

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

## Editors

Terry Barrett  
Ohio State University

S. Alex Ruthmann  
New York University

Eeva Anttila  
University of the Arts Helsinki

Brad Haseman  
Queensland University of Technology

<http://www.ijea.org/>

ISSN: 1529-8094

---

Volume 16 Number 8

June 10, 2015

## Engaging Families Through Artful Play

Robert Brown  
University of Melbourne, Australia

Citation: Brown, R. (2015). Engaging families through artful play. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 16(8). Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v16n8>.

### Abstract

This paper explores how aligned arts and play experiences can extend child and family engagement in a public outdoor space. The importance of outdoor play for children is strongly advocated and in response local governments provide playgrounds and recreational open spaces. To extend further the experiences afforded in such spaces some local governments now employ ‘play workers’, whose role is to prompt exploration and facilitate connections. With the intention of animating an uninviting and underused outdoor public space, the ArtPlay Backyard program presented a series of artist-facilitated experiences that encouraged children and families to explore, interact and transform. Research into this program, undertaken through observations and in-situ interviews, mapped the views and actions of children, parents, early childhood professionals and artists. The study concluded that the program was highly engaging to families who were animated by ‘artful play’: experiences guided by artists, who, acting like ‘play workers’, stimulated imaginative, aesthetic, creative and social encounters with people, place, and materials.

## **Introduction**

It is a warm day. The large open outdoor area adjacent to the public facility ArtPlay, glares with reflected light emanating from the fine gravel ground cover. Families rarely interact with this space that serves as thoroughfare more than a place to stop and take time. Impersonal and unprotected from the natural elements, the space does not invite children to stop, notice and play: the space is vacant. (Researcher observation)

Ironically the space described, which was rarely inhabited, was located in a vibrant central riverside environment adjacent to a public arts facility for families, ArtPlay.<sup>1</sup> To extend beyond indoor and fee-based booked activities, the ArtPlay Backyard program was initiated. Managed by the City of Melbourne, it sought to engage wider family participation and animate an outdoor environment through creative play facilitated by artists. This paper reports on research that mapped and interpreted what invited families and how they responded to the ArtPlay Backyard experiences. In particular, it explores how the arts and play aligned to enhance child and family engagement.

## **Play and the Arts**

Play is broadly characterized as voluntary, intrinsically motivating and non-instrumental (Brown, 2009; O'Toole, 2012), an experience that Hendricks associates with, "the freedom of human beings to express themselves openly and to render creatively the conditions of their lives" (2008, p. 159). A wide range of health, social and cultural benefits are associated with children's rights to engage in outdoor play, including the development of creativity, aesthetic awareness, cooperation, and connectedness (Hirsh-Paske, Michnick Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009; Lester & Russell, 2010; American Institute for Research, 2005; Moore & Cosco, 2000; Hart, 1982.). Despite this strong support for play some argue that contemporary children, particularly those living in urban environments, do not play enough (Gleave and Cole-Hamilton, 2012) and that opportunities to play are challenged by "children spending more time in adult-directed activities and media use", and subsequently "forms of child play characterized by imagination and rich social interactions seem to be declining" (NAEYC, 2010, p. 116). Responding to an identified need for outdoor play designers plan 'play spaces' - sites for social and cooperative play, aesthetic engagement and physical exploration (Department of Victorian Communities, 2010). This planning is essential, particularly in cities where 60% of the global population is expected to gravitate to by 2025 (Prout, 2003).

---

<sup>1</sup> Open to children aged up to 12 years, ArtPlay provides a wide range of artist-led programs that serve a broad community within and outside the municipality.  
<http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/artplay/pages/artplayhome.aspx>

In growing cities such as Melbourne<sup>2</sup>, playgrounds suitable for child and family recreation are readily available though the license given to interact in, and act upon such environments can be restricted to fixed and predictable activities that limit exploration and social connection. Framed by a belief that child and family engagement in public spaces can be enhanced, local governments in the United Kingdom employ ‘play workers’ to encourage and extend, but not direct, children’s interactions (Kilvington & Wood, 2010). Such adult facilitation, which involves scaffolding and leaves children largely to lead their own investigations, resonates with a ‘guided’ approach advocated for engaging young children with the arts (Wright, 2003; McWilliams, Brailsford-Vaughns, O’Hara, Novotny & Jo Kyle, 2013).

