

## **Understanding Children's Perspectives on the Definitions and Importance of Play**

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### **Abstract**

Ideas about children and play are socially constructed by hegemonic societal values, beliefs, and institutions. Research engages with children's play in ways that are constructed and reinforced by adults. Therefore, it is important to deconstruct dominant discourses about play because they are used to maintain adult-dominated power stratification and enforce normative beliefs. This study aims to understand how children define, conceptualize, and operationalize play in ways that may diverge from adult assumptions. Focusing on 6-9 year olds in a mid-sized Canadian city, it makes an important contribution to the field, which is overwhelming based on studies conducted in the United States. This study uses a drawing analysis to elicit children's perspectives, which are frequently ignored in adult-centric research. Five to ten children will be recruited from an afterschool program. The children will draw pictures of themselves playing and be interviewed about their drawings. The results will be interpreted within the paradigms of the new sociology of childhood and playwork. These theories acknowledge the socially constructed nature of children and play, engage with children's agency, and address the power dynamics that govern adult-child relations. This study does not aim to make predictable or generalizable findings. Instead, this study focuses on eliciting and expressing the opinions and worldviews of the children who participate. Expected results are that children conceptualize play in non-traditional ways that adults do not consider.

**Keywords:** Play, Article 31, Child

### **1. Introduction**

What is play? What is a child? How are these definitions determined? Play has been conceptualized and operationalized in multiple ways in research, the media, and popular ideologies. Some research attempts to define play by certain criteria or attributes<sup>1 2</sup>. An example is creating separate categories of imaginative, movement-focused, entertaining, and social-relational play<sup>3</sup>. Play has been a focal point of research with children because scholars believe that it is important, natural, and beneficial<sup>45</sup>. Research has posited that play is important because it is associated with learning<sup>6</sup>, self-expression<sup>7</sup>, sociability<sup>8</sup>, and enhanced wellbeing and adaptivity<sup>9</sup>. While emerging research has attempted to avoid romanticizing play<sup>10</sup>, dominant ideas about children still idealize the role that play has in children's lives<sup>11</sup>. For example, preventing children from playing with pretend guns reinforces the dominant Western notion that children are innocent. Additionally, common discourses in Canada suggest that all children play<sup>1213</sup> and that they play frequently<sup>14</sup>. Because it is seen as central to children's wellbeing, adults often feel anxiety about children's play, which is reflected in the media and dominant societal beliefs. For instance, many adults worry that play is declining because of technology<sup>1516</sup>.

A child is typically defined as an individual below 18 years of age. Yet, the designation of 18 as the boundary between childhood and adulthood is arbitrarily chosen. For instance, in Ontario an individual can drive a car at 16 years of age, vote in a government election at 18, and drink alcohol at 19. These are all viewed as adult activities<sup>17</sup> yet have different ages associated with them. Some biological and physiological indicators, such as height and brain growth, are used to reinforce the distinction between life stages<sup>18</sup>. However, arguing that childhood and adulthood are only defined by biological traits ignores the socially constructed nature of ideas about children<sup>19</sup>. This means that thoughts about childhood, including who is and is not designated as a child, vary based on sociocultural and historical factors. As such, there is no singular or monolithic definition for child.

Thoughts about childhood are created and disseminated to reflect the values and belief systems within a society, often by those in power. Particularly, Canadian constructions of children reinforce normativity. The normative child is perceived as White, heterosexual, able-bodied, and docile<sup>20</sup>. These ideologies enforce a Western ideal that is not applicable to all children's lived experiences. Children who diverge from the ideal are thereby marginalized and stigmatized<sup>21</sup>. Additionally, dominant discourses portray childhood as irrational, naturally occurring, and universal<sup>22</sup>. Within the majority of research, normative conceptions of childhood are infrequently and insufficiently challenged. Cultural ideas, social norms, and research inform and reproduce thoughts about children and childhood. Particularly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has played a major role in creating discourses about childhood and play. Article 31 protects children's right to play, which demonstrates that play is seen as essential and integral to all childhoods. The CRC was created to recognize the unique status of children under the age of eighteen. Therefore, children's rights acknowledge the inequality of children while remaining situated within larger human rights frameworks<sup>23</sup>. As a keystone piece of policy, the CRC both defines and creates opportunities for discussion about children, childhood, and rights. These debates reflect, reveal, and assess ideas about children. This study does so as well by engaging with Article 31 through the lens of children's voices. This research contributes to the field of child studies by presenting data from children in a Canadian context, which are both underrepresented populations.

