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When and Why do Early Childhood Educators Reminisce with Children about their Past Experiences?

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When children reminisce with adults about their own past experiences, they are offered a rich forum in which to develop cognitive and socioemotional skills, build their sense of self, and form emotional bonds. Little attention has been directed to reminiscing in educational contexts, however. Our aim was to explore when, how often, and why early childhood educators engage young children in reminiscing conversations. Participants included 251 Australian educators with 1-45 years' experience. Educators completed an online survey asking them (i) the number of times per day they engaged children in reminiscing, relative to other types of talk, and (ii) the times and places these reminiscing conversations were most likely to occur. While individual differences were apparent, more than 85% of educators reporting engaging children in reminiscing multiple times per day. Popular times included arrival (67.7%), meals (65.7%), and group/circle time (58.2%). Educators' qualitative explanations suggested several important reasons to engage children in reminiscing, including to bond, establish home-centre connections, build children's socioemotional competence, reflect on "centre life", and support intentional learning activities. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: educator-child talk, reminiscing, past talk, rich talk, sustained shared thinking

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Reminiscing about the past is a rich lifelong activity. Even before children can talk, they are told stories of their own past experiences and asked “do you remember” questions (Nelson and Fivush 2004). As children develop the language to contribute to these conversations, in early childhood and beyond, they are increasingly offered opportunities to shape the emerging narrative themselves: first with closed questions and extensive scaffolding and later with more open prompts (Fivush, Haden, and Reese 2006; Salmon and Reese 2016). Research with parents highlights the value of these conversations as a way of scaffolding culturally significant traditions of storytelling and narrative, and of supporting children’s emerging sense of self as they move towards adolescence and adulthood (Habermas and Reese 2015; Waters et al. 2019). As adults, reminiscing about our past experiences helps us to further define who we are, to bond with others, and to guide and direct future actions (Bluck and Alea 2009, Pillemer 2008).

While adult-child reminiscing research has traditionally focused on parents, there have been recent calls to extend this work to early childhood educators (Neale and Pino-Pasternak 2017; Van Bergen and Sutton 2019). The majority of children in OECD member countries attend an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program, with many enacting policies to increase this participation further (Balladares and Kankaraš 2020). Within these programs, there is good reason to suggest that educators who engage children in language-based conversations about their own past experiences may further extend children’s language skill, narrative and memory skill, and “sustained shared thinking” (blinded, Neale and Pino-Pasternak 2017). Reminiscing about the past is “decontextualised”, meaning there is the opportunity for children to think beyond

their current experiences to make new connections between the past and present (Test, Cunningham, and Lee 2010). Moreover, as early childhood education centres represent places of “being and belonging” (e.g. Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009), reminiscing may help to scaffold children’s sense of self and place. In the case of unshared experiences in particular, such as weekend activities, educator-child reminiscing may assist children in forging connections between home and centre. Building on these possibilities, the purpose of the current study was to determine how frequently educators report reminiscing with young children, when, and why.

Parent-child talk about the past

Over the past 30 years there has been a wealth of sociocultural developmental research examining the ways that parents reminisce with their young children and the important implications of such talk for children’s development (see Fivush, Haden, and Reese 2006; Salmon and Reese 2016; Wareham and Salmon 2006 for reviews). Parents who frequently discuss the past in rich and elaborative detail, using open-ended questions to encourage their child’s contribution, have children who eventually come to adopt this same style themselves: showing stronger memory performance not just in shared parent-child conversations (Van Bergen et al. 2009) but also later, when independently sharing their memories with an experimenter (Reese and Newcombe 2007). There are also benefits of rich parent-child reminiscing for children’s understanding of self and emotion, particularly when these aspects of the narrative are explicitly scaffolded (Fivush 1994; Van Bergen et al. 2009; Wang 2007; Wareham & Salmon, 2006).

Interestingly, although reminiscing has multiple developmental benefits for children, there are differences in the frequency with which parents report engaging children in such conversations. When European American mothers were asked how

often they engaged in “past talk” with their child, defined as shared talk about events the child has previously experienced, Kulkofsky and Koh (2009) found positive correlations with their frequency of reminiscing about their own lives. When asked to estimate the number of times per week reminiscing occurs, Kulkofsky, Wang and Koh (2009) found wide individual and cultural differences. Although 40% of European American mothers reporting engaging their children in reminiscing 7+ times per week, 26% reported doing so 3-4 times per week and 11% just 1-2 times per week. For Chinese mothers, 28% reported engaging in past talk 5-6 times per week and more than 50% reported doing so just 1-2 times per week.

There are also individual differences in the reasons parents reminisce with their children, including to support their children’s emotion regulation, direct future behaviour, maintain positive emotionality, support children’s sense of self, support conversation, teach cognitive skills, and promote positive peer relationships (Kulkofsky and Koh 2009; Kulkofsky et al. 2009). We suggest that reminiscing might feature prominently in educator-child conversations too, particularly given it’s teaching function and connection to children’s sense of self.

