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Keeping it real: making space for play in early education policy and practice.

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Biosketch

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Abstract

This chapter considers how the pedagogical framing of preschool activity *as a preparation for a school*, may be in conflict with an international consensus advocating allowing children greater control of some of their activities in preschool. The first sometimes promotes an early start to more formal learning, while the second proposes that personal responsibility and self-control and can lead to longer lasting benefits resulting from preschool experiences.

A case study of changing policy and practice in Kazakhstan is used to illustrate the tensions between these two models of learning. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with practitioners in the preschool environment were used to explore how national standards documents interact with underlying beliefs about the nature of learning in the formation of practice.

The findings suggest that, as in other countries, the intention to increase child-led pedagogy may be inhibited by existing classroom-based expectations of children's participation. The chapter considers how participatory research in play environments might help to increase

awareness of the value of child-led play by focusing increased attention on how play supports learning.

Introduction

This chapter explores the value of play as an inclusive, accessible, participatory format that promotes children's understanding of how to engage in activity with others. This chapter argues that for young learners, play not only affords children a space to realise their rights to self-expression, acknowledgment of their identities, cultures but it also provides an important forum for developing a child's personality, talents, instincts and abilities to participate.

Arguments about the value of play for supporting the development learning skills are well documented (Moyles 2010, Brooker and Edwards 2010); this chapter considers why, despite increasing international policy support for the contribution of play in early education, adult attention may continue to focus on adult led pedagogy (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2012). The chapter reflects on how the space granted to play in national preschool policies interacts with spaces for play in preschool provision. It is argued that adults are often drawn to interactions that emphasise the transmission of subject knowledge and formulaic thinking, leading to the marginalisation of play rather than recognising it as an important format for developing child led social learning, interthinking (Mercer 2000, 2007) and distributed cognition (Rogoff 2003).

> While socio-cultural psychologists have described the shared thinking of adults and children as they engage in dialogue and joint activity, they have done so in order to determine its influence on individual children's development. That is they have studied 'intermental' activity in order to understand the 'intramental', while I am suggesting that we should also try to explain children's development as interthinkers. To do so we need to understand how experienced members of communities act as discourse guides, guiding children or other novices into ways of using language collectively." (Mercer, 2000, p.170)

The evidence of effective outcomes for preschool, offered by a number of studies, advocating the value of play based, child-led activity have captured international policy makers' attention but play can still struggle to find space in some early years curriculums and in setting based practice (Waller 2014). The early part of this chapter examines how early education policies promoting more adult led views of school-readiness might be challenged through raising

awareness of play and shared forms of thinking. The middle section of the chapter focuses on Kindergarten policy in Kazakhstan as a case study of the tensions that exists between teacher-led and child-led pedagogies. I found this case study interesting because it featured issues and debates that I have encountered in a number of different contexts. The final section suggests ways in which adults might be encouraged to view play as a more significant component of preschool pedagogy.

1. A space for play in National policies

The articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1989), echo the common linguistic and cultural separation of education and play. Article 29 states that children's education should develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest; while Article 31 advances the right to relax and play as part of joining with recreational activities. The theme of this book centres on article 12, children's right to self-determination, and this chapter argues that for young learners, play not only affords children spaces in which they can choose, but that it is also an important component of developing a child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest. Arguments about the contribution of play to learning in the curriculum are not new (Anning 2010) and therefore this chapter reflects on why despite increasing support for the contribution of play in early education, adult attention is often drawn to focus on adult led pedagogy. Adult-led pedagogy has been promoted by local political pressures to develop 'school readiness' and Gilford (2013) discussing the development of this concept, notes two overlapping, but potentially conflicting dimensions: the first being to support children's holistic development and the second being to prepare children to fit into school cultures. The concern of many early educationalists is that school cultures may focus on particular types of learning and not always be fully supportive of young children's holistic learning development.

