Creating spaces to entertain new perspectives

Creando espacios para entretener nuevas perspectivas

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ABSTRACT

This article explores fundamentals of the professional development of teachers and directors from the context of an early childhood education center. The center environment represents a community in the making, with the possibilities to construct, co-construct and to re-construct learnings and competencies of teachers, directors, young children and their families.

The author analyzes the characteristics of adult teacher play and with those of young children's play. Several influences are identified that impact adults' and children's ability to play.

The article offers several strategies to open dialogue and maintain teachers' exploration of different perspectives of staff and leadership, creating spaces or opportunities for teachers and director to deepen their practice and ability to collaborate with team colleagues, forming a community of practice and *"enter[ing] into a style of teaching which is based on questioning what we're doing and why, on listening to children, on thinking about how theory is translated into practice and how practice informs theory, is to enter into a way of working where professional development takes place day after day in the classroom."* (Curtis y col., 2013, p.21)

KEY WORDS: Early Childhood Education, Professional Development, Play, Listening, Center Teaching Team, Leadership.

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora los fundamentos de la formación permanente de los docentes y directores de centros de educación inicial. Cada centro escolar y su ambiente constituyen una comunidad para construir, co-construir y re-construir aprendizajes y competencias de educadores, directores, niños y familias.

La autora analiza las características del juego de profesores y profesoras adultos en relación a las de los juegos de niños y niñas. Se identifican diversos factores que influyen en la capacidad de niños y adultos para jugar.

El texto ofrece diversas estrategias para abrir el diálogo y mantener la exploración de diferentes perspectivas a la hora de liderar al personal, de crear espacios y oportunidades para que docentes y directivos puedan profundizar en sus prácticas y habilidades para colaborar con sus colegas del equipo formando una comunidad de aprendizaje y *"entrar, así, en un estilo de enseñanza que se basa en preguntarse sobre qué hacemos y por qué lo hacemos, en la escucha de los niños, en reflexionar sobre cuál es la teoría que se proyecta sobre nuestras prácticas y cómo nuestras prácticas conforman la teoría que profesamos; en definitiva, es entrar en un modelo de trabajo en el que el desarrollo profesional tiene lugar en el día a día de las aulas."* (Curtis y col., 2013, p.21)

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Inicial, Formación Permanente, Juego, Escucha, Equipo Docente, Liderazgo.

INTRODUCTION

When five-year-old Coe was asked what advice he would give teachers about how to get better at their

job, he said: *"tell them to find someone to talk to. It's really lonely being a teacher"*. (Curtis, Lebo, Cividanes & Carter, 2013, p. 16)

"As adults, we must offer ourselves spaces for reflection: the experience of discussion groups and exchange of viewpoints between and with parents and teachers has always characterized our way of working. Parents, children and teachers can view themselves in the light of new stories if the world, and culture, and therefore schools, offer them this privilege. The privilege and right of a family to be perceived as the bearer of theories, of expectations, and the possibility of exchanging them and seeing them from different points of view." (Dahlberg, 2012, p. 23)

The focus of this article is on the role of play in the ongoing, in-service professional development of early childhood educators in center-based programs. The relevance of this topic has become elevated in recent years in the United States with the increased bounty of research findings confirming the extraordinary pace and complexity of early brain development and implications these findings have for the optimal, informed care and education of young children in early childhood programs as well as for the preparation and ongoing professional development of the early childhood teachers and administrators who work with young children and their families (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2002; Allen, L. & Kelly, 2015).

Inspired by the critical role that children's play has in children's learning and developments *"a unique and essential space for childhood and for the young child"* in learning and in development (Sarlé, 2008, p. 19), this article explores teachers' play with ideas, differing perspectives, multiple strategies—experimentation and reflection. From a Vygotskian perspective, the socio-cultural dynamics of play elevate its critical importance for the learning and professional development of adults as well as children.

Because of this central role of play in adult learning, it can be assumed that plans for the ongoing professional development of center-based early childhood caregivers, teachers and directors must include "creating spaces" and periods of time to facilitate and ensure early childhood educators' and directors' ongoing "play"—including observation of children, reflection, discussion and debate, and the pedagogical meaning-making that both deepens shared understandings and informs planning, practice and outcomes for young children and their families. From this viewpoint, providing regular, predictable time and space to invite and stimulate participation of the center staff team and administrators in opportunities for investigation, experimentation, reflection and dialogue —an invitation to play together with ideas and to continually re-frame their work with children and co-construct new plans—is at the heart of an effective, sustainable ongoing professional development process. These opportunities and routines together make it more likely that the teachers and director will become a team that keeps learning together, motivated to experiment, investigate, reflect and assess outcomes with center teacher and supervisor colleagues. Through this process, formation can lead to transformation. This article describes and explores the foundations and possibilities of ongoing professional development within the context of an early childhood center-based program.

