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Teacher-Child Interactions and Dramatic Play: Stories from Three Continents and Three Cultures

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Abstract

Dramatic play involves children choosing roles and acting them out. Teachers assume a variety of roles in providing an environment wherein children pretend to be a different people, in different roles, or even something that is not a person. The benefits of dramatic play revealed in previous research include improvements in children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory (1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978; 1986) frame the current discussion. Children become empowered through dramatic play as they learn to consider the perspectives of their classmates, and as they negotiate and balance ideas from other children. This paper focuses on the design, development, and enhancement of dramatic play in early childhood settings in three different countries within three different continents (Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and the United States). The authors provide stories within classrooms from these countries and describe how each situation reveals cultural differences in play, and how the new understandings impacted both the teachers and the children's subsequent actions and thinking. Conclusions describe the bi-directional benefits of play for children and teachers.

Keywords: dramatic play, early childhood development, cognitive and social development, teacher roles, cultural perspective

Cohen (2018) describes how the Victorian's dichotomy between work and play is no longer appropriate. It is noteworthy that providing optimal play experiences requires careful planning, preparation, and monitoring by adults who understand how to relate to children as well as how to enhance their learning in choice-driven play environments. When adults know strategies that ensure children experience safe and mature play (Lillard et al., 2013), learning is more likely to take place. In addition, adults observe the results of their planning during children's play to build upon and extend children's later learning. In this scenario, teachers also become learners; especially when they are teachers of children from cultures that differ from their own. Thus, optimal play experiences and learning become bi-directional.

Scientific evidence supports three different principles of play (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009): 1) children require not only free play, but also play that is guided and facilitated by others; 2) both academic and social skills remain important, and the former does not dominate the latter; and 3) play and learning are not incompatible. After defining dramatic play, two theoretical lenses (Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory and Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory) frame examples of play interactions with different trajectories due to differences in cultural contexts. Subsequent sections are organized by different teacher roles in children's dramatic play activities: planning and preparing materials for children's play; facilitating and scaffolding children's play; and modeling roles. In each section, stories illustrate teaching strategies used with children in three countries within three different continents. These countries (Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and the United States) represent unique cultures. Using stories, examples of how observing children's play as well as the cyclical process that builds understanding for teachers in different cultural contexts become evident.

About Dramatic Play

When engaging in dramatic play, children adopt roles and assume responsibilities for these roles in scenarios which mimic the real world and culture of children (Leong & Bodrova, 2012). Similar to drama, different parts comprise dramatic play. As such, when children engage in dramatic play, they play a wide range of parts or roles. Young children are drawn to symbolic thinking as they engage in problem solving, social learning, and writing and reading (Szecsi, 2008). During the play process, children assume an imaginary role, and then, they act the part by performing tasks related to that role.

For example, a common type of dramatic play observed in preschools in the United States takes place in the kitchen center. Children pretend to cook using tools (e.g., a spatula) typically found in their families' homes. Children may assume the roles of different family members. Those who pretend to be children in the family may ask, "What's for dinner?" When food preparation is finished, all may sit at the small table in the center to eat the pretend food.

It is important for parents and teachers to recognize the value of dramatic play. For too long people believed children's play was inconsequential. Many adults associated play only with children's fun. In some instances, adults considered academic skill learning as "serious business" and thought learning academics was children's "work." Through many years, researchers clearly refuted this belief by providing data showing the beneficial effects of dramatic play, especially for young children in preschool and kindergarten (DeMarie & Bugos, 2020; Hall, 2015).

It is important to provide two different theoretical lenses describing how play contributes to children's and teacher's learning.

Theoretical Lenses Framing the Benefits of Children's Play

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Theory. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) identifies many levels of environments and systems which interact with children's characteristics and qualities and describes the impact of these interactions on their learning and development. Each person has biological and genetic factors that influence how others treat them. For example, a child with physical challenges may be treated differently than a child who does not have those physical challenges. Also, other factors may influence how others treat the child. For example, the way children dress may affect how others interact with them. A child whose clothes are dirty or smell probably will get different reactions from others than a child who wears the latest fashion. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory also elaborates on how the environment has four interrelated systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Each system is detailed in the sections that follow with examples from classrooms in different cultural contexts.

