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LET'S PLAY A STORY: EARLY EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE IMPLEMENTING STORY
DRAMA WITH SUPPORT FROM COACHING

A Dissertation Presented

by

AMANDA WIEHE LOPES

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,

University of Massachusetts Boston

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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August 2021

Early Childhood Education and Care Program

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ABSTRACT

LET'S PLAY A STORY: EARLY EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCE IMPLEMENTING STORY DRAMA WITH SUPPORT FROM COACHING

August 2021

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While imaginative play, music, movement, and the visual arts are established components of the curriculum in early childhood education (ECE), teacher-guided story drama, or “improvised role play stimulated by a story” (Booth, 2005, p. 8), is an underutilized arts-based practice that supports children’s early literacy skills, creativity, and enjoyment of learning. There are numerous practitioner books and resources about the benefits of and strategies for how to incorporate storytelling, dramatic play, theater, and creative dramatics into the early learning environment (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999; Booth, 2005; V. Brown & Pleydell, 1999; Carleton, 2012), however, there is little research examining the process early educators undergo when they attempt to integrate process-based dramatic pedagogies into their practice. This phenomenological case study examined four preschool teachers’ experience adopting story drama as an instructional practice with support from coaching. It explored the ways coaching supported preschool teachers’ adoption of

story drama in their literacy curriculum; teachers' experience engaging in story drama, a creative play-based pedagogy; and what teachers valued about integrating story drama into their pedagogical repertoire. Teachers participated in six weeks of coaching in story drama lesson planning, creative dramatics and storytelling techniques, coupled with observations of them implementing story drama lessons. Data were gathered from class observations and reflective dialogic interviews with participants before, during, and after the coaching intervention.

The results reveal that teachers had a positive experience adopting story drama into their pedagogical repertoire. They felt that coaching introduced them to new techniques, resources, and perspectives while supporting their confidence with implementing story drama independently. Teachers felt that story drama was a meaningful practice in their curriculum with benefits to children's social emotional and literacy skills. Engaging in story drama impacted teachers' relationships with children and colleagues positively. Finally, teachers reported experiencing fun and joy in their workday as a result of playing with children during story drama lessons.

While decades of research have focused on children's play as a vehicle for authentic learning, few studies have examined the role of play in teachers' practice. This study offers a unique view into the experience of early educators' perceptions, in their own words, of adopting a playful process-centered theater-inspired pedagogy and the function of coaching to support their own creative self-efficacy. Findings of this study will allow relevant stakeholders to design professional development opportunities informed by early educators' perspectives on their experience with coaching, play, and story drama.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For over 20 years I have offered creative dramatics workshops and trainings in early learning settings across the United States. I have witnessed an interesting phenomenon: early educators demonstrate an interest in integrating creative dramatics, particularly story drama, or “improvised role play stimulated by a story” (Booth, 2005, p. 8), into their regular practice, but lack the confidence or ability to sustain the practice. What do early educators experience when they attempt to integrate story drama into their pedagogical repertoire? This phenomenological case study sought to better understand teachers’ experience implementing story drama in their classrooms with support from coaching.

While imaginative play, music, movement, and the visual arts are established components of the curriculum in early childhood education (ECE), teacher-guided story drama is an underutilized arts-based practice that supports children’s early literacy skills, creativity, and enjoyment of learning. There are numerous practitioner books and resources about the benefits of and strategies for how to incorporate storytelling, dramatic play, theater, and creative dramatics into the early learning environment (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999; Booth, 2005; V. Brown & Pleydell, 1999; Carleton, 2012), however, there is little research examining the process early educators undergo when they attempt to integrate process-based dramatic pedagogies into their practice. Many studies have demonstrated the benefits of

drama instruction in early learning environments (Brouillette, Childress-Evans, Hinga, & Farkas, 2014; Müller, Naples, Cannon, Haffner, & Mullins, 2018; Wright, Bacigalupa, Black, & Burton, 2008), the role that teachers play in supporting children's development of imaginative play through interactions (Aras, 2015; Soh, 2016), and the potential programmatic challenges of arts-based professional development in early education (Mages, 2012b). While decades of research have focused on children's play as a vehicle for authentic learning, few studies have examined the role of play in teachers' practice. This study offers a unique view into the experience of early educators' perceptions, in their own words, of adopting a playful process-centered theater-inspired pedagogy and the function of coaching to support their own creative self-efficacy.

It is important to note the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on this study. During data gathering procedures, a state mandate required that all childcare facilities close. The timing of this closure impacted the participation of two of the teachers featured in this study as their program remained closed for almost six months. Research procedures were adapted to accommodate this challenge.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an interpretive paradigm in which reality is seen as subjective and constructed both individually and in relationship with others through social interaction. Housed in a critical humanist paradigm, I acted as both researcher and participant in this study in that I provided coaching to the participants while also telling the story of early educators' experience integrating story drama into their pedagogical repertoire using their own words. A defining characteristic of the critical humanist research paradigm is that

researchers are with participants at every step of the project (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). While case study research attempts to make meaning out of the collective experience of a group, this study uses an approach informed by phenomenology and thus aims to investigate both individual and collective experiences of early educators. Because reality is seen as individual and subjective no attempts will be made to generalize the experience of the early educators in this study with the field as a whole.

This study is informed by Vygotsky's socio-cultural approaches to learning and development. Sociocultural approaches stress the interdependence of individual and social processes in knowledge construction (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Story drama is an arts-based teaching practice that evolves from a constructivist learning paradigm that is learner-centered, process-emphasized, and play-based. During story drama, children and teachers co-construct literacy learning using the text of a children's book as a leaping off point for their own improvised cooperative role play of elements either based on or inspired by the story itself. The book may be the launchpad, but the destination is entirely created by the participants, both children and adults in relationship with each other. It is through these interactions, both real and imaginary, that learning takes root. Children are introduced to concepts in hearing the book read aloud and then put them into practice during the role play to individually make meaning out of a shared experience with others. Vygotsky also emphasized the role that language plays in learning (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). In story drama, language is verbal and nonverbal, symbolic and inferred, real and unreal as children communicate orally through speaking, singing, and verbalization of sounds, including gibberish, physically through gesture, pantomime, and movement and aesthetically through

visual art, dance, music, and acting. The sociocultural approaches to learning are central to this study as learning in story drama occurs through interactions and cooperation with others and the environment.

The design of this study is also guided by both Experiential Learning Theory and Transformative Learning Theory. The heart of experiential learning is a “lived experience” that allows learners to “reflect, think, and act” (Girvan, Conneely, & Tangney, 2016, p. 130). Experiential professional development situates teachers’ learning in their classroom environments within the context of their students’ needs (Burke, 2013). In Kolb’s (1984) model of experiential learning, reflection is a moderator between experience and learning. Phenomenological case study was chosen as the method for this study because it relies heavily on interviews that prompt reflection from participants and incorporate thick descriptions of lived experiences in participants’ own words (Vagle, 2014).

Experiential learning is the backbone of this study. Story drama is an experiential approach to teaching, bringing stories to life through teacher-facilitated social interaction and dramatic play. Early educators were supported in their use of story drama in the classroom by participating in six weeks of story drama coaching that includes lesson planning and introduction to different theater techniques to enhance story drama lessons. This coaching is a hands-on process involving participants in practicing the different theatrical elements of story drama and stretching their own creative abilities. The coaching model of this study used an experiential model to support early educators’ transfer of knowledge into practice by demonstrating, actively practicing, and reflecting on different techniques and planning strategies for implementing story drama in preschool classrooms.

This study also drew inspiration from the Transformative Learning Theory. Transformative Learning creates conditions where learners confront their assumptions or existing schemas and through reflection correct or transform their perspectives (Mezirow, 1978). Transformation occurs through reflection on our ways of being or doing and considering alternate approaches (Mezirow, 2012). An iterative coaching strategy was designed for this study to prompt participants' reflection on their practice while simultaneously considering new ways of approaching curriculum. The interview structure of this study is also meant to prompt reflection in early educators on their experience implementing story drama. Mezirow (2012) contends that it is critical for adult learning to "emphasize contextual understanding, critical reflection on assumptions, and validation of meaning by assessing reasons" (p. 73). The design of this phenomenological case study is built on this principle of Transformative Learning Theory.

Positionality

The main goal of this research is to tell the story of early educators' experience integrating a creative teaching practice, story drama, into their curriculum. I believe that for too long early educators have been kept in the margins of research, seen as variables of interest rather than linchpins of the field itself. This view is informed by recent research supporting early educators as leaders of change in ECE (Douglass, 2017; Goffin, 2013) and my own professional experience as an early educator and creative dramatics teaching artist for over 20 years.

My philosophy of learning as an early educator and teaching artist is strongly influenced by the work of Lev Vygotsky, Loris Malaguzzi, and Jerzy Grotowski. Vygotsky

(1978) held that learning is a social process dependent upon interactions with others and the environment. In his view, learning takes place within cultural contexts and is mediated by language. Malaguzzi (1998) described the arts as a language in which young children and adults collaboratively engage to construct knowledge and make learning visible (Vecchi, 2010). His work with early education programs in Reggio Emilia, Italy, was rooted in a process- and play- based view of education that is widely accepted as promoting creativity in both children and adults (Gandini, 2005; Vecchi, 2010). Similarly, the theater artist Jerzy Grotowski (1969) applied a process-based approach to his work with actors, structuring his rehearsals as a lab with open sessions of experimentation. Grotowski's "poor theatre" (1969) stripped away all the nonessential components of a performance, including costumes, set pieces, and props. The process-based and constructivist views of Vygotsky, Malaguzzi, and Grotowski played prominently in my work as an early educator and undoubtedly color my perspective in this study and research design. I believe that children and adults actively and cooperatively construct learning in ECE.

I approach this project in agreement with Cropley's (2016) view that all people have the capacity to be creative under the right conditions. This study regards creativity as a process; a way of experiencing the world. This is a departure from other more traditional product-oriented views of creativity that require that for a person to be regarded as creative, she must generate ideas or products that are both novel and useful (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). I believe that the nature of this definition relies on a subjective view of usefulness that may perhaps discount or devalue ideas that are radically different, outside of social norms, or from different cultures. A product-oriented view of creativity celebrates the concept of talent

which perpetuates feelings that some early educators may have that work against their ability to adopt creative pedagogies like story drama. A process-oriented view of creativity, however, focuses on the creative experience, allowing all early educators to engage in story drama and, through engagement, see themselves as capable creative teachers.

I believe that teachers and children alike, enter with views, experiences, and knowledge that impact their relationship with learning. It is my view that teaching is an art unto itself and each early educator builds a unique pedagogical toolkit. Skilled early educators adapt their practice to meet the changing developmental and learning needs of children enrolled in their class. This process of continual adaptation and change is a natural opportunity for creativity, and it is in this context that this study was designed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Play is often thought of as the natural framework in which learning takes place in ECE. For many years, scholars have touted the usefulness of play as it “serves to provide experiential continuity in a child’s life” (Klinger, 1969, p. 293). Play is in fact a broad term relating to a type of instruction, a way of being, and an enjoyment of process. Jones and Cooper (2005) define play as “choosing what to do, doing it, and enjoying it” (p. viii). It is with this broad conceptualization of play that it is necessary to make the distinction between different forms of play in the early learning environment.

This study is focused on story drama, which is a type of teacher-guided imaginative play. Markey (1976) provides a comprehensive definition of imaginative play as activity where children “through [their] language or overt behavior” use “objects, materials, activities, and situations as though they had properties or attributes other than those which they apparently or actually seem to possess” (p. 10). When considering play that engages children’s imaginations, the terms *pretend*, *fantasy*, *make-believe*, *dramatic play*, and *imaginative play* are often used interchangeably (Caterall, 2002; Fink, 1976; Markey, 1976; Mellou, 1994; Singer, 1973). For the sake of this study, the terms imaginative, dramatic, and pretend will all be used to describe play that engages children’s use of skills that allow them to take on the roles of others through pretend and make-believe.

Dramatic Play in ECE

Dramatic play is an established part of the curriculum in ECE settings. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends that early educators engage in intentional planning of play experiences that promote children's creative expression (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2005). Use of the imagination employs invention and discovery (Berry, 1998), incorporation and adaptation of knowledge, and representational thought (Fink, 1976). Imaginative play is part of the preschool curriculum that seamlessly integrates social-emotional, physical, and cognitive development (Lillard, Lerner, et al., 2013; Mellou, 1994; Sobel, 2006). Classrooms that provide intentionally planned experiences for children to engage in dramatic play offer big pay offs for children's later success.

For decades, researchers have demonstrated the impact that imaginative play has on young children's development. In seminal studies with young children, Klinger (1969) found that dramatic play allows "the accommodative stretching of available schemas so as to provide an experiential bridge between an established cognitive repertory and a strange new set of circumstances," gradually providing new events with meaning and supporting cognitive, language, and physical skill development (p. 293). Fink (1976) supported Klinger's findings with the assertion that children's participation in dramatic play supports the generation of new cognitive structures and capacities. Peisach & Hardeman (2001) discovered that preschool children who engaged in more imaginative activity were better able to take the perspective of others. The early years are a time of rapid cognitive development

and learning activities that promote robust development across domains are important to include in the preschool curriculum. Dramatic play is exactly that type of learning activity.

Imaginative play supports children's social and emotional learning in a variety of ways. Inherently social in nature, dramatic play allows for active peer engagement. There is evidence of a relationship between dramatic play and young children's emotion regulation skills (Galyer & Evans, 2001; Goldstein & Lerner, 2017), relationship skills, and Theory of Mind (Lillard, 1993; Weisberg, 2015). Goldstein and Lerner (2017) found that pretend play effected children's emotional self-control, particularly for those from low socio-economic backgrounds, who, they posited, may have less opportunities for free play. They discovered that the act of being in role as other people, or even animals, offered children a forum for practicing emotion regulation skills and these effects had significant implications. The act of pretending to be another, living for a moment in an alternate reality, demands perspective-taking and representational thinking that are the basis for empathy and support children's sense of self.

Imaginative play supports children's developing self-concept as they try out different roles and develop an inner narrative about the world and their place in it. Kendrick (2005) called the stories that children generate as part of their imaginative play stories of their "becoming", as the experience of playing in role supports their construction of a self (p. 24). Children bring with them a wealth of experience and perspective that is celebrated through dramatic play. When children take part in co-constructing a play experience, they are empowered. It sends the message that their ideas are important – that their thoughts and

feelings matter. This supports the development of a positive self-concept, which in turn feeds self-esteem, a positive view of learning, and a sense of connectedness within the classroom.

When children pretend, they step into an alternate reality that is equally important as the true reality. Children are able to hold these multiple worlds, both real and unreal, and their characteristics, separately in their mind (Weisberg & Bloom, 2009). They may pretend to be different characters, interact in imagined settings, enact fantasy scenarios, or even use make-believe objects. These activities support children's symbolic understanding, counterfactual reasoning, and Theory of Mind (Lillard, Pinkham, & Smith, 2011; Weisberg, 2015). Symbolic understanding is the foundation of reading and writing skills while counterfactual reasoning supports problem solving abilities. Theory of Mind is the representation of another's mental state; it can be described as the cognitive underpinnings of empathy. Magid, Sheskin, and Schulz (2015) suggest that imagination does not merely support thinking; it is thinking. Finally, the skills and capacities used during imaginative play support children's ability to make conceptual changes – which is the very foundation of learning itself.

Imaginative play impacts children's learning in academic subjects, in fact, such that Gopnik and Walker (2013) called it the “engine” for learning in the early years (P. 15). Many researchers have drawn connections between children's involvement in dramatic play and literacy learning. Kim (1999) found that storytelling paired with dramatic play yielded statistically significant changes in children's narrative recall and social-cognitive development. During a critical analysis of studies examining literacy and play, Roskos and Christie (2013) determined that “children use reading and writing to legalize their pretend

play” and that play experiences support children’s understanding and memory of texts (p. 719). Kendrick’s (2005) examination of a young girls’ experience playing house pointed to the influence that experience with literature can have on the scripts that children create in their imaginative play and ultimately stories they develop about themselves and the world. Similarly, Whitmore (2015) discovered that role play gave children deeper context for the characters and action in stories, increasing story comprehension and recall. Role play has also been shown to stimulate students’ interest and learning in mathematics (Palmer, 2010; Sahin, 2018). Other researchers (Bergen, 2009; Ødegaard, 2003) argue that opportunities for imaginative play are important for children to develop the skills needed understanding scientific concepts and preparation for future careers in STEM fields. With so many high impact yields to children’s learning and development, it is no wonder that imaginative play is a cornerstone of the ECE curriculum.

There is evidence that dramatic play contributes to program quality. Robertson, Yim, and Paatch (2018) found that classrooms with higher levels of engagement in dramatic play were regarded as higher quality, as measured using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS). The ECERS scores for classrooms with higher levels of dramatic play were correlated with higher quality social environments. This is supported by studies highlighting the connection between dramatic play and social skill development (Müller, Naples, Cannon, Haffner & Mullins, 2018; Peisach & Hardeman, 2001). Classrooms with higher levels of dramatic play were associated with free movement between play areas and less interruptions from educators, which are also key features of learning environments that promote creativity and school achievement (D. Davies et al., 2013; Ho & Lin, 2015). It can therefore be inferred

that when early educators structure their classroom environment and curriculum to allow for intentionally planned dramatic play experiences, such as story drama, they are setting the stage for children’s cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development, creativity, and academic success.

Creative Dramatics and Story Drama

A significant way to support young children’s imaginative play and subsequent development is through the use of creative dramatics and story drama in the ECE curriculum. Creative dramatics, or “process-oriented drama with children - not presentation, but exploration of ideas and situations through drama” (Brown & Playdell, 1999, p. 4), allows early educators to seamlessly integrate imaginative play into their pedagogy. Creative dramatics is a form of “play-making” rooted in the exploration of themes, stories, feelings, or pictures (Franks, 2010, p. 243). A type of creative dramatics is story drama, or “improvised role play stimulated by a story” (Booth, 2005, p. 8), which couples age-appropriate picture books with theater techniques and multi-sensory activities. While imaginative play, and other arts-based practices in music, movement, and the visual arts are accepted components of the ECE curriculum, teacher-guided story drama is an underutilized practice that offers a valuable way to support children’s early literacy skills, creativity, and enjoyment of learning.

Story drama is unique in that it straddles the worlds of free play and guided play with teachers and children engaging in a reciprocal leadership role in driving the direction of the play scenario. Story drama is an exploration of the themes, characters, and setting of a children’s picture book using multi-sensory props and theater techniques such as pantomime, voice modulation, and creative movement. A story drama lesson may reenact elements of a

story through an improvised linear format, or it may involve several episodes of working through different elements of a story over days or even weeks (V. Brown & Pleydell, 1999). It is a process-based approach to theater-based education – story drama is play, not putting on a play.

Kelin (2007) suggests making a distinction between theater, which often culminates in performance and is a more product-oriented approach, and drama, which is a more informal, process-oriented approach. Participating in drama activities allows students to focus on a “fictional now time” (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999) in scenarios that may run parallel to a book or real life experience, but do not require performance skills or production elements. During teacher guided story drama, children take on roles within an imaginary context, just as they might when engaging in free imaginative play in the classroom or on the playground – there is no pressure to perform in front of others, memorize lines, or follow stage directions.

