Play across Childhood

International Perspectives on Diverse Contexts of Play

Edited by
Pete King · Shelly Newstead

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Foreword

It is always a pleasure to find a book that broadens or challenges your perspective on play. In bringing together a collection of authors from different countries, different backgrounds and different ways of working, this book can do that. By looking at play from international perspectives and in a broader systems framework, we get alternative ways of thinking about play, and about childhood. There is power in a good example (and there are some nice examples in the pages that follow).

There is so much to marvel at in the apparent mysteries of child development. The way in which different aspects of children's development unroll over time, as children develop new skills and abilities and master new ways of doing things and new ways of understanding their surroundings. With a deepening understanding of this and the potential to make a real difference to the lives of children should come a new respect for the workforce that nurtures and educates the next generation.

The importance of how we support and nurture children to help them enjoy childhood and develop into the adults they might wish to become will be apparent to most who already work with children. Many in government and other positions of power may share some of the wonder of the capacities and potential of young children. Sadly we don't often see that translated into policies and investment in the care, health and education of children and the development of the workforce who undertake these important roles.

Play has a key role in much that is best about childhood and yet it too often remains on the margins of practice, training and discussion related to working with children. It is a fundamental part of childhood and yet often elusive. This elusiveness is one of the reasons that the value of play is often underestimated. The fact that it means different things to almost every individual and is usually viewed by adults through their own experience—remembered and not clearly remembered—also contributes to this.

Many topics are covered in the following pages, but there are two important themes which are particularly helpfully illuminated by the chapters that follow. The first is how we value play. In many ways it seems incredible that we still find play overlooked as a fundamental and important part of childhood. Most of those who work closely with children are strong advocates for children having the time and space to play, but as soon as children get older and pressures from the educational system start to appear the consensus begins to fracture. Grappling with these difficult challenges is important. Acknowledging that the value of play is disputed is helpful—considering issues such as the extent to which play has value as an activity in its own right or as a path to achieving something else in child development; or the extent to which play has to be child-led and whether it ceases to be play when adults lead or join in leading can help us to better understand and appreciate play.

The second is the discussion and use of different examples from different settings and countries to illustrate the complexity of play and what it offers to children. This second theme, of how play looks and is different in different places, allows us to see play from a range of perspectives and it is wonderful to see attention paid to this. It offers a chance to move beyond our individual perspectives to consider play in the systems where it operates. Play and playfulness are different in different places and are valued and understood differently. I realise that this statement may seem obvious, but much that is written on play practice and research assumes an underlying agreed set of values that just don't apply in the same way in many parts of the world. Play occurs in a context or a system, and understanding the system within which a form of play or an approach to play lies is crucial, particularly if we want to learn and replicate successful

approaches. Many plans fail if they are just lifted and placed elsewhere, because that context is key. This applies to many other aspects of life and policy relating to childhood, but playful approaches are so rooted in culture and place that this is especially the case. Learning about play from other places offers so much to us in trying to improve the lives of children—this book offers the valuable lesson that you are more likely to succeed in that if you understand where play fits in a system and take time to understand how it might be different from where you are.

Cambridge, UK Paul Ramchandani

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Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AHKA	Active Healthy Kids Australia
AIAN	American Indian and Alaskan Native
CACE	Central Advisory Council for Education
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DCF	Digital Competence Framework
DCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DHET	Department for Higher Education and Training
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
DoE	Department of Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECERS	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
ECERS-R	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
ECLKC	Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center
ECS	Education Commission of the States
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ENC	English National Curriculum

EP	European Parliament
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-School Education
EST	Ecological Systems Theory
EY	Early Years
EYFP	Early Years Foundation Phase
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYP	Early Years Practitioners
FLE	Family Life Education
GLT	Generations Learning Together
GTC	General Teaching Council
HPE	Health and Physical Education
HSE	Health and Safety Excecutive
HSRCNDE	Human Science Research Council for the National Department of Education
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IPA	International Play Association
JNCTP	Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork
MSHS	Migrant and Seasonal Head Start
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NC	National Curriculum
NCPRU	National Children's Play and Recreation Unit
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership
NI	Northern Ireland
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NPFA	National Playing Fields Association
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OFMDFM	Office for First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PCFS	Primary Curriculum Foundation Stage
PIPPS	Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale
PPSG	Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group
SARS-CoV-2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (or COVID-19)
SE	Scottish Executive
SG	Scottish Government
SIF	Swedish Internet Foundation
Skolverket	Swedish National School Authority
SOU	Statens offentliga utredningar

SPC	Social Play Continuum
SSTEW	Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being Scale
ToM	Theory of Mind
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
US	United States
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government
WG	Welsh Government
WNC	Welsh National Curriculum

Introduction

Pete King and Shelly Newstead

The importance and relevance of play in children's lives within their childhood was summed up by Gross (1898) when he wrote:

> The animal does not play because he is young, he has a period of youth because he must play. (p. xx)

How children play in childhood will depend on many factors. Whilst the home environment may be the first environment where children can engage in some form of play, it is not the only setting or context in which they will play across their childhood. Depending on the age of statutory education, during the day preschool children may be looked after by

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extended family, attend a playgroup, a preschool, a childcare provision (childminder or day nursery) or a mixture of all four. Once they have started school, children will engage in play at school and may also attend a form of childcare setting or access other adult-supervised provision such as an adventure playground or youth club. Children's experience of 'play' will differ as they encounter a range of different types of adult-organised provisions. This is the focus of this book, which examines how children experience play in different contexts including preschool, formal education, childcare, playwork and intergenerational programmes.

An Ecological Perspective of Play Across Childhood

When adults are involved in providing for and delivering children's play, children's experience of play will be determined by how play is perceived and interpreted by those adults and what policies and procedures guide how those adults deliver play. How play is perceived, interpreted and implemented within this range of contexts can be explored using Bronfenbrenner's concept of Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (1979). Bronfenbrenner (1974) stated:

> Existing theoretical models in human development typically focus attention on processes occurring within a single setting (e.g., family, day-care center, classroom, peer group). An ecological orientation points to the additional importance of relations between systems as critical to the child's development (e.g., the interaction between home and school, family and peer group). (p. 4)

An 'ecological orientation', using Bronfenbrenner's EST, provides a useful 'framework' for considering how children experience play across their childhood. Across their childhood, children will encounter five different environments, or systems, which will influence either positively or negatively their behaviour and development. Bronfenbrenner's (1992) EST consists of five ecological systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.

The microsystem is the "complex interrelations withing the immediate setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26) and is a "pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a face-to-face setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, p. 39). For the preschool child, this could be their playgroup or early-years provision where they play with other children and the adults supervise the setting. The mesosystem relates to "between settings where developing person participates" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25) and "comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing child" (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, p. 40). This would relate to children moving from the playgroup or early-years provision to formal schooling; this often happens in a transitionary stage where children attend both at some point of the day. The exosystem relates to "between settings where developing person does not participate" and "comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, of which one does not contain the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, p. 40). This is where the policies and procedures of the different types of settings, for example playgroup and school, will have an influence on the type and amount of play children may engage in. The macrosystem is the "manifestation of overarching patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26) and is "the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, p. 40). This could relate to the learning theory used within the setting; for example, many school-based settings have a curriculum set out by the Government which has to be adhered to. The chronosystem "encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives" (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, p. 40).

A Brief Consideration of Play Across Childhood and Ecological Systems Theory

The first environment where children will experience play will often be within their home, which can be considered within the microsystem. The microsystem will involve who the children have within their immediate

home environment such as parents, carers and siblings, which will be determined by different perceptions of why play is important and how children should play at home. Driscoll and Easterbrooks (2007) identified three types of maternal play behaviour where mothers were sensitive-engaged, inconsistent-directive or intrusive-prohibitive. For sensitive-engaged mothers they were "more sensitive, better at structuring, were less intrusive", inconsistent-directive with "high levels of redirecting behaviours" and intrusive-prohibitive were the most "intrusive and prohibitive" (p. 660). Within the home environment, children's play will also vary on how much importance parents and carers place on educational potential compared to children playing for the 'sake' of playing. This was identified in Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff and Gryfe's (2008) study on mothers' perception of play. When how they played with their children at home was observed, three different types of mothers were identified: all play mothers, traditional mothers and uncertain mothers. All play mothers identified strong academic value to both structured and unstructured play. However, they ascribed slightly more learning value to structured activities study. This compares with traditional mothers who perceived "relatively equal levels of academic value across the two play forms", whilst uncertain mothers "with a weaker play-learning belief, ascribed less academic value to play than other mothers" (p. 311).

This academic value of play within the home, before children start attending preschool or formal schooling, has been considered by Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff and Gryfe (2008) within the United States and across many cultures:

> Across early childhood education and home environments, play has shifted from its previous child-initiated basis of "free" or "unstructured play" to a structured, educational thrust for early academic preparation. (p. 305)

This stronger play-learning belief can result in the concept of 'hothousing' (Sigel, 1987). Hothousing is where "the process of inducing infants to acquire knowledge that is typically acquired at a later developmental level" (Sigel, 1987, p. 212), where children's play is organised and structured by the parent to meet a potential developmental outcome, which Sigel argues encourages in preschool children "achievement anxiety" (p. 223).

In addition to differences between mothers, McGovern (1990) found differences in the way mothers and fathers interacted with their preschool children when they played. Fathers engaged in more social play, a factor identified in a recent study on fathers' views of active play with their children where "fathers used play as a means to build relationship and spending time with children" (Creighton et al., 2015, p. 576). However, mothers were more sensitive and responsive to children's cues to play. This aspect of more motherly sensitivity was also found in a study by Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera and Lamb (2004). Fatherly sensitivity to children's play was found to be related to the level of education and income, and it has been found that the more highly educated the mother, the more they encourage their children to read or study (Bianchi & Robinson, 1997).

In addition to the home environment, children could also attend a day care setting or preschool, thus increasing the different types of microsystems children will experience. The range of day care environments can include nurseries within part time or full day care and childminding, and it is possible children will have a different experience of play in the different types of provision. In these settings, there is a responsibility for the professional practitioner (adult) to play, resource and provide opportunities for play that include self-directed play (child-led) and planned activities (adult-led). How a preschool will consider play may be very different to how the child experiences play at home, or if they also attend a day care centre in respect to how much play is child-led or adult-led. Eventually children will start compulsory schooling where play is more focused on formal education.

Although children may have some 'control' over their play in preschools and day care, these provisions have to adhere to organisational policies and procedures, as well as government legislation which falls within the exosystem where play is more focused on adult-defined outcomes. The types of provision relate to the macrosystem. For example, in the United Kingdom, the range of childcare environments include nurseries within part time or full day care, out of school provision and childminding, which have to adhere to the Children Act (1989) (UK Government, 1989) and subsequent legislation of the Childcare Act 2006 in England and Wales (UK Government, 2006), the Children and

Young People (Scotland) Act in Scotland (UK Government, 2014) and the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 in Northern Ireland (UK Government, 1995). All this government legislation forms the 'blueprint' on how the provision should run, and how play supports children's learning and development. Similar 'blueprints' across the United Kingdom exist for Government educational policy and practice. The legislation for each of the UK countries has resulted in their own set of standards which considers the environment, resources and qualifications of staff. Within the UK, there are national standards for England (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003), Scotland (Scottish Government (SG), 2005), Wales (Welsh Government (WG), 2016) and Northern Ireland (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), 2016).

Children's experience of play in relation to the chronosystem can be considered in relation to how children's rights have had more consideration since the United Nations adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959, which was the predecessor for the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (Fass, 2011). The UNCRC consists of 54 Articles, or Rights, which children have from birth up to 18 years of age. Within the UNCRC, the importance of play in children's lives is stated within Article 31:

1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity (UNICEF, 1990, p. 10).

So over time (chronosystem), play within Article 31 has emerged as an important right and in 2013 the United Nations published 'General Comment No. 17', with the primary objective to "enhance the

understanding of the importance of article 31 for children's well-being and development; to ensure respect for and strengthen the application of the rights under article 31" (UN, 2013, pp. 3–4). As of 2020, all countries within the UN have adopted and ratified the UNCRC except for the United States who have yet to ratify it. The change in perception of children's play has seen the increase of play being viewed as a right for children over time. This has resulted in the development of play policies and strategies in the UK (e.g. Welsh Government, 2002). In Wales, the first legislation has been passed where the 22 local authorities that make up Wales have to undertake a play sufficiency assessment every three years under the Children and Families (Measures) Act 2010 (WG, 2010).

This brief overview has demonstrated how play can be considered with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. This book uses the EST framework to consider how children experience play outside of the home in childcare, preschool, formal education, leisure and the new growing interest of intergenerational programmes from across the world.

Content of the Book

This book considers how play is delivered by adults in different contexts of preschool, formal schooling and staffed play spaces, and how young people utilise their leisure time and intergenerational play. Chapters include examples from the United Kingdom, the United States of America (USA), South Africa, Sweden and Australia.

Brodie's chapter starts the book by considering the role that different play experiences, pedagogies and philosophies may have in children's learning and development. From early philosophical work of Froebel and Montessori to the more recent such as the Reggio Emilia approach, Brodie outlines the different approaches to early childhood learning with play as the common approach with both child-led and child-initiated activities. For the adult, it is important how the provision is set up and how they interact with children. This interaction does not consider the adult to always take the leading role and focus on adult-led play, but a balance between adult-led and child-led play.

Weitzel's chapter outlines the preschool Head Start intervention programme in the United States which was developed to address child poverty and educational success. After providing a historical account of the development of Head Start, Weitzel critiques how play is considered and used in Head Start provision with reference to research. Weitzel makes the case that within Head Start in the United States, play is an underutilised resource focusing on how play affects children.

Play in South African preschool provision is the focus of Krause's chapter. Using Brofenbrenner's (1979) EST model, Krause explains how preschool play in South Africa is a multifaceted construct in relation to policy, legislation and theoretical underpinning. This sociocultural contextual approach considers children's right to play (Article 31) and education (Article 28) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 1990) post-Apartheid. The diversity of preschool provision in South Africa has two broad influential factors: access to the provision and quality of service which in turn will impact on children's play experiences.

Axelsson's chapter focuses on three aspects of play provision in Sweden, förskola (preschool), förskoleklass (preschool-class) and fritids (free time). Within the school curriculum, children start in the förskoleklass (the gap between daycare and preschool and school) where, at a subsidised cost, they can attend fritids (free time) which has its own curriculum like the förskola, which Axelsson describes as "well-regulated free play". Förskola is discussed in relation to the role of undervisning (instructional teaching) in the new preschool curriculum where the play and learning environment must support children's digital competence. Axelsson considers how this new approach to the preschool curriculum may influence the balance between teacher-led and child-led play as the focus on subjects and teaching moves towards more adult-led agendas at the cost of children's free play.

The book then moves from Sweden to the United Kingdom (UK) where McInnes explores how play is used in the separate English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland curricula. McInnes maps out the differences in the beginning of schooling age and the different play-based curricula for each of the four countries; in the UK, more adult-led teaching

dominates, rather than outcomes being met by child-led play. McInnes considers the different types of play used within educational curricula, as well as how play is undertaken in children's non-curriculum time during their breaks and recess. The chapter concludes with a consideration of using playfulness within primary school pedagogy and the role of the adult in children's educational play.

Hyndman continues the consideration of play in primary school provision but focuses on the aspect touched upon in the previous chapter of school breaks (or 'recess') in Australia. Hyndman provides a brief historical account of play and schooling and how changes in Australian educational policy have changed the physical structure of the playground, which has impacted on how children play during recess. The chapter considers important aspects of children's play in the school playground, such as the need for risk, for children to be able to manipulate the environment and access to 'loose parts' (Nicholson, 1971) to support children's self-directed play. In addition, children's play in the playground can include aspects of the curriculum such as nature and scientific play. Hyndman concludes the chapter with the need for more play-focused training for teachers that goes beyond the Early Years Learning Frameworks, particularly in how outdoor play spaces can be utilised and led by children.

Children and young people's play in their own recreation time is further explored in Newstead and King's chapter on playwork and Jarvis's chapter on the 'invisible playground'. Newstead and King outline how the current playwork definition of play reflects the process of play as described in the Playwork Principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG), 2005). This playwork approach to play has been widely adopted at international and national policy levels. However, the chapter also highlights some of the tensions and dilemmas created by the definition of 'playwork play' and argues for a revised definition of 'playwork play' to enable more children to truly experience 'free play' in the name of playwork. Jarvis's chapter considers the growth of digital play and how online interaction by older children and young people has potentially replaced spontaneous free play. Jarvis considers the question of whether the play experienced by nearly all children up to the latter decades of the twentieth century may, for some, now be a thing of the past.

The book concludes with the emerging area of intergenerational play, where preschool children and retired adults, many in residential care with conditions such as dementia, play together. Atkins and Bertram discuss how in the United States adults are now living to a much older age. This increase in life expectancy, along with changing family structures, has resulted in fewer intergenerational activities. Reviewing the research literature on intergenerational play, Atkins and Bertram discuss the benefits of children interacting with older adults, which includes their pilot Generations Learning Together project and how this programme in Oklahoma achieved these benefits for the children and older people who attended.

Conclusion

This book provides a glimpse of how children experience play in a range of contexts of preschool, education and their leisure time in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, South Africa and the United States of America. How children experience play in these different areas is considered from an Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) perspective which encompasses not only what takes place within the play provision, but other factors which will influence how children play, such as theory, practice, policy and legislation. The range of contexts and cultures presented throughout the book raise questions about universal concepts and notions of 'play', particularly as it is experienced by children throughout their childhood. We hope you enjoy reading this book as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

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Play in the Preschool

Kathy Brodie

Introduction

This chapter examines the specific area of young children's play in the preschool school year, which is the year prior to starting compulsory education. In England, this is on 31 December, 31 March or 31 August following their fifth birthday (Department for Education (DoE), 2020). Play in the preschool years is part of the 'unique process in children's learning and development' (Moyles, 2015: 14), developing lifelong skills such as resilience, self-esteem (Howard & King, 2015) and self-regulation (Whitebread et al., 2015) to name a few. Studies demonstrate how children's preschool experience can be predictive of their cognitive development in later education (Asmussen et al., 2018) and it is a key time for children's brain development, where playful activity results in synaptic growth (Whitebread et al., 2015). Therefore, the importance of the quality and quantity of play that children get in these years cannot be underestimated.

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The focus in this chapter is the role that different play experiences, different pedagogies and different philosophies may have in children's learning and development. Given that starting school "*carries a lot of weight and meaning*" (O'Connor, 2018, p. 49), these play experiences may be crucial to a good transition process. Children will present at preschool already with very different lived experiences. Some children may have been attending an Early Years setting from babyhood, whereas for others preschool may be their first time spending time away from home or family. In addition, every home and family will have its own unique learning and emotional environment (Whalley & Chandler, 2017); (O'Connor being 'cared about' (2018) as well as cared for), which will evolve and change over time. The types of experiences that children have will affect their play perspectives.

There are some viewpoints that seem to trivialise preschool as being before the 'real learning' starts and that until children start learning the 'academic' subjects such as reading and writing, then they haven't started education—they are 'just' playing. In Bold Beginnings (Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), 2017), research by Ofsted found that, in some schools, 'free play' was an 'unrealistic view of childhood' and some headteachers felt current training "downplayed the importance of reading, writing and mathematics for the under-fives in favour of play-based pedagogy and child-initiated learning" (Ofsted, 2017, p. 29), which was detrimental to children's effective progression.

This totally underestimates the way that preschool play underpins further learning and development. For example, children need to have established a good sense of balance (vestibular), and need good posture and know where their bodies are in space (proprioception) to be able to sit on a chair, hold a pencil and write (Goddard Blythe, 2018). The vestibular and proprioception senses are developed through running, spinning, jumping, moving freely through space and crawling. A child who is running up a slope and then rolling down it is laying down the foundations for good writing skills later on (O'Connor, 2016).

However, there is also an expectation for preschool children to have learned enough to be 'school ready'. School readiness can be described in many ways, from the self-care skills to the cognitive and social skills. Peckham (2016) discusses the importance of a play-based practice for

preschool children around the world, with specialised early years experiences, as being a common factor for getting preschool children ready for the transition into school. Grimmer (2018) turns this around, explaining how schools need to get ready for the children, and in addition, prepare the families for the experiences that their children will be having at school, "demystifying school" (p. 118) for them. The Ofsted report 'Are You Ready?' (Ofsted, 2014) acknowledges that the Early Years Foundation Stage (the statutory framework for Early Years in England) states that 'play is essential for children's development', but then goes on to say that 'increasing the provision of direct teaching over the course of the [preschool] year was an effective part of the process in preparing children from disadvantaged areas to be ready for school'. Whereas O'Farrelly et al. (2018) found that children valued amongst their 25 priorities enthusiasm for learning, running and balance, coping with separation and friends.

The reality is that all of these perspectives have merit and the role of play and play situations cannot be underestimated for increasing learning in different ways. Preschool children will need a range of skills and abilities, and the most effective way of embedding these is through play. For example, play in the preschool years helps children to practice taking another's perspective and develops their Theory of Mind (ToM) (Deans for Impact, 2019). This is an important skill, because the Theory of Mind during preschool is linked to children's improved sociability and it also improves children's comprehension of teacher feedback (Asmussen et al., 2018), two things often cited as required for school readiness. The richness of play in preschool is preparing children for their formal education, without having to introduce activities such as sitting quietly or lining up.

Play in Specific Philosophies or Approaches to Preschool

'Play is a child's work' or variations on that phrase have been attributed to many different theorists, for example Montessori (1914), Froebel (Weston, 1998) and Rousseau (1991), and may have been used by many

of them. In this section, the way that various approaches or philosophies support the play of preschool children is considered. The approaches chosen here are a small selection of the more common ones in the UK, but there are constantly new innovations and changes in good practice for preschool education.

Montessori

The Montessori philosophy (Montessori, 1914) is one where children can freely choose whether to join in an activity or use a piece of equipment; it encourages children to be independent, such as putting on their own shoes and coats. The play is described as "auto-education" (Montessori, 1964, p. 136), that is, play through resources that self-correct. For example, if the different-sized cylinders are not placed in the correct holes, then there will be cylinders left over. Only when everything is in the correct place will all the pieces fit together correctly. However, sometimes the environment can look highly structured, with the resources for activities being put away by the children in a clearly defined and specific area. Children are shown how to use the resources in a certain way, such as building the 'pink tower' block-by-block or pouring water from a glass jug in a specified way and then they are replaced in their designated spot on the shelf. Therefore, the play can look formal and less spontaneous than in other preschool settings.

The benefit of this type of play is the self-control, self-regulation and calmness that children need to have to achieve success with the Montessori materials. Children have to consider the process and what they are doing, rather than rushing through the activity to get to the end result or product, whether that is a physical product such as a painting or a concept such as how many blocks there are in the tower. This type of play environment may not score highly on standardised scales such as the ECERS Blocks (Harms et al., 1998) because there are limited resources of a fixed type.

Steiner

Preschool children would be part of the Steiner early kindergarten age group (Harwood, 1958) in the UK. During this time the children will have a predictable routine of active play followed by quieter or calmer play. The Steiner philosophy doesn't introduce 'formal' education, such as reading or writing instruction, until much later in children's education, usually around 7 years old, so everything is done through the natural evolution of children's play.

Oracy and oral traditions, such as storytelling and singing, are highly valued because they increase memory, cognitive development and the musicality of language. Similarly, mathematics is encountered through everyday chores and activities, such as cooking and crafts. This type of play reinforces the concepts behind mathematics, rather than rote learning numbers. The natural world and the rhythms of nature, such as seasons and celebrations, are key to the Steiner philosophy.

The interconnectedness of nature and social, moral, spiritual, cognitive, physical and emotional development is reinforced through all the play activities that children are involved in. The benefits of such a holistic development is that children become creative, independent thinkers, not pigeon-holed by test results or levels of development within a curriculum.

The biggest challenge with this sort of play environment is that it relies on the teacher or educator having a very good understanding of child development to ensure that the children are getting a well-rounded, truly holistic experience.

Reggio Emilia Approach

Loris Malaguzzi developed the Reggio Emilia approach in 1945 in Italy (Edwards et al., 2011). He believed that preschool children express their learning in many different ways, not just language, but through their creativity, their self-expression and manipulation of materials. These are the 'hundred languages' that are associated with the Reggio Emilia approach.

The play is co-constructed with the atelierista or teacher, who supports children with their learning, rather than the direct instruction that may be more familiar in other preschool philosophies. The environment around the children is considered to be fundamental to children's learning (the third teacher) and is filled with natural and beautiful artefacts for children to play and learn with. Children are given time to develop and expand on their play, extend their interests and display work in a respectful, thoughtful way.

The benefits of this type of play are care and respect for the environment and for other children and adults. Children are respected as having huge potential in being creative, constructing their own knowledge and expressing their knowledge via the hundred languages. However, for some children the lack of structure and strict routines may be unsettling, especially if this is the first time they have been allowed to follow their own interests. Similarly, for some teachers not having a plan to work to and following the children's lead can be demanding and requires thorough knowledge of both child development and the children in that particular cohort.

High/Scope Approach

The High/Scope approach (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995) is also an approach where children and teachers co-construct knowledge during play-based activities. The most notable feature of the High/Scope approach is the 'Plan-Work-Recall' (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995) cycle that happens within a session, often known as 'Plan-Do-Review' (Epstein et al., 2011). As it suggests, the children plan their play activity before entering the environment, play with support from the adults and then come together again with their peers to review their activity.

The focus is on the process rather than the product and aims to develop children's self-regulation and executive function skills. The play is described as purposeful play that has 58 key experiences for children to engage in. Joint problem solving, including conflict resolution, is a fundamental aspect of the High/Scope approach. The predictable routine of

the High/Scope approach to play suits some children very well and arguably is a good foundation for the more formalised environments of compulsory schooling after the preschool period.

Summary

These are just a few different approaches and philosophies towards preschool play, some of which are fairly new, whilst others are over 100 years old. The Montessori and High/Scope approaches have a defined structure around the day and the way that children choose and play with resources. Steiner and Reggio Emilia have much more free-flowing play and are more concerned with play processes and play experiences. In contrast to government curricula, such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), all of these approaches consider children's play to support their holistic development, rather than focusing on the outcomes (e.g. Good Levels of Development in the EYFS) that may be achieved through play.

Describing and Categorising Play

Play is a slippery word to define, explain or even experience. What may be playful to one person may be another person's dreaded chore. Therefore, comparing, contrasting and reflecting on different definitions of play can help to solidify personal perspectives on what play means to the children and the practitioner.

Parten (1932) suggested that infants and young children have six different, distinct types of play in their social participation and that these are generally hierarchical in nature. Children will go from unoccupied play (observing from the sidelines), to solitary play (playing by themselves) to onlooker play (some social interaction, but not activity) to parallel play (side by side with some social interaction and cooperation). By the time children are preschool age, there would be an expectation of associative play (playing together socially, but not always with defined rules or outcomes) and the beginnings of cooperative play (organised play, sometimes with a defined outcome or product, sometimes with defined roles

and responsibilities within the group or pair). More recently, the Social Play Continuum, an observation tool developed by Broadhead (Broadhead, 2004), can be used to help to demonstrate children's social progress and to evaluate the environment (called Areas of Provision at the time). The four domains—Associative, Social, Highly Social and Cooperative—also describe increasingly complex language and behaviour patterns. The emergent play themes that are observed whilst using the Social Play Continuum evidence children's progress through these four domains. Pyle and Jackman (2020) have developed a child-centred (not child-led) play-based learning continuum that has five categories of play—learning through games, playful learning, collaboratively created play, inquiry play and free play—which are underpinned by play-based strategies to match children's abilities.

Social play and play-based learning continuums are useful because the level of play may give an indication of the children's development and growing capabilities. However, this also needs to be applied with caution because every child is unique and will play in different ways according to the situation, other children and adults present, their familiarity with the environment, and numerous other considerations. The challenge with Parten's stages of play is that it could be used as a checklist with the expectation that children's level of social development and learning is reflected in their stage of play, without further evidence or observations. The benefit of Broadhead's Social Play Continuum is the reliance on observation and its rigorous documentation, whilst Pyle and Jackman's play-based learning continuum makes clear links between children's learning and play.

Bruce (2004) describes the twelve features of free-flow play and how these may have an influence on the sort of play that is observed. Bruce tends to take the child's perspective, rather than an adult observation of the play behaviour. For example, it is intrinsically motivated, the conditions have to be right for that child and children wallow in their learning.

The holistic nature of preschool children's play is well described in the twelfth feature:

> Children at play co-ordinate their ideas and feelings and make sense of relationships with family, friends and culture. Play is an integrating mecha-

> nism, which allows flexible, adaptive, imaginative, innovative behaviour. Play makes children into whole people, able to keep balancing their lives in a fast-changing world (Bruce, 2004, p. 150).

Another definition that is multidimensional and includes the personal nuance of play is Else's (2014) play equation:

> Play = choice + engagement + satisfaction (p. 5)

Intriguingly, this again mentions engagement, equivalent to Whitebread's being wrapped up in the play and Bruce's 'wallowing'. Else goes on to say that 'play types should not be a curriculum tool' (Else, 2014, p. 35).

Hughes (2002) describes 16 types of play, which are:

1. Social
2. Socio-dramatic
3. Rough-and-tumble
4. Exploratory
5. Object
6. Creative
7. Communication
8. Deep
9. Recapitulative
10. Symbolic
11. Fantasy
12. Dramatic
13. Imaginative
14. Locomotor
15. Mastery
16. Role-play

There are some obvious common features between some of these classifications, such as the links between social and socio-dramatic or role-play and imaginative play. In fact, most preschool children will move through these different types of play during any given time. For example,

a game involving superheroes may move from a social gathering to rough-and-tumble to dramatic to locomotor in a matter of minutes. This makes Hughes' types of play sometimes difficult to distinguish, but also clearly demonstrates that even a simple game or interaction can be complex, multi-dimensional and vary for each child within the play scenario.

Athey's (2007) investigations and analysis of children's play developed the idea of schematic play. She found evidence of children investigating their environment by repeatedly practising a concept or discovery. The behaviour or play may not, at first, have obvious links until schematic play is considered. For example, children who may play by spinning on the spot repeatedly, who like to watch toys that rotate or who make objects that roll with play dough may be exploring a rotation schema. Analysis of this type of play (or even understanding the underlying theory) can be performed by a teacher or practitioner with good child development knowledge, especially as there are many types of schematic play that thread through and link all aspects of play, from creative to role-play and physical development.

There is also an argument that says that this example may not be schematic play, but is a child developing their vestibular system (spinning), who has just discovered how to operate a new toy (spinning top) and is also practising their fine motor control by manipulating the play dough in their hands. Of course, both of these perspectives are equally possible and may be equally true as well. Schematic play, schema and scheme are very fascinating play concepts, which are still being developed by many researchers, for example Brock and Siraj-Blatchford (2019), and are likely to be expanded or refined in the future.

Sandseter (2007) considered children's responses to play, rather than adults' observations, and categorised six types of play that children and adults considered 'risky':

1. Play with great heights
2. Play with high speed
3. Play with harmful tools (e.g. woodworking tools)
4. Play near dangerous elements (e.g. water, fire, steep drops)
5. Rough-and-tumble play

6. Play where the children can 'disappear'/get lost (or think they can't be observed or heard by adults)

Of the six types, it was the play near dangerous elements, such as a river or near a campfire, that the adults identified most often. Preschool-aged and young children seem not to consider the risks inherent with the environment in the same way as they process the risks of using a saw or climbing high up into a tree. Interestingly, the children described risky play as 'scary-funny', so they seem to be seeking the feeling of exhilaration combined with a fun element.

Sandseter (2010) has since updated her list of risky play to include two objective risks in play:

1. Environmental characteristics (such as height of climbing structure, surface hardness, as well as surveillance of adults);
2. Individual characteristics (such as the height and speed pursued by the child, the rashness of movements, motor control, focus/concentration).

There are many other examples of play types identified and described, but a personal favourite is Whitebread's (2019), which describes playfulness in terms of emotions and experiences of people (adults or children). He explains that however you describe it or whatever definitions there are, ultimately it's play if it feels like play. Moreover, if, as an adult, you've never experienced play or playfulness or being wrapped up in something, then you'll never understand the feeling that children have that is play.

Practicalities of Play in a Preschool Setting

All four Early Years curricula of the UK refer to learning through play: Northern Ireland (Foundation Stage, 2013), Wales (Foundation Phase, 2015) and Scotland (Curriculum for Excellence, 2019) and in England learning and development through planned, purposeful play (EYFS, 2017). The type of play or environment is generally described in the

broadest of terms, for example the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) states, "Children learn by leading their own play, and by taking part in play which is guided by adults" (DfE, 2017, p. 9).

