

Play:

Challenging educators' beliefs about play in the indoor and outdoor environment

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WESTERN DISCOURSES OF EARLY childhood pedagogy promote a play-based approach to learning, growth and development. However, play is a contested concept. Educators' understandings can vary from allowing freedom for children to play without interference, through to a range of adult engagement levels. The Australian *Early Years Learning Framework* adopts a play-based approach to children's growth and development, though says little about adult roles or intentionality in play. This paper draws from recent research that explored educators' beliefs and understandings of their roles as intentional teachers within indoor and outdoor learning environments. Findings highlighted differences between role and responsibility perceptions whereby educators shifted roles from teacher to supervisor between contexts. Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural approach that regards play as a social event and the leading source of development, promoting cognitive, emotional and social development in young children (Connery, John-Steiner & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010), we believe that a re-examination of the role of the educator in children's play requires specific attention. Finally, based on the research, we contest the notion of 'free play'. This paper suggests that by acknowledging the role of the educator as an intentional teacher both indoors and outdoors, and emphasising the complexity of the educator role, a more robust definition of play that is reflective of contemporary early childhood contexts and curricula can evolve to strengthen educator understanding and practice.

Introduction

Early childhood educators in the western world have long been committed to the notion of 'free play' or 'free choice' as a core pedagogical approach (Lester & Russell, 2008; Shipley, 2008; Siraj-Blatchford, 2005; Wood, 2014). The Australian *National Quality Framework* (NQF), urges educators to continually be aware of teachable moments and learning opportunities for children throughout the day (ACECQA, 2013). To achieve this the Australian *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) advocates a play-based pedagogy explaining that play provides opportunities for children to expand their thinking, 'enhancing their desire to know and learn' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15). The EYLF states that educators 'take on many roles in play with children and use a range of strategies to support learning. Educators are encouraged to recognise spontaneous teaching moments as they occur and use them to build on children's learning' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15). The EYLF does not however specifically identify the possibility of

these being during free play. In recent years, evidence has indicated that the least successful learning environments were those where children were left to their own devices or to engage in long periods of undirected play (Broadhead, 2004; McLachlan, Fleer & Edwards, 2010). This research further argues that play-based learning is most effective when it is interactive, involving people, objects and the environment and educators skilled in their support roles.

A recent study by the authors identified important differences in the role educators took when children moved to outdoor spaces and from planned activities to 'free play' or 'free choice' environments. When outdoors, the educators in this study prioritised 'supervision' of children in a 'stand-back' manner (primarily for safety reasons), to the detriment of time spent in meaningful interactions. This led to centres creating an artificial separation of 'play' (children playing with no adult interaction) from 'curriculum' (involving teacher-guided practices) (Bodrova & Leong, 2010), embedding a perception that learning happens indoors and play happens outdoors. The early

childhood habitus of play being 'free', particularly when outdoors, was shown to result in missed opportunities for meaningful learning (Leggett & Ford, 2013). We argue that this belief contradicts the aims of an early childhood curriculum to encompass all the events and experiences that occur within both indoor and outdoor spaces (DEEWR, 2009) and the intention of the EYLF that educators draw on and expand spontaneous teaching moments.

The aim of this paper is to address some of the misinterpretations surrounding play and the place for teacher intentionality and to investigate why a major shift from 'teacher' to 'supervisor' occurs between indoor and outdoor learning environments. This paper first presents a discussion on the role of educators in intentional teaching in relation to children's play within indoor and outdoor learning environments.

The role educators play

The EYLF describes curriculum as 'all the interactions, experiences, activities, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9). What is included or excluded from the curriculum affects how children learn and develop. Intentional teaching therefore, should occur throughout the day, in all spaces, with educators continually aware of opportunities for intentionality that arise with children. The EYLF defines intentional teaching as:

Educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have always been done that way (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15).

