Play, power and pedagogy: A reinterpretation of research using a Foucauldian lens

Introduction

Contemporary pedagogy in early childhood education favours a play based approach to young children's learning and development (Walsh, McMillan and McGuinness 2017; Moyles 2015; Wood 2013; Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson 2006). Research in the area of play pedagogy generally tends to focus on the efficacy and role of the teacher in the learning interaction (Loizou 2017; Fleer 2015; Varga 2003). Literature in relation to play and power dynamics commonly focuses on power dynamics between children (Canning 2019; Skånfors 2010; Gussin Paley 1993) although the role of the educator is implicit in the discussion. The research in this article arose from questions emerging in our own practice with children which were related to issues of power in pedagogical interactions between children and adults. Our understanding of power dynamics within play led us to believe that power, particularly when exercised by the educator, had a potentially restrictive impact on play (Canning 2019, 2007; MacNaughton 2005). Viewing power in this way presupposes that power is a repressive force; it is something that exists but not within an individual's control, rather it is something that is imposed on individuals. This article describes research in which the role of power in play pedagogy is examined.

A second aim of this article is to contest a dominant lens of analysis of young children's play through a reinterpretation of existing data using an alternative lens. Evidence suggests that policy and curricula in the Republic of Ireland in relation to young children is dominated by sociocultural theory and we noted that this had influenced our own previous research (McCabe 2017; Farrell 2011). While sociocultural theory does provide an important lens with which to view early years pedagogy, the domination of one conceptualisation of knowledge and learning is worth contesting given that singular thinking in relation to pedagogy and

knowledge can be viewed as limiting. Agee (2002) notes that the adoption of multiple lenses enabled her research to create multi layered pictures of participants lived experiences. Positioning policy and curriculum developments within the sociocultural paradigm acknowledges and recognises both the social and cultural contexts, but also offers a particular lens with which to view pedagogy and young children as learners. Therefore, an alternative (Foucauldian) lens is applied in this research with the intention of finding new ways of thinking about power in play based pedagogical contexts.

The Research Context

This article describes a collaborative research project between two teacher educators who work in separate schools within the same large university education faculty, teaching different disciplines (Drama and Early Childhood Education) but with a shared interest in play pedagogy. The play research which is reanalysed for the purposes of this study was a drama and play project which took place in two schools (one primary and one pre-school) with children aged between four and six and will be described in detail later in the methodology section.

In the Republic of Ireland, constructs of early childhood pedagogy are often presented as a shared understanding. The evidence for the dominance of the sociocultural paradigm is seen in recent policy and curriculum development pertaining to young children in the Republic of Ireland (O'Kane 2016; Dooley et al. 2014; Kennedy et al. 2012 and NCCA 2009). Sociocultural theories highlight social and cultural contexts as inseparable dimensions in which young children learn. They include both Vygotskian and post-Vygotskian thinking and are predicated on the belief that the process of learning is a social construction and that knowledge is both socially and culturally constructed. A key policy document for early years

pedagogy in Ireland is *Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2009) which provides guidance for adults engaging with children from birth to six years of age. Both *Aistear* and corresponding background research papers emphasise that 'learning is a social process, and children from the very earliest, are active participants in the shared construction of knowledge' (Kernan 2007, 19).

Other recent curriculum developments for young children in Ireland include the new Primary Language Curriculum (DES 2015) and a forthcoming Mathematics Curriculum. Research reports (Dooley et al. 2014; Kennedy et al. 2012) that informed these curricula developments are also underpinned by sociocultural theories. For instance, the mathematics research report for children aged three to eight years of age recognises the dominance of sociocultural theory stating 'sociocultural theories are increasingly the dominant framework used in early childhood education to explain young children's learning' (Dooley et al. 2014, 43-44). These reports are the foundation which informs and structures new and forthcoming curricula. Our research question which focuses on the examination of power within play pedagogy, and our desire to move beyond the sociocultural paradigm, led us to develop a conceptual framework based on Focualdian thinking.

Conceptual Framework

'There is no escaping from power, that it is always-already present' (Foucault 1978, 82).

