

# Introduction to Playful Participatory Research and Advocating for Play

# Gameplan

- Play as a right of children
- Advocating for Play
- The Great Play Debate
- Introduction to Playful Participatory Research
  - Discussions – Teacher Research Examples
  - Documentation as a Tool for PPR
  - Making paper airplanes
  - Choosing PPR Questions
- Stars and Wishes

**“Play must be the right of every child. Not a privilege.** After all, when regarded as a privilege, it is granted to some and denied to others, creating further inequities. Play as a right is what is fair and just. Although children will engage in play differently, play is a child’s right. It is currently being denied in the name of rigor and academics, both of which have been used as racist ways of keeping the status quo in place. That is, **in low-income preschools and schools, we see mandates, which seek to standardize and manage. In wealthier preschools, we witness the possibilities of play unleashed.”**

(Souto-Manning, 2017)

**Kindergarten has changed radically in the past two decades. New research in Los Angeles and New York shows what is happening in today's full-day kindergartens:**

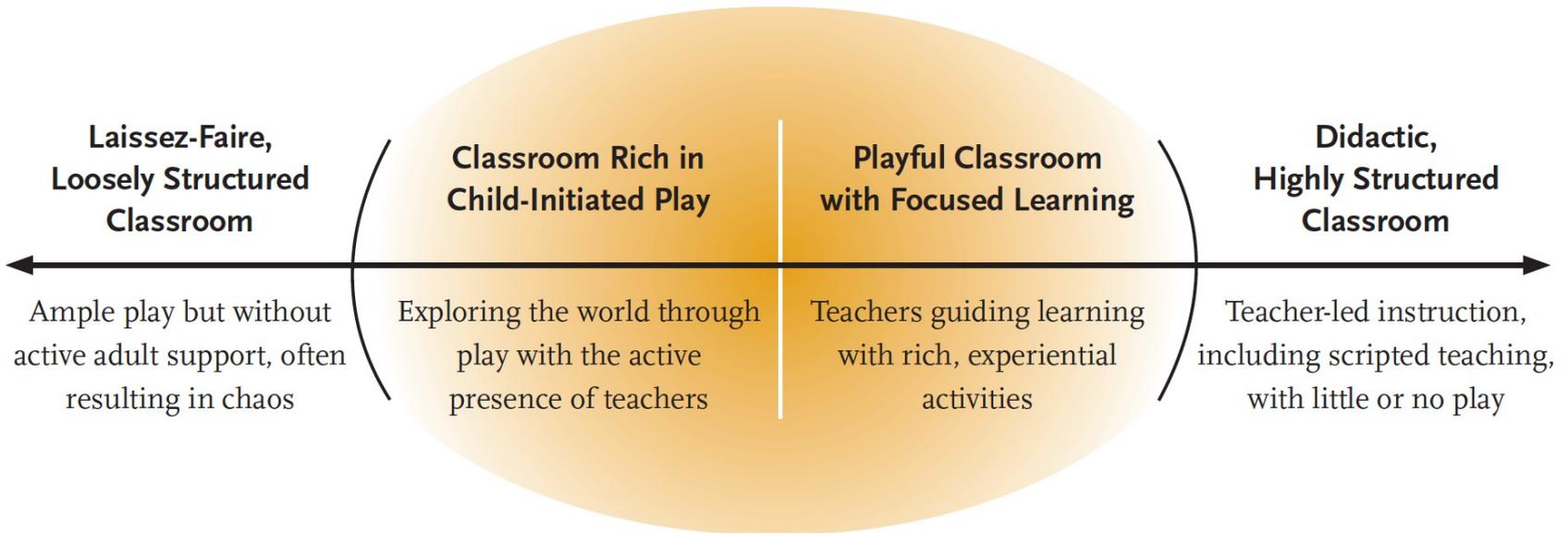
- **2–3 hours per day of literacy and math instruction and testing**
- **Of that, 20–30 minutes per day of standardized testing and test preparation**
- **Less than 30 minutes per day—and often no time at all—for play or choice time**



**CRISIS IN THE  
KINDERGARTEN**

Why Children Need  
to Play in School

## THE KINDERGARTEN CONTINUUM



Has the crisis shifted since 2009?



“When positioned as a privilege, play is granted to children who are in the dominant group while those in non-dominant groups are denied the right to play.” (Souto-Manning, 2017)

Have you seen or heard of examples of play as a privilege, not a right?

# Crisis in Kindergarten report as Advocacy: Recommendations

1. Restore child-initiated play and experiential learning with the active support of teachers to their rightful place at the heart of kindergarten education.
2. Reassess kindergarten standards to ensure that they promote developmentally appropriate practices, and eliminate those that do not.
3. End the inappropriate use in kindergarten of standardized tests, which are prone to serious error especially when given to children under age eight.
4. Expand the early childhood research agenda to examine the long-term impact of current preschool and kindergarten practices on the development of children from diverse backgrounds.
5. Give teachers of young children first-rate preparation that emphasizes the full development of the child and the importance of play, nurtures children's innate love of learning, and supports teachers' own capacities for creativity, autonomy, and integrity.
6. Use the crisis of play's disappearance from kindergarten to rally organizations and individuals to create a national movement for play in schools and communities.

