



Early Childhood Education

The official journal of the Early Childhood Education Council of The Alberta Teachers' Association

Volume 44, Number 1

2016



Early Childhood Education is the official journal of the Early Childhood Education Council (ECEC) of The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). The journal assists the ECEC to achieve its objective of improving practice in early childhood education by publishing articles that increase the professional knowledge and understanding of teachers, administrators and other educationists involved in early childhood education. The journal seeks to stimulate thinking, to explore new ideas and to offer various points of view. It serves to promote the convictions of the ECEC about early childhood education.

Copyright © 2017 by The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta T5N 2R1. Unless otherwise indicated in the text, reproduction of material in *Early Childhood Education* is authorized for classroom and professional development use, provided that each copy contain full acknowledgement of the source and that no charge be made beyond the cost of reprinting. Any other reproduction in whole or in part without prior written consent of the ATA is prohibited. Although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the ECEC or the ATA. ISSN 0012-8171

Individual copies of this journal can be ordered at the following prices: 1 to 4 copies, \$7.50 each; 5 to 10 copies, \$5.00 each; over 10 copies, \$3.50 each. Please add 5 per cent shipping and handling and 5 per cent GST. Please contact Distribution at Barnett House to place your order. In Edmonton, dial 780-447-9432; toll free in Alberta, dial 1-800-232-7208, ext 432.

Personal information regarding any person named in this document is for the sole purpose of professional consultation between members of The Alberta Teachers' Association.

Table of Contents

Volume 44, Number 1, 2016

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

3 *Larry Prochner*

FEATURED ARTICLES

What Do Trial Balloons, Bubbles and Popping
Have to Do with Programming in Early
Childhood Programs?

4 *Beverlie Dietze
and Diane Kashin*

Cross-Cultural Interpretations of the Teacher Role
in "Learning Through Play" Pedagogy

10 *Christine Massing*

THE LEARNING CORNER

A Home for Dogs

15 *Julie Jackie*

Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Development:
A Resource Guide for Practitioners

21 *Lindsay Herriot*

BOOK REVIEW

Best Practices in Writing Instruction, edited by
S Graham, C A MacArthur and J Fitzgerald

22 *Miriam Ramzy*

Early Childhood Education is indexed in CBCA Education.



Kindergarten School, Lethbridge, Alberta, 1912 (Glenbow Archives, NA-3267-38)

From the Editor's Desk

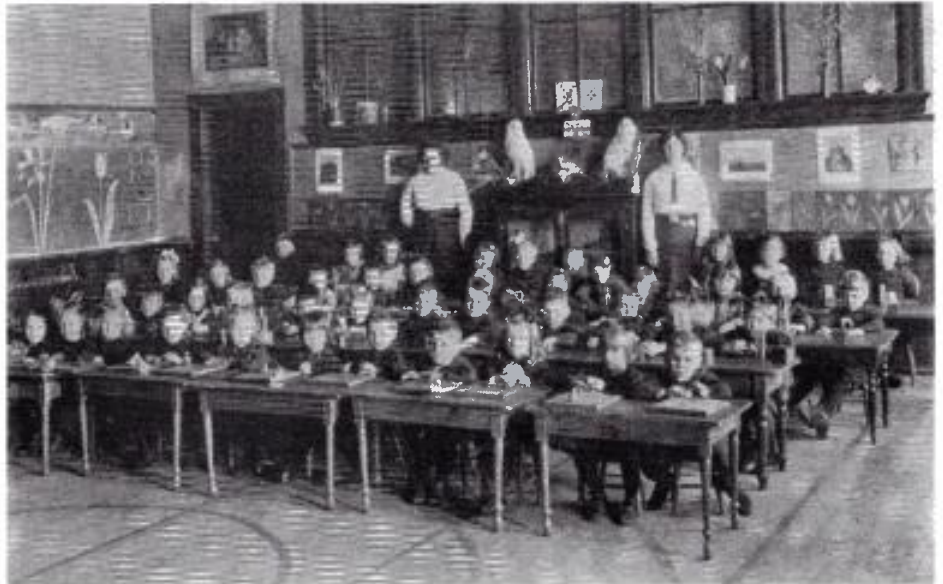
Dear friends and colleagues
A characteristic of a profession is its understanding of a shared history. It is timely to engage readers of *Early Childhood Education* in thinking about the history of our field as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Early Childhood Education Council of the Alberta Teacher's Association. Many ideas concerning early childhood education are transnational in origin, meaning that they reflect global (western) trends and broad social movements. These come to life in our local communities, visible in the work of our colleagues, through the experience of the children in our classrooms, and in written curricula, textbooks, and learning materials.