For the past 18 years, the present author has consulted and collaborated with mentors and early childhood education graduate students, providing consultation to early childhood teachers and directors in total of about 60 centers to date in Southern California. Although most of these centers (public and private) have a physical space for staff meetings, teachers in the majority of these centers lack time that is designated (and remunerated) for meeting, sharing observations of the children and planning activities for the children. This situation is not sustainable over time; the teachers and director of each early childhood center need to create and maintain spaces, time periods and opportunities that are predictable to engage and maintain dialogue with each other.

Teachers need time and space to document the development and learning of the children and families and of their own professional development. Over time, this predictable time and opportunity builds and becomes the "generator" of ongoing staff and administrative learning and development.

THE NEGATIVE IMPACT EXTERNAL FACTORS CAN HAVE ON HEALTHY TEACHING TEAM FUNCTIONING

The "generator" in any early childhood center can be negatively impacted by external factors. One recent negative external factor has been the economic crash experienced in the US and specifically in California from approximately 2008 through 2012. During the 2007-08 year, one of the university consulting teams was collaborating with a director and teaching team of a state preschool center. The director was an excellent administrator and leader, providing staff meeting time for all members of the teaching team during af-

ter school hours and planning time for teachers during the school day.

During the first half of the school year, the consulting team enjoyed getting to visit and to know the lively teachers, observe the children interacting with each other wand with the teachers, facilitating children's learning and planning the center environment. The team's fall semester observations of the children and teachers revealed a robust curriculum of ideas, intentional transitions from one activity to another, and the overall healthy functioning of the center program, the teaching team and the center administration. At the end of fall semester, the state preschool budget was slashed in California. (Center teachers and directors only recently began to recover to 2008 funding levels this spring 2016.)

Returning after end-of-year-holidays, the author and consulting team members found the same teaching team from fall in place, but in emotional disarray. For the first time since 1955, the center had been faced with layoffs and teacher seniority lists had not yet been made public to facilitate layoff decisions. Confronting these serious threats, center teacher-teacher and teacher-director relationships had devolved. Colleagues mistrusted colleagues, attempting to calculate their own positions in the sequence of teacher seniority. In addition, the whole center faced possible closure, threatening layoff of all teachers or, at best, re-assignment of some center teachers to other centers' teams. A well-functioning teaching team was rapidly reduced to a group of teachers who mistrusted their fellow colleagues and rarely greeted each other at the beginning and end of their work day!

It is clear that center teachers have been recently faced with additional challenges that make "creating spaces" for adult play and learning more difficult to achieve.

The following section explores the place of play in adult learning as a foundation for the following section on strategies that can help to create and maintain spaces for adult play and learning for the early childhood center director and teaching team.

Within this context, the present article also seeks to suggest and explore strategies that teaching staff and administration can utilize to become (or regain their stasis as) a community of learners. It is suggested that the process of becoming a learning community (or community of practice)involves adopting, adapting and implementing strategies for center teachers and director to construct, co-construct and re-construct shared learning and understandings as well as to build related pedagogical skills in their work with young children and their families.

The author analyzes the characteristics of children's play in relation to professional development related to teachers' pedagogical practice. Several strategies are presented that facilitate teachers and directors to create spaces, opportunities to analyze and deepen their practices with children and their competency to collaborate with their teaching colleagues, center administration in order to create a community of practiceand *"enter[ing] into a style of teaching which is based on questioning what we're doing and why, on listening to children, on thinking about how theory is translated into practice and how practice informs theory, is to enter into a way of working where professional development takes place day after day in the classroom."* (Curtis et al., 2013, p.21)

RELATED RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER AS A PROPITIOUS ENVIRONMENT FOR ADULT LEARNING AND ONGOING, IN-SERVICE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Related research findings have confirmed the potential for generative adult learning that the early childhood center context provides. The following section identifies characteristics of the center and of adult learning itself that can contribute to making ongoing adult learning and professional development more likely within the center context.

These characteristics include research contributions regarding a) systems perspectives of an early childhood center; b) the potential of communities of practice; c) the power of dialogue in adult learning to identify, discuss and respond to the doubts and questions provoked in daily pedagogical practice; and d) The role of current challenges in impacting ongoing center teachers' and administrators' professional development and program growth and improvement.

SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVES OF ADULT LEARNING IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

Several researchers have identified that the most effective ongoing early childhood educator professional development is situated in the center and the teaching and administrative team context (Fukkink & Long, 2007). In addition, research has confirmed that professional development in situ and "relationship-ba-

sed" reduce teachers' experience of isolation and also reduces rates of teacher turnover (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2008; Buysse & Wesley, 2005). Howes (2010), former Director of the Center for Child Care Improvement at the University of California, Los Angeles, has also cited that center directors have identified two practices that they find effective in professional development and learning among their center teachers, including 1) one-on-one early mentoring by a staff member with more professional preparation and experience, and 2) teachers' reflective practice and directors' and mentors' reflective supervision. These research findings underscore the potential of the center context to generate, support and sustain adult exchange and learning, increasing the likelihood for teacher and center development and change.

Assessing the potential of a center's environment for adult learning as a unique ecology is the focus of a scale developed by Whitebook, Sakai and Ryan (2013). These researchers at the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at University of California, Berkeley, have developed the Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning (SEQUAL) measure in order to examine and assess elements of the center environment that affect the ability of teachers and center administrators to continue their professional development and learning. SEQUAL measures in what ways and to what extent the center environment supports teachers and administrators in adult learning and professional development. This measure is also a tool that can be utilized to increase the capacity of a center environment to support adult learning of its teaching team and administration, ultimately to support better outcomes for children and families.

The measure focuses on five characteristics of the center environment that impact adult learning:

1. TEACHING SUPPORTS: The curriculum, assessment systems used to monitor children's development and learning, materials used in the children's program, services the center provides and/or accesses for children and families, the organization of teachers' daily work schedules;

2. LEARNING COMMUNITY: Individual and collective opportunities for teacher professional development, their sharing of information about their own teaching practices, planning and implementing activities for program improvement;

3. JOB CRAFTING: Program practices and policies that recognize teacher initiative and teamwork and promote teachers' contributions in response to their work;

4. ADULT WELLBEING: Attention to the teachers' experience and center's related policies and practices regarding teacher economic and physical wellbeing;

5. PROGRAM LEADERSHIP: How center directors and supervisors interact with teachers to support their learning, professional development, teaching practices and wellbeing (Whitebook, Sakai & Ryan, 2013).

The authors note that SEQUAL can be utilized as a tool for research, assessment as well as providing information to form the basis of a consulting and technical assistance plan for center program improvement.

THE POTENTIAL OF COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD ADULT LEARNING

The above-cited research findings and development of SEQUAL also suggest the potential of the early childhood center environment as a community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) have made explicit the concept and power of situated learning in their work regarding communities of practice. They underscore that learning is an inseparable aspect of social (or professional) practice and characterize learning as "legitimate peripheral participation" in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31). It is this concept of "legitimate peripheral participation" that suggests the nature of how individual participation is engaged by the presence of and interaction with a community of practice for each teacher within the teaching team. This subtle but powerful dynamic provides the foundation for a community of practice to form, grow, and maintain robust generativity over time.

In relation to communities of practice, Rogoff (2004) has noted that *"Many researchers interested in culture and development found in the writings of Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues a theory that laid the groundwork to help integrate individual development in social, cultural, and historical context. In contrast to theories of development that focus on the individual and the social or cultural context as separate entities (adding or subtracting one and/or the other), the cultural-historical approach assumes that individual development must be understood in, and cannot be separated from, its social and cultural-historical context. According to Vygotsky's theory, the efforts of individuals are not separate from the kinds of activities in which they engage and the kinds of institutions of which they are a part."* (Rogoff, 2004, p. 50)

The focus on teachers' own descriptions of their work activities have been central in the related theore-

tical approach of Engestrom (2007) and in the application of Engestrom's approach to support adult learning of early childhood center staff (Nutall, 2013; 2015).

The recognition and confirmation of the center as context for optimal, ongoing, deep drive early childhood educator learning and professional development contrasts with the current preponderance of the "drive-through professional learning" approach described by Carter (2010), *"Like going through a fast food restaurant, it is a convenient, familiar, economical way to meet requirements in a busy, fast-paced world"* (as cited in Curtis et al., 2013, p. 13), Carter suggests that this "one-size-fits-all" approach to professional development ignores the strength of working with center teachers as a team or as an emerging community of practice, (in addition to ignoring the center team's and center families' socio-cultural-historical context.)

