

# The SAGE Handbook of Outdoor Play and Learning



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# Indigenous Methodologies in Education Research: Case Study of Children's Play in Solomon Islands

Libby Lee-Hammond and Yeshe Colliver

Throughout this chapter we use the terms Indigenous, First Nations Peoples and Aboriginal as terms referring to the Traditional Owners of the nations discussed. The authors acknowledge that they are both non-Indigenous researchers learning and working alongside Indigenous communities with an intention to enter into respectful and efficacious dialogue on the subject of conducting research within Indigenous community contexts. Hence, we understand our position as 'outsiders' seeking to build relationships and engage the appropriate protocols and methods to ensure that research with Indigenous communities is culturally appropriate and inclusive.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it describes a case study of children's play and learning in a remote province of Solomon

Islands and contrasts this with developed countries such as Australia. Second, it strives to demonstrate how following the protocols of Indigenous methodologies afforded perspective on the researchers' own culturally informed subjectivities. It elaborates these two purposes in parallel through an exploration of early childhood education and care (ECEC) perspectives on play and outdoor play provision. It then discusses extant research on outdoor play and learning in Indigenous contexts.

Following this survey of the literature, the chapter will discuss Indigenous methodologies and protocols. It then outlines how observing these protocols afforded a 'bird's-eye' perspective of the researchers' own culture. This bird's-eye perspective facilitated a cultural-historical theorization of Solomon children's play and the broader traditions of the society. In this way, the chapter aims to show the coalescence between Indigenous methodologies and cultural-historical theory. Their coalescence provides insight about

outdoor play and learning in developed world contexts, as well as Solomon Islands. Thus the apparently disparate components of the case study are described as interlocking and informing each other.

## CHILDREN'S OUTDOOR PLAY AND LEARNING IN DEVELOPED CONTEXTS

Play is considered fundamental to ECEC in most Western-heritage countries (Nutbrown, Clough, & Selbie, 2008; Wood, 2013). While there is still debate about its validity (Colliver, 2012; Lillard, Lerner, Hopkins, Dore, Smith, & Palmquist, 2013), there is an assumption that through play, young children can learn about their world naturally and develop into adults (Johnson, Sevimli-Celik, & Al-Mansour, 2012). For this reason, Western-heritage ECEC curricula have traditionally been play-based.

A significant aspect of the development that is considered to occur through play is physical; as children play with small or delicate objects, they develop fine motor skills such as object manipulation or drawing and writing skills (Case-Smith, 1996). Further, through more energetic play and games children are thought to develop gross motor skills that aid the growth of muscles, coordination and bodily awareness (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). For example, 'exercise play' is theorized to peak around 4 and 5 years of age (Smith & Connolly, 1980, p. 290).

This science appears to be reflected in ECEC traditions originating in Europe, as most ECEC centres have some material provision for physically rigorous play outdoors. Through various influences on ECEC and town planning in Europe, the United States of America (USA) and other Western-heritage countries, playgrounds were created throughout the twenty-first century in parks, schools and ECEC settings (Frost, 2010). Outdoor play areas frequently

included sandpits, slippery slides, 'monkey' bars, swings, other play equipment and trees for climbing (Frost, 1989). These types of environments are thought to inspire the physical play that is seen as important for children's development (Bundy et al., 2008; Frost, 2010).

More recently, discourses of safety and duty of care appear to be reducing children's access to these types of play environments (Fenech & Sumsion, 2007b; Wyver et al., 2010; see also Hansen Sandseter, Chapter 7 this volume). Families and educators concerned about the risks of physical injury from outdoor play environments are increasingly limiting children's access to these kinds of activities. Moreover, from the educator's perspective, the litigious nature of many societies means they need to be very careful about risks in the types of play they provide in ECEC centres (Fenech & Sumsion, 2007a; Little, Sandseter, & Wyver, 2012). As one educator explains:

I wish we could have swings ... monkey bars [steel framed bars for swinging], climbing ropes ... and monkey bars are just a no-no. (Educator 1, cited in Little et al., 2012, p. 308)

Another describes the adult strategies to control risk in play:

You observe, you take documentation, you then program for those development areas, you model the correct procedure, you go through – you guide them through slowly, encouraging them, supporting them and you keep repeating; repetition is great, it's developing confidence. (Educator 2, p. 308)

The society's perspective on risk mitigation pervades official documentation related to outdoor play provision. For example, in Australia, as in many developed nations, litigation and duty of care responsibilities are increasing, as evidenced by the Children's Services Regulation. This includes:

(1) Any part of the premises of a children's service that is designated for outdoor play space must be fenced on all sides. (Parliamentary Council NSW, 2004, Clause 45)

In the outdoor environment, children will engage creatively with materials and spaces within the confines presented to them, but those confines are known to lower the developmental potential and their resilience (Bundy et al., 2008; Little et al., 2012; Wyver et al., 2010). It has been noted elsewhere that the majority of early childhood settings represent the most controlled environments children will ever experience (Watson, Millei, & Peterson, 2015). This appears to contradict the ECEC philosophy, wherein environments support children's agency and their opportunities to be 'protagonists' in their environment (Clark, 2010; Malaguzzi, 1994).

Another contradiction stems from research on the perspectives of children themselves. This research consistently shows that play is the preferred activity of many children in schools (Lillemyr, Søbstad, Marder, & Flowerday, 2011) and ECEC centres (Einarsdóttir, 2011; Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011). These findings are consistent internationally, in Denmark, USA (Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011), England (Clark & Moss, 2001), China (Cooney & Sha, 1999; Wing, 1995) and Sweden (Sandberg, 2002). Children from a young age are also very consistent and clear about what is play and what is work (King, 1979; Wing, 1995), and multiple studies (e.g., Howard, 2010; McInnes, Howard, Crowley, & Miles, 2013) indicate that the distinguishing characteristic of play is children's ability to choose and direct their own activities. Thus the more that adults control and regulate children's outdoor play (e.g., in the interests of safety), the less like *play* it will be for children (Cooney & Sha, 1999; King, 1979).

A third contradiction is that young children often find a sense of safety and security in controlling and creating their own outdoor spaces. Moore (2014a, p. 7) demonstrated the emotionally protective value that outdoor play places can have for young children. In another work, Moore (2014b) showed the importance of outdoor play that transcended the risks. These risks were much more prevalent in the adults' perspective than children's.

This research suggests that the more adults regulate children's safety in outdoor play, the less children may feel emotionally safe. With these various contradictions in mind, we now consider outdoor play and learning in Indigenous contexts.

### CHILDREN'S OUTDOOR PLAY AND LEARNING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The term outdoor play and learning may be bifurcated in the research literature. Whereas 'outdoor play' is often used in reference to children's playful use of outdoor equipment within early childhood settings (monkey bars, sandpits, gymnastics mats), 'outdoor learning' frequently refers to learning experiences situated in diverse natural contexts, often for the purpose of learning about and forming a relationship with that natural context, for example, revisiting a favourite tree or rock with which children have developed an affinity or a story.

While research in outdoor learning in developed world communities (predominantly in the UK and Scandinavia) is rapidly growing (e.g., Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2013; Fjørtoft, 2004; Hansen Sandseter, 2007; Knight, 2013; Murray, 2006; O'Brien, 2009; Ridgers, Knowles & Sayers, 2012; Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Swarbrick, Eastwood, & Tutton, 2004; Waller, 2007; Waters & Maynard, 2010), Indigenous research in this area is comparatively minimal. With a handful of studies reported in the literature (Carruthers Den Hoed, 2014; Cosgriff, Legge, Brown, Boyes, Zink, & Irwin, 2012; Lee-Hammond & Jackson-Barrett, 2013; Munroe & MacLellan-Mansell, 2013; Nutti & Kuoljok, 2014), there is scope to consider outdoor play from Indigenous perspectives.