Kindergarten in Alberta has a long history. The Kindergarten School operated in Lethbridge from 1907 to 1924, housed in a purpose-built schoolroom that still stands.

Yet the kindergarten in Lethbridge may not have been the first in Alberta. The Department of Education's *Annual Report* for 1907 noted that

The first kindergarten established in Alberta in connection with public schools was opened in September in Wetaskiwin. The director teaches this department during the forenoon, and is supervisor of music and drawing during the afternoons. The work has been conducted skillfully and the experiment has fulfilled the expectations of the most optimistic. (p 42)

More information on the Wetaskiwin program is in the *Alexandra High School Souvenir* for the year 1909. This early version of a school yearbook described the classes in the Wetaskiwin school from kindergarten to Grade 12. Details on the kindergarten included the names of the kindergarten teacher, Mrs R E Terry (see photo) and her assistant Dorothea Wyld. Children were admitted from five years of age, and the enrolment was more than 50, with daily attendance averaging 35. The publication described a "Kindergarten Department," though there was only a single classroom. This was equipped with a "piano, tables, chairs, rings, and



Kindergarten Department, Alexandra School, Wetaskiwin, 1914 (Alberta Department of Education 1914)

the usual moulding boards, sand tray and paper" (p 19). The curriculum included lessons in

orderly conduct, and a due regard for the rights and feelings of others. First instruction is given in drawing, building and numbers, and [the child] is taught that school is an attractive place, not [one] of work only, which dulls the mind as well as the natural instincts of the child.

These statements indicated that the teachers used a progressive approach in their classes, suggesting that their program was aligned with the ideas of New Education. More than 100 years have passed since the opening of the first kindergartens in Alberta, in Lethbridge and Wetaskiwin. While we have much to celebrate, there is still significant work ahead to ensure that the promise of early childhood education is met to empower children and families from all backgrounds.

References

- Alberta Department of Education. 1907. *Annual Report*. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Department of Education.
- . 1914. *Annual Report*. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Department of Education.
- Alexandra High School Souvenir*. 1909. Wetaskiwin, Alta: Alexandra High School. Available at www.ourroots.ca/e/ (accessed October 16, 2016). 📖

Larry Prochner

What Do Trial Balloons, Bubbles and Popping Have to Do with Programming in Early Childhood Education Programs?

Beverlie Dietze and Diane Kashin

Beverlie Dietze, PhD, is the current director of learning and teaching at Okanagan College in Kelowna, British Columbia. She has been researching the state of outdoor play in Canada since 1997. She has published several articles on staff development and outdoor play topics and three textbooks on early childhood education, two of them coauthored with Diane Kashin. She is the coordinator and a lead researcher of the project Building Capacity—Creating Specialized Outdoor Play Training to Empower Children's Experiences, funded by the Lawson Foundation.

Diane Kashin, EdD, teaches at Ryerson University and consults in early childhood education. Her research interests include emergent curriculum and nature pedagogy. She and Beverlie Dietze have coauthored a number of research articles and two early childhood textbooks published by Pearson Canada. Diane Kashin is currently a research lead on a project on outdoor play and learning funded by the Lawson Foundation.