The overview provided by longitudinal studies of effective preschool pedagogies in a number of countries is presented in the Starting Strong III report (OECD, 2012). The report advocates that allowing children greater control of some of their (Schweinhart et al., 2005) preschool activities promotes personal responsibility and self-control. The Highscope study initiated in the 1960's continues to be used to argue that children who experience a play-based curriculum with a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activity develop a more independent self-managing outlook over the life course (Schweinhart et al., 2013). Larger and more recent studies in New Zealand (Wylie and Thompson, 2003) and the UK (Sylva et al. 2010) also used

suggest that positive social and intellectual benefits accrue in the primary education phase for children from preschool programmes that balance adult-led and child-led activities. This research base is used to argue that opportunities for child-led activity in early education pedagogy not only affirms children as active learners, but they also provides children with opportunities to lead some of their own activities and to engage more dialogically with supportive adults (OECD 2012). Children can, in this way, acquire lasting benefits across the life course by experiencing regular opportunities in their preschool education to control elements of their own learning through play and exploration (Schweinhart et al. 2005, Sylva et al. 2010). The studies are quite specific in pointing out that while preschools in general appeared to be associated a positive start to schooling, for preschool to have a longer lasting impact that experience needed to be of a higher quality. Each of these studies viewed high quality preschool as including a significant proportion of child-led activity and this has been reflected in practice in different countries (Georgeson and Payler 2013). The evidence from these studies is used to suggest that allowing children greater control of some of their activities, promotes personal responsibility and self-control in quality preschool environments, which leads to lasting educational benefits (Wylie and Thompson 2003, Sylva et al. 2010). Such programmes provide children with opportunities to develop and lead some of their own activities and to engage with supportive adults. In this way, children acquire lasting benefits across the life course by having space in preschool education to have some control of their own learning through play and exploration (Taguma, Litjens and Makowieck 2012).

Many countries' national early years curricular reflect different and shifting positions on the space they provide for play. In 2015, President Xi Jinping commented that China had much to learn about Play and kindergarten there have been directed to increase the opportunities for play as a means to promote, creativity and wellbeing (Guardian 2015). The potential of the outdoor learning environment for developing both well-being, creativity and learning was recognised in Chinese policy in 2014 (Hu, Li, De Marco and Chen 2014). In some countries, such has Finland and New Zealand there is a consensus for the value of allowing children space to learn extensively through play to age six, whilst in others such as England an earlier school starting age reflects greater societal pressure to introduce 'school like' activities at age five (Wood and Hedges 2016). In this chapter, interviews from Astana in Kazakhstan are used to illustrate the power of adult-led pedagogy to hold adults' attention in a context where policy has been encouraging kindergartens to create more spaces for child-led, play-based learning and yet existing subject based pedagogies continue to feature strongly in practice.

2.The potential of play as an activity promoting participation

Moyles (2010) identifies play as a difficult to define term; she prefers to view it as a process that features choice, where decision making is left to the participants and is without a fixed outcome thereby permitting risk taking. Vygotsky (1966), who laid the foundations of socio-cultural theory viewed play as the leading source of development in the preschool years. Van Oers (2010) used Vygotsky's framework to suggest that play is not an activity of itself but rather a socially developed activity format where rules are relaxed and there is an increased flexibility together with a high level of social engagement and personal involvement. This is a very helpful perspective that challenges the orthodoxy of frivolity embedded within the word play as used in everyday language. Play viewed as an *activity format* implies that individuals can employ play consciously or unconsciously as a device for learning facilitating experimentation, reflection and often social feedback in a range of activities. Play suspends and can transcend the normal rules and roles of a particular context such as the conventions of traditional classroom learning/teaching. Playfulness is very visible in early childhood because there is so much to learn and children are at an early stage of participating and unembarrassed to be seen playing. Play is arguably something that successful learners continue to do in adulthood, but it is perhaps applied in less obvious forms, as a tool to support learning, innovation and understanding.

