

An Examination of Preschool Aged Children's Perceptions of Play

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to reveal the perceptions of today's children surrounding play. A phenomenological method was used in the research, designed qualitatively for the purpose of revealing preschool-aged children's perceptions of play in their pictures. A total of 97 children being educated in two different preschools in the fall term of the 2018-2019 academic year participated in the study. Purposeful sampling was used in the creation of the working group. before beginning the application to collect data, the children who participated in the sampling were chatted with and their teachers were discussed. The picture drawings were later specified by providing the directive "Let's draw our favorite type of play." The acquired data were analyzed with the interpretive content analysis method, a qualitative analysis. When the results of the research were studied, it was determined that children aged 36-48 and 49-60 months preferred inside spaces as a play space in their pictures while children aged 61-72 months much preferred outside spaces; that the children aged 36-48 more often drew the genders of the people in their play as female while the children aged 49-60 and 61-72 months more often drew their genders as male; that the children aged 36-48, 49-60, and 61-72 months most often chose the spaces where they played their play in their pictures as homes; that the children aged 36-48 months most included technological tools in their pictures; and that the children aged 36-48, 49-60, and 61-72 months most included their friends as playmates in their pictures.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Preschool, play, perception*

Okul Öncesi Çocuklarının Oyun Algılarının İncelenmesi

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Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı günümüzde çocukların oyun algılarının ortaya koymaktır. Okul öncesi dönem çocuklarının resimlerinde oyun algılarının ortaya çıkarılması amacıyla nitel olarak desenlenen araştırmada olgubilim modeli kullanılmıştır. Araştırmaya 2018-2019 eğitim-öğretim yılı güz döneminde iki farklı anaokulunda eğitim gören 97 çocuk katılmıştır. Çalışma grubunun oluşturulmasında amaçlı örnekleme kullanılmıştır. Verileri toplamak amacı ile uygulamaya başlamadan önce örnekleme katılan çocuklarla sohbet edilerek öğretmenleri hakkında konuşulmuştur. Daha sonra "En sevdiğimiz oyunumuzu çizelim." yönergesi verilerek resim çizmeleri belirtilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler nitel analiz yöntemlerinden yorumlayıcı içerik analizi yöntemi ile analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları incelendiğinde araştırmaya katılan 36-48 ve 49-60 aylık çocukların resimlerinde oyun mekânı olarak iç mekân, 61-72 aylık çocukların ise daha çok dış mekânı tercih ettikleri; 36-48 aylık çocukların oyunlarında yer alan kişilerin cinsiyetlerini daha çok kız, 49-60 ve 61-72 aylık çocukların yer alan kişilerin cinsiyetlerini daha çok erkek olarak çizdikleri; 36-48, 49-60 ve 61-72 aylık çocukların resimlerinde oyunlarını oynadıkları mekânları en çok ev olarak tercih ettikleri; 36-48 aylık çocukların resimlerinde en çok teknolojik araçlara; 49-60 aylık çocukların resimlerinde en çok doğa ile ilgili nesnelere; 61-72 aylık çocukların resimlerinde oyunlarını en çok doğa ile ilgili nesnelere yer verdikleri ve 36-48, 49-60 ve 61-72 aylık çocukların resimlerinde en fazla oyun arkadaşı olarak arkadaşlarına yer verdikleri saptanmıştır.

