International Perspectives on
Early Childhood Education and Development 18

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Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Play from Birth and Beyond

International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Volume 18

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Early childhood education in many countries has been built upon a strong tradition of a materially rich and active play-based pedagogy and environment. Yet what has become visible within the profession, is, essentially a Western view of childhood, preschool education and school education.

It is timely that a series of books be published which present a broader view of early childhood education. This series seeks to provide an international perspective on early childhood education. In particular, the books published in this series will:

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This book is dedicated to all in our lives who gave us a passion for play. This includes our playful families, friends, colleagues, children and students who helped to make all aspects of play such a life force – we thank you all.

Preface

Ethel Spowers (Australia, b.1890, d.1947)
Swings 1932
Colour linocut, printed on thin ivory laid tissue, 24.2 × 26.3 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased 1976. Photo: Jenni Carter/ AGNSW
144.1976

I know of no other way of coping with great tasks, than play. (Nietzsche, Ecce Homo)

The academic literature on learning indicates that the process of coming to understand or make sense of the world begins in infancy and that the period of childhood is crucial in processes of learning and human development (Australian Government DEEWR, 2009). Play-based learning has a foundational role in these processes, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) recognises children's right to play as a mechanism for active involvement in learning and development. This book celebrates the role of spontaneous play alongside play-based learning in early childhood development, while also advocating for the value of an ongoing commitment to playfulness in subsequent educational contexts, into adulthood and beyond. While this book is diverse in terms of theme, methodol-

ogy and the perspectives that contributors bring to their consideration of play, a central thesis of the book is that play, in particular contexts, offers a way of creating and becoming oneself. It makes this possible by releasing us from the more mundane and day-to-day aspects of life. As Gregory Bateson (1973) might put it, it liberates us from seriousness and allows for a nimbleness of mind in which experimentation can occur. In particular, the unprescribed nature of free play allows for the experience of unhurried engagement, and the expression of curiosity and wonder that we argue facilitates the process of creating and becoming oneself.

The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott provides a theoretical explanation of the thesis that in play we create ourselves, suggesting that play is characterised by 'unintegration', which Abram (2007) explains as a state characteristic of infancy in which life is experienced as a stream of 'unintegrated' or comfortably unconnected moments. Winnicott uses unintegration to describe the quiet states of the infant, during which she/he is dependent on the mother being in a state of primary maternal preoccupation that provides the holding environment necessary for healthy development. When the mother is in this state, the child experiences a sense of continuity of being in relation with a 'good-enough' mother in a comfortable holding environment at the start of life (Winnicott, 1990, p. 144). Winnicott links this sense of comfort with unintegration, the precursor of the ability to relax and enjoy oneself and also the capacity that gives us the opportunity to become more ourselves. The infant and adult who are able to relax in an unintegrated state are in genuine relation with one another; the infant knows existentially the experience of trust and the sense of feeling safe, and these develop the capacity to 'live creatively', to play (Abram, 2007, p. 67; Winnicott, 2005) and to enjoy cultural pursuits in a way that expands possibilities for individual selves. Both infant and adult experience a comfortable 'everything is up for grabs/everything is included' feeling, which involves the mind, body and spirit. The ability to become unintegrated constitutes a developmental achievement for the infant, and while the adult may only maintain the ability to revisit this capacity fleetingly and intermittently, it is nonetheless a significant achievement for the adult.

The association Winnicott (2005) advocates between unintegration and the enlivening aspects of play helps to draw attention to the social-psychological, ethical, therapeutic and aesthetic implications of play and hence to the contention that play is a way of making life worthwhile. As human beings mature, the value of play and of playful attitudes is less likely to be recognised within the reality of the everyday lifeworld in which we are often preoccupied with specific purposes or responsibilities that demand our attention. Contemporary everyday life is often highly fragmented, given the extent of our mobility, our capacity and our obligations to be engaged in many and varied contexts, both physically and via social media, and our potential for electronic communication. These features of everyday life, perhaps better described as afflictions, exacerbate the tendency towards preoccupation with instrumental pursuits or distraction by multifarious possibilities; as such, they can mitigate against the possibility of the genuine engagement with others that playfulness requires.

At the same time, the intrinsic value of play for children is undermined in contemporary life, if not hijacked, by the toy and childhood learning industries, which

promise extrinsic and desirable instrumental outcomes but are necessarily motivated to greater or lesser extents by commercial interests. These preoccupations and instrumental concerns can undermine our ability to be 'ourselves' in the sense of being a self without a particular purpose, without a particular focus, desire or responsibility to be fulfilled in the present moment – a self that can put aside the reality of the everyday world to playfully explore possibilities. Equally, such preoccupations and concerns can undermine the capacity for genuine human relationship inherent in play and to which Winnicott drew much attention. As Abram argues, Winnicott possessed 'a sensibility to the human need for reliable relationships' and saw the capacity for unintegration and play as integral to the development of such relationships:

> It is sometimes assumed that in health the individual is always integrated, as well as living in his own body, and able to feel that the world is real. There is, however, much sanity that has a symptomatic quality, being charged with fear or denial of madness, fear or denial of the innate capacity of every human being to become unintegrated, depersonalized, and to feel that the world is unreal….Through artistic expression we can hope to keep in touch with our primitive selves whence the most intense feelings and even fearfully acute sensations derive, and we are poor indeed if we are only sane. (Winnicott, [1945] 1992, p. 150)

Here, Winnicott is recognising both the poverty of constant sanity, understood as relentless rational, purposeful, instrumental activity, and the concomitant value of the capacity of adults to become unintegrated. Fink, Saine and Saine similarly recognise the value of play for adults, arguing that it 'is a strange oasis, an enchanted rest-spot in his [the adult's] agitated journey and never-ending flight. Play affords a type of temporal present' (1968, p. 22). This recognition and Winnicott's emphasis on the worth of achieving unintegrated states are noteworthy for this book, since it resonates with our argument that playfulness is an attitude of mind that has as much to offer those adults who are alive to its possibilities, as it offers children. While early life is a teaching ground through the pedagogy of play and the memories of early times of play may be sketchy for adults, the enlivening possibilities of play can be facilitated for adults in various ways. Stories from those who can remember, family photos or videos, all of these prompt us to recall the power of playful times. Reflectively watching infants and young children at play either from our perspectives as parents, grandparents, friends or teachers also reminds us of our own early play life. While these memories may be fleeting, they allow us to revisit early play in a half-remembered way and to appreciate and share in its wonder in our interactions with the young.

The aesthetic dimensions of life provide another means of bringing play alive for adults. Take, for example, the reputed power of the giant mechanical marionettes of the French street theatre company, Royal de Luxe, which was formed in 1979. Jean-Luc Courcoult, the founder of the company, describes the theatrical capacity of the giant puppets, which stand up to 50 ft or 15.2 m high, to 'create a new mythology inside cities where people can recover their innocence'. Courcoult goes on to argue that the giant puppets help to retrieve the extraordinary or 'dream vision' of the world that children have. He argues that 'the Giants evoke in everybody, be they children, their parents or older people,…the same poetry…this form of… dream

and joy, tranquil but powerful' (Courcoult, 2016). This kind of first-hand engagement in play, this 'enchanted rest-spot' in our usual agitated journey (Fink, Saine & Saine, 1968, p. 22), creates a familiar sense that 'we all know what this is', but this assumption can make it difficult to fully appreciate the value of play, and it also undercuts our attempts to interrogate relevant explanatory theories.

Play is a multidisciplinary enterprise, and like other cultural practices, its significance for human experience and fulfilment cannot be interrogated or explained through one or two theoretical perspectives. Consequently, as the work of theorists such as the late Brian Sutton-Smith (2001) attests, theorisation about play is informed by different disciplines. The prominent disciplines and the theorists representing those disciplines within this book include cultural history as examined through the work of Johan Huizinga; philosophy and sociology through the lens provided by Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard and Roger Caillois; psychology as explained through the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Esther Thelen, Linda Smith and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi; and, as evident above, psychoanalysis as explored through the work of the paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. Friedrich Fröbel's approach to pedagogy is also significant for this book since it emphasises the nurturing of creativity in the young child through playful activity.

While the relationship of play to education is central to the book, the claim that play is 'an essential element of man's ontological makeup' is equally important. Play is clearly defined differently in different contexts within contemporary society, but its status as what Fink, Saine and Saine (1968, p. 22) describe as 'a basic existential phenomenon, just as primordial and autonomous as death, love, work and struggle for power', determines that we struggle to draw overarching conclusions about its significance for us within different contexts. We ought not be surprised by this, given the breadth of our engagement in play and playful activity. As Fink, Saine and Saine go on to argue, play is not bound to other basic existential phenomena they identify 'in a common ultimate purpose'; rather, play confronts them all; 'it absorbs them by representing them'. Hence, 'we play at being serious, we play truth, we play reality, we play work and struggle, we play love and death – and we even play play itself' (1968, p. 22).

Why Focus on Play?

Akin to Fink and his colleagues, Mead (1896) included play, along with work and art as one of the three general types of human activity, and so we might choose to answer the question, Why focus on play?, by noting its significance in this regard and recalling Winnicott's grand contention that play offers a way of truly becoming oneself (Winnicott, 1992, p. 212). But the literature on play is also unequivocal about the utilitarian value of play-based learning for enabling the expression of individuality, the enhancement of dispositions such as creativity and curiosity, the exploration of connections between prior experiences and the development of new

connections, the development of relationships and concepts and the stimulation of a sense of well-being (DEEWR, 2009). Indeed, this potential for play-based learning appears to come naturally to young children (Chudacoff, 2011). A number of contributors to the book draw attention to the utilitarian value of play, taking various perspectives on that utility. As editors, we have chosen to focus on Donald Winnicott's contention that play is a way of becoming oneself through genuine engagement with others so as to draw attention to the tension between utilitarian and non-utilitarian understandings of play – a tension that is evident in the various chapters of the book.

Huizinga is also called upon for the value of his argument that play is not to be seen as simply a matter of instinct or of utilitarian advantage:

> [P]lay is more than a mere physiological phenomenon or psychological reflex. It goes beyond the confines of purely physical or purely biological activity. It is a *significant* function – that is to say – there is some sense to it. In play, there is something 'at play' which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to action. All play means something. If we call the active principle that makes up the essence of play, 'instinct', we explain nothing. If we call it 'mind' or 'will' we say too much. (Huizinga, 1949, p.1)

The book acknowledges the utility of play, but at the same time, it recognises the force of Huizinga's claim that the fun we experience in play resists analysis. Fink, Saine and Saine also appreciate this aspect of play, noting that it possesses its own internal space and time, that the play world is the sphere of illusion and hence that thinking about it 'leads ever deeper into the unthinkable' (1968, p. 26). The way in which play resists analysis helps us appreciate the tension implicit in coming to understand play, even with particular contexts. The utility of play in educational contexts is clear and conventionally accepted, but at the same time, the capacity to take a playful attitude to work or study lifts us from merely instrumental concerns and connects us to our humanity, to archetypal forms of human activity.