Children's Microsystems. "Patterns of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person" are part of children's microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 5). These interactions take place among children and the people, places, and materials they encounter in environments where they engage, and these interactions influence the child's learning and development directly (i. e., family, school, neighborhood).

The same object may elicit different play scenarios in different countries. For example, in Saudi Arabia, one of the authors added a blanket to the dramatic play center. She watched as the boys pretended to be men and to wear it as a “ghutra”. A Ghutra is a traditional Arab headdress fashioned from a piece of square, usually cotton, cloth typically worn by Arab men. In a classroom in the United States, another author added a blanket to the dramatic play center on the doll bed. A girl put the doll under the blanket and kissed her good night. Finally, the children in South Africa used the blanket to wrap the doll babies and placed them on their backs. Thus, dramatic play centers become critical areas in classrooms that provide teachers with an inside look at the children’s expressions of cultural practices.

Children’s Mesosystems. A mesosystem is the interaction between two microsystems. The direct interaction *between* these systems (e.g. home, school) is important for children’s and teachers’ learning; the interactions *among* these microsystems (e.g. interactions among the child’s family members; home and school interactions) also impact children’s development and learning. For example, children benefit when their parents and teachers communicate with one another. For example, parent-teacher communication is demonstrated in many forms besides in person interactions. In South Africa, teachers wrote in a daily journal for each child. They did this while the children were napping in the afternoon. The teacher reported something that the child did or said, or something that happened on that day. Then parents had the opportunity to reply to the teacher or to ask questions in this shared journal. Newsletters also were sent home monthly to parents with photographs and news.

At one preschool in the United States, where technology was more available to families, teachers posted daily photos and descriptions on the website. They included photographs of children engaged with materials and with other people at the center. Because accountability and standards remained important to parents of children within this particular setting, the teachers provided links to the required State standards that were demonstrated in the posted photos and text. In this way, parents referenced how play activities helped their children to achieve the Florida standards for preschool education.

What is interesting is that a national survey of kindergarten teachers revealed they did not consider academic skills to be the most important ways for children to be ready and successful in kindergarten (Curby et al., 2017). Instead, the kindergarten teachers rated the four social-emotional skills (e.g., “getting along with others”) higher than the four academic skills (e.g., “knowing upper- and lower-case letters”). Thus, there currently appears to be a mismatch between what parents think is the most important ways to prepare their children for kindergarten and what kindergarten teachers reported as the most important aspects of readiness for success in kindergarten. And, group dramatic play certainly enhances children’s social skills.

When one of the authors visited the child development center in South Africa years later, the teachers asked her to lead a parent workshop. Parents had requested teachers start requiring their children to complete worksheets in order to be ready for school. At the workshop, she explained the benefits of children’s play and shared photos and videos of how alumni children, who were successful in school, had played when they were at the preschool. Parents then worried less about their children’s readiness for school.

Likewise, in Saudi Arabia, parents who are highly educated worry about the achievement of their children. Therefore, documenting the accomplishments of children is important for helping parents to realize that children are learning and also are demonstrating mastery of key standards in the process of their playing.

DeMarie et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of relationships within early childhood settings and provide recommended questions for parents to ask when assessing the quality of different levels of relationships inside a prospective early childhood program for their child. For questions go to <https://www.apa.org/education/k12/high-five.pdf>.

Children's Exosystems. Bronfenbrenner also recognized the importance and impact of other contexts, exosystems, influencing children, but in which children might never have direct interactions (e. g., parent's workplace). For example, although children may never go to their parents' workplace, this system, which Bronfenbrenner labeled an exosystem, can influence how much time their parents can spend with them after school and whether they have money for food, clothing, or housing.

Children's Macrosystems. The culture (i.e., macrosystem) in which children's family and neighborhood are situated contribute to children's learning. Regarding learning, children who were born in a different country from the one where they are currently educated, face the challenge of being in a school that promotes different cultural values from their home country culture. For example, a child born in Saudi Arabia who was relocated to the United States would be shocked to see women and men working together in the same school and participating in coeducational classrooms. Because males and females attend different schools in Saudi Arabia, this aspect of American culture would be unfamiliar. Thus, communication between parents and teachers becomes essential for bridging cultural differences and for promoting understanding. Importantly, children can use play to express their feelings and understandings.

