



Draw and Tell: Uncovering Korean Infant Teachers' Play Experiences and Their Views in Supporting Infants' Play

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Abstract

Using a drawing-based research approach, this qualitative study explored in-service infant teachers' reflections on their play experiences and ways of supporting and scaffolding infants' play at a childcare center in Korea. The participants engaged in a drawing task that illustrated their reflections and memories of their play. They then discussed their drawings by, answering semi-structured interview questions. An analysis of the images and comments depicted in the activity and shared in the interview revealed that participants recalled social and imaginative childhood play memories using natural objects and playing childhood games outdoors. Everyday activities were also regarded as play among the participants, and play activities changed depending on interests, personality, age, and societal situation, such as the Coronavirus pandemic. The findings revealed that infant teachers' interests and preferences influenced their decisions to structure and scaffold or discourage certain play activities in the classroom. Through play, both infants and infant teachers shared positive affect and playfulness. This study suggests a crucial need for early childhood professionals to self-reflect to understand their preferences and play experiences, contemplate how their preferences and experiences impact their teaching practice, and meaningfully integrate play activities in their classrooms.

Keywords Play · Childhood play memories · Drawings · Infant teacher · Early childhood education

Résumé

À l'aide d'une approche de recherche basée sur le dessin, cette étude qualitative a exploré les réflexions des éducateurs de nourrissons en service sur leurs expériences de jeu et les façons de soutenir et d'étayer le jeu des nourrissons dans une garderie en Corée. Les participants se sont engagés dans une tâche de dessin qui a illustré leurs réflexions et leurs souvenirs de leur jeu. Ils ont ensuite discuté de leurs dessins

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en répondant à des questions d'entrevue semi-structurées. Une analyse des images et des commentaires représentés dans l'activité et partagés dans l'entretien a révélé que les participants se souvenaient de souvenirs de jeux d'enfance sociaux et imaginatifs en utilisant des objets naturels et en jouant à des jeux d'enfance à l'extérieur. Les activités quotidiennes étaient également considérées comme un jeu parmi les participants, et les activités de jeu changeaient en fonction des intérêts, de la personnalité, de l'âge et de la situation sociétale, comme la pandémie de coronavirus. Les résultats ont révélé que les intérêts et les préférences des enseignants en bas âge influençaient leurs décisions de structurer et d'étayer ou de décourager certaines activités ludiques en classe. Par le jeu, les nourrissons et les enseignants des nourrissons ont partagé un affect positif et un esprit ludique. Cette étude suggère un besoin crucial pour les professionnels de la petite enfance de réfléchir sur eux-mêmes pour comprendre leurs préférences et leurs expériences de jeu, d'examiner comment leurs préférences et leurs expériences ont un impact sur leur pratique d'enseignement et d'intégrer de manière significative les activités de jeu dans leurs salles de classe.

RESUMEN

Mediante un enfoque de investigación basado en dibujos, este estudio cualitativo analizó las reflexiones de los maestros de jardín de infantes en actividad sobre sus experiencias de juego y las formas de apoyar y estructurar el juego de los bebés en una guardería de Corea. Los participantes realizaron una tarea de dibujo que ilustra sus reflexiones y recuerdos del juego. A continuación, comentaron sus dibujos respondiendo a preguntas semiestructuradas. El análisis de las imágenes y comentarios representados en la actividad y compartidos en la entrevista reveló que los participantes recordaban juegos sociales e imaginativos de su infancia utilizando objetos naturales y jugando al aire libre. Las actividades cotidianas también se consideraban juegos entre los participantes, y las actividades lúdicas cambiaban en función de los intereses, la personalidad, la edad y la situación social, como la pandemia de coronavirus. Los resultados revelaron que los intereses y preferencias de los educadores infantiles influían en sus decisiones de estructurar y fomentar o desalentar determinadas actividades lúdicas en el aula. A través del juego, tanto los niños como los educadores compartían afectos positivos y una actitud lúdica. Este estudio sugiere la necesidad crucial de que los profesionales de la primera infancia reflexionen sobre sí mismos para comprender sus preferencias y experiencias lúdicas, contemplen cómo estas influyen en su práctica docente e integren de forma significativa las actividades lúdicas en sus aulas.

Introduction

Play is deemed a meaningful and integral part of everyday activities during the early years and serves as an important process facilitating young children's learning and overall development (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2005). Play-based learning has been advocated as a recommended teaching approach in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) to promote children's learning and

development (Danniels & Pyle, 2022). Play-based learning is distinctively different from free play (Pyle et al., 2020). Play-based learning should be understood as a multidimensional continuum (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019), involving child-initiated free play and some degree of teacher guidance and involvement (Pyle et al., 2022).