Introduction

Children's play and experiences in early learning programs are influenced by many factors including environmental designs (Fjortoft, Kristoffersen and Sageie 2009), the materials available to support play and the roles that children and adults engage in during the play. There are many program models that guide early learning professionals in developing curriculum for young children. While many provinces across Canada have developed early childhood curriculum frameworks (Langford 2010), educators are still able to take an individualistic approach to curriculum development. A child-centred pedagogy (Langford 2010) encourages early learning professionals to plan experiences from children's demonstrated interests. These interests may be triggered from dialogue, observations, and experiences between and among children and adults, and by environmental attributes.

Regardless of the philosophical tenets or frameworks that are used to guide the curriculum,

MacNaughton (2003) determined that "early childhood educators act in particular ways with young children and develop curriculum for them based on their understanding of how children learn, how they make sense of their surroundings and how they form relationships" (p 9). Creating environments where children feel a sense of belonging and have positive and empowering relationships with others is essential for optimal exploration and engagement in experiences for learning. This is the responsibility of educators if their pedagogical approach is child centred. This does not mean that the curriculum is directed by the child; instead, it opens up possibilities for everyone, including children, to examine their worlds and investigate areas of interest that intrigue them. From a social constructivist world view, learning is a social process that has numerous benefits to young children in developing competencies, risk-taking and self-regulation skills (Dietze and Kashin 2016; Vygotsky 1978).

Social constructivist learning occurs through intense participation and is recognized as a powerful form of learning (Rogoff et al 2003). When children's strengths and talents are acknowledged, full engagement is more likely to occur, especially when their interests are supported and embraced within their family, culture and society. Children's ways of expressing their ideas, their interests and their sources of creating knowledge about their world vary. When adults engage with children, the children's interest in their surroundings and their motivation are strengthened (Katz and Chard 1990). From a constructivist approach, early learning professionals serve as provocateurs and facilitators to help children identify their interests and experience rich and intriguing opportunities for explorations and discoveries. *Constructivism* refers to knowledge that is acquired through active involvement with content and experimentation

(Kashin 2009). Social-constructivism, based on Vygotsky's (1978) perspective, suggests that early learning professionals and children "co-learn, co-research and co-construct knowledge" (Stuhmcke 2012, 7). This means that social context and environmental factors are highly significant in children's level of engagement with their environment (Stuhmcke 2012). Creating environments that entice children and stimulate their interests and curiosity becomes a fundamental role of early learning professionals.

The concept of curiosity has been studied and published about in a variety of disciplines since the 1950s. As outlined by Arnone et al, (2011), Piaget (1952) posited that curiosity is a way that children make sense of their world. He suggested that when children are in the right environment and can act upon their curiosity, they seek answers to the things that trigger their interest. This process is linked to their cognitive development processes and is the foundation for learning. Berlyne's (1978) seminal work examined curiosity through a neurophysiological lens. He suggested that four forms of curiosity could be used to analyze children's play behaviour: perceptual curiosity, epistemic curiosity, specific curiosity and diverse curiosity. *Perceptual curiosity* is described as an interest in and attention to novel perceptual stimulation, which can lead children to engage in further visual and sensory exploration. *Epistemic curiosity* refers to a quest for knowledge and is influenced by the people, materials and experiences offered within early learning environments to support children's play. *Specific curiosity* is identified as a desire to seek out specific information or knowledge on a topic, such as when children become interested in items or experiences available in their environments. *Diverse curiosity* can best be described as being similar to being bored and seeking stimulation to bring a sense of excitement into the environment. Diverse curiosity is prevalent in outdoor playgrounds that have equipment that is not challenging to children or not aligned with their skills and interests (Arnone et al 2011).

