

CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON OUTDOOR PLAY PROGRAMS IN CHILDCARE

CENTRE PLAYGROUNDS:

ARE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS LISTENING?

By

Yunjoo (Christina) Lee

B.A., Early Childhood Education, Ryerson University, Toronto, ON, 2012

B.A., Economics, Ewha Womans University, Seoul, Korea, 2008

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Author's Declaration

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Ryerson University

Abstract

Outdoor programs are part of children's everyday experiences in childcare centres. However, there is a lack of research that explores children's viewpoints on their outdoor programs in childcare centres. This qualitative study examined children's perspectives using the Mosaic approach. In addition, the early childhood educators (ECEs) were interviewed to investigate how they learn about and support children's interests. Findings indicate that using the Mosaic approach can contribute to a more holistic understanding of children's perspectives of their outdoor play programs. Findings also indicate that ECEs use observation and communication to learn about children's interests. The ECEs also stated that they support children's interests during their outdoor programs through verbal support and modelling, changing and expanding activities, and preparing various activities and materials for the children. Discussion on the findings explores multiple methods for tapping children's perspectives, implications for teacher practices, and direction for future research.

Key Words: preschool children's perspectives; outdoor programs; childcare centres; early childhood educators' support

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Dedication

To my parents, my little sister, and my beloved husband, Seung-Hee (Paul) Lee.

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Chapter I: Introduction



Figure 1. Children Playing in an Outdoor Playground. Retrieved from Scholarpedia the Peer-Reviewed Open-Access Encyclopedia http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/File:Redeemer_Sandbox.jpg

Images of children playing outdoors prompt many questions for the viewers (see Figure 1). This research study sought to understand children's perspectives on their outdoor play programs particularly in childcare playgrounds and to examine how early childhood educators (ECEs) learn about and support children's perspectives. As there are few studies investigating children's perspectives on outdoor programs in childcare settings, the findings from this study can contribute to our knowledge about how children view their outdoor play programs and potentially suggest directions for future studies on doing research with children.

Playing outdoors is considered to be an important part of children's lives because children have the opportunity to play with various materials, connect with nature, and gain different experiences from outdoor environments than from indoor environments (Dowdell, Gray & Malone, 2011; Stephenson, 2002; Waters & Maynard, 2010). Also, outdoor play has positive effects on children's learning and development. For example, children can build confidence and self-esteem through the development of gross motor skills as they move in wide-open space and engage in fantasy play with nature (Rea & Waite, 2009; Waters & Begley, 2007).

This study focused on outdoor play programs in childcare playgrounds that are organized

for children to play and explore. Outdoor playgrounds were first developed to promote children's physical development in the early 1900s (Tai, Haque, McLellan & Knight, 2006). Now we know that outdoor play in playgrounds is also connected to other developmental domains such as cognitive and social-emotional domains (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Tai et al., 2006). Outdoor play has become more important as an increasing number of children attend childcare programs (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011). In the case of Ontario, Canada, licensed childcare programs for preschool and older children that are regulated by the Day Nurseries Act (DNA) and operate for at least six hours a day are mandated to have a daily outdoor playtime (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990). The outdoor playtime in childcare centres usually takes place in the playgrounds attached to the centres that are only accessible by children registered in the childcare programs. Therefore, the quality of outdoor playgrounds in childcare programs is an important element to consider when preparing outdoor programs for children (Herrington & Lesmeister, 2006; Rivkin, 2000; White, 2008).

Many textbooks and research studies related to early childhood education and care are useful for creating high quality playgrounds and outdoor programs in childcare centres (Dowdell et al., 2011; Tai et al., 2006; White, 2008). White (2008) stated:

There are six major ingredients that make up a full menu of rich and satisfying outdoor provision for young children ... : natural materials, growing and the living world, water, physical play and movement, imagination and creativity, and construction. Each of these ingredients offers highly holistic learning experiences that contribute to all areas of development and learning. (p. 3)

Information on considering a variety of factors such as children's age in relation to types of materials can also be easily found in textbooks and research studies (Maxwell, Mitchell & Evans,

2008; Tai et al., 2006). In addition, research findings from recent studies on children's outdoor play can be used as references for the ECEs to set up and prepare outdoor programs. For examples, there are studies that examined children's preferences for play areas in the playgrounds (Dyment & O'Connell, 2013; Greenfield, 2004; Holmes & Procaccino, 2009; Martin, 2011), gender differences in selection of play areas (Dyment & O'Connell, 2013; Holmes & Procaccino, 2009), and children's perspectives on playing outdoors (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Greenfield, 2004).

Many childcare centres develop program plans that list activities, learning goals, materials, and assessments (Rosen, 2010). Often, ECEs are educated to plan for outdoor programs based on observations of children's play and behaviours. Their knowledge and perceptions of what is needed for children may be based on their own childhood experiences (Maynard & Waters, 2007), textbooks, and educational training (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011). Such information influences how the ECEs plan and implement activities that stimulate children's learning and development within an outdoor context.

As children in childcare spend a certain amount of time outdoors, learning about children's viewpoints on outdoor programs is important. Sometimes ECEs and children discuss program plans together during circle time. Yet, most of the time, ECEs set up the playground based on planned programs before children go out to play. Textbooks and research studies on outdoor play and playgrounds may be informative, but they rarely discuss children's thoughts and opinions. Children might have a different view of what they want and need in their outdoor programs.

Listening to children's viewpoints helps ECEs to better understand children's interests and concerns (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). A key role for ECEs is to stimulate and support

children's learning. Providing opportunities for children to share their viewpoints empowers children to be active learners who make choices and express their thoughts (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). Children should be given opportunities to share their perspectives to create a program that meets their needs and wants. Children have the ability to express themselves and they have the right to be heard (MacNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). Therefore, it is important to listen to children's voices in order to understand their needs and provide suitable resources. However, many societies tend to view children as vulnerable beings and do not consider children's opinions as valuable as adults' (Matthews, 2007). Therefore, this study sought in a small way to address this issue by examining preschool children's perspectives on outdoor play programs in their childcare playgrounds. Preschool children from two childcare centres were observed and interviewed using a range of research methods including drawing, looking at photographs, taking pictures with a camera, and making playground maps. Children were directly asked what they think about their outdoor programs on their childcare playgrounds. ECEs were also interviewed about how they listen to children and support their interests during outdoor programs.

Given that the focus is on children's perspectives, this study used a theoretical framework that emphasizes the importance of children's rights and citizenship. The new sociological theory of childhood considers children as independent agents with unique points of view, which can be different from those of adults (Smith, 2007). Within this theoretical framework, children have the ability to actively construct meanings about their own lives in the moment. Children are 'beings' in the moment rather than 'becomings' or 'future adults' (James & James, 2001). Therefore, researchers who study children's perspectives seek to ask children directly about what they want and think about certain issues (Moran-Ellis, 2010). Children in this current research project were

viewed as individuals who are able to express their perspectives and have their own thoughts on what interests them and what is best for them.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has also informed the study with its emphasis on children's rights and citizenship. Article 12(1) of the CRC (United Nations, 1989) indicates that children have a right to participate in decision-making in all matters that relate to their everyday lives under consideration of children's age and maturity. Based on this Article, children should be able to express their thoughts about the services they receive, such as childcare services, and activities they participate in, such as outdoor programs. Therefore, this project was designed to listen to children's perspectives on outdoor play within their childcare centre playgrounds in order to provide an opportunity for children to express their thoughts and opinions on a matter that affects their daily lives.

This research study considered that children's perspectives are influenced by their experiences and the interactions with others within a society although children have independent perspectives on issues that relate to their lives. ECEs' perspectives about outdoor programs in childcare settings can influence how an outdoor play program is implemented. Therefore, the ways in which ECEs learn about and support children's interests within a context of two childcare outdoor playgrounds were also examined. Researchers using the social constructivist approach seek to learn how people make sense of a certain phenomenon or setting by asking open-ended questions of participants and reflecting on cultural and/or historical experiences (Creswell, 2009). Thus, children's and educators' viewpoints on outdoor programs are explored within the contexts of childcare centre programs by asking them to voice their thoughts and opinions instead of applying pre-existing theories to children's behaviours and ECEs' teaching practices.

Participatory research on children's outdoor play and their programs is fairly new. Studies on different research methods to examine children's perspectives are emerging but more research needs to be conducted. Some studies focus on children's preferences in play areas as one way to study children's perspectives. However, preference does not necessarily show children's holistic perspectives of their outdoor programs. Various viewpoints such as what children think is important or what they need should be considered. Therefore, my research questions are 'What are preschool children's perspectives on their outdoor play programs in their childcare centre playgrounds?' and 'How do ECEs learn about and support children's perspectives during their outdoor programs?' These research questions provided an opportunity to investigate children's holistic perspectives through different data collection tools. Since there is no official outdoor curriculum or program that is used in childcare centres in Ontario, all the activities that children engage in during their outdoor playtime on childcare playgrounds with the ECEs are termed the 'outdoor program' in this study. Studying children's perspectives on their outdoor program in their childcare playground may provide a better understanding of children's thoughts and opinions. Children's learning and development can flourish when their actual needs and wants are met. ECEs' support is related to providing opportunities for children to share their interests, guiding and assisting children to explore, and enriching children's play activities.

Chapter II: Literature Review

There are extensive research studies on the benefits of outdoor play and effective approaches to providing good quality outdoor programs for children. In contrast, examining children's perspectives on outdoor play programs is a fairly new area of research. The purpose of a literature review is generally to address gaps in research and to compare the results of studies on similar research topics (Creswell, 2009). In order to reflect on recent studies, only documents published after the year 2000 were selected. Background information on children's outdoor play was examined through studies regarding the status of outdoor play, policies related to childcare outdoor playgrounds, and research studies that provide recommendations on how to set up quality outdoor programs. Also, research studies involving children's participation are reviewed, including studies that examined children's perspectives on outdoor play. The perspectives of ECEs may influence children's viewpoints as children construct meaning through interactions with others. Thus research studies that examined both the ECEs' and the children's perspectives were included. However, there were few research studies on children's perspectives and how ECEs support children in outdoor programs that could be found. Therefore, I decided to focus the study in the area of examining children's viewpoints of their outdoor programs and how ECEs learn about and support children's perspectives.

Status of Outdoor Play

Studies on outdoor education and learning have found that outdoor play promotes children's physical development as well as social, emotional, and cognitive development (Rea & Waite, 2009; Rivkin, 2000; Tai et al., 2006; Waters & Begley, 2007). However, over the last decade, the frequency of outdoor play has been decreasing among children. A research study on children between the ages of three and twelve in the United States (US) reported that the

frequency of outdoor play and the length of time spent outdoors have reduced to about half the time the previous generation has had (Clements, 2004). Dietze and Crossley (2000) reported that young Canadian children spend less than ten hours a week outdoors (as cited in Clements, 2004). Also, the number of children playing outdoors after school dropped by 14% over the last decade (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2012). Less children are playing outdoors and they are not getting enough outdoor playtimes.

Some research studies reported that children's access to mass media and technology is contributing to the reduction of children's outdoor play (Clements, 2004; Martin, 2011). The majority of children in Clements' (2004) study engaged more in indoor activities than outdoors: watching television and playing video and computer games. Although these activities were reported by mothers about their children's outdoor play at home, a similar situation was observed in one of the four childcare centres in the United Kingdom (UK) in Martin's (2011) study. The boys constantly played on the computers when they were indoors, and the girls waited for their turn. When children were able to choose between playing indoors and outdoors in some centres, many girls chose to stay in the classroom and play on the computer because that was the time that they did not have to compete with the boys for the computer as the boys chose to go outside. As both Clements (2004) and Martin (2011) reported, there may be a correlation between children's usage of digital technology and the frequency of their outdoor activities. However, it is difficult to determine that there is a direct correlation between the two factors.

Some researchers claimed that watching television and playing games on the computer do not necessarily have a direct influence on having less outdoor playtime (Vandewater, Bickham & Lee, 2006; Vandewater et al., 2007). Two studies intended to find out the extent of children's use of digital technology and to examine the claim that the time children spend on developmental

activities, such as reading and playing outdoors, is negatively affected by their use of technology. According to parental surveys, many of the children aged six months to six years exceeded the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended usage of media and technology, which is two hours of watching television a day for children over two-years old and no television for younger children (Vandewater et al., 2007). On average, children watched television and videos for 1 hour and 19 minutes on a daily basis, and the younger the children were, the more they spent time with the media and technology between the ages of two to six years. Among 1045 parents, less than half of them reported that their children used the computer and video games on a regular basis, but when they did, children spent average of 50 minutes. However, according to Vandewater et al. (2007), the results of the study showed that children's time spent outdoors did not differ between children who exceeded the recommended use of digital technology and children who used less. Similarly, Vandewater, Bickham and Lee (2006) found that there was no significant correlation between the time children watched television and the amount of time they engaged in active play, which included outdoor activities. The authors concluded that computers and television are part of young children's lives, and there is no significant correlational relationship between children using digital technology and playing outdoors.

Another factor that is considered as influencing the decrease of children's outdoor play is adults' attitudes on outdoor play (Clement, 2004; Martin 2011). Parents are afraid of the lack of safety outside because of increasing traffic and crime rates (Clement, 2004). Hence, they tend to prevent outdoor play without adult supervision. If there is no caregiver who can take care of children outside the house, children may have less opportunity to play outdoors. The status of outdoor play at home may influence children's viewpoints, and this can affect children's perspectives and attitudes on outdoor play in childcare as well.

In some studies, childcare centres did not regularly use their childcare playgrounds throughout the year. Even when there was a regular schedule for outdoor playtime, ECEs used weather and safety issues to avoid outdoor play time (Copeland et al., 2011; Martin, 2011; Maynard & Waters, 2007). Children were not consulted in deciding whether to go out or stay in on the days they stayed indoors (Martin, 2011). ECEs' attitudes and non-supportive behaviours for outdoor play can affect both children's perspectives on outdoor play and their play behaviours in playgrounds at their childcare centres. Also, some children in the four childcare centres in Martin's (2011) study showed negative reactions to outdoor play in their childcare centres. They chose staying inside over going out to play in the playground (Martin, 2011).

Research studies regarding the status of outdoor play in Canada was difficult to find. Still, Clements (2004) reported that there was some work done in Canada in order to promote children's outdoor playtime and play spaces. The Canadian Childcare Federation (CCCF) developed a pilot project in the early 2000s (Clements, 2004). The ECEs in childcare settings were provided with resources and received training on how to plan for quality outdoor play in childcare settings. However, the results of the project cannot be determined as no report was released. Studies on outdoor play in Canada is needed to help determine factors that should be changed or improved.

Policies on Childcare Playgrounds for Outdoor Programs

Outdoor play in childcare settings usually occurs in childcare playgrounds. Hence, the design of the playground needs to be aligned with the recommended policies set by the Standards Associations or the government to ensure children's safety. Typically, childcare outdoor settings in Ontario will not be licenced without meeting the safety requirements set out in Canadian Standard for Children's Playspaces and Equipment (CSA) and the DNA. Therefore, reviewing

policies related to childcare playground is beneficial when studying about outdoor play and outdoor programs because ECEs and researchers can understand how the playground can be designed and/or how to set up programs that correspond both to the requirement of the standards and children's developmental goals.

