

Take Two: Using Video as an Analysis Tool for Outdoor Play

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the use of video as a non-participant observational tool for outdoor play. It considers how video can play an important role in qualitative research, especially in capturing sequences of children's play and the different ways in which footage can be utilized to stimulate debate around children's play behaviours and preferences. In qualitative ethnographic research there is often reliance on field notes or reflective observations relying on the interpretations of the researcher (Dicks et al., 2011; Fler, 2015; Haw, 2008). The use of video enables sequences to be replayed, analysed in different ways and shown to different audiences (Flewitt, 2006; Forman, 1999). This flexibility can enrich a research project to develop shared understanding (Canning, 2014; Ely et al., 1991; Fler, 2015).

In this chapter a small-scale qualitative study using video as a central analysis tool is outlined. It is based on a case study of a

4-year-old boy, Toby, engaging in outdoor play in a number of different contexts. The video sequences recorded during the study were used as 'video stimulated review' (Forman, 1999) for both parents and early childhood professionals associated with Toby to better understand his play preferences. Some of the sequences were also used to support continuing professional development (CPD) sessions for a larger staff group to explore the value of outdoor play for young children.

POSITIONING THE RESEARCH WITHIN A SOCIOCULTURAL FRAMEWORK

The study captured through video child-initiated, social outdoor play experiences. Child-initiated play is defined in this study as the idea or motivation for play coming from children, with no adult interaction or stimuli. The video footage featured Toby as he played

with his peers in structured environments such as the childcare setting he attended and informal environments in his home garden and local community play park. The study is located within a sociocultural framework as it recognizes the interdependence between cultural contexts and social interaction in developing knowledge and understanding. Vygotsky (1978) argues that all human activity is motivated by, and takes place in cultural contexts that are developed through the ways in which people communicate and that each individual holds a personal cultural connection or history that shapes their thinking, values and beliefs. This was an important aspect to consider when video recording outdoor play to help understand the actions and reactions of Toby and his friends.

Video data is not 'neutral' because it records what the researcher decides is significant. Therefore values and beliefs influence not only what is filmed but also when it is filmed. Consequently, understanding the theoretical framework, the aims of the study and acknowledging impact of the decisions made in filming selections shows awareness of positioning of the researcher. These considerations are important because within different social and cultural contexts there are many common practices that occur based on unquestioned assumptions about how things are done or roles that different people occupy. Corsaro (2005) suggests that these assumptions not only influence the researchers' actions and decisions, but also shape children's cultural understanding and influence their contribution to the adult world. Therefore, common or taken-for-granted practices are often reaffirmed through actual experiences, for example, what has been seen or heard or emphasized through physical actions. Therefore, how children relate to the world is largely a function based on what they know of their own cultural context and the influence of wider societal norms (Greene and Hill, 2005).

Vygotsky (1978) believes that play is socially situated and is dependent upon the

context of the play environment. In a play situation, and especially in outdoor play, children have opportunities to think in more complex ways because of the variety of factors that can be influential and unpredictable. For example, the way in which children use the environment can influence the direction of their play and the use of resources within that environment can be used by children in ways that have just not occurred to adults. Therefore Vygotsky (1966) recognizes play as an important tool to support children's intellectual and social development, emphasizing the way children's imagination could be linked to developing confidence through practising skills.

INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM

Using video to collect data in this small-scale study meant that the researcher was in control of making decisions about what was recorded and what was important to capture. In observing children, using any type of tool, be it video or field notes, it is impossible to record absolutely everything, even if concentrating on one child, so consequently an interpretive stance was adopted. Hammersley (1998) understands this to mean where human action is understood and interpreted within the context of social practices. The knowledge and understanding developed through taking this approach is always entwined with different views and opinions because the actions of children and adults can be seen from different perspectives. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) point out that the subjectivity of an interpretive paradigm can be considered as problematic because the data generated captures only a moment in time, and that the particular combination of variables operating in that moment may not occur in the same way or in the same context ever again. But an interpretive paradigm considers how people construct knowledge and meaning that allows a contextual narrative of

their experiences to be developed (Lofland et al., 2006).

Therefore knowledge created in an interpretive paradigm is constantly evolving as interpretations are always situated within a context, are largely incomplete, and because of this, ambiguous (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). An interpretive paradigm acknowledges that observations can never be value free or independent of interpretation, and recognizes that there is no single 'truth'. Instead, knowledge and understanding are socially constructed through the ideas that people construct, which in turn are generated in response to cultural trends (Ailwood, 2010). This is an appropriate theoretical framework for observing children's outdoor play because children's actions and reactions in play situations can never be observed completely value free and even the term 'play' is ambiguous and subject to interpretation.

