

Discourses of Play

Yoshi Budd

Linda Mahony

Pam Smith



Early Childhood Australia

A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016

THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Overview

- Contextualising play in the Early Years Learning Framework
- Embodied Perspectives
- Conceptual framework
- Rhetorics/Discourses of play
 - Play as progress
 - Play as fate
 - Play as power
 - Play as frivolity
 - Play as identity
 - Play as imaginary (autonomy)

(Sutton-Smith, 1997)



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Contexts for Play in the Early Years Learning Framework

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Contexts for Play in the Early Years Learning Framework

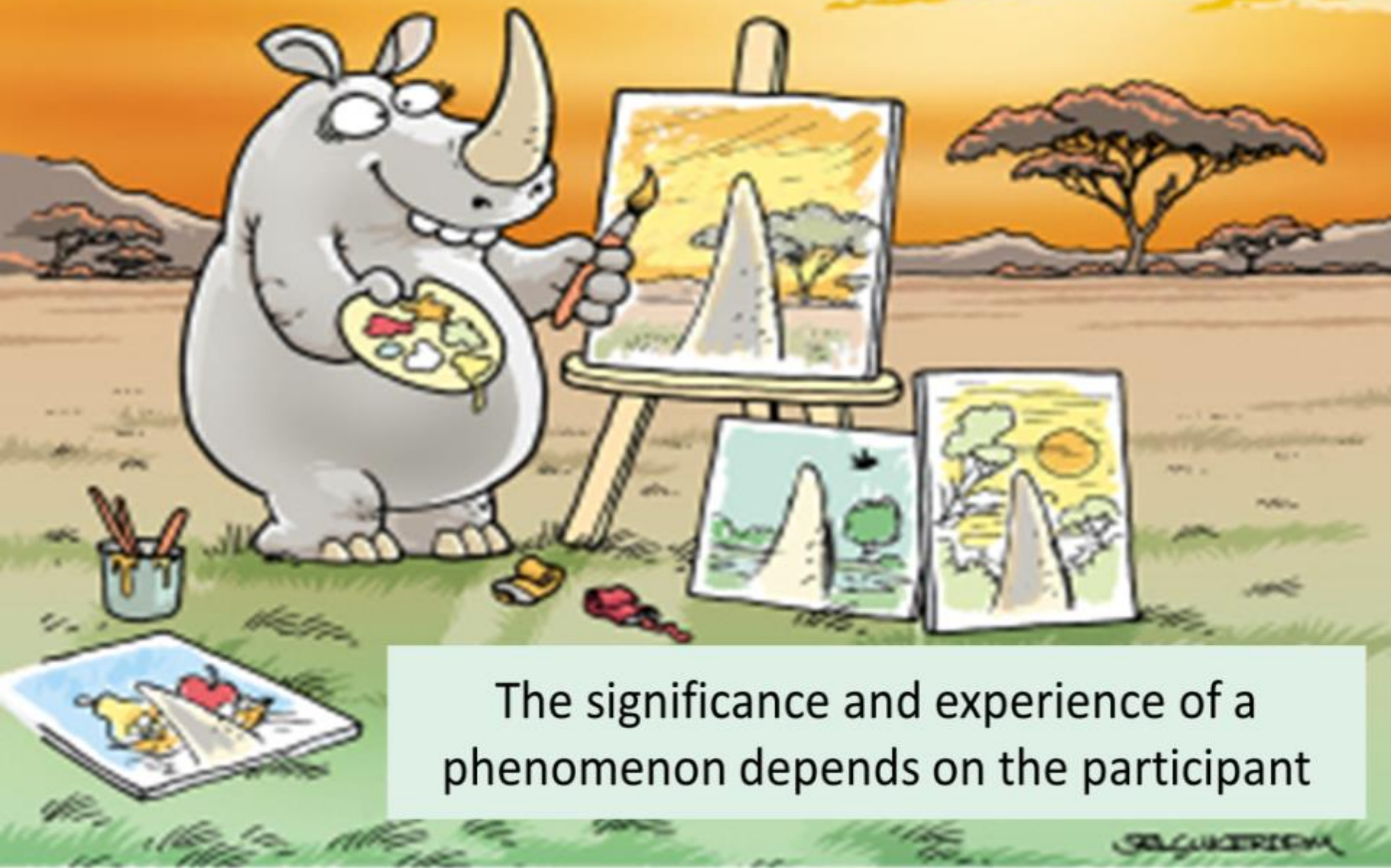
- Head / Hands / Heart (Steiner)
- Cognition / Conation (or psychomotor skills) / Affect (Psychology)
- Knowing that / Knowing how / Knowing why (Aristotle)