Poorly designed and inadequate playgrounds have a negative influence on children's development and learning (Rivkin, 2000). Recognition of the significance of providing quality outdoor spaces for development and learning as well as safety issues led to the establishment of policies in Canada. In the early 1980s, the CSA began to establish standards on playground designs and maintenance (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007). Then, additional standards were set up in collaboration with other committees and organizations based on public playground injury rates and safety matters on playground equipment and materials. These standards began to influence practices in the design of childcare playgrounds in Canada, particularly in regard to the selection of surface materials, installation of structures, and maintenance of spaces (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007). However, the standards focused only on technical aspects and did not reflect the purposes and usage of playgrounds in childcare settings that differ from public playgrounds. Injury rates from the US were used as guidelines for the Canadian standards, while Canadian studies reported much lower accident levels (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007). Moreover, the injury reports that were mostly from children aged five to nine also influenced the playground standards for childcare programs (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007), where a large number of children registered were under the age of six. The references to organize the standards did not match the age group that actually used the settings. In addition, standards provide mostly the minimum requirements on space by child-per-space ratio (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007). Although some policies, such as the DNA, provide guidelines to build different levels of playgrounds associated with

children's development and purpose of learning, they do not seem to be sufficient in terms of listening to children's voices to support their needs and wants.

According to Ontario's DNA, childcare programs for children over thirty months of age that operate for more than six hours a day must have a minimum of two hours of outdoor play time a day in their playground unless the weather does not permit or parents indicate special conditions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990). Similar to Ontario, most childcare centre playgrounds in Canada are used on a daily basis only by children enrolled in the childcare programs under the supervision of ECEs to extend children's learning and play (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007). Herrington and Lesmeister (2006) studied the design elements of childcare outdoor spaces that can improve the quality of the programs in Vancouver with ECEs, and they suggested that providing constant change in play areas and the environments that correspond to children's needs and wants is important. Children's needs may vary according to their abilities, growth, understandings, and experiences. Therefore, modifying the set up and providing opportunities for challenge are critical factors for supporting children's development and enabling quality play in childcare. However, it is difficult to be flexible while strictly following standards.

Safety matters may stop children from having certain play structures and engaging in play activities that they want. Herrington and Nicholls (2007) argued many childcares cannot install swings, which provide unique and valuable experiences for children, as they do not meet the required space in their playgrounds. Due to the possibilities of injuries, there has to be a designated space for swings. However, the requirement of space for installing swings is getting larger because of safety issues, and many childcare centres cannot afford to have a lot of encroachment areas in their playgrounds (Herrington & Lesmeister, 2006; Herrington & Nicholls,

2007). Children need some challenge and opportunities to take risks, and this belief should be reflected in standards for childcare playgrounds. It would be difficult for the ECEs to plan and implement quality programs if standards are impractical. For example, the requirements of large square footage for equipment and play structures make it difficult to reflect what children need and want. Therefore, it is important to understand standards and regulation in relation to listening to children's perspectives.

Recommendations for Outdoor Programs

There is an abundance of suggestions for creating quality outdoor playgrounds for children in the literature on childcare outdoor playgrounds. One key recommendation from older textbooks is to create developmentally appropriate playgrounds that meet the developmental stages of the children using the playground (Jolley, 1995; Wortham, 1989). The characteristics of each developmental stage need to be considered in the playground design as children's performances differ in their needs and experiences. Therefore, designing an outdoor playground based only on the minimum physical standards is not sufficient for childcare programs since the standards is generally derived from public outdoor spaces and used to cover a wide age range of children (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007).

Recently, there is growing emphasis in the literature on providing natural materials in playgrounds or designing a nature-based playground as people are becoming more aware of the benefits of nature (Dowdell et al., 2011; Tai et al., 2006; White, 2008). Children living in cities may have little opportunity to connect with nature, so childcare playgrounds should provide such opportunities with water, sand, rocks, and grass (Tai et al., 2006; White, 2008). In Dowdell, Gray and Malone's (2011) study, preschool children's play behaviours and interactions with nature were examined to find out if nature influences children's play and social behaviours. The

researchers observed and interviewed preschool children from two childcare centres in their regular outdoor areas; one centre had an artificial 'outdoor' playground within a warehouse, and the other centre had a nature-based playground. The artificial playground had no fixed structure in it, but there was a bike track installed apart from the play areas, a sand box, a house area with many props, a quiet play area, a path, and a climbing castle. The playground was set up differently every week to provide a variety of play activities. The nature-based playground had a larger playground than the required space for the number of children, two sand areas, a garden, grass areas, a quiet reading area, play structures made with woods, and lots of empty spaces. According to the results, children engaged in higher amount of imaginative play with various materials, longer period of time in one activity, and stronger and more positive relationships among children in the natural playground than in the artificial playground when children's play activities were compared in the settings (Dowdell et al., 2011).

The natural materials and the environment can stimulate children's imagination and curiosity through the use of open-ended elements. Also, children were more involved in exploring their spaces in the natural playground setting (Dowdell et al., 2011). As the weather and season changes, the playground differs; the transformation of nature can stimulate children's interests (Herrington & Lesmeister, 2006). This can help children to develop various skills, such as observation and problem solving. However, children were not asked what they think about and learn from playing with nature in the studies. Children's exploration with nature may stimulate unplanned learning and influence children's perspectives. ECEs and researchers should ask children what they think about play with nature and provide suitable natural resources and learning experiences to support children's learning and development.

Playground materials, in addition to playground design, have some influence on what

children choose to do in the playground. Maxwell, Mitchell and Evans (2008) conducted a two stage study about how playground equipment and loose materials affect children's play behaviours. Preschool children were observed for ten months in a university based childcare program. In the first study, the researchers found that children were mostly involved in functional play, which children are engaged in repetitive movements using their gross motor and fine motor skills, in most of the playground areas. Dramatic play only occurred in spaces with certain traits such as enclosed spaces, a bridge, and platforms. When 'loose parts' (moveable objects such as blocks, bikes, and fabric pieces) were added to the playground in the second study, children were more engaged in dramatic and constructive play, and these play behaviours occurred in more play areas than in the first study (Maxwell et al., 2008). This study implies that children's play can differ with the materials they can play with, and loose materials can help children to engage in different types of play. However, the study would have been more valuable if the children were asked what materials they wanted and how they were using it to investigate how children perceive the use of the play materials.

Researchers suggested that ECEs' involvement in children's play and the interactions between ECEs and children are beneficial for children's learning and development. Dowdell et al. (2011) found from a study on nature's influence on children's outdoor play that children learn more about the value of nature and acceptable attitudes toward nature when ECEs model behaviours rather than direct the children. The ECEs from the childcare centre with a nature-based playground actively engaged in children's play. The guidance and encouragement that ECEs offered by engaging in children's play tended to stimulate children's interests and foster their development. For example, children were more engaged in finding natural materials and planting when the ECEs joined the children. Based on a study on how outdoor play is set up and

whether children are consulted about setting up their playground, Martin (2011) suggested that children are able to enjoy and engage more in outdoor activities when educators model behaviours and engage in children's play rather than when they simply supervise; the interaction helps ECEs to organize playgrounds that provide healthier and richer learning and developmental opportunities.

Most of the recommendations that have emerged from the research on children's experiences in childcare outdoor playgrounds are based on adult perspectives. The adults, especially the ECEs, decide where to put the structures and toys, which play materials are appropriate, and schedule outdoor playtimes. Studies on comparing children's play in different types of playgrounds and play materials were mostly based on observations and interviews with ECEs. Children's perspectives were rarely considered. However, recommendations on designing and setting up the playgrounds for outdoor programs can also consider children's thoughts and opinions.

Research with Children

Increasing attention on children's rights has led to more opportunities for children to participate in decision-making. Aligned with this trend, there is a movement towards conducting research on children's participation in curriculum development in early childhood settings. Researchers and educators are acknowledging the need to listen to children's voices in order to enhance children's learning and development (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Einarsdóttir (2005b) found that five- and six-years old children are able to share their thoughts on why they go to school and what they do there. Similarly, five-year old children from Sheridan and Samuelsson's (2001) study were able to answer what they like to do in preschool and how their program was decided. Rosen's (2010) study on preschool children's perspectives on how

curriculum is designed showed that children understand that they have a role in curriculum development. Children acknowledged that some activities they engage in come from their ideas. On the other hand, children also recognized the ECEs' power and authority. Children from both studies, Rosen (2010) and Sheridan and Samuelsson (2001), addressed that they influence the curriculum content in their classroom and are able to decide where to play, what activities to engage in, and who to play with. However, children also pointed out that they have to get final approval from the ECEs (Rosen, 2010; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). This implies that ECEs may not be listening to children's perspectives and they do not provide sufficient opportunities for children to participate in decision-making on issues that relate to their everyday events.

Children's perspectives on childcare spaces have become a common research topic in doing research with the children. Listening to children in childcare services is considered to be valuable as it can improve the programs that children receive and bring positive changes to relationships, assessments, and policies (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005). Clark (2005) reviewed several studies that examined children's perspectives on early childhood institutions and investigated the various methods that are used in research studies that involved children. She found that the studies explored different aspects of children's perspectives, and the children were frequently asked about their thoughts and experiences in the setting such as what they do, what they like, and what they think is important. These research studies have become a guideline on how to explore children's perspectives and to how incorporate the practices in childcare programs. Yet, the focus of the studies was more about finding better methods to listen to children's viewpoints, and the settings were related to indoor environments. For example, Einarsdóttir (2005a) used a digital camera and a disposable camera to find out how the tools can be useful for gaining children's perspectives and if there was a difference between the tools in

what children want to share about the important places in their childcare environments. In addition, Clark (2005) advised that children's perspectives are not taken into account in reality as much as in research studies. Also, she suggested that there are more diverse topics in research that can examine children's perspectives.

Clark (2007) compared three studies that examined children's perspectives on childcare environments that used the Mosaic approach, which is a multi-methods technique that is used to listen to children and involve them in doing research. She found that children considered outdoor space to be an important part of their childcare spaces. Children enjoyed playing and learning in their childcare, and children did not necessarily describe spaces by functional areas. Some areas were defined as social spaces and others were personal spaces; some were both personal and social spaces. These descriptions of areas also applied to outdoor environments. Clark (2007) argued that there should be more research studies that discuss issues on outdoor spaces in regard to children's perspectives because there are not a lot of research studies that encompass children's voices on outdoor play spaces. More participatory research needs to be conducted on outdoor environments to learn about what they mean to children and how they can be made better to correspond to children's viewpoints.

Research on Children's Perspectives on Their Outdoor Programs

There are some research studies that focus on outdoor play, particularly children's outdoor play preferences. Holmes and Procaccino (2009) considered gender as a variable that could influence preschool children's choice of play spaces outside. Based on observations of children's play, the researchers found that boys tend to spend more time in the riding area than girls do. The girls preferred the swings and the sand areas, but as the researchers noted, the quantitative results were not significant enough to draw a conclusion. Other play areas showed

similar usage and a declining trend over time for both genders. The study yielded findings about the areas that children frequently play. However, children's preferences cannot be learned only by observing their behaviours. The frequency of play does not reveal directly what areas children like to play in or what they like to do. Dyment and O'Connell (2013) observed preschool children's play in four childcare centres with different playground features. The children's play choices in the playground areas varied in all the childcare centres. For example, the natural area was the most popular space in the playground where nature was the largest area; sandpits and pavements were popular in the small and barren one; and the softfall area was used the most in the playground with the large and old playground. Some gender differences were observed in children's usage of the pavements; boys dominated the paved area, usually riding on bicycles. Despite the different playground designs and various choices of play areas that children chose, functional physical play was most frequently exhibited in all childcare playgrounds. These research studies reveal some information about children's play outdoors in childcare playgrounds. However, the studies above did not investigate what the children actually like to do or want to do. Children have not been directly consulted in finding out their preferences or about their play behaviours.

According to Martin (2011), none of the ECEs in the four centres in her research study asked children how they would like their childcare playgrounds to be designed. Except for one centre that observed children's play to guide a playground renovation, the ECEs and the members of the Board of Directors in the childcares organized the playground structures, materials, and outdoor program schedules. Martin (2011) concluded that children's input in designing and setting up their playgrounds can enrich children's play and learning as the environment meets their actual needs.

The desire to listen to children's perspectives has created opportunities for children to participate in research studies on outdoor play. The direction of research, policies on research, and methods on understanding the insights of children and their behaviours have changed by having children as active research participants (Waller, 2006). Greenfield (2004) conducted a small-scale research study on children's perspectives on their outdoor playground. Five, four-year-old children were asked to take pictures of the playground with a camera. Children stated that they enjoyed being outdoors, and most of the children took pictures of the slide, bikes, sand box, and swings. However, children provided different reasons for their choices such as their favorite areas, places that they feel safe, or spaces that they like to play with friends (Greenfield, 2004). Some also gave suggestions on what they would like to add to the playground. Similarly, Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot's (2011) study on how children and ECEs engage in outdoor learning and how ECEs support children in natural play environments found that there are special play areas that children like and that children enjoy using their senses outdoors. Also, children explored their environments and played with natural elements through spontaneous play and imaginary play. These studies were notable in terms of children's participation in studies to learn children's views on their outdoor playground. Still, more research needs to be conducted to understand children's views and how they can be used to develop outdoor programs.

Research on ECEs and Outdoor Programs

In addition to children's perspectives, ECEs' and parents' viewpoints need to be considered because spaces and programs are defined and created through the interactions that children have with peers as well as adults, especially the ECEs (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Waller, 2006). As ECEs plan for outdoor programs, their views can influence children's perspectives. Therefore, the role of ECEs and their perspectives should be studied along with

children's perspectives. Researchers in a couple of studies asked ECEs about their perspectives of outdoor play. Maynard and Waters' (2007) study on the use of the outdoor environments found that the ECEs thought that outdoor play provided freedom for children to engage in fun experiences, and these viewpoints were based on their own childhood experiences playing outdoors. The ECEs in Stephenson's (2002) study thought that there were larger spaces and less restriction for the children to make loud noises outdoors than indoors, and they perceived that these were attractive factors for the children's play outdoors. Children were able to move freely outside than inside. Also, the ECEs thought that there was more variety of activities that could be prepared for outdoors by setting up the playground differently each day, and the natural elements provided constant change as well (Stephenson, 2002).