## 1.1. Rationale

This research is important because it demonstrates, interrogates, and critiques social constructions of play. It is essential to reveal and dismantle ideas about children because they are based in and reinforce normative discourses that marginalize some lived experiences. Adult discourses about play perceive it as a monolithic entity that is universally positive or negative<sup>24 25</sup>. Complexity and ambivalence are omitted in favour of enforcing one-dimensional beliefs about play. Adults create and perpetuate moralized rhetoric about play to maintain power and subjugate children. For instance, portraying play as trivial allows adults to forcibly structure children's time by characterizing some activities as more important, and therefore more worthy of time, than others. Therefore, this research is important because it critiques supposedly common sense assumptions that often go unchallenged. As such, this study resists and reconceptualizes dominant narratives that perpetuate normativity and prevent social change.

The CRC is the most widely accepted international treaty that has ever been created<sup>26</sup>. All countries in the United Nations except the United States of America have ratified it. A Convention is the strongest type of treaty<sup>27</sup> and it is legally binding for the countries that ratify it<sup>28</sup>. The CRC both defines and creates opportunities for discussion about children, childhood, and rights. These debates reflect, reveal, and assess ideas about children. For instance, thoughts about play, especially Western discourses, are constructed and reinforced by the CRC. Therefore, this study utilizes the CRC and its critiques to interrogate thoughts about play within a children's rights framework.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Drawing As A Research Method

Previous studies have employed the research method of drawing analysis to elicit children's perspectives<sup>29 30 31</sup>. This child-centric method provides opportunities for children to express themselves<sup>32 33</sup>, which is frequently denied in adult-centric research<sup>34</sup>. Drawings can be used to represent experiences and obtain children's thoughts and feelings about specific subjects<sup>35</sup>. Particularly, drawings serve as a portrait of children's "inner selves" and represent their attitudes<sup>36</sup>. Additionally, drawing is a familiar and enjoyable task for many children<sup>37</sup>. Drawing also leaves a record after creation<sup>38</sup>, which is beneficial for later reference. As well, children aged four to twelve tend to not be self-

conscious about their drawings, so they are willing to share them with researchers<sup>39</sup>. As well, typically-developing children begin making detailed drawings of people with arms, legs, fingers, and facial features by five years old<sup>40</sup>. This informed the age range of 6-8 years old that was selected for this study. Overall, this age group was selected because the children were able to create drawings and explain them in a comprehensible manner.

## 2.2. Semiotics, Interpretivism, Meaning-Making, and Interviews

Drawing inhabits a central role in children's communication. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, particularly their use and interpretation<sup>41</sup>. In this framework, children's use of signs and symbols in drawings contains meanings that cannot be verbally expressed<sup>42</sup>. In addition, interpretivism is an ontology that posits that reality is constructed by individuals<sup>43</sup>. Accordingly, people actively and subjectively construct knowledge of their social realities. In research, interpretivism centralizes data as primarily important<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, interpretivism relates to the other theories in this paper's framework by recognizing children's agency and listening to their perspectives. Listening is not a passive process as it involves active, two-way verbal and non-verbal communication<sup>45</sup>. In contrast, traditional scientific approaches to studying childhood posit that objective and universal knowledge can be obtained through rationality and empiricism<sup>46</sup>. For example, children have historically been viewed through psychodevelopmental lenses that focus on linear, upward, and cumulative development<sup>47 48</sup>. As well, scientific expertise is only afforded to adult researchers, while children are seen as passive objects to be researched<sup>49 50 51</sup>. Accordingly, children have historically been excluded from co-constructing research and findings.

