

**Sustainable outdoor playspaces in
early childhood centres:
Investigating perceptions,
facilitating change and generating
theory**

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Overview

- Study background and rationale
- Guiding research questions
- Philosophical stance and methodological framing
- Three snapshots from the data
- Key challenges

Study background and rationale



Guiding research questions

What occurs at the interfaces between natural playspaces as physical contexts for play and the socio-culturally constructed meanings of sustainability and EfS?

Guiding research questions

- What perceptions about sustainability and EfS were evident in the early childhood centre communities?
- How are early childhood centre communities best empowered to engage in transformative change for sustainability and was action research, as an education research paradigm, relevant to this endeavour?
- What framework can theoretically describe the interfaces between natural playspaces, sustainability and EfS to prompt further dialogue, debate and change?

Philosophical stance

- *Axiology*: Being explicit about values and ethics was core to this study
- *Ontology*: Biocentric worldview that positions humans as part of complex and evolving relationships and systems
- *Epistemology*: Social constructionism, collective construction of meanings in light of current contexts and values

Methodological framing

- *Systems theory*: A focus on relationships not objects and the responsiveness of dynamic systems (Bateson, 1979; Capra, 2002)
- *Critical theory*: More than understanding, critical research is about change (Fay, 1987; Friere, 1976)
- *Critical participatory action research* with a view to transformative change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005)

Methodological framing

- Two case study centres, over a one year period with a negotiated action priority offering a focal point for change
- Data created through synergetic focus groups and interviews with educators and parents, as well as service documentation and in situ observations

Three snapshots from the data

Snapshot 1: A significant aspect of promoting the cultural change towards sustainability within the centre was

‘unsilencing the sustainable silents’

Three snapshots from the data

Who might be the ‘sustainable silents’ in your early childhood community?

What provocations could support their voices being heard?

How might the ‘sustainable silents’ become sustainability leaders in your early childhood community?

Three snapshots from the data

Snapshot 2: A growing sense of value congruency between the educators, families, the wider community and the early childhood field.

'I have always liked the centre, I was quite comfortable leaving my children there, but now it appeals to me at a higher level and I feel more pleased and more comfortable leaving my children there. And I like the idea that sustainability is being incorporated into their play and into their learning'

Three snapshots from the data

What are local family and community values around sustainability?

Does your service reflect these and if so, how?

How could your service better align with local family and community values and/or promote sustainability values?

Three snapshots from the data

Snapshot 3: Passive positive responses

'While ideas were positively acknowledged, there was limited responsiveness by the teacher either verbally or actively and shared ownership was not evident'

Three snapshots from the data

As educators how do we authentically and positively respond to families ideas about sustainability?

How can families participate in an active shared role in sustainability?

What sustainability leadership roles can families adopt?

Discussion Point

Share your reflections about the questions raised in these data snapshots

Key challenges

Key challenges to address for services to fully embrace sustainability:

- Perceptions about sustainability and EfS
- Relationships at all levels
- Philosophical/pedagogical understandings and qualifications
- Transformative leadership

**A researcher's
vision.....**



References and Acknowledgements

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