

PARENT-CHILD PLAY INTERACTIONS IN IMMIGRANT
SOUTH ASIAN FAMILIES

by

MAYA GOLDSTEIN

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Abstract

In this study South Asian immigrant parent-child play interactions and parents' perceptions of the role of play in their children's development were examined. Most studies regarding play were conducted in North America; however only a few studies focused on immigrants. This study used an ethnographic approach and had two phases. In the first phase participant observations were conducted with thirteen parents and their children in a drop-in centre and a staff member from the drop-in centre was interviewed. In the second phase, two families were observed in their home environment, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the parents and the mothers completed calendar logs on their children's activities. The findings from both the drop-in centre and the families' homes suggested that there were two main approaches to play and development. The first was a directed approach to play with a focus on educational play activities, and an emphasis on cognitive development. At the centre some parents stayed physically close to their children and focused on structured art activities and alphabet or number toys. The second approach was a natural approach to play in which the parents did not guide their children during play, and believed that in order to learn children should make their own decisions regarding with what and with whom to play. At the centre some mothers spent most of their time socializing with other mothers while the children played by themselves or occasionally with other children. There were also differences in the play patterns in Canada and India, and the parents found themselves caught between those two contexts. In their own culture and tradition parents did not play much with their children because there were always other play partners close by such as neighbors, cousins, siblings, friends and grandparents. However, in Canada the parents were influenced by what they heard in the centre regarding the "learning through play" philosophy and how parents should devote time to play with their children.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Play is a central activity of children's lives in all cultures although it takes different forms (Roopnarine & Johnson, 1994; Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006; Bowman, 2004; Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). Across cultures, parents have different ideas about play and development and parent-child play interaction (Roopnarine & Johnson, 1994; Goncu, Tuermer, Jain, & Johnson, 1999; Goncu, Mistry, & Mosier, 2000; Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2008). In some societies, especially in the Western world, parents believe in child development theories that play increases language and cognitive outcomes, and therefore typically take an active role as the child's play partner. In other cultures, parents look at play differently and the emphasis is not necessarily on child development (Rogoff, 2003; Roopnarine, Laker, Sacks, & Stores, 1998). Instead, in many communities children's play is not an activity that is encouraged by the parents and it is believed that children should play with other children and family members (Rogoff, 2003).

There has been little research on the relationship between cultural beliefs and how parents interact in play activities with their children, parental perceptions of child development or how parents organize their children's time and their home environment in ways that could affect children's play (Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2004). Most studies regarding play were conducted with U.S. or European children and families (Farver, Kim, & Lee, 1995; Goncu, Tuermer, Jain, & Johnson, 1999; Roopnarine & Johnson, 1994; Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006; Roopnarine et al., 1998). There has been less research on children's play in other cultures around the world (Pan, 1994; Roopnarine, Hossain, Gill, & Brophy, 1994). More specifically, there have been few studies in multi-

cultural environments and with immigrant families in North America (Ramsey, 2006). No studies that specifically examined South Asian immigrants' parent-child play interaction and parents' perceptions of children's play were found at the time of the writing of this thesis.

Most research on play has been framed by developmental theories from the Western world. The assumption that play is a universal activity that promotes development is repeated in many play theories (Goncu et al., 1999). However, Parmar et al. (2004) indicated that the strong emphasis on the importance of play in North America is far from universal. The cultural beliefs about the value of play in children's development differ broadly from one culture to another (Cannella & Viruru, 1997; Parmar et al., 2004). Studies regarding play across cultures showed that learning through play is mostly considered a Euro-American and middle class phenomenon, and represents a specific point of view of the world (Cannella & Viruru, 1997). North American mainstream ideas about play and early childhood education do not always take into account the cultural and social aspects, when discussing the implications of play in early childhood education in other societies (Roopnarine et al., 1994).

There is a need to closely examine play across cultures since there are many cultural variations (Goncu et al., 2000). Children's play is influenced by the society, the community, the physical environment and the family's socio-economic status (Goncu, et al., 1999; Rogoff, 2003; Roopnarine & Johnson, 1994). Therefore cultural sensitivity is required while conducting studies on children's play across cultures and it is important for the researchers to be wary about accepting Western explanations for, and assumptions about their play (Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to understand the parents' and children's experiences and beliefs about play by focusing on play activities. Immigrant South Asian parents' perceptions of play and development, and parents and children's play interactions were studied. Canada is an immigrant society, and the South Asian community is one of the largest immigrant groups in the lower mainland of British Columbia (BC stats, 2008). Therefore, it is an important group in Canadian society that needs to be acknowledged by research in the educational world. Their cultural milieu and religious and historical backgrounds are different from those of other cultural groups in the lower mainland. It would be useful for educators to better understand the cultural worlds of their students and what emphasis is given to play and to development in their cultures. Since little research had been conducted in this area, specifically in Canada and with South Asian immigrants, it is hoped that this research will broaden the existing literature and will bring forth the voices and experiences of South Asian immigrants.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Overview

In this chapter, the literature most relevant to this study is presented. A number of definitions of play; several play theories; different types of play; the role of play in development; play and culture, parent-child play interactions and parents' perceptions of play in multi-cultural environments; as well as child development and play in India are reviewed analyzed and critiqued in this chapter.

Definitions of Play

Play is a difficult term to define. People know what it is, but it is challenging to explain and therefore has aroused the curiosity of many educators, psychologists and philosophers (Chance, 1979). There is no standard definition of play in the literature and it is complicated to define and understand because it occurs in many diverse forms and in many aspects of life. Most of the behaviors and activities of young children are considered as play by different theorists (Fleer, 2008). The common denominator of several different definitions of play is that play is an intrinsic, enjoyable and non-literal activity that is usually spontaneous and free from external rules (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rubin, Fein, & Vedenberg, 1983; Garvey, 1990; Krasnor & Pepler 1980; Saracho & Spodek 1998, Smith & Vollstedt, 1985). Play is often defined as an activity carried out for its own sake with a focus on the means rather than the ends, flexibility and positive affect (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) described play as an intrinsic activity, mostly spontaneous and voluntary which involves enjoyment. Similarly, Rubin et al. (1983) said play is

driven by intrinsic motivation and is free from externally imposed rules and involves active engagement. During play activity there is more attention given to the means rather than to the ends. Play is a non-literal activity, that is, an activity that is not serious and most of the time children pretend while playing. There is freedom from externally imposed rules and the participants are actively engaged in the activity. Correspondingly, Smith and Vollstedt (1985) proposed that play is enjoyable, flexible and mostly characterized by pretending.

According to Krasnor and Pepler (1980), “In practical terms play is what children do when they are reasonably free to do what they want” (p.85). They suggested flexibility, positive affect, non-literality and intrinsic motivation as criteria of play activities. Consistent with those definitions, Garvey (1990) identified play as enjoyable, positively valued by the player, spontaneous and voluntary since there is no obligation to play and the activity does not have extrinsic goals. The player is actively involved at some level and play has certain systematic relations with elements that are not play such as creativity, problem solving, language learning, and the development of social rules and cognitive development. Saracho and Spodek (1998) also pointed out that play is an activity that is intrinsically motivated, interpreted and expressed with calm behavior that provides positive results to the participants and is free and unconscious.

In contrast to the definitions mentioned above which focused on play as being intrinsic, enjoyable, non-literal, spontaneous and free from external rules, Vygotsky (1967) argued that play is not an activity that is based on pleasure. He emphasized play as a directed activity which has rules and roles. Play is not spontaneous, because the adults or peers scaffold the child to reach a more mature level of play.

Taking all the definitions into account, I suggest that play can be directed or un-directed and it can involve one or more play partners. It is usually an enjoyable activity chosen by at least one of the players. Depending on the situation it is either spontaneous or planned. It can involve toys or non-toy objects. The focus of play changes according to the children's ages and also depends on their culture, environment, caretakers and play partners.

Play Theories

There are many play theories which connect play to child development, according to different stages and ages. There are also cultural theories which relate to the influence of the culture and the environment on children's play. Piaget advanced a developmental play stage theory which Smilansky expanded. Vygotsky's theory concerns the influence of the environment and adults on children's play. Sutton-Smith discussed the influence of society and culture on play. These theories are reviewed, analyzed and compared below. The theories were selected due to their relevance to the focus of this research and to the age group of the children who participated. It is important to recognize that these theories are mostly Western theories. No theories that relate specifically to play were found from South-Asian culture.

Most of the play theories originated in the twentieth century. This is not surprising, since play is a modern phenomenon and the concept of childhood is rather new. Throughout most of human history children were engaged in gathering and preparing food and taking care of their siblings. Until post-medieval times, children were not treated much differently than adults. As a result a few theories about play began to appear

in the nineteenth century but only in the twentieth century did people start to think of play as an activity with value (Chance, 1979).

Piaget. According to Piaget (1962), play increases the cognitive development and as a consequence contributes to the child's development (Mellou, 1994; Saracho & Spodek, 2003). In his theory there are three stages of play. The first stage is sensory-motor play and it starts from birth until the child is approximately eighteen months old. In this stage, most activities are physical and there are many repetitive actions. The second stage is symbolic play and it starts when the child is about eighteen months old until the age of seven. In this stage children are pretending while playing and use many objects to pretend they are something else. The last stage is games with rules, which starts at the age of six or seven. The play becomes more social, since at least two people are required (Piaget, 1962; Saracho & Spodek, 2003).

Smilansky. Smilansky (1968) mainly focused on sociodramatic play and drew from the stages of Piaget's play theory and others. The first stage is functional play which is mostly based on muscular activities as infants repeat their actions and try new actions and imitate. This is followed by the constructive play stage where children begin creative activities and learn various uses of play materials and are able to stay at a play activity for a longer period of time. Next is the dramatic play stage where children express physical activity, creativity and social awareness. The final stage is games with rules, which is the highest stage in play development. Children learn to accept rules and to control their behavior, actions and reactions and this learning will help them throughout their adult lives. The stages overlap to a great extent and some play behaviors continue parallel to others. Nevertheless, one stage of play always appears as more prominent than others.

Vygotsky. In contrast to Piaget and Smilansky, Vygotsky (1978) mainly focused on the influence of the environment and adults on children's learning. His theory does not focus on children's ages and the different stages they go through, but rather focuses on the role of adults and peers in influencing the child's progression to the next level.

One of the most significant and well known terms in Vygotskian theory is The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the distance between the child's actual development level and the higher level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or while working with more capable peers. In play interaction with adults, siblings or peers children operate in their ZPD and it is the role of the adult or the other peers to scaffold the child to reach a more mature level of play. He emphasized the importance of playing with rules and roles. During play children are experimenting with the meanings and rules of life which are drawn from their own lives and experiences and place these meanings at the centre of the play (Vygotsky, 1978).

Bodrova and Leong (2006) argued that according to the Vygotskian approach adults influence play in direct and indirect ways by setting up the environment for children by choosing their toys and by encouraging them with what and with whom to play. In some cases adults also model for children how to play with a toy and take turns and how to get along with the other partners.

Sutton-Smith. Different from the stage theories of Piaget and Smilansky, Sutton-Smith focused on the cultural aspects of play. Similar to Vytgostky, Sutton-Smith also argued that the environment and adults have a major impact on children's play, however, he focused mainly on the cultural influences of play. Sutton-Smith (1997; 1999) argued that almost every activity children do could be considered as a play activity, even if not

intended. The type of play the child is engaged in is constructed because of the significance of the play to the society the child belongs (Sutton-Smith, 1999). In some societies children are less likely to play, as they are part of the labor force and are expected to help their families from an early age. As a result, there is little time for play and parents and children hardly ever interact in play activities (Sutton-Smith, 1974).

As much as play is influenced by the society and culture, play also occurs naturally. Infants play with their lips, fingers, sounds and more, even if no one showed them how to play. As children grow, they start to be more aware of their surroundings. Their play activities and the amount of time devoted to play in their lives are determined by the adults around them, and the value that play has in their environment (Sutton-Smith, 1974).

In summary, there are developmental theories of play and cultural theories. They do not necessarily contradict one another, and in fact they can build upon each other. Play is dynamic and changes over the years. Aside from the chronological age of the child and the stage he or she is in, play is also influenced by adults, mostly parents and teachers, who affect the playing environment. Society, the cultural group and the daily environment influence the type of play, the objects, the activities and the frequency of play.

Types of Play

Play takes place in many forms, because children play in diverse settings, have different experiences and share these experiences with different people according to the context they are in (Pronin Fromberg & Bergen, 2006). The focus of play also changes according to the developmental stage of the child. Pretend play, social and non-social

play and play with toys and objects, are normally identified with the 3-4 age group that was studied.

Pretend play/sociodramatic play/make believe play. Pretend play is a form of voluntary play activity in preschool age children where the children take on roles and pretend to be someone else such as mothers, teachers or doctors as part of a story line that is related to their world (Chance, 1979; Freeman-Davidson, 2006; Monighan-Nourot, 2006; Smilansky, 1968). During pretend play children often imitate adult activities or an adventure from a book or television show and it helps them to interpret the world (Saracho & Spodek, 1998). However they occasionally deliberately misrepresent reality during pretend play (Chance, 1979).

Pretend play can start by age eighteen months or earlier and by age three most healthy children are engaged in pretend play. Pretend play increases through middle childhood and then gradually disappears (Chance, 1979). Pretend play has a social quality since many interpersonal transactions, events and adventures are expressed through this type of play (Saracho & Spodek, 1998). It helps children to cope with the stress of the world around them (Johnson & Demanchick, 2009).

Many times during pretend play the language that children use is similar to the language of books. Therefore this type of play prepares children to understand stories better and promotes reading and the use of imagination to invent stories (Freeman Davidson, 2006). Pretend play was found to enrich the language performance of young children from different backgrounds and promotes practice and mastery of vocabulary (Levy, Wolfgang, & Koorlang, 1992).

Toys influence children's pretend play since by providing children with dolls, cars or kitchen implements, parents or teachers indirectly structure children's pretend play. In some societies pretend play also revolves around social routines such as greetings or holiday celebrations and is less influenced by toys (Haight, 2006).

Social and non social play. Social play is a type of play that occurs when at least two partners interact with each other (Coplan, Rubin, & Findlay, 2006). It could start before age 2, but increases dramatically between the ages 2-6. At first, children will most likely play with one partner. By the age of 3 or 4 most children are capable of playing with three or more play partners simultaneously since they already have obtained some social skills (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008).

Non-social play is a solitary play activity in the presence of peers. The child could potentially play with others but still chooses to play alone (Coplan et al., 2006). Smith and Pellegrini (2008) also introduced this term as parallel play since the children are playing next to each other but without much interaction. This type of play is mostly common with 2 and 3 year olds. Individual differences in children's social and non-social play patterns are influenced by their dispositional characteristics, social motivation, and social competence and also are influenced by the culture where the child lives (Coplan et al., 2006). Cultural differences are an important factor in social and non-social play, since culture could impact how comfortable the child is in playing with others.

Children who did not interact with peers and played mostly on their own were considered to be at social or cognitive risks, however, it was also suggested that children's non-social activities could be constructive (Rubin, 1982). Lloyd and Howe (2003) suggested that early childhood educators mostly encourage group play and

promote group interactions, and value this as sophisticated play and therefore solitary play is sometimes considered as immature behavior. In a study where 72 children were observed in non-social play and then convergent thinking was measured, it was found that solitary play encouraged other types of skills such as convergent and divergent thinking (Lloyd & Howe, 2003). Therefore, solitary play is not necessarily an immature behavior because children can develop other important skills. Children who play by themselves should not be automatically labeled as having social or cognitive delays.

Play with toys and objects. Toys have an important role in children's environments and are helpful in providing a positive atmosphere for play (Chance, 1979). Toys such as blocks and dolls, which stimulate children to use their imaginations, are beneficial for children, as opposed to passive toys that require limited imagination (Ginsburg, 2007; Wooldridge, 2010). Middle class parents from developed societies are more likely to provide toys and play materials that facilitate the cognitive, physical, and social development of the child (Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006).

However, children can turn almost any object such as food, bowls, boxes and many other items they find accessible into a toy, even if the object is not defined as a toy by society (Cohen, 2006). By playing with objects as opposed to toys with instructions, children are free to try new combinations of actions with almost no external constraints, and it could also help to develop problem solving skills. Some of the other benefits of object play are independence and creative thought, but for learning a specific skill, a toy with instructions could be more beneficial (Smith & Pellgrini, 2008). Children from all cultures and societies play with non-toy objects but in societies where toys are less

accessible and less valued such as in non Western societies, children play with other available objects more frequently (Cohen, 2006; Sutton-Smith, 1997; 1999).

The Role of Play in Child Development

There is broad evidence in theory and research on the relationship between play and child development. Play contributes to a child's physical, cognitive, language, emotional and social development (Chance, 1979; Gagnon & Nagle, 2004; Ginsburg, 2007; Pronin-Fromberg & Bergen, 2006; Saracho & Spodek, 1998). The relationships between play and cognitive, social, and language development are explored in the next sections. These areas of child development are most commonly connected in the literature to play and are relevant to the children's age group of this study.

Cognitive development. Play is one of the greatest contributors to cognitive development by providing the child with various opportunities to construct knowledge about the environment by interacting with different objects (Chance, 1979; Gagnon & Nagle, 2004; Ginsburg, 2007; Piaget, 1962; Pronin-Fromberg & Bergen, 2006; Saracho & Spodek, 1998; Vygotsky, 1967). Pretend play and games with rules are two of the most important elements for cognitive development (Smilansky, 1968). Pretend play has an important role in developing abstract thought, since during and after pretend play children are able to think about the meaning of the situation or the object (Mollou, 1994).

Johnson, Christie and Yawkey (1987) pointed to the link between play and cognitive abilities such as memory, reasoning, abstract thought and language understanding. Play in general, but more specifically pretend play, might contribute to these skills since the use of symbols in pretend play leads to more abstract thought and allows children to practice and combine new skills. During play children have the

opportunity to practice many different behaviors that could be useful in problem solving in the future.