In addition to Bronfenbrenner's theory, Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides a lens for the importance of language and culture. Vygotsky also emphasizes the role of adults in enhancing children's learning.

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. Vygotsky (1978; 1986) believed learning took place within children's zone of proximal development. Berk (2013) defined the zone of proximal development as a "range of tasks too difficult for the child to do alone but possible with the help of adults and more skilled peers" (p. 267). In play, the meaning of words takes the place of objects, and daily oral language develops (Einarsdottir, 2014). During play, learners interact in social settings and use their culture's psychological tool, which is language. These interactions, as described by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, stretch children's way of thinking, a factor that helps to improve language acquisition. According to Bodrova (2008), an approach based on Vygotsky's theory suggests that "young children can master necessary prerequisites of academic skills through engagement in mature make-believe play" (p. 357).

Isenberg and Jalongo (1997) suggest, "Everyone knows that children learn from their teachers, but it literally turns education on its head to consider the other direction - the many ways that teachers can and must learn from children and families" (p. 6). Thus, when teachers observe

children's play, they learn about children's culture and language, and they become better able to enhance children's learning.

Like Bronfenbrenner, Vygotsky thought learning could not be separated from its social context (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). While children play with props (e.g., toys or objects), they engage in beneficial cultural practices (Miller, 2011). Play in classrooms provides ample opportunity for "learning as a natural by-product of involvement in tasks with adults or more competent peers" (Miller, 2011, p. 175). Thus, teachers remain an instrumental part of children's play activities. Examples of responsibilities of teachers are explained in the following section. Different teacher responsibilities help children to build higher levels of thinking.

What Are the Different Roles of Adults When Children Play?

Adults engage in multiple roles that can enhance children's play and benefit their learning. Although preparing the materials for play is an important role for adults, they also assume other key responsibilities: facilitating, role modeling, and scaffolding children's play. And, as teachers observe children playing with the materials they prepared, they learn and plan to enhance (i.e., scaffold) children's future play.

Teachers plan and prepare materials for children's play. Props remain essential for creating viable play environments in early education classrooms. Props, or items used by children to make play scenarios realistic, become integral because they facilitate make-believe or dramatic play. Without props, children's play activities become less creative and productive. As Gupta (2009) explains, it is possible to let children participate in projects where they design and employ props.

One of the authors used a strategy to involve children in planning their dramatic play center in a Saudi classroom. First, children labeled who they wanted to be. This required negotiation and compromise with other children. The author used role necklaces to help children identify what role/character their friend assumed as well as to identify their pretend role/character for others.

Teachers can brainstorm themes and ideas for play scenarios before they gather materials to use as props (e.g., phones or cash registers) and costumes (Hall, 2015). Because they handle props to make their play authentic and mature, young learners may require the assistance of their teachers. As adult role models, teachers "need to model how to use props in a symbolic way, gradually expanding the repertoire of different uses of the same object" (Leong & Bodrova, 2012, p. 32). For example, in the Saudi classroom, the teacher may provide new and unconventional props, removing the more popular ones like plastic fried eggs. While students at higher levels may need to create new props, those in lower levels may modify their existing props to perform other functions. For instance, the teacher may request the learners to utilize the same props they used to create a dog, to come up with a Dalmatian.

Many teaching strategies used by preschool and kindergarten teachers include making signs, building play sets from cardboard boxes, and using other materials that are symbolic representations. Hence, prop usage, as a teaching strategy, improves the quality of dramatic play for children.

When teachers observe children playing with these props, they gain an inside look at children's culture. This is especially true when the teacher is not a member of any of the children's cultures (i.e., their macrosystem according to Bronfenbrenner). This was the case when one of the authors co-created a child development center for two-to-six-year old children in South Africa. The author brought or made many materials for the children, and then she witnessed how children engaged with those materials. She took photographs of children's play and later learned the meaning of that play from adult members of the children's culture. One example is detailed.

An annual event in Tampa, Florida called Gasparilla features a parade, where one can collect a multitude of free strands of beads. The author collected beads from the parade in the United States and brought them to the child development center in South Africa. Her "American lens" expected children, and especially females, to wear the beads as a fashion statement. However, this did not occur.