The links between the arts and play have been widely theorized indicating a spectrum of experience ranging from child directed free-play to adult-goal-directed art production. O’Toole (2012) argues that the arts and play are fundamentally connected through a dialectic relationship, with arts experiences orientated to control and play experiences orientated to curiosity. Dissanyanke (1990) provocatively distinguishes art as “generally considered to be permanent, serious with estimable effects, while play is transient, frivolous and relatively unproductive” (p. 79). Gardner (1982), who associates play with the development of self-identity, and the arts with the development of representational symbol systems, presents a less hierarchical distinction. For others play and the arts are more connected. For example, Balke (1997) states that “play’s expressive elements are what put it close to the work of the artist” (p. 356), a sentiment that aligns with Brown’s view that “the impulse to create art is a result of the play impulse” (2009, p. 61). Dewey’s seminal piece of writing ‘Art as Experience’ (1959), presents a broad conception of art, encapsulated in everyday encounters that stimulate aesthetic sensitivity and culminate in self-fulfilling and holistic ‘accommodation’. This discursive view of art resonates with the properties commonly associated with play, including self-motivated expression and emergent goals. Given this synergy, combined arts and play experiences can be considered mutually enhancing, a belief that stimulated the ArtPlay Backyard artists, similar to play workers, to engage children and families in aesthetic, creative and social encounters; or what could be called ‘artful play’.

### **The Research**

Meandering along the river walk on a Sunday morning the family; mother, father, three year old girl, and baby boy in a pram, find their way to the large open space

---

<sup>2</sup> The percentage of children aged 12 and under is expected to grow by 1% by 2020. City Of Melbourne’s Children’s Plan 2010-2013  
<http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/COMMUNITYSERVICES/FORMYFAMILY/Pages/ChildrensPlan.aspx>

behind the free standing ArtPlay building, searching for the advertised free 'Backyard' nest experience. Nearby two artists have set up a table laden with various types of cord, coloured feathers, tape, seedpods and other natural materials; some of which have been strategically strewn, installation-like, along the ground and draped on small trees and boulders. Invited over by the artists, the young girl, with some encouragement and suggestions about the possibilities of nest making, gathers a collection of materials, and with her family finds a comfortable place to settle and explore. Unhurried other families arrive some just passing by and noticing with interest what was on offer. One artist remains stationed with the materials whilst the other weaves his way throughout the families, talking informally to parents, expressing interest in the children's constructions, and at times modeling the possibilities of wrapping, tying and stacking. The session, which has attracted more than forty children and adults combined, continues for an hour before children and their families, satisfied with what they have accomplished, gradually head on to other pursuits in the nearby city.

The above account is indicative of the types of experiences offered as part of the ArtPlay Backyard free public program, which during its first eighteen months, involved over 500 children aged from birth-to-twelve years, parents, guardians, teachers and early childhood professionals. In total thirty-nine one-hour sessions, facilitated by one or two artists, were offered, primarily during weekends and school holiday periods. Drop-in open public access sessions attracted children, primarily aged one-to-eight years, and their families. To broaden participation dedicated booked sessions were offered to play groups, pre-school centres and schools.

The Backyard artists, including theatre performers, visual artists and designers were all experienced with working with children. Individually or in pairs, in consultation with ArtPlay leadership, the artists generated conceptual and physical starting points to prompt children and families to engage with materials, the environment and each other. Working with unknown families who most cases simply 'dropped-in' to the Backyard space the artists did not pre-determine activities but instead planned for possibilities with the ambition to promote creative play. They did so through provocatively setting out materials to invite interest and informally and responsively interacted with participants to encourage engagement. When working with booked pre-school or school groups the artists introduced the activities on offer and then encouraged children to freely experiment. The artists' goals focused on creative, aesthetic and sensory inquiry rather than the production of particular end outcomes. Throughout the program two artist forums were organized to enable artists to reflect and share their learning on the development of the Backyard activities.

Designed as a collective or multiple case sampling (Burns, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2000), research into the ArtPlay Backyard program focused on dual researcher observations of twelve sessions (normally one hour in duration), which involved artists offering children informal and open experiences including, coloured sand drawing, construction with recycled and natural materials, clay painting, dramatic play with chairs, free-standing doors and cardboard houses, and wind and water whole family explorations (Appendix 1).

Drawing from education psychology theory, (Russell, Ainley & Frydenberg, 2005; Wefald & Downey, 2009), arts-based research (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras & Brooks, 2004; Chappell & Young, 2007), and a four year study undertaken at ArtPlay (Jeanneret & Brown, 2013), researchers defined engagement as the positive affective and cognitive state of self-motivated involvement characterized by initiation, sustained dedication and absorption. Framed by this definition, and guided by a previously developed Engagement Observation Checklist<sup>3</sup> researchers sought to notice verbal and non-verbal indicators of engagement including reaction time, energy, persistence and precision. Triangulating observation data were in-situ semi-structured interviews undertaken with children, parents, guardians, artists and early childhood professionals. Data analysis involved an inductive process of collaborative researcher reflection, reading and re-reading, what Stake (2000) terms as ‘progressive focusing’, so as to interpret core meanings (Bowden & Walsh, 2000) considered logically related and psychologically sensitive, taking into account salience, regularity, uniqueness and emphasis given by participants to particular events and conceptions (O’Toole, 2006; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Willig, 2008). Framed by a constructivist orientation to grounded theory (Willig, 2008; Charmaz, 2008) and techniques that promote reflective practice (O’Toole, 2006), researchers sought a multi-vocal representation of the phenomenon examined.

