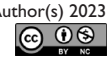
Empirical Article

gsc global studies of childhood

Global Studies of Childhood
1–16



DOI: 10.1177/20436106231156467
journals.sagepub.com/home/gsc


Programming for older children in School Age Care: Adult and child engagement with developmental pedagogies

Bruce Hurst
The University of Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

How to work with older children has been ongoing question in Australian School Age Care (SAC) for over 30 years. Children aged 10–12 years are often spoken of as a problematic Other whose pose a risk to the younger children who attend SAC in higher proportions. This article aims to address the gap in research about what practices might work with this age group. It draws on a qualitative study conducted with SAC practitioners and older children who attend SAC. In semi-structured interviews, practitioners were asked about what strategies they employed with older children. These strategies are then viewed in relation to the perspectives of older children who were consulted via participatory methods and ethnography about what good SAC might look like. The research explores two approaches that draw on developmental knowledges, the use of separate spaces and resources, and a role called apprentice educator. Whilst older children appear to value strategies like age-segregated spaces and resources, they are less likely to take up adult-like, apprentice educator roles curated for them by practitioners. Older children's responses to these strategies can be understood as powerful acts around developmental discourses that construct and reconstruct the category of older child in SAC.

Keywords

older children, outside school hours care, pre adolescent, School Age Care

Introduction

Australian School Age Care (SAC) services provide care, play and leisure in the hours before and after school, and during school holidays for primary-age children (5 –12 years). SAC also plays an

Corresponding author:
Bruce Hurst, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, Level 4, 100 Leicester Street, Carlton, VIC 3010, Australia.
Email: bruceh@unimelb.edu.au

important economic role, providing custodial care for children whilst parents work (Hurst, 2020). Participation in OSHC has increased substantially since the 1990s (Hurst, 2020). In the December quarter of 2019, 465,370 Australian children attended SAC, a figure that highlights its significance in the lives of many children and families (Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2020). SAC is one version of what some researchers call *extended education*, a term used to capture the diverse forms of outside school hours provision internationally. As detailed by Bae (2019), there is no universal form of extended education. How extended education is practised, and the purposes assigned to it can differ greatly. Australian SAC is broadly understood as a play and leisure setting that complements children's formal learning at school, a conception that is like Swedish fritidshem or school age educare (Hurst, 2019; Bae, 2019).

A long standing question in Australian SAC has been how to provide for older children, those aged 10–12 years. How to programme for older children has been the subject of SAC industry publications, professional development sessions, conference presentations and government-funded practice guides (Hurst, 2017, 2020; Gifford, 1991; Kennedy and Stonehouse, 2004; Longobardi, 2001). In 1991, Gifford was commissioned to write a government report into the perceived problem of older children in SAC, indicating that this has been a concern for at least 30 years. In such texts, older children are often written about as a problematic Other, disruptive, rebellious, and too old for SAC (Hurst, 2015, 2020). Despite its prominence in industry texts, there is little peer-reviewed literature dedicated to the question of older children in SAC. The lack of literature does not surprise. Australian SAC is a field with little academic research into how best to provide it (Cartmel and Hurst, 2021; Cartmel and Grieshaber, 2014; Simoncini and Lasen, 2012). There have been two Australian studies conducted by the author of this paper, which emphasises the limited research available (Hurst, 2015, 2019, 2020). It seems likely that how to provide for older children is a concern in other contexts. Gage (2000) and Maheux (1998) wrote postgraduate dissertations relating to older children in Canadian extended education, and there are occasional references to older children in research from the United Kingdom (Hurst, 2017). Anecdotally, professional conversations had with Swedish researchers suggest that older children might also be a concern for Swedish practitioners.

This paper aims to provide insights into common practices adopted in SAC for older children. It reports on a small, qualitative project that sought knowledge from SAC practitioners about how they plan for older children and the concepts that inform their pedagogies. The paper then examines two of their proposed approaches by considering them in relation to the views of older children who also participated in the same study.

The lack of research into SAC and older children in SAC sits uneasily alongside its social and cultural importance. SAC can be underestimated as a minor space that sits in-between the dominant institutions of home and school. For many children, SAC is far from a minor space. In the outer suburbs of Australian cities, some children attend SAC for up to 28 hours per week (Cartmel and Hurst, 2021). One factor that likely contributes to the lack of research is the ways SAC is perceived culturally and politically. Government funding and legislative programmes are formed around the discourse that SAC is a workforce service that primarily delivers custodial care (Cartmel and Hurst, 2021; Hurst, 2017). Positioning SAC as just care underestimates its multiple purposes, including its contributions to children's social and emotional development and significance as a site of play and leisure (Cartmel and Hurst, 2021; Cartmel and Grieshaber, 2014). The low status of SAC is also reflected by its workforce who have mostly vocational or no qualifications (Cartmel and Hurst, 2021; Cartmel et al., 2020). The positioning of SAC as 'just care' exists in tension with other government policy. Since the introduction of the Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance scheme in 2004, SAC has been increasingly positioned as a setting that supports children's education and development. This shift has been accompanied by the introduction of a

national curriculum framework and new terminologies, such as referring to practitioners as 'educators' (Cartmel and Hurst, 2021; Hurst, 2017). Therefore, although working in SAC as a low skill occupation, more is being demanded of workers, including the use of a curriculum framework and assessment and evaluation of children's learning and development (Australian Children's Education and Care Authority, 2022).