The ethnographic nature of this study situated the understanding of children's outdoor play through the connections that might emerge between different perspectives on children's lived experiences. Reviewing the video footage with Toby's parents and associated early childhood professionals with knowledge of Toby supported 'knitting together threads of evidence' (Brooker, 2002: 84) to generate qualitative data that was meaningful in the context of Toby's outdoor play and that contributed to understanding the cultural traditions existing within his family and the more formal learning environments he experienced.

PARTICIPANTS

Toby is 4 years old and lives on the outskirts of a city in the UK with his mother and father and 2-year-old sister. He has extended family close by and the family has a dog who often becomes part of his play at home and when the family take him for walks in the local community park. Toby attends a childcare

setting twice a week and is looked after at home the rest of the time. Toby looks older than his 4 years and is the tallest child amongst his peers. He sometimes forgets his size and strength when playing outside with other children, but has a caring nature and is empathetic when a child is hurt or upset. He has an active social life, regularly meeting up with his peers at the local park and inviting children back to his home to play.

The childcare setting Toby attends has a large outdoor space with a woodland area that has accessible trees for climbing and a small stream running through it. There are lots of sticks and logs and a small area has been left to grow wild, attracting wildlife. The setting encourages outdoor play where children have a certain amount of freedom to explore, problem-solve and be creative with their peers.

The study followed Toby over a 4-week period participating in outdoor play with his peers at his childcare setting, at home and at the community park.

CASE STUDY

Using a case study in the research enabled the data collection through video footage to focus on Toby's outdoor play and strategies he employed to interact with his peers. The flexibility of the case study also provided the opportunity to consider a wider perspective of the social and cultural context in which Toby's play occurred. The data gathered from different perspectives (Toby, his parents, and early childhood professionals) supported the situated understanding of the realities of his outdoor play experiences. In adopting a case study method, intensive knowledge was gained about Toby's outdoor play, his preferences and support network which strengthened an understanding of the social and cultural influences in his life (Stake, 1995). This case study approach also looked for patterns of unanticipated as well

as expected relationships (Yin, 2009) and the study was responsive to the different outdoor situations; it was sensitive in interpreting developing events and in pursuing emerging issues.

In terms of generalizability, Simons (1996) considers that case studies offer ways in which to construct understanding and learning from the evidence presented. She argues that 'by studying the uniqueness of the particular, we come to understand the universal' (Simons, 1996: 230). Thus, by finding more out about particular children's lives through multiple ways commonalities about their preferences can be identified (Dicks et al., 2011). The study observed Toby in different contexts through collecting video data. Using video-stimulated review also gained the perspective of parents and professionals, which built a comprehensive understanding of his outdoor play experiences. Studying outdoor play from more than one standpoint supported the coordination of the data to 'map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour' (Cohen et al., 2007: 254).

METHOD

Video recordings of play were considered the most appropriate way of capturing Toby's outdoor interactions, rather than relying on field notes or written observations (Haw, 2008). This meant that the video data were open to interpretation. However, the advantage of using video as a non-participant observational tool was that it enabled repeat viewing and opportunities for detailed analysis of what Toby was doing when he played. The video data also gave the opportunity for other professionals and parents to view the same footage and to comment, adding a richness of different perspectives to the data.

In the past, researching children's views through video and audio techniques has been

used successfully (Flewitt, 2006; Forman, 1999; Paley, 1988; Robson, 2011; Sawyer, 1997) and in some cases the incidents have been played back to children for their comments (MacNaughton, 1999; Robson, 2011). The video recordings captured all of the play that Toby was involved in during each visit over a period of 4 weeks and multiple visits to different locations (childcare setting, home and community park) ensured that a variety of outdoor play was captured.

