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Professional attitudes and children's practices enhancing risky play: Towards a model of influencing factors

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"Dat we meer vertrouwen krijgen, we willen gewoon zoveel meer"

Professionele houdingen en praktijken van kinderen die het
risicovol spelen verbeteren:
Naar een model van beïnvloedende factoren

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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List of papers included in the dissertation

Paper I (Chapter 2)

Van Rooijen, M., & Newstead, S. (2016). Influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play: A narrative review. *Early Child Development and Care, 187*(5–6), 946–957.

Paper II (Chapter 3)

Van Rooijen, M., Lensvelt-Mulders, G., Wyver, S., & Duyndam, J. (2019). Professional attitudes towards children's risk-taking in play: Insights into influencing factors in Dutch contexts. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, *20*(2), 138-154.

Paper III (Chapter 4)

Van Rooijen, M., & Jacobs, G. (2019). A professionalisation programme towards children's risk-taking in play in childcare contexts: moral friction on developing attitudes and collegial expectations. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *27*(6), 741-756.

Paper IV (Chapter 5)

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CHAPTER 1

General introduction

Introduction

Children's play

Children discover the world and their interests, abilities, and relationships with others through play. Thus, the importance of play for children's well-being should not be underestimated (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Children practice critical competencies, such as independence, collaboration, perseverance, self-esteem, resilience, and communication, while playing (Brussoni et al. 2020). This growth is even more applicable during free, unstructured play: activities without adult guidance or intervention when children decide what and how to play (Bundy et al., 2009).

Risk in play

Playing children are naturally attracted to challenges. They spontaneously engage in activities that tests their boundaries and offer new experiences. From an early age, children engage in risk-taking to expand their age-appropriate skills, as concluded in an evidence-informed position statement on active outdoor play for children aged 3–12 years (Tremblay et al., 2015). *Risky play*, an internationally accepted term, refers to physical play that entails the possibility of injury (e.g., a child balances on a narrow bar with the risk of falling and experiencing pain). Beneficial outcomes of children's play are enhanced by risk-taking, which affords practicing and strengthening a broad spectrum of abilities and contributes to self-esteem and self-confidence, thereby fostering resilience (Brussoni et al, 2015; Dodd & Lester, 2021; Sando et al., 2021). The definition of risky play has been formalized as the combination of 'thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury' (Sandseter, 2009a, p. 4).

Barriers

The possibilities for children to experience an exciting play environment have diminished over a single generation. Parents who remember the free and adventurous play of their childhoods see fewer opportunities for children today to independently play outside. Children's ability to roam independently has declined, the outdoors has become less challenging, and parents and guiding professionals have become more protective and less accepting of risky play (UNCRC, 2013). Moreover, the overprotective stance towards children in society has been increased by a risk-driven culture, an emphasis on safety protocols, and negative social control among adults who negatively judge permissive parents (Adams, 2016; Harper, 2017).

International research developments

Risky play is a fairly recent research area; related studies emerged in the early 2000s in response to diminishing opportunities for risk-taking play and to support presumptions that such activities are beneficial. Stephenson (2003) was the first to use the term 'risky' in the context of play situations. This work described children's eagerness to undertake 'risky' (using quotation marks because of the novel use of risk in play situations, p. 38) physical activities and gave examples of physical risk-taking. Stephenson also addressed the dilemma of early-year teachers who must challenge children while adhering to increasingly restrictive safety requirements. Sandseter's (2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a) pioneering studies presented the definition of risky play, categorizing it into six elements and offering a foundation for global research on children's risk-taking.

The Dutch context of risky play

In the Netherlands, risky play is a relatively new research subject. The first publications in professional journals were from Both (2013a, 2013b) and Van Rooijen (2014). The Consumer Safety Institute's 2017 national campaign further drew attention to risky play in the Netherlands, addressing parents with the slogan, 'With a little risk, they'll get there' (Zuizewind, 2017). In their 2021 mission to prevent accidents by strengthening children, the Consumer Safety Institute focused on childcare settings as relevant places to facilitate risky play through education programs for after-school childcare practitioners, teaching them to become *risicoaches* (risk coaches) (https://www.veiligheid.nl/actueel/risicoach-elke-kinderopvang-aan-de-slag-met-risicovol-spelen).

Childcare as a research context

Every environment offers children challenges, whether it be inside the home, outside in the garden, on the street, or around the neighbourhood. Moreover, structured environments where children spend a considerable part of their day should support play possibilities, through, for example, school playgrounds and childcare settings with outdoor spaces. Although the value of risk-taking in children has been acknowledged, the trend of overprotection has restrained play possibilities for children (Brussoni et al., 2015). One of the contexts for studying risky play is after-school childcare, when children can play and are stimulated by professional staff. However, these practitioners can experience many barriers in facilitating risky play, which are researched in the current study. The term practitioner is used henceforth in this study to refer to caregivers in Dutch after-school childcare settings. The term 'professional' is used in more general descriptions and in theorizing parts as an all-encompassing term for professional

and voluntary supervisors of children in staffed environments, such as childcare or after-school activities.

Pedagogical relationship

In investigating professional dilemmas of facilitating risky play, the pedagogical relationship between practitioners and children in their care is paramount (Little et al., 2012). When supporting children, a practitioner's ability to shift from an adult's to a child's perception of challenge and risk is crucial. Hence, besides examining possible barriers in professional practice, this study explores children's views and experiences.

This dissertation

The current dissertation addresses the sometimes conflicting interests of the different actors in facilitating risky play in after-school childcare: professionals, playing children, parents, and the organization, with each stakeholder serving as a possible change agent. Furthermore, the importance of a challenging play environment is stressed. The main research question is as follows: In what way do professionals perceive factors supporting children's risk-taking in play and how do these perceptions influence children's practices? The central question is extended through sub-questions which are specified in four separate studies. This thesis presents a model based on an international literature review and a survey of which factors influence Dutch professionals supervising children's risk-taking to understand the needs and consequences of professional practice. Through a qualitative field study in seven Dutch after-school childcare settings, the model's factors are verified in practice. Specifically, this work investigates the impact of a professional development program, whereby a challenging play environment is provided using 'loose parts': open-ended materials and equipment without well-defined uses which facilitate unstructured, child-led play. This dissertation aims to contribute to existing theories on risky play and incorporates an applied goal with societal relevance by supporting childcare professionals to improve the quality of risky play experiences for children. Moreover, the present study contributes to understanding of barriers in facilitating children's risky play in the Netherlands; studies within this context are currently lacking.

Attitudes towards risky play

Perceptions of risk

How adults construct and perceive risk, or their risk perception, is bidimensional. One aspect is negative: risk involves threat, danger, and harm and is something

to be avoided, leading to risk control. In contrast, risk can be seen positively as a learning experience for empowerment and self-determination (Loxton et al., 2010). If transferred to play situations, adults' notions of risk as undesirable, combined with a construct of children as vulnerable and in need of protection, may result in overcompensation in the supervision of risky play. If adults instead view risk as essential for healthy growth and conceptualize children as strong and resilient, they may assume a facilitating and more stimulating role. These particular dual constructs of children, either as vulnerable or resilient, may establish dilemmas for adults in deciding proper responses to risk in play.

Limited outdoor opportunities

Children's opportunities for risky play have changed enormously over one generation. What were once seen as typical childhood activities during parents' and professionals' youth are today seen as undesirable or even neglectful. A child roaming for hours outdoors without supervision and coming home when the streetlights come on is rare today. In his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods,* Richard Louv observed that children's connection to nature and play activities in natural environments has diminished. This sentiment was transferred to neighbourhood play in *The Last Child in the Streets* (Hup & Van Rooijen, 2022).

A factor that hinders current challenging play is that the outdoors provides fewer opportunities for children than in former times (Brussoni et al., 2015). First, playgrounds offer fewer risk possibilities since play equipment is scrutinised with safety standards in mind. Second, informal play environments like secret fields and open shrubbery have disappeared or been removed by municipalities because of social unsafety. Third, if children engage in challenging activities like climbing onto a garage, the reaction is excessive, with adults calling the police rather than attempting to understand children's play in urban environments. Lastly, streets and neighbourhoods are being designed to accommodate increased traffic and parking facilities instead of children's play. Ultimately, these adult-led decisions demonstrate an averse attitude towards risky play which disregards children's needs for a challenging play environment.

Societal impact on parental and professional attitudes: the overprotection paradox

The overprotection paradox stems from a leading cultural discourse that children are vulnerable and must be protected from danger and harm. However, uncertainty in risky play excites children, while for many adults, the possibility that something can go wrong arouses fear. If adults transfer this distress to children, their openness to new and challenging situations may dwindle (Yurt & Keleş,

2019). Many adults see children as dichotomous, a tension between strong, flexible, and resilient versus vulnerable, at-risk, and dependent. In the last 25 years, adults' perception of children has devolved to the second view, leading to an overprotection paradox: banning children from risky experiences since they are more susceptible to mischief and danger. This approach is paradoxical as protection from risk and danger increases vulnerability, the one characteristic adults particularly want to prevent (Furedi, 2001). The tendency of overprotection results in intensified safety standards, which significantly limit children's everyday play.

Adults have become more challenged when considering risky play. On one hand, society is more risk-driven with a culture of fear that assigns guilt if something happens (Beck, 1992; Furedi, 1997). On the other hand, negative social control from other parents influences what is considered normal when letting children roam freely, breeding unclarity. Parents letting their children run free can be seen as bad parents, which may be understandable from an individual standpoint. However, the world has generally become safer for children. For instance, the fear of stranger danger outdoors is not grounded in statistics, as the chances of occurrence have dropped over the past decades (e.g., in Canada; Dalley & Ruscoe, 2003). Nevertheless, the perception is that our children are in daily danger because, when something happens, it is in the press and on social media for weeks.

Childcare settings as a way to increase beneficial risky play

These societal developments have led to a challenging context for parents and childcare professionals in guiding children through their need for adventurous play. An outcome of overprotective tendencies is intensified adult supervision of children's free time, from parents and childcare practitioners alike (Wyver et al., 2010). Despite the benefits of risky play, children's opportunities to participate in risky play in early childhood settings are frequently considered too limited. This inopportunity creates dilemmas for professionals in making clear decisions regarding the benefits of challenge and risk, yet their tolerance of risky play is crucial for increasing children's opportunities for risk-taking activities (Little, 2017).

One perspective on physical risk in play recognizes that children are vulnerable yet resilient. In childcare, the professional's role in supporting children in their play activities therefore is protecting children from harm while simultaneously providing developmental opportunities to increase their resilience. However, in childcare practices a fundamental dilemma is the balance between challenging a child whilst simultaneously responding to parental need for protection

and security. These dynamics may cause doubts and tensions in practitioners' daily work or even prompt them to abstain from risky play because of the fear of consequences. Professional caretakers may thus avoid providing challenges since it is better to feel safe and do nothing, with no critique from parents. This dichotomy emerges from the experience of listening to overprotecting parents' concerns while attempting to facilitate children's risky play (Van Rooijen & Newstead, 2016). Childcare is an influential setting to inform parents about risky play's value rather than directly advising them, which has proven less efficient. Therefore, childcare settings are a good place for facilitating children's risky play (Greenfield, 2003). It is of utmost importance that practitioners be trained in guiding risky play while understanding the barriers and enablers promoting it (Lawson Foundation, 2019).

Today's research and discourse on risky play do not stand alone but exist alongside philosophical themes and educational thinking concerning children. The following section provides a broad, but not extensive, overview of discourses in thinking about children and risk.

Discourses on children's risk-taking in play

Influences of pioneers on risky play

Discussion about the importance of risk-taking in children's play, children's perceived competencies, and adults' role in guiding this learning process has evolved over the past centuries. In understanding free play as children's ability to build trust in their skills, ideas can be obtained from the French thinker and writer Rousseau (1712–1778). He critically contributed to the discourse on raising children in his book *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (1762). Émile was not anxiously protected from every accident; he had to know pain to learn to tolerate it (Van Schagen, 1968). Rousseau emphasized the value of children learning from their own experiences and can be regarded as an early advocate for risk in play. He wrote about 'negative parenting', whereby a parent doing nothing in essence creates a 'miracle of education' (Rousseau, 1762/1980, p. 109). Whilst parental blaming without understanding the systems that influence their decisions is inconsistent with current approaches, the pedagogical aspect stands and is a critical view to consider.

Rousseau's viewpoint was complemented by the encouragement of the American philosopher and educational reformer Dewey to let children live in the present (Dewey, 1916). Children are simultaneously 'becomings' and 'beings' (Christensen

& James, 2008). The mentality of being aware of dangers while not noticing all possible minor hazards and accepting things as they come is not only stimulating in childhood but equally applicable to adults who are guiding children into maturity.

The Polish physician Korczak, known as a pedagogue and writer in Poland at the beginning of the 20th century, translated this thinking into a list of rights, such as the right of a child to live and enjoy in the present. A notion that many adults disapprove of or even reject is the child's right to death: 'from fear that death will take our child away, we deprive our child his life; because we do not want it to die, we will not allow it to live' (Korczak, 1919/1984, p. 50). This right is not to be taken literally; rather, adult's perceptions of risk result from seeing dangers that are not there and intervening based on fear.

Playing as a form of natural behaviour, which is especially common in childhood, is difficult to define. Some the criteria to classify play are its spontaneous, voluntary, and rewarding nature (Graham and Burghardt, 2010), reflecting Huizinga's description that play is 'accompanied by feelings of excitement and joy' (Huizinga, 1938, p. 28). This emotional state of exhilaration can be seen in challenging play activities children spontaneously engage in. This natural inner drive is articulated by Huizinga: 'tension means uncertainty, chanciness; a striving to decide the issue and so end it. The player wants something to "go", to "come off"; he wants to "succeed" by his own exertions ... all want to achieve something difficult […] to end a tension' (Huizinga 1938, p. 11). Perhaps Huizinga described risky play decades before it was defined.

Piagetian approaches to studying child development dominated the 1960s and 1970s. Encouraging parents, teachers, and researchers to become more child-centred was one of the virtues of Piaget's paradigm (Christensen & James, 2008). Piaget argued that children steer self-initiated development stemming from their personal efforts. Vygotsky developed this notion into the concept of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1987) to optimally facilitate children's individual needs. Thus, risky play enables children to generate their personal zone of proximal development by continuously engaging in accumulating challenges in their play surroundings from an early age (Kleppe et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2019). Moreover, Arendt emphasized the all-encompassing presence of unpredictability and uncertainty in our lives (1998). Kohlen (2015, p. 166) argues in continuation of Arendt that 'whoever tries to remove unpredictability from action will destroy what is defining us as human', which could be connected to

children's risky play, in which uncertainty is attractive instead of opposed and is inherent to their lives.

The right to play

In contrast to the growing focus on children's safety and protection, recognizing the benefits of risk-taking by children during play has led to the incorporation of concerns about constraints in Article 31 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child by the United Nations (UNCRC, 2013). Increasing levels of monitoring are one of the concerns regarding children's rights. In the General Comment of this convention, also acknowledged as 'the right to play', the trend of overprotection is mentioned; the text also includes uncertainty and challenge as key characteristics in the definition of play: 'some degree of risk and challenge is integral to play and recreational activities and is a necessary component of the benefits of these activities' (p. 12). Moreover, the importance of children engaged in physical activities exercising autonomy is stressed (UNHRC, 2013). The World Health Organisation has recently underscored the importance of physical activity in preventing obesity by promoting vigorous and unstructured play in early childhood development settings (WHO, 2019).

Dutch after-school childcare contexts

Risky play in professional settings

Intensified supervision of children's free play is not limited to parents; such behaviour also extends to professionals guiding children in their free time, like recess supervisors and childcare practitioners. For example, the head researcher of this study was informed by a teacher of a first grade class that 'children are not allowed to climb on top of the playhouse, but your daughter may do it during break playtime because I know that you think that is good for her' when talking about the possibilities of being challenged while playing outside in the schoolyard. Likewise, when under the care of lunchtime and after-school childcare practitioners, children seem subject to distinctive rules and attitudes that affect their play. The teacher's quote emphasizes the sometimes conflicting interests of children, their professional educators, and parents.

After-school childcare in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, childcare facilities consist of daycare or nursery for infants and children up to 4 years old and after-school facilities for children between 4 and 12 years old. The number of children in the latter group is growing; attention to their social and play environments is thus of importance. In the first quarter

of 2020, over 7,400 after-school care facilities existed in the Netherlands, with 409,000 children aged 4 to 12 attending (29% of the primary school population; Rijksoverheid, 2020). Professionals working in after-school childcare are named 'pedagogical staff members' and taught at the intermediate vocational education level. In the curriculum of childcare education, the importance of play is recognized, (e.g., Tassoni & Batelaan, 2011 and Boland et al., 2023). However, learning how to guide and facilitate children's unstructured and risky play has low priority.

After-school childcare as children's leisure time

There is an ongoing debate about whether after-school childcare should play a role in developing aims for attending children (Fukkink, 2020). One view is for the focus to be on guided talent-growing activities like arts, sports, creativity, and music. Another view is that time spent in these settings should be seen as children's free time, providing children with the ability to make their own choices with mostly free play possibilities. In after-school childcare, organizations sometimes consciously choose one of the directions or combine them in a mix of activities. Interestingly, the Dutch Expertise Centre of Childcare's assignment for linking research and professional practice chose children's autonomy and risky play as first subjects, addressing the value of children's choices and interests (expertisecentrumkinderopvang.nl/onderwerpen).

Professional dilemmas surrounding risky play

Childcare settings offer an ideal opportunity for children to become acquainted with risk-taking in play, which promotes healthy growth and development (Brussoni et al. 2020). Interest in the professionalisation of childcare workers is growing as the responsibility for children's upbringing and development is extended from the family area to early childhood education and care institutions (Rijksoverheid, 2020). This sector is subject to increasingly stringent guidelines; society's overprotective tendency towards children has diminished the possibilities for youth to engage in risky play. For a child to enjoy the advantages of understanding by risk-taking, practitioners must pursue a sensible balance between the duty of care and the importance of risk-taking.

Since risky play is an increasingly normative concept and activity, favoured by some and opposed by others, childcare professionals who bring risky play into their practice become part of the force field of influences. There is growing attention in the childcare sector on challenging play activities for children, which organizations use to distinguish themselves from rival after-school childcare providers while presenting themselves as adventurous settings for children. As

such programs must cater to children's play needs, consider parents as customers, support practitioners, meet legal standards, and meet other demands, a pedagogical foundation may be useful. Likewise, it is beneficial to identify factors which influence professionals in their attitude towards children's risk-taking in play. In this study these themes are developed into a model that draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of development; this model captures the interconnected and complex relationships between influencing factors.

Children's perspectives

Play, risk, and children

Play may be considered an occupation exclusively for children that adults do not understand and should not interfere with. A definition of play that recognizes this viewpoint is as follows:

> *Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play by following their own instincts, ideas, and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.* (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group [PPSG], 2005)

Hence, children should be able to play however they want, not how adults think they should. When adults disappear, they give children the greatest confidence by letting them determine risk for themselves, which is what they want most. In this sense, risky play is an adult-constructed notion, and consulting children on risk in their play is illogical because they cannot understand the question. Children may not think about risk; however, they are perfectly capable of assessing or discovering whether an activity is a great risk while playing (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012; Lavrysen et al., 2017).

Taking risks on their terms gives children a sense of self-confidence and mastery, forcing them into new relationships with other children and guiding adults. Children generally have a relatively boundless view of their playing opportunities but frequently say that adults restrict their play possibilities (Chancellor & Hyndman, 2017). If children are given choices and agency to engage in risk-taking, they maintain the spontaneity of outdoor play. Thus, children must be given the freedom to engage in play in their own play spaces and in the manner they choose (Glenn et al., 2020).

Recent discourse has raised questions about an approach towards risky play, who identifies risk, and how adults interact with children and discuss risk competencies and understanding of risky practices with them. It has been argued that children's play has become subject to adult scrutiny and is no longer something children just do, with adults directing and eliminating children's agency to control their own play (Lester & Russell, 2014).

A key question concerns adults' roles in children's risky play. Arising from the previously mentioned definition of play, the task of the guiding adult is that "all intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children" (PPSG, 2005). In this way, children's risky play can be interrupted only in the case of danger and possible unacceptable injury. Again, this adult perspective emphasizes the necessity of discovering and understanding children's opinions about risk in their lives.

Children's voices on risky play

Children's perspectives on risky play have been underrepresented in the recent literature. Most research has been conducted with a focus on the early childhood years. Consequently, asking children about their play may be ineffective, since they may be too young to broadly reflect on their risky play activities. The perspective of older children, from age 6 years on, has only recently become of interest. To our knowledge, a study by Hinchion et al. (2021) and, to some extent, Jerebine's review (2022) represent the limited research on this age group (6–8 years). This dissertation investigates the age group of 5- to 12-year-olds: the age of after-school childcare in the Netherlands. This age group might be of interest since children become more independent as they grow and have more autonomy to make decisions in engaging in risky play situations.

Observing and talking with children

As mentioned earlier in this section, examining the meaning of risky play with children is a challenge, as they may be unable to discuss the concept clearly. Communicating the concept of risky play to children involves identifying real risky play situations and discussing these experiences as they happen. Informally discussing the associated feelings during risky activities helps children formulate responses. Therefore, in this study, researchers tried to respond to children's sense of agency by assuring their autonomy while establishing a relationship with the children, altering the discussion of children's risky play experiences. However, the word 'risky' was not used; instead children were asked about play situations that were somewhat exciting or challenging. Moreover, this study focused on observations, whereby researchers were attentive to risky play and,

whenever suitable, had brief conversations with children during or after play. Hence, children's subjective experiences were explored and the meaning of risky play in specific childcare settings.

A mutual benefit

Mutual understanding between adult professionals and children in childcare settings can benefit daily practice because practitioners can relate to children's needs in their supervision tasks. Such understanding allows children to feel more freedom and autonomy to explore their borders in risky play. Thus, professionals can contribute to children's resilience, allowing them to bounce back from set-backs and disappointment. In her examination of research on resilience phenomena in the lives of children, Masten (2001) called resilience *ordinary magic* and distinguished the two foremost elements in this contextual construct: the risk that must be experienced and the positive evaluation of the adaptive or developmental result for the child. Van Gils connects play and well-being to resilience through a metaphorical *house of resilience*, where the foundation is acceptance and unconditional trust that an adult gives to a child, which adult, in reciprocity, is accepted by the child to be such a person (2014, p. 906). The house's attic is for new experiences with the unknown, which might include risk in play. This study generates awareness of this interdependency between children's risky play preferences and professional caretakers' facilitating roles.

This dissertation

Chapter 2 of this dissertation presents a narrative literature review of international studies on factors that may influence professionals when making risk assessments in childcare settings. This chapter proposes a model identifying five interrelated factors affecting professionals' attitudes to risk, exploring the complexity of and relationships between these factors.

In Chapter 3, the previous model is further examined to explore how these influencing factors impact Dutch childcare. Using an online questionnaire, the findings were applied to adjust the model to provide further insights into the influencing factors and their interrelatedness in a Dutch context.

Chapters 4 and 5 report the findings of a qualitative mixed-methods intervention study conducted in seven Dutch after-school childcare settings. A professionalisation program was introduced in each setting and conducted with the after-school childcare teams, focused on knowledge surrounding, attitude

towards, and supervision of risky play. As part of the program, loose parts were introduced in children's play as resources for encouraging risk-taking activities. The experiences of professionals were evaluated after the intervention with the professional team. Qualitative data were also collected to explore how children experienced the modification of their play environment and their perspectives on adult interference in their risk-taking play.

The study reported in Chapter 4 investigated the development program's impact on the emergence of moral values and dilemmas among professionals. The study examined the boundaries for professionals working with children and collaborating with colleagues, which included balancing protection while facilitating challenging play. Subsequently, the study reported in Chapter 5 expanded the previous studies by focusing on children's perspectives and exploring children's notions of risk and challenge in play. Using observations, informal conversations, and roundtable talks with children, I reported on children's general views on risky play, their play experiences with loose parts, their real-life risky play experiences, and their opinions on the role of guiding professionals.

In Chapter 6, the results described in the previous chapters are integrated and discussed. Implications for theory development, practice and policy are presented along with the study's limitations. To conclude, directions for future research are suggested.

2

CHAPTER 2

Influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play: A narrative review

Abstract

There is a growing concern that adults who supervise children's play may restrict opportunities for children to engage in risky activities. Risk-benefit assessment is commonly advocated as a way of allowing children to take managed risks within settings. However 'risk-benefit' adopts a limited strategy of convincing professionals of the developmental benefits of risk, disregarding other factors which may also influence professionals when making risk assessments in their settings. This paper proposes an alternative approach to supporting practitioners in allowing risk by exploring the complexity of these influencing factors. A narrative literature review identifies five inter-related factors which affect professionals' attitudes to risk. The relationships between these factors are discussed and presented as a model which illustrates the complexity faced by practitioners when carrying out risk assessments. The authors argue that children's opportunities to benefit from risk in play may increase if these influencing factors could be explored within professional development.

Keywords: Risky play; early childhood; narrative review; Bronfenbrenner's model; professional practice; playwork practice

Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing concern about what has been regarded as the changing nature of children's play, and particularly the trend for children to spend more of their free time in institutionalized settings (Meire, 2013; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997). One of the objections raised to children spending more time in supervised settings is the potential impact of supervisory adults on children's abilities to engage in challenging situations and risk activities in their play. Risk-taking is an important part of childhood development which builds confidence, resilience and creativity in children whilst allowing them to test their own limits (Gill, 2007; Staempfli, 2009; Stephenson, 2003; Tovey, 2007), and by taking developmentally appropriate risks in their play children gain experiences which will benefit their future lives as independent and capable adults (Ball, 2002; Ungar, 2007/ 2008). However, adult-imposed restrictions on risk-taking in play is often justified on the grounds of 'safety', with children being banned from a variety of experiences such as running on school playgrounds, playing outside in the snow and accessing areas of forbidden territory (Thomson, 2014). In many Western countries child safety and prominent injury prevention strategies are commonly employed as a justification for increasing playground safety standards and levels of adult supervision (Brussoni et al., 2015).

One of the reasons behind heightened sensitivity to risk in children's play is a fundamental professional dilemma experienced by practitioners on a day-to-day basis. Descriptions of the role of supervisory adults are often expressed in terms of 'keeping children safe', whilst also requiring these professionals to be responsible for the future development of the children in their care. Daily practice is therefore fraught with conflicting priorities, with the 'safety' and 'development' imperatives creating two different narratives of what constitutes 'good practice'. Professionals experience a dilemma between ensuring 'safety' which may result in children being prevented from taking risks in their play, thereby curtailing the desired developmental benefits which such play opportunities afford. In an attempt to address this contradiction in professional practice, the risk-benefit approach encourages practitioners to allow children to experience more risk in their play by evaluating the developmental benefits of risk-taking (Ball, Gill, & Spiegal, 2012). In contrast to risk assessment, which focuses attention on potential harm by identifying hazards and making judgements about how much harm these hazards are likely to cause, 'risk-benefit' attempts to re-frame risk in a positive light by encouraging practitioners to focus on the advantages of risk-taking in children's play, as well as the potential harm which may occur. The underlying assumption of the risk-benefit model is that some adults are inher-

ently 'risk-averse' and an increased awareness of the value of risk will result in these adults allowing children to take more risks in their play (Sandseter, 2014; Smith, 1998).

However this approach to convincing adults of the benefits of risk for children disregards several complex factors in daily professional practice, as it ignores the wider context in which professionals who work with children operate. Child-care and educational settings involve a complex web of relationships, theories, practices, cultural norms and legalization. Well-intentioned practitioners, who want to do 'the right thing' and support children's development through allowing risk in play, can be caught up in this conflicting mesh of personal, professional, regulatory and cultural priorities which obscure what 'the right thing' is when it comes to allowing children to take risks. Arriving at such judgements involves a complex assessment of not only the physical risk to the child within an institutional context, but also the risk to the teacher themselves in the event of an accident. For example, one of the authors of this paper was informed by a teacher that 'Children are not allowed to climb on top of the playhouse, but your daughter may do so during break playtime because I know you think that it's good for her.' In allowing one child to engage in such an activity the teacher risks complaints from other children who are excluded from the same activity, and perhaps also their parents. There may also be consequences for the teacher if colleagues complain about an exception being made for one particular child in the face of guidelines, which explicitly forbid this particularly activity. In coming to such a decision, this professional must carry out multiple layers of risk assessment over and above simply appreciating the developmental benefits of such an activity, which may also include an assessment of risk to themselves on several fronts.

Supporting adults to allow children to experience risk in their play may therefore require a more nuanced approach than simple 'risk-benefit' in order to address the fundamental tensions for professionals in arriving at decisions about risk in play. This paper proposes that one such approach could be the exploration of the underlying influences on professionals' perceptions of risk as a route to understanding the potential causes of so-called risk-aversion in professional practice.

Methodology

A narrative review synthesizes different primary studies and discusses existing theory and context using the reviewer's own background knowledge and emerg-

ing concepts (Collins & Fauser, 2005; Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006). Our intention in this paper is not to provide an overview of all recent research on risk in children's play, but rather to interrogate the literature for relevant factors that influence professionals in either supporting or constraining children in engaging in risk in their play. This paper therefore focusses on literature published in English in peer-reviewed journals between 2005 and 2015 listed in the Scopus databases. The following keywords were used as search terms: 'risky play' and 'risk-rich', and these terms identified 93 potentially relevant articles. All abstracts were read in order to exclude articles which did not contain material on the role of professionals in relation to risk in play. As a result, 17 articles were selected as relevant for analysis, which included empirical studies, theoretical articles and one literature review. As age or setting were not defined in the search method, the articles incorporated children's play up to 12 years and settings including preschool, child care and primary school play environments.