Some studies have found inconsistencies in ECEs' roles during outdoor play. Maynard and Waters (2007) stated that some ECEs supported child-initiated activities, but, many times, ECEs tended to plan activities for the children. Also, viewing safety as a primary issue outdoors seemed to influence ECEs to take on supervisory roles. Many ECEs from Stephenson's (2002) study combined a supervisory role and engagement in children's play which differed from the interactions that happened indoors. Similarly, Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot (2011) found that ECEs supported children in exploring and connecting with nature. Outdoor play tended to be less structured as children took the initiative and ECEs felt comfortable being co-learners with children. The meaning of support in the study was based on the idea that ECEs need to care for children's rights to communicate in their preferred ways, to understand children's interests, and to involve children in designing the services they receive (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011). In their study, outdoor play tended to be less structured as children took the initiative and ECEs felt comfortable being co-learners with children. The ECEs thought that the relationship between

children and ECEs was more interactive and child initiated (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011). In addition, children's risk-taking behaviours and exploration were encouraged, and the ECEs acted as a mediator between children's risk-taking activities and restrictions on playground policies (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011).

Waller's (2006; 2007) studies on children's outdoor learning added dimension of participatory research with children through reflections. The two studies were conducted in local parks apart from their playgrounds, and there was no curriculum prepared by the ECEs for the s. The research studies were conducted to examine the level of involvement of the children in planning the program and three findings could be discussed. First, children's participation in the project enabled the researcher to learn about children's perspectives on their play spaces. Children classified social spaces and individual landmarks in the park after a few visits for the outdoor project, and they named familiar places (Waller, 2006; 2007). Second, children led the activities without the teachers planning for the program in the natural outdoor setting, and ECEs had better understanding of what children wanted to do outdoors. Also, the researcher found that there were more ECE-child interactions outside than inside as ECEs interacted and asked the children to share their thoughts during the project outdoors. The interactions help the ECEs to better support children (Waller, 2006; 2007). Third, making research tools, such as cameras, part of children's everyday experiences would have reduced possibilities of tools misleading the findings of children's perspectives. As children did not have regular contact with the cameras in their childcare programs, children could have been exploring the tools rather than the environments during the projects (Waller, 2006).

The various research studies on recommendations for quality outdoor programs and children's play provoked my interests in learning about what children would think about their

outdoor programs. There are successful studies that asked children to share their thoughts about their childcare programs that they attend and the childcare environments they spend time in. However, there is a lack of studies that examine children's thoughts and opinions about their outdoor programs. Therefore, this study sought to investigate children's perspectives on their outdoor play programs. As ECEs need to encourage children to actively involve in decision making and to adhere to children's best interests, ECEs were asked to share how they learn about and support children's perspectives during their outdoor programs.

Chapter III: Methodology

There may be barriers for children participating in research projects when using research tools designed for adults. Some researchers have examined data collection tools that can be used for research with children (Clark & Moss, 2011; Docket & Perry, 2005; Stephenson, 2009; Waller, 2006). In addition, researchers have agreed that a mix of methods is better for yielding information about children's perspectives because the diverse tools allow children with different capabilities to participate in the research project (Clark, 2004; Einarsdóttir, 2007). For this research study, I adopted the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011) because of its advantages for listening to children's perspectives. This chapter discusses the process and tools that were used to conduct this research study.

The Mosaic Approach

The Mosaic approach is a multi-method research practice that combines visual and verbal data. Clark and Moss (2001) developed the Mosaic approach for research projects that focus on children's perspectives on the services they receive. The Mosaic approach was first developed for three- and four-years old children, and it can be adapted to various age groups and for children who speak English as an additional language (Clark & Moss, 2011). It empowers children by utilizing various methods for listening to children's perspectives. Observation, interview/child conferencing, photography tours, and mapping are some data collection tools used in the Mosaic approach. The combination of multiple methods forms a strength-based approach for children to participate in research studies because the various tools can accommodate children's needs and interests, and they provide an opportunity for the children to share their viewpoints (Clark, 2004; Clark & Moss, 2011). For example, children who are not verbally active can utilize representative tools such as drawings and photographs to assist them

to express their thoughts and opinions. Also, the research tools are used to help children to communicate in a similar way they do in everyday practice (Clark & Moss, 2011). This may help children feel comfortable communicating and interacting with researchers. In addition, the Mosaic approach enables triangulation of the data, which adds validity to the information (Clark, 2004).

In some societies, children are often left out of research studies because they are considered to be dependent on adults and untrustworthy to express their perspectives (Clark, 2004). In the Mosaic approach, children are viewed as experts in their own lives. Children have their own thoughts and opinions about their experiences that need to be heard. This approach is aligned with the theoretical framework of the new sociology of childhood and the notion of children's rights from the CRC (Clark, 2004). Thus, the Mosaic approach allows children to voice their views on issues that pertain to them. Interviews with adults who are involved in children's lives are also part of the Mosaic approach as children co-construct meanings with adults (Clark, 2004). Rather than finding one truth, the Mosaic approach provides opportunities for children as well as adults to reflect on their views and experiences (Clark & Moss, 2011). Therefore, the Mosaic approach was suitable to learn about children's perspectives on their outdoor programs through children's own voices and to study how the ECEs are learning about and supporting children's perspectives during their programs.

Generally, there are three stages in the Mosaic approach: in stage one, children and adults gather information with the researcher; in stage two participants discuss and analyze the information together by reflecting and interpreting the data; in stage three, participants decide whether to continue or change the current practice to take action beyond simply listening to children's perspectives (Clark & Moss, 2011). Due to time limitations and the scope of this

research study, only the first stage was conducted.

Research Design

This research project is a qualitative research study. Qualitative research studies investigate the topic and find out about participants' perspectives on certain phenomena related to everyday context (Creswell, 2009). The aim of this current research study was to explore children's perspectives and to examine the ways in which ECEs listen to children's perspectives. Hence, a qualitative research design was suitable for the study. The purpose of qualitative research is to acquire an in-depth understanding of an issue rather than to generalize the findings (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, individual thoughts of preschool children and ECEs were sought and understood within the context of outdoor play programs in childcare centres.

Participants

Two childcare centre sites were recruited for the study. Preschool children between the ages of two-and-a-half and five-years old and full time ECEs participated in the study. Sixteen children, nine girls and seven boys; and four ECEs, a male and three females, participated.

Sample. Convenient sampling was used to recruit participants. My Major Research Project (MRP) committee members suggested a few childcare centres in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) that were accessible for research studies. A recruitment letter was given to childcare centre supervisors (see Appendix A for the recruitment letter). When the supervisors accepted the recruitment offer, all parents of the preschool children enrolled in the programs were given a consent form (see Appendix B for parent consent form). Participants in research studies on children's outdoor play in childcare programs were usually preschool children (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Holmes & Procaccino, 2009; Martin, 2011; Maxwell et al., 2008). Since there are not many studies on children's perspectives on outdoor play, preschool children were chosen as

participants for my study in order to be consistent with this criterion of participants in other studies and to build on knowledge gained from previous literature.

Many parents gave consent but eight children from each centre were selected to have a manageable sample size for the study. Different methodologies were used on different days. Each day I went in to collect data with the children, the materials for the research activities were set up in one area of the classroom where the research activities did not interrupt non-participant children in the childcare program. Children came to the activities at different times, and their assents were sought before they started the activities. Any child who had parental consent and showed interest became a participant on a first-come first-served basis in the first activity which was drawing and/or looking at playground photographs. The sixteen children who participated in the first activity were asked to participate in other activities throughout the research study. In order to increase the comfort level for children to participate in the study, they were asked whether they would like to do the activities individually or with friends and if they needed support from their teachers for each activity. Sometimes, children can better reveal their thoughts and feelings in a familiar environment with support from peers and teachers and when they have choices to choose from (Brooker, 2001).

Purposive sampling was used to recruit ECEs. Childcare centres have full time as well as part-time ECEs that interact with children during their programs. Full time ECEs tend to form relationships with the children regularly in the classroom more than part-time ECEs. Also, ECEs who have been working full time for more than a couple of years tend to have a better understanding of organizing and managing the program in the centre they work in than new ECEs. Therefore, full time ECEs who had been working in the centre for more than two years have been recruited. In fact, all the ECEs that participated in the study had worked in the

childcare centres for at least fifteen years.

Setting. The research study was conducted in naturalistic settings following children's regular routines in the childcare centres. The data collection with children occurred during program times, either in their classroom or in the playground, because children tend to better communicate and express their feelings in familiar environments (MacNaughton et al., 2001). Also, the research settings were organized to minimize interruptions of the programs during the research study.

Both childcare centres were licensed, not-for-profit childcares located in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Centre One had a large, nature-based playground with an upper playground that was connected to the lower playground with a hill and stairs. On the upper playground, there was a small herb garden beside a large empty space. Also, there was a covered deck with a roof so children can stay out on light rainy days and engage in quiet play. The lower playground had a slide structure, a sand box, a grounded bridge, a bike path, and a climber. Trees and bushes were planted in different places around the playground. The preschool children shared the playground with the kindergarten children by using it at different times. The toddler playground was right beside the preschool/kindergarten playground divided by fences. Centre Two had a play structure in the middle of the playground with two slides, stairs, and a tunnel that connected the slides and stairs. The children and the ECEs called the stairs 'the climber.' A bike path went around the structure, and a sand box was placed next to the entrance of the playground. One big tree was planted in a corner of the playground. The toddler and the infant playgrounds were next to the preschool playground, which was also divided by fences. There was grass surrounding the outside of the playground, and there was a large parking lot across from the playground. The playground environment may influence children's perspectives of their outdoor

programs. However, the purpose of the research study was not to compare children's perspectives of the playground or to find out if the environment influenced children's views. Therefore, the playground environment was not considered as a selection criterion when recruiting participants.

Data Collection Methods

Observations. Interpretation of the observations is dependent on the adults' points of view, but children's actual perspectives can be different from the observed behaviours. Also, their behaviours can change according to the different environmental features such as materials, equipment, and opportunities available to them (Holmes & Procaccino, 2009; Maxwell et al., 2008). Therefore, it is difficult to interpret children's perspectives only through observations. Nonetheless, observation is an important method for capturing children's everyday behaviours and experiences within a familiar setting over a selected period of time to learn about their viewpoints (Clark & Moss, 2011; Rolfe, 2001). Thus, observations were chosen to understand their actions in the context of their outdoor programs. Each childcare centre was observed twice, once during the morning and once during the afternoon outdoor playtime. Anecdotal recording was used to note children's and ECEs' repeated behaviours and narratives. These snapshots revealed some information on events that happened on the playgrounds (Rolfe, 2001). The observation periods also gave me an opportunity to become familiar with the children and the ECEs, and it helped me understand how the outdoor programs were implemented. Usually, observations are conducted several times to obtain diverse incidents and to avoid skewed data. Also, in the Mosaic approach, observations can be used in discussions with children and ECEs to acquire each other's perspectives of the events (Clark & Moss, 2011). Due to the scope of this project, however, the observations in my research were conducted more to help me better

understand what children and ECEs are referring to when they talked about their outdoor programs using other research methods. Often, observations can be conducted to compare and contrast what is observed during observations and what participants say during interviews. Since the number of observations was limited in my study, the observations were not used to verify the correspondence between what ECEs say they do and what they actually do.

Drawing and/or photographs. Interviews with children require some preparation to help children feel comfortable enough to communicate with researchers and to provoke children's interest in the project. Therefore, children were provided with some time to do drawings and/or look at photographs of their playgrounds that I photographed and printed prior to the research activities. The drawings and photographs were not only used as data collection tools but also as ice-breakers before formally beginning the interviews with the children (Brooker, 2001). Children's drawings and the photographs that they chose were included in the data in relation to what children said in the interviews to understand children's perspectives about their outdoor programs.

Before children started the project activity, they were asked for their assent and whether they preferred to participate individually or with a friend (See Appendix B for child assent form). Group interviews can promote children's verbal communication as they have the support from friends, and the interaction can spark discussions on issues that matter to them (Brooker, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2005). Still, some children prefer to be alone when talking about their thoughts and opinions. Thus, children were given a choice. Providing choices to the children empowers them and creates a comfortable atmosphere for children to talk to researchers (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, Baruchel & Jones, 2008).

The children were asked to tell me about their outdoor programs in the childcare

playgrounds by drawing something and/or looking at photographs of their childcare playgrounds. Children were given papers, crayons, and markers for drawings. Drawing can help children reflect their feelings and memories, and many children are familiar with drawing activities (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Adults' interpretation of children's drawings can be different from what the children intend to draw because they engage in meaning-making as they draw (Einarsdóttir, Dockett & Perry, 2009). Also, children's comments about their drawings tend to provide information on the process as well as the content of the drawings (Dockett & Perry, 2005). Therefore, children were asked to talk about their drawings. However, not all children feel comfortable drawing, so the photographs of their playground were provided to help children recall their experiences of their outdoor playtimes and to ease the process of communicating with me (Brooker, 2001). Eleven children chose drawing and five children chose both looking at photographs and drawing. Four out of the five children who chose both activities first started the activity by looking at the photographs and then later asked if they could do drawings. One child drew pictures as she looked at the photographs. No child chose only to look at photographs.

Interviews with children. Children were asked if I could interview them, and they were also given a choice of doing the interview during or after drawing and looking at photographs (see Appendix C for interview questions). Five children who were drawing told me to wait until they finished their drawings. Other children who were drawing felt comfortable talking and drawing at the same time. Children who chose to look at the photographs of the playgrounds were interviewed after they had the opportunity to talk about the photographs they chose.

Conversational interviews using semi-structured questions provided data on children's likes, dislikes, interests, what they think is important, and what they want to add to their outdoor

programs. Conversational interviews generate a natural atmosphere to listen to children because it is similar to their everyday conversations (Einarsdóttir, 2007). Also, listening to children's voices is not simply paying attention to what they say. Observing children's body language, actions, and tone of voice is all part of listening (Clark & Moss, 2011). The acknowledgement of children's non-verbal cues is especially important for young children who are not fluent in speaking. Therefore, children's non-verbal cues were noted during the interviews.

There had to be consistency in the questions asked of all participants to ensure that relevant information was gathered. However, children have different cognitive levels and different needs. Some flexibility to accommodate unexpected events and to support children's needs and comfort is necessary when conducting interviews with children (Irwin & Johnson, 2005). Therefore, four interview questions were prepared with some possibilities of asking probing questions, rephrasing the questions, and paraphrasing children's answers. Children who wanted to finish their drawings before doing the interviews took approximately 30 to 40 minutes for their drawings and interviews. The interview itself lasted for about ten to twenty minutes for each child. Ten to twenty minutes may not be perceived to be long enough to obtain thorough information from interviewees. However, children have a shorter attention span than adults, so it would be difficult for children to focus for long interviews. In addition, children's answers are informative when they are interested in what they are doing and willing to participate, even for a short amount of time.

Playground photography tour. A few days after all the children completed the interviews, they were asked to give me a tour around the playground during their outdoor playtimes. All the child participants agreed to do the tour, and they took the photographs individually. Children were given a digital camera to take photographs of the playground during

the tour. All the children took their own photographs of their playground. Cameras are attractive tools that children can use to communicate with enjoyment with the researcher and to participate in data collection (Clark & Moss, 2011). The photographs that children take with the cameras can support them in expressing their viewpoints, especially for the ones that are not verbally active or who speak English as an additional language (Clark & Moss, 2011; Stephenson, 2009). Adult's perspectives may be added when analyzing the data, so the researchers need to be aware of their bias and interpretation. Nonetheless, taking photographs provide alternative ways other than verbal language for the children to share their perspectives. The children were encouraged to explain what they are photographing and to express their perspectives through verbal and body language as they took pictures. Most of the children stated that the photographs taken were things that they like or are interested in. Some children, however, simply told me the name of the objects that they were photographing.