The EYLF states that 'both indoor and outdoor environments support all aspects of children's learning and invite conversations between children, early childhood educators, families and the broader community. They provide opportunities for sustained shared thinking and collaboration' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16). This EYLF statement implies the need for ongoing intentionality. Worryingly though, one study by Little, Wyver and Gibson (2011) found that practitioners spent the majority of their time 'supervising' children's outdoor play with the adult role during observed play episodes being made up of 86.87 per cent supervision (Little et al., 2011). This may be reflective of a Piagetian child-centred developmental approach that still maintains significant power (Wood, 2014) where children learn from their own engagement with their environment without adult interaction (Piaget, 1970), and/or the perception of pressures to minimise risk. Either way, it is contrary to the EYLF that advocates a range of theoretical underpinnings to frame intentional teaching. Further evidence from the Little et al. (2011) study found that educators often felt that they were invading children's play when outdoors, and preferred to just 'look on' rather

than become 'involved'. This is reflective of Wood's (2014) assertion that free play and free choice are part of the established discourse of child-centred learning.

Research on children's play by Fleer and Richardson (2004) found that educators spoke about the importance of not interfering in children's play, describing their role as facilitating and extending it instead. Educators supported the concept of 'self-learning' where programming was closely related to choice and the interests of children. This indicates some tensions and uncertainties about the difference between interfering and facilitating, revealing an absence of skilled intentional teaching knowledge and ability to draw on a continuum of teaching strategies (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2015) and contemporary theoretical underpinnings. In a national review of children's play in Great Britain, play is described as a process that is freely chosen and defines it as being what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons (DCMS, 2004). There is little reference to the role of the adult. The review, however, mentions that the role of the adult is to support play opportunities. In a more recent study by Ridgway and Quinones (2012), further tensions involving the role of the educator when outdoors were revealed. In this study, early childhood practices of observing children's play but not engaging in play were challenged by the authors who believe that educators' understanding and awareness of the pedagogical role in sustaining children's thinking is vitally important for implementing a play-based curriculum.

Careful planning and management of the outdoor and indoor environments is an essential component of effective, comprehensive intentional teaching (Epstein, 2007). The EYLF suggests that educator guidance and engagement in sustaining play is essential for learning and development within quality early childhood services. Ridgway and Quinones' (2012) research found that it was not only important to consider the 'child playing, but to pay close attention to the complex interactions between the child and the educator' (p. 53), reflecting a sociocultural shift in concepts and implementation of play. Pramling Samuelsson and Fleer (2010) suggest that 'what is needed is a new model for teaching and a different way of thinking about the role of the teacher' (p. 41). The EYLF definition of play echoes both traditional and contemporary views, stating that play is defined as providing 'opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 5). It is reflective of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and play policies in the UK, and as in the UK, reveals tensions between play concepts and policy goals (Wood, 2014). What is missing is acknowledgement of the role of the educator (and others) as part of children's play. We argue that the current definition limits how play is understood. The next section challenges the notion of 'free play' through the sociocultural theoretical lens of Vygotsky (1976).

Can play be 'free'?

Historically, beliefs about play developed from Rousseau's work where children were believed to benefit from freely running and engaging in nature unhindered by adults (Gianoutsos, 2006). Rousseau further advocated for children to have no other guide than his/her own reason (1965), and embedded discourses in early childhood education continue to advocate free play and free choice, echoing past theorising (Wood, 2014). More contemporary thinking however, contends that while play is necessary for learning, the role of the educator is equally important in advancing children's thinking and developing their skills and abilities further.

Vygotsky (1976) not only advocates for play, but situates the role of the educator and more capable peers as essential components of social learning within play. As Vygotsky emphasised, young children's play is not frivolous; it is an intensely absorbing activity that serves as a powerful matrix for children's learning and development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Nicolopoulou, 1993, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). Vygotsky's ideas regarding play are of vital importance to the preschool years. He believed that play is the leading source of development, promoting cognitive, emotional and social development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Vygotsky, 1976). Play according to Vygotsky involves three components: (1) children create an imaginary situation; (2) take on roles and act out roles; and (3) follow a set of rules determined by specific roles. Play therefore has a purpose, is intentional and is multidirectional according to the involvement of various players within social-cultural contexts.

Play is often considered to be a practice initiated by children, while learning is viewed as a result of practice initiated by adults (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). In the context of early childhood curriculum, play and learning can seem separated when, for example, planned experiences such as group-time, craft-time and circle-time have direct teacher input, and other time is allocated for supervised play. It is understood that children create knowledge as they play (Dau, 1999; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). Children's playing and learning is always focused on something; therefore, the notion of a 'free play' environment may certainly be considered a myth (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

From copious long-term research, we well understand that children learn through play (Krasnor & Pepler, 1980; Pramling Samuelsson & Fleer, 2010; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2010; Thomas, Warren & de Vries, 2011; Vygotsky, 1976). Therefore, educators' roles in sustaining children's engagement are of vital importance. Collaboration with another person, adult or peer, in the zone of proximal development leads development in significant ways (Vygotsky, 1976). What is less well documented and understood however is the critical role of the adult in promoting learning through play

within social and cultural environments. Despite clarity in the EYLF about curriculum as all-encompassing, factors discussed in the next section impinge on the role of educators within contemporary Australian early learning outdoor play environments.