The study which is reanalysed in this article was originally examined within a sociocultural research tradition. Therefore, the previous analysis explored the connections between the sociodramatic play activity and children's development, language and cognition, the zone of proximal development and sociocultural construction of knowledge (Gupta 2009). Discussion of power relations are not separate from a sociocultural analysis but the reanalysis in this

article focuses specifically on power. Therefore, the analysis applies themes evident in the work of Foucault (1988; 1980; 1979; 1978; 1966). The Foucauldian concepts of power, truth and knowledge are inextricably linked and the interplay between the three underpins the post-structural notion that a single truth does not exist. What does exist is a particular version of truth, within a given context and space in time. A central idea of Foucault's (1966) is that all epochs of history have particular epistemological assumptions associated with them, for instance, discourse. Foucault develops this idea and argues that over a period of time conditions of discourse change, from one *épistème* to another. Foucault (1972) conceptualises discourse as a body of knowledge, thinking and shared language used to discuss or analyse a concept. He maintains that these discourses systematise and construct how we think, understand and engage with that concept (Foucault 1972). He outlines how these discourses form a general politics or a regime of truth, saying that 'each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true' (Foucault 1978, 131). Cohen maintains that the regime of truth for early childhood education provides a lens to understand 'how some discourses operate and network together to reinforce a particular powerful world view' (Cohen 2007, 7). This powerful discourse determines the ways we perceive children and childhood. MacNaughton (2005) furthers this argument stating, 'the field of early childhood education studies has grown through developing sets of truths about the normal and desirable way to be a child and an early childhood educator that are sanctioned and systematised by government (and) by professional associations' (pp.29-30). A canon of knowledge on young children and their lives has emerged and is often presented as a shared understanding, a shared consensus - a regime of truth. In the case of our research context, this shared understanding presents itself as policies, curricula and frameworks for young children which in Ireland seems to be framed within the sociocultural paradigm only.

Foucault (1979) suggests that we should abandon the tradition that assumes that knowledge can only exist where power relations have been suspended or that the renunciation of power is a prerequisite of knowledge. He argues instead that 'we should admit… that power produces knowledge' (Foucault 1979, 27). Power and knowledge are directly linked; one cannot exist without the other; there is no power relation without the correlative field of knowledge, nor is there any knowledge that does not constitute power relations. Foucault (1979) proposes that power-knowledge relations should be analysed, not in relation to the subject of knowledge, but rather the interrelationship between power and knowledge. The processes and struggles that exist in power-knowledge relations have the potential to create new knowledge and understanding.

Foucault's tripartite conceptualization of power recognises three forms of power, namely: sovereign power; disciplinary power and biopower. Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) discuss the distinctions between the forms of Foucualdian power. They claim that for Foucault biopower exists side by side with sovereign power. In fact, Foucault distinguishes between biopower and sovereign and disciplinary power, arguing that the archetypical form of power is not discipline which governs individuals, but rather a less intrusive technique of population management which he refers to as 'biopower'. The research takes place in educational institutions (schools) which Foucault believes are typical sites of power in an everyday, socialised, embodied form. Foucault (1979) describes sovereign power as a form that is most recognizable through particular individuals such as monarchy, governments or systems. As such, sovereign power is easily identifiable and as individuals we know that we have been acted upon, and by whom. Disciplinary power is more difficult to detect. Foucault maintains that 'discipline makes individuals; it is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise' (1979, 170). In other words, disciplinary power often achieves its effects by the subject embodying power and in doing so

self-governing. Foucault argues ‘traditionally, power was what was seen, what was shown and what was manifested…Disciplinary power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility’ (1979, 187).

For Foucault, human nature does not need to be emancipated through the deconstruction of social constraints, such as sovereign power; he maintains that the subject or individual is constructed through power relations (MacNaughton 2005; Ailwood 2011). As we are inscribed in power because we are constituted by power relations, Foucault (1978) maintains that we cannot challenge power from outside, pretending that we are acting upon power. Instead, as individuals we have the capacity to challenge power from within. Foucault referred to these forms and layers of power that exist within an institution as the 'micro-physics of power' (1978, 26) arguing that power is permeating at the micro level all the time.