During story drama, there is less emphasis on the end result; children engage in free dramatic play without the need for a goal or final resolution. They explore scenarios, try on characters, and investigate elements of the story’s location, staying within the world of the story, but often exploring beyond what was included in the text. Story drama truly brings stories to life for young children, allowing children “to at once become the co-constructors of a story, the story itself, and the characters living within the story” (Booth, 2005, p. 8). Through role play, children develop deeper connection to the characters in the stories – and a deeper understanding of themselves. They make the story their own.

While teachers serve as facilitators or guides in story drama instruction, children are important co-constructors of the role play. Teachers offer the framework while children fill in the details. Story drama instruction uses a “mantle of the expert approach” (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999) wherein early educators shed their *teacher-ness* and adopt another role that allows children to be the experts and leaders of the content. This supports children’s agency in play and self-confidence.

Another main component of story drama instruction is the use of multi-sensory props to support the imaginative play scenario. Open ended props such as scarves and sheets become costume pieces such as pirate kerchiefs and flowing hair, plot devices such as swords to defend against pretend foes or ropes for escaping tall towers, and elements of scenery such as pieces of a nest or rolling ocean waves. Squirt bottles evoke rain, alien drool, and sea spray. Hogan and Howe (2001) found that using open ended props during imaginative play supported children’s engagement, creativity, social negotiation skills and language development. Multisensory props used during story drama promote universal design for students of differing abilities (Dinnebeil & Boat, 2013; Gordon, Meyer, & Rose, 2014) and offer a range of ways to access learning (Peter, 2003). Morrow and Rand (1991) found that preschoolers and kindergarteners were more likely to engage in literacy behaviors and activities when provided with opportunities for dramatic play with props and teachers’ scaffolding. The use of props during role play further supports children’s vocabulary for pretense and the neural decoding used during this process could be laying the foundation for literacy.

Children actively brainstorm, work in groups, and explore during story drama. As a result, they are more likely to be innovative, take risks, and enjoy the process of learning (Gura, 2016; Reiter-Palmon & Arreola, 2015; White & Lorenzi, 2016). When engaging in story drama, children take on roles of the characters represented in a story, or even characters they imagine might be part of the story but are not depicted in the text or illustrations. In doing so, they take on the perspective of characters, quite literally living in their shoes for a few moments. This allows them to build a deeper emotional connection to the story, which supports long-term memory of concepts and content, develops perspective-taking abilities, and cultivates an enjoyment of literature.

At the end of a story drama session, it is common practice to lead children through a reflective activity. They may use a drawing to capture their memory or verbalize it to the teacher. This reflection serves two purposes: it helps the children return to a place of calm before continuing on to other activities in the classroom and it helps students “make connections to the key understandings that lie at the heart of the work” (Miller & Saxton, 2004, p. 8). This type of metacognitive activity also supports robust cognitive development, long term memory of concepts introduced during the story, and executive control.

Story drama places an emphasis on children’s experience of literature. It allows children to “be” the story (Whitmore, 2015, p. 33). Story drama is joyful and engaging, encouraging children’s enjoyment of reading. The evidence is strong that there are many long-term benefits when early educators incorporate story drama into their repertoire of pedagogical practices.

Arts-based Learning in ECE

Story drama is a developmentally appropriate way to integrate theater arts into the ECE curriculum. There many long-standing traditions regarding arts-integrated curricula in ECE. As such, the benefits to children’s development, creativity, and school achievement are well-documented (Barton, 2015; Lorenzo-Lasa, Ideishi, & Ideishi, 2007; Salmon, 2010). The arts are a mode of communication for young children, who have a limited vocabulary with which to express their thoughts and feelings. Brown and Pleydell (1999) suggest that drama in the ECE curriculum is unique in that it “has the potential for communicating to young children in their own language: the language of make-believe” (p. 12). When early educators are encouraged to engage in this “language of make-believe” with children, there is the potential for many high-yield consequences.

There is evidence that arts-integrated curricula impact children’s school readiness. Brown, Garnett, Velazquez-Martin, and Mellor (2018) found that children enrolled in a Head Start program with a curriculum integrated with music, dance, and visual art were more prepared for kindergarten than their peers enrolled in classrooms with the standard Head Start curriculum, as measured by the Bracken Basic Concepts Scale, Third Edition-Receptive (BBCS-3:R). These findings support the notion that drama-based programming could contribute to children’s school readiness. Mages’ (2018) examination of the effect that a theater-integrated curriculum had on the school readiness of children enrolled in Head Start showed no significant positive or negative results. However, due to the enjoyment experienced by children and teachers alike, she suggested that theater-integrated pedagogy,

such as story drama, could be a method for supporting children's engagement in academic concepts especially when paired with more traditional pedagogical methods.

The arts provide unique learning experiences, perhaps most especially for children with special needs. Müller, Naples, Cannon, Haffner & Mullins (2018) found that children with social cognition deficits enrolled in early education classrooms with visual arts-integrated curricula showed less challenging behavior and had more overall growth in social emotional domains than their peers in a control group. They discovered that gains in children enrolled in the arts-integrated classrooms directly corresponded with the five key domains from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These findings suggest that arts-integrated approaches, such as story drama, offer significant benefits to children's diverse learning and developmental needs. These results support other researchers who promote use of drama in education as a form of play tutoring to support the social development of children with special needs (Peter, 2009). Teacher-guided story drama offers an opportunity for teachers to integrate coaching strategies into children's play, modeling appropriate play behaviors and responses both linguistically and through body language, that could support the social emotional needs of young children, particularly those with social challenges.

Story drama also offers powerful engagement opportunities for children who have diverse linguistic, learning, and social needs (Whitmore, 2015). Role play allows children to transcend their real selves as they pretend to be another. Edmiston (2007) writes that during process-oriented drama, children are "valued equal participants in a world where a person's

strengths, rather than any impairments, come to the fore” (p. 340). Like other forms of dramatic play and theater instruction, story drama is a highly social event with children acting out conflicts and engaging in active problem solving in role. Peter (2003) suggests that drama allows a “unique reflective window” on play behavior for children with special needs, providing a “learning how to do it while doing it” approach to social relationships and interactions (p. 21). Similarly, Gallas (1991) observes that “the creative arts, rather than labeling our differences, enable us to celebrate them” (p. 40). The framework of story drama allows children the safety to try on roles that they wouldn’t normally engage in during their real life, supporting their confidence and ability with problem-solving when they return to reality.

Story drama could also be a means for supporting dual language learners (DLL) with literacy concepts and engagement. Loizou, Michaelides, and Georgiou (2017) found that creative drama can create a “zone of proximal play development” in which teachers supported children’s scenario and role creation through playful interaction (p. 10).

Pantomime and movement are key components of story drama, allowing children to express themselves nonverbally. This supports the engagement of DLLs and invites them to participate in literacy activities in different ways than a traditional story reading. Because story drama is multisensory, children are making multiple imprints with vocabulary introduced through the story and are therefore more likely to be able to apply these words in context. This strategy is particularly significant for DLLs who may miss portions of a story when read aloud but can engage in the story when it is brought to life through story drama.

In short, the yields of story drama are wide and the pedagogy necessary to implement story drama fits within a framework of Universal Design for Learning that supports all children.

Creativity and Curriculum

Creative activities, such as story drama, employ sophisticated coordination of different cognitive structures that support memory and attention (Benedek et al., 2014), divergent thinking (Kaufman, Kornilov, Bristol, Tan, & Grigorenko, 2010; Yoruk & Runco, 2014) and the rapid unconscious combination and refinement of ideas (Gonen-Yaacovi et al., 2013; Koestler, 1964). During creative activities such as dramatic play, children switch between conscious and unconscious reasoning, shifting perspectives between self and other, and an active interaction between visual-spatial and analytical reasoning (Aldous, 2007). This supports the development of cognitive flexibility.

With the right conditions, children engaging in story drama may achieve a state of creative flow, what Cseh (2016) calls a “deeply focused, optimal state of consciousness” (p.150). The brain in flow reaches a peak performance level allowing different neural regions to communicate more efficiently and individuals often experience a feeling of euphoria as dopamine is released; further motivating them to stay engaged in their creative activity or learning (de Manzano et al., 2013; Takeuchi et al., 2010). In short, curricula that promote creativity support students’ effortless attention, intrinsic motivation, deep engagement with concepts, and enjoyment of the process of learning.

Story Drama and Early Literacy

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) (2015) recommends that early childhood education include a language-rich environment with a

variety of opportunities for children to engage in diverse and complex language exchanges with peers and adults. Research demonstrating the relationship between teacher speech and children's vocabulary gains supports the use of teacher-directed interactions to support language and literacy development (Bowers & Vasilyeva, 2011). Story drama straddles the worlds of teacher-directed and child-directed instruction. Teachers set the stage by reading a children's book in an engaging way, then act as guides for an improvised role play experience in which children freely experiment. The give-and-take nature of story drama offers an opportunity for early educators to engage in pedagogy that at one moment is teacher-directed and another follows the whole child play-based approach of child-centered learning.

Quality early literacy instruction includes opportunities for children to apply vocabulary in different settings directly after learning the new words or concepts. It is recommended that early educators engage children in interactive language-rich play to support language and literacy development, including the use of arts-based practices such as puppetry, movement, and music (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2015). Story drama is a high impact literacy teaching practice because it provides an opportunity for early educators to include all three of these techniques into one process-based language-rich dramatic play activity. Story drama provides a unique experience; children listen to a story then immediately bring to life different aspects of the book, using its language in a new context. The multisensory exploration of a book directly after reading it employs multiple modes of learning, engaging multiple brain areas simultaneously.

Story drama transforms the regular book reading activity of preschool circle time into an *experience*. Experiential learning allows for multiple connections and imprints with language as synapses across brain regions are firing simultaneously (Hannaford, 1995). This increases the likelihood that students will recall the language, and their experience with it, later in their life. Brown and Pleydell (1999) contend that “all this mental activity promotes both immediate language absorption as well as long-term retention” (p. 94). Story drama is an effective mode of learning in that children are “actively engaged in the construction of meaning and knowledge” (Nathan & Sawyer, 2014, p. 31). This type of complex interaction between neural structures supports longer term retention of concepts learned, as well as development of executive function, theory of mind, and abstract thinking.

Stagnitti and Lewis (2015) found that the quality of preschooler’s pretend play is related to their narrative re-telling abilities and semantic organization skills later in their schooling. Dramatic play exercises build pretense, which in turn increases students’ linguistic competence and executive control, necessary components of school readiness (Bergen, 2002; Carlson, White, & Davis-Unger, 2014). Access to periods of intentionally planned imaginative play, as in story drama, have long term benefits to children’s literacy learning.

Several studies illustrate the ways that play-based activities, such as story drama, support young children’s literacy development (Kendrick, 2005; Kim, 1999; Saracho, 2004; Saracho & Spodek, 2006). Interactive story reading and teacher-initiated play opportunities paired with children’s books supports vocabulary and literacy growth, particularly for dual language learners (Coyne, McCoach, & Kapp, 2007; Moedt & Holmes, 2018; Stagnitti & Lewis, 2015; Toub et al., 2018). Many studies connect theater-based approaches with

literacy learning, particularly for children with diverse learning needs (Edmiston, 2007; Peter, 2009; Whitmore, 2015, 2017). As story drama is a play- and process-based form of theater instruction inspired by children’s literature, it follows that it would produce similar benefits to children’s learning.

Story drama offers a natural opportunity for early educators to weave play and arts-based learning into their literacy pedagogy. Adomat (2012) discovered that drama activities used in a first grade literacy curriculum supported the reading comprehension skills of students who had been identified as struggling. She found that drama helped children express their understanding of stories beyond a literal interpretation. Movement, language, voice intonation, and gesture used during drama gave children a means for moving “beyond the literal meaning to explore the consequences and implications of the story” or to invent stories of their own (Adomat, 2012, p. 349). Children’s understanding of narratives is more complex when literacy curricula incorporated drama.

Moedt and Holmes (2018) found that purposeful play paired with literacy lessons had a positive effect on kindergarteners’ reading comprehension skills and language test scores, as measured by the Test of Early Language Development-3 (TELD-3). Children who received the purposeful play intervention scored significantly higher on language tasks and reading comprehension than children in a condition without play. They recommended that literacy curricula in early education incorporate opportunities for imaginative play with story related props to develop children’s linguistic and conceptual skills. In another study, kindergarteners who played student-directed imaginative games as part of their literacy curriculum scored significantly higher on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy

Skills (DIBELS) than their peers who played games that were teacher-directed and less open-ended (Cavanaugh, Clemence, Teale, Rule, & Montgomery, 2017). These studies corroborate earlier research (Mages, 2008) demonstrating that the incorporation of drama into the preschool literacy pedagogy can be an entertaining and engaging way to support children's school readiness.

Wright, Diener, and Kemp (2012) researched storytelling dramas in preschool classrooms wherein children invented stories then directed their peers in acting them out through dramatic play. They found that activities incorporating storytelling and dramatization promote community building in four main ways: individual roles, group membership, inclusion, and relationship building. They observed that the child-centered nature of the activity allowed for children of various ability levels to participate comfortably in the play and be seen in a positive way by peers. Teachers played an important role in their study as guides for the children, supporting their participation and valuing children's contributions.

NASEM (2015) recommends that early educators' training include an array of instructional practices that support children's reading comprehension, conceptual and subject-matter content knowledge, vocabulary, and listening skills. Training in story drama would support early educators' ability to meet this guideline. Story drama is an instructional practice at the intersection of the creative arts and literacy, offering a powerful way for early educators to support young children's development and enjoyment of learning.

Pedagogy in the Preschool Classroom

While there are several, often conflicting, views of pedagogy in ECE (Murray, 2015), many scholars suggest that a whole child approach to the curriculum in early learning

settings is most developmentally appropriate for young learners (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009; Pistorova & Slutsky, 2018). Whole child advocates, who come out of long-standing traditions, research, and practice in early childhood education maintain that the academic and social skills children need for entrance into elementary school are naturally integrated into children's play (Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006). Recent research has proposed that children's learning and development is a natural outcome of play and exploration (Nilsson, Ferholt, & Lecusay, 2018). Story drama fits within a play-based whole child approach to the early education curriculum framework.

Researchers have pointed to a model of a more playful, creative style of teaching to enhance children's creativity and build a more supportive, developmentally appropriate early learning environment (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2011; Pellegrini, 2009). Pedagogies that balance instructor control and student freedom, use an inquiry-based teaching style, and model creative behaviors for students are more likely to produce a learning culture that embraces and promotes creativity (D. Davies et al., 2013; Jónsdóttir, 2017; Sawyer, 2017). Low-pressure, less structured learning environments that emphasize exploration and discovery are more supportive of creativity in children and teachers alike (Barker et al., 2014; D. Davies et al., 2013; Dobbins, 2009). Story drama offers early educators an opportunity to engage in literacy instruction in a play-based, low-pressure, process-focused style that allows for creativity and promotes the enjoyment of instruction for teachers and children.

Early Educators' Role in Supporting Children's Imagination and Creativity

Early educators play an important role in supporting you children's imaginative play. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (2012) recommends that

early educators “provide opportunities, ideas, and props that extend play, develop imagination and encourage creativity”, including experience with role play (p. 56). Early educators support the development of children’s imagination and creativity by engaging in their fantasy play (Wyver & Spence, 1999), observing and assessing their development during play (Aras, 2015), and providing coaching to enhance the complexity of children’s scripts during play (Fink, 1976). Pálmadóttir and Einarsdóttir (2015) found that young children demonstrated a desire to include early educators in their play. In their study, young children sought out educators for playful interaction, guidance in social interactions, affirmation of competence during play exchanges, assistance with accessing or using materials, and enjoyment during play. When teachers and children play together during story drama, it nurtures their relationship and supports the classroom’s creative learning community.

Creativity is considered a critical component of children’s learning and development, yet there are several studies that demonstrate that there is often a significant bias against creative behaviors and traits in schools (Beghetto, 2007; Gajda, 2016b; Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2012; Rubenstein, McCoach, & Siegle, 2013; Soh, 2016; Westby & Dawson, 1995). Creative behavior is often described as disruptive (Torrance, 1963) or associated with a negative view of students (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009; Westby & Dawson, 1995). If creative students do not feel welcome at school their academics may suffer (Gajda, 2016b), leading to long-term consequences. When behaviors commonly associated with creativity are seen as disruptive, the frequency or intensity of teachers’ discipline can stifle the achievement of creative individuals (Gajda, Beghetto, & Karwowski, 2017). Coaching in story drama may be

a way to address the potential bias against creative students by encouraging early educators' creativity and supporting a more creative approach to lesson planning and curriculum.

There is a strong correlation between teachers' perceptions of their own creativity and their self-efficacy (Rubenstein et al., 2013) and teacher creativity has been linked to student achievement (Yamamoto, 1967). Indeed, teachers who have a positive association with creativity are more equipped to recognize (Lin & Shih, 2016; Sitar, Černe, Aleksić, & Mihelič, 2016) and support creative ideas (Gajda et al., 2017). There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the impact that teacher creativity has on student learning and program quality (Connor, 2015; Henriksen & Mishra, 2015; Leggett, 2017; Priede & Vigule, 2016; Toivanen, Halkilahti, & Ruismäki, 2013). However, there is also evidence that there is a lack of creativity training for educators. While teachers may value creativity, they may not have access to theories or research about how to foster, encourage, or acknowledge creativity, thus making it difficult for them to feel confident promoting creativity in their classrooms (Andiliou & Murphy, 2010; Leggett, 2017; Mullet, Willerson, N. Lamb, & Kettler, 2016; Yates & Twigg, 2017). More research needs to be done specific to early childhood education to better understand the interplay between the creativity of educators and children. Training in creative teaching practices could bolster early educators' creative self-efficacy and pedagogical practices, which in turn could be passed on to students.

NBPTS (2012) state that early educators should “create an environment that stimulates discovery and imagination through different forms of play...” (p. 79). They further state that early educators should “create a variety of dramatic play settings” for children and “when appropriate, accomplished teachers join children in their play, modeling the behaviors

and language appropriate to the roles assumed” (p. 79). While their recommendations refer to teachers creating a designated area for imaginative play in their classrooms, it could also be inferred that leading teacher-facilitated story drama is a way that early educators can support dynamic imaginative play in their classrooms.

There is evidence that the teaching practices used for arts-related learning are different than that in general education settings. Campbell (2017) argues that teaching artists have “specialized attributes” relating to their arts discipline that differ from the capacities of teachers in traditional general education settings (p. 86). Sawyer (2017) conducted a content analysis of pedagogical practices of art and design studios and found that a key defining feature was that teachers in these settings were professional artists. While Sawyer’s review demonstrated that art studios tend to use a flexible, open-ended pedagogy, as might be found in play-based ECE settings, the idea that educators are also professionals engaged in creative pursuits outside of their teaching responsibilities suggests that early educators’ capacity for and view of their own creativity could have an important role in their ability to integrate story drama into their curriculum. Training and coaching in story drama might help mitigate any effects of preschool teachers’ negative views of their own theatrical talent or creativity as it relates to the incorporation of story drama in their pedagogical practice.