At this stage a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to gain insight into re-occurring themes regarding the influences on professional's attitudes to risk-taking in children's play. After coding, the themes were reviewed and the next stage involved defining and naming these themes. Five themes which influence professionals in their attitude towards children's risk-taking in play were identified, and these themes were developed into a model drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model which illustrates the interconnected and complex relationships between the different types of influencing factors. The following sections describe the separate influencing factors in a hierarchical order of closeness to the professional in the model; constructs of children and their impact on professional objectives; how professionals' attitude to risk in play may be affected by personality and gender; the professional–parent relationship; regulatory and legal factors; the societal context and cultural factors.

Influencing factors

Constructs of children and their impact on professional objectives

A variety of constructs of children and childhood underpin professional practice (Petrie, Egharevba, Oliver, & Poland, 2000). Two particular dichotomous constructs of children, either as fundamentally vulnerable or as resilient in nature, may create dilemmas for professionals in deciding appropriate responses to risk in play. Professionals who conceptualize children as essentially vulnerable may overcompensate for their perceived need for care and protection, whilst children conceptualized as resilient may be afforded more opportunities for risk over and

above their actual competencies. However these two seemingly diametrically opposed constructs of children are not mutually exclusive. Risky situations can offer children an opportunity to increase their resilience by developing their risk-management strategies. In this context resilience means that children are capable of understanding their competencies, moderating their risky play and accepting other child's different internal boundaries in carrying out risk-taking behaviour (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012). Seen in this light, the vulnerability of the child is not something which should be denied at all costs. Instead professionals can acknowledge the child's vulnerability and at the same time enable the child to deal with this by focussing on coping strategies, leading to the strengthening of their self-esteem (Hewitt-Taylor & Heaslip, 2012).

Adult constructs of children may also have an influence on children's opportunities to assess risk for themselves. In situations where play takes place unsupervised, it is children who must identify hazards (things which are likely to cause harm) by themselves and make their own judgements about the levels of risk with which they feel comfortable. In other words, when there are no adults around, children are responsible for making their own risk assessments. However, in supervised settings where the adults are responsible for the well-being of the children in their care, those practitioners often have a duty to perform risk assessments on children's play activities. This professional responsibility may detract from children's opportunities to practise risk assessment for themselves, particularly if the adult construct of children does not allow for children being potentially capable of making such judgements. Children's perceptions of risk can be different from that of an adult, because adult and child perceptions of affordances (Gibson, 1977) are different as they relate to individual capabilities, physical characteristics and motivation (Little & Sweller, 2015). As a result children's risk assessments may in some situations be more relevant than that of the adult observer. For example, one study described staff restrictions on 'climbing very high up in trees' (Sandseter, 2009), even though the adults did not know whether children were capable of engaging in this form of play safely.

Constructs of children as vulnerable and in need of protection are unlikely to involve notions of risk-competence (defined as children's skills to recognize, engage and evaluate risks in play in order to protect themselves). In some cases this may result in professionals underestimating children's risk-assessment capabilities and overriding children's legitimate decisions about appropriate levels of risk in their play, thus undermining children's own efforts to make decisions for themselves. Furthermore, in supervised settings, where responsibility for 'safety' lies with the professional, it is the – potentially uninformed – adult risk

assessment which must hold sway. With the support of the legal and regulatory framework, adults who already construct children as vulnerable may assume that their own risk assessment is the only valid one, and are unlikely to incorporate children's own evaluations of risk into their finite decisions on acceptable levels of risk in children's play.

MacQuarrie et al.'s (2015) study on nature-based learning settings in Norway and Scotland demonstrates how this privileging of adult perspectives on risk was avoided through mutual trust and negotiation between adults and children. Children were appreciated as competent partners in learning, which led to adult–child consultation and supported collaboration in risk-taking situations. In this way professionals are influenced by children's view on risk in their daily practice, and such an approach appears to enhance the potential for children to engage in risk in their play. This could be of importance in terms of children's development as the professional's changing view on risk can also have substantial effect on the ways that children construct risk (Niehues et al., 2013).

In settings which involve some form of curriculum for children, this very existence of a curriculum may also create further dilemmas for professionals in dealing with risk assessments in play. Scientific theories embedded into curricula have an impact on professionals' beliefs and practices relating to children's risk-taking in play (Sandseter, Little, & Wyver, 2012). Such pedagogical foundations often remain unexamined by professionals, and risk is therefore evaluated by adults using tacit or 'unwritten' rules (Sandseter, 2012). Influences on belief and practice regarding risk from these embedded philosophical and theoretical approaches seem to result in different outcomes in supporting or restricting risk in play (Little, Sandseter, & Wyver, 2012).

The potential of a 'risk-rich' curriculum resides in adults and children exploring new topics and unfamiliar terrains, as children are capable and wanting to test their capabilities and understandings (New, Mardell, & Robinson, 2005). New et al. state that views on childhood environments vary on beliefs and goals and therefore it could be meaningful introducing beyond reach of children activities, allowing and also encouraging risk in play even if culture or professionals would not see it as well-arranged or appropriate.

Given that the potential benefit and harm of each situation involving risk is highly individual (Hewitt-Taylor & Heaslip, 2012), practitioners are often encouraged to use their professional judgement to arrive at decisions about the individual needs of children. Devising a uniform curriculum around risk, where, for ex-

ample, certain activities or areas are banned to all children at all times, disables professionals from weighing up the benefits of certain play situations against the potential risks according to individual children's developmental needs.

Professional's personal attitudes to risk

A further set of influences on professionals' approach to risk stems from an individual's personal values and experiences. Professionals' own attitudes and beliefs around risk may be brought into their practice, which may then reflect their own boundaries, causing the practitioner to either constrain or enable children's risk-taking. Interventions are then explained by ensuring children's safety 'within reason', meaning they inquire their own limits for risk in order to consider what is suitable for children under their supervision (Sandseter, 2012). In some cases practitioners override their own personal hesitations around risk in order to enable children to take risks in their play, whereas other professionals act 'in a manner that suits them' as they more attend to their own needs around risk-management rather than to the developmental needs of the children they supervise. Professionals can take control over children's activities, putting themselves in a 'position of power' over children (Stan & Humberstone, 2011) and disempowering children in the important developmental area of risk assessment.

Interestingly, adult attitudes to risk may be influenced by gender. Sandseter (2014) found that male practitioners score higher than female practitioners on a scale which measured whether adults were willing to take more risk and seek for new experiences themselves. Male practitioners have a more liberal attitude towards children's risk-taking play and they allow children to engage in greater risky play than women (Sandseter, 2014). Individual high scores on the excitement seeking scale were positively correlated to a more broad-minded attitude on risk in play, suggesting a connection between personality and professional attitudes to risk. The same study indicated that age does not seem to influence the perception of risk in individuals.

To gain an alternative insight in the difference between professionals who are more or less risk tolerant, Hill and Bundy (2014) introduced a tool for measuring risky play tolerance. The instrument, called TRiPS (Tolerance of Risk in Play Scale), reflects Sandseter's (2007) six categories of risky play and can provide a basis for measuring interventions with the purpose to transform professionals' attitude to risk in play. Measuring changes in the beliefs of adults about risky play can contribute to gaining insight in the added value or effectivity of interventions. Beneficial effects were also reported on changing the professionals' beliefs as result of an intervention course which caused a greater understand-

ing of children's playful risky behaviours (Cevher-Kalburan, 2015). The six-week course provided in pedagogical readings, assignments in observing children's play, interviewing teachers and parents and drawing an imaginary playground. Participant's understanding changed from the negative term 'hazard' into understanding the distinction with the positive notion of risk, complementing the outcomes that the concept of risk is socially constructed and often has negative connotations in a theoretical treatise on defining risk (Little & Eager, 2010).

2

The professional–parent relationship

The relationship between professionals and parents is a significant factor in practitioners' attitudes to risk in play. A collaborative relationship between professionals and parents could lead to a collective effort on including risk and challenge into the organization policy as developmentally worthwhile. In investigating the possibilities of a 'risk-rich' curriculum both parents and children can discover new challenging topics and unknown areas of play, conventionally recognized as out of reach of children (New et al., 2005). The conclusion drawn from this study is that a transfer can be made from 'playing it safe to being collaboratively courageous' (New et al., 2005, p. 13) where parents are invited into a collaborative relationship with professionals who accompany the child, resulting in well-informed decisions on the curriculum.

Professionals have been found to engage with parents in various ways, proactively as well as reactively (MacQuarrie, Nugent, & Warden, 2015). In the proactive approach professionals take the initiative to discuss risk with parents, and the reactive approach occurs when professionals and parents retained different opinions about supporting children's challenging experiences. In sharing viewpoints practitioners aim to align the parents' views with their own in order to gain support for their approach to risk-taking in the setting (MacQuarrie et al., 2015, p. 8). Hewitt-Taylor and Heaslip (2012) regard practitioners as designated professionals to engage parents in discussions about achieving a balance between degrees of risk-aversion and protection. They call it partnership; a relationship in which parents and professionals are conscious of the fact that perceptions of risk can differ and are capable of reasoned discussion and sharing understanding. They also draw attention to the impact such a dialogue can have on professionals working in a risk-averse society. On the one hand, professionals who stimulate risk-taking which results in harm to children may be fearful of litigation. On the other hand parents who follow professional advice and allow their children to engage in risk in their play may fear being called negligent. This may in turn have an effect on the professional standing of the practitioner in the eyes of those

parents, in that the professional's future advice is devalued due to the adverse consequences suffered by the parents.

The ways in which professionals address parental concerns about risk seems to be important and requires a degree of confidence in the professional–parent relationship. Exploring beliefs and attitudes in discussions between professionals and parents has been found to be valuable in influencing parents' beliefs around risk-taking. Niehues et al. (2013) introduced collective group interventions called 'risk-reframing sessions' which included parents, educators, staff and volunteers. One of the objectives was to elucidate the process in which parents and educators were enabled to jointly reconstruct healthy risk-taking for children. The findings suggested that both professionals and parents benefitted from sharing their perceptions of risk, as the adults could achieve trusting relationships amongst each other as well as with children. Successful results were reported in considering alternative responses to risk in play; in modelling a process which allowed participants to critique responses and supported them in making considered decisions; and in changing the conceptualization of risk to uncertainty and opportunity. The distinction between danger and risk is also an interesting area of discussion between professionals and parents.

One of the challenges for professionals in discussing risk with parents appears to be the difference between real and imagined risk, and high or marginal risk (Hewitt-Taylor & Heaslip, 2012). This is not an easy task as play context differs and the individual child's actions are not foreseeable, parents and professionals should therefore focus on relative risks and benefits of children's challenges in play. Hewitt-Taylor and Heaslip stress the necessity of professionals exploring their attitude towards risk-taking behaviour as well as enabling parents to address fears over acceptable risk-taking of their children. However, it should be noted that even if professionals and parents share an understanding about the value of risk in play, there could still be a hesitation in the practitioner's freedom to act in practice. Little et al. (2012) found that professionals did not allow other people's children the same amount of risk as they allow their own children. In this Norwegian context accountability issues were not the case as a culture of litigation from parents is uncommon, but professionals were very aware of their responsibility in having other people's children in their care and were therefore more cautious in their approach to risk when working with other people's children.

Regulatory factors

The fourth theme to emerge from the analysis of the literature was that professionals can feel both constrained and enabled by regulatory factors when they want to enhance possibilities for risk in play. In Australian early childhood education centres almost half of the organizations studied experienced regulatory restrictions (Little & Sweller, 2015). Specifically, height restrictions of playground equipment limit the possibilities of risk-taking (Coleman & Dyment, 2013; Dyment & Coleman, 2012; Little & Sweller, 2015). Professionals are therefore reluctant to let children play on natural elements such as rocks and trees. General safety issues regarding supervision and child/staff ratios also prevented professionals from enabling children to take risks in their play. Top-down regulations, in many situations a requirement of licencing organizations to provide care, could therefore inhibit settings developing their own policies in the area of risk in play.

However, regulations are also sometimes regarded by professionals as enabling, which is noteworthy as regulations are experienced negatively in most studies in this review. Australian practitioners felt that regulations could also support their practice (Little, Wyver, & Gibson, 2011). The explanation for this was that professionals found regulations necessary in order to ensure minimum standards of playground equipment. This implies that professionals may find some regulations helpful in setting clear boundaries around risk, as well as welcoming the possibility to use their own expertise and experience in assessing children's risky activities.

One possible unintended consequence of the regulation of safety is that it creates accountability and liabilities for the adults responsible for supervising children's play. Possibilities of accountability therefore have an impact on professionals facilitating risk in play (Little et al., 2012). External regulations which can constrain professionals in their risk-management practices may also contribute to a broader culture of risk-aversion and litigation in society. Professionals demonstrate their awareness of potential health and safety responsibilities by depriving children of risk-taking experiences, and even if they criticize safety policies as over-protective they do not feel able to use their common sense and abilities in carrying out risk assessment (Stan & Humberstone, 2011).

Cultural factors

The thematic analysis revealed that the cultural interpretations of 'safety' consists of a diverse set of factors which interact with one another, making the subject of risk in play culturally embedded and complex. For New et al. (2005) the socio-cultural context in which children live and are prepared for the demands

of the social and physical environment must be considered in relation to adult attitudes to play. These authors offer enlightening discussions of Italian, Scandinavian, Japanese and U.S. approaches to risk in childhood in relation to cultural practices and settings. Different countries appear to have different approaches to risk in play, which can be seen particularly with regard to outdoor play in the literature. New et al. give prominent examples of nations' play cultures; American professionals are amazed at how Scandinavian children are allowed to roam outside for extended periods in all kinds of weather, as they would fear child molesters and liability suits. As an explanation for Nordic educational practices, New et al. state it is important to recognize that an appreciation of the outdoors is considered an important value to propagate among children, as pride in the countryside is prevalent throughout these countries. Children and teachers' beliefs therefore automatically encourage outdoor adventure, despite the weather, as otherwise children would stay indoors during the cold winter months. This enhanced positive approach to risky play in Scandinavian countries, where professionals stimulate children to engage in challenging activities are further explored in interviews with Australian and Norwegian professionals. In a comparative analysis of their beliefs, professionals in both countries appear to acknowledge the importance of risk-taking for the development of children, but they have different ways of applying this in practice (Little et al., 2012). Australian professionals feel restricted by external factors: legal environment, regulatory requirements and the quality of the outdoor environment. Norwegian practitioners feel less obligated to consider these barriers and are therefore freer to apply their own professional judgement in supervising children's risk-taking in outdoor play. This could be interpreted to mean that they are more at liberty to heed their own principles and hence to attach more importance to evaluating the play context than to obeying rules or considering potential liability. This corresponds with Sandseter's (2014) description of Norwegian professionals as having 'few worries' when children engage in risky activities.

Developing a more sophisticated approach to supporting practitioner risk assessment

So far this paper has explored the five themes identified from the literature review which have an influence on professional attitudes towards risk in children's play. However, the presentation of these five factors as separate is a constructed one, as in practice these influences cannot be seen as distinct from one other. Socio-cultural differences in perceptions on risk in play have an influence on institutional practices and hence on individual professional practices. In a similar

trickle-down effect, legal and regulatory frameworks can affect professionals' trust in their own ability to allow play which involves risk, as they fear legal repercussions from parents. Constructs of children which regard children as competent risk-assessors which are not shared by parents and professionals require careful negotiation in order to arrive at an agreed tolerance level of risk, although institutional and regulatory frameworks may still conspire against shared liberal risk-management strategies. Furthermore, there is of course no guarantee that, even if parents and setting take a 'pro-risk' approach to children's play, that all the individual practitioners in that setting will adopt the same position, given that individual approaches to risk seem to be influenced by a variety of different and highly personalized factors.

The inter-relatedness of these five influencing factors may be more usefully conceptualized as a model which draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of development (see Figure 2.1). This model depicts the different layers of influences, and also acknowledges the connections in between those layers which may in themselves create different sorts of influences. Based on the five themes identified from the literature review, the diverse factors are represented by circles which create a scheme wherein the professional is surrounded by influences. As in Bronfenbrenner's original model, the influencing factors which may

Influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play

Cultural

Regulatory

Parental relationship

Personal attitudes

Constructs of children
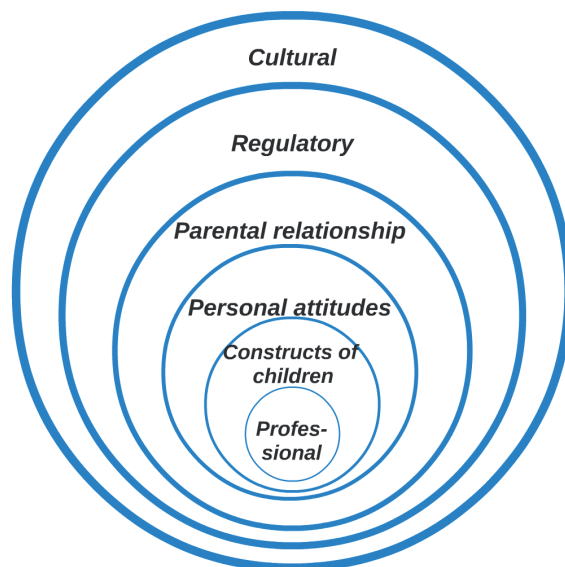
Professional

Figure 2.1. Model

have a more immediate impact on the practitioner's attitudes to risk are placed closer to the professional in the centre of the model. Wider regulatory and cultural factors, although no less important, are depicted as the broader context in which the more immediate personal and professional attitudes and relationships must operate.

1. Constructs of children
2. Professional's personal attitudes to risk
3. Professional–parent relationship
4. Regulatory factors
5. Cultural factors

It is perhaps unsurprising that professionals who supervise children's play feel conflicted in the area of risk (Delahoy, 2012). Practitioners must weigh up all of the influencing elements, taking into account the various practical, personal, ideological and cultural implications for themselves, the children and their setting, and then assess and prioritize them before deciding what might be an appropriate response to risk in play. However, these influencing factors are often unseen: embedded in organizational policies or pedagogical curricula, professional perceptions of parental beliefs, the unwritten implications of regulatory good practice, and cultural and society expectations of 'normal' levels of risk for children. At a fundamental level, professionals must balance the need to protect children from harm with the need to help children to achieve their developmental potential, which creates a central dilemma in deciding which risks could contribute to development and which risks might result in serious harm. Having worked in play settings with children, we recognize this fundamental dilemma: offering freedom and challenge to the child in general, whilst at the same time responding to parental and societal need for protection and security. Professionals have the dual responsibility to provide for a safe play environment and to stimulate children's development to independence, which includes the ability to deal with risk and challenge in their play.

However in practice, the risk-benefit assessment process involves a much bigger and vastly more complex set of personal and professional factors. Even in small settings, practitioners must take account of the opinions of diverse actors: the parents, the manager and other colleagues, and are often unsure whether their course of action is supported by regulations and organization policy. Furthermore, personal and professional judgements must often be taken quickly without time to consult colleagues, placing more pressure on the individual practitioner to do 'the right thing' with any specific protocols to follow. Far from

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being a simple causal relational between an individual's attitude to risk in play and professional confidence in terms of risk, as the risk-benefit process suggests, practitioners frequently find themselves in the middle of a professional blizzard of contradictory opinions, guidelines and legislation related to risk. Practitioners must navigate their way through the tensions which these influencing factors create, often at some considerable risk to themselves when it comes to allowing risk in play. Perhaps it is therefore unsurprising when professionals adopt the default 'no risk' strategy, saving themselves time and energy in weighing up all the various influencing factors and potentially avoiding a law suit into the bargain. Often regarded as a personal affliction of 'risk aversion', professional's reluctance to allow risk in play may in fact be a symptom of a tangled web of influencing factors which are relative to not only individual play situations but also to individual settings, as different factors exert more or less influence on different types of provision and the users of individual settings. Practitioners may not be suffering from personal risk-aversion as much as professional risk confusion, as their views and approaches to risk are shaped by their changing professional experiences in different settings with different influencing factors coming to the fore.

We therefore suggest that the influencing factors on professionals' attitudes to risk-taking in children's play should be further explored by play advocates and researchers. Whilst the 'risk-benefit' approach may encourage some professionals to adopt more positive attitudes to risk-taking in children's play, what this literature review has demonstrated is that professionals working in supervised settings are under significant pressure to juggle potentially conflicting priorities in this area. Even those who are willing and able to address the fundamental contradiction between 'risk' and 'development' in their work may struggle with other influencing factors such as cultural, regulatory, institutional or parental imperatives to limit risk-taking in play. A more sophisticated approach to enabling professionals to support risk-taking in children's play could also support practitioners in recognizing and balancing the various influencing factors in their specific situations of practice. Continuous professional development programmes should first of all acknowledge professionals' everyday dilemma of practice: that their dual responsibility requires them to both provide protection from harm and to facilitate the development of children. By further exploring the underlying influencing factors which create the conflicting situations of daily practice, practitioners could be enabled to address for themselves their own individual and institutional limitations to risk in play. In responding authentically to children's needs, professionals are often required to take risks themselves, frequently finding themselves in situations where they must make choices

without being able to predict or even control the results of their interactions. Understanding the multi-faceted influencing factors at play in supervised settings may empower professionals to make their own risk assessments about the benefits of supporting risk-taking in play. Whilst such a process may involve more effort on behalf of professionals themselves and those who support them, the responses of individual adults can have an impact on the way that risk is perceived by others (Bundy et al., 2009), and professionals who are confident about their own parameters in responding to risk may act as 'change agents' in influencing other professionals, parents and society at large.

Conclusion

This analysis of the literature revealed that professionals working with children in supervised settings are influenced by a variety of diverse and complex factors. The current risk-benefit approach to supporting practitioners to allow children to take risks in their play may be helpful in drawing attention to the developmental benefits of risk. However risk-benefit may fail to convince practitioners to allow more risk in their settings due to a whole host of other inter-related factors which they must take into account when performing risk assessments. These five factors (professional constructs of children, professionals' individual approaches to risk, the professional–parent relationship, regulatory and cultural factors) create dilemmas for professional practice with regard to offering children the necessary opportunities to experience challenge and risk in their play, and can have a significant impact on an individual practitioner's abilities to make clear and supported judgements about the benefits of risk in children's play. By further examining these influencing factors and how they relate to individual practitioners in their specific situations of practice, more may be learnt about how to support professionals to enable children to take risks in their play. Further empirical research is therefore required to investigate whether and how these five inter-related influencing factors impact professional practice in the area of risk in play.

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CHAPTER 3

Professional attitudes towards children's risk-taking in play:
Insights into influencing factors in Dutch contexts

Abstract

Childcare settings offer an ideal opportunity for children to become acquainted with risk-taking in play, which promotes healthy growth and development. Van Rooijen and Newstead's (2016) model, based on a review of international literature, has identified the main challenges for childcare professionals when promoting risky play, namely; conflicting pressures from cultural and regulatory factors, parental concerns, personal attitudes and constructs of children. We used an online questionnaire to examine whether these challenges impact on children's risk-taking play in Dutch childcare contexts. Dutch professionals encounter barriers; especially in external regulations, organization protocols, and parental overprotectiveness. We adjusted the model to gain further insight in influencing factors and their interrelatedness in a Dutch context. Our findings indicate that professionals can be supported with knowledge about and openness in discussion on risky play and with the tools necessary to support autonomy in daily pedagogical decision-making which then supports children's age-appropriate risk-taking opportunities.

Keywords: Risky play; professional development; outdoor play; pedagogical approach; child care; early childhood

Introduction

Children seek excitement and challenging situations despite the possibility of the threat of injury (Kalliala, 2006; Špinka, Newberry, & Bekoff, 2001). Challenge and risk-taking can occur within and outside of play. In early childhood education, the main focus has been on play contexts. The study of 'risky-play' has a long history, but the definition has only recently been formalised as 'thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury' (Sandseter, 2009a, p. 4). Sandseter distinguishes six categories of risky play based on observing and interviewing children: great heights, high speed, rough and tumble play, harmful tools, dangerous elements and disappearing or getting lost (Sandseter, 2007). The study of risky play has a strong foundation in affordance theory. Affordances include the environment as well as the person, signifying that play possibilities are unique for each child and can be influenced by individual characteristics (Gibson, 1979; Sandseter, 2009b). Sandseter's categories of risky play have been used in a range of studies and formed the basis of a recent systematic review, which resulted in the publication of a 'Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play' (Brussoni et al., 2015; Tremblay et al., 2015).

A range of factors in childcare contexts present barriers versus opportunities for children to engage in risky play. Systems approaches such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model provide a framework for analysing the multiple levels of influence on children's risky outdoor play (Bundy, Tranter, Naughton, Wyver, & Luckett, 2009). Some of the influences relate to cultural or within-country factors such as the training of early childhood educators. Little, Sandseter, and Wyver (2012), for example, identified larger discrepancies between the beliefs and practices of Australian versus Norwegian educators in enabling risky play. Until recently, the analysis of important influences on professional attitudes towards risky play using a systems approach has been difficult. Bronfenbrenner's model can provide a useful framework for literature reviews, but it is difficult to test empirically. Van Rooijen and Newstead (2016) introduced a model to overcome this gap, and this model forms the foundation of our analysis (see section 1.1). The Dutch context is of interest because it includes a unique combination of permissive and restrictive elements regarding outdoor play, as further explained in section 1.2.

The positive influence of uncertainty and risk in play can be demonstrated in several developmental areas such as emotional wellbeing, self-confidence and adaptive capacity (Lester & Russell, 2008; Sandseter, Little, Ball, Eager, & Brussoni, 2017). Engagement in risky play is beneficial to the emotional development

of the child. Play allows children to experience and express strong emotions within a safe play environment, which contributes to the regulation of emotion (Sutton-Smith, 2003). Self-confidence originates from the simultaneous experience of risk and mastery. Hence, risky play provides the child with possibilities of being in control of a situation while simultaneously being out of control, offering a safe structure for risk-taking (Gordon & Esbjörn-Hargens, 2007). Furthermore, age-appropriate risky play presents thrilling experiences that induce exhilarating positive emotions, which may prevent anxiety disorders (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011).

Despite the growing evidence for the developmentally positive aspects of children's risk-taking in play, a leading cultural discourse is that children are vulnerable and therefore in need of protection against danger and harm (Hewitt-Taylor & Heaslip, 2012). A trend of overprotection has resulted in the intensification of safety standards on playground equipment, thus setting significant limits on children's everyday play (Brussoni et al., 2015). The constraint on children's freedom to play by increasing the levels of monitoring is one of the concerns articulated in the United Nations (UN) declaration of children's rights. Through its acknowledgment of the 'right to play', the UN certifies that a degree of risk is fundamental to play and a necessary element to let children benefit from play (UNCRC, 2013). Another outcome of the overprotective tendency is intensified adult supervision on children's free time; such supervision is limited to not only parents but also practitioners in childcare and other domains of professional and voluntary youth work (Wyver et al., 2010).

Many recent changes to pedagogical approaches recognize the children's reduced opportunities to engage in risky outdoor play. Despite the benefits, children's opportunities to participate in risky play in early childhood settings are frequently considered to be too limited (Brussoni et al., 2015). A majority of children attend childcare facilities under the supervision of professional workers; thus, the manner by which a focus on protection limits outdoor risky play opportunities becomes significant. This aspect is even more essential as these settings play an important role in facilitating children's risky play in a safeguarded environment, and thus increasing children's competencies (Greenfield, 2003; Lavrysen et al., 2017). Previous studies indicate that professional workers understand the importance of risky play but are sensitive to conflicting discourses of safety and protection (Kernan & Devine, 2010; Little, 2017). Van Rooijen and Newstead (2016) model (Figure 3.1) was developed to improve understanding of the complex interplay of factors that are likely to influence attitudes and practices relating to risky play.

*Influencing factors on professional attitudes
towards risk-taking in children's play*
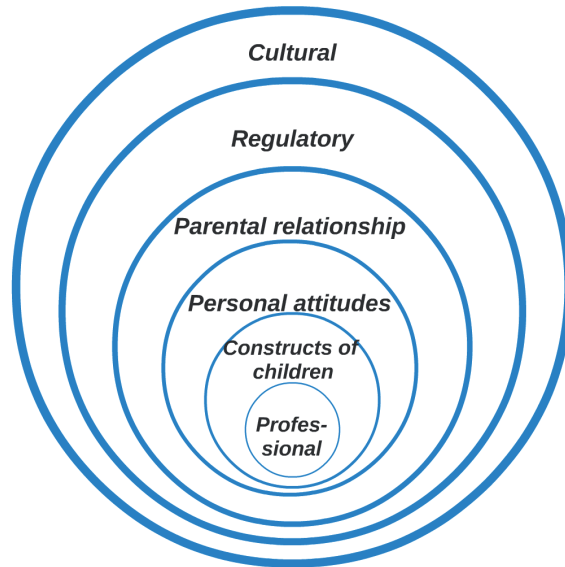
Figure 3.1. Model

A model for factors influencing childcare professionals

Professionals deal with these dilemmas in attempting to adopt a thoughtful approach to risk in children's play. In their daily practice, professionals experience diverse factors that affect their attitude and decision making towards risky play activities. Professionals are found to be more sensitive to the risk of injury and raise concerns about the compromised duty of care when opportunities for risky play increase, even without any evidence of actual increases in injury (Bundy, Luckett, et al., 2009). Therefore, unravelling the intricacy of contexts in which professionals operate, including factors coming from relationships, collective norms and legal matters, is scientifically and societally worthwhile.

