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"Drawing and playing are not the same": Children's views on their activities in Icelandic preschools

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Play is an important part of early childhood education and has been defined from different perspectives and paradigms. However, definitions of play have been studied more from adults' perspectives than from children themselves. This ethnographic research with children aged three to five years and built on sociological construct, will explore children's views on play in two preschool settings in Iceland. Video-stimulated recordings were used to support children's conversations about their different activities in the settings, to explore which activities they considered play. Most of the children said that they were playing when they took on roles and could decide what to do with the material. When the children prepared the play or were drawing, they usually said they were not playing. These findings add to the understanding of play from children's perspectives and are valuable to the research field and for educators working with young children.

Keywords: Iceland, early childhood education, children's perspectives, play, non-play

Introduction

Play is a complex phenomenon that has been studied extensively from different perspectives and paradigms that often have different views of play (Gordon 2015). Although play seems quite easy to recognise when seen, it is difficult to explain, and definitions vary in accord with theoretical background and schools of study (Theobald and Danby 2014). To some extent, there are also differences in how people see play in practice (Wong, Wang, and Cheng 2011). In Iceland, the term *playschool* applies to all group services for children from 18 months to six years old. The term also points to the fact that the main emphasis in early childhood education is on children's learning through play instead of focusing on academic skills (Einarsdóttir 2017). In this article, the term *preschool* is used for playschool. The Icelandic National Curriculum guidelines for preschool views play as natural to children, spontaneous,

inseparable from early childhood, and as the proper focus of all preschool activities. According to the curriculum, children should play freely on their own terms, having possibilities to express their ideas, experiences, and feelings. It is stressed that in play children have opportunities to form social groups and create their own culture where they can express their views while simultaneously respecting the views of other children (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2011). The guidelines indicate that play should be central to all preschool practice with the aim of strengthening children's self-esteem, well-being, confidence, and communication skills (Einarsdóttir 2017).

Research on children's perceptions of play indicate that they do not always view their activities in a same way as adults (Dockett and Perry 2007; Theobald and Danby 2014). Educators might view some activities as play that children might not (Bodrova and Leong 2015). Some researchers, however, (see, for example, Bodrova 2008; Bodrova and Leong, 2015) limit the definition of children's play to make-believe play. This means that the children are playing when they create an imaginary situation, take on and act out roles, and follow rules relevant for the role and the play. Reunamo et al. (2013) suggest that in play "children incorporate motifs for action into themselves, other children, or objects that are not restricted by the real qualities of the items" (p. 293). Previous studies on children's play have mainly been from the adult's point of view; however, recently children's perceptions have been taken into account in research, providing a new perspective (Einarsdóttir 2014). It is important to consult with children about play because they might give important information about their experiences and knowledges from which adults can learn (Dockett and Perry 2007; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008).

This article discusses an ethnographic study with children, aged three to five years, which was conducted in two preschool settings in Iceland. The study builds on childhood research that views children as competent and active participants influencing and reproducing their preschool community (Corsaro 2005), and on *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989), which entitles children to have influence on matters that affect them in any way. This is part of a larger study on children's perspectives on their activities in their preschool settings in Iceland and Australia. The aim of this part of the study is to explain how children view their activities in their preschool settings.

Peer cultures – William Corsaro

Through the years, play has been studied from different disciplines, such as psychological, biological, sociological, and educational (Henrick 2015). William Corsaro (2005, 2015) has conducted ethnographic research with children from a sociological perspective where he views children as active and creative social agents who contribute to the production of adult society and simultaneously produce their own peer cultures. To further clarify how this happens, he constructed the term *interpretive reproduction*. The concept *interpretive* describes the creative and innovative aspects of children's participation in society, and *reproduction* captures the idea that children active contribute to cultural production and change. In other words, interpretive reproduction refers to children's participation in their own unique peer cultures, which they create by appropriating information from the adult world. From this perspective, children are viewed as active competent social agents who have influence on their preschool society and the research process. At the same time, one must be aware of the influences educators, the researcher and society have on the children and their activities in the preschool.