The lack of research means that SAC policy and curriculum are historically informed by research into early childhood education and care, a field that has better established research pathways and shares SAC's play-based curriculum approaches (Cartmel and Hurst, 2021). Whilst helpful in understanding approaches for younger children, early childhood research is limited in helping to understand provision for children aged 10–12 years. There is a small body of Australian SAC research drawing from two studies investigating older children which provides some insights into how older children are understood and programmed for, and their experiences of SAC. There is a dominant discourse in Australian texts that problematises older children developmentally as subjects who are near-adolescent. Adolescents are commonly constructed as a problematic Other (Lesko, 2012; Wyn and White, 1997). Correspondingly, older children can also be depicted as rebellious, sexualised, a threat to younger children, and 'too old' for SAC (Hurst, 2020). The problematising of older children may contribute to programming practices that privilege younger children and marginalise older children in a setting that is supposed to provide for both groups (Hurst, 2015). The children who participated in these studies reported SAC programmes with activities and resources that lacked challenge, risk and complexity (Hurst, 2015, 2020). These studies also demonstrate that age is an important aspect of older children's identities and governs their engagement with these approaches to programming. Older children can be sensitive to activities and resources coded as 'younger' and engage actively with them in ways to construct themselves as older and more capable (Hurst, 2019, 2020). The time late in the day can be difficult for some older children who find themselves at SAC with no same-age peers and few activities they find engaging (Hurst, 2019). Older children sometimes withdraw from play, distancing themselves from younger children and activities they perceive as younger, establishing and maintaining older children's spaces, bringing their own resources, performing the emotional labour of appearing engaged, and covertly seeking play that provides challenge and risk (Hurst, 2015, 2019, 2020). These studies suggest that providing activities suited to children's abilities and aged identities is important. These projects raise questions about whether conceptualising older children's desires as purely developmental is adequate, and whether answering the question of what 'works' for older children in SAC is more complex and uncertain (Hurst, 2020). Whilst helpful, this small body of research conducted by a single author does not offer comprehensive coverage of the topic or a range of perspectives.

There is currently no peer-reviewed literature internationally dealing directly with how SAC practitioners think about and plan for older children. The few available SAC texts, which take the form of practice guides and industry publications are not peer-reviewed and propose generalisable programming strategies founded on the assumption that children's interests are a function of development and that all older children want similar offerings at SAC (Hurst, 2017, 2020). However, Cannella (2008) troubles the universality and truthfulness assumed of the developmental theories that dominate Western childhood discourses and SAC texts. Cannella (2008: 61) argues that

> The concept of maturity is an example of a developmental construction used to regulate children every day, a value-laden norm masked as natural fact.

Here Cannella highlights concepts central to the analysis presented in this paper, that developmental theories, whilst commonly afforded the unassailable status of truth, are instead social

constructions and norms. Cannella's thinking draws on the work of Foucault (1980, 1977) who proposes that much of what is considered true is the product of history, politics and the micro-exercises of power and can therefore change across time and contexts. Highlighting their socially constructed genesis unsettles the efficacy presumed of developmental theories in SAC texts. It permits a questioning of why after 30 years, SAC texts drawing on developmental theories have not solved the 'problem' of how to programme for older children.

Foucault does not see truth as simply a tool for 'explaining' childhood. Truth is part of complex systems of discourse and the exercise of power (Foucault, 1977). According to Burman (2008), developmental truths do not just explain, they 'produce' childhood in the form of social structures, parenting norms, policy and educational practices. Cannella (2008) explains above that these ideas also regulate children. Developmental truths have made possible the grouping and categorisation of children around developmental norms, servicing cultural desires to produce compliant children (Burman, 2008; Cannella, 2008). The productive nature of power can also be traced in the small body of research relating to older children in SAC. Practices founded on developmental assumptions can produce binary approaches to programming that distinguish between 'older' and 'younger' children (Hurst, 2015). The application of developmental truths in industry texts and practice guides have also contributed to the production of the category of older child, a subject constructed as deviant and in need of specialist strategies (Hurst, 2020).

According to Foucault (1980, 1977), truth is constructed through micro applications of power in everyday moments. Children are as active in the application of power as powerful adults. This article examines two practices proposed by SAC practitioners and older children's engagements with them. This prompts consideration whether the actions of older children described are more than developmental reactions to adult practices, but instead complex applications of power that contribute to the production of a particular childhood, that being older childhood in Australian SAC. It is possible that the practitioners and older children who participated in this study all play multiple roles in producing pedagogical practices and knowledge about the category of older child in SAC.

Multiplicity is a feature of Foucault's theory, which also unsettles the universality presumed in developmental theories and approaches. If truth is not singular and universal, then it follows that there is no single way of understanding or practising older childhood in SAC. What it is to be an older child in SAC, how it is regulated, spoken of, and constructed might differ across settings, communities, cultures and communities. Further, older childhood in SAC could fluctuate from moment to moment. Micro applications of power mean that childhood is fluid, acted upon by adults and children in response to constantly changing contexts (Tesar et al., 2021). Consequently, how older children respond to the programming practices described in this paper are likely to individualised, contextual and constantly in flux.