Lustick (2017) notes that Foucault locates power at the sites of transaction between individuals and believes that Foucault would view the power structure inherent in the teacher-student relationship as strong enough to withstand any practice intended at altering its power dynamic. Punch (2001) and Canning (2017) suggest however that this is not the case as they find that children, at home and in school, renegotiate adult imposed boundaries and assert their autonomy, albeit with varying degrees. Skånfors’s (2010) research shows that children position themselves in relation to issues of social order, status and power. Her research indicates that this is a fluid state and related to specific circumstances which is interesting from a pedagogical perspective. Gaventa (2003) observes that Foucault is one of the few writers on power who recognise that power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces us to do things against our wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society. The possible truth of this idea is explored in this

research by investigating the kinds of power evident in play pedagogy and in power negotiations between educators and children.

Methodology

The research process began with informal dialogue and evolved into a space in which we explicitly prioritised inquiry and alternative perspectives around play pedagogy, ultimately arriving at the central question: What is the role of power in play pedagogy? Savin-Baden (2007) notes academic life is increasingly lacking in space to think, discuss and develop ideas, and the power of the individual within Irish universities to contest knowledge has been questioned by the country's president (Higgins 2018). This resonated with us and we agreed with Savin-Baden's (2007) argument that without dialogic spaces, knowledge and pedagogical stances remain static, uncontested, and at the bottom of the academic agenda. Literature on dialogue supports this idea. For example, Bakhtin (1984) believes that life itself is dialogic and contrasts it with monologism which he presents as an oppressive and inauthentic way of being. He observes that 'a monologically understood world is an objectified world, a world corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness' (Hays 2005, 9). As is perhaps typical across universities and educational settings around the world, our conversations around our shared interest of play began informally, through friendship. Bohm (1996) asserts that when true communication in dialogue occurs, friendships grow. We were inspired also by Gussin Paley's letters (2010) about play to her friend in another continent, and knew that she had come to new understandings about children's communities of play, simply through her correspondence with a friend. Bohm (1996) emphasises that dialogue is a process of direct, face to face encounter without a set agenda and is not a form of communication in which opinions are defended or theorised. We met four times and the dialogue that emerged related to our feelings about current national

policy as described earlier and how it intersected with our own practice as educators. Our initial intention was simply to talk openly and examine the thought processes which guide us in our work (Bohm 1996). As the discussion evolved however, feelings and ideas emerged about dominant paradigms in national policy, and also related assumptions were identified in relation to ways of viewing power in play pedagogy. As a result, a desire to explore the role of power in play pedagogy in a new way became evident.

In order to do this, we chose to reexamine previous research conducted on play. The research project which is the source of the play episode and case study discussed here originally took place with the purpose of investigating the impact of educator interventions on the sociodramatic play skills of children (Author). This study was chosen because, as Bodrova reminds us, 'when writing about play, Vygotsky limited the use of this term to the dramatic or make-believe play typical for pre-schoolers or children of primary school age' (2008, 359). A number of transcripts and case studies were generated in the original study, through the use of video recording, in order to provide varied and rich descriptions of children's play interactions. Using this data from the original project we applied Braun and Clark's (2006) six phase framework for thematic analysis. Familiarity with the data existed from the previous study which enabled us to proceed to the remaining stages. Coding was related to Foucault's tripartite conceptualization of power as outlined in the conceptual framework. Biopower was eliminated as a code on the basis that it relates to mass populations. Disciplinary and sovereign power were used as codes as they are forms of power that Foucault believes exist everywhere. Having manually coded the data we identified themes related to children, educators, repressive and productive power. For the purposes of the re-analysis discussed here, one play episode and one case study were selected, based on the fact that they showed evidence of power dynamics in the original sociocultural analysis. The original study was carried out by one of the present researchers (Author) and involved a

drama and play project consisting of ten video recorded sessions in which the researcher as the educator engaged in children's role play and then continued to record as the children played alone.

Ethics

The study was implemented within the ethical guidelines stipulated by the ethical review board of the researchers' university. Therefore, the researcher and the classroom educators agreed in advance an explanation of the project which would sufficiently enable children to understand their role and assent to it. It was made clear to children that they could withdraw from participation without penalty. Parental/guardian consent and participating teacher consent was also obtained. It was made clear to all participants that names would not be used and they are changed in the article. The ethical principle of beneficence (Mertens 2010) was observed in that classes opted in to the drama and play project on the basis of observing and listening to children with regard to activities that they seemed to enjoy. The study was designed to have minimal risk and respect for participants was a guiding principle throughout the field work.

