Playgroup Victoria

Learning Sciences Institute Australia

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PROMOTING THE PROVISION OF PARENTAL PROVIDED PLAY-ACTIVITIES IN TRANSITION PLAYGROUPS

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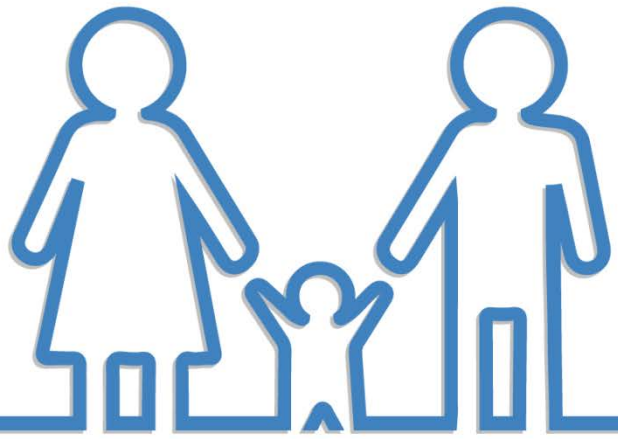

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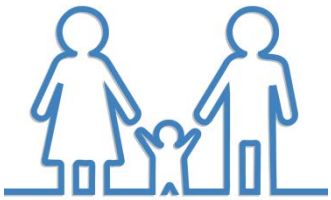

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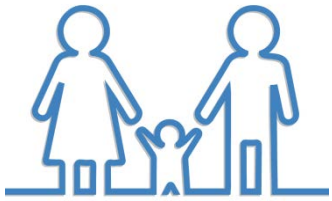
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report evaluates the use of Playmap as a tool to support parents attending transition and community playgroups to implement play activities at playgroup. Playmap is an online tool developed by Playgroup Victoria for use by parents in the provision of parental provided play activities at playgroup. This project recognises the fundamental role of parents as children's first educators and the influence parents have in this role on the quality of their children's early childhood play experiences prior to formal education.

In this project Playmap was released by Playgroup Victoria in metropolitan playgroups in Melbourne. It was released for use by parents and playgroup facilitators in transition and community playgroups for the planning and implementation of parental provided play-activities at playgroup.

Aims and scope

This project focuses on the promotion of parental provided play-activities to young children attending transition playgroups. Transition playgroups play an important bridging role in the process of transition from a supported to community playgroup. Traditionally, during this transition process a playgroup facilitator actively works with parents to plan and implement play-activities for their children as the playgroup transitions to a community playgroup. This project used a new approach to working with parents in transition playgroups by using an online tool developed by Playgroup Victoria to support parents in planning and implementing play-activities in both the transition and community playgroups. The online tool is called Playmap. Using Playmap parents can select from a range of play-activities suitable for implementation in playgroup settings. In this project, parents in collaboration with a Playgroup facilitator used Playmap in the planning and implementation of parental provided play-activities at playgroup.

This research considered three aims in relation to the provision of parental provided play-activities in transition playgroups:

1. To further develop Playmap as an online resource for parents;
2. To establish parents' understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development and the frequency, duration and type of parental provided play-activities in the family home pre and post Playmap usage;
3. To identify the efficacy of Playmap in promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities to young children in transition playgroups as they move into community playgroups.

Methodology

This project was conducted within a sociocultural theoretical perspective (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Specifically, it used the Vygotsky's (1997) concept of tool mediation to understand parents' perspectives of Playmap as a tool for promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities at playgroup. The project used a mixed methods approach to address the project aims. Quantitative methods included the administration of pre and post surveys to participating parents. Qualitative methods included semi-structured focus group interviews post implementation of Playmap with participating parents and playgroup facilitators.

Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of pre and post survey data (Cresswell, 2013). Comparisons between pre and post data were not made due to factors which affected post data collection. Focus group interview data was analysed using an inductive approach to data analysis informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of qualitative thematic analysis.

Findings

The findings of this project indicated that parents do have knowledge of play and are engaging in different play-types at home with their children. The findings further indicated that Playmap has been used successfully in the provision of some parental provided play-activities in transition and community playgroups.

The project established five main findings in relation to the efficacy of Playmap in promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities. These were:

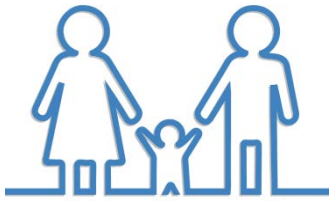
1. Parental knowledge: Playmap is currently aligned to a deficit model of delivery which does not acknowledge or build upon parents existing knowledge and experiences of children's play.
2. Structured play: There is some reluctance amongst parents to fully embrace Playmap as a tool for provision of parental provided play activities at playgroup because it appears to promote structured play to the detriment of open-ended or free play.
3. Socialisation: Playgroup is an important socialisation opportunity for parents and children. This social aspect of playgroup and children's play are both important and interconnected.
4. Playmap activities: Playmap reinforces the value of play in terms of what is already happening in playgroups but it does not enrich the quality of play. In this sense Playmap provided activities for implementation but not ideas for inspiration.
5. Playmap functionality: Parents identified a range of functionality and navigational issues with Playmap that limited their willingness to use it to plan and implement play-activities at playgroup. Playmap functionality did not meet the needs of contemporary and time-poor parents who expressed a preference for using collaborative planning and communication practices to plan and implement play-activities at playgroup.

Conclusion

This report concludes that Playmap has been used with some success in the provision of some parental provided play-activities in transition and community playgroups. In relation to the efficacy of Playmap as tool for promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities to young children in transition playgroups the evaluation concludes with a series of recommendations. These include:

1. Parental knowledge: The reconceptualisation of Playmap as part of a broader approach to parental education that values and extends on parents' existing knowledge of children's play.
2. Structured play: The incorporation of a framework to support parents in their interactions with children at playgroup through a value-added approach recognising the value of familiar open-ended or free play activities at playgroup.
3. Socialisation: The consideration of Playmap more broadly within the social and cultural context that playgroups operate in, which acknowledges socialisation for parents and children as a key aspect of regular playgroup participation.
4. Playmap activities: To expand the breadth and depth of Playmap activities through extension and adaption ideas for promoted play-activities and through an increased range of activities for different age groups, particularly younger children.
5. Playmap functionality: The functionality of Playmap is reviewed to take into consideration the planning needs of playgroup parents, particularly in relation to parents collaborating together to provide play-activities at playgroup. This may include consideration of the incorporation of other contemporary communication practices including social media.

INTRODUCTION



This report evaluates the use of Playmap, an online tool developed by Playgroup Victoria to support parents attending transition and community playgroups to implement play-activities at playgroup. Playmap was introduced into playgroups as a resource for playgroup facilitators and parents to use to support children's play-based learning at playgroup. Playgroup research has shown that children and parents benefit educationally and socially from playgroup participation (ARTD Consultants, 2008; Dadich & Spooner, 2008; Grealy, McArthur, Jenkins, Holland, Butterfield & Andrews, 2012). In this project, Playmap was released in metropolitan playgroups in Melbourne as a resource to support the provision of parental provided play-activities to children in transition playgroups.

Aims and scope

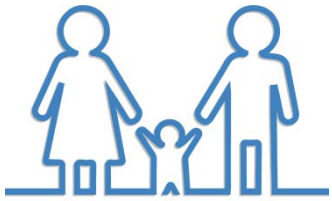
This project focuses on the promotion of parental provided play-activities to young children attending transition playgroups. Transition playgroups are playgroups that operate as a bridge between supported and community playgroups. Supported playgroups are groups serviced by community providers and are typically operated by a trained playgroup facilitator (Jackson, 2013). The aim of supported playgroups is to help families experiencing language, cultural and/or socio-economic difficulties to meet with other parents, and to learn more about the role of play in their children's learning and development (Berthelsen, Williams, Abad, Vogel & Nicholson, 2012). This includes how to best provide their children with access to play-activities in both the home and playgroup setting. Community playgroups differ from supported playgroups because they are entirely parent operated. Community playgroups exist to provide parents with strong connections to their local communities, and to ensure that children have access to a range of play-activities on a regular basis outside the provision of formal early childhood education services (Plowman, 2002). A goal of supported playgroups is that parents attending these groups transition into a community playgroup. This is because funding for supported playgroups is often limited, and that parents benefit in terms of social connectedness from participating in, and leading community playgroups (McFarlane-Piazza, Lord, Smith & Downey, 2012). To successfully support parents in the move from supported to community playgroups, transition playgroups involve a playgroup facilitator actively working with parents to plan and implement play-activities for their children.