Social development. Early peer interaction has an important role in social, emotional and cognitive development. Peer interaction provides opportunities for children to regulate their emotions and to develop an understanding of social norms and expectations (Gagnon & Nagle, 2004). Through play, children manage, at an early age to engage and interact with the world, people and resources around them. These interactions help children to cope with other problems and challenges outside of the play world (Ginsburg, 2007; Johnson & Demanchick, 2009; Pronin-Fromberg & Bergen, 2006; Saracho & Spodek, 1998). It is suggested that children should have time in their daily routines to socialize with their peers and to develop relationships and friendships that do not involve adult participation (Oden, 2006).

Language development. Play and language go hand in hand since children typically use language as a tool in their play, and language plays an important role especially during pretend play (Freeman Davidson, 2006). Children use specific words or tones according to the role they are playing and their language becomes more sophisticated (Chance, 1979; Freeman Davidson, 2006). Hart and Risley (1975) suggested that preschool children learn a language more effectively “incidentally” during free play rather than in formal teaching sessions. Using rhythm and rhymes while playing also promotes language development (Freeman Davidson, 2006).

Play and Culture

Parent-child play interactions and parents’ beliefs about child development and the value of play vary from culture to culture (Bowman, 2004; Pan, 1994; Roopnarine et

al., 2003; Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006). Play helps to socialize children and reflects the values of their culture. Relations with others, such as caregivers and other children are important and frame children's play in how they scaffold or stimulate them (Bowman, 2004; Rogoff, 2003). Cultural differences are also related to the amount of time children spend on different types of play (Bowman, 2004).

Children will most likely play in any environment or cultural setting. However, the characteristics of their play will change if the environment lacks play materials or is not physically or emotionally safe (Pronin-Fromberg & Bergen, 2006). Cultural studies on play indicate that all children play, and that their play is fairly similar (Bowman, 2004). One of the most well-known studies in the area of play and culture is the "Six cultures study" of children's play in a cross cultural perspective that was carried out in the 1950's (Whiting, 1963) and Edwards (2000) conducted a reanalysis of this ethnographic study. Researchers were sent to Kenya, India, Mexico, the Philippines, the United States and Okinawa, where they conducted observations and kept running records of the data. The ages of the children studied varied from 3-10. The observations focused on social interactions, events, play partners and children's and adults' activities. They concluded that children played in all of the communities although the type of play and its focus changed according to the environment (such as whether the children were free to play outdoors), children's work, adults' encouragement and supplies available.

In Nyansongo, Kenya, children were mostly observed working with their mothers as they helped with agricultural work or taking care of the animals and other children. Their parents did not stimulate their play by joining, making suggestions, or offering help or materials. Children mostly played with their relatives and implemented their play

while they worked. The children were often left alone with their siblings with no adults present. When they were taking care of the sibling they frequently imitated, laughed and played with them by touching or teasing. The children had only a few simple toys, all of them homemade. Children's play mostly involved creative-constructive play, for example building a dam while taking care of the cattle.

Similarly in Khalapur, India, the mothers did not encourage their children's play. The children did have time to play since they were not expected to work before age six. The children had few toys but often played with sticks, paper or cloth. Also, in Juxtlahuaca, Mexico, the older children were expected to work while the younger children had more time to play. They played mostly in the courtyard, where an adult was usually present, however, they did not encourage or stimulate their play. The girls especially often played house and pretended to sew or to make tortillas.

In Tarong, Philippines, the children both played and worked and the adults were almost always around the children. The older children went to school in the morning, and in the afternoon took care of their siblings. While taking care of them, the older children taught their younger siblings games with rules that they had learned in school, such as hide and seek, tag, drop the handkerchief and more. Similar patterns were found in Taira, Okinawa, the parents were busy doing physical work, but the children were usually not required to work with them. Children attended a nursery school where they were taught turn-taking and games with rules. After school the older children took care of the younger ones, and they all played together in large play groups.

Orchard Town, located in New England in the United States, was quite different from the rest of the communities as the children did not spend time at work and were mostly involved in play. Compared to the other communities, they had much greater access to toys, games and materials from stores. They lived in small families, with few children around. They did not have the freedom to go outside by themselves and therefore spent many hours indoors. Their parents encouraged them to play alone or with their siblings, and occasionally the parents joined their play or answered questions.

This anthropological study revealed interesting insights on children's play across different communities throughout the world. Many of the children used materials from their surroundings (Bowman, 2004) and the local environment had a great influence on where the children played and with what. Children in the more agricultural communities played mainly outside and with materials they found such as sticks and leaves. In the U.S. children spent most of their play time indoors and played more with store bought materials.

Children managed to play even when required to work and while taking care of their younger siblings. As Schwartzman (1979) indicated, in some cultures children are put to work at an early age, but it does not stop them from playing. Even children at the age of 5 or 6 who take care of their younger siblings and have them strapped to their backs, still find the opportunity to play. Parents that were mostly occupied at work did not engage in play or encourage the children to play, as opposed to the US where parents occasionally participated in the play. It is important to remember that this study was conducted in the 1950's when children had less exposure to media and educational systems and to store bought products.

Schwartzman (1979), an anthropologist who studied play, discussed with other researchers the limitations of anthropological research in this area. It was suggested that the term play may not even exist in some cultures and therefore it is problematic to define and study play in those communities. As such, it may be difficult for researchers to look specifically for play, but they should instead observe their subject's daily activities in which they might discover elements of play.

In conclusion, anthropological studies should be read with caution since most of the anthropologists are of Western origin, often American or European. They sometimes incorporated their own definitions to what play is which at times may not be relevant for the culture in context (Schwartzman, 1979). The concept of culture is also quite ambiguous and complicated (Cannella, 2002) which adds to the complexity of researching play and culture.

Parent-Child Play Interactions and Perceptions of Play in Multi-Cultural Contexts

The findings of several studies of parent-children play interactions or parents' perceptions of play are presented, analyzed and critiqued next. The studies were conducted either with immigrant populations or with groups outside the U.S. Since no studies have been found specifically that concentrate on South Asian immigrants, studies with other Asian groups such as Chinese, Koreans and Taiwanese will be presented. The last two studies were conducted with a mixed group of immigrants from Asia.

There has been limited research about play activities between parents and children in multi-cultural environments (Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006; Roopnarine, Shin, Jung, & Hossain, 2003). Since most studies regarding play were conducted with U.S. or European children and families, there is a lack of information on the beliefs about play of

parents' from other cultural background (Farver et al., 1995; Goncu et al., 1999; Roopnarine & Johnson, 1994; Roopnarine et al., 1994; Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006; Roopnarine et al., 1998).

Parents' assumptions about play and its importance are different from culture to culture (Cannella & Viruru, 1997; Roopnarine & Krishnakumar, 2006). In Western societies, adults usually allow and encourage children to play, and sometimes even teach them how to play, and professionals evaluate whether a type of play is typical for a certain age group. In some immigrant societies parents are just starting to identify play as an activity that will contribute to childhood development, and not just as a physical activity (Roopnarine et al., 2003).

Pan (1994) studied the play behaviors of Chinese children in Taipei, Taiwan and examined whether mothers thought play contributed to their children's cognitive, physical, mental, or social development. Sixty-eight mothers of kindergarten age children enrolled in two private kindergartens participated in the study. The mothers completed a Maternal Attitudes Towards Children's Play Questionnaire to examine their perceptions of play activities that are thought to contribute to children's cognitive, physical, mental or social development and how they arrange children's play. The mothers considered cognitive most important, followed by social development, physical development and finally mental development. Constructive play was most frequently modeled by the mothers. The average time mothers allowed their children to play each day was 1-2 hours. Unfortunately, parent-child play, and how often, if at all, the mothers engaged with their children's play was not examined. This information could have helped to understand more about the mothers' thoughts regarding play and development. In addition,

information from a single data source may not be accurate enough. Instead, the researchers could have applied triangulation, by using at least one additional method, such as observations or interviews, which could have increased the validity of this study and its findings.

Farver et al. (1995) also studied play and development and examined the influence of culture on children's early development and how culture influences children's social and play environments. In this study, 48 preschool Korean-American children and 48 Anglo-American children were observed in different preschools. The parents of the children who were observed were asked to complete a questionnaire about how their children play at home. The results revealed cultural differences in the social interactions of the children, play complexity and adult-child play at home and at the preschool. The Korean-American children had a lower frequency of pretend play. Parents from both cultures had educational goals for their children's play, however their views on how to achieve them were different. Anglo-American mothers reported that play is important for children's learning and development. As a consequence they were more engaged in pretend play with their children than were the Korean-American mothers. In comparison, the Korean-American mothers saw play as a method to entertain their children and not as important for child development and learning.

The children in the study attended different preschools, and the different approaches of each preschool might have had an influence on the results of the study. In the Anglo-American preschool the emphasis was on play, while in the Korean preschool there was a strong academic focus. Taking this into account it is not surprising that the

Korean-American children were less engaged in play than the Anglo-American children and the mothers might have been influenced by their school's approach.

In contrast to the quantitative study presented above Chin and Reifel (2001) conducted a qualitative study with 30 middle class Taiwanese mothers to understand how they scaffold their 2-4 year old children's pretend play. The mothers and children were observed and videotaped during 15-30 minutes in a toy-lending library in Taipei and the mothers were interviewed on their perceptions of participation in play. The results indicated that the mothers made great efforts to interpret play situations for their children. With the older children the mothers presented more challenging tasks during their play and tried to teach their children by giving them instructions and labeling objects for them. Often there were disagreements between the children and the mothers during the play activities, but eventually mothers were most likely to follow their child's idea.

This study, however, took place in a toy-library and it was not clear from the study if the mothers and children attended the library activities regularly. This environment might not have been natural to the participants, and may have influenced their behavior. Also, the fact that the mothers were being observed and questioned could have influenced their attitudes.

Differently from the previous studies which focused on one or two cultural groups, Parmar et al. (2004; 2008) conducted a study with a diverse group of Asian immigrants in the U.S. The purpose of the study (Parmar et al., 2004) was to learn about the parental beliefs about play by studying two different cultural groups, Euro-American and Asian-American. The participants were 24 Euro-American and 24 Asian-American children and their parents from China, Korea, Pakistan, Nepal and India from three preschools in

Connecticut. The parents in the Asian-American group had lived an average of six years in the U.S. prior to the study and the majority of the Asian children were born in their country of origin.

The parents answered two questionnaires, The Education Attitude Scale (EAS) and the Preschool Play and Learning Questionnaire (PPLQ) and were interviewed about their beliefs and practices on play and learning. During a week long period the parents also completed a daily activities checklist about their child's activities related to play and learning at home. The results indicated that the Euro-American parents believed that they had important roles as their children's play partners and considered play to be more important than the Asian parents. They also indicated that play is important for development as an individual and in general, but is especially important for children's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. The Euro-American families usually had a separate room for the purpose of play and the children spent more time helping with chores and reading at bedtime. The Asian parents, however, put more emphasis on the importance of early academics and their children had more toys related to educational play (e.g. alphabet, toys with numbers) and spent more time on activities such as going to the library. Asian families usually had a special place for toys, such as a box or a closet, but not a separate room. The Asian parents did not value play for the development of their children and they did not believe play would help prepare their children for school.

In a reanalysis of data in the previous study Parmar et al. (2008) investigated the role of the parents in children's play, either as a playmate or a teacher in an effort to compare the involvement of Asian immigrant and Euro-American parents in their

children's daily activities. The results indicated that while parents of both groups spent the same amount of time playing with their children, the Euro-Americans spent more time on pretend play, while the Asian parents spent a greater amount of time on pre-academic activities such as learning letters and numbers, and playing math and computer games. The Asian families spent on average three hours per week on pre-academic activities, while the Euro-American families spent about 20 minutes per week on these activities. The Euro-American parents saw themselves as the child's playing partner, while the Asian-American parents more commonly considered themselves as their child's teacher.

One of the weaknesses of Parmar et al. (2004; 2008) is that they did not differentiate between the five different Asian groups in their study and no information was ascertained about differences in the attitudes between the different immigrant groups. This information could have been useful in understanding cultural differences in children's play. Mathews (2000) pointed out the importance of being aware of the diversity between the different Asian groups. Teachers and researchers should recognize that Asian culture is not homogeneous.

In summary, the results of the studies just reviewed suggest that Asian parents were focused on educational play activities, saw themselves mainly as the child's teacher and did not view play as an activity that promotes child development. Differences were found between how Asian parents and American parents interact with their children in play activities. Their perceptions as to why play is important and its contribution to child development were also quite different.

Child Development and Play in India

Overview. The participants of the present study were from Punjab, India, belonged to the Sikh religion and were new immigrants in Canada, and therefore it is important to present some background on their culture and family arrangements. It was a challenge to find studies on the topic of play that were conducted in India and more specifically in Punjab. However, the family structure of Punjabi families will be examined along with, human development beliefs of the Sikh religion, studies on childhood and play in India and the emigration from Punjab to Canada.

Studying human development in India is a fascinating and yet complicated task. The culture is diverse, religions vary, there are geographical differences, and many changes are occurring due to modernization (Misra & Tripathi, 1993). Early childhood care giver practices change within India based on family size, class or caste, rural or urban environment or regional differences. For example, differences were found between children from urban and rural areas in bath and feeding routines (Sharma, 2000). There is a lack of studies regarding child development in India and one of the explanations is that developmental psychology was only introduced to India in the late 1960's. Furthermore, most developmental psychology theories in the West rarely examined cultural differences in child rearing practices with children from India (Sharma, 2000). Most of the questions that were asked in cultural studies in India were similar to questions from Western studies. For example, questions on family life and organizations which were relevant to a nuclear family structure. It was, therefore, almost irrelevant for India where the culture and family structure are very different (Murray, 1984).

In general, child rearing practices in India were and are influenced more by tradition and less by information about child development research. It is uncertain how aware parents in India are of the connections between play and early cognitive and social development (Roopnarine et al., 1994). According to Roopnarine et al. (2003) many parents in India believe that play is incidental and does not contribute greatly to child development. Some parents, especially from East India, put a high priority on education that emphasizes learning early in life. They consider the preschool years as the time that prepares children for academic success and therefore put less emphasis on play. Parmar et al. (2008) quoted a popular Hindi saying: “If you read and write you will become great, but if you play you will be ignorant” (p.172).

The family structure of Punjabi families. The family structure in Punjab is the joint family (Murray, 1984; Nayar, 2004) meaning that the family functions as a solid unit and the adults share the household chores, the child rearing, and financial expenses (Mui & Anderson, 2008). By tradition, the extended family is patriarchal with the father as the head of the family and the household members are his family and his sons’ families (Murray, 1984; Nayar, 2004). The brothers have equal rights as the shareholders of the house and resources with authority in the hands of the males and a hierarchy across the generations (Murray, 1984). Most of the marriages are arranged and the daughters leave their homes after their weddings and move to the husband’s household (Murray, 1984; Nayar, 2004). Traditionally, the men worked outside of the homes, while the women were in charge of child rearing. With time and the modernization process in India, some women began to also work outside of the home; however, they remained the children’s primary socialization agent (Sharma, 2000). With emigration to Canada and living in a

different and modern society the patterns of the joint family changed. For example, brothers mostly no longer live in the same household. In many Punjabi families in Canada the grandparents still live with one of their children (Nayar, 2004).

Human development according to the Sikh religion. It is important to acknowledge that there are many different beliefs about human development in India. Since the participants of the current study were Punjabi-Sikh families one of the beliefs that is most important, is the human development phases according to the Sikh religion. In her book “The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver” Nayar (2004) explains some of the main components of the Sikh human development beliefs. There are two paths of human development: the path of ego reasoning and the path of spiritual development. There are also five layers to the person: the soul, consciousness, action, mind and the body. During infancy the mind is not yet conscious of the soul. The infant’s mind is directed more towards survival needs, which are met mostly by the mother’s milk. Throughout infancy the child slowly starts to recognize the mother, father, siblings and the rest of the family as ‘others’. The infant learns that they belong to the parents, and the parents feel they have ownership of the infant. The child then begins to develop a pride of belonging to a certain family and caste. As the children grow they discover the physical surroundings and experience with their senses.

The belief is that children have little wisdom and have limited ability to concentrate because they are busy experiencing sensual pleasure. Even when children are taken to the temple or when they are occupied with religious acts, it is still rather meaningless because the mind is not yet fully engaged in those activities. Young children are more focused on external experiences and it is hard for them to enter the path of

spiritual wisdom. As people move to the spiritual phase, they no longer feel separated from the 'other'. They feel united with the all-pervasive universal soul. Not everyone advances to the path of spiritual development.

Childhood and play in India. Studies regarding childhood in India are rare (Sharma, 2000) since many of the assumptions on childhood in India have been based on Western research (Kumar, 1993). India is large and extremely diverse and it is difficult to find studies on specific cultural groups within Indian society (Sharma, 2000).

Roopnarine, Hopper, Ahmeduzzaman and Pollack (1993) and Roopnarine et al. (1994) studied adult and infant play in New-Delhi. They conducted semi-structured interviews and observations with 34 families that lived in small joint family units in New Delhi. The focus of this study was parent-child play and parental beliefs about the value of play with infants. Each family was observed for two sessions of thirty minutes each and interviewed on the range of parent-child play in their homes. The observations focused on rough, minor physical play, object mediated play, and "peekaboo" games. The results indicated that both mothers and fathers were involved in low levels of play with their infants. Parents indicated that they played with their infants for enjoyment and to make them happy. The engagement in rough play was low for both mothers and fathers and other relatives and siblings were also not observed in rough play with the infants. During the interviews, parents rarely mentioned learning as a major factor of play with infants but they did mention pleasurable aspects of play.

