Manukau Institute of Technology

I Wonder What Children Think About This?
School of Education Research Symposium May 17 2014
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THE OUTDOOR PLAYGROUND THROUGH CHILDREN’S EYES

Research Report by:
Cheryl Greenfield

Photographs by: Austin, Bernadette, Jayde, Nicholas and Tyla

2003

Figure 3. Photo taken by the researcher during session 4
Children’s perspectives – why?
Lessons learnt from initial pilot study

- Children as permission granters
- Value of handing over the camera
- Importance of children’s first names being used in relation to their photos
- Need to use a wider range of research tools that engage children
- Need to observe using traditional methods as well
Children’s Consent Form to Participate in Research
(using child’s real first name)

Title of Project: Young Children’s Views On Being Outside at Their Early Childhood Centre

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

Researcher: Cheryl Greenfield

My name is: _______________________

☐ Cheryl has talked to me about what we are going to do.
☐ I would like to take photos of the outdoor playground at my centre.
☐ I will let Cheryl take photos of me.
☐ I would like to share my ideas about the outside playground with Cheryl.
☐ Cheryl has told me that she will be showing the photos that I take to early childhood teachers and people interested in what I think about being outside.
☐ I agree to Cheryl using my first name when showing my photos to others.
☐ I understand that my photos will be kept for a long time.
☐ I can say no if I don’t want to talk to Cheryl or take photos.

Child’s signature: _______________________


Multiple Roles

Sufficiently detached but needing to build trusting relationships with children, teachers and parents

Observer as participant’ (Bryman, 2004)
  – to be available to the children and become ‘part of the furniture’, so to speak

Active membership (Merriam, 2006)
  – Taking on an increasingly active role in centre while maintaining distance

A ‘reactive participant’ (Corsaro & Miller, 1992)
Research Questions

• What are children’s perspectives of their experiences in the outdoor setting of their early childhood centre?
  – What are children’s views on the role of the teacher outside?

• What are teachers’, parents’ and the centre owner’s perspectives on outdoor experiences for children and its provision at the centre?
Three Principles

1. The belief that children have ideas, feelings and opinions worth listening to (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999)
2. Establishing and maintaining positive professional relationships with everyone in the research setting is crucial
3. Throughout the data-collection phase, the research procedures should not be too tightly constrained
RELATIONSHIPS

PRE

DURING

POST

PRIVILEGE /RESPONSIBILITY
Bringing forth children’s voices is indefensible if those voices merely serve to silence some, marginalise others, or reinforce unjust ways of becoming (MacNaughton, 2003, p.42).
Inclusion

Wei-bin’s photo of me interacting with non-participant children
Research Methods/tools used

Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2005)
   – an holistic approach to gathering data and analysing data and listening to children

• multi-method
• participatory
• adaptable
• focused on children’s lived experiences
• embedded into practice
Research Tools used with children

- Observation – planned and spontaneous, photographic and written
- Conversations
- Cameras
- Photo elicitation
- Collaborative Drawing
- Touring
- Book making
Photography – Photo Novella

(1) as ‘aides memoires’ in the course of fieldwork
(2) as sources of data in their own right
(3) as prompts for discussion by research participants

(Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993; Kervin et al., 2006)

However, in hindsight, the strategy Hart (1979) used of asking the children to order their photos from most favourite to least, may well have been a more effective strategy to promote discussion.
Taken by Krissy aged 3

Taken by Eilish aged 3

Taken by Paloma aged 4
Alexia’s photo of the mouse

Hamish’s photos of the birds
Photographing friends and researcher taking photos

Joshua K’s photos

Wei-bin’s photo

Taran’s photo

Wei-bin’s photo

Jack’s photo
Handing over my own digital camera

Alexia’s photo

Sam’s photo
Photo Elicitation

• A method of interviewing which worked much more effectively than expected, as found by Clark and Moss (2005), Warming (2005) and Wiltz and Klein (2001).