# How to advocate for more play

First, trust that you are a smart and powerful advocate for children!

Advocacy is easy – you can do it!

Get your story ready – be able to tell a quick story about the impact of increased playful learning for children you have worked with, and back it up with 1 research finding (e.g. from some of our readings in this course).

# How to advocate for more play

- Learn about who makes decisions about education in your community – local, state/district, nationally
  - Reach out to decision-makers and offer to be a resource in your area of expertise.
  - Welcome newly elected officials to office by sending letters, artwork from the children in your class
- Use social media – write, share, and re-post resources and information about the importance of play
- Share information with your school community – other teachers, administrators, families (e.g. during curriculum night, in family newsletters, during staff meetings)

# Advocating for Play Examples



FALL 2017

# A Guide to Nature Play

A guide to the benefits of nature play, and tips to create natural settings in which children can play, learn, and thrive.



Childhood has changed. Children today don't play outdoors much. In a 2009 study, published in the American Journal of Play, which examined the role of play and experiential-learning activities beyond formal schooling in sixteen nations, 91% of Vietnamese mothers reported that their children watch TV often. By comparison, developing countries showed not only the highest rate of television watching, but also a considerably lower rate of outdoor play than developed countries like the US or the UK.

In recent years, children's participation in spontaneous activities and outdoor play has diminished as a result of many factors:

- The popularity of television programs, computer games, and other technological products;
- Longer school days;
- The shift in focus on child's academic achievements, after-school programs and activities;
- Parents' fears about children's physical safety;
- The shortage of quality play spaces near children's homes;
- Parents' lack of awareness about the benefits of unstructured play.

Despite these roadblocks, the play experience should be embraced and enhanced to foster children's healthy growth and development. Hence, this guide will highlight the benefits of play, especially nature play, and provide tips for parents and teachers to create natural settings in which children can play, learn, and thrive.

## Do You Remember...

### What did your childhood look like?

*Was it a time of joy, of play, of exploration and learning?  
Did it include being outdoors;  
watching fireflies, catching frogs,  
planting in the garden, jumping  
rope, and kicking shuttlecock with  
friends?*

### Do your own children play that way?

*Chances are, they don't.*



## Why does Play Matter?



*"For a child to understand something he must construct it for himself, he must reinvent it ... if future individuals are to be formed who are capable of creativity and not simply repetition." – Jean Piaget*

Play is essential to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development of children and youth. In honoring the child's play, we are fostering a "whole child" development. In contrast to the formal didactic atmosphere of most classrooms and home teaching, learning through play generally takes place with limited adult guidance and are largely child-driven. Young children work hard at play. They invent scenes and stories, solve problems, and negotiate their way through social roadblocks. They know what they want to do and work diligently to do it. Because their motivation comes from within, they learn the powerful lesson of pursuing their own ideas to a successful conclusion.

Jean Piaget conducted extensive research into play and concluded that play was a vital component to children's normal intellectual and social development. Piaget also found that physical, outdoor activity not only stretched children's imaginations and social interactions, but also gave them a chance to exercise their muscles and lungs and learn about their physical limitations.

The American Academy of Pediatrics indicated in its most recent clinical report that "play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength." Despite the apparent decrease in both indoor and outdoor play, children's playtime, regardless of form, remains essential for long-term development.

## What about Nature Play?

As you can see, the benefits of unstructured play are abundant. However, children's play time is in sharp decline; especially that spent outside, in contact with nature. Negative consequences include children's reduced physical health, lack of knowledge about nature, and related misconceptions about human dependence on the natural world. What do we know about the benefits of nature play?

- Regular habits of active play during childhood are one of the best predictors of an active and healthy adulthood.
- Outdoor play in green settings reduces stress and symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children.
- School children who use natural playgrounds show more creative play, better concentration, and more inter-gender play than peers with equipment-focused playgrounds.
- Early exposure to plants, animals, and soil helps develop children's immune systems, making them less vulnerable to some allergic and health conditions.
- Frequent, unstructured childhood play in natural settings has been found to be the most common influence on the understanding of sustainability and development of conservation values.

**Megina Baker**  
 Boston University School of Education  
 Early Childhood Learning Lab  
[meginab@bu.edu](mailto:meginab@bu.edu)  
 617-353-3410

**Young Children Need Authentic, Embedded, Play-Based Literacy Experiences**

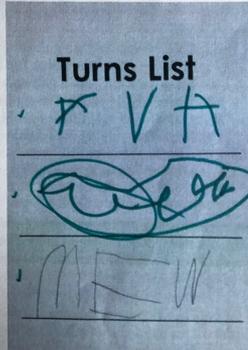
An Act Relative to Third Grade Reading Proficiency  
 Testimony on May 31, 2011



My name is Megina Baker. In the Early Childhood Education program at Boston University, I train student teachers in best practices for teaching young children. I also teach at The Early Childhood Learning Lab, BU's lab school, where we implement a play-based, literacy-rich curriculum for two-to-five year olds. Working with both children and student teachers gives me a unique perspective on the topic of today's hearing.