The children were asked to take ten photographs each of something in the playground that could help them to express their perspectives about their outdoor programs. Because the project was based on the idea of listening to children's perspectives, I tried to follow the children's lead. Six children took fewer than ten, and eight children asked to take more than ten photographs. In spite of this, I had to remind the children that they could not take pictures of other friends and ECEs due to confidentiality issues. Some of the photographs that the children took were out of focus and blurry. Sometimes the objects were partially photographed. In addition, three children frequently went around the playground pressing the shutter multiple times in front of structures and equipment without looking through the camera lens. They seemed to be enjoying the fact that they could use the camera.

Mapping. Mapping is useful for gathering and organizing materials that children

generate (Clark, 2004). The photographs that the children took on the playground were printed and given to the children about a week after the tour. Photographs that were blurry, out of focus, and difficult to recognize were not included. Objects that were photographed multiple times by the same child were not included as well. Taking out some of the photographs may conflict with the theoretical framework, and my perspectives and bias may have influenced the choice of what photographs are included and excluded. However, it was more important to minimize the barriers for the children to express their thoughts. I thought the unclear photographs and duplicated photographs may confuse the children because they are different from their actual playgrounds, and the children may be overwhelmed with too many photographs to look at. All children showed an interest in looking at the photographs they took, but one child did not want to participate in the mapping activity. Nine children did the mapping activity individually and seven children did it in groups of two or three children but used their own set of photographs to make their own maps. There was one occasion when children started the activity as a group and one child left as she finished her map.

First, the children had a chance to look at all the photographs they took and to talk about them. Then the children were asked to sort out any photographs that they did not want to use. The children placed the photographs on a big board and moved them around to make a map of their childcare playgrounds that they go out to play during their outdoor programs. Then, children were asked the same interview questions that were asked after the drawing/photograph activity. Children's thoughts and opinions can differ based on contexts and techniques used because children's competence, knowledge, interest, and comfort level are different in each context and use of methodologies (Einarsdóttir, 2007); therefore, the interview questions were asked again to explore more of children's perspectives of their outdoor programs. Three children

did not want to be interviewed after making their maps.

In summary, data collection with the children was generated through children's drawings and/or looking at photographs, interview questions, playground photographs taken during the tour, and maps of the playground.

Interviews with ECEs. Interviews with the ECEs provided information about how they learn about and support children's interests. This was to find out whether the ECEs were considering children's perspectives during the outdoor programs. Children's perspectives can be influenced by the ECEs who plan and implement outdoor play programs. Therefore, studying the ECEs' perspectives on how they learn about and support children are important elements in listening to children's voices (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Clark, 2004; Clark & Moss, 2011). The ECEs were first asked for their consent (See Appendix B for ECE consent form). Then, semi-structured, open-ended questions were asked, followed by some probing questions (See Appendix D for interview questions). The interviews took place in the centres at a separate time from the interviews with the children, by appointment, in order to avoid ECEs' and children's responses influencing each other and distracting the ECEs from teaching and supporting the children.

Data recording. All interviews and conversations for both children and ECEs were voice recorded. Voice recording eases the process and allows for more interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee without being distracted by keeping track of participants' responses. Also, voice recording and transcripts increase reliability of the collected data with the children and ECEs since they are the same every time the researcher analyzes the data (Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Participants were told about the voice recording and were given the opportunity to refuse using the voice recorder or to opt out from the research study when asking for consent

(Mukherji & Albon, 2010). All the participants consented to being voice recorded.

The children were interested in using the voice recorder. Most of the children were curious as to how the recorder works and wanted to hear their recorded voices. On the first day of the data collection activities, I demonstrated how the recorder is used by recording a short conversation, and we listened to it. Also, I explained the functions of the buttons on the recorder and the children had the opportunity to push the buttons to start and finish the recording. During the activities, several children kept asking if they can push the buttons to turn on and off the recorder. Therefore, some of the interviews were interrupted a few times.

Data Analysis

All the voice-recorded interviews and conversations were manually transcribed into Word files on a computer. Written notes during the interviews and conversations were later combined into the transcripts. Then, the transcripts, children's drawings, photographs that they took, and their playground maps were organized by centre and participants. All the names in the transcripts and files were changed to pseudonyms that I selected in order to protect confidentiality and anonymity.

The transcripts were read a couple of times to gain an overall understanding of the data (Creswell, 2009). Then, children's drawings and the photographs that they took were analyzed. The name of the elements in the drawings and photographs such as structures and materials were written on a separate piece of paper. The data were coded and labeled into three themes based on the research questions: what are children's perspectives, how do ECEs learn about children's perspectives, and how do ECE support children's perspectives.

Using open coding, children's perspectives were coded into two themes that emerged from the data (Neuman, 2006): positive and negative perspectives. For the children, there were

many positive perspectives and few negative perspectives. The positive perspectives were divided into several codes: what play spaces they like, what they like to do, what they are interested in, what they think is important, and what they want to add. Memos were added in regard to the type of play that occurred in relation to the materials, equipment, structure, and activities; my reflection of the process; and the linkage of the conversations with the children to the elements in their drawings and photographs. These analytic memos help to map out the transcripts into meaningful data (Neuman, 2006).

Then, through the process of axial coding, data under each label were compared and contrasted to find out what can be grouped together and placed separately. This linking process increases reliability of the data analysis because the connection between raw data and concepts are strengthened through repetition and logical thinking (Neuman, 2006). Then, the data were categorized and clustered into four themes: children's likes and interests, children's dislikes, children's awareness of safety rules, and what children want to add. Children's likes and interests were the most salient themes. Many times children used likes and interests interchangeably during their interviews, so they were grouped into one theme. The remaining themes, such as children's dislikes, children's thought on safety rules, and what children want to add, were less salient but did suggest that the children can articulate other perspectives about their outdoor programs. Therefore, these themes were also included as a separate theme 'children's other perspectives' in the findings. Children's likes and interests were again analyzed and coded into three sub-themes: physical play, imaginative play, and play with nature. I referred back to the exact quotes from the children since the study was about listening to children. Still, my understanding of children's verbal and non-verbal language, and understanding of their cognitive development level would have influenced my understanding and analysis of data.

Data from the interviews with the ECEs were analyzed and labeled into two themes: how ECEs learn about children's perspectives and how ECE support children's perspectives. Multiple codes were generated through the process of open coding. Some words that stood out from the interviews, such as watching, asking, and listening, were colour-coded to find emerging themes. Then, the responses related to the coded words were copied and pasted into a separate Word file. Axial coding of the ECEs' interviews provided three themes on how ECEs' learn about children's perspectives: observation, communication, and ECEs' perspectives of children's interests. ECEs perspectives on children's interests had four sub-themes: nature, exploration, physical activity, and imaginative play. ECEs' support for children's perspectives had four themes: verbal support and modeling, changing and expanding, preparation, and barriers to support. Barriers to support had four sub-themes: planning, safety issues and different viewpoints, spaces, and weather.

It is important to think and indicate where the thoughts are coming from by reflecting on the researcher's background, biases, and experiences (Check & Schutt, 2012; Creswell, 2009). The skills and knowledge that I have as an ECE might have influenced the process of data collection and analysis. Since I was familiar with the examples that the ECEs provided, I was able to easily connect the commonalities among the cases. Therefore, the interpretation and the forming of the themes could be different for other researchers.

Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate children's perspectives on their childcare outdoor programs and how ECEs learn about and support children's perspectives. The current chapter discusses the findings of the study in regard to the research questions: What are preschool children's perspectives on their outdoor play programs in their childcare centre playgrounds? How do ECEs learn about and support children's perspectives during their outdoor programs? This study's methodologies consisted of observing children during their outdoor programs, interviewing children as they drew pictures and/or looked at photographs of their playgrounds, going on a photography tour of the playground with the children, and making a map of their playground with the children's photographs. Also, ECEs were observed on the playground and interviewed. Thematic analysis was used to develop emergent themes from the data, and the results are presented based on research questions and themes. Direct quotes from the children and the ECEs, as well as children's drawings and photographs they took, are used to support the findings.

Children's Perspectives

Children's responses to the interview questions, photographs they chose from the ones that were provided, their drawings, photographs they took, and the playground maps revealed that the children had particular perspectives on their outdoor programs on childcare playgrounds. Four themes emerged after analyzing the combined data: children have likes and interests, they have dislikes, they are aware of the safety rules which they think is important for their outdoor play, and children identified items that they want to add to their outdoor programs. Children's likes and interests was a salient theme, and the remaining themes were grouped as other perspectives.

Children's likes and interests. All of the data collection methods used in the study revealed what children liked about and were interested in during their outdoor programs. Most of the children had multiple answers to their likes and interests. The activities, equipment, and materials that were related to children's likes and interests were also aligned with what children thought were important for their outdoor programs. For example, Matthew's (3 years 6 months old) playground map (see Figure 2) contained all his photographs of bicycles, scooters, and balls that he took during the playground tour. These pieces of equipment and materials were objects that Matthew both liked and thought were important for his outdoor playtime.

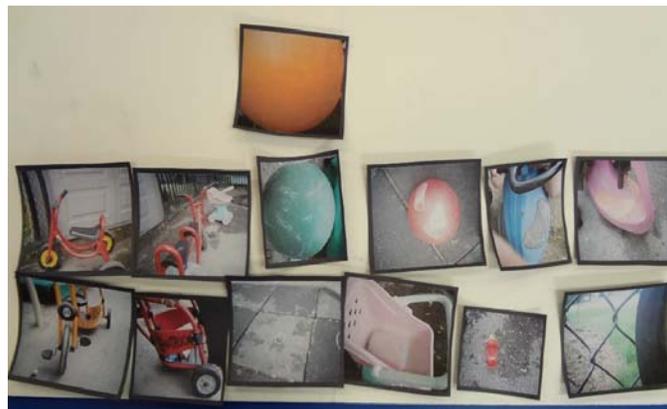


Figure 2. Matthew's Playground Map.

We like to move. Children's likes and interests were mostly related to physical activities that they engaged in during their outdoor programs. They liked exploring the structures and open spaces as they exercised their gross motor skills. Most of the children mentioned the climber and the slide as something they liked about their outdoor programs. For example, Natalie (3 years 11 months old) said she liked the climber because she "can climb". In the case of Silvia (3 years 10 months old), she said that she "climb[ed] and [swang] on the climber". Also, she explained that the climber was important for her outdoor program "because [she had] to climb and go; [she] want[ed] to move [on] it."

Some children expressed what they liked to do in their drawings. Nancy (4 years 2

months old) drew a picture of children going down the different slides in her playground and walking on the structure that connects the two slides (see Figure 3). When she was asked about her likes and interests, she stated that she liked to do what she drew in her picture. Jeff (4 years old) stated “I went down the slide” when he was asked to share what he thought about this outdoor playtime. His drawing (see Figure 4) contained lots of twisty slides that he also said that he liked to go down on.



Figure 4. Nancy's Drawing of Children Playing on Slides.



Figure 4. Jeff's Drawing of Twirling Slides.

John (2 years 9 months old) drew circles on the paper with the markers. When he was asked what he liked about his outdoor playtime, he mentioned all the different physical activities as he drew: “I jump, I jump out the playground. ... And I run out the playground. ... I run around very fast ... go down the hillsI climb, I jump.” Also, before the mapping activity, he kept pointing to the photograph of the rocks that he took and briefly mentioned that he liked them because he could climb on those rocks.

The bicycle and scooter were also popular equipment that most children liked to play with or were interested in. Children were observed frequently riding bicycles and scooters. In the morning outdoor programs, children even lined up in front of the storage shed and waited for the ECEs to take out the bicycles and scooters. Most of the children’s responses to their likes and

interests included the bicycle and/or the scooter. Tony (4 years 3 months old) was asked the interview questions a few times while he was drawing because he kept joining and leaving the research activity. Still, each time he was asked what he liked about his outdoor programs, he said many times that he liked the scooter and emphasized his opinion by repeating his answers; “I like scooter, scooter, scooter, scooter ... because ... they go on and I ride on them.” Diana (3 years 6 months old) told me that she was interested in learning how to ride the bicycle as she pointed to a photograph. She stated that she wanted to “ride [and] pedal.”

Half of the children photographed the ground or the road in their playground (see Figure 5). The photographs were pathways where children ride bicycles and scooters or walk and run around in the playground.

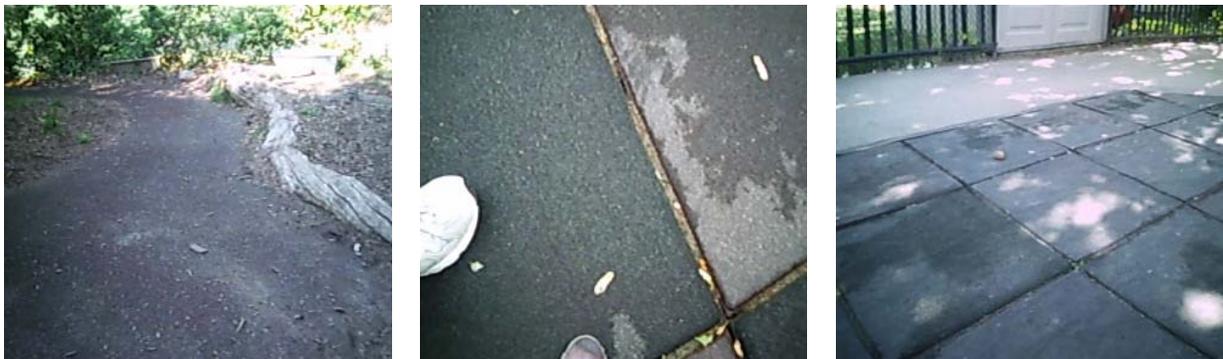


Figure 5. Children's Photographs of the Ground and the Road in their Playgrounds.

Chris (3 years 8 months old) and Silvia (3 years 10 months old) drew numerous pathways with different colours of markers in their drawings. Chris tried to connect all the pathways and identified the end of the roads where he could not go further because of the fence. He pointed out in his drawing the white blank spaces where the bicycles cannot go because there are no roads (see Figure 6). He explained that he would walk on all the pathways in the playground; “I walk, and walk, and walk and walk and walk and walk and walk until there's no more path. And this is where [there's] no more path, and ... if something [falls] and like that, I ask the teacher.” I asked him why he drew that picture and he said that he “like[d] to do that.”