Professional Development in ECE

NBPTS (2012) states that “accomplished early childhood teachers engage in systematic reflection on their teaching to enhance their professional knowledge and skill and to benefit young children’s development and learning” (p. 82); a statement that is echoed by NAEYC (2009). Each group of children present a unique set of skills, behaviors, challenges,

and strengths. Continued reflective practices allows early educators to adapt their pedagogy to meet the changing needs of children and group dynamics. Professional development can be an effective tool for prompting reflection.

Effective professional development includes opportunities for teachers to learn and practice new knowledge through repetition with adequate feedback and reflection (Downer, Jamil, Maier, & Pianta, 2012). Early childhood educators' training must prepare them to work in multiple settings and multiple roles, as their work is in a mixed-delivery system with programs in public school settings, community-based programs, and family child care (Isenberg, 2000). The work of an early educator is complex and multi-faceted, requiring a diverse set of skills and knowledge. Early educators must be trained as designers and facilitators of learning opportunities, as well as knowledge in managing and assessing behavior and social-emotional needs for young children, advisors to families, and advocates for the needs of young children (Isenberg, 2000; Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). As a result, continued professional development is necessary for early educators to stay abreast of new developments in research and approaches to practice.

Despite the body of research substantiating the importance of play in the early childhood curriculum, there is no national standard or expectation that early educators' training include training in how to facilitate play. There are national standards for curricula that address social emotional skills and pre-academics such as literacy and STEM education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009, 2015). In the state where this study is taking place, there is no explicit requirement that early childhood educators receive training in the arts, including drama, either before or after receiving their teaching

credentials. This state's requirements for early educator training are a fair representation of the requirements in other states, some of whom require more and some who require less. It is not typical that states require targeted professional development or training in arts-based practices. Therefore, it is safe to assume that many early educators have not received training in creative dramatics, such as story drama, unless they have a personal interest in the subject.

Given that early educators' in-service training is positively related to program quality and child outcomes (Egert, Fukkink, & Eckhardt, 2018), it is important to consider the ways that early educators engage in opportunities for their own learning and development. Effective professional development introduces specific concepts, addresses challenges of instruction, and fits within the context of teachers' classrooms (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). High quality professional development in ECE must also include opportunities for early educators to reflect on their own practice and views of pedagogy, allow educators to review data from their own classroom or program, and build on educators' prior knowledge (Mitchell & Cubey, 2005). Lappia (2011) adds that effective professional development should be both experiential and social, with opportunities for application of concepts in meaningful contexts and interaction with other teachers, which Easton (2008) suggests is best executed within teachers' own work environment.

An impediment to early educators' ability to adopt new pedagogical practices is their ability or desire to change. Willingness to change, interest level, length of time in the field, and access to support all impact early educators' ability to make changes in their practice, regardless of the length of time they work with a mentor (Peterson, 2012; Wagner & French, 2010). The conditions at the workplace may be such that teachers may not feel comfortable

going against the status quo or challenging leadership. Trust and flexibility are key components to supporting early educators with change (Peterson, 2012). Lieber et al (2009) conducted a qualitative study of ECE professional development and discovered that teachers who were successful at implementing new pedagogical practices were intrinsically motivated, skilled in classroom management, and saw themselves as partners in the development of the new curriculum or practices. Early educators' voices must be included in the process of adopting new instructional practices, if one is to expect buy-in from those participating (H. Davies & Head, 2010; Kragler, Martin, & Kroeger, 2008). If a trainer is seen as an insider, like a coach or mentor, then there is greater potential for early educators to build trust and make progress towards lasting change.

An "evidence-informed, practice-based" coaching framework (McLaughlin et al., 2017, p. 227) that includes protocols that are easy for teachers to replicate is a form of professional development that has shown to be successful when implemented by trained coaches (Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015). Coaching has been shown to be effective in supporting teachers' use of embedded instructional practices (McLaughlin et al., 2017). Recently, coaching has gained attention as a means for providing content-rich professional development with high impact (Artman-Meeker, Fetting, Barton, Penney, & Zeng, 2015; Isner et al., 2011). During my review of the literature I was not able to find any studies that examined coaching in the context of implementing story drama in preschool classrooms.

The majority of studies about early educators' professional development is focused on child outcomes or quantifiable measures of effectiveness. Few studies focus on teachers' engagement in or response to training. Even fewer studies include early educators' responses

to training in their own words. Considering that teacher-voice is an important component of successful professional development, research should address the actual experience, needs, and interests of early educators regarding their professional development. By examining what types of training early educators find useful, professional development can be designed with their unique needs in mind and therefore be more effective at supporting pedagogical change and child outcomes.

Professional Development Trends for Play and Creative Dramatics

Early educators are considered to be generalists, meaning that they are expected to teach all subjects to their students, including language and literacy, STEM, and the arts. Yet, many early educators do not receive specialized training in all of these individual subjects (Isenberg, 2000). Despite national efforts to improve instructional quality in ECE, and evidence that high-quality professional development positively impacts classroom practices and child outcomes (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007), early educators do not receive adequate training in diverse instructional practices, which can affect their self-efficacy and ability to integrate such practices into their teaching (Greenfield et al., 2009). Additionally, pressure to comply with national standards and include more direct instructional time dedicated to academic concepts such as literacy and STEM learning might prevent early educators from seeking out arts-related professional development opportunities (Copley, 2004).

NBPTS (2012) recommends that early childhood educators have “a strong grasp” of content areas, including drama, as part of their pedagogical knowledge and practice (p. 39). They suggest that drama is “one of the ways that children learn about life” (p. 56). While

other arts-based pedagogical practices have become more common in ECE settings, story drama has yet to gain traction. There is evidence that teachers with specialized training in language arts have more confidence in using creative dramatics as a pedagogical practice (Pesen & Üzüm, 2017). What is not known is whether early educators, who may not have specialized training in language and literacy development or teaching strategies, will have a similar confidence in implementing story drama.

Teachers who do not have training in story drama may lean more towards traditional concepts of theater education. By focusing on the technical skills of theater, such as voice projection, line memorization, and orienting to the audience, early educators may mistakenly be leading children down the road to performance, resulting in teacher-directed product-oriented pedagogy (Kelin, 2007). This type of instruction not only constricts young children's natural exploration, but also can impede their creativity and confidence. With training, early educators can better understand the give-and-take of story drama instruction that allows children and adults to co-construct the reenactment or exploration of characters, their inner lives, and interactions. A focus on the process of engagement allows children to be more at ease during their play, thus leading to a deeper, more engaged, period of play that promotes focus, attention, and creative flow.

There have been different trends in early educator professional development relating to dramatic play. One long-standing trend is that early educators' role is to prepare the environment for dramatic play, but never to interfere (Christie, 1985; McInnes, Howard, Miles, & Crowley, 2011; Spodek, 1974). In this perspective, children's play is seen as sacred and not to be "hijacked" by adults (Goouch, 2008; Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006). An

outcome of this trend is that many early educators are reticent to guide or join children in their play (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Aras (2015) discovered that when preschoolers engaged in dramatic play in the classroom, often teachers used the time to document learning, write notes about observations, plan lessons, or take attendance. There is research, however, that demonstrates that children benefit from teacher support with imaginative play (Christie, 1985; Pyle & Bigelow, 2015; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013). In this paradigm, teacher involvement in children's dramatic play is encouraged as a means to promote children's learning. Training in story drama could support early educators' confidence in joining children in play as well as deepening their understanding of the benefits of play as part of the literacy curriculum.

Training in story drama may have other benefits to early educators. Research shows that training in creative dramatics effects pre-service teachers' enjoyment and skills in writing (Erdogan, 2013) and self-motivation (Kosucu & Hursen, 2017). Mages (2012b) also reports that professional development in creative dramatics supported early educators' overall teaching ability and enjoyment of work, such that supervisors took notice. Dehouske (2006) explored the impact that experiences in the arts supported education graduate students' perceptions of their teaching and creative self-efficacy and proposed a model for early educator preparation wherein prospective teachers must nurture the "artist within" in order to become quality instructors.

When we step outside of education and into the research on play and creativity, there is evidence that suggest that adults play an important role in children's play. Some suggest that an essential ingredient to supporting children's engagement in play is teacher playfulness

(Howard & McInnes, 2013). Adults model play skills, social interactions, and ways of being during play with children. During play, adults and children build what Krnjaja (2012) called *co-authorial spaces* where their separate realities, subcultures, and experiences overlap and intertwine. Adults may influence the plot (or script) of the play, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. In these co-authorial spaces of play children and adults can alter power dynamics, construct new meanings and scaffold learning, deepen social relations, and their brain waves synch as they enter a state of cognitive flow and deeply engaged neural activity, and release bonding hormones creating a sense of safety, familiarity, and positive relationship (Krnjaja, 2012; Loizou et al., 2017).

Training in arts-based pedagogies has been shown to transform the way that educators view their own artistic abilities. There is support that residencies with professional artists can impact teachers' views of themselves and their practice (Engelmann, Kappel, & Kerry-Moran, 2018; Mages, 2012a). Lee and Cawthon (2015) discovered that the largest impediment to preservice teachers using arts-integrated pedagogy in their classrooms was their personal beliefs and practices of creativity – importantly, even when teachers stated that they valued the arts as a discipline, they did not necessarily plan to employ arts-based instructional practices. These findings highlight the important role that mindset plays in early educators' ability to employ arts-based pedagogies such as story drama. In short, if early educators feel that story drama requires theatrical talent, and more importantly that this is a talent they do not possess, then they will be less likely to integrate it into their pedagogical repertoire.

Engelmann, Kappel, and Kerry-Moran (2018) studied a visual arts training program with 33 “fiercely linear” preservice early childhood special education teachers (p. 5). They found that although most participants began the program believing that art was an add-on subject taught separately from the main curriculum, by the end of the program students reported that they found value in integrating visual arts into core curriculum areas across subjects. They also found that participants had newfound confidence in their artistic abilities after training, felt more prepared, and therefore more likely to integrate arts practices into their pedagogy in the future. Training in story drama could produce a similar result for early educators, changing not only the way they teach and approach learning, but also the way they see themselves as creative educators.

Mages (2012b) studied a theater-based professional development program for Head Start teachers. The program included 13 group professional development sessions for teachers lead by professional theater teaching artists and 14 interactive sessions with children in classrooms lead by professional teaching artists. The focus of the program was to provide children with a quality arts enrichment program that also supported teachers with using skills they could incorporate into their curricula. Mages found that training supported Head Start teachers’ use of drama techniques during their literacy curriculum and that some teachers “discovered in themselves talents they had not realized they possessed” (p. 181), but that significant administrative support was needed in order to make the program successful. As part of the training, teachers learned the principles of interactive storytelling and drama-based explorations of children’s books, as is used in story drama. Mage’s study did not address the inner process that teachers underwent when trying to incorporate these practices

into their pedagogy or using them on their own without the support of a trainer. Her study also did not address whether teachers who engaged in the training continued using the drama techniques after the professional development program ended.

A challenge of offering drama as an enrichment program taught by a teaching artist, rather than the regular classroom teacher, is the potential for interpersonal dynamics that affect the learning environment. Wee (2011) found that unclear expectations or responsibilities, break downs in communication, and a lack of shared perspective could negatively impact the relationship between an early educator and a teaching artist from an outside organization, which detracts from the value of a drama enrichment program. Wee suggests that incentives for early educators or program-wide support could foster an environment where collaboration is more successful. However, this model requires that early education programs have the budget, access, and desire, to bring in a teaching artist from an outside organization. ECE program budgets are tight, with many programs struggling to pay staff, let alone specialists that are seen as extra-curricular (Whitebook, McLean, Austin, & Edwards, 2018). Training would allow early educators to incorporate story drama into their pedagogical practice without the need for hiring an external teaching artist. This has potential for the largest impact in low-income settings or rural areas where there may be less access to qualified theater teaching artists.

Just as creativity can be developed in young children, the right mixture of environmental factors and supports can help adults develop creative thinking techniques (Cadle, 2015). Professional development activities can be intentionally designed to support the transfer of early educators' creative learning into practice, and there is evidence that this

can have lasting effects on their own creative abilities and creative self-efficacy (Cheng, 2016). Borrowing from Bandura (1994), creative self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs about their own creative abilities, which influences "what individuals try to accomplish, how they try it, and how much effort they spend on" creative activities (Haase, Hoff, Hanel, & Innes-Ker, 2018, p. 2). Creative self-efficacy not only relates to teachers' own creative capacities, but it can have implications for the way they support the creativity of others (Jaussi, Randel, & Dionne, 2007), including coworkers and children in their care.

A coaching model of professional development might be uniquely suited to supporting early educators with their creative self-efficacy. An instructional coach could serve as a creative mentor, by modeling creative behaviors and supporting early educators' view of their own creativity (Huang, Krasikova, & Liu, 2016). Coaches that employ a transformational approach are more likely to be supportive of educator's shifts in their creative self-efficacy (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2016). Additionally, opportunities for collaboration among teams of teachers at the same program could support shifts in creative self-efficacy through the sharing of knowledge and psychological support (Richter, Hirst, van Knippenberg, & Baer, 2012). A training program to support early educators' implementation of story drama that includes practice-based coaching, opportunities for collaboration, and structured reflection would be well-suited to support early educators' use of story drama in their literacy curriculum.

Shifting teachers' belief system is an important component of educational change (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001). The starting place of any evaluation of early educators' experience implementing story drama should be teachers' views of their own

creativity, especially relating to imaginative play, storytelling, and drama. If we consider that human experience is complex and language includes embedded meanings that are context laden, then reflection could be a powerful tool for capturing these perceptions of teachers' own creativity.

The role of early education must be a balanced one – to prepare young children for school, and also to prepare them with the skills to adapt their knowledge sets to real life circumstances. The divergent thinking required to adapt knowledge and innovate solutions for complex problems is supported through creative education. Teachers must be empowered to embrace their own creativity and support its development in their students (Jónsdóttir, 2017; Leggett, 2017). Targeted professional development in creative teaching practices, such as story drama, is needed to support high quality play-based instruction and whole-child approaches to learning and development in ECE.

What is largely missing from the literature is an examination of early educator's experience learning about and adopting creative teaching practices, such as story drama. While there are numerous studies evaluating the quality of professional development as measured by child outcomes, there is little focus on early educators' experience receiving the training or attempting to sustain changes in their practice after training ends. This is particularly true for studies examining creative teaching practices. The way that early educators experience training or changing of pedagogy could affect the way they view themselves, their teaching, and their ability to maintain practice after training.

While research has been dedicated to arts-based instructional initiatives (Honig, 2019; Ludwig et al., 2014; Mages, 2018), and professional development (Mages, 2012b; Sheridan

et al., 2009) few articles have examined the experience of early educators when they attempt to incorporate creative teaching strategies, such as story drama, into their regular curriculum. This study seeks to evaluate the experience of preschool teachers adopting story drama into their literacy curriculum with support from coaching. I addressed the following questions: What do early educators experience when they attempt story drama on their own? What supports do early educators need when implementing story drama in their classroom? What do early educators value about story drama as a pedagogical practice? This study has been designed to address a gap in the research literature regarding early educators' experience when integrating arts-based practices into their pedagogical repertoire so that a deeper understanding about early educators' practice, values, and reaction to creative teaching strategies can be considered when designing professional development and approaches to curriculum.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study examines preschool teachers' experience integrating story drama into their teaching practice with support from coaching. Participants in this study engaged in six weeks of story drama coaching combined with observations and reflective interviews. The main areas of inquiry were centered around what preschool teachers experience as they integrate story drama into their pedagogical repertoire with support from coaching and what preschool teachers value about using story drama in their classroom (see Appendix A).

This study is designed as an exploratory qualitative study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012), using a phenomenological case study framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research is an experiential tradition. Maxwell (2013) describes qualitative research as examining the “process by which events and actions take place” (p.30). Some researchers in the qualitative tradition engage directly with participants, seeking to understand their views, motivations, and characteristics (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). During this study I developed relationships with early educators as part of a six-week story drama coaching intervention in order to better understand their perspectives and to invite active engagement in coaching and delivery of story drama lessons. Participants' experiences with and perceptions of story drama were captured through observations and reflective interviews embedded in the coaching intervention.

Research Design

Housed within an interpretivist paradigm, this study was designed as a phenomenological case study. Interpretivists believe that reality is socially constructed and that meanings, perceptions, and experiences are subjective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kelliher, 2005). Interpretivist research relies on the stories of individuals to draw interpretations about events and experiences. Phenomenological studies examine individuals' experiences and perceptions about a given phenomenon or experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018) as told through iterative interviews and personal narratives (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Phenomenologists believe that individuals find themselves in experiences and make meaning while experiencing the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). Case studies examine phenomena within a real-life context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They are complex and multilayered, gathering data from multiple sources, such as documents, interviews, observations, and descriptive narratives (Yazan, 2015).

The phenomenon in this study is identified as early educators' experience with coaching in and implementation of story drama as a pedagogical practice. I used a phenomenological case study approach to examine preschool teachers' perceptions of story drama and their experience of integrating it into their literacy pedagogy during and after receiving coaching. My intent was to gain deeper insight into early educators' experience of coaching in story drama, a creative teaching practice; better understand the challenges they face when attempting to incorporate story drama into their pedagogical repertoire; and examine the potential benefits to children and teachers, as perceived by early educators, when story drama is integrated into the preschool literacy curriculum.

Many different strategies have been used to study dramatic play in young children and adults. While there are numerous studies using quantitative methods to assess creativity (Gajda, 2016a; Sarsani, 2008; Zahra, Yusooff, & Hasim, 2013), creative self-efficacy (Chang, Chen, Wu, Chang, & Wu, 2017; Tang & Werner, 2017), and the effectiveness of professional development (Egert et al., 2018; Vujičić & Tambolaš, 2017), the perspective of this researcher is that human experience, creative process, and imagination are concepts too nuanced and complex to be assessed through quantifiable measures alone. Recently, there has been a call for more multimethod approaches to research in pretend play (Lillard, Hopkins, et al., 2013). This study's use of phenomenological case study seeks to capture the stories of early educators in their own words as they experience story drama in their classrooms and the process of their own creative journey.

The Researcher

I worked in early education for over 20 years with a specialization in creative dramatics. I have a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts, a Master of Science in Early Childhood Education, and a Post Master Certificate in Early Childhood Education Research, Policy, and Practice. No participant had a direct relationship with me before, during, or after the study that represented a conflict of interest, such as a contract, reporting relationship, or any relationship that may have imparted bias on the study. I have been trained in the skills necessary to conduct this study, including story drama curriculum development and teaching, creative dramatics skills, child development knowledge, and experience as an instructional coach. I understand the nature of the work in early education, specifically in preschool

classrooms, and am well versed in the regulations in the state in which the study was conducted.

Participants and Sampling

The participants for this study were recruited through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is typical of case study research (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) such that a specific population or phenomenon is being examined. Participants were recruited from a network of programs that had previously participated in an introductory story drama workshop conducted by the primary researcher and the contact list of ECE programs affiliated with the university supporting this research. Participation in the study was voluntary. All participants were offered documentation of professional development hours as an incentive for participating in the study. In the state where this study was conducted, full time early educators are required to engage in a minimum of 20 hours of professional development annually. Receiving professional development documentation was of value to participants and did not pose a financial burden for the researcher. The time for the interview and observation sessions was mutually agreed upon by the participants and me to allow for minimal interruption in the regular flow of their classroom responsibilities.