The data captured social interactions of Toby and his friends in their everyday routine play activity through time-sampled video footage. The video data were collected with a basic hand-held digital video camera which had a built-in timer visible on the side-opening monitor. This allowed discreet filming to minimize the awareness of the camera and for the camera to move with the children as they played. In each filming opportunity the camera was positioned a comfortable distance from Toby's play and the zoom features of the camera helped minimize the impact of filming. This was especially useful outside when Toby had access to large open spaces in the community park. The footage was concerned with the interactions of Toby with other children, rather than what they said, and so the camera could be positioned at a distance to minimize any self-conscious play behaviour. It was important that the video was as non-intrusive as possible and that children were not distracted by the camera or filming. Adult influence in the children's play would have changed the dynamics; however, O'Reilly (2009) argues that all ethnographic observations involve some participation and even acting as if not being there influences the situation being observed. She considers that non-participant observation is more about limited interaction. The presence of the video camera to some extent had an effect on the children, and perhaps made them more self-aware in their play because in the first few minutes when the video was recording some children, especially in the childcare setting, would ask why the video camera was

there. Children were reminded of the orientation visit when they were able to look at the camera and ask questions about the study. Once an explanation had been given, children seemed satisfied to continue with their play. Over a period of time children were less inquisitive and appeared to ignore the camera.

Time Sampling

Continuously filming children's play results in lengthy sequences of film that are difficult to organize and analyse. Using time sampling provides a focus for the observations that Wright (1960) considers important and argues that observations should have parameters and a structure. His research involved observing spontaneous and ongoing child behaviour in everyday life. In this study, Toby was making decisions about what, who and where he played within predetermined and negotiated boundaries and the time sample provided an element of structure and organization in gathering visual data.

The observations with the video camera were captured in approximately 2-minute time samples, which Wright (1960) considers the optimum time for this type of observation. The 2-minute timeframe was successful, in as much as the play seemed to arrive at a natural pause at this point, before the play developed further, came to a conclusion or turned into something else. If Toby's play continued beyond 2 minutes, the camera would be stopped and restarted immediately, providing a marker point.

Organization of Observations

Visits to the childcare setting, home and community park for filming were pre-arranged to cover the expected attendance of Toby at the childcare setting and with his parents for home and park visits. Each session in the different locations lasted between

1 and 2½ hours and consisted of either a morning or afternoon visit where video footage was captured when Toby was engaged in outdoor child-initiated, social play. The actual play situations could not be planned and it meant that there could be no expectation about the amount of data that might be collected on each visit, or the type and situation of play that Toby and his peers would engage with.

After the video data had been collected early childhood professionals and Toby's parents were invited to review the footage and semi-structured interviews were conducted based on their responses to Toby's play and what they thought about Toby's play preferences. The interviews attempted to put the early childhood professional and parent at ease and ask questions directly relating to their knowledge about Toby. Through seeking opinion rather than answering questions the power dynamics between interviewer and interviewee were more balanced. This was important, because Mishler (1986) describes interviews as having unequal power relationships between interviewer and interviewee and argues that the perception by the interviewee is that the interviewer has 'all of the answers' and therefore authority and power in an interview situation. Consequently, interviewees may try to tailor their answers to what they think the interviewer wants to hear rather than being confident to express their own opinion.

Ethical Considerations

There were three main areas of consideration in relation to ethics in the planning and design of the study:

- the cooperation and consent of the childcare setting for filming to take place;
- the involvement of individual professionals and parents of Toby in participating in video-stimulated review sessions;
- Toby's assent to be filmed during child-initiated, social outdoor play situations.

For the parents of other children who may have appeared in the video footage, an 'opt out' or passive consent policy was adopted. If a parent or guardian had concerns they could specifically ask for their child not to be filmed, however no concerns by parents were raised before, during or after filming. Vellinga et al. (2011: 2) considers that active consent or 'opt in' can limit participation when large numbers of participants are involved because of the administration and collection of signed consent forms required. They argue that 'if consent is considered an indication of willingness rather than refusal and if risks for the participants are low, an "opt out" arrangement is generally the most effective procedure without violating the option of providing choice'. For the parents of Toby an 'opt in' consent policy was appropriate as their child was the focus of the study and the filming and their specific consent was necessary. When filming Toby at home and in the community park, he was with his friends and the filming had been pre-arranged. Parents of Toby's friends were asked to 'opt in' on those occasions and his friends were also asked their opinion about their outdoor play being filmed.

Child Participants

At the first meeting with children in the childcare setting, early childhood professionals facilitated time where the video camera was introduced to all of the children in the room and the study explained in child-friendly terms. The children were interested in the camera and wanted to hold it, but they were not overly impressed as they were familiar with a variety of technology. Although Toby as the focus for the study had been decided at this point, he was not singled out in the group of children as all of them were going to be filmed. Noyes (2008) states the importance of children understanding the nature of research and how they contribute. In the explanation to children, the idea of

having their outdoor play filmed seemed to be accepted and they were happy to talk about what they liked to play with.

