme of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom, which led us to the first research question and the Photovoice activity. According to Boland et al. (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic created extreme challenges for qualitative research, whereas the need remained for researchers to explore participants' experiences and observations, which led to new ways of data generation. They claim that videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom were increasingly used by qualitative researchers as alternatives to face-to-face meetings (Boland, et al., 2021). Krouwel et al. (2019) affirm this, claiming that, among all the technology available for data generation, videoconferencing is the closest replica of face-to-face interaction. They further explain that videoconferencing is not only more cost-effective, but that it also reduces travel time and venue rental and better enables the researcher to record and transcribe the materials (Krouwel et al., 2019).

Naturally, there are also some disadvantages to take into consideration when using Zoom, including technical issues, privacy and equity (Boland, et al., 2021). During the present study, technical issues were resolved beforehand by ensuring that all participants had access to a good internet connection and by using a laptop or electronic device that was updated and would not delay the process. Privacy was discussed beforehand through informed consent forms and by stating that the meetings would be recorded and later transcribed. During the research process, equity between participants was maintained by ensuring everyone had the correct technology and internet connection to give their opinion and experiences.

Group discussion encourages participants to ask questions, comment on experiences and investigate the experiences of the other participants, as suggested by Cohen et al. (2013). During Cycle One, a discussion took place after the Photovoice activity that guided the conversation and developed the purpose for the second cycle. In Cycle Two, the group discussion mainly focused on the experiences of the teachers and how these were compared among them. Opinions were raised and participants led the conversation in the direction of the development of guidelines for the play-based approach in Grade R. The aim of the group discussions in both cycles was to collaboratively involve all participants to partake in the conversation, share their knowledge and experiences as centred on the play-based approach and discuss guidelines to help them in the classroom. The three recorded group discussions that were conducted ultimately led to the answering of the research questions through recording and transcribing the data.

3.4.2.2 Visual methods

The visual method used in this study included Photovoice. According to Plunkett et al. (2012), Photovoice is an example of a data generation method that is useful because the data it generates

around the understanding of lived experience is rich (cf. 1.9.2). Butschi and Hedderich (2021) state that Photovoice is a qualitative and participatory method that enables researchers to reach a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. They further claim that it is used together with community knowledge and first-hand experiences, which may lead to the development of strategies and guidelines to address issues that are potentially meaningful for society (Butschi & Hedderich, 2021). Budig et al. (2018) expound on the benefits of Photovoice:

- It helps participants recognise the challenges and the strengths in society.
- It encourages discussion and conversations about different issues.
- It gives the participants the opportunity to decide what is important to them and what should be changed.

These guidelines encouraged me to use Photovoice in the first cycle of the study, and it was found to be suitable, because it gave me the opportunity to see the types of play activities available to the Grade R's. The participants had the opportunity to photograph their own choice of play activities and materials that they used in their classroom. According to Budig, et al. (2018), the fact that Photovoice enables the participant to voice their own experiences and perceptions leads to a sense of empowerment.

In the present project, participants had to take different photographs with their cell phones of the various play areas that they used in their school, which could include the physical area or only the materials used to implement the play-based approach. Each photograph had to be accompanied by a short description of the name of the area as well as the development matter that was focused on. The photographs taken by the participants gave me insight into the daily routine in the Grade R classroom and how my participants experienced these activities and further allowed me to compare the different schools. The description accompanying the photo guided the conversations in the subsequent Zoom group discussion about the photographs, which engendered the development of research questions. The Photovoice method was new to all participants, meaning that ethical procedures were first discussed before the activity could take place. They also used their cell phones to take photographs. The photographs were then used in the subsequent group discussion that led to Cycle Two.

3.4.2.3 Field notes

According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), the qualitative field note is an essential component of rigorous qualitative research, because it gives the opportunity to enhance data and provide an in-depth context for analysis (cf. 1.9.3). They further explain that field notes serve many functions in the generation of research data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018):

- It equips researchers to be closely involved in the environment and interactions of participants.

- It provides language-specific data.
- It includes the nature of the environment and how the participants react to it.
- It increases trustworthiness.
- It provides context to inform the analysis of the data.

According to MacDonald (2012), qualitative methods focus on the experiences of the participants, the meanings they construct based on these experiences and how they understand it. MacDonald (2012) further explains that the participants' observations include writing down events, behaviours and objects in the social setting within which these were located. These give rise to the field notes.

Field notes were used during Cycle Two where participants had to record their day-to-day activities and planning in the classroom. The participants had to write down each activity with the children that they engaged in during the day. They had to stipulate whether it was play or a formal activity, and to note when disruptions took place during the activities and what the nature of these disruptions was. Afterward, they had to note the guidelines or solutions that they implemented to overcome the disruptions or prevent them in the future. Their field notes were sent to me via email, which I then recorded and compared, facilitating the development of guidelines that will help the play-based approach to prosper in Grade R classrooms.

3.5 Data analysis

According to Hendricks (2017), the aim of qualitative analysis is to condense a considerable chunk of data to give the researcher the opportunity to link with these in a significant way. It comprises three areas, namely organising, identifying themes and interpreting the data. Mather-Pike (2018) affirms this and explains that data analysis is a fluid process and not a series of isolated steps. The data gathered in this study were organised according to themes that surfaced during group discussions and, because of the participatory factor in this study, themes were closely examined as to the meaningful experiences of the participants (cf. 1.11). For the purpose of this study, I made use of the data analysis strategy involving Tesch's steps (1990) as found in Creswell (1998). We applied the steps in the following way:

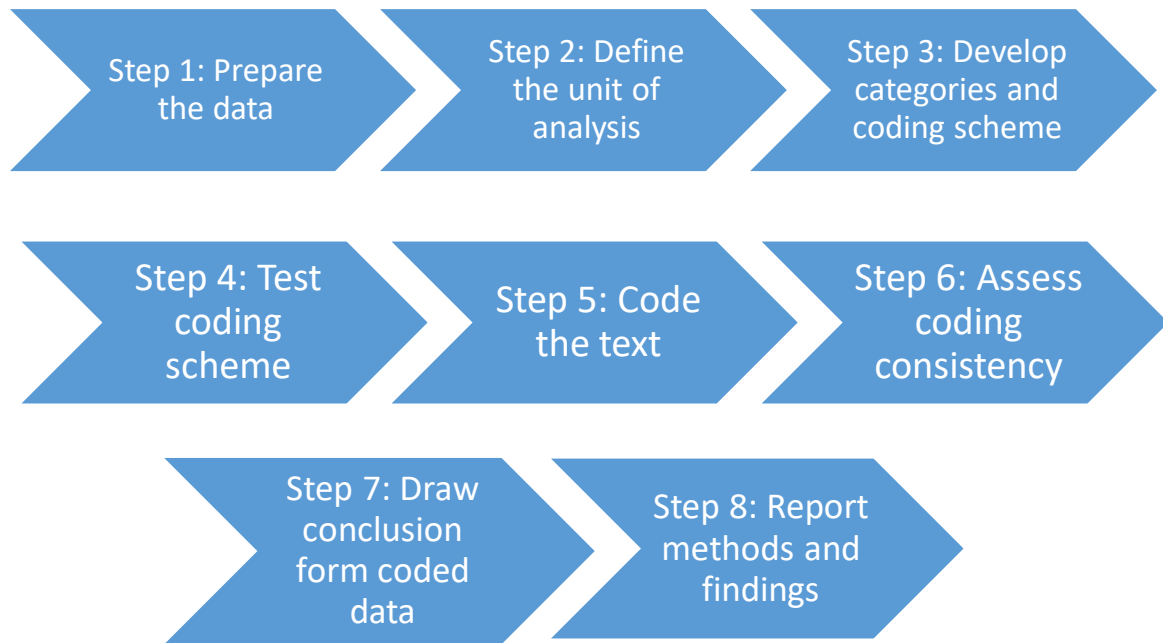


Figure 3.3 Tesch’s (1990) data analysis steps as cited in Creswell (1998)

In Figure 3.3 the steps used to analyse the data are mentioned and it was applied as follows:

Firstly, the data collected during the Photovoice group discussion sessions and field notes had to be organised. I started by making an in-depth study of the transcribed group discussions and how these connected to the Photovoice activity. Reading over the data repeatedly gave me a greater perspective and understanding of it, which led to the categorising and coding of the data. I then had to identify different themes by using a coding system that consists of repeated words and phrases as found in the collected data. The themes were then identified in an ongoing process as the data were processed and understood to a greater extent. The participants’ voices and ideas were the most important elements of the data-generation and analysis processes. Therefore, their input in identifying the themes was extremely important. We communicated throughout the analysis period to ensure that their valuable inputs were kept in mind at all times during the identification of the themes and the interpretation of the data.

During the analysis and presentation of the data that had been collected, direct quotes, as gleaned from the participants’ utterances during their group discussions and field notes, were incorporated to ensure validity and trustworthiness throughout this study.

After following Tesch’s (1990) data analysis steps the following themes emerged from the data:

Theme 1 - Teachers experience the play-based approach as positive.

Theme 2 - Teachers experience challenges when implementing the play-based approach.

Theme 3 - Guidelines identified to foster the play-based approach.

3.6 Ensuring the quality of the research process

According to Wood (2019), research validity is attained through certain methods, including triangulation and participant confirmation. Mather-Pike (2018) confirms this and explains that validity acknowledges the trouble that arises around controlling variables in the social context and warns to be biased in a PAR research study. The model constructed by Herr and Anderson (2014) was employed in the present study to ensure validity and trustworthiness (cf. 1.12.).

Table 3.3 Application of Herr and Anderson’s (2014) validity criteria

Validity criteria	Goals of action research	How did I achieve this outcome
Outcome validity	Achievement of action-aligned outcomes	The use of different data generation methods helped in achieving the outcome of improving the play-based approach, because it identified challenges experienced when implementing the play-based approach.
Process validity	Appropriate research and methodology	Collaboratively sharing knowledge and experiences.
Democratic validity	Results that are relevant to the setting	Equality throughout the study – giving an equal voice to all participants and giving the participants the opportunity to say how they feel about the topic without being afraid.

Catalytic validity	The development of researcher and participant	Applying the PAR method gave the participants the opportunity to experience the play-based approach from other teachers' perspectives, which led them to improve their own way of implementing the play-based approach.
Dialogic validity	The generation of new knowledge	Using knowledgeable participants helped to validate the findings and their expertise helped to create new knowledge.

This table shows that one of the most important duties of a research study is to ensure validity. The way in which the five quality criteria were used in this study will subsequently be discussed.

3.7.1 Outcome validity

Outcome validity relates to the workability of the actions taken to resolve the problem of the study (Hendricks, 2017). It focuses on the outcome of the research. The participants in this study were able to develop strategies to foster the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom and implement it more effectively despite the challenges that they faced, meaning that they were able to focus on and effectuate the desired outcome of the project. In the end, the way in which they tackled the play-based approach led to changes in how they thought about it.

3.7.2 Process validity

Process validity ensures that ongoing learning and development takes place during the cycles of the study. During the process of the present research, participants had the opportunity to engage collaboratively with their own and new experiences as well as with knowledge centred on the play-based approach. By doing this, they enhanced their learning about the play-based approach. This further enabled them to present new knowledge and assist other participants in the process.

3.7.3 Democratic validity

Validity criteria explain the framework that guides the researcher in their communications and interactions with the participants. This study aimed to produce conversations and interactions that were conducted on an equal and respectful level for everyone involved. All participants' experiences and opinions were considered valuable and were incorporated into the guidelines that were developed in the end.

3.7.4 Catalytic validity

Catalytic validity relates to the process through which the researcher aims to reorient or transform the participants' view of reality as centred on the phenomenon. PAR, seen as a method with the agenda to change (Wood, 2019), was used in this study to motivate and expand the participants' views when it came to their implementation of the play-based approach.

3.7.5 Dialogic validity

This criterion centres on defining the evidence collected in the study. Herr and Anderson (2014) suggest the inclusion of triangulation and multiple perspectives, so as to move away from simplistic and untrustworthy data. The participants involved in this study were experts in their field and their knowledge was regarded as valuable. Their voices and experiences were shared through the various participatory methods, which ensured multiple perspectives and an understanding of the phenomenon around the given data.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Researchers should always be aware of the ethical protocols to be maintained during the research process, and these protocols should be an essential part of the research planning (Cacciattolo, 2015). Cacciattolo (2015) further claims that good research ensures the safety of the participants at all times, by making sure that methods are selected correctly and by following ethical steps such as informed consent (cf. 1.13).

The North-West University's ethical committee (EduREC) accepted my application and permitted me to go ahead with the study as proposed (Annexure E). The DBE, Gauteng, also permitted me to conduct research in the selected schools (Annexure B). Informed consent was gathered through the approved consent form, from the participating schools as well as the individual participants (Annexures C and D). The process and the purpose of the study were explained to all participants, as well as the ethical considerations relevant to the research process. Participants were also reminded constantly that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

3.9 Summary

This chapter gave a broad description of the methodology of the study. A critically, transformative paradigm influenced the study and all of its assumptions, including the axiological and ontological assumptions, were discussed in detail. The PAR research method is based on working together collaboratively, with participants actively involved in the situation the study is focused on. Therefore, this research design was best suited to foster the play-based approach in Grade R classrooms.