Outdoor learning often occurs outside of the gates of children's services, including learning about the land and its connection to Indigenous culture, tradition and spirituality

(Lee-Hammond & Jackson-Barrett, 2013). While ‘Aboriginal people have been offering sophisticated, land-based education to their children ... for millennia’ (Carruthers Den Hoed, 2014, p.14), it is only recently that mainstream education in English-speaking countries has deemed learning ‘on country’ as a bona fide pedagogical approach and a subject of education research (Carruthers Den Hoed, 2014; Lee-Hammond & Jackson-Barrett, 2013). There is evidence from the mid-1800s and 1900s in New Zealand and Australia that Maori and Aboriginal ‘survival’ techniques were introduced to non-Aboriginal children as part of their learning (Jones, 2014; Stothart, 1993). These attempts at introducing children to the traditional Indigenous knowledge were utilitarian and regrettably based in an ideology in which Indigenous Peoples were seen as ‘primitive’ and hence, construed as developmentally equivalent to young children. Cultural epoch theory (Schultz & Schubert, 2010) was an interpretation of Fröbel’s race capitulation theory (Fröbel, 1887 [1900]) and gave educators at the time a theoretical framing to appreciate the educational value of providing children with Indigenous practices (Jones, 2014), paving the way for a more respectful way of engaging with different cultures that resists the hegemonic power of European influence.

Indigenous children’s right to learn in the context of their ancestral culture is now enshrined in article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states that:

States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly, children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. (UN, 2008, p. 7)

*Respect* is a crucial foundation for working with Indigenous communities (Townsend-Cross, 2004), a point that Smylie (2007)

highlights in her work in the Aboriginal Canadian health sector. She emphasizes the necessity for humility, respect and cultural competence as a fundamental precursor to working alongside Indigenous people, thus enabling an exchange where both parties are enriched. These principles guide our work as non-Indigenous, ‘outsider’ researchers.

## INDIGENOUS METHODOLOGIES

Any collaboration with Indigenous communities requires an acknowledgement of the history of colonialism and its ongoing impact on individuals and communities. We argue that research and scientific discourses must be *decolonized*. Even the act of researching Indigenous knowledges through Western knowledge institutions such as universities perpetuates this hegemony (Morgan, 2003). It is essential, therefore, to disrupt the researcher’s authority, recognizing the need for research directed by and for those communities for social justice and emancipation (Smith, 1999; Swadener & Mutua, 2008).

Associated notions of *Indigenous* and *critical pedagogies* (e.g., Kincheloe, 2007; Yellow Bird, 2005) employ emancipatory discourses (Freire, 1996). They are defined as ‘*research by and for Indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions and knowledges of those peoples*’ (Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009, p. 4). As Bishop (2005) argues, ‘when [I]ndigenous cultural ways of knowing and aspirations ... are central to the creation of the research context, then ... sense making, decision making, and theorizing take place in situations that are “normal” to the research participants rather than constructed by the researcher’ (p. 126). Consequently, this enables us to acknowledge the ways in which whiteness and European hegemony have contributed to the way we represent and interpret experiences (Moreton-Robinson, 2004).

Traditional Indigenous knowledge may not be linear, fixed or valid across different groups and this is discussed eloquently in the Sámi literature (Oskal, 1999, p. 175). For this reason, it was important to employ a theoretical framework that took account of the local cultural and societal context. 'Indigenous methodologies' refers to the multiplicities of methodologies suitable for each cultural and linguistic context (Botha, 2011). Yet there are also guiding protocols that an outsider ought to be cognizant of in their research with Indigenous communities: first, the centrality of Elders and the need to cultivate a respectful and authentic relationship with communities. Second, we have emphasized the need to examine our own position as 'visitors' in the research space in Indigenous communities. Third, we acknowledge the need to pay careful attention and respond to the local and contextual; the particular aspirations, strengths and practices of the community. The next section explores how a cultural-historical theorization of perspectives helped the researchers in their efforts to see Solomon children's play relative to the context in which it occurred, acknowledging the inevitable influence of our subjectivities. Being transparent in the analysis provided a much more authentic way of engaging with the local context.

