Chapter 6
Holding Hands: Toddlers' Imaginary Peer Play

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6.1   Introduction

The child has the enthusiasm and persistence to imitate and practice technique, and is supported in his/her interest by appreciative parents and peers. (Trevarthen and Malloch 2018, p. 32)

This chapter aims to explore a case example of a group of toddlers' enthusiastic and joyful dance. The toddlers playfully enter into each other's imaginary and creative play. Recent research has demonstrated that children in free play are able to develop their engagement in play; through sharing initiatives and collaborating (Anderson 2018). Toddlers' collaborative play involves sharing imaginary worlds, planning and problem solving (Anderson 2018). Participating in higher levels of collaborative play has been shown to have a direct positive effect on children's cognitive and social competence (Schaik et al. 2018). Alcock (2013) refers to the complexity of toddlers' connection to others as an 'ontological connection of we-ness, with others' (p. 188). It is important for educators to pay attention to the environment, ensuring that it facilitates children playfully relaxing and experimenting with their bodies and actions when communicating with peers (Alcock 2013). Infants and toddlers share reciprocal interactions and collaborative learning through sharing interests with each other, and they develop cooperative attention by engaging in sustained interactions (Degotardi 2017).

Some researchers have explored dance and musicality in toddlers (Custodero 2010). According to Trevarthen and Malloch (2018, p. 26), dance relates to 'human bodies moving with grace and drama', and is a form of communication. As young children learn and develop, they become more fully aware of others' intentions, and

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use dramatic actions to express meaning and musical creativity (Trevarthen and Malloch 2018).

Toddlers use their own bodies and joyful repetitions to communicate that they are interested in each other's play (Løkken 2009). According to Fleer (2015), imaginary play involves improvisation and extending stories. In play, toddlers who cooperate more with others are able to align better their play (Pursi 2019).

Two-year olds value affectionate friendships and communicate joyfully with peers through imitation, meaning making and creative expression (Trevarthen 2018). In young children, early peer relations and distinctive peer interactions are formed in response to familiar peers (Hay et al. 2018). Further, young children who are members of peer groups are able to show abilities such as cooperation and coordination of goals that emerge in toddlerhood (Hay et al. 2018).

Through peer interaction, toddlers are able to explore early non-verbal communication such as pointing, gesturing, and expressing empathy and cooperation (Quinones et al. 2017).Toddlers use pointing gestures to communicate, for example, to indicate where a toy is hidden (Kachel et al. 2018). However, researchers have found that peers do not value all forms of social expectations such as those expressed through the pointing gesture (Kachel et al. 2018).

In seeking to understand toddlers' ways of participating and engaging with each other, the visual data presented in this chapter in narrative form invites the exploration of toddlers' imaginary play dance. Cheeseman and Sumsion (2016, p. 276) suggest we can view infants' and toddlers' learning experience as an 'invitation to learning' and call on educators to give greater consideration to the possibilities of toddlers' shared play and ways of being together. This chapter extends an invitation to think more about imagination and how it develops in toddler peer play.

The following research question guides this chapter: *How do toddlers develop their imaginary play in a peer group?* The case example is analysed using a cultural–historical theoretical approach to further our understanding of the complex nature of toddlers' imagination.

6.2 Cultural–Historical Theory

Cultural–historical theory provides an approach to examining toddlers' imagination and play by accounting for human relationships. Children's imagination continues to develop throughout life, and is enacted through a very complex process (Vygotsky 2004). Imagination is a new form of consciousness in human activity (Vygotsky 1966/2016). Vygotsky's (2004) proposition of the full cycle of imagination is completed when imagination is embodied or crystallised. Imagination depends on everyday experiences, needs and interests, and is situated in time and in a specific culture and environment. Vygotsky (2004) refers to imagination as the image or 'picture we have drawn' (p. 41) to explain that the product of imagination stems from reality. Imagination transforms our personal drives and affective aspirations. It is creative and actively transforms into what is imagined (Vygotsky 2004).