The challenge for the adult is to provide play experiences that support the children's developmental needs, as well as keeping them safe while having fun and making it culturally interesting so they learn about their world and so on. This could be considered to be providing a 'quality' preschool experience; however, this will vary from setting to setting, from a large nursery to childminder, for example. Very often the quality of the setting is determined against scales such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) (Harms et al., 1998) that was used in the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project by Sylva (Sylva et al., 2004) or the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being Scale (SSTEW) developed by Siraj et al. (2015). These identify the environments that may, or may not, give opportunities for different types of play and play situations. Interestingly, there is no consideration of whether the types of play actually happen. The range of play is also limited. For example, almost none of Sandseter's (2007) risky play types would be available to children, even in a setting that is rated as high quality on the ECERS scale. Although these may appear to give objective results, suitable to use for comparison from setting to setting, the results from these are based on subjective judgements from different educators, on a particular day with that certain cohort of children. Whitebread (2019) suggests that quality can be divided into two areas: process variables (the quality of the experience that the child has) and structural factors (e.g. qualification of practitioners, buildings, outdoor area). He goes on to say that play is central to the process variables, as is being playful.

Therefore, if the quality of a setting is reasonably difficult to pin down, the quality of the play within that setting may be even more difficult to determine. However, investigating the different attitudes towards play in different preschool environments can be instructive.

Role of the Adult in Play Situations

Throughout this chapter, the role of the adult as co-constructor of knowledge, facilitator, teacher and educator has been acknowledged. Often the adult's role is underestimated because children will tend to play in some form, whether there is an adult present or not. However, in the preschool the adult's role is a critical balance between care; supporting children's learning through knowledge of child development; fostering independence and resilience required for transition to compulsory education; and ensuring children reach their full potential. Children of preschool age can be at widely varying points in their development, so it takes a skilled practitioner to find the right balance and combination for each child.

Fisher (2016) explains the importance of knowing the children well, having a Key Person approach and tuning into the children. She also notes that "sometimes the best action a practitioner can take is to step back, to observe, and to remain silent in order for the child's thinking to develop".

Creating Environments for Play

There are almost limitless ways that children can interact with the environment that is provided for them; however, preschool children are still constrained by the adult's vision. Even if the setting is in a forest or on a beach, there will be boundaries and rules about where and how to play in the environment. Therefore, considered here are three of the most common scenarios: activities created by adults (structured), activities inspired by children's interests (semi-structured) and the continuous provision in the setting (unstructured), which can be considered as a continuum—from adult-directed play, through adult-guided and adult-supported play, with unstructured or no adult support at the other end of the continuum (Department for Children, Families & Schools (DCFS), 2009).

Starting with activities created by preschool teachers, which is the most structured end of the continuum, activities need to be Developmentally Appropriate, which is described by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as "providing each child with

the right mix of challenge, support, sensitivity and stimulation" (NAEYC, 2020). The nature of the activity will depend on children's strengths and experiences. Therefore, these activities are usually designed to encourage a particular form of play or a particular play outcome, based on the knowledge of the children's needs and interests. For example, there may be a play dough station with flour, salt, water and oil set up so children can mix their own play dough (early mathematics, mixing, exploring) and then manipulate it (fine motor skills, imagination, creativity). However, the children may use the materials in a different way, disrupting the type of play intended by the adult. For example, they may choose to mix the flour into the water tray or put oil into the paints. This is still purposeful play (Ball, 1994), but the adult must now make a choice—allow this play or try to revert the activity back to meet the intended outcomes. Therefore, the role of the adult in structured play is to facilitate and encourage (Russ & Lee, 2019) children towards the intended process outcomes (mathematics, mixing, fine motor skills and imagination) whilst allowing the play to flow naturally. In this example, the adult could provide water scoops for measuring, whisks for fine motor skills/mixing and a narrative about the 'potion' being mixed in the water tray.

Semi-structured play activities are guided by both the adult and the child (Creekpaum, 2019) and result from observations about the children's interests. For example, a practitioner observes that a child is fascinated by fire engines and always rushes to the fence to watch if one is driving by. So that afternoon the children are provided with cardboard boxes, paint and sticking tape to make their own fire engines in the preschool. This type of extended play is an opportunity for the practitioner to extend children's semantic field around their area of interest and introduce new facets, such as other emergency vehicles. However, sometimes this type of activity may not capture the children's interest at all and the children choose to play somewhere else. This is an ideal time for the practitioner to reflect on the original observation (maybe it was the noise that was appealing? Or the high speed?), the type of play envisioned (it was raining in the afternoon so the children wanted to go out in the rain?) and how this could be adapted for the future.

Finally, the continuous provision discussed here is the resources and environment that children have access to freely and independently. For

example, these may be open shelves of resources such as pens and paper or climbing equipment or sand and water trays. When children are playing in or with the continuous provision, the practitioner's role is to ensure that it is suitably stocked for the cohort of children to be able to play freely. For example, this could mean providing fewer materials so the children have to collaborate, although this could also lead to a reduction in the range of play opportunities. The continuous provision must be constantly reviewed and assessed, because the children's needs, interests and abilities are constantly developing and changing.

Interactions During Play

Each interaction during play should be as unique as the child and should follow the child's lead (Russ & Lee, 2019). The almost overwhelming temptation when seeing children playing is to make it an opportunity for a learning moment and add in a question or two—"How many plates does that make? And what colour is this cup?" However, this kind of interaction is rarely beneficial for the children. It is more often the opportunity for the practitioner to be able to tick an evidence box for 'Child A can count to 5 or knows the colour red', rather than a playful experience for the children. Where play is used as a learning outcome, this can be counterproductive and end the play prematurely (Creekpaum, 2019).

Fisher (2016) describes the importance, for a whole range of reasons, of both verbal and non-verbal interactions. However, the timing and appropriateness of the interaction is of vital importance, or else it tips over into becoming an annoyance or distraction from the children's play.

Fisher (2016) describes the characteristics of a welcome and useful interaction as follows:

- The practitioner's conversation builds on the children's thought processes;
- The children are interested in the practitioner's words;
- The practitioner is happy to follow the children's thread of thought, however random it may appear to an adult;
- Both parties are having a positive experience.

Part of the practitioner's role is to ensure that there are opportunities for both child-led and child-initiated activities. In a child-led activity, this could start with something set up by the practitioner, either in the environment or as an activity, but then led by the children into their areas of interest. For example, the play dough station may become a place to mix magic potions or an ice cream shop. A child-initiated activity is one that has come from the children entirely themselves. The practitioner still has a role in this type of play, because the children may need resources or adult support. For example, a group may choose to play pirates, so ask the practitioner to make pirate hats and get the big sheet of paper for the treasure map.

The benefit of both child-led and child-initiated play is that the children's interests are being followed, which is more likely to result in deep-level learning and sustained interest. There are also benefits for children's self-esteem, self-confidence and other areas of personal, social and emotional development. However, there is also a risk that children's learning becomes limited if a practitioner does not sensitively support this type of play because the children are not having the opportunity to expand their experiences, language and skills. The children may lead or initiate the play, but the practitioner must still support and scaffold it, in accordance with the child's requirements. Bruce (2004) suggests that it is the practitioner's responsibility to consider that the child's play agenda may be very different from their own, whether this is stated explicitly or not.

Conclusions on Play in Preschool

> Play is truly the elixir of a child's psychological and cognitive development (Tuber, 2019, p. 65)

Defining preschool play is useful to help the practitioner make meaning from observations of play. Good observations will make clear the learning that is taking place and may possibly highlight developmental issues. However, this must not be used as a tick list because children are unique and their play will vary enormously from day to day, hour to

hour, according to a huge range of external factors and their unique, individual needs.

Considering play as a process, feeling or emotion (Whitebread, 2019) is beneficial because the children's intent then comes to the fore. Rather than what type of play it is, it becomes a question of what thinking process was the child going through. This is essential in order to understand the deep-level, long-term learning that the children are experiencing (Dowling, 2013) so that this can be extended, embedded and challenged and play opportunities are offered that most closely match the children's needs. Most importantly, preschool play is critical for children's foundations for lifelong learning and their personal development.

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Preschool Play in South Africa

Taryn Krause

Introduction

Preschool play in South Africa is a multifaceted construct. It takes into account various influences on multiple levels of interaction, as well as different challenges and supportive factors that exist for each of these. A helpful framework for understanding the complexity of this is an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). This perspective recognises play to exist within the context of development, as well as to be a construct of it—influenced by multilevel environmental systems as they reciprocally interact with one another and with the developing child (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). These different levels of interaction include the microcosm of the preschool, a system to which the child has direct access; the mesosystem, or the relational context between different microsystems such as the school and the home environment; the exosystem, which indirectly impacts on the child; the macrosystem, or broad sociocultural context; and the chronosystem, the passage of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). It is

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within the context of these interacting systems that play is permitted within the South African preschool and, therefore, manifests.

This chapter discusses different factors within each of these levels of interaction so as to better understand the reality of preschool play in South Africa. It begins with an exploration of the South African sociocultural context and how this relates specifically to the preschool environment and play within it, on the macrosystemic level of interaction. Relevant policy and legislation and guiding academic influences are identified. This provides a base from which to explore play in the South African preschool. How play is allowed to manifest within the preschool is evaluated in terms of access to, and the quality of, both educational and play provision and how these interact with one another, taking into account the reciprocal influence of different levels of engagement. The state of the South African preschool—a microsystem of development—as well as its relation to other developmental systems is explored in depth because of its mutually influential relationship with the play that exists within it. A picture of play in the South African preschool—exploring both the contextual and manifest elements—highlights the state of play in this setting as well as strengths and challenges related to the ways in which it is allowed to manifest.

A Broad Sociocultural Context for Preschool Play Provision in South Africa

An understanding of the macrosystemic influence—or the influence of the sociocultural context—on play in the South African preschool is foundational for conceptualising the phenomenon itself. This is because of the nature of macrosystems in providing a "societal blueprint for a particular culture or sub-culture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p.40), and the fact that "specific social and psychological features at the macrosystem level … ultimately affect the particular conditions and processes occurring in the microsystem" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 40). As a process within the microsystem of the South African preschool, play is therefore only fully comprehended within the context of sociocultural interaction.

This is explored in terms of: policy and legislation relating to play and education; the impact of policy and legislation on the structural outworking of the preschool; and theoretical underpinnings that unify South African preschool provision. Although these are not the only areas of influence on the macrosystemic level, they are factors that provide a necessary starting point from which to explore the preschool environment as a microsystem within which play manifests. These are discussed in terms of other relevant systems of interaction as they cannot be examined in isolation.

Policy and Legislation Relating to Play and Education

Policy and legislation, on both a global and national level, set the tone for the sociocultural climate within which play in the South African preschool is permitted, and how children are able to make use of opportunities for play provided within it (Chudacoff, 2007; Neumann, 1974). Recognising the interplay of the macrosystemic and chronosystemic levels of interaction, policy and legislation reflect both the current sociocultural climate and how this is effected by the reciprocally influential relationship between the individual and progressively changing societal values (Ariès, 1996; Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Kamp, 2001). The implementation of child-specific policy and legislation highlights the global and national recognition of childhood as a unique life phase with unique rights (Ariès, 1996; Kamp, 2001). On an international level, this is reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), which highlights, among others, children's specific rights to education and to play, in Articles 28 and 31 respectively. South Africa recognises these rights through their ratification of the UNCRC (1989) as one of 195 countries to have done so. South African policy and legislation extrapolates on the right of children to basic education, and more specifically preschool education, in a number of pieces of policy and legislation on a national level. These include a recognition of children's right to basic education in the Bill of Rights—chapter two of

the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996); and guidelines provided in the South African Department of Education's (DoE) (2001) Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education. The Bill of Rights (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) ensures that the rights of all children, regardless of potential discriminating factors, are protected, which was a significant step after the end of legislated racial segregation (Apartheid) in 1994. The White Paper (Department of Education (DoE), 2001) outlines the provisions and approach of preschool education. However, South African policy and legislation fails in that there is no play-specific policy for preschool education. Although the implementation of national policy reflects a priority for basic educational provision and the ratification of international policy highlights a recognition of children's right to play, it is necessary to explore further how policy and legislation, and other macrosystems, influence the structure and nature of preschool provision for the permittance and outworking of play within it.

The Structural Impact of Policy and Legislation on South African Preschools

The structure and nature of the preschool environment determine the place for play within it. A starting point is to understand the complexities of the structure provided by relevant policy and legislation. According to the DoE (2001) Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education (ECE), preschool education in South Africa forms the main component of a holistic and comprehensive approach to childhood wellness, referred to as Early Childhood Development (ECD) (DoE, 2001). ECD or preschool education falls into two main provisional categories within this framework—public and independent preschools (DoE, 2001, Section 2). Public preschool provision includes those institutions that are funded by provincial government, with independent preschools being "funded through parents' fees, community fundraising and/or donations of material, with some or no financial support from government" (DoE, 2001, Section 2). In the public sector, the DoE is focused primarily on grade R,

or reception year, provision in public schools (Atmore et al., 2012). This is because the grade R curriculum is recognised to form a part of the Foundation Phase of education. However, because it differs in funding and staffing, the grade R curriculum is viewed as falling short of formal education in many ways (Biersteker, 2010). Earlier ECD provision saw subsidies being provided by the Department of Social Development (DSD) to non-profit organisations and ECD centres that cater for the poorest of the population (Atmore et al., 2012). Even with government subsidisation, the majority of preschool education in South African remains fee-based (Atmore et al., 2012). Independent preschool provision is therefore the largest section of preschool education and can take on different forms, including the reception year (grade R) at independent schools; the reception year (grade R) attached to public schools, but managed by the school governing body and operated by a private individual or the community; and independent pre-primary schools that provide for children from 3–5 years of age. In addition to this, ECD provision in the independent sector includes "privately operated or community run crèches or nursery schools that provide for children from birth to 5 years"; and "home-based provision for children from birth to 5 years". In summary, educational and care centres catering for children aged 3–5 years, and grade R, make up the South African preschool. It is evident that the structure of preschools in South Africa is complex and play within the preschool spans across diverse settings. This is an important foundational factor to consider when exploring how play may be allowed to manifest in specific preschool settings, recognising the potential impact of diversity in provision. Unifying factors are similarly significant in identifying the macrosystemic influence on preschool provision. It is therefore necessary to explore, too, these factors that unify diverse South African preschool educational settings.

Theoretical Underpinnings That Unify South African Preschool and Play Provision

While the intricacies of structure highlight the complex nature of preschool education as a context for play in South Africa, foundational underpinnings within the structure itself, as well as in preschool education and child development, reflect aspects of macrosystemic unity within the microsystems of different South African preschools. Each different preschool provider within the context of ECD provision forms part of this comprehensive approach to protecting children's "rights to develop [their] full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential"—the very definition of ECD in South Africa (DoE, 2001, Section 1). They share a common purpose, as well as common theoretical underpinnings. These underpinnings lie in international theories of education and child development. Theoretical guidance in preschool provision today finds its roots in the recognition and exploration of the uniqueness of childhood in the nineteenth century (Ariès, 1996; Best, 1998). It reflects the holistic, developmental approach of South Africa ECD provision and recognises play to be at the heart of that. Leading educational theorists including Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), Maria Montessori (1870–1951) and John Dewey (1859–1952) and leading developmental psychologists such as Vygotsky (1993) and Piaget (1951) all recognise the value of play as a tool for learning and development. Vygotsky (1993) and Piaget (1951) posit that play is at the heart of development, and that it is in fact a means of development—something that links closely with the unified goal of ECD provision. The theoretical underpinnings of preschool education itself, as well as the shared focus of South African preschool provision, bring commonality to a diverse system and give a place—at least in theory—for play provision across the board. The question remains: How does this manifest in context? This is answered by looking at the specific elements of play provision in South African preschools.

Play Practice in the Context of South African Preschool Provision

Policy and legislation, and foundational academic underpinnings, provide a broad starting point from which to understand the place of play in the South African preschool. They identify a recognition for both children's right to play and its potential value, as well as the place for the provision of early childhood education in diverse preschool settings. What they do not identify, however, is how play manifests within different South African preschools. This is only possible when looking at the preschool microsystems themselves and the reciprocally influential relations between them, other systems of development and the developing child to determine what affordances for play are made available, and how they are utilised in context (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Neumann, 1974). This is done through exploring overall service provision within South African preschools and how this gives a space for play specific provision, as well as the practical outworking of play provision itself. Two key factors of equitable ECD provision are evaluated in this exploration, namely access and quality (Britto et al., 2011). Access is explored as it relates to the preschool itself, and then to play within it. This is followed by a detailed evaluation of the quality-of-service provision as it relates to the different interacting bodies that contribute to play in South African preschools. This all serves to provide a holistic picture of play in preschools in the country.

Access to Preschools in South Africa

With an understanding that development takes place in context (Bronfenbrenner, 1993), access in play provision in the South African preschool cannot exist without access to the preschool itself. It is therefore necessary, when examining this concept, to explore the strengths and challenges related to access to South African preschool education. The concept of access finds its roots in the political heritage of the country, recognising that societal changes over time have an impact on the

development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). According to a review of South African government ECD policy and programme implementation reports (Atmore et al., 2012), access to preschool education has increased since the end of Apartheid in 1994. However, the legacy of the legislated racial segregation still finds preschool education being disproportionately limited for people of colour, persons with disabilities and the poorest of the population (Atmore et al., 2012; Biersteker & Dawes, 2008; DoE, 2001; Hall et al. 2019). This reflects the notion that "monetary poverty"—an indirect, or exosystemic, influence on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1993)—"is closely connected to … limited access to education" (Atmore et al., 2012, p. 123). This is not helped by the position of priority that preschool education is given in terms of government spending—on the macrosystem level—with the fiscal support for preschool education remaining significantly less than that of primary school education (Richter & Samuels, 2018). This finds the country in a position where the majority of preschool access is determined by the ability to pay fees (Atmore et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2019), and therefore is unequally attainable across financial lines. Because of a macrosystemic awareness of challenges of access to preschool provision, a longitudinal plan to increase ECD access across the country by 2030 has been developed in partnership with the government (Kritzinger, 2018). However, the process and progress of this implementation remain difficult to assess with no reliable central database of ECD centres in effect (Hall et al., 2019). It is evident that challenges relating specifically to historical discrimination and poverty exist in South Africa that limit access to preschools within it, and that there is still a way to go towards correcting this. This is important to recognise when further exploring play provision in those preschools to which children do have access—because play in preschools is limited on a national level as much as access to the settings themselves.

Access to Play Provision Within South African Preschools

Access to play provision within South African preschools can be understood with the recognition of the preschool as a microsystem in which opportunities for development are made available (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Neumann, 1974). It is through the provision of play that these opportunities are provided and therefore play provision is the base from which we can understand access to play practice. Areas of provision that are explored include the provision of permission, time, space and materials for play. Each of these is discussed according to practice in South African preschools, taking into account varying factors of ecosystemic influence.

Permission to play is foundational to the concept of access to play provision—with a recognition that manifest behaviour is permitted in context (Neumann, 1974). Play in South African preschools manifests within the context of the work focus of the preschool. This is reflected in two studies that explore South African teachers' perspectives of play in the preschool (Aronstam & Braund, 2015; Malan, 2018). In both studies, teachers identify that play has a place in preschools to the extent that it complements or contributes to learning and development. This can take on the form of formal play as a tool for learning or be informal or free play, which is most often associated with outdoor play (Aronstam & Braund, 2015; Malan, 2018). Whatever different play forms are expressed, however, play behaviour is permitted within the context of the preschool as an educational environment. In one of the studies, which explores how play is supported and used with grade R children in particular (Aronstam & Braund, 2015), teachers tended to prefer structured play activities where outcomes can be directly and closely monitored, highlighting an overarching work focus in their approach to play provision. A review of available research and literature (Richter & Samuels, 2018) confirms that this didactic approach is a feature of South African preschools. According to an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1993), a microsystem for development has the ability to either promote or inhibit the possibilities for development within it, depending on how it outworks its focus. This

is significant when recognising that opportunities for play are provided within, and secondary to, the preschool as a purposeful and outcome-focused educational setting in South Africa.

The permission of play in preschools is an aspect that is closely linked to other areas of play provision, including time and space for play. This is reflected in ECD provision requirements (DoE, 2008; DSD & United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2006) for the provision of both indoor and outdoor space for play. The requirements themselves reflect a macrosystemic permittance of the behaviour in the space, and this is outworked both in the provision of play-specific spaces and time for their use. This permittance of play is evidenced in practice in the findings of studies in which South African preschool teachers from registered ECD facilities were invited to share their perspectives on play in different South African preschool settings (Aronstam & Braund, 2015; Malan, 2018). Participants, who came from both advantaged and disadvantaged settings, recognised that both specific space and time for indoor and outdoor play is provided. There is an element of access reflected here that spans across the socio-economic range of registered preschool provision within the country. What is difficult to monitor, however, is what provision is available in those facilities that are not government registered and therefore not held to account (Atmore et al., 2012). A challenge to access in play provision is highlighted here and the extent of this is unclear. What is clear, however, is the recognition that in registered ECD facilities provision exists in terms of permission, time and space for play in context, specifically as it relates to indoor and outdoor play.

Material provision for preschool play is a final key factor in exploring access to play provision in South Africa. This is linked closely to funding, resource provision and safety and security—areas in which a number of preschools in the country face multiple challenges (Department of Basic Education (DBE), Department of Social Development (DBE) & UNICEF, 2010). According to available research (Atmore et al., 2012), access to age-appropriate resources for play is disproportionate in more and less advantaged preschools across the country. In less advantaged communities, age-appropriate play materials are not always available and space and ordinary found objects serve as the primary resources for children's free play activity (Bartie et al., 2016). This stands in contrast to the

findings of a study conducted in independent preschools (Malan, 2018), which sees teachers reflecting on the diverse resources available for children's formal and informal play time in their settings. Disparity in access is a concern in South Africa, from access to preschool itself, to access to material play provision within it. What is yet to be explored is the link this has to the quality-of-service provision across the country and the potential impact this has on children's play experiences in preschool.

Quality in Preschool Educational and Play Provision

Quality is subjective and multifaceted—determined by the interaction of societal values, the availability and distribution of resources, health and safety factors of the environment and the interaction between leadership and management on different levels of functioning (Britto et al., 2011; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss & Pence, 1994). These concepts have been touched on when outlining the political and constructional context of the South African preschool and access to it and to play within it. Exploring quality seeks to go further than this, however, and aims to understand how different systems of interaction integrate for service delivery that either encourages or impedes developmentally appropriate play practice. It is necessary to evaluate the integrative nature of quality in early childhood education and examine the interactions between the different systems that determine it. These include the developing preschool children, the adult teachers, the preschool setting itself and the position and management of the larger organisational institutional settings on the local and national levels (Excell, 2016). These are explored in relation to one another so as to more fully conceptualise the quality of play practice within preschools in South Africa.

Quality Play Practice and the Developing Child

Quality in play practice across diverse South African preschools is linked closely to the role of the child as an active agent in their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Because quality deals with closing gaps in service provision between more and less advantaged communities (Britto et al., 2011), playfulness in childhood—an inherent quality that is unchanging over time and context (O'Brien & Shirley, 2001; Ryan-Bloomer & Candler, 2013)—is a factor that promotes quality practice despite differing circumstances. A South African study that examined playfulness and environmental support of play in preschool children in advantaged and disadvantaged settings (Freeme et al., 2011) found this to be true for children in South Africa, no matter the socio-economic status of the preschool. Both the advantaged and disadvantaged schools were found to be supportive of children's play and playfulness, regardless of their provision of play-specific materials. According to a study that examined the play behaviour of preschool children from an impoverished South African community (Bartie et al., 2016), children's playfulness and resourcefulness sees them playing with ordinary objects when age-appropriate resources are lacking, using space as a resource for play; and using play as a means to explore their environments and to navigate the potential dangers within them. Playfulness is shown to be consistent over context with children's adaptiveness, allowing it to manifest in play behaviour across settings. This makes the child an important agent in ensuring play takes place across the diversity of the South African preschool, despite challenges of access that exist.

The Influence of the Adult Teachers

The quality of play in the preschool microsystem is influenced by other significant agents within it—namely teachers. As mediators of access and of the quality of experience afforded to children (Neumann, 1974), teachers can enact different roles that either promote or restrict quality play experiences (Aras, 2016; Howard & McInnes, 2013; Hyvonen,

2011). This has a lot to do with how teachers apply presence and allow for either autonomous or adult-restricted play behaviour (Aras, 2016; Sturrock & Else, 1998). This differs across preschool settings and according to how teachers perceive the goal of the play itself. In formal learning, as previously identified, South African teachers across the board see play as a means for specific outcome-achievement according to the work focus of the settings (Aronstam & Braund 2015; Malan, 2018; Richter & Samuels, 2018). Where differing approaches are seen, however, is in teacher involvement in free or informal play. Research findings (Aronstam & Braund, 2015; Malan, 2018) reveal that teachers enact a range of diverse roles in children's free play from completely uninvolved, to the adoption of mediation and safety roles, to taking on the role of play partner when invited into children's play. This differs across settings and a single universal approach is not seen to be adopted across the diversity of preschools. With a recognition that teacher involvement has an impact on children's play, it is important to consider what factors influence this involvement and how this manifests in South African preschools.

The influence of teachers' knowledge, skills and training is an important aspect of quality engagement in play practice. This is because teachers' understandings of play can impact their pedagogical approaches to it (McInnes et al., 2011) and adequate teacher training and equipping has been shown in research to be an important asset in the promotion of developmentally appropriate play (Berkhout et al., 2013; Gaviria-Loaiza et al., 2017). In South Africa, minimum standards for preschool teacher trainings exist, according to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2010) Draft Policy on Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications and the DSD and UNICEF (2006) Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services. Despite this, and there being a number of training pathways available in South Africa (Atmore et al., 2012), teacher training appears to fall short across preschool provision in the country. A national ECD audit conducted in 2000 (Atmore et al., 2012) and a later Teacher Qualifications Survey Draft report by the Human Science Research Council for the National Department of Education (HSRCNDE, 2009) both indicate that a large percentage of ECD practitioners lack appropriate, if any, training. Requirements remain unmet mainly in unregistered preschool settings

(Department of Basic Education, DSD & UNICEF, 2010). This is confirmed in a recent study in an impoverished community in South Africa (Knafo et al., 2019), where preschool teachers recognise the need for training to identify and appropriately respond to the needs of children. When it comes to play specifically, further research (Aronstam & Braund, 2015; Malan, 2018) highlights this as a specific-training need identified by teachers themselves. Inadequate teacher training seems to be a challenge in quality service provision in South African preschools overall and as it relates to play. This has the potential to negatively impact play in the settings, although more information is needed in this area.

While recognising that teacher training is an important aspect of quality play practice in the preschool, teacher experience and specific approaches to play also determine the quality of play within the settings. Atmore et al. (2012) propose that, although adequate teacher training is necessary for good practice, quality practice may be more closely linked to practice experience. This is evident in the reflections of trained preschool teachers in a recent study (Malan, 2018) who recognise their practice experience in play-supporting preschool environments to be the greatest influence in their sensitive play practice. This notion of sensitive teachers in play-promoting environments being valuable to play in preschools is one that crosses socio-economic lines. Historical research in informal preschools in an impoverished community (Lines, 1990) shows how adult caregivers avail themselves as resources in play when physical play resources are lacking. A lack of physical play resources remains a feature of poorer schools according to more recent research (Bartie et al., 2016; Freeme et al., 2011). However, this is not shown to impact children's playfulness within these settings. Adults can serve as resources for witnessing, maintaining or partnering in children's play, so as to promote autonomy and developmental gains (Sturrock & Else, 1998). A review of the above reflects a notion that provision of play permission is promoted within preschool environments where teachers allow for play behaviour and for themselves to be used as resources for its outworking. This manifests across socio-economic lines in South Africa and is a play-promoting factor in its outworking, despite evident challenges in terms of teacher training and resource provision that may negatively affect play in the preschool.

The South African Preschool

Resource provision in South African preschools, and how this relates specifically to ensuring quality play practice within them, is best understood when examining the preschools themselves—as microsystems of development and contexts for play behaviour. Resource provision is one of the challenges faced by many South African preschools that relate to economic disparity. Other related challenges, some of which have been touched on already, include limited financial resources in some settings; the fact that many teachers in informal preschool settings are under- or unqualified; class sizes and remuneration for preschool teachers in poorer communities being much larger and much lower, respectively; poor nutritional provision because of the high rates of poverty in the country—an area that effects wellbeing and development overall; and the fact that "[m]any ECD facilities function without basic infrastructure, such as running water, access to electricity or suitable sanitation" (Atmore et al., 2012, p. 129; DBE, DSD & UNICEF, 2010; Richter & Samuels, 2018). These are all challenges experienced across preschool microsystems, with roots in differing levels of engagement that can negatively impact the functioning and well-being of the children within them. Fitzpatrick (2014) suggests, for example, that executive functioning skills developed in the preschool years—linked to children's attention, autonomy and self-direction, which all help with later school adjustment and functioning—are being impeded by factors associated with the disparity of wealth and access to resources within the South African context. These challenges are similarly negatively impacting the outworking of quality play in the preschool, a recognised developmental construct (Vygotsky, 1993; Piaget, 1951). International play research (Berkhout et al., 2013) and a local study that examined South African preschool teachers' perspectives of children's free play (Malan, 2018) both identify diversity in play resource provision to be linked to quality and developmentally enriching play experiences for children. Many impoverished or informal South African preschools, however, lack age-appropriate play resources, and this has a direct limiting effect on children's engagement in age- and developmentally appropriate play (Bartie et al., 2016; Freeme et al.,

2011; Lines, 1990). There is a disparity in the quality of play that is afforded across the scope of South African preschool provision, despite the nature of play in providing opportunities for the natural practice of developmental competencies (Berkhout et al., 2013) and the national goal of ECD provision to promote holistic development in early childhood (Department of education, 2001). This highlights a need to explore what is being done to close the gap in quality in preschool and play provision within the country.

The Local and National Organisational Structure of South African Preschools

Having recognised the role that children, teachers and preschools have to play in quality play provision, it is important to go back to the macrosystemic influence of local and national organisational structures so as to understand how the theorised place for play is allowed for and outworked in quality practice. Quality, by nature, is a subjective construct that is best determined by stakeholder agreement on its constitution and outworking (Britto et al., 2011). South African preschool provision as a whole lacks clear prescriptions of quality play practice, with policy for overall preschool service provision only broadly referencing quality, without specifications of agreed upon measures for its implementation and monitoring (Excell, 2016). According to Excell (2016), "[i]n 2012 … [a] group of disparate ECD stakeholders … came together with the intention of exploring how to take the ECD sector forward, to improve collaboration between and among private and public organisations and institutions, influence policy development and to enhance ECD service delivery regardless of context" (p. 4)—an integrated and ecosystemic approach. In light of a need for quality directives for practitioners, the stakeholders developed a reflective tool for quality practice which explores concepts of quality in the following areas: quality in leadership and management, quality in teaching and learning, quality in the ECD environment and quality in the ECD policy framework (Excell, 2016). This leaves the onus of assessing quality on individual stakeholders and also

lacks recognition of play as a specific service provision within the preschool. Although theoretically play is given a place in South African preschool provision, the lack of recognition in exploring and determining what constitutes quality preschool play provision leaves it an area difficult to monitor across the board. This coupled with limited research available for analysis (Biersteker & Dawes, 2008) makes preschool play and service provision areas where greater research and enquiry is needed for a more holistic picture of their manifest elements.

Conclusion

Play in the South African preschool is a developmental construct that is permitted within the multilevel, reciprocally influential context of interaction, in accordance with an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). It is complex and is best explored taking into account all possible influencing factors. This begins with a recognition that changes over time have led to the current macrosystemic climate (Bronfenbrenner, 1993) where play is recognised as a quality inherent to childhood, and a right to which children are entitled, on a global and national scale. This, with the recognition of a child's rights to basic education—which is explored much more in-depth in South African policy and legislation than play—provides a national context within which play and preschool education are allowed. Theoretical underpinnings that form the foundation of preschool educational provision, and understandings of child development, link play to development and align with the developmental focus of ECD provision (DoE, 2001). This all points to the place that play could have in the South African preschool; however, it does not account for the complexity of context and challenges related to the manifestations of play within this. Challenges exist on different levels—with disparate access both to preschools themselves and to provision within them at the heart of this. Access to preschool provision is a backdrop to the provision of play within it—with inequalities evident across fiscal lines as the country continues to recover from the socio-political damage from a history of politicised racial separation. These challenges permeate in access to play provision within preschools that do not align with government standards

for service provision, as well as settings in more disadvantaged communities—where challenges in resource provision are rife. These challenges not only impact how preschool and play provision is accessed, but what the quality of such provision looks like—with inappropriate resource provision in impoverished preschool settings restricting developmentally appropriate play opportunities.