Play often affords children an opportunity to lead activity, stepping out of their novice role in participation, to operate on a more even status with adults and to lead activity. This permits identities to be reassigned; people, objects and symbols can stand-in for cultural tools and recreate systems of activity in an experimental low risk format (Edmiston 2008). Play affords the opportunity to see what it is like to think together in a powerfully imagined scenario that explores the meanings and possibilities of new roles, artefacts and ideas (Van Oers 2010). To neglect this type of interaction may limit children's opportunities to communicate their ideas and neglect children's right and ability to participate in shared activity in both the short and long term.

> Play as an activity type aims at the mastery of mastering. Play does not produce any concrete knowledge of mastering. It produces general flexibility and a disposition to change one's approach when facing the concrete demands of the situation (Hakkarainen, 1999, p. 234.)

Learning to participate and think with others is a feature of much human activity both inside and outside the classroom. Socio-cultural accounts of shared thinking and distributed cognition arising from Vygotskian foundations (Vygotsky 1987) also advance ideas of an ebb and flow of thinking in the context of social activity flowing between individuals, contexts and objects (Wertsch, 1998, Lave and Wenger 2001, Rogoff 2003, Jordan 2003, Engeström 2007). They emphasise that individual thinking may be limited and carried in different directions by communicative and physical tools that have evolved power through their extended use over time. Novices are inducted into such cultures of play practice and shared thinking (Lave and Wenger 2001) through guided participation (Rogoff 2003). Participation in play is particularly dependent upon people establishing what they are seeking to achieve together and pooling their shared understandings to work through the activity or problem at hand. It is therefore a very helpful forum for developing interthinking.

In classroom contexts, tools rules participants and purposes can be different in details but they may also be surprisingly similar with adults guiding groups of students along prescribed pathways of thinking and pedagogic practice. Many teachers employ a conversational approach in teaching where the classes existing knowledge is draw out and then taken forward through a shared analysis of a problem or context. This *is* a shared thinking process but it can become a limited and ritualised format, that is oriented towards the assessment of individual achievements (Alexander 2000). Where this becomes the expected format for adult interaction in a classroom it may present a barrier to adults and children joining in with more playful thinking. In a collection of studies co-ordinated by Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009), a comparative sociocultural approach was used to examine the cultural attitudes to play represented in video samples of interaction in early education settings in Sweden, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Chile and Wisconsin in the USA. In Australia and the USA, they identified staff taking a non-active observational role in relation to young children's play. This they attributed in part to the influence of the cautions approach to adults interfering in play advanced by advocates of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Breddekamp and Copple 1997) who highlighted that adults often disrupt and curtail children's play when they try to participate. This finding contrasted with case studies in Hong Kong and Japan where adults were perceived to be taking a lead role in activities teaching through play. The New Zealand and Swedish case studies seemed to suggest practice where more adult attention was given to planned reflective activity linked to child-lead play. The Chilean case studies were seen to place more emphasis on shared group and community activity rather than child-lead

play. Edmiston (2008) and Bruce (2010) both argued that adults can make a very rich contribution to children's imaginary play, but that the adults need to enter play with a spirit of experimentation following the intentions of the child players. They suggest that adults need to keep the play feeling real for the children and not push the activity into the abstraction of the subject orientated pursuit of knowledge.

Mercer and Littleton (2007, 2009) and Alexander (2000) show that classroom interactions typically offer scaffolding for children's shared thinking, using the formalized thinking tools offered by the curricular subjects. They point out that the control of these thinking processes often resides with the adult. Assessment processes in classrooms also often emphasise individual retention of knowledge and procedures with fewer opportunities to develop and demonstrate the ability to develop sustain and extend shared thinking (Rogoff, 2003). Play allows young children to create, understand and direct shared thinking. As a result play can offer richer insights into assessing children's capabilities to synthesise and apply knowledge. Helping children to reflect on shared thinking processes in different formats can help them to work more effectively in group problem solving contexts.