Huizinga's work guides our engagement with play in the book precisely for the breadth of his treatment of the topic and his attempt to provide an analysis despite the difficulty of doing so. As a historian and cultural theorist, Huizinga in his major publication on play, *Homo Ludens*: *A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1949), models the multidisciplinary approach to the topic of play that we have adopted in the book. Thus, the book interrogates the broader value of play, along with the ways in which playful engagement might be facilitated in educational contexts, from early childhood to tertiary education and beyond. It devotes considerable reflection to the different sociocultural contexts of play, as well as the ever-evolving relationship between play and technology, play and consumerism, play and spirituality and play and the spatial environment.

One of the volume's distinguishing features is that several chapters include the voices of children and adults as subjects experiencing play. These voices have been important to the way in which play is articulated in the book. They provide empirical indicators and evidence of play's richness, which resonate with our own experiences of this phenomenon and its enlivening role in our lives. In their work on spirituality and play (Chap. 4), Cathie Harrison and Christine Robinson take into consideration two 4-year-olds' experiences of self, other and connectedness during

outdoor play. In her study of play and the primary school, Dee O'Connor shares with readers the views of Dominic, recalling how important risk-taking was during his play time as a young child and how his experiences allowed him to develop into a well-focused and confident young man.

In the introductory chapter to the book, 'Playing with Theory', the editors discuss theorists of play whose ideas are most relevant to a discussion of play in education generally, and which also reappear in some of the chapters throughout the volume. As suggested above, Huizinga provides a rich starting point for an exploration of play as a cultural phenomenon, since his work can be applied to many discipline areas and offers rich inspiration to potential educators. The ideas of developmental psychologists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are then considered, as well as the contrasting approach of psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, who helps to remind those interested in the study of play of the inevitable tension we must face between a commitment to both the intrinsic and the extrinsic value of play. The editors also briefly consider Thelen and Smith's dynamic systems theory as well as poststructuralist analyses of play. Thelen and Smith in particular are used to illustrate a comprehensive approach to human development that attempts to integrate play into everyday life, hence, recognising both its intrinsic and extrinsic value.

The structure of the book is guided by its treatment of three key dimensions of research. These are divided into three sections: (1) The Value of Play, (2) Play Beyond Early Childhood and (3) Sociocultural Contexts, Technology and Consumerism.

The first section, 'The Value of Play', considers play from five different perspectives. In her chapter, 'Considerations of Play Enlivened Through The Work of Donald Winnicott', Cynthia à Beckett extends a focus on the psychoanalytic theories of Donald Winnicott as a key to enhancing our understandings and applications of play, in particular in relation to early childhood education. Winnicott combines psychoanalytic ideas with the psychological notion of flexible toleration to show how play is the mechanism through which creative living can be achieved. Winnicott is distinctive for the way in which his ideas connect with artistic expression but are also relevant to approaches towards implementing curriculum. Concepts such as unintegration and the holding environment, mentioned above, as well as 'transitional object', 'the third zone' and 'formlessness' offer illuminating ways to understand play and enhance relationships among babies, children and adults. Understanding the intrinsic value of play in this way offers us relaxed, trusting opportunities for enrichment, which contribute to the flourishing of the whole personality and hence indirectly create opportunities for development that have utilitarian dimensions.

The second chapter, Kathleen Tait's study of play and babies, 'The First Two Years of Life: A Developmental Psychology Orientation to Child Development and Play', investigates the phenomenon of play during infancy, through the generally utilitarian lens of developmental psychology. Tait provides a review of the forms of play that emerge within the first 24 months of life. Distinguishing between the object focus of play, which comes about through play experiences, and the social focus of play, which emerges through communication experiences, Tait uses empiri-

cal evidence to account for the perceptual, motor and language development skills that evolve through play. Practices of adult-infant play, face-to-face play, game-play and object-directed and person-directed play are defined and explored, as babies shift from social to object and to more integrated experiences of play.

In Chap. 3, Cathie Harrison and Christine Robinson's 'Looking Deeper: Play and the Spiritual Dimension', discusses the connections between play and spirituality in the context of early childhood education and care in Australia. The authors begin by considering historical and philosophical perspectives that support the idea of play as a mode of developing spirituality in children. They then examine children's capacity for spirituality, drawing on the recognition of this capacity in Australia's 2009 Early Years Learning Framework. The authors argue that increased emphasis on both the economic value of the individual and on education for workplace productivity in government policy and rhetoric poses a challenge to cultivating play and spirituality enhanced through play for children. Their use of vignettes explains the link between spiritual capacity and holistic approaches to education and helps to straddle the divide between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for play in the context of early childhood education.

In Chap. 4, 'Muckabout: Aboriginal Conceptions of Play', by Denise Proud, Sandra Lynch, Deborah Pike and Cynthia à Beckett, the recollections of Proud, a Murri woman from Queensland, are a catalyst to an exploration of Aboriginal approaches to play, with reference to existing scholarship on Aboriginal play and leisure. Proud recounts some of her childhood experiences of play in light of some of the values and philosophies of her people, using the culturally significant concept of *Darn Nudgen Burri, which* has connotations of empathy for others, compassion, grace, gratitude and self-sacrifice. This concept underpins Proud's life experience and also interacts with the playfulness she takes to be an essential and defining characteristic of Aboriginal attitudes to life, a playfulness that fully recognises the intrinsic worth of play in the life of human beings. The authors argue that *Darn Nudgen Burri's* moral imperatives along with the Aboriginal focus on mucking about, having fun, teasing and not taking life too seriously can usefully inform educational practice in the wider community in early childhood settings and beyond.

This final chapter in the first section is Dee O'Connor's 'Loving Learning: The Value of Play within Contemporary Primary School Pedagogy', which makes an impassioned case for more play time and playful interaction in primary school. O'Connor observes that while the social, physical, emotional and intellectual benefits of play are well supported by evidence, children inhabit increasingly controlled environments in which there is an overall reduction in risk-taking, outdoor and child-directed play. Using empirical research from the 2012 Irish Neighbourhood Play Research Project, O'Connor shows how and why primary schools could become more playful and act to balance the social changes that are restricting play time and experiences in modern childhood. Taking risks during play becomes a key element of her argument, which uses the experience of Dominic, who attributes his status as young entrepreneur to his encounters with risk-taking during the play experiences of his childhood. O'Connor is drawing attention to Bateson's view of play as occurring within a particular context or frame, one that differs from the

instrumental logic of the everyday lifeworld. Within this play frame, things are both real and unreal at the same time, and the exploration of possibility and risk-taking is inherent (Bateson, 1973).

In the volume's second section 'Play Beyond Early Childhood', contributors show how facilitators, educators and teachers in various contexts and at different levels might use playful engagement to improve their pedagogical practices. Hence, the focus here is generally on extrinsic purported benefits that include boosting student activity and involvement in learning, as well as enhancing flexibility, openness to possibility and reflective consideration of the learning process, so as ultimately to produce graduates who possess the skills to make them fit and flexible for the twenty-first-century world.

The first chapter of this section is Marilyn Fleer and Anna Kamaralli's 'Cultural Development of the Child in Role-Play Drama Pedagogy and Its Potential Contribution to Early Childhood Education'. The chapter argues that there is a place for adult involvement in general imaginative role-play, contrary to the commonly held position that children's play is best left undirected. Fleer and Kamaralli use the work of Vygotsky and Lindqvist, to show how the active support of teachers in devising scenarios jointly created by children and teachers is of enormous benefit to children's development. The case studies they use introduce Shakespeare to primary-aged children, calling on Vygotsky's view that play and drama are closely related, and they also make use of Lindqvist's idea of play worlds for preschool children in relation to the narrative of Enid Blyton. The authors argue that teacher intervention in this process of narrative role-play not only enhances children's play but also offers them a significant opportunity for cultural enrichment.

In Chap. 8, 'The Playground of the Mind: Teaching Literature at University', Deborah Pike explores a problem that arises in the context of the tertiary classroom, that is, that conventional and strictly syllabus and goal-oriented teaching does not inspire students with confidence in their own capacity to engage critically and creatively with interpretations of literature. Pike examines the theoretical background of the concepts of play and playful pedagogy, drawing on early learning and, where available, adult learning contexts and on literary and philosophical perspectives on creativity and play; in doing so, she draws attention to the need to straddle both extrinsic and utilitarian motivations for employing playful pedagogies with recognition of the intrinsic value of such a pedagogy. Building on these theories and from her own teaching experience of literary studies for university undergraduates, she presents a set of activities that employ play in the adult learning context of literature studies.

In Chap. 9, play pedagogy becomes a critical way through which educators can help students develop the competencies requisite to a future in the digital age, which will no doubt create challenges that have not yet been predicted or imagined. In 'Gamestorming the Academy: On Creative Play and Unconventional Learning for the Twenty-First Century', Bem Le Hunte argues that playfulness in tertiary education is key to enhancing creativity in university students and preparing them for a world of supercomplexity. Once the domain of children and early childhood educators, Le Hunte makes a strong case for bringing play back into the academy. She explains how the use of playful pedagogical strategies, such as constructing 'more

beautiful' questions, taking ideas 'for a walk' as well as using games that deprioritise closed questions and answers and narrowly utilitarian approaches to learning, may assist students in becoming more innovative in their thinking. The curriculum is problem based in its approach to learning and includes classes in the disciplines of science, engineering, business, law, health, design, arts and social sciences so as to encourage students to embrace a truly multidisciplinary method for addressing these problems. This facilitates in students the development of philosophical reflection, as well as skills in risk assessment, design and construction, which equip them well to address the multifaceted problems facing our world.

Acknowledging the ways in which playful environments are now considered crucial for facilitating thriving workplaces, leading businesses and post-compulsory education contexts, in Chap. 10, Fiona Young and Genevieve Murray explore the perceptions of playful learning environments created in two secondary education environments in Australia. In 'Designing for Serious Play', Young and Murray continue with the idea that creative innovation is crucial to the social and economic development of contemporary society. They investigate the principles requisite to the design of successful playful learning environments for adolescents, while also identifying some hurdles to its achievement. For Young and Murray, a play-based environment for adolescents is one where students and teachers are not narrowly or solely driven by predetermined outcomes. With reference to aspects of Huizinga's analysis of play, they identify factors, both spatial and attitudinal, facilitative of playful learning and teaching. While noting that there are few examples of playful learning environments in Australian secondary schools, Young and Murray provide a study of two exceptions, describing the use of spaces designed for self-directed and collaborative learning. These spaces include a workshop, café, cinema, boardroom, i-space and retreat and offer students a diversity of spaces in which to work; unlike the schools' traditional classrooms, the deliberate lack of specificity as to their use facilitates collaborative as well as self-directed learning, which the authors argue ultimately impacts positively on playful approaches to pedagogy.

Chapter 11, 'The Power of Play-Based Learning: Pedagogy of Hope for Potentially At-Risk Children', presents the work of Marguerite Maher and Stephanie Smith who claim that while play affords students the opportunity to develop competencies for the future, its value and impact is broader than this: it has the potential to effect social change. Maher and Smith demonstrate and argue for the use of play-based pedagogy with 'at risk' primary school students – such as those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds and refugees. The authors demonstrate that introducing play-based pedagogy increases students' drive towards learning, improves literacy and numeracy, enhances confidence and deepens engagement with learning. Maher and Smith trialled a play-based learning programme in mathematics and science in a year two classroom (the third year of compulsory education) in a school with a high population of at-risk children, and the results were positive in terms of student experience and educational outcomes. Framing their study within the context of Freire's pedagogy of hope, Maher and Smith show evidence of the intellectual and social advantages of this programme.

