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The power of play: enhancing parental engagement and child development through an occupational therapy guided community play space

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THE POWER OF PLAY:

ENHANCING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY GUIDED COMMUNITY PLAY SPACE

by

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DEDICATION

This doctoral project is dedicated to the countless parents who strive every day to create moments of connection, wonder, and growth for their children. May you always feel empowered to play, learn, and nurture with confidence and joy. You are your child's perfect parent and what you do is more than enough.

To my husband, Craig, whose unwavering support and playful spirit remind me daily of the power of presence – thank you for leading by example and never missing an opportunity to laugh, explore, and play with our children.

And to my three incredible children, Nils, Nora, and Henrik – you are my heart's greatest teachers. Your curiosity, creativity, and endless imagination inspire me to keep growing so that I can be the best mother possible to you. Every part of this journey, and the work it represents is because of, and for you.

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To my family and friends, I am deeply grateful for your listening ears, thoughtful feedback, and constant encouragement. Your belief in me and the creation of Honeycomb Café & Busy Bees Play Space has meant more than words can express. Thank you for helping turn a dream, inspired by love, play, and connection into something tangible.

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ABSTRACT

Developmental play is critical in developing a child's cognitive, social-emotional, social, and physical skills and in establishing foundational skills that a child will access throughout their life. Parents play an important role in facilitating meaningful play experience that support a robust development for children; however, many parents face barriers impacting engagement in developmental play such as limited awareness of the importance of play, parental stress, or difficulties with resources to enhance play.

Honeycomb Cafe and Busy Bees Play Space is an occupational therapy-informed, community-based program designed to foster connections, education, and confidence. Through educational courses, parent workshops, and many other offerings, the play cafe will assist in promoting parent-child engagement and enhancing interactions. The pilot study is a six-week educational series "The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time" which targets increasing parental confidence, strengthening parent/child interactions, and reducing parental stress. The program is one component of a larger vision to affect positive change in the local community.

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CHAPTER ONE – Introduction

The importance of play in a child's development is a notion that has been widely researched. The resounding themes that are reported indicate that play is critical in a multitude of ways (Yogman et al., 2018). Research frequently highlights the important role play has in a child's development of foundational skills that will serve them as they progress through toddlerhood, school age, adolescence, and adulthood (Christie, 2022). In addition to existing research supporting the benefits of play, studies also show the effects that poor play, limited play exposure, or play deprivation may have on a child's development (Brown, 2014). The effects of play, or lack of opportunities for play, are profound, and the role of the parent and/or caregiver is an integral component. However, a rising number of households featuring two working parents, stress and other factors may hinder engagement (Tanta & Knox, 2015). This doctoral project will investigate the effects of play on childhood development, the benefits of established healthy play routines, the impact of occupational therapy on play, and how to empower parents to cultivate their children's development through engagement. The problem this doctoral project aims to address is that many parents do not feel adequately equipped with knowledge, confidence, or strategies to effectively engage in developmental play that supports their child's growth and development.

Due to the multifaceted nature of play, it is useful to identify experts in the field to promote best practices for the development of skills through play. Occupational therapy practitioners assume a crucial role in promoting play and providing family education to best support the development of play skills, as reported by Tanta & Knox

(2015). These authors continue to highlight the balance of the science and art of play and how an occupational therapy practitioner possesses the knowledge and skill necessary to facilitate play to ensure a child is receiving the maximum benefit while engaged. Yogman et al. (2019) speak to the specific benefits of play on the brain structure of a child and research continues to identify the links between play and curiosity, which have direct correlations to memory and learning. Yogman et al. (2018) explains the suggestion that decreased opportunities are associated with increased cases of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, poor executive functions, and difficulties with creativity.

Defining Play

While play is a task that is easily observed and described in addition to being thoroughly researched, it is not easily defined; a clear definition has evaded those attempting to encompass the construct for years (Zosh et al. 2018). As researchers continue to investigate play — what it is, how it should be incorporated into daily lives, and the effects of engagement in play — there are vastly different definitions that arise of what "play" truly is. Parham and Fazio (2008) define play as "any spontaneous or organized activity that provides enjoyment, entertainment, amusement, or diversion" (p. 448). They continue to explain the intrinsic motivation of play that focuses on the process and not the end product. This idea is also supported by Zosh (2018). Brown and Vaughn (2010) explain the resistance to defining play due to its ever-changing nature but explain the properties of play that would enhance one's understanding of what play is or what it can be. These properties include:

> (a) Apparently Purposeless (done for its own sake), indicating play is done for the sake of playing and does not contribute to survival; (b) Voluntary, it is not a required activity; (c) Inherent Attraction, engagement in play benefits individuals by boosting their mood or 'provides psychological arousal'; (d) Freedom from Time, when engaged one may lose the concept of time and become engrossed in the task; (e) Diminished Consciousness of Self, individuals do not fear how they are being portrayed during play; (f) Improvisational Potential, when engaged in play, individuals may find new strategies or new ideas to explore; (g) Continuation Desire, one is driven by the inherent pleasure that comes from engaging in play (pp. 17–18).

Researchers Brown and Vaughn (2010) continue to explain the findings put forth by other investigators, which explain a six-step process to play. These steps include (a) anticipation; waiting to see what the outcomes may be; (b) surprise; discoveries being made through play (c) pleasure; a generalized good feeling, (d) understanding; learning new concepts and incorporating previously learned ideas; (e) strength; empowerment through learning in difficult situations, and (f) poise; a sense of contentment and composure in life.

Due to the vast nature of what play is and what it can potentially be, Zosh et al. (2018) encourage individuals to consider play as a construct and not a specific set of criteria. The researchers continue to explain their thinking by viewing play as a spectrum — it allows for the inherent properties of play to remain at the forefront when being observed. Schlesinger et al. (2020) describe play as an activity that includes "joy, agency,

flexibility, active engagement, social interaction, an iterative nature, imagination, and structure of some sort" (p. 204). Schlesinger et al. (2020) speak to the research in which play is defined on a spectrum; the author continues to speak to the different types of play that may be easily observed, including free play, guided play, games, and playful instruction (pp. 204–205).

The Importance of Play and The Role of Occupational Therapy

Despite the difficulties with identifying a clear and concise definition of play, an occupational therapist's role in the promotion of play and the facilitation of prerequisite skills is notable. According to the American Occupational Therapy Association (2020),

> Occupational therapy is defined as the therapeutic use of everyday life occupations with persons, groups, or populations (i.e., the client) for the purpose of enhancing or enabling participation. Occupational therapy practitioners use their knowledge of the transactional relationship among the client, the client's engagement in valuable occupations, and the context to design occupation-based intervention plans (p. 1).

This encompassing definition of occupational therapy speaks to how an occupational therapist is able to address play as an occupation. A therapist may integrate play into child-led play sessions to enhance a child's participation or may provide family education on how to best support a child while engaged in play (Tanta & Knox, 2015).

Due to the versatile nature of play each child may engage differently but it is a construct that supports a child's development from cognitive, physical, social, and emotional perspectives (AJOT, 2014). While play is not the only activity a child partakes

in daily, it has been linked to a variety of benefits. Social-emotional benefits that have been identified include but are not limited to opportunities to engage with peers, learning through social play, comprehension of rules during play, improved emotional regulation, and understanding of one's role in play (Normandin et al. 2023). Furthermore, cognitive benefits include the development of impulse control, understanding of cause and effect, and executive function skills. These skills are all prerequisites to academic abilities later in life, and studies have demonstrated that engagement in free play has a positive effect on a child's classroom behavior (Schlesinger et al. 2020; Veiga, 2016).

Aside from the many benefits play has for an individual, it also supports a child's understanding of self in his or her environment. Normandin et al. (2023) speak to the direct impact engagement in pretend play has on language development, emotional regulation, and the establishment of perspectives for children. Not only do children learn self-help and regulation skills through play, but they also acquire the ability to manage peer relationships through cooperation, thereby allowing a child to utilize previously learned skills independently. All the skills learned through play can be applied for the child specifically, but also for the caregivers (Yogman et al. 2018).

Ward and Payne (2023) highlight the unique role occupational therapists have regarding play. The authors speak to a science-based approach to play that will best support a child's engagement. The understanding of physiological, cognitive, and psychological components of play enables therapists to provide guidance based on how the child engages in play-based activities. Brown and Lynch (2011) address play as a primary occupation for children and go on to say, "play is the work of children." It is this

cooperative approach of science and evidence-based understanding combined with an appreciation for child development and engagement that makes occupational therapy professionals specialists when it comes to play.

Parents and Play

Play is an important occupation in a child's life (AJOT, 2020). Through play, children begin to understand how the world works around them; it allows for exploration, engagement, and skill development (Gingsburg, 2007). Parents take on various roles for their children when engaged in play; they at times will provide meaning, serve as a tool for a child's imagination, encourage during confusing moments, or they may simply bear witness to the play, all of which contribute positively to a child's play (Gingsburg, 2007). The decision to become a parent is multifaceted, and the roles and responsibilities that come with the decision are life changing. O'Laughlin and Anderson (2001) speak to several of the factors considered when becoming a parent, and these areas may be seen as future stressors, two of which are finances and the ability to meet the child's needs. Gingsburg (2007) highlights the stressors that parents and caregivers sometimes feel and how stress can adversely affect their participation in play. Gingsburg (2007) speaks to over-scheduling and lost opportunities to engage in play with children, which leads to a feeling of inadequacy. This begs the question: are parents forgetting how to play with their children because of an over-scheduled lifestyle?

Fisher et al. (2008) highlights the wealth of research in support of play-based learning. The researcher continues to speak to parents' understanding of play and how their perceptions will affect engagement with their child. The article further states that

parents see the benefits of structured and unstructured play and believe they both are beneficial in learning.

Changes in Play and the Role of Occupational Therapy

In recent years, the decline in play has been highlighted because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the limitations associated with social distancing and isolation. In 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric, and Children's Hospital Association discussed the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and their families across the United States. This statement explains the worsening crisis in child and adolescent mental health, which prior to 2020, was of notable concern, but was exacerbated by the pandemic (The American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021).

The importance of play for a child's development and sense of self, and how decreased opportunities for play and socialization due to restrictions in place have affected children and adolescents, is notable throughout the evidence (Tanta & Knox, 2015). Larivière-Bastien et al. (2022) investigated children's perceptions of friendships and socialization as a result of the pandemic. The authors shed light on the awareness children and adolescents possess regarding their needs and social expectations, and how they identified that those needs were not being met due to restrictions in place. Duan et al. (2020) reported that COVID-19's repercussions significantly affected children and adolescents and had a notable psychosocial impact. While COVID-19 spotlighted the importance of play, there is a wealth of literature to support the decline in play as an existing problem prior to 2020 that had direct effects on the well-being of children and

adolescents. (Gray, 2011; Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2011; Putnick, 2023; O'Brien, 2002).

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, childhood play was seemingly facing a crisis due to the increased use of screens and technology in a child's or adolescent's life (Schlesinger, 2020). The means by which a child can access screens has grown tremendously since 1997, as explained by Chen and Adler (2019). The researchers speak to how in 1997 screen access included television, videotapes, electronic games, and home computer-related tasks, as compared to today, where children have access to screens throughout television, videotapes, digital video, game devices, cell phones, smart phones, tablets, electronic readers, and children's learning devices. This significant increase makes it more difficult for simple play, with limited use of technology, to remain at the forefront of a child's attention.

While there are arguable benefits to the use of technology in daily routines, Kerai et al. (2022) identify the implications of the integration of screentime on a child's global development. The researchers identified five developmental domains for consideration, which included: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills. The researchers found that increased screen time generally leads to "developmental vulnerability," thereby showing a negative association between increased screen time and children's developmental health.

The Proposed Intervention

With the trend of play feeling like a chore or a burden for many busy parents, there must be easy solutions to help parents re-learn how to play and engage with their children in a meaningful way. The proposed intervention to address the outlined problem is a for-profit, occupational therapy-informed play café, Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space. This includes, but is not limited to, the development of a cooperative play space in which parents and children alike can feel engaged and comfortable. This play space will be designed as an inviting place for a parent to come and play with their child while other parents and caregivers are present. This space will include open areas and clear sight lines in all areas to ensure that if a parent or caregiver would like to allow their child to participate in independent play, they can easily provide distant supervision.

In addition to open play times, occupational therapy-informed classes will be offered with children and parents in mind. To empower parents, these classes will disseminate information regarding development and the various ways to engage in play. Classes will be offered for parents and children from birth to six years old. Activities provided will be facilitated by a trained OT professional.

There will be parent and caregiver-only workshops offered as well. These will include current topics such as understanding the early intervention and individualized education plan process, pre-school and kindergarten readiness, learning to play together, and other educational and developmental topics. There will also be offerings for parental benefit in mind, such as balancing work and home responsibilities, book clubs, and other options for socializing.

Lastly, an occupational therapist will create simple handouts of tips to enhance play at different phases of development. These will include information about what may be expected at certain ages and stages of development and how to best foster the development of those skills. These fact sheets will include "ways to play" among other pertinent information. All the proposed interventions will be designed to empower parents and caregivers with knowledge so that they feel confident in playing with their child(ren).

Building upon the foundational concepts regarding Honeycomb Cafe and Busy Bees Play Space, this project aims to explore the multifaceted challenges facing parents today and the implications on engagement in developmental play; this includes but is not limited to psychosocial, environmental, and systemic factors. This author will discuss the current literature and intervention models that contextualize how existing approaches facilitate parent and child engagement. The primary objective of this project is to design, implement, and evaluate how a co-operative, play cafe, like Honeycomb Play Cafe and Busy Bees Play Space, will serve as an innovative application of occupational therapy to best support a family in a holistic sense. Through this comprehensive examination, this project aims to demonstrate how this model will effectively enhance parental confidence and child development outcomes within a supportive and inclusive environment.

CHAPTER TWO – Project Theoretical and Evidence Base

Honeycomb Play Café and Busy Bees Play Space is thoughtfully designed to support families comprehensively and holistically. Through the integration of occupational therapy-informed parent and child classes, social opportunities, and cooperative play, Honeycomb Play Café aims to foster parental confidence while promoting key aspects of child development. The space is curated to address a variety of needs for local families, including the barriers that affect engagement in play, such as a decreased understanding of the importance of play, parental stress, and limited access to supportive resources. This unconventional application of occupational therapy showcases the profession's adaptability and ability to bring about positive change, thereby enhancing community well-being.

The Problem

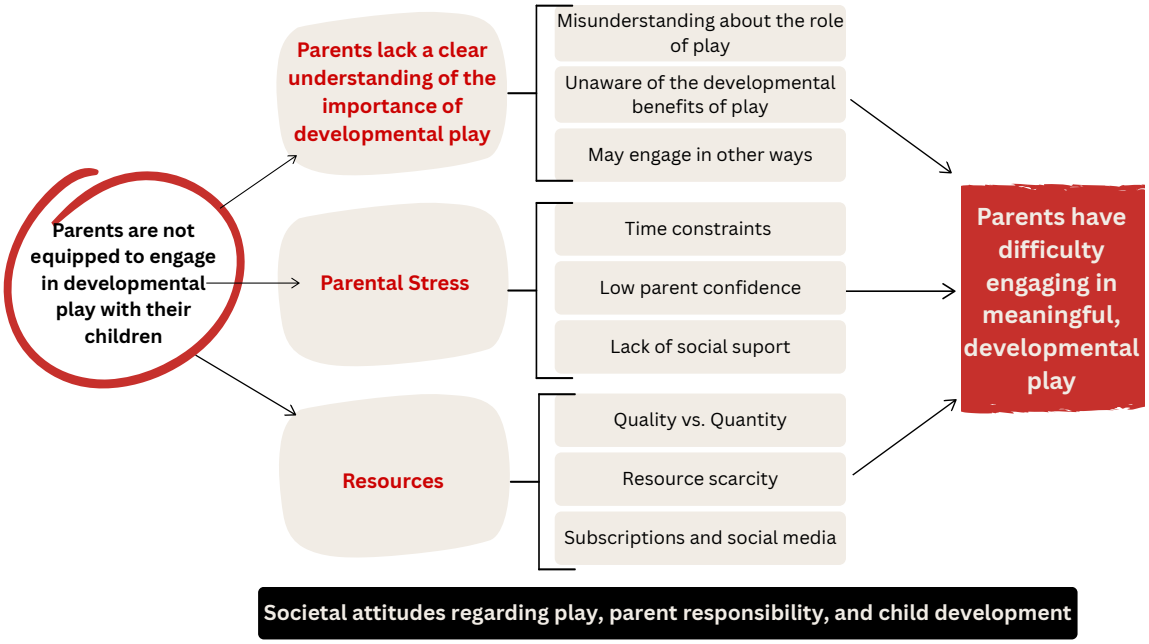
While the presentation of play may look different from child to child, it is a construct that supports a child's development from cognitive, physical, social, and emotional perspectives (AJOT, 2014). Educators with a focus on early childhood education emphasize the importance of play's active and constructive nature, as well as its contributions to global learning and whole-child development (Moon-Seo & Munsell, 2022; Schlesinger et al. 2020).

Aside from the many benefits play has for an individual, it also supports a child's understanding of themselves in their environment. Normandin et al. (2023) discuss the direct impact that engagement in pretend play has on language development, emotional regulation, and the establishment of perspectives in children. Children not only learn self-

help and regulation skills through play, but they also acquire strategies to manage peer relationships through cooperation, thereby allowing a child to utilize previously learned skills independently. All the skills learned through play can be applied by both the child and the caregiver (Yogman et al. 2018). Figure 2.1 presents a visual model of the problem discussed in this chapter.

Figure 2.1

Visual Model of the Problem Presented by the Author



The cause of parents having difficulty engaging in meaningful, developmental play is complex and multifaceted. It is challenging to encompass all the contributing factors to this problem accurately; however, the visual model (Figure 2.1) identifies three factors that directly contribute. The above model identifies the contributing factors that lead to parents not feeling equipped to engage in developmental play with their child(ren), as indicated in the first blue square. The first contributing factor highlighted

here is that parents lack a clear understanding of the importance of play. Whether parents lack knowledge of the global benefits of play for the child, the parent, and the child-parent relationship, or they are unaware of the overall developmental benefits of play, there are implications for engagement. Additionally, while play is a notable factor in child development, parents may engage with their child in other meaningful ways.

The second contributing factor noted in this explanatory model is parental stress, which a multitude of factors can cause. Some considerations to be taken into account include time constraints, whether due to a parent with divided attention among several children at home or to work or family responsibilities outside the home. Parents may also lack confidence in their child's play skills, which limits their engagement in play. Parents may also be faced with a lack of social support that affects the mental health of a caregiver, leading to increased stress and decreased engagement.