Play-based and child-centered learning has also been emphasized and promoted in Korea. In Korea, two separate institutions oversee ECEC with different historical origins (Yu et al., 2021). Kindergartens are for children aged three to five before they enter elementary schools and under the administration of the Ministry of Education. Childcare centers serve children from birth until their entrance into elementary schools and are regulated and supported by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. In light of the government's efforts to integrate education and care, Korea announced a national, common curriculum for children aged 3–5, called the Nuri Curriculum in 2013 (Park et al., 2013). The Revised Nuri Curriculum has recently been mandated for 3- to 5-year-olds in all kindergartens and childcare centers beginning March 2020 and is available free of cost (Dong, 2022; Yu et al., 2021). The Revised Nuri Curriculum strongly emphasizes child-centered and play-based learning (Dong, 2022). Thus, the current educational climate reflects Western educational practices while maintaining traditional values, such as community, academic learning, and self-regulation (Park et al., 2013).

Play Experiences

Teachers support and scaffold children's play not only by creating a playful environment and enacting playful pedagogy but also by involving themselves in children's play (Aras, 2016; Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2009). Teachers who internalize the importance of play have a more significant tendency to use play in their classrooms and nurture the playfulness of children in their classrooms (Pinchover, 2017). Hence, it is critical for teachers to embody the value of play and to be highly involved in children's play. What teachers value stems from their mental constructions based on the previous experiences that influence their educational decisions and teacher behavior in the classroom (Pajares, 1992). After investigating pre-service teachers' childhood memories, Van Hook (2002) argued childhood experiences influence the teachers' values, expectations, and ways of teaching their young learners. In their survey study examining American and Chinese college students' important childhood play experience, Bergen and her colleagues (1997) reported the importance of play in childhood and the dominant influence of childhood play experiences in adulthood. Although teachers' experiences can affect their teaching practices, teachers' play experiences and practices have rarely been examined.

Uncovering teachers' deeply seated beliefs and memories might not be easy. One powerful way to do so is via drawings. Drawing-based research methods have been widely used in social and health-related fields (Bay, 2020). Drawings allow drawers to express complex ideas concretely, thereby offering a different way for them to reveal beliefs or ideas that are not easily put into words (Albert, 2012). However, drawing itself might not reveal the true meaning of the drawings. The use of drawing and writing together can provide richer data since the narratives that the drawers

express within their drawings give meaning to those drawings (Duncan, 2015). Thus, the draw-and-write method allow drawers to reflect on and communicate the true meaning of the drawings and can reveal further information about symbolic and schematic visual representations portrayed in drawings (Duncan, 2015). The draw-and-tell method has much in common with the draw-and-write method. Instead of a written narrative, the draw-and-tell technique utilizes an interview strategy (Bay, 2020). Drawers are invited to discuss their own drawings during the interviews. Drawings assist in recalling events and extending the interview content (Bay, 2020). The draw-and-tell method is a drawer-centered approach since drawers are regarded as the key interpreters of their drawings.

Despite its unique advantages, the use of drawings to deepen our understanding of teaching and learning is quite limited (Albert, 2012). A few studies have used both drawings and narratives to investigate adults' play experiences. Henniger (1994) asked 115 college students, including pre-service teacher education candidates in the US, to draw and discuss their favorite childhood play memories. This drawing-based research revealed that adaptive materials, social play with friends and/or siblings, and outdoor activities were discussed in the remembered play experiences. Similarly, in research examining the stability of Henniger's (1994) findings, Strudler and Schaefer (1997) analyzed play experiences among ninety-five college women in the US and reported that outdoor play and dramatic play with friends or siblings were remembered more frequently as favorite childhood experiences. In a different context, drawing-based research conducted at a Swedish university analyzed play memories from childhood to adulthood among college students (Sandberg, 2003). In this study, college students discussed the significance of play memories and feelings associated with different places, identifying natural settings (e.g., woods, water, and outdoors) as the most important place. However, these drawing-based studies examined only childhood play experiences among adults and did not specifically focus on teachers and their perspectives or practice.