Inadequate resource provision also impacts the quality of the overall service, looking past specific play provision. This can include inadequate teacher training—a need identified by the professionals themselves. Although a lot of disparity is seen, there are challenges to play provision on which preschools appear to be in agreement across the board. This is seen in the didactic approach of most South African preschools—with an outcome focus that again reflects a macrosystemic overemphasis on education without formally recognising the place of play within this. Quality of the play in South African preschools is determined by role players across the different levels of interaction. Although specific quality standards for play in particular do not exist, this concept is explored taking into account the different engaging factors to determine what play looks like in South African preschools. When exploring quality of different levels of interaction, the strengths of players in the preschool microsystems was highlighted—namely, children and teachers. Although teachers' role enactment in children's play is often guided by their context-informed outcome focus, and a lack of education and training specifically around play may negatively impact play opportunities provided, teachers are shown to be a driving force in allowing play to happen across South African preschools in different forms. Individual preschools as play-supporting environments are also shown to be a strong play-protecting factor. However, the consistency of this on a national level is difficult to determine. The information available indicates that some preschool play provision is provided through the provision of permission, time, space and rich resources for play. This is promising in light of a system rife with multiple challenges in provision. Children are also identified as key players in their development and in the outworking of play in preschools—with an inherent propensity to play acting as a protective factor against risks across national service provision. In the face of multiple challenges and limited available data for analysis, there is hope for play in South

African preschools. This is because of the players at the heart of their development, and because of those role players that are outworking various forms of play provision in the country. There is also hope found in the foundation of knowledge. What is known provides a starting point from which to understand play in South African preschools, engage in further exploration and analysis and mobilise stakeholders for change.

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Play in Head Start Programmes: The Underutilised Resource

Janette C. Wetsel

Introduction

Head Start, the United States' largest, most well-known, and highly funded early compensatory and intervention programme, was designed to provide young children living in poverty with the services and education they need to succeed in school (Vinovskis, 2005). In the fifty-five years since its inception, researchers have studied Head Start's children and families extensively (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). However, most of the research has focused on how well children who attended Head Start have performed in school and beyond. Additionally, there has been a plethora of research examining curriculum models used, programmes developed, and pedagogies practiced to facilitate the best possible cognitive outcomes for Head Start participants (Bishop-Josef & Zigler, 2011). Yet, while a few studies mention children's indoor and outdoor play, the discussion of play as a focal point for children in Head Start settings is

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limited. This chapter will provide an overview of Head Start, present an analysis of research related to play in Head Start classrooms, and conclude with suggestions for ways to permeate Head Start settings, policies, and research with play.

Overview of Head Start

Head Start is actually a broad, comprehensive term for several services to families and young children: the original Head Start programme for preschool children; Early Head Start services to infants, toddlers, and pregnant women; services to families by American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN) programmes; and services to families by Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programmes. Head Start takes the "whole child" approach by providing physical health, mental health, and social services to participants, in addition to early childhood education for children up to five years old. In 2018, Head Start programmes cumulatively served around one million children, and since its inception in 1965, has served over 36 million children (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), 2019). Typically, in the literature, the term "Head Start" includes the entire set of programmes when reporting demographics, while research mentioning play during the daily routine refers to preschool programmes for three- and four-year-olds. This chapter will focus on play in the Head Start preschool classroom unless otherwise noted.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood education as "high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age eight" (NAEYC, 2020, retrieved online www.naeyc.org). Since words related to young children used by English speakers do not have the same meaning globally, it is of value to discuss American terms related to early childhood education. In the United States, the term preschool refers both to children who are three or four years old, and to an educational setting for threes and fours. Kindergarten is for children who are aged five. The primary grades to three are for children aged six, seven, and eight years, respectively. According to the Education Commission of the States (ECS), thirty-one states provide preschool, called "pre-k," a shortened version of the word

pre-kindergarten, for four-year-olds in public schools (Parker et al., 2018). Furthermore, a portion of those thirty-one states also provide pre-k for three-year-olds in the public school setting. In the United States (US), a public school is one provided through state and local funds for the education of the children in a community or district and is part of a system of free public education including elementary and secondary schools (Hess, 2004). While some federal dollars fund certain programmes, most of the burden to provide for the schools falls to state governments.

Interestingly, while sixty percent of the states provide pre-k settings for four-year-olds, parents are not required to send their children to public schools for pre-k. In fact, only seventeen states require children to attend kindergarten when they are five (Diffey, 2018). Statutes in each of the fifty states determine when children must, by law, attend school, making the defining of compulsory education in the US difficult. For example, in Oklahoma, children at age five must attend school (70 Okla. Stat.§ 10–105, amended by Laws 2010, SB 1715, c. 57, § 1, emerg. Eff. July 1, 2010). However, in Alaska, children are not required to attend school until they are seven (Alaska Stat. Ann. § 14.30.010). To further obfuscate the issue, although Head Start is federally funded, it is not considered public schooling, even though some pre-k classrooms are partially funded by Head Start dollars (CLKC, 2020).

Beginnings

In order to understand children's play and scholars' research in Head Start classrooms, it is informative to look at the beginnings of Head Start. Who should be responsible for the education and care of children, and who should pay for it, have been continuing questions, beginning in the early 1900s and remaining to the present (Beatty, 1995). Historically, several large events brought this question to the forefront of elected officials' thinking.

The Great Depression left many families without basic needs, and the states wanted Franklin D. Roosevelt's federal programmes to assist their citizens (Hogg, 2019). Additionally, a number of men drafted during both World Wars I and II were illiterate, giving cause for concern to a

government wanting a large pool of people ready for its armed forces (Sanchez, 2015). Another big shift in thinking occurred in 1957, when Soviet Russia launched the satellite Sputnik I (Wissehr et al., 2011). This incident deepened the nation's desire for better education for all children and ushered in the "Back to the Basics" (Brodinsky, 1977, p. 2) movement, aimed at making America's children prepared to compete with Russian children in mathematics and science. These events culminated in a paradigm shift in thinking the states needed the federal government's money and assistance in educating their youth, particularly youth who were at risk for failing (Mills, 1998).

Other concerns contributed to the mindset that the United States must change policies on a national level rather than allowing the states to determine how children should learn and when that learning should begin. Urban crime, juvenile delinquency, and poverty plagued large cities across the country, and states wanted Congress to address the needs of all the urban areas together, since large cities in various states had similar issues. Furthermore, advocates for civil rights for African Americans wanted federal laws to force the states to comply with policies to give equality to people of colour (Lawson, 2015).

The idea of civil rights policies attached to federal funds blossomed into campaign promises in the 1960 presidential campaign. John F. Kennedy's platform included federal intervention in providing aid to American education, and in 1962 his staff "recommended a bill that encompassed a broad social welfare approach to education" (Vinovskis, 2005, p. 22). Kennedy's idea was cut short when he was assassinated in November 1963, but Lyndon B. Johnson, who succeeded him in office, continued Kennedy's dream to help people living in poverty by creating programs for them. Launched in 1965 by Johnson as a part of his "War on Poverty" (Bitler & Karoly, 2015, p. 642), Head Start sprang from these social and educational concerns in a rapidly changing United States. The "War on Poverty" has possibly been the most enduring phrase from the large set of domestic policies spearheaded through the passage of the *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964* (Pub. L. 88–452) (Bitler & Karoly, 2015).

Unfortunately, this enduring phrase "War on Poverty" illuminates a problematic issue. When Head Start programs originated, their designers

saw children through a deficit model: children living in poverty were behind more privileged children when they entered the first grade and needed help catching up (Tanner & Tanner, 1973). Using the deficit model not only influenced practice in Head Start classrooms at the beginning, but also continues to shape current practices and policies for this programme (Barnett, 1998).

Catching up and Getting Ready

In 1960, only about half of the five-year-olds in the United States attended kindergarten and most of them were white boys (Dombkowski, 2001). Many public schools did not have a kindergarten, particularly schools in poorer areas (Beatty, 1995). Policymakers hoped that participating in a Head Start, piloted as a summer programme for children who had not attended kindergarten, would compensate for what low-income children had missed, compared to middle-class and upper-class children, prior to the first grade. This would give children at risk for failure the head start they needed. The summer-only programs lasted from 1965 to 1968, but then transitioned from summer to year-round programs from 1969 to 1972. These years were also a time when kindergarten for five-year-olds became commonplace in the public schools, helping Head Start change from getting children ready for first grade to getting them ready for kindergarten (Beatty & Zigler, 2012). The year-round programs currently continue for low-income preschool children, yet have never been fully funded. Consequently, there has never been a time in US history when all children who qualify for Head Start are able to attend (Johnson & Jackson, 2019).

The term *catch up* has been used throughout the fifty-five years of Head Start as a means to describe how important it is to help children acquire skills required for kindergarten, such as the alphabet and sounds the letters make, counting, colour identification, naming basic shapes and numeral recognition. School readiness is still a popular way to look at early education, and regrettably views play as a time filler and hindrance to learning (Taylor & Boyer, 2020).

Unfortunately, as *back to the basics*, *catching up* and *school readiness* became high-frequency educational jargon, these concepts helped create a misunderstanding of how children learn (Smith & Glass, 2019). This misunderstanding, that drilling basic skills should be the focus of a child's time in the preschool classroom, is counter to the belief that children learn through play and also continues to misinform (Bishop-Josef & Zigler, 2011; Vail, 2003).

Head Start's Role in the Early Childhood Education Community

Very young children playing, prior to going to the first grade and learning how to read, was projected by the media as being the ideal home life in the 1950s. Leaders in the Nursery School Movement, teachers of public school kindergartens and the Child Studies Movement had studied child development and practiced working with children a great deal by the launch of Head Start concerning early education and care (Beatty, 1995). Yet, there was a real disconnect between these groups and the committee appointed to implement Head Start. In fact, historically, Head Start professionals have had a vicarious position with policymakers who limit their communication with early childhood professionals (Beatty & Zigler, 2012). The original planning committee of fourteen had only four scholars with an early childhood or child development background. As a result, children's developmental needs were circumvented in the first set of instructions to the planning committee, which were to research whether intervention in the lives of high-risk young children would raise their IQ scores (Mills, 1998).

Although numerous Head Start studies in the late 1960s measured growth by Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores (Smith & Bissell, 1970; Cicirelli et al., 1970; Kean, 1970), early childhood educators pointed to the fallacies of relying on this type of standardised testing of young children (Mills, 1998; Vinovskis, 2005). Yet looking back at how Head Start focused on cognitive gains in the beginning sheds light on why programmes continue a focus on cognitive gains (Ellsworth & Ames, 1998).

This emphasis creates a pressured environment for teachers and unknowingly controls how children spend their time in the programme (Vail, 2003).

Head Start's Role in a Global View of Children's Rights

Although Head Start was created by a special act in Congress to give marginalised children in the United States an equal opportunity, a similar document created by the United Nations to protect the rights of children worldwide has been opposed by Congress for adoption since its inception in 1989 (Blanchfield, 2015). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC or Convention) crafted this international treaty that calls on countries to take "all appropriate measures to ensure that children's rights are protected—including the right to a name and nationality; freedom of speech and thought; access to healthcare and education; and freedom from exploitation, torture, and abuse" (Blanchfield, 2015, p. 1). During the Clinton Administration, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright signed the treaty on behalf of the United States, but it was never ratified into law. Congress has yet to ratify the treaty, which requires a two-thirds majority vote in the Senate to pass. Opponents of the UNCRC maintain that the US is already an international leader in advocating for children's rights and that supporting it could lead to unfounded political criticisms abroad. Furthermore, a number of Republican senators, claiming concerns about US sovereignty, have consistently opposed ratification (Attiyah, 2014).

Michael Farris, general counsel for Alliance Defending Freedom (2009), a conservative organisation, explained, "There are two core reasons that Americans should oppose ratification. First, the UNCRC would replace domestic law with international law, effectively overriding most American family statutes. Second, the substance of this treaty places government in a position to overrule parents' decisions in 'key areas affecting their children' (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2009, p. 26). Farris also maintained that American children are better off by our government relying on US constitutional decisions than international law (Attiyah, 2014).

A Watershed for Research

In addition to determining the effects of Head Start on IQ scores, the earliest policies crafted for Head Start also included a research component to determine the best approach to use with young children. This made Head Start a watershed for research in early education and care (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). Hubble (1983) reported a collection of 1400 research documents related to Head Start, including a group of longitudinal studies of the effects of Head Start participation on later school success. A literature review of most of the first fifteen years of Head Start research included studies related not only to cognitive development and the raising of IQs, but also to the impact of Head Start on participants' social and emotional development, health, families, and communities (Deming, 2009). All revealed a scarcity of the mention of play. The studies that addressed the impact of Head Start on the emotional and social development of children investigated their development of positive self-concept, curiosity, motivation, self-control, and emotional maturity. Other socio-emotional studies examined child-to-child and child-to-adult interaction, and the effects of Head Start on those relationships (Hubble, 1983). While surveying this area of study, one would expect to find numerous observations of play, scales developed to assess various types of play, and so on. However, only one study mentioned play in a comparison of two curriculum models in Head Start settings where an observational instrument to document free play was standardised (Feeney, 1972). Unfortunately, the *Free Play Observation Instrument* was not widely used and is now unavailable.

Mentzer (1968), who conducted a survey of first-grade teachers with former Head Start attendees in their classrooms, found the former Head Start children were "ready for classroom activities" and had a "willingness to accept discipline" (p. 284). Classroom activities and materials self-reported by the teachers included paper and pencil tasks and looking at books.

Bergen (1998) wrote of the hiatus that existed during 1940–1970 related to play research throughout the field, and the literature review of Head Start research during that time period confirmed Bergen's

statement. Research after 1980 mentioned play more frequently, including in the Head Start literature. Interestingly, Bergen and Honig also authored a booklet for Head Start in the *Basic Educational Skills Project* called *Getting Involved: Your Child and Play* (as cited in Chafel, 1982). This project was subtitled "A Head Start Initiative in Collaboration with Elementary Schools," and was designed for parent education. The Head Start Bureau explained the initiative on the front inside cover:

> Children are natural learners—each one unique, developing in his or her own way. Children learn at their own rate, and in many ways—by doing, playing, trying out and initiating. They learn best when an activity is relaxed and a pleasant experience for them, their parents, and others in the family. The *Getting Involved* series is designed for parents, teachers, and other professionals in Head Start and the elementary schools. It provides ideas for helping children acquire developmentally appropriate based educational skills at home and in school. (Bergen & Honig, 1981, p. i)

The introduction to the booklet includes a definition of play and states, "This booklet is about how children develop and use play skills, and how you can help them do so" (p. 3). These suggestions are for parents, and while they indicate Head Start's view about play, the suggestions are about children's play with their families at home rather than in the preschool setting.

Research Regarding Play in Head Start 1980–1999

Several interesting studies regarding play occurred in Head Start classrooms during the 1980s and 1990s. These pieces of research focused on play in ways that inform the field in two ways: how play affects children and how teachers interact with children during play.

Research into what components need to be present in the classroom to best meet the needs of homeless children lists "a stable, predictable classroom environment" (Koblinsky & Anderson, 1993, p. 21) as a crucial requirement for helping children adjust. They further discuss the

importance of "keeping play areas, routines, and transitions activities consistent, the classroom design and curriculum should also satisfy homeless children's need for quiet space, private space, personal possessions, outdoor activity, and opportunities for emotional expression" (p. 22). This distinction shows giving Head Start children time to play is essential.

Weinberger and Starkey (1994) researched African American four-year-old boys engaged in pretend play to answer this question: Do children who are considered at risk for school failure engage in pretend play, and if so, how much do they play? In what type of pretend play are they involved? The researchers videotaped naturalistic play in the housekeeping and block areas in the Head Start classroom as well as outdoors. They found the children in the study did engage in pretend play that was considered high in quality (i.e., objects used, number of participants) but low in quantity (i.e., number and duration of play episodes). The authors stated, "The strength in this study lies in its in-depth investigation of pretense in this currently understudied segment of the population. Considering the limitations of this study, the findings are of relevance" (p. 341). They also called for further research in classroom design and how much time is scheduled for free play, noting that these variables can directly affect the amount and complexity of play in which the children engage.

Another investigation was conducted to assess the construct validity of the *Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale* (PIPPS Fantuzzo et al., 1998), a teacher-rating instrument of interactive play behaviours of preschool children. Observations using the PIPPS were collected on 523 urban African American Head Start children. The PIPPS scales were confirmed supporting the following constructs of peer play: Play Interaction, Play Disruption, and Play Disconnection. Scale validity was established using indicators of social competence including teacher reports, peer reports, and direct play observation data (Fantuzzo et al., 1998). Children who received high interactive play ratings also obtained high social skill ratings from teachers and were well liked by peers and engaged during play sessions. Children who were disruptive in play received ratings of low self-control and were more likely to be engaged in solitary play. Disconnection in play was associated with low acceptability by peers and lack of involvement in play sessions. The researchers then considered the

practical use of the PIPPS and further study of developmentally appropriate social competencies for African American Head Start children (Fantuzzo et al., 1998).

Also researching teacher behaviours related to children's play, Kontos (1999) studied the way teachers talked to children during free play in 22 Head Start classrooms in two midwestern Head Start programmes. The children and teachers were audiotaped during free play. After transcribing and coding the audiotapes, results revealed that teachers were most often in the role of play enhancer, playmate, and stage manager. Their talk focused most often on statements or questions supporting play with objects and practical assistance. Furthermore, teachers exhibiting different patterns of involvement in roles and activity settings differed in how they talked to children.

While other research regarding Head Start was published in the last two decades of the twentieth century, many of this was similar to research in the programme's beginning. The focus continued to be on specific curriculum models, with additional research centred on literacy, children with disabilities, and English language learners. To encourage this skill-based focus, Bustamante, in writing about the Head Start environment, stated, "In a society increasingly focused on high-stakes testing, we must not lose sight of the importance of domain-general skills that can help children achieve school and life success" (Bustamante & Hindman, 2019, p. 35).

One argument Bishop-Josef and Zigler (2011) made concerning the amount of play in Head Start was that if the centre adopted a curriculum model including play, then the children were playing. However, there have been several studies regarding Head Start teachers' fidelity in adhering to the curriculum exactly as it is designed. Sanford-DeRousie and Bierman (2012) studied how closely teachers followed a purchased canned curriculum, in which everything they were to do and say was completely spelled out for them, and how willing the teachers were to sustain a curriculum after a pilot when the researchers had left. Teacher responses suggested efforts to promote sustainability of a curriculum were best targeted at reducing competing demands, rather than simply highlighting the benefits of the new curriculum. Over time, the parts of the curriculum model the teachers liked and could do easily remained,

while aspects that required additional teachers' tasks faded. Therefore, adopting a curriculum model that includes play does not solve the issue of ensuring that children engage in play.

Current Research

Similar to Kontos' research (1999), Gest et al. (2006) studied distinctive patterns of teacher talk during free play, mealtime, and book reading in Head Start classrooms. In this research, the scholars observed teacher–child interactions in those three times of the daily schedule and noted "instances of pretend talk, decontextualised talk, and rated the richness and sensitivity-responsiveness of the teacher's talk" (p. 293). Interestingly, as the authors were discussing the methodology, they made this observation: "Both teachers remained in the classroom during free play and were expected according to program guidelines to facilitate children's play during free play … whether a teacher engaged with children during free play appeared to depend more on teacher initiative than on programme policies or assigned roles" (p. 300). Findings indicated 65% of the teachers observed did not engage in any pretend talk in the free play setting. A conclusion the researchers drew from the data analysis was "there is considerable room for intervention and improvement in teachers' use of pretend talk during free play" (p. 310).

A study of activity settings and daily routines in preschool classrooms determined there are quite diverse experiences in Head Start settings for low-income children (Fuligni et al., 2012). Regardless of the curriculum model chosen by the programme, the teacher's structuring of the daily routines was more of a determinant in how much playtime would be allocated during the day. Further research is needed to illuminate how Head Start teachers structure their day, as well as how they explain the reasons behind their particular temporal environment. Another research question is how much time is used with daily routines, such as tooth-brushing, and whether play is used as simply a time filler for children who finish with daily routines while waiting for other children, Do Head Start teachers view play as a valuable experience in its own right? Certainly, after reading the research discussed here, it is clear that findings of large

amounts of playtime at one location are not generalisable to the nationwide Head Start programme. Play has a prominent place in the written Head Start curriculum (Bishop-Josef & Zigler, 2011), but further research is needed to determine the amount and types of play existing across the nation in various Head Start programs. While this would be a daunting undertaking, we will not know how much children actually engage in play without further research.

Play as an Underutilised Resource

Edward Zigler, often called the 'Father of Head Start', defended the programme as being a place where children are encouraged to play (Perkins-Gough, 2007). He noted the original Head Start oversight committee, of which he was a member, was concerned with children's play during the day at the Head Start preschool. He further stated that play is a part of the child's day when they come to Head Start. Yet, in an earlier publication, Zigler referred to play as the "untapped resource in Head Start settings" (Finn-Stevenson & Zigler, 1999, p. 4). Many others have advocated for Head Start, realising that with the number of types of care the teachers address each day, it is difficult to manage all of their requirements and let the children play for extended periods. Bergen (1998) suggested the development of a research replication/collaboration network that would bring together university researchers of varying levels of experience, graduate students and early childhood practitioners as a way in which play could be further infused into early childhood research, and including Head Start in this network could certainly add to the richness of what we know.

Bergen (1998) also recommended Head Start teachers be involved in the study of play by using action research. This would not only add to the knowledge base of the field but would also empower them to speak up for play within their contexts. It would also enable Head Start teachers to engage in what several theorists (Roopnarine & Johnson, 1984) have called the highest form of play: research on play while they play with the children in their care.

Supporting a Stronger Emergence of Play in Head Start

This chapter has provided a brief overview of Head Start, from its beginnings to its present place in American society. While it has certainly not been perfect, Head Start has made a lasting impact on millions of children's lives for good (Mills, 1998). Along with an overview of its history, within the societal and historical contexts of rapid change in the mid-1900s United States, this summary has attempted to contextualise Head Start within the early childhood education field domestically and globally. An analysis of research related to play in Head Start classrooms determined a great need for using the Head Start setting throughout the country for future play research. Certainly, the suggestion of encouraging Head Start teachers to engage in action research would illuminate the role of play in Head Start settings. It may also bring play to the forefront of the consciousness of all those involved in Head Start: teachers, families, researchers, and policymakers (Barnett, 2010). There are several resources for Head Start teachers currently available that encourage them to use indoor and outdoor play (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2020). Having these materials available helps to validate the high value of play in the classroom setting and also adds play to the discourse of Head Start teachers. Further advocating for and support of the Head Start teachers will help to permeate the use of play throughout Head Start settings on the micro level. Promoting play in preschool classrooms to policymakers and elected officials, making certain to mention Head Start and its need for inclusion of play, will help to permeate the use of play throughout Head Start settings on the macro level. These strategies, combined with more research, can address the need for play to be at the forefront of discussions involving children enrolled in Head Start. Finally, specific professional development for teachers to assist them in planning for and implementing play will help to promote Head Start as a model for incorporating play in the lives of its children.

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Play in UK Primary Schools

Karen McInnes

Introduction

Play is considered beneficial for children's learning and development. However, how this is enacted in practice will vary depending upon the age of the child and the type of setting. School is where children spend a vast amount of time, with most children in primary school in the UK being between the ages of 5 and 11 years. This age span encompasses different curricula which vary throughout the four nations of the UK. Usually children encounter a play-based curriculum in their younger years, for example, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in England or the Early Years Foundation Phase (EYFP) in Wales. However, past the early years of schooling, and for most of their primary schooling, children encounter subject-based curricula where a more nuanced understanding of play may have to be developed, and this will be explored in this

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chapter. In addition, play time, although being increasingly eroded, presents another opportunity for children to play in the primary school and this will also be discussed. Finally, this chapter will present the need for a focus on playfulness, alongside play, which, it will be argued, transcends curricula subject-based delivery and can be implemented by all teachers regardless of the age of children being taught.

Primary Schooling in the UK

The statutory age for starting school varies across the UK. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, it is after children turn five years of age and in Scotland it is between 4.5 and 5.5 years of age, depending on the month of birth. However, in reality most children start primary school at four years of age. Table 1 explains the age bands, terminology and

Table 1 Primary schooling across the UK

Age during school year	England	Wales	Northern Ireland	Scotland
4–5	Reception - Early years foundation stage	Reception - Early years foundation phase	Year 1 - Primary curriculum foundation stage	P1 - Curriculum for excellence
5–6	Year 1 - National Curriculum KS1	Year 1	Year 2	P2
6–7	Year 2	Year 2	Year 3 - Primary curriculum KS1	P3
7–8	Year 3 - National Curriculum KS2	Year 3 - National Curriculum	Year 4	P4
8–9	Year 4	Year 4	Year 5 - Primary curriculum KS2	P5
9–10	Year 5	Year 5	Year 6	P6
10–11	Year 6	Year 6	Year 7	P7

curricula used when discussing primary schooling across the four nations of the UK.

As can be seen, there are different curriculum frameworks covering the four nations of the UK. In England, the reception year is covered by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which is a play-based curriculum consisting of areas of learning (communication & language, physical development, personal, social & emotional development, literacy, mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts & design). From year 1 the National Curriculum is followed and is divided into four Key Stages across the primary and secondary age phases. Key Stages 1 and 2 make up the primary age phase and the primary curriculum is divided into three core subjects (English, mathematics and science) and 8 foundation subjects (art & design, computing, design and technology, languages (Key Stage 2 only), geography, history, music and physical education). Religious Education is taught separately as it is not a national curriculum subject (Department for Education (DfE), 2013).

In Wales, children experience the play-based Early Years Foundation Phase (EYFP) curriculum which covers children up to 7 years of age (Welsh Government (WG), 2015). This curriculum consists of areas of learning (personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity, language, literacy and communication skills, mathematical development, Welsh language development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development), rather than being subject led. The National Curriculum (WG, 2008a) is subject led and is for children aged 7–11 years of age. This includes the same subjects as the English curriculum but omits a foreign language, which is replaced with the teaching of Welsh. This is all set to change in 2022 with a new curriculum with areas of learning and experience to be delivered to children from 3 to 16 years of age (WG, 2020).

In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) encompasses children aged 3–18 years of age (Education for Scotland, 2019). The primary years are covered by the stage called the Broad General Education and this is made up of 8 areas of learning: expressive arts, health & wellbeing, languages (including English, Gàidhlig & Gaelic learners and modern languages), mathematics, religious & moral studies, sciences, social

studies and technologies. In Northern Ireland the Primary Curriculum Foundation Stage (PCFS) comprises three age phases as shown in Table 1 and consists of six areas of learning: language & literacy, mathematics & numeracy, the arts, the world around us, personal development & mutual understanding and physical education (Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2007).

Play and Education

Play is difficult and complex to understand and define, if not impossible (Moyles, 1989). It is interpreted and used differently across disciplines but within early years education it is described as a vehicle for learning (Howard & McInnes, 2013). It is seen as foundational for the development and education of young children and has been described as "the child's work" (Isaacs, 1929, p. 9). Today the importance of play within early development and learning is demonstrated through its inclusion in all four UK policy and curriculum frameworks (EYFS—England, birth to age 5; EYFP—Wales, ages 3–7; CfE—Scotland and PCFS—Northern Ireland, ages 4–6) (Pescott, 2017), with all four stipulating a play-based curriculum.

However, whilst play is a distinctive feature of these early years UK policy and curriculum frameworks, and is mentioned explicitly, it is viewed as an activity designed to meet educational outcomes for young children (Wood, 2015) and as such has been described as being hijacked to serve the needs of the curriculum (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). In a play-based curriculum these outcomes should be met through child-led, child-initiated and spontaneous play. However, in reality, policy and curricula guidance outlines a view of play which is planned, purposeful and structured (McInnes, 2019). Ultimately, these different views of play result in different types of practice, from children playing freely to adult-led teaching sessions, which many consider not to be play.

Play in Primary School Policy and Curricula

The place of play within primary schooling has changed over time. The Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education (CACE), 1967) recommended play-based learning throughout the primary years resulting in experiential learning being introduced and utilised in many primary classrooms. Teaching and learning were based around themes and projects rather than subjects, and classrooms appeared very play-oriented (Briggs & Hansen, 2012). With the advent of national curricula (Roberts, 2019), teaching and learning became based around subject areas with play being distinct from work with work taking precedence, lessons being divided from play times and play being something that children do once their work has finished, with activities such as 'golden time', a period of time at the end of the day or week where children have a choice of more play-based activities (Dodds, 2014; Duffy & Trowsdale, 2014). Kushner (2012) argues that this is due to inherent contradictions between the nature of children's play and the nature of schooling, where the former is about freedom and following one's own interests and the latter concerned with teaching to adult-prescribed outcomes. However, these contradictions also exist within the early years as practitioners try to deliver a play-based curriculum to meet pre-determined learning outcomes (McInnes, 2019). Nevertheless, play is discussed within UK policy and curricula documentation in the early years, but it is far less apparent in primary curricula documentation across the four UK nations.

In the English EYFS, delivered in the reception year, play is referred to as "planned and purposeful" (DoE, 2017, p. 9). When scrutinising the English National Curriculum documentation, which covers the remaining primary years, there is no mention of the word play, as the documentation provides a framework for the curriculum subjects which need to be delivered. In Wales, the EYFP for younger children within primary school embeds the notion of play and teaching through play throughout the documentation. Play is discussed as a serious but necessary endeavour to ensure children learn and develop (WG, 2015). In addition, there are supplementary documents and guidance which assist the practitioner in their delivery of a play-based curriculum; Learning and Teaching

Pedagogy (Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), 2008a) and Play/Active Learning for 3–7-year-olds (WAG, 2008b). Once children move out of the Foundation Phase the curriculum is divided into the different subjects to be taught and there appears to be no mention of play.

In Scotland, although the curriculum runs seamlessly from 3 to 18 years of age, it is divided into different curriculum levels. The early level is from 3 to 5 plus years of age and, like the Welsh early years curriculum, play is embedded throughout. Play is mentioned within every area of learning. The next two levels, first and second, which encompass the primary school ages from 6 to 11 years, mention play in relation to mathematical learning where it is acknowledged that planned purposeful play helps learners understand mathematics (Education for Scotland, 2019). In addition, for the early level, there is a supplementary document which provides guidance on how to facilitate active learning so children can learn through play (Scottish Executive (SE), 2007). This document discusses different ways of playing, such as spontaneous play and planned, purposeful play and how they might be implemented in practice. It predates the CfE and when first introduced was considered a novel approach outside of the nursery environment and one that teachers within primary schools struggled to grapple with due to different interpretations of what a play-based pedagogy meant (Martlew et al., 2011).

In Northern Ireland, play and playing is weaved throughout the curriculum guidance for the primary years and mention is made of building upon the play experiences in the Foundation Stage as children enter Key Stages 1 and 2. During these key stages, play is explicitly mentioned in mathematics and numeracy, the arts and physical education. For example, when talking about children learning mathematics it says, "they should continue to be involved in play activities which allow them to develop and apply their mathematical understanding in practical contexts" (CCEA, 2007, p. 58). Overall, how play is viewed within primary curricula across the UK is variable. Another way of looking at play in the primary school is through the use of appropriate play types for use with primary-aged children.

Types of Play in the Primary School

Briggs and Hansen (2012) identify ten types of play which they consider suitable for learning when teaching primary aged children: "artistic or design play, controlled imaginary or social dramatic play, exploratory play, games play, integrated play, play using the whole school environment and beyond, replication play, small world play, role play and virtual play" (p. 32). These types of play were considered appropriate as they are based on the leisure time activities of this age group of children. Their justification for these play types was also based on the observation that children choose these types of play activities when they are at leisure and relaxed, and therefore they would be motivated to engage in these play types when learning in school.

Many of these play types are self-explanatory, such as artistic play or role play. However, others warrant further discussion. Controlled imaginary play would appear to be a misnomer. Imaginary play is usually viewed as an activity which evolves from the player's imagination. Therefore, how can this type of play be controlled and who might be controlling it? It could be implied that within a classroom environment, this type of play, although initiated by the child, is being controlled by the teacher. Further description of this type of play refers to imaginary play that is based on a particular imaginary frame: for example, using story prompts to take on the role of particular imaginary characters. The use of predetermined story prompts implies a form of adult control. However, if too much control is exerted by adults and children lose agency over the play then it may not be viewed as play at all (Howard & McInnes, 2013). In fact, this point could apply to other play types such as exploratory play and games play.

