



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY

Maleka Donaldson,
Smith College, United States

REVIEWED BY

Lynne Sanford Koester,
University of Montana, United States
David DeLiema,
University of Minnesota Twin Cities,
United States
S. Lynneth Solis,
Harvard University, United States

*CORRESPONDENCE

Paula M. Jakopovic
✉ paulajakopovic@unomaha.edu

RECEIVED 31 January 2024

ACCEPTED 16 August 2024

PUBLISHED 30 August 2024

CITATION

Stamatis KM, Jakopovic PM, Mendoza KR and Wisneski D (2024) Reconceptualizing risk: toward a theory of small risks in informal family play settings.
Front. Educ. 9:1379372.
doi: 10.3389/educ.2024.1379372

COPYRIGHT

© 2024 Stamatis, Jakopovic, Mendoza and Wisneski. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

Reconceptualizing risk: toward a theory of small risks in informal family play settings

Kristina M. Stamatis, Paula M. Jakopovic*, K. Rende Mendoza and Debora Wisneski

Department of Teacher Education, University of Nebraska Omaha, Omaha, NE, United States

Risk-taking in early childhood play is often associated with taking physical risks in outdoor settings. In this study, we explore the notion of “small risks” as a way to examine the how parents and children engage in intergenerational play at a series of informal, indoor pop-up play events that took place at community centers in a large, urban setting. We utilize auto-photography and small stories to examine participants’ self-selected examples of the ways their family units typically engaged in play. Our findings suggest that risk-taking in play, when re-envisioned through the lens of small risks, is more complex and nuanced than previously thought, particularly for families from non-dominant communities.

KEYWORDS

early childhood, family learning, family play, risk-taking, risky play

1 Introduction

Following calls to expand and reframe notions of risk in early childhood education (e.g., [Cooke et al., 2020](#)), this paper examines the ways families engaged in play and risk-taking in informal learning settings. While risk-taking has often been conceptualized as something that children engage in primarily in outdoor spaces to establish boundaries, confidence, and creativity (e.g., [Sandseter, 2007](#)), we question the ways that such notions of risk-taking in early childhood play might limit our understandings of the ways young people, and their families, engage in play together. In this article, we follow scholars who explore conceptions of creative risk-taking in teaching and learning (e.g., [Balkin, 1990](#); [Beghetto, 2018](#); [Harris, 2004](#); [Henricksen et al., 2001](#); [Storli and Sandseter, 2019](#)) to situate risky play within the contexts of broader sociocultural and sociopolitical risks that families take to consider the ways that risk might go beyond the possibility of physical harm. While we acknowledge that this is a divergence from the traditions of early childhood research that examine risky play as “thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury” ([Sandseter, 2009](#), p. 3), we also see a need to extend the ways that play researchers examine risky play in order to better attend to the experiences of those who have been historically marginalized in education research broadly.

Risk has been defined in a myriad of ways in the literature, yet it is inherently part of the human experience. Perceptions of risk can vary by setting ([Boholm, 1998](#)), and can be influenced by the media, societal status (e.g., [Nyland, 1993](#); [Sjöberg et al., 1996](#)), and factors such as ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and education (e.g., [Vaughan and Nordenstam, 1991](#)). Thus, when exploring risk within the context of families, particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds, risk can take on nuanced forms. For example, families may face risks such as food insecurity, lack of access to adequate healthcare,

barriers to immigration and documentation, and other policy-based barriers (Alaimo, 2005; Bacong and Sohn, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2021; Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 2017). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 added an unprecedented layer of risk for the population at large, but with enhanced risk for categories such as intergenerational households and people of color (Thomeer et al., 2020). Understanding risk within the context of play matters because, while risk has been shown to support child development (Sandseter, 2007, 2009), it always takes place within the broader ecosystems in which families live. In this paper we utilize risk as a way to analyze the spaces where young children and their families engaged in play at a series of community playdays that were designed and implemented shortly after the height of the pandemic during the 2021–2022 school year.

Following Brussoni et al. (2012) and Brussoni et al. (2015) and others (e.g., Marey-Sarwan et al., 2018), we seek to better understand the ways that diverse young people and their families navigate a variety of risks directly tied to their identities and the ways those identities are centered or marginalized across sociopolitical contexts. These risks, both real and symbolic (e.g., Bourdieu, 1991; Rajabi, 2021), have the potential to influence the ways families engage together, enter public spaces, and engage in risky play. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic during which this study took place, families who lived in intergenerational households and particularly families of color were often deemed “at risk” based on comorbidities, vocations, and other systemic inequities that meant they were often highly cautious of engaging in public spaces together (Thomeer et al., 2020). In other words, if a family is experiencing food or housing insecurity, fears about documentation, and/or systemic persecution and oppression, just entering the physical and psychological spaces where play is invited can feel risky.

We use this paper to explore the potential for borrowing theoretical tools to make sense of play and risk-taking in public learning environments. Specifically, we examine the experiences of 58 families and their children across six informal play events during the 2021–2022 school year. The play events were part of a larger study aimed at engaging historically marginalized community members in designing and building playful learning spaces in a large midwestern city [e.g., Playful Learning Landscapes Action Network (PLLAN) 2019; project site] during the 2021–2022 school year. All the families who participated identified as people of color and were enrolled in their local community centers’ early childhood and parenting programs. Drawing from narrative and qualitative research methods, including small stories (e.g., Georgakapoulou, 2007) and auto-photography (Noland, 2006), we follow other early childhood scholars who define risky play as the possibility of danger, loss, or injury but also consider this possibility as existing prior to children’s engagement in play in the contexts and actions that frame their play and present different risks for people with different positionalities (e.g., the ways that some families must worry about deportation where others do not). Acknowledging the ways that families who have experienced oppression may exist constantly with the possibility of this kind of physical and psychological risk, we see risky play as engagement in small moments of creativity with the potential of danger, loss, or injury, including the possibility of perceived failure or sanction. While we recognize that this definition overlaps with other conceptions of mistakes (e.g., Frost et al., 1990; Peterson et al., 2024), failure (Eskreis-Winkler and Fishbach, 2019, 2022; Kapur 2015; Tawfik et al., 2015),

and error (Mera et al., 2022; Metcalfe, 2017; Pan et al., 2020), we draw specifically on risk in our framing because of both the rhetoric of the families within our study and the broader narratives of risk in our contemporary sociopolitical context. Almost daily, during the pandemic and after, we have seen headlines highlighting the risks that people of color encounter in their daily existence in the U.S., from police violence, to contaminated water, to illness and food scarcity. Therefore, we intentionally use risk and risky play to frame this study.

In this paper, we examine the ways that parents¹ and their children engage in this kind of small risk through small moments of play. Drawing from the notion of small stories (e.g., Bamberg, 2004; de Fina and Georgakapoulou, 2012; Georgakapoulou, 2007) as a conceptual lens and method for understanding the small risks in which families engage during play. These scholars define small stories as “narrative-in-context” and describe them as “a gamut of underrepresented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell” (Georgakapoulou, 2007, p. 146). We think of small risks as also in-context, moments of risk within the larger sociocultural and sociopolitical narratives of family play.

In this study, we examined the ways that young people and their parents engaged in playful learning together when playing with building materials, instruments, and loose parts at six play events that took place within two local community centers. We found that parents within these settings were often quick to engage in and facilitate small risks with their children, despite their oft-stated aversion to exposing their children to the psychological risks that often characterized their daily experiences as people of color in a mostly conservative city. Drawing from the notion of small stories, we use this paper to begin to develop a framework for observing and analyzing small risks in play. This lens has potential to extend how educators and facilitators enact their support of families and children regarding playful learning. In the following sections, we review some of the foundational literature on intergenerational play, as well as that on risk-taking, and then consider the ways that conceptions of small stories might support our understandings of the ways families play, the risks they take together in free play, and the barriers they describe to risk-taking across settings.

2 Literature review

2.1 Play

Play is widely acknowledged as an essential part of child development where young people make sense of the complex ecosystems—social, political, and environmental—within which they live and grow (Storli and Sandseter, 2019). The United Nations (1989) even points to play as a fundamental right of children that supports linguistic and literacy development, physical development, and overall

1 Throughout the paper we use the terms “parents” and “families” to denote any adult-child relationship based in care. We recognize that families across these settings had many structures where adults and children were supporting one another to learn and grow.

well-being (Golinkoff et al., 2006; Nathan and Pellegrini, 2010; Rubin et al., 1983). While early studies centered on the link between play and learning (Fein, 1981), more recent studies include examinations of risk-taking in play as essential for child development (Sandseter, 2007, 2009). This type of play allows children to participate in settings that are uncertain and challenging, which helps foster their growth in the areas of independence, skillfulness, and social bonding (Dweck, 2006; Grolnick, 2009; Grolnick and Seal, 2008; Sandseter and Kennair, 2011). However, analyses of risky play have also shown that these positive outcomes may be hindered by adults striving to keep children safe (Sandseter, 2007; Sandseter et al., 2021). In the following sections we review literature around intergenerational dynamics in play to contextualize our study. We also look to the literature around risky play and the ways families support or hinder children's engagement in risk to understand the ways that risks might be reimagined to support our understanding of intergenerational playful learning. We end with a conceptual framework for analyzing small risks in family play.

2.2 Intergenerational play

While much of the research on risky play has focused on its benefits for young children, studies have also explored the ways that intergenerational play has the potential to increase care between children and elders (Agate et al., 2018; Davis et al., 2002), as well as how designed spaces can help to facilitate learning among families (e.g., Fisher et al., 2008; Ridge et al., 2015). Intergenerational play has also been examined as part of physical education for young people and has been positively correlated with their positive self-awareness and self-worth (e.g., Hynes-Dusel and Clements, 2001). As such, play is a tool adults can use to “reframe different situations with their children in a playful manner, turn harsh situations into fun, and act in a flexible, humorous, creative manner in times of stress” (Schneider et al., 2022, p. 2; citing Barnett, 1990; Shorer et al., 2019; Levavi et al., 2020). Play becomes a means of engaging in the world together, exploring narratives, and making sense of possibilities and of potential risk. While play is an essential part of young children's experience as they learn to navigate the world, play can be disrupted when it is deemed unsafe by parents and educators (Brussoni et al., 2012). In this way, intergenerational play has potential to both extend and hinder children's growth, creativity, and potential to overcome failure.