In contrast to the study of Roopnarine et al. (1993; 1994) which was conducted in an urban environment, Sharma (2000) focused on play as part of village life. He presented a critical review of infancy and childhood in India based on an ethnographic

study conducted in a village near New Delhi. The author spent one year in the village conducting many observations. He found that almost all homes in the village had a large courtyard shared with the neighbors which created an environment that promoted non-parental care. Women in the extended family were the children's primary care-givers and therefore also the primary socialization agents. Neighbors had an important role in taking care of the children and children were often left with other family members or neighbors. Children often played and ran in the street, usually accompanied by other friends. Whether inside or outside, children were always in close proximity to adult supervision who were close by and available even though the adult's presence was not at all times obvious. Children were taught to take responsibilities in doing chores. Girls carried out household duties such as putting the dishes away, drying laundry, etc. Most of the everyday activities of the parents took place in the presence of the children.

Most mothers believed that the process of development happens naturally as the children grow up and that children were not capable of acting independently in the early years. Mothers taught the children from a young age the names and objects of things around the house and the names of family members. The children were frequently observed playing in a crowded room without much direction from the mothers and often asked for attention from other caregivers or even strangers.

Respect and sharing were important elements that children learned from an early age. Children were asked to be polite to others, to greet them, and to be kind. They were expected to share toys, books, and other belongings both with children who lived in the house and also with friends and neighbors. Children learned that objects, people, and activities were collective and nothing belonged to them specifically; they also shared

space, food, and clothing. Most families did not have separate or special beds for children but rather shared a bed with other family members.

Similarly to Sharma's (2000) findings Sutton-Smith (1999) argued that in many cultures like in India, the group is more central than the individual. More attention is given to physical closeness to the infant than to parent-child play stimulation. Children often sleep with other family members from an early age throughout childhood, and it is less likely that children would have their own specific space. Many of the play interactions between parents and children revolve around social patterns in which the mother helps the child through play to adapt attitudes and behaviors that are important in the extended family or society.

As part of a UNESCO, project Murphy (1953 as cited in Kumar, 1993) visited India and wrote a report for the UN regarding social tensions: There is a continuation between the world of children and adults. The child is part of the adult space in daily life and there is a close proximity between the parent and the child, especially at an early age when the children are often carried. The children are usually present in places where adults are talking or are being entertained.

Differently from the previous studies presented in this section, which focused on the family life, Viruru (2002) focused on the school setting. She conducted an ethnographic study of 115 children ages 2-5 in a school in South India. Interestingly, while the researcher was taking notes of the children playing on the playground, one of the teaching assistants approached her curious to know on behalf of whom the study was being conducted and why children's play was of interest (Viruru & Cannella, 2001). The findings suggested that the school focused primarily on academic subjects such as

English and Math. During school time there was not much attention paid to social development activities or play (Viruru, 2002). These findings are revealing, especially taking into account the young age of the children. They reinforce the notion that play was not considered an activity that should be encouraged, even in a school setting in the early years.

Migration from Punjab to Canada. Emigration from Punjab to Canada started at the beginning of the twentieth century, but the majority of the immigrants from Punjab arrived in Western Canada after the 1950's in a few waves of migration (Nayar, 2004). Many of the immigrants came from an agricultural background in India with little formal education and worked at blue-collar jobs in Canada. They were suddenly introduced into a modernized capitalist culture and society, which was very different from the one they had come from. (Nayar & Sandhu, 2006). The vast majority of immigrants from Punjab to Canada are from the Sikh religion. However, because the migration from Punjab to Western Canada was so complex and occurred in waves, the Sikh community in West Canada is quite diverse in itself and not a monolithic ethnicity (Nayar, 2004).

In summary, childhood and parenting in India are quite different than in the Western world. Other people such as neighbors, family friends and other family members take an active role in raising the children, and the parents are not necessarily the people who are most responsible for raising the children. In addition, children usually have many play partners close by and therefore parents may rarely interact with children in play activities. Interactions usually occur naturally in the home environment and the children often help their parents. The emigration process from Punjab to India was challenging for some immigrants. The cultural differences, the life style in Canada and the changes in

family structure are just part of the challenges many immigrant parents face. The strong emphasis on play in the new environment could be quite different for them as well.

Summary of Literature Review

An aim of this chapter was to review, analyze and critique the literature relevant to this study. Definitions of play, play theories, types of play and the role of play in development provided the background for a deeper understanding of the main components of this study. The topics of parent-child play interactions and parents' perceptions of play in multi-culture environment as well as a review of studies on childhood and play in India, are directly related to the research questions and to the participants of the study.

Chapter III: Methodology

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to document South Asian immigrant parent-child play interactions and to learn about the parents' perceptions regarding play and development. Specifically, the goal was to understand the focus of children-parents play, by examining the type of play activities, the frequency of the activities and the parents' perceptions on play in the children's lives and in their development. It was anticipated that the research would broaden the existing research about what parents believe about children's play, which is quite limited, especially with immigrants' populations and more specifically South Asian immigrants. The study investigated the following research questions:

1. How do South Asian immigrant parents interact in play with their children? What type of play activities occur and what is the focus of the play activities?
2. What are the perceptions of South Asian immigrant parents on the role of play in their children's development?

Ethnographic Approach

Interpretive research focuses on the quality, meaning and, the nature and essence of the phenomenon and how people make sense of their world and experiences (Merriam, 1998). The purpose is to learn about a specific problem or to understand a situation. Sometimes the purpose is not specific and there is more than one way to learn about a particular issue (Richards & Morse 2007).

In ethnography the focus is on culture (Merriam, 1998) and it is a way to study human lives and behaviors (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). This study focused on cultural understanding of play within a specific cultural group, Punjabi South Asian immigrants. The aim of the study was to learn more about play interactions between parents and children in this group, as well as parents' perceptions on play and development. Ethnography is based on the assumption that cultural beliefs, values and behaviors are learned and dynamic (Richards & Morse, 2007). However, there are many ways to define culture (Merriam, 1998; Richards & Morse, 2007) as it is an ambiguous and complicated concept (Cannella, 2002). Merriam (1998) emphasized the beliefs, values and attitudes that construct the behavior patterns of a specific group of people. Richards and Morse (2007) added that culture can also be defined as the perceptions and ways in which people view their world.

Ethnography field work allows the researcher to have an extended and direct engagement with the participants and to explore their beliefs and interactions in these settings throughout everyday activities (Bhatti, 1999; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Throughout this study I was in direct contact with all the participants, and learned about their interactions through the observations, and their perceptions from informal conversations as well as structured interviews. During this period of time I was deeply immersed in the daily lives of the families, in activities such as cooking, eating, cleaning, reading books, watching TV or other activities that took place during that time, such as watching the Olympic torch parade. Consistent with the ethnographic approach where the researcher studies the members of the cultural group directly (Richard & Morse, 2007),

this study took place in settings where the participants were conducting their daily activities.

The data in an ethnographic study are usually derived from a few sources such as observations and interviews (Richard & Morse, 2007). In this study the data were collected in two different settings, a drop-in centre and the homes of the participants using participant observations, calendar logs, interviews, and informal conversations as data collection methods. The observations aimed to capture the parents' and children's activities during their daily lives. The parents' voices were also captured through the interviews and the calendar logs.

Setting

Canada has one of the largest growing immigrant children populations in the world (Beiser, 1998). More specifically, in the lower mainland of British Columbia, there reside many populations of immigrant groups, especially from Asia. In British Columbia, immigrants from India are one of the largest groups alongside immigrants from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (BC Stats, 2001).

This research was conducted in a city located in the lower mainland of British Columbia, where many South Asian immigrants live. More specifically, it is one of the most diverse cities in Canada and has one of the largest growing populations of immigrants (BC Stats, 2008). According to the 2006 census (BC Stats, 2008) 38.3% of the population were immigrants and 7.4% of those immigrants arrived within the last five years. Thirty five percent of the total immigrant population was from India. The first part of the study took place in a family resource program in a neighborhood in which 48% of

the immigrant population was from India. Seventy percent of those whose mother tongue was not English speak Punjabi (BC Stats, 2005).

Procedures

Recruitment. The recruitment process began through a community resources organization that runs programs for immigrant and refugee families in the target community. Consultations were made with the manager regarding centres utilized by South Asian families. The manager suggested the drop-in centre which is an informal program for parents, grandparents, caregivers and children under the age of 6. The program emphasizes parent education and family support. Playgroups provide opportunities for children to socialize and make friends and partake in a number of activities including art, music and stories. A variety of toys are available and a snack is provided. The parents have access to community parenting resources. They learn about child development, early literacy, parent-child interactions, and the health and safety of the children. I contacted the director of the program who confirmed that the target population indeed participates in the program and she gave formal approval to recruit and conduct the research at the drop in centre.

Consent. Since the study had two phases, two separate consent letters were required for the parents to sign as well as a consent letter for the staff member who was interviewed.

Phase One. A recruitment poster (Appendix A) was placed in the centre a few weeks before the study informing the parents and caregivers that frequent the centre about the research. In addition, recruitment letters (Appendix B) were made available at the sign-in area of the centre and with the staff members so that parents and caregivers

could read them. I visited the centre with an assistant twice a week prior to the actual start of the study and spoke with potential participants. If the parents were interested, I reviewed the consent letter with them and obtained formal consent (Appendix C). A staff member from the centre who was fluent in both English and Punjabi helped to translate the letter and consent form for the parents when necessary, but most of the parents spoke and read English. As developmentally appropriate, the study was explained to the children as well. In the consent letter for Phase One of the study, there was also a section where the parents could indicate a willingness to be contacted for potential participation in Phase Two of the study. A staff member from the centre was interviewed as well (Appendix D).

Phase Two. In the consent letter for Phase One, parents had been asked if they had an interest in participating in Phase Two of the study. The criteria for selecting the families were: 1) their own interest in participating; 2) an examination of their relevant interactions in Phase One; 3) they spoke and understood English; 4) they had immigrated to Canada within the past six years; 5) for parallel construction it was necessary to recruit a family with a male child and a family with a female child. From the group that expressed interest and were eligible, two families were selected. A separate consent letter (Appendix E) was distributed to all four parents and the researcher reviewed and explained the letters to them prior to obtaining their signatures.

Confidentiality, privacy and ethics approval. The study was approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the University of British Columbia (Appendix F). As per these standards, the participants in this study were not identified by name in this document. Instead pseudonyms were used in the field notes of the observations and

names were removed from the calendar logs. Pseudonyms were also used in the transcriptions of the interviews. A list of participant names and contact information was kept separate from the interview transcripts. All study documents including the observations records, calendar logs, and transcripts from the interviews were identified only by a code number pseudonym and all computer files were password protected.

Participant observations. Participant observation can help to learn the perspectives of the population in the study since the researcher reflects on, and critically engages with his or her own participation (Tedlock, 2005). In participant observation the researcher is, to some extent, immersed in the daily activities of the people being studied (Smith, Rankin, & Berthrand, 2005). Participant observations in this study were conducted in both phases. In the drop-in centre, I became acquainted with the parents and the staff (and vice versa) before beginning the participant observations. During the observations I was immersed in the centre activities. In the second phase of the study conducted in the families' homes, I observed and took notes while the families were engaged in their day-to-day activities.

Participant observations also help the researcher to build trust relations between the participants and in some cases with other informants or stakeholders that could be helpful in recruiting or understanding a culture (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). In this study, the participant observations were indeed helpful to build trust relations between the participants and myself, as well as with the staff members in the centre who assisted in recruiting some of the families. During the observations at the centre I developed good relations with the families and the staff at the centre, which was helpful during the observations and later when I chose the families for the second phase.

Spending time with the families at their homes was also helpful in getting to better know them and their routines, and to build trust relations for the interviews.

Participant observation is typically a part of the data collection along with other field-based research strategies (Smith et al., 2005) such as interviews or focus groups. In this study, I conducted interviews with the parents from Phase Two and the staff member. The mothers from Phase Two also completed calendar logs. Participant observation can improve the planning and effectiveness of other methods which may be utilized, such as interviews, because it sensitizes the interviewer to the cultural relevance and appropriate behavior and questions during the interview (Mack et al., 2005). The participant observations helped in the present study for me to become familiar with the families and their routines before the interviews. I interviewed the parents about some occurrences which were recorded in the observations, in order to gain a broader understanding of the participants' activities and beliefs.

Calendar logs. I asked the parents to complete daily activity logs and to record what, where, and with whom the children were interacting. The log covered a one week period and parents were asked to fill in three different time slots on three different days. I gave the parents an orientation on the calendar log at the final home observation. They were asked to describe their activities with their children in an open-ended format. It was their decision what to record and the logs were later discussed in the Phase Two interviews.

Semi-structured interviews. The interview is a common and powerful method utilized in order to attempt to understand other people (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The interviews in the present study were in-depth semi-structured interviews, in order to give

the researcher flexibility. Typically the researcher has some general topics to explore in order to discern the participant's views, but usually the participant frames and structures the responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In the present study, I listed four broad open-ended topics to explore during the interviews. The interviews were conversational and many of the topics were addressed by the participants without me having to raise them. The calendar logs were also discussed in the interviews with the mothers as they explained the logs and the activities.

Participants

Phase One. The participants in this study were 13 parents, (12 mothers and one father), and their children who attended the drop-in centre regularly. The number of years of the mothers' stay in Canada varied from two to nineteen years, while the average was nine years living in Canada. The one father had lived in Canada since childhood.

While the research was initially intended for children ages 3-6, there were no children above the age of 4 at the centre, so the main focus of the observations were children 3-4 years of age. However, in some cases there were younger siblings who also took part in the centre activities. While all the observations concentrated on children ages 3-4, interactions of the children and the parents with the younger siblings were also recorded. Eleven boys and seven girls took part in Phase One. Eight boys were ages 3-4, and the remaining three were ages 1-2. Five girls were ages 3-4, while two girls were ages one and two.

Another participant was a staff member from the drop-in centre who belonged to the same cultural group being studied. The staff member has been in Canada for 30 years

and has a diploma as an early childhood educator. She has worked in early childhood education for the past 30 years and has been employed at the drop in centre for two years.

Phase Two. For Phase Two of the study, I selected a family of a boy (Jay) and a family of a girl (Dalbir), for follow up observations in other environments and conducted interviews with the parents.

Jay's Family. The participants were Jay, a 3 year old boy, Manjit, his younger sister who was one year old, and his mother and father who were in their late twenties. The mother emigrated from Punjab and has lived in Canada for five years and worked occasionally as an on-call resident care aide for seniors. The father has lived in Canada for 14 years and worked independently and was present during one observation.

Dalbir's Family. The participants were Dalbir, a 3 year old girl, Amar, her brother who was one year old and her mother and father who were in their mid thirties. The mother and father have been in Canada for two years. Similar to Jay's mother, the mother also had a professional background related to medicine (a pharmacist). The mother was on maternity leave at the time of the observations, but was taking training courses to become a triage nurse. The father was not working due to an injury and was home most of the time during the observations.

Data Collection

Overview. The data were collected in two different settings, the centre and the families' homes. In addition, the data were gathered through: observations, interviews both with a staff member at the centre and with all the parents and the calendar log that was filled in by the mothers. Each phase started with a pilot study.

Phase One: Centre-based. Phase One took place at the drop-in centre and consisted of a pilot study, observations of 13 parents and their children and an interview with a staff member from the centre who belonged to same cultural group as the parents who participated in the study.

Phase One: Pilot. Prior to the start of the formal data collection, a two week pilot study was conducted. The purpose of the pilot study was to familiarize myself and the assistant with the environment, the families in the centre and the staff. During this period, the assistant and I went to the centre, but did not write notes during the activity time. Recruitment began and consent letters were collected. I learned the routines at the centre, the different interactions of people and noted a few key points that I believed needed to be further examined while conducting the observations. As a result of the pilot study, I created a template to assist with the Phase One observations (Appendix G). The points that were recorded in this document were the type of activity, physical interaction and proximity between the parent and child, verbal exchanges between the parent and child, and the actions of the parent and the child.

Phase One: Observations. Observations were conducted twice a week over a period of four weeks. Each one of the parents and their child or children who were present at the centre while we were there, were observed for ten minutes. During the time of the first observation, I asked the parents a few background questions such as how many years they had been in Canada and the age of the child. Most parents and their children were observed three to four times and were observed at least once by myself and at least once by the assistant.

Interview with a staff member. After the data from the observations at the centre were coded and preliminary themes were created, I interviewed the staff member from the centre who belonged to the same cultural group as the participants. The preliminary findings from Phase One were discussed with her in order to obtain another perspective. The staff member was knowledgeable about the traditions of the cultural group and described what she thought were their beliefs regarding child rearing, play and education. The interview with her also contributed to my understanding of the educational philosophy of the drop-in centre, the decision making process and other insights concerning the drop-in centre.

Phase One: Memos. After each visit to the centre as well as after the interview with the staff member, I wrote a short memo reflecting on my experiences and feelings during the time at the centre.

Phase Two: Family-based. After completing the Phase One observations and conducting a preliminary data analysis, I selected two families, using the criteria presented earlier, for participation in the Phase Two study. Phase Two included observations in natural environments, the calendar logs and semi-structured interviews with the mothers and the fathers.

Phase Two: Pilot. Prior to starting the formal observations with the families, I returned to the centre to reconnect with the families selected as several weeks had passed since the end of the Phase One study. The purpose of these meetings were to get to know the mothers and children better, to facilitate their comfort level with me and to obtain final consent for Phase Two participation. During the meetings with the families at the centre I also observed the interactions between the mother and the children.

After the visit with the families at the centre, I conducted a pilot visit to the homes of the two participant families. The purpose of these visits was to become familiar with the environment and for the family to become more comfortable with my presence in their home. The visits were also beneficial to see the organization of the homes and toys and to identify other people who lived there.

Phase Two: Observations. Four, two hour observations were conducted in the home of each participant family during this phase. The observations took place on different days and at different times of the day and I kept field notes throughout the observations, recording what happened during the visit. I also noted the organization of the house, the configuration of the physical space, where the children played and the location of the toys. I also paid attention to changes in the organization of the house from one visit to another (e.g.: furniture being moved or a new toy had appeared). Because TV viewing took a large part of the children's time, I noted what programs were on, who was watching and for how long and who turned the television on and off. Although I explained to the parents that the observation could take place in any location where they spend time with their children, all of the meetings took place in the families' home at the choosing of the family. However, I also spent time with the families in their cars and with one family in the front yard and driveway.