Integrated play is described as an integrating mechanism which enables children to make connections between past and present experiences, thereby creating new meaning and understanding. However, it is hard to see how this is a play type as it is not referring to a particular way to play or type of play. It would appear to be describing a process which enables children to make sense of their world. Replication play is a play type which may be unfamiliar to many teachers. It is described as a type of

play which enables children to test out different roles in society and perceive the world from different viewpoints. This may be more familiar to teachers as role play, where children also have the ability to take on different roles and experience different ways of being, although this is viewed as a separate play type within this taxonomy.

Virtual play, otherwise known as digital play in the early years of education, is one play type that has grown and changed over the last few years. For the early years, digital play is not a clear concept. It is often seen as an activity not a play type (Stephen & Plowman, 2014), and often moves between and encompasses both digital and non-digital activities and between different spaces, for example home and school (Sakr, 2020). Over the last few years there has been a rise in children's understanding and experience of digital devices at home, with children having access to smartphones, game consoles, laptops and PCs. Schools need to replicate and build on these home experiences, but this is often met with scepticism by many teachers who do not see the value or breadth of use of educational technologies in the classroom (Teo, 2012). However, it could be argued that further research is required to evidence the extent of children's digital use at home and how this compares to school in order to demonstrate to teachers what is required within the classroom environment.

Within the UK primary curricula, computing and design and technology are features of both the English National Curriculum (ENC) and the Welsh National Curriculum (WNC). In addition, in Wales there is a Digital Competence Framework (DCF) (2008d) which identifies the digital skills children require from nursery to year 11. It is seen as a cross-curricular responsibility and can be applied across a wide range of subjects. In Scotland all types of technologies are encapsulated in a curriculum area called technologies and progression is viewed from 3 to 18 years of age. In Northern Ireland, using information and communication technology is seen as a cross-curricular skill and an optional digital framework for primary schools is in the process of being developed (CCEA, 2019).

Primary schools need to provide access to digital technologies and enable cross-curricular links, which many of the curricula and policy guidance are enabling (Burnett, 2016). However, concerns have been raised regarding the rise of technology use and digital play in terms of

children's wellbeing, safety and cyberbullying, but these have largely been unfounded (Stephen & Plowman, 2014; Burnett, 2016). In fact, digital games can often lead to positive outcomes, as shown by one recent example, a project on the use of prosocial digital games in primary schools, The ProSocialLearn Project (Parsons & Karakosta, 2019). This project involved primary children engaging with a series of digital games to increase their prosocial skills and findings suggested that these games were enjoyable for both children and teachers and that children learned a range of prosocial skills.

Overall, these play types have the potential to support the implementation of play in primary school classrooms. They could be used to facilitate a discussion about play and its place in the primary school. In the primary years which follow early years curricula, many of these terms will be known and in use. For example, many early years classrooms have role play and small world play areas. However, in the primary years which follow subject-based national curricula, these terms are more problematic. Whilst some of the play types map onto curriculum subjects, for example virtual play with computing, design and technology and games play with physical education, many do not. Play types such as play using the whole school environment and small world play are not subject based and will not have resonance with teachers and are, therefore, unlikely to be used.

Play Times in Primary Schools

Lessons are not the only opportunity for play for children during the school day as school play times also provide an opportunity for play, with total play times accounting for 22% of the school day in Key Stage 1 and 20% of the school day in Key Stage 2 in England (Baines & Blatchford, 2019). In the UK, it has been customary to have three breaks or play times in the school day for primary aged children: morning, lunch and afternoon. However, there is very little policy or legislation governing school play times and how they are used. There are guidelines relating to health and safety but very little in relation to timings, space, activities and supervision ratios. Consequently, there have been considerable changes

to play times over many years. According to Baines and Blatchford's (2019) survey of play times in England, which is a repeat of their previous surveys held in 1995 and 2006, there has been a reduction in the length of play times since 1995 by an average of 45 minutes at Key Stage 1. In addition, this reduction in play times has been replicated worldwide (Prisk & Cusworth, 2018). Generally, this has been achieved by cutting afternoon breaks and reducing the length of the lunchtime break. Reasons given for these changes have included needing to cover the curriculum and consequently needing more time for teaching and learning. In addition, more schools have been withholding some or all of play times from children as a method of managing misbehaviour as well as enabling individual children to catch up on work.

There is a lack of clarity about the purpose of play times; however, according to teachers, they provide an opportunity for physical exercise, fresh air, energy release and socialising, whilst according to pupils they like play times for socialising, autonomy and freedom to engage in playful activities (Baines & Blatchford, 2019). These times should provide a different type of play opportunity to that offered in lessons. It should be a time for unstructured child-led play where children can engage in various types of play which they would not be able to engage in in the classroom, such as rough and tumble play. This type of play has various developmental benefits such as independence and self-regulation (Gibson et al., 2017). It also provides the opportunity for creative, social and emotional development (McNamara et al., 2018). In addition, arguments have been made for the physical aspect of play times providing health benefits and helping the fight against childhood obesity (Mroz & Woolner, 2015; Ramstetter et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, according to the Baines and Blatchford (2019) survey, this type of play has been reduced due to the increase in play time supervisors compared to 1995 and 2006. Many play time supervisors provide general oversight of play activities and, with minimal support and training, may curtail play activities they deem risky or dangerous, such as rough and tumble play. In addition, increasing numbers of play time supervisors organise and supervise activities such as team sports and more indoor activities such as music and curriculum-support activities (Burgess, 2016). Furthermore, in the above survey, three-quarters of children

reported that they took part in adult-organised activities at play times, although this reduced as children got older.

Overall, play times provide a break from structured classroom lessons and should provide an opportunity for free unstructured play which has benefits for children's development. However, it would appear that over recent years children's opportunities for this type of play at play times have been eroded. The reasons for this include the reduction in the amount of play time due to curriculum pressures and attempts at behaviour management. In addition, the rise in the number of play time supervisors has led to more structured activities being offered at these times.

Playfulness, Learning and Pedagogy in the Primary School

Learning through play is considered important for children's development and wellbeing, whatever their age (Smith, 2010). Play is natural, it aids development, it enables children to gain conceptual understanding, to make connections between concepts and skills and to engage in deep, lifelong learning. The Lego Foundation has identified five characteristics of play which they consider promote learning: feeling joyful, being meaningful, actively engaging, iterative and socially interactive (Zosh et al., 2017).

The first characteristic, feeling joyful, is used to describe an activity which is pleasurable, enjoyable and motivating. It is something which engenders a positive emotion. In terms of learning theory, it can be linked with positive mindsets (Dweck, 2006) which foster resilience and learning. Being meaningful is about children being able to actively connect and construct new learning with previous learning and has its roots in Piagetian constructivist theory (Piaget, 1970). Actively engaging refers to children being involved in activities which require them to be active or hands-on. In addition, they need to be 'minds-on' to be fully engaged (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). The iterative characteristic links with Bruner's work on the spiral curriculum and children revisiting ideas and trying out new ways of thinking and problem solving (Bruner, 1960). Finally, being

socially interactive is derived from Vygotskian social constructivist theory and reflects the importance of sharing and discussing with others as one is learning and how this aids deeper learning.

These characteristics may also be considered to be ones which define playfulness as an approach or attitude towards a task rather than characteristics of play itself. Playfulness as an attitude or approach to an activity links to internal affective qualities of being, such as enthusiasm, motivation and willingness to engage (Moyles, 1989). This is a useful way to consider these characteristics as it is suggested that taking a playful approach or attitude may be far more conducive to learning and development than the play activity or play type itself (Bundy, 1993). Duffy and Trowsdale (2014) state that a playful attitude to learning needs to be promoted in primary schools in order to develop a range of skills and dispositions such as resilience, problem solving and perseverance. In addition, experimental research has shown that there are a number of cues children use to feel playful such as location of an activity, adult role in an activity and choice in an activity (McInnes et al., 2009, 2010) and that when children feel playful, they demonstrate enhanced performance (Howard & McInnes, 2013).

Zosh et al. (2017) consider playful learning to exist along a continuum from free play to direct instruction, although this latter way of learning could arguably be considered not play. This continuum of playful learning includes free play, which is child-led; guided play, which is child-led but is scaffolded by an adult; and finally games, which are adult designed and comprise rules within which children play. This continuum reflects distinctions in child agency between those activities which are child-initiated, and where children have free choice, and those which are adult-initiated, and where children have little to no choice. However, work by King and Howard (2016) has highlighted the need to consider this more flexibly and discuss the need for adaptable choice and negotiating agency in activities for optimal learning.

Parker and Thomsen (2019), on behalf of The Lego Foundation, have identified eight pedagogies currently used within primary schooling which they believe are consistent with learning through play and a play-based pedagogy in the early years. They refer to them as the 'older siblings' of a play-based pedagogy and demonstrate how they align with the

five characteristics of playful learning (Zosh et al., 2017). They have then tracked the five characteristics of playful learning against these pedagogies which they say are "playful and highly effective" (p. 7). They collectively term these pedagogies as "integrated pedagogies" (p. 6), although they could be termed 'playful pedagogies' due to the incorporation of features of playfulness. The eight pedagogies are: active learning, cooperative & collaborative learning, experiential learning, guided discovery learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning and Montessori education. These have very little overlap with the learning play types discussed earlier, although the exploratory and integrated play types may have similarities with some of the above pedagogies, most notably experiential learning and project-based learning.

Active learning involves learners having choice regarding the what and how of an activity and thereby being active or involved in the learning process. Cooperative and collaborative learning involves learners working together and interacting socially to complete a task. Experiential learning is where learners engage in quality learning experiences with others. Guided discovery learning is where learners are guided to discover ideas or knowledge for themselves. Inquiry-based learning begins by asking open-ended questions or presenting scenarios which learners need to engage with. Problem-based learning starts with a problem which needs to be worked through in small groups whilst project-based learning has learners working together on a specific project. Montessori education is a prescribed method of education involving particular materials and environment and it involves many of the elements outlined in the previous pedagogies. These characteristics of playful learning and the integrated or playful pedagogies may be used as an additional way of scrutinising UK primary curricula for evidence of play.

Playfulness in Primary School Policy and Curricula

It is made clear at the beginning of the English National Curriculum that the document provides an outline of what should be taught but that "teachers can develop exciting and stimulating lessons to promote the development of pupils' knowledge" (DfE, 2013, p. 6). However, throughout the document there is little mention of terminology reflecting the playful pedagogies identified above. Children aged up to 7 years in Wales experience the Foundation Phase Curriculum, which has play and active learning embedded throughout. In addition, it also contains language such as "experiential activities" (WG, 2015, p. 3) reflecting playful pedagogies. However, once children are taught according to the WNC, reference to any language associated with play or playful pedagogies is missing.

When reflecting on the Scottish CfE against the pedagogies identified by Parker and Thomsen (2019), playful words are in abundance. When discussing the curriculum, phrases and words such as interdisciplinary learning, project learning and thinking creatively are used to guide teachers in devising and delivering the curriculum. There are design principles which support their design of the curriculum which feature phrases such as children having challenge and enjoyment and personalisation and choice. In addition, teachers should embed creativity throughout their designing of the curriculum. The experiences that children should receive involve active learning, cooperative learning and active engagement which foster children's motivation and deep learning. Within different areas of learning, words such as creativity, ingenuity, exploration and experimentation are used (Education for Scotland, 2019). Teachers are clearly being encouraged to think and implement playful pedagogies to enable children's learning and development.

As previously stated, the Northern Ireland primary curriculum explicitly mentions play, not just within the Foundation Stage but also at Key Stages 1 and 2. In addition, many of the words associated with playful pedagogies and the characteristics of play and playfulness can be found throughout the different subject areas, such as challenging and enjoyable, exploration, choice, enthusiasm, curiosity, exploring and co-operative

learning (CCEA, 2007). Furthermore, guidance on implementing playfulness in the curriculum and children's learning has been provided, which includes playful structure, playful interactions and playful opportunities (Walsh et al., 2007). The learning experiences expected within the primary curriculum should include activities which involve children investigating and problem solving, they should be challenging and engaging, relevant and enjoyable, enquiry based, active and hands-on and should offer children choice.

Overall, there are clear differences in how play and playful characteristics are discussed in primary policy and curricula documentation and how this might be enacted in teaching practice. In England there is no mention of play or the terminology associated with playful pedagogies. This does not necessarily mean that playful pedagogies are not being utilised in English primary schools but that the curriculum guidance does not necessarily promote this. This potentially opens the way for more didactic, subject-based teaching. In Wales the situation is slightly different in that children in primary schools up until the age of 7 years experience a curriculum which is infused with play and playful pedagogies as teachers are encouraged to teach in this way. After the age of 7, however, the curriculum resembles that of the English one. Whether playful pedagogies persist in the later years of primary schooling is dependent upon individual teachers and the overall ethos of the school. This transition from a clear play pedagogy to a potentially more didactic one at age 7 is reflective of the transition experienced by English school children when they transition from the EYFS to the National Curriculum (NC) at age 5.

In Scotland, from scrutiny of policy and curriculum documentation, it would appear to be very different. Language associated with play, playful learning and playful pedagogies is woven throughout the design of the curriculum, subject specification and teaching practice. Teachers in primary schools in Scotland are clearly being encouraged to teach in a way that enables play and playful attitudes and behaviours. It would appear that the same can also be said of primary schooling in Northern Ireland, with language associated with play being used within documentation and teachers being guided to engage in playful pedagogies.

Play and Playfulness and the Role of the Adult

Play and playfulness in the primary school is contingent upon the adult. This may be a teacher trained for the early years or the later years of primary school, teaching assistant or play time supervisor. Previous discussion has identified that when current policy and curricula documentation are interpreted in the light of the playful pedagogies, teachers are encouraged to teach in a way that facilitates play and playful behaviours. Parker and Thomsen (2019) identify specific skills and knowledge that all teachers need to deliver playful pedagogies; these include content or subject matter knowledge, specific strategies and structures to implement the different pedagogies such as guiding, scaffolding and questioning and class management techniques. However, play and playfulness are not mentioned, and one could use these skills and knowledge and not implement play and playfulness in teaching.

In the reception year of primary school in England and the first few years of primary school in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland teachers are expected to deliver a play-based pedagogy, and the role of the adult is crucial (Howard & McInnes, 2013). However, it is fraught with difficulty as there is confusion regarding the role and benefits of play in the early years setting. In addition, the policy and curriculum view of play is one of planned and directed play, which conflicts with teachers' beliefs about the value and place of free play for children's learning (Wood & Chesworth, 2017). Further research has also indicated many teachers' confusion in relation to play and learning, with teachers holding two competing views: children can learn through play but play and learning need to be enacted separately (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). These findings have implications for the adult role in play. Teachers express uncertainty when faced with decision-making regarding whether, when and how to intervene in children's play, to the extent that they report lacking the requisite skills to accomplish this (Hunter & Walsh, 2014). However, research evidence demonstrates that when they understand play and are confident in their play practice, they are more likely to be playful and more able to implement a playful pedagogy (McInnes et al., 2011).

The training of all teachers should prepare them for practice, yet this does not appear to be the case. The training of teachers and the teaching standards which teachers must meet (National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), 2013; DfE, 2011; General Teaching Council (GTC) Scotland, 2012) do not explicitly mention knowledge and understanding of play or play-based pedagogies. Teachers repeatedly report receiving limited training on play and playfulness, which leads to limited understanding of play within early years and primary practice and of the wider discourse and use of play (Howard, 2010). However, if in-depth training is provided, both initially and ongoing, this helps to develop positive beliefs regarding play and its place in the curriculum as well as the intention and understanding to implement it in the classroom (Jung & Bora, 2015).

One issue which is possibly more dominant within the later years of primary schooling rather than the early years is related to the role of the adult and power and control (Briggs & Hansen, 2012). Classroom teachers have a specific job to do, which is to teach children. They are meant to be in control and ensure that children learn to the requirements and outcomes of the curriculum. Within a play-based curriculum, this power dynamic should shift with more control and power being devolved to children as they are given more choice. For many teachers this an unfamiliar and uncomfortable position (Martlew et al., 2011). In the playful pedagogies identified by Parker and Thomsen (2019), there should be a more equal balance of power and control. However, this very much depends on how the activities are organised and delivered. For example, an experiential learning activity can still be adult-led and delivered with children having very little power and control in the process. Nevertheless, activities which enable a sharing of power and control between teachers and children should support a more playful approach in all primary school classrooms.

Primary school teachers and other adults in the primary school should consider their own playfulness when taking a playful approach with children. Teachers need to instigate the playful pedagogies but in a playful way. First, this requires an understanding of play and playfulness and using this to develop a creative and nuanced approach to understanding and implementing primary curricula and guidance. The five

characteristics of play (Zosh et al., 2017) can also be used to develop playfulness. Adults in the primary school should be joyful when teaching and engaging with children and their activities. Adults should take time to understand children and their activities so they can interact with them in a meaningful way and potentially join in with their activities in a way that does not hijack the play or playfulness. Adults should be hands- and minds-on with children, which requires open mindedness and flexibility; it also requires the sharing of ideas through sustained discussion. Finally, choice about and within activities should be negotiated so that agency is dynamic and shared. Playfulness from the adults working with them will enable children to be playful, which fosters development and learning.

Conclusion

Children learn and develop through play, not just in the early years but throughout primary schooling (Smith, 2010). However, play within curricula documentation across the UK is patchy at best. Attempts have been made to introduce play and provide alternative ways of looking at play within the primary school, for example Briggs and Hansen's (2012) play types, but these lack clarity. Parker and Thomsen's (2019) model of playful pedagogies, informed by the characteristics of play and playful learning identified by Zosh et al. (2017), provides a way of reinterpreting UK curricula and developing a more nuanced understanding of play as well as enabling a focus on playfulness. This is already under way within the Scottish and Northern Ireland curricula and associated guidance. It is this focus on playfulness which provides a way for teachers to reimagine the curriculum, curriculum delivery and their own practice. Focusing on playfulness allows all teachers across the different age phases in primary schools, and play time supervisors, to interact with children in a playful manner. It allows curricular activities to be delivered in a playful way and potentially enables the breakdown of power relations between children and adults. Play and playfulness also need to be on the agenda when training teachers and play time supervisors so that they can be trained to understand the value of play and playfulness. In this way playfulness can infuse all aspects of the primary school day and positively impact children's learning and development.

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Play and Education from a Swedish Perspective

Suzanne Axelsson

Introduction

This chapter looks at children and play in Swedish preschools and wrap-around care. It refers to the new preschool curriculum which came into effect in July 2019, where 'instructional teaching' (undervisning) is now a requirement for the first time. The chapter will explore how 'undervisning' is in the process of being redefined to suit the play-ethos of preschool education.

The chapter is divided into five parts. First, it presents a brief introduction to the education system in Sweden, including the different education levels of the educators. This will be followed by a closer look at play in preschools, preschool classes and fritids, referring to how the curriculum values play and how this is being translated into the daily lives of educators and children in the settings. The word preschool will be used when referring to Swedish 'förskola' (ages 1–5), preschool class when

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referring to 'förskoleklass' (6 year olds) and the Swedish word 'fritids' when referring to the wrap-around care for school children aged six to twelve. This will be followed by exploring outdoor play and digital play, two forms of play that are found in the three different types of settings in a variety of ways. The chapter will conclude with reflections on the play available to children ages one to twelve attending Swedish preschool, preschool class and fritids.

A Brief Look at the Swedish Education System

The Swedish education system starts with preschool for children between the ages of one and six. In the August of the year the child turns six, their education continues in the preschool class, which is located in a school environment. After this introductory year children start the first grade of school. Nine grades are divided into three—primary, intermediate and secondary (lågstadiet, mellanstadiet and högstadiet). Years F-9 (preschool class to ninth grade) are obligatory; preschool and gymnasiet (a three-year sixth form programme) are not obligatory but the majority of children/youth attend them. Of these, 84.4% continue to gymnasiet (Skolverket, 2018a 2018b) and 84% attend preschool with a range of 47% of one-year olds and 94% of five-year olds (Eurydice, 2020).

Prior to the introduction of the curriculum in 1998, preschools were known as 'daghem' (dayhome) but were fondly referred to as dagis (Carlsson & Focklin, 2007; Kärrby, 2000). Dagis is still a much-used term by many, even over twenty years after the shift from the social services to the Swedish National Agency of Education known as Skolverket in Swedish. Preschool and fritids in Sweden are heavily subsidised and are available to all children from the age of one until the summer of the year they finish sixth grade. There is no homeschooling option in Sweden because school, not education, is the legal requirement. In Swedish language this is known as 'skolplikt' – school duty (Berg, 2003). The training of educators in the preschool and school systems differs from each other not only in content, but also in duration. In the preschools there are teachers with a three-and-half-year university education, 210ECTS (Stockholm University, 2020a) and nursery nurses (barnskötare) which is

a gymnasie (sixth form) equivalent programme. In schools F-6 teachers study for 4 years, 240ECTS (Stockholm University, 2019) and teachers of grades 7–9, known as subject teachers, train for between 4 years and 5.5 years (240-330ECTS) depending on their subject (Stockholm University, 2020b). Also found in schools are 'fritids' teachers. 'Fritids' is not only wrap-around care but the teachers are often connected to the preschool class as extra support to teachers during the school day to enable small group work. These fritids educators have a three-year university education, 180ECTS (Stockholm University, 2019). ECTS is the European Credit Transfer System; in Swedish these credits are referred to as "hp" Higher Education Points (EC website).

Preschool and Play

Swedish preschools are legally required to be open from 6:30 am to 6:30 pm and it is implied in all the social media groups I participate in that 'undervisning' (teaching/instruction) should occur throughout the day as planned lessons and spontaneous pedagogical interactions. The focus in collegial dialogues tends to be around how to plan time for learning and less often about how to plan time for the children's own free play, even though the lesson planning is based on play. "Undervisning" or teaching is a part of the preschool day in Sweden but there is no schedule of lessons and breaks like there is in schools. As the curriculum states that lessons can be spontaneous (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b), this can mean young children can be exposed to lessons, or lesson-like activities, at any point in the twelve hours a centre is open. In the preschool class and school, it is stated how much time should be given to lessons, as in the number of hours per week, but none of the educational policies state for how much time children need breaks from learning, only that they have the right to them and that lessons and breaks should be designed in the children's best interests. This is quite different from teachers' rights to breaks, which is a legal requirement for schools and it also specifies how long they should be (Skolverket, 2019; Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2019). The preschool curriculum (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b) states that teaching should be well balanced with rest based on the developmental needs

of the children and the duration of their stay, as children can typically stay anywhere from three hours to twelve hours in the same group/class.

As the new Swedish preschool curriculum becomes more focused on subjects and teaching, while still based on the foundation of play, I can sense this balancing act of teacher-led and child-led, of rules and freedom, of lessons and play is becoming ever more precarious. Ensuring there is an appropriate amount of play is a concern that is reflected globally in early years education (Gunnirsdottir, 2014; Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2006; Lester & Russell, 2010; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Shipley, 2008; Walsh et al., 2017). Granberg (2003) reflects that play should not be used as a teaching method, but that children learn through play. However, this does not necessarily mean that there should be no teaching.

My theory of Original Learning (Axelsson, 2018) suggests that there needs to be adequate time to play in order to process the lessons taught/learned, and that there is a play and learning equality where the two are interwoven. Lessons can absolutely be playful, or play-filled, but this should not be confused with play. King and Newstead (2019) write about childcare workers' understanding of play as a process rather than play as a product, referring to the Play Cycle Theory (Sturrock & Else, 1998) as a tool to gain a deeper understanding of recognising children's play. Play as a process rather than product implies that it cannot be used as a tool to make teaching more fun but has its own inherent value. Pramling and Wallerstedt (2019) explain what they mean by play-responsive teaching and how it differs from play-based teaching:

> Teaching is theorized as an activity – that is, as something mutually constituted by participants (preschool teachers and children) – in contrast to instruction as an action… Play is understood in this perspective not as something to base teaching on (so called playbased teaching), as something that can subsequently be left behind *(product)*; rather, teaching is understood as inherently responsive to play, as a potential dimension of any teaching activity in preschool (*process*). (p. 8)

Play-based learning, learning through play, play-based preschool didactics, child-directed learning, and pedagogy of play are terms that are being frequently used to describe the play, learning and teaching dynamic

(Thomas et al., 2011; Pramling et al., 2019; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009) and can sometimes add to the confusion of what is play, what is learning and what is playful learning. Pramling and Wallerstedt (2019) write, "two questions that are at stake today are the role of *play* in preschool teaching, and how the learning *content* (alternative goal) that is addressed is viewed" (p. 9). These are, indeed, important questions, not only for the early years sector but for schools too. How educators are trained to see play, learning and teaching as a process, rather than teaching being a product that is being transferred to children (with play as one of those tools), is a pertinent question for the evolving Swedish preschool.

Granberg (2003) writes that adult attitudes towards play can often interfere with the actual play; for instance, the idea that all children *can* play or *should* play *with* each other, or that all children *must participate* in the play, biases educators when they observe children playing. This can result in subverting the children's natural play instead of enabling the children's play, especially when it comes to supporting those children who are struggling with play (or appear to be struggling from an adult perspective). Folkman and Svedin (2003) describe play like rings on water, that if the play is functioning the rings ripple outwards positively impacting their social interactions, academic learning and so on; therefore, a functioning play ecosystem can result in more effective lessons, just as play-responsive teaching will maximise the children's learning without compromising their agency (Pramling et al., 2019).

In Anna Wirsén's paper (2003) two preschool teachers were interviewed, one newly qualified and the other with almost 40 years of experience. What was interesting to read in their descriptions of free play in preschools was that the more experienced teacher had seen a remarkable difference in children's *ability* to play, reflecting that children required more adult intervention to play successfully in groups than previously.

Both teachers reflected on outdoor play as a space where children get to play more freely, partly because this is when the adults stand around and talk with each other. The two teachers see this somewhat differently from each other. One thinks that it is not good that there are staff just chit-chatting, while the younger one thinks it is natural due to there being so little time for the adults to discuss with each other. Personally, I have mixed opinions about this based on my experiences working in

preschools for over 20 years. There is a need to talk with colleagues and discuss the learning and play that has been observed and there is a lack of adequate time for collegial reflection. On the other hand, I have also experienced many in the preschool yard that are not talking about work, the children or play but chatting about their own personal lives with each other, and only react when they hear problems and step in as the 'fixer'. I do not think this is a particularly Swedish dilemma, and is more than likely found across the globe. Does this imply that free play is an accidental phenomenon due to the fact that the adults are not paying attention, rather than it being a deliberate choice of the adults to step back and be visibly invisible, observing and learning from the children's play? And how does this impact the quality of the children's play context? This brings me back to King and Newstead's research (2019) about supporting Early Years Practitioners (EYP) to better understand play using the play cycle, to observe play with intentionality in order to improve quality.

Olofsson Knutsdotter (2003) talks about children who are unable to play in preschools and the challenge this presents for teachers, as they need to work out if it is due to the child not feeling secure, not being aware of the play codes/signals or problems at home. She also talks about the importance of the educators as play role models to enable these children to interpret the rules of play. My Swedish social media feed is often filled with comments and images of how adults should not be participating in play, and that their very presence means it stops it being play. Mixed messages of what educators should be doing is confusing to well-intentioned adults striving to offer the best play and learning provision.

Preschool Class, Fritids and Play

In 1990 it was decided that six-year olds should be provided a placement in schools instead of preschools and by 1997 this process was completed (Pramling Samuelsson & Mauritzson, 1997), creating the preschool class (at first called grade 0), a bridge between preschool and school. In 1994, a national investigation (Statens offentliga utredningar (SOU), 1994:45) explored the possible consequences of starting school at age six instead of seven and came to the conclusion that schools would require change in

order to meet the needs of six-year olds and to avoid the risk that many children would experience a sense of academic failure and be turned off learning. Recently, in 2018, the preschool class became obligatory for all children. This change in the freedom to attend preschool class, or not, is rooted in several factors. The main reason for Sweden opting for 'skolplikt' rather than education to be a legal requirement is equality. The preschool class has now become a part of a ten-year compulsory education and the Swedish government is striving to ensure that the two percent of children who were not attending preschool class are accessing the daily six hours of term-time education. Another reason given for starting at age six by the Swedish government is that seven is relatively late compared to an international perspective (Utbildningsutskottet, 2017; Ackesjö, 2019). Finally, starting in autumn 2019, new compulsory evaluation forms in math and Swedish need to be completed on every child. These are designed to be able to ensure that no child is left behind and is given the support they need to attain the Knowledge Requirements by the end of grade 3 (Skolverket, 2011). The preschool class remains a bridge between preschool and school with a clearer focus on school preparation.

Preschool class and fritids are included in the school curriculum, each with its own chapters specialising in its specific needs. Under the heading 'The Task of the School' (which is written for all three school forms—preschool class, school and fritids), the school curriculum states, "Creative and investigative activities and play are essential components of active learning. In the early years of schooling, play in particular is of great importance in helping pupils to acquire knowledge" (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b, p. 8). Johansson and Pramling-Samuelsson (2006) write that play in schools tends to be a method for learning and teaching while in preschools play has its own value. How play is being viewed impacts the kind of play children have access to, and also complicates dialogues about whether children are getting enough play within the educational system.

Fritids is available to children aged 6 to 12 at a heavily subsidised cost to parents. Over the years group sizes have been increasing while the number of educators has not (Ackesjö, 2011). Despite the fact it is called 'free time' in Swedish, this is considered a pedagogical part of the day where there is homework help and also learning through play. It

also has its own curriculum where the word 'undervisning' (teaching) is frequently used and all the school subjects are covered. The fritids curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) is more reminiscent of the preschool curriculum (2018) that guides the educators to include math, literacy, creative expression and so on, rather than being like the school curriculum, which is more learning-content specific. Of all the 6–12 year olds, 57% attend fritids, 89% are 6–9 year olds and groups consist on average of about 39 children (Skolverket, 2019). As a nation, Sweden continually strives towards equity within the school system. However, the fact that not all attend this pedagogical wrap-around care, with the same opening times as preschool, raises the question: Are some children disadvantaged because they do not attend fritids (Supstiks & Åkesson, 2016)?

One could describe fritids as a space for well-regulated free play. Pedagogical activities, dividing children into smaller groups, or organising excursions are offered as options to choose 'freely' between. Pihlgren and Rohlin (2011) write about school and fritids creating a whole, where children can be exposed to formal and informal learning as well as free play. They also point out that this free play becomes more and more reduced as fritid educators become more learning goals based and there is less space to play in. In July 2019 it was decided that fritids should also have a minimum of at least one legitimised fritids-teacher at every setting. In Sweden educators are required to be both qualified and legitimised. It costs 1500 Swedish krona for a fritids-teacher legitimation and without this certificate adults can only work as a fritids-teacher on a one-year contract or take on the 'lesser' title of fritids-leader (Lärarförbundet, 2019). The same qualification route applies to preschool and school teachers too, to qualify from a teacher training programme and then to apply and pay for legitimisation.

Hansen Orwehag and Mårdsjö Olsson (2011) write about the strengths and weaknesses of the informal learning that occurs at fritids, where play allows children to learn through their interests but does not make the learning as visible and obvious as it is during school hours. Play is seen as the foundational learning method in fritids, even though free play is something that many see as essential for preschool and school-aged children (Dahl & Englesson, 2015; Miller, 2013; Hakkarainen, 2006). Arnell and Lundbäck (2015) write that the fritids educators that they

interviewed all found it easier for free play to occur outside rather than inside, due to space and the number of children, and that many were uncertain of what the balance between free play and teacher-directed play should be. Boverket and Movium (2014) write

> When the school was municipalized, a large part of it moved educare into the school premises, which they were not built for originally. Today, 80 percent of children aged 6–9 are enrolled in the educare centres, of which three quarters are housed in the school premises. For these children, the school environment is the only outdoor environment they have access to during weekdays (p. 12)

If children attend a school that has a small or no yard, this seriously reduces their free-flow access to outdoor play and makes them entirely dependent on the attitudes of the fritids educators to outdoor play and activities.