Instead, it was only the boys who put on the beads; then, they began to dance and chant. After observing for some time, one of the girls, who was an immigrant from a different country in Africa, put strands of beads around her neck and joined the boys in dancing and chanting. The boys stopped dancing; laughing so hard, they fell to the ground. One of the boys then went to her, took her hands, and said, "If you want to dance, we can dance like this." He proceeded to lead her in "Western style dancing."

The author shared photographs of the episode, and she attempted to hum the tune she heard with someone who was a member of that culture. The woman said, "Oh, yes!" She proceeded to translate the chant and told her why it was not appropriate for a girl to dance with the boys. Because the girl was from a different African country, she also was not familiar with that cultural practice. Episodes like this helped the author to get inside the children's culture. It helped her to understand why some environmental conditions were expected, and how she could provide tools to help children to express their learning in culturally appropriate ways.

Teachers facilitate and scaffold children's play. In a more directive role, teachers not only plan and prepare the classroom environment, they also explain and discuss lesson objectives as well as monitor and evaluate the results (Leong & Bodrova, 2012).

Facilitating children's play. In one of the author's classrooms in Saudi Arabia, the teachers prepared artifacts and materials to support children's play related to the theme for that week, which was the bakery. The teachers placed dress-up clothes such as a chef's hat and materials such as oil, flour, bowls and spoons in the house area. They also created a checklist to assess children for their understanding of this theme. The checklist included items such as naming the ingredients for making bread. Children from the United States who entered this preschool setting probably would not be familiar with how fresh bread was made. It might be more culturally relevant for them to have a frying pan and spatula available to pretend they were making hamburgers.

Leong and Bodrova (2012) mentioned that a teacher may need to take a role in the play to enrich it when it has become "stale" (p. 33). For example, when the children pretended that they were at a restaurant, the teacher later called to make a reservation. Thus, children, framed by their

cultural lens, play and interact with materials and peers in particular ways. However, teachers can also engage and enhance their play without taking over in a primary role. Through careful observation, teachers and children from outside the dominant culture can learn from this play.

Likewise, teachers may facilitate children's play by providing a structure for their activities. Often, this means that teachers, parents, or older peers act as guides, helping children to make decisions and to solve problems. For example, in the Saudi classroom, if the child wanted to make bread and there was not flour at the center, the adult would ask the child what could be done to get the flour. Facilitators stay outside of play areas for the most part, and they add materials and ideas only as needed or requested (Jones & Reynolds, 2011).

Teachers prepare the place and provide it with necessary materials, walk around the center, and ask the children exploratory questions to help them to expand their play and to discover resolutions. Teachers support children's ability to problem-solve during their play.

Scaffolding children's play. Scafton and Whittington (2015) describe scaffolding as adult support that helps children do things they cannot accomplish on their own. Scaffolding is most beneficial when adults support children to access play, particularly when some of them are not actively participating. Wasik and Jacobi-Vessels (2016) believe the critical role of adults in children's play is to scaffold the learning of children without directing the children's play. Leong and Bodrova (2012) mentioned that to remind children of new vocabulary, the teacher can take a secondary role such as patient or customer and make a request from the children as they act out the main role (e.g., a doctor). Therefore, by assuming a role in dramatic play, teachers can scaffold children's learning without directing the play.

In a Saudi Arabia classroom, the author watched as a child evidenced trouble completing his tower in the block center, so he said, "I want to make a big tower as a kingdom center tower, but my tower keeps falling down." The author asked him, "Why do you think the tower is not staying up?" and "What do you need to fix it?" Then the child started to put all the bigger blocks on the bottom. Then the author continued to ask him, "Could you think of another way to make it stay up?"

This illustration shows how teachers' questions can provoke children's thinking. Critically, without explicitly telling a child what to do, the teacher's question helps the child to solve a problem through play. Answers are not simply "right" or "wrong." Instead, children experience the opportunity to try, and if that does not work, to try again, and if that does not work, they will then try again. Perhaps these experiences encourage children to develop growth mindsets and to persist when they encounter future challenges (Dweck, 2006).

Teachers as role models. While facilitators guide children from a distance, role models get in close and do the same activities as the children. They show the children what to do and how to do it. Jones and Reynolds (2011) described role models as frequent players who enjoy relationship building and content enrichment with their students. The reasons for entering their play are to help children get started with new or unfamiliar materials or to help them through difficult social experiences. To help children make progress in this manner, the adult models play strategies (e.g., entry), so children trust them as co-players.