Early childhood professionals influence children's experiences and the depth of play that they engage in (Dietze and Kashin 2012). Adult attitudes toward children's play and exploration can either facilitate children's opportunities and desires to be curious or create barriers that reduce their motivation to act upon their sense of wonderment (Chak 2007). When children's curiosity is sparked and their desire to explore heightened, more in-depth, long-term exploration occurs (Chak 2007; Driscoll and Lownds 2007). Children have higher levels of exploration, discovery and learning in environments

with unique resources and experiences and where curiosity is honoured (Perry 2001).

Inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach practiced in Reggio Emilia, Italy, some educators in Canada use provocations or invitations in the environment as a way to spark children's curiosity. *Provocations* are the deliberate and thoughtful actions taken by adults or children that provoke or extend children's sense of wonder and thinking, such as adding unique displays or materials to various parts of the environment. As described by Gandini (1998), provocation is something arriving by surprise. Provocation is a means for provoking further action and exploration (Fraser and Gestwicki 2000), which is related to sparking children's curiosity and their desire to explore ideas and possibilities in depth. The idea of trial balloons could serve as a means or a tool to begin the process of triggering children's interests and ideas and be a precursor to provocations and invitations.

Current Study

The purpose of this study was for the authors to explore the idea of introducing a new concept known as *trial balloons* into early learning program planning to support early learning professionals in gaining insight into children's interests and ideas. The traditional concept of trial balloons is not new; however, using it as a program planning strategy is a new concept in early learning programming.

The term *trial balloons* may have originated in 1782 with Joseph and Etienne Montgolfier, when they began testing the idea of releasing hot air balloons into the environment.¹ The brothers observed what happened to each balloon in an effort to seek information on the level of safety of their idea. Since the term *trial balloons* was initially coined, its usage has evolved as a way to describe examining whether an idea, a product or an action is worth developing.

The authors were inspired to search for a new process that could be used by early learning professionals before using provocations by discussions at a national conference with more than 50 early learning professionals, who expressed concerns about investing time into planning for provocations without knowing if children would be drawn toward the materials or intrigued with an idea or action. These concerns led the researchers to explore two core questions. First, is there a process that early learning professionals could use to gauge a child's interest in an idea, material or

¹ Some information about the brothers and their invention is available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgolfier_brothers (accessed November 15, 2016).

experience before a provocation? Second, would a process such as the trial balloon concept help early learning professionals to gain insight into the level of interest that children have about potential materials, ideas, or environmental places or designs? The researchers were curious to explore how the trial balloon concept could provide early learning professionals with a program planning process that would provide insight into the types of experiences and environmental factors that would support co-constructivism between and among children and adults.

Research Methodology

This study employed narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method that uses a process of studying, examining, and using discourse or writing to bring meaning to questions, experiences or perspectives (Meier and Stremmel 2010). Drawing on Dewey's position that educators examine the past-present-future continuum of experience, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) asserted that individuals' lives are stories—stories that unfold over time, with experience, reflection and new meaning.

The authors engaged in a process of writings about their observations of program planning in the early childhood sector, including their thinking about how children play and learn and the strategies that early childhood educators use for program planning. They documented their reflections about their ideas of a trial balloon concept, in both pictorial and story concepts. They first examined their various writings and concepts separately and then combined their works for a collaborative exploration and discussion. This process helped them to be able to "pull out narrative threads that hold together the interwoven fabric of past, present and future lives and their personal and professional selves" (Knowles and Cole 2008, 15). As well, by looking at their individual and collective concepts, they were able to make sense of their perceptions about trial balloons as a programming process in early childhood settings with children three to five years of age. When they determined that they had workable ideas and articulated their "Aha!" thoughts about the benefits of trial balloons, they engaged in further exploration. They re-examined and reflected upon their documented learning stories to seek out themes and patterns that would clarify whether and how trial balloons could promote children's curiosity triggers within their play spaces. As part of the narrative inquiry, the researchers drew upon a co-constructivism approach, gaining new knowledge from both the similar and the varying insights and perspectives shared.