The recruitment and criteria of the participants selected through purposeful sampling were discussed next. Five participants took part in the study and the necessary ethical guidelines were respected, such as informed consent forms and voluntary participation. The data-generation methods used to generate the data were justified and including group discussions, Photovoice and field notes. The PAR research design gathers data in a cyclical process and this study included two cycles that focused on different research questions. The data analysis strategy was discussed next, which focused on identifying the themes that were visible in the data. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the validity and ethical considerations that underpinned this study.

In Chapter Four, the findings of the First and Second Cycle will be discussed as supported by the participants' verbatim statements and literature.

CHAPTER FOUR - DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM CYCLE ONE AND TWO

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, an in-depth literature review was undertaken to define the research questions and to build a theoretical framework that guided the study. The PAR design and what it entails were explained in detail in Chapter Three. I justified the choice of paradigm, the data generation methods, the data analysis methods and the ethical aspects of the study.

In this chapter, I critically discuss the themes that were identified in Cycles One and Two through using thematic content analysis. I used a critical transformative paradigm to make sense of the data and I discuss the findings by quoting the participants. The discussion is guided by the research questions and provides an examination and interpretation of the themes and sub-themes that were identified and categorised in both cycles.

Cycle One:

What are teachers' experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R?

Cycle Two:

How can teachers improve their use of the play-based approach in Grade R?

What guidelines can be derived from the findings to foster play-based learning in Grade R?

Reference is made to the scholarly literature to support or contradict the findings.

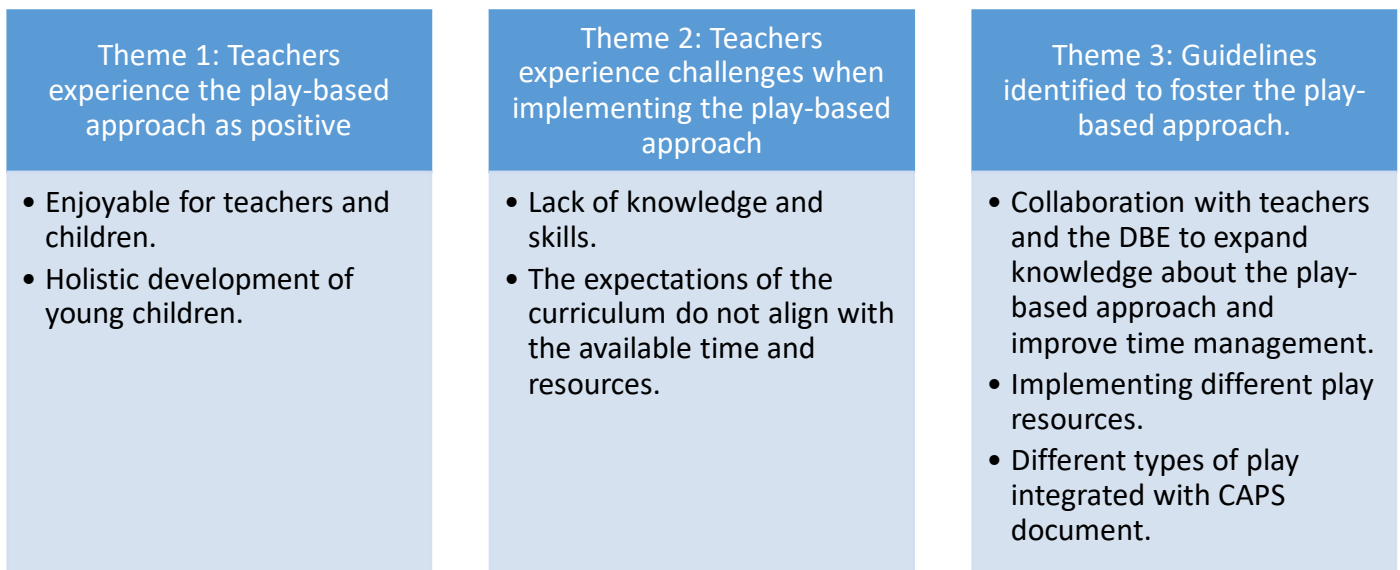
The aim of the first cycle was to explore the experiences of Grade R teachers who use a play-based approach in the Grade R classroom. This led to the second cycle, the aim of which was to focus on how to improve the use of the play-based approach and to offer guidelines that can be followed to achieve this goal. During each cycle we planned, acted and reflected on our actions.

The main themes and sub-themes are illustrated below:

- 1) Teachers experience the play-based approach as positive.
- 2) Teachers experience challenges when implementing the play-based approach.
- 3) Guidelines identified to foster the play-based approach.

In addition to these main themes, the following sub-themes surfaced during the thematic content analysis process and are explained in Figure 4.1:

Figure 4.1 Themes and sub-themes that emerged during Cycle One and Two.



Each of these themes and subthemes will now be discussed by providing verbatim extracts from the data. The data is also compared to relevant literature to answer the research questions.

4.2 The data generation methods implemented in Cycle One

The data generation methods implemented in the first cycle are shown in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Data generation methods implemented in Cycle One

Data generation method	Data documentation	The question focused on:	Data generated and analysed by:
Research questions: <i>What are teachers' experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R?</i>			
Core group discussion	Transcribed document	How do you experience the play-based approach as a Grade R teacher?	Gathered and analysed by the core research group.
Photovoice activity	Photos and narratives	What skills develop through the play-based approach?	
Core groups discussion	Transcribed document	Do you regard the play-based approach as important for school readiness?	

Table 4.1 portrays the different data generation methods that were used to gather the data in Cycle One. A discussion and presentation of these findings will follow. Cycle One began with an introductory meeting, where all participants had the opportunity to introduce themselves and tell a bit more about their teaching experiences. I also introduced myself and presented the aim of the study and what to expect from it. I explained the ethical part of the study and we signed an ethical agreement to ensure that we adhered to ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and integrity (ANNEXURE E). The roles and responsibilities of participants were discussed.

Wood (2019) explains that PAR regards people who are actively involved in a specific situation as being in the best position to improve and change their circumstances. This idea guided us to collaborate and share our knowledge and experiences as suggested by Kemmis et al. (2014). Kemmis et al. (2014) also mention that the researcher should work collaboratively with all participants and with no hierarchical order put in place. We then proceeded to talk about their experience of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom. At the end of the first meeting, I explained the Photovoice activity and how we could collaborate to investigate their experiences of the play-based approach.

The Photovoice activity required the participants to take photos of the different activities and materials that they use to implement the play-based approach in their classroom. This allowed me to see how they and the children physically experience and present the play-based approach. The final meeting of Cycle One was then held after the Photovoice activity, to discuss the photos and the meanings thereof, which led to the answering of the first research question. The cyclical process was followed, as explained in Figure 4.2 (cf. 3.3.2):

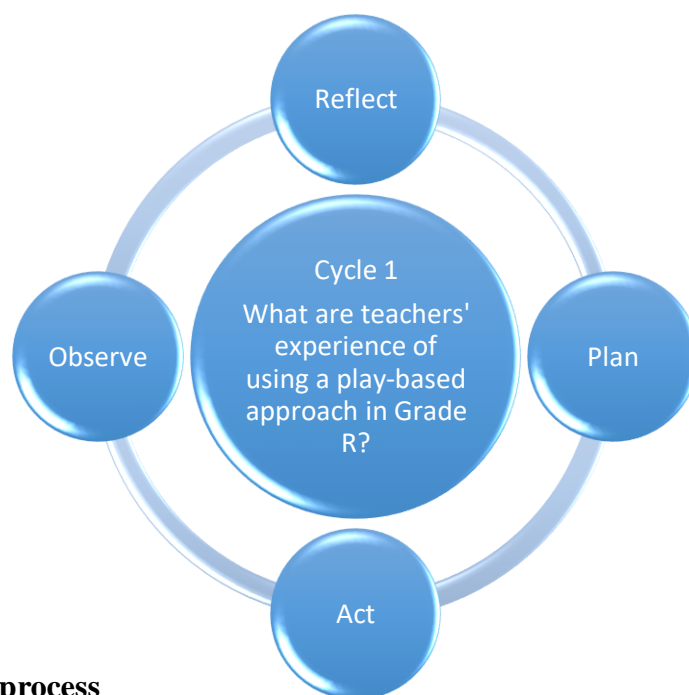


Figure 4.2 The cyclical process

Figure 4.2 explains the cyclical process that was followed in order to ensure that action research took place and participants collaboratively followed the necessary steps. As PAR is seen as a social, co-learning and cyclical process (Kemmis et al., 2014), the key PAR principles were embodied during the data generation process which included participants to collaboratively working together to create a social change.

This led to the discussion of the data gathered from the first cycle.

4.3 Discussion and presentation of data from Cycle One

The data was analysed by using thematic content analysis (cf. 3.7), as suggested by Tesch (1990). Different codes were identified and assigned to indicate the relevant data source and participant. To ensure that every participant stayed anonymous, their assigned participant name was used. “P” refers to the participant, which will be followed by their given name, such as “PA” which refers to Participant A, “GD” which refers to the group discussion and “PV” which refers to the Photovoice activity. The participants were quoted precisely as said and supported with literature where necessary.

The main themes that emerged from the data gathered in Cycle One are outlined in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2 Themes and sub-themes identified in Cycle One

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Teachers experience the play-based approach as positive.	1.1 Enjoyable for teachers and children
	1.2 Holistic development of young children
2. Teachers experience challenges when implementing the play-based approach.	2.1 Lack of knowledge and skills.
	2.2 The expectations of the curriculum do not align with the available time and resources.

Table 4.2 indicated the identified themes and sub-themes that emerged from Cycle One’s data. While the themes are discussed individually, they overlap and influence one another.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Teachers experience the play-based approach as positive

The first theme that emerged focused on the positive experience that teachers have when using a play-based approach. This positive experience include the enjoyment factor, not only for the children, but for the teachers as well. In Chapter Two it is pointed out that a play-based approach develops the child holistically, which includes social, emotional, cognitive and physical development where children have fun while learning (cf. 2.2). Play activities can be divided into two groups, namely

direct teacher involvement and indirect teacher involvement (cf. 2.3.1). This enables the teacher to identify her/his role in guiding children. Chapter Two also outlined that the theory of Lev Vygotsky (1977) assigns the role of scaffolder to the teacher (cf. 2.4), enabling teachers to identify the needs of children and to give guidance in accordance with the children's needs.

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Enjoyable for teachers and children

One of the most used phrases during the core group discussions was that “The play-based approach is fun”. According to Borisova (2018), play is the natural way in which a child learns, and enjoyment leads to engagement. When children are playing without realising that they are learning, it leads to the creation of love for school (cf 1.1).

Participants mentioned that it helps them to teach the children while they are actively involved in the learning activity. One of the participants explained that play-based learning allows a child more time to develop certain skills and described it in the following way:

“The teachers can teach them the skills better when they physically experience it and it just makes it easier for the child that maybe takes a bit longer to develop you know than just to use more formal methods, because that child then just gets even more behind [GD2.2, PD].”

According to UNICEF (2018), play creates different and enjoyable opportunities for the child to develop in various domains. Even though development is holistic and complex, play can simultaneously address different development areas in a fun way, which formal worksheets aren't always able to do (cf. 2.6.2). The participants agreed with this statement and explained that it is easier to explain abstract concepts with concrete experiences:

“I am so glad that this change happened and I hope to never go back to the more formal methods. The learners learn much easier with play-based approach they get much more time to practice what they need to learn. Otherwise, they just experience it in an abstract way you know like Participant D said, it is more concrete [GD1.1, PA].”

Other participants added that the play-based approach also leads to the creation of knowledge:

“Yes, I also prefer the more play-based experiences for the learners, because of their enhancement of their knowledge. Uhm yes because that is how knowledge is acquired by the Grade R child [GD1.1, PB].”

“I also want to add that it is much more fun for me as well, uhm you know we love teaching in a play-based manner, because it is fun and yes their discipline is also better [GD1.1, PA].”

“Yes, it is normally a fun activity for the teachers as well, because they know that they should be quiet during play time and the discipline is usually good [GD2.2, PE].”

According to the participants, it also seemed like the overall perception is that discipline in their classes is much better when they are implementing the play-based approach, which makes it more enjoyable and easier for the teacher to get through the day’s planned activities. Ali et al. (2018) mention that play, as a natural learning strategy for children, gives the teacher the opportunity to build meaningful experiences, which means that the child is then looking forward to playing and exploring the different activities with their teacher and peers (cf. 2.3.1).

Children do enjoy playing and most of their days consist of different games and fun activities (Peterson et al., 2017). Ali et al. (2018) mention that while children enjoy themselves so much, they don’t even realise that they are developing academic skills and knowledge to prepare them for formal learning (cf. 2.5). Yogman et al. (2018) explain that play is voluntary and often doesn’t have an exact goal in mind. It is fun and spontaneous and children can be seen to engage in play activities, which builds executive functioning skills that contribute to school readiness. Bored children will not learn well and therefore play is an ideal method to learn 21st-century skills, such as problem-solving, collaboration and creativity (Yogman et al., 2018). Some of the participants agreed with these statements and they also claimed that play enhances knowledge:

“The learners learn much easier with play-based approach they get much more time to practice what they need to learn while having fun [GD1.1, PA].”