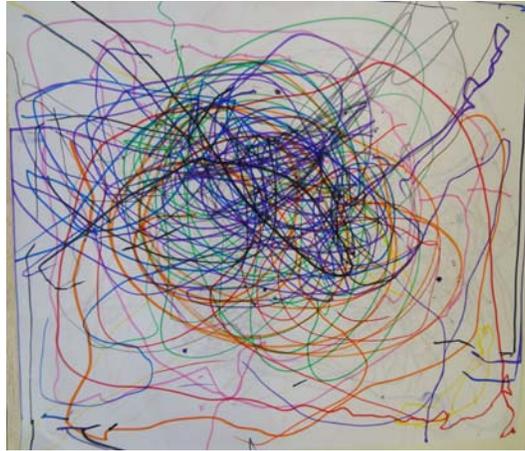


Figure 6. Chris' Drawing of Multiple Pathways.

Diana (3 years 6 months old) frequently pointed to the photographs of the hoops placed on the ground during the interview when she was asked what was important for the outdoor program. She said she liked to engage in an “activity” with the hoops. During the picture tour, she took a picture of the hoops, and demonstrated how she hops over the hoops, alternating her legs (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Hoops Set Up for Activities and Diana's Photograph of Hoops.

The children also described their physical activities as part of group activities. Some children said they liked to be on the move with their friends. Chris (3 years 8 months old) expressed his interest in playing hockey on the upper playground with his friends, and Crystal (5 years old) commented that she liked the slide “because [children] get to go down holding hands.”

Valerie's (4 years 3 months old) drawing (see Figure 8) also showed how she played with

her friends on the playground. Her drawing showed two people, Crystal and herself. Valerie described what she liked to do with her friend; she skips around the playground, holding hands with her friend.



Figure 8. Valerie's Drawing of Skipping with her Friend.

During the observations, Silvia (3 years 10 months) approached me and explained a game that children like to play together. She said, “We like playing a lot of games and we have a game called ‘catch Chris’ and I like that.” She also mentioned a similar game during her first interview, in which the children run away from each other and if they get caught, they are “put in jail.”

The ball was another popular toy that was used by the children to engage in physical activities. During the observations, children used the balls for various activities. The balls were not only used for throwing and catching, but children also sat on the big balls, such as the red and the blue balls, and bounced around the playground. Nancy (4 years 2 months old) and Crystal (5 years old) shared their experiences of the activities they did with the balls.

Nancy: We just shoot some balls beside that thing ... [the] basketball hoop.

Crystal: We shake some balls in a parachute.

During the mapping activity, Odette (3 years 7 months old) kept all three pictures of the basketball hoops and placed it in the middle of her playground map (see Figure 9). The basketball hoop was used for children to throw the ball into the hoops and catch them.



Figure 9. Odette's Playground Map.

Matthew (3 years 6 months old) took photographs of all the balls in the playground during the photography tour (see Figure 10). He often pointed to the photographs saying “I [like] the ball, ball, ball” when he was making the playground map. He mentioned all the coloured balls individually.



Figure 10. Matthew's Photographs of Various Balls in the Playground.

Alice (3; 7), similarly, included balls of different colours in her representation (see Figure 11). She drew a rainbow ball to symbolize “all [the] balls in different colours” that she had in her playground.

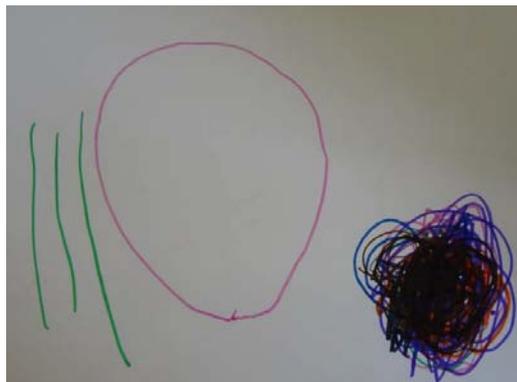


Figure 11. Alice's Drawing of Balls.

We like imaginative play. Some equipment and materials that children identified as likes and interests were used for children’s imaginative play. The equipment and materials used in imaginative play varied, but generally the children liked to role-play. For example, Diana (3 years 6 months old) briefly mentioned that she played ‘Rapunzel’ on the playground in the first interview. This was also mentioned during the map-making activity as she said, “[I] like to [be] Rapunzel.” Similarly, during her drawing, Valarie (4 years 3 months old) mentioned that she role-played a movie called ‘Mermaidia’ with Crystal on the playground. Also, Crystal (5 years old) noted that the house area provided opportunities for the children to meet and play with other children “because lots of different people come in and [children] get to know their names.”

Aaron (4 years 9 months old) and Chris (3 years 8 months old) pretended that there was a train in the playground and went to different stations. Chris did not mention his imaginative play during the interview, but I observed him peddling a bicycle around the path, and on each round he shouted different names of subway stations, “Greenwood, Greenwood station. ... Pape, Pape station.” He also said “ding, ding, ding” when there were other children or adults in his way. Aaron drew a picture of his playground while explaining how he liked to drive a train (see Figure 12); the train went through the tunnel (circle), over the bridge (triangle), and around the playground (lines that the arrow is pointing to). There was also a train station (square) where other trains stood.



Figure 12. Aaron’s Drawing of his Imaginative Play Driving a Train in his Playground.

Two children, Matthew (3 years 6 months old) and John (2 years 9 months old) said they liked playing with the baby dolls. John said he “bring[s] the baby up and down the playground”. Matthew took a picture of the baby carriage during the playground tour, commenting “baby’s here” as he pointed to the carriage.

Five children photographed the sand box and three of these children stated that they liked playing there as they did the photography tour. During the observations, some children were spotted digging and dumping sand with different sand toys. Helen (2 years 9 months old) said that she “use[d] a shovel in the sand box” as she described her play. Some of the children’s imaginative play took place in the sand box area. During the interview, Alice (3 years 7 months old) said that she wanted to “make some cakes in the sand box for mama to eat.”

We like nature. Half of the children mentioned nature as something that they liked or were interested in, and these perspectives were expressed most often during the playground tour. Both the boys and girls took photographs of the trees, flowers, leaves, woodchips, logs, and the sky. Several children also included the photographs of nature in their playground maps. For example, Andrew’s (2 years 9 months) playground map included woodchips, trees, and the sky (see Figure 13). Tony (4 years 3 months old) placed the photographs of leaves and a tree (see Figure 14).



Figure 13. Andrew's Playground Map.



Figure 14. Tony's Playground Map.

However, it was mostly the girls who talked about the natural world. Silvia (3 years 10 months old) took two photographs of her playground - plants and trees (see Figure 15). During the mapping activity, she explained why she took these pictures: “See, you know why I take pictures of these stuff? Because I like plants, because of their [leaves], they’re pretty.”



Figure 15. Silvia's Photographs of the Plant (Leaves) and Trees.

Nancy (5 years old) shared her experience playing with the snails in her playground. She stated “I like playing [that] and snails and stuff ... It’s fun. ... And you get to see different animal[s] and [how they] all move.” Natalie (3 years 11 months) stated that there was nothing really important for her outdoor program “except the tree.” Then, she added two trees in her drawing. She explained that the trees were important “because, then you can throw tennis balls ... up to the tree.” Although this was not her favorite activity outdoors, she said that she liked to do that sometimes.

Other themes in children's perspectives. Less children expressed their perspectives on other issues compared to their likes and interests in their outdoor programs. Still, the data did show that children can express other perspectives than their preferences and interests.

Children's dislikes. Most of the children said there was nothing that they disliked in their outdoor programs. Four children shared their dislikes about their outdoor programs, and they communicated this perspective during the interview and mapping activity. Negative experiences on the playground tended to influence children's perspectives of what they disliked about their outdoor programs. Silvia (3 years 10 months old) stated, "I love the bikes, but except crashing into each others." Similarly, Chris (3 years 8 months old) reflected on an accident of getting sand in his eyes in the sand box and he said that he did not like that. Not being able to play with friends and friends being sick seemed to be disappointing for Nancy (4 years 2 months old). She described that she would not like it "if best friends were playing with [her] and then they have a tummy ache or something." In addition, damaged equipment seemed to be something the children disliked. Tony (4; 3) said he liked the scooters, but not the pink one because "the bottom [was] broken." The bottom of the scooter was cracked and it was bumpy when children rode on the pink scooter.

Children think the safety rules are important. Four children thought that the safety rules were important for their outdoor programs. In Centre One, the children had to ask the ECEs to watch them when children wanted to go on the climber. Chris (3 years 8 months old) mentioned this during the interview as he listened to the discussion that I had with Silvia about the climber. He said "The teachers need to watch you [when you are on the climber]. That's why it's [im]portant." Similarly, Crystal (5) explained some safety rules during the interview that she could remember when she was asked what was important: "No crashing into people with your

bikes. ... You have to be good and kind ... respect other people, show kindness.” After the mapping activity, she was asked the same interview questions. She was aware of the safety rules in the playground and thought these were important to play safe during her outdoor programs: “[it is important] to care about your friends ... and for your friends to care about you, too.”

What children want to add. Some children shared their opinions on what they wanted to add to their playgrounds. A few of them wanted to have more of the materials and structures that they already had in their playgrounds such as the sand box and scooters. Crystal (5 years old) wanted to have a different kind of scooter than what was already in her playground. She described the scooter with her hands as she explained, “a scooter that you just use your [one] foot and you go.”

Aaron (4 years 9 months old) mentioned that he wanted another sand box in his playground. With the help of his friend, we clarified that he wanted two sandboxes in this playground;

Aaron: And sand box.

R: And sand box. But you already have a sand box. ... Don't you have a sand box in your playground?

Aaron: Yeah.

R: Oh, but you said you want to add a sand box?

Aaron: Yeah.

R: Does that mean --

Natalie: I think he wants another one, I think that's what he wants.

R: Is that what you mean?

Aaron: (Nods head).

R: So, Aaron, how many sand box[es] do you want to have?

Aaron: Two.

Some children suggested adding things that were not present in their childcare playground. Aaron stated that his “outdoor program need[ed] water.” His childcare centre playground had a water tap, but the tap was closed when the research study was conducted. Three children stated that they wanted to have a swing set. Nancy (4 years 2 months old) and

Valerie (4 years 3 months old) commented how children can play together on the swing by pushing each other to go further. They also suggested that different sizes of swings were needed for different age groups in the centre.

Nancy: [We need to have a swing set] because if somebody pushes us, they can, we can just sit on the swing.

Valerie: And even, and even big ones, big kids' ones and babies' ones.

Nancy: It's for the preschoolers.

Valerie: And Babies?

Nancy: Yeah. Except the babies have to be in the baby [swing].

Crystal (5 years old) had a space in mind where she thought was good to have a swing set installed. After she made her playground map with the photographs she took on the playground, she was asked if there was anything she wanted to add. She pointed to the empty space beside the basketball hoop and stated that she wanted to add the swing set in that spot.

How ECEs Learn about Children's Perspectives

The analysis of the interviews with the ECEs showed how they learn about children's interests during the outdoor programs. The ECEs used two strategies: observation and communication. Also, the ECEs' perspectives on what the children were interested in was added as a third theme.

Observation. All the ECEs stated observation as the first tool they used to learn about children's interests during their outdoor programs. The ECEs looked around the playground to see what children were doing and with whom each child was playing. Adam, an ECE from Centre One, explained, "We'll be in the area where they're playing, watching and listening and doing our observations." Other ECEs mentioned similar experiences observing children's play activities as a way to find out what children were interested in. During my observation periods for the study, the ECEs were scattered around the playground watching the children play. In Centre One, the deck on the upper playground was a popular space where the ECEs stood and

monitored what the children were doing. It was difficult to distinguish if they were supervising or observing, but there were occasions when ECEs took notes or approached children after watching their play from a distance.

Communication. Communication was another strategy that was used by all the ECEs to learn about children's interests during outdoor programs. The ECEs tended to interact with the children and ask them questions that related to their play. Daniella, an ECE from Centre Two, stated that the ECEs would "get involved in [children's] play by asking them open-ended questions" such as "What are you doing?" to learn about children's interests. Brianna used various communication styles to learn what children are doing and what they need. She stated "It's watching their cues; you listen to their questions and you ask questions if you're not sure to find out what they are interested in, and then see how you can gather material." This communication style was noted during the observation period as well. Chloe asked two girls by the kitchen set area what they were doing, and the girls said they were trying to make food with the snails for another ECE. Chloe had a short conversation with the children about finding the snails in the playground and preparing food.

Brianna mentioned that there were times when ECEs had follow up discussions with the children during indoor community circle time to plan for outdoor programs. Often, children would approach the ECEs and ask for toys and materials that they wanted and needed for their play, and the ECEs would ask them how they were going to use them. Daniella explained that this was one way to find out what the children were interested in. She mentioned that ECEs paid close attention to what the children ask for and tried to follow their lead:

Or if there's something that they want that they know is in the shed, they might ask you for it. So if I take out, let's say ... the strollers and maybe the babies, [children] might want the baby carriage or the carrier, or they might want the purses to go with it. They want to extend their own play with being the mommies or the daddies, so they might ask

for those extra things. ... If they ask for something in specific [and] if you've got the materials, you can go and utilize it for the child. ... Sometimes the kids would come up to you and say I want to play red rover, [or] I want to play 'what time is it Mr. Wolf', so you follow their lead.

During my observations for the study, a couple of children asked the ECEs for certain equipment and materials in the storage. Children would ask for scooter, strollers, bikes, and balls from time to time.

The ECEs learned about children's interests also by communicating with other ECEs. Sometime, each ECE had different ideas about what children were interested in so the ECEs would compare and share what they know about the children to provide what they thought children needed and wanted for their outdoor programs. This was especially noted in the interviews with the ECEs from Centre One. The ECEs from Centre One planned their indoor and outdoor programs as a team, while ECEs from Centre Two planned for the programs individually, alternating indoor and outdoor program planning. Adam explained that the ECEs from Centre One discussed "what's been going on" during the outdoor programs by sharing their "observations of things that [they've] seen in the past week, what the children are into" with each other to find out about children's interests.

What ECEs think children are interested in. The ECEs were also asked what they thought the children were interested in to find out if their understanding corresponded to the children's. There were four themes that emerged from the ECEs' answers: nature, exploration, physical play, and imaginative play. The ECEs used the word 'interests' predominantly whereas the children used 'like' and 'interest' interchangeably.

Children are interested in nature. All the ECEs noted that the children were interested in the natural world - bugs, insects, and worms were found by digging in dirt. Brianna stated that children were always curious and asked "how do things moves, how do they live, where do they

go.” She explained how children used their senses to connect with nature and that they were interested in anything that was happening around them and wanted to know all about it. Chloe and Daniella mentioned that the children were good observers of the birds and snails in their playground, and children wanted to play with them all the time. The natural element was emphasized by all the ECEs, and they wanted to help the children learn to appreciate and connect with nature during their outdoor programs.