The final factor identified is resources; this speaks to limited access to resources and an overabundance of resources available. Parents are often plagued by a consumer society that encourages the regular purchase of toys, games, and gadgets. While playrooms may be filled, parents may be torn between quality versus quantity of toys available to their child(ren). Contrarily, many parents are limited by resource scarcity. These limitations may be geographic, financial, or related to other factors, among many other possibilities. A limitation in resources may affect a parent's engagement in play due to feelings of inadequacy or lack of confidence. Finally, with tools like social media, many families are encouraged to purchase items to promote developmental play or to explore subscription-based play boxes. While these tools may be effective in promoting

overall play and engagement, the quality of play may be impacted.

Along the base of this explanatory model, readers will notice a rectangle highlighting societal attitudes regarding play, parent responsibility, and child development. This theme applies to all subsets of this explanatory model. Societal expectations regarding play, whether it should be academically driven or truly exploratory in nature, will influence how play is managed. Secondly, societal expectations regarding parental stress will have direct implications on the play and engagement of a parent. This will address the work-life balance, managing and mitigating stress, and how responsibilities should be effectively handled. Lastly, due to the accessibility of social media, societal expectations of resources should also be taken into consideration. This may speak to the overabundance of toys and games for children that are branded to "promote brain development" and may have implications on a parent's confidence surrounding play.

Theoretical Base of the Problem

To comprehensively understand the complexity of this problem, this doctoral project will be grounded in Developmental Systems Theory (DST), which provides a framework for examining the interconnected factors that influence parent-child play interactions and their developmental outcomes. This theory provides a comprehensive overview of human development, highlighting the complex relationships between various factors, including genetics, environment, social, and cultural influences, that affect outcomes for both the child and the parent (Guralnick, M. J., 2019).

The Developmental Systems Theory (DST) is a theoretical framework that aims to better understand development by establishing connections between nature and nurture, while also considering various external factors. The DST focuses on the interconnectivity of these aspects of an individual's day-to-day and how reciprocity among the identified aspects is the foundation of development (Guralnick, M. J., 2019). The consideration of all these factors aligns with the foundation of occupational therapy, which is to treat the whole person and support engagement in their preferred occupations. This theory addresses the dynamics between individuals, tasks, and environments to identify and understand the barriers to continued engagement and how that may affect development.

The Developmental Systems Theory was selected as the primary lens to view the identified problem of "parents have difficulty engaging in meaningful, developmental play" because of the appreciation for multiple factors affecting outcomes and the idea that it is not as simple as nature vs. nurture. This framework embodies a holistic approach to a problem and collects information from several vantage points to best inform the issues. The non-linear approach to progress is fitting for a better understanding of why parents may struggle with engagement in developmentally appropriate play.

Synthesis of Evidence for the Problem

This doctoral project aims to identify specific barriers that prevent effective parent engagement in play activities and examine how these obstacles contribute to broader developmental concerns for children. To examine parents' engagement in meaningful, developmental play and the implications on child development, the author

asked (1) Is there evidence that parents lack understanding of how developmental play contributes to their child's cognitive, social, and emotional growth?; (2) Is there evidence that parents lack knowledge of how to use toys and materials to facilitate developmentally appropriate play activities?; (3) Is there evidence that parental stress reduces the frequency or quality of parent-child developmental play interactions?; (4) Is there evidence that insufficient access to age-appropriate toys, social supports, or play spaces limits parents' ability to engage in developmental play? (5) Is there evidence that parental self-efficacy and confidence in play skills influence engagement in developmental play activities?

Literature searches were conducted across multiple online databases, including APA PsycINFO, CINAHL Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, ERIC, The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, and the Boston University Library Database. Search terms included, but were not limited to, the following: parent, mother, father, caregiver, developmental play, childhood play, childhood development, play skills, stress, well-being, confidence, engagement, developmentally appropriate toys, toy scarcity, community-based play, social supports, and play groups. Many of the sources identified here were published between 2020 and 2025, in an effort to identify relevant research for a generation of parents who have emerged since the COVID-19 pandemic.

To ensure the literature included in this synthesis was directly relevant to the research objectives, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed. Studies were included if they were published between 2015 and 2025; however, there was a strong preference for articles published between 2019 and 2025. The decision to focus on the

latter part of the timeframe is aimed at addressing post-COVID parenting and capturing the current generation of parents. Other inclusion criteria included that studies should be peer-reviewed and empirical, focusing specifically on parental engagement in developmental play. Topics such as parent-child interaction, structured play, the role of psychosocial factors affecting play, and how play facilitation and education impact play were also considered. Articles selected generally examined parents of typically developing children without a medical diagnosis that would affect the development and acquisition of expected milestones. Studies were excluded if they were dissertations, not available in full text, or did not reflect contemporary parenting challenges and social dynamics. Furthermore, studies were excluded if the primary clinical population focused on individuals with developmental disabilities or conditions requiring specialized interventions.

Following a review of the literature, this author identified major recurrent themes regarding parental engagement in developmental play, including but not limited to a.) Parents do believe play is important and has developmental benefits for their children; b.) parental stress does affect engagement in developmental play; and c.) participation in social or community-based play or training programs enhances parent confidence and participation in developmental play. It was anticipated that there would be limitations in research that explicitly address parent confidence and knowledge. However, embedded in much of the literature was the theme that parents had a desire to do their best for their child but felt they lacked the specific skills to do so, specifically in the realm of play.

Parents' Beliefs Regarding Play

It is irrefutable that play is an essential part of a child's day-to-day life, fostering the development of skills that will serve them throughout their life. To better understand parents' awareness of the importance of play and its role in supporting a child's social, cognitive, and emotional development, the author examined several articles. Research demonstrates that engagement in play is associated with improvements in children's self-regulation, executive function, social-emotional competence, and cognitive development, though the strength and nature of these relationships vary across developmental domains and contexts (Ravindran, et al. 2021; Metaferia. et al, 2021; Metaferia, 2020; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020; Foulds, 2023). The literature suggests that while parents believe play is a necessary component to support their child's development, the depth of parental knowledge remains unclear (Foulds, 2023; Dhas et al. 2022). Although the lack of parental awareness or confidence while engaging in play was not the primary focus of the articles reviewed, it was a resounding theme (Foulds, 2023; Metaferia, 2020; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020; Ravindran et al. 2021). The author noted a consistent theme of parents' limited understanding of the perceptions of play and how those limitations ultimately affect engagement in developmental play.

Many parents recognize play as a beneficial outlet for children; however, their perceptions often do not extend to a comprehensive understanding of how crucial play is for children and its implications for social, cognitive, and emotional growth. Studies reveal that without a proper understanding of the benefits of play, parents may inadvertently limit their child's opportunities to engage in developmental play, thereby

hindering development (O'Fallon et al. 2020; Ong'ayi et al. 2020; Kumari, 2025; Bourha, 2024). The literature supports that parental knowledge gaps may contribute to decreased confidence and reduced participation in developmental play. This highlights the importance of interventions that provide education to empower parents to support their child's growth more effectively and confidently.

The importance of play in the child-parent relationship is significant, but it stretches beyond developing secure attachment within a family unit. These play interactions support the development of foundational skills that children will utilize throughout their lives (Ravindran et al. 2021; Metaferia et al. 2021; Metaferia, 2020; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020; Foulds, 2023). Several methodological limitations may compromise the validity of findings regarding parents' understanding of the importance of play. First, many studies examined parent-child interactions in laboratory or clinical settings rather than natural home environments, potentially leading to artificial or heightened engagement that does not reflect typical play patterns. Second, studies relying on parental self-report measures of play skills and engagement are vulnerable to social desirability bias, where parents may overestimate their knowledge or involvement to appear competent.

There is a gap in the literature that reports explicitly on parents' understanding of their respective roles in play. However, Bipath et al. (2022) investigated parental understanding of practices regarding play and concluded that parents generally benefit from guidance to engage in developmental play with their children. With this information and the nuance included in literature surrounding play, one can reasonably discern that

parents do not have an in-depth understanding of the benefits of play for a child or how they can support the acquisition of skills (Yogman, et al. 2018; NIH New in Health, 2018; Waldman-Levi, 2021, Moon-Seo, et al. 2024).

While it is established that parents deem play an important activity, the literature also suggests parents lack knowledge on how to not only select but also how to implement toys to promote engagement in developmental play (O'Fallon, et al. 2020; Ong'ayi, et al. 2020; Kumari, 2025; Bourha, 2024). Toys and other materials can serve to enhance play opportunities for both children and parents, but when parents are uncertain about the toys and their features, they may feel inadequate. Motivating factors for how parents select toys for their children vary from family to family, but a notable takeaway is that parents are looking for inherently educational toys (Kumari et al. 2025; Bourha et al. 2024). Healey & Mendelsohn (2019) provided insight into the difficulties parents encounter when attempting to select toys in a technology-driven era. Their research supports the claim that appropriately selected toys can enhance developmental play. They state "[t]oys are most likely to facilitate developmental advances in the context of interactions with and support by caregivers (including scaffolding and guided play rather than as a result of the toy itself" (p. 4).

Parental Stress and the Implications for Play

The National Institutes of Health released a special issue highlighting the various ways a child's play can enhance their development, as well as how a parent or caregiver can further support it. The publication states, "Parents are children's most enriching plaything," emphasizing not only the importance of play but also how a parent's presence

can promote a more meaningful play session. When parents face daily stressors, it may impact their ability to engage fully in developmental play with their child. When assessing the role of parental stress and engagement in parent-child developmental play interactions, the literature has provided inconsistent support for a correlation between stress and the quality or duration of engagement (Williams et al. 2020; Azhari et al. 2022; StGeorge, 2021). Despite the inconsistent findings in the literature regarding a direct correlation, a resounding theme identified was those programs facilitating play or child-parent relationship therapy decreased parental stress and yielded lower reports of difficulty with engagement in play, along with increased parental confidence. (StGeorge, 2021; Öztekin & Gençdoğan, 2023; Williams et al. 2020).

While parental stress may or may not hinder a caregiver's ability to engage in developmental play, it is essential to address how mitigating parental stress specific to child development and play fosters greater confidence in a parent's ability to support their child. Participation in parent-child programs focused on enriching play, education regarding development, or social play proves to decrease parental stress and improve a parent's perceived confidence while engaged with their child (Foulds, 2023; Teggelove, et al. 2019; Healey, & Mendelsohn, 2019; Chu, et al. 2024; Yogman, et al. 2018). The literature consistently supports the notion that parents who participate in community-based programs or interventions informed by child-parent relationship theory experience increased confidence, leading to stronger emotional connections and enhanced interactive engagement with their children. The inverse is also noted in the literature: parents or caregivers who experience toy scarcity or lack access to play spaces or social supports

typically yields increased parental stress potentially diminishing opportunities for meaningful play and engagement (Foulds, 2023; Teggelove, et al. 2019; Healey, & Mendelsohn, 2019; Chu, et al. 2024; Öztekin, & Gençdoğan, 2023).

In an effort to better understand contributing factors that lead to the problem of parents not feeling equipped to engage meaningfully in developmental play with their child(ren), the author identifies several consistent themes: while parents value play and believe it is important, they often lack a depth of knowledge and confidence; the use of or lack of access to toys, play spaces, and social supports all have implications on engagement in play; and parental stress has the potential to influence the quality and duration of play.

Community-Based Family Establishments & Education

Notably, the literature highlights that parent or caregiver education will enhance engagement in play and promote sustained engagement during play sessions. Participation in coaching interventions or social groups can help address parental stress and ultimately improve confidence, which may lead to a deeper connection between parents and children.

Despite clearly identified patterns in the literature, a gap remains in directly assessing parental confidence in understanding their role in developmental play. More targeted research is needed to investigate further where parents feel they lack skills or knowledge and how to equip parents best to participate in developmental play. Ultimately, supporting parents in understanding their role is pivotal for child development. Empowering caregivers with skills, confidence, and resources to engage in

play is a crucial step in shifting the task from a chore to an opportunity for growth, development, and connection.

When parents are equipped with tools and strategies that support their confidence in play and understand how it aligns with expected developmental milestones, they gain a deeper understanding of its importance and the critical role of parenting. Through improving parental self-efficacy in play, the potential positive effects are notable. This shift will allow for increased parent-child security in the relationship, promote improved confidence for both parent and child, and instill a strong foundation for lifelong skills.

It is essential to evaluate the implications of the themes identified in the current literature and their potential relevance to the development of community-based programs that support parents. Initiatives related to parent and community development built around play are multifaceted in their potential; not only do these programs address cooperative play, but they also target gaps in parental knowledge while promoting confidence in parents. Community-based programs, such as play cafes, help make support for parents more accessible and commonplace. Through cooperative play and community learning, places like these helped decrease the taboo surrounding the need for support. It allows parents to seek out resources without fear of judgment or shame, promotes self-efficacy, and helps mitigate parental stress, thereby improving family well-being and community engagement.

CHAPTER THREE – Overview of Current Approaches and Methods

The importance of play for a child's development is well established in literature. It affords children the opportunity to learn, develop social-emotional skills, and allows for opportunities for bonding between parent and child (Hackworth et al. 2018; Teggelove et al. 2019; Sparaci & Gallagher, 2025; Lavey-Khan & Reddick, 2020). The research consistently highlights the positive implications of play; yet parents report uncertainty when engaging in developmental activities with their children (Rathunde & Isabella, 2019; Teggelove et al. 2019; Daley et al. 2018; Spivery, 2014). Parents report benefiting from participation in community-based programs for caregivers and children, which helps mitigate stress and allows for more engaged play. Programs such as these offer opportunities for education and fostering an improved understanding of child development (Chu et al. 2024; Rathunde & Isabella, 2019; Lavey-Khan & Reddick, 2020).

To better understand evidence regarding interventions, educational supports, and community-based resources that promote parental involvement in developmental play, literature searches were conducted across multiple online databases, including APA PsycINFO, CINAHL Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, ERIC, The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, and the Boston University Library Database. Search terms included, but were not limited to, the following: parent, mother, father, caregiver, developmental play, childhood play, childhood development, stress mitigation, parent support groups, community groups, education, well-being, confidence, engagement, community-based play, social supports, and play groups. In addition to

reviewing scholarly works, the author investigated credible contemporary sources that address child development, family education, and community programming to support family initiatives. Sources identified include, but are not limited to, Zero to Three, Parent Powered, and the National Institutes of Health. To ensure the credibility of the contemporary sources reviewed and their relevance to the topic, each source was assessed based on the reputation of the author and/or the organization, the timeliness of the content, and its alignment with the topic of parental engagement in developmental play, which supports children's growth and development. The synthesis aims to critically examine the current approaches that support parental engagement and identify implications for designing effective programs to empower parents in their respective roles.

To ensure the literature included in this synthesis was directly relevant to the research objectives, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed. Studies were included if they were published between 2015 and 2025; however, there was a strong preference for articles published between 2019 and 2025. The decision to focus on the latter part of the timeframe is aimed at addressing post-COVID parenting and capturing the current generation of parents. Other inclusion criteria included that studies should be peer-reviewed and empirical, focusing on typically developing children to allow for broader generalization of the findings. Studies were excluded if they were dissertations or were not available in full text.

Synthesis of Literature

Following a review of the literature, interventions that support parental education regarding engagement are a clear pathway to promoting successful participation in developmental play and supporting a child-parent relationship. Key interventions identified include, but are not limited to, parent coaching, family-based play, and accessibility of educational resources for families; these themes will be used throughout this synthesis. Community programs and resources that incorporate these aspects of support and education are shown to promote increased motivation among parents to engage in developmental play and to inquire about ways to enhance their participation and involvement in such play (Chu et al. 2024; Rathunde & Isabella, 2019; Lavey-Khan & Reddick, 2020). While the literature supporting the benefits of community programming is substantial (Chu et al. 2024; Rathunde & Isabella, 2019; Lavey-Khan & Reddick, 2020), several methodological limitations have been noted. For example, small sample sizes and frequently recruited participants are already enrolled in parallel programs. Due to the nature of recruitment, the ability to generalize the findings may not accurately represent parents who independently seek out paternal support programs. The establishment of initiatives such as Head Start and Zero to Three further promotes supporting the child and the parent together utilizing comprehensive services in and out of the home, addressing the whole family's needs, and providing education on stress mitigation and management. Programs like these enable high-quality learning through play and daily engagement. (Zero to Three, 2025; Madalyn, n.d.).

Structured Coaching and Filial Therapy

The literature highlights a trend that many parents actively seek coaching to enhance their parenting skills and their ability to engage meaningfully with their children. Participation in programs that provide education is associated with increased feelings of empowerment and confidence in a parenting role. Through the guided-play structure, parents can learn and apply strategies in real time and seek feedback. As a result, parental engagement and the quality of developmental play have improved (Daley et al. 2018; Hackworth et al. 2018; Spivey, 2024; Chu et al. 2024). Interventions centered on parent coaching provide structured guidance that fosters a sense of confidence in caregivers, enabling them not only to engage in play but also to enhance their child's play. Evidence suggests that coaching increases parental confidence and responsiveness, which in turn leads to positive outcomes for the child (Chu et al. 2024; Rathunde & Isabella, 2019; Lavey-Khan & Reddick, 2020).

Much of the literature emphasizes the importance of research-based guidance for parent coaching in addressing concerns related to parents' perceived difficulties with engagement in developmental play (Chu et al. 2024; Rathunde & Isabella, 2019; Teggelove et al. 2019). Effective coaching creates a meaningful and integrated approach that empowers parents to use play as a tool confidently to foster skill development and nurture a healthy, secure relationship. Much of the research in this area refers to Filial Therapy, an intervention that equips parents to serve as therapeutic agents for their children. The approach has been shown to enhance emotional regulation, strengthen parent-child relationships, and promote healthy psychological well-being (Russell et al.

2025; Cherry, 2025; Teggelove et al. 2019). Together, Filial Therapy and parent coaching address the establishment and refinement of skills to engage in play, as well as the confidence to sustainably implement a family-centered model sustainably, promoting positive long-term outcomes.

Community-Based Peer Supports

While the benefits of one-to-one coaching or intervention are readily understood and well-supported in the literature (Russell et al. 2025; Cherry, 2025; Teggelove et al. 2019), the need for community-based environments to facilitate the transfer of learned skills and provide ongoing education must also be considered. Findings show that parents who engage in and participate in co-play not only improve their confidence but also highlight the benefits of information sharing, modeling, and time spent with a facilitator (Hadley & Newman, 2023; Lavey-Khan & Reddick, 2020; Chu et al. 2024; Grandisson et al. 2023). Considering the importance of developing a strong foundation and implementing learned skills into daily life, resources such as community play groups, music classes, or other opportunities for engagement are essential in continuing to support a parent's confidence. Under the guidance of a coach or clinician, a parent may be inclined to follow the facilitator's suggestions, thereby limiting the opportunity for child-led play. Leaning into child-led play, imaginative play, or collaborative play not only supports the parent-child relationship but also fosters the cognitive flexibility and growth of a child (Spivey, 2024; Chu et al. 2024; Russell et al. 2025).