Keywords: Okul öncesi, Oyun, Algı

Introduction

The play, which has existed since the dawn of humanity, can be defined as a fun or serious but charged play carried out entirely voluntarily and consciously that has a unique and finite timeline, that a certain space, order, and rules, that can be repeated without considering the result of transfer as of the moment situated into memories (Değer, 2012). Theorists, researchers, and educators of various disciplines and viewpoints like Piaget, Freud, Erikson, and Vygotsky who tried to explain what play is and why children play reported that play has a big role in learning and development and that play includes health, happiness, and creativity. With regard to play, researchers reached the consensus despite having differing views on the topics of the characteristics of play that, play is generally a human behavior that exhibits certain characteristics (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001). Play is not just an entertaining activity but a factor necessary for the cognitive, emotional, and societal development of the child. Children find opportunities to exhibit their characteristics like creativity, language, and societal cohesion and become emotionally comforted by means of play, behaving as they wish in a safe environment; and they maintain their personal development by playing the role that falls to them in their relationship with the individuals in their surroundings (Rubin, 1983; Thompson, 1990; Saracho, 1996; Şahinkaya, 2008). Play that requires physical strength like running, jumping, climbing, and crawling support the regular working of the bodily systems and the motor development of the child by supporting the child's physical development (Koçyiğit et al., 2007). Absorbing information by asking questions during play, transferring the information to others, the principles during play, gaining the rules and learning the roles of the child in the future with play, harmonizing with playmates, and becoming better acquainted with their surroundings contribute to their social development (Şimşek, 2004; Poyraz, 2012). During play, learning many concepts like size, shape, color, dimension, weight, volume, measuring, counting, time, space, distance, and space; many mental processes like criticism, classification, listing, analysis, synthesis, and problem-solving; and many realized sensorial concepts like big-small, thick-thin, hot-cold, and sweet-sour support the cognitive development of the child (Koçyiğit et al.,

2007). Thanks to the interaction they establish with their surroundings while playing, they gain the habits of forming sentences, speaking comfortably, and expressing their thoughts. The development of skills like asking questions, obtaining new information, and transferring information to others present positive contributions to the linguistic development of the child (Akyel, 2011).

Play is a societal truth. It is possible to better understand the behaviors of children and adults individually or in a group through play. This is why children's play reflects the traditional culture of society (Emir, 2011). The child's play has changed from the past to the present Child play has changed from the past until today. One of these changes is the spaces where they play. Clements (2004) determined that children today play less in outdoor spaces compared with a previous generation and set aside more time for television and computer plays. Especially the frequency and duration of the children's outdoor play were noted, and it was reported that children today spend more time in a passive state and indoors than the previous generation. Similarly, Karsten (2005) reported that children today play less in outdoor spaces, have more restricted areas, have less playmates, play more at home, and are exposed to greater limitations originating from parents. One of the reasons for the changing of the children's play spaces is intense and uncoordinated urbanization. As a result of rapid urbanization, large play areas where children can reanimate their traditional street plays they play have been taken from their hands (Akin, 2015).

Another change that childhood play has underwent are the devices they use. Play, entertainment, communication, socializing, and many more similar habits of children who encounter electronic and digital devices in the first years of childhood vary. Traditional play most preferred among young children are being replaced by online plays played with electronic devices with the growth of children (Kars, 2010; Sapsağlam, 2018). It is seen in the literature review that there are similar studies. Shields at Behrman (2000) determined that preschool-aged, 2-5-year-old children play an average of 27 minutes of computer plays a day and most prefer computer plays over traditional play and toys. Rideout, Vandewater & Wartella (2003) determined in their study that 48% of children aged 6 and under use a computer, 70% of children between the

ages of 4 and 6 use a computer, 68% of children aged 2 and under watch television, and children aged 0-6 watch an average of one hour of television and play 38 minutes of video plays a day. The European Cooperation in Science and Technology (2016) reported that 25% of children between the ages of 0-2 and 36% of children between the ages of 3-5 have their own tablets. With regard to these studies, it is seen that along with the development of technology today children's styles and perceptions of play are changing in time.

It is seen that the children use many tools like balls, ropes, pins, and hula hoops in their play and play in tools like balance beams, seesaws, swings, gymnastic cushions, and vaulting boxes (Kadim, 2012). However, it is observed today that they have abandoned these instruments for technological devices. It is seen in the literature review that there are studies that reveal that the play behaviors of children vary based on gender (Thorne, 1993; Freman, 2007). They revealed that male children took hold of most of the play spaces, held wide spaces for sports and playtime activities; and that girls played plays like hopscotch and jump-ropes by meeting in smaller areas closer to school.