This section of the chapter has sought to argue that to focus on classroom culture may limit children's participation to focused adult led activities and particular types of thinking. In the longer term this potentially constrains their future participation in shared thinking because it also restricts the development of participatory dialogic thinking skills and behaviours (Alexander 2000).

3. A case Study

The following case study of policy and practice in Kindergartens in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, is used to illustrate how tensions between models of learning can compete for space over time in cultural-historical contexts. It is argued that this case study illustrates how the re-framing of the preschool learning environment may be filtered through prevailing cultural commitments to collective modes of thinking and learning embedded in the concept of preparing children for school. The OECD's (2012) international review of early years policy and practice suggested that documents setting out national standards are used by governments as a major tool in shaping practice and can be effective where they are explicit about policy intentions. This case study illustrates the potential for pedagogical cultures to resist and rework change.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with practitioners in their preschool environments were used to explore how national policy documents promoting more child-led learning interacted with their underlying beliefs about the nature of learning and the kindergarten curriculum. The examples offered in the case study are drawn from a series of document reviews, observations and interviews, supporting a review of the National Standards document for Preschools in Kazakhstan (2012). This review was part of a wider road map project to review the national education strategy (Bridges 2014). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two Ministry of Education policy makers and two experts with a responsibility for coordinating training at a national and local region level. Interviews were also conducted with three preschool experts from Astana kindergartens. In addition to these interviews, three state managed kindergartens and three privately managed preschool settings were also visited. These settings were in deferent areas of the city of Astana and reflected a range of approaches to teaching and learning. The aim of the data collection process was to assess the nature of the kindergarten learning environments and to ask staff about the influence of the national standards on their teaching, including how pre-service and in-service training supported the application of the standards to practice.

Kazakhstan is one of the largest nations by geographical area. Kazakhstan gained independence from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991. The initial challenges of establishing new economic and political institutions have been taken up within the context of a growing sense of national identity and increasing affluence as the vast minerals wealth of the nation continues to contribute to the developing social infrastructure (Bridges and Sagintayeva, 2014). In the Soviet system and era, kindergartens were widespread, perceived to be of high quality and free. Following independence there was a decline in the availability of places and a perceived decline in the quality of provision. The expansion of places and the improvement of quality continue to be addressed as the nation grows in economic confidence alongside an increasing demand for preschool places. This is particularly the case in big cities where there is a perceived need to be ready for school and both parents are more likely to be in employment. Waiting lists for kindergartens have been very long, parents put their children's names for places long before the children are ready and pay to have their child moved up the waiting list. Under the Balapan (little chicks) initiative, which is developing provision in partnership with the private sector, the number of children attending preschool had increased from 40% in 2010 to 75 % in 2013 (Bridges and Sagintayeva 2014). Officials in The Ministry of Education emphasised steps to increase access to preschool in Kazakhstan. As part of developing a strategic action plan for 2018, part of an 11-year plan, aiming to increase access

and quality so that by 2020 there should be a place for all of the 60,000 children aged 3-6 in Kazakhstan. For children in the 5-6 'preparatory' age group, Kindergarten is compulsory and the focus is more on preparation for school. For children aged 3-5 kindergarten is optional and for those aged 1-3 it is not compulsory.

4. A commitment for changing pedagogy

A desire for change, specifically to reduce the proportion of what one Kindergarten leader referred to as "teaching from the front" was expressed by all of those interviewed. The head of the preschool programme at the ministry of Education identified policy priorities related to a play based pedagogy as identified in the Starting Strong.

> The Priority for change is to move from a more school like classroom environment to a more play based experience for children. Preschool should be a transformative space for children, outdoor play, sports (competition quite a feature, sports, traffic awareness,) outdoor play should take place outside on daily basis and children should be taken out into the real world environment to learn. Lessons should not be holding children in the classroom, good teachers should be caring and able to make the children laugh.

