

Abstract

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Title: The educator as researcher of playful learning: professional development as research-informed practice in the early years.

In this paper, I make a case for academic researchers (outsiders) to work together with teacher-researchers (insiders) in the generation, circulation and use of knowledge. Specifically, the paper focuses on my research with practitioners over many years relating to the theoretical frameworks, conceptualisations and knowledge of playful learning and playful pedagogies in early years settings. In England, since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, formal teaching in many early years settings has gradually eroded play and playful learning opportunities. This is now changing but our heritage of understanding, through observation and reflection the relationship between play and learning has been substantially eroded. Drawing from my own research, I will consider how research partnerships between insiders and outsiders can be a source of professional development for educators and academic researchers, a means of knowledge production relating to the field of study and, potentially, a substantial way of influencing policy development that locates children and their needs at its heart. Along the way, I will consider benefits, challenges and ethical dilemmas as illustrated through joint study of playful learning and playful pedagogies.