McClintic and Petty (2015) interviewed early childhood teachers to recall their own memories of early childhood outdoor play and examine their beliefs and practices regarding outdoor preschool play. Teachers in their study remembered outdoor play fondly. However, even teachers, who believed outdoor play was important in the development of young children, struggled to fully understand the learning potential of outdoor settings, which could prohibit children's play due to limited playground space, safety issues, and strict rule enforcement.

It is a widely accepted premise that "a fundamental element of any curriculum for babies, toddlers, and young children is play" (Page et al., 2013, p. 76). However, very few studies examined infant teachers' role in infant play within everyday practice. Infant teachers should scaffold infants' play while meeting infants' varying needs, interests, and developmental levels (Shin & Partyka, 2017). Infant teachers proactively and responsively participated in infant play, taking on various roles to enrich and advance infants' play (Jung, 2013). However, how infant teachers' previous play experiences influence their teaching practice is still underexplored. Therefore, this study aimed to uncover play memories and experiences among in-service infant teachers in Korea and explore how previous play experiences manifest in

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of participants

Name	Years of experience	Age group working with
Teacher Ahn	7 years	1 year old
Teacher Bae	7 years	1 year old
Teacher Cha	3 years	1 year old
Teacher Ha	9 years	2 years old
Teacher Im	8 years	2 years old
Teacher Jung	2 years	2 years old
Teacher Lee	4 years	2 years old
Teacher Nam	7 years	2 years old
Teacher Oh	7 years	1 year old
Teacher Yoo	2 years	1 year old

infant caregiving in terms of supporting and scaffolding infants' play. The research questions this paper sought to answer are as follows:

1. What are infant teachers' perceptions of their play experiences?
2. In what ways, if any, do these play experiences translate into their current teaching practices?

Methods

Given that the focus of this study was to describe and understand infant teachers' subjective memories and experiences of play and the meanings they describe in terms of play as a teaching practice, the phenomenography guided this study. The phenomenographic method examines "qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and various phenomena in the world around them" (Marton, 1986, p. 31). Semi-structured interviews are the most popular phenomenography data collection method, focusing on the relation between the participants and the phenomenon (Han & Ellis, 2019). Using both drawings and interviews can be meaningful and complementary. The draw-and-tell method can effectively and powerfully uncover perceptions, memories, and experiences of play and its connection to teaching practice among infant teachers.

Context and Participants

The study was conducted at a large university-based childcare center in Seoul, Korea. The center is committed to practicing play-based learning and child-centered philosophy based on the belief that children develop physical, cognitive, linguistic,

social, and emotional skills through play. The teachers' role is to facilitate children's learning while children initiate their own learning.

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher made initial contact with the faculty director and the program director of the childcare center and explained the purpose of the study. With support from the program director, participants were contacted and recruited. Only teachers in the infant classrooms were invited to participate, as the focus of the study was to investigate infant teachers' experiences and practices regarding play. The researcher clarified that their participation was optional and voluntary, and the collected data were kept confidential.

The study participants consisted of ten female infant teachers. No male infant teacher was working at this childcare center during the data collection period. The participants' teaching experience varied, ranging from 2 to 9 years. They were caring for infants aged 1 or 2 years old. All participants held bachelor's degrees. A summary of the characteristics of the participants is provided in Table 1.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data sources included a drawing task and semi-structured interviews. To better accommodate the teachers' busy schedules, the researcher decided to meet with small groups of participants. Three groups were formed: one group with four teachers and two groups with three teachers. Each group was met with and interviewed on separate days. Each meeting lasted approximately 60 min.



Fig. 1 Teacher Bae's drawing of outdoor childhood play

At the beginning of each meeting, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants. After obtaining permission from the participants, the meetings were recorded. Before starting the drawing task, the researcher provided each participant with blank sheets of white paper and color markers. The researcher also emphasized that the drawings would be used to engage in conversation about play, and that the participants' artistic skills were not the focus of this study. The size of the paper was 5×7 in (13×18 cm). A smaller paper size was chosen because it is easier to control than a large piece of paper and so that the participants would not be overwhelmed with the size of the paper.