Educator-child talk about the past

While reminiscing has been under-researched in the early childhood context, a number of important similarities exist between educator-child reminiscing conversations and sustained shared thinking conversations (see Neale and Pino-Pasternak 2016 for review). Like reminiscing, for example, sustained shared thinking conversations offer educators and children the opportunities to co-construct and extend narrative dialogue together and to evaluate their everyday activities and experiences (Sylva et al. 2004). For educators, there is also the opportunity to provide formative feedback on children’s responses in situ (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva 2004): thus scaffolding and extending their

development. Sustained shared thinking is an important element of early childhood pedagogy, suggesting similar possibilities and benefits for reminiscing too.

Sustained shared thinking between children and educators may be particularly important when discussing the past, because reminiscing conversations are decontextualised: that is, removed from the here-and-now (Test et al. 2010). Decontextualised talk is more linguistically complex than other types of talk (Rowe 2012, 2013), more abstract, and more likely to include cause-and-effect statements and relations (Rowe 2013). In the case of reminiscing, for example, there are opportunities to connect the past with the present and future, to connect the past to the self, and to reflect on the meaning of past episodes (Salmon and Reese 2016). Given the complexity and abstraction of conversations that are decontextualised, there is an important need for educators to scaffold and support children's participation (Test et al. 2010).

To our knowledge, only one study to date has considered patterns of reminiscing amongst early childhood educators and children. In our own study, in which we asked educator-child and mother-child dyads to talk about shared past events, we found that the individual differences in educator-child elaboration were even wider than those in mother-child elaboration (blinded). Educators with diploma- training were less elaborative on average than were degree-trained educators or mothers (blinded), but with higher mental state language (blinded-b). Because dyads in our previous work were asked to reminisce for us, however, we do not yet know how frequent these conversations are in everyday early childhood practice. This is particularly the case for one-on-one reminiscing conversations, given the frequent group interactions within the early childhood context (Test et al. 2010). Nor do we know how such conversations come about within the early childhood context, their function, or how they compare to other types of educator-child talk.

Given the educative nature of early childhood education, we consider it likely that some early childhood educators may be particularly likely to reminisce with children in order to support the development of key cognitive and socioemotional skills (blinded). In addition, because reminiscing offers a valuable means of creating connections between children's home and centre lives (blinded, Neale & Pino-Pasternak, 2017), we also consider it likely that educators will reminisce to find out more about children's experiences and to bond (see Test et al. 2010). In addition to understanding the frequency of educator-child reminiscing, therefore, and the times when it occurs most frequently, our present study also maps educators' explanations for reminiscing at these specific times.

The present study

In the present study we aimed to determine when, how often, and why early childhood educators report reminiscing with the children in their care. We focused our study in Australia, where long day care is the most common type of care for children who do not yet attend school. Approximately 45% of 2- to 3-year-olds attend long day care (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2015), for example, while 95% of 4 to 5-year-olds who are not yet in school also attend either a standalone preschool or a preschool program in a long day care centre (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018). The vast majority of children, 95%, are enrolled for more than 15 hours per week (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018).

Given that early childhood classes have multiple children learning together, we also aimed to capture how patterns of educator-child reminiscing differ for individual children versus children in groups and for events that the educator has shared with the child or children versus those that the child has experienced separately, at home or in different parts of the centre. To do so we used a mixed-methods explanatory design

(Creswell 2009). In this design, quantitative data were collected to provide a broad understanding of when and how often reminiscing occurs in the early childhood context, how it differs for shared vs. unshared events and one-on-one vs. group discussions, and how it compares to other kinds of talk. Rich qualitative data about why educators engage children in reminiscing at these times were then used to supplement, explain, and extend the quantitative data (see Creswell 2009; Mertens 2010).

Materials and methods

Participants

Our initial sample included 251 early childhood educators from the state of New South Wales, Australia. Twenty-two educators commenced but did not complete the online survey: thus, the final sample included 229 educators. The majority of respondents reported that they currently taught children in the preschool years, aged 3-5 (65%), with smaller numbers teaching toddlers, aged 2-3 (19%), or babies, aged 0-2 (16%).

Educators who took part in the study ranged in age from 21 to 70 years old ($M = 39.50$, $SD = 11.65$), and had between 1 and 45 years of experience ($M = 14.24$, $SD = 9.48$). The sample was also culturally diverse. While the majority of educators reported being European Australian ($n = 175$), there were also educators who identified as being from Western Europe ($n = 25$), subcontinental Asia ($n = 25$), East or South-East Asia ($n = 16$), or other. No participants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Consistent with sector trends, the vast majority (98.8%) were female.