“I also prefer the more play-based experiences for the learners, because of the enhancements of their knowledge [GD1.1, PB].”

“I agree, the play-based approach is much more on their level of learning, because the young child learns through play [GD1.1, PE].”

In Chapter Two it is reasoned that children will engage more in an activity when they are entertained and, for that to take place, the child needs to show interest in the material and apparatus available to them. According to Mendelsohn (2019), the most expensive toys aren’t necessarily the best toys and educational apps won’t make your child more prepared for school. He further explains that suggestions have been made that interactive media may promote learning, but no conclusive evidence shows that its benefits match the benefits of active, creative, hands-on play with traditional toys, such as jungle gyms, play dough and dollhouses (Mendelsohn, 2019). The Photovoice data gathered are aligned with the statements made by Mendelsohn (2019) and are also supported by the CAPS (2011) document for the foundation phase, which mentions the different materials and apparatus that can be

used during the play-based approach (cf. 2.2). It seems that all schools make use of traditional toys, which will ensure hands-on active play that is focused on having fun while developing skills.

Next, a more detailed look at some of the photos and descriptions of participants is presented, explaining different activities where children develop while having fun.

Participant A – Figure 4.3 and 4.4: Jungle Gym



Figures 4.3 and 4.4 portray some of the participant’s views of a play-based activity that children develop while enjoying themselves. The participant explained that the jungle gym consists of different activities and that it is placed in the outdoor play area:

“Photo A and B, are photos of our jungle gym at school. It has a slide, stairs to get onto it, monkey bars and a bridge and a spiderweb. This is in our outside play area where children can play [GD2.1, PA].”

It was noticeable that multiple of the participants took photos of their jungle gym area and the explanation, therefore, was that it is the most common area where children go to have fun and play when they get the opportunity. Participant B further explained:

“I can’t think of a Grade R school that doesn’t have some sort of climbing apparatus outside for free play, you know it is just a fun way for the child to run and play around [GD2.1, PB].”

It seems that most schools have a jungle gym in their outdoor play-areas, because children enjoy being physically active and using their imaginations to create their own games.

Figure 4.5 is another example of a climbing apparatus provided by participant E:

Participant E – Figure 4.5: Climbing frame



Participant E added that it is a fun activity that keeps children busy while they develop their gross-motor skills in particular. According to the DBE (2011), physical and motor development should be regarded as fundamental in Grade R and could be achieved through play by making use of different apparatuses, such as the jungle gym (cf. 2.5.2). The participants agreed with this idea and they explained:

“My photo A is our climbing frame and it is also an outside activity this is an unstructured activity [GD2.2, PE].”

“You know I just think it is a fun area which the child enjoys and they can play different games on it, they can play alone or with a friend and yes, it is an easy activity to keep them busy with, while they are developing [GD2.2, PE].”

The above discussion highlights that the play-based approach is enjoyable for both teachers and children. The different apparatuses available to the school all contribute to the element of fun by using the strategy as well as the fact that children develop holistically by learning through play. The next sub-theme focuses on the developmental areas that improve with the play-based approach.

4.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Holistic development of young children

The second sub-theme focused on the way play-based approach contributes to the holistic development of the young child. Ali et al. (2018) explain that the benefits that the play-based approach has to offer are undeniable and can create ample opportunities for the child to develop in every domain that is necessary to be considered school ready (cf. 2.3.2). The participants agreed that children can

develop different skills simultaneously during play. The participants added that the type of activities, the materials and the apparatuses used to implement the play-based approach is also versatile and add to the holistic development of the child.

In Chapter Two the benefits and advantages that play has to offer for the holistic development of the child are explained (cf. 2.5). According to Peterson et al. (2017), the benefits of play for the development of cognitive, emotional, social and physical skills are irreplaceable (cf. 2.5). One of the participants shared the importance of the play-based approach in achieving school readiness:

“Play basically can develop any area necessary to help in getting the child school ready, so it develops social skills, emotional skills, physical skills, cognitive skills, problem-solving skills, it expands their imagination, you know the list just goes on [GD2.2, PF].”

The participants seemed to be in agreement that play develops all dimensions, but also that different activities can focus on different domains. According to Vygotsky (1977), play is the highest level of preschool development, because it included different developmental areas (cf. 2.4). Vygotsky (1977) gives the example that when children interact in an imaginative play scenario, they don’t only develop their social skills, but also their vocabulary and language skills and problem-solving skills (cf. 2.4). Participant F agreed and argued that holistic development is supported while the child is having fun:

“The number of skills that children can develop through play at the same time surprises me every time. You think they are only playing but they are developing on so many levels. Like when they are playing with blocks, they are developing physically, socially and cognitively while they are having fun [GD2.2, PF].”

The participants argued that one play activity can address more than one domain simultaneously. Lunga et al. (2022) regard holistic development as one of the irreplaceable benefits of the play-based approach (cf. 2.5).

Different play resources and materials can be used to develop children holistically. In the photo (Figure 4.6) below, Participant A explained that children can develop multiple skills when playing with Zoob toys:

Figure 4.6: Zoob toys



Participant A explained that:

“Zoob toys fall under construction toys. It is used inside the classroom during unstructured play. Skills that children develop while playing with the Zoob toys include fine motor skills, vocabulary and language skills, visual-spatial awareness, reading and writing skills, critical reasoning skills, imagination, problem-solving skills and mathematical skills.” [PA]

The multiple developmental areas visible during this simple play activity confirm the statements above that one play activity can focus on different developmental areas. According to the DBE (2011), development should take place in Grade R through play, because of the holistic development benefits that play activities offer. According to Participant A, children develop their fine motor skills by playing with smaller toys and strengthening their finger muscles. Vocabulary and language skills develop when they talk to their friends about the different shapes and colours of the Zoob toys. Problem-solving and mathematical skills develop when they need to find a solution for the structure they are building with the Zoob toys, to reach a certain height or form a certain shape or pattern. Another participant shared a play activity that focuses on different developmental areas:

Participant B – Figure 4.7: Puzzle

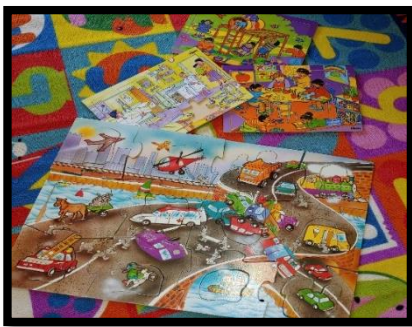


Figure 4.7 is an illustration of cardboard puzzles that are built in the indoor free-play area. According to Doherty (2020), the main skills that are developed through building puzzles include physical skills (such as motor development and eye-hand coordination), cognitive skills (such as mathematical and problem-solving skills, shapes and memory) and emotional skills (including patience and setting goals). The children’s spatial awareness and spatial language are also developed.

A puzzle is once again a simple play activity that can be done by children to develop different skills. According to the participant, it is not only mathematical skills that develop when they build a puzzle, but also language and physical skills:

“Fine motor skills are developed by manipulating pieces. Cognitive/mathematical development when planning and solving problems and learning about space and shape. Language skills develop when learners solve puzzles in a group and discuss possibilities and what they see in the pictures. Gross motor skills develop when completing large floor-puzzles containing bigger pieces.” [PB]

The discussion quoted above confirms that a play-based approach gives young children the opportunity to stimulate the development of perceptual skills for school readiness. De Jager (2020) regards physical and motor development, social and emotional skills, logical thinking skills, language development and cognitive development as important areas that determine whether a child can be considered school ready. When discussing the use of the play-based approach to enhance the holistic development of young children, participants identified challenges that influence the implementation of a play-based approach.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Teachers experience challenges when implementing the play-based approach.

The second theme that emerged from the data gathered in cycle one is that teachers experienced challenges when they implemented the play-based approach in their classrooms. These challenges include the lack of knowledge and skills, for the teachers, the parents and other stakeholders. In Chapter Two it is pointed out that the definition of play could also create confusion about what exactly is expected from the teacher when implementing the play-based approach (cf. 2.6.2). Ali et al. (2013) explain that the lack of a clear definition of play makes it difficult to create a curriculum for the play-based approach with definite recommendations and guidelines that teachers can follow (cf. 2.6.2).

The participants confirmed that, while they are aware of the fact that the play-based approach is beneficial for the child’s development, they are unsure if the time spent on play activities and formal activities are aligned with the curriculum. The participants also claimed that parents sometimes question whether children are actually learning or if they are only playing. The next section reports on the challenges that teachers experienced when using a play-based approach.

4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Lack of knowledge and skills

It was quite clear during the group discussions that teachers were unsure if they are implementing the play-based approach correctly, even though they could distinctly see the benefits it has to offer for the child’s development. According to Esterhuizen (2019), uncertainties about the play-based approach cause the role of the teacher to become a challenge and this influences their perception of the play-based approach (cf 2.3.1). Participant F explained that she preferred the play-based approach over formal teaching methods:

“I really like using play as a method of learning and I prefer it over a formal method of teaching, but because I was once used to a formal way of teaching my Grade R’s, I am unsure of what exactly is expected of me [PF].”

Pinchover (2017) explains that the teachers’ understanding of their role during the play-based approach, together with what they know about the strategy, influence their perception of the approach to play (cf. 2.3.1). A lack of knowledge about how to implement the play-based approach can cause teachers to be afraid to implement the play-based approach, even though they know about all the benefits it has to offer. Another participant shared her view:

“It wasn’t long ago when I was a student and you know, at university you are made aware of the benefits of play but you are never taught how to implement it as a full-time strategy. You focus more on the academic development of the child, like how to teach them maths concepts [PD].”

The uncertainty of the teachers’ role in the play-based approach can cause a great deal of confusion among the parents and caregivers as well, making it difficult for them to regard the play-based approach as a trustworthy teaching strategy. Borisova (2018) mentions that parents and caregivers prefer a school to present more academic teaching strategies, because they believe that play activities take away opportunities for true learning (cf. 2.6.2). This is evident through our participants’ experiences as well:

“Some parents support you, but there are parents that question why we play so much and whether their child is actually learning something [PA].”

Another participant added:

“I agree, the parents don’t understand how we can assess their child and give them marks on for example a language activity, but the activity assessed was a play activity [PB].”

Peterson et al. (2017) describe that, due to the demands made by parents, Grade R teachers are expected to decrease play activities and replace them with more formal learning activities (cf. 2.6.2). This can cause even more confusion for the teachers because they are aware of the benefits that play has to offer, but the parents don’t perceive these benefits as the teachers do. According to Esterhuizen (2019), some parents believe that play is a waste of time. Therefore, an increase in structured formal activities can be seen in pre-schools throughout South Africa. A participant explained the following in this regard:

“In our school, we mostly follow the play-based approach, but we are also expected to do some structured activities. But I also know of Grade R schools that are only following a formal way of teaching, where the children play the minimum [PE].”

It is evident that even though the teachers are aware of the benefits that the play-based approach has to offer, they are unsure of their role when implementing it. Also, parents don't always understand how important the play-based approach is.

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Expectations of the curriculum do not align with the available time and resources

It was quite evident from looking at the participants' field notes that time management is a challenge they face, because teachers are overloaded with administration work and struggle to meet the expectations set by the curriculum. It seems as if the teachers want to incorporate as much play as possible, but the competing expectations from the department and the parents do not allow enough play activities. According to Fesseha and Pyle (2016), teachers found it difficult to make time to teach all the elements in the curriculum while including play in every activity (cf. 2.6.1). Participant D explained her point of view:

“The curriculum expects an enormous amount of work and assessment to be done, with only a short time to assess. This can hinder the play-based approach as one needs to get through the work as quickly as possible [GD3.2, PD].”

Even though it seems as if the curriculum for Grade R's regards play as being important, the teachers still struggle to find enough time to implement the play-based approach effectively. As mentioned by Aronstam and Braund (2016), the CAPS (2011) document indeed provides an opportunity for the play-based approach to take place in Grade R, but unfortunately, the available ECD programmes still differ significantly. The CAPS (2011) document also states that formal-based learning should be avoided in Grade R and that the focus should be on holistic development through play. According to Participant B that is not always the case:

“We play every day, but I know we can play more. The Department still expects you to complete the books and worksheets they provide, but they also want you to mostly develop through play. That is impossible when you need to focus on their formal work and their assessment requirements [GD3.1, PB].”

It is quite evident why time management is seen as a challenge: Teachers are trying to reach the expectations set out in the curriculum through play, but formal work is also an expectation, with no clear time set out for it in the curriculum. In ECD, the play-based approach can be regarded as a popular but controversial term, especially in a developing country such as South Africa (Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2016). Ogunyemi and Ragpot (2016) further explain that it is a challenge to create a play-rich curriculum and environment for early education in South Africa, due to wrong perceptions about

the value of play, incompetent teachers, inadequate funding and policy inconsistency (cf. 2.6.4). It seems as if policy and curriculum inconsistency is one of the main challenges that impact negatively on the time management of the Grade R teachers. According to the participants, the play resources available to them are mostly funded through the school and the parents:

“Our school is lucky enough to have a lot of play resources for inside and outside play activities, but we only receive a small amount of it from the department, the school had to buy most of the resources [GD 3.1, PA].”