Parent-child play is largely recognized as a tool to build familial connections that support children's social and emotional skills (e.g., Pettit et al., 1998; StGeorge and Freeman, 2017), too much parental involvement in children's free play has been linked to hindrances in children's self-regulation and behavioral development (Obradović et al., 2021). These researchers found that children whose parents disrupt or correct them when they are already in the process of playful learning tend to have more difficulties engaging on their own, experiencing delayed gratification, and acting with independence. The notion that guided play is only sometimes beneficial is not new. Sutton-Smith (1997) explained that despite their importance in facilitating experiences for their children, parents have potential to disrupt the benefits of play when their involvement impedes children's ability to experience moments of agency and discovery. Some theorists even pointed to adults as the facilitators rather than participants of play, suggesting that adults often do more harm than good if they are

trying to over-participate in children's play (e.g., Brown and Briggs, 1990).

Despite the extensive research on play between children and adults, questions remain about the potential for parallel play between these groups. Weldemariam (2014) further explored the role of adults in child's play, recognizing that adults need to first understand the roles that children take on as they play and the potential for learning and discovery in creative play before they can productively act as co-players. She, like other play scholars (e.g., Johnson et al., 2005), pointed to the need for parents and teachers to approach facilitation of play cautiously so as not to disrupt the potential for imaginative, self-guided learning that can occur when children are deeply engaged in play. Despite these cautions, a few studies have examined the potential for parallel play or simultaneous play between parents and children. For example, Roque (2016) examined the potential for collaborative and creative learning between parents and their children in playful informal learning settings (see also Keifert, 2021; Marin and Bang, 2018). Roque found that the potential for learning across these groups was heightened when both children and their parents had opportunities to act as experts within the setting, both teaching one another and learning together and on their own. While parents were at first hesitant to engage in this kind of playful learning with their children, as barriers were removed both through education and through familiarity with the setting and technologies, their willingness to engage in new and unfamiliar tasks both with their children and alone appeared to increase (see also Widman et al., 2015). In this case, parents needed to be invited to act as participants in play and to engage in ways where they were not centered as the expert. Further, they needed opportunities to see themselves as invited and having space for the same kind of playful learning that they sought for their children. This kind of play alongside their children required parents to be willing to relinquish their expectations for themselves and take on new roles as learners. Little et al. (2011) and Widman et al. (2015) work similarly discussed the ways that the norms and established rules of play spaces sometimes need to shift for parents to allow for or engage in play that might otherwise be deemed risky.

2.3 Risk-taking in play

Risky play and risk-taking in play are often synonymous with children's engagement in outdoor play that presents the risk of physical injury. Research across the fields of education and health sciences supports risky play as a necessary component of child development that provides children opportunities to engage in environments where uncertainty and challenge can facilitate their development of autonomy, competence, and connection (Dweck, 2006; Grolnick, 2009; Grolnick and Seal, 2008; Sandseter, 2007, 2009; Sandseter and Kennair, 2011). When children learn to approach risk and engage with, rather than avoid it, they can develop effective tools for dealing with uncertainty and adversity to mediate risk (Cohn et al., 2009; Frederickson, 1998, 2001, 2004). Much of the existing literature on risky play in early childhood education focuses on play in outdoor settings (e.g., Brown, 2009; Niehues et al., 2013; Sandseter, 2007; Sandseter et al., 2020; Tovey, 2007), which involves risk-taking that may result in injury. These studies often examine the potential for learning and development as young children discover their limits, establish boundaries, and engage in activities that pose a challenge or

danger to their safety. Additionally, some of these studies examine how adults disrupt the risks that children might take.

Risky play has also been conceptualized as taking moves to attempt “something that has never been done before” (Sandseter, 2007, p. 238; citing Stephenson, 2003). While Sandseter (2007) suggested that control or the lack of control is a large part of what constitutes “risky,” she and others acknowledge that physical risk is not the only factor in children’s attempts toward risky play. For example, Kleppe et al. (2017) examined risky play for very young children (ages one to three) and described it as “play that involves uncertainty and exploration—bodily, emotional, perceptual or environmental—that could lead to either positive or negative consequences” (p. 12). Still others have considered risky play to be emotional, an engagement with something that stretches children and their families toward the unknown (Cooke et al., 2021; Nikiforidou, 2017). While we acknowledge the literature on risk-taking in outdoor play as aligned to physical safety, in this study, we are interested in this more psychological or affective perspective on risk. In the following sections, we offer some perspectives on parents’ beliefs on risk and how these beliefs manifest in disrupting or facilitating children’s play.

2.4 Parent conceptions of risk-taking in the literature

2.4.1 Parent beliefs about risk

Parents’ beliefs about play and risk-taking directly affect their responses to their children engaging in or avoiding risky play. In other words, parental beliefs about participation in activities (Sallis et al., 2000), injury risk (Boufous et al., 2004), and environmental safety (Soori and Bhopal, 2002; Weir et al., 2006) all influence their children’s resulting exploration of (or lack of) risk-taking in play. In outdoor settings, this includes not only physical injury, but also considerations such as “stranger danger” and other environmental risks (e.g., weather, traffic, lack of adequate play spaces; Brussoni et al., 2012). Although parents may recognize the benefits associated with risky play, studies show they also often maintain a strong desire to protect their children from engaging with risk (e.g., Kelley et al., 1998; Niehues et al., 2013).

2.4.2 Parents’ role in risk mitigation

Contemporary research has examined parents’ perceptions about their role when it comes to their children engaging in or avoiding risky play. Little (2010) explored the role of the parent during outdoor play, noting that, while all parents spent majority of time supervising their child’s play, their other interactions were contingent on the child’s observed behavior (i.e., providing physical support, encouragement, praise, or giving instructions). Despite one-fourth of parents in the study self-reporting positive attitudes toward moderate risk-taking, only 8% of observed play included moderate risk, with most observed play categorized as either No/Very Low Risk or Low Risk. In a follow up study that further explored risk-taking in structured outdoor play settings (i.e., early childhood centers and neighborhood playgrounds), no children engaged in moderately risky play, regardless of parent attitudes toward risk-taking and play, indicating the potential for rules and expectations in formal play spaces to negatively impact opportunities for children to engage in uncertainty and challenges (Little et al., 2011). Morrongiello et al. (2006, 2008) further found that parents often model strategies to help children understand how to

mitigate risk, but it is less clear how they help children distinguish between perceived positive and negative risk-taking. Similarly, Smith et al. (2015) studied intergenerational play and the perspectives of parents who had experienced intergenerational poverty. While parents who have experienced poverty saw the value of play, the authors found a disconnect between this perceived value and whether parents felt they should actively engage in play with their children. Such studies suggest the importance of understanding how parents identify the balance between mitigating and allowing for their children to engage in risk. As such, it is important to untangle how parents conceptualize which types of risks are appropriate and which risks should be avoided.

Scholars have examined this dichotomy to better understand parents’ support of and aversion to risky play. Little (2010) found a significant difference between parents who self-identified as risk takers versus non-risk takers and the observed level of risk they allowed and encouraged their children to engage in. Niehues et al. (2013) further explored parents’ reactions to risky play. They identified several reasons why adults who self-identified as risk-takers often experienced automatic protective responses (Gardner, 2008) when their children attempted to take risks through exploratory play. First, parents reported feeling overwhelmed by the volume of available child rearing resources (often suggesting what is advisable in terms of safety). Second, they expressed fear of the level of risky play they allowed negatively influencing others’ view of their parenting skills. Finally, participants’ perception of the level of risk shifted depending on whether they were concerned for their own or another person’s child in their care. Niehues et al. (2013) further found that when parents were provided with space to engage in slow thinking where they can weigh all possible outcomes and engage in complex decision making instead of relying on fast thinking that tends to provoke a protective response (Kahneman, 2011) they began to mediate their own fears and discomfort in allowing their children to engage in risky play. Such studies hint at the idea that risky play in public spaces, while potentially beneficial for young people’s development of confidence, connectedness, and emotional regulation, is often mitigated by parents’ desire to keep their children safe.

With this in mind, we expected this study to reinforce the notion that parents would mitigate physical and conceptual risks when engaged in free play with their children. However, in our initial observations, we noted that families’ playful interactions were more complex than just making moves to support or disrupt risky play. To better understand this complexity, we look to theories from English and literacy to better understand the microgenetic moves families engaged in toward risk and play in public spaces.

3 Conceptual framing

3.1 Conceptualizing small risks through small stories

In this study, we propose the notion of small risk to better understand the ways that families chose to engage in a public play event. We draw upon the lens of “small stories” (Bamberg, 2004; Georgakapoulou, 2007) from literacy and English studies to consider the ways that narratives across modes can act as moments of embodiment, stories and narratives told by participants that point to sociocultural contexts and structures of social organization (de Fina

and Georgakopoulou, 2012). We take the perspective that family interactions are always embedded in the sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts in which they take place. Small stories, though often narrative in nature, offer a means of observing the fringes of identity within learning settings, by providing a means of reading between the lines of what the researcher aims to gather, and instead attend to the subjective interpretations of participants (Enciso, 2017). Georgakopoulou (2007) explained that small stories that belie participants' subjectivity can emerge as part of research data in between the "grand narratives" that researchers often seek with interviews, focus groups, and observations. In this piece, we use this idea of small stories (e.g., Bamberg, 2004; de Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012; Georgakopoulou, 2007) to propose the lens of small risks. By small risks, we mean those moments of play that stretch families toward the possibility of danger, whether real or symbolic. We draw from this lens to better understand how parents help to facilitate their children's development when engaging with uncertainty through play.

In contrast to the types of risky play that can lead to injury, which could be considered moderate or large risks, we frame our work around the notion of small risks, or those that present (on the surface at least) minimal risk of failure and no likely risk of injury. Such risks can be ephemeral, moments that pass quickly and sometimes without observation, much like the notion of "small stories," which Bamberg coined as those that "...we tell in passing, in our everyday encounters with each other, and which I considered the 'real' stories of our lived lives" (Bamberg 2004, p. 367). Small stories allow the storyteller to select episodes that are removed from the social settings in which they were shared (in this context, play spaces) and are "under-represented narrative activities" (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 146). This is not to say that small stories are limited to literary products, such as transcripts, as this narrows discourse to language that, when removed from the original social context, can result in meaning that is lost in translation (Bamberg, 2004). Rather, small stories can be thought of as recent events, or what Georgakopoulou refers to as "breaking news," that can take place using a range of tools in addition to face-to-face communication (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 150). Such stories can, but are not required to, involve a temporal ordering of events.