For example, when a newcomer attends class, the teacher may want to support that child's entry into play. While one of the authors was standing and watching the children in her Saudi classroom playing at centers, she saw a child standing off to the side of the dramatic play center. The child seemed unsure about how to participate with others. The author talked to the child and pretended she was a neighbor who had come for tea. The author then sat down at the table and invited the reluctant child to serve her a tea.

In the United States, for example, the week before or after Thanksgiving, the teacher might ask a reluctant child if he or she would like to make a Thanksgiving dinner. She would invite the child to tell what they should cook for their Thanksgiving dinner. Other children would be likely to join after the reluctant child decided the meal, and the teacher announced their intention. The teacher would allow the children to proceed with their own ideas for preparing the meal. As soon as teachers see the newcomer has been accepted into the play environment, they would step out of the situation and encourage the children's play to progress.

Adults support children's play and learning when they direct, facilitate, and model responsibility. Leong and Bodrova (2012) described "Propels," an acronym for plan, roles, props, extended time, language, and scenario. Propels is a method used by early childhood educators to determine the level of mature play taking place in their classrooms. The acronym PROPELS can be explained as follows:

- **Plan-** The potential of children to think about play before it starts.
- **Roles Children Play-** The collection of expressions (verbal, emotional, etc.) that children make when acting out a role.
- **Props-** The various items or objects that are used by children when playing.
- **Extended Time Frame-** The time taken by a play activity, over and above that which has been allocated, mostly taking several hours or days.
- **Language-** The verbal utterances made by children when playing a certain role and coordinating their actions with their counterparts.
- **Scenario-** The situation that is acted by children, which is characterized by role playing according to a given script.

Thus, the intention is not for teachers to direct children's play. Instead of controlling the play, they provoke children's thinking and helping them to take the initiative to play together. A gentle question or a hint about a situation is all that is needed to help the group of children to launch their own ideas and to build upon them.

Supporting Academic Skills in Dramatic Play

Leong and Bodrova (2012) declared that "mature make-believe play is an important and unique context, providing opportunities to learn not afforded by other classroom activities" (p. 34). Thus, it is natural to suggest that dramatic play can be implemented to enhance and enrich curriculum and instruction (e.g., writing and literacy).

Writing instruction. Because of dramatic play, early learners begin to appreciate the meaningfulness of the printed word. These children enjoy printing words that give their everyday

life purpose. Peterson (2015) notes that some children, who are reluctant to write in class settings, are satisfied by printing words in the context of their play 'worlds.' This is true because when children write while playing, they fulfill a purpose that is meaningful to their needs.

For example, a teacher encourages the children to write when they write a prescription when playing a doctor role, or reading the product packaging at a pretend drugstore, or interpreting a map while travelling. They embed literate behaviors in their play. As an instructional practice, it is important because it promotes children's understanding of text and early writing development.

Peterson (2015) indicates dramatic play that involves writing benefits a culturally relevant pedagogy. Children engaged in play often integrate home and cultural knowledge into their writing as they create play themes associated with their cultures. With the guidance of adults, children explore the benefits of dramatic play in the development of their writing abilities (Harden, 2015).

In terms of the products of writing in dramatic play sessions, functional purposes become evident. For example, Ihmeideh (2015) asserts "When children engage in dramatic play activities, they experience realistic settings and functional reasons for using print" (p. 252). Peterson (2015) labels the signs used in association with these play activities as 'environmental print.'

A main function of environmental print is to provide a range and variety of contextual information for the children as they play with props in centers and/or scenarios. Observers report some children create their own unique letter and word writing while they are engaged in dramatic play scenarios. For example, one of the Saudi authors had a food theme one week, so all the lessons and activities that week related to food. She turned the dramatic play center into a grocery store and asked children who engaged in that center to write a shopping list. She noticed most of the shopping lists contained rice and chicken. This is because Saudi's national meal, "Kabsa", consists of these ingredients. Children in the United States might include items such as hot dogs and apples; whereas children in South Africa might include bread and biltong (a beef jerky) in their list of items. Creating lists helps children to see writing as a means, not just as an end. They begin to understand how language works.