The role of childcare professionals involves achieving a critical balance between protecting children against harm and providing them with a safe environment versus fulfilling the pedagogical assignment to stimulate children's development in independently engaging risk and challenge in their play (Bilton, 2010; Stephenson, 2003). In the day-to-day work of professionals, which includes facilitating children's play, the perception of risk and the attitude towards children's risky play are of fundamental importance (Little et al., 2012; Sandseter, 2012; Sandseter, Little, & Wyver, 2012). Professionals' beliefs and attitudes regarding

risky play, with the possibility of injury, can change over time. Moreover, diverse elements affect their decision making. These influencing factors on professionals' attitudes towards risk can cause difficulties in their daily work as they continuously make decisions about children's actions, which involves balancing consideration of the longer term gains of risk-taking and the immediate safety concerns. Van Rooijen and Newstead (2016) depict the influences in a model (see Figure 3.1) and argue that the further exploration of these factors can be valuable for professional development. Affecting the professional from more distant to a closer connection, five factors are distinguished: cultural aspects, regulatory influences, parental relationship, personal attitudes and constructs of children.

Professional barriers to the facilitation of children's risk-taking in play depend on sociocultural contexts; thus, these factors are further illustrated by identifying the countries in which the studies have been conducted. For example, the likelihood of litigation or even the perceived threat of litigation varies considerably across countries. The present study contributes to understanding of barriers in facilitating children's risky play in the Netherlands. To date, the Dutch context has been relatively under-researched.

Cultural aspects

Current research has demonstrated some cultural differences that connect to the outermost layer of the model. Culturally determined ideas towards the benefits of children's exposure to risk-taking appear to have an effect on how adults encourage children's engagement in risky play (New, Mardell, & Robinson, 2005). Australian educators might feel restricted in their practice, whereas Norwegians express a more permissive context and 'few worries' in applying their own judgement on children's risk-taking in play (Little et al., 2012; Sandseter, 2014). Furthermore, attitudes to risky play seem to be connected to positive or negative connotations to the concept of risk that is socially constructed, and hence dependent on nations' sociocultural backgrounds (Little & Eager, 2010). To reflect the current literature on risky play, cultural influences capture all of the conditions that occur within a country or other bounded contexts and have yet to be disentangled from factors that are known to influence outdoor play such as urbanization (Freeman & Tranter, 2012), socioeconomic status (Kimbro, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2011) and weather (Eide, 2017).

Regulatory influences

In the Van Rooijen and Newstead model, regulatory influences include policy, regulatory frameworks and legal frameworks that may lead professionals to feel

vulnerable to litigation. The possibility of litigation for disregarding safety regulations has been identified as a constraint on Australian professionals permitting or facilitating risky play (Little & Sweller, 2015). In the UK, professionals involved in primary school children's outdoor camp activities were aware of the positive aspects of risk-taking in play but felt unable to overrule safety policies (Stan & Humberstone, 2011). This situation is in contrast to Norwegian professionals who give less priority to potential liability than to their own risk-assessment capacities (Little et al., 2012).

Parental relationship

Another influence on professionals' attitudes towards risk, as depicted in the model, is the opinion of parents. A minority of parents can have an impact on other adults, creating discomfort about the possibilities of even minor injuries (Bundy, Luckett, et al., 2009). Although several international studies emphasize the need for the parents' cooperative relationship between parents and professionals to support children's risk-taking in play, they also reveal the difficulties in engaging in and maintaining this relationship (Hewitt-Taylor & Heaslip, 2012; MacQuarrie, Nugent, & Warden, 2015; New et al., 2005; Niehues et al., 2013). In the Scandinavian context, professionals experience the parents' stronger support; however, they allow their responsibility towards other people's children in their care to influence their approach to risky play (Little et al., 2012).

Personal attitudes

The individual characteristics of the professional have also been identified as a factor. Stephenson (2003) argues that educators who are interested in physical play and enjoy being outdoors themselves have a more open-minded attitude towards the risky behaviours of children in their care. Sandseter (2014) identified a connection between an excitement-seeking personality and a more permissive attitude of professionals to risky play. Furthermore, professional attitudes towards risky play may be influenced by gender. Sandseter found that male childcare professionals have a more permissive attitude and allow children to participate in greater risky play than women are willing to do (Sandseter, 2014).

Constructs of children

Finally, an influencing factor is the professionals' view on children's capabilities. Constructs of children reinforce professional practice; supervisors can perceive children as vulnerable and resilient individuals who are also affected by the pedagogical foundations of the organization that these supervisors work for; consequently, these aspects cause dilemmas for their supervision on risk-taking in play (Hewitt-Taylor & Heaslip, 2012; Little et al., 2012). Adult–child consulta-

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tion and supported collaborations have been found to change the adults' perspectives on risky play in the Norwegian and Scottish nature-based learning contexts (MacQuarrie et al., 2015). Professionals' view on children and the effect of including the developmental benefits of risk in pedagogical foundations for facilitating risky play in practice seems to generate different outcomes and does not depend on sociocultural differences (Hewitt-Taylor & Heaslip, 2012; Little et al., 2012; New et al., 2005).

Influencing factors in the Dutch professional practice

The Dutch context includes restrictive factors that are evident in Australia and UK (Van Rooijen, 2017). By contrast, permissive elements are observed in Norway, and therefore offer an important framework for advancing the under-standing of the multiple factors that influence the availability of outdoor risky play for young children. Childcare organizations obtain public funding, but they have a commercial base and a customer-led approach. Interestingly, awareness of the positive value of children's engaging in risky play, distinguished on vari-ous platforms, is growing. The Consumer Safety Institute started a campaign in 2017, in which parents were informed about the benefits of risky play and were challenged to support their children in their risky play activities (Zuizewind, 2017). This campaign was substantiated by the publication of a 'Position paper on risky play', which was endorsed by organizations advocating for children's play (Kuiper, Cotterink, & Van Rooijen, 2017). The new national law for childcare which introduced additional possibilities for risk-taking in play was exemplified in the accompanying document on 'We protect children against great risks and learn them to deal with small risks' (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2016). The advice for childcare organizations is to develop professionalisation programmes for enabling pedagogic professionals to facilitate the provision of challenging learning opportunities to children (http://www. eengezondestart. nl). The new 'risk monitor' no longer strictly prescribes the process of conducting safety assessments, but it provides staff with space to make their own consid-erations, and thus connect to children's development (https://risico-monitor.nl).

Aim of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes towards risky play among Dutch childcare professionals. Van Rooijen and Newstead's model of influencing factors functions as a heuristic for analysing the results and allows for relating Dutch attitudes towards outcomes from other countries. This study used a ques-tionnaire among professionals and collected factors, which could enhance the understanding of the attitudes and opinions of children's supervisors and how risk in play can be perceived by professionals regarding children in their care. In

advancing the understanding of how influencing factors work on professional attitudes, these outcomes can help practice by empowering professionals to support children in their play. The objective is to gain further insight into the manner by which childcare professionals perceive children's risky play possibilities and a deeper understanding of the influencing factors that are involved in developing their attitudes. As the model is derived from theory, exploring relevant research, this study adopts a bottom-up approach. We initially verified the model in the professional developmental context and consequently evaluated it with childcare professionals through a questionnaire.

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Method

We developed an online survey based on Van Rooijen and Newstead's model (2016). We used SurveyMonkey (Platinum edition) to create the online questionnaire and collect respondents' replies.

Participants

Up to 101 subscribers of *KindVak* fully or partially completed the questionnaire. *KindVak* is a digital newsletter for professionals working with children, which is sent periodically to 25,000 professionals. An invitation to complete the online questionnaire was incorporated in the digital newsletter on 23 July 2017. The number of professionals who actually read this newsletter is unknown.

According to the publisher of the newsletter, the majority of readers are female and working in childcare organizations; however, further population details based background variables are undetermined. Referring to a survey that the publisher conducted in 2015 among the subscribers ($n = 500$), 82% of the respondents were working in childcare, 15% in education and 3% in youth care. Subscribers of the digital newsletter expressed an above-average interest in their own professional development; hence, a risk of some positive bias cannot be excluded.

Readers of *KindVak* were invited twice to complete an online questionnaire between 23 June and 7 July 2016. Up to 101 respondents registered. Assuming the subscriber survey was identified as internal and relevant, we would expect approximately 133 returns. We achieved over 75% of that return rate. This figure exceeds the expected return rate for electronic surveys with two invitations, which is generally estimated at 58% (for health research, McPeake, Bateson, & O'Neill, 2014). In addition, Livingston and Wislar (2012) note that response bias starts to diminish at a 60% response rate; nevertheless, caution should still be

exercised and the interpretation of results should consider possible bias. Not all of the respondents completed the entire questionnaire. After the first part on 'possibilities and experiences', 71 respondents continued to the second part of the survey. Fifty-nine respondents completed the third part of the questionnaire, including open-ended questions and information about personal and professional background. The loss of respondents during the study could be caused by an increase of respondent's burden, as the questions were increasing in difficulty. After the first part of the questionnaire, in which respondents were asked to tick boxes, the successive parts involved ranking and open-ended questions; these queries tapped into deeper beliefs, which could be more onerous to answer.

Among the professionals who completed the full questionnaire, 48 were working in childcare organizations, 6 in primary education and 5 in 'others' such as special needs environments, working while retired or engaged in dual jobs (n = 59). In percentages, these numbers correspond to the average of the population, which diminishes the probability of a biased sample. We did not find significant differences in the background variables between the respondents who answered only one part of the questionnaire versus those respondents who replied to all three parts. Therefore, despite the relatively high non-response as the percentages conform to population estimates and do not vary between groups, the probability of a biased sample is apparently within acceptable ranges (Schouten, Cobben, & Bethlehem, 2009).

The current study complies with the Association of Universities in the Netherlands codes of conduct for academic practice,[1] the Scientific Integrity code and the Dutch Personal Data Protection Act. The data management of this study conformed to the Code of Conduct from the Organization of Dutch Universities. For this research, conformance to these codes of conduct did not require the approval of an ethical review board. The respondents were provided with information about the aim, confidentiality and use of data, and their response to the digital questionnaire indicated a presumption of their informed consent. Answering the questionnaire was anonymous unless the respondents chose to share their contact details and expressed their interest in participating in follow-up research on the topic of children's risk in play.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire involved three parts, after which a section focused on the personal and professional background of the respondents. A definition of risky

play (Sandseter, 2009a, p. 4) was provided at the start of the questionnaire to ensure that the respondents share the same concept of risk in children's play.

Part one: possibilities and experiences
In this part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked about risk-taking in play, specifically the possibilities that children experience outdoors during the time they spend at school, in childcare or in other environments where professionals accompany them. This part addressed the following question: 'In your working environment, do children have possibilities to engage in risk and challenge in their outdoor play'? This question was asked for each of Sandseter's (2007) six categories of risky play, namely high speed, great heights, rough play, harmful tools, dangerous elements and disappear/get lost. The answers were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale labelled as very much (5), much (4), sufficient (3), somewhat (2) and not (1). Examples illustrated the categories to provide the respondents with an awareness of the types of play that pertain to different typologies.

Part two: attitudes
Professionals working with children develop an attitude towards risk in children's outdoor play. The focus in this section of the questionnaire was on factors that can modify this attitude. Therefore, the respondents were asked: 'What influences you in your attitude towards children's risky play'? To answer this question, we used a *ranking scale*. We instructed the respondents to provide their preferences in ranking factors from the *most important* (1) to the *least important* (10).

We derived five of the given options from the theoretical model based on a narrative literature review in international contexts and elaborated by Van Rooijen and Newstead (2016), namely cultural aspects, regulatory influences, parental relationship, personal attitudes, and constructs of children. In a small-scale pilot study, six professionals from childcare and playwork were asked if they recognized the five factors from the model in their daily practice and were offered the possibility to include additional influencing factors. The results of the study yielded five more factors, namely opinion of colleagues, play environment, the playing child, pedagogical framework and organizational protocols. In this manner, influences from international contexts as well as possible additional factors from the Dutch professional practice could be tested in this questionnaire. This approach could induce an adjustment of the model for the Dutch childcare context, as presented in the Discussion section. In total, 10 influencing factors were presented to the respondents to be ranked in order of importance, thus

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allowing for our adjustment of the model from Figure 3.1 to the Dutch context if the results are in that direction.

Part three: opinions

This section of the questionnaire included four open-ended questions to assess the professionals' opinion towards children's risky play. Respondents were introduced to these questions asserting that children's supervisors have a dual responsibility: on the one hand, the provision of a safe play environment and protection against danger and, on the other hand, the pedagogical assignment to support children's development in independently engaging risk and challenge in their play. Weighing these two elements in the professional duty of care can engender a 'balanced attitude' towards helping children to reach their developmental potential. The questions were as follows:

(1) *What is your opinion on children's risky play?*
(2) *What positive and negative aspects on children's risky play can you indicate?*
(3) *What dilemmas towards children's risky play do you encounter in your daily work?*
(4) *What is helpful for you to develop a balanced attitude towards children's risky play?*

In the second question, we provided two answering cells, positive and negative, to offer space for writing comments on both options.

Analysis

We transferred the quantitative data from the online program SurveyMonkey to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 24) software. We analysed the questions from the first part using means and independent t-tests for the differences between various professional settings. We conducted tests for potential dissimilarities between groups of respondents in terms of childcare environment (childcare versus after school care). We did not find any significant differences between respondents who filled out all of the quantitative questions versus those respondents who only completed the first section; hence, we decided to include all of the respondents in the first analysis.

The rank-order questions in part two were handled as multiple response questions using SPSS multiple response options. Frequency tables for the three most important influencing factors were created ($n = 71$).

For the analysis of the four open-ended questions in part three, the focus was specifically on the opinions of respondents of childcare as a homogenous group of professionals (*n* = 48). As question two is divided in two segments, five answers were provided by the respondents. For the analysis of these qualitative data, we adopted the steps used in the approach of Gläser and Laudel (2013). First, the raw data were linked to prior theory and the research question. The raw data were subsequently structured in categories that were derived from empirical information in the text and supplemented according to theory. Three researchers, including the first two authors of this article, coded the answers to accomplish optimal triangulation (Creswell, 2007). This procedure allowed for the enhancement of inter-rater reliability and the identification of the main key issues.

Results

Part one: possibilities and experiences

The professionals were asked to what extent, in their working environment, children have possibilities to experience risk and challenge in their outdoor play. Table 3.1 presents the mean score for each of Sandseter's (2007) six categories of risky play. The respondents reported *high speed* as giving the most opportunities for children to engage in their play in the setting. If we further compare the categories, the second most scored is *great heights*. The lowest scores are found for *harmful tools* and *dangerous elements*. Using a five-point Likert-type scale, we determine that with the exception of one outcome, all of the outcomes are below *sufficient* (3.0). Table 3.1 also includes frequency tables that illustrate the percentages of the scores of the different scale categories. For four of the six categories on risky play, 68% or more of the professionals working with

Table 3.1. Descriptives risky play: percentages (%), means and skewness (N = 101).

Risky play possibilities	1 not	2 some-what	3 suffic-ient	4 much	5 very much	Mean	Skew-ness
Speed	5.0	19.8	37.6	27.7	9.9	3.18	-.08
Height	12.9	32.7	33.7	16.8	4.0	2.66	.22
Rough play	34.7	33.7	13.9	10.9	6.9	2.21	.86
Harmful tools	76.2	12.9	5.9	4.0	1.0	1.41	2.29**
Dangerous elements	83.2	9.9	3.3	4.0	0.0	1.28	2.81**
Disappear/get lost	38.6	36.1	9.9	7.9	6.9	2.08	1.28*

* p < .05, ** p < .01.

children in their care observe no opportunities of any significance, scoring not or somewhat, for *rough play* (68.4%), *disappear/get lost* (74.7%), *harmful tools* (89.1%) and *dangerous elements* (93.1%) in their practice. Approximately half of them perceive no or somewhat possibilities on *great heights*. For the *high speed* category, nearly 25% notice no or somewhat possibilities of children's risk in play. The categories of *harmful tools*, *dangerous elements* and *disappear/get lost* are significantly skewed to the left.

In a further exploration, the categories on independent variables were verified to identify significant differences. A segmentation between professionals working with children aged 0 to 4 years and professionals working with children of primary school age (4 to 12 years) was conducted. This analysis denoted a statistically significant difference in the *harmful tools category*, in which professionals indicated substantially more possibilities for older children (t(57) = −2.03, *p* < 0.5).

Another significant outcome was in the comparison between respondents working in childcare (*n* = 32) and those respondents working in primary education (*n* = 26). Significant differences between both groups of professionals were found in *harmful tools* and *dangerous elements*, in which professionals from primary education perceived more possibilities than from childcare (t(56) = −2.30, resp. −1.93, *p* < 0.5).

Part two: attitudes

The influencing factors derived from the model and the pilot study combined are cultural aspects, external regulatory factors, parental relationship, personal attitudes, constructs of children, opinion of colleagues, opportunities in the play environment, knowledge of the playing child, pedagogical framework and organizational protocols. Professionals have ranked these factors from 1 to 10, where 1 pertained to the most influencing factor, whereas 10 the least influencing factor. Data were used as multiple answers and frequency tables were utilized. As the middle category is known to be less valid and reliable (test–retest), analyses were performed for the most important (counted value 1) factors, the second most important factor (counting value 2) and the third most important factor (counting value 3). The least important influencing factors were analysed as well (counting value 10).

As Table 3.2 demonstrates, a strong rank order is not evident: the mean of the most important factor is not close to 1, whereas the least important factor's mean is not close to 10. Most of the respondents believed that their own knowledge of

Table 3.2. Ranking influencing factors.

Ranking factors	Mean (lower is better)
The playing child	4.59 (Most influencing)
Pedagogical framework	4.75
Play environment	4.85
Organization protocols	4.96
Constructs of children*	5.00
Parental*	5.41
Personal*	5.77
Regulatory*	5.79
Opinion colleagues	6.86
Cultural*	7.02 (Least influencing)

*: factors derived from the model (Van Rooijen & Newstead, 2016)

the playing child was the strongest influencer (ranking first) of their behaviour towards risky play (*n* = 17, 23.9% first ranking), followed by the organizational rules and protocols (*n* = 10, 14.1% first ranking) and external influences (*n* = 9, 12.7%, first ranking). The analysis of the second most important influencing factor confirmed these results. Fourteen respondents (19.7%) ranked own insight in the playing child in second place; by contrast, nine respondents (12.7%) ranked external rules and protocols in second place.

When we analysed the third ranking order, 12 respondents ranked their own insights in the playing child (16.9%), but most of the respondents ranked the possibilities of the playing environment as the third most important influencing factor (*n* = 14, 18.3%).

Finally, we evaluated the factors that were perceived as the least important influences. The outcomes were clear: neither the culture of risk avoidance was believed to be very influential (*n* = 25, 35.2%) nor was the opinion of colleagues (*n* = 18, 25.4%).

Further exploration did not indicate any differences between groups, such as age of children and childcare/education.

Part three: opinions

Analysis of the responses from the 48 participants identified key issues regarding opportunities in and barriers to supporting children's risk-taking in play. The

results were clustered in the same order as the questions that were presented to the respondents.

Opinion on children's risky play

Almost all of the respondents positively value the opportunities that risky play delivers for children. Two elements that are deemed to be the most important are: they have to learn by themselves and they have to perform this activity through experience, herein understanding what children are capable of doing and the abilities that they are missing. The explanation for this appreciation is interlinked to children's healthy development and is pronounced in six distinct categories: discovering boundaries, daring and being able, estimating risks as risk is part of life, developing self-confidence and self-dependence, improvement of social interaction and development of creativity and solving capabilities.

In their positive evaluation of children's risky play, the respondents simultaneously identify some hindrances. These hindrances largely pertain to Health Authority safety regulations and the concerns of their pupils' parents. The respondents subsequently experience personal barriers in their approach to risky play practice. These barriers are related to feelings of tension, even fear and doubt on when to intervene.

The necessity to establish a balance between letting children take risks versus fulfilling the requirement for careful supervision also emerged in the respondents' answers. Age-appropriate risk-taking, tuning in on the individual child as well as assessing acceptable risks are elements that could support this finding.

Positive and negative aspects of children's risky play

Coding the positive aspects of risky play generates five distinguishable categories. First, children learn about their limitations by daring and doing. Second, children grow and develop self-esteem and self-confidence, which can cultivate their resilience. Third, they learn to take physical risks in their play by assessing these risks. Fourth, the value of learning by doing and discovering new experiences is mentioned. Finally, the positive influence of social interaction on children's personal development that comes with risky play reveals itself in the analysis as a positive connotation.

The negative facets of risk-taking in play can be distinguished in three different elements. The most prevalent is the possibility of an accident causing injuries that range from common and specific pain to serious harm. Fear for the dangers that can hurt children hereby arises. Another negative aspect is that children

may be unable to oversee the risk or overestimate themselves while engaging in risky play. This negative factor goes along with the supervisor who experiences difficulty in guarding these boundaries for children, resulting in the possible approval of unacceptable risk. Finally, the consequences for others are mentioned: risky play can have undesirable effects on other children in their play and parents can address the organization, which can trigger the loss of clientele.

Dilemmas towards children's risky play

In articulating the dilemmas that the respondents encounter, they indicated mostly barriers in their working environment. Eleven respondents who state a distinct dilemma place their positive attitude on risky play and what this attitude delivers to children against the various restrictions that they experience. Overall, five categories of barriers are differentiated from the data: (1) regulations, protocols and policy from the respondents' organizations and the Health Authority; (2) overprotective and anxious parents for injuries and dirty/damaged clothing; (3) colleagues with different opinions or characteristics, thus causing difficulty in reaching an agreement; (4) respondents' own concerns about their attitude towards risky play and how to bring this attitude in practice; and (5) the differentiation of groups and individual children who require a careful approach to supervision.

Factors that help to develop a balanced attitude towards children's risky play

The themes emerging from what the respondents need in their approach towards children's risk-taking in play are categorized from two viewpoints. The first perspective focuses on the factors that are important in supporting professionals, which are displayed in the rank of presence in the data. The second standpoint highlights the actions that professionals expect from stakeholders, which are present in their working environment.

The beneficial factors from the most frequently mentioned to the least frequently mentioned by the respondents are as follows:

(1) Professionals need insight into and experience with the risky play of children.

(2) Regulation authorities have to be less strict and more generous in offering additional opportunities for risky play in directives.

(3) Parents can be provided with more insights into the value of risky play to reach agreement on this matter.

(4) Children can be developed into more self-reliant individuals by offering them more opportunities to manage risk and uncertainty in their play.

(5) Colleagues, with whom the subject of risky play has to be discussed, to gain their moral support.

(6) The outdoor environment requires additional risky play opportunities.

(7) The childcare organizations need to include risky play in their pedagogical guidelines.

(8) Other factors should be considered, such as attention to risky play in education and research, availability of background information, attitude of society and financial support for outdoor risk-taking in play facilities.

The actions towards risky play that are useful for professionals are as follows:
- *making their own decisions* in daily risky play practice
- *making arrangements* with colleagues and parents
- *giving consent* for risky play activities by parents and health authority organizations
- *endorsing the importance* of risky play by colleagues and parents

The first element—professionals' need to be able to make their own decisions—emerged strongly in the data. The respondents primarily mentioned the necessity to gain experience in making their own judgements on risky play situations. Furthermore, they considered multiple possibilities for guiding children, ranging from 'nearby' to 'from a distance'. Finally, professionals preferred to encounter individual children in their competency while focusing on the needs of the group under their care. However, the respondents also concluded that they required instruments to be able to make their own decisions. These instruments include tools for assessing risks, supervising risky play and guiding individual children in a group, thus supporting children's risk-taking in play more autonomously.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study is to examine professionals' attitudes towards risky play in Dutch childcare settings. Professionals' ranking of influencing factors and open-ended responses were interpreted using Van Rooijen and Newstead's model (Van Rooijen & Newstead, 2016) of influencing factors. The results highlight the importance of different influencing factors to Dutch childcare professionals' perceptions of children's risky play. Results from the ranking of various influencing factors indicate that professionals, as a group, encounter difficulty in differentiating between potential barriers that they experience in facilitating risky play. The differences in responses between ranking and open-ended responses are noteworthy. One possible explanation is based on a methodological

argument: The ranking procedure compels respondents to consider options that may not be readily apparent to them. In doing so, it may also contribute to their experience of being unable to realize changes by themselves. The discrepancy between ranking and open-ended questions can also be explained more theoretically, namely in the context of the model by Van Rooijen and Newstead (2016), which follows Bronfenbrenner's (1979) approach for examining influences that are close to an individual (proximal) or further away from an individual (distal). Professionals may perceive these influences as equal to their span of control, as they have more possibilities to change the nearby factors such as their own constructs of children compared with the distant aspects such as cultural beliefs. Based on the current findings, the open-ended questions apparently elicit a discussion of proximal factors that professionals can control more easily; yet as a group, professionals view the distal factors as highly influential.

Comparing the results in the Dutch childcare context to the model of influencing factors

The model of influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play (Van Rooijen & Newstead, 2016) was based on international research; thus, the current study examined its applicability in Dutch contexts. In the model, cultural aspects are depicted as the most distant context in which professionals are acting, influenced by the societal expectations of supervising risk in children's play. Interestingly, cultural factors rank as the least influencing factor for Dutch professionals. Moreover, in the qualitative part, cultural factors were scarcely mentioned as a barrier in professional practice. This finding could denote that childcare professionals do not experience a risk avoidance culture. It also suggests that Dutch culture towards risky play is less restrictive than the cultures of Anglo-Saxon countries where risk awareness is high and compensation claims are made easily in case an untoward incident occurs. The relative absence of the influence of cultural beliefs on professionals may indicate Dutch culture can be placed closer to the more stress-free attitude towards risky play situations of Scandinavian countries that Sandseter (2014) describes.

The *regulatory influences* included in the model refer to the external rules from health authorities as well as the internal policies of the organizations in which professionals are working. The ranking of influencing factors implies that professionals experience these two factors separately as external regulations may have a noticeably less impact than organizational protocols. However, this distinction is less clear in the analysis of the open-ended questions. Professionals indicate that health authority safety regulations affect them the most negatively in their

possibilities to support risky play in practice; meanwhile, organizational protocols are less frequently mentioned as a barrier.

Parental relationship is positioned in the middle of the model, signifying that the opinion of parents can play an important, but less impactful, role in the development of professional attitudes towards risky play compared to the factors close to the professional. The mid-range ranking of parental influences supported this finding, but open-ended responses implied a higher level of importance. Professionals perceive that the parents are omnipresent in their thinking and acting in terms of decisions on children's risky play activities. Therefore, professionals recognize the substantial importance of engaging parents in collective agreements on the value of risky play and the manner of bringing this approach in practice.
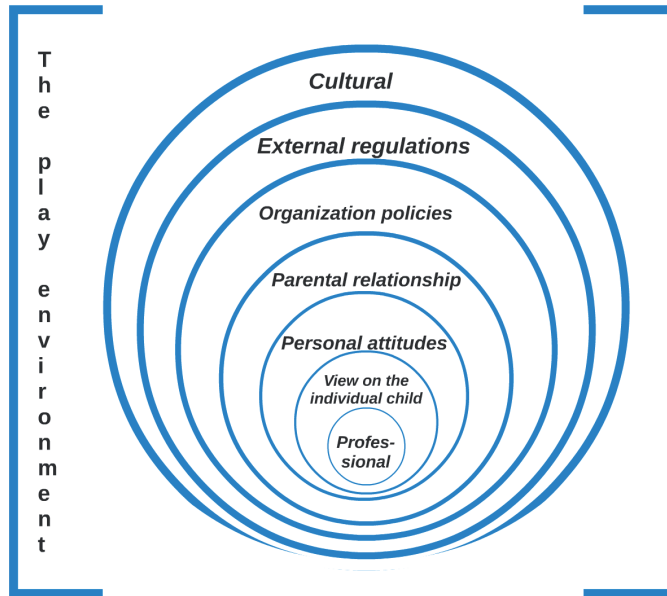
Personal attitudes constitute the next influencing factor from the model. This study finds that the professionals' individual characteristics do not determine their professional attitudes towards risky play. Gaining more insight into the value of risky play and making day-to-day decisions on guiding children helps to develop professional attitudes, including dealing with risk in play to increase the competencies of children.

The professional's *constructs of children* are located in the model closest to the professional. This factor as well as the playing child scored high in the rankings. Professionals acknowledge the significance of risk-taking in play for the children's healthy development. Professionals express the necessity to adjust their supervision on risky play to the needs of the individual children, which could indicate their awareness of the vulnerability and resilience of children.

The *outdoor play environment* and the *opinion of colleagues* were not included in the model and appeared to influence professional attitudes. Within the Dutch context, professionals acknowledge the opportunities for children under their care to experience *high speed* and *height*, which are the most common play types in child care outdoor play spaces. However, the five-point scale indicated that professionals perceive children's overall risky play opportunities to be inadequate. Further confirmation of this view arose from the qualitative outcomes in which professionals expressed a need for more risky play opportunities in outdoor environments. The pilot study suggested that colleagues in professional organizations could play an important role for two reasons. First, people have to collaborate in day-to-day practices. Second, the force of social pressure by peers is evident. However, based on the results, this factor seems to play no significant role.

Influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play: adjustment for Dutch childcare contexts

T h e p l a y e n v i r o n m e n t

Cultural

External regulations

Organization policies

Parental relationship

Personal attitudes

View on the individual child

Professional

3

Figure 3.2. Adjusted model

Adjustment of the model based on the Dutch contextual study

As a result of a pilot study among Dutch practitioner respondents, the question-naire included five additional factors. With reference to the outcomes, we suggest an adjustment of the model, which can be of value for international studies, including Dutch contextual studies (see Figure 3.2). The designated influences *constructs of children* and *the playing child* seem evenly important, and therefore can be recognized as confounding concepts. We recommend conceptualizing both in one factor, *view on the individual child*, revealing the significance of the professional understanding of children. A critical notion is that the view on children is changeable, and the professionals' attitudes can become less important than their observations of the needs of individual children. The results suggest that Dutch professionals find a high degree of importance in the differentiation between the individual needs of children in their care; in doing so, they broaden their own perspective of the capabilities of children, thus adjusting their attitudes towards risky play. The *regulatory factors* from the original model are divided into external factors, from legal health and safety organization, and internal factors such as organizational protocols and pedagogical policies. Further research is necessary to articulate the manner by which these factors influence professionals separately and are inter-related to each other. Thus, we propose

to distinguish between *external regulations* and *organizational policies*. The *play environment* is perceived as a conditional factor for the possibilities of experiencing risky play: no risky environment, no risky play. This concept connects to the limitations that a 'poor outdoor environment' offers, thus minimizing risk-taking in play (Little & Wyver, 2008, p. 38). Hence, we suggest the identification of the play environment as an elementary influence and the starting point for studying the other elements; therefore, in the model, we position the play environment next to the inter-related factors.

Limitations of the study

The results of this study should be considered within the context of its limitations. The number of respondents involved in this study was 101, and 59 completed the entire questionnaire. Generalization from these results should be regarded cautiously as some bias may have emerged among the respondents sampled. For example, the likelihood that respondents with an interest in risky play may have been greater and consequently are more open-minded towards the subject could have resulted in their over-representation. However, the objective of this study is not to generalize outcomes but to gain further insight into influencing factors. Use of open-ended questions allowed professionals to express views about the theme of risky play that may not be captured by the primary quantitative questionnaire. Because the open-ended questions provided comparable results and insights into the particular influences that can be discerned, this study can offer a clearer understanding of professional attitudes. Moreover, the working environment of the respondents varies across child-related settings. As the possibilities of risky play depend on this setting, an overall conclusion cannot be derived. However, in the analysis of the open-ended questions, only childcare professionals were included, thus providing a focused examination of this sector.

Conclusion

The intent of this paper was to explore the influencing factors on the professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play in Dutch childcare contexts. Interest in risky play in the Netherlands is growing, whereas knowledge about barriers and facilitators becomes more important. The use of the model of influencing factors in international contexts can provide advanced insight. Although our study has limitations, we present the inter-related factors in an adjustment of the Van Rooijen and Newstead model, which can be useful for further research in Dutch contexts. The adjusted model could be valuable for understanding the attitudes towards risky play for other countries as well.

The results of this study suggest that professionals themselves are aware of the multitude of factors that influence their attitude towards and practice of risky play activities of children in their care: individual aspects (personal and professional) include the organization, parents, children and stakeholders that represent society. Professionals define many barriers in their work on facilitating children's risky outdoor play, which they are unable to change by themselves. However, they also indicate the requirements for gaining the highly needed autonomy in their practice and the method through which children can benefit from additional risky play possibilities.

This study may be a valuable contribution to the research on risky play and the factors that influence the professionals' attitudes towards facilitating such play. It explores the influencing factors in the Dutch context and offers profound insight into professional barriers to children's risk-taking in play. Therefore, this study can be used in professional development of Dutch childcare staff to enhance their attitudes and practice on challenging and risky play. However, in cases where childcare professionals may experience similar barriers at face value, these hurdles may vary between different childcare settings, according to the pedagogic framework of the organization, parental attitudes or trust in workers. Further research could ascertain the extent to which such factors are influencing professionals in various childcare contexts.

Similarly, further research could examine the manner by which professionals in childcare and other child sectors can be equipped to, on the one hand, provide children with opportunities for risky play and, on the other hand, supply them with tools for reframing hindrances in their working environment such as parents, organizational barriers and external regulations. Further international research will be useful to identify the predictive power of the model in a range of cultural contexts and determine whether the model can be applied to identify the key factors that may be functioning as barriers to children's risk-taking in play.

Note

1. http://www.vsnu.nl/files/documenten/Domeinen/Onderzoek/The_Netherlands_ Code%20of_Conduct_for_ Academic_Practice_2004_(version2014).pdf.

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CHAPTER 4

A professionalisation program for children's risk-taking in play in childcare contexts: Moral friction on developing attitudes and collegial expectations

Abstract

Interest in the professionalisation of childcare workers is growing, as the responsibility for children's upbringing and development is extended from the family area to early childhood education and care institutions. This sector is subject to intensified guidelines, where the overprotective tendency in society towards children has resulted in diminished possibilities to engage in risky play. This creates dilemmas for professionals in making clear decisions, balancing between protection and facilitating challenging play situations. This paper investigates the impact of a professional development programme developed and delivered by the main author on facilitating children's risky play in seven Dutch afterschool childcare settings. A qualitative study was conducted to examine moral values and dilemmas emerging in this context. Moral frictions centred around 'safety and autonomy' in the work with children, and 'unity and diversity' in collaborating with colleagues.

Keywords: ECEC professionalism; risky play; normative professionalisation; moral dilemmas; qualitative research

Introduction

The last decade shows an extensive expansion of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector and an increasing political regulation of these settings (Oberhuemer, 2005). One domain that is subject to intensified guidelines and policy regulations is the safety and protection of children in structured environments such as day care and after-school childcare. Research has indicated that children's chances to engage in risky play in ECEC settings is frequently considered to be limited (Brussoni et al., 2015). The overprotective tendency in society towards children has led to intensified adult supervision on children's free time, including childcare (Wyver, Tranter, Naughton, Little, Sandseter, & Bundy, 2010). A possible reason is that children in the past decades were provided with increased 'sentimental value', thus enhancing fear-driven and overprotective thinking. De Visscher articulated this rationale as the 'big bad wolf syndrome' in which unpredictable danger exists in children's play environment (De Visscher, 2008, p. 75). Therefore, children should grow up in protected areas such as school and childcare.

However, in the past decades interest in the consequences of safety regulations has grown in research and public debate internationally. The increase in risk minimisation protocols, especially in indoor and outdoor play opportunities, may guarantee children's safety; however, it has negative consequences on children's physical and emotional wellbeing in the long term (Wyver, Bundy, Naughton, Tranter, Sandseter, & Ragen, 2010). Sandseter elucidated the term 'risky play' to indicate that which is lost in an overprotective society and defined it as the combination of 'thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury'. She also distinguished risky play into six categories, namely great heights, high speed, rough and tumble play, harmful tools, dangerous elements and disappearing or getting lost (Sandseter, 2007/2009, p. 4). Several studies provide evidence for the benefits of children's natural propensity towards risky play and their capability of taking and managing risks (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012; Tremblay et al., 2015; Sandseter, Little, Ball, Eager, & Brussoni, 2017). Engaging with risk enhances children's resilience, self-confidence and risk competence (Rutter, 2006; Lavrysen et al., 2017; Sandseter et al., 2017). Furthermore, in the 'right to play' treaty risk and challenge are considered as essential components of children's play but require boosting of the level of monitoring by professionals (UNCRC, 2013). This is also the meaning of the Pedagogical Framework Child Centres 4–13 years (Schreuder, Boogaard, Fukkink & Hoex, 2011) which stresses that children 'who are overly protected and helped do not get the opportunity to estimate and avoid risks. However, overestimating children and letting go with-

out assistance is also not the right way' (p. 40). For childcare organisations, this requisite implies the provision of an environment that is simultaneously 'safe and challenging'. Although this new policy argues for a more liberal approach towards risk-taking in play, it also raises questions on how 'safe' *and* 'challenging' or 'risks' *and* 'health' can be simultaneously put into practice.

Hence, professional workers are expected to act between the duty to protect children and the responsibility to provide beneficial risky play environments. This task is emphasized in early childhood education and care literature, stating that professionals finding the right balance between safety and challenging opportunities is crucial, as their negative attitudes can have detrimental consequences on a child's development (Waite, Huggins, & Wickett, 2014). Consequently, interest in the professionalisation of childcare workers is growing, because of their increasingly complex responsibility for children's upbringing and development.

The trend of overprotecting children creates dilemmas for childcare professionals in making clear decisions and achieving a balance between safety and the facilitation of challenging play situations (Little, Sandseter, & Wyver, 2012). This is evident in day-to-day practice where professionals intend to act spontaneously and autonomously towards children but are restricted by factors beyond their control. A recent survey of Dutch childcare professionals reveals that the possibilities of engaging risk in their play activities for children in childcare settings are limited and that professionals experience barriers to provide challenging opportunities for children in their care (Van Rooijen et al., 2019). These barriers include personal obstacles and external factors in the environment, such as organisational policies, and resistance of parents. Therefore, childcare professionals should be equipped to address the constraints that they experience in supporting children in their care (Van Rooijen & Newstead, 2016). To support childcare professionals in dealing with these dilemmas and constraints, a professionalisation programme was developed to introduce and facilitate risky play in after-school childcare contexts in The Netherlands. This programme aims to develop the awareness of the benefits of and obstacles to risky play; the ability to discuss these factors with colleagues, parents and other stakeholders; and to deal with conflicting interests and barriers in regulation and the organisation. This article focuses on the difficulties that the programme participants reported and what they learned about tackling the dilemmas of children's risky play. First, it outlines the theoretical perspectives on ECEC professional development and the factors influencing the professionals' attitudes. Second, the article describes the professional development programme and the qualitative research approach. Third, it presents the results from the analysis. Finally, conclusions are

drawn about the learning and development of childcare professionals on this programme and recommendations are made for future professional development programmes on facilitating children's risky play.

Early childhood education and care professional development and attitudes towards risky play

In the past decades, the field of childcare encountered an increase in state-controlled policies on the content and outcomes of children's development (Oberhuemer, 2005), resulting in frameworks and regulations for the quality of professional work. A framework can be useful for supporting professional practice and improving the status of the work in the childcare sector. However, detailed frameworks can undermine professional autonomy and judgment and increase control and accountability (Woodrow, 2004). The bottom line is that professionals' own understanding of the value of children's play and learning fades into the background, which may limit the individual development of children. Similarly, fixed policy and curriculum inadequately support the context within which childcare professionals work, where they have to consider multiple opinions, regulations and circumstances that affect their actions. Hence, professionals need to be encouraged to reflect on their personal and professional views, preferably in a collaborative manner. In particular, they need 'to be encouraged to see themselves as interpreters and not as mere implementers of curricular frameworks' (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 12).

Ongoing research stresses the importance of professionalisation in the early childhood education and care sector, incorporating the perspectives of childcare professionals to develop new standards (Havnes, 2018). A paradigm is suggested in this debate, which embraces 'openness and uncertainty', relating to the day-to-day work of childcare professionals and creating an understanding of the differences between professionals (Urban, 2008). Recent studies have revealed the factors that affect the professionals' practice and attitude towards risky play (Bundy, Tranter, Naughton, Wyver, & Luckett, 2009; Little & Sweller, 2015). Van Rooijen and Newstead (2016) have integrated these influencing factors into a model based on the international literature and further elaborated the model in Dutch childcare contexts on the basis of a survey among professionals (Van Rooijen et al. 2019). The model includes the professionals' views on the individual children, personal attitudes, parental relationship, organisational policies, external regulations and cultural influences. The professional is placed at the centre, with influencing factors that range from close to more distant. The profes-

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sionals' perspectives on individual children refer to their evaluation of children as vulnerable or resilient, and everything in between. The personal attitudes of professionals pertain to character, for example a thrill-seeking tendency or physical energy level. The parents' views and styles are involved because professionals are responsible for their children. The issue focuses on whether parents are overprotective of their children or are confident of the professional supervision of risky play. The childcare organisation with its protocols, pedagogical view and policy is an influencing factor as well. Furthermore, safety inspections and other regulations affect professional attitudes and behaviours. Finally, societal and cultural influences likewise exist, which may differ from country to country.

The notion of 'normative professionalisation' can elucidate these influences, which entails a demand for reflection on moral values, issues and dilemmas in professional work and the intention to learn from all these considerations (Jacobs et al., 2008; Ewijk & Kunneman, 2013). Normative professionalisation also involves both a critique of technical and instrumental professionalism and an answer to de-professionalisation by reducing professional autonomy and neglect of professional values in society. To start with the latter, the American sociologist Freidson (2001) argues the diagnosis that 'good work' is under pressure. He suggests that professions consist of an abstract moral 'core' and goal, or humanitarian values such as 'health', 'justice' and 'equality'. In the case of pedagogical work, the main professional value could be child 'development' or 'well-being'. The theoretical framework of Freidson (2001) constitutes three logics. The first logic is professionalism, which connotes the values and goals, knowledge and skills that are typical for the profession. The second logic of managerialism refers to steering and control mechanisms that are created by legislation and regulation, funding and institutional and organisational protocols. The third logic is consumerism, which pertains to the needs, motives and interests of clients, citizens and customers who require social, educational and health services. Professionals work within the context of institutional regulations and procedures (managerialism) and customer demands, needs and motives (consumerism). These aspects may conflict with professional and personal values and trigger moral questions and dilemmas about 'what should be done and how' (Freidson, 2001). Moral issues and dilemmas arise within a context of different standards that influence pedagogical work. The previously outlined model of influences can be linked to the tension between the logics that Freidson proposes. The personal values, beliefs and attitudes of professionals towards risky play may differ from the parents' views, professional and organisational standards and societal norms, causing the professional practice to become complex and contradictory.

Following this line of argument, professional work can only partly be based on scientific knowledge, facts and tools, on instrumental professionalism. Urban (2008) has argued that the work of educational professionals is characterised by relationality, co-construction, openness and uncertainty; at the same time, they belong to a professional system that remains guided by hierarchical approaches to knowledge development in which scientific evidence determines how 'good practice' looks. This grounding is necessary but insufficient for professional work, as has been argued by Schön (1983):

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing "messes" incapable of technical solution. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, however their great interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society, while in the swamp there are problems of greatest human concern. (p. 42)

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Normative professionalisation therefore pertains to an attempt to perform good work within the messiness of daily practice without clear guidance or the unequivocal evidence of effective actions. It can be understood as becoming aware of the force field of different values, normative frames and standards in practice and as a continuous learning process in which the question of 'what is good acting' in this particular situation is central. A critical dialogue with others (parents, team leaders and colleagues) is key in this learning (Urban, 2008; Jacobs, 2010). It requires relational competence and relational agency (Edwards, 2010) to be able to work within a setting with different stakeholders who all hold their own values and perspectives. The recently introduced concept of 'amor complexitatis' (Kunneman, 2018) refers to the 'love' of complexity and uncertainty in professional work, including the inconsistencies and contradictions within the self. Instead of ignoring difficult questions and frictions, normative professionalisation denotes connecting to and exploring them, thereby enabling good work.

Risky play is a highly normative concept and activity, which is favoured by some and opposed by others. After-school childcare professionals who bring risky play into their practice become part of a force field of influences, as previously outlined. These dynamics may cause doubts and tensions in their work or even prompt them to abstain from risky play because of the fear of consequences. In this study we took the perspective of normative professionalisation to learn more about the normativity in play in the ECEC field.

Methodology

The current research focuses on after-school childcare in The Netherlands. We will discuss the research context, research goal and question, the participants, and the data collection and analysis.

Research context

In The Netherlands, no formal educational provision exists until the age of four, when children start with primary education. Childcare facilities consist of day care, or nursery, from birth to four years, and after-school facilities for school-age children between 4 and 12 years old. Early childhood education and care, from birth to eight years, is allocated in day care and after-school care centres. It has an increasingly important place for a strongly growing group of children. In 2018, the country had more than 9,000 locations for out-of-school care and the majority of children use an organisation for after-school childcare, i.e. over 33% of children between 0 and 12 years of age visit some form of childcare (Rijksoverheid, 2018). Professionals working in after-school childcare are named 'pedagogical staff members' (PSM, which abbreviation will be used henceforth for the Dutch context and the research), and they are taught at the intermediate vocational education level. A recent study on the quality of after-school childcare (Fukkink & Boogaard, 2016) reports that based on the judgments of external observers, the quality of after-school childcare in the Netherlands appears to be predominantly adequate to good, especially regarding emotional support by the PSM, indoor and outdoor space and organisation. However, weak parts were also identified, such as the intended stimulation of children's development (see also Jilink & Fukkink, 2016). This has become more complex due to the new legislation that shows a more open-minded approach to risk, highlighting this aspect: 'We learn children to deal with small risks, but protect them against big risks' (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2016, p. 6). Similarly, safety inspection demands that childcare organisations implement policy on supporting children in dealing with minor risks themselves and avoid hazards with major consequences on health and safety (Rijksoverheid, 2019). However, the childcare sector and politicians underscored the need to develop policy that professionalises educators in such a way that they are capable of providing children with challenging learning situations (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2016).

Goal and research questions

The goal of this study was to obtain insights into the impact of a professionalisation programme that aims to enhance the PSM professional competencies in

facilitating risky play, including interacting with relevant stakeholders such as parents, colleagues, children, managers and safety inspectors.

This study sought to answer the following questions: (1) What do PSM find important in their work with children in after-school childcare, especially towards risky play? (professional values); (2) What tensions and dilemmas do PSM encounter in their daily practice of facilitating risky play? (moral frictions); and (3) What moral development do PSM report as being involved in the scheme (moral learning)?

Participants

Ten childcare organisations showed their interest to participate in the research project in response to an open call published in a sectoral journal for childcare organisations and professionals. The main selection criterion was that the organisation could facilitate the whole trajectory of implementing the professionalisation programme for one after-school location and the entire team of professionals, including enabling the introduction of loose parts play for children. Having learned about the time investment, three organisations withdrew which resulted in the participation of seven after-school childcare settings located in different regions of the Netherlands. The settings varied in size and context: some settings combine day care with after-school childcare, whereas others provide only after-school childcare. The participating settings can be characterised as an outdoor setting, a sports childcare, a setting on a farm site, a setting in the accommodation of scouts, a setting in the context of urban low socioeconomic status (SES), one in a village comprising families with high SES and one setting in a regular urban context. Sixty-two professionals (48 female and 14 male) from seven locations participated in the professionalisation programme, ranging from 6 to 16 participants per setting. Three participants were directors of the organisation, 12 were managers who also worked with children and 47 were PSM. The participants ranged in age from 20 years to 62 years ($M = 33.87$, SD 9,83), and they had experience in the childcare sector from 1 to 40 years ($M = 10,98$, SD 7,27). Five participants had university qualifications, not necessarily childcare related, 26 participants had a higher education diploma and 30 had received middle education; the educational attainment of one person was unknown. The settings varied according to the age groups that the participants served; the participating professionals were equally divided in their present work to these groups: 4–7 years, 8–12 years and 4–12 years.

Professionalisation programme

To examine the experiences of PSM, a professionalisation programme was introduced in each setting from February to June 2018. The programme consisted

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of five modules, which were conducted in three sessions with the after-school childcare team and were focused on knowledge, attitude and supervision of risky play. The programme is based on research and theories on risky play and professional and educational development and is characterised by creating a powerful learning environment that enables critical reflection and learning (Mezirow, 1991; Jacobs, 2010). The five building blocks include an introduction on the topic of risky play and influencing factors (knowledge); pedagogical underpinnings of risky play and risk-reframing session, partly aimed at parents and other stakeholders (attitude); facilitation and guidance of risky play, loose parts play, risk-benefit assessment principles, partly focused on management and safety inspection (practice); feedback from experiences with risky play facilitation (reflection); and evaluation of the programme and continuation (implementation).

The sessions were provided for by the first author of this paper, in this way he functioned in a double role as researcher and facilitator of the professional development. The value of this approach is that the researcher could bring in knowledge through which professionals could share their experiences of their practice, known as the 'teaching and learning process' (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Cartmel & Brannelly, 2016). After two sessions, loose parts were introduced in children's play for a six-week period as resources for encouraging risk-taking activities. Loose parts are not toys but are open-ended objects that are capable of providing children with many play possibilities to engage in themselves (Nicholson, 1971; Hyndman et al., 2014; Patte, 2017). A sea container or play shed was filled with items in collaboration with local recycle shops. The items were specifically appropriate for stimulating risk-taking activities according to the risky play categories defined by Sandseter (2007). Crates, ladders and stools provided the possibility of great heights. Rough and tumble play was encouraged by introducing buckets and stretchers, and high speed was stimulated by using buggies and office chairs. Abundant items were available so children could disappear, and cable reels and tree trunks were used for balancing. The experiences of PSM were evaluated in the third session with the professional team.

Data collection and analysis
A qualitative study (Merriam, 1998) was conducted to assess the experiences of PSM with the professionalisation programme. It included a thematic analysis of the PSM perceptions of their development in the trajectory. For this study, 45 semi-structured evaluation forms were filled in by participants who were present at the evaluation sessions in each setting ($n = 45$) after the professionalisation programme had finished. The forms consisted of four questions (What do you feel is important to you in your work? What has changed? What do you

find difficult? What is still needed?) regarding seven topics, namely children and their play; facilitating risky play; participants' own attitude; team's perspective; relationship with the parents; organisational policy and governance; and public health care institution that controls policy and practice in after-school childcare settings. The participants were also asked whether their expectations were fulfilled or what they would have preferred to occur regarding the professionalisation programme, the introduction of loose parts and the research connected to both.

Furthermore, minutes were made of the discussions that the professionals had in the last meeting about the programme, and these minutes were added as data to the evaluation forms. A qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was performed on the professionals' responses. The theoretical framework of normative professionalisation was used for its sensitising concepts, including professional values and moral friction (Jacobs, 2010), relational competence (Edwards, 2010) and *amor complexitatis* (Kunneman, 2018). The analysis was carried out in three steps After 'first reading', getting to know the raw data, the evaluation forms were coded thereby 'reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments' (Creswell, 2007, p. 180). We looked especially at frictions and difficulties mentioned regarding the seven topics, although it was also important to see what topics did not or almost not raise any issues. These are included in the results section and discussed in the last part of this article. The last step was 'axial coding' (Boeije, 2010), whereby the text was read again and subcategories were applied using the theoretical lenses as sensitising concepts. Both authors carried out this analysis separately to provide interdependency, after which the results were compared and agreement was reached about the codes and themes.

Ethical considerations

All participating childcare professionals were informed about the nature, methods and goals of the research at the start of the programme and had the opportunity to ask questions. They gave their consent by signing a form. Furthermore, the childcare organisation, parents and children were informed about the programme and the introduction of loose parts. After the organisation had agreed to participate, the parents were asked for consent for their child's participation in the loose parts play. All the children in the setting were informed about the research goals and the provision of loose parts play. The first author of this paper carried out the professionalisation programme in all settings and collected the data. As this could create a possible conflict of interest, the second author had no interference with the data collection and took the lead in the analysis

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phase. In this way a possible bias of the facilitating researcher is catered for. Moreover, the collaboration between an 'insider' researcher-facilitator and an 'external' researcher enhanced the interpretation of the data from both practice and theory. Data have been safely kept according to the latest legislation and the data management policies of the university. Moreover, the names of individuals and settings in the transcripts have been anonymised to uphold the participants' privacy.

Results: professional development and attitude towards risk-taking in play

The results of the analysis are presented along the three research questions on the values that professionals adhere to in their work with children, the moral friction they experience in facilitating risky play and the lessons learned from the professionalisation programme.

Professional values in after-school childcare

Although the respondents were asked about their values towards specifically risky play, they clearly broadened this aspect by identifying the elements they find important for children in their care as a whole. 'Pleasure', or the sense of enjoyment that children experience, turned out to be the dominant value for professionals. It was closely connected to 'challenge', 'discovering', 'experiencing' and risk-taking. Safety was also mentioned alongside other values such as 'freedom of choice', 'using fantasy', 'togetherness' and broad development. With the introduction of loose parts, the professionals observed the emergence of various modes of play: more children went outdoors, more joint play occurred, play with new play friends took place, and more communication between children transpired. However, when discussing the risky play programme, some of these values clearly caused friction for the professionals as they had to decide on their actions.

Friction between the values of safety and autonomy

The main friction mentioned by nearly all the participants was the dilemma about 'when to let go and when to intervene'. This dilemma was expressed in statements of difficulties such as 'finding a balance between an acceptable risk level and a child's freedom' (R.) and 'finding a good balance between steering during play and letting children go' (E.). Interestingly, many participants spoke about 'finding a balance' instead of deciding on the right action. When explaining

these difficulties, they referred to their struggle to have trust in the children's capacities to assess risks:

> [It] is difficult to have confidence in the children, their self-reliance, and their own insight [..] If it seems "really" dangerous in my eyes, to say nothing; to allow them to "experience" the risks. (M.)

Other participants felt more convinced of the children's abilities to push their own limits or observed children more closely 'to see if [they are] aware of something dangerous or risky' (T.). Nevertheless, the professionals felt they needed to push their own boundaries to shift their perspective from risk to play, for example 'I sometimes see hazards rather than play type' (Ev.) and 'I should be more daring' (I.). Next to tensions in the relationship with the children, the professionals experienced friction at the intrapersonal level between the values of safety and autonomy.

Compared to the substantial expressions of difficulties towards children's supervision and collaboration with colleagues, PSM reported few frictions on their relationship with parents, towards their organisation and safety institutions. According to them, parents showed low involvement towards the increased possibilities for children's risky play: '[they] ask few questions, want to pick up their children rapidly, show no interest' (T.). PSM experienced overall positive reactions by parents who are interested in the programme: 'parents see that their children are enthusiastic, and with some explanation about the project parents also judge it as super' (Ma). Regarding the organisation they felt that the organisational policies should connect more to the projects novel play possibilities, and managers should trust their professionalism. However, they also experienced that the project already helped to change practice from bottom-up: 'through implementing the project our procedures in daily practice are softened' (A.). PSM only scarcely mentioned the impact of safety inspection institutions, most of them reported 'no pressure'.

Friction between the values of unity and diversity

The second major friction involved the professionals' relationship with their peers. These PSM expressed the importance of drawing one line within the professional team to reach alignment on the issue of risky play by adopting the same attitude towards it within the group: 'We need shared norms from which we will work' (A.); and 'Differences in opinions are difficult, and we should continue to discuss them so that we become aligned' (T.). Other participants mentioned their wish of 'being equal-tuned' and 'finding a middle ground in the team' (H.). How-

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ever, some participants acknowledged the need to leave their comfort zone in the dialogue and cultivate an openness to the differences between colleagues: 'We need to move towards each other but with respect for everyone's boundaries' (A.).

Moral learning and development

Regarding their professional learning and development, the participants mentioned the importance of critical dialogue about values and actions with colleagues in developing their own attitudes towards risky play: 'You discuss certain situations and examples and take a critical look at your own attitude through insight from others and discussing yourself' (M.). Some professionals already reported positive changes within their team, including strengthened collaboration, intensified consultation, enhanced sense of connection and improved communication. They felt that they influenced one another positively in terms of their attitudes towards risky play. Additionally, PSM reported an adjustment not only in attitude but also in behaviour. They found themselves observing more and taking a slightly distant position without intervening whenever possible: 'I let the child be freer, [I] will indicate less quickly that something is dangerous or not' (R.); and ' [I] do not intervene quickly, only where necessary' (Am.). Moreover, PSM mentioned that they increased their self-reflection and modified their intrapersonal views: 'I also seek out [setting] boundaries within myself' (An.); 'Wondering, asking questions' (C.); '[I engage in] thinking: what is my feeling and how bad is this?' (S.); and 'I have adjusted my own limits' (A.).

To conclude, PSM reported more positive values around children's risk-taking play after the professional development programme and observed improved play experiences through the introduction of loose parts. However, moral friction caused tensions and difficulties for professionals on the programme; it centred on 'safety and autonomy' in their work with children and 'unity and diversity' in collaborating with colleagues. An examination of the learning and development that the PSM reported also uncovered these two lines and an extension of the 'limits within self'. However, as stated earlier neither a major friction nor a development during the programme emerged in the relationships with other stakeholders such as the parents and the organisation. The next section discusses these findings.

Discussion

In this section we discuss the findings regarding the moral values and frictions that PSM encountered, and their professional learning and development through the programme.

Professional values and dealing with moral friction

One of the goals of this study was to find out what moral frictions the PSM encounter and in what kind of relationships: with children, colleagues, parents or the organisation. It was found that the PSM reported a vast array of values attached to their work with children. An interesting result was that some of these values cause friction, as both autonomy and safety is regarded as important for children. This raises dilemmas as to what value needs to be dominant in what situation or for what child. Also within the relationship with colleagues, PSM were struggling with the question of diversity: is it allowed for professionals to employ different values in working with children or should they draw one line? For the relationship with parents and the organisation, PSM did not mention any moral frictions. This is in contrast to what we expected, based on Freidson's theory (2001) that places weight on the contradictions between the different logics of professionalism, consumerism and managerialism. In other words, the current study did not find evidence for friction caused by parents (consumerism) or the organisation (managerialism). The professionals viewed that the organisational policy had not moved yet with the development towards risky play and that parents could exhibit increased involvement. Nevertheless, they did not experience any major friction between the logics. Interestingly, the messiness of practice in childhood care is caused by moral friction *within* the professional logic of childhood care. The conflict occurred between different professional values: pleasure and experiencing, which are important for the freedom and autonomy of the child on the one hand and safety on the other hand. Both values are required for a healthy child development, but they also create uncertainty among PSM about 'how to act' and conduct 'good work'.