When attempting to engage in developmental play, having a conducive environment can facilitate successful interactions. Numerous programs have been

established worldwide to promote the importance of the family's role in a child's life and development. Head Start and Zero to Three play pivotal roles in promoting parent confidence regarding developmental play. The programs are designed to reduce stress, build knowledge, promote self-care, and make programs such as these more accessible (Zero to Three, 2025; Madalyn, n.d.).

Stress Mitigation and Parental Well-Being

In addition to programming to promote early engagement for children, it is imperative that parents feel capable of participating in developmental play, which highlights the importance of parental mental health and stress mitigation, as they navigate early childhood. Mindfulness and meditation practices have proven to be an effective intervention for stress management (Chapline et al. 2021; Urbanowicz et al. 2023; Burgdorf et al. 2019). While there are numerous resources for mindfulness, accessibility can become a barrier to engagement, highlighting the need for community-based programs that offer stress mitigation strategies in addition to opportunities for play.

While formal programs, such as parent coaching and filial therapy, provide substantiated guidance for parental engagement (Russell et al. 2025; Cherry, 2025; Teggelove et al. 2019), it would be valuable to recognize the significant impact that less formal community-based programs offer. Informal settings allow for the organic establishment of peer relationships and connection, as well as the natural sharing of knowledge among parents. A community-based setting is a valuable pathway for parents who may not have access to formal therapy services but are still seeking support, modeling, and strategies to manage parenthood.

Bridging Formal and Informal Interventions

Considering both traditional interventions offered by clinicians or therapists and informal support through community-based educators, the ultimate goal of empowering parents with knowledge remains at the forefront. Individuals working in this space can equip parents with practical and sustainable tools to promote engagement in developmental play, including strategies for meaningful play, as well as self-care strategies such as stress management. The foundation of these skills may be laid in a therapeutic environment, but parents should be provided with ample opportunity to carry over learned skills and strategies in community environments.

Structured interventions to promote parental confidence in developmental play are well established in the literature (Spivey, 2024; Chu et al. 2024; Russell et al. 2025). However, significant gaps in the literature are apparent for the post-COVID generation of parents. There is limited research exploring how informal settings, such as community-based play groups, play cafés, or parent-child programs, contribute to parental confidence in engaging in developmental play. Studies that investigate the transition from formal to informal programs will provide valuable insights into how these levels of support affect both the parent and the child. Future research may investigate how informal spaces and programming may integrate evidence-based practices to support parental confidence when engaging in developmental play effectively.

Play is a crucial component of social-emotional growth, cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and cognitive growth for a child (Hackworth et al. 2018; Teggelove et al. 2019; Sparaci & Gallagher, 2025; Lavey-Khan & Reddick, 2020). Programs rooted

in filial therapy, such as those offered by Zero to Three or Head Start, empower parents with skills and strategies to engage confidently. However, there is limited research investigating how informal programs and settings may support parents and children in a valuable way. Whether formal or informal, programs that support parents in engaging in developmental play will have positive implications for both the parent and the child.

Through the examination of the literature, play to promote literacy was a recurrent theme, whether the focus was on implementing toys and play sessions or the correlation between parental engagement and later literacy skills (Hadley et al. 2023; O'Fallon et al. 2020; Ong'ayi et al. 2020). Several studies have explored the significance of parental engagement in the development of skills; however, there are limitations in the scope of the impact of engagement in developmental play. As a result, further empirical investigation is needed to more clearly delineate the influence of parental engagement on children's social-emotional development, cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and overall cognitive growth, thereby supporting the existing literature.

This synthesis critically examined the current research landscape in the area of parental engagement in play and the implications for child development. Many of the peer-reviewed articles were systematic reviews and meta-analyses composed of randomized control trials, which minimizes bias and improves internal validity; however, there is a general theme of small sample size with several articles that use non-randomized designs, which limits the confidence in generalizability; in an effort to continuously measure and enhance impact, pilot studies should incorporate iterative evaluation. Furthermore, there are limitations in the active recruitment of participants —

many of the participants were enrolled in parallel programs and not seeking services. As research in this area continues to evolve, it is necessary to increase sample sizes and implement mixed-methods approaches.

Implications for Program Design

With a comprehensive understanding of the available literature, the findings must be integrated into program development to empower parents to engage in meaningful, developmentally appropriate play. The literature strongly supports the need for opportunities for cooperative play with modeling from an occupational therapy practitioner to promote parental confidence and engagement (Spivey, 2024; Chu et al. 2024; Russell et al. 2025). The development of a play space should aim to offer both therapist-led and peer-driven components as an effective intervention to address the community's needs. Programs should be designed to be versatile and aim to address not only developmental outcomes for children but also the holistic needs of the family.

Structured Coaching and Filial Therapy

The available evidence should be considered when intentionally designing programs that offer structured coaching, grounded in filial therapy, the principles of occupational therapy, and that adopt a family-centered approach. Through modeling, occupational therapy practitioners provide parents with the opportunity to observe and practice specific play techniques, receive real-time feedback, and gradually build their confidence in using newly acquired skills. Coaching sessions should focus on building strategies to engage in developmental play and supporting parents in applying these skills outside of the play café. Filial therapy components, such as guided interactions, can

provide opportunities for deeper connections, allowing parents to become more in tune with their child's needs during play and engagement (Russell et al. 2025; Cherry, 2025; Teggelove et al. 2019).

Community-Based Peer Supports

To address the need for social support and connectedness, the proposed program, in addition to occupational therapy practitioner-led programming, will offer opportunities for peer-driven engagement and collaborative play. These opportunities will allow families to commiserate as they navigate the challenges of parenting, while also facilitating natural exchanges of practical strategies among caregivers.

Stress Mitigation and Parental Well-Being

The implications of parental stress and its potential to hinder parents' engagement in developmental play should be considered during program development and should inform the offerings aimed at addressing parent stress and promoting a sense of well-being (Williams et al. 2020; Azhari et al. 2022; StGeorge, 2021). Many of the interventions that have been proven effective, such as mindfulness training, stress management and reduction, and facilitation of supportive relationships, should all be embedded within the program. By addressing parent well-being, the program will enable sustainable engagement and promote parental mental health in relation to parenting. Structured sessions with an occupational therapy practitioner and peer support will effectively address engagement in developmental play and parental well-being.

Considering the available literature and the role of occupational therapy in parenting, a well-designed program will leverage these components to provide

comprehensive, evidence-based support for families, ultimately empowering parents to engage in effective developmental play with their children.

CHAPTER FOUR – Description of the Proposed Program

This chapter introduces the design and structure of the proposed program to support parental engagement in developmental play. The program is deeply rooted in the principles of occupational therapy and is shaped by the themes identified throughout the research on the topic. This practical application of current literature will support the programming offered within Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space.

The proposed program is an occupational therapy-informed play café designed to enhance parent engagement in developmental play, thereby supporting child development and growth. The author aims to boost parental self-assurance and enhance their skill set to improve confidence when engaging in developmental play. The proposed program features occupational therapy-informed courses that target various tasks and strategies to foster the acquisition of developmentally appropriate skills. The interventions will be multi-faceted and include direct instruction, modeling, and real-time feedback, as well as parent-child free play, to facilitate the application of learned skills. Honeycomb Play Café intentionally incorporates therapeutic, educational, and community-based principles to meet parents where they are, providing a supportive environment that fosters growth and development. The space recognizes the distinct challenges that parents face and aims to empower parents through accessible opportunities. Due to the nature of the setting and occupational therapy-informed structure versus direct service, a cash-based model will be used.

Grounded in the Developmental Systems Theory, Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space translates theoretical insights on environmental and relational influences

into an accessible, community-based model for families. The play café will address barriers to developmental play by fostering parental confidence, skill-building, and encouraging meaningful engagement.

The Problem Being Addressed

Play served as a dynamic and multi-faceted construct that is crucial to a child's growth in the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional domains (The American Journal of Occupational Therapy [AJOT], 2014). The current research emphasizes the active, constructive qualities of play and its role in promoting whole-child development and how through play, global skill development is achieved (Moon-Seo & Munsell, 2022; Schlesinger et al. 2020). Through play, children not only acquire skills that will be generalized throughout their lives, but also in developing a deeper understanding of themselves and their environments. Normandin et al. (2023) highlights the significant influence pretend and imaginative play has on language development, emotional regulation, and perspective taking. Through these developmental processes, children are enabled to cultivate self-help skills, improve self-regulation, and engage in appropriate peer interactions through cooperation and problem solving. Yogman et al. (2018) continue to emphasize the benefits of play reach further than the child but support the parent-child relationship.

Despite the well-documented benefits of play, contemporary family dynamics often limit opportunities for engagement in meaningful play. Many parents report play feels like an additional responsibility rather than a natural opportunity for connection with their child. Contributing factors include limited understanding of the developmental

benefits of play, the significant implications play can have on a child, and restricted access to community support. These barriers contribute to the diminishing of parental confidence and hinder the quality of parent-child interactions while engaged in play. This doctoral project addresses this problem by focusing on empowering parents with knowledge, strategies, and supports promoting parental confidence during engagement in developmental play that fosters child and family well-being.

Theories to Support the Explanation of the Problem

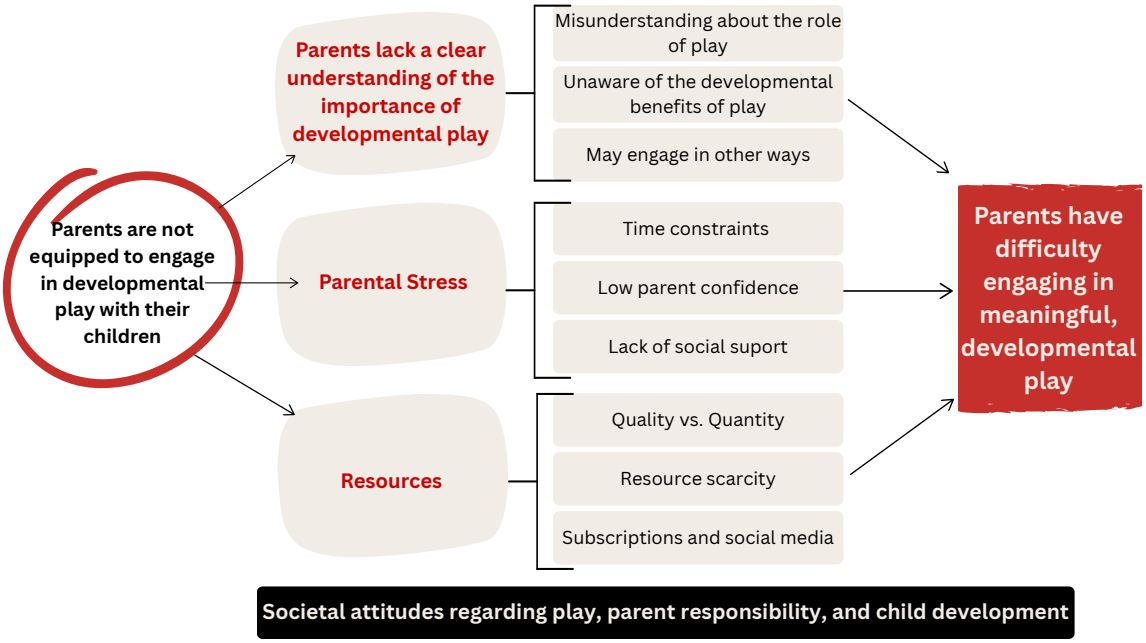
Due to the nature of the problem being addressed, multiple theories could support the explanation of the issues presented; however, the Developmental Systems Theory (DST), which provides a framework for examining the interconnected factors that influence parent-child play interactions and their developmental outcomes, appears to be the most clearly linked. This theory provides a comprehensive overview of human development, highlighting the complex relationships between various factors, including genetics, environment, social, and cultural influences, that affect outcomes for both the child and the parent (Guralnick, M. J., 2019). The Developmental Systems Theory is a theoretical framework that aims to better understand development by establishing connections between nature and nurture, while considering many external factors (Guralnick, M. J., 2019). This theory addresses the dynamics between individuals, tasks, and environments to identify and understand the barriers to continued engagement and development.

The Developmental Systems Theory was selected as the primary lens to view the identified problem of "parents have difficulty engaging in meaningful, developmental

play" because of the appreciation for multiple factors affecting outcomes and the idea that it is not as simple as nature vs. nurture. This framework embodies a holistic approach to a problem and collects information from several perspectives to best inform the issues. The non-linear approach to progress is fitting for a better understanding of why parents may struggle with engagement in developmentally appropriate play.

Figure 4.1

Visual Model of the Problem



Parents often encounter difficulties engaging in meaningful, developmental play with their children due to various factors outlined in the visual model in Figure 4.2. Many parents lack a clear understanding of the importance of play and its implications for development, which can limit engagement. Secondly, parental stress is a factor that contributes to challenges with engaging in developmental play. Stress can result from time constraints, multiple responsibilities, a lack of confidence, and limited social support

— all of which can impact a parent's ability to play. Finally, access to resources, whether overwhelming or scarce, can lead to feelings of inadequacy or confusion regarding the best tool to enhance play. All of these factors are influenced by social attitudes regarding play, parenting, and child development, which can impact the level or quality of engagement in play for parents.

Stakeholders

Micro Level Stakeholders

Due to the community-based nature of programming, the community and caregivers are one set of primary stakeholders for this program. To best serve the identified populations, the owners will begin by collecting information informally through online surveys and questionnaires. These will target identified demographics to collect relevant data before establishing offerings for the community. Stakeholders who will be invited to provide feedback through surveys and questionnaires will be any patrons of the play café. The owners will continually work to meet the needs of the clients and evolve where necessary. Secondly, due to the nature of this self-funded endeavor, additional primary stakeholders will be the two primary business partners of the play café. With the community vision in mind, the owners will continue to reassure the patrons that feedback is continually considered.

In addition to the primary stakeholders identified, occupational therapy professionals will also be stakeholders due to their expertise and guidance. The occupational therapists involved will design and deliver evidence-based courses that include direct instruction, modeling, and real-time feedback. The role of an occupational

therapist will also be to ensure that activities are appropriate and graded accordingly. They will leverage their knowledge and expertise in child development, sensory integration, and family-centered care to guide all aspects of programming.

The role of the occupational therapist in Honeycomb Play Café is to provide holistic and collaborative opportunities for engagement, all in support of promoting child and family well-being. The occupational therapist ensures that programming is developmentally robust, inclusive, and supportive of the family unit. As the play café continues to grow, the occupational therapist will expand their responsibilities to include enhancing local impact, accessibility, and quality of services provided.

Meso Level Stakeholders

Community partners will also have a distinct stake in Honeycomb Play Café. Local, child-focused businesses and organizations will have an interest in the business and potential collaborations. These relationships may include hosting a local pediatric dentist for a workshop regarding oral health and hygiene, and to increase a child's comfort with a practitioner, it may be a local dance school that may offer a class in the play space to promote their services, or it may be a local group supporting mothers in postpartum.

Each stakeholder addresses a variable of the play café – whether it is the business model or the interventional model. The stakeholders establish a supportive network to continue propelling the business forward, enabling it to become an integral part of the local community. As the business continues to grow, the author aspires to influence policy frameworks, resource availability, community priorities, and sustainability.

Macro Level Stakeholders

When shifting the lens from a community view to a broader environment, other stakeholders must be considered, such as policymakers and family- and child-focused organizations. Policymakers can expand the portfolio of the play café through legislation, licensing, and program eligibility. They can identify strategic priorities that support the business and identify funding that support family programming and community-based programs. Child-focused organizations should also be considered stakeholders. Developing a positive relationship with government agencies, foundations, or advocacy groups may facilitate the implementation of programs to support community-based families, potentially leading to advocacy for broader access.

Illustrative Case Scenario

The following is an illustrative case scenario that highlights a current trend in parenting and how this Honeycomb Play Café and Busy Bees Play Space would help address the needs of both parents and children.

Mary is a 37-year-old mother of Michael, who is 19 months old, and she is expecting her second child within the month. Mary is home on maternity leave and will remain home for the first six months of her new baby's life. Mary reports she never felt "good" at playing with Michael and is worried that when the new baby comes, she will struggle more. She reports she is extremely fatigued due to the pregnancy and does not feel she engages with Michael in a meaningful way – she turns to educational programming and subscription play kits to facilitate play for Michael. Mary is concerned that she is not doing enough to foster the development of foundational skills for Michael.

In an effort to address Michael's skill development and to promote socialization, Mary has enrolled him in a drop-off play group for children ages 18–24 months within the community. She is confident Michael's needs are being met in the group but continues to seek out opportunities for parent/caregiver and child play groups where she can refine her play skills and learn new strategies.

At Michael's routine well-visit with the pediatrician, Mary reported to the doctor her concerns regarding her ability to guide play and inquired about the importance of play in the home. She stated she is seeking external support for herself as she transitions to mom of two, for Michael, and for her new baby. The patient care coordinator in the office recommended a local, occupational therapy-informed play café.

Following the advisement of the patient care coordination, Mary plans to attend a postpartum support group one time per week, where it is encouraged that her newborn come to sessions with her. The group will provide a supportive and encouraging environment for mothers to speak freely about their experiences, successes, and struggles from week to week. Each week will feature an expert who will benefit the mothers, for example, a pediatric occupational therapist to discuss play, a pelvic floor physical therapist, a family therapist and psychologist, a speech therapist, and a lactation consultant.

After completing the postpartum support series, Mary enrolled in the "The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time" series for the new baby and "Play with Household Items" for Michael. In both groups, Mary is provided with direct instruction and guided practice. She is educated about the benefits of play and how each activity presented supports skill development. Included in the workshops is access to the play space, where Mary is able to babywear and engage in child-led play with Michael. Through all of the groups, Mary has made meaningful connections with other parents – she has bonded over shared stressors and successes. Mary reports that following the workshops, she feels more confident in playing with her children and better understands the "why" when it comes to play.

The presented scenario addresses the challenges that many expectant parents, new parents, or seasoned parents navigating transitions with their child(ren) face. The pressures of managing the home, children, and work are notable and may become apparent during a routine well-visit for your child. Parents are forced to come face-to-face with their parenting as they answer questions from the pediatrician regarding play, floor time, screen time, and much more. It highlights the importance of empowering individuals with knowledge to support meaningful engagement in their dynamic roles.