THE POWER OF DIALOGUE IN ADULT LEARNING

"Dialogue is of absolute importance. It is an idea of dialogue not as an exchange but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result. And it goes to infinity, it goes to the universe, you can get lost. And for human beings nowadays…to get lost is a possibility and a risk…" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 184)

It is exactly promoting and working with this "possibility and risk" that are also at the heart of creativity in children's play that make meaningful adult learning and professional development more probable, too. And in the world of young children's development and learning and early childhood pedagogy, there is a need to stimulate and ensure a new sort of "bio-diversity"—a "socio-cultural diversity" as Dahlberg and Moss label it (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 21) *"both as a value and out of self-interest to ensure our future"*—the future of early care and education. Dahlberg and Moss continue, suggesting that through dialogue, teachers can confront *"otherness, dissensus and provocation"*, countering the effects of an *"increasingly dominant and smothering discourse about early childhood education in particular and in education in general, a largely English-speaking… discourse."* (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 17)

CURRENT CHALLENGES IMPACTING ONGOING CENTER TEACHERS' AND ADMINISTRATORS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAM GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

There are a number of current challenges that are impacting early childhood educators and their ongoing professional learning and development. To begin with, the early childhood profession depends upon a body of foundational assumptions that guide the early care and education (ECE). Over the past 130 years in the U.S., dramatic and repeated shifts in these assumptions have been documented(from the wide array of distinct programs and goals—from days of the first day-nurseries providing 12-hours-a-day custodial care to poor urban children in the 1880s to the part-day nursery schools serving children of middle class families in the 1930s, to the Head Start programs serving children from low income families today). Recently, Goffin and Washington (2007) have researched how perspectives regarding early care and education have changed in the United States from the 1980s to the 2000s within five categories: 1) views on children and their early learning; 2) external interest in early care and education; 3) characteristics of early care and education programs and services; 4) descriptors of the early care and education field; and 5) leadership dimensions (Goffin & Washington, 2007, p. 59). This section will describe a number of examples of this shift across five categories to demonstrate the dizzying complexities of the ECE field in the United States today.

Views on children and their early learning and purposes of ECE have shifted.

While before and during the 1980s, many early educators shared an image of the "whole child" and the child's natural developmental process across developmental domains that would be stimulated by teachers' providing a nurturing and supportive environment, brain development research has led the field to focus upon children as "voracious learners" and early education as an opportunity to take advantage of this early stage of development. In the past, ECE programs served specific populations of children and families, and program goals centered on supporting parent employment or alleviating poverty, etc. Now programs tend to focus on children's early learning, there is a renewed interest in school readiness and alleviating the achievement gap children experience across their school career.

DESCRIPTORS OF THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FIELD REVEAL A DRAMATIC SHIFT IN EMPHASIS OVER TIME

These include:

Early care and education knowledge base. While early care and education knowledge base has drawn

predominately from developmental psychology, Goffinand Washington note that there is an increasing expectation that early educators be well-versed din educational program planning structures, theory and practice (e.g., curriculum, assessment, etc.) While the minimum preparation for early childhood teachers was often dependent upon state licensing, there has been increased movement toward requiring a minimum of a four-year baccalaureate university education.

The role of the early childhood teacher has also shifted. While through the 1980s, teachers were often perceived as nurturers of children's development, today the emphasis is increasingly on children's education with less attention paid to those early educators or caregivers who work with children 0-3 years of age.

Pedagogy and curriculum are two concepts that have seen a very distinct reconfiguration in early care and education. Goffin and Washington describe that before and during the 1980s, early childhood professionals often distinguished across a range of provisions from provision of custodial care, to facilitation and support of children's development to didactic instruction. Concurrently, the early care and education field generally recognized developmentally appropriate practices defined re-defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in response to debates within the early care and education profession. Similarly, curriculum discourse elevated alternatives including the role of children's play, child-initiated or child-selected activities and emergent curriculum approaches based on observations of children's interests. Early care and education curriculum is currently characterized by state guidelines or state-approved methods and/or curriculum content, with a growing prevalence of packaged curriculum programs and emphases on literacy and numeracy content.

Center leadership. While center leadership traditionally prioritized supporting teachers daily work with children and families, the predominant focus of center leadership currently is on promoting center change and achieving benchmarks of program quality and teaching quality as assessed by measures described above and others. (Goffin & Washington, 2007, pp. 60-61)

As Curtis and colleagues (2013) have noted, this confluence of shifts in the early care and education filed have, perhaps unwittingly, given primacy to external determinants of the goals and activities of an early childhood center-based program. Early care and education teachers often report they sense a loss of "voice" in determining and documenting their daily work.