Outdoor Play

There is a Swedish proverb (that rhymes in Swedish) that there is no bad weather, only bad clothes, and this proverb is very much in tune with the attitudes of the Swedish people and the outdoors. The outdoors is used every day, whether it be the pre/school yard, the forest, or nearby parks or public spaces. Risk assessments do not need to be completed to take children outside of school property and this gives freedom to both teachers and children to choose their destination, sometimes just before they leave the premises. As an increasing number of settings do not have their own yard or have a space that is unsuitable for all of the children simultaneously, being able to utilise the neighbourhood and the whole city is essential (El Faraj & Kärvegård, 2010).

The preschool/school yard is a space that is not only used during school hours in Sweden, as they are also public spaces for play in the evenings, weekends and school breaks. This has both benefits and disadvantages. The benefits are that there are extra spaces for children's play, close to their homes, and these are spaces that the children are familiar with. The

disadvantages include the need for secure storage of any loose equipment used during school hours, as well as the extra wear and tear on the equipment and vandalism. Research (Wells, 2000; Haluza et al., 2014) indicates that green and natural outdoor spaces are the best for the cognitive development and well-being of the children, but sadly these are often the areas that are subject to the most wear and tear and vandalism, and the cost of replacement is expensive. Christofferson (2014) suggests that this might lead to cities and school authorities replacing natural areas with more durable hard surfaces.

There is much research available on the importance of the school and preschool yard for the social and cognitive development of children as well as their well-being and health (Mårtensson, 2012; Söderström et al., 2013; Sandseter, 2011; Fägerstam, 2012) not just for usage during break times/free play, but also as part of lesson planning and the concept of the outdoor classroom.

Risky play is something children have controlled access to, and an ever-increasing protective layer seems to be being added to the role of the educator. Emma Adbåge's (2018) children's book *Gropen* (The Hollow) shares the story of children seeking exciting play in the small natural hollow on school grounds and how the educators can only see the danger and are unable to see the play and the benefits, or to adequately assess where accidents are actually happening, as the only accident in the story happens when a child trips down the steps of the school entrance. The story maybe reflects the real-life situation of many preschools, preschool classes and fritids where children are gaining less and less access to the spaces that allow exciting, open-ended play that has uncertain outcomes. Gill (2018) writes about risky play and how it is perceived and how it often causes anxiety in adults more than it should and therefore limits children's access to risky play. Ball et al. (2019) also confirm this and suggest that there is a need for educators to be provided with risk benefit assessment frameworks and a broader perspective of risks and dangers in play and daily life.

Outdoor and digital play are increasingly being reflected on as a way of breaking down the borders of how they are traditionally seen and to have a more transdisciplinary approach. For example, digital microscopes and cameras are being used in a variety of ways outside. Equally, outside play

is being brought inside to be experienced once more through another medium, for example, watching their filmed outdoor-play, or continuing learning/play with indoor materials using images the children/teachers have just taken outside projected onto a wall (Nilsson & Åkervall, 2016).

Digital Technology and Play

The European Parliament (EP) (2006) identified eight key competences for life-long learning, one of those being digital competence. The new Swedish preschool curriculum (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b) also requires educators to provide a play and learning environment that enables children to be adequately digitally competent. According to Forsling (2011), digital competence includes possessing basic Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills, that is, to be able to retrieve, assess, produce, store and communicate with and through digital media.

This means that digital play and learning is now required in Sweden from the age of one, when the new preschool curriculum became legally active in July 2019. Lagergren and Holmberg (2019) introduce their chapter about digital play and learning with the following statement:

> Digitization in the early years is not about digital technology itself, it is not just about hardware or software. It is very much about the children and the staff. People who learn and develop together with digital technology. It's about what users do together with the digital tools and systems. (p. 15)

The idea is that digital play is not simply about time spent gaming and using pedagogical apps on screens but that a wide range of digital tools can be used for children to explore the world through play. Digital cameras, computers, apps, projectors, bluetooth, internet, mobile phones, printers and so on have changed the conditions of play and learning for the children, but also for educators, including how they document and access pedagogical material, and the experiences they can offer children. My experience of holding digital play workshops is that many educators have a preconceived idea of what digital means—often 'screen-time'—and usually a limited use of those screens, which often creates a negative attitude towards digital play landscapes as they are not seen as open ended.

In Sweden, 87% of children aged between birth and ten years use the internet, with about half of those using it on a daily basis (Internet Stiftelsen, 2019). There has also been an increase in the use of the internet by preschool children from 2018 to 2019, from 42% to 48%. There is a clear change in the accessibility of the internet, including 8% of preschool children having their own mobile phone by the time they start school and 54% of Swedish seven-year olds having their own mobile. The statistics above indicate a changing landscape of contemporary play, where technology and digital tools are now play materials like blocks, dolls and dress-up clothes. Edwards (2013) argues that there is a need to reconsider the relationship between traditional and contemporary play, using the term "converged play". By this she refers to play that relates to children's popular culture, which the statistics show includes digital and technological tools.

The new preschool curriculum (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b) requires educators to provide a play and learning environment that allows children to develop "adequate digital skills" (p. 10). As mentioned, according to Forsling (2011), digital competence includes being able to retrieve, assess, produce, store and communicate with and through digital media. The Swedish Internet Foundation (SIF) (Internet Stiftelse, 2019) shares figures showing that the majority of preschool children accessing the internet, primarily by tablets, are using it to watch films and programmes. As an educator I have aimed to provide adequate digital competence by exposing the children to experiences that allow them to discover more uses of the tablet than just being a consumer, focusing them, instead, on being producers.

A reason for being digitally competent, given by a preschool teacher to Kjällander (2017), is to understand that it is people behind the designing and programming of computers, games and robots and that with young children this is best learnt by doing—by creating and playing with digital tools, including developing early programming skills. Kjällander (2017) talks about how digital play and exploration has enabled educators to better understand young children's play, learning and thoughts in a way that analogue play, drawing and talking has not been able to due to the fact that the children are so young that their fine motor skills and language skills have not yet developed enough to communicate their full

capacity of comprehension and creative/critical thinking. Digital literacy allows children to communicate through colours and symbols: tablets do not require the same finger dexterity as writing/drawing or computer keyboards. Digital literacy (Kjällander, 2014) also allows children to think and write simultaneously, where pen and paper requires a child to think first, then write. This simultaneous thinking and doing can provide a space of play and creativity, as it is more forgiving when making mistakes or changing your mind to adjust the text on a screen than it is on paper.

The Swedish Media Council (Statensmedieråd, 2017) have examined the changes in children's usage of media, including a report on how young children (0–8 years) access and use various forms of media. The report (p. 11) reveals that it is relatively uncommon for the youngest children to use the internet and digital games on a daily basis, but that this is slowly increasing over the years and, at age eight, it exceeds the amount of daily reading, and then daily television viewing somewhat later (daily internet use becomes more common at age 9 and daily digital gaming at 10). With this in mind, introducing digital play and learning into educational settings, even as early as preschool, can be seen as an important approach to enable children and their parents to see digital tools, including tablets, as something more than a place for gaming and a tool to entertain children while making dinner. Allowing children to develop a digital competence that enables them to think critically about their digital consumerism, and how technology can enhance play, learning and development, is an essential future skill.

In the curriculum, children are encouraged to explore and play with "digital and other tools" (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b, p. 15). This does not suggest that the digital should replace the analogue, but simply that digital tools should be used if they can enhance the play and learning in a way analogue tools are unable to. Kjällander (2017) says that children should be active, creative producers and not passive consumers. Digital play is a new realm of play for many educators and there are many pitfalls, including tablets being used in a babysitting-like manner to keep children quiet.

From a sustainable point of view, digital play can allow children to explore without the same waste, as colour apps, art apps and so on can provide opportunities to be creative in a repetitive manner without the

paper waste. This, of course, should be combined with real-life art techniques and media to expose children to the full sensory experience of art—sound, smell, touch (vibration shifts of different materials interacting with each other), even taste, and not just sight.

Technology and social norms have been rapidly evolving, and continue to do so (Valdez et al., 1999; Holliman, 2011). Terms such as 'digital native' and 'digital immigrant' exist to explain the difference between those who are born into a world of digital tools and those who were born without them (Prensky, 2013). As technology evolves, so does expectation.

As an educator I have been in the field long enough to have started documenting with children using analogue cameras, to the early days of expensive digital cameras, and now the accessibility of cameras on phones. I have also witnessed how preschool children have had little to no access to technology, due to cost, or the fact computer and mouse usage was not optimal for young hands, compared with today where it would be hard to find a preschool in Sweden where children do not have easy access to a digital medium of one kind or another. Social media demonstrates this access, as many Swedish preschools, or educators, have an account and sharing digital play and exploration is well 'liked'.

Digital tools have allowed children to participate more in the documentation of their own play and learning, as educators no longer need to worry about the cost of developing film when taking photographs, and films can be taken, deleted and new ones produced. This creates opportunities for children to play with the digital tools, for example, playing with the slow motion function, or making their own stop motion or time lapse films. Children also get the opportunity to experiment with digital tools like the digital microscope. This experimental play can then be projected onto walls or screens and the children can engage through play once more. This can provide opportunities for multi-directional learning (Loyens & Gijbels, 2008) through play exploration, in the sense that children are learning from each other through a shared experience and the educator is learning not only what the children are interested in, but often also how technology can be used beyond their own imagination. Educators are most often the 'immigrants' in the digital world and time taken observing digital natives at play could offer an opportunity to speed up the process of digital inclusion as a non-native. There is now a

generation of digital natives just entering the profession as educators, so change is coming. This change has been experienced by many educators turning to the digital world in order to reach out to children during the Covid-19-induced lockdowns of 2020.

The Swedish National School Authority (Skolverket) offers several online courses for teachers in preschool, preschool class and fritids to learn more about digital play and learning, including courses that explore the impact of digital tools on identity and equality, children's integrity, and how they can be best implemented.

Natural social interactions and creative play may be disturbed by the introduction of digital play outside (Hitron et al., 2018), so there needs to be careful reflection on how tools can and are being used. Digital tools should be used to enhance the play and the relationships that exist and not be the main event of the activities and/or play (Lagergren & Holmberg, 2019, Kjällander, 2017), instead blurring the borders between digital and analogue to create a new playscape, rather than one or the other.

Conclusion

It seems apparent that play is evolving and that our traditional way of viewing play is being challenged by the play of the digital natives. There is also a continued need to encourage children to play outside and use their whole bodies. There are companies designing playscapes that include physical and digital elements, both indoors and outdoors (Sallnäs Pysander, 2018), that are being researched to better understand this new playscape of digital *and* analogue, both indoors *and* outdoors. A playscape that reflects the childhood of today.

There is a need for adults to understand play and childhood, to be able to fully understand how children are communicating and learning and to be able to facilitate that as play-responsive educators (Pramling et al., 2019). The curriculums in Sweden have been evolving, as have the definitions of the various educators in the Swedish education system where the focus on education and teaching has been taking a more prominent role. This has not involved play being less important, but there is always

a risk that there are misinterpretations and more focus on teaching that usurps the power of play. Eidevald et al. (2020) shared recently their concerns that on 9 March 2020, the Swedish Government (SOU, 2020) initiated an investigation into changing the preschool class into the first grade of school, stating that it is detrimental for children to start with formalised learning too young. My own concern is what happens to the bridge between preschool and school if this happens: will, in the near future, five-year olds become that bridge?

My social media feed, a source of inspiration and dialogue in the digital teacher's repertoire, is filled with exchanges between my British counterparts who tend to focus on how to ensure there is enough play in the learning, while here in Sweden we are discussing how to weave teaching into the play. Pramling and Wallerstedt (2019) assume this is due to the British early years, being based on clearer features of school preparation and school-like forms of work organised into lessons, while Swedish schools have evolved from a Fröbelian play-based learning. It seems that play has become subversive to the intention of the curriculum, when the curriculum is goal focused, so despite teachers knowing that play is good for children, there is a lack of time and space for it to be woven naturally and effectively into the rhythm of the classes' learning agenda. Pramling and Wallerstedt (2019) write, "One cannot then say that preschool teachers teach (or should teach) but instead that in their role as a preschool teacher is to involve children in shared activities of a teaching kind" (p. 14). Can play-responsive teaching ensure that play not only survives and thrives in an educational environment, but also continues to evolve and the teachers' understanding of play with it?

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Play Across Australian Schooling

Brendon Hyndman

Introduction

> Inscribed in the memory of its community … invisible tracks that trace the history, meaning and use of every significant feature of the environment. Each place has its own story, its own melody, and often its own special importance for a particular family.
>
> To an outsider, it is just a landscape of trees, rocks, water. Without close, patient and attentive listening and learning from the traditional owners of this land, the song and storylines that mark every inch of their earth are unknown and unknowable to the non-initiated. (Factor, 2004, p. 142)

In the spirit of well-known Australian play scholar Dr. June Factor's (2004) work, this chapter aims to move the audience through the tracks

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of history, allowing the audience to draw meaning from the work that has been previously conducted into play across Australian schooling. Without being closely attentive to the storyline that marks Australian school play during recess periods, we are less informed to be able to push forward with confidence into new frontiers of Australian play. This chapter articulates the small body of work that has progressed the insight, knowledge and development in the area of school play during recess periods across Australia.

The Beginnings of Australia's School Playgrounds

Since the 1800s, Australian school playgrounds have changed rapidly to meet the requirements of school communities and to meet government education policies (Maddern, 1969). Barbara Chancellor (2005) describes how compulsory schooling was introduced into Australia by 1873, which resulted in hundreds of new schools being built in the subsequent years. This resulted in school playgrounds being constructed from wide-ranging materials and designs, according to availability within each of the communities. The period up until the 1920s resulted in many school playground settings often being barren and devoid of play equipment (Chancellor, 2005). Yet there were sightings of horse paddocks with horses being ridden, garden beds being used by students, cadet training, craft work, agriculture and drawing (Chancellor, 2005). As Australian schools moved further into the twentieth century, school play spaces started to emerge that included large grassed areas, asphalt areas and play areas which included shade. By the 1950s and 1960s, the children could be seen engaging in games with painted lines (Chancellor, 2005).

One of the most notable Australian playground research projects was 10 months of research during 1954–1955 conducted by Dorothy Howard, a United States Fulbright scholar (Jones et al., 2017). Travelling across Australia, Howard documented wide-ranging rhymes and chants across urban and regional communities. Howard discovered rich accounts of Australian children playing hopscotch, having ball bouncing rhymes,

playing marbles, and counting/string games in a significant geographical account of children's play in Australian schools at this time (Jones et al., 2017). The work of Howard was continued in the 1970s by Dr. June Factor and Dr. Gwenda Davey (2009) and revealed how complex and valuable chants and rhymes were for Australian school children, as children developed riddles, jokes, superstitions, games, rhymes, recorded music and other artefacts. Australian school children were shown to be adapting to chants that were learnt from their peers, having implications for how chants and rhymes adapt over time. Chancellor (2005) suggests that opportunities to engage in chants and rhymes in modern society are much more restricted and likely to be limited to school playgrounds, placing further emphasis on the importance of promoting play within Australian primary school playgrounds. Chants and rhymes are also regularly voiced during other wide-ranging play aspects within the school playground (e.g., skipping, clapping). Yet during the past decade, wide-ranging categories of play have still been captured by researchers via the 'Childhood, Tradition and Change project' including a range of games associated with balls, boards, fingers, cards, chasing, circles, clapping, climbing, collecting, constructing, counting, dancing, being dramatic, using technology and guessing (Darian-Smith & Henningham, 2014).

Dramatic Changes to Australian School Playground Contexts

The 1970s period resulted in a raft of changes to the play and school playground landscapes across Australian schools during the novelty era of play. It was at this time that loose parts equipment was being embraced worldwide for adventure school playground purposes and coincided with Simon Nicholson (1971) releasing his theory on loose parts. This theory was underpinned by how increasing the amount of variables in an environment can empower a child's creativity when considering increasing colours, shapes, sizes, equipment types, locations and quantities. It was during this period that a large Australian study was conducted by Peter Lindsay and Denise

Palmer (1981) which explored the games played within school playgrounds of almost 5000 children across 21 Brisbane primary schools. Lindsay and Palmer photographed a total of 255 varying playground games, discovering that the most common games played by the children were hopscotch, marbles, clapping games, ball games, pursuit games and skipping. Yet in the 1980s, a decade after adventure playgrounds swept across schools internationally, there was a push to 'standardise' school playgrounds in Australia with a focus on playground superstructures with large frames, monkey bars and slides (Pascoe, 2017). The standardisation of Australian playground equipment structures was introduced due to perceived injury concerns during children's play, alongside a move to implement national playground safety standards (Pascoe, 2017). Despite modern research discovering how loose parts are often perceived by adults as being more risky than actual incidences of injury (Bundy et al., 2009), the standardisation and fixed equipment changes in the 1980s were seen as increasing the safety and management of school playgrounds. During this decade of Australian play, Heather Russell revealed just how much cultural difference and immigration influences were impacting on children's collaborative play behaviours (Russell et al., 1986). The fixed playground superstructures resulted in fewer play variables for children to engage with, and in modern contexts fewer play variables have been found to be detrimental to children's developmental opportunities (Chancellor, 2013; Hyndman, 2017a). Chancellor's (2013) description reinforces this by stating, "In Australia, considerable resources are spent on fixed equipment in school playgrounds that is not designed for deliberate modifications by either children or adults" (p. 71). Across many of Australian schools, school playground superstructures remain which are decades old or outdated, large, expensive and fixed into a specific location (Chancellor, 2013). Research has also discovered that school children are becoming bored with these fixed structures that are positioned for many years within their school playgrounds and the children report that they have played on the same equipment "hundreds of times" (Hyndman et al., 2012). Research is also finding that demonstrations of incidences of creativity are fewer in those school children who have fewer play variables available associated with more fixed playground equipment (Hyndman & Mahony, 2018).

Elizabeth Wood (2012) revealed concerns about how play for children was under threat across other parts of the world due to over-protection, over-organisation and low access within urban environments. There was concern that 'free' outdoor play could vanish. It has become clear across the research that restrictive policies that include too many rules and regulations have been reported as negatively impacting on students' creativity, activity and diversity of free play (Hyndman, 2017a). There are many instances of removing school playground equipment with replacing classroom buildings, the amalgamation of school facilities, reductions in school break times and over-crowded play areas for children (Hyndman, 2017a). The desire for teachers to have a 'hassle free' time during recess supervision can be wrongly perceived to be related to more policing-type supervision roles. In contrast, for example, the abolishment of play restrictions in a New Zealand primary school has improved students' behaviours for teachers (McLachlan, 2014). Letting school children lead their own play pursuits has also been shown to have strong learning engagement and student-collaboration benefits (McLachlan, 2014). This takes away the perceived onus on teachers feeling like they need to control the learning variables.

Empowering Play Strategies in Australian School Playgrounds

The peak National Advocacy Organisation for Play in Australia is Play Australia, a "secretariat for the International Play Association (IPA)" (Play Australia, 2020, online). Play objectives in Australia have generally followed the IPA's vision to "protect, preserve and promote the child's right to play as a fundamental right" throughout Australian states and communities (Play Australia, 2020, online). With Play Australia being a branch of the IPA, the definition of play has followed what is accepted by the IPA and identified via the General Comment No. 17 from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (2013):

> Children's play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. Play involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental or emotional activity, and has the potential to take infinite forms, either in groups or alone. These forms will change and be adapted throughout the course of childhood. The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013, p. 6).

School playgrounds during recess are one such place in which children are provided opportunities to be able to initiate and self-modify their play environments. This creates tension with the needs of supervising adults who wish to keep the control of their environments steady, with little chaos and few requirements for tidying up. The autonomous nature of children changing and creating their environments has been earmarked as one of the most empowering aspects of play (Hart, 1979; Moore, 1986). Loose parts being incorporated into the environment provides the added benefit of creativity and experimentation (Nicholson, 1971) and this can allow children to build enhanced connections with their spaces (Moore & Wong, 1997) for example, when children build cubby houses (Australian play dens). The building of cubby houses can be at odds with the adult supervision requirements of school playgrounds today for high visibility and tidiness. This type of play aligns with definitions from Pellegrini and Blatchford (2000) and Rubin, Fein and Vanderberg (1983) who describe play as disposition when children actively engage in flexible, non-literal ways through intrinsic motivation. Yet once the children are familiar with the play structures they have built, this can further align with the scholars' description of play by being 'familiar and stress free' in context and engaging in 'activities easily identifiable as play' (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2000). The more variables that children can manipulate during play with loose parts can also align with Bishop and Curtis's (2001) three descriptions of play. These descriptions include (1) imaginative content, (2) opportunities to be physical and children working together

with loose parts (e.g., to construct with materials), which can align with (3) verbal content.

The benefits of loose parts (e.g., wooden planks, blocks, milk crates, hay bales, tyre tubes) has continued to be re-emphasised and adopted by Australian schools over the past 10 years. In Australia, the impacts of loose parts over an 11-week period were measured in 5–7 year old children in 2008–2009 by Bundy and colleagues. The loose parts provisions were seen to have positive short-term impacts on the intensity of children's active play (Bundy et al., 2009) and levels of playability (Bundy et al., 2008); the long-term positive impacts were also established (Engelen et al., 2013). Australian teachers have also been interviewed as part of the evaluation of the impact of the loose parts provisions, with teachers perceiving that the strategy enhanced levels of resilience, social interactions and creativity within the school playground. This is despite teachers being cautious about how children in the early primary school years would use equipment that was able to be moved around and the adults perceiving that the equipment would pose an elevated risk (Bundy et al., 2009). Across all primary school ages, loose parts have been found to increase the number of steps accumulated by 5–12 year old children, activity intensities and the amount of distance covered during active play (Hyndman, 2015). This was compared to a school with more fixed school playground facilities in place. The ability of children to self-direct, choose and evolve activities with different types of equipment has had positive short-term effects on physical quality of life and levels of enjoyment. Hyndman, Benson and Telford (2014) discovered that loose parts promoted growing levels of complexity over time with how children direct their play behaviours. This complexity evolved from curious-imaginative play, to building/constructive play to combinations of both types of play over months and years of observations. Similar to Bundy et al.'s (2009) investigation, the school teachers validated the findings with younger-aged children with perceptions of improved teamwork, negotiation skills, creativity, problem solving and observational learning capacities (Hyndman et al., 2014). Moreover, the benefits of loose parts to address Australian curricula and creativity components have also been recognised (Hyndman et al., 2017; Hyndman & Mahony, 2018).

Another way for Australian school children to self-direct their own play is through nature or scientific play. Although a lot of Janet Dyment's earlier work investigating the use of greening strategies in school children's active play was based in Canada, a study included Australian children in 2009. Dyment et al. (2009) found that the introduction of greening strategies such as trees, rocks and gardens impacted on higher amounts of 'moderate' intensity active play in Australian children. Playing outdoors has traditionally been seen as being tagged onto the science curriculum, with the positives of kinaesthetic experiences with natural features well reported (Titman, 1994; Moore & Wong, 1997; Malone & Tranter, 2003). Chancellor (2005) describes playing with nature outdoors as being seen as one of the greatest sources of 'scientific/sensory play' which can occur in sandpits, grass/dirt areas, water, rocks, gardens and trees/shrubs. Chancellor also alludes to scientific/sensory play being able to occur in any part of the playground where children can freely explore smells (flowers, trees, freshly mowed lawns), sounds of birds or the wind, alongside experiencing a variety of equipment textures (wood, metal, plastic). Australian play research has demonstrated the evidence of the power of the outdoors and engaging with nature for children's development through play.

Teacher Preparation, Processes and Characteristics of Australian School Playgrounds

In Australian schools, there is a trend of high proportions of sporting-focused areas with football ovals and basketball and netball courts (Chancellor & Cevher-Kalburan, 2014). This is no surprise with sport being a major influencer on Australian culture. A positive is that most Australian schools also have reasonable allocations of trees, sandpits and shaded playground areas (Chancellor & Cevher-Kalburan, 2014). The school playgrounds are largely resourced, designed and managed at a local school level of governance and the only national mandates are for the playground safety standards of facilities (Australian Playground Standards, 2019). Yet there

is an absence of policy or guidelines which advise Australian schools what exactly should be included within schools to use playground facilities for children's development and learning. Schools deciding on which types of facilities are administered allows playground designs to conform to the preferences of each individual school community. The negatives of not having a guiding template for schools to follow can lead to not prioritising play facilities at all and excessive focus on resources inside classrooms, rather than outside learning via play. Without clear and uniform expectations, there has been a reduced quality of Australian school playgrounds with incidences of over-policing of regulations and an absence of natural features that has made school play uninviting (Pellegrini, 2008). Chancellor (2013) describes Australian primary school playgrounds as having a 'spectrum of quality' in relation to how each school perceives what is important for each community. The priorities for a school budget could differ according to school gardeners, maintenance employees, recycling areas, pets, indoor facilities and specific play equipment provisions. The research is starting to emphasise that if we invest more in school playgrounds, children will have greater opportunities to develop cognitive, social and physical skills to better connect with nature and improve overall wellbeing (Hyndman et al., 2016).

In Australian teacher training programmes, pre-service primary school teachers rarely receive formal learning in how to enhance play and the value of play, especially for during recess periods within primary school contexts. The focus on learning within indoor classroom spaces or early childhood contexts is less balanced with that of outdoor play in primary schools (Chancellor, 2013). Despite greater play-based focus via Early Years Learning Frameworks, there is little play-based focus for those beyond the early years across the total of almost 9000 primary, secondary and combination schools in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The lack of teaching preparation and focus on the outdoor spaces in primary schools (Chancellor & Hyndman, 2017) can lead to teachers not seeing this part of schooling as a priority if their four years of training has not covered these learning spaces. Australian teachers will then judge children's play based upon the rules and regulations within school playgrounds or subjective assessments, which impacts on the play opportunities and play freedom of the children (Chancellor & Hyndman, 2017).

Although many Australian school teachers will consider school playgrounds for formal lessons or classes in areas such as Maths, Science, Arts, Dance, Geography and so forth, when questioned about the amount of learning that happens when school children are playing during recess times, many Australian teachers have little knowledge (Chancellor, 2013). There are many concerns about falling literacy and numeracy scores in Australian schools, yet rather than creating more unstructured break time to develop children's attention within classes, there has been a focus on preparing children for summative testing (Appel, 2019). By undertaking more training around the potential of school play spaces to enhance unstructured outdoor play, teachers will also be able to help identify when and where maintenance needs to be considered (Hyndman et al., 2014). Maintenance of school playground equipment has been described by both staff and students across multiple studies (Chancellor, 2013; Hyndman et al., 2014; Hyndman & Telford, 2015) to be a vital consideration to ensure positive play behaviours continue.

The Supervision of Australian School Playgrounds

The supervision of school children's play is a complex and ongoing issue in Australian schools. In many schools, the fear of litigation and injuries can weigh heavily on school administration (Hyndman & Telford, 2015). This also can make it difficult for schools to consider lessening the slack on administering rules, regulation and restrictions. What can be perceived as risky and dangerous can actually be the opposite. Across Australian schools, a requirement for all teachers is to engage in playground supervision during recess (alongside before & after school) (Chancellor, 2013). Many questions have been raised about the tensions between school teachers' supervision during recess periods and what will most benefit the school children (Evans, 2003; Thompson, 2014; Chancellor & Hyndman, 2017). Up until the new millennium, there had been very little research into Australian school playgrounds. In Australia, school principals have always been able to freely determine the

daily timetable according to their own perspectives (Evans, 1997). This had often compromised the allocation of recess time by replacing the recess time slots with specialist teachers or accommodating other timetabling needs. With bullying incidents attributed to school playground time, some schools even considered outdoor recess more trouble than benefit (Evans, 2001). Teachers had previously only listed the benefits of children playing during recess with Spencer's surplus energy theory (1870) or valued how recess could assist in social development (Chancellor, 2005). Evans (2003) revealed that across Australian schools, the longest recess breaks were getting reduced in a 'reactive', rather than 'proactive', quest to reduce misbehaviour within school playgrounds. This move was based upon a collective of school leaders to try to reduce bullying incidences. Yet what has been discovered over recent decades is that if school children are bored, and have few outlets for free play opportunities and exploration, this will lead to misbehaviours or lashing out to pass the time (Hyndman & Telford, 2015; Hyndman, 2017a).

Until recently, Australian school playgrounds had been perceived by adults as a place where children would have a break from 'work' to undertake active play (Evans, 2003). Prior to this, Evans (1990) described how teachers "refrained from intervening in any playground activity unless it was deemed essential to do so" or saw playground supervision as "obligation they would gladly do without" (p. 225). Interestingly, Evans described how teachers were "given no advice as to what they were expected to do while on duty other than the fact their physical presence in the playground was required" and enforced the importance of teachers receiving adequate training. Many Australian schools consist of the three breaks scheduled each day amounting to around one-fifth of school time—a small morning recess break, a long lunch break (around an hour) and an afternoon break (Department of Education (DoE), 2019). Two decades ago, Australian schools often had greater occurrence of rough and tumble play, and if a teacher was involved in supervision, it was often at a distance. This all changed around the turn of the millennium when there was a push to increase the number of teachers on duty, embed tighter regulations on what school children could do in the playground and enforce stricter consequences for perceived misbehaviour (Evans, 2003). Some schools were even reported as organising alternative, mundane and/

or structured activities for school children to reduce misbehaviours (Breheney et al., 1996). Examples of the reductions are highlighted by Evans (1997) when interviewing school principals. It was found that the school principals were taking 15 minutes off lunchtime (despite keeping time for eating lunch) and implementing strict "new discipline policy" (pp. 19–20). This strict discipline was showcased years later when Chancellor (2005) unearthed that primary school teachers were demonstrating misunderstanding by stopping children from undertaking rough and tumble play and enforcing rules that were unnecessary and counterproductive. Examples included the removal of treated pine and reducing recess time; Chancellor (2005) had previously cautioned that such overdiscipline and enforcing restrictions could result in children becoming disrespectful towards the importance of rules that guide society.

Fast forward to the present decade, and there are still clear differentials between how teaching staff perceive 'good or bad play' in comparison to what can be suitable for Australian school children's development (Thompson, 2014). For example, teachers have perceived that school children's play can be too messy, unhygienic, risky or aggressive or the play could be seen as less worthwhile compared to what the teachers experienced when they were younger (Chancellor & Hyndman, 2017). Yet many of these types of school play in Australian schools have strong development benefits for school children by bringing in more play variable to engage with textures, surfaces, use of space and physical variables (e.g., testing physical parameters) associated with rough and tumble play (Chancellor & Hyndman, 2017). Another supervisory tension that has continued in Australian schools for decades (Evans, 2003) is that playground supervision during school recess periods has been seen as a 'duty', a 'burden' or a place for the school children to 'let off steam' from the perceived 'more important learning' occurring within indoor classroom spaces (Chancellor, 2013; Chancellor & Hyndman, 2017). Although teachers continue to be burdened with educational change, curriculum demands, a crowded curriculum and other time constraints, it is vital that teachers receive improved insight into the benefits of play for learning in primary schools (and in some cases, secondary schools). This is especially pertinent with fewer places outside school for children to play with increases in traffic volumes, less time availability and increases in urbanisation

(Williams, 2017). The school setting can be the only place for children to freely play, climb, jump, swing, hide and run around. Many primary school children are experiencing homes with reduced or no backyards or access to local parklands. Other children are living in built up urbanised areas with over-protection and over-regulation (Wood, 2012). Historically, children were more likely to be able to play outdoors. For many children today, school play may be the only context which provides sufficient space and play freedom under supervision (Evans, 2003). Yet a positive is that Australian schools are now endeavouring to embed more play-based and outdoor learning into the school curricula and teachers may now look to the school playground for further play and developmental opportunities (Chancellor, 2013).

It is clear that Australian schools and teachers continue to balance wide-ranging challenges to be able to optimise school children's play within playgrounds and there is therefore a need for improved professional development. A large proportion of Australian schools also consult with the community relating to school playground rules (Chancellor, 2013). This can be problematic if there is increasing emphasis on adult-imposed rules and regulations (Hyndman et al., 2012). In Australian schools, the children are rarely consulted in the design of school playgrounds (Hyndman, 2017a), despite being the primary users of such spaces. Ensuring students' needs and desires are accounted for is important, as there are currently major concerns around school children's physical activity levels in Australia and prevalence of sedentary behaviour (Active Healthy Kids Australia, 2018). Moreover, bullying has been reported in 30 of 300 Australian government primary schools surveyed (Chancellor, 2013).