Small risks, like small stories, may appear unremarkable in that assumptions can be made as to what constitutes risk in play spaces, particularly indoor settings that may limit the potential for physical harm. Stephenson (2003) observed that not all risk-taking in early childhood settings is related to the act of play itself, rather it can also involve moments of uncertainty, such as being a newcomer in a setting and wondering what it looks like to engage and be accepted as a member of the community. Similarly, Cooke et al. (2021) suggested that focusing solely on outdoor risks ignores attending to "social, emotional, and cognitive risks such as asking a friend to play or contributing ideas to a conversation" (p. 14). Thus, we conceptualize small risks as moments where individuals wrestle with the potential for failure, whether observable in a social setting or not. In this study, we utilized auto-photography (Noland 2006) to capture these small moments that happened, often quickly, during a series of play sessions to examine the types of small risks that families took engaging in intergenerational play.

We see these small risks as important because they point us toward the ways that diverse families might experience and engage with play together. We posit that families who have experienced systemic oppression and marginalization in their day-to-day

experiences might experience risk differently than those families whose identities represent the dominant perspectives in research and education. We acknowledge that environments designed for public play (i.e., playgrounds, community centers, and educational spaces) are often more dangerous for people with Black, Indigenous, Latine, and other global majority identities because of the systems of power that continue to deny people of color the power and privilege of their white counterparts. This is also true for people of lower socioeconomic status, whose physical environments might present real threats due to lack of maintenance and resources. We think of small risks as those moments of risk that do not inherently stand out as part of the "larger research narrative" (de Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012, p. xx), but that were documented by families as important moments within their playful experiences. We recognize that these small moments of risk have the potential to feel large to individuals, particularly within the sociopolitical context that frames their lives. When the spaces that families with non-dominant identities engage in were primarily designed to support their ability to fit into the mostly white narratives that govern many of our education and early childhood settings in the United States, their attendance and even their existence may feel risky. Small risks—such as inviting a child to knock down a structure or shifting the norms of a space to better fit familial experiences of play—may then represent far more for families than is evidenced in the current literature on risky play. It is with this in mind that we frame our analysis.

4 Methods

4.1 Context

To contextualize this study, we must locate the initiation of risk for ourselves and with our own positionalities. The authors of this paper are all white and work for a local urban university in the school of education. Two of the authors identify as queer. However, of the four authors, only two of us were engaged in the facilitation and data collection for this study and both of us are typically visibly positioned as straight, white, cisgender, and able-bodied. While the study took place toward the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors were invited to choose whether to use masks in the community space, while the families were required to mask during the first workshops. Additionally, in initial meetings with community partners, there was hesitation from community center staff, most of whom were people of color, to engage in research because there were histories of research in the broader community that included data misuse, families being left without resources when the research ended, and a general sense of extraction that the community center staff wanted to avoid. Our project was invited to engage in the community centers after explaining that we were interested in studying and designing with families. However, the notion of risk began even before the study, as community center staff explained that our presence was welcome but that those in our position had previously drawn mistrust.

This study is part of a larger project designed to build urban playgrounds in an urban center of a large midwestern city that has been historically redlined and under-resourced. This study took place as the initial phase of the larger study to get to know the community members who might benefit from community-design work to reimagine playful spaces in their city [Playful Learning Landscapes

[Action Network \(PLLAN\) 2019](#)]. This data set was drawn from play events across two informal learning centers in the city in the 2021–2022 school year at the end of the city’s formal response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The centers featured early childhood education and after-school care centers for birth to third grade. Additionally, the centers offered English language classes, as well as other educational resources for parents of young children. The centers were founded using state and federal funding and with the intention to close learning gaps by supporting early literacy development and to combat poverty for families by providing meals, childcare, and education. The centers partner with different community organizations, including a local community college and our institution, to offer educational opportunities, citizenship courses, and other resources to ensure families have access to food, housing, and education that can support their engagement in the city.

The history of the centers is complicated by the segregation of the city—which is reinforced by a highway that was built through the old city center and now leads to the wealthy, mostly white suburbs. The Treeline center (all names are pseudonyms) primarily serves Black and Latino residents of the city. The Treeline center sits on a business corridor between a private Jesuit university and a burgeoning, mostly Black-owned business district. The Farfield center is about 5 miles from the Treeline center and is just off the city’s Latino-business district. The center is primarily Spanish speaking, though a growing number of Q’anjob’al speakers also access the center’s resources. Each center serves more than 150 families each week, with engagement varying by season. At the start of the project, center staff warned that there had not been much in-person programming since the pandemic and cautioned that participants may not choose to risk their health in these public spaces.

4.2 Participants

The participants who engaged in this project were invited by the centers to partake in programming based on their previous participation in similar programs. 150 participants engaged in six play events that took place over a university school year. Approximately 35 participants attended each session, which equated to 10 families at each session on average. About half of the families attended more than one event, though only six families across the sites attended all three events. Activities were facilitated by two university professors and up to six graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in teacher education and counseling programs. Between three and six members of the centers’ early childhood faculty joined for each event. At both centers, early childhood faculty, whom the centers called navigators, acted as interpreters for the families who spoke Spanish and Q’anjob’al. Community center faculty recruited families to engage with the play events. While the play events targeted young people ages 3–5 and their care providers, all family members were invited to take part in the play activities and many families who attended consisted of at least one adult caretaker and between two and six children aged 3 to 15. Many participants seemed to have prior relationships from previous programs at the center. While children often attended the center for early childhood care, they mostly stayed within their family groups during the workshops. All the families engaged at the center were identified by faculty as lower-socioeconomic status. To mitigate risk to participants,

we did not collect individual demographic data or names beyond what they chose to share with us on their designed materials and photographs. The studies involving human/animal participants were reviewed and approved by University of Nebraska’s Institutional Review Board (approval 0142-22-EX). Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants and by participants legal guardian/next of kin.

4.3 Play days

This study took place across six pop-up play events for families with young children. Given the purpose and location of the community centers, we expected that all families would be of lower socioeconomic status and would mostly identify as people of color. Building from the Family Creative Learning workshop model ([Roque, 2022](#)), the workshops were organized to give families opportunities to eat together, get to know each other, play together, and then share their experiences. We designed the workshops specifically to create opportunities for families and their children living in the larger study’s target areas of the city to share how they already played in informal settings and to reflect on the kinds of play spaces they wanted to see built within their neighborhoods. The workshops were designed to use the same materials across each community center; however, the centers’ program directors determined the dates and times of each play event. At Treeline, we hosted two play events in the evening and one in the afternoon. At each Treeline event, families ate a meal together prior to engaging in play. At Farfield, the events each took place after a morning adult English as a Second Language (ESL) class. Families played together and then were invited to eat and debrief their experiences. Each event took place just after a class adjourned to capitalize on audiences already attending the play center. Families were invited to play and were offered the opportunity to choose whether to document their play together through drawings, photos, and videos. Researchers provided materials including colored pencils, paper, and iPads, that families could use for documentation.

The playdays were all based on themes (e.g., world music or “build your ideal play space”) and included suggested free play activities where families could opt into different ways of engaging with a variety of materials. Each playday included a short introduction where families were introduced to the project and the larger design work for the community playgrounds and were then invited to illustrate their favorite way to play together. These illustrations were shared across the workshops with the families to document their ideas about play ([Roque 2023](#)). The first playday at each site featured blocks of various sizes set up in small stations around a large room at each of the community centers. The second featured music, dance, and musical instruments that families could use to play together. The third playday was the one most targeted to understand how families saw play within their communities and featured loose parts (e.g., [Cankaya et al., 2023](#)), including buttons, blocks, and natural elements such as branches, boxes, and other materials, that families were invited to use to design their ideal play space for their community. The playdays were minimally facilitated. Facilitators (researchers, center faculty, and students) were instructed by the research team to talk to families and were invited to engage in parallel play, playing with materials next to families, but were asked to allow families to lead the activities. At the end of each day, there was a short, facilitated opportunity to share,

where facilitators invited families to share what they had created and documented.

4.4 Data collection

In this study, we used qualitative methods, including auto-photography where “participants take photographs, choosing images to represent themselves” (Noland, 2006, p. 2). We were interested in exploring the risks that families took in play in public spaces as a tool to understand the desires and designs they shared for building public playgrounds in their neighborhoods. Photographs taken by families provided a way of seeing families’ interpretations of their own stories. As Noland (2006) explained, “it enables researchers to look at the participants’ world through the participants’ eyes” (p. 2). This approach can also help to relieve feelings of stress that often come with participants being asked to be subjects of a study, as it allows them to depict moments without needing to rely on language and was one way that our team sought to mitigate the risks to families who might be grappling with issues of documentation or who had previously been treated unfairly in research settings. Self-selecting moments allows participants to be “expert guides leading the fieldworker through the content of the pictures” (Collier and Collier, 1986, p. 106). In this study, we saw auto-photography as a way to offer “participants the freedom to use their actual surroundings, to pick and choose the people who are important to their self-concepts, and to decide what issues and what objects are the most salient to their construction of self” (Noland 2006, p. 3).

This method of documentation, alongside fieldnotes, artifacts, and interviews, also aligned with Bamberg (2004) notion of small stories as moments in between the large narratives of research. By asking families to document what was important to them, the research team had opportunities to see the small moments and therefore small risks that families valued. In this way, we worked to disrupt the historical relationships between the university and our participants, honoring their perspectives both in the ways they defined play and in the ways, the project collected data.

4.5 Data analysis

We began our data analysis by recognizing the importance of auto-photographic research as being a collaborative interaction between participants and the researcher (Collier and Collier, 1986). To help account for this, we used photographs, researcher field notes, and interviews as units for analysis. We began with the photos, initially organizing them by location and playday session. For this paper, we analyzed data from the first playday to develop a framework for examining the larger data set. We then examined individual photos and sorted by participants (tagging photos with the same family members) and which materials they were engaged with. There were several instances where families took photos of materials only, in which case we utilized the field notes to tie the images to the families who took the photo.