This "perfect storm" of factors makes it even more imperative that early care and education opportunities for ongoing professional learning and development be robust, meaningful and center-based.
While perspectives from the field and teachers' work have changed, early childhood awareness of the importance of center teachers' opportunities for ongoing reflection and planning has significantly increased. Also, public recognition of the results of early brain development research has increased and there has been a concomitant rise in public interest in early childhood program quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS). Quality rating and improvement systems across each state typically focus on measuring the nature and quality of teachers' teacher-child interactions as determined by measures such as CLASS (Pianta, Paro, & Hamre (2008) and their demonstration of effective organization of the center learning environments as typically measure by Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) (Harms, Clifford and Cryer (1998). At the same time, this shift in focus has taken attention away from valuing the early childhood center as a system and teaching team dynamics. Teachers' current complaints include that teaching and center assessments are seldom linked to the opportunity to reflect upon the new and multiple expectations for their work with children (Curtis et al., 2013, p. 2). Exacerbating this situation, multiple coaches are sometimes assigned to the same center program (sometimes one for the director and one for the teachers, at times, one for each individual teacher) to support program improvement. While more center teachers and directors are now receiving coaching and consulting support, some assessment teams and coaching teams working in the same center do not communicate with each other. Another model focuses on supporting the development of the director as center leader, abandoning direct coaching of teachers. This situation has led to increased teacher frustration and questioning—How is a focus or topic for early childhood professional development determined? and—How is the early childhood center teaching and administrative team supported to work together for common or complementary goals of growth development and improvement?

DEFINITIONS OF QUALITY IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Zaslow (2011) describes the current situation in detail. She notes that a new focus on program quality has led

to generating a wide variety of related research and public policy questions for early care and education higher education faculty, professional development providers and trainers, policymakers and program planners, as well as center teachers and administrators. These questions include:

- What is the best way to prepare and to continue to provide professional development to early care and education professionals?
- What level of preparation and licensing or certification should teachers have to work with young children?
- Are specific groups or sectors of populations of children targeted or is the goal for universal provision of early care and education for all?
- Will public support for QRIS focus on children 4 and 5 years of age for school readiness, or for children 0 to 3 years of age as well to ensure an optimal beginning?
- How will the program curriculum be organized? Will a specific packaged curriculum become state-approved or will an emergent curriculum based on children's development and interests be recognized?
- How will child developmental and learning outcomes be measured? How will teachers be evaluated? (e.g.,…based on child outcomes? teacher-child interactions? the teacher's arrangement and utilization of the learning environment?, etc.)?
- Will evaluation outcomes be tied to financial incentives for the individual teacher or individual program ("high stakes" evaluation [Zaslow, 2011])?

The consideration of factors identified by Goffin and Washington (2007) and questions generated by Zaslow (2011) reveal the increased complexity of the role and work of early childhood center teachers and directors. The description of the current situation suggests that early childhood educators are faced with constant change. Many early educators appear to experience the challenge of external factors while attempting to co-construct center pedagogy that is coherent, stimulating and satisfying to children, families and teachers, too.

This situation is further complicated due to the absence of a cogent national policy in the US for the provision of early care and education. US early care and education services are characterized as a "mixed delivery" system comprised of public and private, all-day and half-day, family child care home-based and center-based services for young children and their families (Zaslow, 2011).

Simultaneously, a national initiative titled "Race to the Top: Early Learning Challenge Grant" (from 2011 to the present), has promoted change in early childhood systems and program services at the state level directly in 20 of the 50 states of the union. These changes have included funding and policy development to 1) definitions of quality through a identifying a number of teacher and program factors to monitor and measure children outcomes as well as teacher and program quality improvement results. Also, beyond Head Start and Race to the Top Early Learning Challenges national initiatives, each state also boasts its own system for regulation of centers and preparation and certification of teachers within its state borders. In the English-speaking world, technical questions and quantitative indicators of progress, learning and development tend to predominate. National trends in the US include an emphasis on Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) that generates a central question: What are the strategies that best support early childhood teachers' and directors' professional development and program quality improvement in each center (Frede, Gilliam, & Schweinhart, 2011)?

Related early childhood politics are revealed in Britain and Australia. From the University of London, Moss (2001) has confirmed that the British government has asked only one simple question, "What strategy works best?" Moss recognizes that early childhood policies and systems that are based on one, sole method of assessment, with the assumption that definitions of quality and related criteria are stable, immutable elements, and also reflect the belief that a social scientist can be totally objective, negate the complexities of moral dilemmas and philosophy (Moss, 2001, p. 126).

From her perspective at the Catholic University of Australia in Melbourne, Nutall (2015) has also noted that educators report that they are often faced with the contradictions between competing priorities of their center director for teachers to exercise individual initiative (e.g., the confusion caused by urging teachers to "think outside the box" about their pedagogical practice while at the same time being instructed that the teaching team would not be allowed to "move forward" until all teaches are "on the same page" (Nutall, 2015).