The purpose of this study is to reveal the perceptions of today's children surrounding play. One of the best ways to reflect the perceptions of preschool-aged children is pictures. The acceptances of drawings as a prospective method first began with the use in the 1920s of human figures to evaluate personality and cognitive capacity (Leibowitz, 2013). The perspective on children's drawings started to change as of the 1940s, and the idea that a drawing was an effective method in the external reflection of children's emotions and motives gained weight (Thomas & Silk, 1990). The picture was used for the purpose of evaluating the individual's interaction with their surroundings as well as evaluating their personality and cognitive capacity. The Draw A Family, Tell A Story, and Draw A Group tests can be shown as examples to the use of a picture in evaluating an individual's interaction with the environment (Wall, 1970). Drawing pictures is one of the methods children use to express themselves and interpret the world around them because children possess a very small vocabulary in the first years of life (Anning, 1999; Anim, 2012). According to Yavuzer (2015), pictures are a stronger instrument of expression than words for young children and provide sig-

nificant hints to adults relating to the inner world and growing process of children. Children reflect the difficulties they experience but struggle or are afraid to explain verbally in the pictures they draw with the unrealized effect of their subconscious. Children draw not what they see but what they think and imagine (Çankırılı, 2012). According to Venger (2003), children draw pictures of what they find important. Based on this, a picture is a shared product of the conscious and subconscious levels. People at all ages, and especially in childhood, reflect their emotions and anxieties in pictures. It is seen in the literature review that there are many studies in which child drawings are used (Sapsağlam, 2017; Brechet & Jolley, 2014; Özkan, 2014; Crusco 2013; Crawford et al., 2012; Dağlıoğlu et al., 2010; Joiner et al., 1996). However, in the review of the relevant literature, it was seen that previous research was directed more towards the play preferences of teachers, the effect of play education programs, and topics like play addiction. No study that reflected preschool-aged children's preferences and perceptions of play was encountered (Sapsağlam, 2018). This is why it is thought that this study is important in terms of the contributions it will provide to the field. For all of these reasons, this researched aimed to reveal preschool-aged children's perceptions of play.

Answers were sought to the following questions in line with this objective.

1. How was the distribution in the preschool-aged children's pictures based on the play spaces?
2. How was the distribution of the people at play in the preschool-aged children's pictures based on gender?
3. How was the distribution of the spaces being played in within the preschool-aged children's pictures?
4. How was the distribution of the objects at play in the preschool-aged children's pictures?
5. How was the distribution in the preschool-aged children's pictures based on the person at play?

Methodology

Research model

A phenomenological method was used in the research, designed qualitatively for the purpose of revealing preschool-aged children's perceptions of play in their pictures. A qualitative process was observed to realistically and integrally present the perceptions and evens in a natural environment. Phenomenology includes an individual's definition of a conscious experience with regard to a phenomenon (Christensen, Johnson & Turner, 2011; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). One of the ways to capture the expressions of children from different perspectives is for the observer to look from various perspectives and draw meaning by prioritizing the images and to bring a more integrated perspective to children's explanations with images. "Looking with a phenomenological perspective" includes acknowledging and expecting that each child approaches the drawing through different means and has a unique drawing style with compositions, shapes, and colors they may specifically love or not love in their explanations through drawing. Phenomenological research attempts to explain people's perceptions about a phenomenon (thing perceived with the senses), the meanings they assume, and the feelings about the phenomenon (Patton, 2014). While analyzing the pictures of the children, what was phenomenologically important was the emphasis on being open to various meanings, the context they created, and the worldview of the maker (Malchiodi, 2005). The phenomenon attempting to be explained in the research is preschool-aged children's perceptions of "play".

Working Group

A total of 97 children, ages 61-72 months (n=36), 49-60 months (n=33), and 36-48 months (n=27), who are being educated in two different preschools in Giresun in the fall term of the 2018-2019 academic year participated in the study. The distribution based on gender for the children in the working group was composed of 38 girls and 59 boys. All of the

children found in the working group were children that exhibited normal development and did not have any special needs. Purposeful sampling was used in the creation of the working group (Patton, 1987). The purposeful sampling method fully emerged within the process of qualitative research. Purposeful sampling allows for the in-depth study of situations thought to possess rich information (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2003). The measurements thought to be important for selection were specified in this sampling. According to these measurements, it is thought that the chosen sampling was able to represent the research population with all its characteristics (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001).