There were four main participants in this study ranging in age from 23-54 years (an average age of 38 years); all of whom were female with English as their primary language. All of the participants were white; one also identified as a Hispanic. Two participants completed master's degrees and two participants had completed some college coursework, but not yet attained a degree. The participants had worked in ECE for between 2 and 16 years, an average of 7.75 years with between 2 and 11 of those years teaching preschool.

Three of the participants had 20 children enrolled in their classrooms; one had 15 children enrolled at the time of the interview. All of the teachers enrolled were currently teaching in preschool classrooms. For the sake of this study preschool is defined as a classroom serving children between ages 2 years 9 months and 5 years old as of September.

The participants in this study worked in two different community based early education programs; none of the participants worked in the same classroom. Focusing the sample from two ECE programs is not outside of the norm for an exploratory phenomenological case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2014). Two participants worked in classrooms that received subsidy funding from the state for serving families with a lower socioeconomic status. All of the participants worked in ECE programs that used play-based curricula. This was not a criterion of the study and was not an intentional part of the sampling strategy. All of the participants worked in classrooms with coteachers and teaching assistants/student teachers. Additionally, two participants worked in a program that is a parent cooperative with parents serving as volunteers in the classroom, allowing for smaller adult: child ratios.

In addition to the four main participants in this study, the directors at their programs were interviewed at the beginning of the study to give context about the environments in which they work, their internal supports for professional development, and a better understanding of the teachers' relationship with the leadership at their program. Because of the influence that program leadership can have on teacher dispositions, pedagogy, and willingness to change, directors were seen as worthy of including in the study for context purposes (Douglass, 2017). The directors were both female and white, ages 46 and 58 years,

and spoke English as their primary language. One director had completed a bachelor's degree; the other completed a master's degree. One director had 10 years of experience in the field with 8 years in preschool and the other had 38 years of experience in ECE with 36 years working in preschool settings. The directors were not the main point of focus for this study and were interviewed only once for background information before coaching and observations began.

The focus of this study was on teachers' experience with story drama and while children were present for the lessons, and potentially impacted by them, they were not seen as main variables of interest. As a result, no identifying information was collected about children. Their real names were not recorded in any field notes; pseudonyms were used at the onset. Demographics information about the children were captured broadly as reported by the participants and directors in initial interviews. This information was used for context only in the planning for coaching sessions and not included in the analysis because it was seen as potentially unreliable data.

Coaching Intervention

This study implemented six weeks of coaching in story drama lesson planning to support early educators' adoption of story drama into their literacy curriculum. The plan for the coaching intervention was inspired by my 20 years of experience as a creative dramatics instructor, early educator, and teacher trainer. Inspired by recent research on PLCs, coaching, and continuous quality improvement (Diamond & Powell, 2011; Feldman, 2016; McNicholas, Lennox, Woodcock, Bell, & Reed, 2019), this coaching intervention was designed using an iterative learn, try, and reflect cycle (LTR) to support the transfer of

learning into practice. Facilitated reflection was an essential part of the coaching intervention and this study's design. This decision was based on Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning wherein reflection is the moderator between experience and learning. The layers of meaning embedded in this approach correspond with more recent conceptualizations of experiential learning (Kuk & Holst, 2018).

The coaching intervention was an iterative process, evolving and responding to the needs of the participants. Diamond and Powell (2011) found that teachers enjoyed an iterative approach for a professional development program for Head Start teachers focused on language and literacy instruction because it was responsive to their needs and applicable to the context of their individual programs. Additionally, using an iterative approach allowed me to be flexible to changes in participants' schedule, classroom needs, and/or individual learning styles.

During each session I introduced different creative drama techniques and supported participants with planning a story drama lesson inspired by a picture book (see Appendix B). We discussed and often practiced these techniques as part of the learning process while also creating a detailed written lesson plan using a template as a guide (see Appendix G). Techniques and learning introduced during coaching included storytelling and expressive reading practices, fundamental pantomime and tableau methods, classroom management strategies during movement exercises, classroom environment design, ways to structure a story drama lesson plan for successful implementation, and methods for book selection. Teachers were not expected to mimic or recreate my instructional style, but rather take strategies, develop them further, and make them their own, adapting them to fit the context of

their classroom's needs and their own pedagogical style. For the first four weeks of coaching I guided participants through the process of planning a story drama lesson for books I selected in advance as books that fit the criteria for being easily adapted into story drama. For the last two weeks of the intervention, participants selected books on their own using the criteria introduced during coaching.

Typically, participants had one week to continue refining or practicing their lesson plan before implementing it in their classroom. During this *try* phase of the coaching cycle, teachers were encouraged to make the lesson their own. I would return to observe the lesson in action and take rich field notes to support the development of questions for reflective interviews in the next coaching session as well as identify areas where teachers may need added support or reinforcement of techniques previously introduced during coaching. Coaching sessions took place either immediately after the lesson or later that day and began with a reflection on their experience implementing the story drama lesson.

Research Procedures

Prior to beginning this study, all participants received a free 1.5 hour workshop introducing them and their coworkers to story drama, its potential benefits to children's learning, and the procedures for delivering a story drama lesson, including an interactive demonstration of a story drama lesson with the book *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963). This book was chosen for the introductory workshop because of its popularity and familiarity within early education. After the introductory workshop, participants were offered the opportunity to continue in the study voluntarily. All early educators who participated in

the workshop, regardless of their interest in continuing in the study, received professional development credit for participating.

At least two weeks after receiving the initial story drama workshop, and before coaching began, I interviewed each of the participants about their experience with the workshop, prior experience with story drama or theater arts, teaching style and influences on their curriculum, current literacy curriculum in their classroom, view of their own creativity, and experience attempting to implement story drama after the initial workshop. At this time, I also interview the program directors where each of the participants work to better understand each program's support for teachers' professional development and creativity and the program's curriculum philosophy or other information pertinent to the study. After the initial interviews I established a schedule with participants for the coaching intervention and observations. The schedule was developed taking into account classroom needs, study timeline, and participants' work schedule.

Once these initial steps were complete, the coaching intervention began. During the first week of coaching I introduced fundamental story drama techniques connected to teaching a lesson inspired *King Bidgood's in the Bathtub* by Audrey Wood (1985) and we cooperatively planned a lesson. Within a week of the coaching session, I observed participants implementing the lessons in their classroom during circle time. Information from these observations helped me understand what occurred when participants tried the lesson for the first time and adapt the plan for the next coaching session. During observations I took detailed notes about how closely participants followed the lesson plan, what creative dramatics techniques from coaching they used, children and coworkers' response to and

engagement in the lesson, and any environmental factors or other elements that may have influenced the lesson or participants' experience. Typically, that same day I would hold the coaching session for the next book, beginning with a reflection on their experience implementing the lesson, the successes and challenges of each lesson, and ideas for adapting in the future. During the last week of the coaching-observation cycle, I met with participants after they tried the lesson to gather their reflections but did not provide any further coaching.

Four to six weeks after the final coaching and observation cycle, I returned to interview participants about their experience continuing to implement story drama after coaching ended. I conducted these final interviews with two participants. On the last day of the coaching-observation cycle at one of the sites for the study the Governor in the state where this study was conducted announced the mandatory closure of all early education programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially the closure was to last two weeks, so we planned to continue the study as scheduled. However, the program ended up being closed for five months so the two participants did not have the opportunity to implement story drama immediately after coaching ended. I made several attempts to schedule a follow-up interview with those two participants, but due to extenuating circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were not successful at completing those final reflective interviews. The last reflective session during the sixth week of the coaching-observation cycle was extensive and it was deemed that the data collected during that interview was sufficient enough to include the data from those participants in the study.

Data Collection

This study examined multiple sources of data to develop a better understanding of participants' experience integrating story drama into their literacy pedagogy. In order to get a holistic view of the phenomenon being studied, I collected copies of all story drama lesson plans written during coaching sessions, record the coaching sessions themselves, perform multiple interviews with participants before, during, and after the coaching period, and observed participants teaching story drama lessons. Collecting data from multiple sources supports the validity of the findings in qualitative research (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Maxwell, 2013; Weiss, 1994). Using multiple sources of data allowed me to address my research questions in unique ways (see Appendix A).

A primary mode of data collection was in-depth dialogic interviews with participants. Rubin and Rubin describe interviews as “a conversational partnership” (as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 155) with participants. In person interviews allowed me to capture the participants' body language and facial expressions as aspects of how they communicate their perceptions of story drama, coaching, and the experience of adopting new pedagogies into their regular practice (Opdenakker, 2006). Interviews were conducted at the beginning of the study to gather background information, during the study to develop and understanding of early educators' experience of receiving story drama training and adapting their practice, and at the end of the study to evaluate the early educators' perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the training and sustainability of the story drama practices. I used an interview guide approach, identifying key broad topics framed as open-ended questions, eliciting the participant's perspective, during the initial and final interviews (Rossman &

Rallis, 2012; Weiss, 1994). During coaching sessions I primarily used an unstructured interview approach common in phenomenological studies to allow a more conversational flow for participants such that they reveal feelings, thoughts, and emotions about the phenomenon being studied, in this case their experience with story drama, naturally (Vagle, 2014).

My role as the researcher was to allow the participants' stories to unfold naturally within the framework of the interview with minimal interruption on my part. Every effort was made to conduct interviews outside of early educators' regular classroom hours and when no children were present. Interviews were audio recorded and be transcribed within 24 hours of completion. Additionally, I wrote reflective memos to capture the overall disposition of participants and environmental influences after each interview session and during classroom observations.

The initial interviews allowed me to collect necessary background information about the participants, their program, and the families they serve. The interview with the program directors was centered around demographics of the staff and families they serve, the program's educational philosophy, professional development expectations, and resources or supports for early educators provided by the program. The interview with participants centered around their prior experience with creative dramatics and story drama, education philosophy, background information about prior education, qualifications or professional development, and their experience using story drama after the introductory workshop. Lines of inquiry included (see Appendix C):

- What did you experience when you tried to do a story drama lesson after the workshop?
- What supports did you need to help you be successful?
- What do you find most challenging about using story drama in the classroom?
- What prior training have you had in theater arts, creative dramatics, or story drama?
- What prior training have you had in story telling or book reading?
- In general, how do you feel about professional development?
- What are early educators' perceptions of their role in children's dramatic play?
- How creative are you?
- Tell me about the curriculum you use in your classroom.
- What type of literacy curriculum do you currently use? What is included?
- How much time do you typically spend planning literacy lessons each week?

Using a dialogic interview approach allowed me to adjust my interview questions in the moment to gather more in-depth information specific to each participant. A narrative interview structure is common phenomenological studies with an emphasis placed on capturing the story of the participants in their own words with less direction from the researcher.

I used a brief questionnaire to accurately capture the demographics of the participants (see Appendix D). The questionnaire asked participants to record their age, level of education, race, ethnicity, number of years in early education, and respond to one question

about their level of creativity. These questionnaires were used as a means to efficiently collect demographic information for the study and were not designed as to be part of the main body of analysis.

Reflective interviews were be incorporated into each week’s coaching session. These interviews allowed me to adapt the coaching to the needs of individuals and better support their learning and adoption of the story drama techniques. Lines of inquiry for the weekly interviews included (see Appendix C):

- What did you experience when conducting the story drama lesson?
- What was challenging about implementing the week’s story drama lesson?
- What aspects of the story drama were most successful?
- What supported the implementation of the story drama lesson?
- What supports are needed to continue implementing story drama?

The coaching and interview process supported and built off of each other. Reflective interviews were embedded throughout the coaching intervention allowing efficient data gathering processes and adding value to the coaching sessions.

In addition to interviews, I observed participants implementing the story drama lessons developed during coaching. Observations were recorded in in-depth field notes rather than videos to protect the confidentiality children enrolled in participants’ classrooms. These observations were used to design the weekly coaching sessions and reflective interviews and also to collect data about what occurred when participants attempted story drama on their own.

Six weeks after the last coaching and observation cycle, I returned for a final follow-up interview with participants. The purpose of this interview was to examine early educators' experience implementing story drama after the support of coaching has ended.

Guiding questions include (see Appendix C):

- Are you still using story drama in your classroom? Why or why not?
- What was challenging about doing story drama in your classroom?
- What aspects of story drama were most successful?
- What supported the use of the story drama in your classroom?
- How did you benefit from using story drama in your classroom?
- How much time do you typically spend planning literacy lessons each week?
- What do you think children gained from the story drama lessons?
- Do you think you will continue using story drama? Why or why not?
- Would you recommend that other teachers use story drama as part of their literacy curriculum? Why or why not?
- Tell me about your experience receiving coaching.
- What interactions did you have with families related to your story drama lessons?
- What interactions did you have with coworkers related to your story drama lessons?
- How has your view of your literacy curriculum changed since receiving coaching in story drama?

- How creative are you?
- How has your view of yourself or your teaching changed since beginning this project?

The focus of these follow-up interviews was to capture early educators' perceptions of the sustainability of story drama as part of their pedagogical repertoire. In total, I engaged in approximately 8 hours of interviews with each participant, including brief interviews conducted as part of weekly coaching sessions, and about 6 hours observing their practice (see Appendix E).

Additionally, I conducted interviews with the program directors at each site to gather background information pertinent to the study that was not captured during the initial participant interview. Lines of inquiry for this interview include (see Appendix C):

- What are the professional development requirements specific to your program?
- What are your expectations for teachers' professional development?
- What supports do you offer early educators for their professional development?
- Tell me about the types of families you serve in your preschool classrooms.
- What is a challenge that [the participants] might have when learning about or using a creative teaching practice, like story drama?

Interviewing program directors allowed me to compare data gathered during the participant interviews about program supports for professional development or curriculum development

as it relates to the feasibility of sustaining story drama as an instructional practice once coaching has ended.

Throughout the data collection and analysis period, I wrote memos to capture any thoughts during the data collection process before, during, and after interviews, coaching sessions, and observations as well as while coding. Qualitative inquiry focuses on the “direct interpretation of events” and case study and phenomenological research “the dependent variables are experientially rather than operationally defined” (Stake, 1995, pp. 40–41). Memos were used to continue to inform future coaching and interview sessions, capture emerging theories during data collection, and eliminate any bias while conducting analysis. Memo writing and comparative analysis help minimize bias in qualitative studies because, as reflective practices, they support a researcher’s ability to be objective (Maxwell, 2013). Memos can be used to moderate the researcher’s thoughts such that they do not impose personal bias or theories on the data being gathered or analyzed. During data collection, I wrote memos to capture information about the perceived state of mind of the participants or factors that may have influenced their interview or lesson implementation, notes about the physical environment, initial thoughts or ideas to include in future interviews or coaching sessions, ideas for initial codes during analysis, and early interpretations or thoughts I had while serving as both the researcher and coach.

Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service and checked for accuracy by the primary researcher prior to beginning analysis. Prior to each coaching session I re-read the field notes from the observation, the transcript from the previous interview, and any memos related to the observation or interview to generate a list of

questions for the coaching session and a list of the creative drama skills I needed to review or reinforce in the session. I began coaching sessions with a reflective interview, during which I repeated questions from previous interviews and double-checked answers given to ensure reliability. Field notes from observations were transcribed by the primary researcher at the end of the coaching cycle for each participant.

Identifying information of the participants was redacted on all interview transcripts, field notes, and memos prior to analysis and replaced by pseudonyms. A database including the pseudonyms and the participants actual names was maintained in a password protected file that only the primary researcher can access. All interview transcripts, field notes, memos, and lesson plan documents were saved in a separate password protected file with access granted only to those immediately connected to the data gathering or analysis of this project.

This study is focused on describing early educators' experience with story drama using their own words, thus it was critical that I maintained a focus on transactional validity. Cho and Trent (2006) define transactional validity in qualitative research as "an interactive process between the researcher, the researched, and the data that is aimed at achieving a relatively higher level of accuracy and consensus by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences, and values or beliefs collected and interpreted" (p. 321). To address transactional validity during coaching sessions I shared data previously captured in interviews and field notes to be sure that I was capturing participants' thoughts and experiences accurately. I completed these member checks before entering any final waves of analysis.

Data Analysis

The data collection and analysis processes of this study was iterative as each wave of data collection was used to inform the next (Rossman & Rallis, 2012), allowing me to shape the study to gather the most information possible to support my research questions in the time allotted. Transcripts of interviews, field notes, and memos were entered into the qualitative software ATLAS.ti 9 to aid with data analysis. All documents were organized by participant, then by site.

I began coding all interview transcripts and field notes after completing the last coaching cycle was complete. Interview and observation transcripts were initially coded in the order in which they were conducted, in batches organized by participant. This allowed me to begin by conducting a thorough case-by-case analysis directly related to the research questions. Coding supported my ability to understand the unique perspectives and experience of each participant as she engaged in coaching and tried teaching story drama lessons in her classroom. During the first round of analysis I used structural coding to establish connection to the main research questions of the study. Structural coding “applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question used to frame the interview” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 98). Examples of structural codes used during this first phase include: *attitudes of coaching, attitudes about PD, SD encouraged teacher flexibility, what supports are needed, attitudes about SD and child outcomes, perceptions of teaching ability, attitudes about SD, beliefs about teachers’ role in play, relationships with others, attitudes about literacy and books, and impact on literacy practices*. This was quickly followed by rounds of descriptive and In Vivo coding to

dig deeper into participants' perceptions. Descriptive codes are those that classify quotations using one word to describe the topic. Descriptive codes used in my first round of analysis included *observation, logistics, teacher-directed, fear of judgement from others, children take the lead, play-based curriculum, structured planning time, illustrations, and coaching*. In Vivo coding refers to short phrases that are direct quotes from participants that are then used to classify themes. Examples of In Vivo codes used included *it's fun, anxiety, not anxious anymore, love that book, don't need to write it down, different than plan, I'm not disciplining children the whole time, spelling is not my thing, maybe if we had a better selection of books, they get to move, and they stay engaged longer*. After the first round of analysis was complete, an initial analysis revealed themes of interest in addition to the original research questions.

During a second round of analysis, I used evaluation, pattern, and focused coding to explore these emerging themes and draw further connections to findings revealed during the first round of analysis. Evaluation coding assigns a judgement about the substance of a variable of interest; examples of my evaluation codes were: *coaching encouraged intentional planning of play experiences, increased teacher confidence, increased children's interest in literacy, SD encouraged teacher flexibility, continued SD after coaching, and introduced teacher to new books*. Pattern coding summarizes segments of data; examples of my pattern codes are: *previous experience with the arts, conceptual shifts about pedagogical practice, continued SD after coaching, SD vs theater performance, challenges/barriers of adopting SD, curriculum planning is informal practice, attitudes about sustainability, curriculum supports before coaching, and supports needed to adopt SD*. Once I coded each case

independently, I went back through all of the cases to see if codes added during each round could then be applied to the other cases. Finally, I grouped relevant codes together for ease of analysis. These main emergent themes were: *how does coaching support adoption of SD*, *perceptions of SD as a meaningful practice*, *impact on curriculum planning*, *relationships with others in the classroom*, and *impact on story time practices* (see Appendix H).

After completing coding, I generated a report of quotations under each code for each participant. This helped me begin to tell their story using their own words. I chose representative quotations and created a lengthy memo including quotations summarizing the main findings for each participant. These were saved in separate files to support writing my results for each independent case and also aided in cross-case analysis.