The remainder of this paper will consider the long-standing question of how to programme SAC for children aged 10–12 years. It describes two approaches used by SAC practitioners and considers these strategies from the perspectives of older children who attend SAC. The poststructural theories described in this introduction inform the analysis. This theorisation permits analysis beyond the simple question of whether or not something 'works'. As a piece of poststructural analysis, this paper does not seek to provide an answer to question of how to programme for older children, but it hopes to provide valuable insights into the complex interconnections between developmental knowledges, adult programming practices, children's actions and the production of knowledge about older children. It also seeks to disrupt the developmental ways of thinking and working that have contributed to the problematisation of older children in SAC and the equity concerns these raise (Hurst, 2015, 2020).

Method

This analysis draws on two separate data sets. The first set was provided by semi-structured interviews conducted with eight adult SAC practitioners from Victoria, Australia from a mix of rural and metropolitan locations. All practitioners were the leaders of their SAC settings with oversight of programming decisions. Six of the practitioners were women and two were men. Participants were not asked what their qualifications were, although it is expected that as leaders most would have a minimum of a diploma-level qualification (Cartmel and Hurst, 2021). The interviews aimed to provide insights into the following questions:

- What programming strategies do SAC practitioners employ with older children?
- What knowledges do SAC practitioners draw on in their work with older children?

The semi-structured interview format provided a consistent set of questions across participants whilst also allowing the flexibility to explore unexpected and emerging topics (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Practitioners were asked:

- What do you consider an older child to be?
- What strategies do you use when working with older children and why?
- Is there anything that makes it difficult to work with older children?

It was hoped that these interviews would give an insight into programming practices and the thinking that informs them.

The second data set comes from qualitative research conducted with a group of 10 older children attending SAC. The children's research was more extensive and involved a combination of participatory methods, ethnography and semi-structured interviews. Over a 6-month period, ten children from one SAC setting in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne were asked to produce a project that communicated what they thought 'good' SAC for older children looked like and discuss their project in a semi-structured interview. Children could choose the medium for their project and work alone or in groups. They chose a variety of media including drawing, photography, video, dioramas, writing and collage (Hurst, 2020). The approach was informed by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which asserts that children have the right to speak about matters that affect them (United Nations, 1989). The method gave children time to formulate their views and communicate them in ways that felt comfortable (Clark and Moss, 2001; Lundy and McEvoy, 2012). Whilst project work was underway, ethnographic data was collected, observing life at the research site and recording events that seemed significant. These included events that were repeated, seemed to capture something representative of a child or setting, or appeared to be a disruption to normal events (Fujii, 2015). The method was well suited to capturing the complexity of children's lives at SAC and the multiple applications of power around programming strategies. Ethnographic data helped to deepen understandings of the children's projects and inform the content of interviews.

The practitioners' and children's research, whilst conducted separately, were both part of a single project that had ethics approval from the University of Melbourne Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, and permission from the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training. The identities of child and adult participants are protected by pseudonyms. Whilst each method provided insights into planning approaches for older children, it is important to recognise that the comparisons presented in this paper are imperfect. In particular, data from the practitioners' interviews was not as rich as that provided by the more extensive children's research.

The research data was coded and subject to inductive thematic analysis, an approach suited to analysis of qualitative data to identify the major topics of concern to participants (Terry et al., 2017). Coding was conducted in phases. The familiarisation phase involved reading transcripts to form an overall impression of the experiences of practitioners and children. Initial coding involved labelling statements relevant to the research question. Codes were refined over repeated engagement with transcripts and then grouped into themes that captured a shared concept or concern. These themes were constructed and refined through repeated engagement with the transcripts (Terry et al., 2017). This approach facilitated analysis that reflected the concerns of participants, whilst highlighting any unexpected themes.

Two proposed approaches to working with older children

This project aimed to provide knowledge about the approaches practitioners employed with older children in SAC and the thinking informing those approaches. The practitioners spoke of two main strategies; providing older children with spaces and resources separate from younger children, and creating an adult-like helping role that this paper calls the *apprentice educator.* The analysis that follows describes each of these approaches, the knowledges practitioners draw upon to form them, and the complex ways that children engage with them.

The use of separate spaces and resources

The most common approach used by all eight practitioners, was to employ programming strategies that separated older from younger children. Chief among these was the provision of separate spaces, where older children were designated a physical space away from younger children. Practitioners' rationales for a separate space varied, but seven spoke about older children's maturity as something that made the practice desirable. Maturity is a concept that is often unclearly defined but rarely questioned (Cannella, 2008). The practitioners understood maturity through a number of developmental concepts citing older children's greater independence, physical abilities and intellectual capacities.

Understandings of maturity were entangled with understandings of older children as transitional subjects. All eight practitioners spoke of older childhood as a transitional stage between the more traditionally accepted stages of middle childhood and adolescence making reference to broader social transitions. These included the transition to secondary school, adolescence, independent self-care and access to more mature media. Seeing older childhood as a transitional stage runs counter to developmental theory which sees older children as belonging to a discrete middle childhood stage, not residing in between stages (Hurst, 2017; Erikson, 1964, 1968; Freud, 1962; Inhelder and Piaget, 1958; Kohlberg, 1969). That older childhood does not align exactly with developmental theory does not surprise. Cultures can take up developmental ideas in ways that are partial and not consistent with the original theory (Burman, 2008). Seeing older childhood as a distinct, transitional stage with different developmental needs underpinned practitioner's rationales for needing a separate space.

Being more mature and transitional was not always viewed positively by practitioners. Dwelling in the boundaries between socially constructed categories imbues subjects with a perception of danger (Douglas, 2013). Four practitioners considered older children's closeness to adolescence a risk to younger children who were presumed to be more innocent and vulnerable, an idea informed by Rousseauian concepts of childhood (Archard, 2004; Cannella, 2008). These four practitioners believed separate spaces were needed to protect younger children.