Data Collection

Throughout the 2013/14 academic year, the authors began an exchange of ideas about whether and how the concept of trial balloons would work with children between the ages of three and five years in early learning programs. Drawing on the ways in which marketing consultants use the concept of trial balloons, the researchers shared ideas about using a trial balloons approach as a method to test children's sense of curiosity on topical issues or materials. They sketched out ideas, using a combination of mind mapping with word and pictorial representations to visualize the concept as a programming strategy.

1. The authors examined the concept of trial balloons using the following questions as a lens and a way to develop new conceptualizations for this idea.
2. If we think about the concept of trial balloons from an early childhood education perspective, what might it look like? How might this process support early learning professionals in advancing the potential of children's curiosity being triggered?

How might the concept of trial balloons be expanded to a programming process? What might that programming process look like? Would the concept of trial balloons add value to children's experiences?

The concepts were sketched out by one researcher and critiqued by the other. This was followed by collaborative discussions, which led to further adjustments to the concept. A back-and-forth process occurred between the two researchers throughout the process. Each researcher asked focused questions of the other to attempt to bring clarity to the idea. As they explored the concept more fully, they used focused questions, experiences or materials or a combination of all three as part of their strategy to "float" ideas. Each time they floated a trial balloon, they recorded their personal perception of whether such a strategy had merit for further consideration. Then they discussed their perceptions with one another. As those discussions took place, notes were taken and examined individually to determine themes, and recurring themes, that evolved from the onset of the project. This back-and-forth process and reflection allowed for the idea of using trial balloons in programming to remain fluid. The researchers drew upon their reflections as a way of making meaning and to visualize how trial balloons could be used in early childhood programming. Using a constant comparative analysis to identify themes, perceptions and ideas within the data helped them to see strengths and gaps if the concept were to be

adapted as a programming strategy. As they explored the concept, the depth and breadth of the concept expanded to include *bubbles* and *popping*. Their exchanges led to them to create a number of ideas about the bubbles and popping and then discover how the model aligned and supported child-initiated processes and, just as important, advance the depth of programming in early learning programs that would have meaning for children.

Results

The concept of using trial balloons as a process to gain insight into the types of provocations that may be introduced to children in their play is new to the literature. The process of examining the core questions about the concept of trial balloons revealed a shared belief that the concept has a place in the early learning programming process.

The authors lived the floating trial balloons idea in their research. The more ideas they floated about

how trial balloons could support children's programming, the clearer the benefits became of using the concept with early learning professionals and children. They extended the concept to include *bubbles*. Bubbles were viewed as transient objects that children connect with and can last a wondrous moment in time. Building on the perspective that materials in an inspiring environment can act as a third teacher (Gandini 1998; Fraser 2011), it became clear that trial balloons could be the forerunner to producing bubbles of programming experiences to support children's curiosity, exploration and learning.

In combining the idea of balloons and bubbles, the commonality between the two became apparent—they *pop!* As the researchers examined those two components in relation to children, ideas about how balloons and bubbles bring joy, ignite wonder and spark curiosity became clearer. The **POPPING** process (see Table 1.1) has the potential to further provoke minds and expand learning. This extends thinking about what is possible.

Program Design		Professional Responsibilities
P	Provocations for play	Set the stage and provide children with the bubbles and balloons to begin the playful process.
O	Observation, documentation and interpretation	Own your voice as a professional engaging with children in this playful process.
P	Keeping a project/inquiry, or multiple projects/inquiries, going	Based on observation, documentation, and interpretation, build your program in collaboration with others while you continue to observe, document and interpret.
P	Planning for future experience	Conceptualize learning questions that will lead the inquiry and identify the project to be undertaken. Consider the whole of the project through its title. Have it reflect its collaborative nature.
I	Identifying interests	As part of the interpretative process, identify the interests of the children, but be careful not to trivialize. Look for authentic and meaningful interests that can provide future experiences.
N	Next steps	Like a bubble, the project or inquiry cannot last forever. A balloon cannot stay inflated forever. Plan for the transition. What are your next steps?
G	Group growth	Document your group and community experiences, including the growth and development of all the players.