Children want to explore. All the ECEs mentioned that children liked to explore the outdoor environment and materials, but their examples varied. Brianna stated that children noticed the differences between indoors and outdoors, such as the structures, toys, materials they can use on the playgrounds as well as the fresh air and large spaces. Children screamed out loud as they ran in the playground, which they could not do in the classrooms. Adam mentioned that children really liked to learn new things and helping others learn; children learned how to fill up water into a spray bottle, and they were eager to share their knowledge with their friends. Daniella noted that children utilized everything that was available on the playground and asked for more equipment and materials if they needed something specific. According to Chloe, children showed interest in all surrounding events such as construction and weather. Also, she mentioned that children were interested in everything that the ECEs did, so the role of the ECEs was important because “anything that’s done with enthusiasm by the staff drew the children’s interests.”

Children are interested in physical activities. The ECEs from Centre One, in particular, thought that the children enjoyed physical activities; children liked to run around the playground with carts and go for a walk with their baby dolls. Brianna mentioned that the “children [were] really into dancing” and that they wanted to examine how their body can move. Adam stated that

the children enjoyed playing games in a group, such as playing tag and hide and seek. He said that the children learned how to take turns and follow the rules through the group activities as well. The ECEs thought that children enjoyed using their bodies and moving around during their outdoor programs.

Children are interested in imaginative play. Some of the materials that the ECEs thought children were interested in were related to imaginative play. For example, Adam said that children played grocery shopping with the baby dolls, shopping carts, and the kitchen stove. Children took different roles as they made up scenarios on their own. Daniella provided examples of children using their imagination to build snow men and snow forts in the winter, when they did not have a lot of materials to play with.

How ECEs Support Children's Perspectives

Data analysis revealed that ECEs used three approaches to sustain children's interests and help children find out what activities they wanted to engage in during their outdoor programs. There were also some barriers for the ECEs to support children's interests.

Verbal support and modeling. ECEs stated that they supported children's interests by asking questions to the children, encouraging them, and guiding them. When children seemed to have a hard time finding activities to engage in, the ECEs helped children find out what they wanted to do by asking them questions. For example, Brianna stated that she monitored "if children are having a hard time creating their own plans" and tried to help the children "initiate their ideas [if they are] always following someone else." Brianna said that she asked the children, "What do you want to do? What are you interested in?" Then, she would encourage "the child or group of children [to] gather the materials that they need for their plan". Sometimes if the children needed to be "stimulated a little bit more", she would "engage with the children" to get

the play started and set a direction for the activity. She mentioned that following the children's lead was important, but some children needed help acknowledging what they wanted to do.

According to the ECEs, simple comments seemed to motivate children to explore more and attempt various types of play with different children. Chloe stated that she gave lots of praise to the children by calling out their names and saying "I really like the way you're playing with different children." Encouragement was also used to support children to learn and develop new skills. All the ECEs urged children to attempt to take the first step in a challenging activity.

Adam gave an example of supporting a child to learn how to climb up and down the climber by himself.

The other thing is challenging them with their gross motor abilities, what we call 'taking safe risks.' ... When they climb up the climber, they have to be able to climb up the climber and climb down. We'll assist them, but I'm not going to pick them up, pick them down. When they are climbing down, I will take their foot, guide it to the next level [and] say "there you go, you're almost there" and help them that way.

When the verbal guidance and support were insufficient to help children find what they wanted to do or extend children's play, a couple of ECEs said they would initiate an activity and ask the child to join in. Modeling tended to help children explore their options and build new experiences. For example, Chloe shared her experiences of noticing children who needed support and helping them engage in an activity; "When I'm on the playground, I really watch which children aren't playing and which children need the assistance, and I really encourage those children to come and do an activity." She said the sand box was a good area for modeling and helping children find an activity to play. She would start building sand castles with one child and "before you know it, ... six children are building castles" together and a whole city is made in the sand box.

Changing and expanding. ECEs supported children's interests by changing the

materials and the play context and expanding children's play. ECEs found out what children were interested in, and then they modified the activities. One way to do that was connecting indoor and outdoor activities. All the ECEs thought that there was a linkage between indoors and outdoors, and they tried to incorporate them as much as possible. Children's play and interests were sustained by doing a similar activity in another context. Daniella provided several examples of expanding the indoor activities to the outdoor programs that children were interested in:

When we had the dinosaurs that [children] were able to dig and look for [indoors], one day, I actually went out on my lunch and I dug up the dinosaurs and I hid them in the sand box. ... [If children] like to play restaurant inside, you make sure you got all that material outside and extend their play outside as well. We've also done treasure hunts outside where we burry stuff in the sand box, like those little jewels, and [children] had to look for it. We've made [the] treasure boxes out of paper mache of shoe boxes [inside] that the kids decorated it [as they] stuck jewels on them.

The connection between indoor and outdoor activities was also initiated from the outdoors. For example, Chloe explained, when the children enjoyed watching the birds on their playgrounds, they made binoculars and bird nests with paper mache indoors. Similarly, Brianna stated that if the children were interested in flying kites outdoors, the ECEs helped the children make their own kites as a creative arts activity indoors and play with them outside.

Adam stated that the schedule sometimes had to be changed to meet the children's needs. Children's play behaviours and attention span could change with minor rescheduling of the indoor and outdoor time. When he first started to work in the centre, they had the outdoor playtime later in the morning. Children explored different play areas indoors, had group time, and they went outside later. In the morning, children had built up excessive energy that cannot all be used in the classroom. Children showed aggressive and dynamic behaviours for which controlling the misbehaviours was difficult. Adam suggested changing the schedule; do the morning outdoor program first, "enjoy the weather, get the excessive energy out" and then come

inside. He said there was a great change in the children; “the noise level [dropped down], the children focused on what they were doing, and there was less conflict in the classroom.”

Preparation. Since children’s interests differed from child to child, ECEs tried to have different kinds of activities ready on the playground so that all children can engage in play activities that they were interested in. For example, Chloe stated:

We have gross motor, but we also have quiet activities for them; we have the kitchen center, we have the sand box. We take playdough out in the spring and summer time, and we also have colouring table set up in the spring and summer. We have a good variety of activities.

Also, the various activities were to encourage children to engage in different kinds of experiences each week during their outdoor programs. Unless the children were really interested in certain activities, the ECEs would switch the materials and activities once a week. Brianna said that the ECEs would discuss “what kinds of things [they will] be adding, taking away, what they need to do” and planned their programs accordingly. In Centre Two, the ECEs planned for two daily special group activities such as obstacle courses, What Time is it Mr. Wolf, and games with the parachute. Chloe used a list of outdoor games and activities that she learned from a couple of workshops to prepare for the different activities that the children could play during their outdoor programs.

Although ECEs supported children by providing various play opportunities, all the ECEs mentioned that following the children’s lead is more important than simply providing different materials. Brianna stated that the role of the ECE was to “provide materials” for the children “but [not to control] what they should do with them.” She emphasized the importance of activities being child centred and child initiated.

According to Daniella, there were some common interests among children each year. Although children have multiple interests, there were some broad repetitive themes that occurred

every year as the season changed or children's physical development reached a certain stage.

Therefore, Daniella thought that having all the materials that the ECEs thought children would be interested in was one way to support children's interests:

You'll always find a common interest with the group. I mean, the groups that we've had the past couple of years have always been interested in bugs. It just seems to be something that all kids want to learn about. So, you try to have all the materials ready and on hand because eventually, [when] comes spring, you're going to look at bugs. Or, [when] comes winter, you're going to be talking about snow and getting the shovels. So, it's good to prepare yourself as the seasons change, to get those materials in place basically. And [it] helps with the programing.

Barriers to support. Although the ECEs had various strategies to support children's interests, it was not always easy to meet all the children's needs and wants. All the ECEs encountered multiple barriers to supporting children during their outdoor programs.

Planning. The ECEs usually planned outdoor programs to meet children's interests. However, sometimes the planned programs became an obstacle to supporting children's interests because the planned activities and playground set up did not match to what the children wanted and needed at the moment. Since the City of Toronto's Childcare Services requires ECEs to plan for activities and post the program plans on the bulletin board (City of Toronto, 2012), the ECEs regularly had planning times for indoor and outdoor programs. However, the ECEs had to often adjust the plans because children's interests would change from time to time. Also, the pre-planned activities did not satisfy all children during their outdoor programs. Children had different needs and wants, so following the program plans did not meet all children's interests. Adam stated that he tried to "think of [himself] in the child's position." Just because the children were interested in one thing one day, it did not mean that the children would be interested in that the next day. Therefore, the ECEs could not rely on the program plans to support the children's interests, even though the plans were based on observations of the children on their outdoor

playtimes. On many occasions, ECEs' spontaneous responses were needed to support children's interests. Brianna illustrated this position: "You have to be more in the immediate ... on a day-to-day basis to be involved and to say 'okay, what is it that the children want now' ... not what they wanted last week."

Safety issues and different viewpoints. Safety was the first thing that the ECEs addressed that sometimes this prevented children from playing the way they wanted. Some play activities potentially led to accidents or damage to the toys. Adam gave an example of an occasion when the number of carts on the playground had to be reduced. He knew that the children enjoyed playing with the carts; "They wanted to go out grocery shopping with their babies, carts and this and that." However, what ended up happening was that "the children [went] running with them, and then they [were] crashing into each other, or crashing into the wall." So the ECEs and the children "had to ... really negotiate" about the play activities and number of toys that were manageable by the children.

Sometimes ECEs had ideas that could provide more opportunities for children to explore their interests, but they could not attempt to do it because of potential danger. As children are in group care, the ECEs had to be more cautious of accidents and safety hazards. For example, Brianna perceived children's interests in the natural world and wanted to provide opportunities for the children to connect with nature. She said that it would be interesting for "some children having their socks and shoes off because [their] feet need to be really grounded to the ground." However, from her perspective, some parents would not like such activities, and there could be unexpected danger.

Some parents had different viewpoints on children's outdoor play activities than the ECEs and did not like their children getting dirty. Adam shared his experience of having

conflicting opinions about a child's play in the dirt outdoors. The child had fun digging and picking up dirt with his hands on the playground. The child enjoyed exploring the dirt and woodchips going through his fingers, feeling the texture, and observing how they spread out. Adam stated that the child "was loving it, but [the child's] mom was not so happy because he was really dirty when he got picked up." Adam tried to explain that he understood why the mom was upset, but as a teacher, he was trying to let the "child explore the environment." The mom did not perceive such activity as purposeful play. However, Adam argued, "for some children, purposeful is using his hands; there were things he felt [that] he never felt before." Such conflict between the parents and the ECEs tended to make it difficult for ECEs to let children explore freely and to support children's interests.

Space. The ECEs from both childcare centres said that their playgrounds were not big enough and limited the number of play activities that children can engage in at the same time. Chloe stated that she thought she had an "excellent playground" as they recently renovated it and the ECEs "were asked what they wanted in their playground setting so [they] chose what [they] wanted." However, she mentioned that because of the size of the playground, it was difficult to set up activities in the playground when they had a large group of children outside:

Sometimes it's too congested, there's too much stuff out. And so, there's not much room for the children to move freely. And also, ... it's really easy for our kids to kick the ball over the fences.

Sometimes, children could not fully engage in their play because they had to compete for space. Children had to take turns to engage in the different activities they were interested in or remove some materials to make space. According to Brianna, children constantly had to compete for space in the pathway. She stated that "sometimes children just want to run, [but] then they have to watch out for the bikes; the bikers, the people on the bike, have to watch out for people

running.” Although they seemed to have a big playground, “it’s not big enough for the number of children that are on it.” Children needed more free space.

Weather. Often, on rainy days and extreme cold or hot weathers children’s outdoor playtime was cancelled and replaced with indoor playtime. Children could not explore outdoors during inclement weather days, even if children wanted to play outdoors. Daniella shared similar thoughts during her interview as she stated that “the only thing that’s unfortunate [about the outdoor program] is [that] there’s nothing we can do about the weather.” I also had to reschedule my visits to the centres a couple of times to collect data because the outdoor playtimes were replaced with indoor activities.

Chapter V: Discussion

Children's Perspectives on Outdoor Programs

Children in this study had more positive than negative perspectives on their outdoor programs. This outcome was similar to most of the studies related to children's outdoor play. For example, Greenfield (2004) found that children enjoyed playing in their childcare playground, and Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot (2011) discovered that children were deeply engaged in playing with nature outdoors. There were no children who did not want to go out in this study, which was different from Martin's (2011) study. Most of the children were smiling when they talked about their outdoor playtime and were excited to see the photographs of their playgrounds. The children listed various structures, equipment, materials, and activities that they liked and were interested in. There were only a few children who stated some dislikes related to their outdoor programs.

Although there was a broad range of children's likes and interests, many of them were related to physical play. Dymont and O'Connell (2013) found in their study that the majority of children engaged in physical play in all the different types of playgrounds in their study. Similarly, children in Martin's (2011) study enjoyed various activities that related to physical development. Children in the current study liked to climb, slide, run, walk, and jump in the playground. Outdoor play definitely promoted gross motor development, and children had experiences playing and learning through moving and exercising their bodies.

My findings on children's perspectives also showed that children liked outdoor play that promoted social and cognitive development as well as physical development. Some children liked playing with friends and engaging in imaginative play, which were noted in other studies such as Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot's (2011). Also, children engaged in imaginative play on the

bicycles in addition to developing their gross motors. Children used the equipment and materials for different types of play. Similar to Dymont and O'Connell's (2013) findings about the type of play children engaged in the different play areas in the playground, the sand box was useful for children's constructive and symbolic play. Children built and made different things with sand and engaged in pretend play. The loose materials in the playground tended to encourage children to engage in various types of play, which is consistent with Maxwell, Mitchell, and Evan's (2008) study, which found that children were more engaged in dramatic and constructive play after the loose materials were added to the playground.

This research study sought to broaden the range of research on understanding children's perspectives on outdoor play programs by including factors other than children's preferences. Children were asked about their likes, interests, dislikes, what they considered important, and what they wanted to add in their outdoor programs. Some children stated that they did not like the accidents they had and the damaged equipment in the playground. When children were asked what they think is important for their outdoor programs, children's answers were closely related to their likes and interests. Some of the equipment and activities that they liked were repeated or children's reasoning for the importance was linked to their likes and interests. Although there were a small number of children who shared these opinions, the findings of the study contributed to suggest that some children have a holistic perspective on their outdoor programs; some children have the ability to share their thoughts and opinions on various aspects if adults ask them in an appropriate manner.

The children in this study recommended equipment and materials such as water and swings as additions. Water can extend children's play by its property to change traits of the various materials with which it comes in; thus, providing opportunities for imaginative play.

Also, having slightly different types of equipment can add diversity and choice to children's play, as Crystal (5 years old) mentioned about wanting a different kind of scooter that she can ride standing up rather than sitting down. Children need opportunities to share these viewpoints to improve their learning experiences. Children wanting to add swings to their playground corresponded to what the children in Greenfield's (2004) study wanted. Many children do not have the opportunity to play on the swings in childcare outdoor programs as there are no swings in their playground. As Herrington and Nicholls (2007) argue, the standards for playgrounds have strict space requirements for the installation of swings that many childcare centres do not have. As it shows in the findings of the current study, children are aware of the importance of safety rules in the playground; children are capable of being cautious and following the rules, and children will probably know how to play safely with the swings to prevent injuries. Therefore, children's opinions should be considered and incorporated in the standards along with the safety regulations rather than solely relying on injury reports to determine the space requirements.