In Australia, the early childhood educators responsible for delivering the education and care program within long day centres can be tertiary degree qualified or have a non-degree qualification. Degree qualified educators are early childhood teachers with a four-year teaching degree, while non-degree qualified educators may have a Diploma in Children's Services, which is equivalent to one year of the four year

teaching degree, or a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, which is the lowest level of qualification required (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2019). Educators with a Certificate III will possess some theoretical and practical knowledge and skills, although the certificate itself has no equivalency to a tertiary teaching degree.

Materials

The online survey completed by educators was hosted on the Qualtrics survey platform and included three sections¹. In first section, educators were asked to report a number of demographic variables including their age, gender, cultural affiliation, country of birth, language/s, academic qualifications, years of experience teaching in the sector, the age of the children in their current room or class, and the educator: child ratio in their current room or class.

In the second section, we administered a talk frequency questionnaire: asking educators the frequency with which they engaged children both in reminiscing and in other types of talk. Our questionnaire adapts and extends Kulkofsky et al.'s (2009) original memory sharing prompt. In the original prompt, parents were asked to record on a scale of 0 to 7+ how many *times per week* they estimate engaging with their child in talk about past events. Although the prompt is sensitive to cultural and individual differences between mothers (Kulkofsky et al. 2009), pilot testing with four early

¹ A fourth section included two memory function scales (an adult scale and a child scale). These scales represented the first phase of longitudinal work considering the inter-relationships between adult and child memory functions. They are not the focus of the current analysis, however, and are not reported here.

childhood educators suggested that we may encounter ceiling effects. Indeed, all four educators with whom we spoke suggested that they would typically talk with children about events or activities they have experienced multiple times per day. These conversations included discussion about activities the educator and children had experienced together at the centre, as well as unshared activities that the educator has knowledge of a particular child or group experiencing separately (e.g. at home, on non-rostered days). Following the advice of our pilot group, therefore, we revised our response rating scale to 0 to 7+ *times per day*.

To determine how reminiscing fit within educators' broader pedagogical strategies, and to provide points of comparison, we also repeated the original memory sharing question for other kinds of talk. Our questionnaire therefore included eight items: (i) talk about past events the educator and child experienced together in the centre, (ii) talk about past events that the child experienced outside the centre, (iii) talk about the child's emotions, (iv) talk about others' emotions, (v) imaginative talk, (vi) talk about how things work, and (vii) talk about shared future events, and (viii) talk about unshared future events. We administered this scale twice (in counterbalanced order): once for one-on-one talk with individual children, and once for talk with children in a group.

Finally, in the third section of our survey, we asked educators to describe instances in the day when they were most likely to engage children in reminiscing. Participants were given the following prompt: "*We are interested in conversations that you have with children in your centre about events the children have previously experienced. We refer to these conversations as past talk. Past talk may include events you experienced together, as well as events that children experienced but you did not. In the box below, please describe when and where you usually engage in past talk with the*

children in your care. Please provide up to 5 instances". Consistent with the exploratory nature of this research question, a large and expandable free recall box was provided in the survey for participants to enter as much or as little detail as they wished. All written responses were later extracted and analysed in light of: (i) the specific instances reported by educators and (ii) the justifications and explanations they provided alongside these instances, as below.

Procedure

Following institutional ethics approval, an invitation to participate in the research was emailed to Directors of early childhood education centres from Sydney and surrounding regional areas. Directors were invited to forward the invitation to educators in their centres. The invitation included a link to an information and consent form, and educators who agreed to participate were invited to then click a second link to the survey proper. The survey proper took no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Once complete, participants were invited to leave their email address in order to be entered into a draw to win a \$150 gift voucher.

Analysis of qualitative data

To analyse educators' qualitative responses to the open-ended reminiscing prompt, we adopted an inductive thematic approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). First, the first author familiarised herself with the responses by reading and taking initial notes. Second, codes were created from the data. This process continued until all possible codes were exhausted. Two distinct types of codes emerged: specific locations or times of the day ("instances") when educators engaged children in reminiscing, such as "*mealtimes*" and "*departure*", and additional explanations or justifications that help contextualise their response, such as "*supporting home to centre transition*". The second author then reviewed all transcripts and codes and made suggestions where needed. Third, higher-

level themes (i.e. sets of cohesive and patterned responses with multiple instances across the dataset; Braun and Clarke 2006) were drawn iteratively from the codes. For example, codes related to “*reflections on excursions*” and to “*daily recaps*” each contributed to a broader theme: “*reflections on centre life*”. Infrequent codes that did not contribute to any larger patterns, such as “*at the playdough table*”, were discarded.