The programme adopts and endorses a child-centred approach to teaching, and as such, the authors argue that it should be well supported through initiatives in the professional development of teachers.

The final section of the volume, ‘Sociocultural Contexts, Technology and Consumerism’, is devoted to considerations of the sociocultural contexts of play, with a special focus on much-vexed issues of consumerism, technology and play, and the utilitarian and commercial aspects of play.

Bronwyn Davies begins the conversation in Chap. 12 by drawing our attention to the ways in which play among children becomes an enactment of gender roles and gendered games, by both ‘assembling and dismantling’ gender. ‘Gendering the Subject in Playful Encounters’ engages with Gilles Deleuze’s concepts of ‘deterritorialisation’ and ‘lines of flight’ to assist us in appreciating the ways gender and play ‘intra-act’ with each other. Gender and play are viewed as forced into an encounter with each other in which both are consequently changed. Davies uses examples from Australia and Sweden to examine the ways in which the play of children, on the one hand, maintains the status quo through the performance of traditional gendered behaviours but, on the other hand and more importantly, children’s play is presented as ‘deterritorialising’ these behaviours and challenging them through ‘cuts’ and ‘molecular shifts’. In such instances, ‘creative lines’ of escape come about by ultimately disrupting traditional binary concepts of gender. Such deterritorialising acts involve risk-taking, and for the female child, it is this tension between the desire for risk-taking (traditionally unfeminine) behaviour and the imperative to enact normative femininity that becomes a battleground. Allowing these creative moments and shifts to take place is key to encouraging students to inhabit emergent identities, which are also likely to be more authentic.

Anne Kultti and Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson present the results of their study of the objects and tools of play in Chap. 13, ‘Toys and the Creation of Cultural Play Scripts: Play Practices in Early Childhood Education Through a Study of Objects as Mediational Tools in Children’s Play’. Using Vygotsky’s ideas, they show how the objects used in play co-constitute the meaning of the play via the framing of an imaginative narrative that children create around the objects. Their empirical study examines the use of play objects with four children to show how teachers can learn from observing the toys, objects and other props used so as to support children’s involvement in play as they move in and out of imaginary framings. The authors argue that object-play activities enhance cognitive and linguistic capacities of children, as they move towards and away from reality during play. Such a programme supports the development of children’s imaginative thought and allows teachers to participate with children in creating imaginative activities.

Chapter 14 draws from work undertaken in an Australian Research Council-funded project, which explored how children engage in online and digital activities in the home. ‘Playing With Technology: Young Children Making Sense of Technology as Part of Their Everyday Social Worlds’ by Susan Danby, Christina Davidson, Maryanne Theobald, Sandra Houen and Karen Thorpe is an empirical study of children’s play with an indubitably contemporary focus. Using an ethnomethodological approach, the researchers investigated the way technologies and children’s involvement in pretend play intersect. The chapter records the ways in

which young children use technologies in everyday life by recruiting both real and imaginary props to support their play activities. Via detailed conversation analysis and by observing the children's gestures, their gazes and their speech during these play activities with technology, the authors are able to reveal the nature of the children's relational encounters, their spontaneous interactions and their embodied action fantasies in these forms of play. In doing so, they recognise the place of technology in enhancing the more intrinsic dimensions of play and help draw attention to the nuanced view of play that this book recommends.

In some contemporary literature, the question of how children play becomes a question of whether or not certain kinds of play are actually any good for them. In Chap. 15, 'Play, Virtue and Well-Being: Is Consumerist Play a Bad Habit?', philosopher Angus Brook poses this very question. From a virtue ethics perspective, Brook explores the possibility that what he refers to as consumerist play may be opposed to the intrinsic purposes of play and may well lead to bad habits of playing insofar as consumerist play appeals to and manipulates human appetite and desire. Brook examines the relationship between virtue ethics and play and considers a number of theoretical approaches to play, including those of Huizinga, Gadamer and Caillois, in order to determine play's purpose. Ultimately, it is Aristotle's concept of happiness as 'eudemonia' that he argues is most useful in helping to determine the value of play in terms of what it might ideally enable us to achieve. Brook turns to St. Thomas Aquinas' view of play as an intrinsic and basic human good and a contributor to human well-being to draw attention to the moral dimensions of play and particularly to emphasise the potential of the habitual practice of playing consumerist games to undermine, rather than to foster, well-being.

Consumerism and play are the focus of the volume's final chapter by Camilla Nelson and Ari Mattes, 'Lego, Creative Accumulation and the Future of Play'. Nelson and Mattes uncover the phenomenon of Lego – the largest toy manufacturer in the world – by examining the continual reinvention of their core message of 'play' and the way in which it is likely to shape the future of play: work becoming play and play becoming consumption. Their analysis extends into *The Lego Movie*, in which play becomes entirely instrumental and utilitarian as a mode of advertising. While the movie may appear to be a critique of capitalism, it simultaneously subverts and reinforces capitalistic principles, playing a game with an audience whose parents are well acquainted with the purported evils of capitalism but who still like to play and acquire. Nelson and Mattes explore the way in which playing with Lego reveals the consumerist impulses driving media entertainment and the immersion of our children in play that occurs in a branded world.

Conclusion

This volume contends that play, particularly spontaneous play, offers pathways to creating and becoming oneself. However, this contention is juxtaposed to a parallel and contemporaneous commitment to the value of play-based learning in early childhood development and to the productive use of play-based pedagogies within

schools and tertiary education institutions. Certainly, play is not a mere childish or trivial pursuit, and hence, it is not insignificant – either in terms of broad conceptions of what play has to tell us about the nature of human being and its capacity to help us understand the meaning of our existence; or in the contributions it can make to social, moral and intellectual development.

Play in some of its forms can put us in contact with metaphysical or spiritual dimensions of our being. Equally, it can free us to explore the world around us, our relationships, our understanding of self and our place in the communities of which we are part. It can provide us with space for creative activity and reflective thought and space to test our presentation of self, and most importantly, it can give us pleasure and respite in the process. These valuable aspects of play are intrinsic to it, or as Alasdair MacIntyre (1996) might put it, they are goods internal to the practice of play.

Given that most of the contributors to this volume are involved in different spheres of education or in activity associated with education, the value of playful learning from a broadly instrumental perspective has been emphasised. However, while we wish to challenge narrowly instrumental attitudes to play, to encourage playful attitudes in education and in social life more broadly, we cannot fail to notice the way in which the intrinsic worth of play can be undermined in contemporary contexts. Like artistic endeavour and the human capacity for aesthetic expression generally, the very pervasiveness of play as a human activity determines that as with art, it becomes the focus of commercial activity. But play's pervasiveness as an element of human life and as a particular orientation to any situation also ensures that it will not disappear. Rather, play is likely to take different forms in the future. The threat for the future, as noted above, is that the play of children who are responding to their own natural curiosity and sense of wonder might be hijacked by commercial interests or by instrumentally focused approaches to play in educational contexts. Protecting play from such threats requires a preparedness to tolerate the tension implicit in play as a phenomenon – in that it is a natural human phenomenon, inevitable, ubiquitous and valuable for its own sake, while also being instrumentally useful. We do learn about the expectations or flexibility of the social world through play; we enjoy coming to understand an idea in the context of play-based learning, and we come to appreciate the limitations of play via the tensions we perceive between play and the serious world of work and external accomplishment. While from the perspective of its worth play is for the most part autotelic, it can also be purposive, although without any narrow or particular purpose.

It is our view that confronting the tension related to play as a purposive activity, although one without any particular or specific purpose, demands that we engage in continual and reflective negotiation with ourselves; this negotiation requires that we interrogate our own attitudes to and uses of play in the many contexts in which playful engagement can occur. Part of our negotiation will require recognising that the instrumental advantages or outcomes of play are only likely to be fully achieved if we are prepared and able to recognise that the instrumental advantages or outcomes of play are by-products of genuine engagement in play.

Thus, the goods external to playful engagement, such as the development of particular skills and competencies, are only possible via a commitment to the goods internal to the practice of play, which demand a genuine and free engagement in play for its own sake. This requires a particular kind of intentionality or motivation, sometimes referred to as indirection (Lynch, 2005); play, artistic endeavour and the development of friendships share this form of intentionality. In each of these cases, attempts to directly achieve the goods extrinsic to these practices will frustrate their achievement. Rather, we must engage in play, artistic endeavour or activity with potential friends for its own sake. We must be free of any specific expectation and aware of the fragility of the enterprise since it is possible that play can be disrupted or even become dangerous and dark, so as to undermine rather than contribute to human flourishing. The point here is that just as we cannot guarantee that a friendship will develop with an acquaintance, or that an impressive work of art will be the outcome of an artist's activity, nor can we guarantee that play will achieve a particular outcome.

Nonetheless, play is a phenomenon that encapsulates possibilities for becoming, for well-being and for flourishing that we bypass at the peril of failing to reach our potential as human beings. Thus, the recognition of the value of play's creative potential and the challenges with which playful engagement presents us can easily be interpreted as moral imperatives; as Fink, Saine and Saine put it: 'precisely, in the power and glory of our magical creativity we mortal men are "at stake" in an inscrutably threatening way' (1968, p. 29).

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Contents

1 Playing with Theory 1
Cynthia à Beckett, Sandra Lynch, and Deborah Pike

Part I The Value of Play

2 Making Life Worth Living: Theories of Play Enlivened Through the Work of Donald Winnicott 25
Cynthia à Beckett

3 The First 2 Years of Life: A Developmental Psychology Orientation to Child Development and Play 39
Kathleen Tait

4 Looking Deeper: Play and the Spiritual Dimension 61
Cathie Harrison and Christine Robinson

5 'Muck-about': Aboriginal Conceptions of Play and Early Childhood Learning 79
Denise Proud, Sandra Lynch, Cynthia à Beckett, and Deborah Pike

6 Loving Learning: The Value of Play Within Contemporary Primary School Pedagogy 93
Dee O'Connor

Part II Play Beyond Early Childhood

7 Cultural Development of the Child in Role-Play: Drama Pedagogy and Its Potential Contribution to Early Childhood Education 111
Marilyn Fleer and Anna Kamaralli

8 The Playground of the Mind: Teaching Literature at University 129
Deborah Pike

9 Gamestorming the Academy: On Creative Play and Unconventional Learning for the Twenty-First Century 151
Bem Le Hunte

10 Designing for Serious Play 163
Fiona Young and Genevieve Murray

11 The Power of Play-Based Learning: A Pedagogy of Hope for Potentially At-Risk Children 181
Marguerite Maher and Stephanie Smith

Part III Sociocultural Context, Technology and Consumerism

12 Gendering the Subject in Playful Encounters 207
Bronwyn Davies

13 Toys and the Creation of Cultural Play Scripts 217
Anne Kultti and Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson

14 Pretend Play and Technology: Young Children Making Sense of Their Everyday Social Worlds 231
Susan Danby, Christina Davidson, Maryanne Theobald, Sandra Houen, and Karen Thorpe

15 Play, Virtue, and Well-Being: Is Consumerist Play a Bad Habit? 247
Angus Brook

16 Lego, Creative Accumulation and the Future of Play 265
Camilla Nelson and Ari Mattes

Appendix 281

Index 287

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Chapter 1
Playing with Theory

Cynthia à Beckett, Sandra Lynch, and Deborah Pike

> *Matur[ity] …: means to have rediscovered the seriousness one had as a child at play*
>
> – Nietzsche (1973, p. 94)

This chapter presents play as an uplifting but nonetheless complex and elusive ideal, which notoriously resists definition. To greater or lesser extents, depending upon social, cultural and economic conditions, play is recognised as an essential and fundamental aspect of human behaviour and culture. This chapter explores play from both developmental and cultural perspectives, particularly focussing on considerations of play within an educational paradigm. While there are undeniable instrumental benefits, both intellectually and socio-culturally, in using play educationally, the limitations of this developmental focus are addressed. The chapter recognises that a dedicated focus on the use of play for instrumental purposes may undermine its intrinsic personal and interpersonal benefits. Somewhat analogously, play within a commercialised context may also undermine its invigorating possibilities and perhaps conceal malevolence or bias. The chapter concludes by drawing attention to those aspects of play that make for a richer comprehension of its role in human development and in education.

