Child’s Play: An Educational Issue. The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Value of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class.

Submitted in part fulfilment for the Award of M.Sc. in Education and Training Management (eLearning)
Child’s Play: An Educational Issue.
The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Value of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class.

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Abstract
Throughout the course of my research I examined (i) how I could use play in my Junior Infant classroom to replace traditional, didactic teaching methods and (ii) how I could use video to gain parental support of this initiative. I was concerned that I was not honouring my values of responsibility, engagement and inclusion in the classroom. I was equally conscious of my accountability to the parents of the children I teach.

This paper describes my action research study using the Living Educational Theory approach. Through two cycles of enquiry I aimed to inform my own professional development regarding best practice for play as a teaching and learning methodology. Cycle 1 focused on the use of digital games to engage the “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) in my class. The emphasis of Cycle 2 was on traditional play rather than digital play.

I believe that video is an effective form of communicating with parents. I used video to challenge and change traditional parental perceptions of play, thus garnering support for play as a legitimate teaching methodology.

Keywords: Play; Parents; Aistear; Video; Early Childhood Education; Digital Game-Based Learning: Living Educational Theory
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 My Context

In 2008, I graduated from St. Patrick’s College with a Bachelor of Education. I began my teaching career in a Junior National School in Dublin West, which comprises of classes from Junior Infants to Second Class. For the past four years, I have taught Junior Infants in the school.

1.1.1 School Background

There are six classes of each class level in the school with 25 students in each class, amounting to a student population of 600. There are 43 teachers and four special needs assistants working in the school. The school is a very diverse community with pupils of many varying nationalities and cultures attending it. For many of the pupils, English is a second language. The school has “designated disadvantaged” status, meaning it suffers from “impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education” (Education Act, 1998). This status allows for more support for pupils, for example, a lower student-teacher ratio, a care-team and additional language support teachers.

During my four years of teaching, there have been many significant changes within the school. A new school principal was appointed in 2009, paving the way for many fresh ideas and initiatives in the school. One such initiative has been a drive to meet the national standard of information and communications technology (“ICT”). Meeting such a standard requires there is up-to-date teaching and learning equipment in sufficient supply in the school (ICT Strategy Group, 2008). In order to achieve this, each classroom has been fitted with an interactive whiteboard, a school website has been established and cameras,
visualisers and children’s laptops have been introduced. In a technological sense, the school is now thriving and teeming with equipment.

1.1.2 Challenges to the School

Over the course of my four years in the school, due to decreased funding available to the Department of Education, the school has suffered from a national moratorium on posts of responsibility in schools. Curriculum development in each subject area, as well as other special interest areas such as ICT, can no longer be appointed to a teacher, thus making it more difficult to begin any new initiatives or develop teaching practices on a whole-school basis.

Further cutbacks have resulted in the loss to the school of its home-school liaison facility. Previously, a home-school liaison teacher was appointed specifically to ensure communication, coordination and cooperation between the school and the parents of the pupils. The home-school liaison teacher was dedicated to building a partnership between the school life and home life for the children and to creating a working relationship and bond with parents. Without this position, communication between the school and the parents has become more infrequent and challenging for all parties. Moreover, communication is made all the more difficult by the fact that many parents have little or no English.

1.2 My Interest

In an effort to address the challenge of promoting special subject areas in the school without appointing any new posts of responsibility to teachers, the school has created “special interest groups”. These are groups in which several members of staff who share a common interest in an area of the curriculum or
teaching development meet on a regular basis to ensure there is continuing progress in the school. In 2010, I became involved in one such special interest group in relation to “play” in the school. This sparked my interest in the concept of play as a teaching and learning methodology in early childhood education and the potential to use various types of play to teach the infant curriculum.

1.3 Play in a National Context

The last two decades have seen significant development in policy and legislation in relation to the education of children in Ireland.

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<td>1991</td>
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<td>Strengthening Families for Life</td>
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<td>Developing a Partnership with Families</td>
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<td>Primary School Curriculum</td>
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<td>Children First – National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>National Children’s Strategy, Our Children – Their Lives</td>
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<th>Learning: Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector</th>
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<td>2004</td>
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Updated from “Towards a Framework for Early Learning” (NCCA, 2004)


These frameworks, in addition to the Primary School Curriculum (1999), signal recognition by the Irish education system of the importance of play in the education of the young child. The Primary School Curriculum states that “as a learning medium, play is crucial in junior classes” (Government of Ireland, 1999 p41). Aistear highlights the importance of play as a context for learning and development. Similarly, Síolta refers to play as “central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child”.

These frameworks recognise the natural propensity of children towards play and promote learning through manipulative materials and “hands-on” practical activities rather than traditional structured teaching. Furthermore, they stress the role the teacher must play if students are to receive maximum benefit from playful activities.

In particular, Aistear has highlighted to early childhood educators the importance of play for the holistic development of the child. Furthermore, it has brought to light the role that the teacher can take in playtime in order to improve the young child’s learning experiences within play. French (2007) describes play as a social activity within which children construct meaning from
the world around them. Thus, it is the adult’s responsibility to scaffold their environment to make play a meaningful and educational experience. Kernan (2007) highlights that play is an intensely complex process which, when harnessed correctly, can have massive educational benefits.

1.4 My Concern

In light of changing views on the role of play in early childhood education, I was concerned that I was not engaged in best practice. Despite a curriculum that promotes active and dynamic teaching, I felt that I relied too heavily on workbooks and “chalk and talk” methods of teaching. Church (2006) describes as “disturbing” the amount of time young children spend learning “through pencil and paper tasks instead of hands-on, interactive activities”.

While I was keen to explore more engaging and enjoyable methods of teaching by implementing a new play initiative in my classroom, I had a further overriding concern.

“As the value of play is questioned in these times of rigorous academic accountability, teachers of young children are faced with either defending the use of play or giving it short shrift in the classroom” (Myck-Wayne, 2010 p14).

The academic pressure of the education system commences in Junior Infants. The 1999 Infant Curriculum promotes the holistic development of the child but recent changes in Department of Education guidelines place increasing emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills. An ordered increase in standardised testing and regular assessments in classrooms signal a return to the emphasis on the three “R’s” – reading, writing and arithmetic – rather than the holistic development of the child. With such external scrutiny on literacy and numeracy, it may seem to the parents of my pupils that my time in the
classroom could be better spent than on play. Hall et al. (2008) describe how, as teachers, we are accountable to parents and thus are obliged to report to them.

My concern, therefore, lay in justifying the time I spend on playtime not only to myself but, more importantly, to the parents of the children I teach.

It is the responsibility of each individual school to convey changes in practice to parents. It is the responsibility of each teacher to demonstrate accountability for his/her time in the classroom. I was fully conscious of my accountability to parents and the need to justify any increase in time spent on play. However, I was concerned about the lack of effective communication I had with parents following the loss of the home-school liaison teacher, who had previously kept parents informed about classroom practices and aired any concerns they may have had. In light of the breakdown in communication, I was not convinced that parents would understand the educational benefits of a new play initiative.

1.5 My Objectives

Firstly, I wanted to explore in greater detail the educational potential of play in early childhood education. I hoped to teach the curriculum through structured play activities rather than through the use of traditional, didactic teaching and textbooks. Rieber et al. (1998) describe how play can be used to achieve this objective. They state that teachers can “invoke play and channel it toward achieving goals and objectives within the curriculum”.

Secondly, I needed to gain parental support of my play initiative. Powell (1998) states that parents are more likely to support an educational initiative if they believe in its strength and positive influence in their child’s education. Tekin (2011) supports this view, stating that parents are more motivated to become involved if they believe it will lead to their child’s educational success.
However, in my own context, the language barrier that exists with many parents and the loss of our home-school liaison teacher has heightened this a challenge in the workplace. Thus, my research study aimed to overcome this challenge and demonstrate to parents the learning power of play. With such increasing emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills, it is important that parents view play as a methodology to teach these skills rather than as an activity outside the curriculum.