Results

To determine how often early childhood educators report engaging young children in reminiscing, alongside other types of talk, we present quantitative data from our talk frequency questionnaire. Next, to determine the instances during the day when educators were most likely to engage young children in reminiscing, we present reminiscing “instances” from our open-ended exploratory reminiscing question. We ranked these instances in order of popularity. Finally, to explore educators’ reasons for reminiscing in these instances, we present six qualitative themes and exemplar quotes that emerged as justifications in our exploratory reminiscing question. Taken together these findings provide complementary quantitative and qualitative evidence from educators about how often, when, and why educator-child reminiscing occurs.

How often early childhood educators report engaging young children in reminiscing

Educators’ self-reported talk frequency across all eight types of talk is presented in Figure 1. To test for differences in the frequency of talk reported by educators we conducted a (2) x (8) repeated measures ANOVA. The first factor was talk partner (one-on-one vs. group) and the second was talk type (shared past events, unshared past events, child’s emotions, others’ emotions, imaginative talk, how things work, shared future events, and unshared future events). There was a significant main effect of partner, showing that frequency scores for one-on-one talk were slightly, yet consistently, higher than they were for group talk, $F = 107.21, p < .001$, partial eta =

.30. There was also a significant main effect of talk type, $F = 48.49$, $p < .001$, partial eta = .16. As shown in Figure 1, reminiscing about shared or unshared past events was less frequent on average than talk about emotions, but as common as talk about imaginary scenarios, how things work, or the future.

Interestingly, and notwithstanding small but consistent differences in the frequency of one-on-one vs. group talk, large individual differences between educators emerged. As shown in Figure 2, approximately half of all participating educators reported engaging children in various types of reminiscing 5-7+ times per day. In contrast, more than one third (37.3%) reported reminiscing with groups of children about unshared events just 0-2 times per day, and one in five (18.2%) reported reminiscing one-on-one about unshared events 0-2 times. Similar patterns emerged for reminiscing about shared events.

These findings suggest that reminiscing is a remarkably common way for educators to engage young children in talk. One-on-one reminiscing conversations were more frequent than group conversations, as they were for other types of talk, and large individual differences in reported reminiscing frequency between educators also emerged. For the majority of educators, however, both are used to engage children in conversations about their past multiple times per day. This is true both for experiences the educator and child have shared together and those that the child has experienced separately, outside the early childhood education context.

When educators report reminiscing with young children

Drawing on our qualitative thematic coding, the most popular times for educators to engage children in reminiscing were as children arrive (e.g. “*on arrival... 'oh you went on the train to the city on the weekend? wow! What did you do?'*”), and during meals (e.g. “*Meal times is always an area for discussion. We ask questions about both past*

and present events and what has happened and will happen during the day or week”).

Approximately two-thirds of educators reported engaging children in reminiscing during these times (Figure 3). Reminiscing during group/circle time was also popular, being reported by more than half of the educators (e.g. *“Each morning the group gathers for a “yarning circle”. Children have the option of taking a “talking stone” indicating they would like to contribute to the circle. Topics of the circle vary daily as children openly discuss their weekend, events, families and how they are feeling”*).

Other relatively common instances for reminiscing reported by some educators included during departure, outdoor time, everyday chatting, change time, and rest time². Each response was reported by at least 25 educators in the sample. Given the frequency of reminiscing among educators and children was relatively high, the wide diversity in other instances reported may suggest that reminiscing is common across multiple everyday early childhood activities.

Why early childhood educators report reminiscing with young children

Educators’ qualitative explanations for why they engage children in reminiscing at various times fell into six broad themes: to settle children in; to support the formation of close home-centre connections; to support children’s social and emotional competence; to support intentional learning activities; to support children’s reflections on “centre life”; and to bond. Note that pseudonyms are used for all educator quotes.

² Supplementary chi-squared analyses comparing responses by educators’ teaching context showed that ‘group/circle time’ responses were more common among educators in preschool rooms, $p < .05$, and ‘change time’ responses were more common among educators in babies’ rooms, $p < .05$. No other differences were significant.

First, reminiscing conversations were considered by educators to be a useful tool for settling children in. Thus, there was an explicit preferencing of affective care. According to Stephanie (42 years old), a diploma trained educator in a babies' room, for example, *"I find this a good way to support children to transition from home to care. It helps them reflect, reset emotion and settle into the day"*. Lily (45 years old), a degree trained teacher in a preschool room, also used reminiscing *"during morning engagement to settle children"*, while Sam (43 years old), a degree trained teacher in a preschool room, identified that reminiscing enabled children *"to settle on separation"*.

Second, educators engaged children in reminiscing to support the formation of close connections between their home and centre lives. Billie (28 years old), a degree trained teacher in a babies' room, stated that reminiscing was useful *"when children are engaged in the activity that happened over the weekend, going to the farm, camping etc..."*, while Terri (29 years old), a masters qualified teacher in a preschool room, stated that: *"on Mondays we ask children what they did on their weekend as a show and tell group time in the morning/before lunch. Children usually describe going to swimming and parties, etc. ... I talk to children about events in the community around them."* Like Terri, multiple educators reported being particularly likely to reminisce about children's home lives on the first day of the week (*"Tuesday or Wednesday... their first day back"*).