### **Family Engagement**

Greeted by artists who acted as both hosts and facilitators, families were quickly made to feel welcome and at ease in the ArtPlay Backyard sessions. Those attending commonly lived in, or near, central Melbourne, were mostly Anglo-European, with a smaller proportion stemming from Asian backgrounds. Weekend sessions attracted families with infants and young children, while those held during school term holidays attracted a broader age range. Most families had never been to ArtPlay. One parent noted that she thought she wasn’t sufficiently ‘artistic’ to book into an ArtPlay workshop, whereas the Backyard activities were non-

---

<sup>3</sup> For more information go to - [http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news\\_and\\_activities/projects/artplay/behind\\_the\\_bright\\_orange\\_door](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/artplay/behind_the_bright_orange_door)

intimidating, indicating that the outdoor play and arts experiences attracted some families who may not have otherwise subscribed to a dedicated indoor arts activity. The flexible and informal nature of the sessions created a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, one conducive to social play and collaboration. These types of spaces were highly sought after by families with young children. For those living nearby in city apartments, outdoor play spaces literally served as the ‘backyard’ for their family. For regular visitors to the city inviting play spaces were sought to anchor visits, providing a launching pad, or retreat, from the bustling city precinct.

Participants were highly engaged in the ArtPlay Backyard sessions, as demonstrated through their ready take up of the activities offered, positive affective interactions, concentrated effort and sustained participation. Throughout the sessions observed children demonstrated open and self-directed explorations, for example, making arrangements and constructions with recycled tubes and boxes, drawing with sticks in the sand, painting with clay on large boulders. Children also engaged happily and readily in imaginative and physical play stimulated by small chairs, igloo tents, a free standing working bright red door and cardboard houses with star-shaped windows. Whilst families were able to discontinue participation whenever they wanted most stayed on for the entire time session, and many stayed on beyond the time scheduled for the activity (normally one hour). The primary conditions that engendered family engagement were the possibilities of creating and transforming individually and with others.

### **A Place of Possibilities**

The mother and her three-year old daughter settled, under the shade of a large umbrella, on a piece of green astro-turf and proceeded to collect and construct with a plastic tubes, small boxes and other recycled materials. The daughter noted that she liked the colours of the materials available. The mother appreciated that what was on offer didn’t fit perfectly together, which set a challenge, “just to see what they would make”. For example, making things stand upright and attaching cable-ties together encouraged her daughter to form her own ideas, which was fun. However, the mother was grateful when the artist passed by and gave some simple advice as to how the materials may be joined together. Other children were attracted to the colourful creation made, and asked if they could play with it. The child agreed, which began a process of collective construction and de-construction that continued until the session waned. (Researcher observation)

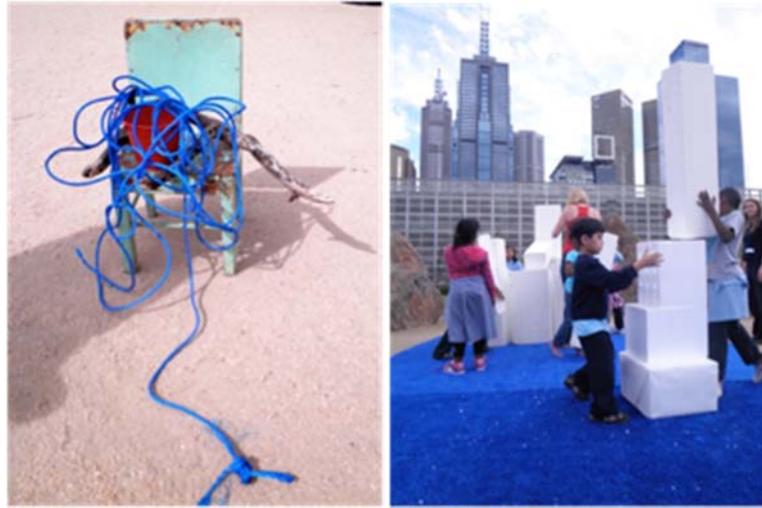
The opportunity to use sensory-rich and readily transformable materials was a stimulus for engagement. Artists, sensitive to the potential of materials to encourage aesthetic exploration, mark making, and construction, offered an assortment of sticks, sand, clay, cardboard tubes, fabric pieces and large foam blocks. Several parents noted these materials gave “great

freedom to experiment” and allowed children “to do whatever they wanted”. They were also appreciative that children of diverse ages and abilities could readily manage the materials. Such an inclusive and open-ended experience was noted positively as an alternative to more passive commercially produced toys and electronic games. For example, one grandmother felt strongly that,

A lot of the children now have excessive material toys and I think offering them things like this really taps into their creativity. You’re just seeing it right now (she gestures towards her grandson who is tipping shells onto the ground and drawing with a stick in the sand). How good was that? I mean that was stunning!