Next, we assigned descriptors to each photo related to the type of play we observed families engaging in, based on Sandseter’s (2007) six categories of risky play, which included (1) play with great heights; (2) play with high speed; (3) play with dangerous tools; (4) play near

dangerous elements; and (5) play where children can get lost. Our initial interest in this kind of risk was to understand the risks that parents were both comfortable with and designing for when they engaged with their children. Based on prior literature, we expected to see parents mitigating risks and describing how they would expect to mitigate risk in an outdoor environment; however, in our first round of coding, we recognized that the images families captured, even when paired with fieldnotes, did not always map onto Sandseter’s categories in the ways we anticipated. While we acknowledge the importance of understanding risky play in and parent and educators’ role in facilitating that play, we were struck by the ways that small risks had implications for our project in much larger ways. As Georgakapoulou (2007) explained in her work on small stories:

under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell. These tellings are typically small when compared to the pages and pages of transcript of interview narratives (p. 146).

Our initial categories of risky play did not appear to map neatly onto the data set families had constructed or the fieldnotes, artifacts, and recordings we collected.

In our second round of coding, we returned to the photos families collected and paired them with interviews, fieldnotes, and artifacts to seek out the small stories or small risks that emerged in the families’ interactions. While we recognized that families themselves had not framed these moments as risk, the notion of small risk allowed us to more deeply analyze the moves that families documented and the ideas they reported in conversations as part of the overarching design of the physical spaces that are the larger study’s goal. Through this iterative process of coding, we recognized that small narratives of family’s play emerged within series of photos taken by the same families. Our conceptual framework emerged as we noted that families were documenting moments of play that pointed at small narratives that were not immediately noted in fieldnotes but did surface in some of the parents’ descriptions of the activities when they spoke with researchers.

Drawing from notions of small stories, we re-examined the data to identify themes related to play and risk, seeking to identify both examples of “small risks” taken by families and disconfirming evidence. The goal of the analysis was to help the researchers understand the nuanced layers of risk that are involved in even seemingly small moments. Where we could, the research team used field notes and interview data to confirm our categorizations of small risks, however this data was not always present. We aligned our assertions to our conceptual framework around small risks and acknowledge that one limitation of our analysis is the etic positionality of the research team. To mitigate this, we engaged in multiple rounds of discussion with each other and the community center staff, who provided more nuanced interpretations of the families and their backgrounds, alongside the images they captured. Several themes emerged from this analysis: risk in public spaces, risks of physically building with loose parts, risk of failure, and leading risky play. In addition, we drew from community center faculty interviews to examine the ways there was a risk of documentation for some families. After our third round of coding, we met as a research team to compare and discuss our interpretations of families’ small risks. We utilized both interpretive analysis (Collier and Collier, 1986; Noland, 2006; Thomas, 2009) and narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993; Bamberg,

2004), drawing upon the photos, field notes, and parent interviews to better contextualize the participants' perspectives and retelling of small stories of familial play and risk. We think of small risks as both outcome and method, a way of seeing what is happening and a way of navigating the in-between moments that lead toward families' engagement together. While we recognize that the families themselves may not interpret these moments as risk, but attending and attuning to them creates the possibility in research of building more nuanced and critical understandings the context of family play and the risks involved. In the following sections, we offer examples of the ways small risks emerged in our analysis and the ways these small risks point to new understandings for facilitating and engaging in play with families.

5 Results

In this study, which took place across six informal play events over 2 years, we use the notion of small risk—moments of uncertainty that feel like risk, whether psychological, affective, or physical—to expand our understanding of the interactions that families had while engaging in play together. In the following sections, we share several examples from our data analysis to illustrate two of the ways we observed small risks during the playdays, including the ways that children were allowed to lead small risks and the ways that adults engaged in their own small risks in play. We then offer a few examples of the parents' analysis of why they often avoid risks in these historically under-resourced areas of our city.

5.1 Small risk stories: facilitating children's small risk-taking

In the literature on risk-taking, several scholars noted that even when parents believe that risky play is positive for their children's development, they tend to direct children's outdoor risk-taking to mitigate the risks their children are taking (e.g., Little, 2010). Our observations and analysis of families' photographs pointed to the ways that parents allowed children to lead small risks within the playdays with much more freedom than is described in outdoor settings. For example, several times we noted that parents were stepping back, rather than forward as we would expect from literature on risk mitigation (e.g., Little, 2010; Niehues et al., 2013; Obradović et al., 2021) to allow children to stack boxes, blocks and other materials to the point of destruction. In one instance, during the first workshop with blocks and boxes, an adult participant, Jose (all names are pseudonyms) had his wife, Elise, video record as he stood aside and encouraged his son not to be careful, but to destroy the structure that they had built (see Figure 1).

In the image, Enrique, Jose's son, is in motion, moving his hand toward the tower to knock it down. Jose, who along with Elise, had stacked the boxes well above Enrique's head, watched the destruction while casually leaning against a nearby table. We were struck by the documentation of this moment, as the family had taken few pictures of their engagement in building the structure, but instead chose to document what the research team noted was the most physically dangerous part of their play. Boxes tumbled around Enrique, hitting him in the head. While they did not pose much possibility of extreme



FIGURE 1
Jose encourages his son, Enrique, to knock down the tower.

injury, the researchers were impressed with Jose's facilitation of this moment and saw the engagement as a moment of small risk where the family opened themselves up to the possibility of the unknown. This was reinforced in a research memo where Author 1 wrote that one of the community center staff had pointed out this interaction and discussed her surprise at the comfort families felt in allowing for "real play." She said that the families were letting children lead, rather than the more controlled version of engagement she sometimes saw when families were working to fit into the norms of the classrooms at the community center.

Jose and Elise were not the only parents who facilitated or allowed their children to engage in small risks within the playdays. Another example of children leading the risk-taking with encouragement from their families occurred when Habib, who was 3 or 4 years old, decided to build a tower out of snap cubes. In the initial photo, Habib is standing next to his mom, reaching for the snap cubes (see Figure 2). In the background, she and his sisters made patterns on the floor. Eventually, Habib's older sister Monique began to build a tower out of the blocks (Figure 3). Stacking was one of the most common ways of engaging with the materials across the three playdays and was one of the ways we most frequently observed parents and children engaging in as they navigated play together. In this case, Habib watched for a few moments as Monique built, then began to mimic her (Figure 4). In the images (which were captured by another sister), Lissa, the children's mom, reaches her hand out to stabilize Habib's blocks as the stack begins to crumble. This kind of mitigation of risk—disrupting the way that the children were playing to make sure that they did not encounter failure—tracks with the literature on parents' interference in children's risky play (e.g., Little, 2010; Little et al., 2011; Sandseter, 2007). However, because of the auto-photographic nature of this study, we were able to see how the moment of small risk shifted from mitigation toward engagement together as Lissa took her children's lead.

In the series of photos, Lissa reaches her hand toward Habib's stack of snap cubes as they start to bend and break apart. Then, the



FIGURE 2
Habib reaching for snap cubes.



FIGURE 4
Lissa supports her son, Habib, as he attempts to mimic Monique's tower.

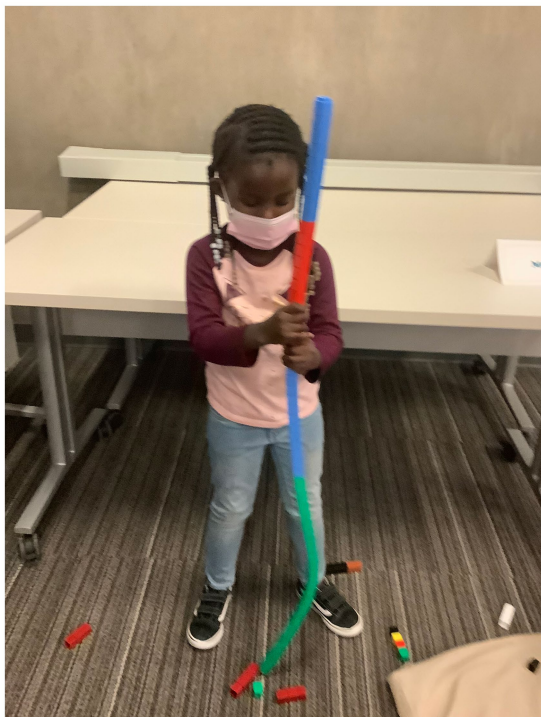


FIGURE 3
Monique creating a snap cube tower.



FIGURE 5
Lissa encourages risk-taking in collaboration with her children.

next frame shows Lissa joining in, not to facilitate the stacking, but allowing the children to stack the blocks on her forehead (see Figure 5). The family had called a facilitator over to take a picture. In

the image, Lissa reached up to stabilize the blocks, much as she did in the first image, but instead of acting as an outsider to mitigate the risk for her children, the image depicts her as an integral part of the risk,

both physically as the snap cubes loom over her face threatening to topple on her and as a builder and participant in the possibility of failure while stacking. While Lissa was the only parent we observed engaging in risk in this way, we were struck by the ways that both Lissa's family and Jose's acted as representatives for the larger group in terms of joining in the risks that children chose to take. This illustrated the ways that parents not only allowed children within the playdays to lead in small risks but also joined them. In each of these examples, small risk was documented as part of the goal of play, a step in the narrative rather than a thing to be avoided. By supporting children to both build and destroy their creations, parents appeared to be embracing notions of risk and allowing children to lead the play in ways that were unpredictable.

5.2 Small risk stories: parent's small risks

Across the six playdays, we noted in fieldnotes and memos that while children of all ages engaged immediately in play upon entering the community spaces, parents tended to begin the playdays standing and watching their children from the outskirts of the room. Community center facilitators explained to the project team that the spaces we were using for the playdays were normally used for ESL classes that the parents would take or for community center board meetings, which were typically very formal and full of the mostly white board members. Therefore, while children often attended the centers for childcare based in play, the parents were used to viewing the centers as spaces that hosted more formal events. Although most parents did not directly articulate any hesitation to the research team, we noted changes in parent involvement as we organized and analyzed the data that aligned with community center staff observations. The progression of photos and fieldnotes capturing the play across family units often illustrated parents moving from the sidelines into collaborative play with their children. We viewed the need for parents to reimagine the purpose of the community space as a type of risk-taking for adults who are used to the norms of how one ought to act in classroom and meeting spaces. The data highlighted how parents engaged in this risk-taking in stages, first through the eyes of their children, observing the ways in which the children interacted with the materials and others within the space, then by physically inserting themselves into the play.