Participant F added:

“We receive the DBE books from the department, for the formal activities, but we only get a small amount from the department to use on LTSM (Learning Teaching Support Material). The Head of Department did mention something about Six Bricks training and equipment, but we didn’t hear anything about that in a while [GD 3.2, PF].”

It appears that although the schools get money from the Department of Basic Education, only a small amount is allocated to buying educational toys. According to Setlhare et al. (2016), the availability of resources through the department can be attributed to the segregated apartheid education system, where resources were divided unequally according to race groupings (cf. 2.6.4). This puts extra strain on the teachers to make sure that they have the necessary play resources available, whether it is resources that were bought or resources that they made themselves:

“A lot of play resources don’t have to be bought or be expensive, you can make it yourself if you have the time and the material. Like counters for maths can be anything from rocks to bottle caps [GD 3.2, PD].”

Even though the curriculum makes provision for play to take place in Grade R classrooms, the Department also expects formal work to be done. The CAPS (2011) daily programme for Grade R explains the different play activities that must be implemented, but securing the resources for these activities is the responsibility of the school.

As a research group, we discussed and reflected on both the positive experiences and the challenges that the play-based approach has to offer in Grade R. This led us to go into practice, collect field notes and collaboratively work together on creating guidelines to overcome the challenges and foster the play-based approach in Grade R.

4.4 Presentation of data from Cycle 2

Cycle Two started with a group discussion, focusing on Cycle One with a reflection. We reflected on all the challenges that were identified by the participants and how these challenges impact the effective implementation of the play-based approach in Grade R. The participants and I made a list of the exact impacts these challenges have on the child and the teacher:

- When play is taken out of Grade R learning activities, the enjoyment factor of school and learning gets taken away.
- Teachers that are unaware of what is expected of them in the classroom can't teach in an effective manner, which is a disadvantage to the child's development.
- By incorporating too much formal work in Grade R, an opportunity for holistic development through play activities gets taken away.
- Curriculum and policy document expectations that don't align with what is expected of teachers in the classroom leading to confusion and time management issues.
- Uninformed parents lead to extra pressure on the teacher and less time to spend on play activities.
- Unavailable play resources cause play activities to be denied.

In order to address the above challenges, the participants and I brainstormed ideas on how to ensure that the impact of the challenges can be prevented when the play-based approach is implemented. The ideas included teachers having an administrative and planning period, half an hour before the child comes to school, so that they can decide together what play activities to incorporate with the formal work that needs to be done. The teachers also researched DIY play resources that they can make themselves with limited materials to benefit the play-based approach. Teachers also planned to send out research links to parents, sharing articles with them that contain information about the benefits of play and how important it is for the child's development.

In order to foster the play-based approach and to ensure that it is implemented effectively and reaches its full potential as a teaching strategy, guidelines had to be developed. This led us to Cycle Two, to identify guidelines that can help reduce challenges regarding the play-based approach.

The data generation methods implemented in the second cycle are shown in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Data generation methods implemented in Cycle Two

Data generation method	Data documentation	The question focused on:	Data generated and analysed by:
Research questions:			

<i>How can teachers improve their use of the play-based approach in Grade R?</i>			
<i>What guidelines can be derived from the findings to foster play-based learning in Grade R?</i>			
Focus group discussion	Transcribed document	How to improve the use of the play-based approach?	Gathered and analysed by the research group.
Field notes	Hard copy document	What guidelines can be followed to foster the play-based approach?	

The list created by the research group guided Cycle Two, which focused on using the collected data to create guidelines that can help teachers foster the play-based approach in Grade R. Group discussions and field notes gave rich data that made it possible to answer the second cycle’s research question. The third theme was identified in Cycle Two.

Table 4.4 Theme 3 and sub-themes identified in Cycle Two

Theme	Sub-theme
3. Guidelines identified to foster the play-based approach.	3.1 Collaboration with teachers and the DBE to expand knowledge about the play-based approach and improve time management. 3.2 Implementing different play resources. 3.3 Different types of play integrated into the CAPS (2011).

Table 4.4 explains the third theme that was identified in the second cycle and will now be discussed in detail.

4.4.1 Theme 3: Guidelines identified to foster the play-based approach

It became clear, through the data, that the participants were aware of the importance of the play-based approach and the benefits it has to offer for early childhood development. However, it was also noticeable that the participants are confused about their role in the play-based approach and how much time they are allowed to spend on it. The CAPS document (2011) states that Grade Rs should mostly focus on learning through play, but the expectations from the parents and the department make

this difficult or impossible. Although the participating schools are in a position, most of the time, to maintain or create play resources, for the most part, the Department only provides them with formal work resources needed to teach and learn, such as the compulsory workbook published by the DBE (DBE, 2021). Therefore, the guidelines developed were incorporated into the themes and worksheets of the DBE workbooks, to assist in time management and assure that time is spent on play development activities while simultaneously completing the formal work. Implementing different play resources, such as Six Bricks,¹ was also identified as a guideline, because of the value it has to add to the play-based approach and resource availability.

4.4.2 Subtheme 1: Collaboration with teachers and the DBE to expand knowledge about the play-based approach and improve time management

The play-based approach is not only an enjoyable teaching strategy, but it also gives the child an opportunity to develop multiple skills simultaneously. Esterhuizen (2019) argues that, in South Africa, it is unfortunate that not all teachers and curriculum developers regard play as important but will instead let children focus on academic activities (cf. 2.3.2). This led us to create guidelines collaboratively, for teachers to incorporate play activities while also completing the Department's required formal work.

In one of the group discussions, Participant F mentioned something about the Six Bricks play strategy. According to Hutcherson et al. (2014), the Six Bricks play strategy is an approach developed in South Africa in 2013, by Brent Hutcherson, the director of Care for Education. It involves developing through play by only using six different coloured Duplo Lego bricks. They further explain that the strategy includes an activity book with over 300 play activities that are designed to be repeated daily, to develop and promote social and emotional areas, language and mathematics, group games, and sensory and perceptual skills (including gross and fine motor skills) (Hutcherson, et al., 2014). The DBE partnered up with Care for Education and UNICEF (2017) to introduce the play strategy in the Foundation Phase in South African Schools (Brey, 2017). The participants explained more about their knowledge of the Six Bricks strategy:

“We contacted our District office and they said that Gauteng schools are scheduled to receive their Six Bricks training early in 2022. According to them, the Department will provide each child with their own set of Six Bricks and the teacher will receive formal training in the strategy [GD3.3, PE]”.

¹ According to Hutcherson et al. (2014), the Six Bricks play strategy is an approach developed in South Africa by Brent Hutcherson, director of Care for Education, in 2013, which involves developing through play by only using six different coloured Duplo Lego bricks

Participant F added:

“The teacher guide on Six Bricks is available on the Care for Education website, with a quick online course that shows you the basics [GD3.3, PF].”

We collaboratively studied the Six Bricks teacher guide, which we found on the Care for Education website (Education, 2021) and this led us to develop a guideline to incorporate a Six Bricks activity with the DBE workbook activities. This guideline helps teachers with time management because play and formal work can be done simultaneously due to the incorporation of Six Bricks as a play resource.

4.4.3 Subtheme 2: Implementing different play resources (Six Bricks)

The play-based approach includes the incorporation of different play resources in order to develop different skills. According to Ali et al. (2018), equipment and resources play a key role when implementing the play-based approach, since the resources provide children with opportunities to explore and create in multiple creative ways (cf. 2.3.2). Six Bricks is a hands-on play resource that helps children develop their senses, language and speech, cognitive, motor, social and emotional skills (Hutcheson, et al., 2014).

In order to incorporate the Six Bricks resource into the daily programme of the Grade R's, the participants and I created the guideline in the form of a lesson plan. We identified a language activity in the DBE workbook and created a lesson plan for it, which includes a Six Bricks activity to promote the skill that needs to be taught. The DBE workbook (DBE, 2021) language activity that was identified included the k-sound activity, which focused on learning the sound visually, auditorily and in writing. The lesson plan we created collaboratively, to help with time management and to incorporate the Six Bricks as a play resource, follows:

Lesson Plan: Afrikaans - Huistaal k-sound	Lesson objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Learner needs to recognise the k-sound visually and auditorily.- Learner needs to be able to write the k-sound correctly.- Learner needs to be able to verbally identify words beginning with the k-sound.
Introduction: Use your Six Bricks to build the letter k on your table. This gives the child the opportunity to kinaesthetically experience the k-sound by building it with concrete models. Some	

<p>children will build it in 2D and others who are a bit more advanced will even try to build it in 3D.</p>	
<p>Lesson:</p> <p>Leave your Six Bricks k-sound on your table and use your finger to go over it a few times. This experience gives the child the opportunity to write over the k-sound with their finger, feeling the correct movement and once again kinaesthetically experiencing it. After writing over the Six Bricks k-model with their finger a few times, the child can now go over the k-sound with pencils in their workbook.</p>	
<p>Closure:</p> <p>Put your Six Bricks in front of you and divide into groups of four. Each child should now connect the colour of each brick to a k-sound word and tell their group a story about that k-word for example: <i>'n Blou kas, My broek hang in 'n blou kas. 'n Oranje kat, My ouma het 'n oranje kat.</i> This gives the child the opportunity to think of words starting with the letter k and to connect them to a certain colour. Each child will add their own experience when telling their group something about the k-object they have identified.</p>	
<p>Resources used:</p> <p>DBE-workbook</p> <p>Six Bricks</p>	<p>Skills developed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language skills, including word play and expansion of vocabulary (cf. 2.2.1). - Social skills, through socially interacting with peers and expanding knowledge in a group (cf. 2.2). - Construction skills, through a guided play activity by manipulating objects (cf. 2.2.1). - Fine-motor skills, when using the fingers to go over the sound, building and writing the sound (cf. 2.5.2). - Cognitive skills, through gaining new knowledge about the sound and expanding knowledge in a group (cf. 2.5).

	<p>- Reasoning skills, through analysing and experimenting with new knowledge (cf. 2.1).</p>
--	--

This lesson plan includes the formal work required from the department and the Six Bricks strategy is also incorporated as a resource, to assure that the skill being focused on is also developed through the play-based approach. Even though the participants didn't formally receive their training in the Six Bricks strategy yet, they used the Lego blocks available to them in the classrooms and implemented this lesson plan. Participant A explained how she experienced it:

“It was such a fun way to complete the formal work activity, the children enjoyed it and it was evident that they understand the concept more, because they had the opportunity to add fun into formal work and talk about their own experience [FN, PA].”

Participant B added:

“The objectives of the lesson plan were achieved and time was used much wiser, because we played and worked at the same time [FN, PB].”

The lesson plan that was created can be adjusted to meet the requirements of all the different subjects, including mathematics, and extra Six Bricks activities can be added to enhance the skill focused on even further. According to the participants' field notes, the skills developed through this activity incorporated with Six Bricks include:

- Language skills: learning sounds form part of language, the children expand their vocabulary by creating k-words and they also expand their language skills when telling a story about the different k-words.
- Social skills: the children get the opportunity to work in groups and this helps with their social skills, they need to communicate and listen to each other.
- Construction skills: the children develop their construction skills when building the sound with their bricks, in 2D or in 3D.
- Fine-motor skills: the children have to use their fine motor skills when working with the blocks, going over the sound with their fingers and writing the sound.
- Cognitive skills: the children develop these skills through gaining new knowledge about the sound being taught and they also learn new information from their peers.
- Reasoning skills: the children develop these skills through analysing the new sound and experimenting with different ways to build and use it verbally.

The participants enjoyed the addition of the Six Bricks strategy to the formal work and are excited to adjust their other formal work lesson plans to add a Six Bricks activity. The Six Bricks strategy is so versatile that it is possible to add an activity to the different formal worksheets that need to be done. By collaboratively working together to incorporate formal work with play resources, a guideline was created to foster the play-based approach in Grade R and to improve time management and the use of play resources while the joyful element remained a priority.

4.4.4 Sub-theme 3: Different types of play integrated with CAPS

Chapter Two outlined the different types of play that can be implemented in Grade R and that are beneficial to the child's development (cf. 2.2.1). According to Ali et al. (2013), by implementing a play-based approach, the child gets the opportunity to develop holistically (cf. 2.5). In order to foster the play-based approach and to give the child the opportunity to develop holistically through play, the different types of play need to be incorporated into the daily programme of Grade Rs. The CAPS (cf. 2.2) document also clearly states that different types of play should be included daily, to ensure that the child develops accordingly (DBE, 2011). Together, the participants and I studied the different types of play required by the CAPS. This led us to create and implement different play activities to ensure that all types of play are implemented and to nurture holistic development in the children. This guideline that was created also presents an opportunity to evaluate the quality of play activities, because it needs to be categorised into types of play. Participants A, B, D, E and F, implemented the following play activities and areas to ensure that all types of play are executed and that holistic development takes place (cf. 2.2.1):

4.4.4.1 Imaginative play

Participant E stated that children make use of their imaginations during imaginative play and that they usually have props and costumes to help them get into character (cf. 2.2.1, Table 2.1). For example, this includes a fireman's costume and a hose pipe, or a doll house and kitchen utensils. According to Loizou (2016), imaginative play develops language and social skills, problem-solving and self-regulation skills, as well as creative skills. Figure 4.8 shows the imaginative play area and all of the different costumes and props made available to the children to develop the abovementioned skills. The activity includes children pretending to be a certain character, dressing up and using their imagination to do role play.