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Perspective as embodied



The significance and experience of a phenomenon depends on the participant

Perspective



Perspectives:

2 female teachers interviewed: 20 years and 40 years experience in primary schools

Interview questions:

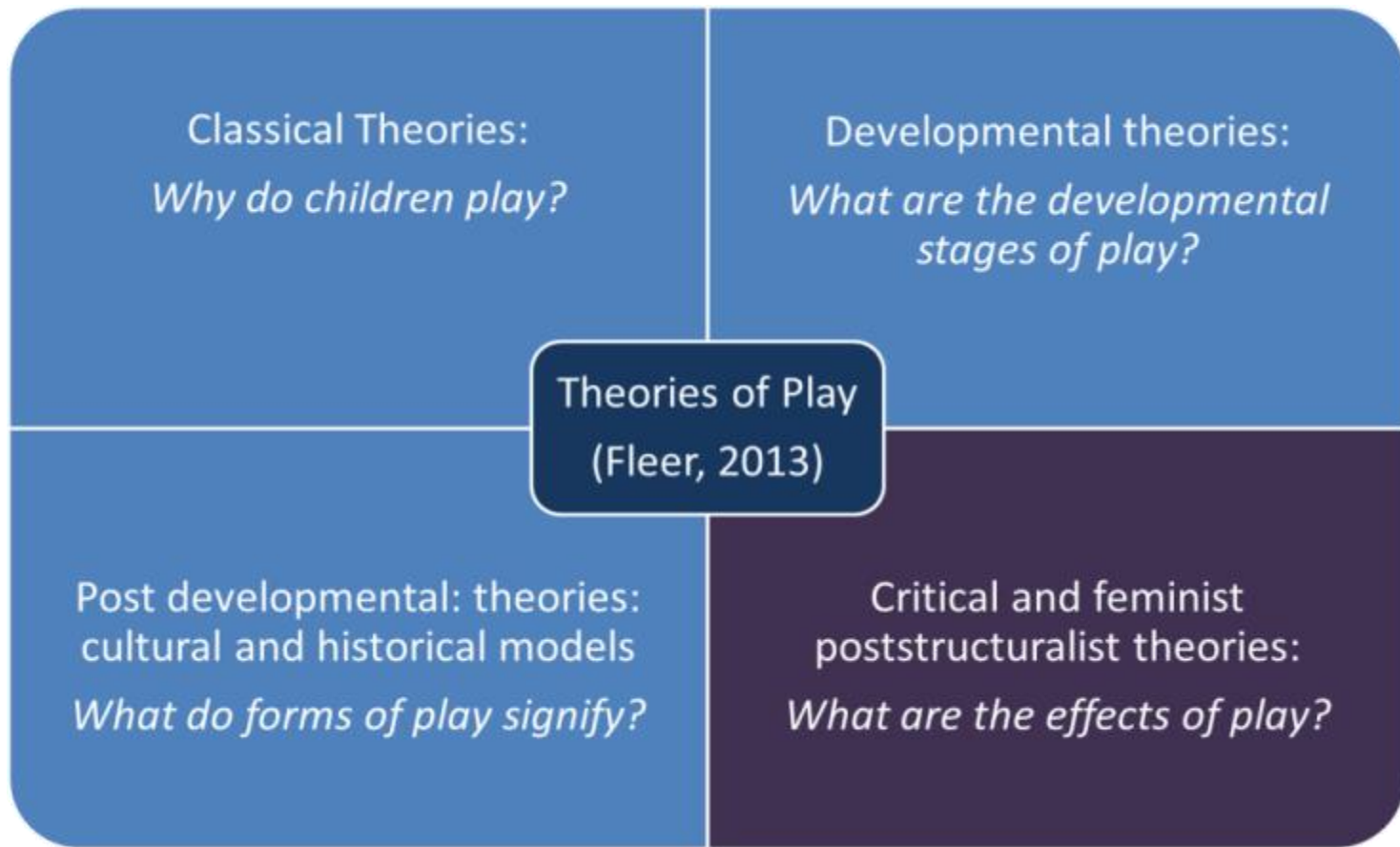
- What does the word *play* mean to you?
- What is the main purpose of play?
- When you were a child, what sort of play did not engage in?
- As an adult, do you still play?
- Where and when do you play, and with whom?
- What is your past and present teaching background?
- How have you used play as a teacher?



