I love the Reggio image of a child idea. If we reflect on how we see a child that gives us insight into how we are interacting with them. How about the child's image of a teacher. Once I was at a Kindy, a long time ago, and the kids had some puppets, and they were pretending to be teachers. "SIT DOWN AND BE STILL!" the puppet teachers bellowed. "Hmmm" I silently reflected. "That's their image of a teacher".

I saw a 2 year old with amazing basketball hoop shooting skills. Way beyond his pay rate. I asked his dad (yes sometimes I get to meet parents!) where did this come from. He said every day they shoot hoops at home. Kids learn by gathering experiences. The more experiences, the more learning. There is a thing called the 10,000 rule. Do something for 10,000 hours and you will be a master of it. Sometimes a two year old can get pretty close to doing something for 10,000 hours.

Natural consequences, vs teacher consequences. Once (but no matter when), a kid (Lets call her Kid A, named after that Radiohead album) built a cubby, and didn't let anyone in. An excluded disgruntled kid dobbed them in, so the teacher laid down some rules. Blah blah blah, this and that, and so forth. Now everyone was grumpy. But check this version out. Kid A built a cubby, and didn't let anyone in. An excluded disgruntled kid dobbed her in, and I said "people are entitled to let who they want into their own house. Let's make our own". We made a cool 'underground' barrel house. Now Kid A comes over and says, "can I come in?". Natural consequence learning came next. Here endeth my story.

It's tough being 4. You live in a world controlled by others, with very little power and autonomy. Cubbies are a great place where kids can claw back a little dignity and have power and control over their lives. The other day some young fellas built their own house. Inside I spied 4 of them. Relaxing with their shoes off and hats off. Their house, their rules.

I was at a city Kindy group time and was testing children's ability to look after themselves. "What would you do if a brown snake appeared next to you?" I asked. "Kill it!" shouted one, "RUN!" alerted another, "Stay still" said an unassuming 4 year old girl. "Stay still! Wow, how did you know that?" I queried. "Just do," she replied. She left out the bit that her mother is a wildlife carer, and she has massive nature experience. Once again, more life experiences equals more learning.

One of the best things about outdoor play is the ability to integrate the senses. As they say, Sensory integration is the foundation of all knowledge (Jean Ayres). The other month we were playing outside and found some fur. Cat? Fox? Bear? One of the kids sniffed it, and rightly deduced Possum fur. Next minute there is a train of us sniffing around looking for a possum. We discovered new scents. A lemon gum, mouldy wet bark chips, and someone's bum (Not mine, I shower every day!). In the Jon Young book, the Coyote guide, he suggests, if you find a track in the dirt, stop and take a big doggie sniff. Not only does this potentially inform you of the age of the track, the beast that made it, and the environment the beast crossed; it also integrates your senses. Sneaking around following a scent ignites not just your olfactory sense but your visual, tactile, auditory, proprioceptive, and vestibule senses. They all work together to give you a big picture of the world around you. Do connecto blocks on a mat in the home corner offer a similar, rich sensory integrated experience?

Check out this story on a 5 year olds ability to understand timelines. We made a bunch of mud spiders, and after 45 minutes this 5 year old, let's call her Zaphod Beeblebrox, asked to check it to see if it was dry. It wasn't. A bunch of other kids asked to see if theirs were dry, and Zaphod Beeblebrox piped up and said "they won't be dry because I did mine first, and mine hasn't dried yet." We make sense of our world by experiencing it, then reflecting on what we have experienced. She has obviously spent more time than most 5 year olds considering the passage of time, and how things pass through it.

Once, but no matter when, I was at a site, and one of the senior staff requested that before the break we should reset the yard, by pulling down all the structures, and letting the kids start afresh. I wonder what pedagogical understanding fuels this yearning? The pedagogical reason I have for not doing that is, child led play deepens, the longer they are uninterrupted. Also, by allowing children the autonomy to direct their own play, I am showing them how I respect their endeavour. And one more point, Lev Vygotsky says "in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself". Real play, the kind that Vygotsky, among others, describes, is child initiated, child-directed, and child-led. Once we add rules and design, it still offers opportunities to grow, and learn, however it isn't the rich deep experience the great theorists have identified. Be free my minions. Free to play. Free to learn.