I decided to attempt to alter traditional parental perceptions of playtime by producing a video artefact that would defend my use of play in the classroom and demonstrate accountability to parents. With the creation of such an artefact, I aimed to (i) justify the use of play, (ii) foster support for play as a teaching methodology and (iii) bridge the widening gap in communication between the school and the homes of the children.

In relation to my own learning and ongoing professional development, I aspired to produce a video that modelled the links between play and the Junior Infant curriculum, I would improve my own practice of using play in the classroom. The challenge of creating a video for parents, in which I would feature myself, would afford me the opportunity to examine my practices and identify areas for improvement. The video would enable careful scrutiny of my own work and thus, would facilitate reflection on my practice and lead to improved teaching and a move towards best practice in relation to play.

1.6 My Research Statement

The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Value of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class.
2. METHODOLOGY

In an effort to address the research statement “The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Value of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class”, I adopted an “Action Research” approach based on Whitehead’s “living educational theory approach”.

2.1 Using Action Research as a Methodology

Throughout the research, I aimed not only to challenge traditional parental perceptions of play in early childhood education but also to examine my own role as a Junior Infant teacher and consider how I might improve my practice in relation to education through play. This commitment to bring about change within my own practice is deemed as “insider research” (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006 p.11), lending itself to an Action Research approach.

Action Research is defined as “the study of social situations with a view to improving the quality of action within it” (Elliot, 1991 p.69). It is a form of professional development, allowing the person involved to be both researcher
and practitioner. This self-study approach to research was my rationale for choosing Action Research as the methodology for my study.

**2.2 Whitehead’s Living Educational Theory**

In an attempt to improve my own practice, I honoured the “practitioner” aspect of Action Research. I hoped that engaging in this role would enable me to generate new knowledge and to produce my own theory of educational practice. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) refer to this concept as generating a “living educational theory”. By generating my own living educational theory, I would also fulfil the “research” aspect of Action Research.

McNiff and Whitehead (2006) argue that as we attempt to contribute to new knowledge, we must firstly understand our ontological stance and values. They explain that often the motivation to improve one’s practice arises from the desire to live up to social and educational values. If we are not working in the direction of our values, we are “living contradictions”.

The assertion of one’s educational values from the outset of the research is an integral part of the living educational theory approach to Action Research. By declaring his/her educational values, the researcher can then evaluate the level and effectiveness with which he/she honours those values in his/her daily practice. When those values are not being honoured, Whitehead notes that the practitioner is a “living contradiction”.

**2.3 Values**

Values are those standards and judgements by which you hold yourself accountable in your practice. They are the core principals that inform your work. In my practice, I value, in particular, (i) responsibility (ii) engagement and (iii) inclusion.
2.3.1 Responsibility

As a teacher, I feel I have a duty to engage my pupils and to include their different needs and learning styles in my teaching. Engagement and inclusion therefore, were the values I stated at the outset of my research as those that underpinned my living educational theory. I expected that my reflective journal, my critical friend, my peer validation group and my supervisor would all serve as evidence that I was honouring these values in my research.

My research was put forward for final validation in a presentation made to my supervisor, researcher Jack Whitehead and my colleagues on the course.

https://vimeo.com/44192515

During this presentation it became clear that there was a more significant, core value underpinning my research. As I presented my research for validation I spoke of the accountability I felt to parents. I described the obligation I felt towards them and the responsibility I felt towards the children. It became clear that although I value engagement and inclusion in my classroom, responsibility is the core value underpinning my living educational theory. I undertook the research project in order to honour the responsibilities I have to both the children in my class and their parents.

2.3.2 Engagement

Mooney (2000) quotes philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer John Dewey who believed that “when children were engaged, learning was fun and exciting in and of itself”. In my classroom, I aim to fulfil my value of engagement by capturing the attention and interest
of my students at all times. The use of ICT, use of the outdoor environment, child-led learning activities and play are all aspects of my teaching which I incorporate with the aim of engaging the children in my class. I view these activities as motivating, interesting and appropriate to the young age group I teach. They encourage interaction among, and inspiration and imagination in, the children.

2.3.3 Inclusion

My classroom is a diverse environment with many different denominations, cultures and languages. I value my pupils equally and aim for each child to achieve his/her full potential. I fully embrace the diversity in my classroom. Inclusion is valued within the entire school and we celebrate the different nationalities of our pupils and their parents, we respect their different perspectives and, in so far as is possible, we nurture the cultures of all children. I aim to make my classroom an inclusive environment for children. Songs and rhymes, pictures, games and differentiation of tasks help me to live in the direction of this value. Resources are tailored to meet the individual needs of each child so that his/she may achieve his/her full potential.

2.4 Methods of Data Collection

I employed a variety of methods of data collection in my research study as follows:

2.4.1 Journals

For the duration of my research, I kept a reflective journal. This journal documented my learning, understanding and reflection as my research progressed. Over the course of the research, the reflective journal
became a source of integration between my experience as a practitioner and my learning as a researcher. It allowed for careful reflection and evaluating of my learning. Janesick (1999) describes this process as a form of “triangulation”. She explains that journals enable the researcher to examine different interpretations of data in a “dialogical manner”. Boud and Knights (1994) state that journals enable the student to process his/her experience and generate alternative appreciations of learning, understandings of findings and a new way of viewing situations. The ongoing dialogue in my journal was an invaluable source of qualitative data collection to me in my research.

2.4.2 Video

Throughout the research project, I gathered video footage as a source of evidence. Christian et al. (2010) describes how there is a challenge facing researchers working with children due to the extreme differences in cognitive ability between adults and children. Thus, they emphasise the need for innovative methods of data collection suitable for use with children. I view video as an appropriate and fitting method of gathering
data in my context. It enabled me to capture and document learning in action in the classroom.

I strongly believe that visual imagery is the most powerful and fitting means of addressing the importance of play and influencing parental perceptions of play. Video footage of the children at play will provided me with qualitative data as evidence of the power of play.

2.4.3 Critical Friend

My research was presented, on occasions, to my “critical friend”, an academic colleague who also taught Junior Infants, therefore understanding both my work context and my research approach. My critical friend provided social validation and feedback on my research findings.

2.4.4 Validation Group

During the course of my research, I presented to validation group meetings with my fellow students. These validation meetings served as both a method of data collection and a form of analysis of data collected through other methods. The validation group provided feedback to me whilst also providing a forum for me to work through my findings and thereby leading to a deepening in my understanding.

2.4.5 Interview with Parents

This qualitative form of research was essential in gathering evidence to back up my claim that parents are not fully informed as to the educational benefits of play and therefore do not value playtime in the classroom as a learning tool.
2.5 Validating my Claim to Knowledge

I employed Habermas’ (1976) “four criteria of social validity”, as described below, to test the validity of my living educational theory and my claim to knowledge.

2.5.1 Comprehensibility

Social validation enabled me to determine that my learning and findings were clear and intelligible. Validation meetings with classmates and my supervisor ensured that my work demonstrated my values of responsibility, engagement and inclusion. My research findings were continually redrafted after each meeting to ensure they were engaging and inclusive of readers and audiences.

2.5.2 Truthfulness

Qualitative data was collated as evidence using a range of methods in order to justify my claims to knowledge. My learning journal, video footage and feedback from validation meetings and my supervisor all contributed to my learning and form part of my own living educational theory.

2.5.3 Rightness

The educational values underpinning the research were clearly stated from the outset to provide a rationale for my educational enquiry.

2.5.4 Authenticity
Video footage and data gathered provided evidence of the values being honoured in my practice.

In addition, my work was continually presented to a validation group with an appeal for feedback. My research was also repeatedly submitted to my supervisor in order to validate my claim to knowledge and ensure my findings were reliable.