Traditionally, playgroup facilitators have worked with parents in transition playgroups in the absence of any supporting materials intended to help parents continue the provision of play-activities to children in community playgroups once the transition period is over. This project used a new approach to working with parents in transition playgroups by using an online tool developed by Playgroup Victoria to support parents in planning and implementing play-activities in both the transition and community playgroups. The online tool is called Playmap. Playmap provides an overview of different types of play known to benefit children's learning and development. These include, Exploration; Literacy and Language; Active Play; Music; Imaginative; Construction; Art and Craft; Discovery and Social Play. Parents can select any one of these play-types and identify from a menu of suggested activities a range of play-activities suitable for implementation in playgroup settings. In this project, parents participating in a transition playgroup used Playmap in collaboration with a Playgroup facilitator moving gradually towards independent use of Playmap as they transitioned into a community playgroup.

This research considered three aims in relation to the provision of parental provided play-activities in transition playgroups:

1. To further develop Playmap as an online resource for parents;
2. To establish parents' understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development and the frequency, duration and type of parental provided play-activities in the family home pre and post Playmap usage;
3. To identify the efficacy of Playmap in promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities to young children in transition playgroups as they move into community playgroups.

LITERATURE REVIEW



Children's play-based learning

Children's learning through play is well documented in Western European literature (Edwards, 2003). Traditional play philosophical perspectives describe children's learning through play through a constructivist lens (Smith, 2009). Heavily influenced by Piaget's work, a constructivist lens describes children learning through play experiences that are open-ended and seek to facilitate inquiry. Traditional play-types described in the literature include outdoor and physical play, construction, art and craft, fine motor, exploratory and pretend play (Bergen, 2015).

Contemporary play perspectives are influenced by sociocultural theory and in particular Vygotsky's (1978) seminal work. Contemporary perspectives describe children's play-based learning as a socially and culturally mediated (Wood, 2014) meaning making process. When viewed in this way children's play-based learning including but not limited to traditional play-types, is mediated by interactions with adults and peers and through the use of cultural tools such as language. Through a sociocultural lens children's play-based learning occurs through interactions with others including modelled and guided interactions between adults and children (Bodrova & Leong, 2011). Contemporary play perspectives have contributed to understanding of how children's play-based learning can be further facilitated or advanced through different types of play and teaching strategies. In Australia, contemporary play perspectives are described in national and State curriculum documents including the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (DET, 2016). In these documents traditional and contemporary play perspectives are recognised through references to both open-ended and intentional teaching.

Current research has provided important knowledge about how children learn through play and pedagogical approaches to promote children's learning through play. Research informed pedagogical approaches for adults' engagement with children in play such as sustained shared thinking (Sylva et al., 2004) and intentional teaching (Epstein, 2007) aim to encourage interactions between adults and children that promote learning. Prevailing research perspectives tend to encourage a balance of open-ended and directed or guided play (Wood, 2010). An example of a framework that promotes a balanced approach is the play-framework (Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie & Hunt, 2010) which provides a framework to support early childhood educators to incorporate open-ended, purposefully framed and modelled play-activities. Whilst research informed frameworks and strategies for promoting children's play-based learning are provided to staff in early childhood education and care through training and professional learning, traditionally in Australia this has not been the case in playgroups other than for staff who are in paid coordinator roles.

Parental provision of play-activities

The parental provision of play-activities to young children is known to promote young children's learning outcomes and to increase their later levels of educational success (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003; Dodge & Sparling, 2007). Play-activities associated with an increase in young children's learning includes opportunities for children to paint and draw, sing songs and nursery rhymes with adults, and participate in co-reading and to play games involving numbers and letters (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004). Research suggests that the benefits

of parental provided play-activities can outweigh the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage on young children's later learning outcomes (Rodriquez & Tami-Lemonda, 2011; Schweinhart, 2002; Schweinhart, & Weikart, 1997). Increasing the provision of play-activities to young children is therefore a key feature of supported, transition and community playgroups – all of which have a focus on ensuring that young children have access to play-activities provided to them by their parents, both in the family home and in the playgroup setting.

Despite extensive research establishing the benefits of parental provided play-activities for young children, little is known about parental understandings of children's play and its relationship to children's learning and development, and the provision of play-activities to children in the home in terms of frequency, type and duration of play-activities. Existing research from the United States of America and Australia identifies typical periods of time spent in childcare activities, of which play with children is included with other activities, such as food preparation, transporting children to activities and/or supervision (Baxter, & Hayes, 2007). However specific data about time spent on play with children and the type of play-activities participated in within the family home is not well established.

Children's play-based learning in playgroups

Research regarding parental participation in supported and community playgroups suggests that playgroup attendance supports parents in learning more about children's play and the type of activities they might use with children in the family home (Berthelsen et al., 2012; Evangelou, Smith & Sylva, 2006; McLean, Edwards, Colliver & Schaper, 2014; McLean, Edwards, Morris, Hallowell & Swinkels, 2016). Research also suggests that playgroup participation benefits young children's later learning outcomes (Gregory, Harman-Smith, Sincovich, Wilson, & Brinkman, 2016; Hancock, Lawrence, Mitrou, Zarb, Berthelsen, Nicholson, & Zubrick, 2012). For example, data from the LSAC study in Australia indicated that children with a history of playgroup participation had higher levels of literacy and numeracy capacity at school entry than those without previous playgroup experience (Hancock, et al., 2012). Further, Gregory et al. (2015) report on research that aimed to examine how playgroup attendance might impact on children's early learning and development outcomes. This study utilised data from the Australian Early Childhood Development Index (AEDC) and found that there are universal benefits for children attending playgroup particularly in the areas of language skills, communication, social competence, emotional maturity and general knowledge.

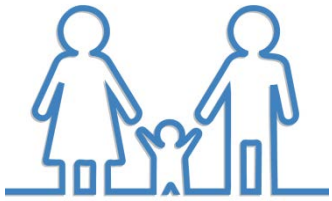
A limitation of existing playgroup research is that little is known about how to most effectively support parents in the provision of play-activities to children in the home and playgroup settings – particularly as this pertains to parents' participation in transition playgroups as they move into community playgroup provision. Internationally, a range of parental education interventions have reported successful outcomes in supporting parents to develop parenting skills and to provide educational activities for children in the home. Notable examples include the Abecedarian project (Campbell, Pungello, Burchinal, Kainz, Pan, Wasik, et al., 2012) and Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Traditionally these types of interventions have employed top-down approaches to the dissemination of information including direct instruction strategies and/or delivery by a trained early childhood professional (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, Skouteris, Harrison, Hemphill, Sullivan & Lambert, 2015). The Room to Play (Evangelou, Smith & Sylva, 2006) model from the United Kingdom offers insight into an approach that aims to be "safe and welcoming for parents" (Evanglou, Coxon, Syylva, Smith & Chan, 2013, p. 129). This is achieved through providing a "neutral" (p. 129) environment in the form of a playgroup in a busy shopping centre, for parents to engage in play with their children. In the findings of this research Evangelou, Smith and Sylva, (2006) identified five elements which contribute to a transferable model. These elements include 1) location; 2) communication and relationships; 3) information; 4) staff professional learning; and 5) play-based curriculum. The element of play-based curriculum is of interest in the Australian context where curriculum documents such as the national EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and the VEYLDF (DET, 2016) have been "designed for use by early childhood educators working in partnership with families" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 1). It may be that a similar resource such as Playmap,

for parental use in playgroups may support parents in the provision of play-activities in the home and playgroup. This project therefore focuses on the promotion of parental provided play-activities to children in transition playgroups using Playmap as a new online tool to foster parental access to information about children's play and suggested play-activities across a range of play-types.

Research questions

1) What are parents' understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development pre and post Playmap usage?
2) What is the duration, frequency and type of parental provided play-activity in the family home pre and post Playmap usage?
3) What are parents' perspectives on using Playmap as they move from transition to community playgroups?
4) What aspects of Playmap need further development to enhance its effectiveness as an online tool to foster parental access to information about children's play and suggested play-activities across a range of play-types?

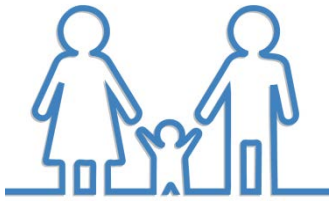
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



This project was conducted within a sociocultural theoretical framework. Sociocultural theory acknowledges the social and cultural context that learning occurs in and recognises that learning occurs through the co-construction of knowledge (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). In this project we were interested in parents' perspectives of Playmap as a tool for accessing information about children's play and play-activities across of range of play-types. As families move from a transition to community playgroup their perspectives of Playmap as a tool are important in determining the efficacy of Playmap in meeting the needs of playgroup families across a range of social and cultural contexts. This is because as playgroup families transition into a community playgroup the planning and implementation of play-based learning activities for their children becomes their responsibility.