In preschool, children form relationships with other children outside the family, who are important members of their lives. Children create their own *peer cultures* by using the experience and knowledge they have gained at home to participate in social events with peers (Corsaro 1992). *Peers* have been specified as children who spend time together in preschools on daily basis over longer periods of time (Löfdahl 2014). *Culture* has been defined "both as the context within which the child develops and the context into which the child develops" (Rogers 2010, 153). Löfdahl (2014) argues that peer cultures are contexts for children, where they change and expand their understanding of the community by using their experiences, meanings, and actions to contribute to the society, both here and now and also in the future. Peer culture is, according to Corsaro (2015), a stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers. In peer cultures children are likely to share norms, attitudes, and values, which they express in their play and other activities.

In this study, the children are seen as competent and active participants in shaping and sharing values, concerns, materials, and routines. They use experiences and knowledges gained from family and preschool society to create their own culture of peers. Therefore, in each of the two preschools there is a unique peer culture that is created by the preschool community: the children, their families, and the educators. This is the lens that was used in this study, both when

exploring children's activities in their preschool settings and when the children participated in the research process by observing and discussing their own activities.

Children's perspectives on play

Play in preschools has been studied from the perspective of different groups, such as educators (Wu 2014), parents (O´Gorman and Ailwood 2012) and children (Einarsdóttir 2014). This study explains how children view their activities in their preschool settings, which means that the children's own experiences, perceptions, and understandings of their life world are presented (Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson, and Hundeide 2013). Research with children about their activities in preschool settings has indicated that they have different views from adults on play (Dockett and Perry 2007) and that children generally make a clear distinction between play and non-play (Einarsdóttir, Children's perspectives on play 2014). This study focuses on children's views on play and non-play.

Researchers have found different characteristics of children's activities that need to be established so children will view their activities as play (Einarsdóttir 2014). The findings from a study by Wong et al. (2011) suggest that children see play as a self-initiated activity, intrinsically motivated, enjoyable, creative, and often involving social-interaction. These findings are in accord with other studies indicating that children see play as an informal, creative, and enjoyable activity in which they use their imagination, take on roles, and are in control. Also, children often consider play as a social activity, because they find it important to have someone to play with (Einarsdóttir 2014).

Educators and researchers have developed ways to reframe, rethink, and redefine the role of play in early childhood settings by inviting children to take part in the discussion. Theobald and Danby (2014) explored how children explain their activities in preschool. When the children were asked about their activities, they named the activity, for example, building or listening, rather than use the term *play* for what they were doing. The term *play* did not come up until it was introduced to them by the educators. The educators interpreted this as children's play being a part of who they were; therefore, they did not label activities separately, that is, play or non-play.

In different cultures, children may view their activities in different ways (Wu 2015). Wu (2015) studied the difference between Chinese and German children's views on play and

learning in kindergarten. She found that some of the Chinese children considered activities such as singing, stringing beads, and reading as types of play. However, the German children only considered their free-play as play. Wu suggested that the children were influenced by the educators' view of play, that is, the Chinese educators believed many of children's activities were play, while the German educators considered only children's free-play as play.

Research where children's views were taken into consideration also emphasised characteristics of non-play activities. Children seem to view non-play as activities controlled by educators and activities that require a specific outcome (Einarsdóttir 2014; Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2008). This does not necessarily mean that the children relate play to the absence or involvement of educators, but they do consider activities controlled by the educators as non-play (Howard, Jenvey, and Hill 2006). The children in Theobald et al.'s (2015) study distinguished between play and non-play activities, and they used the term *work* for the latter. Some children said that they were working but not playing in the arts room and that they were not playing when they needed to listen to the educators and learn from them.