Collection of data

One of the greatest difficulties for studies conducted with children is that the children might not want to give information to a researcher they don't know or might not want to participate in the research. This is why methods unique to children should be selected before conducting interviews with children. Methods like having children draw pictures, take pictures, and play will help the children have a more entertaining and interesting time with unstructured processes and will facilitate the collection of data by increasing the children's trust in the researcher (Punch, 2002; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). This is why the draw-and-explain technique was used in the study to collect data regarding the children's perception of play. The draw-and-explain technique includes the drawings of children and their explanations regarding these drawings. The draw-and-explain technique is a descriptive method used to explain how children structure thoughts and concepts (McWhirter, Collins, Bryant, Wetton & Bishop, 2000; Shepardson, 2005). Before beginning the application to collect data, the children who participated in the sampling were chatted with and their teachers were discussed. The picture drawings were later specified by providing the directive "*Let's draw our favorite type of play.*" For the picture study, pastel paints and white A4 paper was provided, and they were granted the opportunity to work as long as they wanted. No interventions were made in the children's drawings, and no guidance was provided. Later, each child was asked to explain the pic-

ture they drew, and what they explained was recorded on the back of the picture.

Data analysis

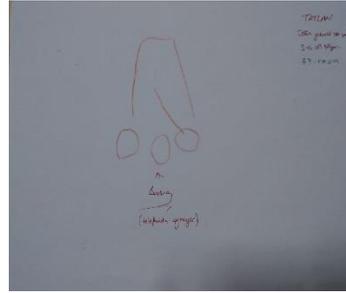
The visual elements that create the children's drawings of play constitute the data for the study. The acquired data were analyzed with the interpretive content analysis method, a qualitative analysis (Ball and Smith, 1992; Banks, 2001). For the purpose of examining the data obtained from the children's drawings in a more detailed manner, a "content analysis", a method used in qualitative data analysis, was used, and the data were analyzed by individually coding for each teacher and family. The objective of the research was taken into consideration while coding, and codes were created in this respect. The codes were created with an open coding method. In this respect, the codings were interpreted after being primarily tabulated. In the creation of themes (categorization), either themes previously developed by others are taken or, when this had not been previously done, a new system of themes can be developed (Bilgin, 2006). An intercoder reliability analysis was conducted by individually examining the researchers in terms of the themes in which the discourse of the observers is specified. In this process, formula Intercoder Reliability = $[\text{Consensus} / (\text{Consensus} + \text{Divergence})] \times 100$ (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was utilized, and the intercoder reliability percentage was calculated as%. According to Kabapınar (2003), if the consistency between the two codings was 80% of greater, it is expressed that the analyses in the research, and therefore the research, were reliable. In this context, it is thought that the data were reliable because the consistency percentage obtained from the research was above 80%.

It is seen that the number of pictures in the tables and the numbers of children in the working group do not coincide. The reason for this situation originates from the children being asked about some of the pictures and the researchers being unable to analyze and reach a shared consensus (Table 1, Table 3), and there being no person or gender-inclusive data in the pictures, or only objects being drawn (Table 2, Table 5).

drew the gender of the people taking part in their play as boys and girls, respectively; that 58.8% (n=10) and 41.2% (n=7) of the children aged 49-60 months drew the gender of the people taking part in their play as boys and girls, respectively; and that 70.4% (n=19) and 29.6% (n=8) of the children aged 61-72 months drew the gender of the people taking part in their play as boys and girls, respectively.



Picture 7: 36-48 months girl picture



Picture 8: 36-48 months boy picture



Picture 9: 48-60 months girl picture



Picture 10: 48-60 months boy picture



Picture 11: 60-72 months girl picture

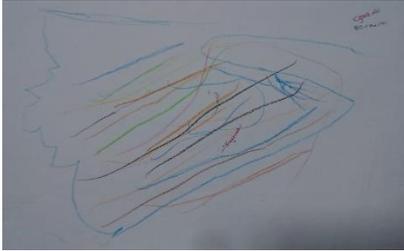


Picture 12: 60-72 months boy picture

Table 3. Distribution of the spaces being played in within the preschool-aged children's pictures

| | 36-48 months | | 49-60 months | | 61-72 months | | Total | |
|--------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|-------|-----|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Home | 11 | 31.4 | 12 | 34.2 | 12 | 34.2 | 35 | 100 |
| School | 1 | 25 | 3 | 75 | - | - | 4 | 100 |
| Garden | 4 | 28.6 | 2 | 14.2 | 8 | 57.2 | 14 | 100 |
| Street | 7 | 26.9 | 8 | 30.7 | 11 | 42.4 | 26 | 100 |
| Park | 3 | 25 | 6 | 50 | 3 | 25 | 12 | 100 |

