

ILLUSTRATING ADVENTUROUS PLAY

Background

What is adventurous play?

Child-led activity where children experience feelings of **excitement, thrill and fear**; often this occurs in the context of age-appropriate **risk-taking** (Dodd & Lester, 2021), such as climbing a tree or going for a walk in the dark.

Why is adventurous play important?

Theorised to **reduce anxiety** (Dodd & Lester, 2021) through increased **coping**, tolerance of **uncertainty**, understanding of **physiological arousal**. Also found to improve **children's risk competence** (Lavrysen et al., 2017), and provides opportunities for children to learn **motor skills** (Fjørtoft, 2001).

How is adventurous play measured and researched?

Adventurous play is often measured using an adults' perspective, for example, through **parent or teacher report** (e.g., Dodd et al., 2022), or through **observational studies** (e.g., Sandseter, 2009). However, adventurous play may look **different for every child**, so this external perspective is problematic. We cannot know how children think and feel about their play unless we **ask them**. Young children's viewpoints are very rare in quantitative research on play, particularly play in school or nursery (FitzGibbon, Oliver, Nesbit, & Dodd, under review).

Taking the child's perspective

Some previous research has taken the **child's perspective** using qualitative methods including **multi-method mosaics** (e.g., Hinchion et al., 2021), and creative methods like **drawing a dream playground** (e.g., Ward, 2018). Children's **self report** has not yet been used to study adventurous play but is increasingly being **recognised as a valid** means of collecting quantitative data (Ruzek et al., 2020; Barnett et al., 2022).

Project aims and methods

Project overview

In this seed project, I use a participatory approach to develop and validate a new pictorial self-report measure of adventurous play for use with 3- to 7-year-olds.

Phase 1: children participated in workshops (described below) to inform the researcher and illustrator about how they conceive of and engage in adventurous play. Phase 2: video data and drawings from these workshops will be thematically analysed. Phase 3: the illustrator will use the emergent themes to develop a set of illustrations to prompt children's self report. Phase 4: these illustrations will be validated for use as a self-report tool.

Phase 1: Mosaic-method participatory workshops

Participatory workshops were run in one kindergarten and one P2 (Year 1) class in Stirling, Scotland. The workshops were facilitated by Dr FitzGibbon and a children's illustrator Kasia Matyjaszek. The mosaic method (Clark, 2001; 2017) combined several participatory techniques (see below). Video recordings and workshop artefacts will be transcribed and analysed to inform creation of the illustrations.



Workshop artefacts



Kindergarten; slides and climbing



Kindergarten; swing, obstacles and lava



P2; sea monster attacks ship



P2; fire Godzilla



P2; dragon with a beautiful face



P2; mighty dragon protects heart stone with forcefield

Workshop reflection

In the playground, children demonstrated many examples of adventurous play, for example, **balancing across planks** of wood precariously placed between tyres, **jumping across large gaps** between benches and stacks of palettes, **chasing each other at high speeds** with wheelbarrows, and **dangling upside-down** off railings. Children were very willing to show off these activities to the researcher.

However, when it came to **talking about** and **drawing** adventurous play, or play at all, the primary-age children in particular quickly moved into **fantasy**, describing and drawing dragons and sea monsters and epic adventures (see examples from the artefacts). This suggests that adventurous play may be **fun to do**, it is **less fun to talk about** and draw in realistic terms.

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