Sometimes I enter play unsolicited (I've only been doing this for 26 years and I am still learning). I ponder my actions. Do I do it because I'm working with children and feel I must engage with them or I'm not doing my job? Is it because I'm a teacher,

and I think I can redirect the play into something more beneficial for future school needs? Mostly, it is because I can see the possibility of enjoyment they might miss, based on my experiences of 61 years of playing, and the observations of thousands of children playing. An example is, a bunch of kids are in a cubby making coffees. Unsolicited, I ask for a coffee, then query how much it costs. Historically I know, once money is mentioned, then kids go money mad. They need money, they hoard money, different objects become different values of currency, they love handing back change, and counting makes many feel like they are all grown up. It's like the Reggio Idea of throwing prompts into the mix. I think entering play, unsolicited, can have its place in the modern education world where multi-age group play is rare, however it's got be done with the care and awareness that you would exercise crossing a busy crocodile road with a white pointer as a hat and a death adder as a jock strap.

Once, but no matter when, I was at a CPC, and they had a massive mulberry tree full of sweet dark Mulberries. I gathered up the juicy fruits and started handing them around to my monkey friends. A teacher quickly interjected, saying if we let children eat berries that come from a tree, that might encourage them to eat poison berries from poison berry trees. I said "I thought this was an education site? Can't we educate them?" This site chose prohibition over education. Skip 5 years. Now I am at a childcare service full of Lilly Pillies. I pick a handful and gobble them down like a manic monkey. The kids ask if they can eat them. Well, they are known as a native Australian superfood high in many goodies, so I said sure. We found worm holes in some which meant the worms had already left the fruit, so we kept eating. The kids learnt that food comes from nature, we can share food with the animals, and they got to hear a story about a time I ate a poison berry and how the bitter flavour didn't leave my mouth for 4 hours. One of our jobs as adults is to educate the younglings about the foods we eat. They won't work that out through play. They will only learn about it when we pass down this info. Vygotsky calls this Socio-Historical constructivism. Kids construct knowledge by interacting with society and its elders.

I was making my morning cuppa, and I had my first decision of the day. Do I sit in the kitchen and scroll through the google click baits or sit outside in the fresh morning. Three laughing Kookaburras celebrated my correct choice.

I was at a childcare centre that had multiple yards, based on age. I had the same resources in both yards. An educator was looking over the fence and commented on how the different age groups engaged differently with the same resources. She wasn't reflecting on the children's learning because educator reflection is written in the Early years learning framework, or because it's an expectation of the company she works for. She was reflecting because she was in the present, she noticed, and

she has an innate curiosity regarding child development. That is the best reason to reflect on the education world around us.

I love Kindy traps. The physics of trap creation is one thing, however, at Kindy, trap creation nearly always leads to kids becoming animals. When a kid becomes an animal, suddenly body movement becomes heavily considered. Mindfulness permeates. Limbs get held in strange manners; movement breaks from its human shackles, and language becomes alien. Their bodies flirt with yoga, as they pounce, gallop, and slide. Such a great way for kids to connect mind and body, and the best thing is, they can do this all day. I have heard many an educator lament “oh no! She is a cat again”. Just for fun, I participated in a baby cheetah game, where I was the zoo man, and they were the cheetahs. It went for forty minutes straight before I cracked and had to look for bugs.

One of my favourite things is to reflect with the kids, on their learning path. I saw a kid doing the wrap around and around knot on a stick. It kept unraveling. I asked if he would like me to show him a special knot. He agreed, so the didactic lesson commenced. After a few goes, he was tying double granny knots everywhere. Later that morning I said “I remember when I first met you, and you couldn’t tie knots. Now look at you”. He smiled and carried on knotting.

Once, but no matter when, a young fella pulled a millipede in half. It’s a worm now (referring to a worm like gizzard extrusion). I asked why he did it, and he said he wanted to see its spirit. I said now the millipede can’t see his family anymore (harsh I know, but millipedes are a practice animal, that can help us understand the world, and the connections that abound). Later he found a skink. He didn’t try and see its spirit.