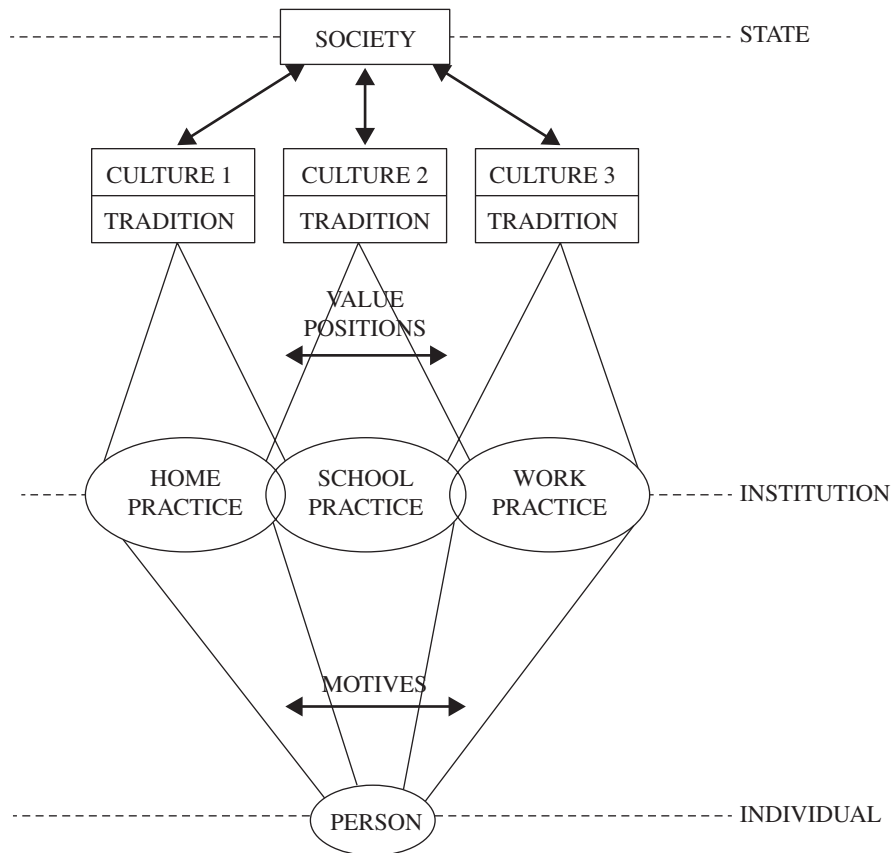
### **CULTURAL-HISTORICAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Cultural-historical theory was developed by Vygotsky (1896–1934) but has been extended by multiple scholars (Daniels, 2001; Davydov & Kerr, 1995). It can be useful for research in Indigenous communities to understand the cultural context (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993). This is because it theorizes meaning as created directly through participation in cultural activities, within those communities, rather than through the individual (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1979). This is particularly pertinent

where 'outsider' researchers work with 'insider' Indigenous communities to conduct research (Botha, 2011; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

A particular cultural-historical model that is useful to understand the outdoor play of Solomon children is Hedegaard's theorization of perspectives (Hedegaard, 2008, 2009). Hedegaard (2008, p. 17) proposes a model that is productive for analysing activity at different 'levels': the individual, interpersonal, institutional and societal (see Figure 31.1). As the goal of cultural-historical research is holistic analysis (Chaiklin, 2012; Fleeer, 2008), one level may be foregrounded with the other levels maintained 'in the background' (Matusov, 2007, p. 324). Levels are not viewed as separate, but are given meaning in relation to the whole context (Rogoff, 2003, p. 58). This affords an understanding of an activity's meaning for the people *of that context*. In this way, the Indigenous methodological protocols discussed earlier (deference to Elders, humility and responding to the contextual and local) are given a framework by using a cultural-historical theorization of perspectives (Botha, 2011; Hedegaard, 2008). This means we put aside our own value judgements because the activities gain their full meaning within their own ecological niche. This sometimes poses challenges for researchers since it is emergent in nature and requires a flexible and responsive approach.