Several families, referring to local Melbourne playground designs, commented that excessive safety concerns were potentially restricting creative play opportunities for their children. A Youth and Children’s Services Support Officer, who was managing a playgroup attending a booked session, made an impassioned plea to enable children to take reasonable risks. She stated, “I love the look on kids faces when they can actually effect a change on something themselves and the fact that today you gave the children sticks. Children need to be able to play with things that have an element of risk. Let’s celebrate adventure!”

Materials were purposefully selected by artists for their potential to provoke aesthetic interest, construction and imaginative play. The placement of unexpected objects in the outdoor space, such as small chairs, rope, buckets and coloured balls (Figure 1), created an incongruous dynamic with the surrounding environment, one that drew attention and prompted investigation. At times artists offered suggestions by setting out partly constructed forms and arrangements, for example, coloured ribbons tied between a group of small trees. Serving as the ‘host’, as one ArtPlay artist noted, the environment presented itself as a ‘place of possibilities’, with children given permission and encouraged to draw, tie, stack, enclose, wrap and also act out self-generated dramatic play scenarios alone and with others. Confident in their social relations with peers, school groups enthusiastically collaborated to build large sand circles, cardboard apartment buildings, and ‘spy camps’.



**Figure 1.** Transformative materials and environments

The openly structured and unhurried activities invited children to inquire and create. With no set goals, arrangements and constructions co-created by children and adults emerged and dissipated. Transformative materials arouse curiosity and stimulated interest in the role-play embodied in the building process, more so than any quest to create definite outcomes or structures. Even when participants made elaborate installations that took care and time they were content to dismantle or leave these for others to extend upon, sometimes keeping a record through photographs. Throughout the development of these ephemeral works, the children demonstrated attentiveness to aesthetic and embodied experience, whether by painting a boulder with clay slip, or making floating arrangements of bright tissue paper pieces and marbled colour dye in a transparent tub of water (Figure 2). The enjoyment and sense of achievement, evident in the children's focused engagement, was the opportunity to discover and invent.



**Figure 2.** Floating arrangements. Looking up at the sky.

Children were encouraged by artful and playful relationships with artists that extended, aesthetically and symbolically, their natural inclinations to play. The artistry in these encounters was evident in the children's attentiveness, deliberation and sustained engagement. Families were thankful for the artist support that they noted as 'encouraging', 'inspiring', 'respectful' and 'challenging.' Acting like play workers, artists made themselves available for requests for materials, ideas or physical assistance. As one artist noted, he saw his role as stimulating children to "discover their artistic being." To do so artists used open questions and modeling to prompt children to explore the spatial and aesthetic possibilities of object arrangements and installations. They also co-played alongside children encouraging them not just to investigate materials but engage in imaginative and narrative play during the process. For example, one artist, as part of a discussion about nests, prompted a child to look for what 'birds had hidden in the bushes', an inquiry that promoted aesthetic engagement and play that extended the experience beyond the task of just manipulating materials. Another artist, whilst talking casually with the child's parent, interacted with a fifteen-month-old infant for over thirty minutes as she sat on a foam mat. This connection, described as a 'dance' by the artist, involved drawing in the sand and clapping sticks, with the child and artist playfully mimicking each other. As the artist noted, she wasn't trying to lead; she was just responding to the girl's interests and investigations, guiding her to notice relationships and see new possibilities.

Parents also encouraged playful explorations and many actively co-played alongside their children, constructing sculptures together or dressing in capes to run like the wind down a small hill. They commented positively on the opportunities to engage in creative and playful activities with their children. Once settled and aware they had license to act in and upon the environment, children were happy to play independently, knowing that supportive adults were not too far away.

### **A Mutually Enhancing Experience – Artful Play**

Public spaces that don't encourage exploration, interaction and transformation limit child and family engagement. This was the case in the outdoor area adjacent to ArtPlay before the injection of 'artful play'. Children and their parents were highly engaged in the ArtPlay Backyard sessions, as demonstrated through their ready take up of the activities offered, positive affective interactions, concentrated effort and sustained participation.