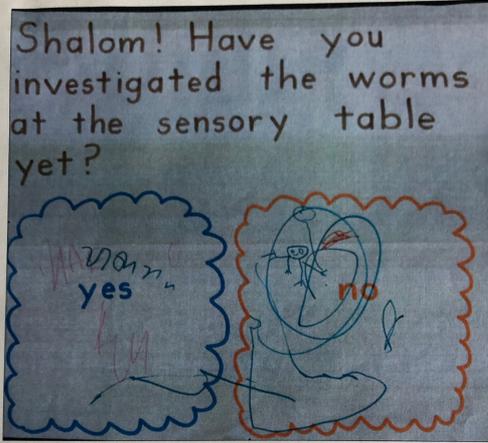
I've read the "Turning the Page" report, and fully support this legislation. The key to success in preparing children to be readers is to ensure that young children WANT to learn to read and write. There are a number of excellent programs in Massachusetts that do this; the preschool at Boston University is among them. Every child in our preschool goes on to kindergarten ready to read. They have solid understandings of the connection between alphabet letters and sounds in words. They know the purpose of putting marks on a page to represent ideas. We never drill alphabet letters or use worksheets. But we do teach reading every day. The curriculum is play-based, meaningful to the children, and incorporates reading throughout a child's day. If all children in the state of Massachusetts experienced this type of curriculum, I am certain that we would not see the worrisome statistics evident in our current MCAS scores.

Picture a three-year old who wants to play with the blocks, but someone else is already playing! What does she do? Maybe she pushes the other child out of the way. Maybe she cries. But this is a perfect moment for a literacy opportunity! A skilled teacher can reinforce language, guiding the child by telling her, "Say, I want that!" The desire to play is highly motivating, and we can build in a meaningful literacy experience here by saying, "You want to play with the blocks? Ok! Of course you can - write your name right here on this list." To the right is an example of a "turns list". This is a strategy that we use in our preschool that capitalizes on a child's powerful desire to play and turns it into an opportunity for literacy.



# Testimony at State House Hearing

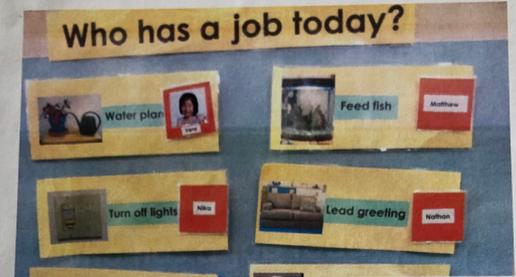
Now, take a look at the Morning Message below:



When the children arrive each day, they interact with print by reading the message with a teacher. The teacher can tailor how the message is read so that each child has developmentally appropriate opportunities to read familiar words, reinforce vocabulary, or predict a specific word based on contextual cues. And when a child makes a mark on the message to indicate his preference, the moment is motivating and affirming of her abilities as a reader and writer. He is not required to write his name, which could result in feelings of pressure or failure for a young child. Rather, he is encouraged to "write" using a scribble, or drawing, or making marks that resemble letters. Any way he chooses, he is successful at communicating information in writing, and this means he wants to keep on reading and writing more.

All of the children in our program leave us as emergent readers and writers, confident in their existing skills and eager to learn more. Each day I feel a sense of wonder as I see how capable these children are. Please come and see for yourself - our preschool has an observation room, and I want to extend an invitation to each one of you to come for a visit, so that you can see just how powerful play-based reading experiences can be for young children. We need to ensure that ALL third graders in Massachusetts are proficient readers. We CAN do this by giving preschool-aged children chances to read and write in meaningful ways each day, so that they develop the disposition of being a reader at an early age. Thank you so much for putting the children of Massachusetts first, and considering this legislation.

Here are some additional examples of meaningful literacy opportunities for two-to-five year olds:

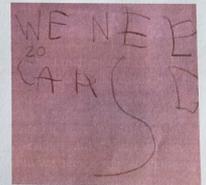


When children arrive at school, pictures and text provide information that matters immediately. Children want to know if they have classroom jobs, so they are eager to decode this text. Over time, picture cues can be phased out and print can be used alone.



Here, a child wanted to save his structure in the block area. The teacher said, "Yes, you can save that structure - but we need a sign so that everyone knows not to take it down at clean-up time." Mark used his knowledge that alphabet letters represent sounds in words to write PLEZ SAV R SSTR, "Please save our structure."

Children in the preschool often request materials for their play. When a child asks for something, the teachers say, "That's a great idea. Write that down so that the teachers know what you need." In the note below, a child requested more cars for his play. When the teachers respond to a child's request, the children learn that reading and writing are powerful and can benefit them.