In cultural-historical research, activity is the established unit of analysis (Matusov, 2007; Stetsenko, 1999). Vygotsky (1987) insisted that all human activity has a motive, and cultural-historical research must strive to examine activities because that is the only measurable realization of internal motives. When research can explain *why* something has occurred, it has explained a phenomenon completely (Arievitch, 2003). Yet the 'why' (motive) is evident in the 'how' (activities). Hedegaard (2008) likewise insists that perspectives are best understood by examining activities, in order to reveal



**Figure 31.1** Hedegaard's (2009) model of perspectives. (Reproduced with the author's permission)

motives, but adds that activities and motives are realized differently *at different levels*. At the societal level, for example, she stipulates that activities (the 'how') are realized as traditions, and the motives for them (the 'why') are realized as conditions (Hedegaard, 2008, p. 17). We chose this level of analysis because that was the level at which we were striving to understand the play of the two different contexts (Solomon Islands and Australia). Hedegaard demands that understanding young children's play would thus need to be considered in relation to *traditions* (how) and *conditions* (why). In this way, we implemented Hedegaard's model to provide insight into the meaning outdoor

play activities have within their whole socio-historical and cultural context. For example, the play activities of Temotu children will have meaning that is best understood not in relation to our own (or any other culture's), but to Temotu society's sociohistorical and cultural motives.

A case study methodology allowed us to examine society-level traditions and conditions while also keeping a holistic view of the context. This view was informed by field notes, photographs, video clips and informal discussions as data collection tools. In the Findings and Discussion section, we acknowledge the inevitable influence of our *own* traditions and conditions in the analysis.



In qualitative research, this reflexivity is a central component of the study's reliability and validity (Cousin, 2010), and it is important to remain cognizant of the fact that our research is shaped by such subjectivities. For example, the high esteem that our officialized entry through respected organizations afforded us into Solomon Islands was apparent from early on. Due to the historical influence of cultural epoch theory (Schultz & Schubert, 2010) and colonization, there seemed to be an assumption in Solomon Islands that our cultural norms were in some ways superior because we come from developed countries and have educated backgrounds. Yet our cultural-historical theoretical framework suggested that the natural context in which activities such as play are occurring are the only values by which they can be judged; one cultural context is not superior to another. Our grounding in Indigenous methodologies and protocols also created an imperative to resist the hegemonic power that comes with developed world contexts (Swadener & Mutua, 2008). It became important to identify the unavoidable influence of historical hegemony, not only on the way we interacted with people and collected data, but also in our analysis of what the play activity *meant*. Our research was activity too, and this needed to be accounted for, just as Hedegaard's (2009) model accounted for the activity we researched. We thus visualized Hedegaard's (2008) model for both Solomon Islands *and* the Australian contexts, and how they intersected in the context of us as outsiders conducting research with an Indigenous community. While Hedegaard's (2008) model has been productive in other work (e.g., Colliver, 2016), the addition of the imperatives of Indigenous methodologies has added a level of influence to the model (see Figure 31.2). In this way there was a comfortable fit between the overarching theoretical and methodological frameworks that we believe contributed to a deeper and more ethical engagement with the research process and subject matter.