Phase Two: Calendar logs. I asked the parents to complete a calendar log (Appendix H) on three different days, during three different times of their choice, and to describe their activities during these periods. The parents were asked to write who participated in the activities, where the activities took place, and what happened during the activities. The logs had several purposes. It served as additional data where the

parents' voices were heard, beyond the observations which were from my perspective. The logs also gave me insight as to what was happening when I was not present, and at other times of the day. Because the participant observations were conducted at the homes, the log provided more information on activities occurring outside the home in other locations such as the playground, the temple and during visits to relatives' homes. This information provided a broader picture of the families' lives and of other settings where the children spent their time. The logs added further validity to the observations. I compared what the mothers wrote in the logs to my own observations, and examined similarities and differences. The logs also served to prepare the mothers for the interviews by directing their thoughts to the activities that they do with their children. By completing the logs before the interviews the mothers reflected in advance on the type of activities they were engaged in with their children.

Both mothers and fathers were given the option to complete the logs, but only the mothers completed them. The mothers indicated they believed that the fathers did not spend enough time with the children in order to accurately complete the logs. The logs were completed in the two week period between the last observations and the interviews. I called the families during this period to determine if they had questions regarding the logs.

Phase Two: Semi-structured interviews. Phase Two was concluded with semi-structured interviews conducted separately with all four parents. Topics that were covered in the interviews included the parents' definitions of play, the place of play in the child's life and development, why children play and differences in growth and play between India and Canada as well as their participation in the drop-in centre (Appendix I). I asked

the parents for their views about specific topics that arose from the observations at their homes, such as activities that the children were doing or songs from the centre they sang at home. The logs were also discussed in the interviews. The mothers described what they wrote and I asked questions in order to clarify and try to determine which activities from the logs the mothers identified as play activities. Thus, the logs and the interview helped to capture a broader picture of the families' lives.

Phase Two: Informal conversation with parents. During the observations at the families' home I held several informal conversations with the parents. When the parents made remarks that were relevant to the research, I recorded those comments in a separate record to document another source of information from the parents' voices.

Phase Two: Memos. After each visit to the families' homes, as well as after the interviews, I wrote a short reflection on my experience during that visit. In the memos I reflected on what I felt and learned during the observations or interviews.

Connections between Phase One and Phase Two. The purpose of Phase One was to gain a broader understanding regarding the culture being investigated and the phenomena in question, parent-child play interactions. Initiating the research in a place where parents and children come to interact and play was very helpful in capturing what was happening during those interactions. In addition, after coding and analyzing the data from the Phase One observations, I developed a better understanding of the culture, which gave me many ideas of what to further explore while conducting more in-depth observations with the families.

The Phase One study also facilitated the selection of the two families for Phase Two. Based on the observations at the centre I had greater knowledge about each parent

and child. Observing the families in advance and getting to know them assisted in the family selection and it enabled me to gain the trust of the families selected for Phase Two. Also, the families attended the centre activities regularly and they thought highly of the program and staff. The fact that they were introduced to me through the centre and that the staff approved of the study assisted in building trust relations with the families.

The combination of collecting data from both the centre with a larger number of families participating, and in-depth data from the observations in the families' homes and interviews with the parents strengthen this study and its validity. It adds another level of data to analyze and to compare parents' actions and beliefs. Observing the children in another environment other than their homes, added to my understanding of the children's development and interactions with peers and other adults.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is critical in an ethnographic study. The researcher cannot isolate him or herself from the research, findings and interpretation (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). There are some advantages of being an outsider to the cultural group being studied, since the beliefs, values, practices and behaviors are new to the researcher and he or she might be more objective (Richards & Morse, 2007). I had lived in Canada for four years but was born and raised in Israel, a milieu that is different both from the South Asian and the Canadian cultural contexts that were both new to me on some levels. In this study I was an outsider to the cultural group under investigation and also an outsider to the Canadian context. Being from outside of the group contributed to the research in this case because I did not approach it thinking I knew or understood one cultural perspective better than the other. I was always interested in immigrants and

cultural differences and before starting the study I read about the cultural group, but was eager to learn more from the participants of this study. I believe that the parents saw me as someone who had an interest in their culture, and therefore were happy to participate, in order for me and others to learn more about their culture. In this study, the voices of the participants were heard as they were given the opportunity to freely discuss their perceptions and values.

While conducting the observations at the families' homes and while conversing with the parents, I sensed that the fact that they knew that I, like them, was new to the Canadian culture and society helped to build acceptance and trust. The fact that we had the immigrant experience in common, and we shared an effort to get to know the new culture, different accent and experiences with the immigration procedures, helped the participants to open up and share their thoughts and beliefs as well as their difficulties and struggles in the new culture.

Even though the families and I had this in common, I feel that my experiences as an "immigrant" in Canada were also different than that of those families. I had moved to Vancouver in order for me and my husband to complete graduate studies in Canada. I never thought of myself as an immigrant per se, maybe because when we left we thought it was for a temporary stay in Canada, to complete our degrees and that eventually we will go back. Our experiences in the new country were very positive and we learned to love our new city and environment very quickly. Over time, we decided that we might want to stay in Canada permanently, but it was not the purpose when we first arrived.

When I moved to Vancouver I was surprised by how multicultural the city was. Coming from Israel, also an immigrants' nation, I was curious by the differences in

attitudes to immigrant groups between Israel and Canada. Before and during my studies I also worked in early childhood preschools in Vancouver and participated in drop-in centres, similar to the one in the study, while I worked as a caregiver. As expected, the preschools and drop-in centres were diverse with many different culture groups. While working with the children and conversing with the teachers I realized that the area of play is also affected by cultural differences. It seemed to me that often the South-Asian group was misunderstood by the teachers, which caused frustration for both the families and the teachers.

My background in working in multicultural preschools and drop-in centres and being a new immigrant to Canada myself, contributed to both my relations with the parents and children as well as with the staff members in the drop-in centre. I was able to help out the staff members occasionally in the drop-in centre and to assist the parents and children. I connected easily with the children and quickly turned from a stranger to a friendly person. The parents were open to sharing with me their perceptions of play and development as well as other aspects of their lives. My background and experiences helped to form my understanding of the parents' philosophy as well as the centre's philosophy. I saw how different approaches to play were part of a cultural context and also played a role in trying to integrate in the new society.

Data Analysis

Coding was the first step in the data analysis, and was used in the process of taking raw data and making it into conceptual meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Coding helped to organize the different data sources and to discover patterns (Auerbach &

Silverstein, 2003). Since the data for this research were collected in two phases, there were also two phases of coding.

First I coded the observations from the drop-in centre. The observation form was a table which already contained a few categories: type of activity, physical interaction and proximity, verbal exchange between the child and parent, what the parent was doing and what the child was doing. I combined all the different observation sets according to these categories. First I labeled the items from the observations. For example: cars, dolls, running, hugging and so on. After labeling and reading the data a few times I started coding by grouping the different labels into larger categories, for example playing with parents, child or sibling were grouped into 'playing partners'. Calling mom, pulling her leg or hand or sitting close to her while she talked were grouped into 'seeking parents' attention'. Examples of a few codes were: leader of activity (child/parent), activities chosen (what type of activities were chosen by children and what type by parents), parents' role modeling, educational focus, use of English in play, playing partners (who the child mostly was playing with: parents, peer, sibling, alone), parents' involvement, (parents spending time with their children or socializing with other parents at the time of the activity) and seeking parents' attention (if the children were trying to get their parents' attention and how).

I was specifically looking to see what were the main play activities chosen by the children and parents and for this I used the word count strategy focusing only on when the child or parent chose a specific activity. I counted the occurrences of the activities chosen by children and parents, also known as frequency distribution. This helped to discover the themes in the observations across the different participants (Ryan & Bernard,

2005). For example, the children chose to play in the pretend play area with tools and kitchen items, with cars and trucks and with paint activities. I also counted the activities that the parents chose. The parents chose to play with their children in art activities, with alphabet toys, toys with numbers, and play dough or sparkly dough.

The interview with the staff member was conducted a few months after the observations and the analysis of the data. One of the goals of the interview was to discuss with the staff member the preliminary findings. The staff interview introduced an additional perspective from a member of the same cultural group, who was well acquainted with the group.

After the initial coding and the word count process I discerned several themes by grouping the different codes. I was looking for repeating patterns that had commonalities (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). I identified two main patterns from the parents' activities (directing activities and socializing parents) and I then grouped the children's activities according to these patterns. I looked at which activities the children did with their parents, who chose these activities and what they did while their mothers were socializing. This was also helpful in the second part of the research with the families, since I already had a broader picture of parents and children's play interactions within this cultural group.

Coding was used also for the second phase of the study, for the observations, calendar logs, and interviews. There are a few different methods of coding. One is open coding where the researcher provides the code name and basically creates a new code. Another way is in-vivo coding which involves creating concepts using the actual words of the participants and using those words as codes. The terms of the codes are derived from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the second part of the study, I used both open

coding and in-vivo coding. Examples of a few open codes from the observations, logs and interviews are: songs and phrases from the centre, TV viewing, trying to include parents in the play, imitating parents, suggestions from the parents, climbing on furniture, educational play, the appropriate age for playing, play in India and so on. I grouped the different codes into themes, for example: climbing on furniture, playing with coins, and playing with DVD boxes were grouped into the theme 'non-toy play'. In-vivo coding was drawn mostly from the interviews, for example statements of the parents regarding differences between Canada and India.

Participants also use metaphors and similes to describe events or emotions. These metaphors and similes can help to understand the events and experiences of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, one of the fathers used a metaphor of a chicken to compare child rearing in India and in Canada: "kid is like a chicken. There are two kind of chicken..."

Then, I found commonalities and identified themes as well as sub-theme categories. For example, songs, phrases and routines from the centre were grouped into the theme "the importance of the centre". This theme consisted of sub-themes such as: incorporating elements from the centre at home, school readiness, a place to meet other children, and the role of the mother at the centre.

I used the ATLAS qualitative analysis software analysis (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2009) to organize and store the data. The observations notes and the transcribed interviews were entered into the software. I coded the data and grouped the different codes into main themes by using the software. I created lists of

codes with the different places it appeared in the text, and list of the themes with the codes under them. It was helpful in organizing the data in the different codes and themes.

Triangulation and the Validity of the Study

Triangulation is the use of multiple methods, data sources and researchers to increase the validity of the findings (Mathison, 1988). The data in ethnographic studies usually consist of a few types of data, and the process of data collection usually happens in a few phases (Richard & Morse, 2007). The current research had two main phases and a few data collection strategies. It is also beneficial to have more than one researcher and several methods of data collection (Freeman, deMarris, Preissle, Roulston, & Pierre, 2007). The data for this study was collected from the observations at the drop-in centre and at the homes, the calendar logs, the interviews and informal conversation.

Phase One was conducted in a drop-in centre and observations were conducted by two observers and each family was observed at least once by each observer. It is similar to using investigator triangulation, which means using more than one investigator while conducting a research, which adds to the validity of the research and its findings (Mathison, 1988). After the data was coded and the main themes were identified I met with the second observer to discuss her input on the observations. I asked her to tell me what she thought was important from what we observed. Then, I presented her with my themes and we discussed each one of them and largely agreed on the main findings.

After the completion of the preliminary findings of Phase One, I returned to the centre to interview the staff member and to discuss the main findings with her. The staff member interview was another level of data and introduced an additional perspective from a member of the same cultural group, who was well acquainted with the group.

In both phases the environment was natural to the participants, and they were observed during their everyday activities. In Phase Two I observed two families, interviewed the parents and collected the calendar logs. As mentioned before, it is highly important to collect data from several sources. The triangulation of the different data sources helped me to see if there were differences and similarities between what the parents thought of play, as indicated in the interviews, and how they interacted with the children according to the observations and the calendar logs. I compared between actions that I observed and between statements made by the parents. It helped to bridge the two research questions, as to how parents interact with their children's play activities and what they think about them.

All the data was reviewed by a peer reviewer to check the interpretations of the data and to control for researcher bias. The peer reviewer read all the data and the findings. She made comments and raised questions and we met a few times to discuss her questions and to clarify areas of uncertainty. I addressed her comments and question where I thought it was appropriate.

Chapter IV: Findings

The findings chapter is divided into three main sections: the findings from Phase One observations and the staff member interview; findings from Phase Two observations, interviews, calendar logs and informal conversations with the parents; and connections between the findings of the two phases.

Parent-Child Play Interactions at the Drop-in Centre

Overview of the program. Phase One was conducted at a family drop-in centre located in the lower mainland of British Columbia. The program operated four days a week for two and a half hours of activity time and was open to children up to the age of six, parents, grandparents and other childcare providers. The parents/caregivers were required to stay at the centre during the activity time. The centre had a capacity of 50 people each day and occasionally the centre was filled to capacity. The majority of the participants were South Asian and most of the mothers were dressed in traditional clothing (colorful saris), and many of the boys wore turbans. One of the staff members spoke Punjabi and she often communicated with the parents in that language.

The day began with one hour and forty five minutes of “learning through play” activities followed by clean up and washing hands, and sitting down for a snack provided by the centre. Occasionally the parents contributed to the snack, especially when celebrating a child’s birthday. Snack was followed by story time, when a staff member put out books, in the English language only, in a basket on the carpet and parents and children read or looked at a book together. The day concluded with circle time, led by one of the staff members who usually read a book and then sang songs. The parents and

children sat together on the carpet during circle time and before going home the children got a stamp on their hand from the staff member.

The activities took place in one large space with different areas such as tables with puzzles, electronic alphabet toys, play dough or sparkle dough and another table was devoted to art activities which changed every day. The baby area was in a corner of the room and laid out on a carpet were toys designed for infants. In the car area, there were many cars and trucks in addition to a road carpet and a plastic Fisher Price garage. In a different corner there was a pretend kitchen with an oven, table, dishes and pretend food as well as play tools such as a hammer and a drill. A small area was devoted to dress-up with items such as princesses' dresses. There were only a few dolls in the centre. Two staff members were present at each session and they set up the room in advance, put toys on the tables, arranged the pretend play area, prepared an art activity and snack and one of them led the circle. They also answered parents' questions, and provided more supplies as necessary.

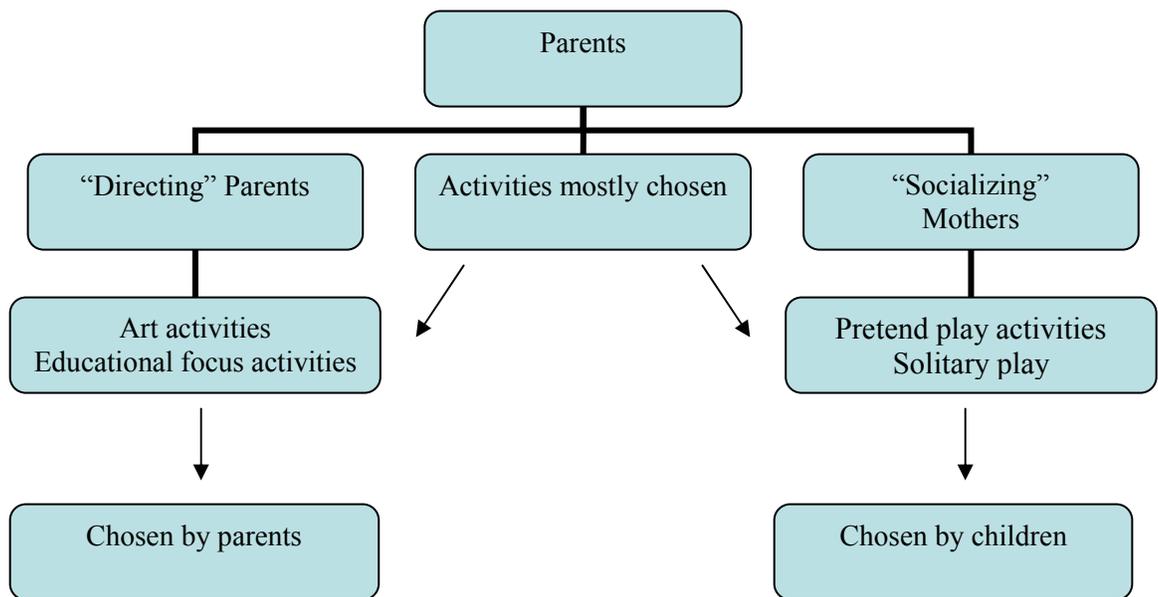
According to the staff member who was interviewed, the program supported "learning through play", which means encouraging parents to interact with the children in a way that the children learn while playing. The staff member reported that many South Asian parents were not aware of the importance of play in the child's life and focused on more traditional educational activities. At the centre, the staff encouraged the parents to teach the children the ABC's by singing a song or playing games.

Two groups of parents, play interactions and activities. The parents at the Drop-In Centre either stayed physically close to their children for the majority of their time at the centre, engaged in many activities together, and directed their children's

activities, or they spent most of their time socializing with other mothers, and in general did not stay close or interact with the children during play activities. The one father observed was involved in his children’s activities.

Children with parents who directed their activities played with educational toys and participated in structured art activities as selected by the parents. There were fewer play interactions between the children and mothers who belonged to the socializing group of mothers. These children were more involved in pretend play activities such as playing with tools or the kitchen area, and mostly in solitary play. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Findings from the Drop-in Centre



“Directing” parents group. These parents stayed physically close to their children and interacted with their children in art activities, numbers and Alphabet toys, and

play/sparkly dough and the activities were mostly chosen by the parents. The most common activity was the structured art activity where there were certain rules to follow to create something, such as a Christmas ornament, preparing a sculpture, gluing a snowman and decorating it, or making necklaces and so forth. In some cases the parents were highly engaged in the art activity and would complete most of the project by themselves. Occasionally parents called the children away from a certain activity to take them into the art area. In most cases the children were not fully engaged in the art activities and sometimes tried to change the activity when the parent was not paying attention.