This project was conducted using the sociocultural concept of tool mediation. Tool mediation suggests that people use physical or conceptual tools to achieve the object of their activity. Mastery of a tool changes the object of activity (Vygotsky, 1997). In this project, Playmap was to be the tool used by parents and playgroup facilitators to promote the provision of parental provided play-activities in transition playgroups. In this research the use of Playmap as the tool was to be examined pre and post Playmap to identify frequency, duration and type of play-activity provision in the home.

METHODOLOGY



Design

The project deployed a mixed-methods approach (Mertens, 2005), including survey and focus group interviews. A mixed methods approach involved the both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. This approach was used to enable the aims and research questions to be appropriately addressed (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Quantitative techniques included the administration of pre and post surveys (Mertens, 2005). Pre and post surveys (Appendix 1) were conducted with playgroup parents and implemented prior to and three months' post implementation of Playmap. The survey was orientated towards identifying parents' understandings of role of play in young children's learning and development and the duration, frequency and type of parental play-activity in the home pre and post implementation of Playmap. The survey contained items regarding the frequency, duration and type of play-activities parents provide their children in the home. For example, items included, '*Does anyone read to your child at home? If yes, how often?*' and '*How frequently do you engage in songs and rhyme activities with your child?*' It also contained items regarding parental understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development and sub-headings including: a) routines; b) play-activities in the home; c) television; d) computers and tablets; e) reading materials; and f) other educational activities.

Qualitative techniques included the use of semi-structured focus group interviews (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Focus group interviews (Krueger, 2009) were conducted with playgroup parents post implementation of Playmap and were orientated towards identifying parental perspectives on the benefits and limitations of using Playmap to promote the provision of play-activities for children in transition and community playgroups (Appendix 2). Example focus group questions included, '*How have you used Playmap at playgroup?*' and '*What have been the main benefits or limitations of using Playmap for play-activities at playgroup?*'

Table 1 provides an alignment of method and technique according to project aims and research questions.

Table 1. Data collection method and technique according to project aim and research questions

		Research question	Method
Aim 1:	To further develop Playmap as an online resource for parents.	- n/a	- Summary of recommendations for Playmap completed in accordance with project timeline.
Aim 2:	To establish parents' understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development and the frequency, duration and type of parental provided play-activities in the family home pre and post Playmap usage.	- What are parents' understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development pre and post Playmap usage? - What is the duration, frequency and type of parental provided play-activity in the family home pre and post Playmap usage?	- Pre and post surveys with playgroup parents
Aim 3:	To identify the efficacy of Playmap in promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities to young children in transition playgroups as they move into community playgroups.	- What are parents' perspectives on using Playmap as they move from transition to community playgroups? - What aspects of Playmap need further development to enhance its effectiveness as an online tool to foster parental access to information about children's play and suggested play-activities across a range of play-types?	- Semi-structured focus group interviews with playgroup parents and facilitators

Playmap as the tool to be used by parents and playgroup facilitators to promote the provision of parental provided play-activities in transition playgroup was introduced to playgroup families by Playgroup Victoria. A link to Playmap was provided via email and/or the Playgroup Facebook page. During the three-month implementation phase parents were provided unlimited access to Playmap to gain information about children's play and suggested play-activities across a range of play-types. Incentives to use Playmap and/or professional learning were not provided to parents during the implementation phase. The choice to use Playmap to support the implementation of play-activities in the transition playgroups remained with participating playgroup parents and facilitators.

Ethical considerations

This project was conducted with ethical approval from the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee. The project was approved on 21 July, 2015 (ID: 2015-100E). All participants in this project were provided with explanatory statements and completed consent documentation.

Participants

Operational construct sampling as a form of non-probability sampling (Walliman, 2011) was used in the recruitment process. Operational construct sampling was used in order to ensure that participants could provide valuable insight into the research questions (Patton, 2015) as transition or community playgroup parents. Participants were recruited from 10 metropolitan playgroups operated by Playgroup Victoria during 2015 and 2016. The project aimed to recruit 6 or more parental participants from each group (n=60). However, despite repeated and regular contact with participating playgroups and facilitators by Playgroup Victoria and the research team target numbers for recruitment were not met. The recruitment process was documented and included in the pre-implementation phase a visit to each playgroup by a research team member who provided additional support to parent participants to complete the pre-survey. This included assisting parents upon request to read and complete the survey questions. In order to protect the identity of all participants' pseudonyms were used for all participant and playgroup data.

Data collection processes

Pre-surveys with playgroup parents: were administered between October and December. The playgroup facilitator of each playgroup was contacted by phone or email by a member of the research team to arrange a visit to each playgroup. Some parents chose to complete the pre-surveys during the playgroup visit and others parents completed the pre-surveys at home and returned them to the playgroup for collection the following week. During this process some parents asked for assistance in completing the pre-survey and assistance was provided by the research team member at the level requested by the parent. This required the research team member to read some questions or parts of the question to the parent. Table 2 provides a summary of the playgroups and participating numbers at each playgroup for the administration of the pre-survey.

Table 2. Summary of playgroups and participants per playgroup for pre-survey

Playgroup	No. of surveys
Rosebud	4
Plenty	3
Diamond Creek	7
Footscray	5
Chandler	7
Rowville	4
Boronia	7
Belgrave	3
Croydon	6
Pascoe Vale	5
Total	53

Post-surveys with playgroup parents: were administered after the three-month implementation period during April - June. After parent and facilitator feedback during the pre-survey phase an ethics modification was put through to enable the post-surveys to be completed by parents online. Ethics approval was granted and the post survey was available for completion from February 2016. Links to the online post-survey were sent by Playgroup Victoria to participating parents for completion. The online option did not produce a high response rate with only four surveys completed online in April 2016. After this low response rate, a second ethics amendment was sought to enable the post-

survey link to be sent with a reminder message via text and/or email to be sent by the research team to participating families. This ethics modification was approved in May 2016 and text and email reminders for completion of the online post survey were sent to participating parents. This process produced a further seven post-survey completions. After this process a further ethics modification was sought and approved to enable the research team to phone each of the parent participants to follow through on the completion of the online post-survey and to offer assistance to complete the survey over the telephone. Approval was granted in May 2016 and a member of the research team then called each of the participants to follow up on post-survey completion. Additionally, hard copies of the post-surveys were distributed at participating playgroups and a research team member visited the playgroups to provide assistance to any parents requiring support to complete the post-survey. This process resulted in the final completion rate of 17 online post-surveys.

Focus group interviews with playgroup parents and facilitators: were conducted face to face at five playgroups. A total of five interviews were carried out with parent and facilitator participants. These interviews involved a total of 16 parent and/or facilitators and are summarised in Table 3. The semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted between May and June, 2016. The focus group interview contained 22 questions about parents and/or facilitators use of Playmap for the provision of parental-provided play-activities at playgroup. A member from the research team contacted the playgroup facilitator from each playgroup to organise visits to the playgroups to carry out the focus group interviews. From the original list of participating playgroups Croydon playgroup parents were unable to continue participation due to the playgroup ceasing operation during the post implementation period, Rosebud playgroup was unable to continue due to participating parents no longer attending the playgroup, contact was unable to be re-established with facilitators at Footscray and Plenty playgroups. Rowville declined to participate in the post-data collection because although these parents indicated that they had looked at Playmap these parents had not used it and expressed that they did not have anything the wished to say about Playmap. Focus group interviews were conducted with parents and/or facilitators from Belgrave, Boronia, Diamond Creek and Pascoe Vale and Chandler. These interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription company adhering to a stated privacy policy.

Table 3. Summary of focus group interviews

Playgroup	No. of focus group interviews	No. of participants
Belgrave	1	4
Boronia	1	5
Chandler	1	1
Diamond Creek	1	3
Pascoe Vale	1	3
Total	5	16

Data collection during the post implementation period was compromised due to a number of factors. A delay in Playmap being released in all participating playgroups meant that the post data collection period extended into the new year to enable a three-month period of time for parents to use Playmap as a tool for the provision of parental provided play-activities to children in playgroups. For some parent participants this created a delay in post-survey data collection.

Several other issues emerged that further compromised the completion of post-surveys and focus group interviews. In particular, this included the transient membership of families participating in transition playgroups. For example, during the pre and post implementation period Diamond Creek Playgroup, which began the period with seven parent participants, had forty percent of these members move on and an additional two new members join the playgroup. In a further example

Pascoe Vale Playgroup, from the original group of five parent participants had only two original parent participants including the facilitator remaining and an additional fourteen new members joining the playgroup during this period. Further, Belgrave Playgroup increased from three to four parent participants interviewed as more mothers from a 'Mother's Group' joined the playgroup.