To learn more, we invite you to visit the preschool.  
 The Early Childhood Learning Lab at Boston University  
 2 Silber Way, Boston  
 617-353-3410  
[child@bu.edu](mailto:child@bu.edu)

# Playful Advocacy

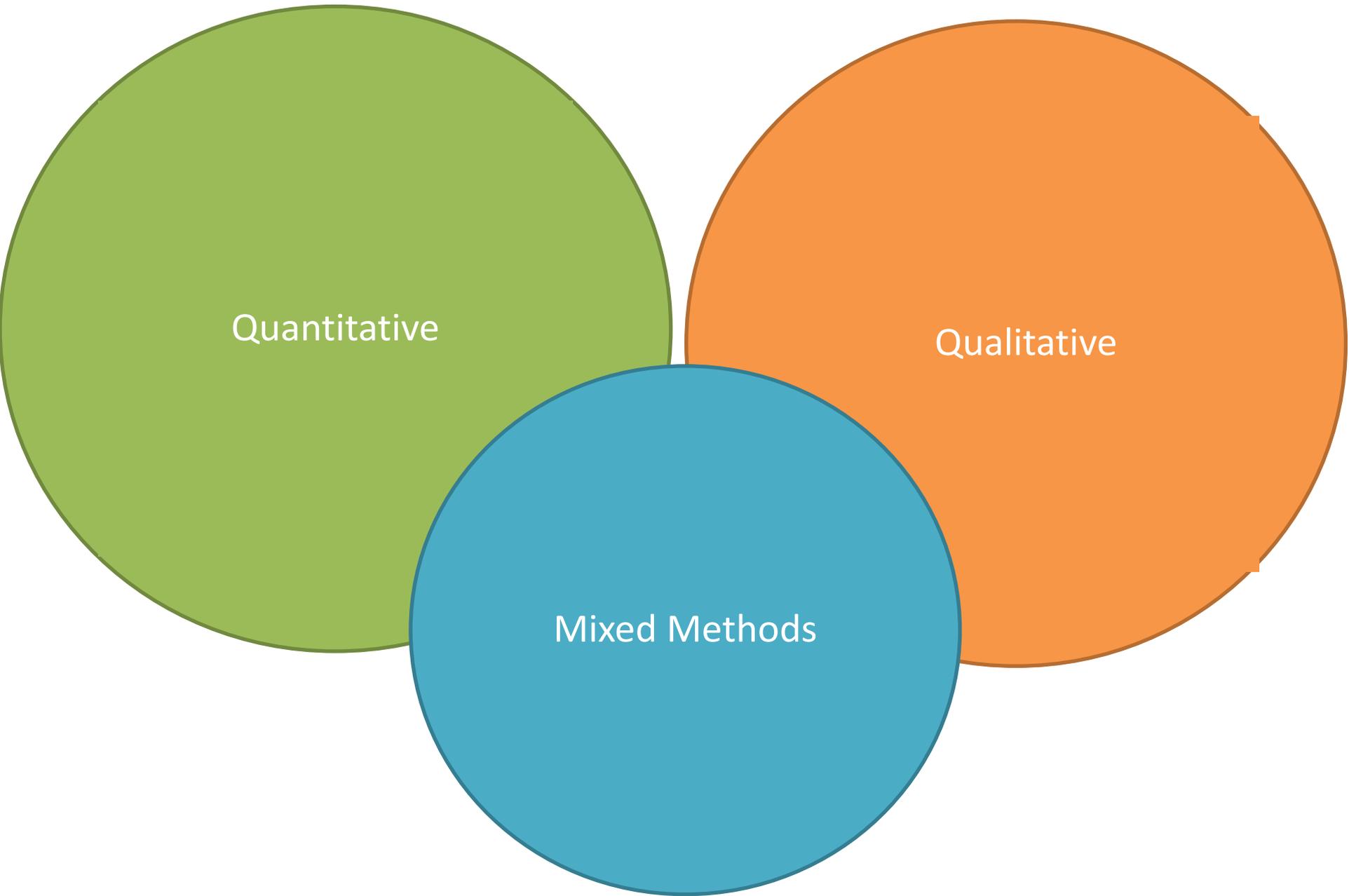


*Mimes replace traffic police to reinforce good traffic etiquette in Bogotá (1995).*

<https://creative-states.org/explore/its-time-we-play-our-way-out-of-intolerance/>