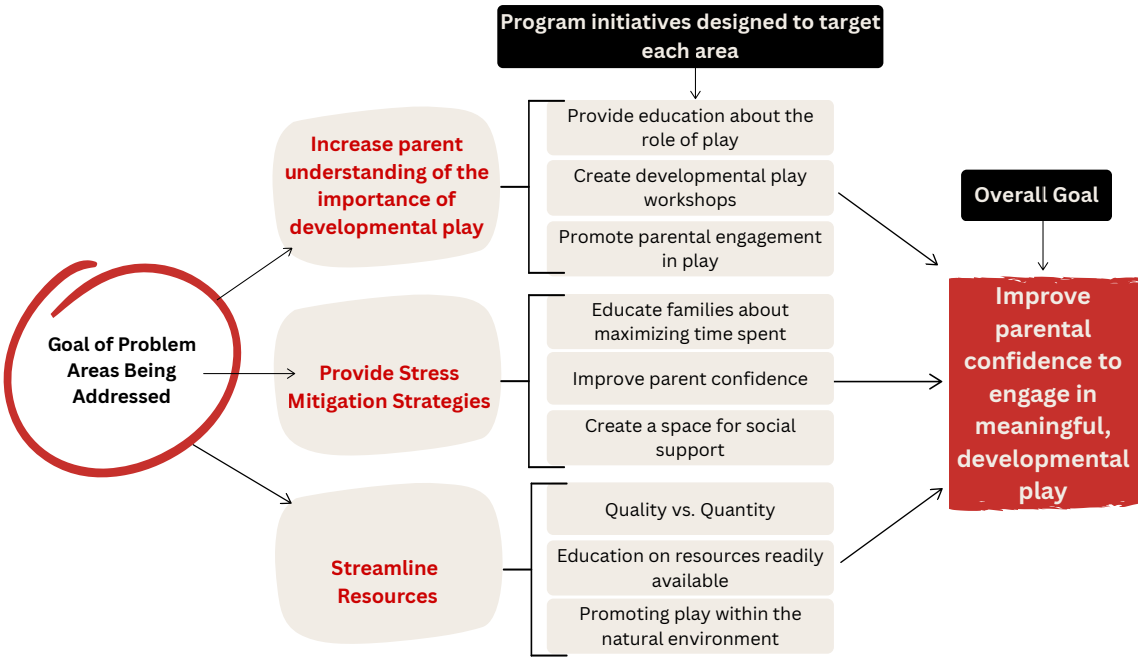
Main Objectives

The author aims to create a welcoming, safe, and enjoyable environment for families and the community to gather, connect, and relax. By combining a café with a dedicated play space for children, Honeycomb Play Café and Busy Bees Play Space will cater to the needs of parents and caregivers looking for a unique place to unwind. In the example, Mary is seeking support and resources as she manages new transitions in her daily life. She seeks to participate in programming that normalizes finding support during parenting and is eager to engage in the multi-faceted approach offered.

As noted in Figure 4.1, there are three primary barriers to meaningful engagement in play, all of which can be addressed through participation in the play café's programming. The problems identified are: 1. Parents lack a clear understanding of the importance of play, 2. Parental stress affects engagement in play, 3—the oversaturation of resources for families. As a result, a play café has been developed with various ways to address these problems. The program goals are highlighted in Figure 4.4. Goals include increasing parental confidence by 20% when engaged in developmental play, expanding the parental knowledge base regarding play, and learning how to grade the tasks at home.

Figure 4.2

Visual Model of Proposed Program



Full Logical Model

The logic model depicted in Figure 4.3 illustrates how the proposed play café would serve as a vehicle for parent education, supporting meaningful engagement in developmental play. The flowchart highlights the program inputs, endorsing theories, activities, and outcomes. Also included are anticipated barriers to implementing this program.

Honeycomb Play Café is an occupational therapy-guided community play space designed to address the barriers that affect parental engagement in developmental play. One component of the broader vision for the play café is a six-week course led by an occupational therapist, providing education on topics related to child development and supported by trained staff. The model is grounded in Developmental Systems Theory,

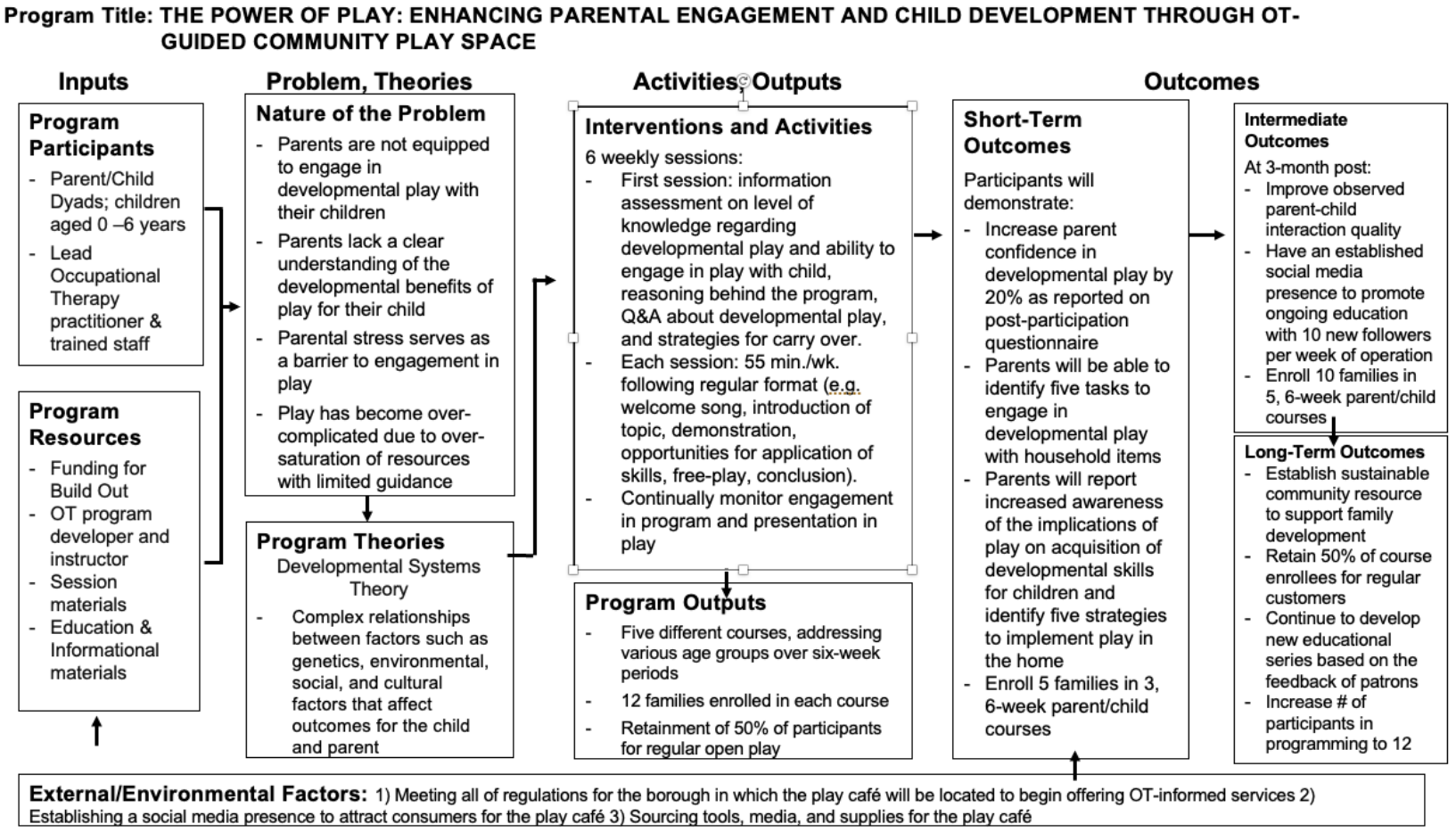
which emphasizes the dynamic and reciprocal interactions between genetic, environmental, and socio-cultural factors and their influence on child and family outcomes.

The program structure and activities consist of weekly, 55-minute sessions delivered in a consistent format from week to week. Sessions will include occupational therapy-based activities and education that will be continuously monitored through the program to ensure interventions remain effective for participants. Outputs of the program include the development of five tailored course options for various age groups, enrollment of 12 families per course, and retention of at least 50% of participants for regular open play or membership.

The program's outcomes include a 20% increase in parental confidence regarding engagement in developmental play, the ability to identify ways to play with household items, and an increased ability to verbalize the importance of play. Immediate outcomes will be reviewed at the three-month mark, which will include measurable improvements in parent-child interaction quality, the development of a strong social media presence, and the continuous enrollment of new families in sessions. The long-term outcomes outlined focus on the sustainability of Honeycomb Café, the ongoing engagement and retention of customers, the expansion of educational offerings, and targeted increases in enrollment.

Figure 4.3

Full Logic Model



Program Participants and Resources

The clients and resources needed for the development of a play café and for the course offerings are discussed in this section. The author aims to establish an occupational therapy-informed play café with specialized workshops to support parents as they engage in developmental play with their child(ren). Due to the multi-faceted nature of this endeavor, several key considerations must be addressed.

Establishment of the Play Café

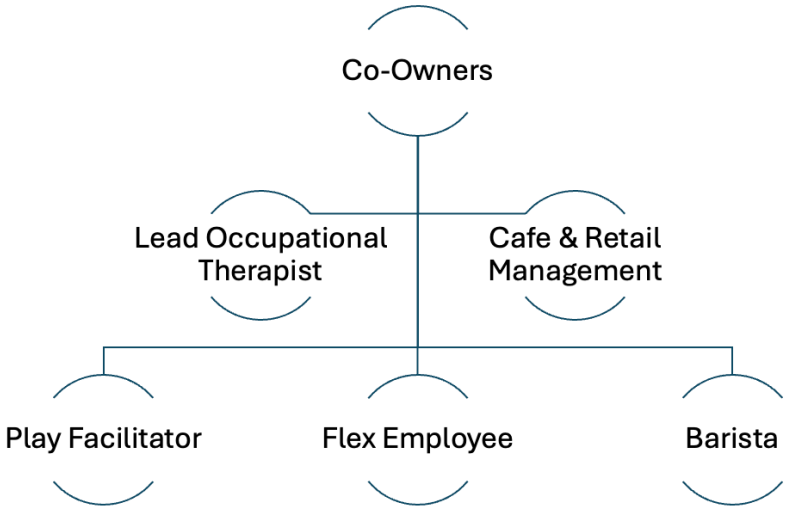
At this time, the author has identified a location for the play café to operate, and a lease has been secured. Due to the nature of the business, the author is responsible for complying with planning and zoning board guidelines to ensure business can be conducted. Following the receipt and review of documents, applicants will be offered a date on a zoning board agenda to appeal to the borough. Once approved, construction for the play space will begin, and a community outreach plan will be implemented.

Personnel

Figure 4.4 provides a visual representation of the organizational flow of staff and personnel for Honeycomb Play Café. There are several levels of employees indicated, all of whom contribute to the success of the establishment and its offerings. All employees will report to the co-owners of the business to ensure clear communication among staff and to address any concerns of patrons promptly. The outlined structure supports both program integrity and therapeutic outcomes through adequate staffing, supervision, and support. Roles, responsibilities, and required training are outlined here.

Figure 4.4

Personnel Organizational Chart



Co-owners

The co-owners of Honeycomb Café are equal partners and primary stakeholders of the business. There will be established reciprocal communication in all aspects of the business to ensure efficiency in program development, offerings, and community outreach. The co-owners will take on the roles and responsibilities of lead occupational therapist and café and retail manager. Both co-owners will seek workshops related to managing a café and attend barista training to ensure they can effectively train their hired staff.

Together, the co-owners will oversee operational and staff management, monitoring daily operations, supervising scheduling, ensuring consistent product quality, and ensuring compliance with local health, safety, and food handling regulations. The co-owners will handle cash management, daily sales, and any necessary reconciliation, and ensure profitable targets are met through strategic inventory planning.

Lead Occupational Therapist

The lead occupational therapist is responsible for developing course offerings and for overseeing the implementation of programs. The lead therapist will supervise all clinical and educational activities and collaborate with play facilitators to ensure programs are effective and engaging. The lead therapist will ensure that the business offerings align with the business's mission, are inclusive, and accessible. Additional training to be explored includes parent coaching, leadership development, and program assessment.

Cafe & Retail Management

The co-owner responsible for café and retail management will oversee inventory management for café supplies and retail goods. The co-owner will provide a warm and inclusive environment for patrons and collect feedback to enhance the customer experience. The co-owner will collaborate with the lead OT to schedule course offerings during optimal times. Additional training to be explored includes food and safety compliance, retail management, and team leadership and staff development.

Play Facilitator

The lead occupational therapist will train the play facilitator to ensure that all practices align with the occupational therapy-based methodology, so that the OT-guided play follows the designed schedule and addresses all topics planned for the sessions. The play facilitator will be responsible for preparing and cleaning up the session and play area, as well as leading the group or supporting the lead facilitator. Training for the play facilitator will follow the six-week training plan outlined in Table 4.1. To ensure the

reliability of play facilitation, ongoing training will be available for all staff.

Barista

The café staff will be responsible for preparing and serving beverages and snacks in the café space. They will prepare drinks following available recipes to ensure product consistency for the consumers. The baristas will manage restocking the café and retail areas, managing the point-of-sale system, and greeting guests as they arrive at Honeycomb. Training for baristas will be a combination of on-the-job training and workshops put on by the co-owners. Trainees will learn to operate the equipment, manage customer interactions, and maintain a tidy workspace and café area.

Flex Staff

Flex staff will be members of the Honeycomb Café team, serving as play facilitators or baristas. They will complete the training outlined above in each area. These team members will assist with private parties and special events and will be scheduled to work at the café and play space during one shift.

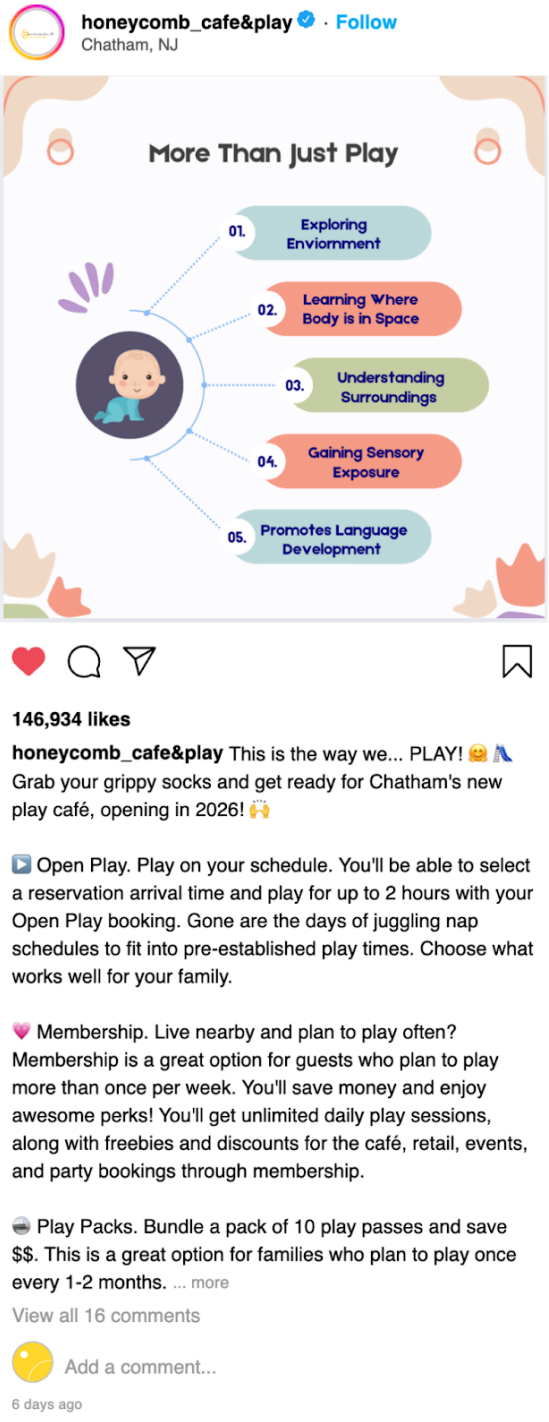
Program Participants & Outreach

The primary participants in this program will be parents or caregivers and their young children, aged 0 to 6. They will be recruited through modern advertising (i.e., social media) and community partnerships, as well as exposure. A social media presence will be established once the business is approved by zoning and can proceed with construction. Social media posts initially will be intended to garner interest and build momentum within the community. There will be a variety of posts, including, but not limited to, educational content for parents, recommendations from an occupational

therapist, course offerings, play space collaborations, and general updates on the construction and opening. Sample social media posts are shown in Figure 4.5. Due to the inclusive nature of the business, no screening tools will be implemented initially. However, future phases will include the establishment of a screening tool and course offerings that become more varied.

Figure 4.5

Sample Social Media Posts



In addition to social media recruitment, participants will be recruited through community partnerships and exposure. For example, the lead occupational therapist will act as a play expert for a new mothers' group within the community and will offer information regarding the play space and workshops. Additionally, the lead occupational therapist will participate in street fairs and community events, offering abbreviated classes to local childcare facilities. Information will be sent home with the students as a means to reach their parents. A sample educational piece on the role of occupational therapy in parenting is shown in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6

Educational Material Regarding the Role of OT in Parenting

Ethical and Safety Considerations

Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space is an OT-informed, family-centric play café. This space must prioritize ethical and safety standards that protect the well-being of all patrons of the café and play space. To ensure the safety of the children, all

staff will be required to provide a background check, clear supervision protocols, and will be educated on mandatory reporting procedures for suspected abuse. The physical building will incorporate universal design to ensure accessibility in all areas.

Interventions and Activities

This play space and programs offered are designed to support a community of caregivers and children. The mission of the facility includes language that supports the feel of a village and provides outreach to individuals navigating parenthood. Each program will target a different component of the caregiver-child pair, for example, sometimes highlighting the role of one over the other; ultimately, both the child and the parent will benefit from participation.

A pediatric occupational therapist will inform all programs. These offerings will be backed by research and best practice, and the lead occupational therapist will train staff accordingly to ensure dissemination of information and carryover are completed efficiently and effectively. Participation in open play requires minimal delivery, other than providing an open space for a child to play for a prescribed amount of time. Structured courses for caregivers will be designed and delivered by an occupational therapist, while occupational therapy-informed peer play groups will be facilitated by trained staff.