1.1 Introduction

While acknowledging that play is rarely regarded as a transcendent ideal, this book is inspired by its creative possibilities and advocates for incorporating more play into education on all levels. This chapter explores theories of play from both

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developmental and cultural perspectives, arguing that play is a key element of cultural life. Appreciating the cultural aspects of play makes for a richer comprehension of the role of play in human development and in education. Focusing on the sociocultural aspects of play as a broadly educational phenomenon, this book demonstrates the potential of play to challenge certain cultural imperatives. Play and playful attitudes can contest the materialism of Western values and the commercialization of play, the tendency towards instrumental thinking evident in educational environments and the often narrowly prescribed outcomes that compel educators and caregivers to 'teach and test' in order to achieve these outcomes. This latter imperative is challenged by many contemporary studies of play (Crain, 2003; Elkins, 2007; Gray, 2013).

This book poses similar challenges by advocating for a deep and expansive reconsideration of play and its significance, one which also champions practical applications of play from the perspective of disciplines as diverse as architecture, literature, psychology, drama, film, philosophy, early childhood and primary, secondary and tertiary educational studies. Thus, contributions to this volume provide fruitful analyses and suggestions for rethinking play from various disciplinary vantage points, particularly in educational settings. While recognising the limitations of considering play in the educational paradigm, the intention of this book is to reinforce a commitment to playfulness in education by engaging with significant theorists in this field. At the same time, the book addresses the work of theorists who do not often appear in educational literature but who nonetheless offer guidance as regards the value and incorporation of play into education at every point and in fact into life more generally.

Given that the literature and scholarship on the play is vast, it is not possible here to include many worthwhile theorisations of play, nor to provide an overview of the multiple schools of thought which have emerged in play studies across the different disciplines over the ages, including important recent studies into areas such as play and new materialisms (Alaimo & Hekman 2008; Barad, 2007; Harraway, 2008), among other areas. The theorists explored in this chapter, such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, are relevant to psychology and education in both the formal and informal sense; however, the discussion in this chapter extends beyond developmental paradigms. It begins with an overview of historical-cultural theorists of play, identifying Huizinga as a key theorist for understanding of play in culture; he is thus treated at some length. After considering the developmental paradigms of Piaget and Vygotsky, the chapter then focuses on the work of particular theorists who have critiqued these paradigms, including the transformative work of psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott, as well as the work of poststructuralists, such as 'anti-psychologist' Erica Burman.

The work of theorists such as Huizinga and Winnicott are foundational and are thus essential to appreciating the discussion of play that takes place in this volume; therefore their ideas form the heart of this chapter. Their own work, which often defies disciplinary categories, offers productive potential for multidisciplinary treatments. This book argues for their relevance to educational studies, affirming the invaluable contribution they make in helping us reconfigure our understanding of play and, on a more practical level, assisting us in invigorating the possibilities of

play. It is to this end that the book showcases its multidisciplinary perspectives, showing the fertile possibilities for education that engaging energetically and dynamically with other disciplines provides; in fact the book argues that this engagement may also prepare us for more creative, spontaneous and meaningful lives.

1.2 Philosophical and Sociohistorical Perspectives on Play

All human beings play or have played – even if participation in play is only fleeting via word play or entering into a joke in social interaction. Theorisation about play suggests a number of intersecting narratives; for example, some theorists regard play as an innate capacity, while simultaneously resisting the idea that it has a biological function (Huizinga, 1949). Natural law theorists categorise play as one of the human goods, in which we should all participate if we are to be fulfilled as human beings. Despite some interpretations that take Ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, to be critical of play by comparison with serious work (Fink, Saine, & Saine 1960), Plato advises us that '[w]e should pass our lives in the playing of …*certain* games' or certain pastimes (Plato, *Laws* Book 7, 803e); while Aristotle took the view that play had its own virtue, eutrapelia, a term that denotes wittiness or skill in conversation and is the virtue of those who exercise humour with tact and good taste (Ramsay, 2005; Aristotle, 1995, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2, vii; 4, viii). St. Thomas Aquinas argued, at least in one context, for the inherent worth of play, arguing that playful action is sometimes an end in itself (1945, Summa Contra Gentiles, III, II, 7); he claimed that 'play has no purpose beyond itself; what we do in play is done for its own sake' since it is itself required for our happiness (Ramsay, 2005, p.14). Similarly, like Aquinas, John Finnis sees play and leisure as important for human fulfilment (Finnis, 1983). But, as Johan Huizinga has argued, play nonetheless resists analysis, and his interest is precisely in 'what play is in itself and what it means for the player' (1949, p. 2).

Certainly play is enjoyable, but it is also fragile and we can find it difficult to articulate what it is that happens between individuals engaged in play, or what it is that precipitates play in children and in adults, or even what is to be included within different categories of play. When, for example, does play become artistic expression? When can it be regarded as a spiritual activity given that, on an analogy with prayer, it can be said to allow us to enter a world where different laws apply (Pieper, 2009; Rahner, 1967). How do we understand play in the context of technology? While the concept of play notoriously resists definition, it nonetheless persists as an essential part of human behaviour, communication and culture.

It is clear that play is a phenomenon with its own sociohistoric contours. There are differences in cultural understandings of play and of childhood activities; attitudes to children and conceptions of what constitutes play and/or the boundaries between play and ordinary activity have changed over time and across different contexts. Play is thus a dynamic phenomenon, dependent upon a number of variables including one's age, race or gender, among other factors, which alter accord-

ing to history, temporality and situation; it is also subject to variation depending on the person/s or group experiencing the play.

Suzanne Gaskins, Wendy Haight and David F. Lancy (2007) argue similarly that play is a 'culturally constructed activity that varies widely across cultures (as well as within them) as a result of differences in childrearing beliefs, values, and practices' (p. 179). They state that the quantity and quality of play varies across cultures, and that there are differences in 'objects made available to play (including material objects, space, and time)' (p. 170). As they put it:

> it is possible that children in some cultures need to learn less through play because they are socialized to enter into worlds that are less complex and less open-ended [than others]. From this perspective, such skills as creativity and inventiveness, which seem to be particularly supported in play, are not necessarily needed or even valued in all cultures. (p. 198)

Brian Sutton-Smith (2001) also adopts a sociohistoric approach, drawing attention to a broad rhetoric of 'play as progress' (pp. 35–51) and the predominance of the idea that play is beneficial for child (and animal) development. His approach is valuable for its proposition that understandings of play, their accompanying rhetoric, have changed over time, been developed and modified. He identifies seven rhetorics of play – both ancient and modern – that present ideas of play as progress and he argues that no single or unified meaning can be assigned to play, and no understanding of it can be static.

Mechthild Nagel (2002) also challenges understandings of play, tracing the history of the idea of play from antiquity to modernity, to argue that play has been maligned by being juxtaposed to work, serious activity and rational enterprises as well as by being presented as an aesthetic object or ideal free from ethical and political concerns. Rather, she suggests a more nuanced approach to play. While this chapter recognises the force of the claim that particular sociopolitical factors affect the possibilities for the expression of play, it values the perspective on play that sees it as an uplifting but nonetheless complex and elusive ideal.

1.3 Towards a Definition of Play: Johan Huizinga

Johan Huizinga's seminal work on play, *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture* (1949), is an historical-cultural study of play which considers the phenomenon from multiple angles, including language, law, poetry, epistemology, art and anthropology. Huizinga's work has been highly influential in studies of play, including game and cultural studies, ethology, sociology, anthropology and social psychology. His contribution to our current understanding of play is thus substantial and significant as his ideas prove themselves to be applicable and renewable over time. Huizinga argues that play is the most fundamental human function, one that has permeated cultures from the beginning of civilisation. However, he says that animals played first: 'play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them

their playing' (1949, p. 1). Huizinga goes so far as to argue that civilisation arises as and is dependent upon play. He also states that in order to understand play, we must avoid constraining it – either in terms of instinct or intellect; this is an imperative that suggests openness to possibility and flexibility of thought. His multidisciplinary approach to play provides a theoretical framework and a springboard that many of the contributors to this book have used in their particular exploration of play. For Huizinga play is a way that community members learn how to behave in interaction with others, and to this extent, it contributes to the positive construction of society, but it is also valuable as an end in itself.

Huizinga explains play by delineating five characteristics that he argues are definitive of play and which frame his analysis, as well as the subsequent theorization of many commentators (Bruce, 1996; Dockett & Fleer, 1999; Fromberg, 2002; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 2005). These characteristics identify play as voluntary, separate from the ordinary or the 'real' (i.e. the serious and purposive aspects of life), secluded or limited, ordered and finally as an enterprise that surrounds itself with secrecy (Huizinga, 1949). Given that they frame the analysis offered by many contributors to this book, the characteristics and their implications for humans at play in contemporary contexts are explored below.

1.4 Play as Voluntary

Huizinga explains the importance of the voluntary nature of play in this way:

> Play to order is no longer play; it could at best be a forcible imitation of it. By this quality of freedom alone, play marks itself off from the course of the natural process. It is something added thereto and spread out over it like a flowering, an ornament, a garment .... Play can be deferred or suspended at any time. It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. (Huizinga, 1949, pp. 7–8)

Huizinga highlights the way in which play is lost through the imposition of the will of one over another that can happen during times of social exchange. When children and adults are fully at play, their involvement is both voluntary and total. These are the times when nothing is held back, and in fact it is not possible to hold anything back and remain at play. Employing Huizinga's analogy between play and a garment allows us to imagine those engaged in play as wrapped in a protective shell that liberates them, or at least insulates them from the (instrumental) seriousness of much of the everyday life world; at the same time the analogy is uplifting since it allows us to consider play as an unfolding akin to 'a flowering' of possibility. At the same time, recognition of the necessarily voluntary nature of play creates tension between a commitment to providing opportunities for play in educational, social or workplace settings and the more instrumental concerns embedded within those settings, such as concerns with curriculum outcomes, safety and economic output.