The transitory nature of regular participation by families in transition playgroups was also characterised by parents unable and/or prepared to commit time to complete post-data collection due to mobility in minimal cases (e.g. one reason given was moving to a different state) or moving on elsewhere for reasons which weren't given or sought in the scope of this field research. In addition, participant illness affected non-attendance at an organised focus group interview (e.g. two participants were unable to attend an interview in a small playgroup due to illness on the day of the scheduled interview). Although contact by a research team member was made consistently with each playgroup facilitator in the process of post data collection, the ebb and flow that seems to be part of the dynamic of parent participation made it difficult to engage parent participants in the post data collection process. The contact initiated by the research team member to engage in post-implementation data collection is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of contact by research team member with each playgroup for post-implementation focus group interviews

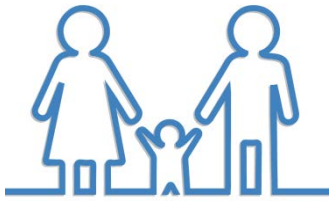
Playgroup	Type of contact	Total no. of attempts to contact (if applic)	Using Playmap	Focus group interview carried out	Additional information
Rosebud	Phone Email	9	n/a	no	Unable to make contact
Plenty					No contact initiated – due to low participant rate pre-implementation
Diamond Creek	Phone	1	Yes	Yes	
Footscray	Phone Email	5	n/a	No	Unable to make contact
Chandler	Phone Email	n/a	Yes	Yes	
Rowville	Phone Email	n/a	No	No	Not willing to be interviewed – conscious decision not to use Playmap. Indicated that parents had looked at Playmap but will not use it.
Boronia	Phone email	n/a	No	Yes	
Belgrave	Phone	n/a	No	Yes	
Croydon	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Playgroup did not continue in the new year
Pascoe Vale	Phone Email	n/a	Yes	Yes	FG interview rescheduled three times due to a local event and inability to participate during Ramadan.

Analysis

Analysis of pre and post survey data involved descriptive statistics (Cresswell, 2013). Comparisons between pre and post data were not made due to factors previously described that affected post data collection. Focus group interviews were analysed using inductive coding (Cresswell, 2013). Inductive coding was used to explore the ideas and concepts coming through the interviews (Rennie, 2011). These interviews were orientated towards identifying parents' perspectives of using Playmap to plan and implement play-activities for children attending playgroup. Although this data collection was compromised in that parents identified a lack of use of Playmap in these playgroups we have found an in depth consideration of parents' perspectives of Playmap. Interviews with parents have shed light on why the uptake of Playmap in these playgroups was not to the extent that was expected during the intervention period and provides important insights into future directions for interventions of this nature.

The inductive analysis of interview data drew on Braun and Clarke's (2000) phases of qualitative thematic analysis. This involved *familiarisation* with the data through reading and rereading transcripts to identify key ideas about parental perspectives of Playmap. The next phase involved systematic *coding* of general themes followed by a process of *searching* for additional themes and sub themes. During this phase general themes identified included structured versus free play, activities, technical and appearance and parental knowledge. During the *reviewing* phase coded extracts were checked against each theme and through a process of *refining* the themes the final coding of extracts and analysis was completed. As part of this process inter-rater reliability measures involved another member of the research team cross-checking codes assigned to extracts in the data.

FINDINGS



This project used Vygotsky's (1997) sociocultural concept of tool mediation to examine the efficacy of Playmap-as-tool to promote the provision of parental provided play-activities in transition playgroups. Parents and facilitators as the *subject* used Playmap as the *tool* for the *object* of activity which is to provide play-activities for children attending playgroup. The outcome was an in depth consideration of parental perspectives of Playmap-as-tool for the provision of parental provided play-activities in playgroups.

Table 5. Outcomes in relation to project aims

		Outcome	Status
Aim 1:	To further develop Playmap as an online resource for parents.	- Summary of recommendations for Playmap completed in accordance with project timeline.	Achieved
Aim 2:	To establish parents' understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development and the frequency, duration and type of parental provided play-activities in the family home pre and post Playmap usage.	- Parent understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development and the frequency, duration and type of parental provided play-activities in the family home were established pre Playmap. - Low return rate of post surveys due to extraneous factors	Compromised
Aim 3:	To identify the efficacy of Playmap in promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities to young children in transition playgroups as they move into community playgroups.	- In depth understanding of parent perspectives of Playmap identifies benefits, limitations and reasons for lack of uptake of Playmap in transition playgroups	Achieved

Aim 1. To further develop Playmap as an online resource for parents.

This aim was addressed through a consultative process prior to the implementation of Playmap. A member of the research team reviewed Playmap and provided Playgroup Victoria with a series of recommendations to further develop Playmap as an online resource for parents. These recommendations included incorporating further visual materials such as photographs of examples of play-activities and aligning the play-activities described in Playmap with the outcomes identified in the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009).

Aim 2. To establish parents' understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development and the frequency, duration and type of parental provided play-activities in the family home pre and post Playmap usage

Parental understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development and the frequency, duration and type of parental provided play-activities in the family home pre- Playmap

implementation in the transition playgroups. The recruitment and pre-survey data collection process extended beyond the initial time line by two months as there was some reluctance by parents in transition playgroups to be involved. A member of the research team spent additional time in the playgroups building relationships with playgroup parents and assisting parents to complete the pre-surveys.

Pre-survey data indicated parental awareness of a range of play times and activities in the home (Table 6). The most common items in the home for children's play included outdoor games (88.67%), toys cars, trucks (88.67), songs, rhymes and chants (88.67%), art and craft (86.79%), construction (84.9%) and ball games (84.9%).

Table 6. Play-activities in the home

Item (n=53)	Item in the home	%	Child uses regularly	%
Sandpit	21	39.6	14	26.41
Play dough	40	75.47	20	37.73
Dolls	42	79.24	28	52.83
Dress ups	33	62.26	22	41.50
Songs, rhymes and chants	47	88.67	39	73.58
Puzzles	49	92.45	30	56.60
Children's Books	49	92.45	45	84.90
Alphabet games	33	62.26	15	28.30
Maths Games	23	43.39	10	18.86
Construction	45	84.90	39	73.58
Art & Craft	46	86.79	32	60.37
Balls games	45	84.90	37	69.81
Outdoor games	47	88.67	39	73.58
Tea set, kitchen toys	39	73.58	26	49.05
Toy cars, trucks	47	88.67	37	69.81
Electronic learning software	24	45.28	14	26.41
Furby toy with AI component	9	16.98	5	9.43
Handheld games console	11	20.75	2	3.77
Electronic games	12	22.64	2	3.77
Tablet (i.e. iPad)	28	52.83	16	30.18

Parents also reported engaging with their children in a range of play activities (Table 7). Parents reported regular engagement in reading books with their children with 34% of parents indicating that they read books with their children for more than twenty minutes a day. A further 18.9% of parents further reported engaging in songs and rhymes with their children for more than 20 minutes per day. Watching television (26.4%) and role playing games (32.1) were also popular with parents engaging in these activities for more than 20 minutes daily.

Table 7. Frequency of parental engagement in activities with their children at home

Item (n=53)	5-10 mins	%	10-15 mins	%	15 -20 mins	%	< 20 mins	%	Weekly	%	Monthly	%	Never	%
Joint storybook	7	13.2	14	26.4	11	20.8	18	34	1	1.89				
Songs and rhymes	17	32.1	8	15.0	9	17	10	18.9	6	11.3				
Watching videos	5	9.4			7	13.2	14	26.4	8	15.1	2	3.8	7	13.2
Role playing	4	7.6	10	18.9	6	11.3	17	32.1	7	13.2	3	5.7	2	3.8
Computer games	1	33.3	1	1.9	1	1.9	1	1.9	8	15.1	2	3.8	27	50.9
Table games/ applications	3	5.7	1	1.9	4	7.56	4	7.6	6	11.3	3	5.7	22	41.5
Smart phone games/apps	2	3.8	1	1.9			5	9.4	9	17	5	9.4	22	41.5

A range of other activities were also reported by parents prior to the implementation of Playmap in the playgroups which indicated parental awareness of children's play in the home (Table 8). These included educational outings (71%), pretend play (84.9%) nursery rhymes (98.1%) art and craft (88.7%) and alphabet and counting activities (88.7%). The use of digitally enhanced toys (30.2%) and play with non-functioning digital equipment (56.6%) was reported to a lesser extent.

Table 8. Other educational activities in the home

Item (n=53)	Yes	%	No	%	No resp	%
Does your child have any digitally enhanced toys?	16	30.2	17	32.1	20	37.7
Does your child play with any old/non-functioning digital equipment?	30	56.6	20	37.7	3	5.7
Does anyone ever sing/teach your child nursery rhymes?	52	98.1	0	0	1	1.9
Does your child use writing/craft materials?	47	88.7	3	5.7	2	3.8
Does anyone ever practice the alphabet / letter names /counting with your child?	47	88.7	3	5.7	2	3.8
Does your child engage in pretend play with props or toys?	45	84.9	4	7.6	4	7.6
Does your child go on educational outings?	38	71.7	13	24.5	2	3.8

Post-survey data is not presented in the findings of this report. Comparisons between pre and post data have not been made due to the factors that impeded the post-survey data collection process. In particular, the low return rate of post-surveys was influenced by the transient nature of transition playgroups. Additionally, the delay in release of Playmap into these playgroups extended the three-month implementation period into the new year and parents who completed the pre-survey were no longer attending these playgroups. Parents also reported issues accessing Playmap with the link not working, which prevented use of Playmap in the playgroup.