Figure 4.8 is an illustration from Participant D's school's imaginative play area.

4.4.4.2 Constructive play

Constructive play includes building and manipulating objects to construct a visualised idea (Zhang et al., 2022). Zhang et al. (2022) further state that skills developed through constructive play include mathematical skills, spatial awareness, logic and problem-solving skills, as well as social skills (cf. 2.2.1, Table 2.1). Figure 4.9 illustrates Participant F's constructive play area at their school.



Figure 4.9 Construction play area

According to Participant F, the construction play area assists in the holistic development of the child and the activities that can be done are endless. The children can build something that has specifically been assigned to them or anything creative they can think of. One can include the use of certain colours and shapes or add limitations such as only using a certain amount of blocks.

4.4.4.3 Outside play

Outside play includes children learning through play and exploring outside, by exercising their bodies and using their imagination (Bento & Dias, 2017). The DBE (2011) also adds that outside play can be done with or without resources and toys. Participant A claimed that they use outside play as a free

play activity every day, because it gets the children moving, using their imagination, and talking to one another. According to Bento and Dias (2017), skills developed through outdoor play include gross and fine motor skills, social and emotional skills, language skills, problem-solving skills, and perceptual skills. It also increases their imagination. Figure 4.10 gives an illustration of the outside play area that Participant A's school uses to ensure holistic development, and Figure 4.11 illustrates the outside play area at Participant D's school.



Figure 4.10 Outside play area of Participant A's school.



Figure 4.11 Participant D's outside play area.

The outside play area can be beneficial for holistic development with or without play resources, considering that children can also simply run, balance or skip (Bento & Dias, 2017). According to participant D, the outside play area is the most versatile area and the children can play with almost anything or without any resources at all. They make different play resources available for the children, including bikes, skipping ropes, jungle gyms, hoops, balls and different motor development resources.

4.4.4.4 Sensory play

According to Sheridan (2017), sensory play includes children developing their senses by using explorative and manipulative play, which includes sand pits and water play. Participant E stated that

the sand pit is indispensable in Grade R teaching, because of the holistic development it has to offer. Skills developed through sensory play include fine and gross motor skills, language and social skills, problem-solving skills, creative skills, and perceptual skills (Sheridan, 2017). Figure 4.12 gives an illustration of the sensory play area of Participant E's school, which includes the sand pit.



Figure 4.12 Sensory play area of Participant E's school.

Participant E also added that play resources can be included in sensory play to help them manipulate the sand more. The sand pit can be used as a free-play area, or as a more structured play area where the children need to build something specific or write something in the sand.

To ensure that holistic development can be accomplished through play, all of the abovementioned types of play need to be integrated into the daily programme of the Grade Rs, as stated by the CAPS document (DBE, 2011). The participants also focused on the indefinite play activities that can be implemented under each type of play, which ensured that this guideline will help in fostering the play-based approach.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I reported on the findings of both cycles. The participants identified how they experience the play-based approach in Grade R and what challenges they are facing when they implement it. It was evident throughout both cycles that not only the children enjoyed the play-based approach, but the teachers also found it to be a more joyful and developmentally appropriate teaching strategy. Cycle Two led to collaboratively working together with the DBE workbook, to create a guideline that ensures that the play-based approach is fostered in Grade R without denying the formal work requirements. The Six Bricks strategy was introduced and incorporated into the formal DBE workbook to ensure that play activities still took place. The available Six Bricks activities can be incorporated into all learning areas and can be adjusted according to the child's needs. During each

cycle, we followed the cyclical process by planning, acting, and reflecting. The cyclical process which was implemented, allowed the PAR principles of collaboratively working together to create a social change, to play a key role in the collection and analysis of the data generated. The critical transformative paradigm enabled the participants to collaboratively engage with the research problem and to reflect on the way they interact with the educational practice, which enabled them to make a social change. In Chapter Five, I answer the research questions, present a conclusion, and make recommendations to further the study.

CHAPTER FIVE - SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

My experiences as a foundation phase teacher motivated me to do research on this topic of play in the early years, because I know how important it is for children to play because play opportunities enhance young children's holistic development. I also understand the incredible strain under which Grade R teachers are working. The findings in Chapter Four suggested that teachers are aware of the benefits that play has to offer, but uncertainties involving the curriculum and the expectations of the DBE make it difficult for them to fully integrate the play-based approach as a teaching strategy in Grade R. It was also indicated that the play-based approach is followed in the Grade R classrooms, but that it is not as fully integrated into each developmental and assessment activity as is prescribed by the CAPS document (2011). The findings of Cycles One and Two were discussed in Chapter Four and in this chapter, I explain the ways in which this study's research questions were answered. I also give a brief description of each chapter, my reflection, and the conclusion.

5.2 Summary of chapters

A brief summary of Chapters One to Four follows:

5.2.1 Chapter One: Background and overview

The first chapter presented the rationale for the study and the problem statement, which then led to a statement of the research questions that were to be answered through this study. The theoretical framework from Vygotsky (1978) was briefly discussed. I also briefly discussed the research methodology, research methods, integrity, and ethical aspects of the study.

5.2.2 Chapter Two: Fostering of the play-based approach in the Grade R classroom

This chapter focused on the literature underpinning and supporting my study. It gave an in-depth explanation of what play is and how the play-based approach is implemented as a teaching strategy. The benefits that play has to offer for children's development were discussed in detail and evidence proving this was added. The challenges that teachers have to face when implementing the play-based approach in Grade R were also discussed and Vygotsky's theoretical framework (1978) supporting the study was explained.

5.2.3 Chapter Three: Theoretical discussion of the research design and methodology

In Chapter Three I elaborated on the research methodology and research methods that I used to answer the research questions that were set out in Chapter One. I motivated why a critical transformative paradigm was chosen to guide this study. I also explained how PAR was used for the research design. I outlined how data generation techniques were implemented to generate data by using a participatory approach. The way in which the two cycles were used to increase teachers' awareness of the play-based approach was discussed, as well as the need to introduce them to new ideas. I also outlined the integrity and ethical aspects of the study.

5.2.4 Chapter Four: Discussion of the research findings from Cycle One and Two

This chapter consisted of a discussion about the findings of the study. The findings from both cycles were discussed together with supporting literature from the data gathered in cycles one and two. The themes and subthemes were guided by the theoretical framework of Vygotsky (1978). Three main themes and seven subthemes emerged from the data gathered:

Theme 1: Teachers experience the play-based approach as something positive.

- Subtheme 1: Enjoyable for teachers and children.
- Subtheme 2: Holistic development of young children.

Theme 2: Teachers experience challenges when implementing the play-based approach.

- Subtheme 1: Lack of knowledge and skills.
- Subtheme 2: The expectations of the curriculum do not align with the available time and resources.

Theme 3: Guidelines identified to foster the play-based approach.

- Subtheme 1: Collaboration with teachers and the DBE to expand knowledge about the play-based approach and improve time management.
- Subtheme 2: Implementing different play resources.
- Subtheme 3: Different types of play integrated with CAPS (2011).

5.3 Answering the research questions

The main research question that guided this study was: *How can PAR be used to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R classrooms?*

In order to address the above main research question, the following sub-questions were answered:

5.3.1 What are teachers' experiences of using a play-based approach in Grade R?

It was evident from the first group discussion that not only the children, but the teachers as well, experience the play-based approach as joyful. Overall, the play-based approach is a positive experience for the Grade R teachers, and they enjoy implementing it as a teaching strategy in their daily planning. Part of the positive experience the teacher has with the play-based approach includes the holistic development it has in store for the child (cf. 4.2.1). Teachers are aware that children develop different skills simultaneously through play activities and this motivates them to implement the play-based approach as frequently as possible.

Even though the teachers experience the play-based approach as positive, they also experience challenges when they implement it (cf. 4.3.2). These challenges include the lack of knowledge and skills that teachers experienced (cf. 4.3.2.1). It also surfaced that parents expect more formal work and do not always understand the importance of the play-based approach (4.3.2.1). Teachers are unsure of exactly how much time they need to spend on the play-based approach, because the curriculum states that it should mostly focus on play, but formal work is a simultaneous and competing requirement from the DBE. Extra pressure from parents also leads to the teachers adding more formal work to classroom activities and decreasing play time in their daily planning. The participants argued that they need guidelines to foster the play-based approach in their classrooms and meet all the other requirements (cf. 4.3.2.1).

The group discussions were a collaborative workspace, where participants were free to share their ideas, experiences and knowledge with others. We participated collaboratively to answer the above-mentioned research question. The participants had the opportunity to expand their knowledge, create new knowledge and address the challenges that they identified.

5.3.2 How can teachers improve their use of the play-based approach in Grade R?

For the participants to improve their use of the play-based approach, the challenges they identified needed to be addressed. During the action group discussions, we reflected on their experiences and challenges and therefore actions were implemented changes to address the challenges that had been identified (cf. 4.2.2.1).

These challenges included the lack of knowledge and skills, not only for the teachers but for the parents and other stakeholders as well (cf. 4.2.2.1). The teachers went for training in Six Bricks and we also collaboratively studied the play-based approach through different literature. The teachers were unsure of the role they must take on during each play activity, due to the lack of one definition of the play-based approach. The parents don't have the requisite knowledge about the benefits that play has to offer for childhood development and therefore they see it as a lazy way of teaching.

Therefore, the parents were introduced to the play-based approach by communicating different articles that they could read about the benefits of the play-based approach. Another challenge that needed to be addressed is the expectations set out in the curriculum that do not align with the available time and resources (cf. 4.2.2.2). This leads to confusion for teachers and makes it impossible for them to efficiently implement the play-based approach in Grade R. The teachers had to create a lesson plan which included the work set out by the curriculum incorporated with different play strategies.

Collaboratively we created guidelines to improve and foster the play-based approach in Grade R. These guidelines were implemented during the second cycle.

5.3.3 What guidelines can be derived from the findings to foster play-based learning in Grade R?

It was important that the guidelines that were created focused on not only improving the play-based approach in Grade R but also on fostering it (cf. 4.3.1). Four important guidelines included (cf. 5.8):

- Time management: By incorporating new teaching strategies which combine play with formal work, teachers can plan more effectively (cf. 4.3.2.2).
- Life-long learners: It is the responsibility of the teacher to be updated on new developing teaching strategies in order to benefit the child (cf. 4.3.2.1).
- Collaboration between teachers: Teachers should work together and share their knowledge (cf. 4.4.2).
- Implementing different types of play: Teachers should make use of different types of play in order to ensure holistic development takes place (cf. 4.4.4).

The main focus was to improve time management for the teachers to implement the play-based approach, but at the same time also for them to meet the requirements set out in the curriculum for formal work. The resources used were also taken into consideration because they had to be versatile and adaptable to any formal worksheet that was presented.

The Six Bricks strategy was incorporated with the DBE workbook and implemented in the Grade R classroom through a lesson that incorporated play together with the formal work that had to be completed. The Six Bricks strategy has an activity book consisting of 300 play activities, as well as an application that can be downloaded, not only by teachers but also by parents (cf. 4.3.2). We collaboratively created a language lesson plan, where a Six Bricks activity was incorporated with a DBE workbook activity, and the subsequent classroom experience of all participants was extremely positive. The guideline that we presented gave the teachers the opportunity to use their time more wisely, because they were able to complete formal work through play activities and limited play resources.

At the time of the data generation, the teachers had not yet received their formal training in Six Bricks, but after contacting them in 2022, they confirmed that they have now indeed been trained in the Six Bricks strategy. The DBE, working in collaboration with UNICEF and Care for Education, also provided each child with their own set of Six Bricks (cf. 4.3.2). The teachers then went further and collaboratively incorporated Six Bricks activities for most of the formal work in the DBE workbooks. The parents were also informed of this strategy, and they were introduced to the LEGO brochure that is available online and the Six Bricks application, to give them an opportunity to also implement the play-based approach at home.

5.4 Personal reflection

At the beginning of this study, I found it quite intimidating to build a relationship with strangers and gain their trust to share their knowledge and their own personal experiences. Luckily, the one thing we all had in common was that we were all teachers. This made the process much easier because we all know the circumstances of our working environment and the challenges that we have to face, which made our group discussions a safe place for all. It was also quite challenging to only listen to the participants at some times and not force my own opinions, experiences and perception onto them. At the beginning of the study, I also questioned my competency to facilitate the group discussions and create trust within the group, because I am much younger than all of the participants and I am also a Grade 1 teacher instead of a Grade R teacher, like all of the participants. My reflective journal proves this:

“I am quite overwhelmed with the group discussion that just took place because I know that I am working with participants with a lot of experience. I know this is an advantage to me and our study, but it is also quite intimidating.”

As a novice action researcher, I had to prepare myself well enough to be confident in leading the group discussions and building trust between the participants during these discussions. I was impressed with the participants' willingness to share their ideas. A participant even mentioned during a group discussion that she is so excited to be a part of this study and it reminded her of why she became a teacher. It was also quite a relief to know that teachers are aware of the benefits that the play-based approach has to offer and that they are indeed trying to implement it as much as possible. This made it easy to collaboratively create guidelines to foster the play-based approach, especially because the participants wanted to see a change and improvement in the implementation of the strategy.