THE ROLE OF PLAY IN ADULT LEARNING

"…personal and professional development, like education, should not be seen as static or unchangeable qualities, achieved once and for all, but rather as a process, an ongoing path that we follow from birth throughout

our lives, now more than ever.Personal and professional development and education are something we construct ourselves in relation to others, based on values that are chosen, shared and constructed together. It means living and living ourselves in a permanent state of research." (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 137)

It is well-established that play has a powerful role in the development and learning of children. What similar role does play have in the professional development and learning of a center's teachers and director so that they, too, can live in a "permanent stage of research"? In asking this question, one detects an inherent(potential and realized) strength of each early childhood center to serve as a community of learners for the center teachers, director, children and families. And, as for children, most adults learn more through opportunities related to their work, applying new ideas and information to real-life work situations in the socio-cultural context of the daily work environment (Whitebook & Bellm, 2014).

Sheridan, Howard and Alderson (2013) have stated that understanding child development is central to the work of teachers in an early childhood center program.The authors emphasize that children learn through play. Sheridan et al., (2013) also note, *"Nevertheless, learning through play depends upon children's ability to play.*" (Sheridan et al., 2013, pp. 1-2)

Similarly, center teachers and director can learn through play with ideas and diverse perspectives, only if they have enjoyed the opportunity to create spaces for dialogue, in order to develop and exercise their ability to play with multiple internal factors related to the development and learning of the children and their families. From this perspective, the formation of a community of learners makes likely the teaching team's ability to ponder and consider elements of the center (e.g., the curriculum, program goals, their evaluation and documentation together).

The dimensions of this level of collegiality and collaboration were described by Rinaldi as *"more than the sum of individual thoughts, nor is it a game of majorities and minorities. Instead, it is a zone for interpreting and projecting, it's a different method for thinking; it is a co-construction…"* (Rinaldi, 2011, pp. 73-74 translated from Spanish by the author).

CREATING SPACES AND TRUST: INVITING EXPERIMENTATION, RUNNING RISKS AND MAKING MISTAKES

This section of the article presents three approaches to creating spaces for adult learning, adult play with ideas, experiences and perspectives together. First, a comparison is provided of characteristics of children's play and adult play in learning. Second, a number of strategies are presented that individual teachers and teams can utilize to open and sustain adult play engagement in learning together. Third, an approach for leaders to use to support teachers' adult learning and co-inquiry is provided.

I. A COMPARISON OF CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN'S PLAY AND ADULT PLAY IN LEARNING

Brown (2009) has identified the following characteristics of children's play. Adult play can occur in learning and collaborating together to identify and address challenges as well as experiences of wonder encountered in their work with children and families. Below each characteristic of children's play is a comparable contribution of adult play and learning within the teaching team with intentionally-designed spaces and opportunities.

- **Apparently purposeless: no obvious survival value; play for play's sake**

At times, teachers come together to share the "not knowing" the conundrum or the surprise for which they have no current response. This state can feel "purposeless" and teachers need to be able to tolerate this limbo to discuss and explore together in order to consider related factors, a range of perspectives and co-construct possible responses.

- **Voluntary: not required; optional**

While co-inquiry may not be a condition of a teacher's labor contract, it is an essential element to ensure one's own continuous professional development and learning while enjoying the support of center colleagues.

- **Inherent attraction: exciting, attractive, feels good**

Over time, creating and utilizing predictable spaces for adult play, dialogue and learning in a teaching team acquires an inherent attraction and stimulates intrinsic motivation in participating teachers.

- **Freedom from time: lose sense of time**

Professional development and learning in staff meetings and planning meetings can tend to run over meeting time periods. In satisfying situations, this is enjoyable.

- **Diminished consciousness of self: lose self in the zone or flow of play; during imaginative play, might pretend to be a different self.**

STRATEGIES	FUNCTION AND GOAL OF THE STRATEGY
Change the use of the Word *but* to *and* in your descriptions.	To abandon the expectation that one concept or action is juxtaposed to another is a fixed way. To think inclusively of others and of ideas. To be open to considermore and new factorsto suspend judgments and brainstorming for a while.
Use metaphors.	Metaphors help to visually and quickly communicatecharacteristics of a concept or experience effectively to others.
"Tell me more…"	Especially when you are shocked or frustrated with someone's response, extend your listening and the other's description in order to understand better what the other person is expressing.
Change the use of "I" to "WE", e.g.,"How can we find out together?"	Communicate you are present to find out, side by side, with the other(s). It readies you and the other(s) to co-inquire, to co-construct new learning, to work together
Use the Co-Inquiry Process (Please see added slides at the end of this article.)	This process give a presenting teacher the time to describe a problem situation and for the listening colleagues to remain open and disposed to listen, reflect and, only later, brainstorm together to seek alternate solutions and perspectives.
If your mother (mentor, teacher, etc.) were here, what would s/he do?	This strategy can bring the influences of significant others into the discussion to facilitate respectful, culturally sensitive dialogue and collaboration.
Communicate appreciation and gratitude to the presenter for the work accomplished to date—(not for what you may have expected that was not achieved.)	Base your communications on the strengths you have observed in the situation and in the work of the team and of individual colleagues. In expressing appreciation and gratitude cite specific achievements and specific efforts others have exerted.