# Playful Participatory Research

A tool for for understanding and deepening learning through play



Quantitative

Qualitative

Mixed Methods

# Qualitative Research

Participatory  
Action Research

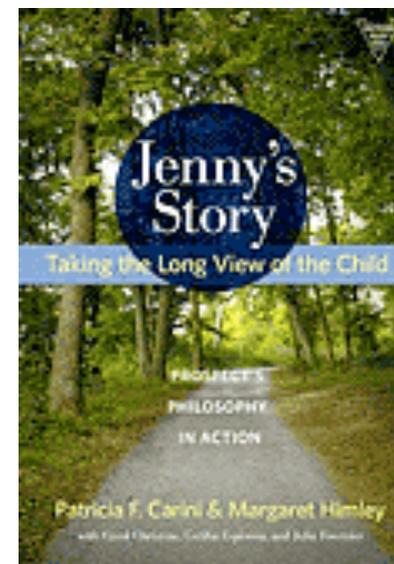
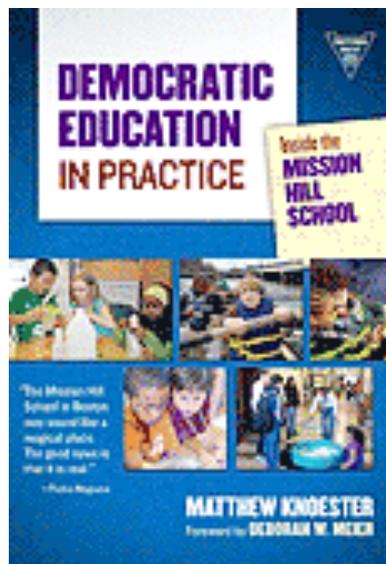
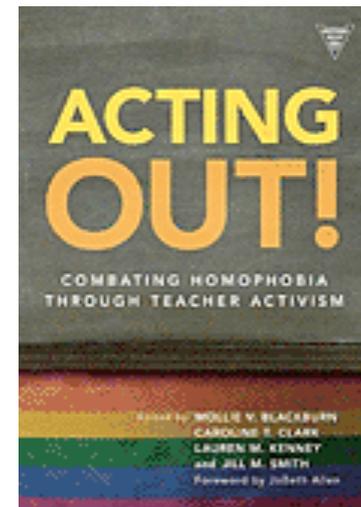
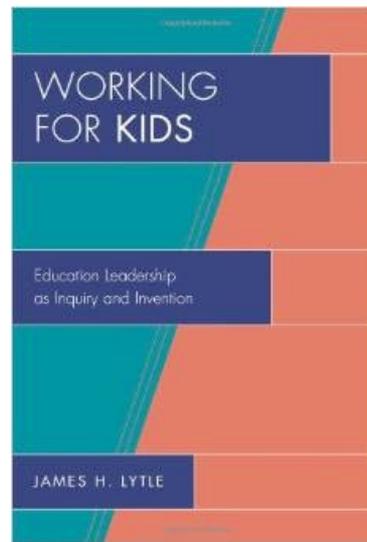
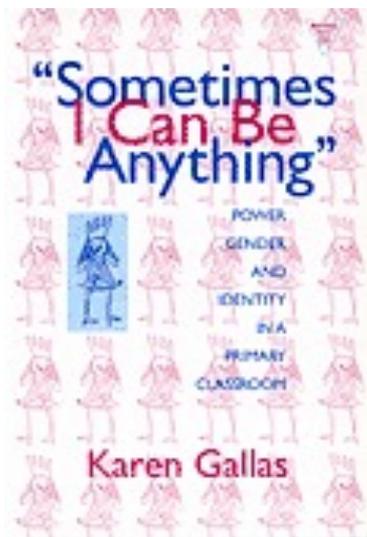
Ethnography

Discourse  
Analysis

Practitioner  
Inquiry

Case Study

Phenomenology



# The Playful Participatory Research Process



# Playful Participatory Research

## *Examples*



# A Playful Participatory Research Example: The Kindergarten Study group International School of Billund, Denmark



“We keep getting messages about learning through play, but I kept feeling like I have to stop it.”

*Marina, K3 teacher*



**Some of the kindergarten teachers at the International School of Billund in Denmark were finding that during recess time, they were saying no more than yes:**