It was found that most PSM deal with these diverse and contradicting professional values by 'achieving a balance'. In the same vain, they are collaborating within the team by attempting to 'find a middle ground'. This way of coping with moral frictions fits in with Dutch policy that encompasses a balanced approach between safety and challenge. Moreover, it might be culturally grounded in the '*poldermodel*', an acclaimed Dutch version of consensus decision-making in social policy in which all sides or parties constantly have to gain some advantage. However, this concept disregards the ⬚messy⬚ practice of PSM. Guiding children

in risky play is not a simple weighing of benefits and risks but a split-second decision that is based on the perceived abilities of the individual child, the attitudes of PSM and the perceived views of other relevant stakeholders, the work culture in the organisation and other factors, which all are compressed in the decision to intervene or not at a specific moment in play. Schön (1983) refers to this approach as 'reflection-in-action'. Moreover, reflection-on-action among PSM in a critical dialogue is limited. These PSM recognize the importance of collaboration and communication about values and differences within the team. However, in current team collaboration, most PSM strive to align views and values or find a middle ground on which to act and feel the same about risky play.

Moral learning and development of PSM

The results raise the question whether the programme has enabled PSM to sufficiently deal with the messiness of after-school childcare work. Normative professionalisation does not entail a substantial balancing of different values but tackles the complexity and uniqueness of persons – children, PSM, parents, managers, policymakers – and situations. This premise is expressed by the concept *of amor complexitatis* (Kunneman, 2018), which refers to the 'love' of complexity and uncertainty, including inconsistencies and contradictions within self. Urban (2008) characterised early childhood education and care as a 'messy business' because all the stakeholders, including children, professionals and parents, have their individual and often opposing interests. He described early childhood education and care practice as 'a constant co-construction – and therefore necessarily open and undeterminable' (p. 144) because outcomes unavoidably arise from the interactions between the professional and the child, in multifaceted socio-ecologic contexts. Hence, PSM might be better supported by an approach in their work that values this disarrayed practice, connecting to their professional understanding of children and their play. This idea is also supported by the concept of pedagogical sensitivity, which pertains to doing the right thing for this child in this situation. It is about tactful action as 'an immediate involvement in situations where I must instantaneously respond, as a whole person, to unexpected and unpredictable situations' (Van Manen, 1991, p. 519). The implications for future professionalisation programmes include ensuring the programmes' support for PSM to increase their confidence in dealing with uncertainties instead of attempting to find a new ground or rule to guide their practice. Collaboration with colleagues – and possibly also parents and managers – subsequently entails engaging in a dialogue about differences and learning from these differences; and not finding a 'middle ground' but a common ground in which these differences are respected.

Influencing factors on professional attitudes towards children's risk-taking in play

The outcomes of this study can be related to the model of influencing factors that affect the professionals' practice and attitude towards risky play (Van Rooijen & Newstead, 2016; Van Rooijen et al., 2019) and which links in with the different logics Freidson (2001) proposes. The model includes conflicting pressures from cultural and regulatory factors, organisational policies, parental concerns, personal factors and the professionals' views on the individual child. The professionalisation programme seems to have modified the last two factors and apparently introduced a new factor, that is, the influence of professional peers.

The programme impacted upon the values and norms of childcare professionals, which transformed their attitudes positively towards risky play as well as changed their views on children's risk competences. However, the findings were based on the respondents' self-assessments, which could provide some bias about attitudes towards risk-taking in play especially since the first author and facilitator of the programme was pro-risky play. A study utilising interviews by an external researcher for generating data is likely to provide more insight in professional beliefs. Moreover, the participating childcare organisations were interested in the subject of children's risky play and will have advertised the programme in a positive way to its PSM, which could have contributed to the positive outcomes.

The outcomes also indicated that the opinion of colleagues is highly relevant and that acknowledging and discussing differences between childcare professionals in their attitude towards risky play seems crucial for effectively fostering team collaboration and enhancing the awareness of the diversity of children's needs instead of setting one standard.

Furthermore, a 'loop of risky play change' can be discerned, as the risky play of children affects professional attitudes, which consequently influences the professional's intervention, thereby resulting in more autonomous play, among other outcomes. This idea is connected to the experiential learning that Kolb has described, which introduces a cyclic process of professional development (Kolb, 1984). The model of influencing factors is presented as linear, in which all the influences are directed towards the attitudes of professionals. The qualitative analysis indicates a more dynamic and complex process. Urban (2008) also concludes that the factors that determine early childhood education and care practice situations are 'all but static' and one-sided, and they require value-based decision and experience. In this manner, the professional development

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programme's most important value is its potential for creating a self-sustaining cycle of risky play and concomitant professional attitudes.

Conclusion

Exploring the impact of a professional development programme on the professional attitudes and learning towards facilitating risky play in after-school childcare settings reveals that ECEC professionals experience tension around safety and autonomy in their work with children, as well as unity and diversity in collaborating with colleagues. Although new policies are developed towards a more liberal approach to risk-taking in play, they can also create new dilemmas for professionals, as the mantra 'safe *and* challenging' or 'risks *and* health' can be perceived as a *contradictio in terminis*. The professional development programme contributed to the positive attitude of ECEC professionals and the increased collaboration and dialogue within the team.

However, the study also revealed that professionals experience engaging in risky play and addressing the uncertainty that comes with that as challenging. A PSM described the programme as a 'voyage of discovery both for the children and for myself'. This depiction indicates that risky play provides both children and professionals with novel insights and new experiences. Further research should focus on boosting the confidence of ECEC professionals to deal with uncertainties and make their own decisions in their practice, appreciated by colleagues, in favour of children's experiences in risk-taking play.

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CHAPTER 5

"It is scary, but then I just do it anyway":
Children's experiences and concerns about risk and
challenge during loose parts play

Abstract

Children's risky play opportunities depend on supervising adults' attitudes and the play environment. The possibilities to engage in risk-taking outdoor play for children have seriously decreased over the last few decades, due to safety concerns and adults' preoccupation with protection. In response to this shift, research has increasingly focused on influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play. However, children's perspective on risky play is underrepresented in the recent literature. This study generates awareness of children's risky play preferences and interests to help professional caretakers hone their facilitating role. We explored children's notions of risk and challenge in play during a loose parts intervention stimulating risky play and facilitated by after-school childcare practitioners. A thematic analysis examined observations, informal conversations, and roundtable talks with children about their risky play experiences. Children describe their risk-taking in play as experimental and daring. The findings report on children's general views on risky play, their play experiences with loose parts, their real-life risky play experiences, and their opinions on the role of practitioners. By relating the results to risky play research and self-determination theory, this study offers insight into children's innate needs. Taking risks on their own terms gives children a sense of self-confidence and mastery, and forces them into new relationships with other children and guiding adults. Consequently, children fulfill the three universal needs of self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Keywords: children's voices; risky play; elementary school children; intervention program; qualitative research; loose parts play; self-determination theory; outdoor play; unstructured play

Introduction

Risk is a major concept in modern Western society and is predominantly perceived as something negative to be avoided, leading to hazard-based approaches to everyday situations (Adams, 2016; Beck, 1992/2006; Harper, 2017). This attitude towards risk has consequences for the way children are approached in educational and nurturing settings. Children are perceived as vulnerable and prone to accidents, leading to safety concerns and adults' preoccupation with protection (Lester & Russell, 2014; Sandseter, Kleppe, & Sando, 2020). These perceptions have been implicated in the declining opportunities for children to engage in risky play. Recent research has shown that children's possibilities to independently engage in challenging and risk-taking outdoor play have seriously decreased over the last few decades (Brussoni et al., 2012; Brussoni et al., 2020; Little, 2015; Sandseter et al., 2020). Adults who can recall experiences of ultimate freedom to play in their own childhoods find it difficult to give their own children the same room for exploration (Gill, 2007). In this context, research shows that if children are free to select the level of risk in their play activities, they will frequently choose a higher level than the guiding adult would predict and consider acceptable (Yurt & Keleş, 2019). A lack of opportunities for risky and challenging play has negative consequences for becoming a healthy adult, such as learning to trust oneself, recognizing one's limits, and knowing when it is better to ask for support (Ungar, 2008).

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In response to this shift, research has increasingly focused on children's risk-taking and motivation for engaging in risky play (Brussoni et al., 2012; Little, 2015; Sandseter, 2012). Recent discourse has raised questions about the approach towards risky play, about who defines risk, and about how adults engage with children and discuss with them their risk competencies and understanding of risky practice. It has been argued that children's play has become subject to adult scrutiny and is no longer something children just do, with adults controlling children's play and removing children's agency to determine their own play (Lester & Russell, 2014). Supervising adults habitually rush judgments on risky play, which has a negative impact by inhibiting children's challenging play activities (Chancellor & Hyndman, 2017). In general, children have a relatively boundless view of their playing opportunities, but they frequently say that adults restrict their play possibilities (Glenn et al., 2012). Glenn et al. argue that adults should facilitate rather than hinder children's play by providing children with choice and agency and by allowing them to retain the spontaneity associated with outdoor play.

The scope of this paper is elementary-school-aged children's understandings of risky play. Related contemporary research has examined children's own understanding of their well-being in childcare settings (Cooke et al., 2019; Fukkink & Boogaard, 2020; Mashford-Scott et al., 2012). This child-centric study is in line with the increasing attention given to children's own views in research about their life-worlds (e.g., Lavechin et al., 2020; O'Leary & Moloney, 2020; Rajab & Wright, 2020), specifically their own ideas on risky play (Jerebine et al., 2022).

This paper examines children's perceptions of risky play and describes the outcomes of their experiences in a professional environment (i.e., after-school childcare), where loose parts were introduced to provide additional opportunities for risky play. The goal of this study is twofold: firstly, to contribute to existing theories on risky play and self-determination; and secondly, to achieve an applied goal with societal relevance by supporting professional caretakers in facilitating risky play. In this article, we use the term *practitioner* as an all-encompassing term for professional and voluntary supervisors of children in staffed environments, such as childcare or after-school activities.

Theoretical background

Developmental values of risky play in childhood

Firstly, it is important to understand the developmental values of risky play in childhood. Sandseter's definition of risky play has been widely accepted in international research as a "*thrilling and exciting form of play that involves a risk of physical injury*" (Sandseter, 2009, p. 4). Importantly, the definition refers to physical risks, not social perils. Children show a common preference for risky play when choosing between typical play types; girls and boys equally practice risky play both outdoors and indoors (Sandseter et al., 2020). Notably, a wide range of such risk experiences is important for children's well-being in many aspects: "*It helps them keep healthy and enhances their resilience, enables them to develop and learn, influences their perception of themselves and their self-esteem, and provides excitement and pleasure*" (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2009, p. 2). In this context, Cooke et al. (2021) describe beneficial risk as engaging in experiences that take a person out of their comfort zone and include outcomes that may be beneficial to learning, development, and life satisfaction. Play containing uncertainty allows children to position themselves in situations that convey a feeling of risk without overexposing them to the serious possibility of injury (Gordon & Esbjörn-Hargens, 2007; Pellis & Pellis, 2009). When they create risky play situations, children are in control while experiencing the sensation of being out of control.

Therefore, children need space, both socially and physically, to be active and engage in challenges. It is necessary that they take risks in their play to develop "risk competence," which refers to "*the process of becoming knowledgeable and skilled in assessing risks and therefore acquiring the competence to take risks more safely*" (Gordon & Esbjörn-Hargens, 2007; Pellis & Pellis, 2009). The educational foundation for building risk competence is that children can protect themselves and make the right choices on their own. Malaguzzi (1993) mentions the concept of the "rich child," whereby children are seen as competent and resourceful with a richness of skills, knowledge, and capabilities. Moreover, eradicating risk in play is literally impossible; likewise, it withholds from children essential experiences to develop resilience by experimenting, exploring their capabilities, and mastering new activities (Berger & Lahad, 2010). By limiting opportunities for risk-taking, adults are also depriving children of opportunities to strengthen their resilience and their ability to cope with stress and uncertainty. This can lead to anxiety and other mental health issues and may cause children to avoid new experiences (Dodd & Lester, 2021; Sandseter et al., 2023).

Self-determination theory and risky play

In addition to understanding the developmental values of risky play in childhood, this theoretical framework applies self-determination theory to risky play. Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985/2000), proposes a framework for how to better understand and promote children's optimal development and autonomy (Côté-Lecaldare et al., 2016). SDT has previously been applied to children's play, exploring adult influences on children's perceptions of choice when they play (King & Howard, 2016). With both a biological and psychological perspective, SDT emphasizes important and natural developmental tendencies that can be related to the functioning of children—specifically, risk-taking play. Three indispensable aspects of risky play can be distinguished that are likewise existent in SDT as the roots of motivation. These three basic psychological needs are autonomy, competence, and relatedness (desire to feel connected to others) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Firstly, risky play is related to improving children's autonomy, developing decision-making skills (McFarland & Laird, 2018), improving agency (Cevher-Kalburan, 2015), and enhancing responsibility (Jelleyman et al., 2019). Secondly, risk-taking play has been proven to benefit children's competencies like risk perception, mastering risk, motor control, and courage development (Lavrysen et al., 2017; Sandseter, 2007/2012). Thirdly, the possibility of engaging in risky play depends on which interrelated role supervising adults adopt towards children, how much confidence adults project towards the child, and how the child experiences this confidence (Sandseter, 2014; Van Gils, 2014). Moreover, the nature of risky play often involves

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relating to other children and socially interacting as peers when they engage in challenging activities.

The role of practitioners in supporting autonomy

After-school childcare can offer optimal opportunities for children to become acquainted with risky play; however, there are protectionist barriers to lift for enabling practitioners to support children in daily practice. A growing amount of children's time is spent in structured environments, such as school, childcare, or other institutes, where professionals supervise them (Fukkink & Boogaard, 2020; Hofferth, 2009; OECD, 2006). However, the primary responsibility for children lies with their parents. The allocation of duties between parents and professional caregivers (e.g., childcare professionals and teachers) is challenging. Parents expect practitioners mainly to offer protection and to ensure a safe social and physical environment, contrasting with the professional duty of care, which also encompasses responsibility for healthy growing up and thus providing risky play possibilities for children (Hundmeyer & Prott, 2005; Prott, 2010). Childcare work is regulated by protocols and controlled by public health services and educational inspections, where health and safety are paramount.

As indicated above, an emphasis on risk as something to be avoided at all costs does not improve children's opportunities for challenge and freedom of play and thus limits their opportunities for healthy physical and psychological development (Sandseter, 2012). Within the societal discussion about challenges and security for children, there is an argument that a risk–benefit assessment should be linked to pedagogical perceptions (Lobst & Van den Bogaard, 2011). This view originates from a vision that allows children the freedom to grow up in a challenging and development-oriented environment. Practitioners focusing on the adaptability of choice should assist and guide children through play by varying the amount of motivation and beneficial risk, and by doing so, work to increase a child's actual and potential level (Vygotsky, 1978). In this view, practitioners should provide children with opportunities to deal with risks and challenges in their play, thus conceding to the natural urge of children to overcome their fear and explore their boundaries in physical play (Stephenson, 2003). Indeed, there is a movement for professionals in education and childcare to reconsider their role as risk-avoiders and to prioritize the curiosity and understanding of children over adult expertise (Hayes, 2005). However, factors that can hinder professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play involve practitioners' own character and their relationship with parents (Van Rooijen & Newstead, 2016). Likewise, professional attitude, motivation, and actions that help them provide a challenging play environment for children are influenced by caregivers' understanding

of children as well as regulatory and cultural factors (Van Rooijen & Newstead, 2016).

Cooke et al. (2021) suggest that it is important to help practitioners plan and support opportunities for children's risk-taking and to increase practitioners' confidence to develop innovative risky play practices. Consequently, the under-standing of risk-associated practices and the development of managing risks during play in childhood must be a focus in daily practice and in higher education for professionals working with children—in particular, in childcare. In line with the notion that beneficial risk-taking in play can support physical, cognitive, social, and emotional abilities (Brussoni et al., 2015), curriculum documents and government policy increasingly encourage professionals in childcare institutions to allow children to be risk-takers (Sandseter et al., 2017). In the Netherlands, for example, this policy is phrased as follows: "*We teach children to deal with small risks but protect them against big risks*" (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employ-ment, 2016, 6).

Loose parts as affordance for risky play

For after-school childcare settings, so-called loose parts are relatively easy to implement by the team, at low-cost, and effective in stimulating children's risky play. In this study, therefore, a loose parts play (LPP) intervention was introduced. Loose parts are open-ended materials and equipment without well-defined uses. Such parts facilitate unstructured, child-led play. LPP is a technique evolved from playwork practice that makes use of "stuff" like old crates, tires, office chairs, and cable reels in play spaces, inviting children to engage as they prefer with limited adult involvement (Besse-Patin, 2018; Bundy et al., 2011). Loose parts afford maximum opportunities for engagement, and LPP is rooted in the loose parts theory of Nicholson and the theory of affordances of Gibson (Gibson, 1979; Heft, 1988; Nicholson, 1972). Both theories assume that the number and kind of variables in an environment are directly related to the various opportunities for action or use—and that the affordances (uses) are different for each individual (Little & Sweller, 2015). This philosophical approach attaches the features of out-door play possibilities (e.g., loose parts) to the bodily and mental propensities of the child (Houser et al., 2016). LPP interventions offer extended opportunities for risk-taking, which has positive developmental benefits for children's compe-tence, social skills, and physical activity (Bundy et al., 2009; Lavrysen et al., 2017; Sando & Sandseter, 2020). Like previous research in this study, LPP was chosen to enhance opportunities for risky and challenging play (Bundy et al., 2009; Hynd-man et al., 2014). Hence, we provided recycled scrap materials to cater to catego-ries of risky play, such as great heights, rough-and-tumble play, high speed, and

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disappearing (Sandseter, 2007). Items included crates, cable reels, office chairs, ladders, buggies, and tree trunks.

Context of this study, aim, and research questions

In the present study, children's own constructions and experiences of risk-taking were explored. After-school childcare (also called "out-of-school care" or "school-aged childcare") is a significant social and play environment for an increasing number of children. In the first quarter of 2020, more than 7400 after-school care facilities existed in the Netherlands, with 409,000 children aged 4 to 12 years attending, or 29% of the primary school population (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

This study adopted a qualitative approach and is part of a larger, mixed-methods intervention study on children's possibilities of risk-taking play in after-school childcare in the Netherlands and the professional attitudes of the staff supervising this kind of play (Van Rooijen & Jacobs, 2019). The impact of a professionalisation development program on facilitating risky play has been described in detail elsewhere (Van Rooijen & Jacobs, 2019). The conclusion of that study was that moral tension existed in the domains of "safety and autonomy" when working with children and in the domains of "unity and diversity" in collaboration with colleagues. Practitioners observed more joint play, play with new play friends, and more communication between children in their risk-taking play with loose parts [66]. For the present study, qualitative data were collected to explore the perceptions of children regarding the intervention. This paper thus expands on the outcomes of risky play for practitioners by focusing on how children experience the modification of their play environment and their perspectives on adult interference in their risk-taking play activities. This study adopts an exploratory approach to assess how children interpret their experiences and evaluates the benefits children realize in their risk-taking play, focusing exclusively on their perspectives. A phenomenological approach was employed, using informal conversations, observations, and roundtable talks to capture children's lived experiences (see also Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019). Phenomenology appraises descriptions and reflections on practice as essential to understand the nuance and nature of the experience (Van Manen, 1990). By applying this avenue in this study, the risky play practices of children were leading and thus, we did not place an emphasis on age, gender, or other contextual factors. Following Smith (1998) in his "pedagogy of risk", this study does not pursue a representative group of children selected by age or gender, it is their individual perceptions of risk that are of importance in determining the nature of risk-taking responses. In rigorous thematic analysis, the authors engaged in reflective discussion to reveal these experiences in main themes.

The focus of this study was on gaining an understanding of school-aged children's involvement in a loose parts intervention intended to stimulate risky play and facilitated by childcare practitioners (see also Bundy et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 2019). The first aim is to contribute to the literature around risky play and SDT by generating awareness about children's views about their risky play preferences and interests. The second aim is to explore tools for practitioners to consider regarding their relatedness with children in facilitating more risky play connected to SDT needs. Four research questions were formulated. The first two questions explore the definitions and categories of risky play (Sandseter 2007/2010) and the theory of loose parts: (1) What do children see as risk-taking in play? (2) What kind of play do children experience using loose parts? The third and fourth questions are grounded in SDT: (3) What experiences do children have with risk-taking during this study? (4) What is the opinion of children about the role of practitioners during risky play?

In the remainder of this paper, we firstly present the design of this study, including how the data were collected as well as the methodological approach. Secondly, the outcomes of the empirical study are presented in the context of children's play spaces. Subsequently, it is argued that children's voices are important for practitioners who are guiding them in their play experiences.

Materials and methods

This study in after-school childcare settings was conducted in the Netherlands from February to June 2018. The research team explored children's notions of risk and challenge in their play. In this chapter, we describe research participants, data collection methods, and data analysis, and we elaborate on the ethical issues relating to research in children's space and time.

Loose parts materials

All settings involved were given access to a sea container or shed containing different loose parts for the duration of six weeks. The practitioner team decided when children had access to these parts, varying from one to five afternoons a week, with a duration of two to four hours per play session. Loose parts were collected in collaboration with local recycle shops, which may have led to differences in materials between the locations. However, every storage contained at least the following scraps, thus enabling five of the six categories of risky play (Sandseter, 2007):

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1. Play with great heights: crates, ladders, stools cable reels, tree trunks;
2. Play with high speed: office chairs, tires, mattresses, buggies, walkers;
3. Play with dangerous tools: ropes, sticks, planks;
4. Rough-and-tumble play: buckets and stretchers, cushions;
5. Out-of-sight play: carpets, garments for making huts.

The category "play near dangerous elements like water and fire" was not included in this study's facilitation of risky play. Such play cannot be facilitated with loose parts and must be closely supervised. However, children can have experiences with these elements in other contexts, like home.

Participants

Ten childcare organizations responded to a call in a professional national child-care journal. In a later stage, three withdrew for time-investment reasons. The seven remaining childcare institutions, located in different regions of the Netherlands, were selected. The settings varied in size and context (See Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Context, age, and number of children in participating childcare settings.

Context	Age of children with access to LPP	Number of children*
Outdoors ("forest school")	4–12	60
Sports focus	4–6	20
	7–12	30
Farm site	4–12	90
Scouting accommodation	4–8	30
Urban low socioeconomic status (SES)	4–7	120
	6–12	40
High SES village	4–12	40
Regular urban context	9–12	45

* Dutch after-school childcare is organized by groups of 20 children. Note, this number is not specified in gender, because it was not planned which specific children would participate in the LPP, as the presence of children varied from day to day. Children were not present every day of the week, and the LPP days were decided by the team.

Data collection

This study was conducted with the assistance of nine undergraduate student researchers from the bachelor's pedagogy program (educational theory) at the University of Applied Sciences, Utrecht, under the supervision of the first author. The students could apply for participation in this project to carry out research

tasks as part of their curriculum. Prior to the beginning of the research, the students attended a meeting where they were informed by the first author of practical matters, research design, and procedures, including their specific tasks. On an individual basis and in monthly sessions as a group, students were coached by their lecturer (fourth author of this article) in a setting where they could share their experiences. The principal researcher was present at two of these group sessions to teach theories on risky play and visited each research setting monthly to facilitate the student researchers. In addition to a range of possible methods that students were already familiar with, they learned the theory and practice of appropriate research tools to elicit children's views. The "reactive method" of Corsaro (2005) and the "neutral intermediary" approach from Meire et al. (2015) were influential in how student researchers were informed. Each student was assigned to an after-school childcare location; two settings received two students for different age groups. The student researchers were present two or three afternoons a week during a period of four months. The first month allowed the student researchers to get to know the children and context; thereafter, they participated in the professionalisation program of the team and performed their research tasks before, during, and after the LPP intervention.

To understand children's risky play experiences, qualitative and interpretivist approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) were used. Data were gathered in multiple ways. Diaries were used for capturing observations and informal conversations with children about their outdoor play behaviour. In each setting, a single round-table talk about their risky play possibilities was conducted with the children.

Procedure
Student researchers were sensitive to children's risk-taking play, making use of Sandseter's (2007) categorization of risky play and the risky behaviour categorization regarding children's motivation and skills from Little and Eager (2010). The student researchers made notes of their observations and informal conversations as "thick descriptions" in digital diaries (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In all settings, in total, 321 notes were taken on children's play activities. Moreover, at each location, student researchers organized a roundtable talk with four to six children selected by the practitioner team, using a semi-structured topic list (Coster & Gleeve, 2008; Humberstone & Stan, 2011). As moderators, they were instructed not to explicitly refer to risky play to enable children to use their own vocabulary. The structure of the group conversation, which lasted 15–30 min, consisted of five themes: (1) exciting and challenging play experiences; (2) reasons for and feelings about this play; (3) possibilities for this play at the setting; (4) what practitioners do and say during this play; and (5) differences with

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the home setting. The interviews with children consisted of often fragmented, ambiguous, and sometimes inconsistent narratives, which echoed the complex reality of children and the way they talk (Brussoni et al., 2020; Watson, 2006). The roundtable talks, with a total of 49 participants aged from 4 to 10 years, 32 males and 17 females, were recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis was then undertaken, encompassing the reading and re-reading of writings to recognize common themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2016). Firstly, all primary data were read and re-read thoroughly by the first author (close reading). The quantity and extent of the data varied considerably, depending on the location, the student researcher, and the after-school organization. Therefore, it was decided to draw up the material as a single document comprising all roundtable transcripts, observation notes, and informal conversations. A content analysis was performed on the transcripts to scan the children's responses to the four research questions to organize the data. Because the present study focuses on exploring children's experiences with risky play, only elements concerning actual practices were analysed. This resulted in including 8 transcripts of roundtable talks, 7 observations, and 9 informal conversations before the intervention, as well as 39 observations and 20 informal conversations during the intervention for analysis. All authors, except the second author, then carried out a qualitative thematic analysis to inductively develop a list of codes that were used (Boeije, 2010; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Creswell, 2007) in consecutive steps. Firstly, close reading was carried out with the goal of becoming familiar with the raw data. Secondly, the researchers coded the text, thus "*reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments*" (Creswell, 2007, p. 180). In this stage, each of the researchers focused on one of the research questions. Thirdly, axial coding was applied to define subcategories (Boeije, 2010). In the fourth step, emerging patterns were derived through group discussion, reflecting the current research questions, and comparing the most common codes and relations between codes to develop the main themes. Key findings were then discussed between researchers, resulting in full agreement. Those findings are presented in Chapter 5.

Ethical considerations

This study followed the codes of conduct for academic practice published by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands. The data were stored safely according to the data management policies of the University of Humanistic Stud-

ies. Applicable procedures for research in educational settings were used during the period of data collection. Specifically, the following measures were taken to guarantee an ethically responsible research approach.

The participating childcare organizations were informed about the loose parts intervention before they agreed to participate. Both organizations and parents received information about the goal of improving children's risk competence and increasing practitioners' competence in supervising risky play. Parents were asked for consent that their children would be involved in the LPP and that their children would be questioned about their experiences and ideas. All the children in the settings were informed about the research project and the aim of providing the loose parts. They were free to ask questions to obtain more information, and it was ensured that the children understood that they could withdraw at any time (Grieg et al., 2007). None of the parents refused the participation of their child, and no child withdrew during the study. The names of individuals and settings were anonymized to maintain the privacy of the participants.

In line with previous research on and with children, we recognize that children's expressions are influenced by their interactions with researchers and their assumptions (Crotty, 1998). Hence, in the data collection phase, as well as during the analysis, our understanding of children's voices and their ability to convey them was inhibited, which shaped our interpretations of the data (Cooke et al., 2019; Khoja, 2016). However, the researchers were responsive to the children's world by assuring their autonomy and active participation and by displaying pedagogical sensitivity in their contact with the children (Miranda et al., 2017; Lévinas, 1979; Van Manen, 2015).

One of the components of this study was to diversify children's risky play, including allowing the children to expose themselves to potential peril. This approach raises ethical questions about adult responsibility (Sandseter, 2010). To forestall dilemmas in the field, the professionalisation program that was carried out before the loose parts intervention was started included the risk–benefit approach, which encourages practitioners to tolerate more risk in children's play by assessing the developmental benefits (Ball et al., 2012; Van Rooijen & Jacobs, 2019; Wishart & Rouse, 2019). The program, conducted in three sessions, focused on knowledge, attitude, and supervision of risky play. It also incorporated the facilitation and guidance of children's risk-taking and loose parts play. In this way, the regular staff as well as the student researchers were aware of their non-intervening role, only intervening in children's play in the case of serious possible physical harm that children could not predict.

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Results

The results of the analysis are presented in line with the four research questions, revealing three and subsequently four main themes (see Table 5.2).

Children's general views on risky play

We found that the children could give many different examples of risky play in their lives. Our analysis focused on ranking the six categories of risky play that children most frequently pronounced. Foremost, they perceived risk to be merely related to physical risks. They most often connected their practices with the categories of height and speed. Rough-and-tumble play and play near dangerous elements, like water and fire, were also often detailed in children's descriptions of risk in play, although less than height and speed. Dangerous tools and playing out of sight were the least mentioned.

Table 5.2. Summary analysis: themes and descriptions.