The current study

As reported here, play has been studied from different disciplines and perspectives; however, a better understanding of play in peer cultures is needed and this can be done by asking the players themselves (Howard and McInnes 2012). This article discusses play from children's perspectives, building on childhood studies from a sociological construct. The aim of this study is to explain how the children themselves experience their activities in preschool. This is done by using video-stimulated accounts (Theobald 2012), which means that the children's activities are video-recorded and they are invited to observe them and discuss their activities. The discussions with the children are also recorded and used for further analysis. The video-stimulated recordings with the children will, therefore, add to the studies of play from children's perspectives. The research question that will be answered in this article is: *What characterises children's activities in preschool that they consider play and non-play?*

Methodology

The present study was conducted in two preschool settings with children aged three to five years and is inspired by ethnographic approaches. This means the researcher, who is the first

author of this article, engaged in fieldwork for an extended period of time, from February 2015 until January 2016. She spent four to five months in each preschool setting, three days a week, three to four hours each day. In this environment she got to know the children, the educators, and the culture of the settings (Silverman 2013) and undertook participant observation, which was documented in field notes (see Corsaro 1985). The researcher was aware that her position as an adult in the setting could be more powerful than the children's position (Löfdahl 2010). Therefore, for the purpose of equalising the power relationship between the researcher and the children, the researcher acted differently from the educators in the setting by taking part in the children's different activities. For example, she sat on the floor with the children during circle time when the educators sat on chairs, and she took part in children's freely chosen activities while the educators usually watched.

Participants and context

This study was conducted with two groups of children in two preschools in Reykjavík, Iceland. One criterion for choosing these preschools was that the settings needed to include at least one qualified preschool teacher on the staff, whereas only 30% of the staff in Icelandic preschools are qualified. Another criterion was that the setting has to emphasise children's learning through play, as reported in the Icelandic National Curriculum guidelines for preschools (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture 2011). Most of the children who participated in the study had attended preschool since the age of two and stayed there for seven to nine hours on weekdays. Therefore, the children were quite familiar with each other, the educators, and the setting.

First, all gatekeepers (the municipality, preschool principals, educators, and the children's parents) were asked for informed consent (Dockett, Einarsdóttir, and Perry 2011; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008). Next the children themselves were asked for informed assent being gatekeepers in their own account (Danby and Farrell 2005). All gatekeepers gave their consent and 46 children out of 52 gave their assent. The children who participated were invited to choose a pseudonym for their preschool and for their name. This was done with the aim of helping the children understand the researcher's duty of confidentiality. The preschools were given the names Ravenswood and Butterfly.

In the first preschool, Ravenswood, 18 out of 20 children and four educators participated. The preschool was chosen because a certified preschool teacher was on the staff and the children had approximately one hour for play or freely chosen activities in the morning. This was the activities on which this study would mainly focus. The setting was rather small and divided into two rooms, one smaller than the other. The smaller room had one large table and the bigger room had two large tables. Thus, the children's freely chosen activities often took place sitting at tables. Activities often observed involved puzzles, drawing, building Legos, and playing board games. The children's views of play in Ravenswood influenced how the second preschool setting was chosen; that is, there needed to be more emphasis on activities that took place on the floor with different material than was often the case in the first preschool.

In the Butterfly preschool, 28 children out of 32 and five educators participated. This setting was spacious and divided into four rooms, two big rooms and two small rooms. The two smaller rooms had tables but there were none in the bigger rooms. Therefore, children's freely chosen activities often took place on the floor. In this setting, the children's choice of activities often involved unit blocks, hollow blocks, clothing/dressing, household equipment, plastic animals, dolls, and drawing. Here, the children had more time for free activities and play in the morning than at Ravenswood. After circle time and group activities, there were often two to three hours remaining for freely chosen activities. In both settings, when the children had time for freely chosen activities, the educators were close by but usually did not take part in the activities.