Table 1.1 Program Popping (Dietze and Kashin 2016).

As the idea of combining bubbles and balloons evolved and was considered metaphorically, the authors theorized that each can trigger, prompt, provoke or expand curiosity. When the concepts of trial balloons and bubbles are combined, they can guide program design in early learning programs. Table 1.1 provides an overview of how trial balloons and bubbles bring a new perspective to programming to early learning environments.

When a trial balloon is launched by children or adults and if the idea becomes of interest to children, it has the potential to “spiral into learning that has no beginning or end,” much like the metaphor of a tangle of spaghetti that Malaguzzi (1998) used to describe knowledge (p 131). The newly formed concept of *trial balloons*, *bubbles* and *popping* creates a visual that has merit for early learning programs, because the emergent nature of the spiral of learning supports a child-centred pedagogy within a social constructivist environment.

Discussion

There are benefits of drawing upon research and processes from different disciplines, such as using the marketing strategy of trial balloons to seek insight into thoughts and perspectives of constituents. Using the concept of trial balloons requires a thoughtful and planned process. Early learning professionals gain a deeper understanding of potential opportunities with and for children when using new processes or ideas in their practice. Engaging in discussions with peers and critical friends (Bullough, Knowles and Crow 1992) to explore the core questions of *if*, *what*, *why*, *when* and *how* about the potential of launching a trial balloon brought forth the development of the model. Documentation and discussions may bring value to colleagues and children that trigger their ideas, points of view or processes to a point where a vision for a trial balloon could be formulated. Critical dialogue with colleagues about trial balloons and the popping process may be needed to fully understand their purpose, benefits and strategies in the programming process. Launching trial balloons is intended to be a collaborative experience used to experiment with ideas to spark curiosity, create new options for children’s play and scaffold opportunities (Dietze and Kashin 2016; Malaguzzi 1998).

Floating trial balloons is like planting seeds—the intent is to germinate ideas, fertilize children’s thinking and actions and nurture new experiences or dimensions for exploration that children have not necessarily encountered before. This new programming perspective positions early learning professionals to support and promote exploratory,

experiential learning, dialogue and reflection that could lead to new knowledge creation. The more collective exploratory work that is examined in early childhood programs, the more likelihood curiosity will be aroused and new learning will be transferred to practice (Harris and Chrispeels 2008; Harris and Jones 2010; Webster-Wright 2009). This supports early learning professionals in envisioning children’s ideas in relation to their philosophy about how children learn through play.

When early learning professionals think about and practise programming in a particular way, there is potential for the experiences, programming and opportunities extended to children to become stagnant. Because they challenge early learning professionals’ perspectives, thinking processes, experiences, beliefs and values in relation to theoretical frameworks and practices, the trial balloon and popping processes have the potential to provide a more complex and comprehensive understanding of children’s interests and opportunities for new knowledge creation or “Aha!” moments (Sherman 2009).

Future Research

The concept of *trial balloons*, *bubbles* and the *POPPING* process brings a new lens to programming in early learning programs. Combining the trial balloon concept with observations, pedagogical documentation and reflections adds new knowledge and tools for early learning professionals that are focused on designing environments that offer curiosity triggers to children. For this reason, this concept is worthy of having early learning professionals test this programming process to see its strengths, opportunities, gaps and weaknesses in relation to their program philosophy and current programming practices.

Conclusion

Creating environments and experiences that trigger children’s sense of curiosity is highly participative and fluid in nature. Early learning professionals can support children’s sense of curiosity and wonderment by making conscious efforts to bring new ideas, materials or options for exploration into the environment. Early learning professionals draw upon their program documentation, observations and understandings about children and their partners in learning, pedagogy and context (Hedges and Cullen 2012) to seek insight into children’s interests. The idea of using the concept of *floating balloons* and *popping* as strategies for engaging children in exploring

potential opportunities provides a unique way to gain insight into children's interests and expand upon strategies for extending children's play.