Parents frequently chose alphabet or number toys. The parents sat with the child and reviewed the numbers and the English alphabet, by using a toy that had either numbers, letters or colors. Sometimes in the art area parents asked their children to write down numbers or letters. Even when parents spoke Punjabi at the centre there were certain words that were said in English such as numbers, letters and colors. The toys and books at the centre were in the English language and there were no toys with Punjabi scripts. The staff member indicated that South Asian families put an emphasis on educational activities as they believe that children need to know the alphabet and numbers before they start school. As a result some of the children lack social skills because the parents pay more attention to educational activities and less to social ones:

I believe they are lacking some of the social skills when they go to school to grade one. When they go to kindergarten, they know ABC and write ABC, but their social skills are lower level, that's what teachers are

telling us, and they [the children] cannot express their feelings, and so they have challenging behavior in schools... (Staff member, May 2010).

When the parents modeled for the children it was mostly during art or play dough activities. The parents mostly showed the children how to do something like holding a brush, or how to make something during art activity or from play dough like a sculpture of a snowman. Parents usually showed the children how to do something without much explanation or did the activity by themselves while the child was watching. For example, during play dough or sparkly dough activities the parents made shapes with a shape maker, and showed the children how to use the shape cutters or the roller pin. The children in most cases looked interested in the activity, but were mostly watching the parents. Occasionally the parents continued playing with the dough while the child moved on to a different activity.

“Socializing” mothers group. Mothers in this group spent most of their time at the centre talking to other mothers, especially about child rearing. The children often tried to get their mothers’ attention by calling them, approaching them with toys while they were talking, standing between mothers, pulling at their hands or by sitting or playing close to their mothers. The staff member was also aware of the difference between the two groups of parents and she explained that the centre is almost the only opportunity that mothers have a chance to socialize with each other and to speak about their children. She said that sometimes mothers who mostly socialize are reminded to interact with their children or they tell the children to ask their mothers to play with them: “...so sometime we do need to remind them that this is your time to socialize but this is also the time for

you to play with your children, so sometime we tell and they don't mind" (Staff member, May 2010).

Children of the mothers from this group often chose the pretend play area and used plastic tools, such as a hammer or a drill or kitchen items, such as the plastic oven, setting the table and arranging the plastic food and fruit. Another common activity was playing with cars, trucks, the garage and the road carpet. They made the cars move on the floor, slid the cars down the garage toy ramp, or used the road carpet as a road.

If the children chose art activities on their own, they mostly selected activities that involved paint. While parents were highly involved in other art activities, children mostly did paint activities by themselves. Sometimes the parents put a smock on the child beforehand or during the activity or complimented the child by saying that it was a nice picture. The children also played with the water table, pouring water from one cup to another; the parents stood on the side and watched or talked with other parents in the area.

In some cases when the mothers were talking, the children picked an activity and played alone, even when there were other children around them doing the same activity. For example, a few children stood around the water table, but each of them played alone pouring water from one cup to another and there were no verbal or physical exchanges between the children. When the children did play by themselves they played with cars, the water table, tools, an iron, vacuum and kitchen items. The staff member assumed that children sometimes feel overwhelmed at the centre because there were so many children and adults around and that was the reason they preferred to be by themselves: "...and sometime its very overwhelming for the child, they just like to sit down.... sometime we have 20-30 kids here, they cannot be playing with everyone. I will sit in one corner, and I

am fine” (Staff member, May 2010). The staff member also reported that most families that come to the centre regularly do not interact with each other outside of the centre.

Summary of Phase One findings. The type of play and the interactions between the parents and children were different across the two groups of parents. The parents and children from the first group, the directed parents, mostly interacted through educational play and structured art activities and the activities were mainly chosen by the parents. In the second group, the socializing mothers, parents interacted less with their children in play activities. Children chose their own activities and were mostly involved in pretend play and played generally by themselves, occasionally with other children and rarely with their parents.

Considering the differences in the activities which were chosen respectively by the parents and by the children, it is possible that the parents chose activities that were more interesting to them or they thought were more important. The children chose activities that were appropriate for their age and their developmental level. According to the play theories of Piaget (1962) and Smilansky (1968), 3- 4 year old children are mostly engaged in pretend play and therefore it is not surprising that these were the activities the children most often selected. As for solitary play, the centre’s philosophy of the importance of learning through play and the strong emphasis on that might have played a role. That is because the centre may have influenced the parents to emphasize and devote their time at the centre to these types of activities and less to the importance of peer interaction, sharing toys or group play. Therefore, when not playing with their parents children played mostly alone and not with other children.

Parent-Child Play Interactions at Home

Jay's family. Jay, a 3 year old boy, lived with his two parents and a one year old sister, Manjit, in a detached house in the community. In the basement apartment of their home lived another family that emigrated from Punjab and they had a five year old daughter, Livroop. Jay spent a lot of his time with Livroop as she was often upstairs or he was downstairs in her apartment. Jay's mother had been in Canada for 5 years, his father for 14 years and the two children were both born in Canada. Other than Jay, Manjit and their mother, Livroop was often present and her mother and grandparents were occasionally present. Jay and Manjit's father worked outside of the home every day and usually did not return home until the late afternoon. The mother worked occasionally during the day or the night as an on-call resident care aide for seniors.

Jay spent most of his time in the living room, which had three sofas at one end of the room and an open space on the other side of the room. The TV was located at the far end of the room. Jay's toys were in a cupboard under the TV and in drawers near the TV. The toys he had included: cars, action figures, duplo blocks, balls, puzzles, beads and a few electronic alphabet toys. A door connecting the kitchen to the living room was always open so the children could go freely between the living room, kitchen and the rest of the rooms. Jay spent much of his time running between the living room, kitchen and the rest of the house, sometimes by himself and occasionally with Livroop. The house had three additional rooms, the parents' bedroom, the children's room where both children slept and where they had a few toys, and a third room which was used as a small temple. Most of the activities took place both in the living room or the kitchen, and

occasionally in the basement where Livroop lived. Jay rarely went to his room or brought toys from there.

Jay often played with cars and trucks and he spent time running around the house. He also climbed the furniture, jumped from one sofa to the other or climbed on top of a table or an unused TV which stood in the corner of the room. Livroop and Jay spent a lot of time together, running after each other or playing with cars or dolls. TV viewing was also a big part of Jay's life. He usually turned on the TV but sometimes his mother turned it on or asked him if he wanted to watch TV. Jay watched cartoon programs such as: "Sponge Bob" or "Kids vs. Kat" and most of the time the TV was on in the background while Jay, Livroop and Manjit were playing in the living room. Jay rarely sat for longer than five minutes to watch TV without doing something else.

Jay's mother and her children visited the drop-in centre regularly twice a week. They also went to the park, especially on nice days. The mothers usually fed the children in the living room while they were playing. Jay was usually playing or running around, and would come to his mother to eat a bite and then continue playing. Manjit was fed, breastfed or changed usually in the living room. Sometimes when the mother changed her diaper she sang to her either in English or Punjabi and occasionally Jay and Livroop joined in. The mother would pick up Manjit frequently and carry her around the house. The mother spent time in the kitchen preparing food, chai tea or cleaning, while the children were in the living room or the kitchen.

Jay's mother also played with him at home with puzzles or alphabet toys. She often suggested activities to Jay, most often looking at books, electronic alphabet toys or blocks. The mother and Jay read books together during the day and before going to sleep. The

father worked full time, six days a week. He devoted Sunday to his family and did activities such as shopping, going out to eat or playing ball with his son in the back yard.

Dalbir's family. Dalbir, a 3 year old girl, lived with her two parents and her one year old brother, Amar, in a detached house. Dalbir's parents have been in Canada two years and Dalbir was born in India and arrived in Canada when she was 10 months old while her brother Amar was born in Canada. During this study Dalbir's mother was on maternity leave, however she was taking some courses in order for her degree to be recognized in Canada and to become a triage nurse. The father was not working at the time since he was recovering from a hand injury. Occasionally a neighbor or a friend who lived in the house were present, but usually for no longer than ten minutes.

Similar to Jay, Dalbir spent most of the time in the living room which had three sofas and a TV in the corner, and most of her toys were under and near the TV in a cardboard box and in a small cupboard. Her toys included dolls, pretend kitchen items, a computer toy, a push-on car and a singing caterpillar. The kitchen was connected to the living room and there were no doors or barriers between them. Dalbir and Amar slept in the same room as the parents and another room was rented to a family friend. Most of the activities during the observations took place in the living room and the kitchen and on one occasion, Dalbir played in the driveway near the house.

Dalbir often played with dolls and pretended she was cooking with real or pretend toys. She also frequently played with a measuring tape, coins, blankets and a push-on car. Both parents were usually around when Dalbir played but did not participate in her play. She sometimes tried to give them pretend food, or to measure their hands and arms with the measuring tape. The TV was on for at least part of the time during the observations.

The family did not have cable TV and Dalbir only watched DVD's of "Clifford". The TV and DVD were turned on either by Dalbir or one of her parents and the TV was usually on in the background while Dalbir was doing other activities.

Dalbir's mother was cooking much of the time and sometimes Dalbir helped by rolling dough. Usually the family members ate separately. The mother was still cooking while Dalbir ate, then the father ate and lastly when she was finished cooking, the mother also sat down to eat. The baby was fed either by the mother, father or a neighbor. The parents picked up the baby often and held him in their arms or cuddled him, and Dalbir and her mother hugged a lot as well. The mother sometimes sang songs to the baby, usually Roly Poly, a popular song from the centre, and also made the motions with her hands. Amar laughed and also tried to make the motions. Dalbir joined in the singing as well.

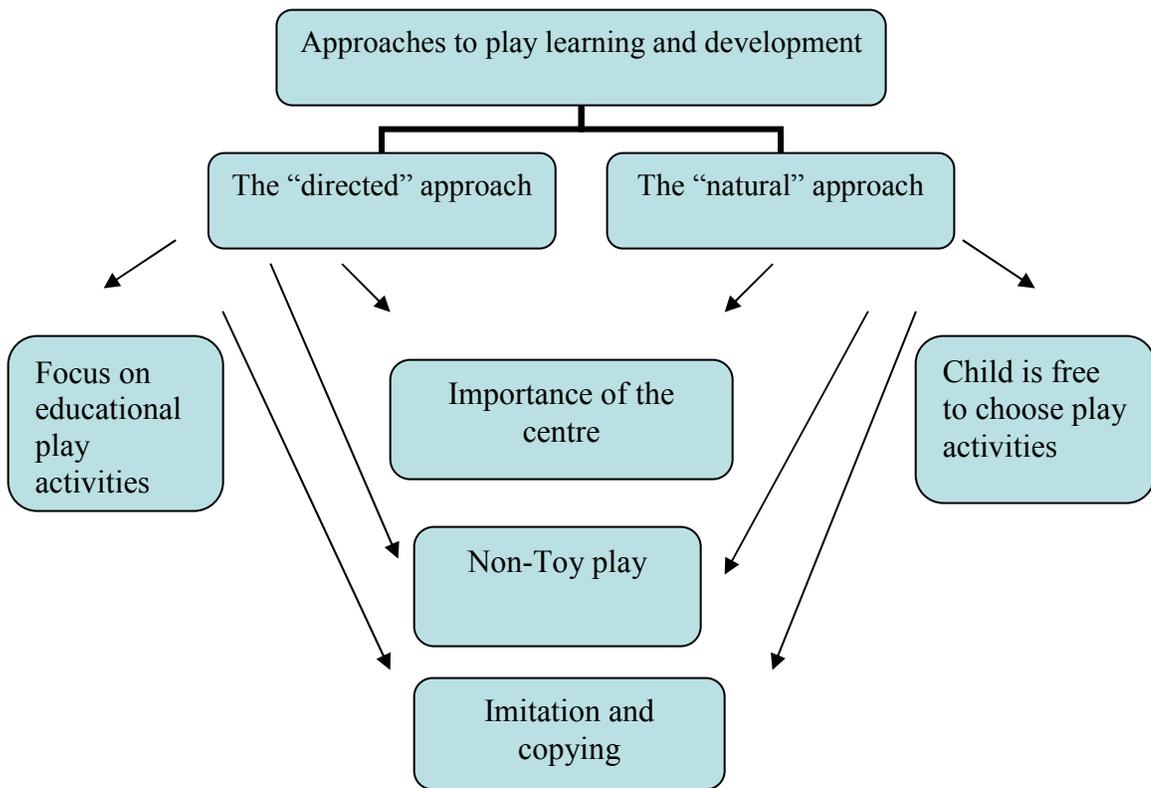
Dalbir's mother and her children went to the drop-in regularly, usually twice a week. Also, Dalbir's aunt (the father's sister) lived in the same city and Dalbir had a cousin who was a bit older than her. The mother and children visited there regularly and the children played together inside or outside in the cul-de-sac with other children from the neighborhood. The family also visited the temple regularly on Wednesday evenings usually with the children. The father occasionally took Dalbir and his nephew to ride the skytrain, either to downtown or to the airport to see the airplanes. The parents sometimes took their children to a nearby park.

The "directed" approach and the "natural" approach to play interactions.

The findings suggested that the two families held different approaches to play, learning and development. While in Jay's family educational play was observed more than in

Dalbir’s family, as her parents did not interact much in play activities with their daughter. The sub-themes include the importance of the drop-in centre, non-toy play and imitating and copying (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: Approaches to Play Learning and Development



Jay’s family, and especially his mother, supported educational play and focused on activities such as alphabet toys and labeling items such as furniture in the house or things seen outside from the window. The alphabet toys were either electronic, where the child pressed a certain letter and then pressed the picture or words that start with the same letter, or non-electronic toys, like puzzles with letters. The role of play in development

according to Jay's mother was mainly through educational toys that promoted cognitive development:

Because for me I like the educational toys, because now I stopped to bring cars, now I bring educational toys...Educational toys means 1,2,3 there's a puzzle right, you can pick, then I have computers, the small toy computers then he know ABC he know 1 to 10, he know the coloring (Jay's Mother, April, 2010).

Jay had a few toys with letters and numbers and his mother frequently gave him those toys and encouraged him to play with them. Sometimes she asked him to play with a certain toy but did not stay with him while he played. On other occasions she sat with him while they reviewed the letters and words that start with those letters or asked him to identify items or people in the house (e.g. she would point at a chair and ask him what it was, or at a person and ask him for the person's name). Jay's mother indicated that puzzles and reading are the activities they mostly do together: "mostly I play with him puzzles and then reading, and they have one blackboard and usually night time before he go to bed, we have blackboard and I like to play with them with stickers" (Jay's Mother, April 2010). In the calendar log she also wrote that she spent time with him reading books.

Dalbir's parents never interfered while their children were playing and as a result rarely initiated play activities. They supported a "natural" approach to play and indicated that they would not choose the activities for the children, and that learning occurs naturally through their play because they have the freedom to play with what they want: "but if they are playing, I never say do this, don't do that, do that, no. They are free to do

anything, because they learn” (Dalbir’s Mother, April 2010). Play promoted social development, and through play children learn important social skills as well as being part of society: “I just want that she will become civilized, that she will learn how to behave in company of others” (Dalbir’s Father, April 2010).

The parents did not participate in Dalbir’s pretend play, even when Dalbir made efforts to include them, for example when giving them pretend food. Even though, Dalbir’s mother rarely initiated play activities with her daughter she was aware of what her daughter was doing and she often explained her daughter’s acts (e.g. explaining that she is pretending to make pizza).

The parents from both families indicated that children learn through their play and the mothers heard the phrase “learning through play” in the centre regularly, yet they interpreted it quite differently. As discussed before, Jay’s mother focused more on educational toys, while Dalbir’s parents believed that the learning would occur naturally and she never actively taught her daughter:

Today [at the centre] I was reading a book, that was alphabetical. I asked her, Dalbir what is this? She said “mommy, that is apple”. Then I asked her, then what is B? B is ball. I was surprised... I never teach her these things....But now I think they get it automatically, I never forced my kids to do anything, they do whatever they want (Dalbir’s Mother, April, 2010).

Even though Dalbir’s parents rarely initiated play activities and hardly ever participated even if Dalbir tried to include them in her play, they did other activities together. Dalbir often asked her mother if she could help her cook and

the mother agreed. The mother said that when she grew up in India her sisters and herself always helped their mother in the kitchen and thought of that as a fun activity and not as a chore and this is why she loves to cook until today. She believed her daughter was learning important life skills while helping her cook and it may even be a play activity for her daughter:

I need not to teach her, you need to do like this. She will adopt by chance, like during her play, she will adopt everything that I am doing. At present that is play, but by the time, that will be part of her life. She will learn how to do this (Dalbir's Mother, April 2010).

Values such as sharing and respect for others were highly important to the parents from both families and they believed that these values can be taught through play:

With the games they learn how to work like teamwork... So if there is one ball you can't have all the time, you cannot say this is mine. But with the giving other, it's like sharing stuff. The kid learn to share other stuff as well (Jay's Father, April 2010).

During one observation Dalbir was busy playing with a push-on car. Her mother explained that her brother received this car as a birthday present from his aunt just the day before. She said she does not separate between the children's toys and when Amar was born she told Dalbir that he is her brother, therefore what is his is hers and vice versa.

Despite those differences between the families there was agreement between the parents that age is a major factor in their children's play and development.

They reported that children play because they are at the appropriate age and that their play changes according to their age.

Importance of the drop-in centre. Both mothers visited the drop-in centre regularly with their children and the importance of the centre in their lives was expressed in several ways: incorporating elements from the centre at home, school readiness, a place to meet other children and the role of the mother at the centre.

At home, the mothers incorporated elements from the centre such as songs from the centre and the declarations of clean-up. The singing was mostly intended for the younger siblings: “She [Manjit] likes the kids’ song, right? Zoom Zoom she know I say to her Zoom Zoom she know, what a Zoom Zoom she likes, Johnny Johnny all the time she wants to play” (Jay’s Mother, April 2010). The term “clean-up” was used sometimes at home. At the centre the play activity always ended when one of the staff members indicated clean-up time and then everyone sang the “clean-up song” and started to clean up. Singing songs from the centre and using phrases from the centre indicated that the centre was important to both the children and the mothers. It was not just a place they attended but a place to learn songs and to utilize a similar routine from the centre at home.