Conditions for engagement, emphasized in both children's art and play, are self-motivation, a sense of discovery and enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1997; Eisner, 2002). This was clearly evident in the ArtPlay Backyard sessions. As Dissanyanke (1990) states, "What motivates children to play, create, and explore through the arts, is the freedom to choose what

ideas they explore and the ways these ideas are explored” (p. 79). Like play, child-directed arts experiences are engaging ‘autotelic’ activities, done for their own sake, rather than for any particular attainment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). There was no take away artwork or expectation to be artistic, something some families noted as a reason they had been previously hesitant to book into the indoor ArtPlay arts workshops. Children were aware that their installations and drawings were non-permanent. This ephemeral orientation to expression resonates with the ‘art as experience’ philosophical tenet proposed by John Dewey (1959), an interpretation that highlights the intrinsically motivating, self-rewarding, aesthetic and discursive processes at the core of both play and the arts.

Children gravitate to free play, though without challenge engagement may soon wane. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) connects the level of engagement a protagonist experiences with the sense of discovery and creative challenge afforded. Whilst motivated to take up the novel activities on offer, what sustained engagement in the ArtPlay Backyard activities were opportunities to interact, inquire, problem-solve and transform, often collaboratively. Vygotsky’s writing links creative experience and play, the latter interpreted as an interactive social form of embodied imagination and imagination in action (Connery, John-Steiner & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010). Imagination is also a core ‘source of content’ for arts experiences, which as Eisner (2002) states, “not only give permission but also encouragement to use one’s imagination” (p. 82). Whether acting out social roles in small cardboard houses, or posting letters to imaginary friends through a bright red door, artful play experiences became a catalyst for imagination, transformation and shared invention.



**Figure 3.** Dramatic play outdoors

The role of the adult in children's play can be significant. Whilst children are motivated and able to self-generate play, unknown public spaces may inhibit the confidence to explore and create. Adults can have a positive or negative effect on play. Left to themselves' children's interactions can become repetitive, and in such cases adult presence can extend the possibilities of play (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2010). Whether through the time, space and materials made available, or by modeling and encouragement, the adult's input impacts on child engagement. This was the case with the ArtPlay artists who had to quickly engender a positive psychological atmosphere and emotional connection with children, a condition considered crucial to engagement (Roos & Statler, 2004; Galton, 2008; Jeanneret & Brown, 2003). Once informal positive relationships had been established the artists, acting like 'playworkers' (Kilvington & Wood, 2010), took on a variety of roles that centred on what Balke (1997) terms a 'play dialogue'. Guided by the artist's awareness of the creative and aesthetic possibilities of the materials and experiences offered to children, artists had to act flexibly and responsively to guide, rather than lead the children's artful play. Eisner (2002) highlights how the arts heighten sensibilities and encourage new ways of seeing the world, and enable children to, for example, see "a rock aesthetically" (p. 84). Importantly, through their words and actions, the artists encouraged children to 'notice' their surroundings, pay attention to aesthetic qualities and relationships, and be aware of their actions (Figure 4). These are key conditions for engagement, imagination, art-based inquiry and creative learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Craft, 2002; Jablon & Wilkinson, 2006; Eisner, 2002). The Backyard artists' presented children with creative challenges by the selection and placement of cognitively rich materials, ones that were open to possibilities and could be readily manipulated. Proposing experiences chosen for their improvisational and transformative potential, rather than any set or predictable use, artists were both planned and responsive in the experiences they offered, an approach that resonates with 'flexible purposing' advocated by Dewey (1959), Eisner (2002), and 'possibility thinking' argued by Craft (2002) as a significant element in creative play.



**Figure 4.** Adults and children noticing together

Representation and expression are at the core of both play and the arts. (Vygotsky, 1966; Roos & Statler, 2004; Dissanyanke, 1990; Ahn & Filipenko, 2006; Balke, 1997; McCardle & Wright, 2014) and materials as ‘mediums’ provide significant tools to generate narratives and mediate meaning making (Eisner, 2002; Vygotsky, 2004; Roos & Statler, 2004). Throughout the program children were afforded diverse materials and experiences that promoted individual and contemplative forms of expression, for example making slow repetitive patterns in coloured sand. Such an intimate connection with the environment may not have occurred without the positive emotional climate created by the artists. The experiences offered in the ArtPlay Backyard program allowed for, or further still invited, collaboration and co-playing, which connected children to each other and to their parents. This propensity to create with and alongside others aligns with what Trevarthan (2013) explains, as the ‘imaginative companionship’ and the ‘inventive sociability’ generated through play.

Increasingly some argue, parents have less time to play with their children, whilst there is growing abundance of playthings which require little of the child (Balke, 1997; Wright, 2003). The willingness of parents to play with and alongside their children can enhance children’s learning (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2001) and parent-child bonds (Ginsburg, 2007). Parents valued the opportunity to play and create with their children, in activities that were simple to manipulate or act out, and non-rule governed. By modeling their own enthusiasm for playful learning parents can encourage rather than direct their children’s participation (O’Reilly & Bornstein, 1993). Such encouragement was evident in the Backyard experiences, which as one parent positively reported, were “more about collaboration rather than parents doing it for kids.” This comment indicates that to some degree child engagement in artful play depends on families who are invested in noticing and playing themselves. In doing so the benefit of the experience extends beyond the child to the whole family.