ECEs Learning about and Supporting Children's Interests

The ECEs in the study were aware of the importance of child initiated play; they reported that they followed the children's lead and listened to what they say during their outdoor playtimes. Crystal (5 years old) stated, "we get to choose which scooter we want if we ask when we're walking to the playground, [and] we could have it." There was one comment from Crystal that indicated that the ECEs do not always follow children's lead and can reject children's choices. She stated that "if you [are] too silly, you won't have the scooter that you want." As the children in Rosen's (2012) and Sheridan and Samuelsson's (2001) study signified, the ECEs hold some power over the children, which children also acknowledge.

Overall, ECEs from this study seemed to be actively engaged in learning about and supporting children's interests. According to their interviews, the ECEs noticed the children's cues about what they were interested in or needed help with through two strategies: observation and communication. ECEs in other research studies used these strategies. For example, Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot (2011) noted that two educators kept journals of their observations and understandings of the children's outdoor play, which they used to plan for their outdoor programs. Also, ECEs from Maynard and Waters (2007) study asked open- and closed-ended questions when children were playing outdoors to enrich their play and thinking process. The combination of the ECEs' interpretation of children's play and directly listening to children seemed to be beneficial for the ECEs to understand the children's interests.

Nevertheless, the questions that the ECEs asked to learn about and to support children's interests in the current study did not directly ask children about their preferences and interests. Most of the ECEs said that they asked children "what are you doing?" Only Brianna said she would ask "what are you interested in?" and even this was used with children who had a hard time engaging in activities. Asking children about what they are currently doing and what they want to do or learn is not the same thing. However, ECEs tend to assume that what children are currently engaged in is something that children are generally interested in. This suggests that ECEs need to pose more direct questions that can reveal children's interests on their outdoor play programs.

Also, the ECEs' perspectives on what children were interested in and needed were not based only on what children were telling them. Similar to what Maynard and Waters (2007) found, ECEs from Centre One, in particular, compared their own childhood experiences of playing in nature and always running around trying new things to what the children in their

childcare centre did. The ECEs' experiences tended to be the standard as to whether children are getting enough opportunities outdoors. Adam and Brianna recalled their childhood and stated that they used to climb trees and spend many hours playing outdoors after school. They mentioned that children's interest in nature is a natural thing such as they used to be as a child, and that children should be given more opportunities to connect with nature on nature-based playgrounds during outdoor programs in childcare. This implies that the ECEs were judging children's interests through their perspectives rather than directly asking the children.

Similar to Martin's (2011) study, the children in the current study were not consulted when the playgrounds in Centre Two was renovated. Chloe explained that the ECEs were asked to share their knowledge and opinions to set up a better playground for children's play outdoors; however, there was no mention of children being involved in that process. This implies that children's participation is still not considered essential in decision-making, and ECEs tend to assume that they already know what is needed for the children. Although the occasions were more related to designing the playground, this is important to note as children's outdoor programs generally take place in their childcare playgrounds.

A unique aspect of my study was comparing what the ECEs thought children were interested in and what children actually stated that they were interested in. In general, ECEs had some understanding of what children are interested in, such as children enjoying physical and imaginative play. However, the children talked more about playing with loose materials than the ECEs did. The ECEs talked about how children were interested in exploring nature more than the children themselves stated. It is important to note that children's verbal communication skills could have affected the difference between children's and ECEs' answers. For example, children took many pictures of nature, but only a few talked about the natural elements as their likes and

interests. Perhaps children need some help to better express more complex thoughts and opinions; describing how the sky and woodchips relate to their outdoor play could be more complex than explaining how they use bikes and slides with action words. The ECEs need to find alternative methods to understand what children think, need, and want. On the other hand, it could also be that children have a different viewpoint on playing with nature, which means that ECEs may need more sufficient methods to listen to what children exactly think, need and want.

The findings on ECEs' perspectives on how they support children's interests showed a combination of the patterns found in the literature. The ECEs monitoring children's play to support children do what they want to do rather than instructing them what to do was similar to how the ECEs supported children in Maynard and Waters' (2007) study. Also, the ECEs in my study discussed how they encourage children's risk-taking activities as the ECEs in Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot's (2011) study did. ECEs in my study were comfortable challenging and guiding children to the next level and they took a supervisory role to ensure that children were safely engaged in risk-taking activities. Although the ECEs in this study interacted and played with the children, this tended to happen when children were having a hard time finding play activities and wandering around. However, Stephenson's (2002) and Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot's (2011) studies found that ECEs engaged in children's play not only to enrich the overall program but also to learn about what the children are experiencing.

The linkage of indoor and outdoor activities was a common strategy used by all ECEs in this study to support children, which has been not fully discussed in the literature. As Dowdell et al. (2011) and Stephenson (2002) argue, children can gain different experiences in outdoor environments than in indoor environments even with the same play activities. Therefore, connecting indoor and outdoor learning may promote children's holistic development.

The ECEs also mentioned some barriers to supporting as well. The barriers that the ECEs mentioned tend to be related to standards and views from other adults on outdoor play. This implies that there is a need for communication among adults about how to reduce the barriers, what is working and what is not, and that all adults who influence children's outdoor programs need to listen to children's viewpoints to support children during their outdoor programs together.

Implication for Other Research Studies with Children

Reflecting on the methodologies to find out if those used in the study were effective in answering the research questions is important in qualitative research because it increases the validity of the study (Creswell, 2009). Also, the reflection on the methodologies in this study can help learn what can be used in other research conducted with children. How the different data collection tools were useful in yielding children's perspectives on their outdoor play programs in childcare playgrounds and how ECEs learn about and support children's interests is discussed below.

The Mosaic approach provided opportunities for children to talk about their perspectives through various methods: observation, drawing and/or looking at photographs of their playgrounds, interviews, a playground photography tour, and mapping. Depending on their comfort level and interest in the project activities, children did share various thoughts and opinions about their outdoor programs. Each child had his/her own viewpoints and the answers to the interview questions varied. Different experiences and time spent in the childcare centres can generate different perspectives, but children's answers cannot be disregarded for being unique and different (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Therefore, each child's responses and comments were considered to be valuable in their own way to understanding how children view their outdoor programs. Also, as Clark (2004) suggests, the different research tools enabled

triangulation among the data. When children's responses from the different methods were compared, the majority of the children had similar answers. Although there were some unique responses regarding equipment and materials for each data collection method, overall, children's likes and interests were particularly consistent. Therefore, the Mosaic approach is a useful methodology to use when studying children's perspectives and doing research with children.

Drawing and looking at photographs were attractive research activities for many children. The drawing activity helped some children engage in the study immediately. As in Dockett and Perry's study (2005) about children's insight of starting school, drawing helped children feel comfortable and focus on a task while interacting with me as a researcher. All the children drew something about their outdoor play experiences, and most of the time, the drawings related to their likes and interests. As Einarsdóttir, Dockett and Perry (2009) mentioned, I learned that children's comments on their own drawings are essential as children can build on thoughts and attach meanings to their drawings through conversations. Children's explanation or comments provide a clearer understanding than adults' sole interpretation of the drawings themselves (Dockett & Perry, 2005). It would have been difficult sometimes to understand what children drew without their explanations because many children were not at the pictorial stage, which is when they can represent objects with symbols and adults can recognize their drawings; many of the children scribbled as they drew. For the children who were not verbally active, I tried to encourage them to comment on their drawings through body language and pointing at the playground photographs. This helped me better to understand what the children were trying to express rather than children only trying to articulate their thoughts.

As drawing and photographs are appealing activities to the children, many non-participant children who did not have parental consent kept asking if they could join. I prepared

extra materials for these children so they can have the same experience. However, some of these children without parental consent wanted to get my attention and engage in the participant-researcher interaction by having me ask them the interview questions. This sometimes interrupted the research activities, and I had to regain the attention of the participant children. Asking help from the ECEs to do a similar activity, if possible, with the non-participant children may reduce interruptions to process of the data collection.

Photographs of the playgrounds were useful when children were hesitant to draw, and they helped to probe children's responses. Sometimes, children drew what they saw in the photographs, which helped them remember the details of the structures, equipment, materials and also the layout of the playgrounds. Also, some children did not know the name of the equipment or materials, such as the basketball hoop, herb garden, wheelbarrow, and upper deck area. The photographs helped children point out what they wanted to mention. However, the photographs of their playgrounds were not useful for children to express their dislikes or what they wanted to add to their outdoor programs. Other tools should be considered to learn about these perspectives.

As the findings show, the conversational interviews, with the help of drawing and looking at pictures, assisted me in gaining children's various perspectives on their outdoor programs: their likes, dislikes, what is important, and what they want to add. Children freely talked as they were asked some questions. As Irwin and Johnson (2005) suggested, rephrasing questions with more familiar words did ease the interview process. For example, sometimes children did not answer the question about what they think is important, but listed things as I modified the question by asking what they think is really needed for their outdoor playtime.

R: What do you think is important about your outdoor playtime?

Valerie: I don't know.

R: Something that you think that you really really really really need to have for your outdoor playtime?

Valerie: The climber.

Children who were not verbally active also had a similar experience.

R: What do you think is important for your outdoor playtime?

Matthew: Umm. --

R: Something that you really really really really really need?

Matthew: This. (Pointing to the picture of the sand box).

R: Oh, what's this?

Matthew: [Sand] box.

Children actively participated in the playground tour using the camera. As Stephenson (2009) discussed in her study that used a camera also, the short conversations that children had with me as they took photographs helped me understand what they liked and were interested in. In addition, children's description and interpretation of the photographs that they took provided opportunities for children to share their perspectives about their outdoor programs during the mapping activity (Clark & Moss, 2011). Many children recognized their photographs, and children named each of the photographs as they reviewed them. The mapping activity was also helpful for children to organize their photographs by putting each into places to make a map of their playgrounds as Clark and Moss (2011) found. Children recalled how their playground looked like, and the maps showed that children are aware of the layout and how outdoor programs were set up. Some had a little difficulty placing moveable materials and natural elements and kept replacing the photographs, but at the end children were all able to make a map of their playgrounds.

The interview after the map making was useful in terms of triangulation and gaining more insight of children's perspectives. However, three children did not want to be asked the questions. The process of making the playground map may have taken too long or answering to more questions after finishing their maps may have been overwhelming. Moving around the photographs in the map according to the questions could have created a more interactive

interview and captured children's attention as they could have talked more about their perspectives. Also, if the mapping activity was modified into a data analysis activity with the children, it could have been a more meaningful research study with children as Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry (2009) suggested. Organizing the photographs into categories could have provided an opportunity for the children to participate in the data analysis process to verify if I understood children's perspectives properly (Einarsdóttir, 2007).

The successful and unsuccessful elements that were discussed in this section can be adapted into other research studies conducted with the children to learn about their perspectives. Also, the research tools can be adapted in ECEs' teaching practices as they are similar to common strategies that they use. It can help ECEs to gain and understand more of children's holistic perspectives when planning and implementing programs with the children and to reflect whether they are listening to children's thought and opinions.

Study Limitations

Although the research methodologies were beneficial to answering the research questions, there are some limitations to the study. First, children's lack of explanation made it difficult to fully understand children's perspective. There were also some comments related to their outdoor play that children did not specify why they mentioned it. For example, a few times Diana (3 years 6 months old) and Matthew (3 years 6 months old) pointed to and referred to the chalk in the photographs I presented during the interview. I asked them if there was a reason they are mentioning the chalk and what they do with it. However, they did not provide any explanation. Also, some parts of children's drawings or some photographs that children chose before or during the interviews had to be left out from the analysis to minimize misjudgment because children did not provide any comments. Therefore, I was not able to learn about all the children's

perspectives.

Children talked about the structures and materials as they looked at the photographs and focused less on other aspects that can happen during their outdoor playtime, such as the activities they engage in or the interactions they have with others. This may be because children felt more confident naming objects than actions. Therefore, it was difficult to have a full understanding of children's thoughts and opinions. More probing about the activities related to the actions and experiences might have helped to learn more about children's insights.

In addition, children got confused a few times when they were asked what they dislike/do not like about their outdoor programs. For example, Andrew stated that he liked the climber, but he also named the climber when he was asked what he did not like. I wanted to clarify his answer, so I asked him whether he liked it or not. Andrew said that he liked the climber, but did not answer to what he disliked. My further questioning did not help clarify the answer. Some children tended to say "I don't know" or "no" to some questions, particularly when they were asked about their dislikes. Children may not have any dislikes in their outdoor programs, so I had to respect their answers. However, there are possibilities of children not understanding the concept of dislikes or did not know how to express their opinion on negative issues. Children's perspectives could have been better understood if the interview questions were more clear and direct.

Secondly, drawbacks on the data collection tools brought limitation to the findings. Children could not photograph themselves, their friends, and the ECEs in the playground which could have provided in-depth information about children's perspectives on their outdoor programs. Photographs of playground structures and equipment cannot represent all the activities and interactions that children engage in during their play. For example, Clark and Moss (2011)

gained more insight to children's perspectives on childcare spaces with photographs of younger children and facial expressions. Also, a few children randomly pressed the shutter without looking at the lens; many photographs were blurry and out of focus. The children might have been more attracted to the technology than showing me their playgrounds and expressing their views about their outdoor programs (Waller, 2006). Children would have better used the tool to share their perspectives if they were familiar with using the camera and had more time to explore the technology before the activity. Children's familiarity and experiences in interacting with the research tools has a great influence on how much information the researcher can gain from the children and how valid the information can be.

Moreover, a few of the children named some of the photographs different from what they originally took. For example, John had a photograph of the climber with his finger covering part of the lens, and he said "there's snow." Also, in the case of Tony, he picked a photograph of the ground and said "I didn't take that picture" because he did not recognize what it was. Helping children to take clear photograph might have helped them talk more about their perspectives on their outdoor programs.

Thirdly, there are limitations to the findings from the interviews with the ECEs. The interviews with the teachers were useful to find out about the various ways the ECEs learn about and support children's perspectives during outdoor programs. However, their responses cannot be proven as the ECEs were self-reporting about their practices. Although two observations were conducted in the beginning of the research study, it was not enough to verify whether the ECEs actually did what they say they did in the interviews. Investigation on the correspondence of ECEs' actual behaviours and their responses to the questions can provide further insight to whether ECEs are listening to children's perspectives.

Clark and Moss (2011) suggest having all participants, such as children and ECEs, discuss and reflect on the collected data, and also consider if any change or continuity is needed to respond to children's perspectives. This process provides opportunities for the participants to be part of data analysis and think of changes that can occur to better support children's perspectives in the future (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Clark & Moss, 2011). Discussion on the children's and ECEs' viewpoints and their experiences on outdoor programs could have brought further understanding of children's perspectives on outdoor programs and ECEs' practices to learn about and support children. However, these aspects were excluded from this study because of the scope of the study.