After completing the analysis for each independent case, I turned to a cross-case analysis. I compared the four cases across the five main grouped themes for my last wave of analysis. I returned to the memos summarizing results for each participant and looked for similarities in the way they described their experiences with these themes. I then wrote a separate memo summarizing the findings across cases, again using representative quotes to tell participants' story using their own words. Telling participants' story about their experience with story drama was the main variable of interest and using their own words was an important aspect of staying true to my chosen method of a case study influenced by phenomenology.

I discussed aspects of my study with peer debriefers to support the validity of my data analysis. Talking to colleagues or outside experts not directly affiliated with the study about my analysis procedures supported the credibility of my findings (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, &

Murphy, 2013). I shared my reflection on the coaching experience and preliminary findings with two women who currently work as early educators at programs not affiliated with this study, helping me account for bias that may influence analysis as I am serving as both researcher and coach. One of these debriefers, a Haitian-American woman aged 42 who had bachelor's degree and over 20 years of experience in ECE in the U.S., supported my ability to reflect on the diverse perspectives of my participants and the implications for the families they serve. Another debriefer, a white woman aged 30 who has a master's degree and over 15 years of experience in ECE, supported my reflection on the coaching intervention, pedagogy of the coaching itself, and any influence the coaching has on early educators' attitudes about story drama or their curriculum in general. A third peer debriefer, a doctoral student who is studying early education and is a former early educator reviewed my coding system and preliminary findings. Her perspective on qualitative methods helped me maintain the rigor of my analysis and credibility of the findings throughout the analysis and writing process.

Ethical Considerations

Written informed consent was received from every participant prior to beginning the study, but after the initial workshop (see Appendix G). Participation was voluntary and participants could opt out of the study at any point. I shared my contact information with participants so they could reach me between coaching sessions if they needed to discuss something that happened during coaching or needed to adjust our schedule.

Because I served as both the researcher and coach for this project, I recorded my own thoughts or reflections that ran tangentially to data analysis in a series of reflective memos. These memos served as points of reflection as well as to maintain balance between my two

roles; they were not part of the data analysis for the study. I discussed my dual roles with my peer debriefers to account for any bias that might have influenced my analysis.

Risks

Every precaution was taken to minimize risks to the participants. The coaching sessions and interviews were conducted outside of early educators' regular classroom duties. This was intentionally arranged so as to have the least impact possible on the daily functioning of the ECE program. Every effort was made to schedule the coaching sessions at a time that was mutually agreed upon by the researcher, the participants, and the program administrator. When possible, coaching sessions involved both participants from each program to support efficient scheduling at the program.

A portion of the data collected during this study took place when children were present in the classroom. No identifying information about children was collected as part of this study; children's names were not used in the field notes and were redacted from interview transcripts. It is reasonable to assume that children were impacted by changes in teachers' pedagogy or practice, but it is proposed that this was not to their detriment. If at any point it was suspected that the teaching practices promoted as part of this study had a negative effect on children, the study would have been terminated. Because children were not the subjects of this study and observations were focused on teachers, written consent was not required by the Institutional Review Board monitoring this research.

Benefits

All of the participants received certificates documenting professional development hours for the pre-study workshop and coaching sessions – a total of about 7.5 hours. As early

educators are required to receive professional development annually this was seen as adequate incentive for participating in this study. Because of the nature of their work, it is often difficult for early educators to find meaningful professional development that does not disrupt their work schedule or place an undue impact on their classroom (teacher absence, classroom coverage problems, curriculum plans for substitutes, etc.). Therefore, it is assumed that offering job-embedded professional development such as the coaching provided during this study, was an additional incentive and benefit to the participants. Additionally, participants received free copies of four picture books used during the coaching intervention.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Amber

At the time of this study Amber was new in her role as lead teacher. She received story drama coaching as part of this study during her first months of having her own classroom as a lead teacher. During her initial interview she described her curriculum as play-based with an emergent curriculum that was planned rather informally, with no written plans for literacy activities. Book selection was based on themes of study and gathered informally from a collection of books in the schools' basement, she rarely read new books before introducing them in the classroom, and did not write out individualized lesson plans based on books. Prior to coaching Amber described reading as her least favorite time of day because she did not feel confident reading out loud in front of her colleagues. This fear of judgement harkened back to her own experiences in school and being chastised by peers and teachers after read aloud activities. She had not been to a library since she was in middle school because of an experience she had being kicked out of the library for eating. While she said she enjoyed reading to her son at home, she did not enjoy reading for herself or in her

classroom; in fact, she reported that she went out of her way to avoid reading at work and at home.

Coaching changed her relationship with literacy

After participating in story drama coaching and subsequent observations of story drama lessons, during which she was required to read books out loud to children with adults present, she reported that she was no longer anxious about reading in front of others.

“I hated reading stories before... I like reading to my son, fine. But to them it's, like, getting out of my comfort zone. I feel like I've gotten out of my comfort zone a lot.”

When asked about her fear of reading in front of others after completing the 6 weeks of coaching, Amber responded: “If it was just me, fine, but when there's other teachers it's like, "You're judging me", but now it's like, whatever.” She reported that she was now inviting other teachers from within her program and friends who worked at other programs to visit her classroom to observe story drama lessons; further demonstrating that she was not anxious about reading in front of others.

Prior to coaching, Amber reported that she was worried about reading in front of children because she did not feel confidence with her own literacy abilities. She mainly read books with which she had some familiarity, rarely changed the books in the classroom, and almost never positioned herself near the books during free play so she could avoid reading. Prior to the study she often delegated reading during circle time to her coteacher. After story drama coaching, Amber reported, “[Reading] doesn’t bother me at all, especially when [the

children] get into it, because it's like they tell the story for me, pretty much. It just flows... I like it." She further reported that she read in her classroom more often after coaching:

"Yes, [before coaching] I definitely read less. It would be like sometimes, during circle, we'd do songs and stuff like that. If we needed extra time, I would read a story. Or, if kids brought a story up to me, I would read it. Now, it's more, 'We're going to read a story. Do this and do this.' Yeah, [I'm] definitely reading more than I was before."

She explained that practicing the read alouds and planning more intentionally for each story during coaching she gained confidence. Being observed by the coach also helped her become more comfortable with other adults present while she read and interacted with children.

Finally, Amber's perspective about literacy curriculum and experiences in her classroom shifted as a result of participating in story drama coaching. She said, "I always knew literacy was important in the curriculum, but I think I've definitely used it more [since coaching]." She reported that the tools she learned during coaching, especially the qualities of a good story drama book, helped her with book selection. Before the study she reported that she had not been to a library since her teens and had a negative association with going to a library. By the end of the study she considered her local library as a possible free resource for gathering books for her classroom and was thinking of taking her son there to get a library card. In her final interview, she reported that she now saw reading as a classroom management technique: "It's actually, if everything's getting crazy, it's like, "All right, let's grab a book. Let's sit down." Then, it's like controlled chaos. They make their own little play." Participation in story drama coaching transformed Amber's relationship

with books, reading, and literacy curriculum. With renewed confidence she planned to continue teaching story drama lessons. She said, "Yeah, like the first week, I was like 'Oh, anxiety, I don't want to do this.' But now it's like 'oh, it's Thursday.'" This transformation was sustained for the six weeks after coaching ended and she reported that she was dedicated to continuing with the new literacy habits and routines she established both at home with her son and with the children in her classroom.

Participating in Story Drama impacted relationships with children and colleagues

Before coaching Amber reported that she was very nervous about being observed by others, especially the coach, with whom she had no prior relationship. After coaching, she was more comfortable and even was inviting teachers from other classroom and programs to observe her teaching story drama lessons.

"It doesn't bother me at all anymore... It's actually like, I'd rather have you there because then you tell me "do this, do this," it's like [encouraging] and doesn't bother me."

This self-reported change in her confidence was observed during her story drama lessons as her teaching demeanor and reading style became more relaxed with each lesson. Halfway through the coaching intervention, Amber's program director stopped me in the hallway to report that she had noticed a significant change in Amber's confidence in the classroom. She felt that it was a direct result of receiving story drama coaching and not only impacted her classroom practice, but also her interactions and relationships with her coworkers.

A change in Amber's relationship with colleagues was most evident during observations of story drama lessons. During the first two weeks of observation, it was evident

that Amber entered the lesson prepared and ready to teach. Less evident, however, was the degree with which Amber had prepared her teaching assistant for the lesson. Boundaries appeared unclear, with the teaching assistant either sitting on the sideline watching or doing another activity, such as cleaning, while Amber conducted the lesson. During coaching we discussed what this was like for Amber and she expressed frustration, wanting help during the lesson. Through coaching, Amber revealed that she didn't feel comfortable giving direction to the assistant. We came up with a plan for how she could involve her teaching assistant more in the story drama lessons. The following week, Amber felt more successful with the lesson. When asked what helped her be successful, Amber responded, "...planning with [the assistant] ahead of time. So this time I told her "Oh, I need you to sit with me," but I didn't tell her "hey, become something," even though she did, but telling her actually this time, "this is what I need from you." As the weeks progressed, Amber and her assistant appeared more relaxed with each other, taking turns being in role with children during the story drama lesson and having clearer boundaries.

Amber reported that her relationship with other colleagues at the program changed as a result of her participation in story drama coaching.

"They're just shocked because I'm outgoing, obviously, but when it comes to activity and stuff, I'm a little shy I guess. But I've been like obviously opening up. And then my friend, we talk, because she works at another daycare. We talk about school or whatever and I was telling her how I was doing this and everything and she was like "No, I just read stories and then we do whatever," and I was like "Well that's not

fun." She was like "oh, okay," but she doesn't get it. But here, I feel like all of our teachers are very involved, and other daycares, I feel like they're just so like blah." Additionally, she reported that she was able to deepen her relationship with her son's teacher as a result of the study. Halfway through coaching, Amber explained that the other teacher participating in the study from the program was her son's teacher (something unplanned and outside of my knowledge during participant selection) and as a result she and her coworker, also her son's teacher, had been engaging more often. She said that having the common experience of receiving story drama coaching brought them new things to talk about and had deepened their relationship not just as colleagues, but as a parent-teacher relationship.

Finally, Amber reported a positive change in her relationships with children. First, since her son was enrolled in a different classroom participating in the study, they deepened their bond discussing the stories and how they played them at school. She said, "He'll tell me all the time about *The Wild Things*, and all that." Because she had also received coaching on the same books, she had a better understanding of types of questions to ask him at the end of the school day and this helped her have a better window into his learning and school experience. Amber also said the nature of her relationships with the children enrolled in her classroom change. She said she started the study unsure of how children would respond to story drama lessons but within a couple of weeks of introducing story drama, she felt "kind of like proud, because it's like "Wow, they're getting it!"

During observations, I saw a change in Amber's discipline style during circle time and story drama lessons. In the beginning she would often stop reading or activity to redirect individual children or even move them to a different place. Over the six weeks of observation

of story drama lessons, Amber visibly became more relaxed and her discipline style followed suit. She used more humor and distraction to redirect behavior and when she called out individual children it was to point out positive behavior or participation in the role play. These techniques discussed during coaching became part of Amber's toolkit and allowed her to spend more time engaging with children and less time disciplining. Amber said that participating in story drama coaching and lesson plans allowed her to put herself in a childlike mindset

“It's like, I'm being a child with them, but they also don't need a lot of redirection because we're all so engaged in it. I don't really ever have to come out and be like, ‘Okay stop.’ They all do well with it. I get to have fun too.”

Prior to coaching she said that often children needed someone to sit with them or have an object to help them focus and “fidget” less. She said that she didn't need any of those tricks or supports during story drama lessons, “It's like they're all ready”. She felt that story drama provided children an outlet for their behavior, “It's awesome, because it extends the time, and they're into it. They're not running crazy.” She went on to explain,

“Well, we have a lot of high-energy children, so sitting through a story is not ideal. They'll sit, but not for long. With [story drama], it's like they get to move, or, they get to think for themselves, so they're actively doing things, so they stay engaged longer. It's easier to keep them together longer than just sitting and reading a story.”

Amber found great benefit to making story drama part of her regular story time or circle routine in the classroom.

Teaching story drama impacted Amber's relationship with one child in particular, a boy named Mateo. Mateo, like many preschoolers, had difficulty sitting still during story time. During my first observation, I noticed that Amber said his name more often than she did any other child's and it was always followed by a negative comment about his behavior. During coaching she explained that she often found Mateo's behavior challenging during story time, particularly because he did not sit still and often talked while she was reading. However, what she quickly found was the story drama was a natural outlet for Mateo. When Amber read the stories more expressively and added prompts to encourage engagement, Mateo sat still, leaned into the book, and was an active participant in the role play, often taking the lead and encouraging his classmates. Amber said Mateo remembered the stories and continued the role play for days, even weeks, after she had introduced the story drama lesson. She observed,

“He gets the most out of this. He loves it. Which is good because he's usually all over the place, but he's so interested in [story drama]. Yeah, when we do this, he loves it. Because remember the first story, him sitting was like [difficult], but once he knows we're going to do something fun after this, he's all for it. And he's the one that usually carries the story all week the most.”

During her final interview, when I returned after she had tried story drama on her own for 6 weeks without coaching, Amber reported that often Mateo would initiate a role play after story time and that she and the other children would follow his lead. When asked if her relationship with Mateo changed, Amber responded,

“I think so. He loves [story drama], and he looks forward to it so much. He's another one with high energy, and doesn't sit well for a long period of time. When it's a story drama, Mateo is the star of the rug. He takes on every part. He almost is like the teacher. He'll be like, ‘All right, now you're this, and you're that.’ Everyone just goes with it.”

This indicates that not only did story drama impact Amber's confidence with teaching and relationship with the children it also positively impacted Mateo's confidence and his relationship with Amber and his classmates. Amber felt that story drama benefited the children, their ability to comprehend and recall stories, which are important literacy skills in preschool, and her relationships with children and other adults.

Coaching supported confidence with implementing story drama independently

Amber reflected throughout the interviews and coaching sessions about the impact that coaching made on her confidence with teaching story drama. She was nervous about teaching story drama at first, unsure that she had the creative teaching ability to do it on her own. During coaching we created a thorough written plan for each story drama lesson and reflected on each lesson, what was successful and what she might change if she did the lesson again another time. Coaching also included an introduction to different creative dramatics and classroom management techniques.

Amber said that writing out intentional lesson plans was new to her; it was something that she had submitted as course assignments in her schooling but never actually put into practice in her classroom experience. During coaching she stated that she was discovering how much planning supported her confidence in teaching. After her first story drama lesson

she said, “It wasn’t bad because we went through the plan together first, so that helps. I knew what I was doing so it wasn’t bad.” As coaching continued she reflected on the value of having a thorough intentional plan for story drama lessons.

“I feel more comfortable. I feel like it’s getting better... Planning it [helps]... The way my brain works, I have to have things written out or I’ll be all over the place. I feel, like, when you plan it out, you’re reading this story and this is your goal to get to. It Helps me think about it. Where if I was just to not have this and this book, my brain would turn to mush after, like, ‘What am I doing?’ but planning helps a lot.”

While Amber had weekly planning time with her coteacher, she had not experienced writing detailed plans for lessons, especially not for literacy activities or circle time.

Amber also was not in the practice of reading books before introducing them in the classroom. We spent time each coaching session reviewing the different parts of each book, the story elements, storytelling techniques to incorporate during the read aloud, features of the illustrations, and potential open-ended questions to ask children while reading. During observations I watched as Amber’s confidence reading out loud and teaching story drama lessons grew. She took more time with each book, lingered on pages for children to examine illustrations, and asked thought-provoking questions to children to help them make deeper connections to the story.

Coaching was a time of intentional reflection on the experience of teaching story drama – an experience that was also new to Amber. She commented, “That was nice. It’s like we don’t ever get the chance to, ‘I could’ve done this or this.’ Or, what could go better. It

helped for the next time.” When I asked what her usual routine was after she finished a new lesson and she replied, “We just do the activity and then it’s done.” The Learn-Try-Reflect model of the coaching intervention supported Amber’s reflection and growth in her teaching practice. She reported that she enjoyed coaching: “I liked it because it was helpful. I wasn’t just thrown in it, and being like, ‘Do what you got to do.’ It was planned it out. Then, meeting after, what I did well, or what could be improved. Then, fixing it the next week. It was helpful.” She said this structure of coaching supported her confidence teaching story drama independently once coaching ended. She reported that she kept the lesson plans she wrote during coaching so she could revisit and reteach lessons later in the year or with another group of children.

Bianca

At the time of the study, Bianca had recently been promoted to lead teacher and was establishing a new classroom at the program. The program had just added an additional preschool classroom and Bianca was coteaching in the classroom with a more seasoned teacher, who did not participate in the study. Bianca’s classroom also had a student teacher that functioned as her teaching assistant. The coteacher and student teacher were both visibly older than Bianca and at the first observation I noticed that Bianca acquiesced to both. Prior to this study Bianca had no experience with creative dramatics and during the initial interview she admitted that the only planned movement activities she experienced in her classroom were when she took the children outside for gross motor play. She said that while she thought the children would enjoy participating in story drama, she did not feel confident “being silly” in the classroom.

Story drama coaching introduced new literacy resources and practices

In her initial interview, Bianca disclosed that she often felt overwhelmed when trying to choose books to read with children. She said she didn't know where to start or how to find a "good" book; one that the children would enjoy, be age appropriate, and compliment the curriculum. She did not change the books in her classroom often and when she did she primarily drew from their programs' collection of books. As part of the coaching curriculum, we discussed the qualities of a good story drama book: strong characters, inviting illustrations, clear conflict, and a repetitive hook that invites participation from the reader/listener. We discussed how to use the library and the American Library Association website's list of award-winning picture books as a resource for choosing books for the classroom. During her final interview Bianca shared that book selection was not as difficult for her after receiving coaching. She said, "Actually, it's not as overwhelming anymore, because I figured out a way to have the librarian help me with that process. So, before I didn't really use the library as much. I was just skimming through the stories and seeing what I can find. But now actually use the library a lot." She also reported that she now viewed the library as an extension of her classroom:

"So we'd go every Tuesday, and get maybe four to five books to last us throughout the week and we try to find the most that we can act out, but it's hard. There's so many books in the library. I try to go based off the awards that you were telling me. So the librarian would search them up and then gather them for us while we're doing the art activities at the library, and she'll

bring them over to me and I'll just look through them just to make sure they were like age appropriate. Definitely [easier]. Going by the awards help a lot.”

Story drama coaching introduced Bianca to new resources to support her literacy curriculum and she was able to continue to use those resources to support sustained implementation of story drama after coaching ended.

Bianca felt that story drama coaching and teaching changed the way helped her gain confidence during story/circle time and improved her storytelling skills. She said that before story drama coaching, “I would just read in one tone and now it’s multiple voices. I think it’s a lot better for me; I benefited from this a lot. So have [the children] because they enjoy it.” Bianca said that she was reading more expressively during story time as a result of coaching and spending more time with books. She shared, “I go deeper into the pictures and the words now. Before I just used to read it off and be like, ‘Alright, that was the story.’ But now it’s like, ‘Okay, why do you think this is happening?’ I would ask explanations or questions throughout the story and see what they would say.” Bianca described using more inquiry-based teaching techniques during story time after receiving story drama coaching; techniques that support children’s engagement with literature and build cognitive and reading skills. During her final interview Bianca described such a major shift in her confidence with leading story time that she now viewed circle time, a time of day that she did not previously enjoy, as her favorite part of the day and something she looked forward to during the work day.