In addition, Zittoun and Rosenstein (2017) suggest that the process of creating everyday experiences in a setting provides an imaginative exploration of present possibilities and even impossibilities that might occur.

Vygotsky's (1966/2016) cultural–historical theory traditionally considered the young child's world of play as being guided by imagined situations, and the creation of rules and roles that included behaviours and actions that might be acceptable to the play situation. A child's play echoes elements of previous experiences and is a 'creative reworking of the impressions [the child] has acquired. [The child] combines them and uses them to construct a new reality; one that conforms to [their] owns needs and desires' (Vygotsky 2004, pp. 5–6). Imaginary situations always have rules that are created in the course of play and the actions that are executed match the rules and roles. Play is a collective activity where children are able to be inside and outside an imaginary situation: taking two positions simultaneously (Kravtsova 2014; Kravtsov and Kravtsova 2010). For example, crying like a hospital patient (inside) and planning the hospital setting (outside). In play, the child *acts* with intentions and makes sense of their play as they perceive and experience the world (Kravtsova 2014). The child creates an imagined situation with which they are familiar in real life in play (Kravtsov and Kravtsova 2010).

In particular, in image play or imaginary play, the child establishes a role or a character that they identify as 'play for one's self' (Kravtsov and Kravtsova 2010, p. 37). The child creates their own image of something with which they are familiar and with which they are able to identify. By identifying with this image, the child makes sense of their personal position relating to who they are in reality, thereby taking a new position in play (Kravtsov and Kravtsova 2010). Imaginary play forms part of an initial point for all children's play. This is where the child is inside an imaginary situation identified by an object or character in imaginary play (Fleer 2010).

Winther-Lindqvist (2009) also notes that 'playing involves rules as well as pretence' (p. 1) and rules are important to examine the everyday life of peer-group play. Children identify each other's interests or motives in peer groups, and share a sense of belonging in their peer-group life (Winther-Lindqvist 2012). Educators are important in developing toddlers' collective knowledge, which enhances their imagined play narratives (Li et al. 2016). Toddlers are able to relate affectively with peers when they engage in imaginary situations and actions in shared play (Quinones et al. 2017).

6.2.1   Collaboration

Contemporary researchers are widely engaged in developing better understanding of the role of collaborations, intersubjectivity and shared play in early childhood learning (Anderson 2018; Edmiston 2008; Howes 2011; Trevarthen and Aitken 2001). Anderson (2018) proposes that there is great significance in understanding reciprocity when children engage with their peers by examining the choices they

make to engage or otherwise. Anderson (2018) notes that in spontaneous and/or free play, young children actively express their intentions and wishes and bring their own unique set of engagement and entering-the-play strategies. Fleer's (2015) work on play worlds suggests paying attention to imaginary situations that are based on stories and fairy tales where children and educators can engage in collective role-play.

Children's interactions are developed through collaboration and negotiation (Mejia-Arauz et al. 2018). Different cultural patterns suggest that collaboration includes 'finely tuned coordinated moves by which the participants contribute as an ensemble to the activity' (Mejia-Arauz et al. 2018, p. 119). Collaboration also involves participants building common ground and using nonverbal and verbal communication to contribute to the course of the interaction in a shared activity. Mejia-Arauz et al. (2018, p.119) also refer to 'fluid collaboration' as people engage in interaction patterns that bring synchrony and rhythm to their active behaviours.

It is also important to account for the child's perspectives in peer interactions. In our research, the examination considers children's perspectives and the creation of their cultural and living worlds (Nilsson et al. 2017). Children's wellbeing and happiness are produced when they socially interact, play and explore, and through these social relationships it is possible to examine children's agency, that is, their choices and self-chosen activities (Seland et al. 2015). A sign such as a child's hand reaching out to another child's hand may indicate an offer or gift of self-choice to join the activity. A sign such as this can organise the individual's own behaviour through another person (El'konin and Vygotsky 2001). Lave and Wenger (1991) brought early attention to the 'view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other', and a decade ago, Rogers and Evans (2008) urged a reconceptualisation of space, organisation and role-play, so that they could be 'seen from the child's perspective' (p. 118).