For their drawing task, the participants were invited to draw their own experiences with plays based on the following question: 'Could you draw a picture about your own play?' Upon completing the drawing task, the researcher asked participants to talk about their own play and play experiences. The participants then discussed their teaching practices, especially the play-based learning that they engage in as a teacher.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Korean and recorded. The open-ended interview questions were designed to allow for the development of emergent themes and the meaning of human experiences. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim in Korean first and then translated into English. Each set of transcripts was read holistically without any coding at first. This approach was used to obtain a general understanding and impression of the data. Next, each transcript was read repeatedly, and the data reduction process was performed. All comments related to each specific question were selected and reorganized. Using open coding, excerpts representing the same central ideas or concepts were grouped together (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This process helped the researcher to compare and contrast the data continuously. Next, axial coding enabled the research to organize the developed codes and aggregate codes into broader categories (Strauss & Corbin,



Fig. 2 Teacher Cha's drawing of childhood games

1990). These emerging or preliminary categories and selected representative comments were reviewed while looking at the depicted images. The images needed to be contextualized and juxtaposed with verbal data to allow the researcher to better understand the participants' complex perceptions and experiences. Through a selective coding process, the categories were reviewed, condensed, and refined. Finally, core categories and corresponding representative comments were finalized through repeated reviews of the data that captured the essence of the data.

Results

Outdoor Childhood Play Experiences

When participants were asked to think about their own play experiences, four participants shared their childhood play activities, while others talked about their current play experiences as adults. Childhood play activities took place outdoors, involving natural materials and specific childhood games. Teacher Bae (see Fig. 1) illustrated childhood memories related to creative and imaginative play activities in outdoor environments using natural objects.

When I think of play, it reminds me more of the games I played as a child than the ones I play as an adult. We often met with relatives. When all the grown-ups were watching us, we were playful and made jokes in front of them. I would grind stones and make medicine. I remember that I played with natural objects because I was in a bit of a rural area. Also, with relatives and younger cousins, we just rolled the blankets around here and played princess games (laughs). We played with a dressing-up book a little. Also, I went to many places with our family. The fact that we just caught fish in the water and the valley was very impressive. It was a very fun playful episode. I drew that. (teacher Bae)

Teacher Bae enthusiastically shared her fond childhood memories and remembered her childhood memories were social, such as playing with cousins, taking trips with family, and meeting her relatives in an urban area. Her childhood memories were related to pretend play, such as being a princess with wrapped blankets or grinding stones to make medicine. Her childhood memories were related to pretend play and natural, unstructured play materials.

As shown in the excerpt below, one participant talked about specific games she played as a kid, even a game she played when she herself was in childcare.

And one of the things I remember the most from when I was a child is that at childcare, they made an airplane, and if you put a magnet on the back of it, the airplane moved around like this (gesturing circle movement). That was so memorable at a young age. So when I thought about what I played when I was young, that airplane came to my mind, so I drew it. (teacher Nam)

In Fig. 2, teacher Cha also illustrated a specific childhood game that she enjoyed playing with her friends outdoors.

I think I used to play outside when I was young. My friends from the neighborhood always gathered on the playground in front of the apartment complex, and we'd just play games like Mugunghwa kochi Pprietseumnida ['The Mugunghwa Flower has Blossomed']...And there was a little dangerous play structure in that playground [referring to a jungle gym structure]. I think there were a lot of dangerous structures that you could climb up, hang up and go up to the top. A lot of physical play. (teacher Cha)

Teacher Cha drew a scene in which she and her friends were playing this specific game that is played widely in Korea on the playground. This game is called 'The Mugunghwa Flower has Blossomed.' This is a Korean version of the game 'Red Light, Green Light.' This game is quite popular among young children and is commonly found in modern times as well (Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Culture). As seen in the drawing, teacher Cha drew the person who is 'it' standing with their back turned and facing a tree, while the rest of the children are slightly farther away from the 'it' person. The game continues until children gradually move close to the 'it' person while the 'it' person shouts the phrase ('The Mugunghwa Flower has Blossomed'); the children then successfully touch the 'it' person and run away. A speech bubble that teacher Cha included above the 'it' person indicated that the 'it' person was shouting the phrase. Her drawing specifically showed a rule of this game. In addition, teacher Cha drew herself and other children on the playground structure:

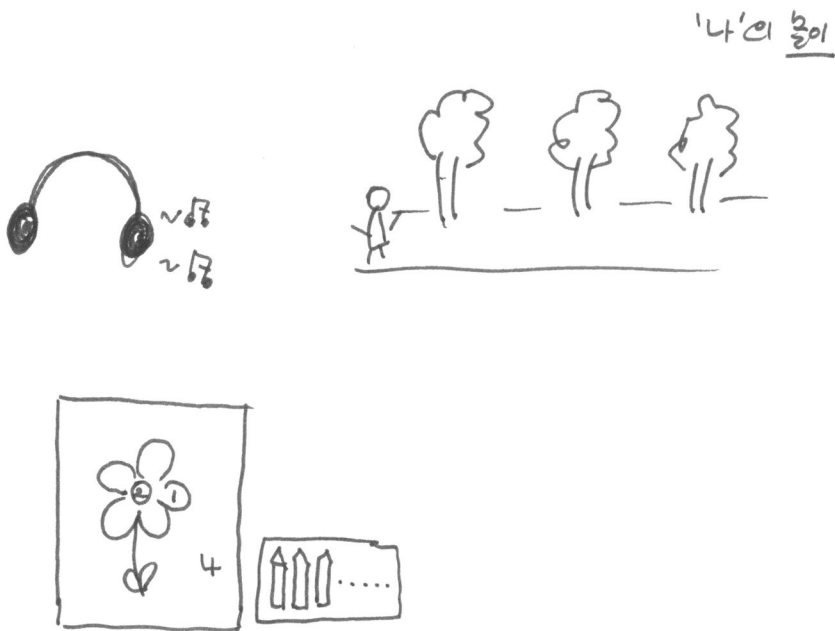


Fig. 3 Teacher Jung's drawing of play altered with coronavirus

on top of the structure, using the slide, and swinging on the monkey bar. Yet, interestingly, even though she herself played on those structures as a child, she referred to her active play around the jungle gym structure in the playground as dangerous.

In teacher Cha's drawing, there was an image of someone calling the teacher's name. However, the teacher did not verbally comment on the image. When the researcher enquired about this specific image, teacher Cha explained that her mother was calling her from the apartment to come inside to eat after playing outside for a while. This might indicate the possibility of her spending a prolonged time outside until she was called home for mealtime.

Everyday Activities and Hobbies as Play

Some participants contemplated how they would approach this drawing task. Teacher Yoo shared her confusion about whether she should draw her play activities with kids in the classroom or her hobby.

Uh, I guess I was a little caught off guard by this one. When I think of my own play, is it the game I enjoy playing with children at daycare, or is it truly my hobby?... So, I was a bit unsure of what to draw, I think I drew it with some hesitation...I just drew something that I enjoy doing in the classroom with the kids, and things I really just feel free to do—what I like to do when I have free time. Memories of me playing in the playground are pretty memorable for me, so I drew myself playing on jungle gym and stuff. (Teacher Yoo)

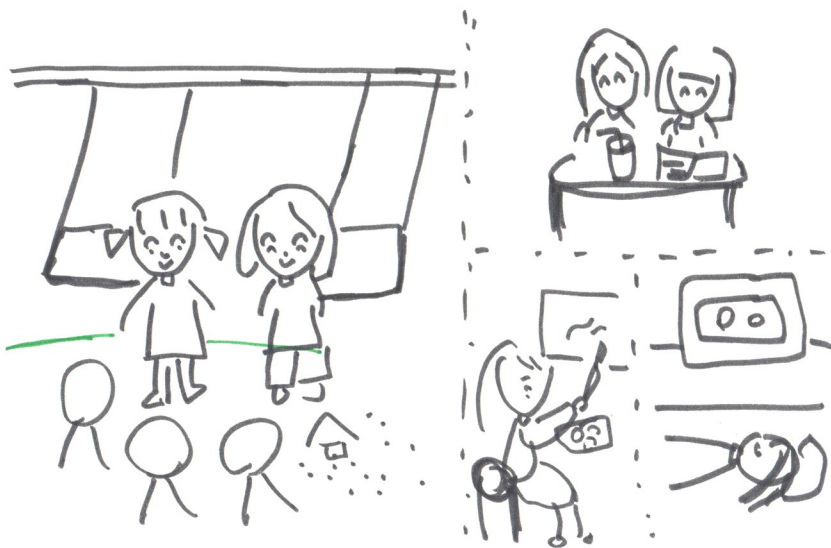


Fig. 4 Teacher Ha's drawing of her own play changing with age

Nonetheless, participants mentioned that their own play encompassed activities that they enjoyed or that made them feel happy. Hobbies and activities in which participants enjoyed engaging were described as forms of play. Play activities that participants enjoyed as adults could be social or solitary and active or quiet, as expressed in the following interview excerpts.