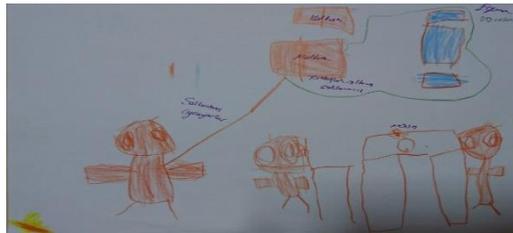
When Table 3 is examined, it was determined that most 31.4% (n=11) and least 3% (n=1) of the children aged 36-48 months who participated in the study drew the spaces being played in as a home and school, respectively; that 34.2% (n=12) and 14.2% (n=2) of the children aged 49-60 months drew the spaces being played in as a home and garden, respectively; and that 34.2% (n=12) and 0% (n=0) of the children aged 61-72 months drew the spaces being played in as a home and school, respectively.



Picture 13: 36-48 months picture at park



Picture 14: 48-60 months picture at home



Picture 15: 60-72 months at home play picture

Table 4. Distribution in the preschool-aged children's pictures based on the object at play

| | 36-48 months | | 49-60 months | | 61-72 months | | Total | |
|------------------------------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|-------|-----|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Park instruments | 3 | 23.7 | 1 | 7.7 | 8 | 61.6 | 13 | 100 |
| Nature | 3 | 7.7 | 15 | 38.5 | 21 | 53.4 | 39 | 100 |
| Animal | 2 | 100 | - | - | - | - | 2 | 100 |
| Vehicle | 3 | 14.2 | 13 | 61.9 | 5 | 23.8 | 21 | 100 |
| Toy | 3 | 25 | 4 | 33.3 | 5 | 41.7 | 12 | 100 |
| Ball/Balloon | 2 | 16.7 | 4 | 33.3 | 6 | 50 | 12 | 100 |
| Technological devices | 8 | 66.6 | 2 | 16.7 | 2 | 16.7 | 12 | 100 |

When Table 4 is examined, it was determined that most 66.6% (n=8) and least (n=2) of the children aged 36-48 months who participated in the study drew technological devices and balls/balloons and animals, respectively; that 38.5% (n=15) and 0% (n=2) of the children aged 49-60 months drew objects relating to nature, and animals, respectively; and that 53.4% (n=21) and 0% (n=0) of the children aged 61-72 months drew objects relating to nature, and animals, respectively.



Picture 16:36-48 months technological picture



Picture 17: 48-60 months nature device picture



Picture 18: 60-72 months toy picture

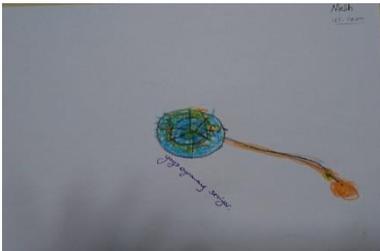
Table 5. Distribution in the preschool-aged children's pictures based on the person at play

| | 36-48 months | | 49-60 months | | 61-72 months | | Total | |
|-------------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|-------|-----|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % |
| Mother | 2 | 28.6 | 1 | 14.3 | 4 | 57.1 | 7 | 100 |
| Father | 2 | 28.6 | 1 | 14.3 | 4 | 57.1 | 7 | 100 |
| Sibling | 2 | 28.6 | 2 | 28.6 | 3 | 42.8 | 7 | 100 |
| Grandmother | - | - | 1 | 100 | - | - | 1 | 100 |
| Grandfather | 1 | 100 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 100 |
| Friend | 5 | 25 | 6 | 30 | 9 | 45 | 20 | 100 |
| No people | 0 | 30.8 | 24 | 36.9 | 21 | 32.3 | 65 | 100 |

When Table 5 was examined, it was determined that children aged 36-48 (n=5), 49-60 (n=6), and 61-72 (n=9) months most included their *friends*, and least included their *grandparents* in their pictures.