> Table 2: Estrategies for creating and maintaining open spaces for dialogue • Source: Fish, J. (2015)

Experimenting with new pedagogical strategies can be like a teacher is assuming a new role, trying it on for size.

• **Improvisation potential: lose rigidity in the way we do things: open to chance, opportunity and serendipity.**

The generation of metaphors can help the individual teacher and teaching team identify characteristics of the situation that might otherwise go unnoticed.

• **Continuation desire: a drive or desire to keep doing it.**

Teaching teams that regularly engage in a predictable co-inquiry process with the assurance of a dedication time period tend to continue this practice. This comparison suggests the potential for the creation and utilization of spaces and opportunities for adult play and learning in the early childhood center context.

II. Strategies and tools for creating and maintaining open spaces for dialogue

From experience in consulting in centers, this author and colleagues have developed the following to increase one's own openness to dialogue, to make dialogue more likely, and to continue or maintain dialogue. The overall goal of these strategies is to build mutual trust, an expectation and ability to explore and play togetherwith emerging ideas, persistent challenges, and differing perspectives. Over time, the use of these and other strategies facilitate building relationships that make the creation and sustainability of a community of learning more likely (Table 2 <).

THE CO-INQUIRY PROCESS

(Modified by Dr. Jan Fish from a written description developed by the California State University, Fresno early childhood center program 3-28-06 source unknown)

Before each teaching team meeting,one teacher prepares to present recent developments or a specific situation in her/his work with children.

The teacher brings:

• Notebook: to write down questions members of the teachingteam pose in response to the teacher's presentation and description. The teacher also comes prepared with documentation (e.g., observation notes, written reflections, children's work, photos, etc.)

• Other teacher participants have important roles as listeners and reflectors (not as advice givers).

PART 1: PRESENTING THE CURRENT WORK

The teachers sit in a comfortable space and the presenting teacher is invited to begin by asking to share her/his work. The teacher gives a BRIEF description of the current work or situation and how and when the work started, and how it has developed to date. No interruptions at this stage of the meeting.

PART 2: RESPONSE TO THE WORK DESCRIBED BY THE TEACHER

The teachers of the team go around the circle and share what they found interesting and why.

They speak from a personal perspective.

The presenting teacher just listens and takes notes.

PART 3: QUESTIONS TO PROVOKE THINKING MORE DEEPLY (NOT ADVICE GIVING)

The teachers go once again around the circle one-by-one and ask one or two short questions to gather more information. e.g., "*I am wondering what your hypothesis or question is now about this situation…*"

"I am curious about how much the teachers know about special… I hear some recurring ideas. What meaning do you think they have?"

The presenting teacher listens takes notes regarding these questions. At the end of the circle, the presenting teacher can choose to answer some of the questions.

PART 4: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, AFFORDANCE AND BRAINSTORMING

The participating teachers acknowledge how far the work has come since the last presentation.

Brainstorming: Together, the teachers begin brainstormingon directions the work might take so it will be more based on mindful observations and consulting activities to date.

The teachers go around once again offering a list of questions or provocations the presenting teacher might ask (not what she might do), e.g., *"I am wondering how the teachers would react to inviting a guest who is an expert in this area…*

Have you considered asking the teachers the same question?

What if you assigned some homework to the teachers to bring something in from home to use in this collaboration? I'm interested in what other kinds of intelligences could be used in this consultation."

Affordance: Teachers suggest materials and other resources that could be usedin the presenting teacher's work. Are there other materials that might provide a provocation if they were added to this area of the collaboration?

Metaphors: The presenting teacher is asked to offer a metaphor for the situation and current work, e.g.,
"If this child/experience/situation were a flower/animal/shoe, what would it look like? or
What does this remind you of?"

PART 5: THE SEMINAR PARTICIPANTS THANK EACH OTHER FOR A GOOD MEETING

BENEFITS OF THE CO-INQUIRY PROCESS

The process allows teachers to reflect on their work.

Both the presenting teacher and the participating teacher colleagues can learn to become better communicators about their pedagogical practices.

The presenting teacher may learn what focus might be most valuable for continued related work in the context of the current situation.

The teachers can learn to ask better questions.

The teachers can learn to be selective about what to document.

The presenting teacher receives appreciation and acknowledgement from her/his peers.

The teachers and director can see the presenting teacher as a competent and growing professional.