One example of this kind of small risk taking was that of Maria, a parent with two pre-school aged children, who stood near the door during the second playday. She watched and smiled but stood most of the time, saying little. One of the center staff suggested that the family was newer to the community center and possibly new to the United States, which we took to mean that this kind of hesitation was typical of Maria's interactions in the space. The playday was music and dance themed, with stations set up around the room that included small percussion instruments, rainbow play silks, and a "dance floor" marked with painter's tape. There was also a large piece of butcher paper on the floor with crayons spread out along it. Maria's children entered the space and immediately gravitated toward this drawing station. As her children began to draw, Maria seemed to hover at the door and appeared unsure of how to engage (see Figure 6). While she did not take pictures, her children took close ups of their drawings and asked facilitators to take pictures of them playing. It was not until another parent began organizing many of the children to play a dance

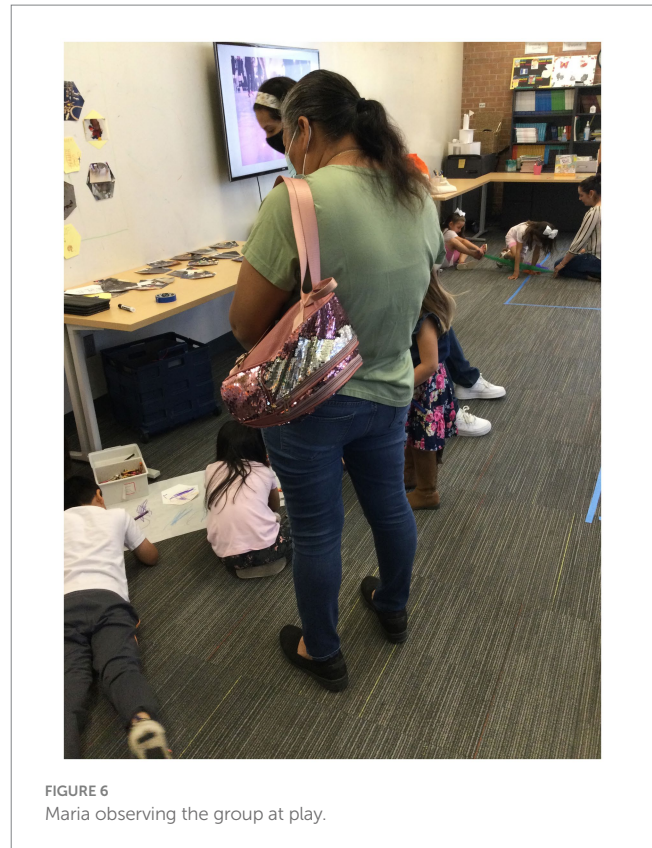


FIGURE 6
Maria observing the group at play.

game with scarves that Maria joined the play. When invited by the other parents, Maria picked up one end of the scarves, encouraging the children to run through them to the music. At first, Maria engaged in the playday by watching her children; however, when invited, she revised her participation toward a more active role in the play. Taken in isolation, Maria's experience may not seem like risk at all; however, through the lens of small risks to understand the social and cultural contexts surrounding the stories within our data (Georgakapoulou, 2007), we recognized a pattern where parents who had just recently begun attending ESL or parenting courses at the center sometimes needed an invitation from a facilitator or another parent to reimagine their engagement as playful within these learning spaces. The risk becomes apparent in the context of community center staff comments, where we begin to see Maria as a newcomer to both the space and to the city, working to learn how to fit in and "play" in ways that are sanctioned and safe. Missteps here may appear small but can result in lack of childcare, food, and support systems including English classes. In this context, what we as white researchers and educators may position as small risk may have felt quite risky for families. Another way that we observed parents engage in play extended the notion that invitation by children or by other adults might lead to deepened engagement in play by parents. Fieldnotes illustrated that nearly all the parents we observed engaging in play with their children began by engaging either directly with their own children or at the invitation of another adult. Alessandra and her husband, Leo, for example, began playing with KAPLA wooden bricks upon sitting down with their children during the initial playday. While they initially worked together with their children to build structures out of the bricks, we noted that their children swiftly wandered to other parts of the room, while Alessandra and Leo continued to build, laughing and

documenting their structures with the iPads. While we observed many instances where adults engaged in play with their children and then shifted their attention to their own more individualized play, we were especially struck by the way that Alessandra took small risks in her building.

Where most of the adults we observed playing with blocks appeared to build wide structures with sturdy foundations, Alessandra built a complex and unstable structure, stacking the bricks in a spiral pattern (see Figure 7). What was most interesting to us about Alessandra's play, however, was not just the way she seemed to counter the sturdy structural engineering we had seen from many of the adults, but the way that she continued to stack the bricks long after her children had lost interest in the activity. While fieldnotes captured her children running after one another at the other end of the room, Alessandra built her stack higher and higher, engaging in this small risk (an unstable structure destined to eventually topple) not as part of a family activity, but as something she was invested in for herself. At one point when a facilitator approached, she smiled and said she thought she was coming for the kids but was happy to be playing for herself. Alessandra's statement reinforced the notion that this kind of play, while perhaps not physically dangerous, still required the small risk of disrupting the typical use or ways of interacting in the community center to engage in play.

5.3 Navigating even small risks in play

While we observed and families documented numerous instances of small risk, we also noted that these moments did not occur within



FIGURE 7
Alessandra engaged in solo play while her children play elsewhere.

a vacuum but were often negotiated as families navigated engaging together in play. One family stood out as an example of the ways that parents and children had to navigate and negotiate play and the risks they took just by engaging in these activities together. Meagyn and her son, Titus, entered the third playday together and sat close to the door of the large room where the board meetings typically took place at Treeline. It was evening and Titus, who was around 6 years old, yawned and then dumped out a large box of connecting blocks and figurines. Meagyn sat in a chair looking over her son and talking to a researcher as Titus played. She explained that she did not often attend events at the community center because as a “working, older, single mom” she often was stretched too thin. She went on to explain that she had had Titus when she was in her mid-40s and felt that she often had to choose between spending time with him and putting food on the table. “I’m always so tired,” she explained, “But we could come tonight because you gave us dinner. This is really different for us.” She went on to describe several health problems she had encountered in the past years that she felt inhibited her ability to play with her son. After some invitation and encouragement, Meagyn moved from the chair to the floor and challenged Titus to use all the blocks in the bin to build a structure.

In our fieldnotes, we noted that Titus and Meagyn seemed to have some tension in the ways they wanted to play. Meagyn continuously pointed to ways that she thought Titus should change the structure, building a much more stable piece than he had initially designed. Meagyn guided Titus, stacking all the blocks side by side, instead of following Titus’ lead as he stacked the blocks as high as possible when playing on his own. While Titus was smiling, one researcher noted that he seemed to engage more deeply when the family began to run out of square block pieces and had to shift their design toward a more precarious structure to meet Meagyn’s goal of using all the blocks. As they negotiated ways to meet this goal, we noted that the two also seemed to begin talking more, engaging together to navigate the challenge and risk of the structure toppling. By the end of the playday, the two had successfully used all the blocks and Meagyn began taking pictures of the structure (See Figure 8). She then turned the camera around, taking several selfies with Titus to document the day, though she had initially said she did not like pictures of herself. As she was leaving, she explained that it felt good to do “something different together.”

5.4 Barriers to even small risks

While most of the families we observed engaged in at least some small risks in their play, a few participants appeared to refuse risk taking at all. One family included an older teen who, though he did use the iPad to document his family’s play, did not appear to be engaged in the playday beyond observation. While we recognized based on our teaching experience in secondary schools that just attending the community night might have felt like a risk for him, we did not have enough evidence to make that claim. This was also true of several other parents who sat looking at phones or holding the iPads as children played around them. While they were present, fieldnotes and images did not capture their interactions with others. In interviews, several parents did address feeling hesitant to engage both within the playdays and more broadly in the playgrounds and other spaces outside the community center. These parents said that



FIGURE 8
Meagnyn and Titus's block creation.

play was not always part of how they related to their children, that their time together was constrained by having to prepare meals, work, and ensure the well-being of all their family members. Though they acknowledged that the barriers for play within the playdays seemed lower than those they typically encountered, they did not always feel comfortable playing in front of others. It is worth noting that at least half of the parents who articulated this discomfort did record themselves playing with their children during the playdays. Even when they expressed discomfort, they took small risks and faced these challenges with their family.

In addition, even parents who appeared deeply engaged in risk-taking with their young people at the playdays acknowledged that there were substantial barriers to play in their communities. Often these barriers were connected to risks that parents felt were insurmountable, for example, several parents expressed concern that there was no safe public playground in their area of the city because so many of the playgrounds had fallen into disrepair or were covered in broken glass and other detritus. Parents also noted that public play spaces in the under-resourced areas of the city were often places where unhoused folks tended to gather, which they felt prevented them from engaging in those spaces with their children. Still others noted that cost was a substantial factor in prohibiting them from engaging in play spaces, either because the playgrounds they felt were safe were far away or because they were run by private groups and charged an entrance fee. While all families documented the ways they played in their own homes and communities, most also expressed concern with the lack of access to playful spaces where they could engage with their children. When we examined these comments through the lens of small risks, it seemed that risks often occurred before play began, were part of the sociopolitical

fabric of the places where families lived and were sometimes insurmountable.