Aim 3. To identify the efficacy of Playmap in promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities to young children in transition playgroups as they move into community playgroups.

The project identified five main elements in relation to the efficacy of Playmap in promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities to young children in transition playgroups. These were: 1) parental knowledge; 2) structured play; 3) socialisation; 4) Playmap activities; and 5) Playmap functionality. Each of these elements are discussed in turn.

Parental knowledge

A key element influencing playgroup parents' decisions to use or not use Playmap was identified in the recognition of parents existing knowledge base about children's learning and development. Parents expressed a concern that Playmap did not acknowledge this existing knowledge base and seemed to operate from an assumption that parental knowledge of their own children's learning and development was limited. Parental knowledge was expressed by parents in terms of generational knowledge that is handed down from parents and grandparents such as "*discussing with our parents, that there will be milestones*" or acknowledgement that "*being children ourselves once and knowing what we enjoyed and what our parents had done with us at certain stages of our own development*" provides a foundational base to build upon. These concerns are also echoed in parental education literature where deficit models of parental education (Evangelou & Wild, 2014; McLean, et al., 2015) which use top-down approaches to the delivery of early childhood curriculum, tend to ignore in the delivery any existing knowledge that parents may have about their own children.

Knowledge of children's play, learning and development was also described by parents as developing through their interactions with other parents at playgroup. This seemed to be an aspect of their learning that parents described as missing in the implementation of Playmap. For example, one parent described this collaborative aspect involving the sharing of parental knowledge amongst parents at playgroup as influencing the play-activities that are provided at playgroup:

> I'd actually say too that we learn from each other too. We come here as a group and we just discuss things that have happened during the week and someone else might come up with an idea [play activity] or try doing whatever it is [play activity] at home and it might prompt us to look at something different and step out of the box a little bit. I think we're learning from each other as well, rather than just Playmap.

This perspective of learning is similar to sociocultural perspectives of learning which emphasise learners' co-construction of knowledge in social and cultural contexts, through interactions with others and as a collaborative process (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

Structured play

There seemed to be some concern by parents that Playmap promoted the implementation of structured and highly organised play-activities to the detriment of free play. Parents expressed a preference for play at playgroup to be about having choices for children's free and open-ended play.

Parents described a resistance to the structured play that Playmap was seen to be advocating. This was because free flowing play in the playgroup was considered to meet parent and child needs:

> I love the free play, I love the un-structure, they're learning to socialise, they're learning to interact, they have their little issues but they work through things and that's really important for them to be able to do that.

The free play or unstructured play-activities at playgroup were valued because these were "child-led" and welcomed as a change from the many other structured activities that families are engaged in during the week:

> I feel like most of our kids are probably engaged in quite a few structured activities during the week as it is, so most of them go to kinder or swimming or music or whatever else we all do outside and I think for us playgroup has often been a time where we come together … as a mothers group where the kids have sort of grown together and do a bit of that independent free-ranging kind of play.

Although some structure was still described in the child-led aspect of play at playgroup it seemed to be talked about more in terms of guiding the children's play:

> I feel like we won't often provide a lot of structure to what we do here except where we have done art activities or we've directed play by bringing out those big mats and the blocks, the soft blocks and things like that where we've sort of directed activity but it's more child led.

Comments such as these were indicative of parental awareness of their children's engagement in free play and adult mediated play (Bodrova & Leong, 2010) at playgroup. As one parent noted: *"I suppose just that the children are all really engaged in what they're doing. Sometimes I don't feel the need to provide a lot more because they're feeling happy and involved*". This would seem to suggest the need for consideration of parental education approaches with the potential to complement or value-add to parents' current play practices at playgroup such as the pedagogical play framework (Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie and Hunt, 2010) which provides for combinations of adult and child-led modelled, open-ended and purposefully framed play.

Parents further noted that the child-led aspect of the existing play-activities was more conducive to having a playgroup at an external venue than many of the structured activities described on Playmap. This was because parents viewed child-led activities as easily extended upon using available resources. There was some concern that many of the activities in Playmap were not able to be implemented using the equipment and resources available at the playgroup venue:

> What's available in terms of equipment [we would use] and we wouldn't necessarily bring anything to playgroup to do a different activity … We come here to use what is here.

Parents ascribed value to the play-activities that were presented on Playmap in terms of offering suggestions for play at home. A reason given for this was that the activities were well suited for parents and children to engage with "*at home individually with [our] kids rather than here [playgroup].*" The suggestion that Playmap had potential benefits for elevating the quality of play at home was summarised by one parent who noted:

> I find they [children] get a little bit bored at home with their set toys and that sort of thing. That's where Playmap activities are good because you look at them and think, 'Oh yeah, we could do this, we could do that.' and it prompts you to do a few more different things I suppose.

Although not the explicit focus of Playmap there is some indication from these findings that parents valued Playmap for ideas for play at home where group knowledge and the added stimulation of interacting with other children and families at playgroup was not accessible.

Socialisation

One of the main reasons for attending playgroup was parents and children's socialisation. One parent noted that she was "*looking for it [playgroup] just as much for myself … it was for me and for Florence [child] and it's been a benefit for both of us*". In this sense playgroup provided parental support through:

> …an opportunity to catch up on a weekly basis for those initial support needs around being new parents and we've sort of bonded that way – then we found a venue that was safe and contained with some activities for the kids.

For parents, socialisation was the main purpose of playgroup and although children's play at playgroup was also considered an important aspect of regular attendance these two aspects were described as interconnected and inseparable:

> To be able to come here [playgroup] and let the kids go off and have a play, play with different activities, be able to play with other kids, for me to have a chance to debrief and just talk and have some adult conversation. I do notice it when it's not on. I get a lot out of it.

Additionally, these types of comments seem to be indicative of some concern by parents that this intertwined relationship between play and socialisation at playgroup was not necessarily recognised in Playmap. Small scale studies have demonstrated the importance of cohesion within the playgroup to support young families (Gibson, Harman & Guilfoyle, 2015) and build social capital. The findings presented here suggest a need for stronger cohesion between families shared goals for play at playgroup and those promoted in Playmap for parents to embrace Playmap as a tool for the provision of parental provided play-activities in transition and community playgroups in ways that build knowledge and capacity.

There was a strong emphasis on play at playgroup as fundamentally being about the development of children's social skills. There seemed to be some criticism of Playmap having an emphasis on structure rather than socialisation. Parents described not using Playmap because there was not enough emphasis on children's social learning as a key driver for play at playgroup:

> I think for our playgroup it's really just free play and teaching them [children] to be cooperative with each other and sharing with each other rather than the values of formal teaching and structure.

These types of parental responses to Playmap had an underlying focus on the need to value the play that was already happening at playgroup and the rich interactions between children and parents and children that were already occurring and facilitating learning:

> They're learning all their social and emotional skills through each other and through us modelling appropriate behaviour; how to behave with each other and how to share and how to look after each other in appropriate ways and to interact so they might learn those things through doing the activities together.

Similar findings have also been reported in other studies in community and supported playgroups (see Grealy et al., 2012; Hancock et al., 2012; McShane et al., 2016). In our own research (McLean et al., 2014) in supported playgroups in schools (SPinS) we have shown that parents identify

children's social learning as an important benefit of their participation in SPinS. The findings reported here further suggest that this is the case in transition playgroups.

One parent's comments seem to capture the essence of the discussion across all participating playgroups about the social aspect of playgroup for parents and children. This parent expressed her opinion that playgroup is about spending quality time with her children that involved "*more cuddles, more hugs, more kisses, more time*" and Playmap did not necessarily help her to do this.

Playmap activities

The activities that were available to parents on Playmap were described as having some benefits for parental use. This was described in terms of providing ideas for activities for highly active children or children who lose interest in some of the usual play-activities. For example, one parent noted:

> It's given us something to focus on instead of him [child] just trying to drag me around the yard or go off and climb this or that. Yeah he's a real climber and into everything.

Other parents described art and craft activities that they had enjoyed with their children or found useful. These included using "*body parts to make little butterflies*", "*gluing, sticking and pasting activities*" and "*blowing bubbles*".

Parents could also see benefit in the use of Playmap for "*first time mums*" as it provided "*different activities to do*". Essentially, these parents indicated that Playmap "*would be a very useful tool for maybe first-time mums or younger mums who maybe haven't got good networks and support*", however these parents did not particularly afford any benefit to using Playmap themselves.