To ensure staff are adequately trained prior to leading courses, they will be required to complete a training program with the lead occupational therapist. The training will include six weeks of structured education and hands-on experience, allowing for a successful transition. Staff training will follow the schedule seen in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Sample Training Schedule for Play Facilitator

	Training Schedule for Class Lead
Week 1	• Lead occupational therapist will provide plan for the session to the trainee. Trainee will observe an OT-informed play session with parents and caregivers and identify themes and strategies used throughout the session. • Trainee expected to familiarize themselves with the facility and materials available for sessions. • Constructive communication regarding session and expectations for next session to be provided.
Week 2	• Lead occupational therapist and trainee will review the plan for the session together. Lead OT to highlight the theme and activities to support the theme throughout. • Trainee will be expected to welcome parents and children, inquire about the week and application of learned skills at home. • Trainee will lead welcome song, gross motor preparatory activity, and closing song. • Meeting following session to discuss strengths and barrier or any areas of concern.
Week 3	• Lead occupational therapist will review plan with trainee. Trainee will select theme of the session they would like to provide education to families throughout session in addition to responsibilities in session the week(s) prior. • Ongoing communication to continue to support a collaborative relationship and foster confidence in trainee.
Week 4	• Lead occupational therapist will review the session plan with trainee. Trainee will be asked to provide input for session to implement in addition to responsibilities from week(s) prior. • Ongoing communication to assess confidence of trainee in leading sessions.
Week 5	• Trainee will discuss the plan for the session with lead occupational therapist and inquire about any areas they are unclear about. Trainee will lean on lead OT for support in session. • Session will be co-lead with lead OT and trainee. • Ongoing communication to assess confidence of trainee in leading sessions.

Week 6	• Trainee will discuss the plan for the session with lead occupational therapist and inquire about any areas they are unclear about. Trainee will lead the session from start to finish with lead OT as support. • Meeting following session to discuss strengths and barriers or any areas of concern.

As discussed, the problems identified as barriers for meaningful engagement in developmental play are: parents lack a clear understanding of the importance of play, parental stress affects engagement in play, the accessibility of resources for families. The primary goal of the play café is to promote a community-based location where families can destress and access educational resources to promote confidence in play.

In addition to the play space, there will be workshops designed to address the concerns of the families. The workshop will be a six-week series focusing on a specific topic, but each week will address a different component. The description of the series included below is for "The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time." Future program development will include topics such as Navigating the IEP Process, Understanding Early Intervention, How to Play at Home, How to Play with my 6-Month-Old, How to Simplify Play.

The design of the educational series will be weekly, 55-minute sessions with discussion, teaching, and demonstration, guided practice for skill development, and open play for the opportunity to implement newly learned skills. A sample session will follow the format seen in Table 4.2 — this is an abbreviated version and the full sample schedule can be found in Appendix D.

Table 4.2

Sample Schedule of The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time

Sample Weekly Schedule of The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time		
	Weekly Class Format: 10:00–10:15 Welcome & Catch Up 10:15–10:25 Introduction Song & Cooperative Play 10:25–10:40 Lesson & Discussion 10:40–10:50 Open Play & Q&A 10:50–10:55 Wrap Up & Goodbye	
	Topic Covered	Objectives
Week 1	• What is tummy time and why is it important? • Education on the development and improvement of head and neck control, back and shoulder strengthening, and core engagement. • Introduction to basic positioning and safety during play.	• Participants will be able to describe three developmental benefits of tummy time and how it related to posturing with 75% accuracy. • Parents will demonstrate safe and developmentally appropriate positioning for tummy time play with their infant with minimal multi-modal cues by the end of the first session.
Week 2	• Identify ways to monitor signs of progress in tummy time activities. • Discuss developmental milestones associated with tummy time. • Discuss positioning of baby and toy placement to promote engagement and visual regard.	• Participants will be able to identify three signs of progress with tummy time and appropriately grade tasks with progression by the end of the session. • During open play times, participants will apply principles of toy placement and positioning to promote opportunities for visual tracking and reaching.
Week 3	• Address tummy time in various ages. ○ Birth to three months, three to six months, and six to nine months. • Education regarding ways to enhance tummy time with toys or sensory mats.	• Participants will be able to identify age-appropriate tummy time strategies by the end of session 3. • When provided a selection of resources, participants will select appropriate toys and sensory materials to improve engagement in tummy time sessions.

Program Outputs & Outcomes

An overview of the anticipated program outputs, which are direct results of the program's interventions and activities, is presented here. To best illustrate the planned and expected outcomes for the play café, a chart has been created and is organized in Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7

Program Outcomes

Anticipated Outcomes			
	Course Offerings & Enrollees	**Social Media Outreach**	**Collaborations**
Phase 1: Pre-Opening Phase	- Advertising memberships for Honeycomb Play Café - Advertising three courses for families to enroll in - Conservative Projection (CP) – Enroll 3 families pre-opening - Optimistic Projection (OP) – Enroll 5-7 Families	**Weekly Social Media Posts to Include** - One post per week regarding the status of construction - One post per week regarding course offerings upon opening - One post for a giveaway that requires participants to share on their social media to enhance visibility	- Collaborate with tea provider and share pre-opening sales of products - Collaborate with partners (e.g. construction, architect, designer) to promote on social media
Phase 2: First Six Months	- Actively running three parent/child courses for enrollment o CP – 8 Families enrolled o OP – 15 Families enrolled - Scheduled open play in the play space 3x daily o CP – 8 Families in each session o OP – 15 Families in each session - Begin Advertising next set of classes o Offering 8 classes for the next session o CP – 12 families enrolled o OP – 15 families enrolled	**Weekly Social Media Posts to Include** - A look inside "Ins and Outs of Tummy Time" - Reminders of open play times and link for booking - Advertising the next series of classes - Sneak peek at party packages	- Schedule Tots in Tutus pop up dance class - Schedule a guest speaker o TOPIC: Balancing With Nutrition Postpartum/Energy Blueprint for Mom
Phase 3: 6-12 Months of Operation	- Actively running 8 child/parent classes o CP – 14 Families o OP – 15 Families - Open Play Daily o CP – 12 Families o OP – 15 Families - Begin offering social events for families o Stitch Night o Mom's Night Out o Board Game Night - Begin Offering Private Events o CP – 4 birthday parties booked	**Weekly Social Media Posts to Include** - Toddler perspective – GoPro footage from a child playing in the play space - Advertisements for expansion of course offerings - Highlighting the importance of play and how Honeycomb supports that - Party package and private event marketing - Pop up event for a stitch night o Participants will create a hand embroidered sweater	- Collaborate with local children's shoe store – will be linked to the toddler perspective post - Professional Pop Up – Child psychologist speaking about the benefits of community-based play

The long-term vision of the play café is to be an integral part of the local community, where parents and families can come together to learn, play, and grow. The unique role of occupational therapy will allow all patrons to benefit from engaging with the play café. One of the primary areas Honeycomb will focus on is empowering parents to engage in play with their children in the most effective way and to support meaningful interactions. This space aims to address the identified barrier of decreased parental understanding of the importance of play through educational classes; Honeycomb aims to address parental stress through curating a sense of community and connectivity in addition to offering groups such as a postpartum support group and will streamline resources for parents to promote ease and confidence when selecting toys to support play.

Anticipated Barriers & Challenges

Entrepreneurs will inevitably face barriers and challenges, especially when embarking on a new endeavor. Immediate barriers that the author anticipates include the proceedings with the borough to obtain the necessary variances for use and permits for the business. To best address these barriers, it would be prudent to retain an attorney to guide the process and facilitate effective communication with town officials.

When advertising and establishing a presence in the community, clarity is paramount. Many families may find the model confusing and expect direct occupational therapy services instead of offerings designed by the lead occupational therapist in a community-driven space. To best mitigate any confusion regarding the business model and offerings, the author will participate in town fairs, offer drop-in play, and provide promotional materials.

A considerable concern is community buy-in for the business. With the vision of becoming an integral part of the local landscape, it is essential that local families are interested in the products being offered. To ensure the community's needs are considered, the author will conduct pre-opening surveys to identify the community's needs. The business plans to collaborate with several well-regarded local establishments to foster positive initial interactions with the community. Once open, if the Honeycomb Play Café is successful but the courses face low enrollment, the author will offer a free play pass or invite families to a mock session of a workshop.

Challenges and barriers are natural when opening a new business, especially when the business is multi-faceted, such as a play café. Mitigation strategies should be carefully considered and implemented to ensure a successful launch.

Summary & Conclusions

Honeycomb Play Café and Busy Bees Play Space is a unique business model designed to address the identified problem; parents have difficulty engaging in meaningful developmental play with their children. As a result of the barriers identified, the author set out to develop programs within the scope of the play café to address each area effectively.

As this model was developed, the humanity of the problem was closely considered. The Developmental Systems Theory (DST) provides a comprehensive overview of how human development is influenced by genetics, environmental, social, and cultural factors, and how these factors contribute to relationship formation (Guralnick, 2019). The framework of this theory examines the interconnectivity of

external factors that affect relationships and can be directly applied to engagement in play to foster a positive child/parent relationship.

The idea of an occupational therapy-informed play café, such as Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space, provides a solution to the identified problem. However, in addition to promoting parental confidence, the space will also allow for continued opportunities for growth. Honeycomb aims to foster a greater sense of connection among individuals in the same stage of life, for parents navigating their new roles, and for children as they explore and learn about the world through play. The mission is to create an inclusive space where every individual has the opportunity to grow. The business intends to continually evolve as the community landscape changes and patron needs shift. With each change, the business aspires to positively impact the direct community it serves, while also enhancing existing policies to continue supporting children and families. Chapter 5 will assess the feasibility and impact of the program using a mixed-method approach. Observational data, participant feedback, and pre- and post-measures will create a clear picture of the effectiveness of the programming offered, ultimately highlighting how programs such as Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space support parental engagement in developmental play.

CHAPTER FIVE – Program Evaluation Research Plan

Program Scenario & Stakeholders

Honeycomb Café is curated to empower parents with knowledge through education, enabling them to return to meaningful play and create a community where parents and children alike can learn, play, and connect. The plan for program evaluation and research outlined in this chapter will assist the co-owners of the space in analyzing the programs offered and adjusting them accordingly to ensure that the programs meet the needs of the patrons. The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time is one component of the offerings at Honeycomb Play Café and is the focus of the program's evaluation. Outcomes derived from these evaluations will be incorporated into communication with stakeholders to ensure the effects of the programs are accurately represented, thereby facilitating the continued development of the offerings at Honeycomb. These activities are highlighted in Chapter 6.

Research Practice Scenario

Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space is designed to address the barriers to engagement in developmental play for parents. The three primary barriers to engagement in developmental play have been identified as 1. Parents often lack a comprehensive understanding of the role of play in a child's development. Parental stress, and 3. Difficulty understanding what resources are adequate in play. In the example of Mary in Chapter 4, she felt overwhelmed in her role as a parent to Michael, believed she lacked support, and was unsure of how to best engage with her child. An occupational therapy-informed play café is an opportunity to support the multi-faceted needs of parents and

children as they navigate new roles together. The example demonstrated community-based programming that supports Mary and Michael in engaging in meaningful play.

Despite the wealth of literature supporting the notion that play is an integral part of a child's development (Moon-Seo & Munsell, 2022; Schlesinger et al. 2020; Ravindran et al. 2021; Metaferia), et (al, 2021; Metaferia, 2020; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020; Foulds, 2023), research also suggests that many parents do not feel prepared to facilitate developmental play with their child(ren), but they also feel under-supported and overwhelmed at the idea (Ravindran, et al. 2021; Metaferia, et al, 2021; Metaferia, 2020; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020; Foulds, 2023). Through a community space, parents will have ample opportunity to create connections with other adults while their children are engaged in play, participate in educational classes to foster knowledge and confidence, and take part in social events. This concept was developed in response to the challenges facing many parents today as they navigate their roles and responsibilities (Williams et al. 2020). Many parents struggle with managing their professional and personal responsibilities and feeling successful in all aspects of their lives. This Honeycomb Play Café aims to mitigate stress, promote educational engagement with children, and streamline resources.

Illustrative Case Scenario

Mary was an active participant in the postpartum support group, Wiggle & Wonder — a class focused on play with toddlers, and The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time with her now, 12-week-old baby at Honeycomb Play Café. Through increased participation, Mary feels a deeper connection to Honeycomb and the people she interacts with and has a sense of community and support as a result. As Mary continues to patronize the café — she has also attended Moms Night Out and Stitch Night, two social events at the café to foster friendships.

Following the participation in the postpartum group and the two child-parent classes, Mary reports she feels more knowledgeable in ways to play and how it supports Michael's development. She reports that she implements strategies learned to best manage tantrum-like behaviors in Michael. Her reports were consistent with her post-participation assessments.

As Mary balances her time and attention between two children, she has made an effort to schedule a playtime with Michael when the baby naps to ensure he feels connected and his needs are being met — she indicated that she feels she is able to make the short nap time a meaningful play session because she learned about maximizing play at Honeycomb. She feels confident in her skills for engaging her new baby during wake windows.

Vision for Research

The concept of Honeycomb Café & Play Space, an occupational therapy-informed play café, is rooted in the understanding that accessible, community-centered interventions with play as the foundation have the potential to empower parents in their role and support child development. The short-term goal of this project is to empower parents and caregivers by expanding their knowledge base and enhancing their competence in engaging in developmental play. The outcomes of this program will be measured through caregiver reports of understanding of developmental play and its support for the acquisition of milestones. The long-term vision of this program extends beyond individual cohorts and aims to cultivate a community in which parents can address the three identified barriers to engagement in meaningful play. Through

systematic data collection – including caregiver reports, pre- and post-interviews discussing the experience and benefits, and observational data collection — the project aims to assess the immediate benefits of the program and how they can be generalized to a long-term understanding. The purpose of this evaluation is to determine whether participation in the program improves parental confidence, thereby enhancing child development and community connectedness.

The lead occupational therapist will utilize the plan for program evaluation and research outlined to identify necessary adjustments to the program, provide clear communication with stakeholders, and garner community support. The primary stakeholders of the play café are the lead occupational therapist, the business partner, and the immediate community it serves. Secondary stakeholders include community partners, local policymakers, and businesses focused on family and childcare. While the information collected from this research project will be valuable to the primary stakeholders, it also has the potential for a broader reach. More broadly, the findings of this project hold notable potential to contribute to the occupational therapy knowledge base in several ways. Firstly, it will expand the current evidence supporting the role of occupational therapy in family-driven services, while also addressing the role of OT in a community-based setting. The findings of this project will also contribute to the role of the parent in play and how those interactions contribute directly to child development, and how OT can facilitate those interactions. Lastly, the findings of this project may reveal how occupational therapy can be applied in a non-traditional way to bridge gaps for individuals who lack access to direct occupational therapy services. By exploring this

topic, there is potential to shift the current landscape of traditional occupational therapy and inform future programs, further assessing the role of OT in the family.

This program aims to systematically examine the outcomes associated with a family's participation in a play series and other offerings at the play café. Honeycomb Cafe is designed to strengthen parental engagement to support child development through an occupational therapy lens. It is built to foster a sense of community and camaraderie among patrons that nurtures growth for parents and caregivers. The author aspires to apply occupational therapy practically to enhance and advance community outcomes. This program will address an existing gap in the role of occupational therapy in parenting and the influence the profession has beyond traditional settings.

Engagement of Stakeholders

The efforts to engage stakeholders will depend on their participation in the development and sustainability of Honeycomb Play Café. Due to the nature of the business, the primary stakeholders are the co-owners, the lead occupational therapist, and other occupational therapy practitioners, who will support the program from conception to execution. Additionally, the business serves families who patronize it and are active participants in programming, as well as the broader community it supports. The co-owners plan to conduct regular planning and strategy meetings to design, implement, and review the offerings of the play café. This review is essential to the research design and ensuring the business meets the community's needs. In an effort to be thorough, meetings will focus on each source of revenue independently: play space, programming, retail, and café. Based on the discussions in meetings, the owners will identify areas for continued

growth and opportunities for professional development.

Engagement with families and community members will be addressed through online surveys, questionnaires, and feedback forms, allowing for continuous collection of input regarding the client experience at Honeycomb. The co-owners strive to maintain open communication with patrons, doing so through face-to-face interactions in the business, as well as through digital media and social media, to highlight the changes made based on feedback received. This information will be essential in establishing a robust client base, which will enable continued research to determine the efficacy of the programs being offered.

Additional stakeholders include local child-focused businesses and policymakers. To be successful in a community-driven business, it is essential to have buy-in from the local community and surrounding areas. The unique and shifting needs of these populations must be considered when planning and implementing new programs. In an effort to best serve the identified populations, the owners will begin by collecting information informally through online surveys and questionnaires. These will target the identified demographic to collect relevant data prior to establishing offerings for the community. Additionally, strategies will include integrating into established local events, such as local farmers' markets, street fairs, and community gatherings. During these events, the co-owners of the business will be prepared to address questions and concerns from community members, educate prospective patrons about their offerings, and provide QR codes to the created surveys for additional opportunities to share input.

Stakeholders who will be invited to provide feedback through surveys and

questionnaires will be any patrons of the play café. The owners will continually work to meet the needs of their clients and evolve where necessary. To ensure stakeholder satisfaction, the co-owners will integrate relational content that demonstrates the feedback provided and the program that resulted directly from the communication. Through the analysis of themes identified through stakeholder engagement, the co-owners will use the insights to inform strategic decisions, and outcomes will be compared to stakeholder expectations to ensure sustainability.