6 Discussion

Much of the research on risk-taking in early childhood settings has focused on the ways that risk can support young children to discover their own boundaries and to learn how to navigate the world (Brussoni et al., 2015). While much of this research has explored risky play in outdoor spaces with risk framed as engaging in uncertainty or challenge that has the potential to result in physical injury, some work has (e.g., Stephenson, 2003; Tovey, 2007) suggests that, rather than the chance of physical or environmental harm, risk taking can include grappling with emotional, perceptual, and even social uncertainty (Cooke et al., 2021; Kleppe et al., 2017; Nikiforidou, 2017). Still other scholars have recognized the ways that power is negotiated in these kinds of risky-play experiences across contexts (e.g., Jobb, 2019). In this study, we examined families' experiences engaging in intergenerational play at pop-up, indoor play events at informal, urban learning centers. These centers were positioned in areas that serve families identified as lower-socioeconomic status, with nearly 75% of participating families identifying as bilingual or emerging bilingual. Through our analysis, we found that, although some of the ways families engaged in play were similar to those identified in previous literature, we also observed children and parents disrupting the traditional paradigms of intergenerational engagement in play. Families engaged in small risks by encouraging young people to experiment with destruction; engaging in possible failure through the collapse of a structure; playing together to disrupt the typical expectations of a physical educational space, and to reimagine their interactions differently together. We also recognized that there were barriers, even to small risks, when families did not feel safe enough to engage. In the following sections, we discuss our analysis of the key findings and explore the implications of small risks in future research.

6.1 Analysis of key findings

Previous research on risky play (e.g., Little, 2010; Obradović et al., 2021) has found that parents often take on the role of mitigator when it comes to their children's attempts at risk taking. In our findings, however, we noted instances where children and parents disrupted this expectation when parents offered space for their children to take small risks while engaging in play, rather than trying to control or mitigate the situation, exemplified by Jose and Elise's encouragement of their son to demolish the cardboard box tower. We also noted times when parents allowed their children to lead the play and engaged in play with them, without being overly involved in directing or controlling the manner of play. Even instances where parents initially mitigated risk, such as Lisa stepping in to support her son's tower from falling over, which we would expect based on the literature (e.g., Little, 2010; Little et al., 2011; Sandseter, 2007), we saw shifts from avoiding to engaging in risk together as Lisa began to let her children direct the play. Given the sociocultural context underpinning these families' previous experiences with play in community settings, such nods toward engaging in small risks through risky collaborative play become even more risky when taking into consideration the fear that

parents might face in terms of being judged about their parenting decisions in public spaces (as noted by researchers such as Niehues et al., 2013).

Small risk had been present throughout the family's construction of the structure. When it was completed, the risk of failure or injury through collapse was turned into part of the play. We were struck by the photo the family took, capturing the moment just before the tower collapsed on top of Jose and Enrique. While we know that stacking and knocking down blocks and other structures is part of the joy of childhood play (Clements and Sarama, 2020), given the ways that parents tend to mitigate risks that might result in injury, we were struck by Jose and Elise's willingness to allow Enrique to engage in the destruction without trying to stop the boxes from landing on him. While it was unlikely that Enrique would get severely injured, we still saw this as a moment of small risk because it disrupted the norms of the space and the ordered engagement we observed as other parents stacked and played next to their children. By leaning on small risk as a lens for observing play, we noted that the moments of risk in between the larger narratives of families playing together became visible. Much like small stories, the notion of small risk uncovered the moments in between the overarching research narratives we sought as a team and allowed us to uncover the micro-moves families took together to engage in intergenerational play that embraced moments of risk, moved through them, and allowed children to lead and discover ways of interacting together.

Another finding we noted related to small risks, surfaced through examples in the data where the parents themselves moved through Parten (1932) stages of play— shifting from observation to collaboration with their children, as well as from parallel play to solo play. This finding hints at the potential for these sorts of loosely structured events to act as a space where play is encouraged by all, and parents can engage not only in parallel intentions with their children [as suggested by Fleer (2015)] but also allow them to find the joy and fun of engaging in play for themselves. This finding is supported by the literature around the shift that can happen from parents seeing themselves as overseers or observers of play and instead as playful participants as they became more comfortable with the revised norms and expectations of the play spaces (Widman et al., 2015; Little et al., 2011; Roque, 2016). As we observed adults gradually begin to lean into play during the events, we often saw them building structures designed with sturdy foundations and organized, sometimes intricate patterns, whereas their children's creations were often freeform in nature, at times even in jeopardy of toppling over at any moment. Rather than parents mitigating or not taking risks at all, they engaged in small risks next to their children, suggesting that when parents are not worried about physical risks, they may be more likely to engage in play and to even model risk-taking for their children themselves.

Researchers who have studied risk-taking in play note that children appear to respond to adults' interpretations of risk, often mitigating their own sense of risk-seeking to attend to their caretakers' preferences (Little et al., 2011). These concerns from well-meaning adults sometimes have adverse impacts on young people's play, acting as barriers to young people's engagement in activities that might present any kind of risk (Boufous et al., 2004). In this study, we noted that as families engaged together and documented their own small risks, the barriers to play appeared diminished. Where parents often began their engagement in the playdays watching their children play, nearly every adult family member who participated in the playdays

shifted from observation to collaboration. This unstructured time and space for family play seemed to support family collaboration and cooperative play, and parallel play between parents and their children. This kind of parallelism reflected Fleer (2015) discussion of teachers' engagement in parallel intentions and worlds as part of the facilitation of children's free play. However, we also observed a divergence from literature in that parents were not only supporting children's free play, but fully engaging in that play themselves. For example, parents often engaged first with their children, then in parallel to their children, and finally on their own, even when their children's attention was diverted toward other activities. Using small risks as a lens for this kind of play, we began to recognize patterns emerge in our analysis that pointed to the ways that parents navigated their own potential for risk within the playdays.

Aligned with notions of small stories that are contextualized by the sociocultural norms that surround them, this kind of small risk was dependent upon parents adjusting the relationship they had with the space to reimagine themselves in a new, more playful role where it was acceptable for them to engage alongside their children in exploring and building. As stated in the case, Maria's hesitation to engage in the play experience may not seem like risk but the pattern of parents who had recently attended ESL or parenting courses at the center needing invitation to engage in play tracked with the literature on parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds needing support to reinterpret the spaces where play took place. This was further reinforced as we talked to parents who explained that they did not feel safe taking their children to play in outdoor spaces. In these parents' experiences, the risks to just access playgrounds were too high because these spaces either were not well-maintained or were the only places available for people experiencing houselessness to spend their days in the city. Parents needed to reframe the community centers as places where they were invited to play and to make sense of what it meant to play in public with their children safely. Sometimes an invitation from a facilitator or another parent allowed families to reimagine their engagement as playful within these learning spaces.

In her writing on parents engaging in creative learning, Roque (2016) described the ways that parents recognized themselves as more than parents but as participants in the playful learning process. We were struck by the ways that Alessandra and others seemed to engage in the play first for their children and then for themselves. In interviews and conversations, parents described the desire for public plays spaces to not only engage their children but to act as spaces where they themselves could play. From the perspective of small risks, we saw these independent acts of play as a way of asserting their own ideas into the reimagining of the playday setting into something not just for their children but for themselves. While this act may not seem important on its own, many of the families we worked with described themselves as feeling marginalized and segregated within the city and even within the community centers themselves. When families are positioned as "outsiders," anything outside of the norm can feel risky. By engaging in play on their own, these parents engaged in the small risk of rewriting the narrative of expectation for themselves within the community center.

While we have written about moments of small risk as though they were independent from one another to unpack their occurrences, we noted that most of the families who engaged in the playdays did not just encounter one kind of small risk, but multiple. Layered together, the experience of engaging together in small risks added to

large shifts in families' interactions from the initial entry into the playdays to their end. Like small stories, small risks offered an opportunity to observe the microgenetic moves that families made to engage in risk together through play. While the risks were seldom physical or mentally dangerous, they still required negotiation and ultimately shifted the ways that families treated and approached the sociocultural context of these learning spaces.

In our analysis, we saw Meagyn and Titus as navigating risks just by entering the playday space. For Meagyn, the playday could be risky because it was outside of her comfort zone and strained her already limited time. For Titus, meeting his mom's challenge meant risking his own ideas of play to attend to hers. However, in attempting the challenge of using all the blocks, the two had to bridge their ideas and meet somewhere in the middle, both building a stable structure and allowing the potential for failure as they added the stacks of blocks at more precarious angles that Titus had already constructed before Meagyn joined in. These small risks, by Meagyn's own account, added up to engaging in new and positive ways together that was less controlled than she was comfortable with. For this parent, play was a risk in and of itself, as was the documentation, by taking a selfie, the family seemed to be acknowledging, as they stated, "something different" had taken place (this photo was not included here so as to honor the anonymity of the participants and the risk taken to engage in this way during the play session).

Finally, we recognize that some parents did not document even the small risks they took by entering the playday. In interviews, these parents even remarked that risk-taking was beyond the scope of what they were comfortable with because the topography of their neighborhoods, playgrounds, and schools were characterized by risks too great to allow their children to encounter. However, by engaging in observations of small risk, we were able to note that for these parents, even entering the public playday may have felt risky. As [Georgakapoulou \(2007\)](#) noted, by allowing families to surface the risks they took themselves, we were able to see even this refusal as a meaningful way of participating in the broader context of the playdays.

7 Implications

In her chapter on small stories, [Georgakapoulou \(2007\)](#) wrote:

Small stories as the narrative data in the participants' self-recorded conversations that resisted easy categorizations were part of socialization settings (cafés, parks, benches etc.) outside school that formed at that point in their lives crucial sites of subjectivity small stories were thus intimately linked with the town's topography as socio-symbolic semiosis: they were social activities habitually associated with *sites of engagement* that is, socio-cultural spheres for semiotic activity in real time... (p. 149, citing [Scollon and Scollon, 2004](#)).

She goes on to explain that as culturally shaped sites of meaning, small stories existed in the "liminal spaces" (p. 149) that participants engaged with throughout their daily lives. As we draw from the notion of small stories to consider the ways that families engage with

small risks in play, we are struck by the way that play is also socially constructed activity for meaning making, entirely dependent on the sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts in which families live. As researchers we are interested in how to design sites of engagement for families who have been historically marginalized or overlooked in design efforts. To do so effectively, we need to understand the types of risks—those it takes to enter the space as well as those it takes to engage within the space—that families are encountering to build spaces that center justice and align to the needs of families who encounter the most oppression. When families found the barriers to engaging in risky play too profound, they navigated these with smaller moves to support their collective meaning making in play. Parents needed to reframe the community centers as places where they were invited to play and to make sense of what it meant to play in public with their children safely. Sometimes an invitation from a facilitator or another parent allowed families to reimagine their engagement as playful within these learning spaces. We argue that if we are interested in understanding the ways that families navigate risk together, we must consider their cultural identities and the ways they have been positioned by the systems and structures of society to be allowed to take risks, to be allowed to play.