Participating in Story Drama impacted relationships with children and colleagues

Bianca felt that participating in story drama had a positive impact on her relationships with children. She shared “I feel like it’s made my relationship with the

children better; we've gotten closer." During coaching she described a shift in her teaching through story drama to a more playful mindset, one that described as an opening: "My brain opened up more to how children think." She felt that participating in story drama gave her relationships with children new context, "I feel like it helps more with the children and the teachers' relationship...I mean the students get to see that you could be on the same level as them. Like they can get us silly and playful as them." During coaching she reflected on how this shift in relationship, as she perceived it, impacted her teaching, "I would listen to their ideas and feed off of them. When we are on the rug exploring and bouncing off what they say until one of them says something that connects to the story and then I will say something that also connects to the story. It's like we all bounce off of each other. It has me thinking they're using realistic things and then bounce into the imagination things." This, she said, deepened her teaching practice because she was listening in a different way to children and teaching more responsively as a result.

Throughout the coaching and observation period, Bianca had both a student teacher and a coteacher in her classroom. Bianca's program director shared with me that she thought Bianca was very reserved in the classroom and often deferred to other teachers rather than taking the lead. I noticed this during my first observation in the classroom; Bianca seemed unsure of boundaries with her coteacher and did not give direction to the student teacher during the first story drama lesson. This resulted in a shorter than expected first story drama lesson because children were not sure of the expectations and did not fully engage. During coaching we talked about strategies for using her student teacher or coteacher to model for children how to participate in story drama, roles they could be assigned, and the importance

of sharing the plan in advance. The second story drama lesson was much more engaged as a result and Bianca's relationship with her student teacher took a different direction. She shared,

“Before I started the story dramas, we weren't really talking like that, but she had just started. I didn't really know much about her, but as soon as she saw you and she realized what I was doing, she was like, ‘Oh yes, I'm joining this. I know this is going to be fun.’ She did it, and then my other coworkers joined in too. So it was extra help. It was better. They were able to engage the children more as well, the ones that were having a hard time in the beginning. So it worked out a lot.”

Bianca's relationship with her colleagues continued to thrive after coaching ended.

“There would be funning moments and everyone would just laugh and see what they would do for the next story. So it was fun.... It actually brought us closer as well. Because we weren't really talking like that. It was literally just about the kids and curriculum. That was it. And now we actually all have a relationship together. No we all text after work and hang out after work.”

For Bianca, participating in story drama became a bonding experience with her colleagues; a shared experience that they had not previously experienced. This impacted her connection to her coworkers and the work itself, which resulted in more job satisfaction and a deeper engagement with her work as a teacher.

Bianca shared during her final interview that her relationship with her director had changed as a result of her participation in the study. “She loves the silly side of me.... Before

I was silly, but not as much. I always felt like people were staring at me, but now she's actually staring at me and I'm like, "Alright, whatever. I'm going to have fun with my friends over there... I felt like I was always being judged by a boss. But it's not even like that to be honest. It's more relaxed and settled." During some of the weeks she implemented story drama lessons her director was filling in for her coteacher and Bianca felt that participating in the story drama together brought them closer. At the end of the study, Bianca shared that she had started to teach some of her colleagues how to do story drama in their classrooms. This illustrates not only a shift in her relationship with coworkers but also her confidence in her teaching abilities.

Coaching supported confidence with implementing story drama independently

Bianca reported that she enjoyed the coaching sessions and that she had never experienced professional development like that before.

"It was really good actually because in the beginning I felt like I didn't know what I was doing at all, so I had a lot of questioning about it after the first one, like, 'Okay, I might need way more coaching, and I need to ask way more questions about what to do, and different ways to do it.' So I loved the coaching part of it."

Learning storytelling and creative dramatics techniques during coaching impacted the way she approached the read alouds during circle time: "I feel like my voice is more into it because I'm prepared to read this. So I know how to word it and continue reading. So I feel it's different." During observation I noticed a progression in her storytelling abilities – she

used more character voices, lingered on pages to examine the illustrations with children, and used pacing, rhythm, and voice modulation to add interest to her read aloud.

Bianca felt that coaching supported her ability to teach story drama. The asset-based framework of the coaching design impacted her confidence.

“The first two weeks I was kind of shy and like, ‘Oh this is going to be awkward.’ But then it actually stopped getting awkward, because you was just giving me positive feedback. The majority of the time though, everything was positive that you told me. And I felt like I was progressing over the next couple of weeks, so it was positive. I felt more comfortable, even though I just met you those weeks. But it was just like, the positive feedback made me feel more comfortable.”

Bianca felt that coaching impacted her confidence with teaching story drama and also her creative self-efficacy.

“I had never felt creative until like two months ago, when I had to basically do this classroom alone, because the curriculum ideas and everything, and then doing the dramatic reading and having to come up with the acting out part. So made me feel a lot more creative. And then it was like, ‘I didn't know I was this creative before,’ so I think it opened up a different side of me.”

The Learn-Try-Reflect model of the coaching intervention allowed her the opportunity to build her knowledge about different techniques to use in her story drama lessons, practice her skills, and reflect on her experience implementing them. As a result coaching impacted her pedagogy and her view of herself.

Finally, coaching supported her confidence with teaching story drama independently once the coaching sessions ended. In her final interview Bianca shared that she repeated story drama lessons she had tried during coaching but used her reflective notes to modify the lessons. She said doing the lessons a second time using her notes as a guide allowed her to refine the plan and have more success. Bianca sustained the story drama practices she learned during coaching during the six weeks after coaching ended. She said she felt that coaching “prepared me enough to do it on my own.” She did not always intentionally plan story drama activities after coaching, but she did lead impromptu story drama lessons based on children’s interest. “Now I feel pretty comfortable with it because then I was doing the dramatic reading so often with you and then I tried to keep it going even after we finished the coaching.” She said that she enjoyed doing story drama so much that she looked for opportunities to try it at home with her nieces and nephews.

Camille

At the time of the study, Camille had worked in early education for 16 years, 11 of which were spent teaching preschool. She shared her classroom of 20 children with two coteachers and rotating parent volunteers. Her program used an emergent play-based curriculum that drew inspiration from the schools in Reggio Emilia. Camille had experience using theater techniques in her classroom, mostly centered around playback or small performances. Outside of work she enjoyed making visual art and had experience working on theater productions and other types of performance in her local community as a director and playwright. When asked if she had any formal training in performance or the arts, she said she considered herself “autodidactic”, meaning she preferred self-directed learning.

Camille participated in half of the coaching sessions with her colleague, Deena. They worked in separate classrooms and had a positive relationship. Their director shared that many on the staff saw Camille as a mentor and went to her for guidance or ideas. Camille came to her coaching sessions with the confidence of a seasoned teacher. The last two coaching sessions were completed one-on-one on the phone due to changes in her routine at home. The day after the last coaching session the governor announced that all early education programs would close because of the growing coronavirus pandemic; Camille never had the opportunity to engage in trying story drama lessons without the support of coaching and, despite several scheduling attempts, we were not able to have a final interview.

Coaching introduced new perspectives about the teacher's role in play

During her initial interview, prior to coaching, Camille shared that she looked for opportunities to encourage dramatic play across multiple areas of the classroom. When asked if she participated in the dramatic play with children, she described scenarios where she felt she would have to intervene during their play.

“We brought in a highchair so that they could feed the babies. It just needs you to step out it may be able to feed the baby, beginning foods. Or like today I noticed that there's a little cradle in the, and it was filled with jenga blocks and you know, wooden food. And I was like, ‘Wow. That doesn't look very safe or comfortable for as a place for a baby to sleep. Would you like some help cleaning up this area so that you could lay your baby down when he's ready to take a nap?’ because I ended up feeling worried about this situation...”

During observations I noticed that Camille tended to take a more teacher-directed approach to circle time, which impacted the way she taught story drama. I saw a tension between her wanting to direct the play experience and also engage in the play with the children.

During the first coaching session we cooperatively planned a process-based story drama lesson for the book *King Bidgood's in the Bathtub* by Audrey Wood (1985). We planned for children to be actively playing out the activity in the book. When I returned a week later what I observed was a completely different lesson with children sitting through the entire activity. Camille offered direction from a chair in the circle. Her reading was very expressive and drew children into the read aloud, but there were no opportunities for children to play and take on roles. What resulted was more of a performance from Camille than a play- and process-based activity for the children to engage with the book.

During coaching sessions we talked about different techniques for classroom management while also encouraging exploration and movement during the play portion of a story drama lesson. I introduced creative drama techniques for soliciting participation from children and granting children the mantle of the expert. Gradually, Camille incorporated more opportunities for children to take on roles and the focus was more on *playing with* rather than *playing for* children. Camille implied that she was less comfortable with the heavily process-oriented style of story drama. "It's different if I'm on a stage and I'm a character. That feels very different." She was nervous about doing the lesson wrong, even though it was her lesson plan.

I found that despite resistance to writing out a detailed lesson plan, Camille had more success with using a process-focused approach for the lessons she had planned more

deliberately. She shared that she was not accustomed to planning play experiences with detail and preferred to have loose notes or write it “in my head”. Eventually she found that the way she could find inspiration with planning story drama lessons was through music. “What felt to me as a way to engage with this particular book was about finding music that to me made sense for the different parts of the story. At least to me, anyway, it made sense.” However, for one lesson she had such detailed plans for different pieces of music she wanted to include as prompts for movement activities, that she became flustered with referring to her notes about which piece of music corresponded to each part of the drama activity. Sometimes this caused the children to lose focus, but they usually stayed engaged with the activity regardless of the music, as long as they had opportunities to move and play roles.

Camille felt that her classroom environment was not ideal for movement activities. During coaching we talked about different approaches to how to lay out her classroom for story drama or alternative spaces to use. She ended up moving her class to a larger space in the building when they participating in a story drama lesson. This allowed her to set up the alternate space as an environment unique to the book they were going to explore. Camille spent thought and care on the environment design, including setting props, costume elements, or make-shift scenery elements (like sheets of fabric) to create the mood for children when they entered the room. She said that using that alternate space inspired her and she looked forward to exploring it more often with children for story drama lessons after coaching.

Participating in Story Drama impacted relationships with children

The change in Camille’s pedagogy from being more teacher-directed to more process-focused impacted her relationships with children. During observations I watched as

she infused more humor into her disciple style and her teaching style became less formal during circle time. By the sixth observation her expectations of behavior had relaxed and children could move freely around the entire space during movement activities with little to no redirection. As a result there was less interruption in the play portion of the story drama lesson, allowing children to be more actively engaged for longer, calling for Camille to join them in the play, and more instances of teachers and children laughing and playing together in role.

Story drama changed Camille's relationship with one girl in particular, for the purpose of this study we will call her Mei. This was Mei's first year at the program and English was not her home language. Camille shared that because of a language barrier she had found it difficult to connect with Mei, particularly during story time. She said, "typically if we are reading a book [she] is gone because she doesn't have the vocabulary or life experience". However, what she noticed was the play experiences during story drama allowed to be more expressive with her body and interact with her teachers and peers differently. Camille reflected after one lesson, "She was actually laughing and participating in a way that wasn't very typical." This gave Camille the idea to incorporate more opportunities for movement during her story drama lessons and allow Mei opportunities for different types of engagement.

Deena

At the time of the study Deena had worked as a preschool teacher for four years. She shared her classroom with 15 children, two coteachers and a rotating parent volunteer. She described story time as one of her favorite parts of the workday and enthusiastically shared

book or author suggestions during coaching sessions. She reported that she was excited to try story drama after the pre-study workshop and while she thought the children would enjoy it, she had concerns about how to keep them focused. Outside of work, she had experience working on theater productions and other types of performance in her local community.

Deena participated in half of the coaching sessions with her colleague, Camille. They worked in separate classrooms and had a positive relationship. Their director shared that many on the staff saw Camille as a mentor and Deena often went to her for guidance or ideas, which I also observed during coaching. The last two coaching sessions were completed one-on-one on the phone due to changes in Camille's routine at home. The day after the last coaching session the governor announced that all early education programs would close because of the growing coronavirus pandemic; Camille never had the opportunity to engage in trying story drama lessons without the support of coaching and, despite several scheduling attempts, we were not able to have a final interview.

Coaching introduced new techniques, resources, and perspectives

Deena entered the study with an enthusiasm for reading and a broad experience with children's literature. She enjoyed choosing the right book for her classroom and was reticent about the idea of having four weeks of books dictated by the study rather than children's interests or her preference. One book in particular, *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni (1963) was a struggle for her; she enjoyed the illustrations but had difficulty connecting with the text. This coaching for this book centered around exploring an imaginary environment inspired by the illustrations. We wrote a detailed lesson plan and talked through different scenarios for how to approach the story, including many creative dramatics and movement techniques for

bringing the illustrations to life. After the coaching session, and before implementing the lesson, she called to ask if she could do a different book. Her director called and asked if she could do a different book because she was anxious about the lesson. When the day for the lesson arrived, I observed as Deena seamlessly led children on a process-based movement experience in her classroom, down the hall, and into a second classroom. All of the children were fully engaged for the entire lesson, which lasted about 30 minutes. Afterwards, Deena reflected during coaching, “It was more fun as a story drama than I expected...” Later she admitted that the children had asked to revisit the book again and again. She said she and her coteachers had such fun with the lesson that she hoped to try it again.

Throughout coaching, Deena reflected on how much fun she was having teaching story drama lessons. She seemed surprised by this – she expected the children to have fun but had underestimated how much fun she would have in the process. She commented that story drama was “an opportunity to be a little creative and do something a little bit different.” While she was used to planning for the activities in her classroom, this was her first experience writing thorough intentional lesson plans for play. She opted to stop using the story drama planning template introduced during coaching because she felt it was too structured.

“I actually found it was helpful for me to go from chicken scratch to transfer. You know what I mean? Like for my own purpose. It just makes more sense to my brain. I actually used [the template] to write it all down and then two nights before I was sort of really trying to think more strongly about it and I actually flipped it over and rewrote my notes.”

When asked what method she preferred for capturing her lesson plan, she said,

“There is something to me about having a blank piece of paper and the possibilities of a blank piece of paper. That being structured in a way makes me feel like there is a right way and a wrong way. When I have a blank piece of paper there is no right way or wrong way. My thoughts can be very fluid.”

Part of Deena’s process was to plan intentionally and thoroughly during coaching sessions, then continue to revisit and explore the ideas in her thinking throughout the week. She felt this allowed her to feel more prepared when it came time to teach the lesson.

Deena’s love of literature and reading was evident during observations. She was a skilled storyteller, using inflection, phrasing, and voice modulation to hold children’s attention during the read aloud. On one occasion, however, her love of literature was a barrier to her confidence in teaching her lesson. She reported that she felt pressure to remain true to the story and that made it hard for her to be in the moment during the lesson. “I think the hardest part for me is that I like the book so much and I didn’t want to not do a good job of it. Like I really wanted the kids to love it as much as I love it.” During coaching we discussed that in creative pedagogy, like story drama, there are many right answers or approaches to a lesson or a book. Upon further reflection she admitted that she and the children did have a lot of fun with the lesson and they talked about it for the rest of the day in other areas of the classroom. She acknowledged that was the marker of a quality story drama lesson – a focus on the process of engagement rather than adherence to the exact words of the book.

Deena said that teaching story drama was different than what she had experienced before and it was freeing for her.

“Yeah, it just feels very different because...in many things I do, the kids are assigned a one-to-one role, and this is so different from that because there is not any one to oneness about it... I think it's freeing. I think it's much easier. Because I think when you have one-to-oneness in this age group, somebody's feelings are always hurt, and somebody always is dying to do it and then gets shy at the last second. So, I feel like actually the lack of one-to-oneness is much nicer for three year olds. By the time they get across the hall, I think many of them would love their own starring part. But with this group, I think ... Even my really headstrong kids, I think most of them would feel suddenly shy if they had 14 sets of eyes looking at them. ...it's very different. The thing about a lot of theater is that, not always, but frequently it's more linear, and I feel like story drama is not necessarily linear.”

She shared that participating in story drama was changing her perspective of approaches to drama and theater in early education.

It's like, well, a kiwi doesn't really taste a lot like an apple, even if they are both fruit, and a story drama is certainly drama, and a play or a musical is certainly drama, but they feel really different. I think the biggest thing for me is that because I'm very comfortable with the whole drama side of things, because I'm perfectly happy to get up and make a complete fool of myself in front of a bunch of kids, like even fifth graders who really care about people making fools in front of themselves. These guys obviously don't. I feel like that is what most informs my ability or willingness to do this, is sort of the

fact that I know, I'm confident that I can be whatever I want to be because I've already done it with kids in another kind of setting. Right? So, like one certainty informs the other, but I don't think that how I plan ... Other than, you know, when I'm doing straight drama, I certainly try and think about how things are going to go and what I want to accomplish, and what experience I want people to walk away from it with, and that's also true in story drama.

This was supported during observations of her story drama lessons. Over the six-week observation period I watched Deena's teaching style move away from a more teacher-directed product-oriented style to a child-centered process-focused style of *playing with* children rather than directing activity.

Participating in Story Drama impacted relationships with children and colleagues

As Deena grew more confident in her story drama teaching abilities, her approaches to children's behavior during lessons also changed. Her reactions to one child in particular changed as a result of this shift. There was one boy she frequently mentioned as being "active" and concerned that if he lost focus his behavior would distract other children and she would "lose control" of the classroom. I observed that he was very engaged in her storytelling each lesson and while he was not always still during her reading, he appeared to always be focused on the story. During the play portion of the lesson, he was an active participant often taking on role. Through the course of the observations Deena called his name out less often and began using humor to redirect or distract him, which maintained his engagement in the activity and diffused conflict. During coaching, Deena reflected that she was seeing him differently and was surprised at how much he was engaged in the activity.

I observed that the feeling in the classroom became more relaxed with each lesson. At first, the teachers seemed to need permission to participate. They either stood on the side lines watching the children or conducted other duties (like cleaning or preparing the next activity) while the activity was underway. Gradually the coteachers started to engage in the play with the children. One of her coteachers became a clam during her lesson for *Swimmy*; a clam that children had to interact with in order to retrieve the book for the read aloud. In another lesson the same teacher took on the role of a sea monster, sending children to the island of wild things. I observed the adults laughing with each other and commenting about how much fun they had during the activity as they transitioned to the next thing.

Cross-Case Findings

Story drama coaching supported intentional planning and book choice

All of the teachers that participated in this study benefited from working at programs that allowed some amount of paid planning time. Two teachers planned with their coteachers on planning during nap time and the other two used time before or after the school day with coteachers to plan. In all cases, planning was informal with a calendar of activities or experiences that would occur across the week but no thorough plans for each specific activity. Book selection in all classrooms was directly related to themes of study, largely chosen by the teachers and sometimes inspired by children's interest. Books were selected from convenience – what they had access to at their program or in their home collection. Two teachers reported that they would sometimes go to the library or buy a book if there was something specific they were looking for and could not find at the program.