Ravi: They've *got their own space so* they're *not getting into trouble perhaps for talking about certain things. . . that we think preps (age 5–6 years)* shouldn't *be listening to for example. . . well you know they might be talking about body stuff.*

Anwar: *Because older kids can have a tendency to um talk about like you know things that probably they* shouldn't *talk about. . .*

Bruce: *So what things?*

Anwar: *I* haven't *been around like around it. . . But* I'm *just going by like you know what* I've *heard. So like you know if* there's *you know sex ed, do you really want you know* 5's 6's *(older children) talking about sex ed in front of like you know a prep?*

In these quotes, Ravi and Anwar cite older children's interest in sexual knowledge as inappropriate for younger children and something that requires separating the two groups. For Anwar, these sexualised conversations are assumed, stating that he has only heard about but not experienced such conversations. Neither practitioner appears to blame older children for their interest in sexualised topics, saying in their interviews that this is understandable given that sex education is part of the classroom curriculum. Ravi suggests a separate space will also protect older children by preventing them from getting in trouble. This suggests they see older children's body talk as inevitable rather than something that can be discouraged. This inevitability reflects a developmental conception of older childhood which sees increasing interest in sex and sexualities as a biologically pre-ordained. Practitioners like Ravi and Anwar believed separate spaces to be a way of allowing older children to engage in sexualised talk away from impressionable, younger children.

Participants cited other aspects of older children's maturity when discussing separate spaces, such as their desire for riskier play.

Ravi: *They wanted to do you know this thing where they jump up and climb up on the wall. . . where they do those flips and that*

Bruce: *Yeah parkour*

Ravi: *. . . if you look at it, is quite dangerous. . . So I kind of let them. And I make sure I have a staff member right there, just to keep an eye on them. And* I'm *letting them do certain stuff but. . . the younger kids* aren't *allowed to attempt some of this stuff.*

Ravi expresses a concern that younger children might copy older children's physical risk-taking. Ravi's fear that younger children will copy illicit behaviours appears informed by a concept of childhood that dominates Western cultures, the child as sponge, a conception that sees children as reproducers of environmental influences (Kehily, 2008). Assuming that younger children will simply reproduce older children's risk-taking without consideration amplifies the risk that older children are presumed to present.

Whilst Ravi found ways to support older children's risky play, other participants found it more difficult. Nikki felt constrained by government regulation.

Bruce: *Is there stuff that gets in the way that makes it harder to care for that age group?*

Nikki: *. . .some regulatory things like. .* .we're *not even allowed to let them do handstands and stuff like that.*

Nikki suggests that government assessors responsible for enforcing regulations would take a dim view of risky play. Whilst Australian SAC regulations do not explicitly prohibit handstands, Nikki's belief still constrains practice. In Australian early childhood services, which operate under the same regulatory regime, there can also be uncertainty about the fairness of assessment outcomes

and clarity about what regulations actually are (Grant et al., 2016; Togher and Fenech, 2020). Also as Foucault (1977) reminds, the mere perception of judgement constrains actions. It is also possible that Nikki's reluctance to allow gymnastics reflects a broader discomfort with older children's physical risk-taking and its place in SAC.

In addition to separate spaces, all participants recognised older children's maturity by providing them with separate resources, which included their own books, visual media and craft equipment. Although these practices were not spatial, they still served the same purpose of segregating older from younger. Separate resources were particularly important for practitioners who were unable to provide a separate space. SAC is often provided in shared and makeshift settings that makes providing separate spaces difficult (Cartmel, 2007). The limitations of some SAC spaces meant that practitioners could not always provide older children with age-targeted resources. In particular, more mature audio-visual materials like movies and video games were considered problematic in spaces shared by younger children. Like the provision of separate spaces, the use of separate resources was founded on discourses of development and maturity. They were provided to older children on the basis that they had greater strength and dexterity to handle larger and more complex and delicate equipment, and greater social and emotional capacity to cope with more adult literature and media.

Foucault (1977, 1980) proposes that individual actions are micro exercises of power governed by dominant discourses. These practices of separate spaces and resources were governed by developmental discourses that dominate understandings of childhood and practices in childhood institutions like SAC (Cannella, 2008). In addition, these practices also generate knowledge about the categories of children they aim to provide for (Foucault, 1977). In the case of older children in SAC, the practice of providing separate spaces and resources constructs this group as a population developmentally distinct, who sometimes pose a risk to younger children, and are on the cusp of secondary schooling and adolescence, and in need of specialised ways of working (Hurst, 2015, 2020).

Children's engagement with separate spaces and resources

Separate spaces and resources for older children were a feature of the programming at the child participants' SAC. The older children had their own room where they could eat, socialise and play for the first hour of every session. In their interviews, all child participants identified the room as something that they valued. The space's importance is reflected by how the participants acted in and around it. During meal time, older children policed the space, monitoring its boundaries and chasing away younger children who came too close. When the boundary was breached they would sometimes co-opt powerful adults to remove younger children. The older children also engaged in work-like activities such as the drawing and posting of signs designed to warn younger children away. They also secretly manipulated displays to remove visual traces of younger children, therefore strengthening older children's ownership of the space. Younger children also participated in segregating practices, by self-monitoring and restricting their movements to areas outside the room even though no physical boundary existed (Hurst, 2017).

