

Educator Risk-Taking for Reimagining Education and Educational Research

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There has been increasing interest in risk-taking in education in recent years. Voluntary risk-taking can be beneficial for learning, pleasure, health and happiness. Yet research on risk-taking in education is still evolving. In early childhood education research, there is a focus on children's risk-taking, with limited attention to educators' risk-taking. Considering the potential benefits of risk-taking, and the increasing research on children's risk-taking, it seems important to understand early childhood educators' risk-taking in professional practice. The research reported in this presentation explored how educators working in high quality early childhood education settings viewed and engaged with risk-taking. The research question was: *How is risk-taking conceptualised by educators?* The research was a qualitative multisite case study involving 55 educators in three Australian early childhood education settings that had received an *exceeding the national standard* rating in the national assessment and rating process. The study applied the theory of practice architectures as a theoretical, methodological and analytical framework. The theory of practice architectures is an ontological site-based practice theory that focuses on everyday practices and the conditions that support practices. Data were generated through observations, interviews and documents and were analysed using a combination of thematic analysis and the theory of practice architectures. Findings show that educators in the participating services viewed risk-taking as a valuable and important part of their professional practice. Participating educators engaged in a range of risk-taking, including providing opportunities for children to take risks, expressing ideas and beliefs and doing things that were new. Findings identified that educators in the study were motivated to take risks for their own professional growth and development, to develop children as competent and empowered individuals, and as acts of advocacy and activism. Findings indicate that for educators in the study, risk-taking was undertaken for the benefit of high quality early childhood education. These findings have implications for educators, leaders and policy makers in both the pursuit of high quality education and in navigating education and educational research in uncertain times. Taking carefully considered risks may be necessary in moving education and educational research forward, and in responding to changing conditions and emerging challenges. Further research exploring the conditions that support risk-taking across a variety of settings, and possible interventions and professional development, may be of benefit in shaping the future of education and educational research.