During the time when children were shown the video camera they verbally agreed to being filmed. The children were aged between 3½ and 4 years and because of their age, children's assent was gained rather than their full informed consent (Hill, 2005). Lindsay (2000) states that seeking informed consent from children is always questionable as it is difficult to know if children understand the context in which the research will be presented or the implications for them at a later date. However, in the 4 weeks prior to the filming, on visits to the childcare setting, the camera was visible and accessible for children to handle, although no actual filming took place.

Toby was asked if he was happy to be filmed and he gave his verbal consent. It was important that Toby views were acknowledged as the study was mindful of children's rights to express their views and be heard in matters that affect them (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 12; UN, 1989). Throughout the filming period, at the beginning and at the end of each visit, children were asked if they were happy for the camera to be present. Toby and his friends sometimes wanted to see what had been filmed, especially when filming took place in the home or in the community park. Their requests were accommodated, usually at the end of a visit, and they were then asked if they were happy for the filming to continue next time.

Gatekeepers

Early childhood professionals acted as gatekeepers for the children's participation in filming in the childcare setting. In research with children Alderson and Morrow (2004) consider gatekeepers as a way in which safeguards can be put in place to ensure children have a choice about participating. Practitioners

or parents were present at all times during filming and the video captured naturally occurring child-initiated, social outdoor play in their daily routine. Alderson (2004) warns that children may find it difficult to tell an adult that they no longer want to participate because the relationship between the researcher and child is not well established. Therefore, children were made aware that they could go to a practitioner or a parent if they felt unsure of being filmed, just as they would go to an adult in all other aspects of their daily routine.

The study brought a relative stranger with a video camera into the children's world. In general, children were not particularly bothered by the video camera, sometimes asking to be filmed and other times deliberately moving away from where the camera was. Langston et al. (2005) consider that researchers, especially collecting data over a period of time or a number of visits need to be vigilant to children's unspoken expression or reluctance to participate. The early childhood professionals in the childcare setting had a responsibility to the children's well-being and as such were in a position to monitor children's behaviour whilst being filmed and also safeguard against any negative behaviour towards other children in line with their established childcare policies. The practitioners were also attuned to children's individual responses to the video camera being present and were therefore able to support them in participating or withdrawing from the study.

Confidentiality, Privacy and Anonymity

Participants' data from the video-stimulated review interviews was assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and all computer data records used the same pseudonyms. All interview transcripts were made anonymous to ensure participants' identities were not revealed. Computer data and video footage was held securely

with restricted access via a user name and password. Toby's parents and the childcare setting agreed that video extracts may be used in conference presentations and dissemination of the study. Where other children appear in the video footage, specific consent was sought from the parents for the individual presentations of the video footage. If necessary, images were obscured to protect participant identity.

The video content filmed at the childcare setting was made available to early childhood professionals associated with Toby. They received a copy of the completed video footage on DVD, and Toby's parents also received a copy of the complete footage in the childcare setting, their home and community park. The footage also formed part of the interview process for both the professionals and parents, used for video-stimulated review (Forman, 1999).

The video aspect of the study acted as non-participant observations and captured the naturally occurring instances of child-initiated social outdoor play in different play situations. In the childcare setting the researcher was not counted in the legislative requirement for child/adult ratios and there was an agreed protocol that the filming would not (as far as possible) engage with children's play or indeed in any conflict that arose amongst children. In the setting, the outdoor play space was within a defined area and practitioners acted as gatekeepers if a child wanted to withdraw from being filmed. If any child was in danger or conflict arose, the practitioners acted in accordance with the setting's policies regardless of the filming. At the end of each filming session the researcher, practitioners and manager/owner discussed any incidental event that happened during the session and the potential reasons for the play behaviour. All of the practitioners and managers at the setting expressed interest in taking part in debriefing sessions and on-going conversations about children's outdoor play and their play preferences. Their commitment, time and willingness to accommodate

the study have resulted in an open dialogue about children's play and individual setting practices.

In the home and community park environment, Toby's parents acted as gatekeepers. In each visit Toby would be playing with his friends and therefore their parents were also present in the background and on hand to resolve any conflict between children, if it occurred.

FINDINGS

One of the most significant findings from the study was that there was never a moment in any of the observational video sequences where Toby looked as if he had run out of play ideas. There was a desire and motivation to use whatever resources he found within the different outdoor play contexts to follow his own interests and ideas to a conclusion or change his play into something else. There was a fluid exchange of ideas between the children he engaged with, and discussion and experimentation fuelled his exploration and experience of outdoor play.