Method and analysis

Video-stimulated recordings were used to support children's conversations about their activities in their preschool settings (Theobald 2012). Children's varying activities in different areas in the preschool settings were recorded. The children who were observed in the recordings were invited to watch them and talk about their activities. In that way, they had opportunities to explain the recordings and discuss what they were doing in the activities recorded and interpret what the other children and educators were doing. The children were asked open-ended questions to encourage them to go into a deeper conversation, for example, "What were you doing there?" and "How do you play?" The conversations with the children took from 10 minutes up to 35 minutes.

The researcher made sure that all children who wanted to participate in the study were recorded and had an opportunity to watch and take part in discussions. All recorded activities were used to support children's conversations and the researcher did not stop data gathering until she found she had answers to the research questions, and the children began repeating themselves. For example, in the first setting at the time when the researcher thought she had got the answers, a girl said to her, "You are always asking the same questions". This convinced the researcher that the conversation had been saturated. The conversations were video-recorded and then transcribed and used for further analysis. Table 1 shows the number and length of the recordings of the children's activities and conversations.

Preschool	Number of activity recordings	Total length of activity recordings	Number of recorded conversations	Total length of recorded conversations with children
Ravenswood	16	2 hours 12 min	13	2 hours 16 min
Butterfly	20	5 hours 23 min	16	4 hours 56 min

Table 1.

As Table 1 indicates, there is a difference in number and length of the recordings of children's activities and conversations with the children between the two preschools. The first reason is the number of children who participated, 18 children at Ravenswood and 28 children at Butterfly. Therefore, there were more recordings taken in the latter. The second reason is that recordings of activities that took place while children sat at tables were shorter than those that took place on the floor where children had the opportunity to move around. Also, the conversations with the children about activities that took place on the floor were longer than those of children who were seated.

The conversations with the children were transcribed verbatim and physical expressions were registered as well, such as when a child nodded instead of saying yes or showed some kind of emotional state, like sadness. Therefore, the transcript indicated what the participants did and said (Corsaro 1985). The transcribed conversations with the children were coded looking for things that recurred, salience, and patterns (Graue and Walsh 1998; Lichtman 2010) related to the children's play and non-play activities. The focus was on freely chosen activities and how the children explained what they were doing in those activities.

Trustworthiness

The findings of this study were introduced to the children at the end of the data construction phase. The researcher wrote a story about the findings, in language that was simple and understandable for the children, and read it to the children and the educators to determine what they thought of it, such as if they recognised the story as relating to them. While reading the story, the children had opportunities to provide their views and opinions.

Most of the children showed interest in listening to the story. They were excited to hear their pseudonyms quoted but they did not make many comments. However, in the Butterfly preschool, one boy stopped the researcher when she was reading the story and said, "It was not like that". When asked, "How was it?" he could not explain what he meant, but he did not want his quote in the findings. Following his comment, the quote was erased from the summary of the findings. The researcher interpreted the children's reaction to the story to be that the findings did not surprise them. She was not telling them anything new; this was, of course, something they already knew. Thus, the children saw themselves relating to the findings, on which they mostly agreed.

Findings and discussion

The recordings of the children's conversations indicated that they had both common and different views on their activities in their preschool settings. This section will discuss how the children viewed their activities, that is, how they explained some activities as play and others as non-play. The children explained: play needed preparation, but the preparation was not play. They further indicated that different ways of using materials influenced the explanations of their activities. Additionally, they expressed the belief that the activity of drawing was different from play. The findings presented here show characteristics of activities the children considered play and non-play.

"The play has not started yet" – Preparing for play

A common characteristic of play, according to the children, was that it had a preparation phase where the children set the stage, decided which roles to play, and decided who could be involved in the play. Once the preparation was finished, the actual play could begin. One

example from a recording in the Butterfly preschool illustrated this. A girl named Jóhanna called out, "The play has not started yet" to let the other children know that she was still preparing and not ready to start the actual play. In the recording, she was building a cat house with hollow blocks and putting the props in place. The researcher asked Jóhanna, "What were you doing before the play started?" to which she responded, "We were practicing". The researcher asked "how do you practice?" Jóhanna then crawled on the floor and showed the researcher how to play the cat.

