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'PED'agogical talk: Child-focused playful learning in the early years

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Understanding and utilising play for learning in the early years appears easy but is actually not. It is essential that all those involved in play, practitioners and researchers, have a clear understanding of play in order to integrate play and learning rather than hijack it under the auspices of 'planned purposeful play' (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Play is complex with traditional views based on adult observations of the act of playing and these do not necessarily accord with children's views of play. Consequently, I have always found the concept and practice of play difficult to teach to early years students and, at one point, vowed never to teach the subject again. Imagine my surprise, three years later, to be embarking on PhD research on...play and learning. However, focusing my research on understanding play, and playfulness, from children's perspectives and how this can be used to understand and influence play practice has been a revelation (McInnes et al., 2011; 2013). In this presentation I will:

- Explore children's views of play using photographic methodology which demonstrates similarities and differences between adults and children's use of environmental and emotional cues in defining what is and is not play. (McInnes & Birdsey, 2014)
- Demonstrate how using children's cues to formulate play and not play conditions enables a playful attitude and approach to an activity which enhances children's learning (McInnes, 2010)
- Discuss what this means for practice in terms of the role of the adult, child agency and the environment (Howard & McInnes, 2013).