The voluntary nature of play is well documented, and yet its voluntariness has become a key issue in many educational settings, particularly within early child-

hood education. Only when educational and home settings allow children opportunities to play freely with materials both indoors and outdoors do such settings have the potential to demonstrate Huizinga's view of play as voluntary. Access to materials for dramatic play, block play, painting, collage, as well as to books, puzzles, music and outdoor play areas is instrumentally required, but the opportunity for individuals to choose the play area that interests them and to respond as the impulse takes them is a factor that is definitive of play (Bruce, 1996; Frost et al., 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005).

1.4.1 Play as Not 'Ordinary' or 'Real'

The second of the characteristics of play, which identifies it as neither 'ordinary' nor 'real' life is clearly evident in early childhood settings where children enjoy turning ordinary objects into imaginative things and pretending. Play allows a transformation to occur, so that nothing need be what it seems. As Huizinga explains:

> ...play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life. It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. Every child knows perfectly well that he is 'only pretending', or that it was 'only for fun' …. Nevertheless …play being 'only a pretend' does not by any means prevent it from proceeding with the utmost seriousness, with an absorption, a devotion that passes into rapture… [Indeed, p]lay may rise to heights of beauty and sublimity that leave seriousness far beneath … as an *interlude* in our daily lives … a regularly recurring relaxation … it becomes the accompaniment, the complement, in fact an integral part of life in general. It adorns life, amplifies it … and is to that extent a necessity. (Huizinga, 1949, pp. 8–9)

The activity that Huizinga argues is 'only pretend' transforms what might superficially seem to be supplemental to ordinary life – an opportunity to move into a 'temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own' – into a *necessity* by virtue of its capacity to amplify or enhance human life (Huizinga, 1949, p. 8). 'Stepping out of real life' through play transforms 'ordinary' life and is both exciting and pleasurable for those involved; it takes them outside the 'ordinary' or 'real' imperative to satisfy immediate wants and appetites and hence offers a temporary interlude, 'a regularly recurring relaxation', and one that becomes an integral part of human life (Huizinga, 1949, pp. 8–9). Thus, the 'unreal' becomes as vital as the 'real' by enlivening, adorning or amplifying life; consequently, the unreal helps to construct the real by enlarging the possibilities for human activity and engagement. Eugen Fink (1960), a phenomenologist and student of Edmund Husserl, strongly emphasises the way in which play opens us to pure possibility, to the unlimited character of life and to a sense of the limitations that reasoned and purposeful decisions place on us.

Another phenomenologist, Alfred Schutz (1973), who was also a former student of Husserl, reinforces Huizinga's distinction between play and ordinary life, by arguing that play is one of the non-paramount realities; on this view, play, like dreams, religion and scientific contemplation, is of a different order of reality than

that of the everyday life world. Schutz argues that these orders of reality are distinct from the world of daily life with respect to cognitive style, tension of consciousness, doubt, spontaneity, experience of oneself and of one's inner time perspective. To elaborate, the doubt which exists in the world of play is different from that which exists in the world of scientific contemplation; each being different to the world of daily life – a different set of laws prevails in play. Schutz's theorization of play also helps us to understand its capacity to enhance and amplify life and hence to become 'a necessity' (Huizinga, 1949, p. 9), both for individuals and for society as a whole, since this capacity encapsulates part of just what it is to be human.

Play's meaning, its significance and expressive value and its spiritual and social associations are crucial aspects of culture, on Huizinga's view (1949), and the demand that it not only be voluntary activity but also that it provides a respite from 'ordinary' life reinforces its value to the development of individuals and the groups of which they are members.

It is worth nothing that scholars such as A. D. Pellegrini (1991) critique the idea of play as something separate from ordinary life, in particular, by challenging the dichotomy of that separates 'play' from states that are 'not play'. Pellegrini views playful states as on a somewhat fragile continuum depending on the presence of constitutive features of play that are present; thus play states range from instances of pure play to states that are more or less playful. Other scholars argue that play is a mode or attitude rather than an activity separate from ordinary activity (Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976; Moyles, 1989), and this view might be seen to be reinforced by the views of John Dewey (1977) who draws a distinction playfulness as a foundational attitude and play as temporary activity that expresses that attitude in particular ways.

1.4.2 Play as Secluded or Limited

One aspect of the way in which play occurs is characterised by Huizinga in terms of its secludedness or limitedness. Most strikingly, while play can happen anywhere, play is more likely to occur in particular locales and is also restricted as regards its duration in time, driven by its own rhyme and rhythm. As Huizinga explains it, play:

> … contains its own course and meaning … Play begins, and then at a certain moment it is 'over'. It plays itself to an end. While it is in progress all is movement, change, alteration, succession, association, separation. (Huizinga, 1949, p. 9)

Those of us wishing to facilitate play in particular contexts must recognise that while times of play can appear in any place and at any time, there are certain places that both stimulate and enclose secluded times of intense play. For example, in early childhood settings, there are certain places such as the home corner, the dramatic play area and the block play corner that expedite play; although as noted elsewhere in this book, secluded play in educational settings is undermined by supervision policies requiring that children must be visible so that staff can ensure their safety.

1.4.3 Play as Creating Order

The secludedness or limitedness of play is supported by Huizinga's view that play has the capacity to bring 'a limited perfection' into the confusion of life and to create order although this is an order that can easily be spoiled in the context of 'the game' if the least deviation occurs. The affinity between play and order strikes Huizinga as aesthetically significant; play can be beautiful even though the connection between play, order and aesthetics is not evident in many educational texts. Recent theorists nonetheless acknowledge the force and importance of the aesthetic within play (à Beckett, 1991; Eaton & Shepherd, 1998; Fenney & Moravcik, 1987; Kolbe, 2001). As Huizinga explains:

> The profound affinity between play and order is perhaps the reason why play … seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics. Play has a tendency to be beautiful … The words we use to denote the elements of play belong for the most part to aesthetics, terms with which we try and describe the effects of beauty: tension, poise, balance, contrast, variation, solution, resolution, etc. (Huizinga, 1949, p. 10)

Since play can easily be spoiled and robbed of its character by a disruption of the limited perfection it demands, it is inherently fragile and uncertain. The desire to play sits juxtaposed to the possibility that engagement in play can dissolve in a moment. Huizinga argues that the element of tension in play makes it ethically valuable for the player, particularly in the context of competition.

> [T]he element of tension imparts to it [play] a certain ethical value in so far as it means a testing of the player's prowess: his courage, tenacity, resources and, last but not least, his spiritual powers-his 'fairness'; because, despite his ardent desire to win, he must still stick to the rules of the game. (Huizinga, 1949, p.11)

Similarly, the facilitation of play has ethical dimensions, requiring equanimity, courage and persistence on the part of the facilitator: the equanimity to accept the tension implicit in play, given its fragile and uncertain nature, and the courage to maintain and persist in one's commitment to the worth of the order it creates.

Huizinga's reference to the spiritual aspect of play is one also explored by both Josef Pieper (2009) and Hugo Rahner (1967). However, Huizinga's emphasis on the player's capacity to maintain sufficient self-control and concern for mutual engagement in playful action goes to the question of conscience and moral character, and Huizinga singles out the 'spoil sport' for his cowardice, his incapacity or unwillingness to help maintain the illusion of the play world (Huizinga, 1949, p. 11). The rules of play must be followed, and this involves support of the mind and body through the spirit in order to reach the desired result.

Some scholars take some of the difficulties of play further to robustly contest the idea of play as something ordered or beautiful. Sue Grieshaber and Felicity McArdle (2010) argue that play is not necessarily an innocent enterprise, that it can involve social injustices such as racist, sexist or classist attitudes and even bullying. One might argue, however, that these attitudes and activities do not constitute play; that is, once someone is hurt, insulted, excluded or discriminated against, the activity is no longer play, and the fragility of the playful state is evident. Once players

consciously or unconsciously pursue an agenda that disrupts the capacity to participate in play as individuals of equal worth, the play activity is hijacked – whether intentionally or not – by other purposes and loses its playful quality. Michelle Tannock (2008) in her study of children's 'rough and tumble' play reinforces this view, arguing that when play becomes aggression, it is no longer play. She uses the example of the 'cheerful play face' or 'play face' as an indicator that all those involved are at play. However, Richard Schechner (2002) draws on Jeremy Bentham (1864) and on Clifford Geertz's (1972) ideas of 'deep play', to argue that some forms of play become so extreme as to risk one's life or become so 'dark', that participants lose their awareness that this is play, given that the play situation becomes serious.

1.4.4 Play as Surrounded with Secrecy or 'Differentness', Without Material Interest or Profit

The final identifying characteristic of play for Huizinga is its tendency to create and enjoy creating a private world for all involved, one that is not instrumentally focussed and 'not serious'. As he argues:

> we might call it [play] a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (Huizinga, 1949, p. 13)

For Huizinga the activity of 'dressing-up' most vividly illustrates the 'differentness' and secrecy of play since when 'dressing-up', people are disguised within the part being played (Huizinga, 1949, p.13). This is a world belonging to the players, one in which the customs of ordinary life no longer apply. Hence, play's distinction from 'real' or 'ordinary' life is reinforced, simultaneously with its freedom, given that forced pretence cannot be described as play. The logic of such a play world suggests a certain social system within play, where notions of gain and profit are no longer relevant.

Despite managerial concerns about constant visibility for reasons of child safety and protection, early childhood theorists encourage the design of outdoor play spaces that provide private, aesthetically pleasing hideaways, which create opportunities for secrecy (Dockett & Fleer, 1999; Greenman, 1988). These opportunities are enhanced by the provision of props and materials for activities such as cubby-making in unexpected outdoor spaces. Arguments in favour of the right to be able to play in private places and the importance of secrecy, by writers such as Greenman and Stonehouse (1997) and Van Manen and Levering (1996), might be seen to be undermined by governmental or education department rules and regulations requiring that children be visible at all times; however, Huizinga's observation that chil-

dren can attain a degree of privacy by 'dressing-up', acting or disguising themselves suggests at least one way that they might be able to subvert institutional rules.

1.5 Developmental Theories: Piaget, Vygotsky, Thelen and Smith

While medieval stereotypes of the child tend to present children as miniature adults, taking part in adult games and festivities (Ariès, 1996), seventeenth century philosophical theories of child development, such as those of John Locke, might suggest the possibility of a less-determined view of children's participation in play and games. Locke argued that the child's mind was a tabula rasa, a blank slate on which experiences accumulate and make their mark. But, it was not until the nineteenth and early twentieth century that approaches to play and child development established the view that play enhanced children physically, mentally and spiritually. Snider ([1900] 2013) reports that Friedrich Froebel, for example, saw the education of the young child within the context of what he saw as the general purpose of education: to lift human beings to their full potential and more specifically to unfold the human soul to God. Noting Froebel's commitment to Schelling's philosophy of nature, Snider makes reference to Froebel's views as expressed in the *Education of Man:*

> Education should lead and direct man to clearness concerning and in himself, to peace with Nature, and to union with God; hence it should elevate man to the knowledge of himself and of mankind, to the knowledge of God and Nature, and to the pure and holy life conditioned through these. (Snider [1900] 2013, p. 26)

Froebel's contention is that the future life of the child depends upon the happy unfolding of each human being to perfection and the ability of all to accomplish their destiny and find joy and peace. Barnard reports him as arguing that:

> The active and creative, living and life producing being of each person, reveals itself in the creative instinct of the child. All human education and true culture, and our understanding also, is bound up in the quiet and conscientious nurture of this instinct of activity, in the family; in the judicious unfolding of the child, to the satisfaction of the same, and in the ability of the child, true to this instinct, to be active. (Barnard, 1881, p. 83)

The *Sonntagsblatt* or Sunday Journal, in which Froebel wrote irregularly between 1837 and 1840, became a classic authority on his views. It preceded his use of the term *kindergarten* and explained his approach to the development of the child's creative instinct through play and its value for learning and human fulfilment.