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Conceptual frameworks for understanding play



Early Childhood Australia

A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016

THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Classical Theories of Play

Why do children play?

- Burn off surplus energy
- Restorative – a means to deal with stress or physical or mental exhaustion
- A means of developing physical and mental competencies
- Play development signifies human evolution – animal to human behaviours

Q: “The main purpose of play is to ...?”

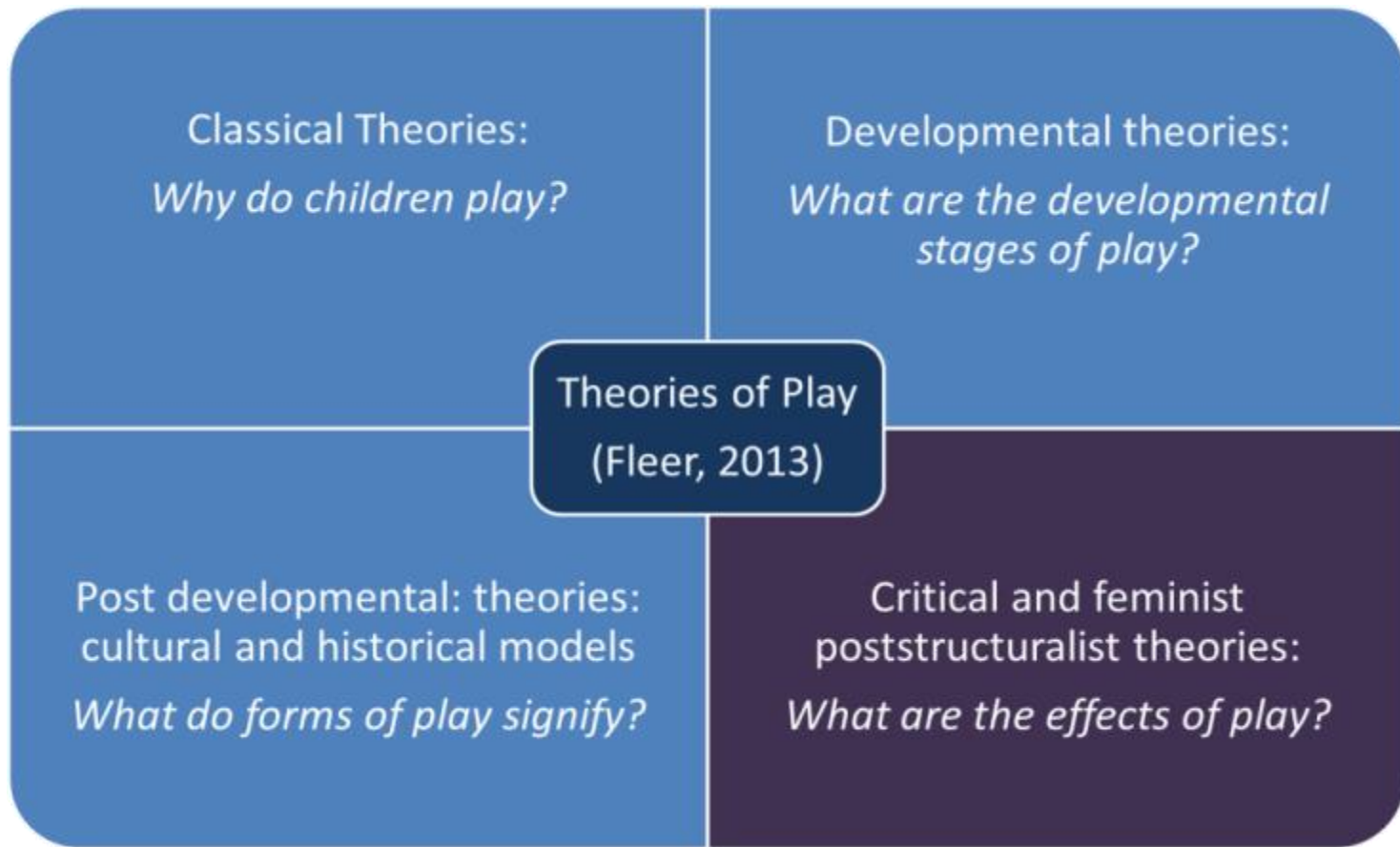
A: “Have **fun**. Exercise the imagination. Make sense of the world. I’m not sure that adults play in the same way. Play means **relaxation** and a way to **refresh** and as a balance to the working life and there are so many different situations in which we use the word play. I think **recreation** is a concept that we use to describe play in the adult world.”