Australian Secondary School Playground Contexts

The majority of research into school playgrounds in Australia has been confined to primary school settings, which leaves a lot of scope to uncover the state of play in the secondary school context (Darian-Smith &

Henningham, 2014; Ridgers et al., 2013; Hyndman & Chancellor, 2017). To date, there have been inconclusive results relating to whether any active play interventions have been successful (Kriemler et al., 2011). In Australian secondary schools, it has been found that when the adolescents are allowed to bring sporting equipment into the school playgrounds, it increases active play behaviours (Ridgers et al., 2013). The impact of secondary school playground influences is poorly understood, despite many secondary school students reporting that they seek active play opportunities that contrast with the facilities and opportunities that exist within their school playgrounds (Hyndman, et al., 2012).

To investigate Australian secondary school playgrounds more thoroughly, Hyndman and Chancellor (2017) audited 14 secondary school playgrounds across the state of New South Wales. A valid and reliable school audit tool (Jones et al., 2010) was used to gauge the presence, quantity and quality of the secondary school playground facility designs. The findings uncovered that almost all secondary schools contained borders which shielded the play areas from nearby properties (aesthetics), and a portion of schools possessed natural features (trees, gardens) and were free from vandalism. There was a regular presence of signs and markings to 'calm traffic' around the school and walkways for the adolescents to explore. Despite these features, there was a common presence of both rubbish and graffiti across each of the school playgrounds. Moreover, there was a high prevalence of picnic tables and benches and a distinct absence of facilities to encourage active play and informal games. Compared to studies with Norwegian secondary schools, the Australian contexts had a dramatic absence of obstacle courses, fixed playground facilities and surface markings (Hyndman & Chancellor, 2017). Hyndman et al. (2012) found that there could be reduced priorities for encouraging active play in Australian secondary schools, which was further confirmed by the audit of 14 secondary schools. Adolescence is a vital period to link the developmental benefits established in primary school to creating habits into adulthood, especially as Australian adolescents experience almost the lowest physical activity participation in the world (Guthold et al., 2019; Hyndman, 2019). More focus needs to be undertaken to ensure that the playability and play opportunities within

Australian secondary schools are not diminished and overlooked in the transition from primary school.

Curriculum, Policies and Protections for Australian School Playgrounds

Australian play is regularly impacted by extreme weather events, especially with play during recess periods often being outdoors (Hyndman & Zundans-Fraser, 2021). Within Australian schools, there is a requirement for all children to undertake sun-protective practices during outdoor play (e.g., wear sunscreen and hats, seek shade and wear sunglasses) and this programme has had strong success (Sharplin et al., 2013). Yet another safety danger which is emerging is related to extreme heat-related influences. When school children are exposed to extreme heat, this can negatively impact their bodily systems through discomfort, dehydration, blood flow and sweating responses which can lead to serious heat illness if children are not protected (Hyndman, 2017b). When considering active types of play (unstructured, spontaneous physical activities without purpose) within Australian school playgrounds, heat risks are further elevated. In 2017, Hyndman proposed a five-stage action plan policy for Australian schools to protect children during outdoor activities such as play, which was later endorsed by the Australian public (Hyndman & Zundans-Fraser, 2021). The proposed national heat protection action plan (Hyndman, 2017b) included aspects such as flexible scheduling of activities, shaded features, access to cooled water, and improving awareness of heat-protective strategies and communications.

This proposal resulted in a lot of public debate, with many parents believing improved national heat protection during Australian children's play would help improve learning and development (Hyndman & Zundans-Fraser, 2021). This makes sense if children's health is optimised when they are engaging in play experimentation and exploring their senses during outdoor activities. Currently, the factors prioritised to protect Australian children during school play are related to the national design safety standards such as height, crowds of children, sizes and

layouts (DoE, 2019). Heat protection has also often been overlooked within Australian education, with many schools adopting guidelines from other areas such as sport (Hyndman, 2017b).

Another major barrier to Australian children's play is that minimum recess times for unstructured play are not mandated by the Government or Education departments. The information about recess times is a 'loose' guide and times for unstructured play can be adapted according to a school's context. For instance, in 2019 a Western Australian primary school reduced opportunities for unstructured free play down to just 15 minutes to focus on more adult-directed activity opportunities (Carmody, 2019). This was a reaction to incidences of sedentary behaviour or children not playing with each other in the school playground, rather than considering positive school playground strategies that have been trialled in Australian schools (mentioned earlier in the chapter). Despite data being collected from Australian governments related to a range of disciplines, there is little information reported relating to recess periods according to prevalence or proportions within a school day. Without more focused collection of this data, a full picture of the situation across Australian schools will be difficult to achieve, especially with each state in Australia overseeing their own systems.

Scholars based in Australia are now calling for one hour of mandated time across primary and secondary schooling dedicated to children engaging in unstructured play and to encourage more movement (Sahlberg, 2019; Hyndman, 2019). Other recommendations have also been advised for parents and families to dedicate one hour each day around school time to turn off devices and play more, alongside breaking up periods of more 'structured/scheduled' time (Sahlberg, 2019; Hyndman, 2019). In Australian schools, there have been growing incidences of sedentary behaviour through excessive use of electronic devices and screen time, which has a parallel impact with the very low physical activity levels being recorded (Active Healthy Kids Australia (AHKA), 2018). These patterns can start early and are especially concerning, with Australian teenagers' physical activity participation being ranked 140th in the world out of 146 countries (Guthold et al., 2019; Hyndman, 2019).

Yet despite the concerns with school recess, within Australia's national Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum we see many

incidences of play being prioritised within curricular progressions (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2019). Of course, how teachers deliver, prioritise (e.g., some points might state playground or classroom) and facilitate the curriculum can be determined by each individual or group, yet there is promise to having such structured connections for Australian children's development. Throughout the curriculum until Grade 10 (~15–16 years) there are wide-ranging syllabus points relating to participating in play that promote engagement with outdoor settings to creating games with and without equipment (ACARA, 2019). There are also opportunities within the national curriculum to consider the school playground to be a healthy, safe and active space, alongside manipulating and modifying objects, time, space and efforts with movement ideas. Unfortunately, despite such positive emphasis on play such as self-direction and choice within the curricular points, there is still little training for adults within Australian school systems to make informed decisions around play behaviours. Hyndman et al. (2017) investigated and showcased through hundreds of observations how introducing equipment strategies during school recess periods could meet the Australian curriculum HPE sub-strands of communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing, moving our body, contributing to healthy and active communities and learning through movement. It was discovered from the study that primary school children can have difficulty coming up with ideas and being engaged in play if they do not have access to equipment during school recess. Moreover, the more re-locatable or movable the equipment was, the more complexity in the type of play was evident (Hyndman et al., 2017).

Conclusion

It is acknowledged that over a period of 100 years, the volume of research into play within Australian schooling has been limited. Yet from the research that exists, it is clear that more student-centred focuses need to be incorporated within Australian schools for children's play. Children need to be afforded opportunities to experiment with the furnishings, dimensions and textures of the physical features of their school

playgrounds for their own adapted purposes (Factor, 2004). Adult indifferences continue to creep into Australian children's play and act as an ongoing barrier without clear guidelines for what is acceptable nationwide. A lack of consultation often occurs when providing school playground play opportunities and this can disadvantage children, despite well-planned and designed playground facilities from an adult's perspective. Children will play, no matter what we do as adults, yet the quality of those play opportunities will suffer in Australian schools unless we allow the fundamental play components of 'self-direction' and 'choice' to be upheld for children.

Decades ago, Sutton-Smith (1982) cautioned that recess periods could potentially be removed from schools, despite the quality learning which occurs. By determining the factors which have influenced play within Australian school playgrounds, we can provide insight for policy makers to ensure that more positive strategies are put in place to benefit the lifelong habits of our children. Over the past 100 years of play across Australian schooling, the small collections of research showcase the evolving phases of play from empty paddocks and hard surfaces, to more adventurous play opportunities with rich rhymes, chants and equipment options, to more adult-imposed, restrictive policies on play. The lessons learned from these historical accounts point to the importance of 'rediscovering' the importance of students taking back ownership of their play. Adults' roles can be to step back further and be involved by promoting resources by listening to students' needs to create a richness of play variables (equipment and spaces with a multitude of colours, shapes and purposes) for Australian children to discover, experiment with and explore. The research points to Australian schooling play moving towards phases where play may need to be better protected from weather extremes and sedentary behaviour distractions such as electronic entertainment to ensure Australian children's development through play continues to be maximised into the future.

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The Process of Play in a Playwork Context

Shelly Newstead and Pete King

Playwork is a recognised profession in the UK and the practice of playwork is currently growing internationally. Within playwork, play is currently defined as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (PPSG), 2005, p. 1). This chapter outlines how this playwork definition of play was originally developed and has since been widely adopted at national and international policy levels. The tensions for practice created by the playwork definition of play are also discussed, which may result in children's experience of playwork being very different to that intended by the current definition of play. It is proposed that a revised definition of 'playwork play' may enable more children to truly experience 'free play' in the name of playwork.

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Introduction

Playwork is a recognised occupation within the United Kingdom and is defined as:

> a highly skilled profession that enriches and enhances children's play. It takes place where adults support children's play, but it is not driven by prescribed education or care outcomes. (SkillsActive, 2010, p. 3)

Playwork has generally been associated with working with school-aged children (in the United Kingdom (UK), 4–15 years old), although a playwork approach is increasingly being used with preschool children (Chan et al., 2020). Traditionally, playwork has taken place within dedicated play settings, such as adventure playgrounds, parks and open spaces (Chilton, 2018). However, a playwork approach is increasingly being adopted in a much broader range of settings, such as out-of-school care provision (King & Newstead, 2019a), prisons (Woodall & Kinsella, 2017) and hospitals (Matsudaira, 2020). A playwork practitioner is usually known as a 'playworker', although other job titles are used in non-traditional playwork settings (Cartmel & Worch, 2020). This is particularly the case in an international context where the job of 'playworker' does not exist (van Rooijen, 2020). Whilst professional playwork qualifications have been developed in the UK, in recent years there has been a trend towards deregulation which has created inconsistency where regulatory requirements still exist (see, e.g. Gov.UK, 2020; Welsh Government (WG), 2016). Currently there is no need for anybody to hold a specific playwork qualification in order to call themselves a playworker, both in the UK and worldwide.

Playwork is supported by the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005) which purport to "describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people" (PPSG, p. 1). The question of what playworkers do and why has been one which has been much debated in the playwork field over the last 70 years (Newstead, 2019). However, the Playwork Principles currently provide the following definition with the Playwork Principle No. 5: "The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the

creation of a space in which they can play" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1). Within these play spaces, the role of the adult in playwork is conceptualised as a provider and facilitator of play (Newstead, 2004), which is achieved through the proactive provision of 'play opportunities' by adults (Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork (JNCTP), 1997; Stobart, 2001).

Playwork has its own distinct understanding of play, originally developed by adventure playground worker and playwork theorist Bob Hughes in the 1980s and drawn from existing play literature (see, e.g., Bruner, 1972; Garvey, 1977). Within playwork, play within the Playwork Principles is understood as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1). This chapter examines the strengths and tensions of the theoretical and practical applications of this playwork approach to play as a process. It begins by describing how the playwork description of play was developed and explores the implications for policy and practice of this approach to play within a global context. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the playwork understanding of play and argues that the development of the playwork definition of play might further support children in today's supervised settings to experience play as a process.

Historical Account of the Development of 'Playwork Play'

The contemporary focus on play is a relatively new one in terms of the history of the development of the playwork field. This section provides an historical account of how the playwork definition of play was originally developed in the 1980s as a response to unfavourable conditions for playwork, and how the playwork field subsequently assumed its modern-day persona of play.

The contemporary occupation and practice of playwork originated in the UK adventure playgrounds set up just after the Second World War (Newstead, 2016). Adventure playgrounds were a new idea from Denmark, imported by Lady Allen of Hurtwood (Hurtwood, 1946) and

then re-created all over the UK by local individuals and groups. Once the challenges of creating and operating the physical spaces of adventure playgrounds had been mastered, the adventure playground pioneers turned their attentions to the tricky problem of defining their newly created adult role within these unorthodox spaces for children. However, this task proved far more challenging than the creation of adventure playgrounds themselves. By the end of the 1970s, those involved in creating this brand new job role had made little progress in articulating what made a playworker a playworker, and had reluctantly come to the conclusion that playworkers were probably 'born, not made' (Allen & Nicholson, 1975; Lambert, 1974).

As alternative and often controversial provision for children, adventure playgrounds in the UK have frequently had to fight for their survival. Funding was often in short supply due to a general lack of public recognition and acceptance, and many adventure playgrounds had to close as a result (King George's Jubilee Trust, 1955; National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) 1960). A further threat presented itself in the 1970s in the form of 'health and safety' (Hughes, 2006). The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) (Health and Safety Executive (HSE), 2020) was essentially aimed at workplaces and factories in an attempt to create safer working conditions for employees. However, this new health and safety legislation posed something of a challenge for adventure playgrounds, where playworkers allowed (and sometimes positively encouraged) children to take "self-calculated risks" (NPFA, 1984, p. 4). This approach resulted in what could be described as hazardous conditions on adventure playgrounds, and sometimes even injury. In the absence of any coherent rationale to explain their role, playworkers struggled to articulate their seeming 'anti-health and safety' approach or why they believed that it was important for children. As a result, several adventure playgrounds were closed and many others had their adventure surgically removed (Chilton, 2018).

Faced with challenges on several fronts, including lack of funding, the health and safety agenda and the creation of childcare for school-aged children (Chilton, 2018), playworkers in the 1980s became increasingly concerned about the complete obliteration of adventure playgrounds and their unique offer to children (King, 1988; Williams, 1986). Several

playworkers recognised the problems of not being able to justify their approach in the face of more powerful agendas and set about trying to articulate their own distinctive agenda (Shier, 1991), a task which had essentially been abandoned by the previous generation of adventure playground pioneers.

Various ideas were put forward as the reason for the existence of playwork and its unique practices, including playwork as community development (O'Grady, 1986), playwork as informal education (Burkhardt, 1977) and playwork as an anti-social behaviour measure (Johnson, 1990). Rather than agreeing on one unique agenda, debates and disagreements about the nature and purpose of playwork raged throughout the sector, including disputes about whether playwork could or should be defined at all (Benjamin, 1961; PlayEducation, 1983). However, one narrative appears to have gained more traction than others, which was the importance of play for children. In a deliberate attempt "to take up our philosophy of the '60's, drag it, squealing, into the '80's and make it durable" (Hughes & Williams, 1982a, p. 8), Bob Hughes and Hank Williams (both experienced adventure playground workers and employed by the National Playing Fields Association at the time) wrote a series of articles which conceptualised the rationale for playwork in terms of defending and promoting the importance of play in children's lives. This rallying call for playwork to justify its existence in terms of play was based on the notion of adventure playgrounds as spaces which compensated children for a general lack of opportunities for children to play in wider society (Hughes & Williams, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1982d, 1982e).

Hughes and Williams' (1982a) exposition of playworkers as providers and facilitators of play provided the 'missing link' in the long battle for a shared meaning of playwork. Whilst not all playworkers were involved in community development, or were particularly concerned with 'anti-social behaviour', or favoured the idea of playwork as an extension of the education system, what they did share was the experience of playing children on their adventure playgrounds and the could recognise the value of play as Hughes and Williams (1982) described it. Universally applicable to adventure playgrounds across the UK, this "ludic mantra" (Candler, 1999, p. 230) was widely adopted by playworkers who had finally gained a definitive purpose and language with which to describe their new-found

aims. Playwork's reinvigorated identity gained popular support in theory and practice and became cemented in the playwork literature:

> playwork is the specific act of affecting the "whole environment" with the deliberate intention of improving opportunities for play (Playboard, 1984 cited in Brown, 2003, p. 54)

In 1985, the Joint National Committee on Training for Playwork (JNCTP) published *Recommendations on Training for Playwork* (also known as 'the Salmon book') which defined playwork as " an adult occupation concerned explicitly and directly with play" and also included Hughes' original definition of play as "behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (JNCTP, 1985, p. 16). In 1986, Hank Williams made an impassioned plea (published by PlayEducation, which was set up by Bob Hughes and his partner, Annie Perrono) for playwork to focus on the importance of play: "I have always felt that playwork undersold the value of play due to the need to sell the value of playwork" (Williams, 1986, p. 3).

However, not everybody involved in adventure playgrounds/playwork was so enamored by this new-found philosophy of playwork. Frank King, a well-respected adventure playground worker in Bristol at the time, warned of the dangers of developing a knee-jerk rationale for the existence of playwork out of necessity and challenged the conceptualisation of playworkers as providers and facilitators of play: "one of the fundamental mistakes we've been making is to fail to recognise, or at least to communicate, that what we do or cannot do, is provide play" (King, 1988, p. 2). For Heseltine (1982), locating playwork's rationale in play was an imperfect, short-sighted solution to a much more complex problem: "Play and play leadership are only the means to an end, yet we've come to see them as the end. Probably because we don't know what the real end is" (Heseltine, 1982, no page number).

Despite such misgivings, the rationale of play as the justification for playwork in a play-deprived world was widely adopted by popular playwork consent. The need for children to experience play as 'freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated' became the new imperative on which adventure playgrounds and playwork were founded and

operated (Armitage, 2014). On 16 December 1991, the UK Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 1989), which included the specific right to play within Article 31. This global policy further legitimised the emerging playwork claims about the need for adults to promote and defend children's right to play and for a qualified workforce to drive this important agenda (Shier, 1996). By 1991, the National Children's Play and Recreation Unit (NCPRU) had set up an accreditation scheme for playworkers which specified competency in terms of providing and facilitating children's play (NCPRU, 1991). The Assumptions and Values of Playwork, which underpinned the first set of National Occupational Standards for Playwork (1992), were also constructed around the espoused need for children to experience the form of play preferred by playworkers:

> Children's play is freely chosen, personally directed behaviour, motivated from within; through play, the child explores the world and her or his relationship with it, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges she or he encounters. By playing the child learns and develops as an individual. (no page number)

Over the last thirty years, playwork theory has been further developed to reinforce playwork's professional identity in terms of providing and facilitating play. The current National Occupational Standards for Playwork are underpinned by the Playwork Principles (PPSG, 2005), which are also based on the concept of play as the primary focus of playworkers and include a version of Hughes' original definition of play as "a process which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1). Hughes' 'play types' theory and Sturrock and Else's 'play cycle' theory (Hughes, 2002; King & Sturrock, 2019; Sturrock & Else 1998) support the need for playworkers to recognise the importance of play for children and for adults to enable children to play in a way which is "freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1). Nicholson's (1971) 'theory of loose parts' is also now widely used to create opportunities for children to make choices about what they play with and how they use materials (Besse-Patin et al.,

2017). Playworkers therefore now regard themselves as providers and facilitators of play as "a process which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) in a play-deprived world in both theory and practice (King & Waibel, 2016).

The Influence of 'Playwork Play' on National and International Policy

Although a relatively modern rationale for the existence of playwork, in recent decades the playwork approach to play has had a significant impact on policy and practice internationally. This section discusses how playwork's understanding of play as "a process which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) has impacted policy at an international and state level.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the importance of play in children's lives is reflected globally in the 54 Rights within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As of 2020, all countries within the UN have adopted and ratified the UNCRC except for the United States.

Article 31 of the UNCRC states:

1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. (UNICEF, 1989, p. 10)

In 2013 the United Nations published 'General Comment No. 17' as a supplement to Article 31, with the primary objective to "enhance the understanding of the importance of Article 31 for children's well-being and development; to ensure respect for and strengthen the application of the rights under Article 31" (UN, 2013, pp. 3–4). Playwork's original adventure playground intentions for providing children with time and

space to do what mattered to them (Newstead, 2016) and the development of the modern-day playwork description of play by second generation adventure playground workers significantly underpinned this international initiative to secure time for 'free play' for children. The need for a General Comment was spearheaded by the International Play Association (IPA), originally called the International Adventure Playground Association and created by highly influential adventure playground pioneers, including C.T. Sørensen, Lady Allen of Hurtwood, Drummond Abernethy and Arvid Bengtsson (Allen and Nicholson, 1975). The concern of the contemporary IPA, which led to the creation of the General Comment, was that the right to play as stated by Article 31 was being generally understood as the right for adults to use play to achieve adult agendas (such as education of children), rather than children's right to direct their own play in their own time and in their own way, as implied by the playwork definition of play. The case for children's play being understood as a process within the General Comment No. 17 was further supported by an extensive literature undertaken by Lester and Russell (2008), both experienced adventure playground workers who continued to work within the playwork field (Lester, 2016; Russell, 2005).

Within the United Kingdom, all four countries have developed play policies as a result of the input and influence of playworkers and/or the playwork definition of play. The first national play policy was published in 2002 in Wales and there are now play policies in Scotland (Scottish Government (SG), 2013) and Northern Ireland (Office for First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), 2008; 2010; 2011). England did have a play strategy (DCFS/DCMS, 2007), but the change in Government in 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures resulted in the abandonment of this strategy (Voce, 2015) and England does not currently have a play policy.

Across these United Kingdom policies, there is similarity in how play is defined and considered as a process, reflecting the definition of play being 'freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated'. For example, both Wales and Scotland state:

> play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or

> reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live. (Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), 2002, p. 3, Scottish Government (SG), 2013, p. 16)

Whilst Northern Ireland (OFMDFM, 2008) makes a very similar statement within their play implementation plan:

> Play is satisfying to the child, creative for the child and freely chosen by the child. Play may or may not involve equipment, be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, be done with other people or on one's own, have an end product or not, be light hearted or very serious. (Office for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), 2008, p. 3)

Although now defunct, the English Play Strategy (DCFS/DCMS, 2007) was also based on the playwork definition of play:

> This Strategy defines play as children and young people following their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons, having fun while respecting themselves and others (p. 11)

In respect of areas of professional practice, the Welsh play policy implementation plan (WAG, 2006) has a specific focus on playwork, as reflected in their theme of "A Playwork Profession" (p. 13). Although they refer to an "integrated children's workforce" within the two themes of "Play in Schools" (p. 8) and "Play in the Community" (p. 10), the focus is very much on playwork, particularly open access play within the community with some cross-professional considerations. This cross-professional aspect is more explicitly stated within the Scottish play strategy (SG, 2013), which also includes the role of parents, both within and outside of the home, and intergenerational play. The role of parents is also considered within the Northern Ireland play strategy in respect of children's development and community cohesion by "contributing to community and society".

The Welsh Government also now has the Children and Families Measures (Act) 2010, which was the first legislation specifically including

statutory guidance for children's play (WG, 2014) as part of addressing the child poverty agenda. Since 2012, each of the 22 local authorities in Wales has undertaken a play sufficiency assessment every three years. For the first time within the UK, this policy made the provision of play a statutory duty where:

1. A Local Authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in accordance with regulations.
2. A Local Authority must secure sufficient play opportunities in its area for children, so far as reasonably practicable. (WG, 2010, p8)

A play sufficiency toolkit has been constructed by a planning group which had a strong playwork contribution (WG, 2015). This play sufficiency toolkit links to the statutory guidance (WG, 2014) which refers to the 2002 Play Policy and therefore reflects the playwork definition of play being 'freely chosen'. This move to implement play provision as a statutory duty has also recently been followed in Scotland where there is now a duty under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 (Legislation.gov.uk, 2020), which states that:

(1) A planning authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in preparing an evidence report. (the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, 16C)

Essentially constructed on playwork's espoused appeal for more 'free play' in children's lives, these international and national policies and statutory duties have highlighted children's varying experiences of play and the need for adults to recognise the value of play from a child's perspective.

The Influence of 'Playwork Play' on Local Policy and Practice

As the previous section describes, the playwork definition of play as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) has been highly influential at national and international policy level. As discussed earlier, the playwork definition of play was originally conceived as a rationale for the purpose of playwork and a justification for the existence of playworkers in the face of adversity in the 1980s. However, implementing a philosophical foundation of providing and facilitating play as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) has created several challenges at a practical and conceptual level.

First of all, the notion that playworkers exist in order to provide the sort of play which negates the need for adults creates something of an existential dilemma, as described here by Conway (2003):

> Professional playwork practice is thus faced with squaring the circle of maintaining the child's sense of autonomy and control over their own play experiences within adult interventions within their play space and time. (p. 105)

There is an inherent contradiction between the notion of play as a process which is completely child-led and child-directed, and the conceptualisation of the playworker as a provider of that form of play. In playwork, it is children who should make the decisions about how and what they play. The process of play, or the "content and intent", should always remain with the child (Hughes, 1996, p. 22). However, conceptualised as providers of play, it is the adult playworkers who are responsible for determining children's "projected play needs" (Hughes, 1996, p. 36) and then providing for those play needs through the planning of 'play opportunities' (Walters, 2008). Playworkers are thereby elevated to a position of authority where they are responsible for the quantity and quality of the play process, in direct contradiction to their own guiding construct of play as being chosen and directed by the children.

Furthermore, play is 'enriched by skilled playworkers' (Play England, 2009) who choose an 'intervention style' that extends play (PPSG, 2005). This intentional intervention makes it more likely that they will "adulterate" (Sturrock & Else, 1998, p. 93) the play, generally understood as the undesirable practice of transforming children's play with adult ideas and agendas (Kilvington & Wood, 2018). Adulteration is widely condemned in the playwork literature (MacIntyre, 2007; Sutton, 2014), and yet the contemporary conceptualisation of playworkers as providers and facilitators of the play process legitimises adulteration as not only an acceptable but a desirable practice in playwork.

A further challenge to putting the playwork definition of play into practice is that it is highly debateable whether play which takes place in settings supervised by adults can ever be accurately described as a process which is 'freely chosen' and 'personally directed' (Brown, 2008). The intention behind the playwork definition of play is to describe "the freedom which play allows for children when the interests of others, especially those of the adult world, recede into the background" (NPFA, 2000, p. 6). However, Hughes' original description of play was based on his adventure playground experience in the days before regulation and legislation, where children were not only purposefully left to their own devices, but also there were very few playworkers to keep an eye on them (Hughes, 1975). By contrast, the reality for many children spending their free time in modern-day supervised settings is that it is nigh on impossible for them to escape 'the interests of others', be that the interests of those that own or operate the setting, the budget holders, parents, policy makers or other stake holders. Children therefore frequently have to negotiate their way through a series of adult pre-defined possibilities about how to organise and conduct their play processes, which may include restrictions on resources, limitations created by the environment and the availability (or otherwise) of appropriate play partners (Howard & King 2014).

Even in the most permissive of supervised settings, children may still find it difficult to escape the interests of adults. Many settings in which children are compelled to spend their leisure time are required to uphold strict ratios of adults to children. The pervasive presence of adults can result in children's experiences being filtered through the perspectives and

experiences of the playworkers doing the supervising. For example, children's experience of risk-taking in supervised settings is influenced by the personal and professional interests of the adults in the setting (van Rooijen & Newstead, 2017). Whilst some adults may fully support the child's right to experience play which is "freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated", it is by no means guaranteed that all adults will interpret this to its fullest extent. Referring to the Assumptions and Values of Playwork (1992), Hughes (1996) vividly highlighted this contradiction between playwork policy and practice: "I have been to many playwork organisations which have stated values on the office wall and that's normally the last reference I've seen to them. The reality has been that they articulate the values of Christ and implement the working practices of Genghis Khan" (p. 5). In a survey of playwork settings by SkillsActive (2006), children said that they wanted "freedom and choice" (p. 24), yet several studies have found that children's 'choice' can be limited to choosing from a variety of activities organised by playworkers (Smith & Barker, 2000; Cole-Hamilton, 2002).

It is therefore questionable whether play as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005, p. 1) is achievable for children in many contemporary settings, either from a philosophical or a practical perspective. Playwork's cherished conceptualisation of play has also come under pressure with the growth of playwork into a wide range of non-traditional settings in an international context (Cartmel & Worch, 2020). In the 40 years since the original definition of playwork play was adopted, adults working in a wide range of understandably restrictive settings such as prisons and hospitals have sought inspiration from playwork. Despite best intentions, it is often a practical impossibility for adults working in such settings to provide or facilitate play which is completely under the control of the child. Furthermore, in the recent global pandemic, children's opportunities to engage in play as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005) have become limited even in traditional playwork settings, where opportunities to develop their own play processes have been curtailed by restrictions such as sharing equipment (King, 2020). Recent work by Willans (2020) has also called into question the notion of some children with specific needs being able to

engage in play as defined in the Playwork Principles, pointing to the need for adults to be actively involved in the play process in order to support some children in their play. Under the current playwork definition of play, such active involvement and sometimes taking a lead would be regarded as adulteration (Sturrock & Else, 1998) as it defies the concept of minimalist adult intervention—or as Hughes (1996) put it, "no approach, no need" (p. 51).

Unable to provide the ideal of 'playwork play', some playworkers have become disillusioned with the current playwork philosophy of play as 'purist playwork' and abandoned it in favour of more adult-led pedagogical approaches (Smith, 2010; King, 2020). This has led to the creation of new interpretations of the rationale for playwork, such as adult-led educational and developmental agendas (King & Newstead, 2019), which legitimise adulteration in the name of playwork. As a result, another raft of meanings of 'playwork' has been developed, including play as learning through play, health interventions and social development (King & Newstead, 2019a). Children may therefore experience 'playwork' in the form of educational enhancement and child development interventions, rather than as an opportunity for them to experience play as a process which is fully under their control. Whilst knowledge of playwork theory, such as the play cycle, play types and loose parts (Sturrock & Else, 1998; Hughes, 2002; Nicholson, 1971), has helped some practitioners to focus on the process of play for children rather than the outcome (King & Newstead, 2019a, 2019b), playwork training and qualifications have been in decline for several years (Dallal, 2015). Less training and education of adults who call themselves playworkers (or playwork practitioners) means that exposure to playwork theory is reliant on individual motivation and interest (King & Newstead, 2020). Adults without a full understanding of play as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005) may be more likely to organise and structure children's play in their free time, particularly if they work in settings where more restrictive practices are required.

Despite Hughes and Williams' best efforts to secure the future of playwork by providing it with a philosophical foundation of play (Hughes & Williams, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1982d), the current definition of playwork play has created real challenges in terms of its practical application

and for the development of playwork as a modern-day profession. Whilst international and national policies support the playwork approach to play, in reality children across the world may be unable to experience a real freedom to play in supervised settings for a range of pragmatic and ideological reasons as described above. A fresh approach to describing and defining 'playwork play' may liberate children (and adults) from the current definition's conceptual constraints and provide clarity for practitioners working in a range of settings to put the playwork approach to play into practice. It could also help to further distinguish playwork from other professions which use play to achieve adult agendas when working with children, for as Gladwin (2008) observed, there are many adults working in supervised settings who could facilitate children's free play with relevant professional support. This could then lead to more children experiencing play on their own terms within the constraints of the supervised settings in which they find themselves.

Conclusion

The philosophy of what is commonly known as 'free play' has underpinned the UK playwork field for the last 40 years (American Journal of Play, 2008). This chapter has described how the current definition of playwork play, as "a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated" (PPSG, 2005), has been widely adopted at international and national policy levels. However, it has also been demonstrated that the practical application of the playwork definition of play creates several tensions and dilemmas for playwork practitioners, which may result in children's experience of playwork being very different to that intended by the playwork definition of play. It is proposed that a revised definition of 'playwork play' may enable more children to truly experience 'free play' in the name of playwork.

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Dangers in the Invisible Playground? Young People and Online Play

Pam Jarvis

Introduction: Young People and Play

The English Secondary School Curriculum document (Department for Education (DfE), 2014) uses the word 'play' exclusively in its meaning to 'play a role'; there is no mention of the concept of play-based activity in learning, not even within teacher-directed activity. The vast majority of research on older children is situated in school, and where play is referred to, it is usually in the sense of classroom activity that children might find fun. In a twenty-five-year career researching play, I have found that children over 11 when questioned about play often perceive this as something younger children do, possibly because of the prevailing culture. But when they are asked about 'having fun', they frequently begin to talk about what are best described as play activities. So, what is 'play'? Huizinga (1950) proposes that play and culture are intricately interwoven, and that

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play is "one of the main bases of civilization" (p. 5). Reed and Brown (2000) suggest that it is an activity that is felt rather than done.

