

Teachers and academics researching together children's views on play

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Overview

1. Revisiting play
2. Considering play as a “case”
3. Children talking about play
4. Implications? Enhancing professional understandings
5. Experiences as researching-practitioners



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Revisiting play

Play is notoriously difficult to define –

- a fundamental requirement for children (United Nations, 1989).
- a range of creative activities in which many members of society engage (Ebbeck, Yim & Lee, 2013).
- an holistic approach recognising the children's life experiences in diverse contexts

Belonging, Being and Becoming (DEEWR, 2009)



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Tensions and tug-of-rope binaries for educators



How do children view play?

matadornet.com Photo: Mikey Schaefer, National Geographic

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The project: Considering play as a “case”

Phase	Details	Participants
1. Considering the case	Collaborative research meeting to plan & design the study Research questions	Teacher-researchers Academic-researchers
2. Casing the joint – Teachers talking about play	Interviews with each teacher to discuss their initial thoughts on play and being a teacher researcher	Teacher-researchers Academic-researchers
3. Getting on the case – Children talking about play	Video ethnography in classrooms Video playback interviews with children	Teacher-researchers Children
4. Locating ourselves in the case	Collaborative research meeting using video playback	Teacher-researchers Academic-researchers
5. Searching the case	Written reflections	Teacher-researchers

Teachers talking about play : time to reflect



- What do you see as play?
- How do children describe what they do?
- What do you think children see as play?`
- What is not play?
- What is the place of play in the curriculum?
- What is the your role in play?



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Data Analysis - 2 parts

Using a *child's standpoint* with the understanding that children have their own construction of what play and learning is.

Part 1

- Narrative analysis -focused on the “what” of the children’s accounts - the content or “told” aspect in focus

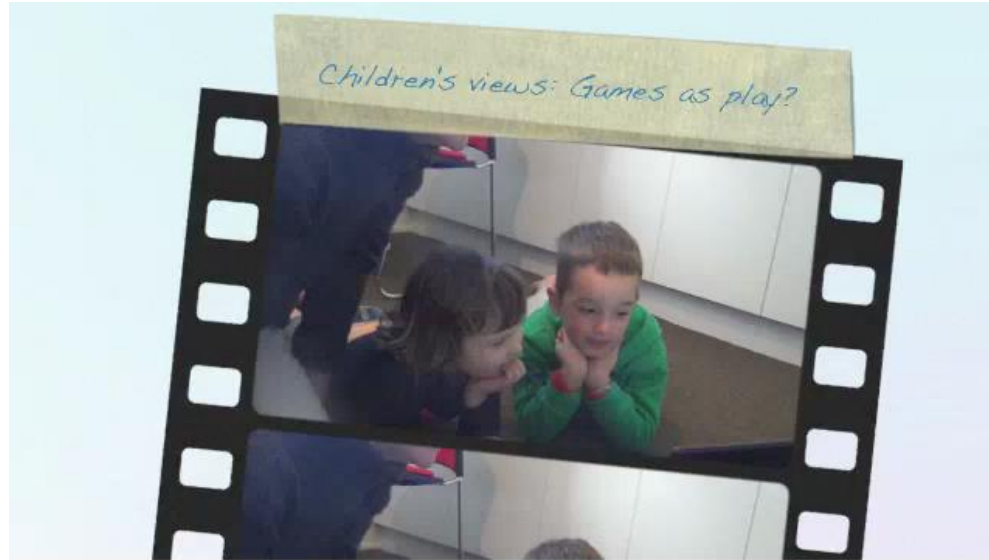
(Mayall, 2002; Einarsdottir, 2010)

Part 2

- Thematic analysis - key themes that emerged



What counts as play: Pretence & Participation



Michael: It's our vet.
T'cher: Oh, in the vet. So why were you in the bath then, if it was a vet?
Michael: Because in night time.



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What activities are play: Friends & ownership



T'cher: When you're doing things like making games - like with the dogs and their families - what do you call that sort of thing that you're doing?

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What's not play: No ownership



T'cher:: So what - what do you call this when you're - when you're doing this sort of stuff at Kindy, what do you call this?
Sophie: Um, ballroom.