Both mothers indicated that one of the main reasons they started going to the centre was the opportunity for their children to meet other children and to learn how to share and to get along with others:

One more reason why I went there because all the time he’s alone at home and then my daughter she’s born last year, right? And before he’s alone at home and then I feel he likes sharing over there he likes to play with kids, right, that’s the main thing (Jay’s Mother, April 2010).

Dalbir's mother provided a similar reason: "Because I want Dalbir to get out of this house. I want something for her to play, because at that time, she was alone, Amar was not born". (Dalbir Mother, April 2010).

The mothers were looking for a community and it was important for them that the children would have the opportunity to interact with other peers and adults. The mothers also celebrated their children's birthdays at the centre and it was important for them to do so with other children. In addition, in the centre, the children got to know other children and interacted with them and learned how to get along and to share: "I feel it's a good thing to go to centre, because the kids they like sharing and they know the kids, right? They know the name, this kid name and this kid name and they know to say hello, hi..." (Jay's Mother, April 2010). Even though it was important for the mothers that their children would interact with other children, during the centre observations Jay and Dalbir rarely played with other children. Their mothers did not encourage them to play with others or tried to introduce other children to them. The centre was also perceived as a place where language skills were improved: "So when we started going there, she started learning from other kids, like her co-age other kids. Now she can ask anything, she can speak English, she can ask everything" (Dalbir's Mother, April 2010).

The mothers did not speak of the centre as a place and an opportunity for them to meet other mothers or friends for themselves. Also, they did not mention that their children met friends from the centre outside of the centre. This corresponds to a similar statement from the interview with the staff member, in which she stated that most families do not interact with each other outside the centre.

The centre was also important for school readiness since it helped prepare their children for kindergarten. Even though the mothers held different approaches to play and learning they both wanted their children to be prepared for school and to have some routine in their lives:

We have story time, circle time, the kids learn, it's really good, it's good time, the kids know how to sit down in circle time because they have to go for kindergarten, they have to sit down, they have to listen to their teachers... (Jay's Mother, April 2010).

Dalbir's mother indicated that the centre is no different than preschool in the way it prepares the children for kindergarten:

I think that it is like preschool ... because they are providing all the facilities, they are teaching the kids same as they are learning in preschools, they paint, they draw, everything is the same as they do in preschool. ... They have 4 days in a week, and if I have there for 4 days in a week, I don't think I need to go, I don't need to pay for my kids' preschool, because she will be prepare for kindergarten in the centre (Dalbir's Mother, April 2010).

It is important to remember that the centre is a drop-in and not a preschool. The fact that Dalbir's mother did view it as a substitute to preschool could also reflect on why she did not interact with her daughter while being there. In preschool, the parents do not stay with their children, as opposed to a drop-in where they are required to stay. Also the staff at the centre did not work closely with the children like teachers at a preschool, as they were there mostly to supervise and to support the parents. However, both mothers

referred to the centre as a school or preschool and to the staff who work there as teachers. In the calendar log both mothers wrote that they went to school with their children referring to the drop-in centre. The fact that the mothers referred to the centre as a school and it was important for their children's school readiness emphasized how essential the place was to them.

The mothers' role in the centre was captured differently, while Jay's mother thought that she should interact with her child in education focus activities and Dalbir's mother thought she should allow her child independence. Jay's mother belonged to the group of mothers who directed their children's activities at the centre and followed their children closely, while Dalbir's mother belonged to the group of the socializing mothers and did not necessarily stay physically close to her daughter at the centre. Jay's mother explained:

...just, for example if I go with them to the centre, if I can't play with them then I just talk with other ladies, then it's not really a good thing because this is a drop-in, right, we have to play, we have to see what their development going through, right, what they like this is, what they don't like... we can learn their choice too (Jay's Mother, April 2010).

Jay's mother might have been more influenced by the philosophy of the centre and its support in learning through play. Dalbir's mother explained why she thought it was important to keep a distance from the children during the activities at the centre: "...like if you want to make a habit of your kid to keep them separate from you, because when

he's going kindergarten then he needs to, he or she needs to separate from the parents” (Dalbir's Mother, April 2010).

The centre was a place where Jay's mother could learn which toys her son preferred and then try to acquire the same toys for home: “...when I saw something then I just wanted to bring it home too, because I saw the puzzle, I saw my kids are playing with puzzles then I bring puzzle at home” (Jay' Mother, April 2010). On the other hand, Dalbir's mother was happy that there were toys in the centre that they do not have at home: “...like we are newcomers, we cannot afford bunch of toys ...but she is enjoying every type of toy over there, so I need not to buy those toys for her, that is in my budget” (Dalbir's Mother, April 2010). The way the mothers perceived their role in the centre influenced the interactions between them and their children as to whether to interact with the child or give the child more freedom.

Non-toy play. The meaning of non-toy play is when the children used objects that were not purposely defined as toys such as bowls, furniture, coins and cardboard boxes. Both children were highly engaged in playing with items that were not defined as toys. Jay frequently climbed the furniture, especially the sofas and a big unused TV which stood in the corner of the room. Occasionally he played with a blanket, by hiding himself underneath it or pretending to be Spiderman. Dalbir also climbed the furniture and played with many objects she found in the kitchen such as bowls, jugs, and tongs. She also used a measuring tape by trying to measure different items including her parents' hands and arms. She had a collection of coins and frequently poured them out, and arranged them according to size or counted them. Both mothers indicated in the interviews that they

were aware that the children like to play with objects which are not defined as toys. Dalbir's mother also indicated that she purposely arranged her kitchen accordingly:

[Amar] play with the buckets, they are empty buckets, like these bowls. Everything I stored in this floor cabinets. Dalbir was also doing this when she was his age ... so I put all the plastic ones in the lower ones, so that if he wants to play, he can play, nothing can hurt him (Dalbir's Mother, April 2010).

The parents stated that when they were growing up in India they often played with items that they made like cotton dolls and with sticks, bowls and mud. Playing with non-toy items was a major part of their children's activities and the mothers were aware of that and they encouraged this type of play by arranging the kitchen and intentionally supplying the children with items from the kitchen to play with. Jay's mother, who maintained a more directed approach to play, also indicated that her son played frequently with objects in the house and she encouraged it.

Imitation and copying. Dalbir was highly engaged in pretend play and her parents often commented that she was copying them. Her most common pretend play activity was cooking. Her mother was often cooking and sometimes she played at cooking, while her mother was a few meters from her actually cooking in the kitchen. During one observation the mother was not present when I arrived. Dalbir immediately went to the kitchen and pretended to pour from a jar to a cup and offer it to me. The father explained to that she was imitating her mother, because the mother always offered drinks to visitors. In the interview he said:

...following the footsteps of their parents. It's a way of hospitality you know back in our India. In our culture. Whenever somebody visit us. We are even known for our hospitality even around the world. We are famous for this. So I., she just learning. Copying from her parents (Dalbir's Father, April 2010)

Imitation was an important part of their children's play and the parents sometimes supplied toys that matched what the parents were doing, that the children found interest in: "As like we have tools stuff, my husband he has cabin maker and he has tools kit, and he want to play with this kit, this is why we bring the kids' toys too [tools]" (Jay's Mother, April 2010). Jay was less involved in this type of pretend play than Dalbir; his pretend play mostly involved cars that he propelled. He was more engaged in pretend play when he played with Livroop with her Barbie dolls and by pretending to drive a car by sitting on the coffee table. Dalbir's parents connected pretend play to imitation and thought that the children were imitating them and it is another way in which the children learn about the world.

Summary of approaches to play, learning and development. The families had different approaches to play and learning, and as a result their interactions with their children were also different as well as their perceptions on play and development. Jay's mother tried to structure his activities more, chose educational activities and emphasized cognitive development. Dalbir's parents did not choose any play activities for her and she made her own decisions regarding play. Jay and his mother's interactions occurred while reading or looking at a book, playing with stickers, labeling items or playing with alphabetic toys. Dalbir and her mother also interacted through books but it was only when

Dalbir chose the book. Other interactions involved activities such as cooking together, visiting the playground or riding the Skytrain.

The mothers looked for a community for their children to play in and to get to know other children. Therefore the centre was important to them and it is not surprising that they attended the activity regularly. Playing with non-toys and the encouragement that this type of play had from the parents reflected their way of thinking that play could happen anywhere and with almost any object and is therefore a natural part of life.

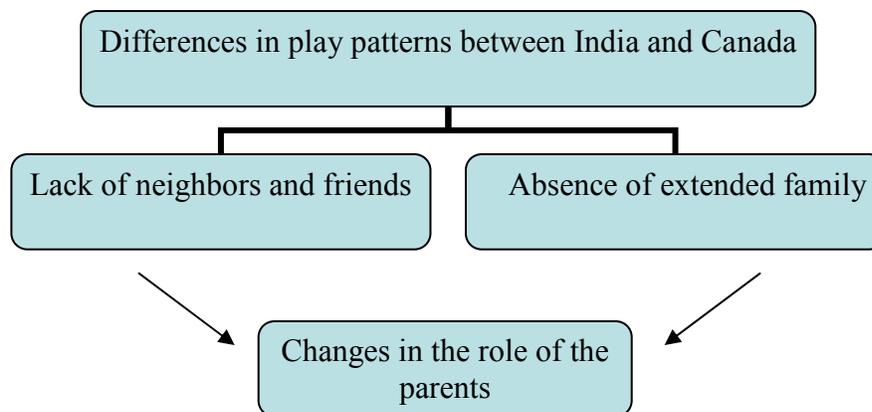
Dalbir's parents believed that by imitating and copying them, the children learn important life skills.

Differences in play patterns between India and Canada. All the parents perceived differences between Indian and Canadian child rearing practices. Parents spoke about the environment and society in Canada which is less open than India, there are more restrictions, and it is more complicated for children to meet other peers to play with. Jay's father used the chicken as a metaphor to describe how he sees the differences in how children grow up in India and in Canada:

...kid is like a chicken. There are two kind of chicken. One is bollard, bollard mean you feed them and the chicken grows faster, these are those. Back in India, we are rooster kind of. Open area, do whatever you want to do. Go wherever you want to go. Play whatever you want to play. Do anything you want to do. Here there are restrictions.... And I believe in here, everybody is like not very open hearted (Jay's Father, April, 2010).

The differences between the two countries were expressed in changes in the life style, in the family structure, in the community around them and in children’s play. The lack of family and friends in the parents’ and children’s lives and the absence of the extended family had a major influence on how parents interacted with their children in the new environment. As a result there were many changes in the role of the parents in Canada, also as the children’s play partners. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3: Differences in Play Patterns between India and Canada



Lack of neighbors and friends. One of the key differences between Canada and India came from Dalbir’s mother: “In Canada people raise their own kids, but in India other people raise your kids” (Dalbir’s Mother, April 2010). In India, parents are supported by the community, neighbors, friends, and other family members who take an active role in playing with the children, teaching them or taking care of their daily needs. Children always have other children of their neighbors or family members, such as cousins, who lived in their home to play with. In contrast, in Canada the parents felt more

closed in their homes and isolated from their neighbors, whereas in India children are free to go on their own to their neighbors' homes:

But when I was there, I can go to any house at any time with no problem. Here you have to phone first, and maybe people aren't home, or if they're home they have their plans. But back in India you want to go, go. You want to come, come. It's a different type of environment (Jay's father, April 2010).

Playing outside in the street is an activity that children do regularly in India and the neighbors help each other: "In India there is no restriction that kids are not going outside without parents, because the neighbors are very helping hand in India" (Dalbir's Mother, April 2010). All the parents regretted the fact that there were not many children close by for their children to play with and said that their children sometimes felt lonely. When possible they tried to take the children to the park or to arrange for the children to meet with other children, but it was more complicated than in India. Dalbir had a cousin who also lived in the same city, but not close by. In the calendar log her mother wrote: "We went to her aunt's home, it was a sunny day, Dalbir played with the neighborhood kids, they were cycling in the cul de sac..." (Dalbir's calendar log, April 2010). The mother said that even though Dalbir can play outside in the cul de sac where her cousin lived it is still different than India because an adult always has to supervise the children.

As mentioned, Jay had a friend who lived in the basement of his house. The children spent a lot of time together, and Jay's mother often took care of Livroop, or Livroop's mother or grandparents took care of Jay and his sister. Jay's mother appreciated that her son had a close friend and that she had adults around her, but she still

wished more children would live close by: “Because there’s no kids outside, even we don’t have any house over there, right? There’s no kids, only Jay, my son, and their daughter, they just play together” (Jay’s Mother, April 2010).

Dalbir was born in India and was raised there until she was 10 months old. To emphasize the differences between Canada and India in regard to other people who take care of the child her mother gave an example of the market in their village: “...and someone was passing from this side they take her and they went to the market, and they came back and they dropped her and they went away...” (Dalbir’s Mother, April 2010).

Absence of an extended family. The parents also indicated that they do not have their extended family in Canada and it makes their life very hard because in India the grandparents spent a lot of time with the children:

And her grandma take her out, because the ladies in my village used to sit all together in somebody’s home and they have, like all the grandmas sitting in one place and they have all their grandsons, the grandmoms are talking and the kids are playing in front of them...the small kids (Dalbir’s mother, April 2010).

In Canada the mothers needed to organize their time differently since they have to take the children with them everywhere: “...because now you can see I don’t have family here, right? I have to go for shopping, everything for kids by myself. Then I have to arrange their story time, their bed time” (Jay’s Mother, April 2010).

By not living with their extended family their children had fewer partners to play with. In India there were always other children around, while in Canada their children do not have much company of children their own age: “But they have company of children

around because in our country there is a culture of joint families. It is expected that in joint families many other children there in the same age groups.” (Dalbir’s Father, April 2010). Even though Dalbir’s father had a sister who lived not far from them he indicated that it is not the same as in India: “Even we might not be meeting each other for long time. But it’s not the case back in India.” (Dalbir’s father, April 2010).

Changes in parent-child play interactions. The differences between India and Canada had an influence on the way the parents interacted with their children. In India parents were not expected to entertain or to play with their children since there were always other immediate playing partners for their children like other children or the grandparents. Even though the parents were raising their children in Canada they were still influenced by the practices in their home country and by how they grew up:

I used to play you know hide and seek. I used to ride a bike also with the other children. I play Holi also. Holi holi. You know? the festival of color, spreading colors at others. It comes in month of rain in March. So we have some different plays and games (Dalbir’s Father, April 2010).

Interacting with their children in play activities was somewhat new to the parents: “...because we have alternators there, they have grandparents to take care of them and we concern about our jobs, we had Saturday and Sundays to play with them...” (Dalbir’s Mother, April 2010). In Canada, the mothers had to spend more time with their children, also because the grandparents were not present and because the children did not attend preschool. It caused changes in the parent-child interactions in general, but also specifically in play interactions. In Canada, the parents were expected to play more with their children and the children had fewer playing partners, therefore the parents were

mostly the immediate play partners of the children and the parents tried to adjust to that, each in their own way.

Summary of differences in play patterns between India and Canada. The major differences between Canada and India were expressed in the lack of community and support which influenced play patterns. In Canada there were not many close play partners for their children and the parents felt that it was missing from their children's lives. As a result they had to fill this vacuum and to act more like a play partner for the children, which was new to them. Even though the city where the families lived had a high population of South Asian immigrants, the parents reported that they did not have much support from the community around them and were more isolated in Canada. Their children were sometimes isolated and lonely as well, since they did not have children close by to play with, or were not free to play outside on their own.

Connections between the Centre and the Homes

In the centre the parents fell into two main groups, in terms of how they enacted play with their children. The first group consisted of parents (including one father) who stayed physically close to their children and interacted with them throughout most of the play activities. The second group of mothers was less involved in their children's play. Similar patterns were found in Phase Two in the families' home. Jay's mother belonged to the group of parents who spent most of the time at the centre close to her son. At home, she initiated many of the educational toys activities such as alphabet toys and books. She emphasized that "learning through play" activities are mostly related to educational activities and her son would not learn if she did not supply him with the appropriate toys. On the other hand, Dalbir's mother was part of the group of mothers who spent most of

their time socializing at the centre. She also emphasized the phrase “learning through play”; however, her interpretation of it was quite different, as she claimed that learning happens naturally through play. Even though the mothers interacted differently with their children at the centre they both thought highly of the centre and considered it to be a significant part of their children’s world.

Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter is divided into the following sections: A discussion of the main findings and their connections with the relevant literature, the limitations and strengths of the study, contributions to the literature of Human Development Learning and Culture, implications for early childhood educators and childcare providers, future directions, and conclusions.

Discussion of Key Findings

Two research questions were explored in the present study: 1) how do South Asian immigrant parents interact in play with their children? and 2) what are the perceptions of South Asian immigrant parents on the role of play in their children's development?

Parents and children interactions in play. The first research question considered parents' interactions in play with their children, the type of play activities and their focus. From the findings it was revealed that there were two main types of interactions. The first one was directed interaction. Both at the centre and at one of the homes, the parents' interactions with children occurred mostly through educational toys and art activities and they rarely interacted through pretend play activities. The second type of interaction was non-directed. At the centre the mothers spent most of the time socializing and therefore did not spend much time with their children. At one of the homes the parents defined it as "natural" since they believed children learn naturally through play, and therefore they do not need to impose or interfere during their play

activities. Interactions between the parents and children involved daily life activities such as cooking.

Goncu, et al. (1999) suggested children's activities depend on the community they belong to, however, from this study it was found that in the same community and the same cultural group, people hold different views regarding play, and therefore their interactions with their children in play is different. Parents' and children's interactions in play were revealed in a few different ways through educational play, naturally in their everyday life, and their house's spatial organization. Also, solitary play was found to be one of the common types of play in the children's lives.