The following conversation with Kevin (aged 10 years) provides further insights into the importance of the separate space.

Bruce: *So what do you think of this Grade 5/6 room?*

Kevin: There's *a part about I* don't *really like it because even though they (younger children)* don't *come until 4.30*, it's *still kind of annoying cos they named it the 5/6 room for a reason, and* it's *annoying having them coming in while* we're *having private conversations.*

Bruce: *So how would it be different if they* couldn't *come in here?*
Kevin: *We could talk about things that we want to talk about. . . Cos some of the stuff that they would hear might be a bit inappropriate.*

Kevin expresses frustration that the separate space becomes available to other children at 4.30 pm, drawing attention to the naming of the space, which designates it as belonging to children in Grades 5 and 6. He communicates an unwillingness to compromise age restrictions that bound the space. Like the adult practitioners, Kevin also draws attention to 'mature' conversations that he believes pose a risk to younger children. In doing so, Kevin actively participates in creating knowledge about the category of older child. Just like the practitioners, all subjects including older children exercise power around developmental discourses (Foucault, 1980).

Having their own resources also seemed important to the child participants and was demonstrated in other ways that were not always visible. Sky (age 10 years) revealed that she and her friends secretly bought their own markers to SAC. They considered the markers provided for the research as too 'babyish'. The markers provided were a popular brand, short, fat, with limited colours and made for younger hands. The SAC workers provided fine-tipped markers which they suggested were okay but often damaged by younger children who could also use them and therefore not as good to use. A practitioner revealed late in the project that Sky and her friends sometimes had permission to use a 'secret' set of markers. Kevin and his friends also expressed frustration that younger children were 'too young' to use some sporting equipment. Older children's desire for their own equipment has appeared in previous studies where older children in SAC construct younger children as primitive and destructive (Hurst, 2015). These various acts demonstrate that children can be sensitive to the age and developmental coding of resources and materials. The children in this research were aware of age ratings given to games and equipment by manufacturers, and the developmental cohorts that products like markers are marketed to. Interviews and observational data demonstrated that participants like Sky and Kevin actively distanced themselves from resources they believed were intended for younger children and aligned themselves with resources that they believed consistent with their identities as older and more mature (Hurst, 2017).

The older children in this research valued the use of separate spaces and resources. They were visibly active in preserving the grade 5/6 room as an older children's space. Being present in SAC for 6 months with the participants also revealed covert actions such as older children secretly bringing their own equipment to SAC. A developmental interpretation would see older children's engagement with these programming strategies as driven biologically. Theorising poststructurally provides a more complex reading. As suggested in previous research, being seen to be older is an important aspect of older children's identities in SAC. Older children understand maturational discourses to construct their identities as more mature and capable subjects (Hurst, 2020). The actions described in this section, were ways of preserving older children's aged identities. They demonstrate that older children's can be aware of developmental discourses and align themselves with spaces and resources that are age-coded as older and distancing themselves from those that are age-coded younger. These actions can also be understood as powerful acts that actively re-inscribe and preserve the developmental categories into which children are organised at SAC and school (Foucault, 1977).

The 'apprentice educator'

The other main strategy discussed by practitioners was offering older children the opportunity to take up a role with adult-like responsibilities that will be referred to as *apprentice educator*. Seven out of eight practitioners used apprentice educator as part of their pedagogies.

Renata: *She comes here to us, and* we're *happy to have her come here, but we* don't *treat her as one of the other kids as such. She comes in with ideas and we say*, 'there's the kids, go for it'.

In this example, Renata describes how she encourages a Grade 6 girl (11–12 years) to act as an educator, the commonly used title for SAC practitioners. Renata's version of apprentice educator is similar to that employed by the other practitioners in this study. The role made available to children a number of tasks that practitioners used in varied combinations including, leading activities for younger children, caring for younger children, helping in the kitchen or performing administrative tasks. Leading activities and caring for younger children were the most common tasks, used by five participants. Cannella (2008) writes that developmental discourses position children as subjects in process, with adults understood as the 'finished product' at the end of the developmental trajectory. This reflects cultural desires that privilege the adult subject position as more complete and more powerful (Burman, 2008; Cannella, 2008).

Deb: *You can hear yourself in their (older* child's*) voice. So especially when* they're *running activities.* They're *(older children) like*, 'you know well you just have to wait because I'm already helping someone' *and they use that voice and you think, god is that me? Like are they imitating me?*

Deb reveals a developmental assumption underpinning the role of apprentice educator, that an adult-like identity is a desired subject position for older children, who will welcome being positioned as more adult with responsibility for others. However, this version of apprentice adult is not accorded full adult status. Deb sees older children as imitating or 'trying on' adult roles and identities. The apprentice nature of the role is illustrated by the fact that it is only available to older children under supervision by actual practitioners.

The apprentice educator also hierarchizes by producing and re-iterating a category of child that sits between middle childhood and adolescence. Like segregated spaces, it also constructs boundaries between older child and younger child. The apprentice educator might also be desirable for practitioners because it promotes a 'safe' version of older child characterised by helping and caring roles. Apprentice educator likely feels safe in that it silences the sexualised and risk-taking behaviours that four practitioners in this study associated with older childhood. It encourages older children to take up a safe version of pre-adolescence.

Apprentice educator was often a gendered role. Age and gender intersect in how they shape the distribution and application of power to construct children as capable and mature (Hellman et al., 2014).