No going up the slide

Ride bicycles only on the bike track, in one direction

Do not climb on the trees

Do not play with apples that fall from the tree

No throwing items over the fence

It is not allowed to dig outside of the sandbox

It is not allowed to play with tree branches

Choose

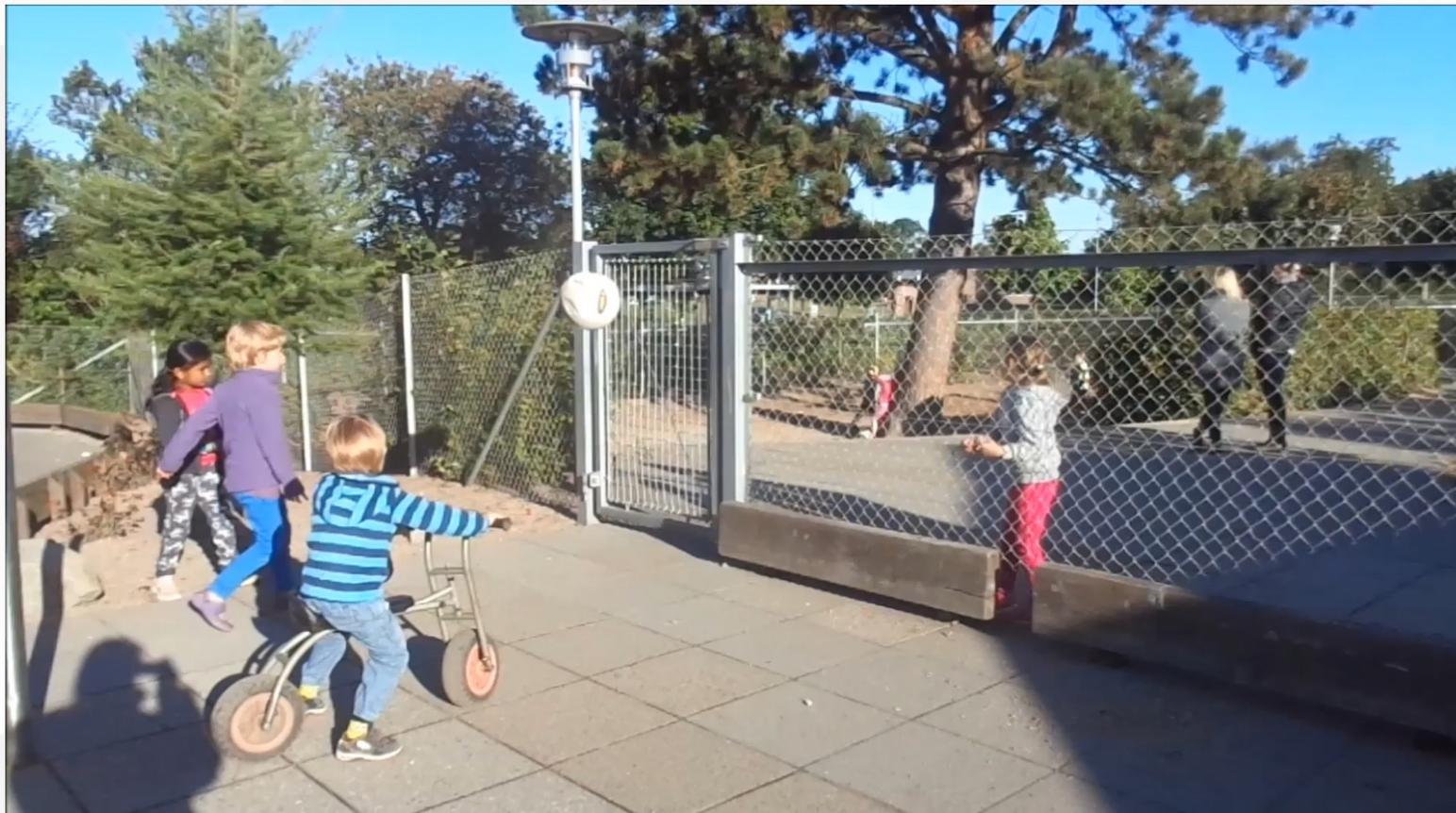
Choose a context  
and research  
question

# What happens when there are less rules on the playground?



Document

Document to explore your question



# Looking Playfully at Documentation Protocol (20-25 min)

- Listening: The presenting teacher names their question and gives context about the documentation they are sharing (2 min)
- Looking: Look carefully at the documentation for a few minutes (2-3 min)
- Clarifying: Presenter answers short, fact-based questions from the group (2 min)
- Noticing and Wondering: a round of “I notice” (just saying what you see/hear in the documentation without judgement), and then “I wonder” statements. The presenter listens and is silent (4 min)
- Pretending: Take on roles and act out a scenario captured in the documentation (2-3 min)
- Noticing/Wondering again: Did the playing help you notice anything new? (2 min)
- Inspiring: Repeat the presenter’s question. What could the presenter try as next steps in their teaching? Or share ideas of what to document next. (5 min)
- Closing: The presenter has the last word to share their take-aways/questions. (2 min)



## Reflect

review your documentation and notes from inquiry group meetings and reflect on what you've learned about your question

### Wonder for K2B

When playing with plus, plus there are other kids doing around them, they are not m. I think the kids can themselves in the game groups, without being der what the kids might e the centers more cozy?

Children who are focused on their ble and stay concentrated re are children who are m. I think it is a good idea vided the class into three the opportunity for I wonder what ideas the r making the different ractive?

Classical music playing in the I see children focused in see a comment from the ys "it is going the right

### K3A

#### What happens when there are less rules in the playground?

As the playground and it's rules has been a discussion topic for months K3A wanted to explore what would happen if there were less rules in general in the playground. The children created some freedom green bracelets, and we let them wear them every morning during our break before lunch. The children had just 2 rules on bracelet time:

- We take care of each other.
- We take care of the materials in the playground.

All the other rules could be broken during that break. We observed the children for 4 days and was quite surprise with the results.

- The children didn't do anything that they normally don't do.. ( ride their bicycles in the blue part of the playground and bridge, dig in the mountain of soil, play with the primary children through the fence..)
- The children made their own safety rules.
- They needed less grown up supervision
- They felt trusted, they asked us for input and shared their ideas and plans with us feeling safe and confident during the observations.
- The children understood perfectly what the bracelet meant ( They are still asking us when they can wear it again..)

We saw quiet children interacting with others, "runners" staying in the playground without the need of jumping fences and escaping, Christian finally enjoying being outside, shy girls becoming risk takers and trying new things (Veronica, Rofaida, Luiza). **Happier children, less incidents and no material or trees damaged in the whole week.**

To be continued... :)

### See-Think-Wonder for K3A

I **see** children from KG interacting/playing with children from primary on the other side of the fence, and children playing safely at the areas where they were told not play at, with certain toys, due to safety reasons.

I **think** these children are capable of understanding what is safe, when they are involved in the decision making process on what is safe playing at the playground.