Drawing analysis emphasizes the importance of children's meaning-making processes when describing their drawings. Previous research has focused on the aesthetic quality or skill of children's drawings<sup>52</sup> or attempted to draw psychodevelopmental assumptions based on structural features<sup>53</sup>. Adults ascribed these determinations of worth or ability, which ignored children's subjective reasons for and enjoyment of drawing. Emergent research focuses on understanding what the drawings represent according to children's narratives. Post-drawing interviews are essential because children's underlying narratives contain more meaning than the drawings themselves<sup>54</sup>. Meaning-making helps researchers understand children's worldviews, thoughts, experiences, and intelligences<sup>55</sup>. Drawing and subsequent interviews elicit different and more detailed narratives than other methodologies can<sup>56</sup>. Notably, children can interpret and reinterpret their drawings to carry different meanings<sup>57</sup>. Admittedly, it can be argued that these shifting narratives reflect an inability to access an objective truth. Yet, researchers must embrace the changing, multidimensional, and often contradictory nature of ideas about play as inherent to play itself. Cox argues that the narratives children create are the truth at the time, so everything they say about their drawings is valid and true<sup>58</sup>. In this study, a semi-structured interview guide was used to answer key research questions while still allowing the children to discuss what was most salient to them.

## 2.3. Participatory Action Research

This study is an example of participatory action research (PAR), which elicits, listens to, and includes children's voices<sup>59</sup>. PAR is based in the desire to challenge hegemonic social structures and empower oppressed individuals<sup>60</sup>. PAR must be collective and self-reflexive to understand research practices, social situations, and institutions<sup>61</sup>. In PAR, children's thoughts, preferences, and desires are afforded equal weight to adults'. Historically, studies on play have been purely theoretical<sup>62</sup> or observational<sup>63</sup>. The conclusions drawn from such studies may not be accurate because researchers may have imposed their own adult interpretations upon children's play<sup>64</sup>. These interpretations omit children's subjective experiences and expertise. In this study, drawing is an important component of PAR because it allows children to express themselves<sup>65</sup>. As well, the interpretivism framework of this study emphasizes the importance of research data<sup>66</sup>. Through interpretivism, this study centres the children's drawings and the subjective experiences that they encapsulate<sup>67</sup>. Centring the drawings through PAR is important because it allows children to participate in research in meaningful ways<sup>68</sup>. Specifically, in this research the children demonstrated their drawing and storytelling ability, which formed the basis for data analysis from a child-centred approach. As well, PAR helps address or counteract some ethical issues surrounding research with children. For example, PAR facilitates access to children as research participants by decreasing adult paternalism and protectionism<sup>69</sup>. This occurs because adults recognize the respectful and child-friendly nature of PAR<sup>70</sup>.

## 2.4. Consent

The Carleton Research Ethics Board-A approved this research (protocol #109240). Adhering to Morrow and Richards' guidelines on the ethics of conducting social research with children, informed and positive consent was obtained from all children, caregivers, institutions, and other relevant adult gatekeepers<sup>71</sup>. Approval was obtained from the director of the after school program to recruit and conduct research. Monica Patterson provided academic supervision and guidance throughout the research process. The children were seen as able to give consent based on their age (six to eight years old) and competence<sup>72</sup>. Competence refers to children's abilities to do or understand something<sup>73</sup>. Typical Western constructions of children portray them as automatically incompetent, vulnerable, and immature because of their young age<sup>74</sup>. These developmental narratives ignore children's abilities to understand the world around them. So, the children in this study were assumed to be competent when the research was explained in age-appropriate language. Verbal consent was obtained from the children and written consent from their parents. Children and their parents consented to participate in the study and to be audio recorded. If a child or parent consented to participate but not to be audio recorded, this decision was respected and the researcher took handwritten notes during the interview. At every step, the research was explained to the children in age-appropriate language and they were asked if they had any questions. If so, they were accurately and completely answered.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Participants

Participants were recruited from an after school childcare program in a mid-sized Canadian city. The program accepts children from kindergarten to grade four. Permission to recruit and conduct research was obtained from the program director. Five children 6-8 years old participated (1 boy; 4 girls). Parents of children in the after school program were contacted for recruitment. First, the program director sent an explanatory email with a letter of invitation provided by the researcher. The researcher also held an information session at the program while parents picked up their children. Flyers and letters of invitation were distributed to interested parents. The program director sent a follow-up email to parents a few weeks later. The researcher's email was provided on the flyer and letter of invitation, and interested parents contacted the researcher directly. Interested parents were then emailed consent forms. Signed forms were returned electronically via email or were printed as hard copies and given to the researcher. Children's verbal consent was obtained before the drawing analysis commenced. Recruitment and interaction with participants began in September and concluded at the end of December of 2018. All names in this paper are pseudonyms assigned by the researcher.