Below are three examples, one from each of the outdoor play contexts that was filmed. There is an overview of the whole of the video sequence followed by short interpretations of Toby's actions identified by the time code on the video. Parents and early childhood professionals also give their views on Toby's play from reviewing the sequences independently.

Childcare Setting

Video sequence: Tree climb (length 01.40.76)

Toby and three of his friends are thinking about climbing one of the trees in the woodland area of the childcare setting. They are stood at the base of the tree, looking up into the branches then talking to each other and looking up again. Toby points to one of the

branches and walks around the tree trunk, touching the bark and pulling at some of the lower branches. He tentatively places his foot on a part of the trunk that is sticking out and reaches up for a branch. He balances there for a moment, working out what to do with his other foot. He twists his body so that he can get his other foot in between two branches a bit further up. The three other boys are looking up at Toby, one holding up his arms in case Toby falls back. Toby manages to step up into the tree and inches his way along one of the thicker branches. He turns and sits on the branch and then waves to his friends to try and get them to join him. They attempt to follow his actions one at a time with Toby pointing and giving instructions to them. Once all four boys are in the tree, two sitting on the branch and two standing between branches, they start to talk about being super heroes. Toby becomes quite animated in his actions and jiggles around on the branch. The other boy shouts out to stop as the branch is moving under him and he clings on. The boys standing between branches start to climb down and when they are near the ground jump out of the tree and run around the base. The boy who told Toby to stop moving inches his way back to the tree trunk and Toby gives some re-assurance whilst also moving in the same direction. Eventually both boys climb down the tree and run off in the same direction.

Specific observations from the footage

Time code: 00.00.00 – 00.28.66

Toby is trying to work out how to start to climb the tree and by walking around the tree trunk is looking for different options. Although he is with three other children, he takes the initiative to be the first to attempt to climb.

Time code: 00.07.85 – 00.45.04

Once Toby is in the tree he feels able to give instructions to the other children as they follow his actions. He gives encouragement and

moves along the branch so that another boy can join him sitting on the branch while the other two stand between the other branches.

Time code: 00.46.07 – 00.57.02

As the boys discuss which super hero they want to be, Toby becomes excited making shooting noises as he outstretches his arms and twists his body from side to side. When the boy next to him shouts for him to stop, Toby shows concern and does stop, instructing the other boys to start to climb down, which they do.

Time code: 01.03.45 – 01.10.15

Toby waits for the other boys to climb down the tree. He is patient, offering advice on where they could put their feet or where they could hold on to different parts of the tree. He then shows his own skill and balance in moving along the branch and negotiating his way down the tree.

Time code: 01.15.30 – 01.30.28

When Toby gets back on the ground the other boys have started to run off away from the tree. Toby looks around and momentarily looks as if he is going to do something different, but then turns and runs in the same direction, swinging his arms making shooting noises again.

Reactions from parents and early childhood professionals

Reactions after viewing the video sequence as part of video-stimulated review interviews:

We encourage a lot of free play here because we have all the outside space and we do a lot of observing of children working together and particularly problem solving. Children get the chance to explore what they want to do, their interests and so letting them climb and explore is an important part of giving them enriched experiences. (Early Childhood professional)

Toby was leading that play wasn't he? He knew what he wanted to do and encouraged the other boys to come with him. He also knew when he had taken it a bit far and showed concern for the boy who told him to stop shaking the tree branch.

I think it shows how Toby is a bit of risk taker, but he also has compassion for others and that is lovely as a parent to see. (Toby's mother)

Community Park

Video sequence: Stick argument and resolution (length 01.20.56)

Toby is in the park with two of his friends. They are all involved in a running game where one of the boys is chasing the other two. Toby picks up a long but thin stick lying on the ground next to a tree. He waves it above his head and starts running with it. The other boys follow in pursuit and one manages to grab the end of it. There is a brief pulling backward and forward until the other boy grabs the middle of the stick and there is a moment when all three refuse to let go. Toby then drops to his knees and tries to lie on the stick, making the other two let go. But one of the boys grabs the end again, this time pulling upwards and the stick breaks. The boy laughs and runs off and Toby looks at the shorter stick he is left with. He breaks the stick in half again and gives a piece to the other child. They all now have short sticks and re-start the running game, now using the sticks outstretched in an attempt to 'tag' one another.