Home-centre connections were also important at departure, with reminiscing used to share with parents what children have engaged in during the day. Avril (53 years old), a degree trained educator in a preschool room, described *"assisting children in sharing information with their family at pickup"*. Tammy (26 years old), also a degree trained educator in a preschool room, encouraged children's reminiscing *"in*

conversations with their families”, while Zali (29 years old), a degree trained teacher in a babies’ room, scaffolded reminiscing “*on exit with their parents present*”.

Third, educators engaged children in reminiscing to support their developing social and emotional competence. According to Stephanie (42 years old), a diploma trained educator in a babies’ room, “*I use this as a social competence tool. Children find things easier to understand when they are reminded of a time they have been in the other persons shoes*”. Janali (47 years old), a certificate-trained educator in a toddlers’ room, reported using reminiscing “*when there is a dispute over a toy (angry, frustrated, sad)*”, while Tracey (41 years old), a degree-trained teacher in a preschool room, reported using reminiscing “*when a child is upset, using past knowledge to influence play – such as during role play*”. Geraldine (63 years old), a degree trained teacher in a preschool room, simply wrote “*during emotional upsets*”. In all such cases reminiscing was described as spontaneous, used to coach children’s understanding of emotion and perspective taking in moments of conflict or disturbance.

Fourth, educators engaged children in reminiscing during intentional learning activities. In these responses explicit pedagogical intentions were clear (“*during morning intentional teaching activities*”; “*it is often related to what the children are doing, thinking about, challenged by*”), with educators discussing how reminiscing about children’s previous experiences could help reinforce new learning and create new connections. Mariella (45 years old), a degree trained teacher in a preschool room, engaged children in reminiscing “*during experiences which can be linked to prior learning or events*”, while Zara (36 years old), also in a preschool room, reported reminiscing “*... at intentional teaching periods, we often reflect on why we are exploring a topic or what we have already learned*”. As highlighted in the following

responses from Sal, Joanna, Ottie, Bethanie, and Freida, reminiscing supported a wide range of intentional learning activities:

“During our unit of inquiry about how they have changed from babies to now” (Sal, 40 years old, degree trained teacher in a preschool room)

“During science activities to inquire about which experiences they have previously made” (Joanna, 53 years old, diploma trained educator in a preschool room)

“Reading books, making connections with children’s relevant events” (Ottie, 50 years old, degree-trained teacher in a preschool room)

“When engaging in reflective drawing- children share thinking and recall shared experiences” (Bethany, 33 years old, degree trained teacher in a preschool room)

“If we’re reading a book together, we may ask the children whether they’ve had the same or a similar experience... and get them to share their experiences and knowledge”. (Freida, 21 years old, diploma trained educator in a toddler room)

Fifth, educators engaged children in reminiscing to reflect on their “centre life”. Yasmin (27 years old), a degree trained teacher in a babies room, explained how she reflects:

“when changing a child’s nappy (‘did you enjoy Emily’s dance class this morning?’), when outside in the garden (‘remember when the sun was out yesterday the ground got very hot, didn’t it?’) ...”, while Bess (39 years old), a degree trained teacher in a

preschool room, explained how children’s reflections across time might guide future centre activities: *“we talk regularly about where we have been and where we might want to go next, what we liked or didn’t like”*. Interestingly, when describing children’s

reflections on their centre life, several educators also mentioned the use of daybooks

and photos. Gabrielle (38 years old), a diploma trained educator in a babies’ room,

noted that she often engaged children in reminiscing when *“looking over a past project documentation book with photos of the children”*, while Jacqui (50 years old), a degree-

trained teacher in a preschool room, engaged children in reminiscing *“when looking together through the children’s portfolios and daybook – revisiting experiences, linking previous learning and exploration”*. Alissa (36 years old), a masters’ qualified teacher

in a toddler room, described her use of photos: *“we will put photos on the wall and talk to children about the excursion during group time or whenever they are looking at the pictures”*.

Sixth, reminiscing provided educators and children with opportunities to bond. These bonding conversations were initiated by children as well as educators. Azalea (31 years old), a degree trained teacher in a preschool room, reported reminiscing *“when a child initiates a conversation, ...any time they unexpectedly come to me sharing of a past adventure or asking me where I was when not at the centre”*, while Mariam (32 years old), a degree trained teacher in a preschool room, reported that *“during outside play, children approach me to share information or I see they need some support so I just sit and start a conversation with them”*. In such cases, an educator’s own approach is critical. Denise (24 years old), a certificate trained educator in a toddler room, articulated how she initiates reminiscing conversations with shy children:

“I always engage myself in discussion all the time whether the child is responded or not, I find 9 times out of 10 the child is interested and will become comfortable about opening up with me as long as I am being open and patient with them”.