Deb: *I think that gives them, you know, a sense of power. Like* they've *got a bit of authority and yeah. Especially the girls, like they love, you know, mothering of the little kids and yeah, and the boys are more like, you know, I want to be, you know, the captain and I want to be the coach of the sports team.*

Deb summarises what was a consistent trend across the interviews. She identifies heteronormative versions of the apprentice educator where girls perform as nurturers and boys as sporty and leaders. Walkerdine (1990) writes about 'good girls', a heteronormative category whose members derive their power from being helpful and well-behaved. Across the interviews, nurturing and caring roles were made available almost exclusively to girls. Renata and Deb regarded the apprentice educator as not just a diversion for older children but preparation for future lives. Renata

expressed a hope that being encouraged to care for younger children would lead to a future career in SAC. Contrastingly, when boys were spoken of as apprentice adults, it was mostly in relation to leadership and sport, qualities that are normatively associated with males (Connell, 1995; Swain, 2003).

Categorising children as apprentice educators in gendered ways has implications for equity. The rigid gender roles embedded in the different versions of apprentice educators are constraining. Whilst participants suggested children were notionally free to adopt any helping role within the service, normative expectations of gender mean that children are more likely to take up roles that align with gender norms (Butler, 1990). Girls in particular would find it difficult to adopt leading roles, something that contributes to gender inequity in adult life (Hoyt and Kennedy, 2008; Paule and Yelin, 2022).

Children's engagement with the 'apprentice educator'

The SAC that child participants' attended also made available the role of apprentice educator. On one afternoon, older children were asked to lead activities and act as role models for younger children. The child participants explained that they were also required to act as buddies for first-year students or participate in leadership and mentoring programmes for younger children at school. Much in the same way that SAC was divided into 'older' and 'younger', the children's schools were divided into 'senior' and 'junior'.

Whilst separate spaces and resources were a dominant theme in the older children's data, the apprentice educator was not. One justification for using apprentice educator provided by practitioners was that older children enjoyed it. However, no child included apprentice educator in their project, and the semi-structured nature of interviews meant the role only emerged in discussion with two participants. No older children identified being apprentice educator as something that they thought made SAC a good place to be. Additionally, in the 6 months at the research site, no child participant sought out a helping role. The only time children acted as apprentice educators was when it was made compulsory.

The two participants who discussed apprentice educator provided insights into how they engaged with it. Of note was the way that they drew upon developmental discourses circulating the role to position themselves as more mature and closer to adult.

Bruce: *So is being a role model something* that's *expected of you, that* you're *supposed to do?*
Penny: *Yeah*
Bruce: *So who talks to you about that?*
Penny: *Well, my teacher at school. . . She tells us that the Grade Sixes are supposed to be role models to all the younger students at our school. And Robyn tells us here (at SAC) that* we're *supposed to be responsible and show the other kids how to act.*
Bruce: *.... So how do you feel about that?*
Penny: *I feel* it's *good, seeing that* they're *looking up to me and to all of my friends.*

In this exchange, Penny, a 12-year-old girl demonstrates active engagement with the role of apprentice educator. She takes up maturational terminology like 'responsible' and 'role model' to construct older children as more mature and capable subjects. Penny also uses hierarchical language, suggesting that younger children 'look up' to older children, a clear expression of developmental discourses that position adult and near-adult as the desired subject position.

That child participants were mostly silent on the role of apprentice educator requires consideration. Given that older children are already reluctant to attend SAC (Hurst, 2020), it seems unlikely that offering them adult responsibilities will improve participation. There are also questions about the place of this strategy in SAC curriculum. SAC is positioned by government and Australian culture more broadly as a place of play and leisure (Cartmel and Hurst, 2021). Children who attend SAC, also value it primarily as a site of play (Hurst, 2015, 2020; Bell and Cartmel, 2019; Klerfelt and Haglund, 2015; Simoncini et al., 2015). Asking one category of child to forego play and engage in labour is troubling. It categorises older children as subjects whose place in SAC is better justified by their capacity to provide cheap labour. It needs to be considered whether positioning older children as apprentice educators limits their access to play opportunities in a setting purposed with providing play.

That the child participants did not identify apprentice educator as important does not mean it was without effect. Penny's interview demonstrated how she deployed the developmental discourses threaded through apprentice educator to claim an elevated social status and construct herself as closer to adult. It is an example of the productive nature of power and discourse and how they can produce knowledge about different categories of child (Foucault, 1977).

Conclusion

Australian School Age Care practitioners have been preoccupied with how to programme for older children for over 30 years (Hurst, 2020). This article sought insights into how practitioners went about the task of providing for this age group. The interviews conducted with practitioners revealed two main programming strategies used with older children. The first was providing separate spaces and resources specifically for older children. The second was to make available to older children a helping role in SAC called the apprentice educator. According to these practitioners, separate spaces made it possible to meet the specific developmental needs of older children, whilst also protecting younger children from activities such as sexualised talk and risk-taking that were deemed a risk. The apprentice educator was deployed on the assumption that older children desired more adult-like roles and responsibilities.

This research also drew upon the views of 10 older children who attended SAC to gain their perspectives on these two programming strategies. This analysis showed that separate spaces and resources were considered important by all child participants. Having their own space and equipment was a way of preserving their identities as older children and also having a programme better suited to their abilities and desires. On the other hand, older children were mostly silent about the role of apprentice educator, with no participants highlighting the practice as something that was good about SAC.