Whilst outdoor play in public settings can be readily available to children, particularly in dedicated playgrounds, opportunities to engage in artful play outdoors are rare, except for occasions when short-term dedicated arts stations are established, for example as part of a community arts festival. The ephemeral experiences offered in the ArtPlay Backyard program; orientated to creative and aesthetic experience, rather than set artistic goals and outcomes, aligned art with play and helped to connect children deeply with the physical environment, and feel a sense of ownership within it. The program integrated the arts into the environment itself, with rocks, gravel or a rolling hill, forming part of the emergent experience. In this context children were not making ‘art’ so much as using the landscape as Trimble (1994) proposes, as a ‘medium for understanding the world’.

Positioned at a top of hill, the artist invited the children to lay on the grass and

look up into the sky to notice cloud shapes and colours. Next, empowered with yellow capes and embodying the feel of the wind, they ran playfully down the hill (Figure 5). Lastly settled on the ground below a raised transparent trough of water, three children gasped and laughed as they looked up at the sky through the movement of brightly coloured tissue paper floating and merging with swirling blue dye. Created by the observing children and added to by others, the ethereal artwork connected them to each other and their surrounding environment. (Researcher observation)



**Figure 5.** Moving like the wind

Purpose, meaning and connection are key principles articulated in John Dewey's deliberations on the arts and play. These principles underpinned how artists related to children and families in the ArtPlay Backyard program, now ongoing, acknowledged by the City of Melbourne as a successful initiative. Positive responses to this program highlight that the experience of public outdoor environments can be enhanced through opportunities to transform materials and spaces in ways that are imaginative, creative and aesthetic, supported by adults who, invested as co-players, encourage children to explore and notice the world around them through 'artful play'.

### Appendix 1

Session Description	Participant profile	
Booked session Free object play, mark making and dramatic play with natural and manufactured materials. Led by a visual artist.	Vietnamese Playgroup Birth to 4 years 8 children and parents	

<p>Open public session Guided and free object play, mark making with natural and manufactured materials and exploration of the environment. Led by a visual artist.</p>	<p>Primary School 8-10 years 25 children and teachers</p>	
<p>Open public session Free object play, mark making and dramatic play with natural and manufactured materials. Led by a visual artist.</p>	<p>Birth to 5 years 14 children and parents</p>	
<p>Booked session Guided construction with blocks, responding to the built environment. Led by a visual artist.</p>	<p>Primary School 8-10 years 22 children and teachers</p>	
<p>Booked session Guided and free open water, sensory and dramatic play. Led by a designer and animateur.</p>	<p>Japanese Playgroup One to five years 9 children parents and playgroup leader</p>	
<p>Booked session Guided and free open water, sensory and dramatic play. Led by a designer and animateur.</p>	<p>Children's centre One to five years 15 children and early childhood teachers</p>	

Session Description	Participant profile	
<p>Open public session Open exploration with clay in the landscape. Led by a visual artist.</p>	<p>One to five years 10 children and parents</p>	

Open public session Dramatic and object play with custom-made and found materials. Led by theatre performers.	One to five years 11 children and parents	
Open public session Dramatic and object play custom-made and found materials. Led by theatre performers.	Two to six years 7 children and parents	
Open public session Free dramatic and construction play with recycled manufactured materials. Led by visual artists.	Birth to eleven years 39 children and parents	
Open public session Free dramatic and construction play with recycled manufactured materials. Led by visual artists.	Birth to nine years 40 children and parents	
Open public session Free dramatic and construction play with recycled manufactured materials. Led by visual artists.	Birth to ten years 22 children and parents	

### References

- Ahn, J. & Filipenko, M. (2006). Narrative, imaginary play, art, and self: Intersecting worlds. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 34(4), 279-289.
- American Institutes for Research (2005). *Effects of outdoor education programs for children in California*. California Department of Education. Retrieved October 10, 2014, from <http://www.seer.org/pages/research/AIROutdoorSchool2005.pdf>
- Balke, E. (1997). Play and the arts: The importance of the "unimportant". *International Focus Issue*, 355-360.
- Bowden, J., & Walsh, E. (Eds.). (2000). *Phenomenography*. Melbourne: RMIT University Press.