Table 5.1

Stakeholders, Resources, and Level of Involvement

Stakeholder or Stakeholder Group	Type of Involvement	Possible Role(s) and Resources	Specific Interests
Lead Occupational Therapist	P, I, FC	• Developing program • Administering intervention • Data collection and analysis • Modifying program as needed	• Successful development, launch, sustainability, and expansion of program. • Addressing the concerns of community and those served • Increasing awareness of the role of occupational therapy in parenting and family
Parents/Caregivers	P, I	• Participation in program • Feedback	• Completion of program with child • Satisfaction with participation, quality of life, improve • Future programming
Local Community	P, I, FC	• Advocacy for the programming • Needs assessment Feedback and program evaluation	• Inclusivity and Social Connection • Sustainability • Health and well-being

Occupational Therapy Practitioners	P, I, FC	• Consultation on design of new programs to be offered • Provide evidence form the program to necessary parties • Education regarding the role of OT in this space • Program facilitators	• Participate in non-traditional occupational therapy services • Promote the holistic role of occupational therapy • Family empowerment • Inclusivity and access
Child-Focused Organizations	I, FC	• Referral network • Professional development • Advocacy • Evaluation and research support	• Inclusive and equitable access • Family and community well-being • Holistic approach to child development • Sustainability and impact
Local Policymakers	I, FC	• Advocacy and policy support • Funding • Promotion to Community Awareness • Allocation of appropriate resources	• Equity and inclusion • Community health • Economic impact • Community engagement

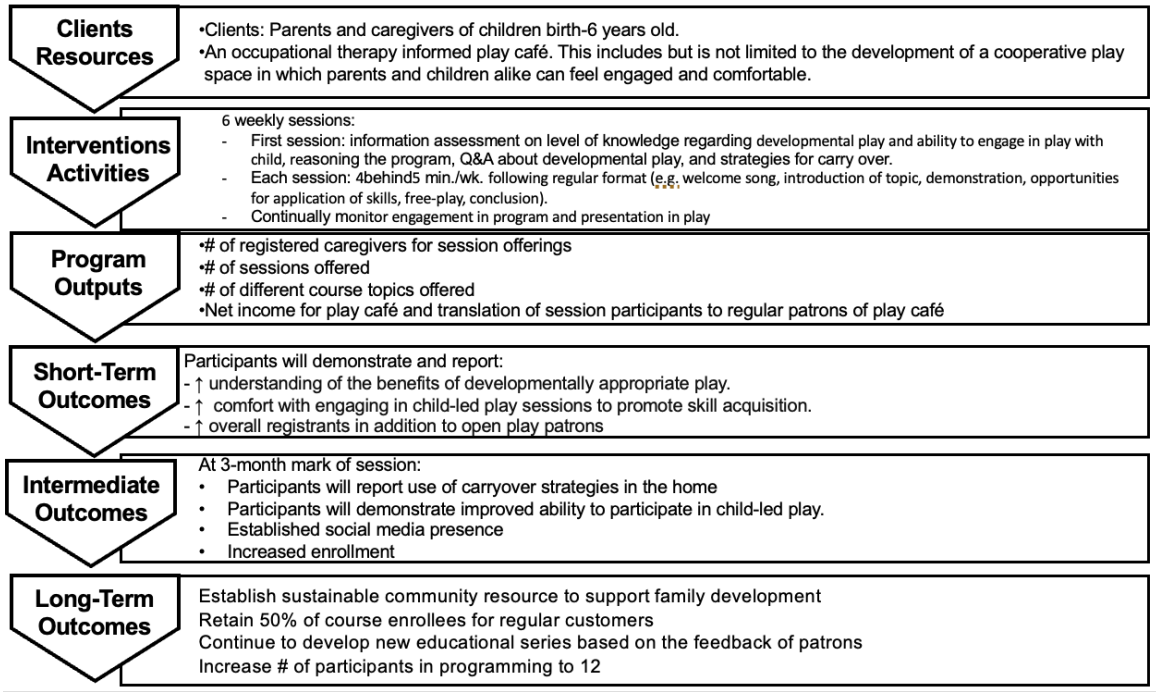
Note: P=Planning, I=Implementing, FC=Future Collaboration

Simplified Logic Model

In an effort to provide a comprehensive view of this program and evaluation, this simplified logic model, Figure 5.1 will be provided to stakeholders. The logic model details the needs of the program and intended outcomes.

Figure 5.1

Simplified Logic Model



Preliminary Exploration

Participation from stakeholders is fundamental to the design, implementation, and success of Honeycomb Play Café. From conception, the process and development have been rooted in collaboration, shared decision-making, and ongoing communication among the primary stakeholders. To ensure that co-owners reach identified stakeholders in an effective and meaningful way, presentations regarding the business model will vary to align with the role and areas of interest for each stakeholder.

Preliminary exploration would include a needs assessment to reflect the unique perspectives of families, occupational therapy practitioners, community representatives, child-focused organizations, and local policymakers. Surveys and questionnaires will be

sent to target audiences three months prior to meetings with stakeholders, with bi-weekly reminders to complete the surveys. The information will be collected via Google Forms, and all data will be reviewed to identify trends and areas to address. Meetings will be held in person to gain a deeper understanding of the role of play, accessibility to community-based play spaces, barriers to engagement, preferred educational topics, sought-after resources, and community cultural views. Each presentation for the respective groups will provide a general overview of the mission of Honeycomb Play Café and how the educational series offer a small glimpse into what the business will provide to the community. The presentation will include information about inclusivity and demographics, as well as short- and long-term outcomes, the research being investigated, and the overall contribution of the program. It will also outline how the program will be assessed and analyzed to improve continually.

The preliminary exploration, including community surveys and consultations with stakeholders, will serve as the foundation for the confirmatory process moving forward. The identified key themes, establishment of program relevance, and confidence in program design to address community needs will be used to guide the tailored interventions, refine content, and shape measurable outcomes. The information gathered through preliminary exploration will ensure that the confirmatory process is aligned with stakeholders, while also allowing for the evaluation of program effectiveness and sustainability. This iterative approach ensures that the program design remains consistent with the evolving needs of stakeholders.

Program Evaluation Research Question by Stakeholder Group

Due to the unique roles and perspectives of the identified stakeholders, the research questions will vary to ensure that each stakeholder's viewpoint is reflected. Table 5.2 organizes anticipated questions from each stakeholder and group that will inform their decision to support the program.

Table 5.2

Stakeholder Program Evaluation Research Questions

Research Design

Stakeholder or Stakeholder Group	***Anticipated Program Evaluation Research Questions***
Co-Owners/Lead Occupational Therapist - Author	**Formative:** • Will the program delivery methodology be engaging for participants such that participation is meaningful regardless of who is delivering the program? • How are the participants reporting on the satisfaction with the content, delivery, and instruction in sessions? • How can program design be optimized to promote parent empowerment? **Summative:** • To what extent does participation in an educational workshop offered at an OT-informed play café improve parent understanding of developmental milestones and competence in play? • Will the program participants report improved self-rated ability to engage in meaningful play with a child? • Will the confidence gains be consistent with program goals and the overall vision of the programming? • What impact do the program and course offerings have on parental stress and community connectedness?

Parents/Caregivers • Target participants; will engage in program delivery	**Formative:** • Will the program content and delivery be sufficient for the caregiver and child pairs to promote engagement in meaningful play? • Will the opportunities for engagement and play be easily relatable for a parent of a child ages 0–6 years? • How well will the play café address individual family needs, parent confidence, and individual child development? • How does participation in programming fit with daily routines and responsibilities? **Summative:** • Will the parents and caregivers report improved competence and enjoyment during play sessions? • Will the program participants demonstrate improved self-reported confidence in relation to engagement with their child? • How will participation in the program influence understanding of child development and milestones? • How will participation in the program address stress mitigation and promote connectivity within the space?
Local Community Secondary beneficiaries of the impact of the play café; opportunity for collaboration	**Formative:** • To what degree will the program content and delivery instruction be sufficient for implementation with clients? • How will the business model align with existing community values? • How accessible and inclusive will the environment be for diverse families within the community? • How will the programming foster social connections and collaboration among families and local businesses? **Summative:** • To what extent will the café contribute to developmental improvements within the borough, and how will it support local families? • What impact will the business have on improving social connectivity and decreasing parental stress?

Occupational Therapy Practitioners	**Formative:** • Will barriers arise when a trained staff member is disseminating program information and strategies versus an occupational therapy practitioner? • Will participants express increased understanding of the distinctive role of occupational therapy in parenting and parent education? • How well will the program design and content align with occupational therapy principles regarding developmental play and family-centered care? **Summative:** • Is the program potentially justifiable based on pilot study findings? • Can research data in the next stage of program launch be used to demonstrate the importance of the role of OT in parenting and parent education? • Will the program participants achieve increased knowledge, as well as improved confidence, when implementing learned play strategies?
Child-Focused Organizations	**Formative:** • How well do the mission and offered interventions align with evidence-based practice? • What opportunities for community collaboration are being explored to support a referral pathway, resource availability, and family engagement? • How will the program and materials be modified to ensure they are inclusive? **Summative:** • What contributions to developmental outcomes and play has the play café made? • How has collaboration improved family empowerment and support networks? • What is the sustainability of the program within the context of the environment?
Local Policymakers	**Formative:** • How well do the mission and offerings of the café align with local policy goals? • What funding or regulatory supports are necessary to implement the program and promote sustainability? • What are the perceived barriers from local policymakers? **Summative:** • How will the café influence equity and access within the community? • Has the program effectively leveraged public resources and partnerships to make a community impact?

Honeycomb Play Café is multi-faceted and aims to address several components of managing parenthood, child development, and community engagement. The component being analyzed in this study is the participation in a 6-week occupational therapy-informed class series for a child and caregiver focusing on tummy time. Through collaboration with the identified stakeholders, the anticipated feedback will help align the program offerings with the mission of the play café. Through the incorporation of diverse perspectives, the café will ensure its ability to meet the community's developmental, educational, and social needs.

Methods

Setting

The setting of the intervention will be at Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Café during a structured play course instructed by an occupational therapy practitioner. Data collection is explained below.

Participants

The participants in the pilot program will be enrollees in the six-week series, "The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time," offered at Honeycomb; the author intends to enroll 12 parent-child dyads for the initial program. The inclusion criteria are as follows: parent/child dyads who will participate in all six weeks of the series, and children are ages 0–8 months. Exclusion criteria are as follows: families already participating in comparable programs, caregivers unable to engage due to language or scheduling barriers, and infants with neuromuscular, orthopedic, or health conditions that limit participation in tummy time.

Summative Methods

The summative research design for this program aims to gain a deeper understanding of the implications of empowering parents and caregivers with information to enhance play and engagement. This base construct will be evaluated in a designated, occupational therapy-informed play café. Due to the early nature of this programming, the preliminary program launch will be used to confirm that the implemented variables contribute to a favorable change. Initially, this evaluation will be a non-experimental design where investigators will provide an outlined intervention and assess the reported data following the implementation and completion of the program. The goal would be to improve the research design to a quasi-experimental group, and eventually to a proper experimental design.

The independent variable will be the engagement in play between a child and a parent or caregiver. This will be the foundation on which all programs will be built. This will allow investigators to assess the effects of the dependent variables, such as participation in parent educational workshops, engagement in community-based play, or completion of a six-week baby and caregiver workshop.

Summative Data Management and Analysis

The summative data will be collected primarily through open-ended surveys, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, group observations. Several groups will be identified for qualitative information. Groups would include caregivers and child duos who participate in a structured 6-week series with a specific focus, for example, "Ins and Outs of Tummy Time." Individuals will participate in pre- and post-interviews that will

be structured and guided by the interviewer. In addition to these semi-structured interviews, surveys will be sent both before and after the interviews, and group observations will be conducted from session to session regarding identified areas. The author adopted a mixed-methods approach to this research, ensuring that both measurable and lived experiences are effectively captured. Given the focus of parental engagement in play to support developmental outcomes for children, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data is essential to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The semi-structured interviews will be conducted in the play space where the educational series will take place. Surveys will be sent via Google Forms to organize the collected data. Group observations will be ongoing throughout the course offerings. Thematic analysis will be conducted without participants present, but the reviewer will complete the analysis independently outside of the educational series.

The primary goal of the summative inquiry is to identify areas where the programs can be further developed to support caregivers and participants. Interviews will be recorded, and an application called Temi will be used for audio-to-text transcription. Additionally, Dedoose will be integrated to identify recurring themes throughout the interviews. When all of this information is collected, it will be analyzed by independent coders who will identify meaningful data sets and assign codes to reflect the emerging themes. The coders will be responsible for developing a comprehensive guide to codes and the associated definitions. The use of Cohen's Kappa will be implemented by the coding team to ensure reliability throughout the evaluation.

Formative Methods

The formative methods that will be implemented will all be geared toward improving program developers' understanding of the overall impact of the offerings. The formative nature will allow investigators to collect data prior to engagement and compare it with data collected after engagement. The application of semi-structured conversations regarding course offerings, preferences on timing, and insights into the desirable number of participants will all propel the programming to success.

Formative Data Management and Analysis

The formative data will be collected primarily through blind surveys, semi-structured interviews, and polls. The formative data will hold a larger target audience than the summative due to the nature of the data sought. The investigators are interested in collecting information from as large a community as possible, even if they will not necessarily patronize the play café.

The primary goal of the formative inquiry will be to identify how caregivers and parents responded to the content and delivery, and if they felt the training sessions/workshops were beneficial. Interviews will be recorded, and the Temi application will be used for transcription. Dedoose will also be integrated to identify recurring themes throughout the interviews. Data analysis will include the use of paired sample t-tests to assess the change over the six-week series; however, if the data do not meet the criteria, rank tests will be employed. Descriptive statistics will create a clear picture of the magnitude of the perceived change.

Anticipated Limitations and Strengths

Anticipated limitations for the programs include, but are not limited to: 1) Parents and caregivers have vastly different knowledge bases regarding child development, which may affect the overall reported effectiveness of the programming; 2) Due to the nature of the for-profit play café, will participating in offerings be cost-prohibitive for some? 3.) Due to the design of programming, neurodivergent families may not feel confident participating? 4.) Will validity be called into question as a result of standardized assessments being absent from this study?

To ensure the programs are accessible to the greater community, the co-owners have identified mitigation strategies to implement to address the program limitations identified. As a for-profit organization, Honeycomb will offer scholarships to reduce cost barriers for families. The business will openly communicate with families regarding what they can reasonably pay for participation in a program. Following the implementation of the programming, the lead occupational therapist will begin planning for neurodivergent families — these programs will be integrated into sessions. Additionally, the co-owners will establish relationships with local neurodiversity advocates to create opportunities for pre-class trials, thereby decreasing stress related to the unknown aspects of the program.

Anticipated strengths of this program include, but are not limited to: 1) Opportunities for parents and caregivers to participate in play at their desired level (i.e., families can choose between open play and a six-week series), 2) All programming is developed by a pediatric occupational therapist with a family model in mind to promote meaningful play, 3) Due to the community-based nature of the programming and

location, parents will have opportunities to consult and information share with other caregivers.

While the program faces several anticipated limitations, the strengths provide strong counterbalances that promote overall sustainability and impact. A notable strength of this program is the flexibility and accessibility of programming, which allows families to engage at their preferred level, whether that is through a workshop or open play. Furthermore, since all programming is designed by a pediatric occupational therapist with a family-centric model, activities will be developmentally appropriate and grounded in evidence-based practice. The program's flexibility and OT foundation, combined with the nature of a community-based setting, allow for authentic connections among peers for information sharing and consultations. When considering all of these strengths, the program is well-positioned for success within the local community. Chapter 6 will explore the broader implications of these findings, recommendations for practice, and the dissemination plan for programming.

CHAPTER SIX – Dissemination Plan

Program Description

Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space is a thoughtfully designed space that aims to empower parents and caregivers through participation in experiential play. The space offers an inviting atmosphere where families can relax with a cup of coffee in the café or participate in a variety of courses, workshops, and events that foster connection and a sense of community. Rooted in occupational therapy and a commitment to inclusion, Honeycomb aims to create opportunities for social support, parental well-being, and cooperative play.

The plan highlighted for this project is a six-week series, "The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time." This course is designed for parents and caregivers to provide education on tummy time strategies and engagement with little ones, while also fostering a sense of empowerment to engage in developmental play with their children. Each session will provide hands-on guidance from a pediatric occupational therapist, enabling real-time feedback and the implementation of effective strategies. Through this program, the importance of child-parent interactions will be highlighted to emphasize the value of developmental play.

This series is one of many that will be offered at Honeycomb. Programs such as these are part of a broader vision to promote the integration of pediatric occupational therapy into daily routines, so that both parents and caregivers feel supported. The intervention-based model will emphasize the importance of intentionally creating community-focused environments to support caregiver well-being and engagement in

developmental play.

Dissemination Goals

The goals for the dissemination plan for "The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time" and "Honeycomb Café & Busy Bees Play Space" are primarily to increase awareness of the relationship between parental engagement in developmental play and the acquisition of age-appropriate skills, as well as how this engagement supports a secure connection within the family unit. The author aims to increase awareness among parents, caregivers, health professionals, and local policymakers regarding the impact of play-based learning and the importance of family involvement. Through education, the author will share the effectiveness of community-based intervention models and the associated improvements that have been observed. In an effort to truly embed itself into the local community, the author also targets sustainable partnerships with community organizations to inform local families to maximize outreach. Finally, the goal of the dissemination plan is to partner with other establishments that may offer similar programming and support to expand the positive outcomes.

The primary goal of Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space is to launch its business model within the community successfully and become an integral part of the local parenting community. This goal is aimed at achieving measurable improvements in a child's development and a parent's confidence when engaging in developmental play. The primary audience for this dissemination activity includes, but is not limited to, parents and caregivers of children aged 0–6. The secondary audience for this information would consist of pediatric healthcare providers, local child/family-focused organizations,

community stakeholders, and local policymakers.

The immediate goals are focused on the local community and positive impact; however, the long-term goals are more broadly designed. The goal is to influence local policy and professional practice to accept the unconventional application of occupational therapy as an accepted form of therapy. Increasing awareness of the reach that occupational therapy has, truly is paramount in making discernible changes in policies that support growing families and young children, as well as in professional standards and practice. The plan for dissemination discussed in this chapter outlines key strategies to ensure the program's success.

Key Audiences & Respective Messaging

Parents and Caregivers of Children Ages 0–6

Parenting does not have to be done in a silo. Families in the midst of raising children may need support with managing roles and responsibilities. Still, they may also feel overwhelmed at the wealth of information available through social media and other outlets. At Honeycomb, the co-owners strive to create an inclusive environment where parents can acquire practical knowledge, receive real-time and hands-on support, and foster a sense of community and connection.

Participation in occupational therapy-informed play will support a child's development, enhance parental confidence, and foster positive parent-child relationships. Whether families are engaged in open play, a class series, or a social gathering in the café, the goal is to empower parents to engage meaningfully with their child. Honeycomb Café is curated to be a resource for

families that nurtures social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. **Share your positive experience with Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space.** This unique space is available to help support child development through the simple act of play. The options for utilizing the space are endless, ranging from a casual cup of coffee to participating in a course or engaging in cooperative play with children in the play space. Whatever works best for individual families will be supported in our space.

Occupational Therapy Practitioners

Occupational therapy has a role in parenting and community-based interventions. A community-based play café, such as Honeycomb, is a clear example of the reach the field of occupational therapy has. In an effort to continue to promote mental well-being for parents, occupational therapists have an opportunity to support parents as they navigate the daily stressors of life and parenting. By leveraging expertise in play, childhood development, and family engagement, occupational therapists can design inclusive programming that addresses the whole family unit.

Access to a community-based occupational therapy space empowers a broader population while remaining very client-driven. This space enables clinicians to consider what the population is seeking and develop programming based on these ideas to support the community's needs. Honeycomb will address inclusion through programming and prevention by enabling parents to engage in guided play and receive education on developmental expectations.