Just a hobby, my hobby. Because it's something I enjoy, and I like to do. Drawing on an iPad or knitting. Those are my favorite types of play, I thought...if it falls into the category, it's my hobby. (teacher Oh)

When I thought about play or when I had the most fun or enjoyed what I was doing, I thought about traveling with my friends. (Laughs) I travel with one or two friends to the beach. I am a bit inactive. So I like to stay home, write in a little diary, and things like that. In doing so, I recharge my energy doing things like that at home. (teacher Ahn)

As portrayed in Fig. 3, teacher Jung also drew everyday activities that made her feel happy. However, her perceived fun activities seemed to be altered due to the coronavirus crisis. Many activities have been restricted due to the crisis. People can no longer go to other places as freely as they did before the crisis. As a result, teacher Jung now tends to engage in more inactive or solitary activities, such as listening to music and walking outside and coloring.

When I think of the word 'play', I feel like it's just something a little fun, something that makes me feel a little bit happy. These days, I like inactive activities, like listening to songs. A small thing like going for a walk while listening to music. There is a stream near my neighborhood, and there is a walking path [trail] there. I can't go out because of corona [coronavirus], so the fun activities I do these days are like walking the trail in my neighborhood. It's just something I've been doing a lot lately. You can't really go anywhere these days. There are many great coloring books. So, I color the page, and when it's finished, I hang it up. There are good ones you can do with paint these days, and I feel proud of them when I hang them up again after I'm done with them. (teacher Jung)

Similarly, teacher Ha expressed how her play activities have changed over time as shown in Fig. 4. Her drawing was more like a timeline exhibiting how her play activities have altered with her age and because of the coronavirus crisis.

I also have the experience of playing outdoors a lot. I think of just playing in the sand with my friends and riding on a swing (laughs). As a grown up, I go to cafes. It was kind of fun to do quiet activities, and I thought those activities were fun and good to relieve stress. The older I get, the more I lie down, resting. Watching TV is my big break. I think it has been more like that since the outbreak of corona [coronavirus]. Just lie down and rest. Now I get tired of resting and I feel like doing something...I am learning to draw. It's fun to learn something. I think that's the best play for me right now. (teacher Ha)

The childhood memories described by teacher Ha were related to outdoor, natural material, and physical play. However, as she got older, she preferred more quiet activities or resting. Her best play at that moment was her newly found hobby, drawing. Her play activities seem to be changed or be newly pursued depending on her age or the situation.

Supporting Infants' Play and Playful Learning

Reflecting on childhood experiences, participants shared how their experiences influence their teaching practice. Due to her particular interest in the natural environment and materials, teacher Bae reckoned that young children did not get much exposure to nature; thus, she tries to incorporate more natural materials and time for children to explore outdoors.

When I was a kid, I really liked playing with natural objects. But in fact, these days, there is no environment in which our young friends can play with natural objects. Even on the playground, you see all urethane floors. I try to utilize natural materials in the flower beds in our center. When we walk outside, it may take a little longer, but if children are curious about something, I try to give them time to explore and play as much as possible. (Laughs.) I think I put more emphasis on that. (teacher Bae)



Fig. 5 Teacher Lee's play activities

Despite her inclination toward physical activity, teacher Ha was discouraged from pursuing the active physical activities, such as Taekwondo, by her parents. Her distinct memories impact her current practices, including providing more physical games and ample time for the children to engage in exercise or outdoor activities.

I really liked to play outside and to be active, but my parents thought those activities could be a little dangerous. If I said I wanted to learn Taekwondo, my parents were like, 'Oh, if you do that, you may get hurt'. They then said, 'Do you want to go to somewhere else? Do you want to go to piano school?' I remember they told me that a few times. During that time, learning taekwondo and kendo was very trendy, and it was really fun. But [because my parents did not support that], I stopped doing those active activities in middle and high school. Yes, that's why I try to give children a little more time when they do physical exercise or outdoor activities. Also, even in the classroom or in situations where we can't go out, I include more physical games. I want to do more physical games than other teachers. (teacher Ha)

One of the physical games she reported incorporating into her classroom was paper-tearing activity using newspapers. Teacher Ha explained as follows:

You just put newspapers in the classroom. You tear the ends slightly because it is difficult to tear them off entirely. Children at the age of 1 do not have the strength yet. Then, if you tear it apart a little and leave it in the class, children will play with them by tearing papers apart. After that (the papers all are torn), you can tape them and make a ball. You can shoot a basket and make a goal. Or you use scissors to make it look like a dress and wear it like this. We can make something like a hat...Especially when we can't go out often or because there's a lot of separation anxiety and stress that children experience in the early stages of adaptation to the center. I think it's good to do sensory play during infancy. (teacher Ha)

Teacher Ha reported supporting physical play in her classroom and utilizing sensory play to ease separation anxiety and to make the transition smooth. Additionally, she provided materials for infants to explore and play, guiding infant's play and offering new ideas to extend their play.