Risk often differs for families from historically marginalized communities, those who are undocumented, of lower socioeconomic status, and living in under-resourced areas of the community. By this we mean that the risks that families from dominant positionalities are allowed to engage in every day in play might hold much more severe consequences for families whose identities have been historically marginalized. If we, as play researchers, truly want to understand what it means for families to engage in risky play together, we must extend our understanding of risk to include the kinds of risks that these families face just by entering public spaces. Complexifying what we think of as risk-taking allows us to better see the experiences of diverse families and children as they engage in play. Ultimately, valuing this kind of small risk offers researchers potential to extend our theoretical understandings of how families engage and how they play.

Data availability statement

The data analyzed in this study is subject to the following licenses/restrictions: this is qualitative data that is not generalizable and not fully anonymizable thus IRB does not allow us to share the data set. Requests to access these datasets should be directed to kstamatis@unomaha.edu.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human/animal participants were reviewed and approved by University of Nebraska's Institutional Review Board (approval 0142-22-EX). Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants and by participants legal guardian/next of kin. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

KS: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. PJ: Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. KM: Writing – review & editing. DW: Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Agate, J. R., Agate, S. T., Liechty, T., and Cochran, L. J. (2018). 'Roots and wings' an exploration of intergenerational play: research. *J. Intergenerational Relatsh.* 16, 395–421. doi: 10.1080/15350770.2018.1489331
- Alaimo, K. (2005). Food insecurity in the United States: an overview. *Top. Clin. Nutr.* 20, 281–298. doi: 10.1097/00008486-200510000-00002
- Bacong, A., and Sohn, H. (2021). Disentangling contributions of demographic, family, and socioeconomic factors on associations of immigration status and health in the United States. *J. Epidemiol. Community Health* 75, 587–592. doi: 10.1136/jech-2020-214245
- Balkin, A. (1990). What is creativity? What is it not? *Music. Educ. J.* 76, 29–32. doi: 10.2307/3401074
- Bamberg, M. (2004). Talk, small stories, and adolescent identities. *Hum. Dev.* 47, 366–369. doi: 10.1159/000081039
- Barnett, L. A. (1990). Playfulness: definition, design, and measurement. *Play Cult* 3, 319–336.
- Beghetto, R. A. (2018). Taking beautiful risks in education. *Educ. Leadersh.* 76, 18–24.
- Boholm, A. (1998). Comparative studies of risk perception: a review of twenty years of research. *J. Risk Res.* 1, 135–163. doi: 10.1080/136698798377231
- Boufous, S., Finch, C., and Bauman, A. (2004). Parental safety concerns—a barrier to sport and physical activity in children? *Aust. N. Z. J. Public Health* 28, 482–486. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-842X.2004.tb00032.x
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Polity in association with Basil Blackwell. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Brown, S. L. (2009). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. London: Penguin Books.
- Brown, D. L., and Briggs, L. D. (1990). Free play in the early childhood classroom. *Read. Improv.* 26, 12–14.
- Brussoni, M., Gibbons, R., Gray, C., Ishikawa, T., Sandseter, E. B. H., Bienenstock, A., et al. (2015). What is the relationship between risky outdoor play and health in children? A systematic review. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 12, 6423–6454. doi: 10.3390/ijerph120606423
- Brussoni, M., Olsen, L. L., Pike, I., and Sleet, D. A. (2012). Risky play and Children's safety: balancing priorities for optimal child development. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 9, 3134–3148. doi: 10.3390/ijerph9093134
- Cankaya, O., Rohatyn-Martin, N., Leach, J., Taylor, K., and Bulut, O. (2023). Preschool Children's loose parts play and the relationship to cognitive development: a review of the literature. *J. Intelligence* 11:151. doi: 10.3390/jintelligence11080151
- Clements, D., and Sarama, J. (2020). *Learning and teaching early math: The learning trajectories approach*. 3rd Edn. New York: Routledge.
- Cohn, M. A., Fredrickson, B. L., and Brown, S. L. (2009). Happiness unpacked: positive emotions increase life satisfaction by building resilience. *Emotion* 9, 361–368. doi: 10.1037/a0015952
- Collier, J., and Collier, M. (1986). *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Cooke, M., Wong, S., and Press, F. (2020). High quality educators' conceptualisation of Children's risk-taking in early childhood education: provoking educators to think more broadly. *Eur. Early Child. Educ. Res. J.* 28, 424–438. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2020.1755499

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

- Cooke, M., Wong, S., and Press, F. (2021). Towards a re-conceptualisation of risk in early childhood education. *Contemp. Issues Early Child.* 22, 5–19. doi: 10.1177/1463949119840740
- Davis, L., Larkin, E., and Graves, S. B. (2002). Intergenerational learning through play. *Int. J. Early Child.* 34, 42–49. doi: 10.1007/BF03176766
- de Fina, A., and Georgakopoulou, A. (2012). *Analyzing Narrative, Discourse and Sociolinguistic Perspectives*. US: Cambridge University Press.
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.
- Enciso, P. (2017). Stories lost and found: mobilizing imagination in literary research and practice. *Literacy Res. Theory, Method, Prac.* 66, 29–52. doi: 10.1177/2381336917718813
- Eskreis-Winkler, L., and Fishbach, A. (2019). Not learning from failure—the greatest failure of all. *Psychol. Sci.* 30, 1733–1744. doi: 10.1177/0956797619881133
- Eskreis-Winkler, L., and Fishbach, A. (2022). You think failure is hard? So is learning from it. *Perspect. Psychol. Sci.* 17, 1511–1524. doi: 10.1177/17456916211059817
- Fein, G. (1981). Pretend play in childhood: an integrative review. *Child Dev.* 52, 1095–1118. doi: 10.2307/1129497
- Fisher, K. R., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., and Gryfe, S. G. (2008). Conceptual split? Parents' and experts' perceptions of play in the 21st century. *J. App. Develop.* 29, 305–316. doi: 10.1016/j.appdev.2008.04.006
- Fleer, M. (2015). Pedagogical Positioning in Play—Teachers Being Inside and Outside of Children's Imaginary Play. *Early Child Dev. Care* 185, 1801–1181. doi: 10.1080/03004430.2015.1028393
- Frederickson, B. L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Rev. Gen. Psychol.* 2, 300–319. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.2.3.300
- Frederickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Am. Psychol.* 56, 218–226. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.218
- Frederickson, B. L. (2004). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *Philosop. Trans. Royal Society B: Biolog. Sci.* 359, 1367–1377. doi: 10.1098/rstb.2004.1512
- Frost, R. O., Marten, P., Lahart, C., and Rosenblate, R. (1990). The dimensions of perfectionism. *Cogn. Theory Res.* 14, 449–468. doi: 10.1007/BF01172967
- Gardner, D. (2008). *Risk: The science and politics of fear*. Carlton North, VIC: Scribe Publications.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). "Thinking big with small stories in narrative and identity analysis" in *Narrative-state of the art*. ed. M. Bamberg (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company), 145–154.
- Golinkoff, R. M., Singer, D. G., and Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2006). *Play learning: How play motivates and enhances Children's cognitive and social-emotional growth*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Grolnick, W. (2009). The role of parents in facilitating autonomous self-regulation for education. *Theory Res. Educ.* 7, 164–173. doi: 10.1177/1477878509104321
- Grolnick, W., and Seal, K. (2008). *Pressured parents, stressed-out kids*. Amherst: Prometheus Books.
- Harris, J. A. (2004). Measured intelligence, achievement, openness to experience, and creativity. *Personal. Individ. Differ.* 36, 913–929. doi: 10.1016/S0191-8869(03)00161-2