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Summary Narrative Analysis

What is play?	What is not play?
Home area	Sitting down on the mat
Playing bubbles	Getting all our stuff
Sport	Resting
Running, jumping	Listening
Building	Building
With the whiteboards	When you're doing nothing
Making things	Painting
Get to play new things	Walking around and looking at what to play

What is play?

Games – Garden games, vet games, outside games, mum and dads, castles, house games

Puppet shows

Games with friends – get to play with other people

Playing with things - sea animals, blocks, cars, trains, trucks, balls, whiteboards, dinosaurs, playdough

Obstacle course – monkey bars- on the fort

Happy, fun

What is not play?

Sharing stories, doing music together on carpet – “I would call it listening”

When the teacher asks you to come and do something

Not doing anything in the game
-not doing one of the artworks

Playing castles all the time – another child’s game

Playing is inside not play is going outside

If somebody doesn’t know what you want to play and they want to play and they say no

The educator's role in play...

Like it	Don't like it
Feels good	Angry – because I want to play with friends
Like it if teachers comes and plays your game – that I like I don't feel angry	Don't like it- teachers says come and do this with me, because that's not playing,
Good - Take photos	Don't like it - Be the boss to tell then what to do and be really good
Get stuff for us – do stuff for us	Just like it to be the kids
Help us to solve problems	
Like it as mums and dads too busy working to play	

Thematic analysis:

5 Key themes of children's views on play

1. *Active* - Doing or playing with something
2. *Social* - Friends, being with others
3. *Playful* - Pretence
4. *Participation* - Having a role, ownership
5. *Emotive* - Feelings of happy, fun



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Complexities

- **Defining play** - Various standpoints of children and teachers
- **Notions of work** - Setting up, planning and building – taken seriously
- **Choice and ownership** – whose idea?
- Listening, **constructions of learning**
- **Educators' role** – when being assisted it's liked, but educators can be seen as interruption or unwanted in the social space



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Implications...

- Reframing thinking and practices
- Taking into account children's standpoints
- Diversity of children's views



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Problematizing play

Helen: Play can be work but it doesn't have to be fun and children don't have to be having a good time. That really struck me and I had to have a really big think about that.

I've tried to listen to whether they use the word play and you don't hear it often from children. And we always talk about what they set up as their games then I think they associate play with games. That makes a connection for them



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Definitions of play

Claire: Prior to filming thought that the children didn't really differentiate between learning and play. After interviewing the children, I feel that I was looking at it from an adult's viewpoint; I could see the learning that was taking place through what I considered to be 'play' but the children differentiated their types of play and segregated it between play and learning.

A comment that stuck with me was when a child said "I am not playing I am building" ... This altered my conception of children's view of their learning. What I had considered to be a game was much more serious for this child.



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Definitions of play

Sharon: I have been interested to note the children do see a variety of things as play and while they say they have learnt things...they often find it difficult to say what it is that they have learnt.

However, when asked what learning is they almost all seem to answer it is learning letters and numbers and when the teacher is talking. This is something I will think more about and I will endeavour to be more conscious of sharing with children what it is they/we are learning through their play.



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Reconsidering the educator's role

Desley: The filming and conversations reaffirmed how engaged children can be in play particularly when it is personally meaningful to them. It confirmed my belief that children's pretend play is an effective teaching and learning tool.



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Experiences as researching- practitioners



- Someone with rich professional knowledge
- Someone who works in communities that involve collaboration networks
- Someone who has a passion about their work
- Someone who starts with a hunch



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Applications of video ethnography to practice

Helen: I see the potential for using this to help describe and interpret play to the parents, when they may be asking about their children's development or interaction, or their level of maturity. I am now exploring the opportunities for using the technique. It potentially has many applications in understanding children and play.

- The process of filming is showing me that play involves a constantly changing dynamic between children.... two children may start a game but as others join the play, the role of leader in the game may change, and then change again as some children accept one child's idea over another.



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Changing practice

Sharon: It has probably changed my practice by making me observe more closely in some instances and to value spending more time being “a fly on the wall” for longer period of time as it has exposed some dynamics between children that are a little different to what I had thought.



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Considerations from being an insider

- Children in participatory role
 - Talking about their lives
 - Respect for children more as people
- Insight into hidden worlds
- Role of adults



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