2.6 Rigour

In order to further validate my claim to knowledge and ensure that there was rigour to my research findings, I employed Winter’s (1989) six criteria of rigour as follows:

2.6.1 Reflexive Critique

From the outset of my research journey and the formation of my research statement, I aimed to define my values in education. The process of writing my reflective journal and implementing teacher-led play in my classroom, enabled me to become the instrument of my own learning. My journals were a constant source of questioning and reflecting on my own practices and learning. It was through this questioning and reflecting that I came to define my values in education.

2.6.2 Dialectics

My journal entries facilitated the constant personal validation of my research findings. They were evidence of my learning and of the impact such learning had on my work practices. As my research progressed,
my journals continued to provide an outlet for me to explore different viewpoints, document my evidence and reflect on my findings.

2.6.3 Collaborative Resource

My research is a self-study in which I aimed to improve my own practice and generate new knowledge. I relied on the feedback of my critical friend, my supervisor, my participants, my colleagues and my classmates as I attempted to support my claims to new knowledge.

2.6.4 Plural Structure

My research findings took a multiple of forms. I collated data by reviewing relevant literature, through the parents and children participating in my research, through emails, Skype and validation meetings with my supervisor and through a continuous cycle of presentation and feedback with my critical friend and validation group.

2.6.5 Risk

Engaging in various forms of research provided me with the knowledge to attempt to change the perception of the parents of the children I teach as regards the value of playtime. In addition, I tried to change the perception that colleagues of mine hold of play. In doing so, I aimed to justify the time I spend playing with the children and the consequent reduction in the time I spend on workbooks, worksheets and traditional style teaching.

I was aware that if my final video production did not achieve its purpose and succeed in changing perceptions, I would then face the situation where I would be forced to be a “living contradiction”. Whilst I may
value play, if I did not accomplish my objective of making others understand the benefits of playtime and value it as a key component of the curriculum, I would have to return to teaching methods that do have the support of parents and colleagues, though I did not value these methods as much myself.

2.6.6 Theory, Practice and Transformation

Throughout the Action Research process, I was both the researcher and practitioner. During this process, I aimed to generate new knowledge that, in turn, would inform and improve my work practices.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the course of the research, I aimed to observe proper ethical practices as mandated by the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Teaching in such a diverse cultural environment, I faced the challenge of receiving fully informed consent from parents and children. I was mindful of the power balance that exists in some cultures between the teacher and the parent and had to ensure that parents did not feel that they were obliged to give their consent. Furthermore, it was essential that parents fully understood my request and its implications for their children. I therefore held an open meeting for all parents to attend in which I explained the purpose of the study and asked for consent. At this meeting, parents were issued with consent forms outlining the research study. I then met parents in a one-to-one meeting in order to clarify my request and ensure their understanding.

In communicating my request to the children in my class, I was aware of the power relationship that exists between us. Such a young age group are generally very eager to please. I made it explicitly clear to them that they had the right to opt out of the video sessions and that they would not miss out on any playtime if they chose to opt out.
Furthermore, in filming playtime in the classroom, I needed to be mindful not to cause embarrassment or discomfort of any kind to any of the children in my class. I was careful not to show the children in any negative light that might upset them or their parents now or in the future. They were given the opportunity to view the video footage and, subject to their parent’s approval, were allowed to decide if they were happy for me to use it.
3. IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Research Structure

My two research cycles took place between January 2011 and April 2012. Engaging in these cycles of enquiry enabled me to form my own living educational theory. The two action research cycles were very distinct. The first cycle focused on the learning potential of technology in the classroom, namely digital games. The second cycle was greatly altered in light of my research findings, my own reflections and feedback from colleagues following the first cycle. The emphasis of the second cycle was on traditional play, rather than digital play, as a method of teaching and learning.

The first cycle of enquiry occurred from January 2011 to June 2011 and focused solely on the use of digital-game based learning with a view to engaging the children in my Junior Infant class through technological means. The stimulus for this enquiry arose out of concern for my overuse of workbooks with my class. I felt textbooks and workbooks were not engaging resources for children of a young age group. My pupils are “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) – children born in a technological era, who spend more time operating computers than they do reading. Therefore, my enquiry focused on determining whether digital games engaged children more than traditional resources.

The second cycle commenced in July 2011 and differed greatly in emphasis from the first cycle. The focused moved from digital games to all games – both traditional and digital – in order to improve student engagement and learning. It involved planning and producing a video that highlighted the educational importance of play to the parents of children in Junior Infant and encouraged parents to participate in play with their child both at home and in “stay and play” sessions in school– sessions in which a parent is invited to “stay and play” in one of the play corners.
3.2 Cycle 1

3.2.1 What was my concern?

Having reflected on my three years as a Junior Infant teacher, I felt I was not engaged in best practice in my teaching and learning methodologies. Though I did not value workbooks these as an educational resource and viewed them merely as colouring books, I begrudgingly accepted them as part of my daily routine in the classroom. Dunphy (2009) describes how “teachers seemed to feel compelled by these [workbooks], and in some cases appeared to treat them as if they were the curriculum”.

My own compulsion to use workbooks derived from the fact that parents paid for them and therefore would like to see them used. Yet, parents paid for them because they were requested by the school on its annual booklists. I was concerned that I had not previously tried to break this cycle.

3.2.2 Why was I concerned?

I believed that over-reliance on workbooks did not constitute best practice. In accepting this traditional method of teaching, I was neglecting to fulfil my educational values of responsibility, engagement and inclusion. I felt that there had to be more engaging and enjoyable methods of teaching, although I had never attempted to explore them.

3.2.3 What could I do about it?

As a teacher in an early childhood educational setting, I realise the value of games in education. The potential of games to support learning is
such that it is included in the National Curriculum (Department of Education and Science, 1999).

My pupils are “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) – children born in a technological era, who spend more time operating computers than they do reading. Therefore, my first cycle of enquiry focused on determining whether I could include games that were appropriate for the modern-day “digital natives” in my class as a teaching methodology. I decided to attempt to improve my practice and engage my students by introducing digital game-based learning to my classroom.

_Teaching a Junior Infant Class restricts me at times in the technologies that I can include in my work practice. Whilst their ability and knowledge create a barrier, I am also mindful of the body of research stating that while technology plays a fundamental part in life and education, the screen time of children needs to be limited. Thus, at my current class level I feel games would be the most appropriate technology to choose. In particular, I will be focussing on serious games._

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3.2.4 _What did I do about it?_

I was aware of the vast array of technology and computing equipment available in the school and felt proficient in their general use. Nonetheless, I felt ill-equipped and ill-trained to adopt proper and effective use of these in the classroom. The interactive whiteboard, the visualisers and the computer suite were convenient resources that made life easier as a teacher. I was not convinced, however, that the manner in which they were used was any more engaging than traditional methods of teaching.
I therefore undertook the eLearning strand of an M.Sc in Education and Training Management with Dublin City University in an effort to improve my practice. Throughout the course, I examined my use of technology in the classroom and how I could use it effectively to engage the children in my class.
I also set out to evaluate the digital games accessible to my school. With a fully equipped computer suite, a set of twenty five laptops and a class computer in every classroom, I was conscious there was already a selection of digital games available to teachers. Furthermore, access to the internet meant a wealth of digital games were easily accessible in every class.

In January 2011, I embarked on an initiative to integrate digital games into my teaching with the intention of replacing traditional, less engaging resources. The aim of this initiative was to improve my teaching and the learning in my class and promote my value of engagement. I attempted to harness the technological skill of the children whilst engaging them in digital games.

3.2.5 Reflection

My research during the period from January 2011 to June 2011 convinced me that digital games do indeed hold a valuable place in the future of the education system. The motivational value of video games
is attractive to any teacher trying to inspire a classroom of children to learn. Their ability to communicate messages, their visual representation of information and the opportunity they provide for collaboration are just some of the advantages that I felt gave them an entitlement for inclusion in the system.

However, following implementation of this initiative, I realised that whilst digital game-based learning may have a place in education generally, it is not as suitable, as motivating or as desirable in early childhood education.