Research Questions	Themes	Description
Children's general views on risky play	"Great heights," "speed," "rough & tumble" and "dangerous elements"	Most occurring categories of risky play
	"Parkour" and "dark/night"	Supplemental, as these are not defined in the six categories
	Positive about "playing together" risks	Making agreements and stating own borders
Children's play experiences with loose parts	Change in play	More outdoors, more opportunities
	Creative and risky play	Novelty in play
	Now playing along with others	New playmates, making plans and having fun
Children's actual risky play experiences	Chance of hurting	Acceptance of possible consequences
	Different emotions	Expressed positively
	Doing it themselves	Having trust, and daring
Children's opinion on the role of practitioners	Adults are a disturbing factor	A non-permissive environment
	Help is acceptable	Only when children ask for it
	Frameworks/borders in consultation	Children have their own vision
	Keep appropriate distance	Present but not intrusive

If I want to jump off my bunk bed, if I look down, it looks like it's 10 m deep. It is scary, but then I just do it anyway. (P.)

Importantly, some children mentioned activities as risky play that are not defined in the six categories, like parkour, which refers to balancing and jumping from one feature to another. Furthermore, they talked about playing in the dark or during the night as risky.

Hide and seek in the dark is exciting to do. (S.)

Children articulated their experiences that come with playing together, which frequently occurs in after-school childcare settings. They viewed such play as risky. They also shared some undesirable experiences, like when one child spoils play for another child. Children usually view these risks positively, as a natural part of playing together. They understand the need to figure out who dares and who does not during a certain play activity. They must indicate their own borders, and making agreements is necessary when rough-and-tumble play is going on.

While we are playing rough, and I do not want things. (A.)

You better go in there yourself; otherwise, we'll push yóu over. (B.)

Children's play experiences with loose parts

Both the interviews and diaries revealed a wide variety of play possibilities the children experienced. They expressed intense enthusiasm for the loose parts, which was sometimes in contrast with the dullness of the after-school childcare they were used to.

This is stuff where we normally aren't allowed to play with. (K)

Now I do not have to be bored anymore outside. (T.)

Usually I went inside to do my homework, what I don't do anymore, ha ha. (K.)

Regarding their play with the loose parts, children frequently mentioned creative and risky play. They also said that before the intervention, they had had fewer opportunities for such play.

We just went off the hill with the wheelchair and then went falling. (S2.)

We always play astronaut; the parasol is then the satellite and the barrel is the rocket which rolls down the mountain. I then go after the barrel with the buggy or run with the parasol after it to have enough reach and then we call together. (M.)

The analysis also showed that children who did not play together before were now becoming playmates. They made plans together for what to do with the loose parts, which gave them enjoyment.

She didn't belong to the group, and now we are playing together. (S2.)

Children's actual risky play experiences

In stating their practices with risk-taking in their play, the children were aware that their actions did not always lead to the most preferred outcome. They were fine with the consequences if it "went wrong", and they seemed to deliberate on these implications before engaging in a risky activity.

Sometimes it goes wrong, I got a bruise and a little bit of blood. (K2.)

Because I am afraid that when I fall, I fall really hard. But I ignore that thought. (L.)

It is okay if something goes wrong. (B.)

The children's words show that they value risky play and that they experience fear and joy at the same time.

It makes me happy, and it makes me less fearful. (H.) A bit scary, and yeah, it is fun! (X.)

The data indicated a strong desire to have opportunities to make their own decisions in risky play. With such opportunities, they feel free to push their boundaries and therefore dare to attempt something beyond their current skill level. By doing so, children feel more confident and trust their capabilities.

That we think ourselves if it will succeed and have freedom to do this. (G.)

It makes me happier and, that I dare more. (P.)

Yes, then I am also proud of myself. (G.)

Children's opinion on the role of practitioners

According to the interviews and diaries, the children's play plans were negatively affected by the actions of adults. There seemed to be many rules that hindered them from following their own interests and ideas in their play—for example, in rough-and-tumble activities.

> We are not allowed to play rough, and we just like it, I want wounds, ha ha. (G.)

> Now the loose parts are here, they (supervisors) don't say that anymore ("play calmly!"). (W.)

> I just want them to leave us alone. (G.)

The children stated that they wanted to receive assistance according to their own criteria. They want to sort things out themselves in their risk-taking activities, and they are competent enough to ask for support if necessary.

> After a while they wanted to go faster. Then the supervisor made a ramp where they could roll off. (observation F2o.)

The children said they needed to be taken seriously and that they wanted to be involved in determining what kinds of boundaries were necessary to restrict their freedom in risky play. Children believed adult supervisors should express more confidence in children and take their opinions into account in a proper way.

> That we get more trust, we want to gain self-confidence, we just want so much more. (G.)

Lastly, adults should keep a suitable distance from the playing area where children experiment with risk-taking. Children understand that practitioners have a role in supervising and are present; however, adults need to be reluctant to say something or intervene in other ways.

> They must stay and watch, but that it is okay what we are doing. (L.)

In contrast to the children who were in favour of risky play, other children expressed no or little interest in risk-taking play.

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No, what I actually do a lot of is talk. I don't really do activities. I am more into talking. (K.)

Sometimes I have a little fear of heights. Then you just do something else. (R.)

I prefer not to play when the risks are too great, and you can get hurt. (W.)

However, these comments are exceptions in the interviews and diaries. Most of the children engaged in risky play at their own level and according to their capabilities and interests—from carefully taking steps to being daring and reckless. These findings reveal the differences between children in their practices and understandings of risky play.

Discussion: children's need for risk and challenge

In this study, children in seven after-school childcare settings were given opportunities to play with loose parts, which stimulated risky play. This play was facilitated through supportive guidance from the practitioners. Children's perspective was the focus of the four distinct research questions on children's views on risky play, their play experiences with loose parts, their actual experiences with risky play, and their opinion of adult supervisors. In this section, the findings are discussed, relating them to risky play, loose parts play theories, and SDT. We also discuss possible implications for supervising risky play practices in professional settings.

Children's views on risky play: physical and social risks as part of regular play

The qualitative data of this study showed that the children's opinions about their general experiences with risky play are mostly congruent with Sandseter's (2007) six categories of physical risks. Heights and speed were most frequently stated as risky, which might relate to the overrepresentation of those possibilities in children's play environments, such as play structures, trees, bikes, and trikes. The mention of rough-and-tumble play as a favourite aligns with research showing that sensation-seeking children are attracted to physical, risky play that can cause injury (Morrengiello & Lasenby-Lessard, 2007). Water is relatively omnipresent in the Dutch play environment, which might explain children's statements that playing near and with water is exciting and risky.

This study revealed some new discoveries about existing risky play categories. Firstly, an interesting result was that children stated play situations that do not fit neatly into the categories and subcategories of risky play (Sandseter, 2009a). It was found that parkour (i.e., leaping from one outdoor place to another) was not present in the original categories; however, this has been mentioned in past studies as an element of risky play (Sandseter, 2014). Furthermore, we found that the children viewed playing in the darkness, in darkened spaces, or after twilight as an important and challenging play activity. This is relatively unrecognized in children's risky play research. For example, Prešlenkova (2017) claims that there is a lack of study on the benefits of free play in the dark. Finally, we found that the children considered playing together to be risky, as it has the chance of going wrong. This aligns with the proposed re-conceptualization from Cooke et al. (2021) , which extends risky play from pure physical risk to social and emotional risk during play. Children in the present study had a positive perception of the risks perceived from playing together; they perceived challenging each other and some mild peer pressure as part of normal play. In this way, children are positioned to make agreements, and they learn to state their own borders.

Children's play experiences with loose parts: change and novelty

Like Bundy et al. (2009), we expected that the introduction of loose parts in after-school childcare settings would alter children's play. The outcomes from interviews and observations clearly indicate that children's opportunities to play changed positively; their play experiences broadened and led to new play arrangements with other children. From an SDT perspective, there were changes in relatedness and autonomy that contributed to children's intrinsic motivation to engage in play with loose parts.

Firstly, the introduction of loose parts pushed children more outdoors, giving new insight into adults' effortless labelling of children as "indoor children" (Karsten, 2006). When the play space and materials offer adequate affordances (Gibson, 1979) for every child, like complexity, versatility, and flexibility in loose parts, it is more likely that all children will be attracted to the outdoors as it is less tedious. We conclude that this is even more important for older children who drop out of after-school childcare because they find the setting boring (Jeugdjournaal, 2018). Secondly, the children reflected through this project on how they played with loose parts, resulting in descriptions of original and novel play situations where imagination and inventiveness increased. Moreover, we found that children described all kinds of forms of risky play that were provided by the loose parts. As one of the intentions of this study was to find out if loose parts would facilitate risk-taking play, the data validate this assumption.

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Future research should focus on which kinds of loose parts are especially appropriate for children's levels of risk-taking. Thirdly, in this study, the children said that the loose parts prompted them to play with different children than before. This trend might originate from children having an interest in the same loose part and making new connections because of that shared interest. This new connection leads children to make plans together, to communicate, and to experience increased pleasure. Overall, we found that the loose parts intervention confirmed earlier research based on professional observations, such as the study of Hyndman et al. (2014). Likewise, in another study, children's play was described by the principal as "*busy, motivated and engaged*" (McLachlan, 2014, p. 6), and increasing social development and cooperation were noted.

Children's actual risky play experiences: positivity and trust

In this study, three distinct themes were identified to reflect how children viewed risky play. Firstly, we found that the children instinctively recognized the chances of hurting themselves by engaging in risky play and that they accepted the possible consequences. This finding aligns with prior research that suggests that children can provide valid self-reports of their willingness to take risks and that children are aware of their risk-taking in play and can report on these actions (Potts et al., 1995). Secondly, we conclude that children associate positive emotions with risky play activities. Sandseter (2010) termed the ambiguous feelings of joy and fear that come with risky play as "*scary-funny*" (p. 100), since individual children in her research described their dual experiences with this phrasing. Misinterpretation of children's fear, which they see as a natural part of their play, can lead practitioners to habitually intervene because they want to protect children against undesirable emotions, thus constraining children's opportunities to discover their boundaries. This restraint would be an unwanted outcome, as the third theme showed that children want to make their own decisions in risky play, which leads them to trust their own actions. In this way, children can expand their risk competence, which is shown to be strengthened by facilitating the possibilities of risky play activities (Lavrysen et al., 2017).

Thus, giving children the opportunity to take risks on their own terms gives them a sense of self-confidence and mastery, connecting to two of the three universal needs of SDT: autonomy and competence. Moreover, children who take risks in play learn to trust themselves, understand their capabilities, recognize limits, and have knowledge of when to ask for assistance (Ungar, 2008). The third psychological need, relatedness, appears in the final themes.

Children's opinion on the role of practitioners: child-led collaboration

This study found a strong judgment of children about the attitude of practitioners and how the possibilities to engage in risky play are affected by a non-permissive and intervening adult. We conclude that children see adults as interfering with their freedom to play in their own way. They understand that in an after-school setting, practitioners have to be present and are responsible; however, children want them as distant as possible so that practitioners do not intrude in their risk-taking play. We found that any necessary general restrictions or rules governing risky play should be made in consultation with children, who want to express their vision. That vision should be taken seriously if children's autonomy is to be promoted. Children were clear that they have no need for adult suggestions or advice during risky play activities. Help is acceptable, but only when children ask for it. Based on SDT, the social nature of activities during risky play involves making choices, relating to other people (children and adults), and developing skills that help them take some control of their lives (King & Howard, 2016). Meeting children's innate need for SDT's category of relatedness (including in risky play) may be a sensitive task for practitioners because they have to shift from distance to involvement. Van Manen articulates this as pedagogical sensitivity, *"which pertains to doing the right thing for this child in this situation. It is about tactful action as 'an immediate involvement in situations where I must instantaneously respond, as a whole person, to unexpected and unpredictable situations'"* (Van Manen, 1991, p. 519).

This sensitivity can be connected to six "interactional skills" used in Dutch after-school childcare settings: sensitive responsiveness, respect for autonomy, structuring and setting limits, talking and explaining, stimulating development, and guidance of interactions between children (Boogaard et al., 2012). These six skills can all support children's risky play (Van Rooijen, 2020). Thus, we conclude that practitioners in after-school childcare have a duty of care to reinforce risky play practices in a sensitive and receptive manner.

Strengths and limitations of this study

Several strengths and limitations may have impacted the results of this study. One strength of this study is its qualitative approach. By eliciting individual children's understanding of risky play, this study enriches the discourse on how to connect to children's needs in their risk-taking play. This study complements the recent literature by exploring children's perspectives on risky play, including those perspectives in relation to supervising adults (Jerebine et al., 2022). The view of children can help practitioners implement interventions that facilitate risky play.

Of course, one limitation of the present study is that different childcare settings and child populations were included; however, the findings were not specified or identified by age or background. Future research should explore the possible differences and similarities between these aspects. Moreover, this study was only a six-week intervention, so the long-term effects on children's judgment and perceptions of increased risky play possibilities were not considered. Although enduring positive experiences could be predicted, future research is needed on this specific approach. Another limitation is that giving the responsibility for the collection of the data to the student researchers had certain constraints and difficulties. The first author purposefully adopted a facilitating role to position students as partners in the research for wide-ranging learning possibilities (see also Yates & Oates, 2019). Improvements could have been made in implementing data collection methods and monitoring accurate registration.

Conclusions: risk as an inherent aspect of children's play

The deliberate creation of uncertainty is present in much playing, and therefore most play situations can be considered risky in some way. Children know this and accept it. However, there is considerable variation in the way risk is perceived, resulting in different child and adult appraisals of risky play. By examining children's perceptions of risky play in after-school childcare settings in this study, we gained an in-depth understanding of their experiences, their risky play with other children, and their relationship with their professional caretakers during risky play. The loose parts intervention was helpful for tapping into riskier play practices, which children could accurately express in words.

Our first aim was to contribute to the scientific knowledge on the concept of risky play. By endorsing parkour as a subcategory and proposing playing in the dark as a new subcategory, the six risky play categories can be more closely described in terms of what children express. Furthermore, we made the case that in children's perceptions of risky play, they need autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as theorized in SDT. The need for relatedness includes the relationship of children with adults, with a more trusting and relaxed atmosphere regarding risk-taking. Moreover, it also includes relationships among children through social interaction and learning processes. In the context of such relationships, children make new friends and experience fun when they engage in risky play.

Another goal of this study was to encourage practitioners to reconsider their approach to supervising risky play. Children can articulate their perceptions of the

attitudes of the adults supervising them and can give clear advice on how to not act regarding risky play. Listening to children can make professional caretakers more aware of the fact that children are competent appraisers and assessors of risk. It is important for children to make their own choices as much as possible in their risky play to experience a sense of freedom. The risky possibilities of the play space, the availability of resources like loose parts, participation by other children, and the proximity of adults influence children's choices pertaining to risky play. The proposed pedagogical sensitivity could be a professional tool for exercising appropriate distance from children. In this way, the outcomes of this study can contribute to changing practices in after-school childcare from the perspectives of protection and proximity. Specifically, instead of quickly intervening in children's risky play, caregivers can move towards a more relaxed, wait-and-see attitude. Realizing that children have an innate need for autonomy and that they can make their own risk assessments in their play, practitioners can trust them, knowing that this trust fosters self-regulation and resilience and is thus essential for healthy maturation.

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CHAPTER 6

Summary and general discussion

Introduction

This dissertation addressed an issue that has received increased attention in research: professional dilemmas in facilitating children's risky play and how to leverage possible barriers in facilitating it (Cooke et al., 2019; Little & Sweller, 2015; Sandseter et al., 2017). The aim of this doctoral research was twofold: to contribute to the scientific body of knowledge on the concept of risky play and enhance professional competencies to facilitate high-quality risky play experiences for children in Dutch after-school care.

I investigated the international literature to define influencing factors, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of development, which was further calibrated for Dutch contexts (see Chapter 2). The chapter also explored the complex interactions between these influencing factors. The model was further used to support professionals in allowing children's risk-taking by empirically testing it in the context of seven after-school childcare facilities. A risky play environment was created with the use of so-called loose parts.

A professionalisation program was carried out to determine the benefits of risky play, to enhance professionals' abilities to discuss these factors with colleagues, parents, and other stakeholders, and to enhance professionals' ability to deal with conflicting interests and barriers in regulation and the organisation. The study examined participants' moral values and dilemmas in this context, elucidating the notion of 'normative professionalisation' (Jacobs et al., 2008; Ewijk and Kunneman, 2013). Children's views on risk and challenge in play were explored during the program's loose-parts intervention, which stimulated risky play. To our knowledge, this study is the only one to investigate both professionals' and children's perceptions of risky play in the same after-school childcare context.

I start by summarising the main findings of the four studies included in this dissertation. Next, I discuss the implications of the whole study for theory development and professional practice. I also suggest starting points for a pedagogical approach to risky play in childcare policy. Lastly, I consider the limitations of the research and propose suggestions for future research.

A conceptual model of influencing factors

The study in Chapter 2 involved a narrative literature review that revealed five interrelated factors influencing professionals' attitudes towards risk: the constructs of children, professionals' individual approaches to risks, the relationship between professionals and parents, regulatory factors, and cultural factors. The

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chapter presented the relationships between these factors in a model based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, which illustrated the complexity professionals face when conducting risk assessments. The model is included in Chapter 2 (page 37) but reproduced below for convenience (see Figure 6.1).

The findings showed that professionals working in supervised settings are under significant pressure to juggle potentially conflicting priorities. Furthermore, the findings suggested that practitioners may not experience personal risk aversion as much as professional risk confusion since their views and approaches to risk are shaped by their changing professional experiences in different settings with various influencing factors at the fore. The study concludes the need for further exploring these influencing factors and determine how they relate to individual professionals in their specific practice situations. This can give insights into how professionals can determine their viewpoints among the conflicting perspectives on risky play, thus supporting children in taking risks in their play.

Influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play

Cultural

Regulatory

Parental relationship

Personal attitudes

Constructs of children
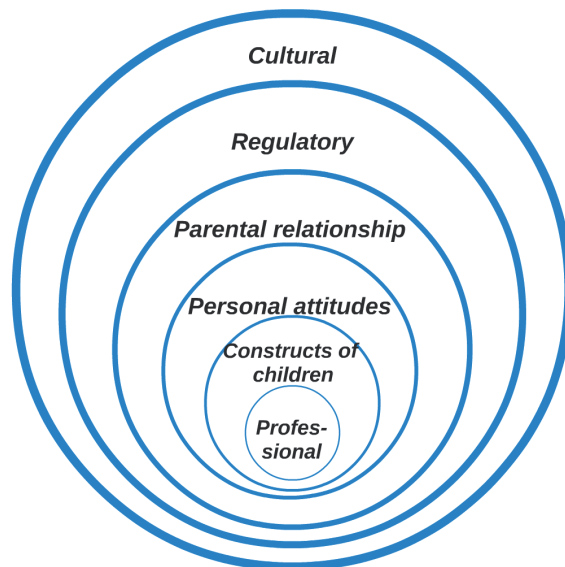
Professional

Figure 6.1

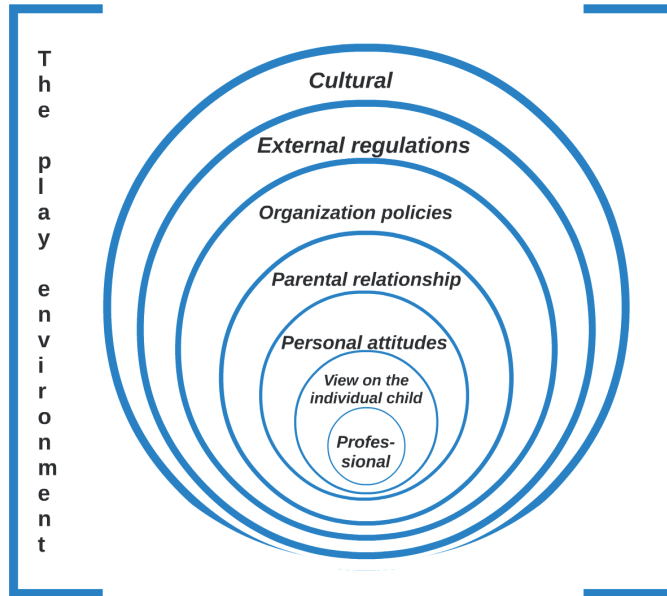**Opportunities and barriers: the needs of Dutch childcare professionals**

This study verified and adjusted the presented model using a questionnaire asking Dutch childcare professionals to evaluate it. The questionnaire was divided into three parts and focused on the professionals' experiences, attitudes, and opinions of risky play. The first part focused on the possibilities and experiences with risky play in the professionals' settings. Professionals acknowledged children's opportunities to experience high speeds and heights within the Dutch context. However, professionals perceived children's overall risky play opportunities as inadequate.

The second part highlighted influences on professional attitudes towards risky play. Although a strong rank order was not evident, the outcomes showed that the professionals believed that their knowledge of the playing child, the pedagogical framework, and the opportunities of the play environment were the most influencing factors. The least influencing factors were the culture of risk avoidance and colleagues' opinions. In the third part of the questionnaire, respondents identified barriers they did not mention in the ranking: Health Authority safety regulations and the concerns of their pupils' parents.

The findings resulted in an adjustment of the model. The constructs concerning children and the playing child were conceptualized into one factor: the view of the individual child. The regulatory factors in the original model were divided into external factors, such as legal health and safety organizations, and internal factors, such as organizational protocols and pedagogical policies. Furthermore, the play environment was viewed as a conditional factor for experiencing risky play. Therefore, the play environment was positioned next to the interrelated factors in the model.

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This adjusted model of six influencing factors provides advanced insights into Dutch and international contexts. Hence, this study can be used for the professional development of Dutch childcare practitioners to improve their attitudes about challenges by promoting the benefits of risky play. The model is included in Chapter 3 (page 63) but is reproduced below for convenience (see Figure 6.2).

**Influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking
in children's play: adjustment for Dutch childcare contexts**

The play environment

Cultural

External regulations

Organization policies

Parental relationship

Personal attitudes

View on the individual child

Professional

Figure 6.2

Improving competencies through a professional development program

The third study investigated the impact of a professional development program on facilitating children's risky play in seven Dutch after-school childcare settings. This qualitative research aimed to understand more about (i) practitioners' professional values, (ii) the moral friction they encountered in their daily practices, and (iii) the moral learning they reported in a professional development program. It focused on professionals working in after-school childcare in the Netherlands. The researchers developed a professionalisation program based on theory about risky play, professional and educational development, and the adjusted model. This program created a robust learning environment that enabled critical reflection and learning (Jacobs, 2010; Mezirow, 1991). The program was headed by the study's first author from February to June 2018 and included five modules: knowledge, attitude, practice, reflection, and implementing risky play. Part of the program was introducing loose parts, which comprised various materials and equipment that assisted children in their risky play activities by inspiring open-ended exploration.

The findings showed that the program broadened the professionals' positive values (i) towards risky play. For example, they observed improved play experiences

by introducing loose parts play. The findings also showed that the practitioners experienced moral friction (ii) between the values of safety and autonomy in their work with children and the values of unity and diversity in collaborating with colleagues. The study did not find evidence of friction caused by parents or the organization, only internal friction between professionals.

Regarding (iii) moral learning, the findings showed that the practitioners dealt with contradicting professional values by 'achieving a balance' within themselves. They strove to collaborate within the team by attempting to 'find the middle ground'. However, both concepts disregarded the 'messy' practice of asking for reflection-in-action and tactful actions. Thus, the alignment of views and values did not support moral learning and development.

Children's innate need for risky play

The fourth study focused on elementary-school-aged children's experiences and ideas concerning risky play. Children aged 4 to 12 were observed in their risk-taking play, and notes were taken during conversations and roundtable talks with small groups of children. The study focused on four research foci: (i) children's general views of risky play, (ii) children's play experiences with loose parts, (iii) children's actual risky play experiences, and (iv) children's opinions of the practitioner's role.

The findings regarding research focus (i) showed that the children added two subcategories to the existing risky play taxonomy: parkour and playing in the dark. The children also broadened the concept of risky play, moving from only physical risk to social and emotional risk when playing together, challenging each other, applying peer pressure, and coming to agreements. Regarding experiences with loose parts (ii), the findings showed that the children were enthusiastic about playing outdoors and frequently mentioned creative and risky play. They also said they had fewer opportunities for such play before the intervention. Moreover, the findings showed that the intervention increased social development and cooperation.

Regarding children's actual risky play experiences (iii), the findings showed that children simultaneously experienced fear and joy as a part of risky play. They had a strong desire to make decisions and push their boundaries, experiencing a sense of self-confidence and mastery. Regarding the children's opinions of the practitioner's role (iv), the findings showed that the children wanted to receive assistance according to their criteria and determine what boundaries were necessary to restrict their freedom in risky play. Children stated that supervisors

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should be more confident in children and keep a suitable distance from the play-ing area as children experiment with risk-taking.

Implications of the study for theory development: professional and child-centred model of influencing factors

This section combines the scientific lessons from all four studies. I discuss the adjusted model for professionals based on Bronfenbrenner (1979) and link it to a model for children's risky play practices. I further incorporate the reciprocal function of loose parts in Gibson's theory of affordances (1977) and appraise Sandseters' risky play categories (2007) with my findings.

An ecological theory for practitioners and children

The studies in this thesis gave broad insights into the critical elements in devel-oping professionals' attitudes towards risky play. Hence, they opened opportuni-ties for a more facilitative role of Dutch professionals. Ecological models (such as the one used in this study) account for the social, physical, and political or societal influences on behaviour. Although the connections between the layers in the model are drawn as defined boundaries, in reality, they are not: they are permeable both ways.

For instance, culture influences organizational rules, so changes in organisational rules ultimately influence the political and cultural surroundings. Furthermore, these changes are complex, so the relations are not necessarily linear. Indeed, small changes in one layer of influence can bring considerable changes in an-other. Moreover, an ethical or value-based aspect is always involved. This study showed that risky play benefits many aspects of children's well-being and sup-ports children's autonomy, resilience, and self-esteem (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2009; McFarland & Laird, 2018).

The model shows how different levels of influence interact. From these interac-tions, tools can be derived at every layer to change the environment to enable risky play. The professionalisation program developed in this study aimed to change the personal attitudes and views on the child, and to enable them to change parental relationships and organizational policies. As Chapter 4 shows, the program had positive results. Thus, future research should study how indi-vidual changes in perceptions of children and attitudes towards risky play can help change organizational and cultural contexts.

A proposal for a model of factors influencing children's risky play practices

In addition to the studies on factors influencing professional attitudes, the concluding explorative study examined children's perspectives (Chapter 5). To emphasise the importance of children's views in the discourse on the possibilities of risky play, I considered their perceptions using the same ecological model to compare the two models and discuss their applicability for scientific and practical usage. To construct a model of influencing factors on children's risky play practices, I build on the analysis and findings of the experiential setting in the final study. The model shows four layers, which places the child in a central position, including factors that afford or constrain risky play from the child's perspective. Building on the initial model (developed from research with professionals and presented in Chapter 3 [page 63] and reproduced below again for comparison [see Figure 6.4]), I present a model for factors influencing children's practices towards risk-taking in their play (see Figure 6.3). I now consider the construction of the depicted four themes.
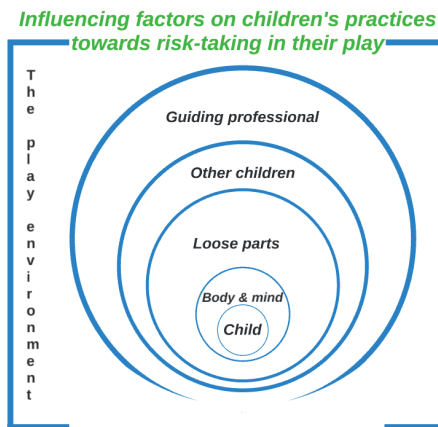

Influencing factors on children's practices towards risk-taking in their play

The play environment

- Guiding professional
- Other children
- Loose parts
- Body & mind
- Child

Figure 6.3

Influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play: adjustment for Dutch childcare contexts

The play environment

- Cultural
- External regulations
- Organization policies
- Parental relationship
- Personal attitudes
- View on the individual child
- Professional

Figure 6.4

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Factors influencing children's practices towards risk-taking in their play

First, the results of my study were about positive emotions towards risky play. The children accepted the chance that they could hurt themselves. Furthermore, the children valued making decisions and being trusted. Thus, bodily and mental experiences affected children's engagement towards risky play, resulting in the layer of *body and mind*. Second, the findings showed that *loose parts* as play materials are thoroughly connected to children's abilities and interests. The

wide-ranging possibilities of loose parts led children to go outdoors more often than before the intervention and provided them with the desired novelty, play motivation, and extended risk opportunities.

Third, the outcomes were related to children's need to experience risk and challenge with their *peers* in adventurous ways. They found new playmates and had relaxed attitudes towards the social risks involved in play, such as challenging each other. Fourth, the children's relationships with *guiding professionals* manifested in their need for risky play. The children emphasised the need for more distance, so professionals should only help if asked. They also mentioned that possible rules about risk-taking should be made in consultation with them.

Analogous to the risky play factors discussed by professionals, the play environment is also a conditional factor in children's practices: no risky possibilities mean no risky play. Children's expressed experiences show that most categories of risky play provide possibilities and are even accelerated by the omnipresence of loose parts. Interestingly, loose parts appear in the model as an environmental conditional factor for risk in the play environment and as influential factors for children. Hence, loose parts have a twofold influence on children's opportunities for risky play. This influence can be explained because the theory of affordances (Gibson, 1977) is reciprocal. (Risky) play is stimulated when the play environment connects to the interests and skills of the child in the best way possible. The ecological psychology theory of affordances refers to the idea that play materials and spaces offer opportunities for activities related to what a child distinguishes and the kind of actions a child can accomplish. Loose parts, therefore, are mentioned in the model as an attitude-oriented factor and a conditional factor.