A few of the pictures used
Touring

The physical nature of walking was in line with what other researchers had found, that children like to go to the places they are talking about (Clark & Moss, 2001; 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2003).
Other researchers, such as Clark (2005) and Dockett and Perry (2003), have also found there is more to gain from listening to young children’s talk during the drawing process rather than afterwards.
Child conferencing/conversations

- Tell me about the places outside you like the best
- Tell me about the parts of the outdoors you do not like
- Why do you like to go outside?
- Tell me about your most favourite place outside.
- What would you like to see changed or added to the outdoor space?
- Tell me about what teachers do outside.
- What do you think teachers should do outside?
Children’s voices
(Greenfield, 2007)

• When asked why they like being outside:
  • Jack: “Swinging on monkey bars, jumping on the tramp. Can do jumping, carpentry and run”
  • Alexia: “I like playing with the water and the sandpit and on the monkey bars”
  • Hamish: “Like going down (the slide)”
  • Mikayla: “To play, do running, playing tigger and winnie the pooh”
  • Sam: “just cause I do...being with friends being able to run”.

• ‘Playing’ was definitely synonymous with being outside
• There had to be playground “so we can play”
• Mikayla said “if...we don’t have anything to play on, and we wont see anything outside, no people, nothing”
• Jack strongly stated that the centre had a playground “because children like to play”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do teachers do outside</th>
<th>What should teachers do outside?</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Look after the kids” (Sam)</td>
<td>&quot;Um play monsters, X plays monsters with us&quot; (Sam)</td>
<td>Teachers look after us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They help you if you are crying and they save you” (Alexia)</td>
<td>Play on the monkey bars&quot;(Krissy)</td>
<td>Teachers should play with us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Watch us… and they help you if you are crying and they save you&quot; (Jack)</td>
<td>&quot;I think that they should play match number games and inside too. Play games on the seats (Jack)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When someone cries the teacher asks them what someone has done&quot; (Sam)</td>
<td>&quot;Play the monster game, and play jail (Alexia)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Researcher’s Observation tools

• Planned observations – time sampling, running records
• Spontaneous observations – photo essays, photographs
• Audio recording
• Research journal
• Parent journals/focus groups
• Book making
1.12.05
Krissy rearranging the obstacle course with Alexia’s help
Paloma’s mum: Paloma is obsessed with the monkey bars. When we go to the park she just wants to do harder and harder monkey bars. She tries the swing ones and goes backwards on them. She doesn’t do much else... she just enjoys it. (journal entry)
Wei-Bin: I like the monkey bars...
go along, dddddd
Joshua Mc – “Everybody put your raincoats on”
Disengaging: Bringing closure through bookmaking

Pukeko’s in the Garden?

October – December 2005

A photographic record of our time spent with Cheryl Greenfield sharing what we liked doing outside.
Analysis

- Inductive analysis which involved discovering patterns, themes and categories within the data and creating multiple mosaics, the findings emerged (Bryman, 2004; Patton, 2002), thereby creating a summary mosaic of preferences
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes that emerged from children’s perspectives on being outside and my observations (taken from 4.4).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Outside was where they played and could be:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Be physically active challenged, and learn new skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Transport and rearrange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Play chasing games, imagine and hide away from adult gaze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Explore and experience nature, and the natural, aesthetic and wider world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes that emerged from adults’ perspectives on being outside (taken from 5.3). Children have more opportunities for:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Vigorous and more complex active movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Moving things around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Playing games and exploring alone or with friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Experiencing nature and the natural and wider world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hiding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Being healthier (psychologically and physically)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning, risk taking, problem solving, using imagination and creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories of significant and unique aspects that the outdoor setting provided (merging of children’s and adult’s perspectives).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Elements of ’ for:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and holistic development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing, learning, imagining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigorous active movement and developing physical skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rearranging and transporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring and experiencing nature, and the natural, aesthetic and wider world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

- Trustworthiness and situated validity
- Flexibility and inclusion

The Mosaic Approach provides an effective, flexible and authentic methodology. By adapting and adding to the methods used by Clark and Moss (2001; 2005), I was able to further explore other research tools that were empowering for participants and provided various ways for them to share their views. The use of multiple tools resulted in data which significantly increased the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research findings.
Recommended Reading


Whāia te iti kahurangi
Ki te tūohu koe, me he maunga teitei
Pursue excellence – should you stumble, let it be to a lofty mountain