Boyle and Charles (2010) utilized a case study to investigate the effect of socio-dramatic play on the support of the beginning writer. They found that in writing/spelling lessons involving teacher-facilitated 'scribing,' young students gained early writing skills to hone as emerging writers. Thus, preschool and kindergarten teachers, who develop writing instruction, always consider the utility of making play activities include functional purpose.

Literacy Instruction. Literacy instruction, complemented by dramatic play activities in early education settings, prove successful. As Sharp, Escalante, and Anderson (2012) state, "The arts, and specifically the dramatic arts, promote increased oral language development, reading readiness, reading achievement, comprehension, and writing skills" (p. 1). Consequently, dramatic play serves as a perfect medium for literacy instruction.

Harden (2016) found that by creating literacy-linked activities in a classroom of four-to- five-year-old children, she could create a setting of dramatic tension. This prompted the children's active participation. Moreover, the children in this study found meaning in signs and cards used in dramatic play centers designed for literacy instruction. Hence, these findings show the importance of using dramatic play scenarios to pose literacy-linked activities that support children in reading, writing, and language arts.

Moreover, preschool and kindergarten teachers often use the environment to explore student's literacy needs. Roskos and Christie (2011) describe how an environment that enriches literacy (e.g., an area for creative drama) promotes literacy behaviors in students. For instance, in the Saudi classroom, the teacher places items in a model fridge, with unreal food in plastic containers. All the items that may be found in a kitchen are provided, including a bin, menus, cereal boxes, and others so that it looks like a real kitchen. The teacher then invites the children to create shopping lists in their books.

The children assume family roles such as father or mother, purchase the food from the 'center', and begin 'cooking'. As the children perform the activities, they learn to read and pronounce the names of the various foods. Children practice by reading the menus or cereal boxes, and then writing the same items on the shopping lists. Finally, the children read aloud their shopping lists as their colleagues listen.

In helping children to develop concepts and language, it is critical teachers make a connection between literacy and children's life experiences (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2016).

Thus, the separation between learning and play disappears. This symbolic representation is meaningful because this is truly child-initiated.

Implications and Conclusions

Considering this discussion, it is highly advisable preschool and kindergarten teachers focus on strengthening the developmental domains (cognitive, social and emotional, speech and language, fine motor skill, and gross motor skill developments); this can be achieved through children's dramatic play scenarios. When the social, cultural, and academic benefits to young minds are witnessed, more teachers might be willing to incorporate dramatic play into their daily classroom activities. Furthermore, when parents, concerned about academic standards, see the benefits documented, they will also appreciate the value of dramatic play.

Increasing the amount of dramatic play in the early education classroom is important for building common ground between children with culturally diverse backgrounds. Scafton and Whittington (2015) believe when preschoolers build meaning with peers during play, they can overcome "cultural, linguistic, racial, and religious differences between their home culture and preschool" (p. 213).

Knowing this, early childhood educators can develop curriculum and lessons that reflect cultural diversity during play activities. Playing together, children can learn about each other culturally and socially. Therefore, one of the goals of dramatic play in the classroom is improving peer

relationships among classmates from different backgrounds. Dramatic play also improves children's daily oral language and literacy skills.

Through dramatic play, teachers assume the responsibility to support children in the development of these oral language and literacy skills. As Ihmeideh (2015) insists, "Play allows children to build and extend their knowledge and skills as they interact with their environment, with others, and on their own" (p. 250). Believing this to be true, most educators strive to support play environments where children can grow and develop on a day-to-day basis.

In conclusion, the main implication of this review is that dramatic play has benefits for children's language and skill development, and further, dramatic play supports inclusion in culturally diverse environments. Also, it is important to note how well dramatic play and dramatic play centers facilitate learning in developmental domains, support writing in authentic contexts, and positively impact curriculum and instruction.

When young children play, teachers and other adults realize children are learning many new skills and abilities in a meaningful context. Encouraging dramatic play in early childhood serves to fortify children's learning and development. As children play in a mature fashion, they become literate participants in an academic environment, where active and authentic learning occur. Thus, the power of dramatic play supports the success of early childhood education and children's academic skill development. Teachers' observations and subsequent actions become integral to optimize play for children's learning and development. Through dramatic play, teachers learn about children's culture. This is especially important when that child's culture is not one the teacher shares. Therefore, learning from dramatic play is bi-directional and cyclical; and most importantly, play and learning are not opposites.

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