Play episode

This episode takes place with children who are in their first year of primary schooling and are aged four to six. The setting is in a lower socio economic area in Dublin, Ireland. The children have one hour of play per day and always have a role play area which changes every few weeks. All of the children enjoy play and interact well with each other generally. Three of the children speak English as a second language as they have migrated to Ireland. Robbie and Sophie have the strongest level of English in the group. Possibly for that reason, they tend to engage in role play the most. The educator is a drama practitioner who is invited to

the classroom to carry out the drama and play project and this is the third session. The classroom teacher is present as an observer only.

The role play area is set up as a castle and the children have been reading the story of Sleeping Beauty. In the version they have read it is a witch who places a curse on a princess as revenge for not being invited to the festivities which welcome the birth of the princess. A variety of costumes and materials related to the theme are available. There are seven children involved in the play episode, although at the beginning, Robbie is refusing to be involved. Educator: 'Who do you think we need in the castle?'

Robbie: 'I want to be the Guard'. (A Guard (the Irish term for policeman) has not previously been mentioned by children or adults. His classroom teacher is sure he would not have known about the guard costume that she then finds.) It is based on medieval rather than modern guard dress but Robbie quickly puts it on and walks over to the door of the castle and adopts a stance of power, looking out.

Educator: (To the group) 'Do you think it would be a good idea to have a party to welcome the new baby princess? If you would like to invite someone to the party, you can do that now.' The children practice inviting people to the party but Robbie still does not seem to be involved.

Educator: 'Robbie, would you like to invite someone to the party?'

Robbie: (In a serious tone) 'No, I’m staying here to look out for the witch'. (The idea has been introduced by the educator that she may be near.) The educator, using role, adopts a different tone to her usual one and announces: ' I am the witch and I know that you are having a party, but you have not invited me!' Odhran exclaims: 'No, this is our castle!' Preston adds: 'No,

because you’re not allowed' Zack says: 'Alacaz, Alcazoo' (which is similar to the start of the spell practiced earlier). Robbie does not interact with the witch in the same way; he laughs.

The children then play alone in the castle and the educator is outside the play area. Robbie at first does not play but says to the educator: 'You need me, don’t you?'. She replies 'I definitely do. Next time the guard might be the only person who can help'. He then starts to join the play by saying to another child who is behind the castle 'Let me come in for a minute' even though the castle boundary is only imagined. Robbie begins then to interact with Sophie who is pretending to be a princess. He says to her: 'Are you pretending to be the witch? He then uses a very different voice to his normal one: 'Are you pretending to be the witch cos you’re the princess with the wand in your hand. You’re going up to the tower cos you’re smashing the castle with your wand'. (The tower and all of the actions are imagined.) 'Sophie, will I kill the witch? Will I? Ha ha, I killded her, [sic], I have her by the hair!'

Findings and Analysis

The original sociocultural analysis explored the connections between the sociodramatic play activity and children's development, language and cognition, the zone of proximal development and sociocultural construction of knowledge (Gupta 2009). Analysis with this lens suggested that Robbie’s initial refusal to play meant that he was not part of the collective construction of knowledge. His lack of language or engagement in role when the educator entered as a witch was interpreted as disappointing in comparison to the language used by other children in order to develop the narrative shared by the group. His greater engagement and richer use of language in the section when children play was attributed to the scaffolding of participating in the activity and the need to reflect some of his own sociocultural experiences through play. The previous interpretation did refer to the power relations between

the children and the educator, and the children and themselves in this play episode. Literature concerned with sociodramatic play often refers to its potential for children to achieve power and agency (Dunn and Stinson 2012; Dunn 2011; Corsaro 2003; Warren 1992). The impact that power had on the play was not specifically analysed as part of the original research however.

Analysing this play episode using Foucauldian themes of sovereign and disciplinary power (Foucault 1979) provides information both in terms of power relations between the players and the power embedded within the play itself. Having initially refused any role, Robbie chose to be a guard within the play. As identified in the conceptual framework sovereign power is a form most recognisable through particular powerful individuals, in this case the Guard. As the Guard holds one of the most powerful positions within Irish society Robbie demonstrates his sovereign power through his role, costume, and body language. The power dynamic shifts as Robbie moves himself from an outsider of the play to the most powerful player, and in doing so, his role dictates the emerging narrative. As the educator is in role as a member of the group of castle party planners, she is also controlled by his actions. Robbie also displays a more nuanced form of power which is that of disciplinary power. 'Disciplinary power regards individuals both as objects and instruments of its exercise' (Foucault 1979, 170). Examples of this can be seen when Robbie disciplines Samantha to go to the tower as a punishment for an imaginary misdemeanour. In addition, as he increasingly controls the direction of play and verbally checks his centrality to the narrative with the educator, it can be seen as an attempt to challenge existing power from within (Foucault 1978).