At Ravenswood the researcher had a discussion with three girls who were dressing dolls during one of the recordings. The girls said that the educator had asked them to dress the dolls because they had guests coming to the preschool later that day. She then asked the girls if they were playing. The girls responded by saying they were not playing, and Sól explained further, "This is just like dressing yourself". Then the researcher asked the girls if they thought they could play with the dolls and the girls agreed they could. The researcher followed up the conversation by asking them how they used the dolls in play. Extract 1 contains the responses of two of the girls.

Extract 1

Sól: Then you just do whatever you like with them, something you know how, except bending them.

R: If you wanted to play with the dolls, what would you do?

Sól: Then we would play 'house'.

R: Play house ... how do you do that?

Elísa: Then you play with all the material.

R: All the material ... what do you do then?

Sól: Then we play the big sister and the mom and dad and brother and the little baby or something.

R: Yes ... what do you do next ... when you have decided who is the sister and mom and ...

Sól: Then you just play, start to play.

In this example, Sól and Elísa explain how the dolls can be used for play. Sól said that when playing with the dolls, she could do whatever she liked with them, building on her knowledge, skills, and experience. When Sól "does whatever she likes", she needs to be in control of the activity using her imagination and creativity, which is in harmony with the findings of Einarsdóttir (2014). In this way, Sól uses her imagination, creativity, and knowledge to contribute to the preschool community through play, which is in line with other studies (Corsaro 2015; Löfdahl 2014). Sól also said that she could not bend the dolls, that is, the dolls could not be treated roughly, which can be related to one of the rules of the role she played (Bodrova 2008) as someone who takes care of a baby and handles it carefully. She could also be referring to the rules of the setting made by educators indicating that it is not allowed to handle materials roughly. This example illustrates how the girls actively contributed to their peer culture through play, while at the same time appropriating information from the adult world (Corsaro 2015). The dolls were often used for play; however, this was not always exclusively the case. The activity of dressing the dolls because guests were expected was not play, because it was controlled by the educator and had the purpose of getting them dressed. This correlates with other studies that show that children do not define activities controlled by educators with specific outcomes, such as play (Einarsdóttir 2014; Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson 2008).

Sól and Elísa in Ravenswood preschool explained in Extract 1 how play needed to be prepared before it began. This is similar to Jóhanna in Butterfly preschool who said she needed to practice before the play could start. Sól and Elísa also explained how they used all the material and decided which roles to play before the actual play could begin. The preparation was a necessary part of the children's play, often enjoyable and taking considerable time. According to the girls, this part of the activity was not play.

Building with blocks is sometimes play

The children explained how different ways of using the material in the setting could influence how they viewed their activities, that is, if they viewed their activities as play or non-play. At Ravenswood, the researcher had a discussion with four children, two boys and two girls, about how they viewed their activities in their preschool setting. The children had chosen to use domino blocks on the floor and they had different opinions on the activity. When the children watched the video recording and commented on what they were doing, the girls said that they

were not playing because they were just arranging the blocks or lining them up. The boys, however, said that they were playing and they were adamant in their discussion about this activity. Extract 2 below is an example of the video-stimulated conversation with the children where Guðmundur explains to the researcher why the boys think the activity of using domino blocks is play.

Extract 2

R: Why do you think this is play?

Guðmundur: Because you can decide what you do with it and these blocks could be men and something.

R: So you think maybe there needs to be men for this to be play?

Guðmundur: Yes, the blocks can be men … this is also a game.