Specific observations from the footage

Time code: 00.06.34 – 00.37.93

Toby is distracted from the running game when he sees a long stick and goes to pick it up. Through his body language it is evident that he is surprised that it is lighter than he first thought and he is able to lift it above his head. He shouts out as he does this and starts to run with it, attracting the attention of the other boys.

Time code: 00.38.02 – 00.52.39

As Toby runs with the stick he looks back to see the other boys gaining on him. He slows down, almost trying to decide what to do; whether to keep running or to let

them catch up. His decision is taken away when one of the boys takes him by surprise in grabbing the stick. The pulling back and forth between the two appears playful until the third child takes the middle of the stick. At this point they all seem to be pulling and Toby then uses his body weight to take the stick down to the ground.

Time code: 00.53.04 – 00.59.88

The sudden movement to the ground makes the other two boys momentarily let go and Toby attempts to cover the stick with his body. He shows his excitement in the game by giving out short shrieks, but when the other boy breaks the stick Toby quickly assesses the situation as he sees the boy run off.

Time code: 01.03.22 – 01.10.87

Toby looks down at the now shorter stick and makes the decision to break the stick in half again. The third boy is stood next to Toby and does not suggest that he does this, he simply looks from Toby to the stick as he breaks it in half. Toby offers the other half of the stick to the boy, who accepts with a smile.

Time code: 01.12.55 – 01.20.56

The running game seems to pick up where it started apart from all three boys now having sticks. Toby runs after his friend and instigates the 'tag' game by tapping the stick on his shoulder as he catches up. When he does this the boy turns and starts to run after Toby.

Reactions from parents and early childhood professionals

Reactions after viewing the video sequence as part of video-stimulated review interviews:

It is interesting to see Toby in a different context, not in the setting. He seems more confident here. He really is running fast! I don't see that when he is here [in the setting]. He is brilliant isn't he at making the best out of a situation – he knew he was in trouble when both of the other boys got hold of the stick and he knew that pulling harder wasn't going to work. So using his weight to take it down to the ground was clever. He was problem-solving, but then it kind of back fired when the

stick broke. But then he was fast thinking and resourceful and also kind. He decided to include his friend and his actions meant that their game could continue. (Early Childhood professional)

I'm really proud of him because that game could have turned out in everyone falling out. He was thinking on his feet and ultimately his actions avoided confrontation. He doesn't like arguments and I could see him thinking 'how can I get out of this one?' (Toby's father)

Home – In the Garden

Video sequence: Mud and small world animals (length 02.00.56)

Toby has his small world farm animals outside and is playing with his younger sister and best friend. They start off near to the house, but as the adults begin to ignore what the children are doing, they move towards the back of the garden to where there is a bare patch of grass, near a water butt. Toby fills a small bucket from the water butt and takes it to the patch where he pours it into a hole he has created with a toy spade. His friend brings along the toy animals and puts them in the mix of mud and water and Toby attempts to make the hole bigger with the spade. When his sister comes along, she tries to splash her boots in the mud, but the boys protest as she stands on the toy animals. She moves out of the way and picks up a toy horse to put in the mud. The boys move the animals in and out of the mud, churning it up. Toby goes to get more water from the water butt when his Father notices what the children are doing and stops the play.

Time code: 00.02.45 – 00.25.65

Toby has a purpose in his movement away from the adults and takes with him the tools he needs to create the mud patch. His friend follows him and takes direction from him as he starts to create the hole.

Time code: 00.30.25 – 00.58.21

Toby is talking to his friend quietly, almost as if he knows he is doing something that he

shouldn't in making the mud patch. When his friend puts the animals in the mud, he claps his hands in agreement that it is a good idea. He works with his friend to get each of the toy animals in the mud, moving them back and forth to also make the patch bigger.

Time code: 01.02.50 – 01.35.88

Toby stops his sister from ruining the game by pushing her out of the way when she wants to splash in the mud. She accepts his small push and observes what the boys are doing. She then attempts to join in with her toy horse and Toby moves over creating a space for her to join in. He directs what she is doing by placing one of his hands over hers and moving it in the same direction as his other hand, back and forth in the mud.

Time code: 01.40.55 – 02.00.56

Toby makes the decision to get more water, he leaves the other two and seems oblivious to the initial enquiry from his father. He concentrates on filling his bucket and it is only when his father physically comes over to where the children are that Toby looks up from what he is doing.