The documents that set out the national standards for preschools (Ministry for Education 2001, 2008, 2012) have, over a sustained period, set out the broad expectation to increase the proportion of child-centred learning for the nation's preschools to follow. For example, they state that educational programmes should include play activity: creative role-plays and games with rules. Section 10.6 (MfE 2001) requires that Preschool educational programmes should be based on the principle of a child-centered approach in interaction between adults and children, allowing for an individual approach to children and work with various groups of children, as well as taking into account age-specific characteristics. The standards call for a balance in the daily preschool routine between lessons, ad hoc activities and free time. They also ask for preschool educational programmes to be based on an optimal combination of individual and joint activities of children (MfE 2001 10.10). The 2012 document suggested that the existing definitions developed by the previous standards be extend by the inclusion of a broader view of children's competencies as able learners. The interviews with national, regional training coordinators and headteachers suggested that they perceived that

> the key challenges are not so much with the standards themselves as with the understanding of college graduates (more from a theory perspective) and from Higher Education with applying theory to practice. Finding well-qualified trainers in the regions can also be challenging. Following international trends for modernisation is a problem because there is very limited experience of these approaches in the country.

The Astana case study suggested the complexity of cultivating a desire for changing pedagogy to make space for more child led participation. Even where practitioners have experience of this type of practice there can still be considerable cultural pressure to provide adult led learning. Those national experts interviewed about the application of the standards also identified the assertive nature of 'traditional' approaches to pedagogy

> Learning is mostly in classes with each centre following a set timetable programme for each subject as described by the books identified in the standards especially in the mornings more times in the afternoons attending for that time. Days are from 8am until 6pm with most children did use cards and pictures to check children's learning as well as more specialist developmental tests. Mostly they are looking to check on children's socialisation.

Their analysis emphasised the persistence of preferences towards subject based sessions that the standards document did not challenge explicitly enough. The Interviews conducted with Kindergarten principles in both the private and state sector in Astana showed that they linked the standards to a prescribed set of activities in textbooks in each area.

> *Much of the time is taken up with the prescribed curriculum and the Kindergarten directors felt this gave very little space for alternatives.*

Recommendations about the range of hours for each subject seemed to be interpreted by the majority of kindergarten principals and teachers as a direct allocation of subject time rather than being incorporated into a more integrated topic based approach to curriculum. Each of the visited kindergartens delivered mostly subject focused sessions of 15 to 20 minutes as recommended in previous versions of the standards. Nine of the ten kindergarten directors interviewed felt that the prescribed curriculum activities took up most of the children's time and that there was very little time for children's interests. In interviews, Ministry representatives in Kazakhstan identified that their priority was to develop preschool staff training by increasing the numbers of well-motivated teachers attending training courses as

well as by enhancing the quality and content of the training. Many of the preschool experts interviewed, thought that a key problem was finding trainers with a clear vision of more child-led play based pedagogy who were able to present this in an accessible way to practitioners.

5. Practitioners and their preschools

The following two examples of Astana settings illustrate how two different kindergarten centre directors embraced the idea of developing more child-led pedagogies while simultaneously feeling bound to provide subject based lessons.

One privately managed preschool centre, demonstrated a marked contrast in the style of teaching and learning to the other centres visited. The leader of this centre had studied at the Montessori Institute in Moscow. In the centre's morning sessions the children experienced an extended period of play based activity where they were free to choose from a variety of painting, drawing, role-play and other structured educational toys in the setting. The leader explained that it had been quite a challenge to find the equipment that was imported at a relatively high cost. The leader said that the children enjoyed the morning Montessori sessions and that in the afternoon sessions they experience the more traditional "teaching from the front".

The leader felt that the play-based sessions offered the opportunity to teach the children on an individual basis as compared to the front of class sessions in the afternoon. The individual teaching allowed children to repeat and master ideas that they might find difficult to master in whole class sessions. She said that children enjoyed these sessions more and they had quite a few children transfer from other more traditional preschools who found it hard to choose for themselves. She believed that learning to manage their own activity and learning was a benefit of this approach.