Despite parent recognised benefits of using Playmap for parental provided play-activities there were a range of issues around the content presented on Playmap that require further consideration. The main concern raised by parents was that Playmap was not inspirational. Essentially, Playmap did not seem to capture the attention or imagination of playgroup parents:

> I know we're not paying for Playmap but it's like if I'm going to be looking into something and spending my time that could go elsewhere I want something that's really going to grab me and I know that will really grab my son. We recently did a volcano, we made it and then it fizzed but that wasn't from Playmap unfortunately.

The activities presented on Playmap were described as similar to what parents already do and did not offer anything new or inspirational:

> I had a look at Playmap and liked a lot of what was on there but … I was already doing a lot of that anyway … I can't say necessarily I learnt a lot. It was things I was already doing and continue to do. I think for groups or people lacking inspiration or people who aren't doing those hands-on things with their kids it would be really useful but I think most of us actually already do things like that.

One parent in describing a potential benefit of using Playmap as an ice-breaker for new parents essentially identified a limitation in not affording educational value to its use:

> If you've got an activity [from Playmap] that you can sit and do with your child around the table with everybody else you've got an ice breaker. That's an ice breaker for the parents.

A lack of breadth and depth in the activities available on Playmap were also identified by parents. Some parents described finding an activity on Playmap and then using another Internet source such as Pinterest™ to make the activity more interesting and appealing for the children at playgroup:

> It's interesting because one of the activities suggested on [Play Map] is bubbles, which is awesome in theory except little kids tip their bubbles out. Then I was on just flicking through Pinterest™ … somebody had wrapped their bubble mixture on a post with sticky tape. So all the kids had to do is pull – they can't tip it over but they can access it. It's at their height, they can access it … and so that's coming to playgroup. So while, okay, you've [Playmap] suggested bubbles but this is how we're going to adapt it.

This idea that parents needed to source supplementary resources to ensure the activities presented on Playmap were more suitable for the children at playgroup was also described in relation to the age appropriateness of activities. Parents noted that there were not enough activities on Playmap, particularly for young children:

> … the problem with [Play Map], well earlier on I was saying about the age, is that only one in four activities, maybe one in five activities would be suitable for under four year olds.

This view was echoed in comments by other parents who noted that *"most of the things [activities] there [on Playmap], they [children] do not have the fine motor skills to be able to engage and participate in".* Parents did however, recognise that some of the activities, although limited in scope for the under two age group, were well received:

> We did a teddy bear's picnic which was – that was friendly to any age group and we even had the babies – everyone brought along a teddy bear, we had a parachute out on the – we did it in summer so we had a parachute out on the ground outside and everyone sat around it with their teddy bears…

Parental perspectives of activities on Playmap seemed to be suggesting that parents found Playmap a useful resource for reinforcing the value of play for children's learning and development but not for enriching children's play at playgroup. These findings indicate that Playmap was not recognised by playgroup parents as value adding to existing practices which may be further indicative of the need to consider the role of Playmap in a more strength- based approach to the use of online resources in parental education initiatives. Such an approach may require consideration of how key learnings from more traditional strength- based initiatives such as the Room to Play model (Evangelou, Smith and Sylva, 2006) may be applied to online contexts for parental education.

Playmap functionality

The functionality of Playmap as an online tool for the provision of parental provided play-activities at playgroup was a further parent-identified focus for discussion. Working and non-working parents self-identified as time poor and with a need for an easy to navigate tool for planning and thinking about the provision of play-activities at playgroup. For example, a working parent made the following comment about the functionality of Playmap:

> I'm a bit time poor and I'd just prefer to walk in [to playgroup] and go, 'Alright, let's do this, this and this.' instead of sitting down and actually formally writing up the program. I do that at work so I probably don't want to come here and have to do that.

A similar comment was made by a parent of three children:

> I can remember how motivated, energetic and how much time I had when I was a first-time mum whereas third time around there's just not that much time in the day to be looking up activities to do. They [children] learn in different ways, number two [child] and number three [child] learn in different ways to what my number one [child] did when we had all that time to do activities.

For parents, Playmap seemed to be "*clunky*" and "*not user friendly*". One parent who had tried to use if for forward planning for more than one session found that she couldn't navigate easily between activities:

> I mean that's what the whole premise of the [Play Map] seems to be is this forward planning but you can do only one session at a time. So say you do a session, you can save it, you can't actually see what's in that session while you're choosing your next lot of activities, you've got to remember unless you've printed it. So what I was doing was copying and pasting and doing my own thing on the computer so I'd remember what I was doing on that date.

The ability to sequence planning for a series of sessions was also a challenging aspect of using Playmap:

> As soon as you go into a new session, a new date that you're planning for, all those things that you've liked are gone. So you've got to read through them all again to find which ones that you liked.

In this comment the parent seemed to be indicating that a bookmark feature might assist parents to return to favourite activities with more ease than the current version of Playmap offers.

In a further example, a parent described how the categories on Playmap that are aligned to the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) were difficult to follow. This made planning using Playmap a challenging process:

> There's five different categories of activities. So when you go into these sort of groups … so when I'm planning a session I want to choose something, not five things, it's [playgroup] for two hours, but I will choose two different categories.

Parents identified other aspects of Playmap's functionality that could be improved. These included the use of further visual prompts that are "*eye-catching*" and more prominent "*bolded headings and then information and sub-headings*". There seemed to be a consensus that Playmap contained too much text and text that was too repetitive. In the words of one parent:

> … it's [Playmap] nothing like a map and there's a lot of text, like when you click on it there's 'About Play Map' there's this and that, there's quite a bit of repetitive text. Just cut to the chase. Busy parents don't have time to sit … Draw a map if you want to.

Other suggestions included a recommendation for suggestions of apps for mobile devices (E.g. iPads and iPhones) to be included on Playmap. This comment seemed to be in response to parental awareness of children's increasing use of these devices and the need for supporting material to guide appropriate use:

> We use an iPad at home for educational apps and we've got a Rocket Speller so it makes it fun for him [child] to learn because each time he spells out a word he gets another piece of rocket and it takes off at the end so it's a fun way for him to learn the

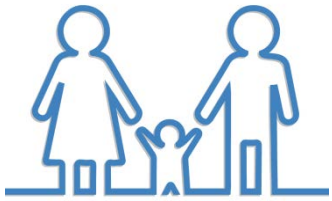
> alphabet. There are some apps that I think are useful on the iPad even though you want them to have limited time on it but using it for education purposes.

The functionality of Playmap was also raised by parents in relation to shared planning. Parents described a need to be able to work collaboratively on planning and to do so within a small window of time. One suggestion to assist with this process was to provide a printed version of Playmap - as online access to Playmap at playgroup for collaborative planning was not available:

> Is it [Playmap] available as a hardcopy document? Because I wonder whether having something like that sitting in this space for groups to come in [to playgroup] and [use] and go, 'Maybe we could do that, we could do that'. Online requires everyone to have put in some time or time aside before coming to playgroup to think.

This parent comment has further alignment with socio-cultural perspectives of learning through a focus on "the social and individual processes of learning" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 193). This parent seems to be referring to a social source for her development through joint planning of play-activities for playgroup with other parents. It may be that the further development of Playmap to improve its functionality as a joint planning tool may to some extent address this parent recommendation.

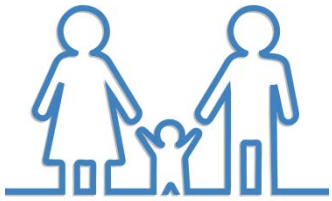
RECOMMENDATIONS



Five recommendations informed by the main elements emerging from the findings, are made in relation to the efficacy of Playmap in promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities:

1. Parental knowledge: The current implementation of Playmap is more aligned to deficit models of parental education (Evangelou & Wild, 2014).
    - Consideration should be given to how Playmap can be incorporated as part of a broader approach that values and extends on parents' existing knowledge of children's play
2. Structured play: Parents reluctance to embrace Playmap as a tool for provision of parental provided play activities at playgroup is fuelled by what seems to be an expectation of structured play at playgroup.
    - Consideration should be given to the incorporation of a framework to support parents in their interactions with children at playgroup through a value-added approach recognising the value of familiar open-ended or free play activities at playgroup. One example is the pedagogical play-framework outlined by Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie and Hunt (2010) that has been used with early childhood professionals to balance open-ended, modelled play and purposefully framed interactions and has potential to be adapted for parental use in playgroups using the concepts of explore, show and share.
3. Socialisation: For parents and children socialisation is an important aspect of regular playgroup attendance.
    - Playmap needs to be considered more broadly within the social and cultural context that playgroups operate in. A more cohesive approach to the uptake of a tool for the provision of play-activities such as Playmap, is likely if strong bonding relationships exist amongst playgroup parents to leverage new learning with Playmap.
4. Playmap activities: Playmap in its current format of presentation is not inspirational. There is a view that it reinforces the value of play rather than enriching the quality of play.
    - Consideration should be given to increasing the breadth and depth of Playmap activities through extension and adaption ideas for promoted play-activities and through increasing the range of activities for different age groups, particularly younger children.
5. Playmap functionality: Playmap functionality does not meet the needs of busy parents in contemporary playgroup contexts. There are navigational issues with Playmap and it is not easily used for collaborative provision of parent provided play activities at playgroup.
    - It is recommended that the functionality of Playmap is reviewed to take into consideration the planning needs of playgroup parents, particularly in relation to parents collaborating together to provide play-activities at playgroup. It may be that other contemporary communication practices such as social media, may provide a more effective platform for promoting the provision of parent-provided play-activities in transition playgroups and that Playmap is considered within this broader context.