Together, these six themes highlight the multifaceted nature of reminiscing in early childhood education contexts. They further illustrate an explicit acknowledgement and awareness among educators of the reasons they engage children in reminiscing and the expected outcomes of doing so.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to determine when, how often, and why early childhood educators report engaging children in reminiscing conversations. Drawing on sociocultural notions of development, these language-based interactions offer children an opportunity to reflect on and describe their everyday experiences and have important developmental benefits. A secondary aim was to capture how patterns of educator-child reminiscing differed for individual children versus children in groups, and for events

that the educator has shared with the child or children versus those that the child has experienced separately.

Reminiscing was a common and everyday activity for the vast majority of educators. Notwithstanding wide individual differences, nearly all educators reported engaging children in each form of reminiscing at least once per day. More than half engaged children in each form of reminiscing at least five times per day. In contrast, in Kulkofsky et al. (2009), just 40% of European American parents and no Chinese parents reported reminiscing with their children 7 times or more per week. This finding is important: while rich developmental benefits have long been shown for parent-child reminiscing (Fivush et al. 2006; Salmon and Reese 2016; Wareham & Salmon 2006), and connections have been drawn between reminiscing, sustained shared thinking (Neal and Pino-Pasternak 2016), and decontextualised talk (Test et al. 2010), no research has yet considered the extent to which educator-child reminiscing occurs naturally in the early childhood context.

There are two possible explanations for the high rates of reminiscing reported by educators. First, because educators typically have multiple children under their care (ranging from 1:3 to 1:12 in the current study), the same educator may engage in multiple reminiscing conversations throughout the day to ensure each child has opportunities to contribute. Second, educators' professional qualifications may also make them more aware than parents of the positive benefits of decontextualised language-based interactions for children (see Test et al. 2010).

Interestingly, given the group-based nature of early childhood education and care, educators also reported that one-on-one talk was slightly, yet consistently, more frequent than group talk. This was true both for reminiscing and for other types of talk, suggesting that educators may be conscious of the need to scaffold each child's

development in language-based interactions (see blinded-b). Further, and possibly also contributing to the higher frequency of one-on-one conversations, group discussions by definition include multiple children. Thus, several one-on-one conversations are needed to meet the same need for each individual child. The suggestion that educators were aware of the need for frequent one-on-one conversations with children was supported by their qualitative explanations for reminiscing, with high levels of intentionality and pedagogical reflection apparent.

Turning to educators' qualitative responses about when and why they engage children in reminiscing, the most frequently reported instances were during arrival and mealtimes. Group/circle time was also popular, while other instances included during outdoor play, departure, and change time. Thus, reminiscing was common across numerous early childhood contexts throughout the day. Explanations for reminiscing were also varied, and included not just to settle children in (thus supporting the home-centre transition) but to support the formation of close home-centre connections, to support children's development of social and emotional competence, to support children's intentional learning activities, to support children's reflections on "centre life", and to bond. These explanations are similar to those reported by parents (Kulkofsky and Koh 2009), but extend further in supporting home-centre connections and settling in. Interestingly, several of these explanations are also predicted in the early childhood literature. For example, Test and colleagues (2010) state that talk enabling children to share aspects of themselves with their educators will necessarily support bonding, while decontextualised talk should help to support the development of academic language and the formation of new learning connections. Importantly, however, our findings show that educators themselves are aware of these functions and

use them with intentionality. Moreover, the findings provide a useful initial map of the different types of reminiscing most used by educators at different times.

Limitations and implications

Our study was limited by the use of educator self-report to measure opportunities for educator-child reminiscing in early childhood contexts. Although this approach enabled us to consider educators' own rationale for using different types of reminiscing, in different ways, and at different times of the day, we did not capture the length and style of these conversations. Future research might consider if more educators who report reminiscing more frequently with children also use a more elaborative style, as is the case for mothers (Kulkofsky and Koh 2009).

The study was also limited by not capturing data at the child level. Although educators report frequently engaging children in reminiscing, it is possible that this occurs more often with some children than others. To understand how frequently individual children are engaged each day in reminiscing with their educators, future research could consider the use of wearable recording equipment such as the Language Environment Analysis (LENA) system (e.g. Weisleder and Fernald 2013). By using this same system to also record children's language-based interactions with parents, educators, siblings, and others, there is potential to map multiple developmental pathways in the real world and determine how these pathways interact (see Van Bergen and Sutton 2019).

Notwithstanding these limitations, there are implications both for future research and for professional practice. First, we note the possibility for children's own contributions to the reminiscing to vary by instance, explanatory theme, and age. Educators in babies' rooms occasionally expressed that "*it's hard with the little ones*", for example, and many of their descriptions of reminiscing appeared highly scaffolded.