Professional Associations

A program like Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space embodies the nature of occupational therapy and drives advocacy. This play café's business model is rooted deeply in the same values on which the occupational therapy profession is built: altruism, equality, freedom, justice, dignity, truth, and prudence. The nature of a community-based play café supports a deep desire to promote the well-being of others in an inclusive manner that is right and just. The potential to effect positive change on a community level is significant; however, the Honeycomb model lends itself to promoting advocacy for the occupational therapy profession, thereby extending the reach of those it serves. Honeycomb's integration of occupational therapy services and community interventions empowers professional associations to champion occupational therapy in new, unconventional domains. Spaces such as these will enable creative partnerships to continue propelling the occupational therapy profession forward, allowing for continued research in areas such as pediatrics, family engagement, and the importance of education and play.

Pediatric Healthcare Providers and Local Child/Family-Focused Organizations

Honeycomb Café & Busy Bees Play Space offers an inclusive environment where interventions are evidence-based and complement pediatric healthcare recommendations. The play space is a valuable partner for local pediatricians and child- and family-focused groups for a multitude of reasons. However, the primary one is that, at Honeycomb, our goal is to promote the family unit,

strengthen family relationships, and foster developmental play. Through purposeful play, parent education, and community connection, the café aligns with best practices in early childhood education and health promotion. It enables families to access resources beyond the traditional medical model. The space can fill gaps for families who have completed occupational therapy services and are seeking opportunities to apply the skills and strategies they have learned.

Policymakers

Investing in community-based play spaces that offer a cost-effective and sustainable model will help improve child and family health outcomes by providing access to inclusive, preventive services outside of the traditional medical model. Honeycomb Play Café offers the social and fiscal benefits of promoting family-oriented play spaces and educational courses designed by allied health professionals. This initiative will help close gaps in child development, family wellness, and inclusion.

Key Sources to Disseminate Information

The dissemination plan for Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space will primarily utilize social media, offering opportunities for community engagement. Social media platforms, the website, a newsletter, and all content creation will be managed by the co-owner, with a media background. The content will vary to achieve several goals, including providing evidence-based information on play and family engagement, highlighting the benefits of the program and allowing children to lead, showcasing the offerings of courses at Honeycomb, featuring signature café items, and exploring other

creative ways to engage the local population.

The Lead Occupational Therapist

The lead occupational therapist is responsible for developing all content related to occupational therapy, play, and the benefits of parental engagement in play. The author and co-owner of Honeycomb Play Café will utilize social media to disseminate information about the business, its programming, and relevant details. The lead occupational therapist will bridge clinical knowledge and community practice to promote an inclusive ennoblement for families.

In addition to utilizing social media platforms, the lead occupational therapist will also consider all available social opportunities. At this time, the author is scheduled to be a guest on a podcast hosted by a child psychologist, discussing play and occupational therapy. Being featured on a podcast with a like-minded following and host will serve as an effective measure to promote Honeycomb.

Current or Former Patrons of Honeycomb Café

Current and former patrons of Honeycomb play a vital role in disseminating information about the offerings at the café and how the facility contributes positively to the community, supporting families with young children. Families who have participated in courses will be asked to share their experiences with their local community, post a public review, and provide feedback that can be used on Honeycomb's website and in promotional materials. Families will also be encouraged to share images or videos on social media that Honeycomb's official social media pages can share. Additionally, all content created and shared by the business pages will be public, allowing patrons to share

posts on their personal social media pages to promote a wider reach within the local community.

Dissemination Activities

To generate interest and anticipation for the launch of Honeycomb Café, the author plans to implement a thoughtful dissemination plan, contingent upon obtaining the necessary approvals from the borough in which the business will be located. The plan will be multifaceted to ensure success. Strategies will include the use of digital media across social media platforms, written communication, presentations, and participation in local, community-centered events.

Social Media Presence & Digital Dissemination

As previously outlined, the Ins and Outs of Tummy Time program is an educational series for parents and children within the community. Programs such as these are one component of a broader plan to support families with young children in the local community. To generate awareness and excitement about the forthcoming Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space, the author plans to establish a strong social media presence once the physical buildout is approved in the intended space. The digital engagement strategy will include progress updates of the space as it undergoes construction, program development for parents and caregivers, space preparation and finishing, the perspectives of the co-owners, and highlights of featured menu items. Content will be developed collaboratively by the co-owners and will be strategically disseminated to engage the target audience. All of these tasks are designed to foster interest among prospective patrons. In addition to the digital content presented by

Honeycomb, the co-owner will be a guest on podcasts and a featured speaker at postpartum support groups, highlighting the importance of parental engagement in child development and the value of play.

Written Publications & Conference Presentations

The foundation of Honeycomb Café is deeply rooted in the core principles of occupational therapy, specifically promoting meaningful engagement, the importance of play, and whole-family support. Honeycomb Café and the course offerings exemplify the versatility of the occupational therapy profession and its role within a non-traditional, community-based setting. Following the successful launch of this business, the author intends to contribute to the professional body of literature by publishing articles that highlight the role of occupational therapy in parenting and examine how settings such as play cafés serve as valuable resources to enhance the parent-child relationship.

In addition to scholarly articles, the author also intends to publish pieces that explore the implications of venues such as play cafés on parenting and the communities they serve. The author will incorporate business development aspects, programming, program analysis, and case studies to enhance understanding of the practical application.

Community-Based Events

Due to the community-based nature of Honeycomb Café, the co-owners must assimilate into the surrounding communities and cultivate strong connections. The author plans to identify local street fairs, markets, and community events in which a booth can be set up to represent Honeycomb Café. Information provided in venues such as these will be tailored to the traffic of individuals visiting the booth. Primary messaging will

focus on the play café, the mission, the programming offered, and the positive implications of the programs. Promotional materials will be available at these events for giveaways, and merchandise will also be for sale.

Dissemination Budget

The cost of dissemination has been analyzed, and the author is confident that the dissemination plan can be executed conservatively. The co-owners of Honeycomb plan to leverage the strengths of each owner; the clinical owner will provide information for posts, while the creative owner will create content for use across various media. The costs associated with the dissemination of Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space are outlined in Table 6.1 and combined with the total cost for program launch in Table 7.2.

Table 6.1

Dissemination Costs

Dissemination Costs			
Item	Year 1	Year 2	Justification
Digital Media • Domain/Platform • Newsletter • Social Media	 $350 $25 $50	 $350 $25 $50	 • Website • Client Contact Database • Enhancements for Posting
Community Events • Registration • Giveaways	 $200/event = $800 $200	 $200/event = $800 $200	 • Reg. fees for local street fairs • Promotional Materials
Total Cost for Dissemination:	$1,435	$1,425	

Evaluation of Dissemination Efforts

Dissemination efforts for Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space will be evaluated using both numerical and statistical data, as well as experiential reporting. It is essential to understand how the investment in dissemination is being returned to the business. Still, it is equally significant to know how the programming and business are impacting the community.

The co-owners will track metrics related to social media, website, and newsletter engagement. Follower growth, post reach, impressions, engagement, click-through rates, and business conversions will all be measured. Community feedback and participation engagement will be monitored to track registrations, participation in events, workshops, and open play signups. The co-owners will collect input from patrons through surveys, polls, reviews, and testimonials. All of this data will be reviewed consistently to assist in the continued development of an ongoing dissemination plan. The co-owners seek to engage the target audience and promote the business to new clients through strategic dissemination.

Digital dissemination efforts as well as community impact responses are more easily tracked due to the nature of the cause-and-effect relationship. To understand the effects of written publications, the author will be monitored through the acceptance of submissions and the reach of the articles.

Conclusion

The strategic dissemination plan outlined here is designed to reach the maximum number of people from an identified target audience, primarily, but secondarily, to reach

others who may find the content relevant. The dissemination plan is designed to foster growth and anticipation of Honeycomb Play Café and Busy Bees Play Space, which will convert into patrons and clients of the café and play space. The business's efforts are geared toward making a lasting impact within the local community and empowering parents and caregivers to engage meaningfully through play.

CHAPTER SEVEN – Funding Plan

Program Description

The Honeycomb Café & Busy Bees Play Space is intentionally designed to cultivate a sense of community and empowerment for parents and children. The space will offer a café with high-quality coffee, tea, and light fare, as well as a safe, fun, and co-operative play space for children. The front of the establishment will feature a cozy café that serves a variety of beverages and light food options, in partnership with an established, reputable coffee brand. The back half of the establishment will house an engaging and clean play space where children can explore, socialize, and play under the supervision of their caretakers. This play café will offer a variety of courses, workshops, and social events for the local communities.

A comprehensive funding plan is necessary to ensure the success and sustainability of Honeycomb. Much of the expense, both financial and time-consuming, will be attributed to the co-owners of the establishment; however, identifying state and federal grants that may be applicable is necessary. Estimated revenue and overhead costs have been explored in this chapter. The funding plan established will help guide the co-owners throughout the first two years of operation.

Budget

The budget for Honeycomb Play Café was determined through market research to understand the best realistic costs of startup, construction, and operation. Due to the nature of the establishment, the author will be required to fully build out and equip an operational café, as well as a play space with inviting play structures that appeal to the

clientele. In addition to the first- and second-year operational budgets, a startup budget is included in Table 7.1. These line items are condensed and identified as startup costs in Table 7.2, which reflects the anticipated operational budgets for the first two years. The budget for year two accounts for increases due to inflation and rising costs, as well as a salary for a manager of the space.

Program Costs

The pilot study is designed as a component of a larger vision to create a space that will facilitate growth for both children and parents, fostering a true sense of community and a place to unwind and destress. The program costs are minimal for the pilot program. Once the space is operational, the co-owner will facilitate the programming within the play café, and materials for the session will be found within the established play space.

Business Securities

To best support the successful launch of Honeycomb Play Café, this author has established a comprehensive framework and network of business securities and professional support. The efforts invested in creating a cohesive team with a clear understanding of the business's goals are imperative for future success. This selected team will assist with risk management and legal compliance and will also play an integral role in creating a sense of trust within the community. At this time, Honeycomb Café has retained the legal services of Stephen Helh with Javerbaum, Wurgaft, secured Harbor Consultants as an engineering firm, and Meredith Colon-Reiman for architectural services. At this time, the proprietors of Honeycomb Café are awaiting a hearing date with the borough's zoning board. Once approved, the owners will proceed with hiring a

general contractor and a construction company. In addition to this professional team, the author, co-owner, and lead occupational therapist carries professional liability insurance. Due to the nature of the services offered, which are occupational therapy-informed rather than direct occupational therapy services, this insurance is not strictly necessary; however, it provides an added level of security. The company also has a policy for general liability insurance at this time, which is required for the zoning board. Once the play café is operational, the business will secure multiple insurance policies, including but not limited to: enhanced general liability, commercial property insurance, product liability insurance, cyber liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, and business interruption insurance.

Marketing Tools

Due to the nature of the outlined business, Honeycomb Play Café requires a strong digital presence through effective use of social media and digital marketing. It is anticipated that the co-owner of the play café will manage all efforts to meet the business's marketing needs for at least the first two years of operation. The co-owner anticipates utilizing free platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and X to begin garnering interest once approved by the borough's zoning board. To maintain consistency in branding, the co-owner will utilize resources such as Canva and other creative platforms to develop content.

The co-owner will also be responsible for establishing a workspace profile for employees to facilitate digital communication. Furthermore, the co-owner will utilize her expertise in the field of digital media to create a website that accurately reflects the space

and its offerings. In conjunction with social media and the business website, Honeycomb will also send out newsletter-style emails entitled What is the Buzz.

Primary Spaces

Play Space

Honeycomb Play Café is an occupational therapy-informed space, and it is essential to ensure that the patrons of the play space benefit from the thoughtful design of the space. The play space will feature several multi-level structures that allow for safe transitions and exploratory play. These structures will be designed with the owners and architects to ensure the playful vision of the space comes to life. Throughout the space, there will be areas for pretend play with the ability to move structures to create an open space for special events. The space will include an area for pre-walkers to ensure the safety of the littlest participants. Within the play space, a fine motor area will be available for children to engage. It is important for the owners to have opportunities for sensory play throughout the space. Walls will be suited with busy boards; floors will offer clearly marked, varying textures, and areas will be designated for individuals to engage with calming toys. There will also be a rotational area to provide a variety of occupational therapy-based skills.

Safety features will be incorporated throughout the play space to ensure that all children can explore and participate safely. The space will feature soft floors with shock-absorbing technology to help prevent injury. All large structures will be secured to the walls using reinforced anchors, and all furniture will have round corners. The space will not be equipped with toys that pose choking hazards in the free play areas.

Café

The specifics for equipping the café are not finalized at the time this doctoral project is being written; however, the co-owners of the business are considering renting versus purchasing much of the necessary equipment, including, but not limited to, espresso machines, drip coffee machines, and an electric countertop rapid cook oven. The café will require undercounter refrigeration systems as well as a display case for pastries and food offerings. Regarding service, the owners will identify preferred plates, bowls, mugs, and cups, and determine whether ceramic and disposable options will be available, or if only disposable options will be provided.

The owners plan to conscientiously furnish the café to ensure it provides a welcoming and relaxing environment for patrons. Items to be purchased include easily cleanable couches and armchairs in addition to traditional bistro-style seating. Due to the family-oriented nature of the business, highchairs and kid-friendly seating will also be considered and purchased.

Finally, the play café will require an innovative point of sale system that has the capability to manage the play space, events, and parties, in addition to managing the café register. This point-of-sale system will be an integral part of the business's success, streamlining sales from all revenue streams.

Table 7.1

Startup Budget

Item	***Startup***	***Justification***
Legal	$5,000	Manage legal proceedings for plan and application submission. Provide representation at planning and zoning board meetings.
Architect	$25,000	Complete all schematic and construction drawings for the space. Provide representation at planning and zoning board meetings.
Engineer	$8,000	Provide borough required documentation e.g. Parking Plan
Application Fees, Licenses, Permits, & Insurance	$1,500	Required fees for applications, permits, and licenses
General Contractor & Construction	$150,000	Provide oversight of the construction. Manage the flow of necessary inspectors to ensure construction moves in a timely manner.
Social Media Marketing Promotional Materials	$200 $1,000	Digital footprint marketing Giveaways and other materials to promote business in the local community
Café Equipment & Supplies	$25,000	Necessary equipment to run a functional café
Play Space Equipment & Supplies	$25,000	Necessary items for the play space

Table 7.2 *Operational Budgets for Years 1 & 2*

Item	***Year 1***	***Year 2***	***Justification***
Startup Costs	$240,700		Explained in Table 7.1
Lease and Insurance	$80,000	$82,000	$15p/sqft*$5,000 +Insurance
Utilities	$20,000	$22,000	Utilities, internet, misc.
Staffing	$20,000– $25,000	$80,000– $85,000	1–2 Baristas per shift 1–2 Play space attendants Manager
Café Supplies	$15,000	$18,000	Coffee, pastries, etc. Cups, containers, etc.
Play Space Maintenance and Supplies	$12,000	$14,000	Maintenance of the play space and upkeep Replacement of toys and other items -Arts and crafts materials Materials necessary for classes
Marketing	$5,000	$5,000	Brand development Mailers Promotional materials
Cleaning and Waste Management	$12,000	$14,000	Dumpster Regular cleaning of space
In-House Programming	$5,000	$5,000	Courses led by co-owner, occupational therapist Pop up parties Seasonal special events
Pop-Up Events	$5,000	$5,000	Adult social events Collaborations with local vendors
Dissemination Costs	$1,435	$1,425	
Total Cost	$419,700	$251,425	

Funding Sources

The pilot program of a six-week, parent/child course is one component in a broader, long-term vision held by the author and co-owner of Honeycomb Play Café. While the co-owners will fund initial startup costs, the scale of the project requires additional capital investment. The co-owners need to explore additional funding sources to support a seamless and successful business launch. The owners have identified $250,000 as a goal for funding this project through grants and loans, in addition to personal investments in the business.

Grants

Through research, the author has identified several grants they will consider applying for to ease the financial burden of startup and operational costs for the first several years. The first grant identified is the Small Business Lease Grant, which awards 20% of the total annual lease payment for a small business based in New Jersey. The following grant is the Amber Startup Grant, which is designed for women-owned businesses in the initial phases of business planning. Awards range from $ 10,000 to $25,000. The author will also consider applying for the Intuit QuickBooks Small Business Heroes grant, which offers awards of $20,000, and additional resources will be available to the business if it is awarded. In addition to already identified grants, the author and co-owner, two women, will continually track the Ladies Who Launch database to identify other grants that may align with the business. This database lists hundreds of available grants, with awards ranging from $250 to $25,000.

Table 7.3

Sample of Available Grants

Title	***Award Amount***	***Criteria for Application***
The Small Business Lease Grant	20% of total annual lease payment	• Applicant must meet the Small Business Association definition of small business • Lease must be a minimum of 5 years, not including options • The lease must be market-rate based on commercial real estate information
Amber: Monthly Start-up Grant	One time award of $10,000 • If granted, additional opportunity to apply for $25,000 grants	• Applicants must be women-owned businesses who aim to make a positive change within their community
Intuit Quickbooks Small Business Heroes Grant	One time grant of $20,000	• Applicants must demonstrate courage, perseverance, and integrity

Small Business Loans

In addition to available grants, this author will also consider small business loans to mitigate the cost of funding this venture. Small business loans are a practical funding option to assist with launching a new business, which can be accessed through traditional banks, credit unions, or the United States Small Business Administration. Funds secured through loans can be utilized for lease agreements, purchasing or renting café equipment, building play structures, or covering general operational expenses. In addition to the identified resources provided by the state of New Jersey, New Jersey's business website offers entrepreneurs a personalized business starter kit. It provides access to suitable funding opportunities to support small business owners.

Revenue Model

Due to the nature of this business model, the café, retail space, play space, and private events will all be sources of revenue. Given the area's gross median income and value for community-based, family-oriented businesses, the Honeycomb is well-positioned to meet market demands. Table 7.4 illustrates anticipated revenue from each area of the business model.

Table 7.4

Sample of Anticipated Revenue

Revenue Source	***Estimated Units Per Month***	***Unit Price***	***Average Monthly Revenue***	***Average Annual Revenue***
Open Play Admissions	600	$25	$15,000	$180,000
Monthly Memberships	45	$130	$5,850	$70,200
Party Booking	16	$700	$11,200	$134,400
Pop-up Events	4 with 12 participants	$40/participant	$1,920	$23,040
Educational Workshops	3 series per month with 12 participants each	$139	$5,004	$60,048
Café Sales			$35,000	$420,000
Retail (Toys, OT Play Kits, Merchandise)			$4,000	$48,000
Total Cost:			$77,974	$935,688

Honeycomb Play Café anticipates an annual revenue of about $935,000 through a diversified model that includes all aspects of the business (i.e., open play, group classes, memberships, events, retail, and café). In year one, due to the high front-loaded costs of building and opening the business, the business is expected to break-even but not be

profitable. The owners must invest in the front end to ensure a solid foundation that supports sustainability. By year two, the expenses decrease, but anticipated revenue remains the same, allowing for a higher profit margin.