The kids were crushing ochre, then adding water and making paint. This is how it normally goes with 4 year olds. They crush a tablespoon worth of ochre powder and along comes a kid and tips 4 litres of water over it, effectively washing it all away. They stare at the slightly yellow puddle of water and start crushing again. Well, this time a young geologist, physicist type scientist steps in and commands the process. “You’re using too much water!” he posits. He authoritatively takes over pouring duties with little resistance. A perfect balance is achieved, and thick lush ochre paint materialises. There was much celebration, and many faces adorned with golden stripes and beards. I wanted to ask the scientist how he came to this understanding, but the answer I always get is “I just know it”. I have to hear from an educator who knows his home life, that he lives in a rich learning environment surrounded by big

brothers, engaging parents, and adoring grandparents. Experiences beget knowledge.

I love Queens ‘We will rock you’ (or “wewillwewill” as the kids call it) As soon as I bash the thump thump clack…. thump thump clack…. 4 year olds ears prick up “That’s on my dad’s radio” they chorus. Soon they join me, and the infectious groove entrains their brains, and they jam along. I celebrate this momentous occasion by singing a Muddy Waters style rendition (I am no Freddy Mercury). What I love the most about this beat is that most kids (even the older school age ones) have little awareness of rhythm. They think drumming is a random bashing of drums. The idea of repetitive patterns goes unnoticed by most. This is why their dancing resembles a heavy metal mosh pit, or a collection of headless chickens. No rhythm. The magnificent ‘We will rock you’ is an exception. The pattern is so brazen the most novice of musicologists feels it. Thank you, Queen, for this gift to children’s musical growth.

I was telling a 5 year old that some germs are good for our bodies. I said some parts of our body need germs so they can practice fighting them. An ears-dropping 5year old said “that would be your white blood cells”

A group of kids were in their cubby. They were enjoying their freedom and their rules. A milk crate was for storage, not sitting (their rule). A visitor came in and was sitting on their storage box. “You can’t sit on it” they chorused. The visitor didn’t comply with the directive and was asked to leave. The ejected visitor turned to an educator for assistance. “He is allowed in,” the educator said. “I suggested the cubby owners should have erected a sign saying, ‘management reserves the right to admission’. that seems to hold court in the real world.

The world is full of noise. Auditory noise like cars, voices, birds, wind and TV. Visual noise like trees, signs, people, and TV. Tactile noise like wind, clothing, and chairs. And olfactory (smell) noise like flowers, cars, and farts. That’s too much Data for a human brain to take in. At an early age we learn to filter out the noise and notice what is important to us. We learn to direct our focus. We focus on things we find interesting, we pick up on patterns, and we notice hazards. A two year old kid will start to notice remote controls. An adult will start to notice remote controls go missing when a two year old is around. Baby brains are hardwired to notice human faces. Some theorise that images of snakes and spiders are hardwired into our brains. Noam Chomsky says we are hardwired to notice our home language. If you live in an environment devoid of nature, your brain will filter that out, as it no longer seems

necessary. Later, when you end up in a beautiful natural environment, you won't notice it because your brain hasn't been trained to take it in. Imagine walking through a beautiful rainforest and thinking "I really like the colour of my new shoes". We can train ourselves through repetition to notice things that we have to be aware of. We have to be aware of nature, because connection to nature is embedded in our DNA. Through repetition, we can connect.

A 4 year old came up to me and said "hey Junk man, this is Laura. Laura doesn't want to get trapped in the cubby". I said "we can make an untrappable cubby!". Piaget reckons 4 year olds can't have empathy, as they are egocentric. That 4 year old was caring about the feelings of the trap fearing girl. That looks like empathy to me.

Often when playing, we will have to look for things. If we are making potions, we will have to look for ingredients. If we are building a cubby, we will have to look for rope, and if we are hunting foxes, we will have to look for tracks. My favourite part of looking is finding things we weren't looking for. While looking for pepper tree roots, we found 'little striped wolf spiders. While looking for feathers we found caterpillars. While looking for fox tracks we found fox tracks. Wait! What? Yes, sometimes you do find what you are looking for.