A second kindergarten director who was also part of the government's working party revising the standards document for the older kindergarten age group. Also appeared content to have two quite contrasting pedagogies co-existing in her own setting. In this case, a quite formal ethos within her own kindergarten curriculum time sessions and a freer celebration of play in the outdoor space. She was passionate about the standards group working to simplify the language of the standards and link it more explicitly to children's abilities. She also believed that the children should have more opportunities to choose and to play. There is agreement in the group about children having a right to choose so that they become more open-minded, adaptable to others and to new circumstances. She perceived children in contemporary Astana

to be different from previous generations “they know more, their parents are more educated, they are ready to learn and develop”. She agreed with other experts in the working party that rote learning was too common and frequently used and at the same time the organisation within her kindergarten featured adult led group based sessions. This classroom context in this setting contrasted markedly with the outdoor space where children had considerable freedom to choose the spaces they wished to go to and who they wanted to engage with. Staff were on hand to engage in much more open and responsive format, allowing the children to developing their own ideas, rules, stories and routines.

These case studies suggest that, as has been noted in other countries (Tharpe and Gallimore 1989), the pursuit of progressive pedagogy will be moderated by existing expectations of the importance of established pedagogic practices. The kindergarten teachers and advisors were committed to change and yet there is a strong systemic cultural expectation that learning needs to be subject focused and adult led in the classroom context. Such a pedagogic culture may also be a contributory factor when adults seek to engage in children’s play outdoors because both adult and child participants expect that they will work towards learning objectives and engage in questioning.

The idea that there may be an orthodoxy of expectation educational activity is advanced by both Brunner and Bourdieu. Such an underlying pervasive orthodoxy relates to what Bruner (1996) refers to as ‘folk pedagogy,’ to indicate that there are culturally accepted views of the mind of the learner and that these consequently influence the nature of the relationship between teacher and learner.

> From this work on folk psychology and folk pedagogy has grown a new, and perhaps even a revolutionary insight. It is this: in theorising about the practice of education in the classroom (or any other setting for that matter), you had better take into account the folk theories that those engaged in teaching and learning already have. For any innovations that you, as a “proper” pedagogical theorist, may wish to introduce will have to compete with, replace, or otherwise modify the folk theories that already guide both teachers and pupils. (Bruner, 1996, 161)

Bourdieu (1977) points to the fact that in most spheres there are common sense intuitive approaches to activities informed by previous experience. Bourdieu refers to these common sense views of good practice as ‘doxa’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.164). The term suggests that there

can be truth in the sense that people perceive things to be such, but there may be deeper truths that lie hidden. Hence, there may be commonly held views or doxa relating to play and learning, which modify or complement the stated pedagogical intentions of any institution. Sociocultural analysis of early childhood education settings suggests that in many contexts there is a tension between allowing children space to play and the space-place-time of preschools, nurseries and kindergartens we enter spaces that preparing children for school cultures. Preschool institutions separate children into age groupings that emphasise abilities, they put children into larger groups, which emphasise the need for adults to maintain order, and they separate children into safer but more abstracted world. It often seems that children require structure and control; this is emphasised by the more we see children in structured institutions the more their dependencies on adults come to the fore. Thus any suggestions to develop a more child led pedagogy run into the difficulty of seeing the child as being capable of leading learning and being able to support an environment to facilitate this (Burman, 2008, Olsson 2009).