From the outset, I was conscious that the youth of today are immersed in media of some description from infancy. Televisions, computers, video games and iPods are a near constant in their lives from an early age. As a result, the screen time of children needs to be monitored and limited. Green et al. (1999) describe how much of the average young child’s time is spent watching television. The more recent study of Rideout et al. (2003) demonstrates how screen time has developed from television viewing alone to computers, television, video games and music media. This increase in digital viewing and play has led to the decrease in active, physical play (Anderson et al. 2008). In light of this research, I was reluctant to fully embrace digital games as a replacement for traditional resources. Such reluctance to embrace the new initiative, however, instigated a change in my attitude to the use of digital game-based learning in early childhood education.

I realised that developing an initiative in which I did not have complete faith and to which I was not fully committed, I was, in fact, a living contradiction. This demanded a change in direction in both my research and practice.
My essay last year was on digital game based learning. However, through extensive reading over the summer, continuing professional development and my own ongoing observations in the classroom, I do not value digital games in the classroom to the same extent. I feel as though the principles of game-based learning are to be valued but should be implemented in the context of physical play rather than digital play. The learning potential for the digital games such as fun, enjoyment, motivation, competition etc. can all be applied to any type of play. Thus, I feel that a second cycle to my action research essay from last year has emerged.

ES514 Journal – 3rd December 2011

It was clear that, though digital games may have a place in the education system, they do not hold the same level of engagement for young children. This gave rise to a new concern and a second cycle of enquiry.

3.3 Cycle 2

3.3.1 What was my concern?

Through evaluation and reflection of the first cycle, I conceded that implementing a digital games initiative, though enjoyable for the most part, was not fully engaging the children in my class.

Church (2006) states, “children need to start with the concrete and then move to the abstract”. I felt that while digital games may be fun and engaging for children, they remain abstract – a virtual world with a simulated environment. They do not enable children to touch, feel, manipulate, investigate or explore objects.
During my digital game-based learning, children remained, for the most part, inactive, passive learners in the classroom. The nature and design of the interactive whiteboard, though engaging for children, only permits one child to interact at a time. The young age group of the children meant that waiting too long for a turn diminished their interest, motivation and concentration. The engagement, fun and enjoyment I had hoped to bring to my lessons were not fully realised. Furthermore, it was clear from the academic research that it is not appropriate, nor is it desirable, to rely heavily on digital games and that time spent on these activities had to be limited.

![Image 4: Majority of class inactive at interactive whiteboard](image)

### 3.3.2 Why was I concerned?

In light of critical reflection on the results of my practical research in the classroom and my readings on academic research in the area of digital game-based learning, I realised that, although I was intending to improve my practice, I was continuing to neglect my educational values. The initiation of such a programme in my classroom did not achieve the level of engagement or inclusion I had hoped for.
3.3.3 What could I do about it?

The Primary School Curriculum for Junior Infants recognises the learning needs of young children. It promotes activity-based learning and experiential development. This “learning by doing” theory has developed throughout the history of early childhood education. In the nineteenth century, John Dewey (1859 – 1952) introduced the concept of “progressive education” – a child-centred, democratic approach to education. This concept continues to influence the curriculum we use today. Dewey believed that education should be “both active and interactive” (Mooney, 2000). Montessori (1870 – 1952) also promoted “learning by doing” in early childhood education. She developed the concept of child-centred education, creating a child-centred environment in which children could learn. She promoted sensory play and child-sized materials and equipment for exploration (Mooney, 2000). Her research impacted the work of Piaget and Vygotsky. Piaget (1896 – 1980) highlighted the importance of play for cognitive development. He believed that children should construct knowledge through play and interactions rather than absorbing or accumulating it from the teacher or the external world (Kamii, 1974).

While I was fully committed to this “learning by doing” approach to teaching, my digital game-based learning initiative alone had not achieved the desired results. I knew I could implement a play-based initiative incorporating both digital play and traditional play, which promote my values of responsibility, engagement and inclusion. In order to honour my values, I needed to (i) embark on a further new initiative to teach in a more engaging manner and (ii) gain parental support of my initiative.
The inspiration and motivation for my new initiative and second cycle of my Action Research enquiry began in the summer of 2011 when I completed a professional development course in Aistear in St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra. The course introduced me to the new curriculum framework for early childhood education. The framework emphasised play as a teaching and learning method in the early childhood classroom. Throughout the course, I was struck by the significant overlap between the benefits to young children of digital games and those of the real, physical play that the Aistear framework promotes. Corti (2005) summarises the benefits of digital games, many of which can apply equally to real games:

- Learners can explore in realistic and relevant environments;
- Rules and regulations are clearly defined;
- Objectives are clear;
- Games are truly interactive and experiential;
- Games have clear outcomes;
- Games are adaptive;
- Games require cognitive skill to analyse the high volumes of information received; and
- Games are genuinely enjoyable.

Aistear inspired me to change my practice and introduce a new teaching framework in my Junior Infant classroom. I hoped to achieve the benefits of digital play though through the use of real, traditional play. I believed that using play as a teaching and learning method, rather than as an activity outside the curriculum, would fulfil my values of responsibility, engagement and inclusion.
Play not only attracts children but adults too. Before entering the teenage years, dolls, sandpits and costumes have been cast aside. Yet, many adults still possess a game console (De Schutter, 2011). Therefore, digital games are seen as a valuable tool in education as they preserve the enjoyable element of play through to adulthood. However, due to the young nature of children in early childhood education, play in its primary sense, is still valued. Therefore, there is no need for digital games to preserve the principles of play. Play, in the child’s sense of the word, can be the teaching method itself.

### 3.3.4 What did I do about it?

In September 2011, I embarked on a new initiative to introduce the *Aistear* programme to my class and to include play as part of my teaching methods in an effort to improve my practice and honour my educational values.

### 3.4 The Educational Benefits of Play

“While playing, children exhibit behaviors that are more advanced than their actual developmental level, thereby stretching the limits of their abilities” (Stevens, 2003 p45). The *Aistear* Framework categorises play into the following five groups:

1. Language Play;
2. Games with Rules;
3. Pretend Play;
4. Physical Play; and
5. Creative Play.

Each of these categories fulfils different functions and contributes to overall learning.
3.4.1 Language Play

Language play involves play with letters, words and sounds. It focuses on reading, writing and listening. During language play, children engage with stories, words and rhymes both in written and oral forms. It can include focusing on individual words, word board games, rhyming words or creating words. This form of play develops word association and creation skills, listening skills and overall oral language. Learning language through play leads to “purposeful talk” and allows for the development of vocabulary in “rich contexts” (Hill, 2010 p.5). The role of the adult in play is then to extend the children’s language where appropriate.
3.4.2 Games With Rules

Schaefer and Reid (2001, cited in Streng, 2008 p.5) describe games as a natural group activity that, “serve children to have fun, to explore, learn and to interact with others”. They state that “[a] game approach can
effectively help children learn new behaviours, become better problem solvers”. Games with rules teach children about fair play, collaboration and teamwork. Children are challenged during these games to take turns, share the goal and work towards the end goal of the game in order to win. To play the game, children must interact, listen to each other and establish the correct moves. This forces children into a high level of cognitive thinking and develops problem-solving skills. Furthermore, during games with rules, children learn to deal with emotional issues – being gracious in a win or a loss.

3.4.3 Pretend Play

During pretend play, children enter into a fantasy world and take on different roles and characters. In doing so, they are learning how to interact with the world around them and the people in it. They learn to cooperate, negotiate and share with each other. They engage in problem-solving, skill building and language development.
Furthermore, pretend play is an important element of literacy and numeracy development. Reading is an abstract skill. It involves looking at symbols and interpreting their meaning. It is through pretend play that this skill is further enhanced.

Almon (2003) describes how, as children engage in fantasy play, they become less dependent on actual objects and use anything they have to hand to represent their needs. Piaget suggested that this pretend play “supports change in children’s representational abilities by providing practice in cognitive skills associated with developing logic structures that progress stage-like to abstract reasoning” (Christie et al. 2010 p.69). For example, children often use a banana to represent a telephone or a bottle to represent a microphone. Using an object to represent something else develops cognitive thinking. The child can see the banana as both a banana and a telephone. This skill can then be transferred to reading.