### 3.2. Data Collection

The primary research method used was drawing analysis with semi-structured interviews. Research was conducted when there was not a scheduled activity during the after care program. The drawing analysis was conducted one-on-one in a discrete, private room with a window. The study took no more than thirty minutes per child. Prior to interacting with the child, the researcher set up the room with two chairs, two pieces of white paper, boxes of crayons, markers, and coloured pencils, and her phone to time and record with. Extra paper was available if necessary. The boxes of drawing supplies were opened but no items were taken out. This prevented bias and encouraged the children to choose the materials they most preferred. Necessary forms were also readied, including the verbal consent form, interview guide, and debriefing form.

Fifteen minutes were provided to draw, which was timed on the researcher's phone. The researcher drew as well, which made the children feel more comfortable and at ease. One child looked at the researcher's drawing but it did not affect the results. The researcher drew animals, which prevented bias because it was unrelated to the drawing prompt the children received. For example, none of the children included animals in their drawings of play. The researcher told the participants not to write their real names on their drawings. The children were not required to use the full time to draw and could alert the researcher if they were done early. If they did not complete their drawing during the fifteen minutes, the researcher would take a picture and participants could bring their drawing home to finish later. However, all children completed their drawing during the time limit. No child asked to take his/her/their drawing home after the study. The researcher alerted the children when there were five and one minute remaining so they would not be surprised when the timer finished.

## 4. Findings

This study's use of interpretivism focuses on how individuals construct their realities<sup>75</sup>. Interpretivism centres the children's drawings and narratives as most important throughout data analysis<sup>76</sup>. This study does not seek to enforce adult interpretations but instead focuses on children's self-expression of their worldviews and experiences. The children created detailed narratives about their drawings by responding to the researchers' interview questions. They discussed their preferences, thoughts, experiences, worldviews, beliefs, values, hobbies, knowledges, and desires. Many of the children had complex stories embedded within their drawings that would have been inaccessible without the children's explanations. As such, this section uses visual and thematic analysis to highlight specific aspects of the children's drawings in conjunction with their meaning-making narratives. This analysis will be contextualized within relevant aspects of the literature review. The drawings will also be placed in conversation with each other to reveal key themes.

### 4.1. Definitions of play

#### 4.1.1. *fun*

In their interviews, the children made clear distinctions between what they did and did not categorize as play. All of them highlighted fun as an essential aspect of play. Every child said that they liked playing and four said that they liked playing because it is fun. Enjoyment was evident in their drawings because all of the children drew themselves smiling. One child also specifically stated that play is valuable because it is pleasurable:

Researcher: Is there anything else I should know about playing?

Participant: Mmm, yes.

Researcher: What?

Participant: That playing is always been important.

Researcher: How come?

Participant: 'Cause it's fun! And fun is important.

The importance of fun in play is consistent with previous research<sup>77</sup>. Yet, this study nuances previous research by revealing that children conceptualized fun in different ways. It is crucial to understand what children deem as fun because it differs between individuals and from adults' viewpoints. Each child had varied opinions about what situations or activities were enjoyable. These included playing sports, playing in the snow during recess, playing with toys and board games, and playing an instrument. As such, play spaces should accommodate children's diverse opinions to avoid privileging some activities and perspectives while marginalizing others. This study also demonstrates that children are autonomous and agential human beings with different preferences, desires, and lived experiences. These should be taken into consideration when creating play spaces to ensure that they are interesting and engaging to a range of children. Additionally, three children said that they had fun doing the drawing analysis. Two children explained that colouring is a type of play that is fun.

#### 4.1.2. *choice*

Choice was another key component in the children's definitions of play. Choice was related to enjoyment because they enjoyed playing when they could make autonomous decisions. Additionally, the children wanted to choose to play with what they most enjoyed. Choice involved being able to decide if they wanted to play:

Researcher: How do you know when you're playing?

Participant: Uh... because I say.

Researcher: Okay. So when you choose, that's when you're playing?

Participant: Yeah.

Researcher: How do you know when you're playing?

Participant: Um... because I wanna play. And I like it.

Researcher: So that's how you can tell?

Participant: Yeah.

The children also expressed that they want the ability to choose what activities to engage in. The children wanted to play with the toys or activities that they most prefer and enjoy. They liked playing more when they could choose what to play with.