In the context of the Kazakhstan case studies, it may be difficult to find a space for a more play-based child-led approach to learning in the classroom context because the resources and structure make it difficult for children to reveal the more open-ended collaborative play. As in other countries, it is in the outdoor environment that there is more freedom (Waller 2014). To safeguard and promote resources for more open play need to be available, but there may also a need to challenge the idea that the most important element of the preschool experience is the adult led classroom-like engagements. Waller (2014) notes that the pressures on English preschools to pursue 'school readiness' may be reducing the resourcing available for outdoor activity. In order to counter this he recommends consideration be given to the following:

> 1. allocation of the appropriate of resources to support learning in outdoor spaces;
> 2. sufficient staff time for documentation and reflection on pedagogy and practice;
> 3. staff development programmes to support the development of guided interaction and participatory processes with young children;
> 4. the need for senior staff to be strong advocates for ECEC and engage with policy-makers at local and national level. (Waller 2014 165)

Encouraging awareness of the potential of play as a space for developing process skills and attitude may be important to defending and extending spaces for play. As longer-term approach to shifting classroom culture directly, it may be helpful to explore awareness raising in the

outdoor context as a space in which play is expected. The outdoor space is one where children are afforded more freedom and practitioners feel less obliged to intervene in subject-orientated ways. It is a space where the talents and strengths children bring to learning can be more visible. Hu, Li, De Marco and Chen (2015) Encourage Chinese researchers to explore and report on the quality in outdoor environments.

> Future studies should continue to explore the quality of outdoor play with a larger national sample to follow children's physical wellness and other outcomes longitudinally. Findings from such studies will enable us to identify evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies to promote children's optimal development through quality outdoor play. (Hu, et al. 2015 73)

If we can to continue to provide positive examples of the richness of child –led activity and demonstrate the value of play spaces for developing school learning readiness, we may continue to build confidence in play as an important aspect of learning readiness.

The Astana examples illustrate that in many contexts the outdoor environment in many contexts is the space where the pedagogical expectation is that activity will be child led. Presenting examples of the enjoyment that children experience in such contexts but also the richness of the experiences in this area is perhaps a good starting point for raising awareness of the value of play. Increased appreciation might be converted into more time and resources being channeled into outdoor spaces and consideration might then be given to how to nurture similar experiences indoors. The following example is taken from an English preschool going through a similar process of self-review.

6. Outdoor play observation,

This example is not intended to illustrate differences in practice between places, but it is simply presented to rather the richness of play in outdoor spaces. It echoes the growing cannon of literature examples of learning stories set outside of classroom spaces (Waller 2014, Carr and Lee 2014) that illustrates not just children's readiness for school classrooms but children's readiness to learn and engage in activity with others.

A practitioner walks under the canopy of branches in the preschool's outdoor area and something falls onto the card she is holding and she takes it to show two boys who are playing under a pirate flag suspended under the trees over a collection of cylindrical steppingstone logs. The boys look with interest at the insect on the page as she explains how the wasp got there.

She asks, “Are you being pirates again Finn?” The boys confirm that they are. The practitioner puts the wasp on a log and moves on leaving the boys to continue their game, which involves them pretending to sail a ship as they step from log to log, and sometimes on to the ground, which is the sea.

Finn, “I’ve got a steering wheel.”
Louis,”I’m going into the sea.”
Finn, “quick the ship is wrecking.”
Louis, “I’ve just been in the mud. Help.”
Finn, “There’s a wasp he’s going to sting me.”
Louis, “me too.”
Finn, “quick I’ll steer the ship.”
Louis, “the wasp is leaving from us.”[The wasp flies away]
Finn, “it’s bedtime for the pirates now.”
Louis, “its bed time.”
Both boys curl up on a log.
Finn, “Morning now let’s get our ship hats on.”
Both boys venture off the logs again.
Finn, “It’s dark in the sea and there are killer whales and they’ll get you!”
Louis “Go back on the ship! You have to go back again!”
Finn “Oh no I can’t get back to you!”
Louis, “oh no! Walk up the plank.”
Finn, “Jump in the sea.”
Louis, “Do you like Octonauts?”{This is a children’s TV programme about underwater animal explorers, who travel in submarines}
Finn, “Yes”
Louis, “I’m Kwasii.” {A swashbuckling cat in the TV programme]
Finn, “and I’m Dashi.” [An engineer dog]
Louis, “and I’m Barnacles.”[A polar bear who is the captain of the submarine]
“Ocotnauts to the launch bay! Sound the Octoalarm!”
[10 minutes have elapsed, and Finn and Louis continue to play developing their set of themed happenings on the logs]