Constraints around play

Australia has recently been involved in a rapid reform where legal systems comprising the National Law and National Regulations (ACECQA, 2013; NSW Government, NSW Legislation, 2013) collectively govern a uniform national approach to the regulation, monitoring and assessment of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services (Cloney, Page, Tayler & Church, 2013). One area where regulatory requirements have significantly impacted Australian educators is in the outdoor learning environment. A national concern for sun safety and children's safety and wellbeing is highlighted in the regulations by the need to supervise children 'at all times' (NSW Government, NSW Legislation, 2013). This impacts not only children's freedom and engagement with the outdoor environment, but the availability of the adult to take an interest in children's play and learning.

Safety concerns during outdoor play are more prevalent due to the nature of gross motor activities and environmental factors. In a study by Munroe and McLellan-Mansell (2013), educators were asked to describe the barriers in outdoor play. Almost all educators in this study expressed concerns about safety. Regulatory requirements for playground safety have previously been identified as having a detrimental impact on the quality of play and the benefits of risky play and its provision. In a study by Little and colleagues (2011), regulations were identified as a key factor associated with practitioners' perceived inability to provide challenging experiences for children outdoors. Educators felt that regulations supported, but at the same time constrained their practice, were inflexible and limited the types of experiences and equipment they could provide for the children. This is despite childhood being viewed as a time for increasing independence and autonomy through learning to manage risks. Lester and Russell (2008) warn that an 'increasing preoccupation with risk and fear has served to diminish the quality of play provision' (p. 152). With more children attending early childhood services for long periods each day, it is becoming important that services reflect on the provisions of facilitative environments where children can safely take risks that extend their abilities (Greenfield, 2003; Milteer & Ginsburg, 2011). Environments that support risk-taking behaviours allow children to demonstrate they are capable, resourceful constructors of their own learning (Stonehouse, 2001; Tovey, 2007). The following research by the authors further investigated educator perceptions of regulatory requirements and constraints around their practice during outdoor play.

Australian research on intentional teaching

Our in-depth investigation explored the intentional teaching strategies of educators with four- to six-year-old children in indoor and outdoor environments. The major focus was on the intentional teaching practices of educators and was drawn from a larger doctoral study (Leggett, 2015). The data reported here focuses on the differences revealed between the educators' practices when transitioning from indoor to outdoor learning contexts (Leggett, 2015; Leggett & Ford, 2013). This qualitative research drew on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) within context-dependent case study analysis as a methodology to elicit rich data on the interactions that occurred between educators and young children (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Charmaz's (2006) constructivist grounded theory is based primarily on Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory. Her approach is consistent with a constructivist epistemology and ontology 'placing priority on the phenomena of study and seeing both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 330). Constructivist grounded theory involved the piecing together of data from multiple viewpoints in order to construct a picture of what intentional teaching 'looks like' for educators within their sociocultural context. The purpose of constructivist grounded theory research is to generate theory through a collaborative approach where data is collated, analysed and re-interpreted (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). By developing a rapport with educators and collaborating together in understanding their shared worlds, constructivist grounded theory allowed the group to begin to discover and develop theories and themes as they emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2011, 2014).

Methods

Participants

Following ethics approval from the university ethics committee (approval number: H-2011-0330), three early childhood centres in NSW volunteered for this research. From these three centres, five female early childhood educators, one male early childhood educator and 59 children aged four to six years agreed to participate. Educators and parents/guardians of children consented to audio-recordings of interactions between educators and children, observations by the researchers and photographs taken by the researcher of educators and children. A primary consideration for this study was that the researcher and participants made decisions and acted in ways that promoted and protected the rights of children, who are generally considered to be voiceless in contemporary society (Nutbrown, 1996; Rodd, 1994; Spriggs & Gillam, 2008). The researchers demonstrated consent by gaining assent for children's involvement prior to the study as well as at each visit, and by respecting children who did not wish to be recorded, photographed, or observed.