This example shows that for Guðmundur, acting out roles was important in order for the activity to be called play. Also, he needed to be able to make decisions about what to do with material, for example, changing blocks into men or something else. This is in harmony with how other research views children's play (Einarsdóttir 2014), such that if the children's activities involve being in control, taking on roles, and using their imagination, they consider the activity to be play. These characteristics of children's play are in accordance with how children's make-believe play has been described by other researchers (Bodrova 2008; Bodrova and Leong 2015); that is, the children suggested that they were playing when they acted out roles, created an imaginary situation, and followed rules related to the play.

In this study, the children's explanations of which activities were play and which were non-play were sometimes connected to how the children used the material. This was evident when the four children using the domino blocks explained their activities. Guðmundur's explanation of how he could decide what to do with the blocks and that they "could be men and something", can be interpreted as him being able to use the blocks in a different way from what is expected (Reunamo et al. 2013). On the one hand, when the domino blocks were used as expected by lining them up and making them fall, the activity was not viewed as play by the girls, but rather as a game like the boys also suggested. On the other hand, when the children were able to change the blocks and make them into something different, such as men, the boys

said that the activity was play. Thus, the children's choices of how they used the material influenced how they viewed their activities.

"Drawing and playing are not the same"

When the children observed the video-recordings and had discussions about activities that took place in the arts room they usually said they were not playing. When two girls at Ravenswood, Elena and Elísa, watched themselves colouring in a recording, they said that this was not play. However, they said that they could play while colouring if they were having fun doing it. The researcher had a similar discussion with some children in the Butterfly preschool where Selma, Áróra, and Jóhanna were watching a recording of themselves drawing in the arts room. They said that they were usually not playing when they were in the arts room; they played in other areas and said that drawing was not play. Extract 3 shows an example of the video-stimulated conversation:

Extract 3

R:	You said that you were not playing in there, that drawing was not play. When do you play then?
Áróra:	When we are not in the arts room.
R:	Why is drawing not play? Can you explain that?
Áróra:	Because drawing and playing are not the same.
Selma:	Playing is what Jóhanna was doing before [she came here]; then she was not drawing.
R:	Jóhanna, how did you play?
Áróra:	You were playing house or hollow blocks.
Jóhanna:	I was playing house and tomorrow I am going to choose the hollow blocks.

The girls agreed that drawing and playing were not the same, which is similar to the findings of Theobald and Danby (2014). Selma could not really explain what play was, but she pointed at Jóhanna's activity of playing house to clarify the difference between play and drawing. Elena's explanation that drawing is not play but that she could have fun doing it

indicates that she views drawing as a playful activity rather than actual play. This can be related to the idea that play is something children like to do (Einarsdóttir 2014; Howard et al. 2006), although having fun doing activities does not necessarily mean that the children are playing. Also, the children can find ways to play in different situations even though the activity they are participating in is itself not viewed as play.

Most of the children viewed the activity of drawing and colouring as non-play. However, in the Ravenswood preschool, two children said that the activity of painting a picture of themselves was play, in contrast to what the other children had said. These two children, the oldest children in the setting, participated more often in formal activities than the younger children, and made visits to the primary school they were soon going to attend. This can be related to findings from Wu's (2015) study, which indicates that children who participate in a more formal learning environment define their activities more broadly than children in playful preschool practice. As Corsaro (2015) argues, children are active in influencing their preschool community, but they are also influenced by the educator's views and actions.

Other studies with children in preschools have shown that children named the activity rather than used the term *play* for what they were doing (Theobald et al. 2015). However, a pattern was observed in the data of this study. First, when the children were asked what they were doing in the recordings and their first response was naming the activity – for example, drawing, painting, or building – they usually agreed that they were not playing. But when the children were asked and their first response was "playing", they often referred to activities in which they took on roles or were pretending and made their own decisions of how to use the material.

Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explain how children viewed their activities in the preschool setting, with a special focus on activities the children explained as play and non-play. Video-stimulated accounts were used to study the children's different activities in their peer culture. This was an ethnographic study conducted in two preschool settings in Iceland; thus the strength of this study is that the researcher took part in children's peer culture over an extended period of time. The children were seen as active participants in the research process and competent of observing their own recorded activities and explaining what they were doing.

Therefore, the researcher could learn from the children's experiences of their activities in the preschool setting.

The limitation of this study is that the findings apply only to the children who participated in the two preschool settings at the time the study was conducted. Additionally, the findings are primarily based on the children's conversations with the researcher and each other, which gives children with good verbal skills a greater opportunity to contribute to the findings. However, the video-recorded conversations with the children also captured their different ways of communicating, such as physical expressions. The aim of this paper was not to give a precise definition of what play is; however, it does gives an important view of the phenomena from children's perspectives.

When the children who participated in this study explained when they were playing, they usually agreed on two aspects of their activities that needed to be in place in order to suggest *play*. The children needed to be able to act out roles and decide what to do with the material, as Guðmundur pointed out when he said, "You can decide what to do with it [the material] and the blocks can be men or something". This leads to the assumption that play from a child's perspective is strongly related to Bodrova's (2008) definition of make-believe play, that is, the children are playing when they create an imaginary situation and act out roles.

Another aspect related to the children's play was that it required preparation. The children had to prepare by building the environment and taking on roles. This part of the activity was not regarded as play, which is in harmony with other studies (Theobald et al. 2015). The play did not begin until the preparation or practice was completed, as was observed when Jóhanna announced to the other children, "The play has not started yet" to let them know that she was still practicing and preparing for play. This was also observed when Sól and Elísa explained how to play with the dolls. Before the actual play could begin, they took out the material, made it ready, and decided which roles to play. The preparation of children's play was often observed by the researcher as an enjoyable activity which took considerable time. Therefore, it is important for educators to take into account when planning the preschool practice that children need time to prepare their activities before they start playing, thus, giving time for uninterrupted play time.

The two preschools in this study had different emphases in their practice. In the Ravenswood preschool, the children were often observed sitting at tables doing activities that they did not consider to be play, for example, drawing and participating in board games. There

were not many opportunities for children's make-believe play because of how the setting was organised and the choices of materials accessible to the children. In the Butterfly preschool, on the other hand, the setting was spacious and organised in a way that the children had diverse materials and uninterrupted time for make-believe play. The children pointed out the differences between play and non-play activities. This was apparent when Áróra stated, "Drawing and playing are not the same." The children were often engaged and enjoyed these different activities indicating that a more balanced approach would be preferable in preschool settings where children can choose between varied activities based on their needs and interests. However, it is critical to take into account the curriculum guidelines that suggest play is children's main way of learning.

Research has indicated that in today's preschools, children's activities seldom fit the definition of play and children have limited time for play because of pressure on educators to start teaching children academic skills at a young age (Bodrova 2008; Bodrova and Leong 2015). This is also the case in Icelandic preschools (Einarsdóttir 2017). In the Ravenswood preschool, only a few of the children's recorded activities were viewed as play by the children. After introducing these findings to the educators, they began to observe and find ways to change the environment and add materials that support children's play. In that way, the educators needed to develop their practice to further meet the requirements of the Icelandic National Curriculum for preschools (2011) and place greater emphasis on children's play in the setting. For preschool educators, this is something worth considering: How much of children's activities in their setting are considered play by the children? How is the setting organised and what kind of materials are accessible to the children?

This study contributes to research with children about their views of play and non-play activities in preschools. The study can be of value for early childhood educators by helping them to understand how children explain their activities in preschool settings, so that they can further support children's learning through play. Therefore, it is critical that children's perspectives are taken into account in the discussion of play in preschools. This study only emphasises children's perspectives on play and non-play. The educators were not asked about their perspectives and, therefore, this is not discussed in the paper. However, it would have been interesting to determine how the educators in these two settings interpreted children's activities.

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