This play episode illustrates the power of place, materials and established culture in the socio-cultural framing of the activity. The children using very a few words and abstracted materials conjure up a very real world where they can try out roles identities and ideas. They can test the

influence of those roles identities and ideas on others. They learn how to harness the thoughts embodies in words, objects to reflect on possibilities and directions of joint endeavour.
One of the setting's leaders reflecting on how she achieved pedagogic change, said

> We were doing those things but not accepting that we were getting those interactions. We didn't realise we were doing those things and the importance of it. Through discussions, staff meetings and training through written observations and evaluations we could see the quality of what we were doing (Hadfield, Jopling and Needham 2015)

Recording and presenting reflective studies of teacher-led and child- activities to permeate and inform each other is an important step in promoting balance. Sharing examples of the benefits of child-led play based pedagogy with parents, policy makers and politicians continues to be important in challenging the pressures to focus preparing children for school only through subjects rather than complimentary skills and dispositions.

Conclusion

This chapter suggests that attempting to change the deep-rooted beliefs about pedagogy is a long-term project that will require further presentations of examples of how play enhances both children's appreciation of early education experiences and contributes to their abilities, aptitudes and attitudes. There is perhaps a doxa, shared by adults and children in some contexts that focus of school preparedness requires the ability to internalise lessons from adult discourse and questioning alongside the development of thinking for one's self. There is therefore an expectation that the adults will introduce target knowledge into the classroom space and that the learners need to internalise or commit that knowledge to heart. An expectation that knowledge is something that we take away with us, located within our skins. Authors such Lave and Wenger (2001), Wertsch (1997) and Rogoff (2003) draw attention to the importance of distributed cognition as a form of thinking that is much less assessed even though it may be present in many classroom exchanges. Play is a format that conjures up worlds by pooling participants' knowledge to create a creative problem solving shared mind.

It may also be helpful to stop referring to 'traditional and progressive approaches' in the debate about the place for play and child led learning in early education. Characterising pedagogic change in this way is unhelpful for a number of reasons. First it puts individuals into a binary (Olsson, 2009) where they have to position themselves. The continuing use of the modern-

traditional binary pushes individuals to position themselves in arguments and in the preschool context, it may mean that we are constrained by thinking. This should be much less a binary and much more a blended spectrum of experiences of adult and child led activities. Thirdly, this binary may be unhelpful when one is sep;;.eking to update the traditional view of play as a frivolous, expenditure of childish energy (Anning 2010). Play should be an integral part of learning that facilitates complimentary dispositions. The social orthodoxy associates play with tradition and perhaps requires more attention to change this underlying view so that by careful observation of children's skills in these contexts practitioners are able to see for themselves that these contexts offer a complimentary skill set.

Presenting engaging studies of a range of child led activity demonstrating what children are capable of from outdoor play, play spaces activities with families, peers and mixed aged groups, need to be viewed can all contribute to this more integrated view of learning. Encouraging practitioners to engage in reflection on children's capabilities, interests and engagement in less directed and controlled learning activity is an important to step in developing practice. Supporting the development of play spaces in the outdoors and sensitive adult observation and participation in these spaces could be an important step in developing children's right to participation and play in a world that is increasingly regulated. It is also a valuable space to develop their skills for lifelong participation and engagement in group thinking and understanding.

Reflective Questions

How much do think with other people? Try to think of times when your thinking is shared with others and consider how do you help each other's ideas to evolve?

Can play and teaching happen together or does one subvert the other?

If you had been the adult present at the example of outdoor play presented in the chapter, how might you have extended the play scenario?

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