Choice has also been identified as an integral dimension of play by other researchers<sup>78</sup>. Children's assertions that they want choice implore researchers and youth workers to listen to and integrate children's preferences. Children are often denied choice and control because adults position themselves as responsible for determining children's lives. Therefore, recognizing that children want choice and creating space for their autonomous decision-making avoids imposing adult agendas that may not align with children's. In practice, choice gives children more independence so they can feel respected and maximize their enjoyment while playing.

#### *4.1.3. definitions of "not play"*

The children often contrasted their understandings of play against their understandings of "not play." Just as their definitions of play involved fun and choice, their understandings of "not play" involved lack of enjoyment or decision-making. Additionally, boredom was a prominent component of definitions of "not play," which is consistent with other studies and theories<sup>79 80</sup>. Three children explicitly used the word "bored" or "boring" to define "not play," while another child described it as such:

Researcher: So when are you not playing?

Participant: When you're just sitting down and staring at the wall. [laughs]

Boredom encompassed games or activities that the children did not want to play with as well as a lack of any activities to do. Two children talked about "doing nothing" as being boring, although they did not explain when, how, or why this happens. One participant also stated that "playing with nobody is boring," which highlights the social nature of play for some children. Adults must create play spaces that engage with children's understandings of boring and not boring so they can play in the ways that they want to. Specifically, the children in this study called for the creation and implementation of engaging place spaces at school and home. Additionally, the children contrasted play against other activities, including eating and learning. This will be further explored in the following section, which details the location and temporality of play.

#### *4.1.4 location and temporality*

The children conceptualized and situated play within specific environmental, physical, and geographical settings and times of day. When prompted, every child specified the location they had drawn. Two children drew themselves outside and three drew themselves inside. They felt that different activities occur in outdoor versus indoor settings. Outdoor play was characterized as active and physical, including soccer, running, sliding on slides, and swinging on swings. Indoor activities were more sedentary, such as building with blocks and playing instruments. Previous studies have also found that children believe that play varies based on location<sup>81</sup>. This research also supports the idea that space and environment influence children's play. Additionally, all of the children explained their choice of location in their drawings. One participant said that her mother takes her to a play space once a week. Another child drew multiple rooms in her house and talked about which of her family members were where.

Temporality and location interacted when considering the seasons, as the children expressed that play activities are affected by the weather. Three children drew blue skies and the sun. Two children drew themselves outdoors and included these elements. Another child drew herself inside but discussed the sun, which was visible through the window. She interpreted the sun as an indicator of the time:

Researcher: What time are you playing?

Participant: Mmm...

Researcher: I see that it's sunny.

Participant: Yeah. [pause] It's the middle of the day. [laughs]

Researcher: How come you drew the middle of the day?

Participant: Because I like the sun.

The children's suns may also reflect a common convention of Western drawing<sup>82</sup>. All three children drew sun in the upper corners of their papers, which frequently occurs in other drawing analyses with Western children<sup>83</sup>.

Two children also included birds in their drawings. The pleasant weather suggests that the children feel that outdoor play is best suited for warm, summer temperatures. This is supported by the activities that the children said they play outside, such as soccer and using the playground equipment. On the other hand, one child resisted this discourse because she enjoys playing in cold weather more. She also explicitly made a distinction between how she plays in different seasons:

Researcher: What kinds of activities do you do when you play?

Participant: Like I said I like playing with blocks. But when it's outdoor recess I like playing in snow and when it's summer – well in summer I don't go to school. But I don't really like summer because it's bees and wasps.

The children had mixed responses about the relationship between playing and school. Research and policy have also had varied and ambivalent approaches<sup>84</sup>. Three children said that they play at school, with one specifically mentioning recess as a time in which play occurred. Yet, no children drew themselves playing at school. As well, no children discussed playing in the classroom or with teachers during structured playtime. It may be that structured playtime does not occur, although this is unlikely. In fact, it may be that the children do perceive it as a type of play or do not think of it as the primary example of play. Three children mentioned after school as a time during which they play, which further demonstrates the dichotomization of play and learning.