Teachers' interests and preferences influenced their decisions to structure class activities. As illustrated in Fig. 5, teacher Lee enjoyed outdoor play, even during inclement weather. Inside the classroom, her own interests were reflected in her current practice. She discussed her tendency to include sensory or active activities rather than sitting-down, paper-based activities. It seemed that she freely played outside with children, playing with snow, and the children also felt very comfortable playing with snow and being physical with the teacher. Her playfulness seemed to promote playfulness among infants.

Things like paper-based activities. I don't like sitting down and doing things like this on paper, so I think I'm a little less involved in paper-based activities and games...I think I'm the type of person who likes to just do things like that [moving her both fistful hands in a small circular motion]. So, when it snows

outside, I just throw it [snow] at the kids, and the kids just throw it at me without any hesitation at all. Yes, I think I play a lot freely. (Teacher Lee)

Teacher Im is adept and dexterous and enjoys arts and crafts. While she happily offered various art projects in the class, her fear of insects prevented her from extending the children's interests in insects, even though she believed that natural activities and animals would benefit children's learning. This implies that teachers might be likely to offer activities that they liked and lend less support to the activities of which they were afraid of.

I think it's because there are times when I'm a little scared of touching insects and animals, so when I go to an outdoor playground, children are very interested in moving insects, but I can't catch it. The management personnel catch insects and let children see them, but I just can't get the courage to do it. (Laughs) I am aware of the benefits of natural activities, animals, and insects, but there are times when I am not willing to step forward. I love making things with my kids, so I think I do crafts often. Whether it's an art activity or an exploration activity, I'm doing like scribbling, making things with clay, and painting, considering the age of kids I have in my class. (teacher Im)

In addition to arts and crafts activities, teacher Im shared her playful memories in her classroom. She reported setting up the classroom environment based on infants' interest in camping and putting a tent in the classroom. She was playful during this episode, wearing sunglasses and dancing with kids with a mirror ball in the background. Both infants and the teacher shared enjoyment and positive affect, thereby creating a memorable play experience together.

One of the things I had fun with the kids was camping. I set up a tent with kids, put sunglasses on, and turned off all the lights, except the twinkling lights like a mirror ball. We all danced together along to a nursery rhyme medley, and we had a lot of fun. Yes, it was really fun, and the kids were sweating so much. The atmosphere was good too. It is one of the most memorable games that children had fun. And I also had fun. (teacher Im)

Discussion

This study utilized the draw-and-tell process to provide a more complementary and holistic interpretation of play experiences and teaching practices among in-service infant teachers. The findings confirmed that outdoor play was recalled as a favorite childhood play experience (Henniger, 1994; Sandberg, 2003; Strudler & Schaefer, 1997). Participants' favorite childhood play activities involved outdoor physical play (e.g., jungle gym play, swings, and playgrounds), unstructured play (e.g., water play), natural objects (e.g., water, sand, and valley), pretend play (e.g., grinding stones while pretending to make medicine and wrapping up with blankets to be a princess), and childhood games (e.g., 'The Mugunghwa Flower has Blossomed').

Childhood play activities were recalled as social experiences by participants, who played with friends or cousins.

Outdoor space has significance in young children's experiences, learning, and development. Outdoor play offers many benefits and facilitates a valuable multisensory, adventurous, creative, and movement-based experience. As many young children spend more time in childcare, the opportunity for children to experience outdoor play might happen only in childcare (McClintic & Petty, 2015). In this sense, childcare and early childhood teachers hold the key to facilitating outdoor activities. This study urges early childhood teachers to reflect on their ways of supporting children's outdoor experiences and incorporate more outdoor settings and natural materials for infants in their practices. Exploring teachers' perspectives and roles in young children's outdoor play should be an area for future study.