Educational play. In Parmar et al. (2008) the focus was on the role of the parents as play partners in their children's play. Their findings showed that Euro-Americans parents spent more time on pretend play, while the Asian parents focused more on pre-academic activities such as learning letters and numbers and playing math and computer games. In the current study, the same pattern was observed at Jay's home and in the group of mothers at the centre who played with their children using educational toys to learn the English alphabet and the numbers and also through art activities. The staff member at the centre also pointed out that early academic skills are very important to South Asian families. This is one of the reasons they emphasized "learning through play" at the centre. They want the parents to understand that learning does not happen only in a formal setting, but it is easier for children to learn while they are engaged in play activities.

According to the Vygotskian theory, it is the role of the adult to scaffold the child to reach a more mature level of play and reach a higher level of potential development

(Bodrova & Leong, 2006, Vygotsky, 1978). Some parents at the centre were modeling to their children and were mostly focused on how to do something (like holding a pencil or a brush) or how to make something (like an art project). This type of modeling, which requires the child's attention and focuses on imitation, was also observed in other cultures, where adults often expect children to learn while they are watching them. For example, in Kenya the mothers modeled to their children the anticipated behavior they required from their children. They expected their children to pay attention and watch them, and by doing so to be able to carry out their task later on (Rogoff, 2003). It is possible that Dalbir's parents who stated that they did not interfere in their children's play, did not think it is their role to scaffold their children's play, because it could impact the natural learning processes of the children through play.

Bodrova and Leong (2006) indicated that while scaffolding the children, adults also need to model how to play with a toy or how to take turns and get along with the other play partners. The parents who were interviewed indicated that learning how to share is one of the most important elements that children should learn through play. However, these types of modeling activities were observed less in this study, both at the centre and in the homes.

Adults set up the environment for children when they choose their toys and when they encourage them what to play with and with whom (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). There is no doubt that in the centre the adults influenced the children's play as it was the staff members who chose which toys to take out and make most accessible and the parents who chose certain toys to play with their children. Therefore, it is not surprising that many parents at the centre were observed interacting with their children through educational

toys. The centre supported learning through play, mostly with educational toys, and these were the toys that were easily accessible to the children and parents. Also, because of this strong emphasis it is probable that most parents thought that it was the right approach to interact with their children at the centre. The parents' approach might have been different had they not participated in an activity that took place in a Canadian context, which emphasized a Western approach to play. It is common in immigrant societies that the students and teachers (and in this case the parents and staff members) do not share the same ethnic, social, racial and linguistic background (Gay, 1995). In this centre, despite the high percentage of South Asian participants, the leading approach was still a Western one and the parents and the children had to adapt to the cultural context of the centre.

Play as a natural part of life. Sutton-Smith (1999) suggested that in some societies, such as in India, many of the play interactions between parents and children revolve around social patterns in which the mother helps the child through play to adapt attitudes and behaviors that are important in the extended family or society. Rogoff (2003) added that children incorporate elements from their parents' work and activities to their play. Dalbir often helped her mother to cook and her mother gave her real dough or vegetables. Dalbir rolled the dough while she stood on a chair next to her mother, watching her and trying to imitate her. Dalbir and her mother did not talk much, but Dalbir learned while watching and made small rotis (type of bread) which the mother put on the pan. Dalbir also often pretended to cook while playing. Rogoff (2003) suggested that adults often expect children to learn while they are watching them, just as Dalbir watched her mother rolling the dough. Similar patterns were found in Mayan girls who learned how to make tortillas by watching their mothers. The Mayan mothers gave their

daughters dough and they in turn made the tortillas as they had seen their mothers do (Rogoff, 2003). In the “Six culture study” the girls from Mexico often played house and pretended to sew or to make tortillas (Edwards, 2000).

Dalbir’s mother explained that her daughter enjoyed this activity and for Dalbir it might be a play activity, but it was also a way to learn an important skill for her daughter’s future. The mother said that when she was younger she and her sisters always helped their mother in the kitchen and it was an enjoyable family time and not a chore. Her beliefs relate to the Sutton-Smith (1997) approach that almost any activity could be considered as play. The type of play the child is engaged in is constructed because of the significance of the play to the society to which the child belonged. In communities where children are often around adults, they often play imitating adult work and implement social roles from that type of play (Rogoff, 2003).

In India there was a continuation between the world of the children and adults as the children are part of the adult space in daily life and were usually present in places where adults pursue their everyday life (Kumar, 1993). In the present study the adults and children almost always occupied the same space. Even if the parents were not actively playing with the children they were mostly aware of what the children were doing and why. In an ethnographic study in a village in India children were frequently observed playing in a crowded room without much direction from their mothers (Sharma, 2000). In this study Dalbir’s parents did not direct her since they believed they should not interfere with her play. Rogoff (2003) suggested that during everyday interactions parents are not often focused in instructing children, but through these interactions they teach the children even without intending to teach them. Children learn from the everyday

conversations of the adults around them. Since the children in this study were always physically close to their parents at home, they learned from watching listening and imitating them.

The house organization of the families also reflects on this continuum between the children's and adults' world. In both families the toys were kept in the living room either in a box, cupboard or drawers under and around the television. Jay had a separate bedroom where he had very few toys but he did not play in this room and almost never brought toys from there. The toys in his bedroom were on higher shelves and were hard to reach and he constantly played with the toys which were in the living room or with other objects around the house. Dalbir did not have her own room, and therefore most of her toys were kept in the living room. A few other toys were kept in a cupboard in the hallway, but Dalbir could not reach it. This was similar to Parmar et al. (2004) findings that the Asian families usually had a special place for toys, such as a box or a closet, but not a separate room.

Keeping the toys in the same space where the adults spent their time and not in a separate room, and the children's play around the adults and in the common space indicated how close the parents and children were. By contrast, in some communities children spend less time in the company of adults. Children have a separate room for play and in general the adults are less accessible, so that their play does not reflect much of the mature activities from the adults' world, and the children probably imitate more from what they see on television (Rogoff, 2003). Dalbir and Jay were mostly imitating the adults around them in their play by pretending to cook (like a common activity of Dalbir's mother), eat, sleep, drive, counting coins, measuring items or using tools (like Jay's father's work).

Solitary play. Since solitary play was observed both at the centre and at the homes, it was interesting to try to understand the nature of solitary play and the reasons it occurred. At the drop-in center many children were involved in solitary play and in these cases parents did not interact with their children while they played and did not try to encourage them to play with other children. Individual differences in children's social and non social play patterns are influenced by many factors such as character, motivation and social competence (Coplan, et al., 2006). It is possible that in this study, children's involvement in solitary play was also due to the immediate environment. The centre put a strong emphasis on "learning through play", and less emphasis was put on the importance of social skills. At home Dalbir was often observed playing by herself, perhaps because she did not have peers close by to play with. Since the parents did not appear highly involved in an active way in her play, she played mostly by herself and sometimes tried to get her parents to participate.

The role of the community. The findings also revealed differences in play patterns between India and Canada. The parents felt that they have less friends, neighbors and family around them to support the upbringing of the children and to play with them. In India, taking care of the children and disciplining them is a responsibility of anyone who is near the child. Children are surrounded by other relatives or neighbors who share the responsibility (Rogoff, 2003). The parents also spoke about how in India many parents do not interact with their children in play activities since their children have other play partners such as cousins, friends, neighbors, or grandparents. Parents did not need to encourage their children to play with other children because it happened naturally in the environment. However, in Canada their children have a lack of playing partners close by.

Rogoff (2003) argued that in many communities, children's play is not considered as an activity that should be encouraged by the parents. Playing with children is considered to be the role of other children or family members. Parmar et al. (2008) discussed how Euro-American parents act more as children's play partners than Asian-American parents. Roggoff (2003) pointed out that middle class parents tend to engage in their children's own interests and activities such as play. The adults become the children's peers and playmates.

The two families of Phase Two also did not have their extended families close by. Some families that arrived to Canada from Punjab still keep the structure of the extended family and the grandparents take an active role in raising the children. However, that was not the case in this study. In both of the families, the grandparents were back in India and the families missed this support. The mothers, especially, felt that the upbringing of their children fell mostly on their shoulders and they had to entertain their children constantly and take them everywhere they went. It was quite different from how they grew up where daily supervision was the responsibility of the whole community and not of one adult who must devote most of his or her attention to the children (Rogoff, 2003).

This led to changes in their role as parents since they had to entertain their children more and also to act as their play partners occasionally, something that they were not used to doing and is not part of their cultural tradition. Immigrants often arrive to a new society with a determination to keep their culture of origin, while still becoming a part of the new society (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). The parents found themselves between two worlds, the world of their cultural tradition, and the Canadian context, their new home, and on some level wished to be part of both. The

parents were now living in the Canadian context where parents are expected to play more with their children, and in addition the lack of play partners close by influenced their interactions with their children. The mothers also attended the drop-in centre where “learning through play” was encouraged and workshops on these topics were given to the parents.

Phinney et al. (2001) argued that generally immigrants arrive to a new country with a strong identity of their national and cultural origin, but with a willingness to adapt to the new society. Furthermore, most immigrants prefer integration where they preserve their culture of origin while adapting to the new culture. This seemed to be the case in this study, where in general the parents tried to make an effort to become part of the new society, and specifically when it came to play, play partners and learning through play. However, the influence of the Canadian context could have been one of the contributing factors to the difference between the two families. Jay’s mother supported the approach of educational play as was suggested by the centre. She had been living in Canada for five years and her two children were born in Canada, so the local influence might have been larger. Dalbir’s parents who argued that they should not interfere in the play had been in Canada for two years and Dalbir was born in India. This could be one of the reasons they were closer to the Indian tradition.

Play and development. The second research question of this study concerned the parents’ perceptions of the role of play in their children’s development. The cultural beliefs about the value of play in children’s development differ strongly from one culture to another and the value of play vary between different communities (Cannella & Viruru, 1997 ; Goncu, et al., 1999; 1997; Parmar et al., 2004). Even within the same culture

parents' beliefs can vary widely. There was agreement between the parents of Phase Two that age is a major factor in their children's play and development. They reported that children play because they are at the appropriate age and that their play changes according to their age.

Dalbir's family might have been influenced to some extent by the Sikh beliefs of human development that children have little wisdom and have a limited ability to concentrate (Nayar, 2000). Her father indicated that he did not expect much from her at this age. It may also be one of the reasons Dalbir's parents did not initiate play activities. Nayar (2004) pointed out that even when children were taken to the temple or when they were occupied in religious activities, it was still rather meaningless because the child's mind was not yet fully engaged in those activities. In the calendar log Dalbir's mother wrote that she took the children to the temple but it was a very stressful time for her because the children were bored and she had to keep them busy since they were not interested in what was going on.

The parents' perceptions regarding play and development were different from one family to another. However, play and cognitive, physical, social and language development were all viewed as having some importance in their children's lives as well as pretend play and its role in child development.

Cognitive development. One of the findings from Parmar et al. (2004) was that Asian parents did not value play for the development of their children and they did not believe play would help their children to prepare for school. In the current study parents did believe that play contributed to their children's development and learning. However, this belief was expressed in different ways. Jay's mother believed that educational play

was the most important, whereas Dalbir's mother indicated that she did not teach her daughter the alphabet and that she learned these things by herself through play.

In the literature many of the relations between play and cognitive development are related to pretend play. Mollou (1994) indicated that during pretend play children think and reflect about the meanings of situations. Pretend play also promotes abstract thought because children use symbols in their play (Johnson et al., 1987). However, in this study, Jay's mother only referred to educational play as a promoter for cognitive development. In the centre she stayed close to her son, and played with him with educational toys because it helped him to prepare for school and she also learned about his development and play preferences. Dalbir's parents, on the other hand, believed that through pretend play their daughter learned important life skills. Dalbir independently chose her own play activities at the centre and at home. Dalbir's mother did not emphasize cognitive development. She explained that one of the most important things Dalbir needed to learn upon starting kindergarten was to be separated from her.

Social development. Peer interactions offer children the opportunity to develop and understand social norms and skills (Gagnon & Nagle, 2004). In the current study the parents of Phase Two indicated that peer interactions were important for their child's play and development, even if they did not encourage it at the centre. Both mothers stated that one of the main reasons they started participating in the centre activities was for their children to meet other children. At home Jay was constantly playing with Livroop and Dalbir often played with her cousin, who was the same age as her, and a few friends who lived near her cousin.

Sutton-Smith (1999) discussed the importance of the group, rather than the individual in some societies. All of the parents talked about India with longing, in relation to how there were always other children around to play with, as part of the extended family or in the neighborhood. They all mentioned numerous times that they regretted that there were not many children who were in close proximity for their children to play with and that the environment in Canada did not allow for them to play outside without adult supervision. The parents indicated that learning values such as sharing and respect for others was an important part of play. In Sharma (2000) it was found that most mothers believed that the process of development is not purposeful or restricted, but rather happens naturally. Dalbir's parents emphasized the importance of learning social skills through play and that they do not teach their children purposely and connected play to learning life skills and being part of society.

Language development. Both mothers saw language development as an important feature of play. As Chance (1979) stated, children talk more during play and their language is more sophisticated and complex than during other activities. Jay's mother said that her son interacted with children in the centre and that it helped to improve his language skills. Dalbir's mother too, said that going to the centre helped her daughter to improve her English. At first her daughter could not communicate well with the other children, but in time she progressed and now does not have language barriers while playing.

Physical development. Roopnarine et al. (2003) reported that in some immigrant societies parents do not see play as an activity that will highly contribute to childhood development, and mostly see play as a physical activity. Both fathers in this current study

indicated that play would contribute to their children's physical development. Jay's father especially, talked mostly about physical and sports activities regarding play. Dalbir's father mentioned that play contributes to physical development but he also emphasized that play is a creative activity.

Pretend play and the contributions to development. In the literature, pretend play was identified as one of the most important types of play that contributes to child development. Smilansky (1968), focused on pretend play importance for cognitive development. The second stage of Piaget's play theory is symbolic play from eighteen months to seven years. In this stage, children are mainly pretending while playing and use many objects to pretend they are something or someone else (Piaget, 1962; Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Most children at the centre, as well as Dalbir and Jay were engaged in pretend play according to their developmental level. Parents did not take an active role in pretend play and the children at the centre were highly engaged in pretend play while playing by themselves or with other children.

Saracho and Spodek (1998) argued that children often imitate adult's activities during pretend play and it helps them to interpret the world. Dalbir's parents viewed pretend play as a way their daughter was imitating them and thus learned skills that would help her later in life. Jay was also involved in pretend play, but less than Dalbir. He was more involved in pretend play when Livroop was around as she initiated it more and by himself he mostly played with cars. The parents' only explanation for his love for cars was that he is a boy. They did not relate to pretend play as something that will contribute to his development, but that could have been because he was less involved in pretend play.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, language was a barrier. Since I do not speak the first language of the participants, only English speaking families were considered for inclusion in Phase Two, which limited the number of possible families. Also at the centre a few families among those that were observed were speaking Punjabi and in those cases I could not understand the conversation. However, the co-observer could understand simple Punjabi which was very helpful. A few families did not participate in Phase One of the project because they had a very limited understanding of English and could not read and sign the consent.

At the centre the parents were aware of the presence of the researchers, and it is possible that as result some parents focused more on educational play. They might have thought that this is the “right” approach to play and what the researcher is looking for. However, it is likely that most of the parents did not act differently, since the staff member from the centre verified that some parents focus on educational play while others socialize. The families participating chose to come to the centre and the families included in Phase Two volunteered to participate. The centre and its philosophy of play had a major influence on the families and their way of thinking regarding play, learning and development. Therefore, the study may not reflect immigrant families who did not participate in a Canadian based program.

Strengths of the Study

This research focused on South Asian immigrants and specifically the Indo-Canadian population. This population has not often been studied and bringing the voices of these families into educational research is highly important, especially in a

multicultural environment. This research highlighted cultural differences between the South Asian group and the Canadian context in the area of play. There is a scarcity of research on immigrants' views of play, and specifically South Asian immigrants. This study could help shed more light on the lives of those immigrants which are a big part of the Canadian society. Also, this study showed that people from the same cultural group hold different beliefs and therefore it is important not to generalize a certain group or to assume that they all think or act alike.

The design of the study is also a strength since this study took place in two environments of the participants and the data was gathered from a few sources using the triangulating approach. The first environment was the drop-in centre, where parents and children regularly participated. They were not required to do anything differently, but rather to just continue with their usual activities. The second environment was the families' homes. In this environment they were most comfortable and were not required to do anything differently as they continued with their everyday routine. The pilot study conducted at the beginning of every phase contributed greatly to this research and built trust between myself, the staff and the participants.

Contributions to the Literature of Human Development Learning and Culture

This study is a Master's thesis as part of a degree in Human Development Learning and Culture. This study connects all the components of this program. First, the study focused on the Indo-Canadian community and culture, a population that is rarely studied and gives voice to this community. Second, it was a study about development as it attempted to understand parents' perceptions of children's development through play. The study also tried to portray a broader view of human development and culture by

reviewing the human development belief of the Sikh tradition. Third, from the connections made between this cultural group and their beliefs about play and development, interesting insights were revealed about learning.

Implications for Educators and other Childcare Providers

We live in a multicultural world. In Canada, and specifically in the lower mainland, there are cultural groups and immigrants from many places around the world. Therefore, it is necessary to consider differences in multicultural societies. Play activities take different forms depending on the child's environment, the culture and the parents' beliefs about play and development.

This study showed that belonging to the same cultural group does not necessarily mean that parents hold similar beliefs about play, learning and development. It is important not to generalize according to the cultural group and to remember that Western explanations or theories do not necessarily apply to all children. It is important to be aware that parents might think differently about what elements will best prepare their child for kindergarten. Early childhood educators as well as school teachers must take into account the child's background when examining his or her development or making assumptions about his or her play. They should talk to the parents about activities at home and understand that parents vary in the way they raise and play with their children. Parents should be consulted about cultural activities and those should include holidays, traditions, food, toys, books and objects from the children's culture.