Data collection

Various data collection tools were used to compile rich data from the three participating centres as part of the case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Six educators in this study used digital voice recorders to record their interactions with children when they felt an intentional teaching moment arose as well as keeping notes in a personal journal. Educators were also invited to attend five focus group sessions planned for each month where in-depth reflection and discussions on intentional teaching practices in response to questions from the researcher were recorded. The university researcher's role involved the collection of data through observations (Boudah, 2011), researcher memos (Charmaz, 2006; Lempert, 2007), field notes (Yin, 2011) and the collection of artefacts such as children's work samples and educators' planning documentation. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was used to store data and analyse transcriptions including 117 transcribed interactions between the educators and children. Key phrases and words were coded and concepts arising from the data were categorised. Focusing on sections of text in order, naming concepts and repeating the process is what Strauss and Corbin (1994) call open coding and Charmaz (2006) calls initial coding. This initial coding supported focus group interviews by naming emerging themes and framing discussions about intentional teaching and intentional teaching strategies.

Findings and discussion

Findings from focus group sessions and the transcribed interactions between educators and children revealed notable differences in how the indoor and outdoor environments were used as spaces for intentional teaching moments (Leggett, 2015; Leggett & Ford, 2013). Educators expressed concern about their role because in the outdoor environment more vigilant supervision of the whole area became a priority. They explained that this left much less time for meaningful interactions that could be constituted as intentional teaching moments, confirming research by Little et al. (2011), Munroe and McLellan-Mansell (2013) and Lester and Russell (2008). The data revealed that there was a definite shift in the role of educator from 'teacher' to 'supervisor' when moving from indoor to outdoor learning environments (Leggett & Ford, 2013). Figure 1 represents five frequently used intentional teaching strategies by educators during play experiences in both environments. As indicated in Figure 1, very few opportunities to extend children's thinking were implemented outdoors.

The Figure 1 graph provides compelling evidence that intentional teaching practices occurred primarily within the indoor learning environment. The decrease in interactions by educators indicates a reduced effort to intentionally teach or sustain children in their learning.

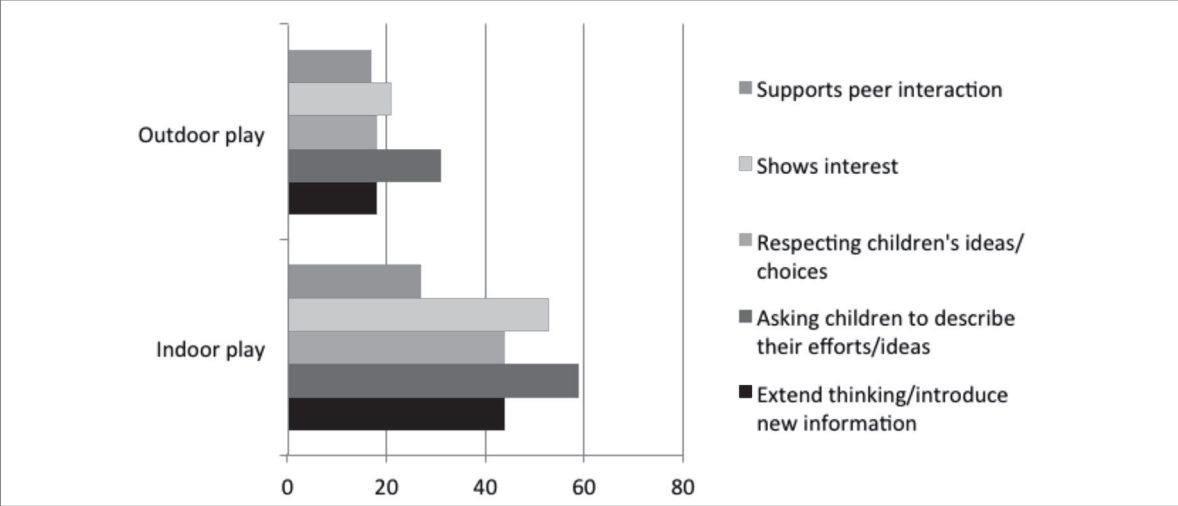


Figure 1. Intentional teaching strategies and the number of occurrences when used by educators during indoor and outdoor free-choice experiences

The educators still asked the children questions and showed interest in their peer relations, but didn't see intentional teaching as a focus outdoors. Figure 2 indicates the five most frequently used strategies by educators as they occurred in indoor and outdoor planned group experiences.