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Conceptual frameworks for understanding play



Developmental Theories of Play

What are the developmental stages of play?

- experimental – exploring the body as/in the world.
- Developing self control
- Sociodramatic – engaging with others (chasing, touching)
- Dramatic (role) play and games with rules (signifying greater self control)

Q: *“The main purpose of play is to ...?”*

A: *“To **learn** and explore the world around me whether it is myself as an adult exploring technology – how to use a computer – I’ll play around with it. Or a child will **learn to use** a toy, or play thing – they will explore as part of play.”*



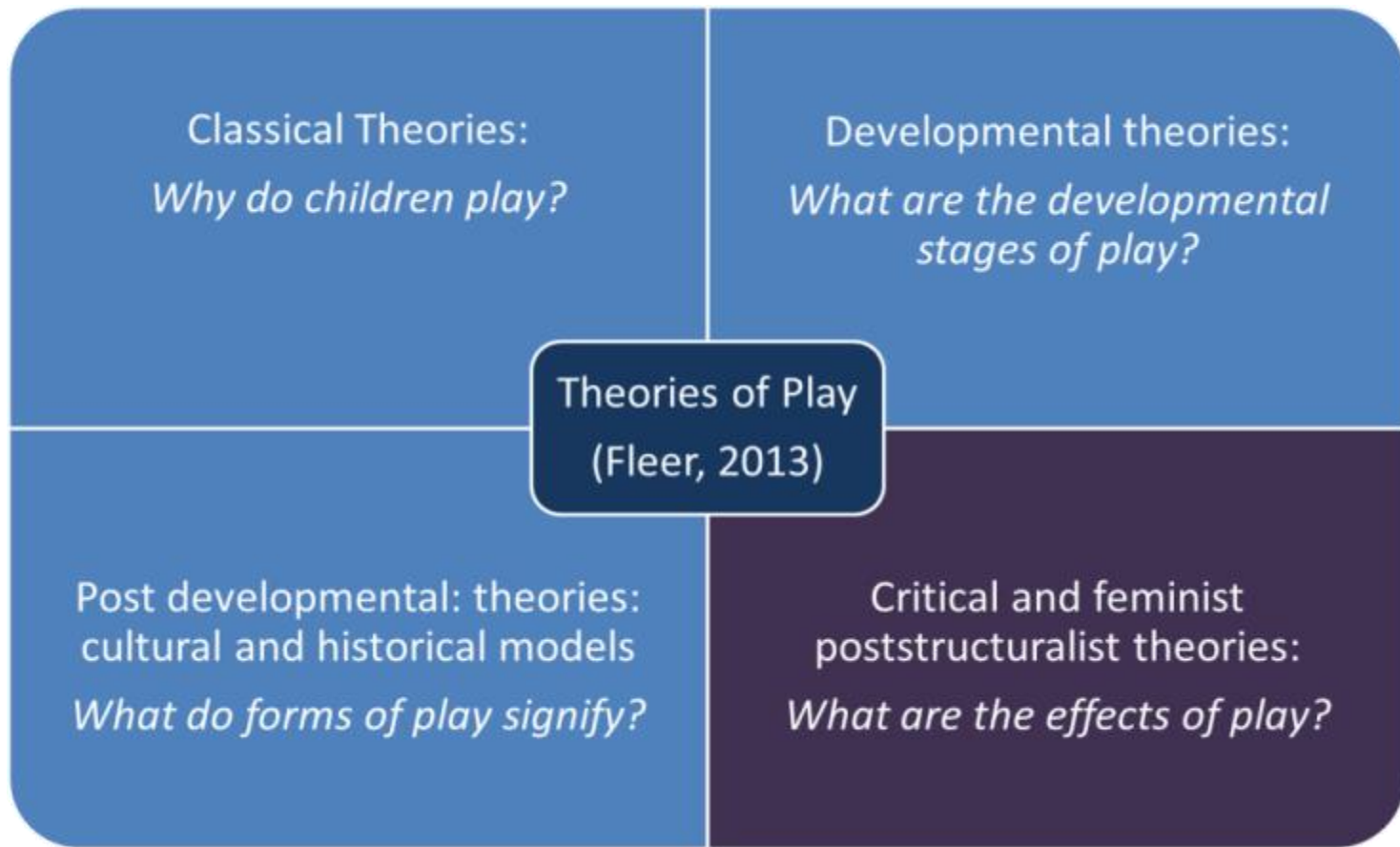
Early Childhood Australia

A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016

THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Conceptual frameworks for understanding play



Post-developmental Theories of Play

Socio-cultural framework after Vygotsky: What do forms of play signify

- Play as an opportunity for intervention
- Play as socialisation
- Play as enculturation
- Play as an exploration of perspective
- Play as the separation of the real and the imagined

“There is an element of competition in play. Play can have an element of competition, which is an interest aspect to consider.”