Using a cultural–historical approach for toddler research broadens the perspective of theoretical observation in viewing the case example. This broadening occurs when we bring the cultural dynamics of toddler relationships, imagination and use of space into a more embodied, collective and researchers' collaborative view. In the context of this research, engaging with a collaborative view increases the likelihood of creating a more flexible and expansive account of toddlers' participation in play.

6.3 Methodology

A visual narrative methodological approach involved studying toddler's everyday activities in long day care centres (Li et al. 2016). Video observations provided an important method for following focus children for long uninterrupted periods.

Visual methodology involves selecting a video clip, to allow a "closer visual examination" of infant and toddlers movements throughout their day (Ridgway et al. 2016, p. 2). Researchers can then carefully select video clips for detailed and careful analysis. Then, a visual narrative is created from video clip in the form of screen capture snapshots.

6.3.1 Sample

As part of an ethically approved research project titled "Studying Babies and Toddlers: Cultural Worlds and Transitory Relationships" aimed to investigate toddlers' cultural worlds and transitory relationships. The wider study sample was conducted in two different long day care centres and involved six focus families in Melbourne, Australia with children under the age of three. Informed consent was obtained from all families. All the participating toddler's names have been kept anonymous.

6.3.2 Data Generation and Analysis

The wider project involved 60.5 hours of video observation generated by the researchers. Seven visits were made to two focus long day care centres. Silvia was filmed three times for seven hours over a period of six-months. The focus was to tracked the focus children with a video camera for an entire day, with only one researcher filming one focus child. The case example used for this research, the video camera was focused on Silvia. The case example was selected because it reveals information about toddlers' peer play relations over a long period (30 minutes), and involves minimal supervision of the educator.

The project that aimed to critically interrogate and examine the everyday life of infants and toddlers through multiple perspectives to the analysis of the visual data. In studying peers actions, creating a methodology that can be blended with a cultural–historical theoretical frame of reference provokes and challenges the broader reading of meaning around the child's participation. Using collaborative visual narrative methodology creates a detailed, refined, dynamic and rich presentation and re-presentation of the qualitative data, the reality and authenticity of the toddler's context and activity is created through the three researchers' interobserver reliability.

The layered analysis of the visual data meant viewing, re-viewing and coming to agreement between the three researchers. The variations of perspectives through a collaborative approach enriched the data analysis. The video data were planned to provide the three researchers with a collaborative opportunity to unite their different understandings, interpretations and cultural perspectives (Quinones et al. 2017; Ridgway 2018; Ridgway et al. 2016).

The case example involves a group of toddlers, Silvia, Emma, Isla, Cynthia and Harry. All were aged two years, except Isla, who was the oldest peer at three years of age. The case example presents a synthesis of toddlers' dance play. In our research context, the educators took the role of supervising toddlers while the educators undertook preparations for Mother's Day were occurring. The following section provides details of how this dance play was initiated by the toddlers.

6.4   Case Example

The case example involves a group of peers dancing and holding hands. This was a playful dance initiated by the focus toddler (Silvia) with a group of peers. The playful dance occurs in the afternoon of a special event planned for later in that day for Mother's Day. The mothers has been invited that day for a special afternoon tea. The dance occurred before the Mother's Day preparations were made.

The educator is playing recorded Wiggles (Australian children's music group) music in the children's story-time meeting space. Wiggles music is very popular with children in Australia, and is familiar to young children. The meeting space is in the corner of the room (away from through traffic), which gives the young children an opportunity to freely dance and sing. A larger group of eight toddlers comes into the space and begins jumping, dancing and singing to the music 'Hot potato'.