Part of each coaching session included time for thorough planning of each story drama lesson inspired by a different book each week. All teachers reported that this was the first time they had introduced books that were not ones their teaching team had chosen and/or were not directly related to the theme they were currently studying. The list of books included in the study was provided in advance and no teachers planned other curriculum elements around either the stories chosen by the coach or the stories chosen by the teachers themselves. While receiving coaching, teachers saw story drama as a supplementary part of their curriculum. It was only after coaching stopped that three teachers reported weaving story drama into their regular literacy teaching practice.

All teachers in the study reported that they had not engaged in intentional planning time for play experiences prior to story drama coaching. Prior to receiving coaching, Deena and Camille both put time and thought into choosing books to support their curriculum, including reading them in advance of introducing them in the classroom and would often discuss the books with their colleagues. Camille reported planning deliberate literacy activities to accompany books such as story mapping, mini-performances, and journal writing activities; all of these activities were teacher-directed and highly structured. Amber and Bianca both reported that they rarely read books to themselves before introducing them in the classroom and that book titles and cover pictures, as well as recommendations from other staff, played a large role in their book selection; neither were in the practice of planning activities based on, inspired by, or connected to stories.

The intentional planning for individual books during story drama coaching offered teachers an opportunity to reflect on and engage with the literature in a different way. All

four teachers read the story drama books in advance of the coaching sessions (a full week ahead of when they would be introduced in the classroom) and came prepared to discuss the books, their themes, and any directions for planning. During coaching, they would discuss the key elements of the story to highlight during a story drama lesson, study the characters using the text and illustrations, investigate evocative elements of the setting of the books, brainstorm possible provocations, or entry points, to bring children into the world of the story, outline a structure for the improvised role play, and plan for the transition out of story drama and into another activity.

Amber reported, “I feel like when you plan it out, you're reading this story and this is your goal to get to. It helps me think about it. Where if I was just to not have this [plan] and this book, my brain would turn to mush after, like, ‘What am I doing?’ But planning helps a lot.” Bianca said that planning during coaching helped her feel successful at implementing story drama, “I had the memory of the [plan] in my head, and I was just jotting down ideas in my head and it helped me out... I feel like it prepared me enough to do it on my own.” Deena reported that coaching allowed her to “think about something to sort of keep it mildly cohesive” which she felt gave structure to the play element of story drama.

Most weeks the teachers would continue to refine their story drama plans after coaching ended. Bianca reported that she would practice her lesson with her nephews at home to see how they would interact and adjust before leading it in the classroom. Deena said she would often think about the outline she made during coaching and refine the ideas before teaching the lesson. This process would sometimes cause anxiety as she was concerned with doing it right, or having the least interruption in the regular curriculum, or the

logistics of the schedule. Camille reported taking the plan home with her and refining it based on what props and music she could find to go with the story. In all cases, the story drama plan was used as a jumping-off point that provided enough structure to guide children through improvised role play connected to the book.

Coaching impacted literacy teaching practices

Observation data revealed that as teachers' gained confidence, their expectations of story time evolved. Children were no longer required to sit in a circle or with their legs crossed. Teachers slowed their reading pace and lingered on illustrations more. Teachers changed the inflection of their voice to imitate characters and played with the tempo of the reading to evoke emotion. Camille moved from reading in a designated chair for circle time during the first story drama lesson, to using her full body to tell the story, with and without the book, during her last three story drama lessons.

These shifts in practice resulted in a change in teachers' and children's interactions with literature. The focus shifted from passive listening to deep engagement with stories. Camille noted that she observed that story drama engaged children who usually were quieter during story time, especially one child who was a multilingual learner. She reflected that engaging story drama with children allowed her to see their experience with literature differently and gave her an opportunity to connect with this one child differently. Deena and Amber both reported that story drama offered an outlet for children who normally would struggle with sitting still through a story. They both described instances where children who typically did not appear engaged during circle time and needed frequent redirection

participated fully during story drama and often referenced elements of the book for weeks afterwards.

Story drama impacted relationships with children and coworkers

All teachers in the study shared that they enjoyed teaching story drama and that it had, unexpectedly, introduced an element of fun into their workday. They all described instances when teaching story drama with support from coaching impacted their relationships with children and coworkers. Bianca said story drama “helps more with the children and the teacher’s relationship. So, I feel like the teachers...I mean the students get to see that you could be on the same level as them. Like they can get us silly and playful as them.” I noticed a difference in all the teachers who participated in this study. In all cases they were more playful with children during my last observation than they were in the first. This could also have been impacted by their comfort level being observed by a coach, but teachers reported that they were having fun playing with children – and their coworkers.

In every case I also observed, and teachers reported, differences in their expectations for children’s behavior because of participating in story drama with support from coaching. Camille changed her approach to supporting a child for whom English was not her home language such that she incorporated more movement activities into literacy activities and used her facial expressions and gesture to help bring the read aloud to life. Bianca, Amber, and Deena all reported having more positive relationships with children they had previously described as challenging; they infused more humor into their classroom management style and relaxed their expectations for how children could participate during story time.

Amber and Bianca also reported changes in their relationships with coworkers. Both gained confidence giving direction to their teaching assistants, who were student teachers placed in their classroom. They also reported feeling confident enough at the end of the study to invite other teachers into their classrooms to observe story drama lessons and teach them how to do it on their own. Bianca also shared that she had a more positive relationship with her supervisor because of sharing story drama play time in the classroom.

Story drama perceived as resulting in positive outcomes for children

All the teachers recognized that introducing story drama into their curriculum had positive benefits for children. One of the benefits was increased social interaction; Bianca commented

“[Story drama] helps them interact more with each other. For some reason they’re broken into groups; they don’t all play with each other. And when we do the dramatic readings, they’re all playing with each other and helping each other out. I would say...they use their imagination more.”

Bianca also felt that engaging story drama supported children’s relationships with their peers and experience at school.

“So, there's one of my children...he used to be so shy and to himself, and he would just sit at the table the whole time with a piece of paper and color. But then after we started doing the dramatic readings and he seen how the children were connecting with each other and playing during the dramatic readings, he was now going over. He would just sit at the table sometimes. He's only here two days out of the week, so I understood why he would do that. But then

once we did a dramatic reading while he was here, he actually came over and interacted with the other children. And now every day he literally walks in with a smile on his face. No more crying for mommy at the door.”

Bianca felt that seeing this benefit to children was motivating and boosted her interest in integrating story drama into her regular pedagogy.

Another benefit that participants noticed was children’s increased engagement with literacy activities and skills. Amber noticed that children in her classroom were able to attend circle time longer and stay engaged in listening to the story, recall details of stories for longer, and were more interested in books after she introduced story drama into her teaching practice. She said, “It was fun and like kept everyone engaged for longer than just reading a story would be.” She further commented, “I think they got more into books, more into reading. Now, when reading is a choice, more of them will go pick up a book and start reading... I think they're way more interested in books now.” Similarly, Bianca noticed that children were more engaged during circle or story time when she led a story drama lesson: “They point out a lot of things in this story now that they never noticed before. And then they're so curious about it, so they continue to ask questions.” Deena also experienced increased engagement from children in her classroom during story drama lessons and commented that children often asked “can we do that again” later in the week. Through her experience with Mae, Camille noted that story drama allowed children in her classroom for whom English was not their home language to engage in story time differently. Increased engagement with literature and stories was a consistent theme from all the teachers in the study.

Bianca felt that incorporating creative movement techniques into her literacy routine through story drama supported children's engagement.

“I think the getting up and moving around. Sometimes I think they would feel like they're supposed to be in one spot. If you're in the dress up area, you got to stay in there. But it's not like that. You get to move around. If you want to drive to the restaurant, you're driving around the classroom to get right back to where you were and you're in a whole different environment. This is going to help me, when it's time to do these stories, because at first I was like, ‘We're going to have stay on this rug and do the bathtub.’ But we actually don't have to stay there. We can move around and get in our car or our motorcycle.”

Deena felt that story time passed quicker when she was teaching story drama. She said, “When I'm in the moment, it all just flies by.” Typically, her story time lasted 10-15 minutes, but with story drama she was able to hold children's attention with a story for 30-40 minutes.

Teachers also stated that they noticed a difference in children's play since engaging in story drama. Amber thought children in her classroom engaged in richer dramatic play after she introduced story drama. She said, “The way I see their imagination has changed because it's insane the things they can come up with”. Bianca felt that children's dramatic play was more creative after she introduced story drama into the classroom. She commented, “[Story drama] helps them play more with each other and they're not just like close-minded anymore. So, I think opening their imagination more from the book, based off the books, helps them play.” Similarly, Deena felt that story drama offered “an opportunity to be a little creative and do something a little bit different.”

Story drama perceived as an enjoyable experience for adults

Story drama is a playful experience and engaging in it is enjoyable for children. I expected that teachers might enjoy the experience but was surprised by how much the experience of having fun would transform the participants' view of their work. They felt that coaching gave them permission to let their guard down with their coworkers and children and interact differently. When I asked Amber what about story drama was different for her, she said,

"I like it. I like the whole drama thing. I'm outgoing, but I feel like in the past I've been very like "I need to get this, this, this, this, this," it also gives me a chance to be like "let's have fun."

The three other teachers also reflected on the ways that playing through story drama with support from coaching had allowed them to relax, be more flexible, and enjoy playing in the classroom.

All of the teachers reported that they had played with children in a more passive way, but story drama is a deliberate experience, one that they planned for in detail, and that changed the nature of their play with children. Because of coaching they now knew how to enter the play, how to respond during the play, and how to bring the play session to a close to transition to the next activity. Coaching built their skills for this and not only gave them permission to play but encouraged it as an essential part of their pedagogy. Camille and Deena, both of whom had experience with the performing arts prior to the study, shifted from a paradigm of *playing for* (a product-oriented or teacher directed style) to *playing with* (a process-focused style).

Similarly, Bianca had not experienced having fun in the classroom in quite the way that story drama allowed her. She said “This has been fun. You know, it’s brought a different side of me out, to be honest.” She said that as a result of engaging in story drama she felt “like now I’m more them...”; the act of intentionally engaging in play allowed her to relax and be more present with the children. In her final interview she commented that participating in story drama coaching had changed the way she viewed her job, “most people say they don’t have fun at work, but I do.” During coaching Deena and Camille also repeatedly commented how much fun they and their coteachers were having during the story drama lessons. Deena was nervous before leading her first story drama lesson and was concerned about how the children would respond. Afterwards she said “It was fun. The kids seemed to really like it.” and she decided to repeat the lesson again a second time on another day to play the story together again.

Because teachers prioritized actively engaging in play in their classroom, through story drama, they were able to relax, be more present, and have more fun at work. During every observation included in this study teachers laughed with their colleagues and the children in the classroom – full, hearty, belly laughs. Story drama seemed to unleash a different type of joy for teachers, which impacted their relationships with each other, the children, and ultimately their practice.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this case study was to examine what early educators experience when integrating story drama, a process-based, theater-inspired curriculum, into their pedagogical practice with support from coaching. The conclusions from this study follow the research questions and findings and therefore address three main areas: (a) teachers' perceptions of story drama as a meaningful practice; (b) the impact on teachers' relationships with children and colleagues; and (c) the impact on story time practices. Following is a discussion of the major findings and conclusions drawn from this research. This discussion is followed by a reflection on the limitations of this study and the potential implications of its findings.

Teachers Recognize Story Drama as a Meaningful Practice

After engaging in story drama with support from coaching, teachers recognized story drama as a meaningful practice. They felt that teaching story drama lessons in their classroom led to positive outcomes for children. They also felt that there were several positive benefits to their practice, enjoyment in their classroom, and job satisfaction.

Meaningful practice for children

All of the teachers in the study reported that they felt participating in story drama had several positive benefits for children. Teachers felt the heavily play centered activity of story drama supported social emotional skill development and deeper peer-to-peer engagement. This supports other research demonstrating a relationship between dramatic play and children's emotion regulation, relationship skills and Theory of Mind (Gayler & Evans, 2001; Goldstein & Lerner, 2017; Lillard, 1993; Weisberg, 2015). Teachers also noticed that after introducing story drama into their circle time curriculum, children were more engaged during story time, had longer story recall with specificity, and increased interest in books and reading. This was especially true for children that teachers had previously found difficult to reach either because of challenging behavior or language needs. These results support the findings of Peter (2009) and Whitmore (2015) that drama is a form of play tutoring that uniquely supports children with diverse social, linguistic, and learning needs. Similarly, this research supports previous findings that demonstrate the ways that play-based activities support young children's literacy development, vocabulary, and story comprehension (Kendrick, 2005; Kim, 1999, Saracho & Spodek, 2006; Moedt & Holmes, 2018). While children were not the variable of interest in this study, teachers' perceptions on the benefits of curriculum to child outcomes is directly related to their willingness to adopt a new pedagogy. Because teachers saw results for children, they were more motivated to participate in story drama and coaching; as a result they planned to sustain the practice once coaching ended.

Meaningful practice for adults

Teachers reported that engaging in story drama, with support from coaching, was meaningful to their coworkers and them. They felt their relationships with children and colleagues flourished as a result of participating in story drama. They also reported that story drama was an opportunity for them to be playful and creative in ways they had not previously experienced. This led to an increase in job satisfaction, a sense of fun and joy at work, and deeper engagement in literacy activities. The findings of this study support the assertions of others in the ECE community who have called for an emphasis on more playful and process-centered pedagogies (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2011; Pellegini, 2009). This research suggests that playful process-centered and arts-inspired pedagogies may have lasting impacts on teachers (as well as children). Few studies have examined the role of joy, fun, and play in the work of early educators; this study offers a unique window into early educators' experience, using their own words to tell the story.

Impact on Teachers' Relationships with Children and Colleagues

Participants felt that engaging in story drama with support from coaching had a positive impact on their relationships with children and colleagues. These findings relate to Wright, Diener, and Kemp's (2012) research demonstrating the community building effect of drama activities for children. Could this not also be true for adults? Edmiston (2007) and Peter (2003) write about the unique worlds created during role play that allow participants to cocreate an experience, breaking down barriers in the process. The findings of this research suggest that story drama offers an opportunity for teachers and children to be equals in their play with one another, promoting community, bonding, and stronger relationships as a result.

Teachers reported that their relationships with their colleagues were positively impacted by their engagement in story drama with support from coaching. They found deeper social connections with colleagues as a result of playing together during story drama lessons. This supports the findings from Mages (2012b) that professional development in creative dramatics supports early educators overall teaching ability and enjoyment at work. Finally, teachers reported being more creative and confident with teaching story drama after receiving coaching suggesting that professional learning opportunities in story drama, specifically coaching, may influence educators' creative self-efficacy, as posited by Dehouske (2006).

Impact on Story Time Practices

Participants felt that coaching introduced them to new techniques, resources, and perspectives that impacted their story time practices. Two of the participants felt more confident implementing literacy activities as a result of coaching and engagement with story drama. All of the teachers responded that adopting new techniques for story drama with support from coaching changed the way they approached their story time curriculum planning and routines. Their expectations of children during story time relaxed and their teaching style during circle became more flexible. These findings support previous research examining the ways that play- and arts-based teaching practices offer low-pressure, process-focused approaches to early learning (Barker et al., 2014; D. Davies et al., 2013). These findings also add to the growing body of literature substantiating coaching as a high impact form of job-embedded professional learning that supports the transfer of learning into teaching practice (Downer, et al., 2012; Lappia, 2011; Easton, 2008) and the importance of including early educators' voices in the process of adopting new instructional practices (H.

Davies & Head, 2010; Kragler, et al., 2008). While other studies have focused on coaching interventions to support literacy practices, this is the first study to our knowledge that focuses specifically on coaching in story drama as a form of pedagogy.

A possible future direction to continue to assess the impact on story time practices, would be to further examine the book choices of teachers. During the pre-workshop teachers received a list of potential story drama books and throughout the coaching sessions we discussed strategies for choosing books, including choosing books with subjects and illustrations that exposed children to a variety of cultures. It would be interesting to further explore the use of story drama from a multicultural perspective, including the use of oral storytelling in place of picture books. Additionally, adapting the story drama and coaching curriculum for use with elementary teachers would allow this study to examine how the practice of story drama could be used for a broader impact on literacy curriculum practices within early education and if similar results for teachers' creative self-efficacy and joy are possible in different education settings.

Implications Related to COVID-19

As a result of COVID-19, a state mandate closed all ECE programs immediately after Camille and Deena completed the coaching-observation cycle. In this study, story drama was presented to participants as an activity that is facilitated in person. It was not introduced with adaptations for virtual learning sessions. Immediately after the closure, Deena reached out asking for ideas for adaptation, but in two decades of teaching story drama I had never once taught it remotely. The multisensory experience of story drama relies upon social interactions, opportunities for full body movement, and a relationship with the environment.

There are no current scholarly works examining how this type of highly experiential dramatic play could be adapted for a virtual setting. A possible future direction for this study would be to examine potential best practices for delivering the introductory workshop, that includes an interactive story drama experience, the coaching model, and the story drama curriculum to be delivered in a fully virtual setting.

Once programs reopened, health and safety guidance restricted early learning activities that placed children in close contact with one another, like dramatic play. Therefore, it is assumed that story drama would not have been considered a safe activity when following COVID-19 health and safety protocols. How might have teachers' perceptions of story drama changed as a result of these health and safety protocols? Once those protocols were lifted, were they able to resume using story drama after so much time had passed since coaching ended? Amber and Bianca would have only had three months after coaching ended to continue incorporating story drama into their regular classroom routine. Was that enough time to embed it in their practice long term? Were Camille and Deena able to pick the practice back up after returning to work? Did any of the participants attempt story drama virtually with the children in their classrooms? When the new school year began in September did any of them introduce story drama with a new set of children? These are all possible future directions for this work.

Summary

What do early educators experience when integrating story drama into their pedagogical practice with support from coaching? They experience deeper connection with their literacy curriculum and practices, deeper relationships with children and colleagues, and

deeper joy at work. This research contributes to a growing body of evidence that process-based playful approaches to teaching have the potential for significant positive outcomes to children. Similarly, this research introduces the idea that playful pedagogy has the potential for lasting positive outcomes for teachers themselves. Play is often described as the work of young children; this study concludes that play is also the work of educators.

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research is not meant to capture a representative sample of the population; therefore the results of this study cannot be generalized to all early educators in the field. This study was focused on a 12-week period during the preschool year; it is not known how extended periods of coaching or implementation may have impacted teachers' views of story drama. The impact on outcomes for children was assessed only through teachers' observations and perceptions as children were not the primary participants in this study. More research would need to be done to better assess story drama's impact on child outcomes.

Impact of COVID-19 on this Research

During the data collection period of this study, a state mandate closed all ECE programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, Camille and Deena were not able to continue with the study after their coaching-observation cycle completed. It is not known what they would have experienced when they attempted story drama on their own without support from coaching. Research practices were adapted to accommodate the challenging circumstance and inferences were made based on observations of their lessons supported by coaching and their own accounts of what they experienced during those

attempts. Because they did not engage in final reflective interviews six weeks after coaching there is less data gathered about their experience in their own words.

Implications for Teaching and Learning in the First Five Years

This purpose of this study was to describe early educators' experience integrating story drama into their pedagogical repertoire with support from coaching. This study fits within the research literature about teaching and learning in the first five years because of its focus on early educators' experiences, told in their own words, with receiving coaching in a process-based theater-inspired playful teaching practice, planning story drama lessons, and implementing story drama in their own classrooms. This study also adds to the knowledge base about what types of professional learning early educators value and arts-based professional development as a means to transform teaching practices.