However, this paper viewed children's engagement with these two programming strategies as more complex than a simple cause and effect relationship where the approach either does or does not work. A poststructural theorisation allowed consideration of the role that dominant developmental discourses play in both forming practitioners' strategies, and children's engagements with those strategies. Further, as proposed by Foucault (1977), it prompted consideration of how the actions of practitioners and older children produced and circulated knowledge about older children, and possible implications of these.

This research suggests that practitioners draw on maturational discourses to develop strategies that position older children as a separate category of child, distinct from the 5- to 9-year-olds they share SAC with. The use of separate space appears to create a programme within a programme for two separate categories of child. Whilst this strategy seems well received by older children, it is perhaps the knowledge that circulates this practice that prompts further consideration. Some

practitioners' segregating practices constructed older children as a social risk to younger children, and a problematic presence at SAC, something argued in previous research (Hurst, 2015, 2020). It also potentially marks older children as outsiders in SAC settings that are supposed to include them.

The practice of apprentice educator draws similarly on maturational discourses, assuming that older children desire more adult roles and responsibilities at SAC, but also raises equity implications. Apprentice educator is presented as a role that older children can take up and perform, but the role seems sanitised. It privileges qualities associated with adolescence that are deemed desirable such as responsibility and leadership, whilst simultaneously silencing others such as sexualised talk and risk-taking that practitioners find less palatable. The role can also be gendered in ways that reinforces stereotypical gender norms. Apprentice educator also has implications for the sorts of play experiences provided for older children in SAC. Roles like apprentice educator direct older children towards work-like acts ahead of play. This exists in tension with the purpose of Australian SAC as a site of leisure and play and prompts consideration of whether older children have the same rights to play as younger children.

The poststructural view adopted in this paper complicates older children's engagement with these two programming strategies. Although all children in the project valued separate spaces, they did so in ways that appeared to draw on the same developmental discourses that class them as a distinct and sometimes problematic category of child. The child participants actively governed themselves and others to preserve the age categories that circulate the spaces and resources provided at SAC. As suggested by Foucault (1977), these acts that occur around these two programming strategies and the developmental discourses that inform them to produce knowledge about the older child. They contribute to the perception that older children in SAC are different and separate to younger children and need separate strategies. The child participants in this research also spoke the category of older child into existence, constructing themselves as older, more mature, more capable, leaders, role models and sometimes, a social risk.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this project. The small sample sizes for both groups of participants place limitations on generalisable knowledge claims. Also, the use of ethnography was valuable in the children's research and a good way of adding depth to interview and project data. The practitioners' data relied on interviews, and without other data sources, it is not possible to test what the pedagogies described look like in practice. Research across more settings that captures programming for older children in more detail would be valuable. It is also important to acknowledge the dearth of research into Australian SAC, even more so examining the topic of older children. Almost all research on this topic internationally has so far been conducted by this author of this article. To understand this topic more deeply there is a desperate need for more research from a range of perspectives. Whilst this research article provides important knowledge, the fact that it relies so heavily on the work of a single author limits any knowledge claims. Future research should also provide deeper consideration of social complexities like race, class and gender. This paper provided some attention to gender but attention to all of these complexities will provide greater understanding of the multiple experiences of older children in SAC.

The two programming practices explored in this article are commonly suggested as a 'solution' for how to provide SAC for pre-adolescent children. Anecdotally, in conversations with practitioners had over many years, these two approaches have been the most commonly suggested. The research does not answer the question of how to programme for older children, nor whether either of these strategies are the 'answer'. However, older children's engagements with the provision of separate spaces and resources is hopeful. One of the motivations in adopting a poststructural stance in this article was to resist universalising older children as a singular cohort with shared

characteristics, an approach that raises equity concerns and silences multiplicity and complexity (Cannella, 2008; MacNaughton, 2005). This research hopefully prompts deeper consideration and further research into the equity effects of universalised strategies like separate spaces and the apprentice educator, and what roles they might play in constucting older children as outsiders in SAC.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: this work was supported by the University of Melbourne and the Australian Government through an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) scholarship.

ORCID iD

Bruce Hurst https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4238-384X

References

Archard D (2004) The concept of childhood. In: Archard D (ed.) *Children: Rights and Childhood*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge, pp.19–36.

Australian Children's Education and Care Authority (2022) National Quality Standard. Available at: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard (accessed 24 May 2022).

Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment (2020) Child Care in Australia report December quarter 2019. Available at: https://www.dese.gov.au/key-official-documents-about-early-childhood/early-childhood-and-child-care-reports/child-care-australia/child-care-australia-report-december-quarter-2019 (accessed 21 June 2021).

Bae SH (2019) Concepts, models, and research of extended education. *International Journal for Research on Extended Education* 6(2-2018): 153–164.

Bell K and Cartmel J (2019) Creating a vocabulary about School-Age childcare using photography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18: 1609406918811488.

Burman E (2008) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. New York: Routledge.

Butler J (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Cannella GS (2008) *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Cartmel J (2007) *Outside school hours care and schools*. Thesis, Queensland University of Technology. QUT ePrints. Available at: http://eprints.qut.edu.au/17810/ (accessed 17 May 2022)

Cartmel J, Brannelly K, Phillips A, et al. (2020) Professional standards for after school hours care in Australia. *Children and Youth Services Review* 119: 105610.

Cartmel J and Grieshaber S (2014) Communicating for quality in school age care services. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* 39(3): 23–28.