The Figure 2 graph provides further evidence for how educators were intentionally using large or whole-group experiences indoors as a platform for teaching children curriculum content and saw this as their primary intentional teaching opportunity and imperative. Analysis of the data indicated that educators planned more organised group-time experiences during indoor time than when outdoors.

Evidence in this study revealed a major reason for the low occurrence of intentional teaching when outdoors. It was found that educators viewed their role as a supervisor rather than a teacher when outdoors due to emphasis on regulatory requirements involving children's safety and wellbeing. The next section of this paper describes how participants in this study viewed play and their involvement in it.

Play-based learning: Indoor to outdoor environments

Most educators agreed that the outdoors produced a sense of freedom for children to explore without the

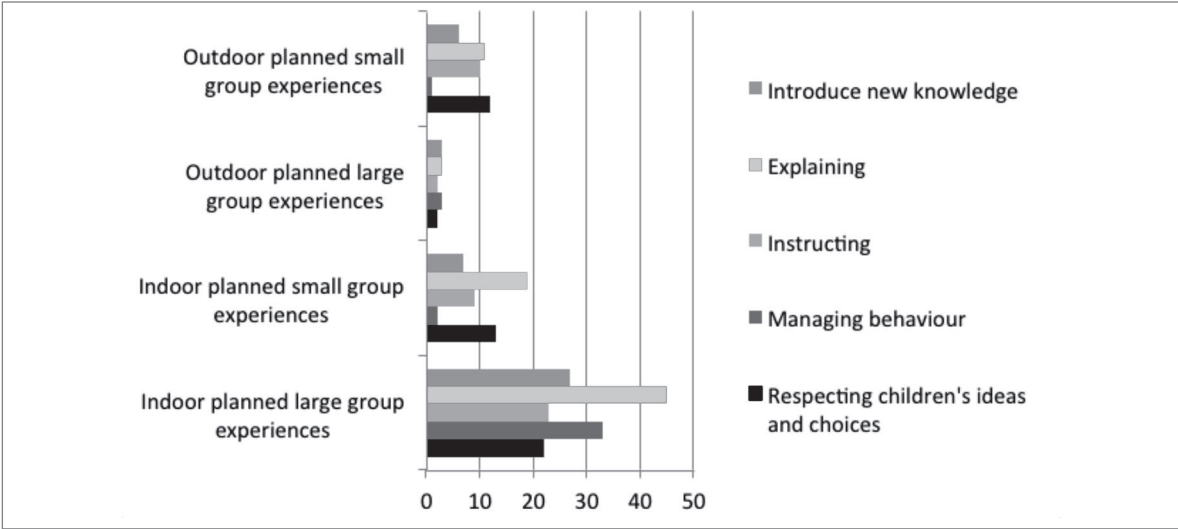


Figure 2. Intentional teaching strategies and the number of occurrences when used by educators during indoor and outdoor planned group experiences

'invasion' of educators asking questions or getting in their way. Educator Carl commented that 'sometimes we need to step back and just let them go ... you don't want to intrude'. All educators expressed the belief that outdoor play became open, free and less controlled, and they felt released from their obligation to 'teach'. Sally mentioned most educators at her centre felt a sense of relief when going outdoors stating 'thank goodness they are outside'. Wood (2014) points out that play is always controlled to some extent by teacher beliefs and values, the meanings they attribute to play, curriculum, policy and classroom order goals and regulations making the notion of 'free play' a chimera.

At the third focus group session, educators were asked: 'How much does supervision responsibilities impact on your ability to intentionally teach children while outdoors?' Educators indicated a major shift in their perceptions of their pedagogical role. Rita, although an experienced educator, felt the pressure from this expectation, raising the question: 'Where intentional teaching sounds lovely, how do you interact meaningfully with a small group when supervising a large group? You can't just leave a whole group of children to intentionally engage with just one or two children'. This question reveals the complexities of the daily mental juggle between their pedagogical role as an intentional teacher and the need for taking the regulatory requirements seriously.