During the 1920s, the earlier and more holistic approaches to child development were challenged by new psychological theories that championed a more intensive exploration of the influences and implications of childhood experiences. Child development became an important research focus area using methodical, scientific techniques (Frost et al., 2005). While the earlier, philosophical explanations of children's development and the role of play in that development remained in currency,

these explanations were being questioned and challenged by the scientific study of patterns of childhood development.

Child development was then considered in terms of broad strands that might take the physical/motor, cognitive/linguistic, personal and emotional or social dimensions of childhood development as their focus. These strands refined and extended the earlier understandings and are key themes in the literature on child development and teacher preparation courses. Questions about the nature of creativity or of aesthetic and spiritual expression were rarely addressed in the child development literature of the 1940s and 1950s. This was despite the fact that this is precisely the time during which Huizinga (1949) was arguing that all the elements proper to play such as order, tension, movement, change, solemnity, rhythm and rapture can attach to the most sublime and creative forms of action so that ideas of ritual, magic, liturgy, sacrament and mystery can be seen as falling within the play concept.

Contemporary literature reflects a more nuanced debate that takes explicit account of the concept of creative development as well as the scientific principles central to much debate in the field. For example, Thyssen (2003) cautions commentators to be alive to the distinction between the child's development (in which the child seen as subject) and the development of functions (whether these are physical, cognitive or emotional, etc.). The work of a number of child development theorists who have contributed to understandings of play in the context of education, such as Piaget ([1945]1962, 1995), and Vygotsky (1976), reflects the tension implicit in recognising this distinction. The vigour of the current debate about the significance of Piaget's work also reflects that tension (Matthews, 1980), but Piaget's on-going influence on child development and play is apparent in training and practice in educational contexts around the world (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Fleer, 1995; Grieshaber, 2004; Lambert & Clyde, 2000).

While also providing a theory of play as a crucial element in that development, Piaget's analysis of the cognitive development of children offers a detailed age and stage theory of individual intellectual development. He argues that learning and development involve two processes, assimilation and accommodation, which he explains through the notion of adaptation. Accommodation accounts for the child's physical bodily adjustment to the introduction of a new stimulus, which involves taking in new information to develop a well-defined, regularly repeated schema or sequence of mental or physical actions, such as learning to hold and use a spoon. This exploration is balanced with concepts of new things. Assimilation explains how the child takes in the new information and balances this with the accommodating aspects of the developmental process. Piaget explains play as part of the assimilation process. A child may assimilate a schema of some type but then be forced to accommodate or adapt this schema if it meets with negative responses from carers, for example, if the child begins to use the spoon to flick food around the room or to hit others. As Piaget puts it:

> If every act of intelligence is an equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation, while imitation is a continuation of accommodation for its own sake, it may be said conversely that play is essentially assimilation or the primacy of assimilation over accommodation. (Piaget [1945]1962, p. 87)

Piaget's view was that in play, the player is more likely to assimilate the external world to fit in with her way of 'seeing' or perceiving the world, rather than to adapt herself to or accommodate the external world. So the child pretends that the spoon is a shovel or a cardboard box is a rowboat (even though she may have had no actual experience of a boat), in this way, play becomes symbolic as the child enjoys a subjective reality, using and developing language to articulate her experience and express her feelings. The balancing of physical and cognitive abilities allows the child to modify previous understandings to move from one stage of development to the next. Thus play, including the playing of games, provides support to assist children in undertaking the transition from sensory-motor stages of intellectual development (in which the child repeats behaviour from within existing schemas for the pleasure of doing so and for the pleasure of subduing reality) to conceptual and operational (imaginative) thinking (Piaget [1945]1962).

For Piaget, the first of three stages is the functional stage characterised by the practice play associated with sensorimotor skill development. The second stage of symbolic and construction play is part of what he refers to as the preoperational stage. Finally, the third stage involves more structured games incorporating rules, and Piaget ([1945]1962, [1969]1971) relates this to the stage of concrete operations. Each stage is described in more detail in the discussion below.

The first stage, which extends from birth to 2 years, involves children in functional, practice play, which develops sensorimotor skills and focuses on manipulation. The infant learns about the world through physical exploration of all that is available (Frost et al., 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 2005; Peterson, 2004). Piaget explains it in this way:

> During the first year … which must be looked upon as the origin of play, the behaviour patterns develop by functioning in conformity with the general law of functional assimilation – and the objects on which they bear have no other significance for the infant than that of providing an opportunity for that exercise. In its sensorimotor origin play is nothing more than a pure assimilation of reality into self, in the double sense of the term: in the biological sense of functional – assimilation which explains why these game exercises really develop the organs and the behaviour patterns – and in the psychological sense of incorporating objects into activity. (Piaget [1969]1971, p. 156)

The second stage that Piaget observes ([1945]1962, [1969]1971) involves symbolic and construction play for children between the ages of 2 and 7. This stage is part of the preoperational stage, and it explains the connections between motor and mental activity. Children are developing an understanding of how things work and do not need to rely simply on their physical manipulation since they start to use their cognitive skills to make sense of the world. In this stage there is not the same need to physically make something happen, and Piaget explains the play experiences of this stage in this way:

> Symbolic play … is also to be explained as an assimilation of reality into the self: it is individual thought in its purest form; in its content it is the unfolding and flowing of the self and a realization of desires, as opposed to rational socialized thought which adapts the self to reality and expresses shared truths; in its structure, the symbol in play is to the individual what the verbal sign is to society. (Piaget [1969]1971, p. 56)

In the first two stages, particularly until children are 3 years of age, Piaget argues that they are egocentric; their world revolves around their own interests and needs, and hence it is difficult for them to understand another person's perspective (Dockett & Fleer, 1999; Frost et al., 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 2005; Peterson, 2004). As Piaget explains, in initial egocentrism, where children are left free to work together, they characteristically 'like being together, and often deliberately split up into groups of two or three, but even so they do not generally attempt to coordinate their efforts; each acts for itself alone, or without mutual assimilation' (Piaget [1969]1971, p. 176).

The third stage of play has a focus on more defined play and games with rules (Piaget [1929]2007, [1945]1962, [1969]1971). This stage is part of concrete operations and applies to children from 7 to 11 years of age, during which period cognitive processes become more structured, children are able produce logical explanations of their experiences and cognitive activity determines action. Piaget (1929) notes that at this point, the need to act is supplanted by the imperative to perform the action mentally. Children now become more preoccupied with games and rules, often choosing structured play activities (Dockett & Fleer, 1999; Frost et al., 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 2005; Peterson, 2004).

Piaget's ([1929]2007, [1945]1962) comprehensive explanation of the logical stages of human cognitive development and the place of play within that development has been widely acknowledged. Both his use of direct observations of children who were often in play situations and his argument that development would only transpire if a suitable environment were provided appealed to educators (Burman, 1998; Dahlberg et al., 1999). One outcome of the acceptance of Piaget's views was the greater value placed on the design and operation of early childhood settings and the creation of social opportunities for children, but the effects of Piaget's approach were felt more broadly. For Piaget, play and playfulness are portable and not confined to a particular space or time. A similar view can be found in the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975), who argues that play can occur at or outside of work, since it depends on the cognitive engagement a person has with the challenges of a situation and the person's capabilities and motivation to meet these challenges. Thus, playfulness or playful engagement reveals a particular kind of intentionality – what has been referred to elsewhere as indirection or 'purposefulness without purpose' (Kant, 1952, pp. 159–69).

However, the role of the adult or teacher in Piagetian theory generally entails setting up the physical environment and observing, rather than taking a collaborative role in play (Burman, 1998; Dahlberg et al., 1999). Piaget's focus on the cognitive development of the individual child determines that his views assume the position of the other in terms of responding to the needs of the individual child. As a consequence of this, Piagetian analysis has been criticised for its failure to take account of the other as *another* social being who can impact on the individual and also be changed by the interactions. There is no acknowledgment of the other as a contributor to a state of mutuality created by both selves. Rather the focus is on the biological progression of the individual child, moving through a series of set stages

in which the child's social exchange occurs within a particular setting, composed of people and things. Little attention is paid to the variability or complexity of the social world in which the child is immersed or to the way in which the child influences others as they play together, and as contemporary theorists point out (Burman, 1998; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Lambert & Clyde, 2000), Piaget's analysis appears to assume that we can unproblematically analyse 'the child' as a representative of all children, including those who do not progress according to his set stages.

Piaget's treatment of play ([1929]2007, [1945]1962) as a means by which children consolidate and develop knowledge has also been criticised for its failure to appreciate the noninstrumental value of play, its value *in itself*; as noted above, this view was proposed by Huizinga (1949). For Piaget ([1945]1962) since play was the result of assimilation dominating the accommodation process, he feared that if the assimilation process were always to dominate, then the child's capacity to move to the next stage of development might be impeded (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005). Since the imaginary aspects of thought can dominate thinking processes in young children, Piaget expressed concern about invention or what he called 'romancing' (Matthews, 1980, p. 39) since such play would then undermine rather than support cognitive development.

It is clear that Vygotsky's ([1933]2002) developmental theories are more sensitive to the child's social environment, given that they show how the social and collaborative aspects of play enhance developmental processes. As Vygotsky argues:

> The play-development relationship can be compared with the instruction-development relationship, but play provides a background for changes in needs and in consciousness of a much wider nature. Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development. Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives – all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development. (Vygotsky [1933]2002, pp. 22–23)

The concept of the zone of proximal development proposed by Vygotsky refers to the distance between a child's actual achievement on a task when working alone and his or her potential ability to achieve in a different social milieu. Vygotsky argued that children have a chance to move beyond their previous level of development when adults or peers lead them into more advanced interactions. Thus, when supported by a teacher, peer or parent with more highly developed skills or capacities than the child possesses at that time with regard to the task at hand, the child's potential for learning and his or her performance can improve. The collaborative leadership or facilitation Vygotsky recommends does not amount to didactic instruction, rather it has more in common with play and the playful exploration of ideas. Such engagement with another, including an adult, enables the development of new skills and abilities through the open, flexible and social nature of the playful interaction.

Vygotsky's work is valuable for his recognition of the way in which the creative and imaginative power of play can take children to a new developmental level. Vygotsky saw imaginative play as a crucial element of children's development since he regarded it as sculpting the way in which children come to understand the world and their place within it. The processes of internalisation that occur in play affect

the progress of children's thinking skills, the way in which they use language, the way in which they understand representation (Hughes, 2009) as well as the way in which they regulate their behaviour and relate to others.