Silvia initiates a jump and pretends to fall down after the jump. This physical dance movement is accompanied by Silvia's loud laughing sounds. The educator leaves the small corner space where the toddlers are jumping and dancing. Another toddler in the group named Ric starts moving his feet and Silvia tries to imitate the movement. She moves closer to her peer Ric, and the other toddlers become excited about listening to the song, whose lyrics are saying, 'Come on; let's jump'. All the group of ten toddlers are now moving freely in and out of the meeting space. They are experimenting with movement to the music and shouting, 'dance, hop, hop' (Fig. 6.1).

The small transitions in the daily life of the LDC are evident in the ways the peers danced and experimented with movement. The toddlers' relations with their world of the dancing corner, music and peers unite as they freely move in and out of the meeting corner space. Silvia appears to enjoy this space as she remains there for a long period (thirty minutes). Eventually, three minutes after, Silvia and an older toddler named Emma are on their own together in the space.

The educator asks them, 'What song would you like to hear?'

The sequential images show Emma dancing like a ballerina wearing a tutu, and Isla following Emma. The tutus were brought from home. We can imagine what wearing a tutu might mean from the toddler's perspective. That is, the tutu is a cultural artefact favoured by toddlers that adds to playing the role of a ballerina.
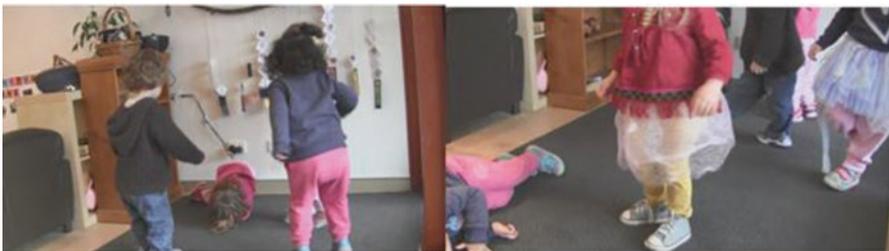

Fig. 6.1 Peer group experimenting with dance movements

Silvia is jumping excitedly. She looks carefully at Emma, who is dancing in her tutu. In an affective gesture, Emma holds her hands out to Silvia as an invitation to dance together.

Silvia happily mumbles, 'Dance with Emma!' Emma (Fig. 6.2) accepts the cheerful invitation made by Silvia to dance.

When carefully watching the video of the peer interactions that follow (Fig. 6.3), we notice that each toddler (Silvia and Emma) demonstrates a different intentions. For example, each of Silvia's movements are about speed. Silvia holds hands with Emma, who in contrast, is focusing on executing more delicate dance moves (Fig. 6.3). Silvia laughs and is smiling (Fig. 6.3). Emma is smiling back at Silvia and enjoying holding hands. Emma shows Silvia a new dance-movement technique, and uses her hands to cross over like a bridge. The educator is observing Silvia and Emma dancing, and when they cross over each other, the educator applauds and says, 'Bravo!'

Silvia and Emma continue dancing, and this time Emma pretends to fall down like Silvia did before. She then comes closer and holds hands with Silvia again while she is laying down on the floor. Silvia stands up. This time they do not hold hands but Emma starts doing pirouettes, twirling with turning around movements and Silvia follows (see Fig. 6.4).

The toddlers also start turning around in a circle with synchronised movements.

Fig. 6.2 Holding hands—Emma and Silvia

Fig. 6.3 Silvia learning new dance moves from Emma

Fig. 6.4 Peer joyful dance between Emma and Silvia

Fig. 6.5 Emma and Silvia falling down

Fig. 6.6 Silvia holds hands with Emma and helps new peer Isla

Silvia tries to hold hands again with Emma; however, as the images show (Fig. 6.5), Emma avoids Silvia, and pretends to fall down. Silvia also falls down and stays on the ground for a moment. Emma then comes closer and tries to help her up. Silvia and Emma continue this dance by twirling and jumping together. Emma pretends to fall down again and Silvia holds her hand to help her stand up, as Emma had done for her (Fig. 6.5).