- Brown, S. (2009). *Play: how it shapes the brain, opens the imagination and invigorates the soul*. Carlton North, Melbourne: Scribe Publications.
- Burns, R. B. (2000). *Introduction to research methods*. London: SAGE.
- Chappell, K., & Young, S. (2007). *Zest Project: Report*. Exeter: University of Exeter.
- Charmaz, K. (2008). Grounded theory in the 21st century: Applications for advancing social justice studies. In Y. Lincoln & N. Denzin (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 311-330). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Connery, M.C., John-Steiner, V. P., & Marjanovic-Shane, A. (Eds.). (2010). *Vygotsky and creativity: A cultural-historical approach to play, meaning-making, and the arts*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.
- Craft, A. (2002). *Creativity and early years education: A lifewide foundation*. London: Continuum.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity, flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Department for Victorian Communities (2007) The Good Play Space Guide. "I can play too". Department of Victorian Communities. Retrieved May 4, 2015, from [http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/222650/Good-Play-Space-Guide\\_2011.pdf](http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/222650/Good-Play-Space-Guide_2011.pdf)
- Dewey, J. (1959). *Art as experience*. New York: Capricorn Books.
- Dissanayake, E. (1990). *What is art for?* Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Ebbeck, M., & Waniganayake, M. (2010). Perspectives on play in a changing world. In M. Ebbeck & M. Waniganayake (Eds.), *Play in early childhood education: Learning in diverse contexts* (pp. 5-24). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Eisner, E. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Galton, M. (2008). *Creative practitioners in schools and classrooms. Final report: The pedagogy of creative practitioners in schools*. Cambridge: Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.
- Gardner, H. (1982). *Developmental psychology: An introduction*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Ginsburg, R. R. (2007). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics*, 119(1), 182-191.
- Giorgi, A., & Giorgi, B. (2008). Phenomenological psychology. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-

- Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 15-33). Los Angeles: SAGE publications.
- Gleave, J. & Cole-Hamilton, I. (2012). *A world without play: literature review*. Play England. Retrieved May 4, 2015, from <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/a-world-without-play-literature-review.aspx>
- Hart, R.A. (1982). Wildlands for children: Consideration of the value of natural environments in landscape planning. *Natur und Landschaft*, 14(1), 34-39.
- Hendricks, T. (2008). The nature of play: An overview. *American Journal of Play*, 1(2), 157-180.
- Hirsh-Paske, K., Michnick Golinkoff, R., Berk, L. & Singer, D. (2009). *A mandate for playful learning in preschool: Presenting the evidence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jablon, J. R., & Wilkinson, M. (2006). Using engagement strategies to facilitate children's learning and success. *YC Young Children*, 61(2), 12-16.
- Jeanneret, N. & Brown, R. (2013). *Behind ArtPlay's Bright Orange Door*. Parkville: The University of Melbourne.  
[http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news\\_and\\_activities/projects/artplay/behind\\_the\\_bright\\_orange\\_door](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/artplay/behind_the_bright_orange_door)
- Kilvington, J. & Wood, A. (2010). *Reflective playwork for all who work with children*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2010). *Children's right to play: An examination of the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide*. Working Paper No. 57. The Hague, The Netherlands: Bernard van Leer Foundation.
- McCardle, F. & Wright, S. (2014). First literacies: Art, creativity, play, constructive meaning-making. In G. Barton (Ed.), *Literacy in the arts: Retheorising learning and teaching* (pp.21-37). London: Springer.
- McCarthy, K., Ondaatje, E., Zakaras, L., & Brooks, A. (2004). *Gifts of the muse. Reframing the debate about the benefits of the arts*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.
- McWilliams, S., Brailsford-Vaughns, A, O'Hara, A, Novotny, S., & Jo Kyle, T. (2014). Art play: Stories of engaging families, inspiring learning, and exploring emotions. *Young Children*, May, 32-40. Retrieved December 2, 2014, from [http://www.naeyc.org/yc/article/art\\_play\\_stories\\_mcwilliams](http://www.naeyc.org/yc/article/art_play_stories_mcwilliams)
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M.B., and A.M Huberman (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*.