This research offers a perspective on the sustainability of creative arts-based and playful teaching practices in the ECE curriculum. This study's unique focus on story drama specifically offers a window into early educators' experience trying a new pedagogical style, planning for play-based instruction, and the ways that arts-based instructional strategies might support curriculum planning and outcomes for children. Including early educators' own words to describe their experience of receiving coaching in story drama and putting ideas into practice adds a new perspective to the knowledge about early educators' practice as well as supports a narrative of respect for the ECE workforce.

This study can be used to describe the potential benefits of integrating story drama into the preschool literacy curriculum. This study's focus on the experience of early educators' in learning about and implementing a new type of pedagogy highlights the process

teachers go through when planning and enacting literacy lesson plans. While other studies have focused solely on child outcomes, this study's focus on the teacher experience adds a new dimension to the research literature on literacy teaching practices. This is particularly important as any curriculum introduced to support children's learning and development is only as strong as the person implementing it in the classroom. Coaching in story drama supported early educators' implementation of a new type of literacy curriculum, story drama, in their classrooms, and their reflections on this experience can contribute to the way that teachers' role is seen in the literacy curriculum development process in ECE.

This study furthers the knowledge base about creative teaching practices in ECE. Programs that emphasize creativity are more supportive of educators' and children's social skills, academic abilities, and overall well-being (Basadur, Runco, & Vega, 2000; Gajda, 2016b; Newton, 2013). While there have been studies evaluating the impact that young children's creativity has on their learning and development (Gajda et al., 2017; Jaarsveld et al., 2015; Torrance, 1980), few studies have examined the role that early educators' creativity plays in nurturing the creativity of their students. This study's emphasis on early educators' involvement in coaching sessions, lesson planning, and teaching practices that provoked their own creativity contributes a new dimension to the literature on teaching practices in ECE. Further research should examine the sustainability of story drama and lasting impact on teachers' pedagogy. Additionally further research should examine the role that teachers' engagement in playful pedagogies such as story drama support their own creativity, job satisfaction, and overall well-being, all of which impact children's learning.

The experience of receiving coaching in story drama impacted the way that early educators viewed, participated in, and planned for events and experiences in their classroom. While the focus of this study was specifically on story drama in the literacy curriculum, it is very possible that there could be other consequences to their instructional practices in other areas of the classroom, as well as their own view of their teaching and curriculum. Further research should explore the lasting impact of the coaching model employed during this study and whether it could be scaled to a larger population, for example an entire ECE program. Similarly, this study focused on the preschool curriculum, further research should address whether the story drama curriculum could be modified to be developmentally appropriate for use with infants and/or toddlers.

Finally, this study offers an opportunity to challenge social norms in education systems. Further research should examine how learning environments be better designed to support creative teaching practices, including what leadership practices, organizational structures, and systemic policies create the conditions for creativity to thrive. Additionally, systems in higher education should be examined to determine how to adequately prepare teachers for planning and facilitating creative and play experiences with young children. Developing teacher preparatory programs that include opportunities for novice teachers to practice playing and *exercising their creative muscles* will be an important step in creating an early education system that fosters and supports teachers' creative pedagogies.

To better prepare young children for the academic and social demands of tomorrow as well as the needs of the evolving globally connected workforce, creativity must be seen as a central part of the early childhood curriculum (National Education Association, 2011;

Shavinina, 2009). The integration of pedagogical practices that specifically support the development of creativity in teachers and children has potential long-term implications for the field. This study's focus on story drama as an instructional practice contributes to the knowledge base about creative teaching practices that are developmentally appropriate in early education and feasible for early educators to integrate into their pedagogical repertoire.

This research offers a unique view into early educators' experience adopting a creative process-based, theater-inspired pedagogy, story drama, with support from coaching. The findings contribute to emerging bodies of literature about teacher preparation and professional learning, early educators' creative self-efficacy and engagement in play, the ECE work environment and teacher job satisfaction, and arts-based approaches to literacy curriculum. Finally, this study introduces the notion that play is a necessary part of the art of teaching and when teachers are empowered to use their imaginations, their practice flourishes.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH QUESTIONS, SOURCES OF DATA, AND KEY VARIABLES
OF INTEREST

Research question	Sources of data	Key variables of interest
Main Research Question: What do preschool teachers experience when integrating story drama into their pedagogical practice with support from coaching?	Interview transcripts Transcripts of coaching sessions Field notes from story drama observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence teaching story drama independently • Beliefs about personal creative ability • Attitudes about engaging in play with children and colleagues
Sub question: How does engagement in story drama with support from coaching impact preschool teachers' relationships with others in the classroom setting, including children and other adults?	Interview transcripts Transcripts of coaching sessions Field notes from story drama observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes about children • Expectations for children's behavior during play and story time • Attitudes about other adults in the classroom environment
Sub question: How does engagement in story drama coaching impact preschool teachers' perceptions of story drama as a meaningful practice?	Interview transcripts Transcripts of coaching sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions about story drama's contribution to child outcomes • Perceptions about story drama as part of the literacy curriculum • Attitudes about sustainability
Sub question: How does engagement in story drama coaching impact preschool teachers' story time practices?	Interview transcripts Transcripts of coaching sessions Field notes from story drama observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual shifts about pedagogical practice • Perceptions of personal reading ability and literacy teaching ability • Attitudes about techniques and resources introduced during coaching

APPENDIX B: PLAN FOR COACHING SESSIONS

Session	Focus & Book	Concepts introduced or reinforced
1	Introducing Story Drama during story time: <i>King Bidgood's in the Bathtub</i> by Audrey Wood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structures for successful story drama lessons • Expectations for children's and adults' behavior during story drama • Evaluating space in the classroom and expanding boundaries • Engagement strategies for read-alouds: inflection & expression • Transitioning between reading and dramatic play • Guiding children to use imagination during story time • Supports for children with physical or sensory needs during movement activities
2	Progress check – what was the experience implementing last week's lesson? Challenges & successes? Exploring characters in the story: <i>Alligator Baby</i> by Robert Munsch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for challenges from the previous week • Engagement strategies for read-alouds: inflection & expression • Transitioning between reading and dramatic play • Using vocal modulation to bring characters to life • Drama embedded behavior supports • Supporting children's suspension of disbelief • Bringing creative movement into storytelling • Evaluating space in the classroom and expanding boundaries • Supports for children with physical or sensory needs during movement activities

3	<p>Progress check – what was the experience implementing last week’s lesson? Challenges & successes? Straying from the plot to explore place: <i>Swimmy</i> by Leo Lionni</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for challenges from the previous week • Transitioning between reading and dramatic play • Evaluating space in the classroom and expanding boundaries • Drama embedded behavior supports • Supporting children’s suspension of disbelief • Bringing creative movement into storytelling • Using movement to create the environment of the story • Supports for children with physical or sensory needs during movement activities
4	<p>Progress check – what was the experience implementing last week’s lesson? Challenges & successes? Creating an imaginary world through story drama: <i>Where the Wild Things Are</i> by Maurice Sendak Supports for book choice for weeks 5 & 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for challenges from the previous week • Drama embedded behavior supports • Loose structure storytelling • Supporting creative exploration outside the bounds of the story • Evaluating space in the classroom and expanding boundaries • Using movement to create the environment of the story • Using vocal modulation to bring characters to life • Voice modulation as cues for plot direction • Supporting children’s suspension of disbelief • Supports for children with physical or sensory needs during movement activities • Qualities of a “good” story drama book and books that reflect cultural diversity

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources to find book recommendations
5	<p>Progress check – what was the experience implementing last week’s lesson? Challenges & successes? Planning your own lesson <i>Book of the teachers’ choosing</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for challenges from the previous week Evaluating space in the classroom and expanding boundaries Using movement to create the environment of the story Using vocal modulation to bring characters to life Voice modulation as cues for plot direction Drama embedded behavior supports Supporting children’s suspension of disbelief Supports for children with physical or sensory needs during movement activities Implications of book choice; fit for children in the classroom and structure of story drama Resources to find book recommendations
6	<p>Progress check – what was the experience implementing last week’s lesson? Challenges & successes? Planning your own lesson <i>Book of the teachers’ choosing</i> Reflection on experience with planning story drama</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for challenges from the previous week Evaluating space in the classroom and expanding boundaries Using movement to create the environment of the story Using vocal modulation to bring characters to life Voice modulation as cues for plot direction Drama embedded behavior supports Supporting children’s suspension of disbelief

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports for children with physical or sensory needs during movement activities• Implications of book choice; fit for children in the classroom and structure of story drama• Resources to find book recommendations
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APPENDIX C: LINES OF INQUIRY

Lines of inquiry for initial interview:

- What did you experience when you tried to do a story drama lesson after the workshop?
- What supports did you need to help you be successful?
- What do you find most challenging about using story drama in the classroom?
- What prior training have you had in theater arts, creative dramatics, or story drama?
- What prior training have you had in story telling or book reading?
- In general, how do you feel about professional development?
- What are early educators' perceptions of their role in children's dramatic play?
- How creative are you?
- Tell me about the curriculum you use in your classroom.
- What type of literacy curriculum do you currently use? What is included?
- How much time do you typically spend planning literacy lessons each week?

Lines of inquiry for weekly coaching session reflective interviews:

- What did you experience when conducting the story drama lesson?
- What was challenging about implementing the week's story drama lesson?
- What aspects of the story drama were most successful?
- What supported the implementation of the story drama lesson?

- What supports are needed to continue implementing story drama?

Lines of inquiry for final interview:

- Are you still using story drama in your classroom? Why or why not?
- Are you still writing detailed lesson plans for your story drama lessons? Why or why not?
- What was challenging about doing story drama in your classroom?
- What aspects of story drama were most successful?
- What supported the use of the story drama in your classroom?
- What supports are needed to continue doing story drama?
- How did you benefit from using story drama in your classroom?
- What about your teaching practice changed as a result of story drama coaching?
- How much time do you typically spend planning literacy lessons each week?
- Tell me about your experience with children during the story drama lessons?
- What do you think children gained from the story drama lessons?
- Do you think you will continue using story drama? Why or why not?
- Would you recommend that other teachers use story drama as part of their literacy curriculum? Why or why not?
- Tell me about your experience receiving coaching.

- Would you recommend that other early educators get coaching in story drama? Why or why not?
- What interactions did you have with families related to your story drama lessons?
- What interactions did you have with your program director related to your story drama lessons?
- What interactions did you have with coworkers related to your story drama lessons?
- How has your view of your literacy curriculum changed since receiving coaching in story drama?
- How creative are you?
- How has your view of yourself or your teaching changed since beginning this project?

Lines of inquiry for interview with program directors:

- What are the professional development requirements specific to your program?
- What are your expectations for teachers' professional development?
- What supports do you offer early educators for their professional development?
- Tell me about the types of families you serve in your preschool classrooms.
- What do you think is special about [the participants'] teaching ability?

- What is a challenge that [the participants'] might have when learning about or using a creative teaching practice, like story drama?

Lines of inquiry for post-coaching interview with program directors:

- What have families reported since the teachers engaged in story drama coaching?
- What have you noticed about the teachers since their engagement in story drama coaching?
- What changes have you noticed in [participants'] teaching since coaching in story drama?
- What have you noticed about the teachers' creativity since receiving coaching?
- What do you think have been the benefits of having story drama be part of your preschool literacy curriculum?
- What do you think have been the challenges of having story drama be part of your preschool literacy curriculum?
- Would you recommend that other early education programs offer coaching in creative teaching practices, like story drama? Why or why not?

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the following questions to the best of your ability. The information from this questionnaire will be kept confidential as part of this study and be used to describe the participants of this study.

1. What is your current age? _____

2. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Trans male/trans man
 - Trans female/trans woman
 - Genderqueer/gender non-conforming/ non-binary
 - Different identity (Please specify: _____)

3. Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Do not know

4. What is your race? (select all that apply)
 - American Indian or Alaska Native (Please specify: _____)
 - Asian Indian
 - Asian/Pacific Islander
 - Black or African American
 - White
 - Another race (Please specify: _____)
 - Don't know

5. What is your primary language? _____

6. What is the highest level of school that you have completed?
 - Elementary school
 - Some high school
 - High school diploma (or GED)
 - Some college but no degree
 - Associate's degree
 - Bachelor's degree

- Graduate studies but no degree
 - Master's degree
 - Doctorate degree
7. How many years have you worked in early education? _____ years
8. What is your current job title? _____
9. How many years have you taught preschool (ages 2.9-5 years)? _____ years*
10. How many total children are currently enrolled in your classroom? _____*

Thank you!

*Questions 9 and 10 appeared on the demographics survey for teachers. The demographics survey given to directors who were interviewed as part of this study included the following two questions instead:

9. How many years have you been an administrator of an early education program? _____ years

10. How many total preschool aged children (ages 2.9-5 years) are currently enrolled at your program? _____

APPENDIX E: SCHEDULE FOR PROJECT AT EACH ECE PROGRAM

Before study begins	1.5 hour Story Drama introductory workshop with all interested participants
At least 2 weeks after workshop	1-1.5 hour interview with each participant Participants complete demographics survey 1 hour interview with program director
Week 1	1-1.5 hour coaching session including interview with participants 1 hour classroom observation with field notes
Week 2	1-1.5 hour coaching session including interview with participants 1 hour classroom observation with field notes
Week 3	1-1.5 hour coaching session including interview with participants 1 hour classroom observation with field notes
Week 4	1-1.5 hour coaching session including interview with participants 1 hour classroom observation with field notes
Week 5	1-1.5 hour coaching session including interview with participants 1 hour classroom observation with field notes
Week 6	1-1.5 hour coaching session including interview with participants 1 hour classroom observation with field notes
4-6 weeks after coaching ends	1-1.5 hour interview with each participant

Total interview time per participant: 6 hours

Total observation time per participant: 6 hours

Total interview time per program director: 1.5 hours

APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT

Consent for Participation in Research – preschool teachers

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Amanda Wiehe Lopes, a doctoral candidate at University of Massachusetts Boston. I understand that the purpose of this project is to gather information about early educators’ experience incorporating story drama into their teaching practice with support from coaching.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation, however I will receive documentation of professional development hours for each hour that I spend in coaching and the preliminary workshop for this study. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I agree to participate in 6 weeks of coaching in story drama during at which time I will have support in planning story drama lessons. I agree to implement these lessons within one week of each coaching session at a time mutually agreed upon with the researcher so as to coordinate an observation of my teaching.
3. I agree to participating in interviews before, during, and after this study. Weekly interviews will last about 20-30 minutes and be incorporated into weekly coaching sessions. Interviews before and after coaching will last approximately 1-1.5 hours. I understand that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during interview sessions, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
4. I understand that all interview sessions will be audio recorded to ensure that my words are captured accurately. I have the right to review recordings of my interviews at any point during the study.
5. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information gathered during this study and my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. No one other than the primary researcher will have access to any of my identifying information.
6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Massachusetts Boston. If I have any questions about this process I may contact them at irb@umb.edu.
7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

- Yes, I have read and understand the explanation provided to me about this study and I voluntarily agree to participate. I understand that my words may be included in publications and presentations about this study.
- No, I decline to participate in this study.

Printed Name	Signature	/
Researcher Signature	Date	/

For more information about this study, you may contact:

Amanda Wiehe Lopes (primary researcher)
Amanda.lopes001@umb.edu

Dr. Anne Douglass, Ph.D. (supervisor)
anne.douglass@umb.edu

Consent for Participation in Research – center directors

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Amanda Wiehe Lopes, a doctoral candidate at University of Massachusetts Boston. I understand that the purpose of this project is to gather information about early educators’ experience incorporating story drama into their teaching practice with support from coaching.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation, however I will receive documentation of professional development hours for the preliminary workshop for this study. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I agree to participating in interviews at two different intervals during this study. These interviews may last 1-1.5 hours. I understand that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during interview sessions, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. I understand that all interview sessions will be audio recorded to ensure that my words are captured accurately. I have the right to review recordings of my interviews at any point during the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information gathered during this study and my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. No one other than the primary researcher will have access to any of my identifying information.
5. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Massachusetts Boston. If I have any questions about this process I may contact them at irb@umb.edu.
6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

- Yes, I have read and understand the explanation provided to me about this study and I voluntarily agree to participate. I understand that my words may be included in publications and presentations about this study.
- No, I decline to participate in this study.

Printed Name	Signature	/
Researcher Signature	Date	/

For more information about this study, you may contact:

Amanda Wiehe Lopes (primary researcher)
Amanda.lopes001@umb.edu

Dr. Anne Douglass, Ph.D. (supervisor)
anne.douglass@umb.edu

APPENDIX G: STORY DRAMA LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE

Story Drama Planning



Book:
Key elements of story to highlight:
Provocation/Discovery:
Outline of dramatic play:
Closing activity:
Materials/multisensory props:

APPENDIX H: THEMES OF ANALYSIS

Main Themes	Themes	Sub-themes
How does coaching support adoption of SD	attitudes about coaching	coaching encouraged intentional planning of play
		coaching helped sustainability
		coaching supports creative self-efficacy
		enjoy story time more after coaching
	attitudes about PD	Professional Development needs
		Preworkshop impact on classroom practice
	SD encouraged teacher flexibility	not anxious anymore
		increased teacher confidence
	What supports are needed	attitudes about sustainability
		challenges/barriers to adopting SD
		Supports needed to adopt SD
		Logistics
	Perceptions of SD as meaningful practice	attitudes about SD & child outcomes
they get to move		
they stay engaged longer		
Perceptions of teaching ability		perceptions of SD teaching ability
		increased teacher confidence
attitudes about SD		it's fun
		SD at home

		enjoy story time more after coaching
	introduced teacher to new books, literacy resources	love that book
		library is a resource
		more thoughtful approach to literacy
	beliefs about personal creative ability	SD versus theater performance
impact on curriculum planning	attitudes about learning	Play based curriculum
	attitudes about arts-integrated curriculum	Previous experience with arts
		SD versus theater performance
	attitudes about teachers' role in play	children take the lead
		teacher-directed
		conceptual shifts about pedagogical practice
	Approaches to curriculum planning	curriculum planning is informal practice
		curriculum planning supports before coaching
		different than plan
		don't need to write it down
intentional plan helps		
Structured Planning Time		
coaching encouraged intentional planning of play		
Relationships with others in the classroom	relationships with children	approaches to discipline
		teacher-directed
		children take the lead
		I'm not disciplining children the whole time
	relationships with colleagues	use of TA
		Viewed TA differently

		Fear of judgement from others
		anxiety
		observation
	communication with families	n/a
Impact on story time practices	attitudes about literacy and books	didn't consider library a resource
		Perceptions of literacy ability
		anxiety
		library is a resource
		illustrations
		spelling is not my thing
		maybe if we had a better selection of books
		love that book
	impact on literacy practices	enjoy story time more after coaching
		illustrations
		introduced teacher to new books, literacy resources
		library is a resource
		literacy practices before coaching
		love that book
		more thoughtful approach to literacy
		they get to move
		SD at home
		SD encouraged teacher flexibility
		I'm not disciplining children the whole time
		children take the lead

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