The findings also confirmed the notion that teachers' early experiences impact their teaching practices and educational decisions (Pajares, 1992; Van Hook, 2002). The participants in this study who enjoyed the outdoors and physical play as children offered infants the chance to spend more time outdoors and actively interact with and support outdoor play. Children's play can also be supported, influenced, and controlled by teachers' interests, and preferences (Wood, 2014). For instance, the chance for infants who are enrolled in teacher Lee's active and sensory-oriented class to engage in sitting-down paper-based activities might be slim. Instead, infants would be exposed to playing freely outside and with snow and water. On the other hand, in a classroom where the teacher enjoys arts and crafts as a hobby, children would be exposed to more arts and crafts-based activities. The fact that certain play activities were less supported due to the teachers' preferences, concerns, and even fear deserved our attention. For example, despite a belief in the power of natural play, a fear of insects prohibited one teacher from fully supporting natural play among infants. Teachers' beliefs might not necessarily translate into daily practice, raising an issue regarding the philosophy-reality conflict (McClintic & Petty, 2015).

The participants were in the same childcare center in Korea. Play-based and child-centered learning have been emphasized and valued in Korea (Dong, 2022). The childcare center the participants were in is committed to enacting play-based learning involving child-initiated and teacher-supported activities. However, it is very much possible for children to have very different outdoor experiences and play opportunities even within the same childcare center, depending on the beliefs, experiences, preferences, and the level of engagement of their teachers (Copeland et al., 2012). Young children should have full access to various play experiences regardless of their teachers' preferences, interests, or fear. This study therefore argues for the importance of self-reflection in practice. According to John Dewey (2003), "we do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience" (p. 78). Reflection is a core component of professional development and quality teaching (Schön, 1983). Through various means, such as reflective journals, observations, and video recordings of teachings, teachers can have valuable opportunities to look back on what, why, and how they do things and reflect on their practice in a broader context. Self-reflection will provide a valuable opportunity for early childhood professionals to understand themselves and contemplate how their preferences and interests impact young children's play experience in their classroom. As a result, teachers can

improve their teaching strategies and provide more meaningful, enriching, and equitable play activities.

Various activities and hobbies were described as play by the participants. Play was described as activities they enjoyed or liked, doing or that made them feel happy, thus highlighting the affective side of play. Those play activities include knitting, drawing, arts and crafts, walking on the trails, listening to music, meeting friends, and resting. Although childhood play experiences were mainly social, play activities as adults could be complex, social or solitary and active or quiet. One interesting point was that while play experiences continue to provide enjoyment throughout one's lifespan, one's perceived play activities seem to change with age or due to the societal context, such as the coronavirus crisis. The participants might have been forced to find alternative play activities because of the coronavirus pandemic's forced societal restrictions. Play activities then could be newly discovered, learned, invented, or reinvented. Thus, the impact of social and cultural context on play experience should be explored further.

It is noteworthy that play-based learning has a broad range of teacher involvement (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Pyle et al., 2022). The infant teachers participated in this study took various roles and switched roles depending on the activities and infants' needs (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Jung, 2013). Teachers in this study provided materials to explore with and extended and enriched infants' play by offering new ideas. They also fully participated in physical play (e.g., throwing snowballs and dancing until they sweated). Sensory and physical play was also implemented to support infants easing separation anxiety and making the smooth transition into new environment, as maintained by Jung (2011). The participants also reported experiencing joy, fun, and playfulness through enacting playful activities. Playful teachers can support play in their classrooms and nurture the playfulness of children in their classrooms (Pinchover, 2017). Recognizing that teachers' perceptions and appreciation of playfulness are critical to nurturing play among infants, it is important not only to support teachers in understanding the importance of play but also to help them to be play partners and players. This suggestion underscores a dire need to examine teacher playfulness and the nature and extent of teacher involvement in play-based learning.

There are a few limitations of this study that need to be recognized. This study was performed at a specific site with a relatively small number of participants. Additionally, certain demographic information, such as the age and education background of the participants, was not collected. Therefore, generalizability can be an issue. It is also possible that some participants felt uncomfortable with the drawing process. In addition, participants' play experiences and perspectives can be influenced by cultural and social contexts. Thus, future studies are needed to examine how cultural and social contexts impact play experiences and practices. Some participants expressed confusion as the drawing prompt was intentionally general. This might be because they have not explicitly thought about their play experiences. The confusion could have manifested because the prompt did not directly ask to focus on either childhood or adult play experiences. The researcher intended to elicit and extract participants' most memorable play experiences and not limit their choices. While the findings brought forward interesting and

significant childhood and adult play experiences in this study, this point could be seen as both a strength and a limitation. It should be noted that little research has been done to explore the play experiences and play-based practices using a drawing-based research method. Thus, this study can provide a new channel for infant teachers to share their voices and open a new avenue for using the draw-and-tell method as a self-reflection tool.

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Declarations

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Ethical Approval Research involved human participants. The research received IRB approval.

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