I could sense that the participants and I shared the same excitement when they went into practice and tested the lesson plan. We have adapted our guidelines to cater to both formal and play strategies.

The participants' field notes contained plenty of information about how the children enjoyed incorporating a play activity with their workbooks and how the teachers felt that they had spent their teaching time well. After Cycle Two, I also felt quite excited about the fact that the guideline that was implemented had the potential to change the efficiency of the play-based approach being used in Grade R.

As I wrote in my reflective journal:

“The guidelines were implemented and the participants' responses are all positive. By incorporating Six Bricks with the DBE workbook, play can be used as a teaching strategy, while teaching formal work.”

It was a privilege to be a part of this study. Even though it had its challenges, ranging from recruiting the participants to identifying the themes in the data collected, not even to mention the time management challenges with being a full-time teacher, I am grateful for every part of this journey. I have learned that teachers who are strangers to one another are willing to work together and build trust in order to improve and better the future of our children. I, myself, attended the Six Bricks training and did the online course as well, and it appears as if it is a strategy that has the potential to change education in the foundation phase. The limitations of the study will now be discussed.

5.5 Limitations of the study

This study only included a limited number of participants, all from mostly the same background and environment. Therefore, it may be possible that the views regarding the play-based approach are limited to the certain area in which the two participating schools are found.

COVID-19 also limited the face-to-face interaction the participants could have with one another, and we had to rely mainly on technology to generate the data. Although the sessions were limited, the sessions were longer and each session lasted for 90 – 120 minutes with very experienced participants. It was also impossible to gather all of the participants together, due to clashing schedules and therefore the group sessions were held separately.

5.6 Conclusions

This study aimed to foster the play-based approach by making use of participatory action research. We explored how teachers experience the play-based approach in Grade R classrooms, established how teachers can improve the implementation of the play-based approach to make it more effective and identified the challenges that teachers might experience when implementing the play strategy. We then developed guidelines to foster the play-based approach and change the way in which teachers approach a formal work activity. We concluded that the play-based approach is of the utmost

importance for the development of the child and that it should therefore be implemented as frequently and efficiently as possible.

Through this study, it was discovered that teachers are unsure of what exactly the curriculum expects from them and whether or not they should spend so much time on play activities, because of the formal work requirements they also receive from the DBE. Teachers must follow the CAPS (2011) requirements, which state that children should develop through different play activities but that they must also complete formal workbooks, which leads to confusion and problems with time management. Teachers also feel extra pressure from parents to follow a more formal teaching strategy, because of the parents' lack of knowledge about the play-based approach and what benefits it has to offer their children.

The DBE provides the participating schools with an amount of money each year, but little of this can be spent on play resources and educational material. Teachers take responsibility to ensure that they have the necessary play resources, whether they buy or make these play resources themselves. The DBE does indeed provide each school with formal workbooks for each term. The teachers are required to mark these workbooks as the children complete them throughout the year.

Based on the findings, it is clear that play does have a central role in Grade R classrooms. However, it can be concluded that play must be incorporated into the classroom together with required formal work on a daily basis, to ensure that the play-based strategy is efficiently implemented. It is advised that teachers use the curriculum as a framework and adapt it to meet all requirements and ensure that the different types of play activities are implemented for the benefit of the child's development.

The participants found the Six Bricks strategy very insightful and they were excited to receive their formal training in this regard. The Six Bricks strategy gives the teacher an opportunity to incorporate play activities with formal activities, even if they only have limited resources. The Six Bricks strategy is also very versatile and can be adapted to any learning area of the foundation phase. Holistic development takes place during the use of Six Bricks activities, giving the child the opportunity to develop while playing. After the participants received their training in 2022, the parents were also involved. By providing them with the online brochure, activity book and application that they could download, parents were informed about how they can implement Six Brick play-based approach at home and about the educational benefits that it has to offer their children.

The PAR research design was deemed a suitable design, because of its collaborative nature and the change that it can bring about in the teaching field. The participants and I learned to trust each other, share our knowledge and experiences, and develop guidelines together that will further Grade R

education. Implementing the guidelines that have been provided enable teachers to introduce play while simultaneously completing formal learning requirement.

5.7 Contribution of the study

This study contributes to a better understanding of what the play-based approach entails and how it can be implemented successfully in Grade R classrooms. It encourages teachers to change their perspectives about the play-based approach and incorporate it, together with formal work, to make their teaching more efficient. The study provides parents and other stakeholders with more knowledge focused on the benefits that play offers for the development of the child. It also guides them to a better understanding of how the teaching strategy works. This study could encourage a change in the curriculum by making it clear what is expected of teachers and how their teaching outcomes should be achieved. A methodological contribution made by this study includes a demonstration of how PAR could be used to collaboratively create guidelines for a group in order to change the existing situation or understanding of a phenomenon.

5.8 Guidelines to foster the play-based approach in Grade R

The following guidelines that are intended to ensure that the play-based approach is implemented effectively and fostered as a teaching strategy in Grade R, are based on my findings:

- Teachers should be lifelong learners and be willing to adapt to a situation to benefit the child.
- Teachers should be aware of new strategies that are available to them and they shouldn't be afraid to train themselves and implement these strategies.
- Parents should be informed at the beginning of the year about the play-based approach and what benefits it has to offer.
- Teachers should use the curriculum as a framework and adapt and incorporate strategies and resources, which will benefit the development of the child.
- Teachers should collaboratively adapt lesson plans for workbook activities, to incorporate a Six Bricks activity and ensure that the children are learning through play.
- Different types of play aligned with the CAPS document should be incorporated into the daily programme of Grade Rs to ensure holistic development.

These guidelines were collaboratively developed through the findings and input of the participants.

5.9 Suggestions for further study

The following questions can be used as a guide to further the study:

- How to use Six Bricks to improve the holistic development of Grade R children?
- How can parents and teachers collaborate to implement the play-based approach effectively?

- How can the negative effect of a pandemic be limited in Grad R classrooms?
- Can the play-based approach go beyond Grade R and be introduced throughout the foundation phase as a whole?
- How can PAR be used by Grade R teachers to promote play in the classroom?

5.10 Concluding remarks

By participating in and leading this study, Grade R teachers will have another option to implement a play-based teaching strategy that develops the child holistically, while also completing more formal curricular work. Requirements and expectations from parents and the DBE will be met, while the children are still having fun as they learn. Teachers were equipped to incorporate play with formal work by only using limited resources. They were introduced to a new play strategy that is versatile, adaptable and fun to incorporate with formal work. This study was beneficial for me, the participants, and other Grade R teachers, because of the changes it offers in fostering the play-based approach by incorporating different types of play activities. In my experience, PAR should be introduced to all teachers as a development method, due to its collaborative nature and the ability to create change.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alcock, S. (2013). Searching for play in Early Childhood Care and Education policy. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 48(1).
- Ali, A., Puteh, S., & Omar, O. (2013). Teachers' Perception towards Play-based Approach in Language and Literacy Development at Preschool. *Journal of Evolution of Medical and Dental Sciences* 7(43).
- Ali, E., Constantino, K., Hussain, A., & Akhtar, Z. (2018). The Effects of Play-based Learning on Early Childhood Education and Development. *ASEAN Education in the twenty first century*, 126-136.
- ARC. (2018). *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Australian Research Council.
- Aronstam, S., & Braund, M. (2016). Play in Grade R classrooms: Diverse teacher perceptions and practices. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5(3), 1-10.
- Asghar, J. (2013). Critical paradigm: A preamble for Novice Researchers. *Life Science Journal* 10(4), 3121-3127.
- Association, I. P. (2010). Promoting the child's right to play. *Consultations on children's right to play report*.
- Azlina, W., & Zulkiflee, A. (2012). A pilot study: The impact of outdoor play spaces on Kindergarten children. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 38, 275-283.
- Baloyi-Mothibeli, S. (2018). *A strategy to improve professional curriculum practice in a Grade R Mathematics class*. University of the Free State.
- Barnard, E., & Braund, M. (2016). Strategies for the implementation of mathematics in Grade R: Teachers' beliefs and practices. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 6(1), 1-8.
- Basit, T. (2003). Manual or electronic? The role of coding in qualitative data analysis. *Educational Research* 45(2), 143-154.
- Bennet, J. (2010). Pedagogy in Early Childhood Services with Special Reference to Nordic Approaches. *Psychological Science and Education* 3, 16-21.
- Bento, G., & Dias, G. (2017). The importance of outdoor play for young children's healthy development. *Porto Biomedical Journal* 2(5), 157-160.
- Berk, L., & Meyers, A. (2013). The role of make-believe play in the development of executive function: Status of research and future directions. *American Journal of Play* 6, 98-110.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. (2004). Do play and Foundational skills need to compete for the teacher's attention in an Early Childhood Classroom. *Developmental Appropriate Practice*, 4-11.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. (2019). *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education*. 2nd Edition. Pearson.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. (2010). Curriculum and play in early child development. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*.
- Bodrova, E., & Leong, D. (2015). Vygotskian and Post-Vygotskian views on children's play. *American Journal of Play* 7(3), 371-388.
- Boland, J., Banks, S., Krabbe, R., Lawrence, S., Murray, T., Henning, T., & Vandenberg, M. (2021). A COVID-19 era rapid review: using Zoom and Skype for qualitative group research. *Public Health: Research and Practice*, 1-9.

- Borisova, I. (2018). *Learning through play*. UNICEF.
- Bowdon, J. (2015). The common core's first casualty: Playful learning. *Phi Delta Kappan* 96(8), 33-37.
- Bradbury-Huang, H. (2010). What is good action research? *Action Research* 8(1), 93-109.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in Psychology* 3, 77-101.
- Brownson, R., Jamie, F., Burgerson, C., & Fisher, M. (2010). Translating epidemiology into policy to prevent childhood obesity. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 436-444.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Budig, K., Diez, J., Conde, P., Sastre, M., Hernan, M., & Franco, M. (2018). Photovoice and empowerment: Evaluating the transformative potential of a participatory action research project. *BMC Public Health* 18:432.
- Butschi, C., & Hedderich, I. (2021). How to involve Young children in a photovoice project. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 22(1).
- Cacciattolo. (2015). *The praxis of English Language Teaching and Learning*. Brill.
- Carr, V., & Luken, E. (2014). Playscapes: a pedagogical paradigm for play and learning. *International Journal of Play* 3(1). 69-83.
- Chevalier, J., & Buckles, D. (2019). *Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry*. Routledge.
- Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Sage.
- Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2009). Developmentally appropriate practice in Early Childhood Programs serving children from birth through age 8. *National Association for the Education of Young Children*.
- Crane, P., & O'Regan, M. (2010). *On PAR: Using Participatory Action Research to improve early intervention*. Queensland: Department of families, housing, community services and indigenous affairs, Australian Government.
- Cremin, T., Glauert, E. C., Compton, A., & Stylianidou, F. (2015). Creative little scientist: Exploring pedagogical synergies between inquiry-based and creative approaches in Early Years science. *Education 3-13* 43(4), 404-419.
- Creswell, J., & Creswell, D. (2018). *Research Design – Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage.
- de Jager, M. (2020). *Ready to learn, ready for school*. Mind Moves.
- Department of Basic Education. (2008). *Evaluation of the accredited training of early childhood development practitioners*. Eastern Cape Department of Education.
- Department of Basic Education. (2011). *CAPS Foundation phase Grade R – 3*. Department of Basic Education.
- Department of Basic Education. (2021). *ECD CENSUS – Play your part in planning our children's future*. Department of Basic Education.
- Department of Basic Education. (2011). *Report on Annual National Assessment of 2011*. Department of Basic Education.
- Department of Basic Education. (2021). *Graad R Werkboek in Afrikaans*. Department of Basic Education.

- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2011). Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications. Department of Higher Education and Training.
- Driscoll, K., & Pianta, R. (2010). Banking time in head start: Early efficacy of an intervention designed to promote supportive teacher-child relationships. *Early education and development* 21 (1), 38-64.
- Dudovskiy, J. (2022). *The ultimate guide to writing a dissertation in business studies*. Research methodology.net.
- Earl, L., Hargreaves, A., & Ryan, J. (2013). *Schooling for change: Reinventing education for early adolescents*. Routledge.
- EDUREC, N. (2019). *Faculty of Education procedure for ethical clearance*. Retrieved from NWU Library: education.nwu.ac.za/sites/education.nwu.ac.za/files/ethics/faculty/facultyOfEducation-EthicalClearanceProcedure.pdf
- Embury. (2017). *Diploma in Grade R Teaching*. Retrieved from Embury – Institute for higher education: <http://www.embury.ac.za/diploma-in-grade-r-teaching>
- Engelbrecht, A. (2016). Kwalitatiewe navorsing: Data-insameling en -analise. In I. Joubert, C. Hartell, & K. Lombaard, *Navorsing: 'n gids vir die beginnavorsers*. Van Schaik.
- Esterhuizen, S. (2019, December 18). *About Play-based Learning*. Retrieved from IACE: <http://www.ilearnthinking.org/about-play-based-learning>
- Excell, L. (2011). Grade R teachers' perceptions of early childhood development and how these impact on classroom practice. *University of the Witwatersrand PhD*.
- Excell, L., & Linington, M. (2011). Move to literacy: fanning emergent literacy in early childhood education in a pedagogy of play. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 2, 27-45.
- Fadhel, K. (2002). Positivist and Hermeneutic Paradigm: A Critical Evaluation under their Structure of Scientific Practice. *The Sosland Journal*, 21-28.
- Fani, T., & Ghaemi, F. (2011). Implications of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development in teacher education: ZPTD and self-scaffolding. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 29, 1549-1554.
- Ferrara, K., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Newcombe, N., & Golinkoff, R. (2011). Block Talk: Spatial Language During Block play. *Mind, Brain and Education* 5(3), 143-151.
- Fesseha, E., & Pyle, A. (2016). Conceptualizing play-based learning from the kindergarten teachers' perspective. *International Journal of Early Years Education* 24(3), 361-377.
- Fisher, K., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Newcombe, N. (2013). Taking shape: Supporting preschoolers' acquisition of geometric knowledge through guided play. *Child development* 84(6), 1872-1876.
- Fung, C., & Cheng, D. (2012). Concensus or dissensus? Stakeholders' views on the role of play in learning. *Early Years* 32(1), 17-33.
- Fusch, P., & Ness, L. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in Qualitative research. *The qualitative report* 20(9), 1408-1416.
- Gall, M., Gall, J., & Borg, W. (2003). *Educational research: An introduction*. Pearson.
- Goldkuhl, G. (2019). The generation of qualitative data in information systems research. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* 44(28), 572-599.
- Golinkoff, R., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2016). *Becoming brilliant: What science tells us about raising successful children*. American Psychological Association.

- Gosso, Y., & Carvalho, A. (2013). Play and Cultural context. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*.
- Granone, F., Reikeras, E. (2021). *Preschoolers learning by playing with technology*. IntecOpen.
- Grant, C., & Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, selecting and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Creating the blueprint for your house. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting education, practice and research* 4(10), 12-26.
- Green, H. (2014). Use of theoretical and conceptual frameworks in qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher* 21(6), 34-38.
- Gulen, S., Baris, S. (2021). Games that parents play with their children and the reasons for their game preferences. *International Anatolia Academic Online Journal* 8(2), 65-84.
- Hakkarainen, P., & Bredikyte, M. (2008). The zone of proximal development in play and learning. *Cultural-Historical Psychology* (4), 2-11.
- Han, M., Moore, N., Vukelich, C., & Buell, M. (2015). Does play make a difference? Effects of play intervention on at-risk preschoolers' vocabulary learning. *American Journal of Play* 3(1), 82-105.
- Hannikainen, M., Singer, E., & van Oers, B. (2013). Promoting play for a better future. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 21(2), 165-171.
- Hartel, C., & Bosman, L. (2016). *Navorsing. 'n Gids vir die beginnervorsers*. Van Schaik.
- Heale, R., & Forbes, D. (2013). Understanding triangulation in research. *Evidence-based nursing* 16(4), 98.
- Hendricks, F. (2017). A Participatory Action Research approach to engaging peer educators in the prevention of teenage pregnancy. *Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University PhD*.
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G.L. (2014). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. Sage.
- Hesterman, S. (2018). State of play-based learning in Western Australian Schools. *Murdoch University*.
- Higginbottom, G., & Liamputtong, P. (2015). *Participatory qualitative research methodologies in health*. Sage.
- Homan, E. (2016, September 20). *Why free play is crucial for early years children*. Retrieved from Pentagon for Learning and Play: <http://www.pentagonplay.co.uk/why-free-play-is-crucial-for-early-years-children>.
- Horkheimer, M. (1982). *Critical Theory*. Seabury Press.
- Huizinga, J. (1938). *Homo Ludens*. Random House.
- Hunter, T., & Walsh, G. (2014). From policy to practice: the reality of play in primary school classes in Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Early Years Education* 22(1), 19-36.
- Iliev, D., Dimov, B., & Atanasoska, T. (2014). The quality of pupil action researchers in the light of research paradigm. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 116, 3902-3904.
- Izumi-Taylor, S., Ro, Y., Han, J., & Yoko, I. (2017). Japanese and Korean Kindergartens' Perspectives of play using photos. *International Journal of Educational Psychology* 6(1), 45-66
- Jacobs, S. (2016). The use of Participatory Action Research within Education-Benefits to Stakeholders. *World Journal of Education* 6(3), 48-55.
- Kekeya, J. (2019). The commonalities and differences between research paradigms. *DWU Research Journal* 31, 26-36.

- Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (2005). Participatory Action Research: Communicative Action and the Public Sphere. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 559-603). Sage.
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R. & Nixon, R. (2014). Introducing critical participatory action research. In S. Kemmis, R. McTaggart & R. Nixon (Eds.), *The Action Research Planner* (pp. 1-31). Springer.
- Kennedy, A., & Barblett, L. (2010). *Learning and teaching through play*. Canberra: The early years learning framework.
- Kenneth, R., & Smith, K. (2018). Play in Human Development. *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Lifespan Human Developments*, 1671-1672.
- Kessel, J. (2018). Let our children play: The importance of play in early childhood education. *Journal of Early Childhood Scholarship and Innovative Practice* 2(1), 5.
- Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. (2017). Understanding and applying Research Paradigms in Educational Contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education* 6(5), 26-42.
- Kolb, A., & Kolb, D. (2010). Learning to play, Playing to learn: A case study of a Ludic Learning space. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 23(1), 26-50.
- Krog, S. (2010). *MED: Movement programmes as a means to learning readiness*. University of South Africa.
- Krouwel, M., Jolly, K., & Greenfield, S. (2019). Comparing Skype and in-person qualitative interview modes in a study of irritable bowel syndrome. *BMC Med Res Methodol* 19(1), 219.
- Kuhn, T. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lal, S., Jarus, T., & Suto, M. (2012). A scoping review of the photovoice method: Implications for occupational therapy research. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy* 79, 181-190.
- Le Cordeur, M. (2016). Aksie Navorsing. In I. Joubert, C. Hartell, & K. Lombaard, *Navorsing 'n gids vir beginnervorsers*. Van Schaik
- Lester, S., & Russel, W. (2010). *Children's right to play: An examination of the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide*. Bernard van Leer Foundation.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Loizou, E. (2016). Play skills and teacher involvement. *Information Brochures on Early Childhood Education*.
- Loizou, E., Michaelides, A., Georgiou, A. (2019). Early childhood teacher involvement in children's social-dramatic play: creative drama as a scaffolding tool. *Early Childhood Development and Care* 189(4), 600-612.
- Lynch, M. (2014). Ontario Kindergarten teachers' social media discussion about full day Kindergarten. *McGill Journal of Education* 49(2), 329-347.
- Lynch, M. (2015). More play, Please: The perspective of Kindergarten teachers on play in the classroom. *American Journal of Play*, 347-370.
- MacDonald, C. (2012). Understanding Participatory Action Research: A qualitative research methodology option. *Canadian Journal of Action Research* 13(2), 34-50.
- Maharaj, N. (2016). Using field notes to facilitate critical reflection. *Reflective Practice* 17(2), 114-124.
- Maree, K. (2016). *First steps in research*. Van Schaik Publishers. Who is the author of the chapter?
- Martens, D. (2015). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology 4th Edn*. Sage.

- Mather-Pike, C. (2018). A participatory action research project to improve school readiness in rural Grade R classes in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *University of KwaZulu-Natal MEd.*
- Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Sage.
- McAfee, O., & Leong, D. (2020). *Assessing and guiding young children's development and learning 6th edition*. Pearson.
- Mertens, D. (2015). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods*. Sage.
- Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009). Crisis in Kindergarten: Summary and recommendations of why children need to play in school. *Early Childhood Colorado*.
- Moore, S., Faulkner, G., & Treblay, M. (2020). Impact of the Covid-19 virus outbreak on movement and play behaviours of Canadian children and youth. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity* 17 (1), 85.
- Morgan, D. (2007). Paradigms Lost and Pragmatism Regained: Methodological Implications of Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1 (1), 48-76.
- Murray, J. (2020). In a time of Covid-19 and beyond, the world needs Early Childhood Educators. *International Journal of Early Years Education* 4, 299-302.
- Murriss, K., & Verbeek, C. (2014). A Foundation for foundation phase teacher education: Making wise educational judgements. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 4 (2), 1-17.
- Newbury, K., Wooldridge, D., Peet, S., & Bertelsen, C. (2015). From policy to practice: Laying the foundation for future math success. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin: International Journal for Professional Educators* 81(4), 8-17.
- Nyumba, T., Wilson, K., Derrick, C., & Mukherjee, N. (2018). The use of focus group discussion methodology: Insights from two decades of application in conservation. *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* 9(1), 20-32.
- Ogunyemi, F., & Ragpot, L. (2016). Work and play in early childhood education: Views from Nigeria and South Africa. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 1-7.
- O'Neill, S., Rajendran, K., & Halperin, J. (2012). More than child's play: the potential benefits of play-based interventions for young children with ADHD. *Expert Review of Neurotherapeutics* 12 (10), 1165-1167.
- Ormston, R., Spencer, L., Barnard, M., & Snape, D. (2014). *The foundations of qualitative research*. Sage.
- Peterson, S., Portier, C., & Murray, A. (2017). The role of play at home and in Kindergarten and Grade one: Parent's perception. *Journal of Childhood Studies* 42 (1), 1-10.
- Phillippi, J., & Lauderdale, J. (2018). A Guide to Field Notes for Qualitative Research: Context and conversation. *Qualitative Health Research* 28(3), 381-388.
- Pinchover, S. (2017). The relation between Teachers' and children's playfulness: A pilot study. *Frontiers in Psychology* 8, 1-8.
- Plunkett, R., Leipert, B., & Ray, S. (2012). Unspoken phenomena: Using the photovoice method to enrich phenomenological inquiry. *Nursing Inquiry*.
- Pramling-Samuelsson, I., & Fler, M. (2009). *Play and Learning in Early Childhood Settings: International Perspectives*. Springer.
- Pyle, A., & Danniels, E. (2017). A Continuum of Play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. *Early Education and Development* 28(3), 274-289.

- Pyle, A., DeLuca, C., & Danniels, E. (2017). A scoping review of research on play-based pedagogies in kindergarten education. *Review of Education* 5(3), 311-351.
- Rehman, A., & Alharthi, K. (2016). An introduction to research paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations* 3(8), 51-59.
- Renz, S., Carrington, J., & Badger, T. (2018). Two strategies for qualitative content analysis: An intramethod approach to triangulation. *SAGE Journals* 28(5), 1277-1288.
- Ritchie, J., & Lewis, J. (2013). *Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers*. Sage.
- Robinson, O. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*.
- Robson, S., & Quinn, S. (2014). *The Routledge International Handbook of Young Children's Thinking and Understanding*. Routledge.
- Rocco, T., & Plakhotnik, M. (2009). Literature reviews, Conceptual frameworks and Theoretical frameworks: Terms, Functions and Distinctions. *Human Resource Development Review*.
- Saputra, J. (2014). Teaching strategies. *Researchgate*.doi
- Sarode, R. (2018). Teaching strategies, styles and qualities of a teacher: A review for valuable higher education. *Technical Research* (5), 57-62.
- Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive and Critical Research Paradigms. *English Language Teaching* 5(9), 9-16.
- Seobi, B. (2015). A Participatory approach to improving the instructional leadership of heads of departments in underperforming schools. *North-West University Potchefstroom PhD*.
- Setlhare, R., Wood, L., & Meyer, L. (2016). Collaborated understandings of context-specific psychosocial challenges facing South African school learners. *Educational Research for Social Change* 5(2), 18-34.
- Sheridan, M. (2017). *Play in Early Childhood 4th edition*. Routledge.
- Singer, E. (2015). Play and playfulness in early childhood education and care. *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art* 8(2), 27-35.
- Sjoerdsma, S. (2016). Importance of Play: Play-based instruction within a Preschool Learning Environment. *Master of Education Theses*.
- Smith, B. (2003). *Blackwell Guide to the philosophy of computing and information*. Blackwell: Oxford.
- Smith, P., & Pellegrini, A. (2013). Learning through play. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*, 1-6.
- Solis, L., Khumalo, K., Nowack, S., Blythe-Davidson, E., & Mardell, B. (2019, February). Towards a South African pedagogy of play. *Pedagogy of play working paper*, pp. 1-46.
- Southcott, L. (2013). The use of play and inquiry in a Kindergarten drama centre: A teacher's critical reflection. *Journal of Childhood Studies* 38(1), 39.
- Stuckey, H. (2015). The second step in data analysis: Coding qualitative research data. *Journal of Social Health and Diabetes* 3(1), 7-10.
- Sutton-Brown. (2014). Photovoice: A methodological guide. *Photography and Culture* 7(2), 169-185.