- Henricksen, D., Henderson, M., Creely, E., Carvalho, A. A., Cernochova, M., Dash, D., et al. (2001). Creativity and risk-taking in teaching and learning settings: insights from six international narratives. *Int. J. Educ. Res. Open* 2:1000024. doi: 10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100024
- Hynes-Dusel, J., and Clements, R. (2001). Moving into the millennium with intergenerational movement and play experiences. *Strategies* 14, 31–35. doi: 10.1080/08924562.2001.11000337
- Jobb, C. (2019). Power, space, and play in early childhood. *Can. J. Sociol.* 44, 211–232. doi: 10.29173/cjs29596
- Johnson, J. E., Christie, J., and Wardle, F. (2005). *Play, development and early education*. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking: Fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Kapur, M. (2015). Learning from productive failure. *Learn.: Res. Pract.* 1, 51–65. doi: 10.1080/23735082.2015.1002195
- Keifert, D. T. (2021). Family culture as context for learning through inquiry. *Cogn. Instr.* 39, 242–274. doi: 10.1080/07370008.2021.1913162
- Kelley, P., Hood, S., and Mayall, B. (1998). Children, parents and risk. *Health and Social Care in the Community* 6, 16–24. doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2524.1998.00094.x
- Kleppe, R., Melhuish, E., and Sandseter, E. B. H. (2017). Identifying and characterizing risky play in the age one-to-three years. *Eur. Early Child. Educ. Res. J.* 25, 370–385. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2017.1308163
- Levavi, K., Menashe-Grinberg, A., Barak-Levy, Y., and Atzaba-Poria, N. (2020). The role of parental playfulness as a moderator reducing child Behavioural problems among children with intellectual disability in Israel. *Res. Dev. Disabil.* 107:103793. doi: 10.1016/j.ridd.2020.103793
- Little, H. (2010). Relationship between parents' beliefs and their responses to Children's risk-taking behaviour during outdoor play. *J. Early Child. Res.* 8, 315–330. doi: 10.1177/1476718X10368587
- Little, H., Wyver, S., and Gibson, F. (2011). The influence of play context and adult attitudes on young Children's physical risk-taking during outdoor play. *Eur. Early Child. Educ. Res. J.* 19, 113–131. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2011.548959
- Marey-Sarwan, I., Roer-Strier, D., and Otto, H. (2018). Contextualizing risk and protection: perceptions of Bedouin mothers from unrecognized villages in the Naqab. *Am. J. Orthop.* 88, 306–315. doi: 10.1037/ort0000282
- Marin, A., and Bang, M. (2018). "Look it, this is how you know:" family Forest walks as a context for knowledge-building about the natural world. *Cogn. Instr.* 36, 89–118. doi: 10.1080/07370008.2018.1429443
- Mera, Y., Rodríguez, G., and Marin-García, E. (2022). Unraveling the benefits of experiencing errors during learning: definition, modulating factors, and explanatory theories. *Psychon. Bull. Rev.* 29, 753–765. doi: 10.3758/s13423-021-02022-8
- Metcalfe, J. (2017). Learning from errors. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.* 68, 465–489. doi: 10.1146/annurev-psych-010416-044022
- Mitchell, U. A., Nishida, A., Fletcher, F. E., and Molina, Y. (2021). The long arm of oppression: how structural stigma against marginalized communities perpetuates within-group health disparities. *Health Educ. Behav.* 48, 342–351. doi: 10.1177/10901981211011927
- Morrongiello, B. A., Corbett, M., and Bellissimo, A. (2008). 'Do as I say, not as I do': family influences on Children's safety and risk behaviors. *Health Psychol.* 27, 498–503. doi: 10.1037/0278-6133.27.4.498
- Morrongiello, B. A., Corebett, M., Laseny, J., Johnston, N., and McCourt, M. (2006). Factors influencing young Children's risk of unintentional injury: parenting style and strategies for teaching about home safe. *J. Appl. Dev. Psychol.* 27, 560–570. doi: 10.1016/j.appdev.2006.08.004
- Nathan, P., and Pellegrini, A. D. (2010). *The Oxford handbook of the development of play*. UK: Oxford Library of Psychology.
- Niehues, A. N., Bundy, A., Broom, A., Tranter, P., Ragen, J., and Engelen, L. (2013). Everyday uncertainties: reframing perceptions of risk in outdoor free play. *J. Adventure Educ. Outdoor Learn.* 13, 223–237. doi: 10.1080/14729679.2013.798588
- Nikiforidou, Z. (2017). 'It is riskier': preschoolers' reasoning of risky situations. *Eur. Early Child. Educ. Res. J.* 25, 612–623. doi: 10.1080/1350293X.2017.1331075
- Noland, C. M. (2006). Auto-photography as research practice: identity and self-esteem research. *J. Res. Pract.* 2, 1–19.
- Nyland, L. G. (1993). Risk perception in Brazil and Sweden. Stockholm: Center for Risk Research, Stockholm School of Economics.
- Obradović, J., Sulik, M. J., and Shaffer, A. (2021). Learning to let go: parental over-engagement predicts poorer self-regulation in kindergartners. *J. Fam. Psychol.* 35, 1160–1170. doi: 10.1037/fam0000838
- Pan, S. C., Sana, F., Samani, J., Cooke, J., and Kim, J. A. (2020). Learning from errors: students' and instructors' practices, attitudes, and beliefs. *Memory*, 28, 1105–1122. doi: 10.1080/09658211.2020.1815790
- Parten, M. B. (1932). Social participation among preschool children. *J. Abnorm. Soc. Psychol.* 27, 243–269. doi: 10.1037/h0074524
- Peterson, E., Sharma, T., Bird, A., Henderson, A. M. E., Ramgopal, V., Reese, E., et al. (2024). How mothers talk to their children about failure, mistakes, and setbacks is related to their Children's fear of failure. *Br. J. Educ. Psychol.*, 1–19. doi: 10.1111/bjep.12685
- Pettit, G. S., Brown, E. G., Mize, J., and Lindsey, E. (1998). Mothers' and Fathers' socializing behaviors in three contexts: links with Children's peer competence. *Merrill-Palmer Q.* 1982, 173–193.
- Playful Learning Landscapes Action Network (PLLAN). (2019). The PLL Model. Available at: <https://playfullearninglandscapes.com/the-pll-model/> (Accessed January 30, 2024).
- Rajabi, S. (2021). *All my friends live in my computer: Trauma, tactical media, and meaning*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Ridge, K. E., Weisberg, D. S., Ilgaz, H., Hirsh-Pasek, K. A., and Golinkoff, H. M. (2015). Supermarket speak: increasing talk among low-socioeconomic status families. *Mind Brain Educ.* 9, 127–135. doi: 10.1111/mbe.12081
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. New York: Sage.
- Roque, R. (2016). "Family creative learning" in Makeology: Makerspaces as learning environments. eds. K. Peppler, E. Halverson and Y. B. Kafai, vol. 1 (Oxford: Routledge), 47–63.
- Roque, R. (2022). Family Creative Learning. Available at: <https://www.familycreativelearning.org/guide> [Accessed November 29, 2023].
- Roque, R. (2023). "Imagining alternative visions of computing: photo-visuals of material, social, and emotional contexts from family creative learning." In, *Interaction Design and Children: Proceedings of the 22nd Annual ACM Interaction Design and Children Conference*. Chicago, IL: New York, Association for Computing Machinery, 68–81.
- Rosenberg, S., and Rosenberg, J. (2017). *Community mental health: Challenges for the 21st century*. London: Routledge.
- Rubin, K. H., Fein, G., and Vandenberg, B. (1983). "Play" in *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Socialization, personality, and social development*. ed. E. M. Hetherington (New York: Wiley).
- Sallis, J. F., Prochaska, J. J., and Taylor, W. C. (2000). A review of correlates of physical activity of children and adolescents. *Med. Sci. Sports Exerc.* 32, 963–975. doi: 10.1097/00005768-200005000-00014
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2007). Categorising risky play—how can we identify risk-taking in children's play? *Eur. Early Child. Educ. Res. J.* 15, 237–252. doi: 10.1080/13502930701321733
- Sandseter, E. B. H. (2009). Characteristics of risky play. *J. Adventure Educ. Outdoor Learn.* 9, 3–21. doi: 10.1080/14729670802702762
- Sandseter, E. B. H., Cordovil, R., Loge Hagen, T., and Lopes, F. (2020). Barriers for outdoor play in early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions: perception of risk in Children's play among European parents and ECE practitioners. *Childcare Prac.* 26, 111–129. doi: 10.1080/13575279.2019.1685461
- Sandseter, E. B. H., and Kennair, L. E. O. (2011). Children's risky play from an evolutionary perspective: the anti-phobic effects of thrilling experiences. *Evol. Psychol.* 9, 257–284. doi: 10.1177/147470491100900212
- Sandseter, E. B. H., Kleppe, R., and Sando, O. J. (2021). The prevalence of risky play in young Children's indoor and outdoor free play. *Early Childhood Educ. J.* 49, 303–312. doi: 10.1007/s10643-020-01074-0
- Schneider, M., Falkenberg, I., and Berger, P. (2022). Parent-child play and the emergence of externalizing and internalizing behavior problems in childhood: a systematic review. *Front. Psychol.* 13:822394. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.822394
- Scollon, R., and Scollon, S. W. (2004). *Nexus analysis: Discourse and the emerging internet*. London: Routledge.
- Shorer, M., Swissa, O., Levavi, P., and Swissa, A. (2019). Parental playfulness and Children's emotional regulation: the mediating role of Parents' emotional regulation and the parent-child relationship. *Early Child Dev. Care* 191, 210–220. doi: 10.1080/03004430.2019.1612385
- Sjöberg, L., Kolarova, D., Rucai, A., Bernstrom, M., and Flygelholm, H. (1996). "Risk perception and media reports in Bulgaria and Romania" in *Cross-cultural risk perception. Technology, risk, and society*. eds. O. Renn and B. Rohrmann, vol. 13 (Boston: Springer).
- Smith, R. L., Stagnitti, K., Lewis, A. J., and Pépin, G. (2015). The views of parents who experience intergenerational poverty on parenting and play: a qualitative analysis. *Child Care Health Dev.* 41, 873–881. doi: 10.1111/cch.12268
- Soori, H., and Bhopal, R. S. (2002). Parental permission for Children's independent outdoor activities: implications for injury prevention. *Eur. J. Pub. Health* 12, 104–109. doi: 10.1093/eurpub/12.2.104
- Stephenson, A. (2003). Physical risk-taking: dangerous or endangered? *Early Years* 23, 35–43. doi: 10.1080/0957514032000045573
- StGeorge, J., and Freeman, E. (2017). Measurement of father-child rough-and-tumble play and its relations to child behavior: measurement of rough-and-tumble play. *Infant Ment. Health J.* 38, 709–725. doi: 10.1002/imhj.21676

- Storli, R., and Sandseter, E. B. H. (2019). Children's play, well-being and involvement: how children play indoors and outdoors in Norwegian early childhood education and care institutions. *Int. J. Play* 8, 65–78. doi: 10.1080/21594937.2019.1580338
- Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). *The ambiguity of play*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Tawfik, A. A., Rong, H., and Choi, I. (2015). Failing to learn: towards a unified design approach for failure-based learning. *Educ. Technol. Res. Dev.* 63, 975–994. doi: 10.1007/s11423-015-9399-0
- Thomas, M. E. (2009). *Auto-photography*. Columbus: The Ohio State University.
- Thomeer, M. B., Yahirun, J., and Colon-Lopez, A. (2020). How families matter for health inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic. *J. Fam. Theory Rev.* 12, 448–463. doi: 10.1111/jftr.12398
- Tovey, H. (2007). *Playing outdoors: Spaces and places, risk and challenge*. New York: Open University Press.
- United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.Pdf> (Accessed January 30, 2024).
- Vaughan, E., and Nordenstam, B. (1991). The perception of environmental risks among ethnically diverse groups. *J. Cross-Cult. Psychol.* 22, 29–60. doi: 10.1177/0022022191221005
- Weir, L. A., Etelson, D., and Brand, D. A. (2006). Parents' perceptions of Neighbourhood safety and Children's physical activity. *Prev. Med.* 43, 212–217. doi: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2006.03.024
- Weldemariam, K. T. (2014). Cautionary Tales on interrupting Children's play: a study from Sweden. *Child. Educ.* 90, 265–271. doi: 10.1080/00094056.2014.935692
- Widman, S., Hayden, K., Stamatis, K., and Roque, R. (2015). Disruptions, dissent, and discontinuities: What tensions in intergenerational learning dynamics reveal about learning design. In: *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of the Learning Sciences - ICLS 2022*. Eds. Chinn, C., Tan, E., Chan, C., and Kali, Y. (International Society of the Learning Sciences). 1613–1616. doi: 10.22318/icls2022.1613