A new girl named Isla appears in the now dance-play area, and observes their interaction. Isla is wearing a tutu like Emma. Isla is keenly observing Silvia helping Emma (who is on the floor), and then Isla pretends to fall down (Fig. 6.6), and looks towards Silvia for help. Emma also tries to help; however, Isla gets up by herself. The three begin to twirl around—Silvia smiles and laughs. She observes Isla and Emma twirling too.

Fig. 6.7 Peers Emma, Silvia and Isla in synchronised group dance and movement

Fig. 6.8 Peer group helping new member Cynthia

Isla enters the dancing game that includes holding hands, moving, twirling and falling down. Isla is now helping Silvia and Emma to get up when they pretend to fall down (Fig. 6.7).

Another girl named Cynthia joins in, and also pretends to fall down; both Emma and Silvia helps Cynthia to get up by holding hands. Isla then joins in Silvia and Emma to help Cynthia stand up for the second time. As they help Cynthia, this creates the opportunity for the entire peer group to hold hands together (Fig. 6.8).

A toddler named Harry also joins the group; however, he participates and enters first by observing and noticing what the other toddlers are doing. The peer group do not form a full circle. They fall together in a line. Silvia helps Emma get up and they finally form a circle. The music becomes faster. Emma, Isla and Silvia make a circle, and include Harry by pulling him in, and they holds hands with Emma (Fig. 6.9). Emma shows Harry how to fall down by falling down herself, and she shows Harry how to dance and hold hands.

Emma asks Harry: 'You want to dance?'

They are now all dancing in small groups, enjoying the experience of dancing together and laughing when they fall down. The group becomes even larger. They keep jumping and moving at a faster speed. After two minutes, Harry, Isla, Emma and Silvia become a whole group holding hands together.

Harry, Isla and Emma are holding hands together. Silvia says (Fig. 6.10), 'Isla, my hand?' She looks at Isla and asks, 'Hold my hand?' Silvia then jumps, holds hands and they jump together. Silvia moves and Isla, Harry and Emma hold hands together and continue with falling down. The dance play finishes when the educator tells the toddlers it is time to pack up, and the toddlers look disappointed.

Fig. 6.9 Harry joins in with Silvia, Emma and Isla

Fig. 6.10 Group dance play

6.5 Discussion

This section presents a discussion on toddlers self-image play, entering each other's imaginary situation and the use of coordinated bodily actions to create a sense of belonging to the peer group.

6.5.1 Silvia and Emma Self-Image Play

The dance play described is an example of the complexity of toddlers trying to align their own imaginary play to joint play. Silvia and Emma bring their own familiar and real-life experiences to this dance play (Kravtsov and Kravtsova 2010). Silvia and Emma identify their imaginary play differently, and bring their own positions to the shared play. Silvia pretending to fall down and Emma dancing like a real ballerina.

Silvia identifies with the joyful actions of jumping and pretending to fall down in this dance play (see Fig. 6.5). She identifies with a familiar experience of falling down to imagine a new play action. Silvia and Emma represent their unique contribution to the imaginary play created with peers. In contrast, Emma's self-image is imagining herself as a real dancer, identifying herself in the situation by using a familiar object such as a tutu.

These familiar situations involve toddlers' everyday experience, for example, Emma attending dancing class and Silvia enjoying playing 'Ring Around The Rosie' that was later confirmed by educators. These everyday experiences might influence toddlers' shared imaginary play.

Silvia and Emma learn from each other's self-image play. For example, Emma shows new dance moves to Silvia by flipping (Fig. 6.3) and twirling (Fig. 6.4). Silvia shows Emma a dramatic movement by pretending to fall down (Fig. 6.5). Their imaginary dance becomes a shared peer play as they hold hands while dancing in a circle.

6.5.2   Peers 'Invitations' to Enter Imaginary Situations

As discussed, imagination is a new form of conscious human activity that develops through life (Vygotsky 2004). Everyday experiences provide an exploration of possibilities (Zittoun and Rosenstein 2017), and play requires the creation of an imaginary situation (Vygotsky 1966/2016). In the case example, the educator provides an opportunity for free exploration by toddlers.