Sandseters' risky play categories (2007) were further developed in successive research, which I contributed to with my findings. Children mentioned that they were especially in favour of risky play involving heights, speed, rough-and-tumble play, playing next to the water, an activity they called parkour, and playing in the dark. The last two did not fit neatly into the six categories and subcategories of risky play presented by Sandseter (2009). *Parkour* is described by children as leaping rapidly from one feature to another with excitement and fun. However, parkour is not specifically mentioned in Sandseters' taxonomy, so it could be recognized as an additional risky play subcategory covering *great heights* and *high speed*. Possibly, parkour was not present in the original groupings since the target group of Sandseters' categorization was early childhood, while my findings focused on older children, 6 to 12 years.

This supposition aligns with the mention of parkour in other literature as an element of risky play. For example, Almon (2013) considered parkour for older children and teens a fairly risky activity that enhances the field of adventurous play, requiring research. Moreover, Brussoni et al. (2020) investigated unsupervised outdoor activities for 10- to 13-year-old children where older boys mentioned parkour as 'something fun but hard to do'. I also found that children viewed playing in the dark as an important, challenging, and risky activity, which is relatively unrecognized in children's risky play research. Play in dark spaces may be seen as a way of disappearing, so I propose including it as a relevant subcategory.

By endorsing parkour and playing in the dark as new subcategories, I add to the ongoing research on risky play categories in terms of how children express themselves.

Main messages for research

1. Ecological models in risky play research and theorizing are useful for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of professional attitudes and children's practices (see, for example, the use of this model in Spencer et al., 2021). Moreover, they can be used to compare different age groups, sectors, and nations.
2. Further examination of the influencing factors and how they relate to individual practitioners in their specific practice situations is imperative to learn more about supporting professionals to enable children to take risks in their play.
3. Ongoing empirical research is required to investigate whether and how the interrelated influencing factors impact professional practice in the area of risky play.

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Implications of the study for practice: use of the models for professional development

Having worked in play settings with children and given training to childcare practitioners, I recognize the fundamental dilemma practitioners face between wanting to offer freedom and challenge to children and simultaneously answering parental and societal requirements for safeguarding and safety. The complex reality of professionals' day-to-day practice is further complicated by weighing the various influencing factors and potentially avoiding complaints and discussions. In every setting, practitioners must account for the opinions of diverse actors—parents, managers, and colleagues—and are often unsure whether

regulations and organization policy support their course of action. Therefore, when professionals 'freeze' and adopt a 'no risky play' strategy for children, it is unsurprising since it saves them time and energy. The models of influencing factors are beneficial in the professional area of after-school childcare to help professionals engage with the dilemmas and work towards a strategy of 'fight' instead of 'freeze'. Therefore, I comment on their use in practice by considering the two models together—one for professionals, including the adjusted format, and the other for children, as presented above.

In both models, the play environment functions as a conditional factor for risky play. Furthermore, theories on child development have shown that risky play benefits children's physical and mental experiences. Thus, practitioners should be aware of these play practices. By observing and listening to children, practitioners can establish these positive elements for children in their care and let children decide on their own terms about their risky play activities. Allowing children to decide aligns with the *guiding professional* factor in the children's model of influencing factors, which requires the practitioner's encouraging and supportive role. Suggestions for practitioners concerning this kind of approach and the use of loose parts are increasingly present in articles for childcare professionals (Van Rooijen, 2021; Van Rooijen, 2022b) and childcare management (Cotterink, 2021). Likewise, articles have given more attention to the idea of free, unstructured play and the value of children's autonomy in general (Van Rooijen, 2022a).

Influencing the influencing factors

As the positive influence of the professional is crucial for children to experience freedom during risky play, it is even more crucial to determine how the factors that influence professionals are viewed and can be altered. In other words, which elements of the model must be influenced to ensure professionals feel freer to facilitate risky play? *Cultural factors* are rooted in society and the general attitudes of a country and are, therefore, relatively persistent and challenging to change. The factors of *external regulations*, especially the care inspectorate (GGD) in Dutch childcare, and *organisational policies* from the childcare organisations were both influential in my study. However, in the empirical section, these factors did not change through the program and intervention for the practitioners. Nevertheless, GGD inspectors today are better informed and trained on the subject of risky play in their relationship with *VeiligheidNL*. Practitioners feel freer when risky play is included in an organisation's pedagogical policy. Nevertheless, the lack of such a policy does not mean that this kind of play should be

forbidden, as risky play is normal for children, and practitioners are considered to be able to supervise it.

However, how the next factor, *parental relationships*, affects practitioners is not evident from the results of my study. The literature and the study's question-naire showed that parents are often viewed as a negative influence; however, in the empirical part, parents did not negatively influence the attitude and practice of risky play. Conceivably, the program functioned as a lever for the organisation and practitioners to freely propagate risky play, which altered parents' attitudes to appreciate practitioners as pedagogical experts on child developmental top-ics, thereby strengthening practitioners' self-confidence in facilitating risky play. Future professionalisation programs should reconsider the presumed negative role of parents and actively involve them in programmed risky play schemes, as my experience from facilitated parent sessions is that they are often more relaxed towards risky play than practitioners think. Furthermore, in the empirical part of the research, the professionalisation program seemed to have modified the factors of *personal attitudes* and professionals' *views on the individual child* towards a more positive risk-permissive stance.

Lastly, the model does not show the influence of *colleagues and collaboration in the team* towards risky play, yet this influence was shown in the empirical study. Practitioners find it challenging to work together to supervise risky play since they sometimes disagree with their intervening borders and aim to find common ground rather than discuss these variations. However, this precise approach hin-ders children from engaging in risky play. Therefore, future professionalisation programs should support practitioners in increasing their confidence to deal with uncertainties instead of attempting to find a new ground or rule to guide their practice, making moral development possible. Moreover, reflection-on-action among professionals in the childcare team should be promoted and supported through critical dialogue.

6

Improving the outdoors: loose parts as a catalyst for risky play

The introduction of loose parts forms the centre of the professionalisation programme in facilitating more extensive risky play possibilities for children. Children 4 to 12 years old were attracted to these play materials, which offered age-appropriate risky play as all ages played according to their competencies. As mentioned, loose parts offer ample opportunities for risky play relative to what children perceive as possible and the kind of actions they can perform. By playing with loose parts, children detect connections between their actions and what the materials offer for risk-taking caused by this behaviour, which is crucial

for training their skills and courage. As the outcomes of the empirical part of my study showed, practitioners and children alike appreciated the loose parts and the imagination and creativeness that they inspired in encouraging forms of risky play. Thus, loose parts catalyse riskier play practices, the advantages of which are accurately expressed by the children's words.

Main messages for practitioners

1. Using loose parts is a cost-effective, easily implemented, stimulating, and straightforward way to encourage supervised risky play activities for children of all ages.
2. Using the models, discuss what hinders the next step in facilitating risky play in your teams and map the necessary steps to overcome these barriers for each factor.
3. Be self-confident in guiding children in risky play: you know them so well that you know what they need, can do, and dare to do.
4. Inform parents about risky play practices by showing and telling them how their children want and need this play, including how you see it foster their self-confidence and resilience.
5. Hence, you can be a change agent needed for a paradigm shift from safety towards trust.

Implications of the study for policymaking: taking a pedagogical approach to risk

Policymakers in the childcare sector are responsible for facilitating practitioners in guiding children in risky play activities. As the current overprotective stance is a societal problem that diminishes children's possibilities of taking risks and negatively affects their skills and well-being, childcare settings can play an important role in propagating the message that risk is essential in children's play. Research underpins the notion that policy-incorporated theories impact professionals' beliefs and practices relating to children's risk-taking in play (Sandseter, Little & Wyver, 2012). Therefore, organisations' policies should include a pedagogical view of risk in play, as shown in a grounded pedagogical approach.

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness as foundations

A grounded pedagogical approach supports professionals in their work and fosters their self-confidence and assertiveness in their daily work, supervising free play. I suggest assigning a pedagogical approach to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000), as elucidated in Chapter 5. The three basic

psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (the desire to feel connected to others) are seen as foundations of risky play.

First, building up risk competence (children's skills to recognise, engage, and evaluate risks in play to protect themselves) is essential for children. By engaging in risk, children train themselves to ensure their safety. Children are seen as risk-competent because they play every moment and take every experience to the next play situation. They also become familiar with their abilities and how to expand them. In this way, children understand their competencies, moderate risky play, and accept other children's various internal boundaries in risk-taking behaviour (Brussoni et al., 2012).

Second, children require the freedom and autonomy to make their own decisions in risky play, as adults cannot think for them or determine the best assessment for engaging in risk. Third, the relationships between professionals and children are essential, as shown in the models based on both parties. This relationship concerning risky play should not be one-way, where professionals intervene in children's challenging activities without considering their perspectives. Instead, professionals must be sensitive to children's needs. This bidirectional relationship enhances the possibilities of engaging in risky play. Therefore, integrating professionals' views on children with the children's views on risk requires more insight into children's perspectives.

Pedagogical sensitivity as an interaction skill

In addition to the six *interaction skills* used in childcare workers' curriculum (Boogaard et al., 2012), I advocate for including pedagogical sensitivity as an essential proficiency for assessing children's risky play. Van Manen defined this skill in the down-to-earth description of '*doing the right thing for this child in this situation*' (Van Manen, 1991, p. 519). Practitioners can then think for every playing child in their care to connect to their needs, wishes, and abilities for risky play experiences.

In conclusion, I reiterate what Smith (1998) identified as requirements for a pedagogical relationship towards risk. This relationship requires close and careful observation of children, questioning the approach to each and every child, observing their growth, acknowledging and articulating their challenges, and knowing when to leave them alone. Hence, the main message for practitioners is 'let go and trust'. Thus, professionals should act on pedagogical foundations grounded in the policies of the working organisation. However, policymakers should constantly inform themselves using signals of the practice to evaluate

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procedures and adjust to practitioners' experiences. Furthermore, policy manuals should give practitioners the autonomy and freedom to make day-to-day split-second decisions concerning children's risk-taking. This autonomy can help support practitioners' positive attitudes and more relaxed approaches to facilitating children's risky play.

Main messages for policymakers

1. Insert risky play into policy, based on pedagogical foundations, to acknowledge and stress the importance of the needs of children, including how the relationship between practitioners and the child is established.
2. Provide plain guidelines for practitioners and regularly discuss dilemmas they encounter in daily risky play practice.
3. Actively promote the vision of risky play to parents and other stakeholders.

Limitations and directions for future research

The results of the current dissertation should be considered within the context of its limitations. One limitation is that respondents in the survey and the participating childcare organisations in the field study were likely to have a greater interest in risky play and, consequently, might have been more open-minded towards the subject than other organisations and practitioners. Moreover, the principal researcher and facilitator of the professionalisation program is pro-risky play. This stance could provide some bias about attitudes towards risk-taking; however, the research was carried out according to the code of conduct principles: honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence, and responsibility (Algra et al., 2018).

Similarly, this study was conducted in collaboration between an 'insider' researcher-facilitator and 'external' researchers, which enhanced the study protocols and the interpretation of the data. Nevertheless, both the respondents' and researcher's attitudes could have positively influenced the outcomes. Therefore, the generalisation of the results should be regarded with caution. Future research should consider a broader sample of professionals and organisations, aiming to include a wide spectrum of risky-play-averse to pro-risky-play participants. Such a study is likely to provide greater insight into professional beliefs than this study, which it can also do by utilising interviews with an external researcher to generate data.

A second limitation is that this study was only a six-week intervention, so it did not consider the long-term effects on professional attitudes and children's judgement and perceptions of increased risky play possibilities. Future studies grounded in realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) to determine 'what works for whom in what circumstances' could examine the extent to which the professional program supplied practitioners with tools for reframing hindrances in their working environment, such as parents, organisational barriers, and external regulations, and equipped them to provide children with opportunities for risky play. Hence, these studies can provide insights into how boosting professionals' confidence in dealing with uncertainties and making decisions positively affects children's experiences in risk-taking play.

Lastly, an important focus of the study on children's risky play environments is the affordances that loose parts provide for exciting and pleasurable activities. The study found that children described all kinds of risky play with loose parts; however, the results did not specify which specific materials are appropriate for engaging in risk. As one of the objectives of the study and professionalisation program was to facilitate more risk-taking play by introducing loose parts, future research should focus on the loose parts that are especially appropriate for children's levels of risk-taking.

Concluding remarks

Reflecting on the research and its constructed ecologic models, I conclude that professionals and children cannot engage in risk without each other's trust and acceptance in after-school childcare settings. It is also important to consider all the indicated influences equally in practice. My research identified these factors and provided a first indication of how to ensure these factors can positively enhance risky play. However, practice is messy and complex. Thus, future research should involve all concerned stakeholders that impact children's risky play contexts to individually evaluate all factors and map positive levers for change.

Moreover, I consider the use of loose parts vital to initiate the 'loop of risky play change', meaning that risky play among children positively affects professional attitudes and consequently influences professionals' interventions in a comfortable way of supporting children's developmental-appropriate risk-taking opportunities. This positive loop is important because professionals' changing views on risk substantially affect how children construct risk. To this extent, professionals and children influence each other in taking a more nuanced and

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relaxed approach to risk, which is the ultimate reflection of the interdependent influencing factors in both models presented in this dissertation.

As a children's play advocate who works with children and professionals on risk-taking, I hope my studies lead to changes in policy, professional attitudes, and children's risky play. My study adds knowledge on risky play and the factors influencing professionals' attitudes towards facilitating such play. Moreover, this study contributes to understanding barriers in facilitating children's risky play in the Netherlands, as, to date, the Dutch context has been relatively under-researched. I see the development program outcomes for professionals and children as a valuable contribution to gaining new insights into the added worth or effectiveness of the interventions. Likewise, the outcomes of my study contribute to changing practices in after-school childcare from the perspectives of uncertainty and adult' proximity. Realising that children have an innate need for autonomy and make risk assessments in their play allows practitioners to develop a more trusting approach, thereby fostering self-regulation and resilience in children, which are essential for healthy maturation.

To summarise, the main conclusion of this dissertation is that professional attitudes towards risky play develop and are enacted within systems. By employing two models based on the scientific literature and practice in Dutch after-school childcare settings, the study generated an advanced understanding of how children experience opportunities for risky play and provided new and improved approaches for policy and practice. The results reported in this dissertation suggest that the outdoor environment needs increased attention, children must be taken seriously in their risk-taking play, and their guiding practitioners need support in their autonomy to make enriched risk assessments.

To cite the child in the title of this dissertation, '…that we get more trust, we just want so much more', this quote reflects children's need for autonomy in the infinite exploration of their skills. As my research shows, the quote equally applies to the professional to whom the child is directing the quote: practitioners also need autonomy to facilitate children's risky play practices.

I end with Korczak's ideas about risk in play, formulated from a child's and an educator's perspective:

> *[Every child has the right to] respect for the setbacks and tears! Not only a torn stocking, but a scratched knee; not only a broken glass, but a cut on the finger and a bruise and a bump that are painful* (Korczak, 1929/2009, p. 35).

> *An educator anxious to avoid any unpleasant surprise, who does not want to be responsible for things that may happen, is a tyrant for children* (Korczak, 2012, p. 104).

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Nederlandse samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

Introductie

Kinderen ontdekken spelenderwijs de wereld en hun interesses, vaardigheden en relaties met anderen. Zij oefenen tijdens het spelen belangrijke competenties zoals zelfstandigheid, samenwerking, doorzettingsvermogen, eigenwaarde, veerkracht en communicatie. Dit is nog meer van toepassing tijdens het vrij, ongestructureerd spelen: activiteiten zonder begeleiding of tussenkomst van volwassenen waarbij kinderen zelf beslissen wat en hoe ze spelen. Spelende kinderen voelen zich van nature aangetrokken tot uitdagingen. Ze nemen spontaan deel aan activiteiten die hun grenzen testen en nieuwe ervaringen bieden. Risicovol spelen, of *risky play*, een internationaal geaccepteerde term, verwijst naar fysiek spel dat het risico op letsel met zich meebrengt. De positieve resultaten die het spelen oplevert voor kinderen, worden versterkt door het aangaan van risico. Hierbij wordt namelijk een breed spectrum aan vaardigheden geoefend dat bijdraagt aan het gevoel van eigenwaarde en zelfvertrouwen, waardoor veerkracht en autonomie worden vergroot.

De definitie van risicovol spelen is door Sandseter geformuleerd als: 'spannende en opwindende vormen van spelen waar plezier en angst door elkaar heen lopen, die onzekerheid bieden en het risico op lichamelijk letsel met zich meebrengen.' De zes categorieën risicovol spelen die zij heeft geïnventariseerd zijn: spelen op hoogte, spelen met snelheid, ruig spel, spelen met gereedschappen, spelen in de buurt van water en vuur, en uit het zicht spelen. De mogelijkheden voor kinderen om een spannende speelomgeving te ervaren, zijn in één generatie sterk verminderd. Kinderen kunnen veel minder zelfstandig buiten ronddwalen, de speelomgeving is minder uitdagend geworden en ouders en professionals zijn bezorgder geworden en accepteren risicovol spelen veelal niet meer. Er heerst steeds meer een risicomijdende cultuur, met een nadruk op veiligheidsprotocollen en sociale controle onder volwassenen die een negatief oordeel hebben over ouders die hun kinderen wel vrijlaten in het risicovol spelen. De overbeschermende houding ten opzichte van kinderen lijkt in de samenleving steeds verder toe te nemen.

Risicovol spelen is een vrij recent onderzoeksgebied; in het begin van de jaren 2000 verschenen de eerste studies. Stephenson was in 2003 de eerste die de term *risky* gebruikte in de context van speelsituaties. Deze studie beschreef de gretigheid van kinderen om 'risicovolle', fysieke activiteiten te ondernemen en gaf voorbeelden van het aangaan van dit soort risico's. Zij ging ook in op het dilemma van professionals die kinderen willen uitdagen terwijl ze zich tevens

moeten houden aan steeds strengere veiligheidseisen. Sandseters baanbrekende studies uit 2007 tot 2010 presenteerden de definitie van risicovol spelen, categoriseerden dit in zes elementen en boden een basis voor wereldwijd onderzoek naar het nemen van risico's door kinderen. In Nederland is risicovol spelen een relatief nieuw onderzoeksonderwerp. De eerste publicaties in vaktijdschriften waren van Both en Van Rooijen, in 2013 en 2014. De landelijke campagne van VeiligheidNL in 2017 vestigde verder de aandacht op risicovol spelen in Nederland en richtte zich tot ouders met de slogan: 'Met een beetje risico komen ze er wel'. Een van de contexten voor het bestuderen van risicovol spelen is de naschoolse opvang, waar kinderen vrij kunnen spelen onder toezicht van professionele medewerkers. Deze pedagogisch medewerkers kunnen echter veel barrières ervaren bij het begeleiden van risicovol spelen. In deze studie staat de pedagogische relatie tussen professionals en de kinderen voorop bij het onderzoeken van professionele dilemma's in het faciliteren van risicovol spelen. Bij het ondersteunen van kinderen tijdens het risicovol spelen is het vermogen van een professional om te schakelen tussen de risicoperceptie van een volwassene en die van een kind cruciaal.

Deze dissertatie

In de naschoolse opvang spelen er vier actoren een rol als mogelijke veranderaar bij het faciliteren van risicovol spelen. Deze actoren zijn: de professionals, de spelende kinderen, de ouders en de organisatie. Dit proefschrift gaat in op de soms tegenstrijdige belangen van de verschillende actoren. Verder wordt in deze studie het belang van een uitdagende speelomgeving benadrukt. De hoofdvraag van dit onderzoek luidt als volgt: 'Welke factoren beïnvloeden professionals als zij het risicovol spelen van kinderen willen ondersteunen, en hoe beïnvloedt de perceptie van deze factoren door de professionals vervolgens het risicovol spelen van kinderen?' Het doel van dit promotieonderzoek is tweeledig: het bijdragen aan de wetenschappelijke kennis over het concept risicovol spelen en het verbeteren van professionele competenties om hoogwaardige risicovol spelen-ervaringen voor kinderen in de Nederlandse buitenschoolse opvang mogelijk te maken. Bovendien draagt het onderzoek bij aan het begrijpen van barrières bij het faciliteren van risicovol spelen van kinderen in de Nederlandse context. Studies in dit verband ontbreken vooralsnog.

## De vier studies

De eerste studie in hoofdstuk 2 omvat een narratief literatuuronderzoek dat vijf onderling samenhangende factoren aan het licht heeft gebracht die de houding van professionals ten opzichte van risico's beïnvloeden: 1. het beeld van kinderen; 2. de individuele overtuigingen van professionals ten aanzien van risico's;

3. de relatie tussen professionals en ouders; 4. regelgevende factoren; en 5. culturele factoren. Het hoofdstuk presenteert de relaties tussen deze factoren in een model gebaseerd op het ecologische model van Bronfenbrenner, dat de complexiteit illustreert waarmee professionals worden geconfronteerd bij het maken van risicoafwegingen (zie Figuur 1). De bevindingen tonen aan dat professionals die met kinderen werken, onder grote druk staan bij het omgaan met mogelijk tegenstrijdige prioriteiten. Bovendien suggereren de bevindingen dat professionals mogelijk niet zozeer persoonlijke risicoaversie ervaren maar dat zij zich geremd kunnen voelen door de inwerking van de verschillende beïnvloedende factoren. Hun opvattingen over en de benadering van risicovol spelen wordt gevormd door de omgeving waarin zij werken en de wijze waarop de vijf factoren daar hun houding kunnen veranderen.

In hoofdstuk 3 is het gepresenteerde model van de vijf beïnvloedende factoren geverifieerd en aangepast aan de hand van een vragenlijst waarin Nederlandse kinderopvangprofessionals werden gevraagd diverse beïnvloedende factoren te evalueren. De vragenlijst is verdeeld in drie delen en gericht op de ervaringen, houding en mening van de professionals ten opzichte van risicovol spelen. Ten eerste zien professionals in hun praktijk diverse mogelijkheden van kinderen tot het ervaren van twee van de zes risicovol spelen-categorieën namelijk, 'spelen op hoogte' en 'spelen op snelheid'. De algehele mogelijkheden voor het risicovol spelen van kinderen beschouwen zij echter als ontoereikend. Ten tweede, hoewel er geen sprake was van een sterke rangorde, tonen de uitkomsten aan dat de professionals van mening zijn dat hun kennis van het spelende kind, het pedagogisch beleid en de mogelijkheden van de speelomgeving de meest beïnvloedende factoren op hun houding ten aanzien van risicovol spelen zijn. De
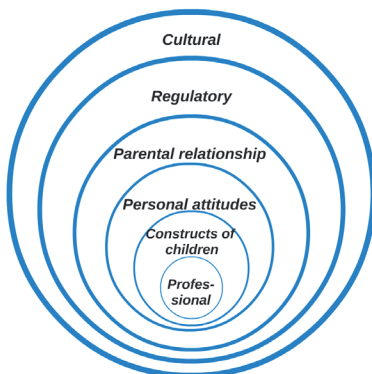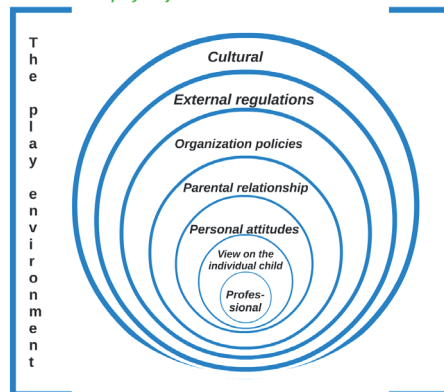
Figuur 1

Figuur 2

minst beïnvloedende factoren zijn de cultuur van risicovermijding en de mening van collega's. Ten derde identificeren de respondenten als belangrijkste belemmeringen in de praktijk de veiligheidsvoorschriften van de GGD en de zorgen van de ouders van de kinderen. De bevindingen hebben geleid tot een aanpassing van het model, zie Figuur 2. Het beeld van kinderen en kennis van het spelende kind zijn geconceptualiseerd in één factor: de kijk op het individuele kind. De regelgevende factoren in het oorspronkelijke model worden nu onderverdeeld in externe factoren, zoals wettelijke gezondheids- en veiligheidsregels, en interne factoren, zoals organisatorische protocollen en pedagogisch beleid. Bovendien werd de speelomgeving gezien als een voorwaardelijke factor voor het ervaren van risicovol spel. Daarom werd deze gepositioneerd naast de onderling samenhangende factoren in het model. Het aangepaste model van zes beïnvloedende factoren biedt geavanceerde inzichten in de Nederlandse en internationale context.

De derde studie in hoofdstuk 4 onderzoekt de impact van een professioneel ontwikkelingsprogramma op het faciliteren van risicovol spelen van kinderen op zeven Nederlandse buitenschoolse opvanglocaties. Dit kwalitatieve onderzoek heeft tot doel meer inzicht te krijgen in de professionele waarden van professionals, in de morele fricties die ze ervaren in de dagelijkse praktijk, en in het morele leren dat ze rapporteren. De onderzoekers hebben het programma ontwikkeld op basis van de theorie over risicovol spelen en over professionele ontwikkeling, met als basis het aangepaste model. Dit programma creëert een robuuste leeromgeving die kritische reflectie en leren mogelijk maakt. Onderdeel van het programma is het introduceren van *loose parts* in de speelomgeving van de kinderen, dit zijn verschillende materialen en spullen die kinderen uitnodigen tot risicovol spelen. De bevindingen tonen aan dat het programma bij professionals een positievere houding ten opzichte van risicovol spelen bevordert. Zij zagen bijvoorbeeld verbeterde speelervaringen door het introduceren van loose parts. De bevindingen tonen ook aan dat de professionals morele frictie ervaren tussen de waarden van veiligheid en autonomie in hun werk met kinderen en tussen de waarden van eenheid en diversiteit in de samenwerking met collega's. De studie vindt geen bewijs van frictie veroorzaakt door ouders of de organisatie. Met betrekking tot moreel leren tonen de bevindingen aan dat de professionals omgaan met tegenstrijdige professionele waarden door te proberen 'een balans' voor zichzelf te vinden tussen het faciliteren van risico en het zorgen voor de veiligheid. Daarnaast streven ze naar samenwerking in het team door te proberen 'de middenweg' te vinden. Beide benaderingen gaan echter voorbij aan de *rommelige praktijk* van het dagelijks handelen en het reflecteren hierop. De

afstemming van opvattingen en waarden tussen collega's verhinderen dus het moreel leren en ontwikkelen.

De vierde studie in hoofdstuk 5 tenslotte, richt zich op de ervaringen en ideeën van kinderen zelf met betrekking tot risicovol spelen. Kinderen van 4 tot 12 jaar werden geobserveerd bij het risicovol spelen, er werden aantekeningen gemaakt tijdens gesprekken en er werden rondetafelgesprekken gevoerd met kleine groepen kinderen. De studie concentreert zich op vier elementen: de algemene opvattingen van kinderen over risicovol spelen, de persoonlijke speelervaringen van kinderen met loose parts, de daadwerkelijke ervaringen van kinderen met het risicovol spelen en de mening van kinderen over de rol van de professional. De bevindingen tonen aan dat de kinderen twee activiteiten noemen die beiden niet precies passen in de zes categorieën en bijbehorende subcategorieën van risicovol spelen die Sandseter presenteert: *parkour* en spelen in het donker. Voorgesteld wordt om deze toe te voegen als nieuwe subcategorieën aan de bestaande taxonomie van risicovol spelen in termen die door de kinderen zelf gebruikt worden. De kinderen verbreedden ook het concept van risicovol spelen, van alleen fysiek risico naar sociaal en emotioneel risico bij het samen spelen: elkaar uitdagen, groepsdruk uitoefenen en tot afspraken komen. Daarnaast waren de kinderen enthousiast over het buitenspelen met de loose parts, zij benoemden de creatieve en risicovolle mogelijkheden van deze materialen. Ze gaven aan dat ze vóór de interventie minder mogelijkheden hadden voor risicovol spelen. Bovendien verbeterde het spelen met loose parts de sociale contacten en het samenwerken met andere kinderen. Met betrekking tot de daadwerkelijke ervaringen van risicovol spelen van kinderen, tonen de bevindingen aan dat kinderen tegelijkertijd angst en plezier ervaren als onderdeel van het risicovol spelen. Ze hebben een sterk verlangen om zelf hun beslissingen te nemen en hun grenzen te verleggen, en ervaren een gevoel van zelfvertrouwen en zelfbeschikking. Met betrekking tot de rol van de professional, tonen de bevindingen aan dat de kinderen zelf willen aangeven wanneer ze hulp nodig hebben en wat hun grenzen met betrekking tot risicovol spelen zijn. De kinderen verklaarden dat begeleiders meer vertrouwen in hen moeten hebben en voldoende afstand moeten bewaren tijdens het spelen zodat ze de ruimte krijgen om zelf te experimenteren met het nemen van risico's.

## Implicaties voor theorieontwikkeling, praktijk en beleid

Implicaties van het onderzoek voor theorieontwikkeling
De studies in dit proefschrift bieden brede inzichten in de kritische elementen van het ontwikkelen van een houding van professionals ten opzichte van risico-

vol spelen. Daarmee worden kansen gecreëerd voor een meer faciliterende rol van Nederlandse professionals bij het risicovol spelen. Het ecologische model van Bronfenbrennner dat in dit onderzoek is gebruikt, houdt rekening met de sociale, fysieke en politieke of maatschappelijke invloeden op gedrag. Het gepresenteerde model van beïnvloedende factoren op de houding van professionals laat zien hoe verschillende niveaus van invloed op elkaar inwerken. In de afsluitende verkennende studie wordt gekeken naar de perspectieven van kinderen. Om het belang van de opvattingen van kinderen in het discours over de mogelijkheden van risicovol spelen te benadrukken, zijn in het concluderende hoofdstuk 6 hun percepties beschouwd met behulp van hetzelfde ecologische model van Bronfenbrenner. Op deze manier kunnen de twee modellen worden vergeleken en kan hun toepasbaarheid voor wetenschappelijk en praktisch gebruik worden besproken.