Cartmel J and Hurst B (2021) More than 'just convenient care': *What the research tells us about equitable access to Outside School Hours Care*. New South Wales Department of Education. Available at: https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/early-childhood-education/information-for-parents-and-carers/OSHC_PolicyLiteratureReview_CartmelHurst.PDF (accessed 17 May 2022).

Clark A and Moss P (2001) *Listening to Young Children. The Mosaic Approach*. London: National Children's Bureau.

Connell R (1995) *Masculinities*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Douglas M (2013) *Purity and Danger. [Electronic Resource] : An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis.

Erikson EH (1964) *Childhood and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Erikson EH (1968) *Identity : Youth, and Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Foucault M (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin Books.

Foucault M (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Random House.

Freud S (1962) *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. London: Hogarth Press.
Fujii LA (2015) Five stories of accidental ethnography: Turning unplanned moments in the field into data. *Qualitative Research* 15(4): 525–539.
Gage HM (2000) *An exploratory investigation of middle childhood friendships, quality of care and children's satisfaction with school-age care programs*. M.A. Dissertation, Concordia University, Canada.
Gifford J (1991) *What About Us? Out of School Hours Care for Older School-Age Children*. Canberra, ACT: ACT Children's Services Program Planning Committee.
Grant S, Danby S, Thorpe K, et al. (2016) Early childhood teachers' work in a time of change. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* 41(3): 38–45.
Hellman A, Heikkilä M and Sundhall J (2014) "Don't Be Such a Baby!" competence and age as intersectional co-markers on children's gender. *International Journal of Early Childhood* 46(3): 327–344.
Hoyt MA and Kennedy CL (2008) Leadership and adolescent girls: A qualitative study of leadership development. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 42(3-4): 203–219.
Hurst B (2020) Re-theorising the pre-adolescent child in School Age Care. *Global Studies of Childhood* 10(2): 120-130.
Hurst B (2019) Play and leisure in Australian School Age Care: Reconceptualizing children's waiting as a site of play and leisure. *Childhood* 26(4): 462-475.
Hurst B (2017) *"Eat, play go, repeat". Researching with older primary-age children to re-theorise School Age Care*. Thesis, University of Melbourne. Minerva Access. Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/190706 (accessed 17 May 2022).
Hurst B (2015) Not always fun: Older children's play worlds in Australian Outside School Hours Care. *Journal of Playwork* Practice 2(1): 7-22.
Inhelder B and Piaget J (1958) *The Growth of Logical Thinking From Childhood to Adolescence; [Electronic Resource]: An Essay on the Construction of Formal Operational Structures*. New York: Basic Books.
Kehily MJ (2008) *Introduction to Childhood Studies*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.
Kennedy A and Stonehouse A (2004) *Shared Visions for Outside School Hours Care*. Melbourne, VIC: Victorian Government Department of Human Services.
Klerfelt A and Haglund B (2015) Walk-and-talk conversations: A way to elicit children's perspectives and prominent discourses in school-age educare. *International Journal for Research on Extended Education* 2(2): 119–134.
Kohlberg L (1969) Stage and sequence: The cognitive-developmental approach to socialization. In: Goslin DA (ed.) *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, pp.347–480.
Kvale S and Brinkmann S (2009) *Interviews. Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
Lesko N (2012) *Act Your Age! [Electronic Resource] : A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*, 2nd edn. New York, London: Taylor and Francis.
Longobardi C (2001) Meeting the needs of older children in School Age Care. *Reflections Magazine*, Issue 3 May.
Lundy L and McEvoy L (2012) Children's rights and research processes: Assisting children to (in)formed views. *Childhood* 19(1): 129–144.
MacNaughton G (2005) *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies: Applying Poststructural Ideas*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Maheux I (1998) *School-age care programs: An identification of factors related to nine- to twelve-year-olds' desire to drop out and their satisfaction*. MA Thesis, Concordia University, Canada.
Paule M and Yelin H (2022) 'I don't want to be known for it': Girls, leadership role models and the problem of representation. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 25(1): 238–255.
Simoncini K, Cartmel J and Young A (2015) Children's voices in Australian school age care: What do they think about afterschool care? *International Journal for Research on Extended Education* 3(1): 114–131.
Simoncini K and Lasen M (2012) Support for quality delivery of outside school hours care: A case study. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* 37(2): 82–94.

Swain J (2003) How young schoolboys become somebody: The role of the body in the construction of masculinity. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 24(3): 299–314.
Terry G, Hayfield N and Clarke V (2017) Thematic analysis. In: *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 17–37.
Tesar M, Guerrero MR, Anttila E, et al. (2021) Infantographies. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. 1–19. DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2021.2009341
Togher M and Fenech M (2020) Ongoing quality improvement in the context of the National Quality Framework: Exploring the perspectives of educators in 'Working Towards' services. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* 45(3): 241–253.
United Nations (1989) *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Geneva: United Nations.
Walkerdine V (1990) *Schoolgirl Fictions*. London, New York: Verso.
Wyn J and White RD (1997) *Rethinking Youth*. London: SAGE Publications.

Author biography

Bruce Hurst is a Research Fellow at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne and has 30 years of experience working in and with School Age Care services. Much of his research work is informed by children's perspectives and poststructural theories and aims to contribute to settings that are responsive to children's views. Through his work, Bruce endeavours to highlight the importance of School Age Care, a setting that is often ignored in research and policy.