With regard to the educator's role, the typical teacher-student power structure (Lustick 2017) seems to be altered. This appears to occur as a result of the fictional roles she takes and the

role taken by Robbie. To an extent the educator uses disciplinary power by deciding the theme of play and adopts sovereign power in role as a witch with the potential to cast spells. Yet she is at the same time moving away from the power which can be associated with educators by taking the low status role of a witch who is not invited to the party. As the children accept Robbie in role as the Guard they begin mirror his behaviour. Like him, they take ownership of the castle and refuse the educator's/witch's entry to the castle. Overall the power of the educator and of Robbie in this case can be seen as productive (Foucault 1979) as it creates shared knowledge of how to assert boundaries and ideas.

Case study

The case study takes place in a preschool setting with children who are aged three and four. The preschool is designated as having lower socio economic status. The room has a range of play activities set out in different areas of the room. There is a play rota in operation but all twelve children can move between the play activities if that is their choice. In this setting the educator is again invited to carry out the drama and play project for ten weeks. As this is a preschool setting the children have a teacher and a childcare worker and are more accustomed to a number of adults working in the room. Play pedagogy is used throughout the four hours that the children attend the setting and, unlike the play episode in the primary school, the teacher in this setting frequently joins in the sessions with the visiting drama educator. This case study focuses on Alex who is aged four and has a speech delay. At the start of the study, when play is freely chosen Alex does not usually go to the role play area but to the construction play area. If he does choose the role play area, it is to join other boys who are not engaging in role play but excluding others from coming into the area. He seeks out adults frequently for praise and physical contact. The following account is a summary of observations which took place over a ten week period.

In the initial sessions Alex seems a little nervous at first of immersing himself in role play. He quickly becomes involved however and watches closely when the adult enters into role and then uses that as a springboard for his own engagement in role. He appears to gain confidence from learning that an adult will respond to him if he is pretending to be someone else. At first he makes many offers in role, as if testing the reciprocity of the adult in a safe way, such as bringing presents for a birthday party and plants to the garden centre role play area. Then he allows himself to believe in the play of the adult, for example when the adult feigns shock at a phone call (on a toy phone) he watches smiling, and then says 'What's (sic) it? What's it?' He increasingly takes roles within play such as a Guard and a taxi driver who takes the wheel of a car taking a large group on a holiday. When playing without the help of an adult, he sometimes still resorts to the role of baby, a role requiring no language but lots of cuddling up asleep.

Findings and Analysis

A sociocultural approach to the analysis of the case study above produced results which focussed on the importance of scaffolding, in line with Bodrova (2008). Alex was viewed as an example of a player who needed the support of a more skilled player to develop his ability to participate in the collective activity of play. Analysis using sociocultural theory also brought an emphasis on the importance of language and the fact that when support was not available, he resorted to a non linguistic role. Vygotsky (1997) discusses the importance of objects in play and Alex's initial interest in using objects as gifts showed his awareness of the objects' meaning. The original case study indicated that Alex enjoyed play episodes and while he did not speak he was often seen smiling and laughing. Sociocultural analysis is concerned with the child's ability to understand the rules of the social interaction that play

involves. Therefore, the original analysis focussed on Alex's growing trust of the educator and also his tentative steps in using objects and pretence in a sociodramatic play context.

A further Foucault based thematic analysis indicates evidence of sovereign and disciplinary power. While Alex does not always have the language to sustain the play, disciplinary power is still evident in his actions. For example, the only way Alex can access the play episode, due to the level of his language, is to make non-verbal offers within the make believe context. His actions enable him to be involved in play and to literally and figuratively have something to give to others in the play interaction. The birthday presents and plants (the objects) affect and govern both the subject's behaviour (Alex) and that of the objects' recipients. This reflects Foucault's assertion that 'disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially by arranging objects' (1979, 187). The educator, whose role can be associated with disciplinary power (Foucault 1980) is less evident in this case study in comparison to the play episode to the other setting. She appears to be more of a model and a reassurance to Alex. Possibly this is due to the fact that play is the main pedagogic activity, unlike the primary school play episode setting, creating less need for children to negotiate power with the educator. This may help Alex to make progress in the way that he needs.