Het model dat de perspectieven van kinderen vertegenwoordigt (zie Figuur 3), laat vier factoren zien die risicovol spelen kunnen stimuleren of bemoeilijken. Lichamelijke en mentale ervaringen, zoals het accepteren van het risico dat kinderen zichzelf pijn kunnen doen, beïnvloeden de betrokkenheid van kinderen bij risicovol spelen, wat resulteert in de laag van *body and mind*. De bevindingen tonen aan dat *loose parts* als speelmateriaal de kinderen de gewenste nieuwsgierigheid, speelmotivatie en uitgebreidere risicomogelijkheden boden, wat in de tweede laag tot uiting komt. De derde laag is gerelateerd aan de behoefte van kinderen om risico's en uitdagingen met *andere kinderen* te ervaren; het vinden
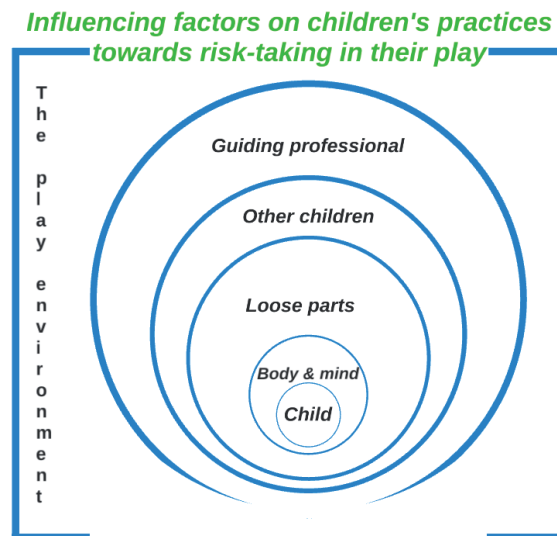
Figuur 3

van nieuwe speelkameraadjes en de ontspannen houding ten opzichte van de sociale risico's die het spelen met zich meebrengt, zoals het elkaar uitdagen. Tot slot, in de vierde laag gepresenteerd, zijn voor kinderen de relaties met de *begeleidende professional* van belang om de ruimte te krijgen voor risicovol spelen; afstand houden en enkel helpen op verzoek van het kind. Analoog aan de factoren van risicovol spelen die voor professionals zijn besproken, is de speelomgeving ook een voorwaardelijke factor in de praktijk van kinderen: geen risicovolle mogelijkheden betekent geen risicovol spel. Uit de ervaringen van kinderen blijkt dat de aanwezigheid van loose parts de meeste categorieën van risicovol spelen mogelijk maakt en zelfs vergroot.

Implicaties van het onderzoek voor de praktijk

In elke werkomgeving moeten professionals rekening houden met de mening van verschillende actoren - ouders, managers en collega's - en zijn ze vaak niet zeker of de regelgeving en het organisatiebeleid hun handelwijze ondersteunen. Daarom is het niet verwonderlijk dat professionals vaak 'bevriezen' en kiezen voor een strategie van veilig spelen, in plaats van risicovol spelen; dit bespaart hun tijd en energie. De modellen van beïnvloedende factoren zijn nuttig binnen de buitenschoolse opvang om professionals te helpen dilemma's aan te pakken en toe te werken naar een strategie van 'vechten' in plaats van bevriezen. De positieve invloed van de professional is cruciaal voor kinderen om in vrijheid risicovol te kunnen spelen. Het is daarom belangrijk om te bepalen hoe de factoren die professionals beïnvloeden, mogelijk kunnen worden veranderd. *Culturele factoren* zijn geworteld in de samenleving en de algemene houding van een land, en zijn daarom relatief hardnekkig en moeilijk te veranderen. De factoren van *externe regelgeving*, met name die van de GGD, en het *organisatiebeleid* van de kinderopvangorganisaties veranderden niet door het in het onderzoek gebruikte professionaliseringsprogramma. Wel geven professionals aan zich vrijer te voelen wanneer risicovol spelen is opgenomen in het pedagogisch beleid van een organisatie. Uit de literatuur en de vragenlijst van het onderzoek blijkt dat de mening van *ouders* vaak als een negatieve invloed wordt gezien. In de empirische studie hadden ouders echter geen negatieve invloed op de houding en praktijk van risicovol spelen. Het professionaliseringsprogramma lijkt de factoren *persoonlijke houding* en de opvattingen van professionals over *het individuele kind* te hebben gewijzigd richting een positievere risico-permissieve houding. Tot slot toont het theoretische model niet de *invloed van collega's* en samenwerking in het team, maar deze invloed wordt wel aangetoond in de empirische studie. Professionals vinden het een uitdaging om samen te werken bij het faciliteren van risicovol spelen, omdat ze het soms niet eens zijn met elkaars grenzen op het gebied van ingrijpen. Daardoor zoeken ze de laagste gemeenschappelijke grens

op, in plaats van dat ze de grenzen met elkaar aftasten en hierover in gesprek gaan. Het is echter júist deze aanpak die kinderen hindert in het risicovol spelen. Professionals zouden zich met het oog op de belangen van kinderen bewust moeten zijn dat het omzeilen van confrontaties en ongemakkelijke gesprekken henzelf en de kinderen niet helpen. Juist het uitwisselen met elkaar en begrip hebben voor diverse meningen maakt dat zij kunnen werken aan hun morele kompas en openstaan voor het verleggen van hun grenzen bij het faciliteren van risicovol spelen.

Implicaties van het onderzoek voor beleidsvorming

Beleidsmakers in de kinderopvang zijn verantwoordelijk voor het faciliteren van professionals bij het begeleiden van kinderen in het risicovol spelen. De huidige overbeschermende houding vormt een maatschappelijk probleem: de mogelijkheden van kinderen om risico's te nemen worden begrensd en hun vaardigheden en welzijn worden negatief beïnvloed. Kinderopvanginstellingen kunnen dus een belangrijke rol spelen bij het uitdragen van de boodschap dat risico essentieel is in het spel van kinderen. Eerder onderzoek ondersteunt het idee dat pedagogisch beleid een positieve invloed kan hebben op de overtuiging en de praktijk van professionals met betrekking tot het faciliteren van risicovol spelen. Daarom is het wenselijk dat het beleid van kinderopvangorganisaties een pedagogische onderbouwing van risicovol spelen bevat. Voorgesteld wordt om de zelfdeterminatietheorie als basis te nemen, waarbij de drie psychologische basisbehoeften van autonomie, competentie en relatie worden beschouwd als fundamenten van risicovol spelen. Ten eerste is het voor kinderen essentieel risicocompetentie op te bouwen om zichzelf te kunnen beschermen. Risicocompetentie houdt in dat kinderen vaardig zijn in het herkennen, aangaan en evalueren van risico's tijdens het spelen. Ten tweede hebben kinderen de vrijheid en autonomie nodig om hun eigen beslissingen te nemen tijdens het risicovol spelen, omdat volwassenen vaak niet de juiste risico-inschatting voor kinderen kunnen bepalen. Ten derde zijn de relaties tussen professionals en kinderen essentieel, zowel vanuit het kind gezien als vanuit de professional, zoals blijkt uit de beide gepresenteerde modellen. Om de opvattingen van professionals en die van kinderen over risicovol spelen te integreren, is meer inzicht nodig in het perspectief van het kind.

Er wordt tevens gepleit voor het opnemen van pedagogische sensitiviteit als een essentiële vaardigheid voor het beoordelen van het risicovol spelen van kinderen, naast de zes reeds bestaande interactievaardigheden die worden gebruikt in het curriculum van kinderopvangprofessionals. Pedagogische sensitiviteit zorgt ervoor dat professionals kunnen aansluiten bij de behoeften, wensen en mogelijkheden tot risicovol spelen van elk afzonderlijk kind onder hun hoede. De

belangrijkste boodschap voor professionals is dan ook 'loslaten en vertrouwen'. Zij moeten kunnen handelen op basis van pedagogische grondslagen die opgenomen zijn in het beleid van de organisatie. Aan de andere kant moeten beleidsmakers zich voortdurend laten informeren over de signalen uit de praktijk om procedures te evalueren en deze aan te passen aan de ervaringen en behoeftes van de professionals. Het pedagogisch beleid zou de professionals de autonomie en vrijheid moeten bieden die nodig zijn om in een fractie van een seconde beslissingen te nemen over de risico's die kinderen aangaan. Deze autonomie kan helpen bij het creëren van een positieve houding bij professionals en een meer ontspannen houding bij het begeleiden van kinderen tijdens het risicovol spelen.

Toekomstig onderzoek

De respondenten in de enquête en de deelnemende kinderopvangorganisaties in het veldonderzoek hadden waarschijnlijk een bovengemiddelde interesse in risicovol spelen en stonden daardoor mogelijk meer open voor het onderwerp dan andere organisaties en professionals. Bovendien is de hoofdonderzoeker en facilitator van het professionaliseringsprogramma pro risicovol spelen. Toekomstig onderzoek moet rekening houden met een bredere steekproef van professionals en organisaties, met als doel een breed spectrum van deelnemers die zowel pro als contra risicovol spelen zijn. Zo'n onderzoek kan mogelijk meer inzicht bieden in de overtuigingen van professionals dan dit onderzoek. Daarnaast was deze studie slechts een interventie van zes weken, dus is er geen rekening gehouden met de langetermijneffecten op de professionele houding en het oordeel en de perceptie van kinderen met betrekking tot meer mogelijkheden tot risicovol spelen. Toekomstige studies gebaseerd op de onderzoeksbenadering *realististic evaluation* die vaststellen 'wat werkt voor wie in welke omstandigheden', kunnen mogelijk aanwijzingen geven in hoeverre het programma de professionals handvatten heeft gegeven om belemmeringen in hun werkomgeving aan te gaan, zoals ouders, organisatorische barrières en externe regelgeving, en in hoeverre het programma hen heeft toegerust om risicovol spelen te faciliteren. Deze onderzoeken zouden inzicht kunnen bieden in hoe het vergroten van het vertrouwen van professionals in het omgaan met onzekerheden en het nemen van beslissingen een positieve invloed kan hebben op de ervaringen van kinderen met het nemen van risico's. Als laatste is een belangrijk aandachtspunt van dit onderzoek, in hoeverre loose parts risicovol spelen mogelijk maken. Uit de studie blijkt dat kinderen allerlei soorten risicovol spel beschrijven met loose parts. De resultaten specificeerden echter niet welke specifieke materialen geschikt zijn om risico's aan te gaan. Aangezien een van de doelstellingen van het professionaliseringsprogramma was om meer risico's te stimuleren door het introduceren van loose parts, zou toekomstig onderzoek zich kunnen richten op welke loose

parts met name geschikt zijn voor het vergroten van de mogelijkheden van risicovol spelen.

Afsluitende opmerkingen

Reflecterend op het onderzoek en de modellen, concludeer ik dat professionals en kinderen in de naschoolse opvang geen risico's kunnen nemen zonder vertrouwen in elkaar en de acceptatie van elkaar. Het onderzoek identificeerde factoren die allen evenzeer van invloed zijn op de praktijk en gaf een eerste indicatie van hoe deze factoren beïnvloed kunnen worden om het risicovol spelen positief te kunnen verbeteren. De dagelijkse praktijk is echter rommelig en complex. Toekomstig onderzoek zou alle belanghebbenden moeten betrekken die van invloed zijn op het risicovol spelen van kinderen, zodat alle factoren individueel geëvalueerd en mogelijk bijgesteld kunnen worden.

Het gebruik van loose parts beschouw ik als onmisbaar om de *loop of risky play change* op gang te brengen: het risicovol spelen van kinderen heeft een positieve invloed op de houding van professionals en zodoende beïnvloedt het op een ongecompliceerde manier het handelen van professionals bij het ondersteunen van de risicomogelijkheden van kinderen. Deze positieve *loop* is belangrijk omdat de veranderende opvattingen van professionals over risico's een aanzienlijke invloed hebben op de manier waarop kinderen risico's construeren. In dit opzicht beïnvloeden professionals en kinderen elkaar in een meer genuanceerde en ontspannen benadering van risico's, wat de ultieme weerspiegeling is van de onderling afhankelijke en beïnvloedende factoren in beide modellen die in dit proefschrift worden gepresenteerd.

Als pleitbezorger van het vrij spelen en als iemand die met kinderen en professionals werkt aan het nemen van risico's, hoop ik dat mijn studies leiden tot veranderingen in het beleid, in de professionele houding en in de praktijk van het risicovol spelen van kinderen. Deze studie voegt kennis toe aan het risicovol spelen en de factoren die van invloed zijn op de houding van professionals ten opzichte van het faciliteren van dergelijk spel. Bovendien draagt dit onderzoek bij aan het begrijpen van de barrières van professionals bij het faciliteren van risicovol spelen van kinderen in Nederland, aangezien de Nederlandse context tot op heden relatief weinig is onderzocht. Ik zie de uitkomsten van het programma voor professionals en kinderen als een waardevolle bijdrage aan het verkrijgen van nieuwe inzichten in de toegevoegde waarde of effectiviteit van een dergelijke interventie. De uitkomsten van mijn onderzoek dragen tevens bij aan het veranderen van de praktijk in de naschoolse kinderopvang vanuit het perspectief van onzekerheid en de nabijheid van volwassenen. Door zich te realiseren dat kin-

deren een aangeboren behoefte aan autonomie hebben en risico-inschattingen kunnen maken bij het spelen, kunnen professionals sterker vanuit vertrouwen werken, waardoor de zelfregulatie en veerkracht bij kinderen worden bevorderd, wat ten goede komt aan hun toekomstig leven als een autonome en competente volwassene.

Conclusie

Samenvattend is de belangrijkste conclusie van dit proefschrift dat de professionele houding en het handelen ten opzichte van risicovol spelen beïnvloed wordt door diverse factoren, waarbij het gebruik van een ecologisch model laat zien hoe verschillende niveaus van invloed op elkaar kunnen inwerken. Door de constructie van twee modellen op basis van de wetenschappelijke literatuur en onderzoek in de Nederlandse buitenschoolse opvang, genereert het onderzoek een geavanceerd begrip van hoe kinderen kansen in risicovol spelen ervaren en biedt het aan de professionele kant nieuwe en verbeterde benaderingen voor beleid en praktijk. Uit de resultaten die in dit proefschrift worden gerapporteerd, blijkt dat meer aandacht moet worden geschonken aan de speelomgeving, dat kinderen serieus moeten worden genomen in hun risicovol spelen en dat hun begeleidende professionals ondersteuning nodig hebben om autonoom risico's te kunnen inschatten.

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Appendices

Appendix 1
Questionnaire 'Challenge and risk in children's play'

Part one: Possibilities and experiences to experience risk and challenge in play
Introduction:
Definition: Risky play is physical play of children involving challenge and tension; it entails children running the risk of hurting themselves. Children can engage in this type of play outside, in the street, in their neighbourhood, or at the playground.
As a professional, you have to deal with children every day who are looking for a challenge in their outdoor play. This experience gives you a good understanding of their opportunities for risk-taking during the time they spend at school, in childcare, or in other environments where professionals supervise them.

Question1: Do children in your outdoor work environment have opportunities to experience risk and challenge? This question is required for each of the 6 elements of risky play.

a) High speeds (e.g. swinging hard, cycling hard, running fast, skating fast, sliding hard)
   ❑ very much ❑ much ❑ sufficient ❑ somewhat ❑ not

b) Heights (e.g. climbing; jumping; balancing; and hanging near high objects, such as trees, walls, fences, or playground equipment)
   ❑ very much ❑ much ❑ sufficient ❑ somewhat ❑ not

c) Rough play (e.g. stick fighting, romping/wrestling, mock fighting, pulling, and pushing)
   ❑ very much ❑ much ❑ sufficient ❑ somewhat ❑ not

d) Risky tools (e.g. knives, hammers and nails, bows and arrows, saws, axes, thick ropes)
   ❑ very much ❑ much ❑ sufficient ❑ somewhat ❑ not

e) Risky elements (e.g. fire, deep water, scrambling on rocks)
   ❑ very much ❑ much ❑ sufficient ❑ somewhat ❑ not

f) Disappearing (e.g. playing out of sight of adults, seclusion, being able to explore)
   ❑ very much ❑ much ❑ sufficient ❑ somewhat ❑ not

Part two: Attitudes: Influencing factors

Introduction: Professionals who work with children develop an attitude towards challenge and risk in children's play. Research indicates that this attitude can be influenced by several factors.

Question 2: What influences your attitude towards risky play for children?
Rank the following from 1 to 9 where 1 = the most important and 9 = the least important factor affecting you.

- ☐ Your relationship with parents
- ☐ Rules and protocols of the organisation for which you work
- ☐ The GGD (Public Health Service) and other external auditors
- ☐ Your character
- ☐ The pedagogical policy and pedagogical principles of the organisation
- ☐ Your own idea of what children are able to
- ☐ Society's culture of risk aversion
- ☐ What you hear and see of children playing
- ☐ The possibilities of the play environment

If there is another factor that influences you, you can note it here and indicate how it scores.

....

scores between ☐ and ☐.

Part three: Opinions: Your attitude towards risky play

Introduction: Research shows that caregivers of children have a double responsibility. On the one hand, they must protect children against risks and provide a safe play environment, and on the other hand, they have the pedagogical responsibility to stimulate children's ability to deal independently with risk and challenge in their play. Your attitude towards risk-taking partly determines how you deal with it in daily practice.

The following questions are about your own attitude towards risk-taking play.

3. What is your opinion on children's risky play?

....

4. What positive and negative aspects of children's risky play can you indicate?
    Positive: ....
    Negative: ....

5. What dilemmas towards children's risky play do you encounter in your daily work?

    ....

6. What is helpful for you to develop a balanced attitude towards children's risky play?

    ....

Part four: Personal Information and work environment Information

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. To ensure that your answers can be properly processed, please provide background information on yourself and your work environment.

1. What sector do you work in?
    ❏ Childcare   ❏ Education   ❏ Youth care   ❏ Other

2. What is your position?
    ❏ Executive   ❏ Management   ❏ Board

3. How long have you been working with children? _____ years

4. What age children do you supervise?
    ❏ 0–4 years   ❏ 4–7 years   ❏ 8–12 years   ❏ 4–12 years

5. What is your education level?
    ❏ Vocational   ❏ Higher profes- ❏ University
    education   sional education

6. Age: _____

7. Gender: Female / Male

8. Would you like to participate in a follow-up study, or do you think your organisation would be open to this? This might involve a personal interview with you or a workshop on risky play within your organisation. If you are interested, please include your name, the name of your organisation (optional), and your own contact details. We will then contact you.

    Name: ....

    Organisation: ....

    Email address: ....

    If you don't want to participate, but still want to have a chance to win the prize, just enter your email address!

Thank you again for your cooperation!

Appendix 2
Evaluation and reflection form

Subject: Reflection and evaluation

Research project risky play BSO

Question: What has been your experiences with regard to **risky play** in this project at out-of-school care? Be specific!

Name: _____

With regard to:	What is important to you?	What has changed?	What's challenging?	What else is needed?
Child's perspective (observing): **How do they play?**				
Facilitating risky play (acting): **What do you do and why?**				
Own attitude (reflecting): **What do you think?**				
View of the team (working together): **How is this going?**				
	Important?	Changed?	Difficult?	Necessary?
Dealing with stakeholders (explaining): parents **What's the relationship like?**				

Dealing with stakeholders (explaining): manager/organisation/ policymakers **What's the relationship like?**				
Dealing with stakeholders (explaining): GGD, cooperative partners, and others **What's the relationship like?**				
	Were your expectations met? What can be done differently?			
Program: Playing with loose parts: *What was this program like in practice?*				
Program: Professionalisation program *How was the course/theory?*				
Program: Research aspects **What was your experience?**				
Is there anything else you would like to add?				

Appendix 3
Informed consent

Research project risky play BSO   2018   martin.vanrooijen@phd.uvh.nl

Informed consent form

Title of research: Research project risky play BSO

Responsible researcher: Martin van Rooijen, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht

For the study, six to eight children from the BSO will participate in two round-table talks. The subject is how they play outside, both at the BSO and at home, and the role of the adult in this play. These children will also be observed more intensively during outdoor play at the BSO to see how they play and whether and how this changes with the 'Playing with Stuff' program. We would like to ask your child to participate in this. If you are okay with their participation, please sign this form. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

To be completed by the parent/guardian

I declare that I have been informed in a manner that is clear to me about the nature, method, and purpose of the investigation. I know that the data and results of the investigation will only be published anonymously and confidentially. My questions have been answered satisfactorily.

I voluntarily consent to my child's participation in this study. I hereby reserve the right to terminate their participation in this study at any time without giving reasons.

Parent/guardian name: ……………………………………………………………………………………….

Child's name: ………………………………………………………………………………………………….

Date:………………………. Parent/guardian signature: ………………………………………………….

To be completed by the student researcher

I have given an oral and written explanation of the research project. I will answer any remaining questions about the research. The participant will not suffer any adverse consequences for any premature termination of participation in this study.

Name of student researcher: …………………………………………………………………………

Date:……………………………. Student researcher's signature: ……………………………………

Appendix 4
Topic list for roundtable talks

Focus group topic list

Do not use: risk, risk play, risky play, dangerous play

Do use: (a little) exciting, scary, challenging, exciting, uncertain, adventurous: play/activities

1. Type of play/activities (general, everywhere)
- What play do you find exciting, challenging, etc.?
- Where do you play?
- How do you do that?
- How does that work?
- Can you give an example?
- How high, fast, far do you go? (what do you play (with): fire, water, frolic, pocket knife, hiding)

2. Feelings evoked by this type of play (generally, everywhere)
- What's exciting about this play?
- Why are you playing this way?
- How does it make you feel?
- Does it always go well, or does it ever go wrong?
- What is okay for you that possibly go wrong? (getting a cut or bruise, breaking a bone, having to go to the hospital)

3. Opportunities at the BSO
- Is there enough challenge for you here?
- What's holding you back?
- What else would you want?

4. Role of supervisors at the BSO
- What do supervisors do and say when you are playing in an exciting way?
- Does it help you or not?
- What should they do? (intervene, ignore you, leave, help, participate, give tips)

5. Home, neighbourhood, and parents

- Is playing outdoors different at the BSO than at home?
- Can you play more/less/differently at the BSO than at home?
- Do parents react differently than BSO supervisors?

Literature

Sandseter 2010a; Stan & Humberstone, 2011; Coster & Gleeve, 2008; Little & Eager, 2010.

Dankwoord / Acknowledgements

Terugkijkend op een periode van bijna 10 jaar dat ik bezig ben met mijn promotie-onderzoek, denk ik aan de mensen die ik wil bedanken omdat ze een belangrijke rol hebben gespeeld aan de totstandkoming van dit proefschrift.

Mijn grote dank gaat uit naar Gerty, die mij in dit prachtige traject heeft onder-steund met haar kennis en ervaring, mij gesteund heeft op persoonlijk vlak en met haar voortdurende positiviteit en doortastendheid mij blijvend motiveerde. Zij nam het 'risico' met mij, mede uit haar persoonlijke ervaringen met spelende kleinkinderen en haar interesse in het onderwerp. Ook was zij altijd belangstel-lend en bereid mij wegwijs te maken in de wereld van de wetenschap. Door de jaren heen is de band die wij hebben door ons gezamenlijke onderwerp versterkt. Bedankt voor je vertrouwen vanaf het begin tot aan het einde, ik heb dit steeds gevoeld. Ik wens je veel mooie dingen toe waar je na je pensionering tijd voor hebt, en met de plannen in het Zweedse.

Mijn begeleider op afstand aan de andere kant van de wereld in Australië, Shirley heeft met haar expertise op 'risky play' mij voortdurend gescherpt en op koers gehouden. Onze jaarlijkse ontmoetingen op de EECERA conferenties waren warm en gaven telkens weer nieuwe energie. Haar suggesties over de internati-onale wetenschappelijke wereld van outdoor play waren heel waardevol. Helaas kan zij niet live bij de plechtigheid aanwezig zijn maar wij ontmoeten elkaar weer op een volgend congres, ik zie er naar uit.

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Mijn onderzoek bij de zeven BSO's had ik niet kunnen uitvoeren zonder de leidinggevenden in de kinderopvangorganisaties die interesse toonden en de pedagogisch medewerkers die aan de slag gingen met risicovol spelen, ook al was dat soms nieuw en een beetje eng. De negen bachelor studenten pedagogiek van de Hogeschool Utrecht hebben een zeer waardevolle bijdrage geleverd aan de dataverzameling, maar belangrijker nog, zij bouwden aan een band met kinderen zodat er een vertrouwde speelomgeving voor hen was om risico en uitdaging aan te gaan. En dit onder deskundige coaching van docent Lisette van der Poel, waarvoor veel dank. De kinderen bedank ik altijd voor het spelen, wat ze natuurlijk gewoon altijd doen, op hun eigen manier en naar eigen ideeën. Wat extra was, waren hun mooie verhalen en verhaaltjes over wat ze spelen en waarom. Tot slot dank aan de kringloopbedrijven die loose parts ter beschikking stelden en zelfs kwamen brengen. Grote dank ook aan Riet Lenting van Kringloop Zeist die vanaf het begin de meerwaarde van loose parts zag, en zonder enige beperking, spullen om te spelen' verzorgt voor al mijn speelprojecten.

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Ik denk vaak aan mijn moeder, vorig jaar overleden, hoe geïnteresseerd zij altijd was in wat ik deed en trots als ik weer eens in de krant stond. Ik mis je bij het afronden van dit proefschrift. Ik ben blij dat mijn vader erbij kan zijn en dit kan meemaken op hoge leeftijd. Lieve vrienden en familieleden, jullie volgden mij van een wat grotere afstand in dit voor jullie onbekende traject, dank jullie wel voor het meeleven.

About the author

Martin van Rooijen was born on November 20, 1966, in De Meern, the Netherlands. In 1984, he obtained his secondary school degree from Niels Stensen College in Utrecht. He worked in various positions, including one at the Dutch tax authority. In the 1990s, he started studying alongside his job: First, he completed the propaedeutic year of teacher training in primary education, followed by a bachelor's degree in social work, which he obtained in 1998. After running his own enterprise in child participation training and children's leisure activities, he worked for three years as manager in after-school childcare. In the 2000s, Martin was a community worker for youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, worked as a playground worker, and coordinated the professional team in two 'building playgrounds' in the city of Utrecht.

In 2013, Martin obtained his master's degree in educational theory with honours at the Institute of Ecological Pedagogy, with a thesis on the subject of parents and risky play. In 2015, he started as an external PhD student at the University of Humanistic Studies, next to his work as a coordinator of children's sports, movement, and play promotion. Martin has published articles on risky play in several Dutch professional journals and has been involved in Dutch networks of outdoor play and children's play rights. He has been a member of the board of the International Journal of Playwork Practice; the Dutch branch of the International Play Association (IPA); and the Outdoor Play & Learning Special Interest Group of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA). He has also built an international network on the subject of risky play. Additionally, he has been involved in several research projects at Leiden University and Utrecht University, among others, and he has collaborated with the Childcare Expertise Centre and the National Institute for Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion. In 2021, he started his own social enterprise, De Blauwe Ton; by training professionals, informing parents, conducting research, and facilitating children's play practice with a loose-parts trailer, he propagates his vision of children's risk-taking play. In 2024, he was the initiator of the first junk playground in the Netherlands, situated in the city of Utrecht.

List of publications

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Other contributions

Kuiper, J., Cotterink, M. en Van Rooijen, M. (2017). *Position Paper Risicovol Spelen.* VeiligheidNL.

When playing, children are naturally attracted to challenges. They spontaneously engage in activities that tests their boundaries and offer new experiences. The possibilities for children's risky play have seriously decreased over the last few decades, due to the overprotective tendency in society. In response to this shift, research has increasingly focused on influencing factors on professional attitudes towards risk-taking in children's play. This dissertation addresses the sometimes conflicting interests of various stakeholders in facilitating risky play in after-school childcare. These stakeholders include professionals, playing children, parents, and the organization, each serving as a potential agent of change. A model is presented, to identify factors that influence Dutch professionals supervising children's risk-taking in their play. Through a qualitative field study in seven Dutch after-school childcare settings, the model's factors are verified in practice. The study generates an advanced understanding of how children experience opportunities for risky play and provides new and improved approaches for policy and practice. The results reported suggest that the outdoor environment needs increased attention, children must be taken seriously in their risk-taking play, and their guiding practitioners need support in their autonomy to make enriched risk assessments.

Martin van Rooijen (1966) obtained a bachelor's degree in social work and worked as manager in after-school childcare, was a community worker for youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and worked as a playground worker and coordinator in 'building playgrounds' in the city of Utrecht. He obtained his master's degree in educational theory with honours at the Institute of Ecological Pedagogy and combined his work with a part-time PhD project at the University of Humanistic Studies. He has been involved in Dutch networks of outdoor play and children's rights and has built an international network on the subject of risky play. In the last three years, he propagates his vision of children's risk-taking in play by training professionals, informing parents, conducting research, and facilitating children's risky play practices.