This tool has produced systematic improvement in developing teachers who use observation, reflection, inquiry, constructivism, and collaboration and define their teaching with these skills.

FOCUS INTENDED AUDIENCE	TEACHING TEAM
Individual Mental Models	A SharedVision
Personal Aspirations	Learning in the Team Context

Table 3: Creating a Generative Team, Engaged in Continuous Learning
Source: Flórez, I.R., (2015), modified by Fish, J. (2015) inspired by Senge, (2006).

THE LEADERSHIP ROLE IN CREATING A GENERATIVE TEACHING TEAM, ENGAGED IN CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Favorable work conditions and opportunities to nourish one's own pedagogical practice and share findings with colleagues though observation, examining concepts and reflecting within a well-developed ability to play, it must be difficult for teachers and director to be successful in their work. When a child or a family is at risk, he/she/they need a teacher or a director who will be there to accompany him/her/them in looking for related resources and solutions. If the teacher is dizzied by multiple external challenges to the daily life of the center, it becomes less likely that s/he will confront the challenge with sufficient flexibility in order to listen, think, reflect, share, and co-construct possible responses.

The center director has a key role in supporting teachers' play with ideas and approaches. In leading an early childhood teaching team, a director runs the risk of dominating staff meetings and interactions with her/her own agenda of expectations and messages to deliver unilaterally. Effective leaders start from the strengths of the teachers and their work individually and as a team, providing conditions that are favorable for continuous learning and co-construction of work together.

Senge (2006) has proposed a strategy for initially engaging in a dialogue between and among members of a work team that permits making individual staff member mental models explicit. Senge also offers the use of the following suggested questions to attract and maintain the focus of all the members of the team.

Directors and coordinating teachers can stimulate their collective vision, articulate their individual aspirations and promote learning within the group. Directors and teacher-coordinators can utilize this strategy to get to know each other and to deepen group learning and, stimulate their collective disposition to support the team in their day-by-day practice.

Table 3 (see above) organizes a leadership approach to making explicit individual and team interests, perspectives and motivations that can support the creation of spaces an opportunities for a teaching team to become a community of learners and increase the likelihood of continuing to learn together.

The following are some questions that arise from this framework:

Recognize and make explicit individual mental models

How can the diverse individual mental models of the group's membership be revealed? How can you realize when you need to stop and recognize the mental models that are present? How can you create opportunities to identify and explore mental models inside your team?

Co-Construct a Shared Vision

How will you discover the individual visions of the team members?

What are some steps you can take to begin to co-construct (or in order to continue to co-construct) a shared vision among members of the team?

Personal Aspirations

What do I want to create for the members of our organization?

What are some gaps between my vision and our current reality?

What can I do to address these gaps?

Learning within the Team Context

How can I create opportunities for dialogue among members of the teamto promote new learning?

What are some of the frameworks, spaces or tools I can create to promote collective learning and coordinate activities?

How can I create a stable environment of trust that invites experimentation and making mistakes so that we can continue learning together?

Source: Flórez, I.R., (2015)

OF TIME AND SPACE: ONGOING GENERATIVITY OF LEARNING

Center teachers and directors are navigating multiples influences concurrently-changes in their situation re-

lated to economics, pedagogical practices and individual child and family priorities etc. These influences can be used to enrich the teaching team's exploration and learning about children and families or, alternatively, the influences can negatively affect the team's ability to learn from the challenge and persist in finding and sharing the generativity of children's and family development as well as their own professional development. Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, both Chilean biologists, have researched and written extensively about a biological mechanism they have identified in organisms: autopoiesis, or the ability to "self-make" or "self-generate"(Capra, 2004, p.82). Luhmann has developed a theory of "social autopoiesis" (Luhmann, 1990, as cited in Capra, 2004, p. 82). It is suggested that through the recognition of the powerful potential of the early childhood center context for adult play and learning, continued generativity of teacher and director professional development can become ensured or at least more likely, a contribution towards achieving a sort of "social autopoiesis."

"Teaching can exist if it is based on the learning processes of children as observed, experienced and documented. It is not simply to change the way of traditional teaching but learning how to teach based on the learning processes of children. It is a context in which the teacher has a concept of constant professional development… What then is professional development mean to us? It is learning. Our job is to learn, because we are teachers. It means staying away from balance, from what has already been decided, pre-constructed, from what is certain. It means staying close to the place where objects and thoughts intersect. It means doing and reflecting, theory and practice, emotions and knowledge.,,Professional and personal development means rejecting the idea of development as 'shaping' from one way of being to another. This kind of personal and professional development tries to think and act with the idea of becoming, of changing in mind."
(Rinaldi, 2013, pp. 25- 27)

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