Reactions from parents and early childhood professionals

Reactions after they viewed the video sequence as part of video-stimulated review interviews:

Toby is quite creative and this comes out in a range of situations – even in mud! He definitely leads the play and somehow gets other children to join in with his ideas. He sort of persuades them with his quiet confidence and sense of authority, even when he must know he shouldn't be doing it! (Early childhood professional)

I couldn't believe it when I saw what he was doing and getting his little sister to do as well. He has always liked getting messy and seems to find every opportunity to get dirty. (Toby's father)

Evidence of Toby's play preferences in child-directed, social outdoor play was evident throughout all of the video sequences

taken over a 4-week period. The insights from parents and early childhood professionals from the video-stimulated review provides different perspectives on his play and supports shared understanding of his actions and decisions in different outdoor play contexts.

DISCUSSION

Toby's Play

The study considered through non-participant video observation Toby's outdoor play experiences and the way he made choices and decisions about his play. Waller (2006) suggests that opportunities to play in natural environments are valuable and significant to children's experiences and general well-being. Children are active participants in their environment, especially when they are able to interact and have the autonomy to play and be creative (Canning, 2013). For Toby, his outdoor play in particular was seen to evoke a desire for him to be more physical in his actions, for example wanting to climb trees, and being more animated in his verbal responses in all three contexts. Langston et al. (2005) discuss how children's play is influenced by their immediate environment as they use the resources available to them to develop and master skills, explore and problem-solve, be creative and use their imagination. The study showed that for Toby the outdoor environment encouraged play that challenged him and allowed him to demonstrate his initiative and risk-taking.

In all three outdoor contexts there is evidence of Toby engaging with the natural materials of his environment and risk-taking; climbing the tree, using the sticks in the park and utilizing the mud puddle for his toy animals in his garden. There is also evidence of his concern for his friends demonstrated through his actions of helping one to climb down from the tree and resolving the argument

in the park, by breaking the stick so everyone could play together. Toby draws on his existing knowledge and understanding of interacting with others and his actions result in creative responses so that further play opportunities can develop. The replaying of the video enables these subtle nuances of his behaviour to be analysed and explored with parents and other professionals (Fleer, 2015; Haw, 2008). It also facilitates connections being made between different play situations in terms of reoccurring themes for individual children's play, for example, Toby's willingness to take physical risks as well as emotional risks in the stick argument and garden play (Canning, 2014).

The process where children come together to share play and create a game out of the environment they find themselves in requires them to utilize their past experiences and interpretations of the world around them (Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007). The interrelationship between the children's social interactions in all of the play contexts draws on their existing cultural understanding and attempts to push some of the boundaries to see 'what happens if ...?'. This is the case when Toby quietly moves himself, sister and friend towards the back of the garden to be near the water butt to create a mud patch. It was almost as if Toby knew that if he tried to create the mud in the middle of the garden, the play would not be allowed to happen, but moving away from the adults enabled him to create the patch and experiment with his toy animals in the mud. His understanding that the mud patch was not something that was acceptable was reinforced by his father's comment, 'I couldn't believe it when I saw what he was doing!' Rogoff (2003) argues that children are alert to learning from the cultural opportunities and reactions from others around them. Their cultural background and social interactions influence what they come to know as acceptable and not acceptable behaviour. Children's relationships with other children and adults shape their future experiences and allow for further interpretation of their social

contexts. Toby has learnt that in order to experience something that is not fully approved of by the significant adults in his life, he has to find a clandestine way to make it happen.

Children's Perspectives

Clark (2005) argues that children need to be acknowledged as experts on their own experiences and their opinions can support findings and conclusions in the same way that 'video-stimulated review' with adults can. Encouraging children to view video footage of their play is a way in which they can be actively involved in research about themselves, offering their opinion, insights and explanation about what they were doing. Burke (2005) argues that the process of using different tools or methods with children in research can enhance understanding of children's lives, and capturing children's opinions about their play experiences can minimize bias and subjectivity of the interpretation of video footage. Children are interested in all types of technology and image-making and their lives are saturated with media influences from a very young age, therefore, they have skills in making meaning from video images (Burke, 2008; Robson, 2012). However, gaining the views of children, especially very young children, can be challenging and using a variety of techniques such as inviting more than one child who appeared in the video to comment; involving early childhood professionals to facilitate the feedback as they have an established relationship with the child or using a prop such as a teddy bear or puppet to encourage children to comment are useful. Other strategies include stopping the video at different points to ask specific questions about what children have just seen themselves doing; playing the video in its entirety, then asking questions; or repeating the video several times before asking questions. Video can also be used to ask more general questions about children's preferences.