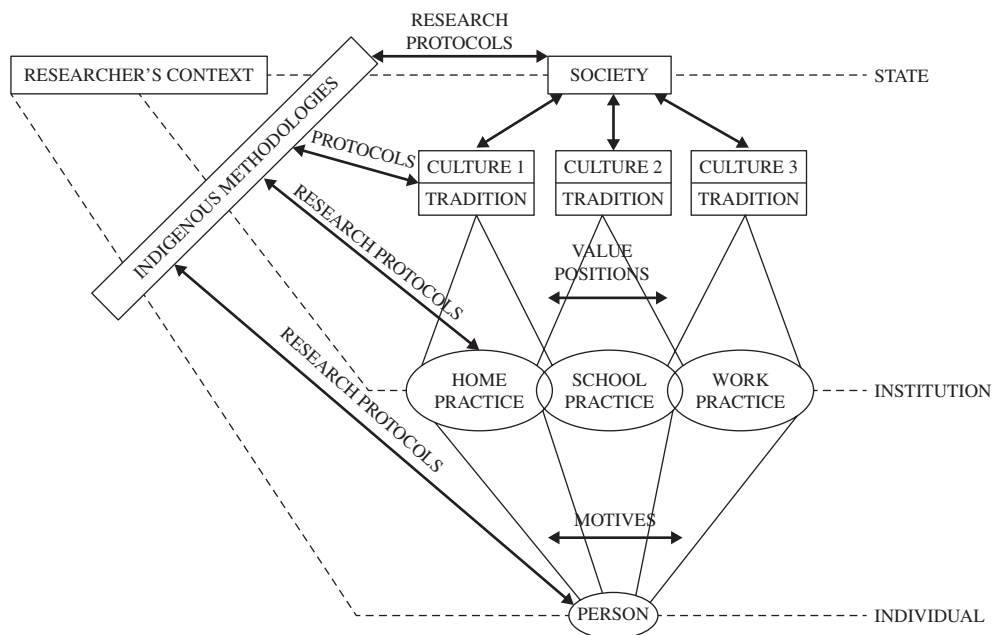
## LIMITATIONS

Throughout the study, both child and adult consent to observe and record children's outdoor play was sought. A case study methodology utilized field notes, photographs, video clips and informal discussions for data collection. Children were shown photographs and videos, and were invited to talk about them. However, the situation being out of the ordinary and the presence of a 'white' woman from Australia was met with excited laughter rather than commentary. This points to the limitations of being an outsider in research in Indigenous communities (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). Ideally, the researchers would have spent more time in the villages and become less 'novel', playing alongside the children and forming more naturalistic relationships.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In the interests of the holistic approach described above, the context of the case study will be outlined briefly. Solomon Islands is a diverse nation of islands in the Pacific Ocean. With more than 80 Indigenous and linguistic groups in the country, and more than 80% of its population living in rural villages, it has a diverse set of environmental and cultural influences (Glasgow, 2012; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1992). For instance, it was a British Protectorate between 1893 and 1978, and the colonial influence is still seen in its 92–95% Christian population, its European government structure and the presence of European-heritage aid organizations. The *lingua franca* of the nation as a whole is Solomon Islands' Pijin, a language composed of English, Spanish and syntax common to many Indigenous languages.

Informal ECEC has a long history in many provinces, including traditions where knowledgeable Elders or parents teach children cultural practices, values and language



**Figure 31.2** Proposed model for analysing perspectives in Indigenous contexts. (Adapted from Hedegaard's (2009) model of perspectives)

(Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1992). In contrast, formalized ECEC has a short history, beginning in 1993 with the introduction of European-style kindergartens now deemed inappropriate for Solomon children (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002; Glasgow, 2012; Toganivalu, 2007; UNESCO, 2000). In response, the Solomon Islands ECEC curriculum, *Valium Smol Pikini Blong Iumi* (Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, 2009), in its final stages of preparation, seeks to bring unity in a nation with cultural diversity, a history of ethnic tensions and multiple resource allocation difficulties (Glasgow, 2012; Toganivalu, 2007).

Solomon Islanders generally have very low levels of material wealth and most families in the remote areas subsist with fishing, gathering fruits, growing vegetables and raising some small animals (e.g., chickens, pigs) for food and sometimes to sell (International Trade Centre, 2014). The absence of electronic media (including television) in most

remote provincial households means children use repurposed local materials to create whole-village games.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The stories of children's games in Solomon Island villages were recorded on a visit to Temotu Province in 2014. The time spent in villages was part of a larger project to evaluate the progress of village kindergartens supported by *World Vision International*. The village residents had previously requested that kindergartens be built and staffed with the support of the NGO in order to help children to have local access to early childhood education. Hence, prior to this visit, we observed the protocols of consultation with the community and village chief and gained permission to move freely about the community. Benefits to the community in engaging

with this process included an opportunity to provide feedback and insight into the development of the kindergarten and to have the various village stakeholders' voices heard and documented.

A game known locally as *Sela Kokonat* was played simply with a quantity of empty coconut shells cut in half. Children gather the discarded shells from around the village (where coconuts are a staple of the diet and freely available). Children used the coconut shells (*sela kokonat* in Solomon Islands Pijin) as the basis of the game. A collection of about 20–30 shells was used. Observing this game in progress, it was not entirely clear what the rules were, so after obtaining permission to film and photograph the game, the first researcher spoke to adults and children in the village to learn more about the details of the game. Field notes from the observation and discussion noted:

About twenty children aged from 3 to 15 played *Sela Kokonat* with great energy and excitement. They set up boundaries by declaring certain trees or huts as the limits of the play space. The coconut shells were laid out in a cluster on the rough sand. The older children decided upon the composition of the teams by selecting a mixture of older and younger players, boys and girls. They formed two teams. Using some stealth, the team that was 'out' in the field ran and stacked the coconut shells into a tower as quickly as possible. The team that was 'in' had one small rubber ball with which to strike the tower and bring it back to zero, the 'out' team had to start stacking shells all over again. If they missed the tower completely their team was 'out'. The team stacking the shells had to do it quickly and before the tower was knocked back down. Once all the coconut shells were stacked into one tower, that team won and they swapped sides. (Field notes, 28.9.14)

The above vignette may be examined in relation to the *traditions* and *conditions* of Temotu children's play, in keeping with the study's theoretical framing described earlier. The fact that the young children's play occurred without adult supervision appeared to be indicative of the societal *traditions* of adults not ascribing much value to young

children's play. This may be understood within the subsistence *conditions*, where activities such as play are not seen to contribute to the society. Much research shows how play across the majority of Indigenous societies across the world is not ascribed much value or attention by adults (Lancy, 2007; Roopnarine, 2011). As one semi-structured interview with an 'insider' adult revealed:

... we do not really see games as a form of stimulus of development, we sometimes see games as a waste of time ... but just to keep kids busy ... we see activities that bring food to the table to be more important, that is why as we grow up we do not see game as important, [but rather] young people engage in fishing, hunting, building houses, gardening as important. (Informant interview, 7.3.15)

Here the *conditions* of Solomon Islands society, where adult labour must be dedicated to survival, appeared to determine the *tradition* of leaving children to self-organize play. Accordingly, young children's use of coconut shells as 'loose parts' in their play (Nicholson, 1972) might be considered their own subcultural practice necessitated by the *conditions* of the *tradition* of coconut consumption. These sit in contrast with the play traditions of the researchers introduced earlier, which require developmentally appropriate and safe adult-designed outdoor environments such as playgrounds, often accompanied by adult surveillance (Frost, 2012). Solomon children's capacity to make use of waste products in order to engage in their preferred activity contrasts with Western-heritage notions of the value of play, where careful adult planning and resource selection foregrounds play-based learning (Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2004; Wu & Rao, 2011). Solomon Islands adult society's reluctance to dedicate labour or time to children's play starkly contrasts the earlier Australian educator descriptions of 'programming for developmental areas' or capacities depending on their risk-benefit analyses (Little et al., 2012, p. 308). It is possible that the play described here affords

more opportunities for children to evaluate and take risks independently, to learn resilience and be creative (Bundy et al., 2008). This is clear in another vignette:

The children were squealing and laughing and smiling the entire time (I observed for at least 30 minutes and they were still going when I had to leave). They ran barefoot among the broken shells and leapt across a creek with very slippery rocks in order to retrieve the ball. I had crossed the same creek minutes before, slowly, deliberately, and with great care, I slipped a few times on unstable rocks and felt a growing fear that I would end up drenched. Even the youngest children (some about 3 or 4 years of age) were adept at quickly navigating the submerged rocks. They knew which ones were sturdy and which were wobbly and how to get to the ball in the least number of steps across the water. They leapt from place to place with speed and agility. Their confidence with this terrain was flawless. No adult apart from me was nearby, there was no monitoring their foray into the running water or the hazards more commonly feared in Western play situations (bare feet, sharp rocks and shells, slippery rocks, running water, older children running and jumping and playing a high energy game with younger children). These were competent children getting on with the serious business of playing *Sela Kokonat*. (Field notes, 28.9.14)

There appear to be some differences between this type of play and that of Australian ECEC settings. The first is Solomon children's use of natural materials to facilitate play, contrasting the Australian educators' regulated provision of outdoor play equipment. The children also appeared to be adept at navigating difficult and perhaps dangerous terrain through their experience with it: opportunities afforded by the apparent lack of adult control common to Western ECEC settings, such as 'documenting ... programming ... encouraging ... supporting ... repeating' (Little et al., 2012, p. 308). In contrast to the Western argument that risky play must be met with traditions of risk mitigation strategies (Wyver et al., 2010), there was a strong tradition of not 'wasting' adult labour, and this tradition arguably afforded the conditions for children's independent learning (about

risk-management, physical skill acquisition, etc). The author's astonishment as an experienced educator when viewing these children's capacities speaks to cultural differences in the way conditions allow for children's capacities to flourish.