In addition, the ECEs were only asked how they learn about and support children's interests, when children's perspectives involve many factors such as their preferences and importance. For example, asking the ECEs "How to you support children's perspectives such as their likes/dislikes, importance, and things they was to add/remove?" would have created richer data on how the ECEs are learning about and supporting various perspectives of the children other than interests.

Direction of Future Research

If I were to replicate this study, I would do it in five different ways. First, I would give more time for the children to explore the research tools such as providing several opportunities to play with the cameras and to look into the playground photographs so that everything they use and do during their outdoor programs is reflected in the photographs rather than exploring the research tools. Secondly, I would extend my observations so that I can compare what the ECEs say they do and what they actually do during their outdoor programs to learn about and support children's perspectives. Thirdly, I would develop the study into a longitudinal study over a year

to examine children's perspectives over time and seasonal context. Fourthly, I would involve both the children and the ECEs to analyze and discuss about the data, and reflect on the current outdoor programs if they correspond to children's perspectives; lastly, I would use more direct and simple interview questions with the children and ask corresponding questions to the ECEs.

Conclusion

Returning to the photograph at the beginning of this research paper and to the research questions, this study did generate some findings on children's perspectives on outdoor programs in childcare playgrounds. The purpose of this research study was to examine children's perspectives on their outdoor play programs and to investigate ECE's perspectives on how they learn about and support children's interests. The study's theoretical orientation, which considers children as capable and valuable informants of their daily experiences, helped me to understand children's viewpoints on their experiences in their playgrounds. Children enjoyed their outdoor programs engaging in different types of play and had various opinions about the structures, equipment, and materials they use on the playground. The Mosaic approach helped me select a range of methods to use for conducting a research study on children's perspectives. The observations and interviews with the ECEs indicated that the ECEs seek to listen to children's voices and to support children's interests, but children are generally not asked directly to contribute their perspectives on quality outdoor programs.

The processes of the study and my reflection on the methodologies enhanced my understanding about the importance of constant preparation and consideration that is needed in research with children. The researcher needs to prepare for and respect children's different needs and interests to better understand their perspectives. Also, sufficient time in conducting the research activities is required to build rapport with children in order to help them feel

comfortable talking to the researcher. Finding ways to ask specific and precise questions to the children was a major challenge in this study. However, interacting directly with the children to learn about their viewpoints was a valuable experience. As outdoor programs are part of children's everyday lives, children should have more opportunities to share their viewpoints. Also, it is important for the ECEs to learn about children's perspectives as it helps them to better understand and provide effective support for the children during their outdoor programs.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The logo for Ryerson University, featuring the text "RYERSON UNIVERSITY" in white capital letters on a blue rectangular background with a yellow vertical bar on the right side.

Hello!

Yunjoo (Christina) Lee, MA student from Ryerson University, is inviting you to participate in a research study. The following information provides a brief overview of the study and details about participation.

Title of Research: *Children's Perspectives on Outdoor Play Programs in Childcare Centre Playgrounds: Are Early Childhood Educators Listening?*

Description of the Study: The purpose of the research project is to hear children's voices and learn what they are interested in during their outdoor play in the childcare centre playground. In addition, it will examine how the early childhood educators (ECEs) support children's interests and learning through program planning. The study will provide an opportunity to look at children's perspectives during outdoor play and compare whether there is a difference between children and ECEs' perspectives on outdoor play program. Furthermore, studying how children's interests are supported in program planning can provide an opportunity to reflect on how much ECEs are listening to children's voices. This research project is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of the Master's student major research paper.

Participation: If you choose to participate in the study, we will ask children and ECEs to be part of:

(1) Observation: Children and ECEs will be observed during outdoor play time in the childcare playground. Written descriptions of children's play episodes and early childhood educators' practice will be recorded.

(2) Semi-Structured Interviews: Children will be asked to share their interest during outdoor playtime and experiences of or suggestions for outdoor play in the childcare playground. Children can draw pictures of their outdoor play experiences in the playground or use photos of their playground as prompts. ECEs will be asked to share their experiences and opinions on practice, program planning and supporting children for outdoor play.

(3) Photography Tour and Mapping: Children will be given a digital camera to photograph the playground and give a tour to the researcher. Individually or in small groups, children will take pictures of the playground while giving a tour to the researcher. Also, children will make a map or chart with the photos, drawings or writings about their experiences of and ideas for outdoor play in the playground.

(4) Audio Recording: Interviews and conversations during drawing, photography tour, and map-making will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy.

A detailed letter of information and consent form will be provided to you on my visit. The observations, interviews, photography tour, and map-making will be administered in the childcare centre during program time for the children. For the ECEs, the interview will be conducted when the ECEs are off the floor in the childcare centre. These dates will be at the convenience of the participants.

Participation in the study is your choice. Declining participation will in no way affect your relations with Ryerson University.

This study has undergone ethical review and has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and Ryerson University's policies. You may direct any questions you have about the study or participation to the principal investigator or the investigator's supervisor:

Principal Investigator: Yunjoo (Christina) Lee

E-mail: yunjoo.lee@ryerson.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Rachel Langford

E-mail: rlangfor@ryerson.ca

Phone: 416 979-5000 ext. 7635

Thank you,

Yunjoo (Christina) Lee

Appendix B



RYERSON UNIVERSITY

Letter of Information and Consent Agreement for Parents **Children's Perspectives on Outdoor Play Programs in Childcare Centre Playgrounds:** **Are Early Childhood Educators Listening?**

Principal Investigator: Yunjoo (Christina) Lee, M.A. Candidate, School of Early Childhood Studies, Ryerson University.

Description of the Study: The purpose of the research project is to hear children's voices and learn what they are interested in during their outdoor play in the childcare centre playground. In addition, it will examine how the early childhood educators (ECEs) support children's interests and learning through program planning. The study will provide an opportunity to look at children's perspectives during outdoor play and compare whether there is a difference between children and ECEs' perspectives on outdoor play program. Furthermore, studying how children's interests are supported in program planning can provide an opportunity to reflect on how much ECEs are listening to children's voices. This research project is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of the Master's student major research paper.

Participation in the Study: If you choose to participate in the study, we will ask your child to be part of:

(1) Observation: Children will be observed during outdoor play time in the childcare playground. Written descriptions of children's play episodes and early childhood educators' practice will be recorded.

(2) Semi-Structured Interviews: Children will be asked to share their thoughts, experiences, and suggestions about their childcare playground. Children can draw pictures of their outdoor play experiences in the playground or use photos of their playground as prompts.

(3) Photography Tour: Children will be given a digital camera to photograph the playground. Individually or in small groups, children will take pictures of the playground while giving a tour to the researcher. Children will engage in conversations with the researcher during their tour about their interests or experience in the playground. Children will be asked to take photos of the playground environment only and not human beings (child, adult).

(4) Mapping: Children's drawings and photos of the playground that was previously generated will be used to make a map or a chart. Children will organize their drawings and pictures into different categories they come up with in a small group.

(5) Audio Recording: Interviews and conversations during drawing, photography tour, and map-making will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy.

Risks or Discomforts: The potential risks of participating in this project are minimal. Some children may feel mildly uncomfortable talking to the researcher or feel some stress thinking and expressing their thoughts. However participants will be informed that they may skip questions or activities, refuse to answer questions, or decide to end participation at any time.

Benefits of the Study: There might not be a direct benefit to the centre and children involved in the study. However, potential benefits of this study include insight into children's perceptions and hearing their voices. Findings from the study may help the centre and staff with future practice, planning, and implementation of the program. However, the researcher cannot guarantee that participants will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The observation records, audio recordings of the interviews, photographs and completed map will be stored at Ryerson University in a locked filing cabinet in the office of Dr. Langford, separately from the consent forms. They will be stored for one year after the completion of the study and then destroyed. Participants will not be identified by name in the transcripts; instead pseudonyms will be employed as the data is transcribed. The principal investigator and the principal investigator's supervisor, Dr. Rachel Langford, will only have access to the data. In addition, there is a possibility that while engaging in a dialogue with the children, a child may disclose an incident of abuse. In the event of this occurrence, I am obligated by law to notify the proper authorities of the child's disclosure.

Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:

There are no anticipated costs for you. There are no compensations for participation.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether to participate or not will not influence your current or future relations with Ryerson University or your childcare centre. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed. Children who have their parents/legal guardians consent to participate will provide their assent before participating in the study. If the child agrees to participate, he or she is free to withdraw his/her assent, chose to take part only in some parts of the study, and to stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are allowed. At any particular point in the study, children may refuse to answer particular questions or stop participation altogether. If the child decides to withdraw from the study any data/information that he or she has provided will be removed from the data set.

Questions about the Study:

If you have any questions about the research, please ask now. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Principal Investigator: Yunjoo (Christina) Lee

E-mail: yunjoo.lee@ryerson.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Rachel Langford

E-mail: rlangfor@ryerson.ca

Phone: 416 979-5000 ext. 7635

Any ethical concerns about the study and/or questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study may be directed to Tony Fletcher, Research Ethics Board Coordinator at toni.fletcher@ryerson.ca or 416-979-5042.

Consent to Participate

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and you have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Audio Recording

_____ Yes, interviews/conversations can be recorded.

_____ No, interviews/conversations can not be recorded.

Name (please print)

Name of Child (please print)

Signature

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Assent Agreement
Children’s Perspectives on Outdoor Play Programs in Childcare Centre Playgrounds:
Are Early Childhood Educators Listening?

Hi, my name is Christina.

I would like to find out what children do and what they think about their outdoor play in the childcare centre playground. Would you like to talk to me about your experience in the playground?

If the child says yes:

1. I would like to draw a picture about my experiences in the childcare playground, or if I don’t want to draw, I can talk to Christina about it with photos of our playground.
2. I would like to take photos the playground. If I don’t want to take pictures, I can talk with Christina about my thoughts and experiences in the playground.
3. It is my choice to do this activity on my own or with my friends. I choose to:
 Do it on my own _____
 Do it with my friend(s) _____
4. It’s okay for Christina to audio record our conversation, but I can stop the recorder anytime. _____ Yes, I would like to audio record.
 _____ No, I do not like to audio record.
5. My mom or dad have said it’s OK for me to do this but if I don’t want to, it’s OK for me to just say so. I can just say “stop now.”
6. If I want to get my parent(s) or teacher(s) that’s okay by Christina.
7. Christina might talk to someone in charge if she is worried about my safety.
8. Christina can use my drawings and/or photos I took of the playground for her project. If I want to keep my drawings when I’m done I can. Christina can ask me for permission to photocopy my drawing but I can say no if I want to. If I want copies of the photos when I’m done Christina will print them for me.

Can you print your name/ make a special mark if this is okay with you?

**Letter of Information and Consent Agreement for Early Childhood Educators
Children's Perspectives on Outdoor Play Programs in Childcare Centre Playgrounds:
Are Early Childhood Educators Listening?**

Principal Investigator: Yunjoo (Christina) Lee, M.A. Candidate, School of Early Childhood Studies, Ryerson University.

Description of the Study: The purpose of the research project is to hear children's voices and learn what they are interested in during their outdoor play in the childcare centre playground. In addition, it will examine how the early childhood educators (ECEs) support children's interests and learning through program planning. The study will provide an opportunity to look at children's perspectives during outdoor play and compare whether there is a difference between children and ECEs' perspectives on outdoor play program. Furthermore, studying how children's interests are supported in program planning can provide an opportunity to reflect on how much ECEs are listening to children's voices. This research project is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of the Master's student major research paper.

Participation in the Study: If you choose to participate in the study, we will ask you to be part of:

(1) **Observation:** ECEs will be observed during outdoor play time in the childcare playground. Written descriptions of children's play episodes and early childhood educators' practice will be recorded.

(2) **Semi-Structured Interviews:** ECEs will be asked to share their experiences of supporting and planning for children's outdoor play program. ECEs thoughts and suggestions on providing high quality outdoor program will be asked as well.

(3) **Audio Recording:** Interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy.

Risks or Discomforts: The potential risks of participating in this project are minimal. There may be minor discomfort talking to the researcher or feel some stress recalling memories from the past. However participants may skip questions, refuse to answer questions, or decide to end participation at any time.

Benefits of the Study: There might not be a direct benefit to the centre, ECEs and children involved in the study. However, potential benefits of this study include insight into children's perceptions and hearing their voices. Findings from the study may help the centre and staff with future practice, planning, and implementation of the program. However, the researcher cannot guarantee that participants will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The observation records, audio recordings of the interviews, photographs and completed map will be stored at Ryerson University in a locked filing cabinet in the office of Dr. Langford, separately from the consent forms. They will be stored for one year after the completion of the study and then destroyed. Participants will not be identified by name in the transcripts; instead pseudonyms will be employed as the data is transcribed. The principal investigator and the principal investigator's supervisor, Dr. Rachel Langford, will only have access to the data. In addition, there is a possibility that while engaging in a dialogue with the children, a child may disclose an incident of abuse. In the event of this occurrence, I am obligated by law to notify the proper authorities of the child's disclosure.

Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:

There are no anticipated costs for you. There are no compensations for participation.

Voluntary Nature of Participation:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether to participate or not will not influence your current or future relations with Ryerson University or your childcare centre. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed. If you decide to withdraw from the study any data/information that you have provided will be removed from the data set.

Questions about the Study:

If you have any questions about the research, please ask now. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Principal Investigator: Yunjoo (Christina) Lee

E-mail: yunjoo.lee@ryerson.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Rachel Langford

E-mail: rlangfor@ryerson.ca

Phone: 416 979-5000 ext. 7635

Any ethical concerns about the study and/or questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study may be directed to Tony Fletcher, Research Ethics Board Coordinator at toni.fletcher@ryerson.ca or 416-979-5042.

Consent to Participate

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and you have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Audio Recording

_____ Yes, the interviews can be recorded.

_____ No, the interview can not be recorded.

Name (please print)

Signature

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix C

Interview/Child conferencing Question Guide for Children

1. What did you draw? (Or what picture did you chose?) Can you tell me about it?
2. What do you think about your outdoor playtime in your childcare centre playground? (e.g. What do you like/dislike about playing in your playground? What is good/bad about your playground or outdoor play program? Why?)
3. What do you think is important for your outdoor play in the playground? (e.g. What do you think is needed to make a good playground? Is there anything to add/remove? Why?)
4. What are you interested in doing in the playground these days? (e.g. What do you like/want to do in the playground? What do you like/want to learn about when you are playing in the playground?)

Appendix D

Interview Question Guide for Early Childhood Educators

1. What do you think about your outdoor program? (e.g. What is good/bad about your playground or outdoor play program? Why?)
2. What do you think is important for children's outdoor play program? (e.g. what do you think is needed to make a good playground or program? Is there anything to add/remove?)
3. What do you think children are interested in or want to learn during the outdoor program? (e.g. what do they like to do/learn?)
4. How do you learn about/support children's interests in the outdoor play program? (e.g. How are they embedded in the program planning? Or how do you prepare outdoor program plans?)