Reading involves looking at symbols (letters) and interpreting their meaning. The letters need to represent a word. They children then need to be able to visualize this word. When children use one object to represent another during play, they are developing this representational skill needed for reading.

3.4.4 Physical Play
Physical play promotes the use of both gross and fine motor skills in children. Gross motor skills are big movements that use large muscles in the legs, arms and torso. Fine motor skills are small movements that use small muscles in the fingers, hands and wrists. Physical play builds strength in big and small muscles. It develops hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness and balance. Through physical play children develop control and direction.

Fine motor skills are developed through manipulative activities in which the children develop the control of muscles in their fingers and hands. This type of play is essential in developing writing skills. Naus (2000, p64) states that “in-hand manipulation skills are the precise and skilled finger movements made during fine motor tasks. Practice and refinement of tasks requiring in-hand manipulation help the child to develop the strength and coordination necessary to grasp, manipulate, and control writing instruments while writing.”
Woodard (2001) identifies gross motor development as a fundamental part of physical education. Furthermore, she suggests that fundamental gross motor movements in early childhood education enhance cognitive skills, social skills, and perceived competence among children. Piek (2008) reports that there is “a strong relationship between early gross motor and later school aged cognitive development, especially processing speed and working memory”.

Image 10: Fine Motor Skills

Image 11: Gross Motor Skills
3.4.5 Creative Play

There is an element of creative play in all other categories of play. Creative play offers many intellectual, social and emotional learning opportunities for children. It develops senses, innovation, imagination and complex thinking skills. During this type of play, children become inspired. They explore curiosities, make discoveries and learn to engage with the world around them. When children paint, draw, pretend, build, read, or play with sand or water, they engage in creative play.

3.5 Developing an Educational Video for Parents

Play has always been an integral aspect of early childhood education in Ireland. However, in recent years, teachers’ attitudes towards the role of play in the classroom are evolving. Many teachers are now beginning to adapt their practices to incorporate play as a teaching and learning methodology. The era when children played at their desks while the teacher worked at his/hers is in the past. This message, however, has not yet been communicated to parents.
In order to fully embrace my play initiative, I felt I needed parental support of the scheme. Whilst the Aistear course has been instrumental in transforming the attitudes of teachers, the traditional perception of parents as regards the role of playtime has not changed. In my experience of teaching Junior Infant children, I realise that parents do not associate play with teaching and learning. This is evident in the remarks parents have made on occasions. Many have justified their child being late for school by commenting that it is “just playtime he missed anyway” or “it’s only the toys she missed out on”.

Although some parents acknowledge the social value of play, most are unaware of the critical importance of play in teaching children core subjects in the curriculum. I felt that the most powerful and compelling method of communicating the educational importance of play would be to capture it on film.

Furthermore, parents are unaware of the important role of the teacher during playtime. Parents recall their own school experiences in which the teacher listened to children reading or corrected work whilst they played. This is no longer the case in classrooms and so, rather than continue to tell parents, I feel it would be more effective to show them in a video production.

3.6 Developing the Video Storyboard

The development of a storyboard for a video revolving around children proved a challenge. The noisy classroom setting, the young age of the children and the unpredictable nature of playtime made storyboarding a difficult task.

I used still photographs of the children at play in an attempt to convey the visual style of the video. I could not control the direction the play would take on days I was due to film and therefore, I felt restricted in scripting the video. I was aware that the narrative should relate directly to the footage on the screen. Playtime in my class is a child-led activity in which the children take control.
and I follow their lead. In order to ensure the play on screen was an authentic learning activity, I could not manipulate the session.

Although it was difficult to begin the filming process with such little sense of control of the outcome, I felt the best way forward would be to film ‘little and often’. I hoped that through frequent filming, the children would eventually become accustomed to the camera and play naturally. I then intended to write the script after the filming process, based on the footage I had captured.

3.7 The Filming and Editing Process

The filming process for the video began in February 2012. The filming took place intermittently throughout February, March and April. It occurred in my own classroom, the P.E. hall and the outdoor courtyards during the daily play sessions. The children would plan their play session as usual and I simply filmed them at work.

3.7.1 Challenges in Filming

From the first day of filming, the process was more difficult than I had anticipated. One element of my new play initiative required the active involvement of the teacher in play. From September to February, the children became accustomed to structured activities in which I played with them. However, during filming sessions, I remained behind the camera rather than in front of it. This disrupted the natural flow of the play session as the children repeatedly broke out of their play role to ask me to join in.

In such a chaotic environment, capturing a steady shot created a further challenge. As the children became accustomed to the presence of the camera, they became more careless. I felt a certain amount of frustration
to filming with young children that I documented throughout the filming process.

With all the best intentions to be careful near the camera, the children don’t understand the space required. They try to be very cautious of the camera and give it a wide arc. The arc however, is not wide enough to avoid the tripod. I was filming the ‘vet’ play corner today. The children were reading and writing appointments, a great shot that would link directly to literacy development. However, E. asked me could he use the toilet while I was filming the shot. In addition to being heard on film he must have also kicked the leg of the tripod because there is a noticeable shake in the footage.

ES512 Journal – 5th March 2012

Today I thought I had a great shot of the 6 children playing in the ‘restaurant’. The level of language and the thought process from them was exactly what I want to demonstrate to parents. When I reviewed the footage later however, the screaming in the background as one of the other groups finished their game of snakes and ladders was all that could be heard. This is not the first time I’ve thought I had a good shot during filming but something in the background or off camera becomes more obvious when I review it.

ES512 Journal – 13th March 2012
3.7.2 The Initial Editing Process

The video was edited using iMovie and Garageband software. During editing, it became apparent that a voiceover would have to be used throughout. The low tone of the children’s voices, the fact that they often tend to speak over each other, the background noise and the interruptions from a busy class made the sound quality of the footage very poor.

The initial storyboard included an interview with a parent, which was intended to serve as evidence of the perception of parents towards play. Feedback in the early stages of the editing made it clear that such an interview was unnecessary. My target audience – parents - were aware of their own opinions on play. The interview, therefore, served no purpose.

Feedback I received on last year’s video production made me aware that I needed to capture my audience from the beginning. As a “hook”
(Koumi, 2006, 143), the video began in a greyscale, quiet and calm classroom with soothing music as the introduction of the video. The idea was to remind parents of their own school days. It was my aim to show the sharp and glaring contrast between this traditional classroom and my classroom today.

Although the topic was play, I hoped for the message and the tone of the video to be serious, demonstrating the science behind the play.

In April, I submitted my video to a validation forum for my classmates and supervisor. The purpose of the forum was to receive constructive criticism and advice on the video. The feedback I received outlines a number of changes needed in order to make my video a more engaging and inclusive artefact. Some of the comments from the forum were as follows:

- The video was too long for the viewer to remain engaged throughout. I needed to cut down on footage that was overlapping and shorten certain shots.
- The tone of the video and the voice did not need to be very serious for the message to translate. A fun, engaging and enjoyable video and voiceover would be more engaging and thus, more effective.
- Panning – the circular movement of the camera – in the opening sequence detracted from overall effect of moving from old style learning to the new play approach. Whilst the idea was an effective hook, I needed to cut to the shots rather than pan the entire classroom.
- The pace and level of language in the video was not inclusive of parents who do not have a high standard of English.
- The shot with the five videos of each of the types of play was too small.
• The split screen shots, comparing traditional school activities with playful equivalents, needed to have the busier, action shot on the left as opposed to the right. This would make for more comfortable viewing, as it is how the eyes naturally read.

• There should be a summary slide or slides.

3.7.3 Back to the Storyboard – Encouraging Parental Involvement in Play

During the course of the enquiry, as I returned to the video storyboard to begin re-shooting and re-editing, I expanded my objective to produce an informative, engaging and accessible video that would not only demonstrate the value of play to the parents of the children in my class but also motivate them to become involved in the play initiative.