I **wonder** if their safety rules would change or their play would change if there were smaller children around them. (Maybe involving the smaller children from K2 and K1 gradually to this "experiment" next time? Please? :))

Farah

I see children taking safe risks with the bicycles/tricycles. I see them using the space and toys respectfully. I think that having two rules was enough, and I think that these open rules enable more teaching and more learning through play. I wonder what would happen if these two rules were the only rules all the time, and if teachers negotiated safety concerns on a case-by-case basis with children as needed.

-Megina

I see students interacting with each other. I think the children are enjoying their play time outside. I wonder if it would be different if more children were out on the playground. Would students continue to play nicely and

### K3B

We recorded a cou the latest issue in o the children playing toys.

### K3B

How do we teach to respect materi not limit their pl

The first video show and Thomas at our banging the pine co magnifying glasses

Second video show Victor throwing the pillows.

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/7nqprxb/IMG\\_438](https://www.dropbox.com/s/7nqprxb/IMG_438)

We showed the chi videos once. The s showed them and t the following quest -What do you notice video?

Conrad is playing w (Divyasri) It's crazy (n) - What was the gan

Share

Share what you learned by writing, making a poster, presenting to colleagues...

### What happens if there are less rules in the playground? Marina Benavente Barbon K3A

**Context:** K3A experienced how different rules change the way they as a class use their outdoor environment. We decided to have only 2 rules in the playground and document what happened. Later, the class viewed the video taken of them while they wore their "Freedom Bracelets." They kept in mind their two agreements, thought about the experience they had and they shared all their brilliant ideas!

When sharing the video and showing the children their bracelets. All of them remembered the experience, had something to say and shared a lot of comments about what they liked about it.



Marina: Does anyone remember our 2 agreements when we had the bracelets?



V: We have to take care of each other and take care of all the things on the playground.

Marina: Do you think the smaller children could learn to handle that bracelet (freedom)?



Ab: Actually I can teach all the girls and C can teach all the boys in K2.

**Reflection:** By giving the children choice and promoting independence and agency we gained a better understanding of how the children like to use their space, their needs and their favourite spots. We realized that during that week we had happier children, less incidents and no material or trees damaged. During the research we also realized that we could use our playful planning tool in a different way, by having fewer rules we made the architecture and "furnishings" (e.g blue foam area, trees and fences) able to be used in more flexible ways.

## Too Many Rules on the Playground: Working the Paradox between Safety and Freedom

Megina Baker and Marina Benavente Barbon  
June 2017



## Sample Mini-Poster

### Annalisa's Question:

How do children in the ECLL navigate gender in their play in the Dramatic Play Area?

**School:** Early Childhood Learning Lab, Boston University

**Children:** Ages 2 years 9 months to 5 years

**Dramatic Play Area (DPA):** Through the course of my observations, the DPA has been set up as a house. There are materials for the kitchen, including pretend food and meal preparation utensils, fabrics and accessories available for costumes and disguises, baby dolls and items for baby care, stuffed animals and items for pet care, and materials having to do with traveling, such as maps, subway passes, suitcases, and a steering wheel. Play in this space is child-directed and teacher-supported.



**Teacher:** EW is bringing her baby and her dog.

**KL:** And her father!

**EW:** Nope.

**Teacher:** EW, is your father coming on this trip?

**KL:** I'm, I'm, I'm your father!

**EW:** No, you're not my father, you're my husband.

**KL:** No I want to be your father... Okay I'll be your cousin, but I still want to be a boy.

**EW:** No, my *husband*.

**KL:** Oh.. but I'm still a daddy, right?

**Teacher:** Oh, you can still be a father, but you can be a father and a husband at the same time.

**EW:** You're a father to me and my baby.

### Reflection:

Throughout my observations at the ECLL, I saw children participating in many different play activities and scenarios in the Dramatic Play Area. Very few times did children actually verbally declare their gender role in their play, as is stated above.

However, when they did, they often did not adhere to strict social gender rules (evidenced by KL's wearing of the red dress above, despite insistence that he pretend to be a boy). In my observations, I more frequently observed children who identify as male taking on more stereotypically feminine activities in their play (cooking, cleaning, caretaking), than the opposite (children who identify as female taking on stereotypically masculine activities). I learned that this group of children does not necessarily express their awareness of gender or their desire to take on gendered roles in the DPA, most frequently engaging in play scenarios without explicitly acknowledging or expressing a gender role. I wonder how this might be affected with the provision of more stereotypically male play props and opportunities? Would there be a more obvious crossing of the binary gender lines with the addition of more stereotyped materials?

# Teacher research articles: small group discussions

- Pretend you are hosting a Playful Participatory Research conference and need to find excellent teacher researchers to speak about their work. Discuss the article that you read with your group, considering:
  - Was the author a teacher researcher? Why?
  - What were their research questions?
  - What kinds of data/documentation were gathered to explore this question?
  - Was the research process playful? Would you call this PPR or regular teacher research?
  - What surprised you/intrigued you about what you read?