Picture 19: 36-48 month mother and sibling-inclusive picture



Picture 20: 48-60 month inclusive picture



Picture 21: 60-72 months sibling- containing no people picture

Discussion and Conclusion

It was observed that the children participating in the research were in developmental stages covering the age periods but showed individual differences. For this reason, the pictures of children were evaluated based on their meanings. When the results of the research were studied, it was determined that children aged 36-48 and 49-60 months preferred inside spaces as a play space in their pictures while children aged 61-72 months much preferred outside spaces; that the children aged 36-48 more often drew the genders of the people in their play as female while the children aged 49-60 and 61-72 months more often drew their genders as male; that the children aged 36-48, 49-60, and 61-72 months most often chose the spaces where they played their play in their pictures as homes; that the children aged 36-48 months most included technological tools in their pictures, the children aged 49-60 months included objects relating to nature in their pictures, and the children aged 61-72 months included objects relating to nature in their pictures; and that the children aged 36-48, 49-60, and 61-72 months most included their friends as playmates in their pictures.

When studying the findings of the research, it is seen that the children entered into technological tools as play tools in their pictures. As a result of the study, it is seen that more technological devices were included for younger children compared with older children. It can be demonstrated that one of the reasons for this situation is the increase of school experiences with the rising ages of the children. It is seen in the literature review that there are similar studies. Shields at Behrman (2000) determined that preschool-aged, 2-5-year-old children play an average of 27 minutes of computer plays a day and most prefer computer plays over traditional play and toys. Rideout, Vandewater & Wartella (2003) determined in their study that 48% of children aged 6 and under use a computer, 70% of children between the ages of 4 and 6 use a computer, 68% of children aged 2 and under watch television, and children aged 0-6 watch an average of one hour of television and play 38 minutes of video plays a day. It is seen in the results of the study that children aged 61-72 months, along with their growing age, drew park instruments in their pictures. It can be said that as a reason for this situation, the children more often used

parks as outdoor spaces because of the decrease in natural play spaces. The results of Kadim's (2012) study show that the children use many tools like balls, ropes, pins, and hula hoops in their plays and play in tools like balance beams, seesaws, swings, gymnastic cushions, and vaulting boxes.

As a result of the research, it was reported that children aged 36-48, 49-60, and 61-72 months most preferred homes as the spaces where they played in the pictures. In the study Clements (2004) conducted with mothers whose children were between the ages of 3-12, it was determined that today's children play outside less and set aside more time for television and computer plays compared with a previous generation. Especially the frequency and duration of the children's outdoor play were noted. It was reported that children today are individuals that spend more time in a passive state and outdoors compared with the previous generation. Similarly, Karsten (2005) reported that children today play less in outdoor spaces, have more restricted areas, have less playmates, play more at home, and are exposed to greater limitations originating from parents.

As a result of the research, it was reported that the children aged 36-48 months drew the genders of the people found in their play more as female, and the children aged 49-60 and 61-72 months drew the genders of the people as male. When studying the literature, it was reported that children generally convey figures of their own gender into their pictures (Yavuzer, 2016; Koppitz, 1968). It is thought that the children in the working group of the research (Girl: 38, Boy: 59) preferred to draw their friends of the same gender into their play and that for this reason the result is parallel to the literature. As a result of the study, it was determined that children aged 36-48, 49-60, and 61-72 months most included their *friends*, and least included their *grandparents* in their pictures. It was reported in the literature review that preschool-aged children liked to be together with their peers rather than adults or younger children (Yavuzer, 2016). Similarly, Can (2011) reported that children acquired their first socialization experiences as a result of interaction with their parents, siblings, and, if present, relatives, within the family. As a result of the research, it is seen that the people the children most reflected in their play were friends, parents, and siblings. With regard to this information,

it can be said that the children reflected the people they like to be together with the most in their pictures. For this reason, it can be said that children need time set aside to play with their peers (Bennet et al., 1999). In light of this information, it is recommended that:

- Open space play be are increased for preschool-aged children,
- Natural play areas be increased rather than structured play areas,
- Families be informed in order to protect their children from the harm of technological devices,
- Time be set aside to play with the moth and father with whom the child is constantly interacting,
- The time children spend with their peers be increased and play opportunities be provided.

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