The parents in this study spoke about feeling isolated and lonely and were missing support from the community. Finding ways to provide more support to immigrants is important to ease their transition. Also the mothers spoke highly about the drop-in centre

and it was a big part of their and their children's lives. Therefore, it is important to have more programs such as the drop-in centre, especially in areas with a high density of immigrants. Moreover, free drop-in programs are important since there is still a lack of child care programs in the lower mainland and some parents cannot afford a preschool or daycare. It is a place where the parents can meet other parents who are in the same situation. The parents wanted their children to have more close play partners. Since the environment they live in is different than India and does not allow the children to play freely outside, at least in the centre the children can meet other children to play with. The centre also needs to take into account the tradition and culture of the participant families, while talking to parents about play and during workshops.

Future Directions

This study could lead to many different future directions as several interesting findings and questions emerged. The first one is gender differences. A family with a male child and a family with female child participated in Phase Two. It is impossible to know if their different approaches and perspectives are also related to gender differences. It would be worthwhile to investigate parents' perceptions and expectations in this cultural group regarding sex or gender differences.

The length of stay in Canada was also a difference between the two families. The mother who supported educational play had been in Canada longer (five years) and the other family had only been in Canada for two years. It could be that the duration of the stay in Canada influenced their perceptions. It could be interesting to examine differences in approaches in immigrant families who have been in Canada longer as opposed to more recent immigrants. Also, the families in this study participated in a drop-in centre and

therefore were influenced by the Canadian culture. A research is needed about play – interaction and perceptions of families who do not attend programs like these.

Other directions could be to investigate other groups of immigrants, and to research children's views on play as well. More research is needed on drop-in centres such as the one in this study. Since this centre has a high attendance and it was found that the centre has an important place in those families' lives, researching those types of centers could help to better understand the needs of immigrant families.

Lastly, the role of the community regarding child rearing in immigrants' lives is a critical issue. All parents stated in the interviews that they felt that they did not have enough support from neighbors around them. The absence of their extended family and the fact that the entire responsibility for child rearing now falls on the parents' shoulders was also expressed. Parents mentioned experiencing loneliness and isolation. They regretted that their children did not have some of the childhood experiences that they had in India, like playing in the street or having other children around all the time. Exploring those aspects in further research could help to understand the needs of this community better.

Conclusions

In this study parents' and children's play interactions in South Asian immigrant families as well as the parents' perceptions on play and development were explored. Observing the children and parents in two different environments helped to understand their interactions and actions, with a focus on play activities. Interviewing the parents and asking them to complete a log of the children's activities was helpful in understanding the

parents' voice and their own understandings and beliefs about play development and learning.

Culture has a great influence on the lives of children and their play. In Canada the families were in between two worlds – the Canadian context and their own tradition. Immigrant groups frequently find themselves trying to adapt to a new life while trying to maintain their home culture and environment. This is also relevant to play and how it is perceived differently in a Western society such as Canada. There is no “right” way as to how to play with children, and therefore people should be open and accept other approaches to play.

Moreover, in the same cultural group there may be large differences in approaches and activities towards play and child rearing in general. Belonging to a certain group does not necessarily mean that people of that group hold the same belief systems. There is a need to broaden the knowledge of human development theories beyond the use of only Western theories or other approaches that may not be relevant. As shown in this study, there are many different ways of viewing children's play and development.

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Come Participate in a Study on Play and Development!



We would like to learn more about parents' perceptions on play and development

The first stage of the study will take place at the Newton Family Resource Program.

All you need to do is to show up to the drop-in centre. A researcher from UBC will be there to observe the activities in the centre, and parents' interaction with their children for those who give consent

More information is available on the sign-in table

Please read it and sign if you are willing to take part and we will contact you to review the consent form.

For additional information, contact Maya Goldstein

Thank you!

Principal Investigator: Laurie Ford, PhD.

Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational & Counselling
Psychology, & Special Education

SPACES Project
South Asian Immigrant Parents' Perspectives of the
Role of Play in Their Childs Development

Letter of Invitation and Recruitment

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We are writing to invite you and your 3 to 6 year old child to take part in a research study that we are conducting in Surrey. You are receiving this letter because you and your child participate in the Early Years Centre in Newton.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about South Asian immigrant parents' perspectives of play in their children's lives. Your to taking part in this study is very important to us. Findings from this study may enhance our understanding on cultural perspectives on play and child development.

Your participation in the study is voluntary and will not affect any services you and your child receive in the Early Years Centre.

If you want to take part, you will be free to stop at any point, or not to take part at all without any consequences, even after you sign the consent form.

The study has two parts. You can agree to take part in just Part One or in both Part One and Part Two. Taking part in this study means that a researcher from UBC will observe you and your child interacting during the hours of activity in the Early Years Centre during part one. The researcher will take notes during the activity so she will be able to accurately remember what was happening during the activity. The notes will not be used beyond this research study.

If you take part in the first part of the study, you will be asked if you would like to take part in the 2nd part of the study. In Part Two we will observe you and your child playing in other settings such as your home or a playground for several times over a 3 to 4 week period. In addition we will ask you to complete a play log several times and to take part in a one hour interview.

If you only want to take part in Part One, that is ok too.

As a thank you for your time, each parent and child who takes part in Part One will receive a children's book. Parents who take part in Part Two will receive a \$75 gift certificate to a local store.

It is very important to us that your family's right to privacy is respected. Therefore, all information collected as part of this research study will be kept confidential. **No individual information will be reported and no child or parent will be identified by name** in any reports about the completed study.

We would be delighted if you would be willing to participate. If you are interested in taking part in the study or would like to learn more about the study and what is involved, you may contact us by phoning the research project office at XXXXXX. You can also call one of the project leaders at the phone numbers listed below. You may also sign the consent form that is attached to this letter and returning it to the box marked UBC SPACES PROJECT at the centre office.

If you do decide to take part in this study, and if you have any concerns about your or your child's rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at XXXX.

Sincerely,

Laurie Ford, PhD
Associate Professor
Principal Investigator
Department of
Educational & Counselling Psychology and
Special Education

Maya Goldstein,
M.A. Student
Human Development, Learning and
Culture
Co-Investigator
Department of
Educational & Counselling Psychology
and Special Education

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational & Counselling
Psychology, & Special Education

SPACES Project
South Asian Immigrant Parents' Perspectives of the
Role of Play in Their Childs Development – Phase One

Parent Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Laurie Ford, PhD,
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special
Education,

Student Co-Investigator: Maya Goldstein
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special
Education,

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Please read the following form carefully. Sign one copy and return. Keep the other for your records. This is a request for your child to take part in the study that we are doing.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to describe South Asian immigrant parents' perceptions of the role of play in their child's development.

Taking Part in the Study Means:

1. That you allow us to conduct observations and take notes while you and your child play and interact in the Early Years Centre in Newton. The person conducting the observations is trained in working with children. She will not observe you and take notes on you and your child unless you and your child are comfortable.
2. That you will come to the Early Years Centre as you regularly do and the researcher will observe your activities there. You do not need to do anything different than in any other time you visit the centre. The only difference is that a member of the research team will be allowed to take notes about your play interactions with your child.

3. There are no risks if you and your child take part. However, if the observations make you or your child feel uncomfortable, you can ask the observer not to observe you. You are welcome to contact us with any questions.
4. Your participation is voluntary and will not affect any services you and your child may receive from Early Years Centre. You will be free to stop at any point, or not to take part at all without any consequences, even after you sign the consent form.
5. You will receive a brief summary about the results of this study.
6. We are not aware of any risks if you and your child take part in our study.
7. The information you give us is confidential. **No individual information will be reported and no parent or child will be identified by name** in any reports about the study. The information collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The only people who will have access to the information you give us are the researchers working on this project.
8. You will have an option to take part in a second part of this study. The second part of this study will be conducted in a family home or location of the family selects. The researcher will observe play activities taking place in the home several times. In addition, participants will be asked to fill in a play log and to be interviewed. If you are interesting in taking part of knowing more about the in the second part of the study, please let us know in the space below. If you are selected we will contact you and you will be asked to sign separate consent letter if you will agree to participate.
9. As a thank-you for you and your child's time and each parent and child who participates in each session will two children's books.
10. If you do decide to take part in this study, and if you have any concerns about you and your child's rights or treatment taking part in our research, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at XXXXXX.
11. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project you may contact any of the researchers at numbers above.

SPACES Project
South Asian Immigrant Parents' Perspectives of the
Role of Play in Their Childs Development – Phase One

Parent Consent Form

Consent for me and my Child to Participate in this Research Project

Please check one of the following:

____ Yes, I agree that me and my child and may take part in this project.

____ No, I do not wish for me and my child to take part in this project.

Parent's/Guardian's signature (please sign):

Parent's/Guardian's name (please print your name):

Date:

Are you interest in learning more about the 2nd part
of our project? If yes, we will contact you at the
phone number you provide below

Yes

NO

Your Phone Number (not needed unless you want
to learn more about the 2nd part of the study:

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational & Counselling
Psychology, & Special Education

SPACES Project
South Asian Immigrant Parents' Perspectives of the
Role of Play in Their Child's Development

Child Care Provider Consent

Principal Investigator: Laurie Ford, PhD,
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special
Education,

Student Co-Investigator: Maya Goldstein
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special
Education,

Dear Child-Care Provider,

Please read the following form carefully. Sign one copy and return. Keep the other for your records. This is a request for you to take part in the study that we are doing.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to describe South Asian immigrant parents' perceptions of the role of play in their child development.

Taking Part in the Study Means:

12. That you would participate in an interview, taking approximately one hour, about the Newton Family Resource Program, and about your perceptions about parenting and play in the South Asian Community.

13. The interview will take place where you and the researcher will agree on a time that is convenient for you.

14. There are no risks if you will participate in the interview. However, if you feel

uncomfortable, you are not obligated to answer any questions. You are welcome to contact us with any questions.

15. Your name and the name of the centre, or any other identifying information will not be on any documents or summary of our interview.
16. You will receive a brief summary about the results of this study.
17. We are not aware of any risks if you take part in our study.
18. The information you give us is confidential. **No individual information will be reported and no parent or child will be identified by name** in any reports about the study. We will do everything we can to make sure there is no personally identifying information about you in any report. The information collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The only people who will have access to the information you give us are the researchers working on this project.
19. If you do decide to take part in this study, and if you have any concerns about your rights or regarding taking part in our research, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at XXXXXX.
20. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, you may contact any of the researchers at the numbers above.

SPACES Project
South Asian Immigrant Parents' Perspectives of the
Role of Play in Their Childs Development – Phase One

Child Care Provider Consent

Consent for myself to participate in this research project

Please check one of the following:

Yes, I wish to take part in this project

No, I do not wish to take part in this project.

Signature (please sign):

Name (please print your name):

Date:

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational & Counselling
Psychology, & Special Education

SPACES Project
South Asian Immigrant Parents' Perspectives of the
Role of Play in Their Childs Development – Phase Two

Parent Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Laurie Ford, PhD,
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special
Education,

Student Co-Investigator: Maya Goldstein
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special
Education,

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Please read the following form carefully. Sign one copy and return. Keep the other for your records. This is a request for your child to take part in the study that we are doing.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to describe South Asian immigrant parents' perceptions of the role of play in their child's development.

Taking part in the study means:

21. That you are willing to participate as a case study in the research. It means that over a period of three to four weeks a researcher will come to your house or meet you in a place agreed by you between four and eight times. You will decide when it is convenient for you for the researcher to meet.
22. That you will allow the researcher to observe you and your child for a couple of hours each time you agree to meet during the three or four weeks of the study.
23. The researcher will ask you to fill in a play log and write down the play activities you do with your child for three days each week that you take part in the study.

Completing the logs will take 5 or 10 minutes each time and about 1 to 3 hours (depending on much you write) total during the entire study.

24. Towards the end of the research you'll be interviewed on your perceptions on play and development. The interview will take about one hour and will take place you and the researcher agree upon.
25. We are not aware of any risks if you and your child take part. However, if you or your child feel uncomfortable at any point, you can ask the researcher to stop taking notes during that day or all together.
26. Your participation is voluntary and will not affect any services you and your child may receive from Early Years Centre. You will be free to stop at any point, or not to take part at all without any consequences, even after you sign the consent form.
27. You will receive a brief summary about the results of this study when we are finished.
28. The information you give us is confidential. **No individual information will be reported and no parent or child will be identified by name** in any reports about the study. The information collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The only people who will have access to the information you give us are the researchers working on this project.
29. As a thank-you for you and your child's time you will receive a \$75 gift certificate to a local store. In addition, we will give your child a children's book.
30. If you do decide that your child take part in this study, and if you have any concerns about you and your child's rights or treatment taking part in our research, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at XXXXX.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project you may contact any of the researchers at numbers above.

SPACES Project
South Asian Immigrant Parents' Perspectives of the
Role of Play in Their Childs Development – Phase One

Parent Consent Form

Consent for me and my Child to Participate in this Research Project

Please check one of the following:

Yes, I agree that me and my child and may take part in this project.

No, I do not wish for me and my child to take part in this project.

Parent's/Guardian's signature (please sign):

Parent's/Guardian's name (please print your name):

Date:

Your phone number so we can reach you to set up
our first meeting.

Appendix F



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road,
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Laurie Ford	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Educational & Counselling Psychology, and Special Education	UBC BREB NUMBER: H09-01987
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
<small>Institution</small>	<small>Site</small>	
UBC Vancouver (excludes UBC Hospital)		
Other locations where the research will be conducted: This project will be conducted in two neighborhoods in Surrey, BC. We will work with members of the community including our research partners with the Early Childhood Roundtable (a group of key stakeholders working on issues relevant to young children and families in Surrey). We have met with members of the local community and they have suggested several drop-in centers to conduct observations. We have decided to conduct our study at the is the "Early Years Centre" in the Newton neighbourhood in Surrey. We have met with staff at the centre and they are in support our project. A letter of support is on its way but did at arrive in before our BREB submission deadline. We will submit this letter to BREB once it arrives. Observations will be conducted in the community centre and field notes will be taken about parent-child play. The second part of the study will be conducted in the homes of two families that will agree to participate as case studies in this project. These of the observations and interviews will take place in the family home or other mutually agreed upon location. If it is not be possible to conduct the interview in the home of the family there are several public family support centres and community centres that have rooms available (including the centre where phase one of the project will be conducted) for projects. Our ideal setting will be a quiet location mutually agreed upon by investigators, our community partners, and the parents in our study (e.g., home or a room in the community centre). If we are at a centre location, a member of the centre staff will be on site. All sessions for Phase One must occur during hours the centre is typically open to the public. Timing of the Phase 2 visits will be agreed upon by the researchers and parents. A safety protocol is used for all off campus research conducted by members of the team in our lab. The members of the research team will check in with Dr. Ford at the beginning of each session via cell phone and check out (call) again at the end of the observations or interview sessions via telephone (if she is not attending). If the call has not been placed within 30 minutes of the expected completion time of the session, a call will be made to follow up with the co-investigator or the other researcher who will be in the sessions taking field notes. If they are not reached by phone, a call will be made to the community centre and follow up will occur as needed and site visit made if needed.		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): N/A		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A		
PROJECT TITLE: South Asian Immigrant Parents' Perceptions of the Role of Play in their Child's Development		
REB MEETING DATE: September 10, 2009	CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: September 10, 2010	
DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:		DATE APPROVED: October 22, 2009
<small>Document Name</small>	<small>Version</small>	<small>Date</small>
Protocol: Proposal for BREB		Version 1 August 26, 2009
Consent Forms:		

Part Two Consent	Version 2 September 28, 2009
Phase One Consent	Version 1 August 28, 2009
Phase One Consent2	Version 2 September 28, 2009
Phase Two Consent	Version 1 August 28, 2009
<u>Advertisements:</u>	
Recruitment Flyer	Version 1 August 28, 2009
Flyer Revised	Version 2 September 20, 2009
<u>Questionnaire, Questionnaire Cover Letter, Tests:</u>	
Interview Initial Questions	Version 1 August 28, 2009
<u>Letter of Initial Contact:</u>	
Recruitment Letter	Version 1 August 28, 2009
Revised Recruitment Letter	version 2 September 28, 2009
<u>Other Documents:</u>	
Agency Approval	N/A October 20, 2009
Play Log	Version 1 August 28, 2009

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

**Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
and signed electronically by one of the following:**

Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair

Appendix G

Observation at the drop-in centre

Day and Date _____ Name: _____
 Parent letter _____ Mom/Dad Child's age _____ M / F
 Number of years in Canada (parent) _____
 Start time of observation: _____ End time of observation: _____

Type of activity / Area	Physical interaction and proximity	Verbal exchange	What is the parent doing	What is the child doing

Examples of activities:

- Constructive play (Lego, blocks, making things)
- Pretend play (playing house, make believe with toys)
- Board games and puzzles
- Art work (play dough, painting)

Points to pay attention to:

What is the child playing with?

Who chose the activity – the parent or child?

Is the parent interacting with the child? Is the parent helping the child? Is the parent telling the child what to do?

How close (physically) are the parent and child or children?

If there is a sibling, how is the parent dividing his/her attention?

Is the parent playing with other children (other than his or her own children)?

Parents' conversations with other parents

Other Notes:

Appendix H

Please pick 3 different days and 3 different times. Describe the activities you and your children did during these periods of time. Please write who participated in the activities, where did the activities take place and what happened during the activities.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
10-12							
12-2							
2-4							
4-6							
6-8							

Appendix I

Outline for interview

Introduction

Please tell me about yourself and about your children

Topic 1: Description of play – in general and in their family context

- What do you think play is?
- What are the favorite activities and toys of your child?
- Going over the log: out of the activities in the log, which are play activities

Topic 2: Why do children play?

- Why do you think children play?
- How you think play will contribute to your child's development?
- Do you think play will contribute to your child's future? In what way?

Topic 3: Differences between Canada and India regarding play

- Do you think there are differences between how children play/develop/grow up in India (Punjab specifically) and in Canada?
- What are the main activities children do in the place you come from?

Topic 4: (for mothers only): Drop in Centre

- Can you tell about the centre?
- Why did you start going to the centre?