Rita's concerns are also understandable when play-based learning in itself is a phenomenon that is difficult to explain well. Play means different things to different people based on personal experiences, contextual relevance to culture, place and time (Goncu, Jain & Tuermer, 2007) and positioning within shifting theoretical discourses. Participants in this study struggled to agree on how play and learning should be defined and managed outdoors. Most agreed that freedom and open-ended play were necessary, while others believed that structure and design for learning was as much a part of intentional teaching practices outdoors as indoors, but struggled to achieve this. Carl shared his observations of outdoor play: 'Watching the two to three [year olds] I think, a big chunk of their day, well it is just aimless!'

In order to find out more of what was meant by 'aimless' play, the researcher asked at a focus group session: 'Taking up Carl's point, do you think the outdoors promotes aimless play?'

Joan agreed, stating:

I'm just thinking when the children are outside, not aimless play, being connected, I don't like aimless play outside; they should actually be doing something, not just wandering around. There is freedom in it ... how would you put it ... just wandering ... there has to be a purpose to it ... but wandering ... you need to pre-empt that and break it up.

Notably however, she didn't refer to intentional teaching, or learning, as a goal in the outdoor environment.

The notion of aimless play mentioned by Joan was re-visited by participants in the following monthly focus group session. Rita, in response to Joan's earlier comments said: 'Joan mentioned before about aimless play ... is that something to encourage? We quite like using our bottom playground for that—free running and collecting gumnuts and they do interesting things down there'. While educators are struggling with the notion of allowing children the freedom, it should be noted here that the educators acknowledge the fact that the children have the intention to explore in their play, while still regarding it as aimless.

Carl agreed, stating: 'It's time for them to get that boisterous energy out so they can focus when they get back in'. He questioned, 'Is that necessarily a bad thing?'

These discussions indicated individual interpretations on play and how they thought it should be enacted in the outdoor environment. There appeared to be tensions about child initiated/led play and 'aimlessness'; there was little recognition that children can have an aim of running and exploring, or observing others, as well as have intent for the purpose of their play. For the educators, the notion of releasing energy so that children can then focus indoors only reaffirms the idea that intentional teaching and the most important learning opportunities take place indoors (Leggett, 2015; Leggett & Ford, 2013). Participants indicated that the indoors provided a more conducive learning environment where educators could engage more with children and organise times where they could teach the children through planned group-time experiences or project work.

Educators reported other constraints on their opportunities to engage with children outdoors ranging from mixed-aged grouping of children, educators taking breaks, routines for changing nappies and morning teas. Concern for sun-safe policies and regulatory requirements involving the need to supervise the children were top of the list. Educators' perceptions of routines as constraints may deny both them and the children rich opportunities for intentional teaching and valuable learning. Overall, educators' understandings of their role in outdoor spaces solely as a supervisor undermined the value play presents for children as, according to Vygotsky (1976), a leading source of development.

Australian outdoor learning environments

The EYLF notes 'Australian play spaces ... invite open-ended interactions, risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature' (DEEWR, 2009, pp. 15–16). Educators in this study expressed their difficulty in balancing children's health and safety requirements while providing genuine opportunities to explore, investigate, feel challenged and take risks in order to meet the educational intent also evident in policies.

During discussions, Rita mentioned that there were 'more distractions' outdoors. Carl further explained: 'Well you go into a different role altogether. Like you were saying, there are a lot more things you have to think about—the other staff, other rooms, the actual running of the centre, making sure everyone is observing the right spots, supervision!'

The need to supervise appeared to become the main subject of concern for educators at this centre when considering incorporating natural aspects of the environment in children's play. Rita described her feelings on this:

We have a couple of trees. So there's one tree, it's only about this high [indicates height of about three metres] and my little girl said, 'can I climb that tree?' and I said, 'no, not today' and then I thought to myself 'why not?' So I asked another educator to come over and I got a crate and I said, 'okay let's work this out'. I then had a line of about 15 children wanting to climb the tree and I was only letting them go to the first fork; but there were about three other staff there who were so stressed about me doing it—but the families loved it.

Rita explained how her decision caused staff at a meeting to report being really uncomfortable with her letting children climb the tree. Safety concerns associated with the risks such play may involve have led to a growing trend in risk management or risk minimisation measures, limiting children's opportunities for positive risk-taking that fosters development (Jambor, 1995; Little, 2008; Little et al., 2011).