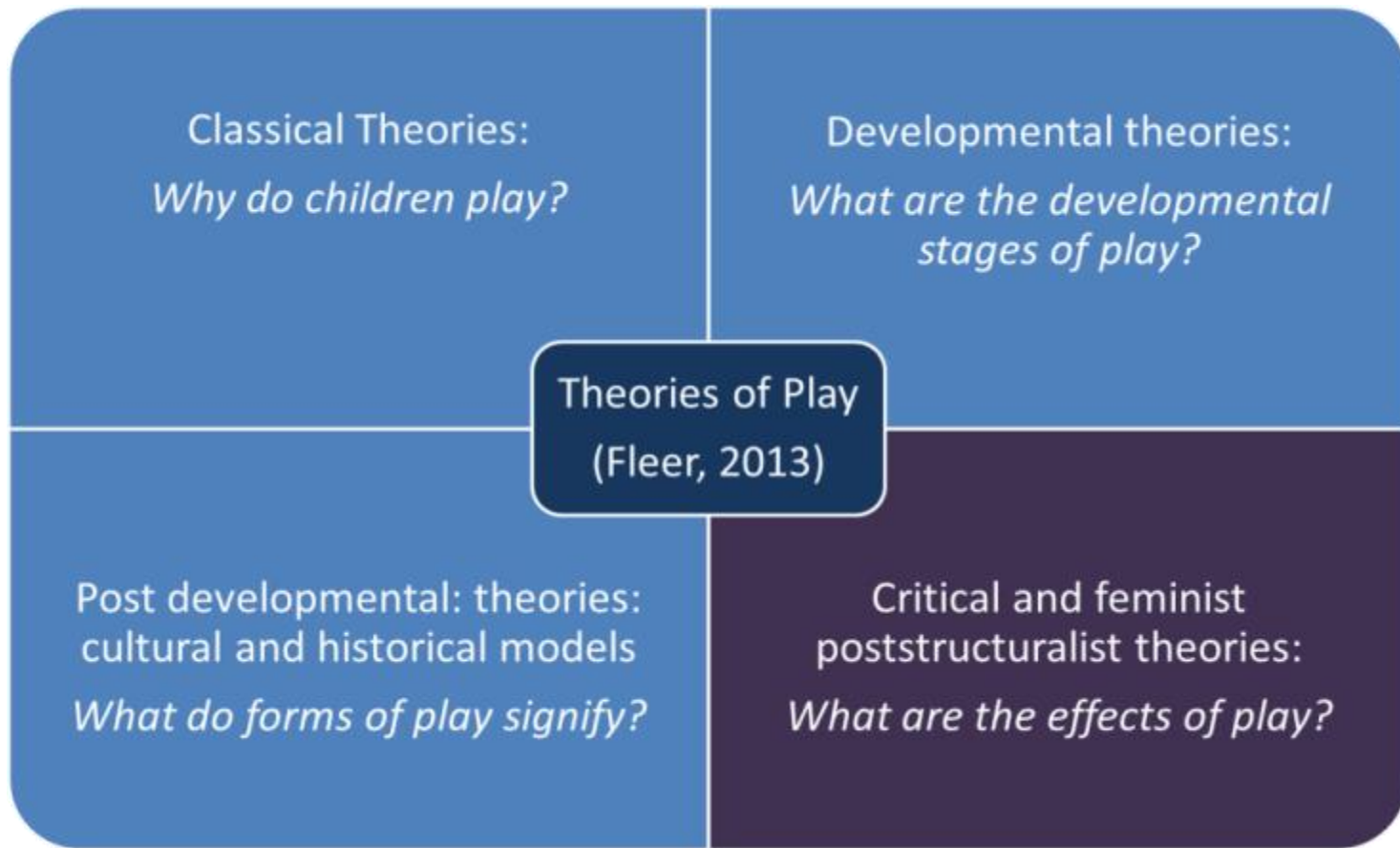
Early Childhood Australia

A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016

THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Conceptual Frameworks for Understanding Play



Post-developmental Theories of Play

Critical and feminist poststructuralist views of play: What are the effects of play?

- Play and power
 - Who benefits most? Who is marginalised?
- Play and discourse
 - How do discourses of play regulate behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and values?
 - How do discourses of play construct identity and belonging?

“What makes a community is not homogeneity, but organised heterogeneity ... the systemic articulation of differences.” (Lemke, 1995)

“There is an element of competition in play. Play can have an element of competition, which is an interest aspect to consider.”



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Discourses of Play: Play as Progress

Psychomotor Domain		
Level	Definition	Example
1. Observing	Active mental attending of a physical event.	The learner watches a more experienced person. Other mental activity, such as reading may be a part of the observation process.
2. Imitating	Attempted copying of a physical behavior.	The first steps in learning a skill. The learner is observed and given direction and feedback on performance. Movement is not automatic or smooth.
3. Practicing	Trying a specific physical activity over and over.	The skill is repeated over and over. The entire sequence is performed repeatedly. Movement is moving towards becoming automatic and smooth.
4. Adapting	Fine tuning. Making minor adjustments in the physical activity in order to perfect it.	The skill is perfected. A mentor or a coach is often needed to provide an outside perspective on how to improve or adjust as needed for the situation.

“There are many definitions of play. When you see the word play it needs to be pleasurable, fun, self-driven but as an educator it needs to also have an element of learning – fun learning.”



Discourses of Play: Play as Fate

Games of chance.

- Play as open-ended, not goal driven but having unpredictable directions and outcomes.
- Play as risk-taking.
- Fate implies there is little control over one's future and this belief can lead to a sense of disempowerment or an abrogation of responsibility.