When reminiscing with older children about unshared events, such as weekend activities, educators instead reported using open prompts (see Fivush et al. 2006 for similar findings with mothers). While observational research is required to confirm these suggestive trends, a particularly interesting finding emerged with regards to intentional learning activities. Educators emphasised the importance of children themselves forming language-based connections between their past experiences and new learning, which in some cases may be unknown to the educator. In mother-child reminiscing, in contrast, fewer child contributions are sought. While bonding conversations are typically dialogic and co-constructed, mothers adopt a more didactic ‘teaching’ role in lesson-oriented reminiscing (Kulkofsky 2011). Future research is needed to consider how parents and educators differentially scaffold children’s learning experiences with talk about the past for different reasons (i.e. drawing on our six themes).

Second, and related to our first implication, it is important that future research delineate the specific developmental benefits that are best conferred in specific types of reminiscing conversations, and those conferred across all forms of reminiscing. Our research highlights the multifaceted reasons that early childhood educators engage children in reminiscing (see Kulkofsky and Koh 2009 for similar findings among parents). Across these instances, scaffolding may differ qualitatively. For example, educators who reminisced to support socio-emotional competence described the spontaneous adoption of emotion coaching techniques in response to children’s distress or conflict. Reminiscing in these instances is likely to offer a richer forum for the development of emotion knowledge and perspective taking than is reminiscing for other purposes (see blinded). In contrast, the use of expansive and elaborative conversational

cues should support children's development of vocabulary, narrative skill, and self-understanding across all reminiscing contexts (Wareham and Salmon 2006).

Third, we highlight the potential to prompt and support reminiscing in a range of early childhood education contexts. Several educators in our study mentioned the use of daybooks to prompt children's reflections on centre life, for example, while others used reminiscing prompts during circle time. By introducing these techniques in curricula and planning documentation, and by introducing physical reminiscing prompts in the environment, there are opportunities to address the wide individual differences in educators' reminiscing frequency and encourage the use of reminiscing for all children.

Finally, given the wide individual differences in educators' reminiscing frequency, we echo calls for professional learning that focuses on reminiscing quantity and quality (blinded; Neal and Pino-Pasternak 2016). Reminiscing interventions have been successful amongst mothers (Reese and Newcombe 2007; blinded-c), and educators already are aware of the positive benefits of sustained shared thinking in other contexts (Siraj-Blatchford 2009). By encouraging language-based conversations about young children's own past experiences, using a high-quality elaborative style, we expect such interventions to offer significant developmental benefits (blinded).

Conclusion

Educator-child reminiscing engages young children in potentially rich, decontextualised conversations about their own past experiences. Educators in our study reported reminiscing with children multiple times per day, particularly on arrival and at mealtimes, but also in other contexts throughout the day. Multiple reasons for engaging young children in reminiscing were provided, including to bond, support the child in making home-centre connections, support the development of social and emotional competence, and support children to form new knowledge connections during

intentional learning activities. This study is the first to consider educators' views about reminiscing and has important implications for future research and practice.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors have no financial interests in this research and no benefits to disclose.

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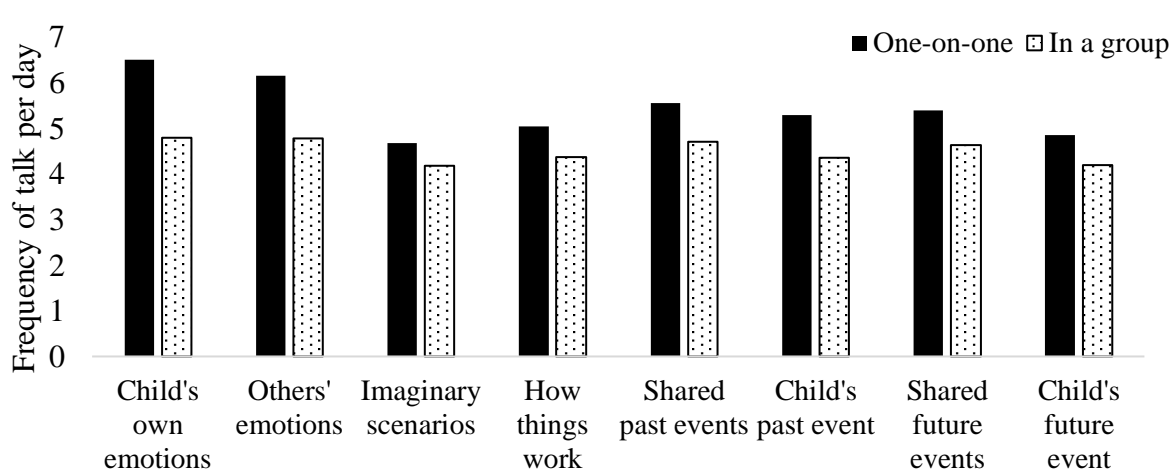