Conclusion

A crucial step in creating a comprehensive business plan is to develop an overarching funding plan that supports the program. To best understand the financial requirements for launching Honeycomb Play Café, a thorough analysis of anticipated costs and expected revenue was conducted. Although the budget is front-loaded due to the initial construction and buildout of the business, it is this foundation that will enable continued growth and success in the future. In addition to personal investment from the co-owners, external funding sources must be explored to bridge the gap between the vision of the Honeycomb Play Café and Busy Bees Play Space and the anticipated thriving business. The multi-tiered revenue streams, including open play, parties, special events, retail, and café, combined with the business's location, position Honeycomb Café for resiliency in the years to come.

A funding plan was developed for the first two years of operation for Honeycomb Café, reflecting realistic expectations. This plan will assist the co-owners in future planning and enable them to understand the necessary funds required to complete this project. The intentional business model of Honeycomb Café provides the potential to create a meaningful and lasting impact on the local community.

CHAPTER EIGHT – Conclusion

There are gaps in parental confidence and competence, as well as the ability to engage in meaningful play, which can hinder a child's development and well-being. Although parents recognize the importance of play, the literature indicates that many feel uncertain about how to facilitate it effectively, often due to stress or competing demands (Hackworth et al. 2018; Teggelove et al. 2019; Sparaci & Gallagher, 2025; Lavey-Khan & Reddick, 2020). The findings of this doctoral project underscore the necessity for structured, evidence-based, family centered establishments that promote both parental efficacy and child development outcomes.

The author considered the current evidence for the problem through the theoretical lens of the Developmental Systems Theory (DST). The analysis informed the cultivation of Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space to address the barriers to engagement in developmental play. The DST considers the complex interrelationships between environmental, social, genetic, and cultural factors that influence family engagement and child development. By positioning Honeycomb and its play-based educational offerings in a community setting, the program aims to strengthen parental confidence, enhance skill acquisition, and foster sustained engagement in developmental play.

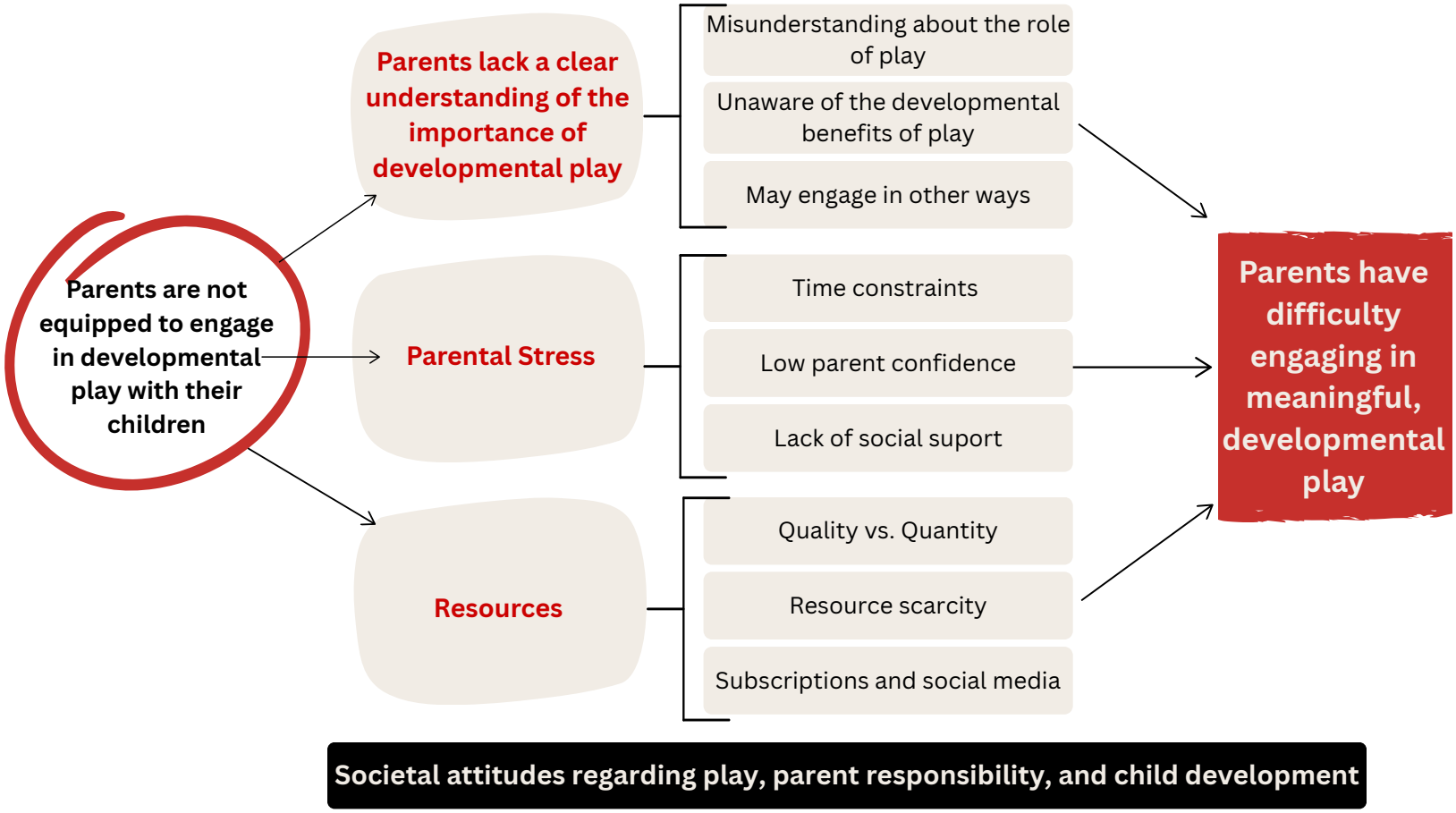
Honeycomb Play Cafe is designed to bridge the gap in parental knowledge and engagement in developmental play by offering a welcoming, non-judgmental, and inclusive environment where parents and children can learn, play, and connect. Rooted in occupational therapy principles, Honeycomb provides parents with accessible, evidence-

based guidance through structured education sessions that promote learning through hands-on experience. Unlike traditional settings, Honeycomb fosters a community atmosphere that normalizes the struggles many parents face and provides an opportunity for sharing thoughts and experiences. Through the creation of a space that emphasizes connection over perfection, and inclusion over judgement, Honeycomb empowers parents to enhance their competence and confidence. This approach not only strengthens developmental outcomes for children, but it cultivates a sense of belonging and growth within the community.

The collaboration of key stakeholders, including co-owners, occupational therapy practitioners, parents and caregivers, child-focused organizations, community members, and policymakers, plays a critical role in ensuring the program's relevance and sustainability. The outcomes of the pilot's six-week program, "The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time," are anticipated to demonstrate the benefits of structured, play-based educational programs on parental engagement and community connectivity.

This doctoral project emphasizes the essential role occupational therapy plays in expanding the accessibility of family-centered, community-based offerings. Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space is an innovative model that bridges therapeutic principles with real-world parental support, ultimately enhancing family well-being and child development. This initiative has potential to inform local policy development, encourage continued advocacy for inclusion and family-centered spaces, and advance the understanding of the developmental benefits of play.

APPENDIX A – Visual Model of the Problem as Presented by the Author



APPENDIX B – Executive Summary

Introduction

Participation in meaningful play has been shown to support the acquisition of developmental skills for a child, and occupational therapy (OT) is distinctly positioned to provide family-centered care to ensure parents are equipped to engage in such play (Hackworth, et al. 2018; Teggelove, et al. 2019; Sparaci, & Gallagher, 2025; Lavey-Khan, & Reddick, 2020). Literature and clinical experience suggest that for many parents, the idea of engaging in developmental play may become overwhelming due to a lack of specific knowledge regarding the benefits of play, parental stress, or difficulties with resources (Foulds, 2023; Metaferia, 2020; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020; Ravindran, et al. 2021).

Problem Being Addressed by Occupational Therapy

A literature review was conducted to investigate the difficulties that parents and caregivers encounter when attempting to engage in developmental play to support their child(ren). Consistent themes found in the research include: a.) Parents do believe play is important and has developmental benefits for their children but seek out guidance; b.) parental stress does affect engagement in developmental play; and c.) participation in social or community-based play or training programs enhances parent confidence and participation (Ravindran, et al. 2021; Metaferia. et al, 2021; Metaferia, 2020; Amodia-Bidakowska, 2020, Foulds, 2023).

Community-based programs, such as Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space, are built on the premise that engagement in cooperative play will enhance the

experience for the child and the parent. A play café can serve as an important resource for parents to increase access to learning resources and workshops, and to decrease the stigma associated with seeking help while parenting. Empowering parents with knowledge to improve play interactions leads to a potential mind shift, making play an opportunity for growth, development, and connection.

Theoretical Base for Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space

Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play space has been thoughtfully designed to foster parental engagement in developmental play and build parental confidence. The identified barriers to engagement in developmental play, as well as a solution, have been analyzed through the lens presented in The Developmental Systems Theory (DST). This comprehensive theory assesses human development and the factors that affect development and outcomes, including genetics, environmental, social, and cultural factors. The consideration of how the identified factors have reciprocal relationships and their impact on an individual's daily life is notable for understanding the dynamics between a person and their environment (Guralnick, M. J., 2019).

In an effort to address the challenges that parents face in engaging in developmental play with their children, an occupational therapy-informed play cafe, Honeycomb, has been intentionally designed. Consistent with the foundation of DST, this model recognizes that many dynamic factors shape child development and the quality of parent-child play interactions. The Developmental Systems Theory considers the relationships among biological, social, cultural, and environmental factors. In contrast, Honeycomb relies on stakeholder information to ensure this nuance is considered in the

development of programs and offerings. By integrating the holistic nature of occupational therapy and DST, Honeycomb Play Cafe will serve as a practical, evidence-based response to the problem.

Program Overview

Honeycomb Play Café and Busy Bees Play Space is an occupational therapy-informed program designed to enhance parental engagement in meaningful play to support child development. The overarching goals of the establishment are to offer regular class series, parent workshops, opportunities for open play, and a comfortable environment where people can relax. The primary component of this program, evaluated in this doctoral project, is a six-week parent-child educational series called "The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time." Through direct instruction and education, modeling, real-time feedback, and open play for families, the program aims to increase parental confidence and competence. All offerings will blend therapeutic, educational, and community-based approaches in an accessible, non-clinical setting.

Program Dissemination

Due to the community-based nature of Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play space, the goals of dissemination are two-fold; the first being to advertise and entice local families within the community to patronize the business to continue offering educational series, workshops, etc.; the second goal is to raise awareness about the significant link between parental engagement in developmental play and child outcomes. Target audiences include families with children ages 0–6, pediatric healthcare providers, community organizations, policy makers, and occupational therapy professionals.

Strategies to optimize the dissemination efforts include community partnerships, social media outreach, educational content, and public engagement to promote the value of an establishment like Honeycomb. Through these efforts, Honeycomb seeks to establish a trusted reputation within the community as an inclusive resource for families. Long-term goals include influencing local policy and professional practice to embrace the non-traditional application of occupational therapy.

Funding

Because the pilot study is a small component of a larger vision to create a play cafe, the overall costs are significant; however, the pilot study alone is relatively low. In an effort to best understand the financial costs required to establish Honeycomb Play Café and Busy Bees Play Space, an itemized budget has been carefully prepared against expected revenue projections. It is estimated that the buildout and startup costs for Honeycomb are $240,700, requiring an overall first-year budget of $419,700 and a second-year budget of $251,425. It is anticipated that the multiple streams of revenue, including educational series, parent workshops, social events, cafe and retail sales, and play memberships, will not only cover the business's operating costs but also yield profitable margins. While the long-term projections show Honeycomb is well-positioned to be successful, initially the financial burden will fall to the co-owners. Therefore, grant funding opportunities have been investigated to support the establishment and sustainability of the business.

Conclusion

Honeycomb Café and Busy Bees Play Space is an application of occupational

therapy in a non-traditional sense yet deeply rooted in the principles on which the profession was built. This community-based play space is an innovative way to address many of the barriers that affect parental engagement in developmental play and to enhance parent confidence. The space and programs offered have been thoughtfully designed to increase awareness of the importance of developmental play and its relationship to children's developmental outcomes. Honeycomb Play Café seeks to serve the local area and make a meaningful impact on the community and the occupational therapy profession.

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APPENDIX C – Fact Sheet

THE POWER OF PLAY: ENHANCING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT THROUGH OT-GUIDED COMMUNITY PLAY SPACE

Erin Marie Andersson, MS, OTR/L, OTD Candidate

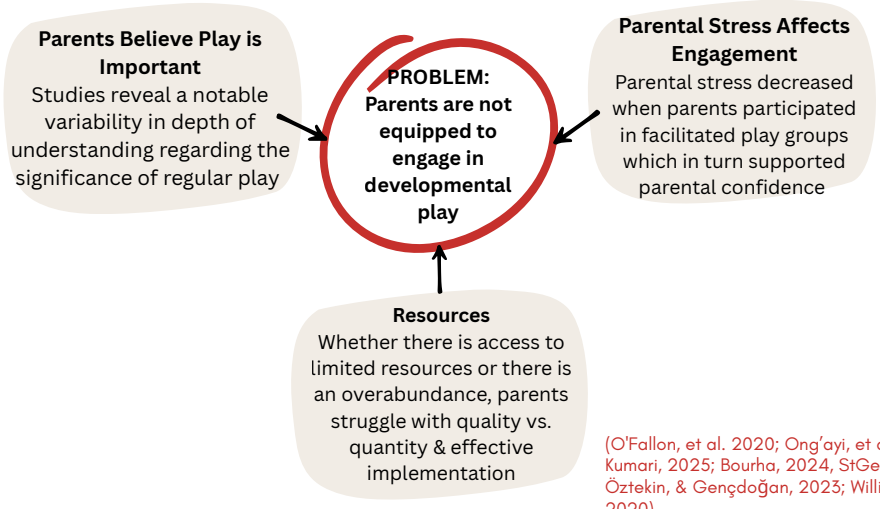
BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Taking Play Seriously

Play is a primary occupation of childhood and is a **critical pathway** for children **to develop cognitive, motor, sensory, and social skills** among others (American Occupational Therapy Association, [AOTA], 2020). AOTA (2020) also emphasizes the therapeutic nature of engaging in meaningful activities to promote overall health, wellness, and well-being across the life span.

The Problem

Many **parents do not feel adequately equipped** with knowledge, confidence, or strategies **to effectively engage in developmental play** that supports their child's growth and development



(O'Fallon, et al. 2020; Ong'ayi, et al., 2020; Kumari, 2025; Bourha, 2024, StGeorge, 2021; Öztekin, & Gençdoğan, 2023; Williams, et al., 2020)

The Power of Play

Proposed Solution

A cooperative play space designed to strengthen the relationships between children and caregivers through education and to foster a sense of community

Honeycomb Cafe & Busy Bees Play Space

- Provides educational workshops for parents & children rooted in current evidence
- Creates a space for cooperative play & connection

Honeycomb Cafe & Busy Bees Play Space

LEARN

The focus of this program is to **enhance parent confidence** to effectively engage in developmental play with their child(ren) through cooperative play within the space.

PLAY

Many parents lack a clear **understanding of the importance of play** and the implications on development which can limit engagement and through course and workshop offerings, Honeycomb will provide education.

CONNECT

Honeycomb Play Cafe will **cultivate a greater sense of connection** for individuals in the same season of life, for parents navigating their new roles, and for children as they explore and learn about the world through play.

Pilot Program

The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time

- 6-weeks, 55-minutes parent/child course
- Assesses pre-/post- parental confidence in developmental play
- Interventions include direct instruction, modeling, real-time feedback, & opportunities for application.

Desired Impact

The Local Community - Honeycomb Play Cafe aims to inspire a sense of community where families feel welcomed, encouraged, and supported to learn, play, and connect

Occupational Therapy Profession - Honeycomb Play Care seeks to promote a non-traditional model of occupational therapy that supports the entire family through meaningful, play-based engagement.

Local Policy - Honeycomb Play Cafe plans to advocate for local policy change to recognize that family-centered spaces as preventative, educational environments that promote child development and family well-being.

honeycomb café
& busy bee playspace

References

Scan for References

APPENDIX D – Sample

Sample Schedule of The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time

Sample Weekly Schedule of The Ins and Outs of Tummy Time		
	Weekly Class Format: 10:00-10:15 Welcome & Catch Up 10:15-10:25 Introduction Song & Cooperative Play 10:25-10:40 Lesson & Discussion 10:40-10:50 Open Play & Q&A 10:50-10:55 Wrap Up & Goodbye	
	Topic Covered	Objectives
Week 1	• What is tummy time and why is it important? • Education on the development and improvement of head and neck control, back and shoulder strengthening, and core engagement. • Introduction to basic positioning and safety during play.	• Participants will be able to describe three developmental benefits of tummy time and how it related to posturing with 75% accuracy. • Parents will demonstrate safe and developmentally appropriate positioning for tummy time play with their infant with minimal multi-modal cues by the end of the first session.
Week 2	• Identify ways to monitor signs of progress in tummy time activities. • Discuss developmental milestones associated with tummy time. • Discuss positioning of baby and toy placement to promote engagement and visual regard.	• Participants will be able to identify three signs of progress with tummy time and appropriately grade tasks with progression by the end of the session. • During open play times, participants will apply principles of toy placement and positioning to promote opportunities for visual tracking and reaching.
Week 3	• Address tummy time in various ages. ○ Birth to three months, three to six months, and six to nine months. • Education regarding ways to enhance tummy time with toys or sensory mats.	• Participants will be able to identify age-appropriate tummy time strategies by the end of session 3. • When provided a selection of resources, participants will select appropriate toys and sensory materials to improve engagement in tummy time sessions.
Week 4	• Tummy time games to play. • How to best incorporate tummy time into regular, daily routines.	• Participants will engage in and modify two tummy time games throughout the session to promote motor development. • Participants will identify three intervals of time in their daily routine to incorporate tummy time.
Week 5	• Different ways to make tummy time easier for baby • Resources available if there are concerns • The implications of regular tummy time on development	• Participants will implement two strategies to adjust tummy time, so their child is more successful.
Week 6	• Recap of all topics covered. • Review tummy time products on the market and recommendations	• Participants will accurately recall and summarize at least five concepts discussed in the program during a collaborative review. • At the conclusion of the program, 85% of the parents will report increased confidence in developmental play.

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