Young Children’s Rough and Tumble Play: Observations of Five-Year Olds at Play

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Why This Topic?

- Minimal research on rough and tumble (R&T) play
- Misunderstanding of R&T play
  - Linked with bullying
  - How it ties in with play
Purpose of the Study

- To gain an understanding of the thoughts of young children (five year olds), parents, and educators on R&T play.

- To identify how rough and tumble play is included or excluded in early childhood settings.
Methodology

- **Interviews** \((n=48)\)
  - Managers \((n=4)\)
  - Educators \((n=11)\)
  - Parents \((n=16)\) children \((n=17)\)

- **Observations**
  - Field based: educators and children
  - Educators:
    1 male, 10 female
  - Children:
    10 male, 7 female
Interviews

- Interviews of Managers
  - Guiding philosophy
  - Daily program
  - Clientele of their setting (including the degree to which the staff and clientele influence program delivery)
Interviews

Interviews of Educators

- Programming guidelines
- Gender differences in R&T play
- Provision for R&T play
- Learning and value of R&T play
- Influence of bullying and aggressive play on their response to rough and tumble play
- How they distinguish aggressive play from R&T
- Professional credentials
- Childhood rough and tumble play experiences
Interviews of Parents

- Reasons for choosing the childcare setting
- Extent that rough and tumble play is included in their child’s daycare
- Educator responses to R&T play
- Gender differences in participation in rough and tumble play
- Location of rough and tumble play
- Value of R&T play
- Their childhood experiences
- Rough and tumble play of their children at home
Interviews

- Interviews of Children
  - Their definition of rough and tumble play
  - Rules for play
  - Consequences of rough and tumble play at daycare
  - Their ideas on teacher and parent thoughts about rough and tumble play

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Observations

- Ten 90 minute observations
  - 30:25 hours of observation in early childhood education settings
  - Daily activities of the children and educators
  - Different times of the day on a variety of days
    - Daily routines
    - Structured activities
    - Transitions
    - Free-play time
Data Analysis

- **Interviews**
  - Authenticity checks
  - Common thoughts grouped together

- **Observations**
  - Analysis of who, what, where, and when
    - 116 R&T play events recorded
    - Both previously identified elements and 20 elements not previously identified in research
  - Analysis of educator responses
Observed R&T Play

- Physical Contact Between Players
- Independent Physical Play Behaviours
- Play Behaviours Where an Object is an Instrument Component
Observed R&T Play

- Physical Contact Between Players
  - 45 recorded incidents (40%)
  - Previously identified R&T play elements
    - Pushing, open handed slaps, wrestling
  - Newly identified R&T play elements
    - Grabbing the body of another player
    - Banging body into body of another player
Observed R&T Play

- Independent Physical Play Behaviours
  - 54 recorded incidents (46%)
  - Previously identified R&T play elements
    - Fleeing, running, falling, chasing
  - Newly identified R&T play elements
    - Use of a loud or roaring voice
    - Large body motions, hitting and kicking motions
Observed R&T Play

Play Behaviours Where an Object is an Instrument Component

- 17 recorded incidents (14%)
- No previously identified R&T play elements
- Newly identified R&T play elements
  - Banging body into fixed object
  - Crashing into object, kicking and throwing objects
Observed Educator Responses

- Rule reminders
- Redirecting play
- No intervention
- Joining rough and tumble play

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Results/Findings

- Interviews
  - Adults
    - Thought rough and tumble play to be a normal part of childhood
    - R&T play aids in the development of social competency
      - Learning to make judgments, self-control, compassion, boundaries, and how to adapt play for other players
    - Aggression is viewed as a separate issue from rough and tumble play
    - Educators and parents acknowledged a lack of education on R&T play
Results/Findings

- **Children**
  - Expressed concerns about safety
    - “someone might get hurt”
  - All the children were observed engaging in rough and tumble play
    - 40% stated they **do** R&T play at daycare
    - 60% stated they **do not** R&T play at daycare
  - Rough and tumble play is more acceptable at home
    - Considered a family form of play
Results/Findings

Observations

- Rough and tumble play occurs both indoors (38% of observations) and outdoors (62%)
- Both boys and girls engage in R&T play although boys accounted for 80% of observations and girls 20%
- Predominately a peer form of play
Implications

- Need for educator and parent information on rough and tumble play.
  - Parents and educators articulated a lack of knowledge about rough and tumble play.
    - Early childhood education training programs
    - Professional organizations and conferences
    - Parenting books, websites and other resources
  - Programs and schools should be planning for the inclusion of R&T play.
    - Policies and procedures, staff discussions
Implications

- Expansion of understanding of the development of rough and tumble play.
  - Pre-operational elements of rough and tumble play
  - Newly identified categories expanded the definition of rough and tumble play
  - Further research is required to assess the universality of the findings
Future Directions

- Home Environments
- Family Composition
- Cultural Groups
- Experience of Players
- Time of Year
- Preschool Settings
- Influence of curricular design on the manifestation of R&T play
  - Traditional Nursery School
  - Direct-Instructional