The appeal of the Russian developmental psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, is that his work is claimed to provide a more collaborative approach to play than that offered by Piaget (à Beckett, 2007). However, the debate about the comparative value of the approaches of Piaget and Vygotsky for understandings of play in the context of education is polarised. Piagetian theory is said to be limited, as we have suggested above, due to its focus on the individual, its failure to engage with social influences or to acknowledge cultural and developmental diversity and its underestimation of the teacher's role (Lambert, 2000). But scholars such as E. Beverley Lambert argue that by comparison with Piaget, Vygotsky cannot be regarded as presenting a theory of play. Lambert argues that Vygotsky's putative theory of play is brief and cannot be regarded as constituting a theory according to scientific conventions of psychology, given that it cannot be replicated or used to predict behaviour in the way that Piaget's theories can. The fact that a book as comprehensive as Hughes' *Children, Development and Play* (2009) does not offer any detailed treatment of Vygotsky, provides some support for Lambert's view. Lambert's critique notes both the work of Rheta Devries, who challenges criticisms of Piaget, and that of Sue Dockett and Bob Perry who attempt to reconcile differences between Piaget and Vygotsky.

Despite such attempts at reconciliation, approaches to human development within the recent psychological literature provide a challenge to both Piaget's stage theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and their common focus on the way play supports development and learning. One among these more recent theories is dynamic systems theory (DST) developed through the work of Esther Thelen and Linda Smith. DST provides a comprehensive and integrated approach to human development, arguing for a consideration of an amalgam of 'mind, body, physical world and social environment' (White, Hayes, & Livesey, 2013, p. 18). Smith and Thelen (2003, p. 347) state that '(i)n human development, every neural event, every reach, every smile and every social encounter' contributes to the whole picture of development. While Thelen and Smith (2006) do not specifically address the issue of play, their presentation of an integrated system can be related to times of play. The free-flowing nature of play can start with the involvement of physical skills and then lead to social responses, such as can be seen clearly when two toddlers sitting near one other reach out with their hands and touch one another. Suddenly this physical exploratory play will erupt into excited smiles and gestures as they clasp at each other's hands. This is a direct example of the way every reach and every smile, happening in play, in turn, has the potential to impact on aspects of human development especially for young children. Doris Bergen (2014), a play and early education scholar, argues that among developmental theories, DST is best placed to explain play even though the significance of this integrated theory for play has not yet been fully articulated.

While DST theorists do not focus specifically on play, there are connections between DST and play that call to mind a definition of human life and the place of play in life that has synergies with the Sanskrit concept of *lila*, discussed below.

This concept takes play to be properly understood as a way of life. Within this collection O'Connor (Chap. 6) approaches this expansive idea of play as a way of life, arguing for the view that play is capable of integrating mind, body and spirit and that this integration facilitates learning.

1.6 Reconsidering Developmental Models

While Vygotsky (1933[2002]) does not provide new theoretical explanations of the process of playing, his views are valuable in explaining the developmental impact of collaborative play experiences. His focus is on children, and consequently he does not address the way in which collaborative playing might impact upon the adult engaged with a child. Nonetheless, he appreciates the role of the adult – as well as the role of peers – in facilitating a child's growth within the zone of proximal development. Piaget and Vygotsky both provide critical foundational information about the nature of play in educational settings, but neither of their analyses are comprehensive enough to allow consideration of the impact that play and playful engagement can have on those engaged in playful interaction within broadly educational contexts, including informal contexts. They do not explore and cannot explain either how potential comes alive for all involved during times of play, the nature of the pleasure we find in play or how adults and children form relations through these times. However, the work of the paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (2005) is devoted to precisely this task and hence makes an invaluable contribution to debate about the value of play in the context of the particular social milieu and social relations within which it occurs. Winnicott takes as a crucial part of his task the imperative to explain that during play, we are free of social exchange.

The work of Winnicott (2005) extends that of Piaget and Vygotsky through his analysis of relationships and his development of relational theories. Winnicott does not view the child as an independent entity or organism in the way Piaget ([1929]2007, [1945]1962) does; rather he argues that in infancy, the child can never be considered a single 'I'. There is always another involved in the infant's life, a life that must be recognised – first and foremost – as a social endeavour. The infant or child and the other are in a social relation and that relationship comes alive through play. Winnicott's theorisation about the social relation differs from Vygotsky's, which emphasises social processes of mutual recognition to explain the development of social relations, the development of the child and what transpires in play. Vygotsky's social constructivism focuses on the way each individual responds to and depends upon the other in a process of social exchange. By contrast, Winnicott goes beyond a focus on mutual recognition and social exchange to explore the inner life in terms of 'physic reality' and outer life, in terms the external reality that is created through behaviour and responses to things around us. He explains this as a process of 'attempting to get in between these two extremes' and argues that '(i)f we look at our lives we shall probably find that we spend most of our times neither in behaviour nor in contemplation but somewhere else' (2005, p. 141). Such a state-

ment may seem surprising from the perspective of our common focus on social exchange, but Winnicott is drawing attention to an intermediate state in which we spend much of our time and in which play comes to life. Within this intermediate state, personal experiences and features of personality and of the environment come together to help generate what he describes as times of 'creative playing'. Winnicott's theorisation about creative playing includes discussion of the concepts of unintegration, formlessness and the holding environment, which are treated in the introduction and Chaps. 2 and 8 of this book by á Beckett and Pike, respectively.

1.7 Poststructuralist Critiques of Developmental Models

The theories about play explored thus far in this chapter are generally considered modern theories and are drawn from various disciplines. James Johnson, James Christie and Francis Wardle (2005) review a growing area of alternative scholarship about play that can be described as postmodern and includes what are referred to as critical education theories. This scholarship focuses on the way education can operate to support inequalities in terms of gender, socioeconomic status and cultural diversity. Such views undermine attempts to offer a totalising narrative about the role and value of play in education. Andrews (2012, p. 55) argues in a similar vein that play must be considered 'from multiple perspectives at the same time' and that no single truth about play can be established, while Sue Grieshaber and Felicity McArdle (2010) criticise the idealisation of play and the assumption that it always has a positive impact. For example, within their critical approach to theorisation about play, Grieshaber and McArdle identify six value statements commonly associated with play and then proceed to dismantle these associations. The value statements include claims that: play is natural; play is about development and learning; play is normal; play is fun; play is innocent, and that it is a universal right. This work is viewed as producing critical education theories of play.

Critical approaches to developmental psychology also attempt to undermine the work of modern theorists addressed earlier in this chapter. Leading critic of developmental psychology (2008), Erica Burman, argues for the socially constructed nature of childhood, and in doing so, criticises the work of developmental psychologists such as Piaget and Vygotsky. Burman contends that their psychology is not free of bias or scientifically neutral, and hence it should be examined for tendencies towards 'psychologism' and 'scientism' that operate in an attempt to regulate the function of families in society. According to Burman, such classifications and scientific discourses repress inherent cultural biases which psychoanalysis is able to critique. Burman sees the rise of developmental psychology emerging as a result of society's demands for measurement standards for children in an age of mass schooling. On her view, this is the product of a Western and individualistic way of thinking about growth and progress. She uses a feminist theory to show how developmental psychology can pathologise mothers, particularly the working class as well as ethnic and minority women. Gail Canella (1997) expresses a similar view of Piagetian

and other well-established developmental approaches, seeing them as problematic because they imply an ideal or 'normal' standard and present child development in terms of linear progression. Such views marginalise those who do not conform to the standard developmental pathways, including children with disabilities or children from non-Western cultures, which do not share the presuppositions of standard Western approaches. In later work, Burman (2010) analyses the way in which childhood development becomes subject to global and capitalist agendas, which she argues determine that some children live in markedly suboptimal conditions. Given that 'knowledge, facts, norms and models are the outcome of specific contextual productions and interactions' (2010, p. 13), the development of disadvantaged children is undermined by poverty and disaffection. In the context of theorisation about play, we can infer that the expansive opportunities available in play will also be undermined.

1.8 Conclusion

As noted above, the Sanskrit word for play, *lila*, encompasses the view that play can enliven our whole being because properly understood it is a way of living life; from this perspective, play is completely involved in all aspects of everyday life. As Nachmanovitch explains it, in relation to Western conceptions of play:

> [*Lila* is] [r]icher than our word, it means divine play, the play of creation, destruction, and re-creation, the folding and un-folding of the cosmos. *Lila*, free and deep, is both the delight and enjoyment of this moment, and the play of God. It also means love. *Lila* may be the simplest thing there is – spontaneous, childish, disarming. But as we grow and experience the complexities of life, it may also be the most difficult and hard-won achievement imaginable, and its coming to fruition is a kind of homecoming to our true selves. (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 1)

Educators and theorists would do well to encourage an awareness of the value of playful interaction and to emphasise its relevance to aspects of every day actions and interactions so as to invigorate daily life and thereby enhance the depth of our engagement with others and also with the self.

Certainly, children use materials and equipment in playful ways as they experiment with the properties of the materials; a child who is playing with materials may be joined by another, as they engage in interaction that begins the process of learning to play with others. But play with a focus on the exploration of materials and the physical property of things, or on practices of social exchange, does not capture the broader significance of play. Through the work of Winnicott, this chapter draws attention to the sociality of the 'in-between' in which play comes to life, and hence all times of the 'in-between' will involve some aspects of the uplifting and stimulating possibilities of play that the term *lila* denotes.

As Nachmanovitch (1990) explains, when adults find this place of playing with children it is like a homecoming, an enlivening characterised by a sense of grace, poise and confidence that makes a contribution to our general well-being. Such an

experience also applies to all interactions, both those with children and adults. The ethical dimensions of recognising and enacting these aspects of playful engagement and their contribution to well-being are explained by Winnicott (2005), but they may also be what Plato was suggesting when he argued that '[w]e should pass our lives in the playing of games – certain games… with the result of ability to gain heaven's grace' (Plato, *Laws* Book 7, 803e). The natural law theorists mentioned early in this chapter, who argue that play and leisure are integral to human fulfilment, recognise play's value beyond its role in sensory-motor and cognitive development in children and beyond its value in their social and emotional development. Along with Aristotle (*Politics*, 1337b31-1338a3), they recognise play's contribution to civilised social life, but they go beyond this to recognise its non-instrumental value. Thus, despite challenges to these positive conceptions of play and the reality of suboptimal conditions that can impact upon the quality of play, play emerges as both instrumentally and non-instrumentally valuable to human life. Although it is the latter characteristic that Huizinga emphasises, arguing that play is intrinsically worthwhile, he also claims that: '[i]n the absence of the play spirit, civilization is impossible' since it is his view that civilization 'arises and unfolds in and as play' (Huizinga, 1949, p. 101 and foreword). This view suggests that in fact, instrumental and non-instrumental perspectives can come together so that genuinely 'civilised' individuals are those capable of and open to facilitating times of 'creative playing' during which the individual is able to 'use the whole personality' and in doing so 'discovers the self' (Winnicott, 2005, p. 73).