4

11/3 11/11/15  
 Mi#  
 ma kande ar  
 rap ska pe  
 mo. It's  
 when you jump  
 up and you  
 dont say  
 anything  
 (I will be there)  
 I will be there  
 (I will be there)  
 I will be there

2/13 4/11/15  
~~purple!~~  
 I went to  
 Rapscajimo  
 this morning.  
 I'm a little sick  
 this morning but her I  
 went to the store and I  
 got some stuff  
 was so  
 good!

3/13  
 IS it a place  
 or something you do?  
 A place.  
 Far away,  
 you just jump  
 upside down and  
 you go there  
 "You do rapscajimo,  
 then jump up and  
 say nothing!"

# Documentation

A tool for learning about play



Project Zero

Reggio Children

**making learning visible**  
children as individual and group learners

Mara Krechevsky • Ben Mardell  
Melissa Rivard • Daniel Wilson

Researchers from Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

PreK-12

# Visible Learners



PROMOTING **REGGIO-INSPIRED**  
**APPROACHES** IN ALL SCHOOLS



## An example of documentation

**Carl** explains his work:

Jag gör ett hav.

Jag behöver den här till sjögräs.

Jag ska ta den här tjugiga skatten.

I'm doing a sea. I'm gonna take spirals. Look at these spirals.

**Teacher:** på svenska heter de spiral

**Carl:** Måste ta spiralerna. Titta - de här två är fina. Lila lila. Jag ska sätta dem baklänges för jag gillar dem.

**Teacher:** Lila lila

**Carl:** Pink pink.





# Definition of Documentation

The practice of observing, recording, interpreting, and sharing through different media the processes and products of learning in order to deepen learning

We often think of teaching as *telling* and learning as *listening*, when we should think of teaching as *listening* and learning as *telling*.

Debbie Meier





11/3 11/11/15  
 Mi#  
 make an  
 rap ska pe  
 mo. It's  
 when you jump  
 up and you  
 don't say  
 anything  
 (demonstrates)  
 I will say nothing  
 (jump) I didn't  
 say anything.



213 4/11/15  
~~purple!~~  
 I went to  
 Popscape's  
 this morning.  
 I'm a little sick  
 this morning but then I  
 went there and I  
 jumped up and  
 I was so  
 happy. And I got  
 a sticker.



313  
 IS it a place  
 or something you do?  
 A place.  
 Far away,  
 you just jump  
 upside down and  
 you go there  
 "You do rapscape's,  
 then jump up and  
 say nothing!"



# Definition of Documentation

The practice of observing, recording, interpreting, and sharing through different media the processes and products of learning in order to deepen learning

**What aspects of this definition of documentation did you see in the example of the child painting?**



# The Airplane Activity

## Learners

The challenge: to come up with two different designs (as a group) for paper airplanes that can fly at least 4 meters, carrying at least 7 pennies.



## Documenter/Observers

**Please observe with the following question in mind:**

*What do you notice about the individual and group's process of building knowledge about aerodynamics and what can you point to that makes you say that?*



## Documenter/Observers

Please observe with the following question in mind:

*What do you notice about the individual and group's process of building knowledge about aerodynamics and what can you point to that makes you say that?*

## Learners

**The challenge:** to come up with two different designs (as a group) for paper airplanes that can fly at least 4 meters, carrying at least 7 pennies.



# Small Group Debriefing

**Documenters:** Choose from your documentation 1-2 key moments or shifts in the way ideas about aerodynamics were being developed to share with the group. Ground your interpretations in your observations. *Please be respectful of the feelings of the learners!*

**Learners:** Respond to the documenters' comments and share your own reflections about key moments or shifts regarding how you and/or the group learned about aerodynamics.



# WHOLE GROUP DISCUSSION

What is one thing your group learned about documentation?

# Playful Participatory Research as teacher professional learning

- Research on professional learning tells us:
  - Single, mandated workshops are not effective
  - Sustained professional learning that is responsive to teachers' needs and interests is most powerful
- Participatory Action Research has been shown across fields as a powerful tool for driving change
- Playful Participatory Research comes out of this tradition, with a playful spin



# Choosing PPR Questions



# Choosing PPR Questions

- **Of interest** to you and perhaps others
- **Relevant** to your daily practice
- **Open-ended** - you don't already know the answer
- Optional (depending on your focus/context)
  - About **play**
  - Connected to issues of **equity** and **social justice**



# Choosing PPR Questions

- Make it a **manageable size** (e.g. confined to a particular activity, group of participants, time frame, etc).
- Make sure you could gather documentation for this question in **30 min or less**.
- Try a question starter:
  - “How do I ...”
  - “How can I...”
  - “What happens when...”
  - “How does X impact/affect/change/influence Y?”
  - “What can I learn about...”
  - and other open-ended “how” or “what” questions.



# Sample Questions

- How can I use play to support learning of another language?
- How could role play support learning about local history?
- What happens when I try using playful approaches for teaching science via remote learning platforms?
- What happens when I engage fourth graders in playful activities related to exploring racial identity?
- How do I integrate anti-bias ideas into choice time activities?
- What can I learn about the children's interests and beliefs during outdoor play/recess/break time?