Forman (1999) suggests that although using video with children can help them to recall what they have been doing and potentially what those actions meant to them at the time, it requires a high level of thinking. Therefore it is not always successful and other methods such as using still 'grabs' from the video and using them as a prompt for discussion may work better. It is also important to consider nonverbal cues that children express when watching themselves back on video, such as pointing to the screen or getting excited at certain points and considering what that means. Robson (2012) considers that using images reflecting play that children have recently been involved in should stimulate children's reflections. She suggests this is especially true when they are videos of children's own play choices and set in contexts that are meaningful to them. However, it is also important to think about expectations from gaining children's perspectives. They may not be insightful or reflective and so having a range of perspectives from those closely associated with the children in the study is important.

Video Observation

The use of video as a research analysis tool presents both challenges and advantages. Some of the challenges have been outlined in the careful consideration of ethics and the need for building relationships so that video observation is accepted by the children, parents and professionals. Video observation can support thinking about new ways of working, however Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) suggest that in order for practitioners to adopt different approaches to children's learning they need to have good general knowledge of child development to understand children's behaviour in different social play situations; have an insight into children's personal background and family circumstances; be able to sensitively interpret children's views and to show respect for

children's competence and experience in their play.

Stephen (2010: 15) recognizes that the 'landscape of provision is shifting' and so in considering children's experiences in different contexts video observation is a method that can be used to analyse those experiences to support children's holistic development. Variations in how practitioners interpret children's outdoor play can cause tension between professionals in what they make of their observations in practice (Sylva and Pugh, 2005). Therefore an important implication in analysing video data and disseminating findings is that professionals, both researchers and practitioners, need to talk to each other, sharing their values and beliefs about children's play. Being actively involved in continuous professional development that focuses on active discussion about the significance of children's outdoor play as well as being self-reflective about how different play situations are interpreted is essential. The sharing of values and approaches to practice may also support understanding inconsistencies in the way play is generally observed and interpreted.

Use of Video Review for Continuing Professional Development

The results from the video footage provided a fascinating insight into children's play behaviour and their interactions with other children. After the study was completed Toby's childcare setting asked for some staff development sessions based around the video data. With the permission of his parents, sequences of Toby's outdoor play were shown to the whole staff team and resulted in stimulating discussion, not only specific to his play, but also to wider concerns about practice, observation, assessment and planning. Howard (2010: 93) argues that practitioners are often susceptible to adopting a structured activity approach

where learning is more easily observed as it allows them to 'manage parental pressure for academic achievement and at the same time protect their own accountability'. Through the discussions with staff it emerged that although practitioners understood the benefits of outdoor play, they did not consider themselves to be 'play professionals' although they wanted to promote a play-based curriculum.

The overriding conclusion from the staff development sessions was that most had never considered analysing outdoor play in such detail and the video enabled sequences of play to be replayed and discussed at length. Sherin and Van Es (2005) consider video as an insightful means of reviewing what happens in the classroom and provides space to reflect on the interactions between adults and children. The ability to review the video sequences of Toby's play provided opportunity for his key early childhood professional and the wider staff group to discuss and reflect on his play and also their role in supporting that play.

As a consequence of the professional development sessions the childcare setting is going to look into using video more frequently in the setting to capture and analyse children's play and to use it as a basis for future professional development. The use of digital cameras in settings and in the home is prolific and so the introduction of video is not seen to be an issue for early childhood professionals. However, some criteria for video recording were discussed so that in terms of supporting professional development, the footage was not a series of random events, but focused on specific areas of practice such as child-initiated, social outdoor play.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the use of video as a non-participant observational tool for outdoor play. It has considered the use of video

in qualitative research, capturing sequences of Toby's play and the different ways in which video footage can be utilized to stimulate debate around children's play behaviours and preferences. Through the outdoor play examples of Toby and his friends, and insights from his parents and early childhood professionals closely associated with him, video has supported understanding his choices, aspects of his personality and play preferences which may have been missed through other data-gathering techniques. The ability to re-play and re-analyse video means that it can be used in diverse and purposeful ways such as professional development or for parents to see their child in a different environment and context. The flexibility of the data enables shared understanding to be developed around the child and can facilitate wider debates about values and beliefs, as in this study, about the benefits and challenges of outdoor play.

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