How many times do we have to hear the story? The children know the story! Some neuroscientists reckon you have to hear something 2000 times before neuro-circuitry is created. Luckily brain circuits can also be created after one experience, however there is no harm in repetition. If I have just read, or told a story, and a kid asks for it again, often I will comply.

I love how often kids will instigate a valuable literacy experience. The other day we were doing the obligatory bug hunt. We found slaters, millipedes, earwigs, and various spider species. One 5 year old decided we should write a book about all of the critters we found at their Kindy. Next minute, kids everywhere had notebooks writing down and drawing everything about the micro-beast they found. I shouted out "hey I thought I said we had to play, and not do work!" They laughed, sh*t-stirred me, and kept 'working' on their book. Sometimes kids free play can look like real schoolwork.

We were playing hide and seek. A 4 year old kid asked me if two people can count at the same time. Lev Vygotsky wrote heaps about children and rules. He spoke of a timeline of development. Rules start off as unspoken. For instance, if you are having a game of chasey the unspoken rule is, one person has to get chased, and the other has to do the chasing. Without following this rule, the game would be silly. Could you imagine two people running around chasing no-one. That's not chase, that's running. Next, they understand the concept of the spoken (or written) rules (they see our society covered in them). However, at the age of 3-6 (roughly) they don't place a lot of importance on how strict you have to be with the rules. Often the rules will change depending on the outcome you want. For instance, in chasey, you aren't 'out' if someone touches you, unless you want to be out. When you get a wee bit older, you start to appreciate following strict rules in your game, as it adds to the challenge. For instance, in "what's the time Mr. Wolf', 4 year olds all want to be the wolf. So, you have a hundred wolves, and one person sneaking up. And when the coalition of wolves yell out a number, say twenty fifty o'clock, the sneaker upper basically adds a thousand more steps, because they really want to be standing an inch away from the dinner time wolf as soon as possible. The 7 year olds, on the other hand have one wolf, and everybody is heavily scrutinised to make sure they only step the required steps. And there are no '100 o'clocks.' They value rules as a means of enabling an activity to run smoothly, fairly, and with a level of predictability. Just like societal rules. So, when the 4 year old kid asks me if two people can count at the same time, I say "sure! It isn't the internationally accepted rules of hide and seek, but when you're four, rules are meant to be explored, not obeyed. You have your whole life ahead of you to obey all the rules. Enjoy your anarchist existence while you can"

I was observing 1 year olds version of risky play. The first risk I noticed them taking was touching an unknown brown sticky substance that looked like poo but didn't smell like poo (what is brown and sticky?… A stick! or my brown clay) The fact they observed adults playing with it, and not vomiting helped them assess the risk. The next risk I saw them take was playing alongside a giant loud hairy gnome (that would be me). When I catch my reflection in a teary eye of a 1 year old, I understand I can be quite imposing. Credit to the little buggers when they take a risk assessment of the situation, and decide the benefits of joining in, such as satisfying their wonderment, outweighs the risk of maybe getting swallowed up by my ever chattering mouth.

I know that in early childhood education the gold standard is encouraging kids to use their own brains instead of relying on adults to do their thinking. An example is; a kid wants to attach a stick to a tree, but can't make it stay, so he asks an adult. The adult response is, "how do you think it can attach without falling." Some love a good thinking challenge. But some get frustrated and think "You're an adult. You already

know how to do this. Just tell me!" He's not thinking about problem solving, he is thinking about what a bastard you are. I know if I was at band practice, and I already knew the chord progression of a song, and the bass player asked me what it was, and my response was, "what do you think it is", he would probably flick his plectrum at my face and say, "stop being an A-hole!". A four year old asked me how to attach a rock on to the cubby door. I said "I suppose there is two ways. One, you could think about it, try a few ideas, and see which one works, thus growing your brain, or you could ask an adult, who already has a big brain". She chose to ask an adult, so I told her how to do it. I don't know if you remember life before the internet, but a lot of our decisions were made based on thinking, trying, failing, then trying again. Now we google the right answer or ask good old '6-finger-a-hand' A.I. to tell us. The internet can sometime function like our elders (even the ones with dementia) and pass on our socio-historical shared knowledge. Some think the art of thinking will vanish when we rely on the web. But we have always had a web of knowledgeable people and libraries around us who share their understandings of the world. There is a time and place for both learning approaches I reckon.