#### *4.1.5. adult interference*

All of the children discussed their parents, and three identified them as factors that influence or prevent play. Three children also talked about their mothers, which may indicate a gendered aspect to childrearing in which the majority of responsibility falls on women. Adult interference was related to temporality because play occurs at specific times of day that are designated by adults. For example, one child said that her parents separate her siblings and prevent them from playing together when they fight. Particularly, the children contrasted playtime against time that was devoted to learning and eating. Previous research has also found that adults structure children's lives by determining what activities are prioritized. Play is often scheduled around the activities that are seen as more important by parents or teachers, which are given precedence<sup>85</sup>. Therefore, play is not always a priority. Instead, it is an afterthought or reward that fills time that is not occupied with pursuits that normative discourses construct as more serious or vital. For example, one child explained that she had to do homework before she could play:

Participant: But my mom sometimes say not [to play], to first do homework

Researcher: Okay. And do you do that?

Participant: Then – yeah I like doing homework first because then it doesn't spend my time of playing. And if you do play first it'll spend your time playing.

Researcher: But if – what happens if you do your homework first instead?

Researcher: It won't waste your time to play.

The participant was extremely excited and animated during this section, which indicates the importance of what she was talking about. The child is creating a differentiation between playing and doing homework as separate activities. She explains that she likes doing homework before playing. This prevents her playtime from being cut into, obstructed by, or limited by homework. She feels that if she does her homework first, she will have uninterrupted time to play that will not be wasted. This indicates the importance and value of play to the child. Notably, it is unclear if this prioritization of homework is her own values or if it represents an internalization of her parents' expectations. Another child said that she played after eating dinner. The order of doing homework or eating followed by playing, as determined by the child's parents, establishes a hierarchy of importance. That is not to say that homework and eating are not important or should not be priorities in children's families. Instead, it reveals that children feel that adults sometimes structure time in ways that implicitly marginalize and undervalue play.

## **5. Conclusion**

Play is an essential component of children's lives. It permeates their everyday experiences through structured sports, inventing games, playtime in schools, playful dispositions, and more. Adult discourses about play perceive it as

natural, beneficial, and integral to childhood. These discourses exclude complex viewpoints and marginalized voices. They are overly simplistic and do not align with all beliefs or lived experiences. Instead, one-dimensional, monolithic, and polarized ideologies are enforced. This study critiqued adult assumptions about play by listening to children's opinions. Including children's worldviews, intelligences, and perspectives challenges social constructions and facilitates a greater understanding of how children define, conceptualize, and engage with play. This study demonstrated that children have complex and varied ideas about what does or does not constitute play.

This study used drawing analysis as a research method to elicit children's voices. Drawing allows children to express themselves, reproduce experiences, create detailed narratives, and communicate feelings. Children are frequently viewed as passive research subjects as opposed to active co-creators of knowledge, although this perception is changing in emergent participatory action research. The children's meaning making and subjective beliefs were most important during data collection and analysis. This contrasts many previous research designs, in which children were viewed as passive objects of research. Particularly, children's play was often researched through observational studies that ignored children's expertise, agency, and subjective knowledge. The present study avoided influencing or overshadowing the children's opinions throughout the research process. This included awareness of power dynamics between the participants and researcher, allowing the children to choose their drawing materials, and answering questions in ways that re-centred the children's agency. Listening to children's thoughts recognizes and respects their expertise. In doing so, researchers can obtain more holistic understandings of issues that affect children.

Five main themes emerged during data analysis. The children defined play in terms of what it is and what it is not. For example, while play was described as a fun activity, "not play" involved a lack of enjoyment and boredom. In this sense, the children reproduced dichotomies that adults use to define play. However, these dichotomies may have emerged as a result of the interview questions, as they inherently categorized play and "not play" as different. The children also identified location and temporality as key factors that affect play. Relevant variables include environmental, physical, and geographical settings; time of day; and time of year. Different spaces affect the play that can and does occur. For instance, indoor play tends to be more sedentary while outdoor play is more active. Moreover, the children expressed that there are different types of play. Playing with a musical instrument was viewed as inherently different than playing with a toy, playing a sport, or playing with others. While they are all types of play, they are understood, experienced, and operationalized differently. Finally, the children said that adults often interfere with and affect play, such as through scheduling that marginalizes playtime.

Play spaces and activities can be improved by integrating children's perspectives. This study calls on adults to engage more deeply with children's ideas about enjoyment, boredom, types of play, and factors that affect play. Doing so allows children to play in the ways that they want to and enhances their play experiences. Making space for children's views resists dominant adult narratives that posit that children lack agency and expertise. Listening to and respecting children's viewpoints enhances their lived experiences by increasing enjoyment of and engagement in play.

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