As Alex grows in confidence over a ten week period, he takes on more roles that demonstrate sovereign power, such as the taxi driver and Guard. Foucault (1979) maintains sovereign power is easily identifiable and therefore as individuals we know we have been acted upon and by whom. Alex's roles are clear and determine the other players' actions. He makes himself responsible for taking the group on holidays, thus positioning himself as a powerful player. Power is also evident when Alex reverts back to being a baby. Taking on this role is successful in encouraging other players to feed him and take care of him, ensuring that the play centres around him. Alex speaks very little, yet is still empowered and play for Alex

induces pleasure (Foucault 1980). Alex seeks power in play and finds it in verbal and nonverbal roles. An educator who is keen to encourage Alex to engage in roles which develop his language might discourage his use of this baby role. Yet an acceptance of children's desire for power in play suggests that this self chosen role enables Alex to feel powerful. Foucault emphasises that power is about relationships (Ailwood 2011) and Alex uses his actions to engage in play in ways which are as powerful as the other children and educators, or sometimes more powerful.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Foucault's concepts of sovereign and disciplinary power (1979) are evident in play interactions and that as well as educators, children themselves use these types of power to affect what occurs. As Foucault writes, power 'is produced at every instant, at every point, or moreover in every relation between one point and another. Power is everywhere: not that it engulfs everything, but that it comes from everywhere' (1978, 122). This is reflected by all actors in the play pedagogy interaction. The children in the study also reflect Foucault's assertion that power produces pleasure (1980) and the positive impacts of power on children evident in the study have implications for pedagogy. The study indicates that children seek sovereign roles and embody these through costume and body language. It can be concluded from this that educators should model, include and take on sovereign roles in role play interaction to encourage children to then take on such roles. The study shows that children use sovereign and disciplinary power when educators take low status roles. Educators therefore need to be ready to take on roles which are less powerful than children's roles to give them the experience of power. In the study children's power is evident even in the absence of language. In this case objects and actions have particular significance in enabling children's power so educators need to be responsive and reciprocal to non linguistic

role interactions. The study showed that the dominant role of one child can be productive, reflecting Foucault's assertion (1980) that power has the potential to be productive. This suggests that in play pedagogy, power can and should be redistributed to children who may lead the interaction in a way that is more productive than the direction intended by the educator. The study also suggests that in settings where play is prioritised as a form of pedagogy children have more freedom to use power in a way that suits their needs rather than focusing on negotiating educator child boundaries. Ailwood points out that educators will always have access to social and institutional forms of power but maintains that 'play is a key site where these are negotiated' (2011, 29). Accepting that power 'is always-already present' (Foucault 1978, 82) including in play and pedagogy, and that power will be sought and enjoyed by children can help the educator to co construct play scenarios with children in which they all have opportunities to use power productively. The educator can use power to 'create a shared understanding of the roles, situations, tasks and materials relevant to the materials presented or experiences offered' (Dunn 2011, 31); and in doing so, alter power relationships and enrich children's play.

Considering the wider context of the field of early childhood education, the research supports the Foucauldian idea that power is not only a negative or repressive force. To view power as potentially productive provides a certain liberation from what had seemed like an accepted idea, or regime of truth (Foucault 1972). In essence, the educator previously viewed the potential of power as repressive only. The paradigm shift when reinterpreting with a Foucauldian lens is that to see that power cannot be separated from pedagogy but that 'it is possible the have relations of power that are open' (Foucault 1988). The local lens of the Irish context is a microcosm of the global narrative of play pedagogy and as such the findings can be applied to other contexts. This research creates a discursive space to deconstruct the importance of understanding power within play pedagogy. It brings to the fore issues of

whose truth and whose power hold sway in contemporary early childhood contexts. The research highlights the need for criticality and contestation of the notion of a singular truth, or a singular dominant lens to understand children and their social worlds.

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