Machen et al. (2005 p.15). encourages teachers to “establish new approaches to encourage parental joint efforts to increase student learning”. I aimed, through the use of video, to encourage parents to participate in “stay and play” sessions - school play sessions in which a parent is invited to take part and play with the children. I hoped that by clearly demonstrating the role of the adult in play to parents, they would be encouraged and motivated to take part and play an active role in their child’s education.

In order to encourage parental involvement in my new play initiative, I felt it was necessary to demonstrate the role of the adult in the play session. This required that I join in the play with the children rather than remain behind the camera.

In order to facilitate this, I received parental permission to keep some children for an hour after school. This enabled me to film without the interference of background noise and interruptions. It also eliminated disruptions to shots from children tripping on the tripod. In this new
footage, the level of language and thinking from the children can be heard clearly. Furthermore, it demonstrates the role of the adult in developing these skills.

3.7.4 Re-editing

I began to re-edit the video based on the feedback from my colleagues, classmates and supervisor. I removed the panning in the opening sequence of the film and replaced it with different shots of the classroom and close ups of the children at work. This alteration also served to reduce the length of the overall video. In order to shorten the video further, I deleted unnecessary shots and edited others.

It was not possible to increase the size of the five videos playing from the one screen without the videos and written description overlapping each other. In order to address this problem, I began the sequence with a full screen version of each video. The sequence then finished with the
five small videos again, though it was now clearer to the viewer what each video contained.

For each of the split-screen sequences, I reversed the order of the shots so that the action shot was on the left and the low-movement shot was on the right.

I re-recorded the voiceover, making a better attempt to add tone, inflection, variety and laughter to my voice. This made the film more engaging and the simplified language was more inclusive of parents with English as a second language. In addition, I added a summary slide at the end of the video to reinforce the arguments I had made.

3.8 Reflections

Before beginning the educational video, I created a video pitch detailing the elements of my proposed video. In this pitch, I outlined my objectives for the video as follows:

- That parents will know that there are different types of play and see these types of play in action;
- That parents will understand that there is a direct link between the curriculum and play;
- To show the role of the teacher in play and demonstrate the teacher modelling different roles to the children; and
- To illustrate to parents that children learn through play.

Educational Video Pitch – 5th November 2011

Upon reflection, I feel that these learning objectives have been achieved through the production of my educational video. Validation from my supervisor, classmates and colleagues has helped me ensure that the video is clear, coherent and fit for its purpose.
As the project progressed, I realised that the more confident, outgoing children in my class featured more in my video than the shy children. Additionally, the English-speaking children featured more prominently as their pronunciation and articulation were better. However, this was not living in the direction of my value of inclusion. I therefore became more aware of the children in the shot, rather than simply the activity I was looking to capture on film. Nonetheless, in order to fulfil my value of engagement, the children had to be easily understood when they spoke on-screen. This conflict of values challenged me throughout the process of making the video.

My attempts to change and improve my practice are documented throughout my research journey. My learning journal, validation meetings with my supervisor and classmates, video footage and photograph capture the journey as it unfolded. Through the two cycles of enquiry, I attempted to implement methodologies that were engaging and inclusive of all the children in my class. In addition, I created an educational video production that I believe is an engaging and inclusive artefact.
4. FINAL REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this research project, I aimed to create an educational video that would enlighten parents as to the educational value of play in the classroom. In light of the recent drive towards more literacy and numeracy in education, I decided to produce this video to make parents aware of the value of play as a tool to teach various elements of the curriculum. In addition, it was my hope that the video would highlight the unnecessary tradition of using workbooks in Junior Infants and demonstrate how structured play can be used as an alternative to workbooks.

As the filming progressed and my own learning increased, my aims for the video broadened to include demonstrating play to parents. I hoped to encourage parents to participate in “stay and play” sessions by exhibiting the role of the adult in play.

4.1 My Learning

Throughout the two cycles of enquiry, I was concerned with the learning of the Junior Infant children in my class. I explored different methods of teaching and learning in order to identify effective, engaging and inclusive practices in my class. Throughout the process, I have extended my own understanding of the cognitive processes of children. The impetus to initiate play as a fundamental teaching method in my class transpired during the Aistear course I completed. The value and learning potential of play in early childhood education was evident during this course. As a result of the two cycles of enquiry, I understand the theoretical reasoning behind the Aistear framework. This understanding enabled me to produce a video artefact that would contribute to the learning of others.

My values of responsibility, engagement and inclusion that I strive to achieve in the classroom were, at times, neglected in my research. Social validation,
feedback from my supervisor and the constant reflective nature of the research highlighted the need for the video to be equally engaging and inclusive in order to fulfil my values in practice.

Honouring my value of inclusion was a difficult task when working with children. I aimed to include all children equally in the video but was hindered when children became camera shy. Equally, the lack of English and the very strong accents of some of the children made it difficult to be fully inclusive. From a viewer’s perspective, I was conscious that many parents had difficulty reading and understanding English.

The creation of the video artefact demanded skill and proficiency in the use of iMovie, Garageband, Keynote and Pages. The learning required to acquire such technical skills was insignificant however, in relation to the skills learned to complete the research study. The confidence, creativity, imagination, inspiration and problem-solving skills that I strive so hard to develop in my students were personally tested many times in developing my own living educational theory. Crotty (2011, p7) describes how “positive affirmation and supporting the emotions that arise through students’ learning journey can be transformative”. In beginning my research journey, I constantly doubted my ability and lacked any pride or confidence in my work.

I found this week frustrating in terms of the assignment. Having just uploaded it I feel that had I my time back again I would do it all differently. I found it very difficult to make a start on the assignment. I felt I lacked the photographic skill to complete it and still feel this way to some extent. Throughout the first week of the assignment I came up with various ideas for photographs that I would like to take as well as their captions. However, I was frustrated when I could not capture the images as I had imagined them. I felt the weather, the light and my inexperience of taking photographs hindered my progress at times.

ES512 Journal – 28th February 2011
While I have always battled hard to do my best and achieve high marks, if I succeed in doing so, I am worried that there is then nowhere to come but down. With each assignment completed well, the pressure mounts for the next one. The same can be said for the journals. Some weeks I am pleased with my journal entry and other weeks I struggle to even get started. Whilst I see this as natural, it is frustrating, as it seems like a backward step.

ES512 Journal – 21st April 2011

After many conversations with my supervisor and classmates as well as validation of my work, I have the confidence to share my work not only with the parents of the children in my class, but with the wider teaching community.

4.2 The Learning of Others
The research study has enabled me to challenge the perceptions parents held of playtime, workbooks and teaching methodologies. As a result of this study, I have reduced the number of workbooks in my class for the coming school year. The parents of my current Junior Infants have acknowledged the ineffective nature of many workbook pages. They have acknowledged the use of play as a legitimate and justifiable teaching methodology. Furthermore, parents have expressed an interest in participating in play with their child during “stay and play” sessions.

4.3 Further Cycles of Enquiry

During the research process, I was surprised by how many teachers – both my colleagues and others teachers outside my school – expressed interest in viewing the final educational video for their own learning purposes. The Aistear philosophy seems to be the way forward for early childhood education, it remains a challenge for teachers. Setting up play areas, the role of the adult in play and planning and reviewing play with children are all elements of the new play framework. In-service courses, guidelines and policies cannot replace the
Child’s Play: An Educational Issue. The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Value of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class. Deirdre Shelly

visual impact of seeing these activities in action in the classroom. The educational video has, to date, been made available to the other teachers of Junior Infants in my school.