Figure 1. Educators' average frequency of talk each day with children one-on-one and in a group

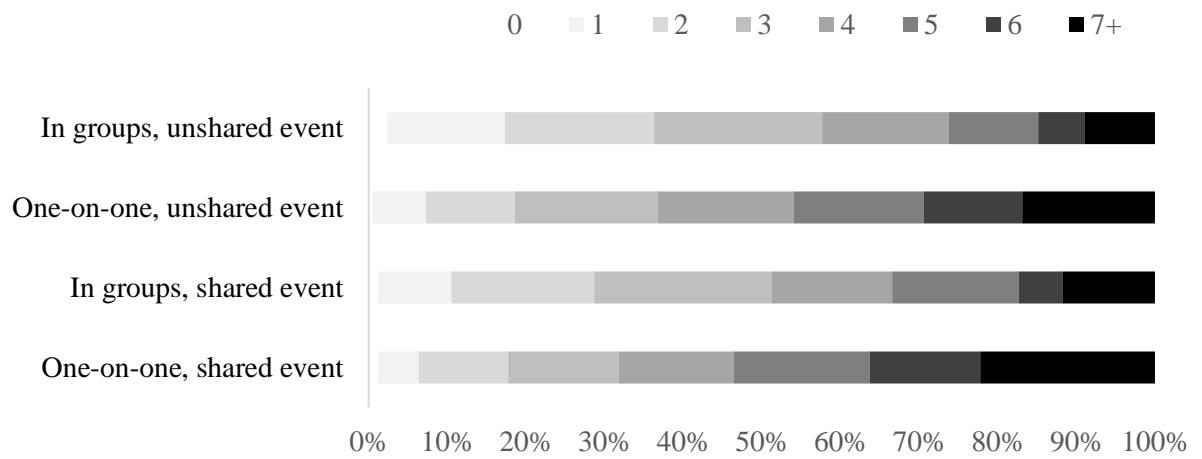


Figure 2. Individual differences in reminiscing frequencies for one-on-one vs. group conversations and shared vs. unshared events

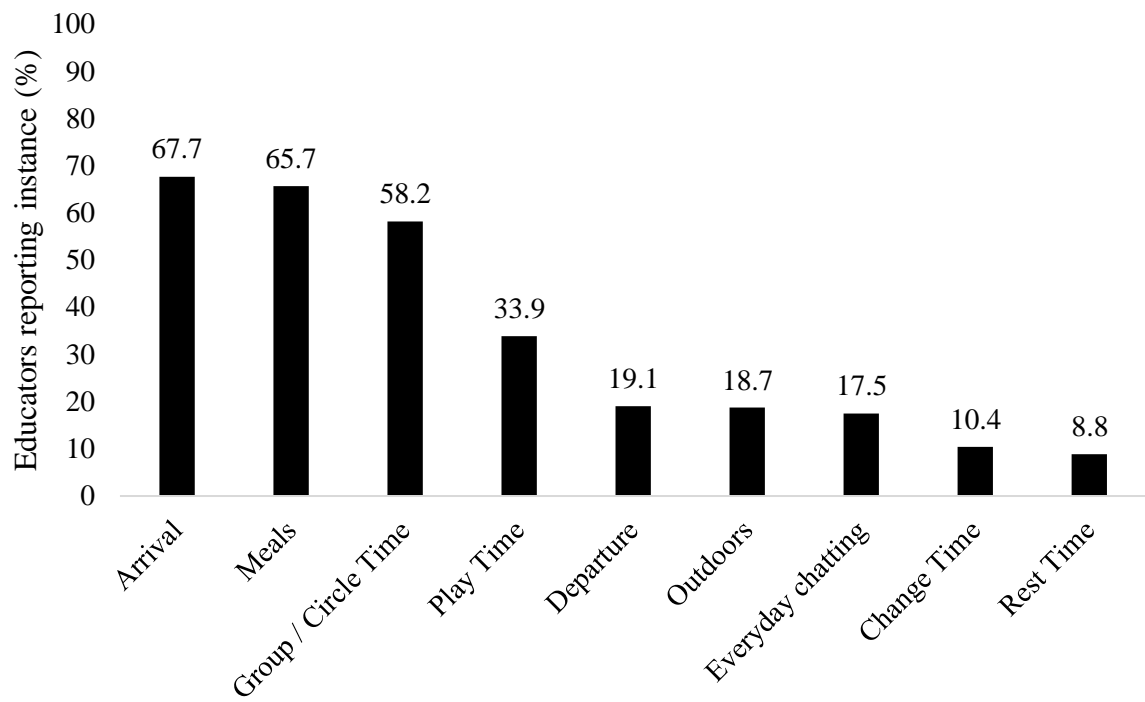


Figure 3. Instances of reminiscing in descending order of popularity.