The American play researcher Scott Eberle (2014) comments:

> The Oxford English Dictionary (O.E.D.) presents five, dense, three-column pages of definitions and usages of play and still manages not to exhaust the subject. Play is "diversion" and "pretense." Play is "exercise," according to the O.E.D; play is "free and unimpeded movement;" play is "a boiling up," play is "any brisk activity." To "deliver blows" counts as play, so does "trifling with words," "dalliance," and going "on strike." To "flit and flutter" and to "frolic" is to play, to "abstain from work" is play, to "strut" is to play, and to "clap with the hands" is play. Play is "capricious," "brisk," "lively," and "irregular." The word appears as a transitive and intransitive verb, as a noun, and as an adjective. The word describes actions, the lack of action, and attitudes. The definitions encompass both causes and effects… We can see, then, why it is not so hard to identify play as to settle on a definition of it. (p. 216–17)

Garvey (1977) attempted to simplify the situation by proposing five criteria for play with respect to human beings of all ages:

- Enjoyable
- No extrinsic goals
- Spontaneous
- Voluntary
- Active engagement

But are all these definitions over-exclusive? It could be argued that this list excludes sport, as sporting activity involves certain extrinsic goals and inhibition of spontaneous behaviour, yet sport is still undertaken as an enjoyable leisure pursuit by many human beings. Others might undertake aspects of learning for enjoyment, which could also be seen as 'work' from another individual's perspective. If we see the term 'play' as equivalent to 'having fun', it becomes clear how different individuals and different demographic groups may perceive what is and is not 'play' very

differently, and how many diverse behaviours might qualify as 'play'. Play therefore appears to be a relative behaviour category: "it is fruitless to devote time and effort to defining what play is and what it is not… by de-emphasising the label play it might be easier to get on with the problem of studying the development of behaviour" (Meaney & Stewart, 1985, p. 11–12).

Just as there are many views upon what is and is not play, and what functions play serves within human development, Sutton Smith (1997) proposed that the orientation that researchers take to play research additionally depends upon their academic background. He concluded that not only were there differences between disciplines, but there may frequently be further differences among members of the same discipline, which creates a pessimistic possibility for any amount of reconciliation in the near future.

Such blurred lines make the possibility of neatly categorising play into arbitrarily defined age groups extremely difficult. In carrying out a series of research projects on young people's play over 2015–17, I took the concept of 'de-emphasising' the label and getting on with the study of behaviour as the premise upon which to design a methodology. Many of the responses I received referred to play and socialisation online, and it is principally upon this topic that this chapter is based. The project was undertaken in three stages. Initially, a questionnaire with a mixture of open and closed questions was used to explore perceptions of 'having fun' with a sample of 11–14-year olds. Following a significant amount of reference to online activity in the data gathered from this study, a focus group of 18-year olds located in the same school was subsequently set up to discuss how they had associated and 'had fun' online when they were aged 11–15. Finally, due to findings relating to the perceptions of girls online made in both previous studies, a sample of 18–21-year old young women were surveyed, and a smaller sample interviewed, again about the ways that they had associated with others and 'had fun' online when they were aged 11–15. The use of young adults over 18 as a sample for the latter two parts of the investigation was necessary due to the safeguarding and disclosure implications of using a sample under 18.

Disappearing Play

In 1969, British researchers Opie and Opie published a study of children's free play carried out in streets and playgrounds during the 1950s and 1960s, either interviewing or directly observing the play of some 10,000 children across England, Scotland and Wales. They commented, "there is no town or city known to us where street games do not flourish" (Opie & Opie, 1969, p. vi). Their study was opportunistic in terms of participants, and encompassed children of all ages, as young as 3 and as old as 14, with children of all ages frequently playing together. It is therefore impossible to limit this section to children aged just between 11 and 14 or 15, but it is clear from the historical record that they were involved in, and frequently led, such play for younger children (Opie & Opie, 1959, 1969).

By the end of the twentieth century, children's play experiences had become rather more constrained. Sutton, Smith, Deardon and Middleton (2007) interviewed inner-city and suburban children in Britain about their out-of-school activities. One of the inner-city participants explained: "There's only one park and no one goes on anything because the 18 year olds go on and vandalise everything. There's a playground near the shops and if the police catch you they take you back to your house. 'You're not allowed to go in'" (Sutton et al., 2007, p. 29). The suburban children described spending their free time in adult-organised activities, for example riding, tennis, swimming, dancing and gymnastics lessons, and after school clubs for activities such as chess and learning to play various musical instruments, which "left them very little time when they got home from school to play or do anything else" (Sutton et al., 2007, p. 26). The dwindling numbers of children playing in public areas over the final two decades of the twentieth century is also described by O'Brien, Jones, Sloan and Rustin (2000) who reflected: "letting children play out is becoming a marker of neglectful or irresponsible parenting" (p. 273). Correspondingly, the Children's Society (2007) interviewed 1148 British adults on this topic, of whom 43% proposed that children should not be allowed to go out unaccompanied by an adult until they were 14. Corsaro (1997) described this process as "the institutionalisation of more and more children's leisure activities" (p. 38).

Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2015) propose that parents increasingly directed their children's usage of public space across the period from the 1970s until the 1990s. They comment that childhood in the global north has become far more geographically restricted in terms of 'roaming' than was the case in the past, with successive generations becoming increasingly restricted to homes, gardens and adult-regulated spaces: the "over-scheduled child" (p. 164). They lament that there is a "paucity of research on … what has replaced outdoor [free] play" (p. 164), and also raise the issue of "a fast developing industry of commercially provided enrichment opportunities" (p. 165) which parents are encouraged to view as necessary for the enhancement of children's intellectual, social and physical skills, with the child as a "a project to be developed" (p. 621) rather than a free-range, maturing human being. In a similar vein to Corsaro (1997) and Elkind (2007), Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2015) raise the concept of "the institutionalisation of childhood" (p. 623), adding that parents frequently see such change as progress rather than as a problem.

Upstart Scotland more recently reflected on the disappearance of children from public areas as analogous to the disappearance of birds from areas in which chemicals had tainted the environment, concluding:

> There isn't one simple reason that children don't play out anymore. The build-up of road traffic, break-down of local communities and changes in parents' working patterns are all implicated, as are the ready availability of indoor sedentary entertainment and a generally more fearful climate (probably related to occasional horrifying media stories about abduction). (Upstart Scotland, 2018, online)

There is additionally a related and ongoing debate about the curtailment of risk-taking in the management of Western children, who tend to be driven to school and not allowed to play unsupervised in outdoor environments due to parent perception of traffic (ironically) and 'stranger' danger (Stephenson, 2003), being instead driven to various adult-supervised venues for organised out-of-school pursuits. In the early 2000s, the Labour government made some funding available for playworkers to create inner-city outdoor play projects, principally for children aged 8–14. This met with only very patchy success, not least due to

the evaporation of the funding when a Conservative Coalition Government subsequently took over in 2010. Voce (2015) describes the increasing complexity of the policy as it moved through layer after layer of government, sometimes generating substantial funding streams that enticed well-intentioned professionals to create far more extravagant activities than those that had previously been resourced on a shoestring, and the subsequent disruption of the process when the flow of funding dried up. He recounts the difficulty of communicating with politicians and civil servants about topics that are completely alien to them, but over which they have enormous power, and how playworkers wrestled with the complex and business focused agendas that government inevitably brought to bear on policy creation. "The play movement's voice was small within a burgeoning industry that was being subsidised by the taxpayer, not for all the rhetoric, to improve the quality of children's lives, so much as to allow their parents to go to work" (Voce 2015, p. 65).

From March 2020, social distancing and lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic situation has increased the time that many children spend online, associating with each other in artificial, programmed environments in which a lot of human signalling in communication is missing (Sloan, 2018). This is problematic for both social and physical development, and of great concern when it comes to increasing obesity amongst children (Royal Society For Public Health, 2015). Issues relating to online play and association are explored at greater length below.

Some research of my own, undertaken in the mid-2000s to consider activities sponsored by much smaller streams of funding, made similar findings. I interviewed some playworkers on a small urban play project, funded by small pots of money that had been made available by a large city local authority in northern England for a team of a dozen people collaboratively staffing an inner-city adventure playground to take play experiences out to children in various settings around the city. A particular goal was to encourage parents and practitioners of all varieties, with children of all ages, to let children take a leading role in their own play activities.

The team created 'Play Pods', shipping containers full of art and craft materials, sports equipment and other play resources, which they took to an area, often a local park, and opened up for two hours for children to

come along and play. This was very much in the spirit of providing children with a set of 'loose parts' (Nicholson, 1971), materials that could be used to fulfil any purpose the children could imagine. Sometimes, the playworkers would take one of the pods to a school playground, but they found that teachers frequently seemed nervous about the children using the equipment and subsequently demanded specialist training. The playworkers then had to explain that they were not 'expert' in wood play or in any specified uses of any of the other play equipment and resources, and that the materials were simply for the children to experiment with as they wished. A playworker explained to me:

> One teacher sat me down and said, OK, can you tell me exactly what they are learning from this? I said well, in terms of wood play, you can look at what tools they use and what conversations they are having when they are doing it … look at the self-directed things that are going on, like there's a lot of investigation going on. For example, they might try to make a cart and put different size wheels on one side, and then they figure out it will only go round in a circle, it won't go forwards, all those investigative things'.

The teachers apparently found this type of learning to be quite mystifying, devoid as it seemed to them of any kind of clear learning outcome or designated product. Some teachers were happy to get enthusiastically involved, but the playworkers subsequently found that however well-intentioned such teachers might be, they frequently "*ended up squashing the play. One said like, ten minutes to make a den, and then he tore one den down saying that it wouldn't withstand any kind of strong weather*."

The children themselves oriented rather differently: "*most of them have never seen anything like it… they don't usually understand that we don't want anything from them … It takes a while for them to understand that we are not there to teach them anything. But when they 'get it', we have fantastic relationships with them. When they fill in evaluation forms 'we did what we wanted to do' always comes top of the 'good points' list.*"

It would seem therefore that twenty-first-century attempts to recreate the type of spontaneous outdoor play which, prior to the late twentieth century, children designed and managed for themselves may prove problematic, both on a large and a small scale.

> The fields and woods where rural youngsters once roamed, the streets and sidewalks where urban kids invented amusements and … the parks and playgrounds where children cavorted away from adult eyes no longer constitute the cherished playscapes that they once provided. (Chudacoff, 2007, p. 189)

It could be questioned whether children were ever *entirely* 'away from adult eyes'—for example, most people over 50 will remember that passing adults would sometimes interfere in free-play activities, sometimes with a threat to make a report to parents! But the evidence indicates that in the past, children had more independence to roam and create their own leisure activities, while today's children are more closely controlled, a process Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2015) refer to as "intensive mothering" (p. 625), which could maybe be more accurately described as 'intensive caretaking' which involves not only mothers, and emerges from a cultural change in adult perspectives of childhood over the last three decades of the twentieth century.

The American researcher Peter Gray comments:

> Precisely how fast and how much children's free play has declined over the last half century is difficult to quantify, though all of the historians of play suggest that it has been continuous and great … The most objective attempt at such quantification, but just for a sixteen-year period, is found in the work of sociologists at the University of Michigan, who made assessments of how children spent their time in 1981 and again in 1997. In both years, they asked a large, representative sample of parents in the United States to keep records of their children's activities on days chosen at random by the researchers. They found that children not only played less in 1997 than in 1981 but also appeared to have less free time for all self-chosen activities in 1997 than in 1981. (Gray, 2011, p. 445)

In England, a study found that contemporary children spend approximately half the time playing outside compared to their parents' generation, and that contemporary children lacked access to the outdoor environment in general (Child in the City, 2018). These findings created the impetus for the Guardian Online (2019) to draw together an article outlining a range of neighbourhood projects focused upon 'giving

children back their freedom'. At the time this chapter was written, in Summer 2020, as Covid-19 social distancing still continues to be a source of concern, such issues have disappeared from the public consciousness to a great extent.

This gives even greater importance to the issues surrounding the environment in which children can still associate in which the peer group set the agenda: the online arena. This was the setting for many play and socialisation experiences as described by my initial, younger participant group, with over 60% in all age groups 11–14 indicating that they spent a lot of time engaging with peers online/through their phones. As such, I decided to seek further reflections upon such experiences with two subsequent samples, and in particular, what might be improved for future generations, as the initial sample seemed highly ambivalent about the experience of online socialisation, with responses including:

11-year old girl: 'People get addicted [to their phones] and never, ever want to lose them and some people can't last a day without them'

11-year old girl: 'A lot of people go on their phones rather than going outside, people aren't really social anymore'.

14-year old boy: 'It is too easy to say things that could be mean or hurtful towards other people [on phones or online]'.

11-year old girl: 'You can't connect and see things like their facial expressions'.

11-year old girl: 'When you are face-to-face they can change the tone of voice to say that they are joking'.

14-year old girl: 'It's more lonely online, no banter, less human interaction'.

14-year old boy: '[Mobile phones] give people a fear of missing out on things if they don't have it'.

11-year old girl: '[When you interact with people online] you can't hold their hand or give them a hug or give them some sweets'.

11-year old boy: 'You can't see facial expressions, so you don't know if they are lying'.

12-year old girl: '[You don't know who people are online, so] they could be horrible'.

The subsequent, slightly older participant groups told me that for children of the mid-2000s and beyond, social networking and online gaming was an arena that frequently served as a type of playground. In particular, they viewed it as an area that was largely invisible to teachers and parents, just as streets and woods had been for children in pre-networked societies, thus allowing them to exert some of the types of independence that children in previous generations had been able to access in outdoor free play. However, they felt that there were drawbacks to association in the online environment that they had not fully comprehended in their earlier teenage years.

The Invisible Playground

Young people currently in their late teens and mid-twenties are the first generation to have, in effect, grown up online. There are many websites, and since the mid-2000s, apps available for young children. First-generation children's social networking sites include, for example, Club Penguin® acquired by Disney in 2007 from a small company in British Columbia, Canada, and the NeoPets® website, invented by two college students in 1999 to entertain themselves and their friends. Some years after children around the world began to use the website, in 2005, it was purchased by Viacom®, the company which owns the Nickelodeon cable TV channel (Jarvis, 2017a). The activities which unfolded in Club Penguin®, NeoPets® and many similar websites involved a child using an online avatar to interact with other players within a fantasy environment. There was an element of social networking, and the type of collaborative activity that would go on to be much further developed within 'gaming' websites, as technology advanced.

Obviously, interaction within such environments is different to playing with other children in a local neighbourhood or playground, most importantly the element of paying to enter and to buy 'enhancements', and of playing with strangers whose real faces are hidden behind online avatars. And by the second decade of the 2000s, concerns were widely raised about the commercial nature of the websites and the lack of physical interaction, both in terms of the sedentary nature of the engagement

and the lack of physical presence, leading to reduced social signalling (e.g., Grimes & Regan Shade, 2005; Turkle, 2011).

Gray (2011) comments upon a significant increase of narcissism, anxiety, depression and consequent feelings of poor well-being in later childhood and adolescence, which he proposes is largely due to lack of authentic 'in real life' free-play opportunities.

> Humans are extraordinarily adaptive to changes in their living conditions, but not infinitely so. They evolved as a species in conditions in which children learned through play [so] …. young people fail to acquire the social and emotional skills necessary for healthy psychological development. (Gray, 2011, p. 444)

Online social networks such as Facebook®, Vivo® and My Space® became publicly available in the mid-2000s, and young teenagers immediately began to use them enthusiastically, not only through a PC screen, but also through mobile, networked devices, principally the iPhone, which was launched in 2006. In 2014, GSMA and The Mobile Society Research Unit found that the most common age for children to receive their own mobile (or 'cell') phone in the UK was 10. And, predictably, as social networking and the smartphone reached the end of their first decade, researchers were beginning to identify problems arising for children that emanated from mobile social networking activity (Jarvis, 2017a). Bullying and lack of adult supervision became key concerns, as did incidences of children posting inappropriate comments and pictures on social media that could not subsequently be deleted. But as Boyd (2014) comments, the online arena may be the only 'place' left for many Western teenagers to simply 'hang out' with their peers. So what if social media is the 'last frontier' in this respect?

> If [young people] continue to lack free time for 'real-life' association, might this mean that they will never be free to construct a deep multifaceted, human identity … restricted by circumstance to experiencing the self and others through shallow, sterile online profiles? (Jarvis, 2017b, online).

When my second sample of participants spoke about playing and socialising online, both genders mentioned social media and gaming, but

boys had a lot more to say about gaming, and girls a lot more to say about social media. This follows findings relating to gender difference in adult friendships, "behaviours selected to maintain large, functional coalitions in men and intimate, secure relationships in women" (Vigil, 2017, p. 143). But as Vigil also found, there is much similarity across gender lines with respect to concerns about friendships, and in the online environment, both my male and female participants were most concerned about their lack of knowledge about the people behind online identities, and the ability to hide unpleasant intentions behind the screen.

A typical example of the type of reflection received from both girls and boys follows.

Eighteen-year-old girl (reflecting on her social networking experiences since joining Facebook aged 14):

> *You get all these random people that you would go round adding on Snapchat, and then you would go, you are basically talking to whoever this person is and you don't know them personally, but they have given out their name and you've added them … It's kind of creepy …. [and] If you haven't got very high privacy settings, they can see more of your life on Facebook than Snapchat … .I went back and changed all my privacy settings because I never, ever checked them and they were all … basically I had none on at all and it only occurred to me recently that I have had this account since I was 15 or so and that just all of this stuff was there … .I just assumed that the default setting would be 'only your friends can see this stuff' but it's not, it's like friends of friends and that sort of thing.*

Eighteen-year-old boy (reflecting on his online gaming experiences from the age of approximately 13):

> *if you were playing a game on a computer for game consoles … you could be in a game, playing this game with everyone else and then someone else in the team or in a different team may add you … And most of the time a normal person would be like, 'I don't even know you, like, why would I do that'. But then with PC if you're playing a game or something, you could be on the headset … with everyone else in the game, and you have like a game chat where people will talk and you can start talking in that … With a computer you kind of take away*

that wall, so then it is just open to talk to anybody. But then it is still your decision if you want to talk to them or listen to them or visually see them or have a chat or something. But it takes that kind of wall out of place and anybody can talk to you, anybody can give you a message, anybody can like contact you in some way … and you don't know if your son, or your child, or your friend has accepted a request and is still talking to that person.

The girls spoke of far greater concerns about the ease of linking to 'random people' than the boys, often implicitly evoking the different levels of intimacy in the different types of conversation that occur on social media and those that occur on gaming sites, the focus being on 'chat' about the self and others in social media, and alternately on actions undertaken whilst playing a game on gaming websites. This is not to suggest a narrow, stereotyped vision of the genders using the online environment very differently in general; it simply reflects what a small sample chose to talk about in an interview situation. The only clue we have about systematically different male/female responses to online interaction at the moment comes from relatively small-scale studies such as the one undertaken by Hartman, Moller, I. and Drause (2015) in which the researchers found that males reported more enjoyment when undertaking violent video games, whilst females reported more guilt at engaging in violent behaviour, despite the fact that the 'behaviour' was located in an imaginary, online environment, and were subsequently less likely to become so deeply involved in gaming.

Amongst my own sample, gaming was overall seen as a positive type of interaction, as long as caution was observed about pursuing in-game acquaintances into the 'in real life' environment. The young people were aware of a high-profile murder that had occurred when a teenager had agreed to meet a fellow player offline. They generally agreed that unless they knew someone offline already, they would not agree to meet in real life. Social media was seen as having more inherent, ongoing problems, in that unkind comments and sometimes focused bullying was an integral part of the interaction, and that sometimes the negative aspects of social media could overwhelm the positive.

The Invisible Playground 1: Social Media

In my third sample of participants, aged 18 to 21, reflecting back on their experiences of social media in their early teenage years, one participant commented that while talking to friends on social media made her happy, "looking at what others have constantly makes me feel like I'm wasted and I'm disappointed in myself and the things I've achieved in comparison to celebrities". This duality was common across the range of responses. The ease of keeping in touch with friends and family, particularly those who lived far away, was seen as uniformly positive, but the competitiveness which could descend into bullying was seen as an inherent and significant drawback: "social media can be a nasty place through hateful comments … It is easy to make up and spread false rumours". This in turn created a situation in which users created more elaborately enhanced images of themselves to avoid negative feedback, and other users subsequently consumed these as real depictions of peers and responded in kind, creating a type of 'mutually assured destruction' situation: "unrealistic images … for example editing photos to have an ideal body can affect self esteem massively." The addictive nature of social media was also frequently raised: "I can waste 5/6 hours on my phone, endlessly scrolling, which stops me doing things I should be doing." Over-sharing of private information was also raised as a problem, which could in the worst circumstances "affect people's jobs" and lead to "people stalking what you're doing". Facebook in particular was seen as having a number of integral peer competition problems that could lead to "eating disorders and self harm". One participant summed up the key issues: "it is quite open and people can be reached and hurt easily." The impact of habitual asynchronous online interaction was also raised by one participant: "I have two younger sisters who are scared to ring people or speak to new people because they are used to 'speaking' over the internet."

Thirty-three out of 39 participants in this third sample, reflecting on their own experiences on the internet in their early teens, thought that under-18s should be more restricted in their access to social networking: "some people… post things that are too mature for them, exposing them to harsher things." Others suggested that under-18s should not be able to network online with people they didn't know in real life, that their interactions

should be monitored and content filtered, and that they should not be able to post photographs of themselves or of their friends. One participant commented, "too many young girls are falling into toxic communities that encourage them to act upon low self-esteem or depression." Another, however, reflected upon the impossibility of tracking young people across the internet: "*they'll always find a different platform that you don't know about to go onto it and …. ones that are not well known can be a lot more dangerous.*"

The electronic intrusiveness of social media interfaces was raised by these slightly older participants, in that knowing that someone has read but not replied to a message could seem like a slight, and the 'snap maps' on Snapchat, which allow 'friended' accounts to geographically track one another. This was also raised by younger, school-aged participants in a different guise: the problem of parents constantly 'keeping tabs' on their whereabouts and restricting their physical movement around their local area, tapping into information that was not available to previous generations of parents. This raises some interesting questions, not about what is 'invisible' in teenage social networking, but what might paradoxically be too visible, turning a networked society into a surveillance state.

The addictive nature of social media and the 'stranger danger' are certainly issues that are potentially shared by gaming. However, a new argument specific to gaming has recently erupted amongst researchers, and it is to this the chapter now turns.

The Invisible Playground 2: Gaming

Fortnite® is an online combat game that emerged from a first-generation multi-player game called Gears of War®, initially in 2011. In 2017, a new and updated version, Fortnite Battle Royale, became very popular around the world. In 2018 'crossplay'—that is, players accessing the same game through a variety of devices—was introduced (Petty, 2018). Feldman (2018) described Fortnite® as "an endless playable cartoon". It was estimated to have 125 million users worldwide by the end of 2018 (Marlatt, 2019). Marlatt argues that Fortnite® is 'more playful' than combat predecessor games such as Call of Duty®, Halo® and Grand Theft Auto®; that it

has more humorous and whimsical content, and less 'real' violence overtones. He moreover proposes that new-generation mass multi-player games like Fortnite®, in which up to 100 players can play in the same game together, generate 'digital communities of practice' in which players build social skills including cultural signalling, situated vocabulary and map reading. "Gamers demonstrate the thinking and moves of good students- they are attentive to detail and responsive to complex factors, with robust skills and decision making" (Marlatt, 2019, p. 3). He suggests that teachers and parents should be less negative about online gaming:

> Fortnight offers a salient example of how contemporary notions of multiliteracies connect to constructivist teaching, it may in fact be the task of schools not to banish Fortnite from classrooms but help its connections to scholastic activities flourish for the benefit of student learning. (Marlatt, 2019, p. 7)

Sloan (2018, online) also highlights the positive benefits of Fortnite®, with an emphasis upon its potential to build social skills:

> The last one standing wins. In other, similar games, this is a gruesome progression, but Fortnite renders everything with cartoony bounce; when a shot lands, the result isn't carnage, just holographic dematerialization. Even inside the game, it's only a game.

Sloan reflects upon learning how to make allies on Fortnite,® and the associated benefits: "I've stood on a hilltop with another player and created together a little island in the rushing river of the rules: time and space for negotiation and trust." In this, she evokes the ancient learning that both human and non-human mammals undertake in rough and tumble and chasing play, learning to make allies in order to act collectively to defeat enemies (Jarvis, 2018). However, the social signalling available in Fortnite®—a simple heart emoji—is very different and far less subtle than would exist within the 'in real life' interactions that the game is modelled upon.

Eichenbaum, Bavelier and Green (2014) and Colzato, van Leeuwen, van den Wildenberg and Homme (2010) agree with Marlatt (2019), proposing that multi-player combat games such as Fortnite® where the player

engages with a collaborative and competitive fighting narrative within an online 'terrain' enhance cognitive flexibility, utilising skills that draw upon perception, attention and 'on the spot' decision making. Eichenbaum et al. (2014) outline research that has shown introducing elderly patients experiencing cognitive decline to gaming can improve cognitive flexibility, whilst earlier, more simplistic and one-dimensional games such as Tetris® do not have the same effect. They also describe the benefits of gaming technology for building and practising complex occupational skills (e.g., for racing drivers, pilots and surgeons).

Much has been made of the sinister potential of combat games, in their enhancement of skills used in terrorist activity, particularly in the wake of young male 'shooter' incidents in the United States (US). Ferguson (2008) and Smith, Ferguson and Beaver (2018) propose that their empirical investigations showed no clear causal connection between the rise in 'shooter' incidents and the playing of online war games, and that subsequently, any speculation in the press on this subject is simply moral panic. Olson also proposed that her research did not find any correlation between high engagement in violent online games and aggressive personality traits, and that the experience of the game has additional emotional benefits. She reflects:

> Informal discussions with young adult game players suggest that some use survival and horror games to process fear, playing the game over and over (from different character perspectives, as the game allows) until the frightening content has been mastered … Compared with other media such as books, films, and radio, electronic games appear to have an unusually expansive appeal and serve a surprising number of emotional, social, and intellectual needs. (Olson, 2010, p. 185)

Overall then, evidence indicates that immersion in a game in which the player inhabits an avatar moving around a 'terrain', competing and collaborating with other players and making decisions based on feedback received, seems to have stronger effects than more passive engagement, in terms of cognitive, social and emotional skills enhancement.

However, it is difficult to separate correlation from cause in such research, due to the fact that such a high proportion of US males now have experience of playing online combat games. And clues that there

may indeed be some things to be concerned about have emerged from neurobiological research, such as the study undertaken by Montag et al. (2012). These researchers found that playing frequent online war games dials down the limbic brain activity normally triggered by distressing stimuli, therefore dulling normal emotional responses to the suffering of others. In this construction, the gaming experience operates as a form of habituation, creating emotional suppression that might unleash more sustained violent activity in a real-life environment. This sheds a different and rather more worrying light upon the effect that Olson frames as 'fear mastery'. In terms of where this leads the player, it is very possible that it is individual difference in terms of both temperament and social situation that decides whether or not a player goes on to utilise skills developed within the game in the perpetuation of real-life violence.

Conclusion: The Invisible Playground: Mad, Bad, Sad or Glad?

It is clear that the online environment can evoke some of the worst types of human behaviour, for example, stalking, addiction, bullying, depression and violence. It can also be a place where human relationships are created, and where game playing can enhance both cognitive and emotional problem-solving abilities. But, it can be argued, so can many of the activities that young people undertake in real life situations. It is possible that we may blame many issues upon the fact that an interaction occurred online, when the same problem may also have arisen from a similar interaction 'in real life'. However, it is also true that fully human physical engagement is not possible online, and that the online environment is, in this sense, a poor fit with the natural environments in which human beings have evolved. The key question for the mid-twenty-first century to explore is whether the type of spontaneous free play experienced by nearly all children up to the latter decades of the twentieth century will ever be possible again in Western society, given the closely monitored and physically restricted environment in which the typical Western child currently exists.

Spring Morning

AA Milne, 1924

Where am I going? I don't quite know.
Down to the stream where the king-cups grow–
Up on the hill where the pine-trees blow–
Anywhere, anywhere. I don't know.
Where am I going? The clouds sail by,
Little ones, baby ones, over the sky.
Where am I going? The shadows pass,
Little ones, baby ones, over the grass.
If you were a cloud, and sailed up there,
You'd sail on water as blue as air,
And you'd see me here in the fields and say:
"Doesn't the sky look green today?"
Where am I going? The high rooks call:
"It's awful fun to be born at all."
Where am I going? The ring-doves coo:
"We do have beautiful things to do."
If you were a bird, and lived on high,
You'd lean on the wind when the wind came by,
You'd say to the wind when it took you away:
"*That's* where I wanted to go today!"
Where am I going? I don't quite know.
What does it matter where people go?
Down to the wood where the blue-bells grow–
Anywhere, anywhere. I don't know.

When this poem was written 'motorway' was not yet a word in the English language, and only the centres of large cities were urbanised in ways that we would expect most suburban residential areas to be nowadays. There was no 24-hour global news feed, with instant access to the whole world's experiences of tragedy and disaster, to spread panic across a global population. One of the most poignant lines in this poem is "It's awful fun to be born at all". How many Western children actually think this today? A report recently published comparing the lives of children in

industrialised nations found that British children were most likely to report feeling that their lives were 'meaningless': "British 15-year-olds ranked 69th out of 72 countries surveyed for life satisfaction, with boys in particular among the least satisfied with their lives" (Adams & Barr, 2019, online). While the online environment can seemingly offer many magical experiences, it cannot offer the freedom of a day spent playing in a natural outdoor environment with no agenda other than having fun 'in the moment'.

> As children of the Enlightenment … we hope … that by abstracting the world we can gain control over it. For all the problems that the Internet creates, it's also part of that desire … to reach beyond ourselves. And that's why I think we're done with the books of tech evangelism and books of paranoid worry. The revolution is complete and the next one is coming. The question is: How do we make human these new worlds? (Harris, 2014, p. 21)

And this is the core issue that contemporary generations of parents, teachers and playworkers have to face. We cannot put the internet genie back into the bottle. We cannot remove traffic from busy streets or silence the ever-present chatter of our news media. But if we wish to survive as the species that we currently are, we need to find ways to make life, and childhood in particular, more authentically human, and to create time and space for children to play and socialise, not only within the electronic 'terrains' of the internet, but also in more physical, essentially human ways. While it is certainly possible to play and to socialise in a virtual playground, we need to question whether children within such an environment use their full human faculties, and if not, what the results of such a restricted experience might be.

Is online play woven into our current culture, as Huizinga (1950) proposes? Quite possibly: contemporary children will no doubt spend significant periods of their future working lives communicating with others online, and play in this arena will be a preparation for this. Is it felt rather than done? The children I spoke to certainly seemed to feel that they were playing and socialising in the online environment. It could be proposed

to meet Garvey's (1977) criteria enjoyment, voluntary and mental activity, but the nature of a programmed interaction creates problems with respect to spontaneity and fixed goals. There is also the issue of lack of physical engagement, which raises a problem with play as an activity in which children have opportunities to develop the ability to decipher primate signalling, such as facial expression and 'body language' (Jarvis et al., 2014). This was also raised as an issue by my young participants, for example: "You can't connect and see things like their facial expressions" and "you can't hold their hand or give them a hug or give them some sweets." So does play online constitute an incomplete type of play? This will no doubt eventually add to the lines in the dictionary against the word 'play' detailed by Eberle in 2014.

In January 2020, following soaring increases in child mental health problems, the Children's Commissioner for England wrote to Social Media companies, "I would appeal to you to accept there are problems and to commit to tackling them – or admit publicly that you are unable to." This is an arena in which we are all still learning. In 2017, I suggested, "The first generation to grow up online, for whom networked technology is an integral component of their cultural world, may be best equipped to lead the way in this endeavour." I hope, therefore, that many more 'voice' projects will follow mine, in the pursuit of future solutions.

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Play in the United States of America: Intergenerational Play

LaDonna Atkins and Anita Glee Bertram

Introduction

The world is changing and soon there will be more elderly adults than children (Vespa, 2019). The global demographic transformation shows there is a need for programmes to serve and support both age groups. As a result, there are currently many efforts under way to bring together children, youth, and older adults. The movement connecting generations and creating intergenerational programming has increased and there are a variety of different programme models. Depending on programme needs, dimensions, and availability of the intergenerational groups and programme goals, the designs of the programmes can vary. This chapter

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will selectively review the research and introduce intergenerational play, programming, and a pilot project.

Within the literature, the term intergenerational is defined as a purposeful and regular exchange and learning between children and older generations (Bostrom et al., 2015). Intergenerational programmes provide beneficial opportunities for older adults and children to interact. Play experience between the generations benefits children's overall development and well-being while simultaneously engaging older adults with opportunities to interact, reflect on life, socialise, exercise, learn, share, and lead. Devore, Winchell, and Rowe (2016) describe how organised programmes can bring the two generations together. Community intergenerational programmes have been developed to encourage interactions of diverse individuals, dispel stereotypes, promote values and traditions, encourage volunteering, promote community identities and values, and promote tolerance.