The National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) has recently expressed interest in viewing the educational video resulting from this research study. Going forward, I would suggest that educational videos demonstrating the uses of play be made available on a national level, through the NCCA to teachers implementing the Aistear framework.
References


Child's Play: An Educational Issue. The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Value of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class. Deirdre Shelly


Appendix A

Journal Entry ES512 18th March 2011

This past week my focus has been on the forthcoming essay. I haven’t yet decided on a direction for the vodcast or the video and therefore have focused my energy on the essay. I find it easier to focus on one task at a time and therefore have decided to concentrate on the essay with a view to completing the poster soon after. Having reviewed the list of technologies from class a number of weeks ago I find that I am limited in the options available to me. Teaching a Junior Infant Class restricts me at times in the technologies that I can include in my work practice. Whilst their ability and knowledge create a barrier, I am also mindful of the body of research stating that while technology plays a fundamental part in life and education, the screen time of children needs to be limited. Thus, at my current class level I feel games would be the most appropriate technology to choose. In particular, I will be focussing on serious games. However, having decided on the technology I am struggling to understand the concept of the action research cycle and how to merge the cycle with a literature review. I therefore feel that maybe I should be focussing on the vodcast at the same time to gain a better understanding of the action research cycle concept. Despite this I still find I am leaning towards completing the essay first. I have much more experience in writing essays than I do in creating videos or making vodcasts and therefore feel drawn towards the essay at the moment.
Appendix B

Journal Entry ES514 3rd December 2011

Last week’s session cleared up some of my concerns regarding the assignment for this module.

My essay last year was on digital game based learning. However, through extensive reading over the summer, continuing professional development and my own ongoing observations in the classroom, I do not value digital games in the classroom to the same extent. I feel as though the principles of game based learning are to be valued but should be implemented in the context of physical play rather than digital play. The learning potential for the digital games such as fun, enjoyment, motivation, competition etc. can all be applied to any type of play. Thus, I feel that a second cycle to my action research essay from last year has emerged.

In the second cycle, I will move away from the literature on the digital games and focus on that of the place of physical play in the education system. I will examine literature to see what the researchers say in relation to this type of play and reflect on my own implementation of play in the classroom.
Appendix C

Journal Entry ES512 5th March 2012

Journal 13/3/12

Today I thought I had a great shot of the 6 children playing in the ‘restaurant’. The level of language and the thought process from them was exactly what I wanted to demonstrate to parents. When I reviewed the footage later however, the screaming in the background as one of the other groups finished their game of snakes and ladders was all that could be heard. This is not the first time I’ve thought I had a good shot during filming but something in the background or off camera becomes more obvious when I review it.
Journal Entry ES512 13th March 2012

Filming in the presence of children is proving to be a big challenge. It frustrates the process and takes more time than I had originally anticipated.

In beginning filming I expected that the children would be very shy and unnatural on video. They have gotten used to the camera now however so this is not an issue. Other challenges are presenting themselves however. One I had not expected to encounter with all the best intentions to be careful near the camera the children don’t understand the space required. They try to be very cautious of the camera and give it a wide arc. The arc however is not wide enough to avoid the tripod. I was filming the ‘vet’ play corner today. The children were reading and writing appointments a great shot that would plug directly to literacy development. However C. asked me could he use the toilet while I was filming the shot. In addition to being heard on film he must have also noticed the log of the taped because there is a noticeable shake in the footage.

This frustrates the filming process and hinders my progress. I ask the children to repeat what they were doing for the sake of the shot they don’t do it as naturally as they would do since they become aware I’m watching them.
Appendix E

Journal Entry ES212 28th February 2011

I found this week frustrating in terms of the assignment. Having just uploaded it I feel that had I my time back again I would do it all differently. I found it very difficult to make a start on the assignment. I felt I lacked the photographic skill to complete it and still feel this way to some extent. Throughout the first week of the assignment I came up with various ideas for photographs that I would like to take as well as their captions. However, I was frustrated when I could not capture the images as I had imagined them. I felt the weather, the light and my inexperience of taking photographs hindered my progress at times.

In hindsight I would also have preferred to create the slideshow entirely in imovie. I created the movie in keynote and transported it to imovie to add the music. In doing so, I lost the effects I had worked on in keynote such as the build-in of the text. However, I recognise that sometimes simplicity and clarity are as effective and thus maybe the overall result is better now without such effects.

While, I feel there is a lot I would do differently, I think this is true of any assignment. Regarding myself as a photography novice, there was a steep learning curve in completing this task. I feel like I have developed my photography skills in the course of the two weeks and have built on my knowledge of aesthetic appeal. I have also developed more of an interest in photography and feel like I will enjoy snapping pictures in the future.
Appendix F

Journal Entry ES212 21st April 2011

I feel like I made a good deal of progress over the past week completing the essay for the Emerging Pedagogies module. However, my fear now is that with so long to go until the deadline date I will gradually lose confidence in what I have written. For all assignments and exams I have completed both in my undergraduate and last semester for the postgraduate, I find that I am become overwhelmed with self-doubt once they are submitted. However, I have never had an assignment finished so long before the submission date and therefore feel the self-doubt will begin to creep in and I will constantly redraft it between now and May. Whilst I would be happy to redraft my essay numerous times in order to present my best work, I am conscious that I have other assignments which also need my focus and attention. I am fearful that almost as soon as I have it completed I will begin to tear it apart again and although it seems I have plenty of time to do this, knowing that I have given little thought to my vodcast and video over the past few weeks, time is very much of the essence. The fact that we have an abstract and a video to complete, which will be based on the essay will hopefully help me to see the value of what I have written.

The discussion on Wednesday night regarding the journal I think sparked some creativity for me. It has helped me to clarify what the journal does in fact mean to me. I have certainly felt that it has been an uphill battle. Whilst I felt validated in some sense with my results for the first semester, and the feedback from my journal, I recognise that it is not impossible to take backward steps either. I feel regarding academia I have always been conflicted. While I have always battled hard to do my best and achieve high marks, if I succeed in doing so, I am worried that there is then nowhere to come but down. With each assignment completed well, the pressure mounts for the next one. The same can be said for the journals. Some weeks I am pleased with my journal entry and other weeks I struggle to even get started. Whilst I see this as natural, it is frustrating, as it seems like a backward step.

From completing my essay I have noted the way I learn myself. The topic of games is reported in the literature as another form of communication and data representation.
However, I don’t consider myself a visual learner. The fact that I completed the essay before even having a concrete idea for the video I think demonstrates the type of learner I am. Although I think I am probably in the minority, I learn through reading and writing. I feel there is probably a certain amount of new knowledge I learn subconsciously from visual sources, when I consciously sit down to study I tend to avoid the colourful diagrams and visuals and focus on the written word. I find this may be contributing to the difficulty I have in tapping into my creativity. However, I find that this is at odds with my work on a daily basis. Given the age group I teach, I work with visual cues every day. I therefore find it frustrating when I lack creativity in college life.
Appendix G
Research Ethics Committee: Notification Form for Low-Risk Projects and Undergraduate Dissertations

DCU Research Ethics Committee has introduced a procedure for notification to the committee of

1. low-risk social research projects, in which personal information that is deemed not sensitive is being collected by interview, questionnaire, or other means

2. dissertations on undergraduate programmes in all disciplines.

The committee requires researchers to concisely answer the following questions within this form (before the project starts):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Importance of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicant Name and E-mail:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deirdre Shelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:deirdre.shelly2@mail.dcu.ie">deirdre.shelly2@mail.dcu.ie</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>If a student applicant, please provide the following:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Study (Undergrad/Taught MSc/Research MSc/Phd):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taught M.Sc. in Education and Training Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervisor Name and E-mail:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yvonne Crotty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:yvonne.crotty@dcu.ie">yvonne.crotty@dcu.ie</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Questions:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provide a lay description of the proposed research (approx. 300wds):</td>
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My proposed research will take the form of a written dissertation and an Educational Video Production (EPV). The purpose of my research is to examine parental perceptions of play in Junior Infants and challenge these perceptions using video technology.
Through completion of my research project I hope to justify to parents the time I spend on play in my Junior Infant classroom. In order to achieve this, I will analyse what researchers in Early Childhood Education say about play. The study will examine the learning value of play and how this differs to parental perceptions. I hope to film playtime in my classroom as evidence of the direct link between the curriculum and play. It is proposed to use this footage to make an EVP indicating the educational importance of play in the Junior Infant classroom. It will be a classroom-based production and will feature the children completing various aspects of the curriculum through playful activities. The video will capture the children during playtime and demonstrate the teaching and learning power of play to the audience. In doing so, I hope to achieve the following objectives:

- That parents will know that there are different types of play and see these types of play in action;
- That parents will understand that there is a direct link between the curriculum and play;
- To show the role of the teacher in play and demonstrate the teacher modeling different play roles to the children;
- To illustrate to parents that children learn through play; and
- That parents will support my play initiatives in the classroom.