(2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

- Moore, R.C., & Cosco, N.G. (2000, September). *Developing an earth bound culture through design of childhood habitats: Natural learning initiative*. Paper presented at Conference on People, Land and Sustainability: A Global View of Community Gardening, University of Nottingham, UK. Retrieved December 2, 2014, from <http://design.ncsu.edu/natural-learning/sites/default/files/EarthboundChildren.pdf>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. Retrieved December 2, 2014, from <http://www.naeyc.org/dap/12-principles-of-child-development>
- O'Reilly, A. W., & Bornstein, M. H. (1993). Caregiver-child interaction in play. In M. H. Bornstein and A. W. O'Reilly (Eds.), *The role of play in the development of thought: New directions for child development* (pp. 55-66). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- O'Toole, J. (2006). *Doing drama research: Stepping into enquiry in drama, theatre and education*. City East, QLD: Drama Australia.
- O'Toole, J. (2012). Art, creativity and motivation. In C. Sinclair, N. Jeanneret, & J. O'Toole, (Eds.), *Education in the arts: Second edition* (pp. 7-14). South Melbourne, Vic: Oxford University Press.
- Pitri, E. (2001). The role of artistic play in problem solving. *Art Education*, 54(3), 46-51.
- Prout, A. (2003). Preface in P. Christensen & M O'Brien (Eds.), *Children in the city: Home, neighbourhood and community*, (p. xv). London: Routledge Falmer.
- Roos, M. & Statler, M. (2004). *Play and the creative arts: A review of concepts and techniques in the psychotherapeutic tradition*. Working Paper 58. Lausanne: Imagination Lab Foundation.
- Russell, V. J., Ainley, M., & Frydenberg, E. (2005). *Schooling. Issues Digest: Student motivation and engagement*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Retrieved November 30, 2009, from [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school\\_education/publications\\_resources/schooling\\_issues\\_digest/schooling\\_issues\\_digest\\_motivation\\_engagement.htm#Overview\\_of\\_the\\_digest](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/schooling_issues_digest/schooling_issues_digest_motivation_engagement.htm#Overview_of_the_digest)
- Stake, R. (2000). The case study method in social inquiry. In M. Hammersley, R. Gomm, & P. Foster (Eds), *Case study method* (pp. 19-26). London: Sage.
- Trimble, S. (1994). The scripture of maps, the names of trees: A child's landscape. In G.P. Nabhan and S. Trimble, *The geography of childhood* (pp. 15-32). Boston: Beacon Press.

- Vandermaas-Peeler, M., King, C. Clayton, A., Holt, M. Kurtz, K., & Maestri, L. (2001). Parental scaffolding during joint play with preschoolers. In J. L. Roopnarine (Ed.) *Conceptual, social-cognitive, and contextual issues in the fields of play and culture studies, Vol. 4* (pp. 165-181). London: Ablex Publishing.
- Vygotsky, L. (1966). Play and its role in mental development of the child. *Soviet Psychology, 12*(6), 62-76.
- Vygotsky, L. (2004). Imagination and creativity in childhood. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology, 42*(1), 7-97.
- Wefeld, A. J. & Downey, R. G. (2009). Construct dimensionality of engagement and its relation with satisfaction. *Journal of Psychology, 143*(1), 91-112.
- Weisberg, D.S., Hirsh-Pasek, K. & Golinkoff, R.M. (2013). Guided play: Where curricular goals meet a playful pedagogy. *Mind, Brain, and Education, 7*(2), 104–12.
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Wright, S. (2003). *The arts young children and learning*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education Inc.

### **About the Author**

Robert Brown is an experienced arts and education lecturer and researcher. Robert's work with children and the arts spans over twenty years and includes undertaking the Research Manager role at The University of Melbourne's Early Learning Centre for over 10 years. In this role, Robert engaged in diverse research and community engagement projects, undertaken nationally and internationally, including projects involving artists working with children. More recently, Robert has acted as the Senior Research Associate for an Australian Research Centre funded project entitled, *Mapping Engagement at ArtPlay* and also led a three-year Australia Council funded Community and Cultural Partnerships Initiative entitled the *ACCESS Project*, which investigated how community arts facilities engage diverse participants in creative arts practices. Robert's ongoing research interests are interconnected and include; child, youth and family arts engagement, artist pedagogies, creativity and play, cultural citizenship and teacher reflective practice.

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

## Editors

**Eeva Anttila**  
University of the Arts Helsinki

**Terry Barrett**  
Ohio State University

**Brad Haseman**  
Queensland University of Technology

**S. Alex Ruthmann**  
New York University

**Managing Editor**  
**Christine Liao**  
University of North Carolina Wilmington

**Media Review Editor**  
**Christopher Schulte**  
University of Georgia

## Associate Editors

**Kimber Andrews**  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**Marissa McClure**  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

**Sven Bjerstedt**  
Lund University

**Kristine Sunday**  
Old Dominion University

## Editorial Board

<b>Peter F. Abbs</b>	<b>University of Sussex, U.K.</b>
<b>Norman Denzin</b>	<b>University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A.</b>
<b>Kieran Egan</b>	<b>Simon Fraser University, Canada</b>
<b>Magne Espeland</b>	<b>Stord/Haugesund University College, Norway</b>
<b>Rita Irwin</b>	<b>University of British Columbia, Canada</b>
<b>Gary McPherson</b>	<b>University of Melbourne, Australia</b>
<b>Julian Sefton-Green</b>	<b>University of South Australia, Australia</b>
<b>Robert E. Stake</b>	<b>University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A.</b>
<b>Susan Stinson</b>	<b>University of North Carolina—Greensboro, U.S.A.</b>
<b>Graeme Sullivan</b>	<b>Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A.</b>
<b>Elizabeth (Beau) Valence</b>	<b>Indiana University, Bloomington, U.S.A.</b>
<b>Peter Webster</b>	<b>University of Southern California, U.S.A.</b>