P1: "I made a pond in the classroom with pond weed and small fish and we went on an excursion to the creek and collected small fish for the pond and to me that is play as experience. Experiential learning : touch, feel, smell."

P2: "In the classroom we always had board games. Dice Games. Throw the dice and move that many spots."



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Discourses of Play: Play as Power

“My favourite game was when I went to my grandmother’s place playing with her buttons. This is a true story. I would get the buttons out and line them up as my schoolroom and I was the teacher.”



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

And the angel said to him,
Stop hitting yourself! But
he could not stop, for the
angel was hitting him,
with his own hands.



Discourses of Play: Play as Frivolity

“Sometimes with very young children there would be a free play session as part of the day but in the higher or more academic years - Early Childhood years’ - this might occur as weekend day activities and not seen as part of the academic day.”



Discourses of Play: Play as Identity

Q: *“What does the word ‘play’ mean to you?”*

A: *“That’s such a big question really because it’s such a broad concept. I guess initially instinctively you think of small children, you think of child’s play and play is something that children do ...”*

“This was a top government secondary school so there was a lot of flag waving to fire up the national spirit ... I prepared a dance troupe – they taught me the national dances and then I organised the performances. I didn’t use play so much in my teaching there.”



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

Discourses of Play: Play as Imaginary (Autonomy and Freedom)

“Imaginative games don’t have set rules.”

Q: *“Where do **you** play?”*

A: *“At home, in my own time.”*



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

References

Fleer, M. (2013). *Play in the early years*. Port Melbourne, VIC: Cambridge University Press.

Lemke, J. L. (1995). *Textual politics: Discourse and social dynamics*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). *The ambiguity of play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Thank you 😊



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016
THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years