**[Karen]:** When we think about play, Sarah, within the early learning context, we often associate with it being fun and it is. And we also think it's something that occurs naturally. It's actually often referred to as being universally understood by children. Is this the case or is it a bit more complicated than that?

**[Sarah]:** Well, that's a great first question. Yes, I think it's more complicated as most things are as we know, the nuances in the detail of these things. This is the fun aspect. I think I'll talk to the fun aspect first, because I think that's really interesting about how play is associated with fun and, of course, it can include fun. But for me, the word fun can create images of ease and somehow a frivolous activity. And I think about noticing over the years how this impacts how play is perceived in the wider community.

**[Sarah]:** So, if we think about fun, it links to our emotions and something is joyful and surely we would want that for all the children that we work with, yeah?

**[Karen]:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** But play is not always fun. I think fun is one emotion and it's fleeting. Part of play can be fun, joyful. And those of us that have seen children play, whether it's in the park, whether it's in early childhood settings or whether it's our own children, we see that. But it's also frustrating, exciting, can be annoying and challenging. It can be hilarious and at times uncomfortable. So, I would say that play encompasses many emotions and experiences within it and when we limit it to fun, it's presuming that, "Oh, that's just one emotion." Where really, it's process driven, and any process has complex ways of being.

**[Karen]:** Because it would be fair to say, would it, Sarah, that sometimes play isn't fair for children?

**[Sarah]:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I think of Sue Grieshaber and Felicity Mcardle's great book, *The Trouble With Play*. And they really just disrupt that notion, that who's having fun in the play? And are all children having fun with the play? What about power imbalances? What about different things that are occurring? And sometimes play amongst children can be discomfort. It can be a real discomfort. And I really like the Ebbeck and Waniganayake quote, when they talk about that through play, children are constructing an identity. Who they are, what they know, their joys and fears as well as their sense of belonging to a family and community.

**[Sarah]:** So, if you think of that, it can't just be fun. It includes fun, but children's play landscapes are as complex as any landscape in our day. And lots of things are occurring and if we think about what they're doing in play, they're navigating their limbs, expressing their ideas, listening to others, sometimes not listening, creating, or co-creating these new worlds, figuring out how to work something out. It encompasses many emotions, actions, and skills.

**[Karen]:** I was thinking when you just mentioned then that free play is the construction of children's identity.

**[Sarah]:** Yeah.

**[Karen]:** I was thinking if I was working in a practice space with children now, that would be helpful to me because some of those disruptive plays or play that sometimes we might imagine not to be as productive or constructive as we'd like, if you viewed it through their lens, well, actually their identity constructors these children. It might be driving me mad, but they're constructing their own identity.

**[Sarah]:** Yeah, yeah. That's a great way. Yeah, really great way of putting it. And I'd really like to pull another part about that complexity is you talked about a universal activity, and I think, of course, when we go to the United Nations rights of the child, there are some agreed characteristics about that and it's a universal activity, yeah? So, children play throughout the world and there are similarities, but the context of children's play is culturally driven. So, to say it's universal, really minimalizes the culture that the play takes place in, you know. So, I can only play at being Bluey or Elsa because these are popular culture motifs that are festooned throughout my day-to-day culture.

**[Karen]:** It's universal within a sociocultural context, I hear.

**[Sarah]:** Yeah, yeah. Because my human, non-human place, objects, rituals in my culture, may or may not be universal and they feed my play, they feed it. And I love Roopnarine. He talks about the idea of a problem with a universal claim about play, is it ignores the contrasting realities in childhood experiences and cultural forces that help shape our play and really express... I'll go back to that idea of our identity. So, it's a culturally constructive activity.

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