It's funny how our backgrounds shape how we interact with kids. I love zombies. Always have. The gorier the better. I was with some 3-4 year olds and zombie play announced itself (thank you minecraft for delivering zombies to a new generation). They were shuffling around, groaning and moaning and saying "Brains". One junior zombie grabbed my arm and 'bit' me. I (being one who follows the clown pedagogy) grabbed a nearby strip of red fabric, quickly half wrapped it around my arm, while the majority of it dangled from my forearm, and shouted "I'm bleeding!". Well, soon, nearly all of the red pieces of fabric had been commandeered and turned into gushing open blood wounds. The great writer Clive Barker once said, "there is no delight, the equal of dread". The childcare yard resembled a 1970's Japanese slasher sword movie. Blood arms, blood heads, blood bodies. One 4 year old was the doctor, and he was running around ripping the fabric blood off us. "I fixed you" he shouted. Then doctors sprouted up everywhere fixing all the zombie victims. One kid, who had a wee bit of a reputation for not considering the welfare of others, shifted from a lurching zombie attacking all within his peripherals to a caring doctor removing blood from his patients, and with such 'uncharacteristic gentleness', so much so that a couple of educators noted it. Some teachers, whose backgrounds may have come from 'my pet pony' rather than 'Dawn of the dead' may have seen this play 'less than ideal'. But hey, we got to see 'uncharacteristic gentleness.'

I write lots of observations and wonderings while working with kids. While reading through my notes, I stumble upon a scribbling I wrote in May 2024, and it resembled, nearly word for word another I wrote a month ago. I will quote it verbatim in all its gibberish grandeur.. *Directed focus. Directed noticing. Training brain to focus on*

shapes. Interest guides focus. Filter stuff out. Lens to focus. Filters when observing, vs filters after observation? To filter when observing can make you miss valuable data, however it can also rid you of distractions, and make you see clearer. The 1930's work of John Dewey, Education and experience, focused heaps on Teacher reflection. Always wonder, always ponder. Best way to grow.

Kids playing with dead things. I saw a dead bird on the other side of the Kindy fence. I really wanted to show the kids, but I remembered a story, nature education guru, Nicki Buchan told me, about letting kids find bones hours after she found them. Thankfully they found the bird, asked me to bring it into the yard, and examined it. I love how their language gives me insight into where their brains are at. What killed it. Cats' eagles' foxes? *This group already had a sound understanding of the predators in this community.* One lad said he has a cat, and when it kills birds, it makes feathers everywhere. *Such a great observation stored away in his brain, to then be used as a reference to discount a future possibility*. Another girl added "where are all its scratches and bruises?". *She understood if a predator killed it, there should be physical evidence.* Another lad suggested we wait until after group time, and if it doesn't fly away, then it's dead. *Research suggest one of the first understandings children have of death, is things don't move. The lad also knew things cannot move for a little while and still be alive*. One dead bird. Many stories. Much evidence of where children are up to on their 'making sense of their world' trip. I once saw a teacher put a dead bird in the bin before the kids could find it. Such loss of emergent curriculum.

The other day we were introducing the concept, and word, pretend' into the brains of some 7-10 month olds. Together we were making mud blobs. Naturally the wee fellows put the mud, (for real,) into their gobs. "Don't eat it for real" I said. "Pretend" Then I showed them an exaggeration of pretend eating. "Pretend" I repeated. They, once again put it in their mouths, for real. "Just pretend" I repeated. They looked with intensity. they think "He makes the sound 'pretend', and then nearly eats it? "Pretend" I say again. After a few goes a frontal cortex light bulb goes off, and they pretend. "Yes! Pretend" I say for the 2000th time. They make the link. The sound (word) pretend means, do something that looks real but isn't. They connect the dots, "Sounds can represent complex actions. But when I see them 4 minutes later their tongue, teeth and lips are a dark chocolate brown. "We are getting there" I think to myself.