CONCLUSION



Transition playgroups play an important role in the transition of supported playgroups to community playgroups. In particular transition playgroups aim to support parents to take on the role of independently providing play-activities for children at playgroup in the absence of a trained facilitator. This makes transition playgroups important sites for parental education about children's play based learning and development. Against this backdrop there is increasing international interest in enhancing parental knowledge of children's play based learning in an effort to improve later educational outcomes (Sylva et al., 2004). This is important because the home learning environment in early childhood is a significant indicator of children's academic success later in schooling (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Research has shown that participation in a playgroup can contribute to parental awareness of children's play (McLean et al, 2014; Evangelou, Smith & Sylva, 2006). In transition playgroups a playgroup coordinator has traditionally worked with parents to enhance this knowledge as they move towards independently planning for children's play at playgroup. In this project an online tool called Playmap was used in a new approach to support parents in transition and community playgroups to plan and implement play-activities at playgroup.

This report considered the efficacy of Playmap as an online resource for promoting the provision of play-activities to young children in transition and community playgroups. The research involved three main aims in relation to the provision of parental provided play-activities in transition playgroups:

1. To further develop Playmap as an online resource for parents;
2. To establish parents' understandings of the role of play in young children's learning and development and the frequency, duration and type of parental provided play-activities in the family home pre and post Playmap usage;
3. To identify the efficacy of Playmap in promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities to young children in transition playgroups as they move into community playgroups.

This report concludes that although Playmap has been used successfully in the provision of some parental provided play-activities in transition and community playgroups there are five main findings pertaining to parental perspectives of Playmap that require further consideration. These findings are:

1. Parental knowledge: Playmap is currently aligned to a deficit model of delivery which does not acknowledge or build upon parents existing knowledge and experiences of children's play.
2. Structured play: There is some reluctance amongst parents to fully embrace Playmap as a tool for provision of parental provided play activities at playgroup because it appears to promote structured play to the detriment of open-ended or free play.
3. Socialisation: Playgroup is an important socialisation opportunity for parents and children. This social aspect of playgroup and children's play are both important and interconnected.
4. Playmap activities: Playmap reinforces the value of play in terms of what is already happening in playgroups but it does not enrich the quality of play. In this sense Playmap provided activities for implementation but not ideas for inspiration.
5. Playmap functionality: Parents identified a range of functionality and navigational issues with Playmap that limited their willingness to use it to plan and implement play-activities at playgroup. Playmap functionality did not meet the needs of contemporary and time-poor parents who expressed a preference for using collaborative planning and communication practices to plan and implement play-activities at playgroup.

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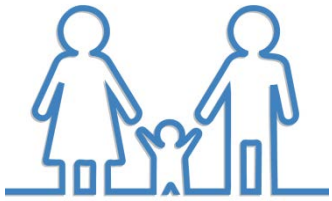

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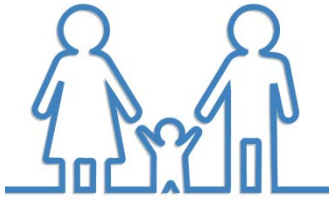
APPENDIX 1



Project Title: Promoting the provision of parental provided play-activities in transition playgroups

Family characteristics

The first section will help us learn about your family characteristics.

1. How many adults live in your household? _____

2. How many children live in your household? Please write the number of children next to the appropriate age and gender bracket.

Gender	0 – 2 years	3 – 5 years	6 – 8 years
Boy			
Girl			

3. What is the primary language spoken in your home? (Please choose only one)
   - English
   - Chinese
   - Hindi
   - Italian
   - Greek
   - Indonesian
   - Spanish
   - Vietnamese
   - Other (please specify) .....

4. Are your children of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? (please tick)
   - ☐ No.
   - ☐ Yes, Aboriginal
   - ☐ Yes, Torres Strait Islander
   - ☐ Yes, Both Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander

5. Please circle your approximate annual **total** household income.

0 - $18,000	$18,000 - $37,000	$37,001 - $80,000	$80,001 - $120,000	$120,001 - $180,000	$180,001 and over

6. Of the adults living permanently in your household, what is the highest level of education completed?
   - ☐ Year 9 or equivalent or below
   - ☐ Year 10 or equivalent
   - ☐ Year 11 or equivalent
   - ☐ Year 12 or equivalent
   - ☐ Certificate I to IV (including trade certificate)
   - ☐ Advanced diploma / Diploma
   - ☐ Bachelor degree or above

Thank you for sharing general information about your family. **The remaining sections should be answered thinking exclusively about your child attending playgroup.**

7. What is the age and gender of the child you will be focusing on? _____

8. What is your relationship to the child?

Mother
Father
Step-mother
Step-father
Grandmother
Grandfather
Guardian

10. **Routines**

In this section we would like to learn more about your child's routine. Please think of a typical week (e.g. last week) to complete the following questions.

1.	Does your child have a regular bedtime?	☐ Yes	☐ No
2.	Does your child attend any childcare service or family day care?	☐ Yes	☐ No
3.	On average how often does your child attend this centre?	Number of sessions per week _____	Number of hours per week _____
4.	What age did your child start at the centre?	Years _____	Months _____
5.	Does your child attend a pre-school program (e.g. three or four year old kindergarten or pre-prep)?	☐ Yes	☐ No
6.	How often does your child attend this program?	Number of sessions per week _____	Number of hours per week _____
7.	Are any other members also involved in day-to-day activities with your child?	☐ Mother ☐ Father ☐ Siblings ☐ Grandparent ☐ Other relatives ☐ Neighbor ☐ Child minder ☐ Peers ☐ Other specify:.....	

11. **Play Activities on the Home**

In this section we would like to learn more about your child's play activities in the home. Please remember to continue focusing on child attending playgroup.

	Which items do you have in your home? (tick appropriate)	Which items does your child use regularly? (tick appropriate)	At what age did you first use this with your child?
Sandpit			
Play dough			
Dolls			
Dress ups			

Songs, rhymes and chants
Puzzles
Children's books
Alphabet games (E.g. matching games)
Maths games (e.g. card games, dice games)
Construction (E.g. blocks, Lego)
Art and craft materials (E.g. coloured markers, glue, coloured paper)
Balls games
Outdoor games (E.g. Skipping rope , swings, bikes)
Tea set, kitchen toys
Toy cars, trucks
Electronic Learning Software
Furby or toy with AI component
Handheld games console
Electronic games
Tablet (E.g. iPad)

12. <u>Television</u>

In this section we would like to learn more about your child's use of television within home.

1. Do you have a TV at home? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. On a typical day is the television on in the background while you are doing other activities? ☐ Yes. Please give an example (e.g. at mealtimes)…… ☐ No

   ……

   ……
3. Does your child have a TV in his/her room? ☐ Yes, TV and DVD player ☐ Yes, TV only ☐ No
4. Does your child know how to use a remote control to operate a TV/DVD/Digital Box? ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. Who does your child usually watch TV with?
   - ☐ Alone
   - ☐ Mother
   - ☐ Father
   - ☐ Siblings
   - ☐ Step-mother
   - ☐ Step-father
   - ☐ Grandparent
   - ☐ Other relatives
   - ☐ Neighbour
   - ☐ Child minder
   - ☐ Peers
   - ☐ Other specify:……

6. What does your child usually watch on TV?
   - ☐ Films
   - ☐ Cartoons
   - ☐ Documentaries
   - ☐ Children's TV networks
   - ☐ Soap operas
   - ☐ Music channels
   - ☐ News
   - ☐ Other specify:……

7. What's your child's favorite show?

   ……

8. How many hours of TV does your child watch per day?
   - ☐ None
   - ☐ Less than 1
   - ☐ 1 – 2
   - ☐ 2 – 4
   - ☐ More than 4

9. Do you restrict your child's TV hours or programmes? ☐ Yes ☐ No
10. If yes, does this ever lead to conflict? ☐ Yes ☐ No
11. If yes, how do you resolve it?