Carl agreed that when he lets children climb a tree at his centre, his decision is often frowned upon. Carl described this as a learning opportunity: 'We have a big tree too. They found a stick insect. It was because I let them climb that tree that they found it. If someone else was there it would have been a whole different experience'.

Australian Standards for playground safety (AS 374) and risks assessed using the Australian and New Zealand playground standards (AS/NZS ISO 31000) are considered to be what constitutes a safe environment for children. However, restricting children's play in order to protect them is linked to past images of the child as weak, innocent and in need of protection (Sorin, 2005; Woodrow, 1999). In contrast, the EYLF and other contemporary views of children depict children as agentic, competent and capable (DEEWR, 2009; Millikan, 2003; Rinaldi, 2006; Woodrow, 1999). The educator is therefore called upon to manage the tensions, not only providing a safe and secure play environment (and considering how contemporary views of the child as 'competent and capable' challenge past views of children), but also in meeting the child's need for confident risk taking and independent learning opportunities. Positioning the child as competent calls on the educator to reconsider his/her role as one who can also competently manage and interact with children in all learning environments. The following section calls upon educators to reconceptualise play as well as their role.

Rethinking play: A new definition

Findings from this research have revealed the need for a more complete conceptualisation and definition of play, reflective particularly of sociocultural approaches that recognise and value the role of the educator in order to counter any misconceptions that play is aimless and 'free' or that play-based learning should predominantly be promoted indoors. Our new definition presents an appreciation of the complex intellectual work demanded by contextually determined social collaboration. This definition will increase opportunities for children to encounter opportunities in all environments to develop their creative thinking as they intentionally participate in shared social learning experiences.

We have sought to contribute a more nuanced definition that argues for the idea that children act with purpose and intention as they play, as well as making transparent the scope of the role of the educator. It is our contention that a reimagining and reworking of the concept and practice of play, particularly while outside, could result in children and adults together managing risk in a proactive and positive manner, thereby alleviating some of the need for 'hands off', stand-back 'supervision'. This then opens up a new space for skilful intentional teaching, managed by thoughtful educators across the day and in all environments.

We argue, based on our findings, that any definition of play as it pertains to early childhood education needs to embed the role of the educator:

Play is intentional and involves children acting with a purpose and goal for personal learning as they actively explore, discover, imagine and interact with objects, people and their natural world. Educators have a role in play and can foster children's holistic development by intentionally sustaining children's thinking and involvement in play-based learning environments.

This definition acknowledges both the cognitive and sociocultural aspects of learning and development. It supports educators to view children as always learning, whatever the space in which they are playing and developing as they engage with others and the world around them, and it claims a space and a responsibility for educators.

Conclusion

The research revealed a practice whereby the role of the educators has shifted from educator to supervisor determined by space and place, thus revealing some interesting absences of intentional teaching that are contrary to EYLF intentions. Further provocations of the educator participants to determine the underlying tensions for the divide between indoor and outdoor learning environments revealed minimal understanding of the potential in children's

play outdoors. A Vygotskian sociocultural standpoint challenges the notion of 'free play', rather proposing that children are intentional, continually learning as they engage with others in play as part of their social and cultural contexts, thus dispelling the myths of play as 'aimless' or 'free'. Additionally, we have claimed a strengthened and legitimate space for adults in children's play.

This study has revealed multiple considerations and tensions for educators who employ intentional teaching, particularly when children are outdoors. The need to supervise children 'at all times', as stated in Australian regulatory documents, as well as concerns for children's safety and wellbeing being of utmost importance have generated concerns among educators that have distracted them from recognising opportunities to become involved with children's outdoor play in meaningful ways. Investigation of how play is viewed, along with educators' shifting roles between indoor to outdoor learning environments has revealed limited understandings not only in defining and understanding play, but also in recognising how play and learning are always synonymous for the child. Educators who are knowledgeable and skilled can interpret how to enact 'supervision' in an agentic and involved manner that includes a space for intentional teaching. We have made a case that the term 'free play' is unhelpful and limiting on children's capacities to lead their own learning. In addition, educators' perceptions and capacity to take part in the process, within safe learning contexts, has further been compromised. We believe that our new definition of play carries the potential to empower educators to reconceptualise the roles of children and educators within play-based pedagogy, particularly in the outdoor environment.

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