2. Detail your proposed methodology (1 page max):

I propose to use an “Action Research” approach to this research project. In this Action Research project, I will study my own practice with a view to improving the quality of my teaching. In Cycle 1, I will examine my own practice of play and how I can improve the quality of, frequency of and attitude towards play in my classroom. The study will take the form of “insider research” as I will be both practitioner and researcher in the project.

Data will be collected using a mixed method approach. Qualitative data will be gathered using video clips, my reflective journals, validation groups and a “critical friend”. Quantitative data will be collected using interviews. Triangulation will be achieved through personal and social validation of my research on an ongoing basis throughout the study.

3. Detail the means by which potential participants will be recruited:

The research population of this research will be recruited through convenient sampling. The participants will be the Junior Infant class I teach. The class consists of twenty-three children, both male and female. There are twelve male and eleven female children aged four or five and representing nine different nationalities. All the children will be offered the opportunity to participate in the research.

4. How will the anonymity of the participants be respected?

Every effort will be made to respect participants’ anonymity. Neither the school nor the participant will be named in the video or in the writing up of the dissertation. However, due to the visual nature of video, total anonymity cannot be guaranteed to participants. This point has been made explicit to the parent’s of the participants when informed consent was sought. My research was explained to parents in a face-to-face meeting in order to address any concerns or
answer questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. What risks are researchers or participants being exposed to, if any?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a risk of embarrassment or self-consciousness to the children involved in the video. In order to combat this risk, the children and the parents will have approval of any video footage which is to be included in the final video production. In addition, the researcher guarantees that every effort will be made to ensure the children will not be portrayed in any negative or unconstructive way in the video. Video footage will focus solely on the learning outcomes from play.</td>
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<tr>
<th>6. Have approval/s have been sought or secured from other sources? Yes/No</th>
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<tr>
<td>If Yes, give details:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval has been secured from the Principal of the school. Board of Management approval has been sought and is pending until the next meeting is held.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental approval has been secured from all parents of the children. Approval from the children will be sought nearer to the commencement of filming.</td>
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<tr>
<th>7. Please confirm that the following forms are attached to this document:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent Form       Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain Language Statement   Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If not, explain why:
Appendix H

Plain Language Statement

1. Introduction to the Research Study
   • The research working title is *The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Importance of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class.*
   • The research is being conducted by Deirdre Shelly, M.Sc. Student in Education and Training Management, in DCU
   • Deirdre Shelly can be contacted at deirdre.shelly2@dcu.ie.

2. Details of Involvement in the Study
   • Children participating in the research study will be filmed during the daily plan for play, the play session and the play review in the class.
   • Both the parent and the child retain the right to opt out of the research study at any time.
   • The parent and the child have the right to view all footage of their child and consent to its use.
   • Filming will take place during the 2011/2012 academic year

3. Potential Risks to Participants arising from involvement in the Research Study
   • There is a risk of embarrassment or self-consciousness to the children involved in the video. In order to combat this risk, the children and the parents will have approval of any video footage which is to be included in the final video production. In addition, the researcher guarantees that every effort will be made to ensure the children will not be portrayed in any negative or unconstructive way in the video. Video footage will focus solely on the learning outcomes from play.

4. Benefits (direct or indirect) to Participants
   • It is intended to use video clips recorded during this study within class lessons. Children can watch their play sessions as a reminder of what they did and discuss what they were doing. In this way, it is anticipated that the video footage can cultivate oral language development and cognitive thinking in the class.
   • Upon completion of the research study, parents will have a deeper insight into classroom life and their child’s school day.

5. Procedures aimed at protecting confidentiality
   • Every effort will be made to respect participant’s anonymity. Neither the school nor the participant will be named in the video or in the writing up of the dissertation. However, due to the visual nature of video, total anonymity cannot be guaranteed to participants. This point has been made explicit to the parent’s
of the participants when informed consent was sought. My research was explained to parents in a face-to-face meeting in order to address any concerns or answer questions.

6. **Voluntary Participation**

- Participants may withdraw from the Research Study at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed. Children who are not participating in the study will not miss out on any play or learning opportunities.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary,

Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee,

c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research,

Dublin City University,

Dublin 9.

Tel 01-7008000
Appendix I

Participant Informed Consent Form

I. Research Study Title
The study in which your child is being requested to participate has the working title of ‘The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Importance of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class’. It is being conducted by Deirdre Shelly, a M.Sc Student in the School of Education in DCU.

II. Clarification of the purpose of the research
Teachers are under increasing pressure to show evidence and accountability for their work in the classroom. This research project aims to investigate the learning power of play in the classroom and furthermore, to generate evidence that demonstrates the value of playtime in Junior Infants. In doing so, the study will gain further insight into parental perceptions of playtime in school and use video technology to challenge these perceptions. The research aims to justify the time spent in Infant classes on play.

III. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement
Requirements will include your child’s involvement in videotaped play sessions.

Parents – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement

Do you understand the information provided?

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?

Are you aware that your child’s playtime will be filmed?

IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary
Both you and your child are free to withdraw from the research project at any point. If you refuse consent, or your child chooses not to participate in the study, your child will not miss any playtime or learning opportunities in the classroom.

V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations
Every effort will be made to protect your child’s anonymity in this research project. Neither the school, nor your child will be named in the video or the writing up of the study. However, due to the visual nature of video, total anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

VII. Signature:
I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to my child taking part in this research project

Participants Signature: ____________________________
Child's Play: An Educational Issue. The Use of Video to Communicate the Educational Value of Play to the Parents of the Children in my Class. Deirdre Shelly

Name in Block Capitals: ________________________________

Witness: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix J

**Letter to Board of Management**

24 Grand Canal View
Kilmarnock
Dublin 8
0879620319
deirdre.shelly2@mail.dcu.ie

23rd January 2012

Board of Management,
Archbishop Ryan J.N.S.
Balgaddy
Lucan
Co. Dublin

Dear Member of the Board of Management,

I am currently undertaking a Master’s Degree in Education in Dublin City University. As part of this Degree, I am conducting a research project that revolves around the educational importance of play in early childhood education. The research will be reported in two forms – an educational video and a Master’s dissertation.

With your kind permission, I would like to film playtime in Junior Infants as evidence of the learning power of play.

My current position in the school is that of a Junior Infant Teacher. I propose to film playtime in my own class for the purpose of my research. The aim of my research is to justify the time spent in Infant classes on play. Teachers are under increasing pressure to show evidence and accountability for their work in the classroom. This research project aims to generate evidence that demonstrates the value of playtime in Junior Infants. In doing so, the study will gain further insight into parental perceptions of playtime in school and use video technology to challenge such perceptions.
The video will be produced for the parents of the children in my class and for future Junior Infant parents to view when they attend the induction meeting with their child’s teacher next year.

Informed consent of the parents and children will be sought before the research begins. Both the parents and the children will be free to withdraw from the research project at any point. If the parent refuses consent, or the child chooses not to participate in the study, the child will not miss any playtime or learning opportunities in the classroom. They will simply not appear in the final video.

The results of this research will be written up in the form of a Master’s dissertation for submission to Dublin City University, which will be available for staff and students from the college library. The film will be shown to my colleagues and my lecturers in Dublin City University and to the examiners of Dublin City University.

If you have any comments or queries in relation to this project, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above telephone number or email address.

Respectfully yours,

Deirdre Shelly