The open space and music creates an atmosphere for exploration of what becomes possible. The qualities of this space provide the creation of an imaginary situation, and the freedom to create a new imagined reality by the group of toddlers. Peers begin with exploration of dance movements (e.g flipping, pirouettes, falling) by using their bodies (Fig. 6.1). Exploration provides an opportunity for peer interaction, to explore choices and create culture (Nilsson et al. 2017). Free exploration is an opportunity for imaginary play exploration.

Previous experiences are important for the realisation of imaginary play (Vygotsky 2004). As noted by Vygotsky (2004), play echoes elements of previous experiences, and the child creatively reworks these elemental impressions to construct something new according to their needs and desires. In the case example, Silvia and Emma bring their previous experiences to their joint play, and create a new imagined reality together as peers. Silvia enjoys jumping; she also invites peer Ric to jump: 'Come on; let's jump'. Emma is wearing a tutu, which transforms her into the role of a dancer, and she dances with Silvia. A toddler's invitation (e.g. holding hands) is important for the realisation of imaginary play with an interested peer. Silvia observes and learns from Emma's dance movement (e.g. cross over Fig. 6.3 and pirouettes). Emma observes and learn from Silvia to fall down and helping a peer (e.g. Fig. 6.5). In an affective gesture, Emma holds Silvia's hands, and this provides an invitation to dance together (Fig. 6.2). Toddlers' invitation to enter each other's imaginary situations involves learning about each's others interest and creatively combining a new imagined reality, together.

In the case example, holding hands and pretending to fall down are part of the imaginary situation that is collectively agreed upon by peers Emma and Silvia. Imaginary situations include actions that are acceptable to the play situation (Vygotsky 1966/2016). Over the course of the game, different needs, desires and

intentions are expressed that invite toddlers to enter and be in the imaginary situation. The embodiment of actions occurs in dancing (Fig. 6.4), holding hands (Fig. 6.3) and smiling (Fig. 6.3). A group of peers forms among Emma, Silvia and Isla, and they create a synchronised joyful dance (Fig. 6.7). The joy is particularly seen in Silvia's joyful smiling (Fig. 6.3). Toddlers express what they are imagining through the embodiment of their actions, rather than by verbally expressing their intentions of how to play. This leads to a complex form of participation because peers Isla, Cynthia and Emma must keenly observe their peers Silvia and Emma to join the play and understand the rules, all while joyfully dancing. These toddlers' imaginary situations are embodied though actions and keen observation of each other's dance movements, and each new participant must acquire understanding of the leading actions and rules in the play—falling down, holding hands and helping peers as they fall down. Emma and Silvia's collaborative imagination includes creating a circle, twirling around and falling down.

This dance play also creates some implicit rules for peers helping each other and falling down to re-join the circle of dance movements. It might be possible that each peer is individually imagining; Emma is imagining being a real dancer and Silvia is imagining really falling down or flying, the movement that falling down provokes. Each individual peer comes to a shared imaginary situation by his or her synchronised movements and interactions, and collaboration in an ensemble activity (Mejia-Arauz et al. 2018).

6.5.3   Participation Through Bodily and Coordinated Actions— Entering an Imaginary Situation

Play is a collective activity where children are inside and outside the imaginary situation (Kravtsova 2014). Play is a collaborative activity in which 'fluid collaboration' is experienced (Mejia-Arauz et al. 2018). Adding to collaboration, when imagination is shared by peers, participation becomes more complex, and involves sophisticated bodily actions that allow peers to enter the imaginary situation of the group.

This imagined collaborative dance allows peers to coordinate their actions inside and outside an embodied imaginary situation. In the case example, embodied dance play is a collaborative play because peers enter into the dance play. The embodied imaginary situation includes peers being inside the dancing, then flickering outside the imaginary situation to help peers, and coordinating their actions in nonverbal ways to help each other (Mejia-Arauz et al. 2018). Peers Silvia and Emma have created a synchronised and coordinated embodied imaginary situation. This embodied imaginary situation includes creating a dance circle of movements by holding hands. Holding hands symbolises the collaborative participation of peers, a bodily action that signifies entering and being in an imagined situation. For other toddlers to enter and participate in the dance play, they first need to observe keenly by

noticing and paying attention to how the dance is played. Isla enters the dancing play initially by observing, and then pretends to fall down by helping Silvia. Isla then helps her peer Cynthia to stand up.