    ……

    ……

    ……

13. <u>Computer/Laptop/Tablet (e.g. iPad)</u>

In this section we would like to learn more about your child's use of computers/laptops and tablets (e.g. iPad) within home.

1. Do you have a computer, laptop and/or tablet at home? ☐ Yes (which one (s))…… ☐ No

   ……

2. Does your child have a computer, laptop and/or tablet in his/her room? ☐ Yes (which one (s))…… ☐ No

   ……

3. Can your child use the mouse ☐ Yes ☐ No

and the keyboard independently?

4. Can your child use the tablet independently? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Is your child allowed to use the computer, laptop and/or tablet unsupervised? ☐ Yes (which one (s))…….. ☐ No

……

6. Who does your child usually use the computer or laptop with?
   - ☐ Alone
   - ☐ Mother
   - ☐ Father
   - ☐ Siblings
   - ☐ Grandparent
   - ☐ Other relatives
   - ☐ Neighbour
   - ☐ Child minder
   - ☐ Peers
   - ☐ Other Specify:……
7. Who does your child usually use the tablet with?
   - ☐ Alone
   - ☐ Mother
   - ☐ Father
   - ☐ Siblings
   - ☐ Grandparent
   - ☐ Other relatives
   - ☐ Neighbour
   - ☐ Child minder
   - ☐ Peers
   - ☐ Other Specify:……
8. What does your child usually do on the computer, laptop or tablet?
   - ☐ Watch films/videos
   - ☐ Play computer games
   - ☐ Play with apps
   - ☐ Listen to music
   - ☐ Chat rooms/Skype
   - ☐ Online shopping
   - ☐ Educational activities/homework
   - ☐ Browse the Internet
   - ☐ Other Specify:……
9. Do you allow your child to use the Internet? Is this supervised or unsupervised? ☐ My child never uses the Internet ☐ My child only uses the Internet when an adult is present ☐ My child is allowed to use the internet independently
10. Do you talk with your child about the safe use of the Internet? ☐ Yes ☐ No
11. Are there parental controls on your computer? ☐ Yes ☐ No
12. Do you lock your tablet? ☐ Yes ☐ No
13. Do you allow your child to use 'YouTube' or other video sharing websites? ☐ Yes ☐ No
14. What is your child's favourite

activity on the computer?

……

15. What is your child's favourite activity on the laptop?

……

16. What is your child's favourite activity on the tablet?

……

17. How many hours does your child use the computer or laptop per day?
    - ☐ None
    - ☐ Less than 1
    - ☐ 1 – 2
    - ☐ 2 – 4
    - ☐ More than 4

18. How many hours does your child use the tablet per day?
    - ☐ None
    - ☐ Less than 1
    - ☐ 1 – 2
    - ☐ 2 – 4
    - ☐ More than 4

19. Do you restrict your child's computer hours or activities? ☐ Yes ☐ No

20. Do you restrict your child's laptop hours or activities? ☐ Yes ☐ No

21. If yes, does this ever lead to conflict? ☐ Yes ☐ No

22. If yes, how do you resolve it?

……

……

……

14. <u>Reading materials</u>

In this section we would like to learn more about your child's reading activities and experiences at home.

1. Does anyone read to your child? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. If yes, how often?
    - ☐ More than once a day
    - ☐ Once a day
    - ☐ Every other day
    - ☐ Once a week
    - ☐ Once a fortnight
    - ☐ Other specify……
3. Does your child enjoy reading? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Who reads with your child?
    - ☐ Alone
    - ☐ Mother
    - ☐ Father
    - ☐ Siblings

Step-mother
Step-father
☐ Grandparent
☐
Other relatives
☐ Neighbour
☐ Child minder
☐ Peers
☐ Other Specify:……

5. What is your child's favourite book? ……
6. Can you give us the 3 titles of the books your child seems to have enjoyed the best?
7. What types of books does your child read?
   ☐ Pop-up books
   ☐ Educational books
   ☐ Books without pictures
   ☐ Interactive books on tablets
   ☐ Children's fiction
   ☐
   E-books
   ☐ Magazines
   ☐ Other Specify:……
8. How many books do you have at home? ☐ 0-10 ☐ 11-20 ☐ 21-30 ☐ 31+
9. How many books for your child have you downloaded for your tablet or e-reader in the last 2 months? ☐ 0-10 ☐ 11-20 ☐ 21-30 ☐ 31+
10. Does your child ever go to the library? ☐ Yes ☐ No
11. If yes, who does he/she usually go with?
    ☐ Alone
    ☐ Mother
    ☐ Father
    ☐ Siblings
    ☐ Grandparent
    ☐ Other relatives
    ☐ Neighbour
    ☐ Child minder
    ☐ Peers
    ☐ Other Specify:……
12. Do you have an e-book reader at home? ☐ Yes ☐ No
13. If yes, does your child use it? ☐ Yes ☐ No
14. If yes, how often?
    ☐ More than once a day
    ☐ Once a day
    ☐ Every other day
    ☐ Once a week
    ☐ Once a fortnight
    ☐ Other Specify……

15. Do you buy books or magazines relating to television programs your child watches? ☐ At least once a week ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never

15. How frequently do you engage in the following activities with your child?

	Daily				Weekly	Monthly	Never
	5-10 minutes per day	10-15 minutes per day	15-20 minutes per day	More than 20 minutes per day			
Joint Storybook Reading							
Songs and Rhymes							
Watching Videos / Documentaries / Series							
Role Playing / Pretend Play							
Computer Games or Programs (Literacy related)							
Tablet games/applications							
Smart phone games/applications							

16. <u>Other Educational Activities</u>

In this final section we would like to learn more about other educational activities that your preschool aged child might experience with you.

1. Does your child have any digitally enhanced toys (e.g., furbies)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Does your child play with any old/non-functioning digital equipment? (e.g. old mobile phones or cameras) ☐ Yes Please specify ..... ☐ No
3. Does anyone ever sing/teach your child nursery rhymes? ☐ Yes ☐ No
4. Does your child use writing/craft materials? ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. Does anyone ever practice the alphabet / letter names /counting with your child? ☐ Yes ☐ No
6. If yes, how often? ☐ More than once a day ☐ Once a day ☐ Every other day

☐ Once a week
☐ Once a fortnight
☐ Other (specify) ……..

7. Does your child engage in pretend play with props or toys?
☐ Yes ☐ No
Please give us an example
……

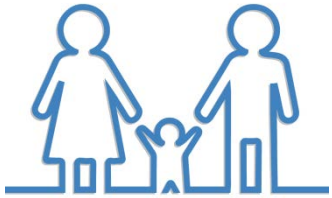
8. Who usually joins in with your child's pretend play?
☐ No one
☐ Mother
☐ Father
☐ Siblings
☐ Grandparent
☐ Other relatives
☐ Neighbour
☐ Child minder
☐ Peers
☐ Other specify:……

9. Does your child go on educational outings (e.g. to museums)?
☐ Yes ☐ No

10. If yes, how often
☐ More than once a week
☐ Once a week
☐ Once a fortnight
☐ Once a month
☐ Other specify:……

Thank you for completing this survey. We greatly appreciate your effort and time.

APPENDIX 2



Focus Group Interview questions

1. What are some of the activities/suggestions from Playmap that you have used at playgroup?
2. How have you used Playmap at playgroup?
3. How has using Playmap at playgroup helped you provide opportunities for children to learn through play?
4. How has using Playmap at playgroup helped you to recognise when children are learning through play?
5. How has using Playmap at playgroup helped you to interact with your children during play?
6. How has using Playmap at playgroup helped you to model playful interactions to encourage children to learn through play?
7. How has using Playmap at playgroup helped you to guide children's interactions during play?
8. What have been the main benefits of using Playmap for play activities at playgroup?
9. What have been the main limitations of using Playmap for play activities at playgroup?
10. Has the use of Playmap for play activities at playgroup influenced play activities at home? If so, how?
11. What do you like about using Playmap for playgroup activities?
12. How could Playmap be further improved or better meet your needs?
13. Has using Playmap helped you understand the role of play in children's learning and development? If so, how?
14. How has using Playmap helped you understand how children can learn about mathematics concepts through play?
15. How has using Playmap helped you understand how children can learn language through play?
16. How has using Playmap helped you understand how children can learn about reading through play?
17. How has using Playmap helped you understand how children can learn about writing through play?
18. How has using Playmap helped you understand how children can learn to interact with others through play?
19. How has using Playmap helped you understand how children can learn about the environment and the world through play?
20. How has using Playmap helped you understand how children can learn about wellbeing through play?
21. How has using Playmap helped you understand how children can learn about problem solving and creativity through play?
22. How has using Playmap helped you understand how children can learn about effective communication through play?