By using the *trial balloon*, *bubble* and *POPPING* metaphor, early learning professionals may have a new approach to programming that could lead to a different type of dialogue about potential experiences. This approach could trigger new ideas among both children and adults, leading to new interests, experiences and knowledge creation. The combined process of using trial balloons and examining the process through the *bubble* and *POPPING* metaphor invites early learning professionals to engage in discourse with colleagues. This could lead them to gain a deeper understanding of children's interests and areas that trigger their curiosity. The importance of early learning professionals continuously seeking ways to support children in being curious reinforces the benefits of using trial balloons in the programming process.

References

- Arnone, M, R Small, S Shauncey and H P McKenna. 2011. "Curiosity, Interest and Engagement in Technology-Pervasive Learning Environments: A New Research Agenda." *Education Technology Research Development* 59, no 2: 181-98.
- Berlyne, D E. 1978. "Curiosity and Learning." *Motivation and Emotion* 2, no 2: 97-175.
- Bullough, R, G Knowles and N Crow. 1992. *Emerging as a Teacher*. New York: Routledge.
- Chak, A. 2007. "Teachers' and Parents' Conceptions of Children's Curiosity and Exploration." *International Journal of Early Years Education* 15, no 2: 141-59.
- Connelly, F M, and D J Clandinin. 2006. "Narrative Inquiry." In *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research*, 3rd ed, ed J L Green, G Camilli and P Elmore, 477-87. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Dietze, B, and D Kashin. 2012. *Playing and Learning in Early Childhood Education*. Toronto: Pearson Canada.
- . 2016. *Empowering Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education*. Toronto: Pearson Canada.
- Driscoll, E, and N Lownds. 2007. "The Garden Wonder Wall: Fostering Wonder and Curiosity on Multi-Day Garden Field Trips." *Applied Environmental Education and Communication* 6, no 1: 105-12.
- Fjørtoft, I, B Kristoffersen and J Sageie. 2009. "Children in Schoolyards: Tracking Movement Patterns and Physical Activity in Schoolyards Using Global Positioning System and Heart Rate Monitoring." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 93, no 3-4: 210-17.
- Fraser, S. 2011. *Authentic Childhood: Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom*. 3rd ed. Scarborough, Ont: Nelson.
- Fraser, S, and C Gestwicki. 2000. *Authentic Childhood: Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom*. Scarborough, Ont: Nelson.
- Gandini, L. 1998. "Educational and Caring Spaces." In *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach—Advanced Reflections*, ed C Edwards, L Gandini and G Forman, 161-78. Greenwich, Conn: Ablex.
- Harris, A, and J Chrispeels, eds. 2008. *Improving Schools and Educational Systems: International Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Harris, A, and M Jones. 2010. "Professional Learning Communities and System Improvements." *Improving Schools* 13, no 2: 171-81.
- Hedges, H, and J Cullen. 2012. "Participatory Learning Theories: A Framework for Early Childhood Pedagogy." *Early Child Development and Care* 182, no 7: 921-40.
- Kashin, D. 2009. *Reaching the Top of the Mountain: The Impact of Emergent Curriculum on the Practice and Self-Image of Early Childhood Educators*. Köln: Lambert.
- Katz, L, and S C Chard. 2000. *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach*. 2nd ed. Stamford, Conn: Ablex.
- Knowles, J G, and A L Cole. 2008. *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.
- Langford, R. 2010. *Innovations in Provincial Early Learning Curriculum Frameworks*. Occasional Paper No 24. Toronto: Ryerson University, Childcare Resource and Research Unit.
- MacNaughton, G. 2003. *Shaping Early Childhood: Learners, Curriculum and Contexts*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.
- Malaguzzi, L. 1998. "History, Ideas and Basic Philosophy: An Interview with Lella Gandini." In *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach—Advanced Reflections*, ed C Edwards, L Gandini and G Forman, 49-97. Greenwich, Conn: Ablex.
- Meier, D R, and A J Stremmel. 2010. "Reflection Through Narrative: The Power of Narrative Inquiry in Early Childhood Teacher Education." *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* 31, no 3: 249-57.
- Perry, B. 2001. "Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the Cycle of Violence." Available at www.childtrauma.org/CTAMATERIALS/incubated.asp.
- Piaget, J. 1952. *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Rogoff, B, R Paradise, R M Arauz, M Correa-Chávez and C Angelillo. 2003. "Firsthand Learning Through Intent Participation." *Annual Review of Psychology* 54: 175-203.
- Sherman, S C. 2009. "Haven't We Seen This Before? Sustaining a Vision in Teacher Education for Progressive Teaching Practice." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 36, no 4: 41-60.
- Stuhmcke, S. 2012. "Children as Change Agents for Sustainability." Professional doctorate thesis, Queensland University of Technology.
- Vygotsky, L. 1978. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. 14th ed. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Webster-Wright, A. 2009. "Reframing Professional Development Through Understanding Authentic Professional Learning." *Review of Educational Research* 79, no 2: 702-39. 🧑