- Swanson, & Richard, A. (2013). *Theory building in applied disciplines*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Synodi, E. (2010). Play in Kindergarten: The case of Norway, Sweden, New Zealand and Japan. *International Journal of Early Years Education* 18(3), 185-200.
- Timmons, K., Cooper, A., Bozek, E., & al, e. (2021). The impacts of Covid-19 on Early Childhood Education: Capturing the unique challenges associated with remote teaching and learning in K-2. *Early Childhood Education Journal*.
- Tremblay, M., Hevner, A., & Berndt, D. (2010). Focus groups for artifact refinement and evaluation in design research. *Communications of AIS* 26, 599-618.
- Tsai, A., Kohrt, B., Matthews, L., Betancourt, T., Lee, J., Papachristos, A., & Dworkin, S. (2016). Promises and pitfalls of data sharing in qualitative research. *Social Science & Medicine* 169, 191-198.
- Tsai, C. (2015). Am I Interfering? Preschool teacher participation in children's play. *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 3 (12), 1028-1033.
- Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H., & Snelgrove, S. (2016). Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice* 6(5), 100-110.
- Vygotsky. (1986). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1977). Play and its role in the mental development of the child. In M. Cole, *Soviet Development Psychology* (pp. 76-99). M.E Sharpe.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Harvard University Press.
- Wadsworth, Y. (1998). What is PAR. *Action Research International* 2.
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health education and behavior* 24, 369-387.
- Weisberg, D., & Zosh, J. (2018). How guided play promotes early childhood learning. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development*, 1-4.
- Weisberg, D., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. (2013). Guided play: Where curricular goals meet a playful pedagogy. *Mind, Brain and Education* 7 (2), 104-112.
- Weisberg, D., Zosh, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. (2013). Play, Language Development and the Role of Adult Support. *American Journal of Play* 6(1), 39-54.
- White, R. (2012). *The power of play*. University of Minnesota.
- Wong, S., Wang, Z., & Cheng, D. (2011). A play-based curriculum: Hong-Kong Children's perception of play and non-play. *The International Journal of Learning*, 165-180.
- Wood, D., Bruner, J., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 17, 89-100.
- Wood, L. (2019). *Participatory Action Learning and Action Research: Theory, Practice and Process*. Routledge.
- Zhang, L., Lian, P., Xue, Y., & Wu, N. (2022). The impact of Block Play on Young Children's production of intrinsic frame of reference: A quasi-experiment. *Early Educational and Development*.
- Zosh, J., Hopkins, E., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Whitebread, D. (2017). Learning through play: A review of the evidence. *White paper*, 1-40.
- Zuber-Skerrit, O., & Wood, L. (2019). *Action learning and Action research: Genres and approaches*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2015). Participatory Action Learning and Action Research for community engagement: A theoretical framework. *Educational Research for Social Change* 4(1), 5-25.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2018). An educational framework for participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). *Educational Action Research* 26(4), 513-532.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O., & Wood, L. (2015). PALAR as a methodology for leading community engagement. *Participatory paradigm for an engaged scholarship in Higher Education*, 81-82.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O., Wood, L., & Louw, I. (2015). *A Participatory Paradigm for an Engaged Scholarship in Higher Education*. Sense Publishers.

ANNEXURE A – LANGUAGE EDITOR

13 November 2022

Dr Etienne Viviers
Suite 226
Private Bag X 43
Benoni
1500

Phone: 082 923 3809

Email: etienneviviers@gmail.com

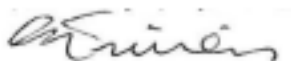
To whom it may concern

This letter serves to confirm that I have conducted proofreading and editing for the Master of Education in Special Needs dissertation written by Tersia Myburgh (NWU student number 33344175), titled "Participatory action research to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R".

The dissertation was supervised by Prof M Koen and co-supervised by Dr I Payne-Van Staden.

I am an accredited language practitioner in good standing with the South African Translators' Institute (SATI membership #1000493).

Kind regards



Etienne Viviers

ANNEXURE B – CONSENT FORM: DBE



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	03 November 2020
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2021– 30 September 2021 2019/563
Name of Researcher:	Myburgh T
Address of Researcher:	289 Wilroox street Sinoville Pretoria
Telephone Number:	075 242 6061
Email address:	Tersiamyburgh19@gmail.com
Research Topic:	. Participatory action research to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R
Type of qualification	Master's in Education
Number and type of schools:	3 Primary schools
District/s/HO	Tshwane North

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school's and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. Letter that would indicate that the said researcher's has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

1st Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 365 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. Because of COVID 19 pandemic researchers can ONLY collect data online, telephonically or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate. The approval letter will then indicate the type of arrangements that have been made with the school.
4. The Researchers are advised to make arrangements with the schools via Fax, email or telephonically with the Principal.
5. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
6. A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
7. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
8. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
9. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
10. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
11. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
12. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
13. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
14. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director, Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
15. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
16. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards



Mr Ganjani Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 09/11/2020

ANNEXURE C – Permission letter from School Principal



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Faculty of Education
COMBER Research Focus Ares
Building B 11

Recipient:

Tel: 018 285 2278
Email: Mariette.Koen@nwu.ac.za

Date February 2021

PERMISSION LETTER: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL/OTHER RELEVANT PERSON

I herewith wish to request your permission for [details of participants] to participate in this research, which involves developing teaching strategies to foster the play-based approach in Grade R through action research. Prior to granting permission, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Participatory action research to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R

ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER

NWU-01204-20-A2

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Prof. Mariette Koen
CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr Isabel van Staden
ADDRESS: North-West University

Faculty of education, Potchefstroom Campus
CONTACT NUMBER: 018 285 2278

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Tersia Myburgh
ADDRESS: Sinoville, Wilroux street 269, Pretoria, 0129
CONTACT NUMBER: 0762426061

FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also obtained from the provincial Department of Basic Education/other relevant body.

What is this research about?

The aims of this research are:

- To investigate how the play-based approach can be fostered and implemented effectively in Grade R.
- To develop teaching strategies to implement the play-based approach effectively in the Grade R classroom.
- To equip Grade R teachers with the necessary knowledge to understand the benefits of following a play-based approach.

Participants

- Grade R teachers

What is expected of the participants?

The data for the study will be collected in the form of different cycles which consist out of recorded core group discussions, photovoice and reflective field journals that will take place through Zoom meetings, after school hours. The participants will be expected to attend at least two cycles and collect field notes and photographs of the selected research question. At each cycle, the project group will decide on the question or the point of interest that needs to be researched. This will be done according to the participants' knowledge and reflections on previous questions and cycles. The participants should make use of their own internet connections and electronical devices and ensure that they have enough data.

Covid-19 Protocol

During the data gathering process, all Covid-19 regulations set out by the Government of South Africa, will be strictly followed, such as wearing a mask, sanitizing and keeping social distance. No face-to-face research will take place, and all data-gathering methods will be applied through the internet and electronical devices.

Zoom sessions

All informed consent documents will be emailed to the different participants and a witness should also be available to co-sign. All signed documents can be scanned or photographed to send to the researcher.

Benefits to the participants

During the cycles, knowledge and teaching strategies will be shared which will benefit the teacher and help with professional development. It will also give the teacher the chance to share her new gained knowledge with her co-workers, to assist in the empowerment and development of others.

Risks involved for participants

Minimal physical or emotional risks are involved during the duration of this study, the participants will have to offer their time to attend the cycles.

Confidentiality and protection of identity

Each participant will be anonymous in the research study and will appear as participant A, B or C to protect their identity. Each participant will be treated with respect during the different cycles and they will know that their voice and opinion matter. This study is absolutely obligation free and participation is voluntary.

Dissemination of findings

As a participatory action research study, it is important to share the results with all the participants because everyone contributed to the findings. The results or findings should be used to benefit all

participants and give them the opportunity to share and empower others with the knowledge gained.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

DECLARATION BY PRINCIPAL/OTHER RELEVANT PERSON:

By signing below, I agree to give permission for the research to take place with the identified participants in the study entitled:

[Enter title here]

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of the participants in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and participants will not be pressurised to take part.
- Participants may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- Participants may be asked to leave the research process before it is completed, if the researcher feels it is in their best interests, or if they do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) ____/____/20____

Signature of School Principal/Relevant person

ANNEXURE D – Participant information and consent form



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Faculty of Education
COMBER Research Focus Ares
Building B 11

Recipient:

Tel: 018 285 2278
Email: Mariette.Koen@nwu.ac.za

Date February 2021

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

I herewith wish to request your consent to participate in this research, which involves developing teaching strategies to foster the play-based approach in Grade R through action research. Before you give consent, please acquaint yourself with the information below.

The details of the research are as follows:

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

Participatory action research to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R

ETHICS APPLICATION NUMBER

NWU-01204-20-A2

PROJECT SUPERVISOR: Prof. Mariette Koen
CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr Isabel van Staden
ADDRESS: North-West University

Faculty of education, Potchefstroom Campus
CONTACT NUMBER: 018 285 2278

MEMBER OF PROJECT TEAM MEd-Student: Tersia Myburgh
ADDRESS: Sinoville, Wilroux street 269, Pretoria, 0129
CONTACT NUMBER: 0762426061

FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Contact person: Ms Erna Greyling, E-mail: Erna.Greyling@nwu.ac.za, Tel. (018) 299 4656

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the North-West University and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines of this committee. Permission was also asked from the provincial Department of Basic Education/other relevant body as well as the school principal.

What is this research about?

The aims of this research are:

- To investigate how the play-based approach can be fostered and implemented effectively in Grade R.
- To develop teaching strategies to implement the play-based approach effectively in the Grade R classroom.
- To equip Grade R teachers with the necessary knowledge to understand the benefits of following a play-based approach.

Participants

- Grade R teachers

What is expected of you as participant?

The data for the study will be collected in the form of different cycles which consist out of recorded core group discussions, photovoice and reflective field journals that will take place through Zoom meetings, after school hours. The participants will be expected to attend at least two cycles and collect field notes and photographs of the selected research question. At each cycle, the project group will decide on the question or the point of interest that needs to be researched. This will be done according to the participants' knowledge and reflections on previous questions and cycles. The participants should make use of their own internet connections and electronical devices and ensure that they have enough data.

Covid-19 Protocol

During the data gathering process, all Covid-19 regulations set out by the Government of South Africa, will be strictly followed, such as wearing a mask, sanitizing and keeping social distance. No face-to-face research will take place, and all data-gathering methods will be applied through the internet and electronical devices.

Zoom sessions

All informed consent documents will be emailed to the different participants and a witness should also be available to co-sign. All signed documents can be scanned or photographed to send to the researcher.

Benefits to you as participant

During the cycles, knowledge and teaching strategies will be shared which will benefit the teacher and help with professional development. It will also give the teacher the chance to share her new gained knowledge with her co-workers, to assist in the empowerment and development of others.

Risks involved for participants

Minimal physical or emotional risks are involved during the duration of this study, the participants will have to offer their time to attend the cycles.

Confidentiality and protection of identity

Each participant will be anonymous in the research study and will appear as participant A, B or C to protect their identity. Each participant will be treated with respect during the different cycles and they will know that their voice and opinion matter. This study is absolutely obligation free and participation is voluntary.

Dissemination of findings

As a participatory action research study, it is important to share the results with all the participants because everyone contributed to the findings. The results or findings should be used to benefit all participants and give them the opportunity to share and empower others with the knowledge gained.

If you have any further questions or enquiries regarding your participation in this research, please contact the researchers for more information.

Yours sincerely
Tersia Myburgh

DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT:

By signing below, I agree to take part in a research study entitled:

[Enter title here]

I declare that:

- I have read this information and consent form and understand what is expected of me in the research.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the research process before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the research procedures, as agreed to.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) ____/____/20____

Signature of participant

Researcher

ANNEXURE E – Ethics approval



Private Bag X1220, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-4849
Email: nkoenrafi.machine@nwu.ac.za

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (EduREC) on 28/05/2020, this committee hereby approves your extension of period as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Participatory action research to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Prof MP Koen

Student / Team: T Myburgh (MEd student - 33344175); Dr I Payne van Staden

Ethics number:

N	W	U	-	0	1	2	0	4	-	2	0	-	A	2
Institution			Study Number					Year		Status				

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single Study

Commencement date: 27 May 2021

Risk:

Low

Expiry date: 27 May 2022

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The study leader/supervisor/principal investigator/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EduREC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EduREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and EduREC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;

- to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
- withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EduREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

The EduREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EduREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof JAK Olivier
Chairperson NWU Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (20211802) C:\Users\20211802\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docx
8 November 2019

Current details: (20211802)M:\DS31802\Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Certificates\Templates\Research Ethics Approval Letters\1.1.1.1 ED-REC Ethical Approval Letter.docx
8 December 2019

File reference: 1.1.1.1.2



Faculty of Education

MINUTES

Meeting: Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education

Date of meeting: 27 May 2021

Agenda items will be approved by the committee members by email round-robin decision.

1 Changes to already approved applications

1.1 Project head	Prof M Koen
Student/Team	T Myburgh (MEd student - 33344175); Dr I Payne van Staden
Ethics number	NWU-01204-20-S2
Title	Participatory action research to foster play-based teaching strategies in Grade R
Time frame	28 May 2020 – 28 May 2021 The application was approved at the meeting of 28 May 2020. Extension of research period is requested.
Decision	Extension approved from 27 May 2021 to 27 May 2022.

2 Next meeting: 24 June 2021; agenda closes on 14 June 2021

Minute keeper: Ms E Greyling

Original details: (10000218) C:\Users\10000218\NWU\Nextcloud\SNTO(X)\Faculty of Education\Minutes\2020\EduREC\2020-02-27\2020-02-27 Minutes Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education.docm
26 February 2020

File reference: 7.4