The peer group formed by Silvia, Emma and Isla help Cynthia as she falls down (Fig. 6.8). The act of helping not only provides an affective form of relating to each other but also symbolises the value of helping one another. Emma helps Silvia (Fig. 6.6), Silvia helps peers Isla and Emma (Fig. 6.6), and peers Silvia, Emma and Isla coordinate their actions, without being asked, to help Cynthia (Fig. 6.8). As the play develops, Harry joins in and holds hands with Emma. Emma shows Harry needs to help her when falling down (Fig. 6.9). Further, the group of peers affectively relate together as they engage in their imaginary situation by dancing joyfully (Fig. 6.10).

As the group grows and the group members become immersed in each other, verbal communication is used as a resource for coordinating and aligning their actions. Thus, Silvia asks Isla to hold her hand as a sign of reaching for help to be part of the dance circle. Peers are able to engage in interactional patterns through dance as they coordinate their actions and maintain the rhythm by dancing together. The peers create a new imagined reality by reciprocating their actions with keen interest and by entering-the-play strategies as imagined and created by Emma and Silvia. Emma and Silvia have previously established the affective actions, through which other peers can engage, collaborate and create a sense of belonging with the peer group. As explained by Winther-Lindqvist (2012), this sense of belonging is established when the members of the peer group identify each other's interests or motives. This new imagined reality is realised by freely entering a dance of holding hands that brings "we-ness" and greater unity to the peer group.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined toddlers' spontaneous dance play in detail, both contextually and conceptually. When peers play together, their imagination is enriched. The context of the corner space of the LDC room provides an encouraging setting for the toddlers' imaginary peer play. The corner space is light filled and has soft floor coverings and a CD player; this encourages the toddlers bring together their imagination and capacity to express themselves through affective interaction and bodily movement. Holding hands and reaching out to peers are familiar early experiences of being together with others (Singer and de Haan 2007).

The conceptualisation of imaginary peer play (using the case example of holding hands and dancing) holds many important interpretative possibilities, and reveals the theoretical opportunity of building further concepts to extend understanding of how knowledge from the toddlers' perspective can be embraced in moments of cultural, social, collective and individual interactivity.

Understanding the complex nature of participation in play has implications for educators. First, it is an important for toddlers to be given time to notice, observe

and keenly pay attention to what others are doing as part of their learning experience. Secondly, toddlers' everyday worlds provide a space for exploration in the LDC centre. Such experiences are seen through Emma dancing with cultural affordances such as the tutu and the Wiggles song. Finally, toddlers' play includes a unique fluid collaboration where coordinated imaginary play is embodied in body movements, nonverbal and verbal communication, and the creation of an imaginary situation. From the toddlers' perspective, imaginary peer play involves an appreciation of, and enthusiasm for, being together that creates a sense of belonging to the group. Playing in a group involves being fully aware of the other group members' intentions as discussed by Trevarthen and Malloch (2018).

Implications for educators show the important role of non-verbal communication and imaginary actions. This research strongly shows that toddlers are gifted in learning through non-verbal means (e.g. pointing, gesturing, and bodily) with peers. Educators can keenly observe toddlers play and the complex imaginary situations they create together. Then, educators can plan for more exploration of peer play and value imaginary play dance as part of their curriculum.

This research has demonstrated how musicality and a small corner space in the room help peers to experiment with dance play. More research is necessary to understand the complex imaginary play situations that are generated spontaneously by toddlers, and how educators can support toddlers further in creating complex and elaborate peer imaginary situations. The idea of toddlers' imaginary peer play is an invitation for educators to respect toddlers' perspectives, including their playful body actions and musical dance creativity.

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