The public health debates are too complex for the scope of this chapter, but the high infant mortality rate in Solomon Islands is more closely connected to access to medical assistance in such remote and economically poor contexts. The play described here contrasts strongly with the risk and regulation discourses of first-world play provision, where technologically enhanced play is ironically often considered an easier and risk-free option by gatekeeper adults. The agility of children's minds using digital devices is contrasted with the possibilities for ingenuity and creativity in Temotu play, where children are ironically exposed to a variety of challenges and possibilities that are not afforded by the prescriptive nature of digital programming and highly descriptive graphics in the developed world that leave little to the imagination. In developing contexts where we strive to provide opportunities for children's learning and development, there may also be fewer opportunities than in contexts such as the ones described in this chapter.

As shown by Hedegaard's (2009) model, there appears to be a relationship between Solomon Islands *traditions* of letting children self-organize play and the *conditions* in which they learn rules of play, social and physical skills, and risk management, in connection with nature and over sharp or slippery rocks in water. The children's freedom to self-govern their play appeared to endow the natural environment with great learning potential. The learning available raises questions about the effectiveness of the levels of adult supervision and monitoring so common to Western ECEC traditions (Fenech & Sumsion, 2007b; Wyver et al., 2010). For example, is it possible that our narrow imaginings of children's capacities in the West (to take risks, or be resilient in spite of small

accidents) are inhibiting rather than supportive? Do the higher levels of material provision in ECEC settings in developed countries deny opportunities for children's resilience and ingenuity that are afforded in developing contexts such as Solomon Islands? These are questions prompted by the increased regulation of outdoor play and growing recognition of the cultural, spiritual and physical benefits of outdoor play and learning. For example, research continues to show that cognitive stimulation in the early years can generate resilience that allows children to overcome the effects of material disadvantage such as lower income or parental education levels, improving outcomes as far as 16 years (Hall et al., 2009). Thus the importance of self-governance in the early years may be even greater for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The capacities of the children described in this study prompt us to reimagine the capacities of the young children we work with in developed contexts.

Using a cultural-historical theoretical framework to understand the complexities of Indigenous methodologies allowed us to forgo some of the assumptions relating to material wealth being necessary for children's well-being, revealing a range of benefits promoted by resource constraints. While some past research has associated these constraints with lower children's outcomes, the current case study provided the space for new ways to respect the role of Indigenous traditions for children's learning in developed as well as developing community contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted using ethical protocols in line with Indigenous methodologies to gain insights into the cultural context of a province of Solomon Islands. After gaining consent of community Elders and research

participants, vignettes of children's play in Solomon Islands were analysed from a societal perspective. Resilience and risk-taking appeared to be afforded by the traditions of leaving children to control their own play in the natural environment. Rather than regulating play-time, space and materials, Temotu society appeared to provide general parameters and basic rules about how older children were to oversee younger children. As researchers coming from contexts where children are given less freedom to choose and regulate how, where and when they play, the vignettes provided insight about the results of giving a wider berth to children's choices.

Further, observing Indigenous research protocols provided context for the activities of Temotu society in relation to play. Hedegaard's (2008) model was productive for understanding how context and culture intersected with play traditions. Yet it was also useful to understand our own assumptions as researchers. When we observed the protocols of Indigenous methodologies, we were also given a bird's-eye view of the hegemonic influence of our own dominating Western-heritage culture. This perhaps afforded a greater appreciation of what, at first, might have appeared to be 'letting children be children' from a *lack of care or thought*. Instead, we were able to see children's self- and group-determination as promoting learning about society, ingenuity, creativity and resilience. This led us to conclude that many of the ways that play is risk-controlled and highly resourced in Western ECEC contexts may ironically restrict children's capacities.

In researching with Indigenous communities, it is essential to consider one's own cultural context as an outsider striving for authentic research. In order to listen to the perspectives of various groups, this case study demonstrated why the various protocols were important – consultation with Elders, respectful and situated relationships, reflexivity – and were conducive to a holistic understanding of the context.

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