Cross-Cultural Interpretations of the Teacher Role in “Learning Through Play” Pedagogy

Christine Massing

Christine Massing, PhD, is an assistant professor in early childhood education at the University of Regina and a former classroom teacher. This work was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Killam Trusts.

Abstract

While learning through play is a common pedagogical approach in Canadian early childhood classrooms, it is dissonant with the didactic, teacher-directed methods used in many cultural contexts. Based on data from a one-year ethnographic research study with African immigrant and refugee early childhood teacher education students, this article explores their perspectives on play-based approaches in relation to their own experiences with play and learning “back home.” The findings suggest that the participants experienced tensions with respect to the role of the teacher because they believed that when teachers assumed a facilitator or observer role, children did not have the same opportunity to learn important cultural and religious values such as respect.

Introduction

Informed by constructivist views of teaching, *learning through play* is one of the primary pedagogical approaches used in North American early childhood classrooms. Such an approach generally assumes that the child directs such play and exploration by choosing materials, themes and partners, while the teacher’s role varies from playing alongside the children and asking open-ended questions to simply observing them and documenting their learning. However, in many cultural contexts, learning and play are quite separate; play is to be free and unsupervised, while learning is viewed as teacher directed and occurring

in school contexts. This disjuncture can potentially lead to conflicts between teachers who embrace play-based approaches and culturally diverse families who bring different ideas about the relationship between play and learning. Using data from a study of East African immigrant/refugee women studying in an early childhood teacher education program, this article focuses on the students’ interpretations of “learning through play” in Canadian early childhood education (ECE) settings in relation to their own experiences in their country of origin. The importance of cultural and religious values, such as respect for one’s elders, undergirded their beliefs about the central role of the adult in structuring and directing learning.

Theoretical Framework

The study is framed by sociocultural theory, informed by the work of Vygotsky (1978), which is premised on the assumption that individuals develop and learn through active engagement with others in specific contexts (such as home, school and community). Expert peers or adults guide children in gaining competence in the skills, practices and knowledges that are valued in those contexts. Socialization patterns thus differ depending on cultural and familial values, beliefs and priorities in child-rearing, and may shift or be altered depending on the context of development (Grusec and Davidov 2010; Heath 1983; Rogoff et al 1993; Super and Harkness 1986). In dominant western contexts, Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) explains, young children are often socialized for cognitive competence; therefore, abstract reasoning, extensive verbalization and “school-like” literacy and numeracy skills are actively promoted to ensure school success. Adults are more likely to play with children or engage in face-to-face verbal conversations or interactions to enhance