Humans, by nature, live life within generations. More parents are working full-time now than they did in the past, while also being the primary caregivers for multiple generations (Feldman, 2021). According to Cohen-Mansfield and Jensen (2015), older adults and children involved in intergenerational programmes thrive due to shared purpose. Seniors engaged in intergenerational relationships and programmes experience better emotional, physical, and mental health. Likewise, interacting with older adults enables children to develop communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and social skills (Dellmann-Jenkins et al., 1991). The benefits of play are well-documented in research. However, intergenerational play and organised programmes are still an emerging area of research.

Research data shows that intergenerational engagement has positive results despite differentiation in programme goals. Agate, Agate, Liechty, and Cochran (2018) found a positive correlation between play experiences and the development of older adults and children. While differences in beliefs, interests, opinions, and life actions naturally exist between generations, lack of interaction between generations can cause misunderstandings and increase stereotypes.

Upon participation in these programmes, children are provided the opportunity to learn patience and empathy and adults are given the opportunity to combat feelings of loneliness. The societal benefits of

these types of intergenerational programmes have shown positive impacts that warrant more research. The most compelling research demonstrates the health benefits for participating seniors and an incline of higher education performance from involved children or youth (Giraudeau & Bailly, 2019; Kinnevy & Morrow-Howell, 2000).

Current Aging Society

Researchers are proposing that by the year 2030, the United States will have more Americans entering their seventh, eighth, and ninth decades of life than ever before (Wacker & Roberto, 2019). This is because "between 2011 and 2030, about 10,000 baby boomers will turn 65 each day" (Cohn & Taylor, 2014, p. 3). Additional research shows that by 2030, there will be approximately 74 million people over the age of 65, which is more than twice the estimated total for that age in 2000 (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2016). There are many people aging at the same time, and this group of baby boomers are well-known for advocating for themselves. This might be because they are better educated and more well-off financially than previous generations. They also live in nice homes and enjoy the services and programmes that were put in place for their parents and grandparents. They also differ from prior generations in that they tend to marry later, have fewer children, and more divorces (Wacker & Roberto, 2019). Ryan, Smith, Antonucci, and Jackson write, "Compared with their parents' generation, boomers are less likely to have a spouse to rely on and will have fewer adult children to serve as caregivers" (as cited in Wacker & Roberto, 2019, p. 4). Additionally, families are more openly being diverse with divorce, remarriage, lesbian and gay families, and bisexual and transgender families. This may impact families' participation in intergenerational family activities that were seen as tradition in previous generations. It seems that church and community events are occurring more in age silos, rather than continuing to share events in an intergenerational way as was reasonably common in the past (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016). Another difference between generations is that families are now mainly employed in the urban areas instead of working on family farms that were

traditionally passed down from the previous generation. Many families move every few years to follow employment opportunities, taking them away from extended family events. Thus, families do not have the opportunities to engage in intergenerational activities like they did in the past (Kamei et al., 2011). For this reason and the others mentioned previously (increased empathy, decreased misunderstandings, etc.), it is important to create programmes that connect different generations.

Benefits of Intergenerational Programmes

Researchers have recognised the potential of using play to facilitate connections and learning. Play is recognised as a universal phenomenon that occurs throughout the life span (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Research supports intergenerational play and programmes that unite age groups (Devore et al., 2016). These shared play experiences provide benefits to all participants. Park (2015) states:

> There were positive trends in mental health and social aspects of the outcomes such as positive changes in attitudes towards older people shown as better mutual understanding decreased stereotyping of older people, and more respect for them. Better psychological outcomes were found, including reduced anxiety and an improved sense of self-worth. (p. 1)

Emerging research that examines the play between older adults and children shows an overall increase in well-being for all parties involved (Mosor et al., 2014). Older adults who work with children and youth have improved health and report better physical and mental health than their counterparts (Park, 2014, 2015). An additional study found involvement in intergenerational programming can minimise negative behaviours. Tierney, Grossman, and Resch (2000) found that youth were 52% less likely to drop out of school when involved with an intergenerational programme.

Skrpoeta, Colvin, and Sladen (2014) found intergenerational play groups were successful in developing a sense of connectedness and that the groups were successful in developing the opportunity to participate in

society and a sense of connectedness. Their study also found an increase in self-esteem as the older generation felt like they were contributing to society (Skrpoeta et al., 2014). Another study surveyed seniors in several programmes and the results indicated increased feelings of well-being and life satisfaction from their involvement with the children (Seefeldt, 2008).

Research has shown the benefits of intergenerational connections for older adults, even those with extreme mental impairments such as dementia (Su, 2017). Lee and Malone (2007) found that adults with severe cognitive impairments seem to participate in parallel type play (Parten, 1932) while still reporting high levels of positive engagement. Older adults with dementia and other cognitive impairments experienced more positive benefits during interaction with children than they did during non-generational activities (Lee & Malone, 2007; Su, 2017). There has been emerging research showing that playing with digital gaming systems provides meaningful interactions and collaborative play (Piirainen-Marsh, 2010; Zhang & Kaufman, 2016). Researchers have found that playing digital games with youth may increase the cognitive and memory skills of older adults (Zhang & Kaufman, 2016). The relationship that develops as a result of intergenerational play is beneficial to all. Children learn many skills from working with older adults. In turn, older adults learn about innovations and technology by playing with youth and children.

Hatton-Yeo and Ohsako (2000) suggest every intergenerational programme should be purposeful in planning and organising play. The physical layout needs to accommodate both age groups and the design must accommodate the use of assistive devices (Hatton-Yeo & Ohsako, 2000). Researchers have also reported the need to have sufficient training for staff (Gualano et al., 2017). Epstein and Boisvert (2006) found that open-ended, process-oriented activities were more productive and promoted active engagement within intergenerational play. Activities need to be geared to all participants who are interested. Their research found that flexible activities lead children and adults to explore different possibilities when thinking of how to accomplish their tasks. Flexibility also gives both generations a higher chance of building relationships during the process of discovery.

Play reaches its full potential when children are engaged and have opportunities of choice (Ceglowski, 1997). Being able to make choices in play is important not only to engage children, but also to engage older adults who may have limited abilities. Choice of activities with how to participate and what they may participate in/with can be less intimidating than being forced into an activity. This approach to intergenerational programmes supports contemporary ideas of play which emphasise the importance of the process and incorporating flexibility that allows play to develop in its own course (Pellegrini, 2009). Also, Morita and Kobayashi (2013) found that more social-oriented, intergenerational programmes versus more performance-based, intergenerational programmes allow older adults to play more roles and allow for more conversations with their playmates.

Intergenerational Play

Play is important for all ages. Davis, Larkin, and Grave (2002) write, "Intergenerational play provides rich and stimulating opportunities for older adults and children to enjoy each other's company and learn from one another" (p. 1). Play acts as a way to bring generations together, and there are benefits for all who are involved. Scholars have found that children's play is different in intergenerational programmes. Adult interactions in play can facilitate and enhance the experience and sometimes children help older adults in their play. Adults can observe, scaffold, or fully participate with a child involved in play. Much is learned through shared activities between the young and older adults. Quality play experiences are created and nurtured when adults are involved in the process (Rymanowicz, 2018). New skill development for children can also occur with these interactions. Intergenerational Play (2019) states:

> Play is particularly beneficial for children when it's undirected, but children can also gain a lot when adults take an active role in play.
>
> Children's play changes when it is intergenerational, and research shows that children display higher levels of language and problem-solving skills when they have lots of contact with adults. (para. 2)

Environment and interactions create a unique type of play experience. Larkin, Kaplan, and Rushton (2010) explain that in order for play to be beneficial, the environment must be set up to facilitate interactions and play that engage both age groups. Interactions between the groups are exceptionally playful and relationships such as friendships can develop (Larkin et al., 2010). The benefits for children include higher language skills and problem-solving skills (Intergenerational Play, 2019). Furthermore, research by Dellmann-Jenkins, Lambert, and Fruit (1991) concluded that the three- and four-year old children who participated in a nine-month intergenerational programme were more willing to share, help, and cooperate with older adults than those without the same type of experience. Interactions during play give older adults an opportunity to nurture younger people, remember and relive some of their experiences, and possibly give meaning to their lives they may not have felt in a while.

Thus, intergenerational play programmes should be considered invaluable to society because of their benefits for all generations. Intergenerational programmes appear to be a win-win for all participants. The cross-generational experiences provide rich relationships for the children with a person who is amenable, supportive, and not a disciplinarian. Many adults see these types of programmes as a way to give back and they often feel they receive more in return from the children. Children and youth involved in play with older adults develop a healthy interaction between generations. Sharing in the context of intergenerational programming can be a valuable way to break down generational barriers and reconnect with different age groups. According to Vincenti (2004), "Age diversity not only provides opportunities for values, knowledge, and insights, that only experience can bring, to be transmitted from the old to the young, but it provides opportunities for the young to contribute new insights and world views" (p. 2).

Diversity in Types of Play Programmes

The phrase 'one size does not fit all' is true for intergenerational programming. Having a strong "understanding of developmentally appropriate practice and support for both children and elders" (Holmes, 2009, p. 114) should be the foundational factor in planning intergenerational programmes. Secondly, there needs to be a meeting to decide goals and objectives for the programme, so all participants are of the same understanding. Effective training is essential, as it impacts adult and child participants alike.

Additionally, cognitive levels of the older adults and children need to be considered at each step of the planning. Safety of both groups (children and older adults) needs to be discussed. Factors in planning an intergenerational programme should include deciding who the participants will be. For example, some questions to ask are: (a) Will they be older adults who live in the community or who live in a residential facility? and (b) What cognitive function level (high or low) is the programme built to support? Cognitive function of the youth is also an important factor. Age and income guidelines and socio-economic status can impact availability for all generations to be involved in programming,

There are many decisions to be made in planning. What is the purpose of the programme? Is the goal of the programme for participants to develop a bond between generations or is it a way to relieve boredom in their lives? The duration of the programme will be impacted by this decision. How long will the programme last? Session lengths can be in a range from 15 to 50 minutes and sometimes for as long as 120 minutes (Su, 2017). Meeting frequency needs to be considered: monthly, bi-monthly, or weekly? Or, maybe it is possible to choose special times based on holidays or other opportunities.

What type of content should occur between the generations? For example, intergenerational programmes may include various activities such as singing, reading, and/or games (Williams et al., 2012; Isaki & Harmon, 2015; Morita & Kobayashi, 2013). There are many other content areas to consider as well, such as drama, dance, art, puppetry, and exercise. Some programmes are designed for the elders to serve the young,

while others are designed for the youth to serve the older adults. Some are designed to have a mutually beneficial relationship. A programme-needs assessment could be a valuable tool in helping identify what ages, talents, and content might be desired. The options are only limited by imagination.

Different Models

There are different models for different types of intergenerational programmes that depend on population, space, goals, and leadership. Each programme has a specific structure. The types of programmes include shared-site, children visiting residential care facilities, older adults visiting children, pull-out programmes, and community intergenerational programmes. This section briefly explains components of each.

In a shared-site, an organization provides services to both older and younger generations housed in the same facility. Resources such as employees and space may be shared (Jarrott & Bruno, 2003). Childcare centres and senior living facilities (adult day or extended care) are typical examples of shared-sites. The space will require planning with a possible window where older adults could watch the children when they are not actively involved in activities. Outdoor areas must be user-friendly for both the needs of the children and the older adults. For example, there should be paths that accommodate wheel toys for children and walkers or wheelchairs for those who utilise them.

In a shared-site like a residential care facility, children or youth of any age could visit and explore different experiences with the residents. Some of the programmes could be as simple as running errands together. This could be an opportunity for great conversation. The wisdom of the older adults could be shared with the teens. Conversations could include topics like where to go to college and helping with career choices. Children from an elementary school or childcare centre could share time with assisted living or memory care residents living with dementia. Outcomes have been generally positive in several studies addressed by Galbraith, Larkin, Moorhouse, and Oomen (2015). Classroom teachers should attend any activities with children at all times. Also, staff from the

residential care facility should be present, because they are aware of the special needs of each resident.

Programmes in which older adults visit elementary-aged children or middle school-age children are usually more structured. Participants might read together, explore an art project, or even try a science experiment. Classroom teachers often decide what content will be used, but a volunteer could also arrange the events. When adults visit child programmes, concerns might include transportation issues for the older adults and conflicts with other life activities, making it difficult for them to attend every time. Weather has also been identified as a challenge area.

Pull-out programmes can be based in a variety of locations. A pull-out programme may occur anywhere where children/youth and older adults have a location where they can share time together. Hospitals often have a rocker programme for babies who need to be rocked, such as children who are living with HIV or another condition. Mentoring or tutoring could occur in many places. Even in a college setting, students could benefit from the wisdom of older adults. Research is limited in this area but has potential for growth.

Community intergenerational programming is a model designed to benefit the participants. It also serves a need that is not being met in the neighborhood or community. For example, participants may work together to plant a community garden, clean up a roadside area or public park, or serve a holiday meal to those in need. The anticipated outcome of intergenerational programmes is to create new and positive relationships. These programmes give meaning to life for both the young and the old. Programming allows for many options to grow and explore (Holmes, 2009; Kaplan & Larkin, 2004). Because these programmes are clearly important, our team decided to implement a project.

The Pilot: Generations Learning Together

The authors of this chapter started Generations Learning Together, which began as a pilot project and grew into a programme that is now in its fifth year and is being applied in a public school setting. This intergenerational programme began as an interdisciplinary group of faculty that planned a

programme to involve older adults, college students, and preschool children (3–4 years in age). Hence, the name of the programme was established. One of the goals was to have employees work with faculty from other departments and utilise their expertise. The faculty from different departments in Family Life Education (FLE) (gerontology, child development, marriage and family, nutrition, and kinesiology) came together to create the pilot programme.

The other goals of the programme were to (a) provide service-learning opportunities and creative experiences for student learning, (b) provide a programme that would benefit the community, and (c) provide research on intergenerational programming and relationships.

The Programme

Generations Learning Together (GLT) is a shared-site programme. This research emerged in a partnership between a university and a local church. This site provided the venue because this location had better accessibility for older adults than the university. The location of the church was a five-minute walk from the university, which was beneficial for students because it provided a service-learning opportunity for those without transportation. The church acted as a resource for preschool children to be involved in the intergenerational programme, since it already had an onsite childcare programme.

GLT met bi-weekly for one hour for a total of six or seven sessions per semester. During the first year, the team tried 90-minute sessions and found that the time was too long for older adults. The programme currently lasts 60 minutes, and additional time is used for students to set up and clean up the programme. The older adults were recruited through the church, newspaper announcements, word-of-mouth, and contact with several residential care facilities. The programme was funded by several grants and awards which were used to pay for student workers, materials, and supplies for the project. College students utilised concepts from their coursework and helped plan and facilitate the programme. Class assignments were used to help students design playful activities to appeal to all ages.

Play-Based Curriculum

The intergenerational programme was set up to begin and end with a large group "getting to know you" activity in which adults, students, and children try to learn about each other. This was done through music, movement, reading, games, and/or discussions. This structured time allowed for the groups to come together at a common area with a particular curriculum goal (Jarrott, 2011). We found this type of activity put groups at ease before integrating into a setting that required more individual communication and use of more complex skills.

After the large group activity, each participant selected a play activity where they liked to participate. Adults and children were encouraged to work together on projects and activities. These unstructured activities allowed for emergent discoveries and decision-making efforts for all involved. Activities were tailored to meet the needs of all the participants and to allow involvement based on the direction of play. Some activities were planned based on the interest or talent of an older adult participant. Activities offered in the programme included dramatic play, art, manipulatives, and gross motor activities. Activities were planned by students pursuing a range of academic degrees. Faculty members contributed ideas and insight to ensure that all activities were age-appropriate for all participants.

Lessons Learned

Participants were asked to complete surveys prior to their participation and after the programme had ended. Older adults and college students both indicated they had improved perceptions of each other as a result of their participation in the programme. Older adults shared that they loved the experience and have a greater appreciation of college students due to the programme. College students had positive attitudes about the older adults. Some older adults used wheelchairs or walkers for mobilisation purposes. Mobilisation equipment intimidated the college students at the start. However, students reflected that they were amazed at how fun,

playful, smart, and kind the older adults in the programme were. Children were interviewed by their classroom teachers before and after the programme. They indicated that their older friends were "a lot of fun to play with," "that some walked with sticks," and "they reminded them of their grandparents" (Bertram et al., 2018).

Throughout the programme the team learned a significant amount, but we found that flexibility was paramount. The older adults had inconsistent attendance due to doctor appointments, other commitments, weather challenges, and a wide range of other time demands. The team worked to encourage them to come and participate in the program and the team simultaneously ensured them that missing sessions due to commitments was understandable and expected. The reassurances of the team seemed to make the older adults feel better about participating in the programme. Attendance for the older adults' demographic ranged from four to sixteen per session. Classroom teachers attended each session with their students, and college students also engaged with the children. Classroom set up depended on selected activities for each session. Adult chairs and carpeted flooring were provided for each session. Alterations to the learning environment were made to accommodate both wheelchairs and walkers. Preschoolers helped adjust the positioning of tables and chairs to accommodate their older adult friends.

Bringing It All Together

The GLT project was met with such success that our team chose to expand. With the help of the Early Childhood Curriculum Coordinator from the local public schools, a pilot project was initiated at a large elementary school. Our team recruited four pre-kindergarten classes and worked with the public schools to gain permission from the public school system and through the university's Institutional Review Board. Older adults in the community were invited via newspaper, word-of-mouth, and through school and university contacts.

Due to public school scheduling, the intergenerational project was 30 minutes per session. Similar to the programme at the church, the team continued its practices with regard to environment set up, large group

introduction activities, and a selection of choices of playful activities afterwards. Our team was able to implement two sessions before all schools closed due to COVID-19. In these two sessions, all parties involved agreed that the programme was helpful and productive. The public schools have decided to pursue intergenerational programming and they will be expanding the intergenerational programme in the fall to other public-school sites. Due to the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020), more commonly known as COVID-19, the programme was not able to yield enough data to properly assess its efficacy. However, the team does have anecdotal observations about the positive effects of the sessions.

The team asserts that programme experience shows that play-promoting activities best engage all generations. One of the older adults shared that "seeing the children here is the highlight of my week". Another gentleman attended almost every session for four years and there is mutual affection between him and the children. When the team relayed that another programme was being implemented, he chose to attend that programme in addition to our original programme he was already attending. The programme has shown that play-based programmes are meaningful to all ages. One major goal of intergenerational programmes is to create new and positive relationships that enhance life's meaning.

Conclusion

In the United States, trending research shows that intergenerational activities and programmes promote unity. As research continues to yield positive results proving the benefits of intergenerational programming, it is the team's hope that programming will continue to expand. The agency Generations United supports, develops, and finds locations for new programmes and is devoted to the dissemination of information to support intergenerational programmes. The agency provides research, resources, and a database of programme locations. This agency has helped navigate the challenge of the lack of any system that disseminates information regarding effective programme models. As noted throughout the chapter, research has shown that intergenerational play is a vital component to

improving intergenerational relations and human well-being. Intergenerational play programmes yield positive societal results such as increasing tolerance, reducing ageism stereotypes, and improving communities as a society. Intergenerational programmes that support play should continue to be pursued by all of society to improve high level unity in communities, business, politics, government, and international relations.

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Conclusion

Pete King and Shelly Newstead

The aim of this book was to consider how children experience play through their childhood outside of their home across a range of contexts from an international perspective. The book used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) as a framework to explore how children experience play in their childhood between different contexts and how their play is influenced by adults, both directly and indirectly. The range of contexts and cultures presented throughout the book raise questions about universal concepts and notions of 'play', particularly as it is experienced by children throughout their childhood. In this concluding chapter, we consider this in relation to Bronfenbrenner's (1992)

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Ecological Systems Theory and offer a model on how diverse understandings of, and approaches to, play can fit within this theoretical concept.

Bronfenbrenner's (1992) EST consists of five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. As a reminder, the EST is defined as follows:

> The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21)

The EST provides a useful framework to consider children's play across childhood. As the chapters in this book have shown, differences within and between different types of supervised play provision exist internationally. These differences are related to a number of variables which can be seen in the context of Bronfenbrenner's five systems, including the age and stage of development of the child, how the setting has been organised (microsystem and mesosystem), the play philosophy used to underpin professional practice, the guiding policies and principles (exosystem and macrosystem) and how views of play and what constitutes good professional practice have changed over time (chronosystem). A further consideration in relation to the chronosystem is that, throughout their childhood, children's play will change as they get older, from preschool through formal education and to increased freedom in their own leisure time, as the chapters in this book have illustrated.

Another factor which will influence how play is experienced by children throughout their childhood is whether play is viewed by adults as a process or an outcome. The chapters within this book highlight how play as a process or an outcome exists in varying contexts across all of these systems. This will affect children's experience of play as child-led, adult-led or a combination of the two, as this concluding chapter will now explore.

Play: Process and Outcomes

One clear distinction between child-led and adult-led play relates to whether the focus is on the process or the outcome of play. The process and outcome of play was considered in the work of Neumann's (1971) *The Elements of Play*, and the child-led and adult-led continuum incorporates Bergen's (1988) 'Schema for Play and Learning', where either the process or outcome could be determined and controlled by the child, the adult or both playing together.

Neumann (1971) identifies and discusses three elements of play, criteria, process and objectives, which, when combined, form "hypothetical definition of play" (p. 11). Neumann (1971) explained each element as follows:

- The criteria of play are intrinsic motivation, internal reality, and the internal locus of control of the activity
- Play is a process which has modes (a way or manner in which something occurs or is experienced, expressed, or done) and operations (an action of functioning)
- Play is directed towards objectives (objects, subjects, functions and locations)

Bergen (1988) developed a continuum with 'free play' at one end where children have "the greatest degree of internal control, reality and motivation" (p. 171) and at the other end 'work', which is "an activity that is engaged in to reach an externally defined goal and for which motivation is external" (p. 173). In between these two extremes, Bergen (1988) has three more schemas of play of 'guided play', 'directed play' and 'work disguised as play'. Bergen's (1988) schema of 'free play' reflects predominately Neumann's (1971) first element of intrinsic motivation and play where the child is in control of their play. With 'directed play' to 'work disguised as play' the adult has more control, and this reflects Neumann's (1971) third element of objectives and outcomes.

The start of play can be initiated by the child themselves or by other children or adults and this can influence both the process and the outcome of play in terms of following either a child- or adult-led agenda.

Weisberg et al. (2013) outline the difference between child-led, guided and adult-led play:

> Finally, we emphasize that play is child led. While it is notoriously difficult to distinguish play from other kinds of activities, one way to distinguish it involves looking at who enjoys the locus of control. In play, children's interests—not those of adults—determine how an interaction moves forward …. guided play, a form of play in which adults scaffold children's active exploration in service of a learning goal …. This situation still counts as play because the adults follow the children's lead … When the adults are in control, the activities resemble work dressed up in play cloth. (p. 42)

In child-led play, the role of the adult is to support the process of playing, where play is considered as "freely-chosen, intrinsically motivated for no external reward" (Garvey, 1990). One of the ways of doing this, for example, is to support children's play cycles (Sturrock & Else, 1998). This does not necessarily mean that children do not have outcomes in their play, but whether these outcomes are reached is purely down to the child: they choose whether they meet their outcome, change their outcome or just give up and do something else. Adults can be part of this play process, but more often they take more of an observer role unless the child 'invites' the adult to play by issuing a play cue (King & Newstead, 2020). As soon as the adult becomes involved in the outcome of play, for example in guided play or play as work, the level of control and choice children have in their play decreases (King & Howard, 2016).

The potential combination of process and objectives in play raises important questions about whether play is "predominately considered a starting point, a process or an outcome" (Howard & King, 2015, p. 133) by adults, and the resulting experience of play that children have in different settings across Bronfenbrenner's five systems throughout their childhood in relation to adult-led and child-led. When we consider Neumann's (1971) hypothetical definition of play and the three aspects of criteria, process and objectives, we can model how child-led and adult-led play can be considered in relation to Bronfenbrenner's (1992) Ecological System's Theory to include Bergen (1988), Pyle and Jackman (2020) and Zosh et al.'s (2017) umbrella term of playful learning. The

process and outcome of play will be influenced by many factors, some in the control of the child and others not. Factors not in the control of the child can include those in the systems far beyond the reach of children in the exo- and macrosystems, such as adult-led outcomes, policy and strategy and legislation. This model is shown in Fig. 1.

Identifying the focus of play (child-led or adult led) in relation to process or outcome through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system provides a framework for the student, researcher and practitioner interested in children's play to consider the complexity of factors which influence children's experience of play, as will now be demonstrated with reference to the chapters in this book.

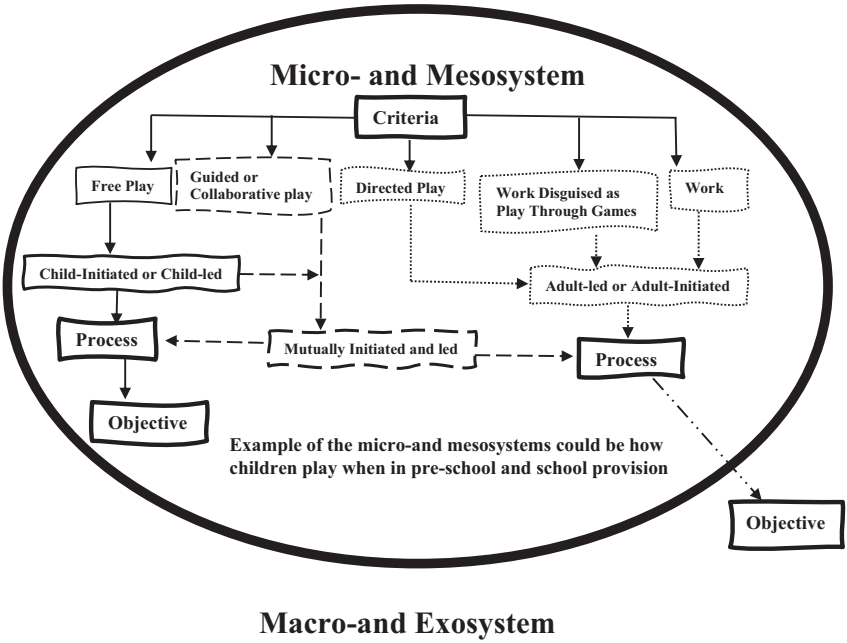

Fig. 1 Children's play and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Play Across Childhood and the Macro- and Exosystems

When considering play in the macro- and exosystems, the theoretical underpinning of play will have an influence on policy, strategy and professional practice as shown in the preschool and school educational chapters in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, South Africa and Sweden. In relation to the chronosystem, many of these theorists have 'stood the test of time'. Play from a Vygotskyian perspective in respect to the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (Vygotsky, 1978) and the adult role in 'scaffolding' (Wood, 1988) the child's play to support their development from their actual to potential level is commonly cited in the early years and formal schooling years. In addition, Piaget's (1962) classification of play (pretend, symbolic and games with rules) is also commonly cited in conjunction with his four states of cognitive development (sensorimotor, pre-operational, operations and formal). Both Vygotsky and Piaget are linked to UK curricula discussed by McInnes in her chapter. In recent times, other theoretical approaches of using play in preschool provision have emerged, for example Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) (see also Brodie's chapter in this book).

One aspect of play in the macro and exosystems that has emerged more recently with varying impact is the consideration of play as a right for children. The creation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 (United Nations International Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 1990) has in some contexts provided a global influence on policy and practice. For example, Axelsson's chapter discussed the new preschool curriculum in Sweden, the 'förskola', which states that the "preschool should reflect the values and rights expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" (Skolverket, 2019, p. 5), whilst Malan's chapter explains how the UNCRC is reflected in recent South African educational legislation. However, as Weitzel's chapter on Head Start in the United States of America (USA) describes, not only is the UNCRC not included within the Head Start programme, but there is opposition from the Government to ratify the convention. Where the

UNCRC is considered within UK educational curricula, the inclusion of and emphasis on children's rights varies between the four nations of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For example, there is no mention of the child's right to play in the English Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education (DfE), 2017).

Although the recognition of the right to play has international support, the inclusion within national strategies and policies can be limited, as discussed in Newstead and King's chapter in respect of England. The impact of legislation, strategy and policy within the macro- and exosystems has both a direct and indirect effect on how children play within the meso- and microsystems, for example the use of play-based learning or Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) (see Brodie's chapter).

Play Across Childhood and the Micro- and MesoSystems

When we consider how children experience play within the micro- and mesosystems, this is where the child may have more control over the play within the preschool, educational or leisure context. For example, in free play, where play is child-led and child-initiated, the process of play is supported by adults. This is the approach taken by playwork practitioners as discussed in Newstead and King's chapter, where the focus is about adults supporting the process of play, rather than achieving outcomes for children. As children get older, as outlined in Jarvis's chapter, the role of the adult may decrease. However, supporting the process of play may involve providing the resources, such as the increase in digital play where mobile phones and games consoles provide the mechanism for young people's self-directed play in what Jarvis terms 'the invisible playground'. There is also the possibility that, in relation to gaming in the 'invisible playground', the objective of the play is governed by factors in the macro- or exosystem, for example, when taking part in an online tournament. Play for older children may also result in congregating in groups in

microsystems such as local parks and open spaces, which will provide other variables which may impact on their play.

As discussed by several authors in this book from different countries, children's experience of play in preschool and early years provision spans the continuum from child-led to adult-led. Within the macro- and exosystems, this may involve play-based learning where the child takes more of a lead through guided or more collaborative play with a supporting adult. The move from child-initiated or directed play may also result in the objective of the play to move from within the micro- or mesosystem to outcome-based criteria within the macro- or exosystem. This is very much evident in Weitzel's chapter on the development of Head Start in America. Here, as with Malan's account of preschool provision in South Africa, more adult-led play occurs as there is no or little play training for staff, a similar point made by Hyndman in an Australian context.

The importance of playfulness in adults is discussed by McInnes and Axelsson in this book, through playful pedagogies and the more relaxed curriculum approach in Swedish preschool. Playfulness can be an approach used by teachers to support the process and objectives of play, as in, for example, the Playful Pillars developed in Northern Ireland (Walsh et al., 2010) based on DAP (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Within such guided and collaborative play, the adult is still being 'led' by the child. However, learning objectives as in play-based learning are set outside in the macro- and exosystems where the objectives of the play are constructed outside the micro- and mesosystems. This raises questions about how much control of their play children can have in these circumstances.

In other situations, such as in the growing area of intergenerational play, the adult may take a more collaborative role but still allow play to be initiated and led by the child. This was described by Atkins and Bertam in their chapter on intergenerational play between the preschool child and the older adult. Here the play may be mutually initiated and the child and the adult may get different benefits from playing together in the microsystem. In the example provided from their intergenerational project, the process of play, rather than the outcome, would appear to be the focus for both the child and adult.

The difficulties of defining play have been well-established in the literature (King & Newstead, 2020). Perhaps one of the challenges in coming to a universal understanding of play from an adult perspective is that, as this book has shown, children's experiences of play are affected by multiple variables created by connections and contradictions within the various systems in which children find themselves. Even from this brief global perspective, this book has raised the question on how universal the concepts and notions of 'play' can be, particularly as it is experienced by children in different contexts throughout their childhood. In trying to define play as a universal phenomenon, perhaps adults are in danger of ignoring or homogenising children's diverse experiences of play, not only within their own cultural and geographic contexts, but also as a result of children's play taking place within and across Bronfenbrenner's different systems within those broader contexts. Furthermore, in trying to conceptualise 'play' as one form of experience, adults also risk overlooking the potential impact of the adult-created systems and their own immediate individual influence on the connections and conflicts created by those systems. Perhaps a more elaborate approach to 'defining play', using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, could result in a more nuanced approach to recognising children's diverse experiences of play throughout their childhood. It could also help adults with an interest in children's play from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives to acknowledge the need for children to experience play throughout their individual childhoods in the many different forms as allowed by the various systems they find themselves in.

Conclusion

This book has discussed how children experience play in a range of contexts from preschool, formal education and their leisure time, based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) Ecological Systems Theory (EST). It has illustrated commonalities and differences in approaches to children's play provision which will have an influence on children's experience of play throughout their childhoods. As discussed in this concluding chapter, children's play will be influenced and affected by aspects within the

macro-, exo-, meso-, micro- and chronosystems that determine whether the process or the outcome of play is the focus, and consequently affect the experience of play for the child. The range of contexts presented throughout the book raise questions about universal notions and concepts of 'play', particularly as it is experienced by children throughout their childhood. Further exploration of these complex and interweaving systems and factors may lead to new perceptions and conceptualisations of 'play' from an adult perspective.

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