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Part I
The Value of Play

Chapter 2
Making Life Worth Living: Theories of Play Enlivened Through the Work of Donald Winnicott

Cynthia à Beckett

Abstract This chapter explores innovative, theoretical approaches to understanding play through the multidisciplinary work of Donald Winnicott. While his theory of the transitional object is well known, it is his lesser known concepts detailed here that have much to say in explaining play. These include playing in the third zone, potential space, unintegration, formlessness and the holding environment. Through the employment of these interrelated concepts of play, Winnicott provides a new analysis of human development in which changes accumulate within a continuous process to generate an individual's personal repertoire of development. Play is central to this process, given its active role in supporting developmental change within the context of what Winnicott refers to as 'good enough environmental provision' (Winnicott DW ([1971]2005) Playing and reality, 2nd ed. Routledge Classics, New York, p. 95). The theory of 'Playing in the In-between', which draws on and extends Winnicott's work, is illustrated via the case study 'Little Kitten' undertaken as part of related research that involved parents and young children in the home setting.

2.1 Winnicott: Play and Early Childhood

At present, scholars from early childhood education and child psychology dominate research and writing when it comes to the matter of play. While there is significant scholarship on the position of play with regard to imagination, creativity, learning and well-being, these endeavours lack central arguments that could support a consolidated approach (Bergen, 2014). Rather than insights, new contributions create more questions and challenges. One reason for this is the disjointed contribution of theory. While the work of current scholars in early childhood education, such as

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Doris Bergen (2014), Elizabeth Wood (2009), and Marilyn Fleer (2013), are noteworthy, and theoretically informed, contributions of this type are in the minority.

The psychoanalytic work of Donald Winnicott offers theoretical opportunities to clarify ideas about the nature of play, how it can be enhanced and its benefits to early learning and the formation of relationship. In his acclaimed work, *Playing and Reality* ([1971]2005), he explains the vital nature of the early years, through a focus on play, explaining how adults and children can be part of what he refers to as 'creative living' through their shared times of play. These are the times when all are part of an open, spontaneous circumstance described by Winnicott ([1971]2005, p. 64) as a 'playground'. The strength of Winnicott's contribution to understandings of play relate to his multidisciplinary stance, drawing on psychoanalysis, psychology and sociology. His work is not well known in the areas that dominate play scholarship such as early childhood education, and yet one might expect that he has much to tell us about this field, given that he is described by popular philosopher Alain de Botton in his introduction to *Playing and Reality* as 'the greatest British psychoanalyst that ever lived'. Winnicott is a prominent and highly regarded figure in the field of psychoanalysis, particularly for contributions made between the 1930s and the 1970s, although his work has not been fully appreciated; as Martha Nussbaum explains, Winnicott is 'not a cultural icon … an intellectual cult figure … and this was as he wished it' (2006, p. 375).

This chapter explores Winnicott's arguments that social times between adults and children are foundational aspects of human development and come alive through play. Also detailed is Winnicott's theory of the transitional object, when the child sees an object for the first time as something separate from the mother and other than themselves. This internationally acknowledged theory provides an explanation of the concept of otherness. This theory and Winnicott's concepts of playing in the third zone, potential space, unintegration, formlessness and the holding environment, help to show how play acts as a mechanism to achieve creative living. Winnicott's multidisciplinary approach is taken to be supporting a new analysis of human development, and this is illustrated using a case study from work entitled 'Playing in the In-between' that draws on Winnicott's theories (2010, à Beckett, 2007; Proud & à Beckett, 2014).

2.2 An Introduction to Winnicott and Play

As noted above, Winnicott's work has not been widely adopted in early childhood education although his understanding of play and his analysis of adult-child interactions, particularly those between mothers and their babies, have great relevance for parents and teachers in the early years (Winnicott [1971]2005; Fink 1960, cited in Elden, 2008; Andrews, 2012; Metcalfe & Game, 2002). In an analysis derived from his work as a therapist and paediatrician, he uses the earliest interactions to show how social processes are first established through playing, how our first experiences

remain with us through childhood and into adulthood and how this playing provides access throughout our lives to what he refers to as the 'in-between', a notion that is central to this chapter.

Winnicott ([1971]2005) explains that the 'place' of playing can be considered a third zone, an intermediate or 'in-between' place that contrasts with the inner world explained through the psychoanalytic perspective and the outer external world of observable behaviour. Being neither of the inner nor outer world, this third zone involves both; it is where people play and it is the place where the in-between can be found. Typically, given the context of interaction in this intermediate zone, people are more likely to be relaxed and trusting so that opportunities for mutual enrichment arise. Entering the 'in-between' is exciting because it provides chances to experiment with and to develop in creative ways so that this third zone becomes what Winnicott refers to as a place of creative living. The connections between play, creativity and feeling relaxed for adults and children are made clear when Winnicott states

> It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self. (Winnicott 2005, p.73)

More significantly and powerfully, therefore, Winnicott asserts that the individual actually becomes who he or she is through the act of playing.

Winnicott developed his analysis of the third zone and potential space within his original treatise on transitional objects. This analysis explains a process by which infants are first aware of 'otherness', that is, the original moment when the infant discovers something that is other than themselves. Adam Phillips (1988) explains Winnicott's transitional phenomenon in this way:

> Winnicott saw the infant's gradual differentiation from the mother as a process of transition from absolute dependence on her as an object subjectively conceived … towards relative independence of, and relationship with, an object discovered to be beyond omnipotent control … it provided a bridge between inner and outer worlds. (Phillips, 1988, pp. 113–114)

This transitional phenomenon is the beginning of an awareness that there are others that are not part of self. No longer is the mother part of self, but rather there is a notion that mother and self are separate entities. This awareness will grow to include full recognition of objects and people that comprise the child's social world. A particular item, even a piece of material such as the corner of a blanket, can become highly significant to the infant as a symbol of this separateness and hence otherness. The length of the period of significance for a transitional object will vary from infant to infant.

Phillips (1988) also explains how the transitional object constitutes more than its separate parts:

> …The transitional object is always a combination, but one that provides, by virtue of being more than the sum of its parts, a new, third alternative… Most children, quite early on, find for themselves a special and unshareable object – a teddy-bear, a particular doll or toy, a piece of material that is for a time indispensable to them… the Transitional Object is essentially idiosyncratic and unshareable. (Phillips, 1988, pp. 114–115)

The idea of the transitional object is a concept that also helps to explain playful endeavour. While it represents a significant development in the infant's thinking skills, it is also an ongoing feature of play when objects take on new and often imaginary meanings.

While the concept of the transitional object is pivotal in the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis, it is less well known by educators who work specifically with children in the birth-to-3 years age range. This well-known theory provides an introduction to concepts of potential space, unintegration and formlessness all explained later in this chapter, as well as to the third zone, as noted above. Winnicott is distinctive for his particular approach, combining new concepts in his explanation of human development and the role of play in that development.

2.3 A New Analysis of Human Development

When Winnicott published his work on the transitional phenomena in 1951, he provided new insights into human development, with his explanation of how children grow beyond the initial relationship with their primary caregiver. Prior to Winnicott's analysis, the Piagetian psychological perspective held a pre-eminent position in theorization about child development. Piaget considers human development in terms of progressive stages that children move through as their skills develop, but Winnicott extends this view, arguing that development does not entail the loss of one stage as it is overtaken by another. Instead a cumulative and continuous process of development occurs, adding to and extending what has gone before in 'a process of inclusive combination' (Phillips, 1988, p.114). Phillips explains this in more detail when he states

> It is integral to Winnicott's approach that developmental stages do not progressively dispense with each other but are included in a personal repertoire. Maturity is then the flexible toleration of, and potential access to, a full and ever-increasing repertoire throughout life. (Phillips, 1988, p. 82)

Play activity is seminal in the development of the maturity Phillips describes as 'flexible toleration'. Playful engagement can enable us to see things differently, as a simple object is used in a different way or an event suddenly undergoes change of some kind. This does not mean that we lose our first experience of that object or event; rather, we add to it, we adapt and tolerate the changes. Play facilitates the development of such flexibility and tolerance as the use of objects and the nature of events are imaginatively and perhaps unexpectedly transformed, in ways children find exciting and which they absorb into their repertoire of understandings. Such personal repertoires enable new perspectives and actions, some of which are repeated in childhood and become favoured rituals, that last our whole life and which Gaston Bachelard ([1958]1969) discusses in *The Poetics of Space*. One important way of understanding how children develop during times of play comes from careful observations of these interactions.

The analysis of human development provided by Winnicott was shaped by his detailed observations of parents and children during a significant period in history. In 1940, Winnicott was appointed Psychiatric Consultant to the Government Evacuation Scheme in the County of Oxford in the UK, a position he held for a decade throughout the Second World War and beyond. He observed infants and young children in a variety of social and physical environments, as they were relocated and sometimes placed in foster homes (Phillips, 1988). These observations enabled him to develop his multidisciplinary theories that accounted for the whole social and physical environment of the child. Children could not be considered as separate entities divorced from all that surrounded them. In this way his work provided a sociological analysis.

Winnicott's sensitivity to the impact of social and environmental factors on interactions between infants and adults and on child development led him to coin the phrase 'good enough environmental provision' to explain the type of nurturing environment that infants require (Winnicott [1971]2005, p. 95). He argues that the main caregiver, who is often the mother, reaches a point where it is not wise to attempt to predict and satisfy all the potential desires and needs of the infant, as was done to the best of the mother's ability for the newborn. This is not a matter of the neglect of the older infant, but rather it encourages the infant to explore their environment for themselves as the magical provisions of the younger infant are replaced by the older infant's own explorations towards satisfaction. This creates the potential for connections to be made between the child's desires and needs and their satisfaction by the mother, and within this scheme, the infant's role is vital. Winnicott explains that a perfect match would be counterproductive. It is needed at first but gradually there can be a variation in the mother's capacity to provide complete or immediate satisfaction so that over time young children develop the ability to adapt to increasingly complex circumstances.

Examples of 'good enough environmental provision' (Winnicott [1971]2005, p. 95) demonstrate the role of play as children explore their environment and the materials to hand in their own way. When parents do not try to provide everything a child might need or desire but rather they provide 'just enough', children are able to develop their own abilities to explore play and contribute when they want to. Examples of how this operates have been detailed by à Beckett (2007, 2010).

The commitment to ensuring that suitable materials are always provided for children in a developmentally appropriate manner contrasts with Winnicott's ideas. His concept of 'good enough environmental provision' warns against providing everything that a child might hypothetically need or desire. He explains that it is better for children to have a chance to explore and discover things for themselves. Adults must be available so they can be involved, but they should not attempt to manage, dominate or 'fix things up' in the play. This allows children to lead the way, to be experimental and to learn for themselves. When there is an opportunity for adults to join the play that time can become a time of special connection, a time of the in-between and of playing in Winnicott's third zone.

2.4 Playing in Third Zone and Explanations of Potential Space

As noted above, this intermediate area or third zone is explained through Winnicott's notion of the potential space. It first comes into being when the change outlined above occurs, from complete provision for the newborn's needs and desires to situations in which infants are given the opportunity to discover things for themselves. What occurs within this process is the possibility of a deep interpersonal connection between infants and adults as adults wait, allowing infants the space and time to engage as they wish to. Rather than responding automatically or in accord with preconceived notions of what the child requires in the situation or predicting what is wanted and providing it, the adult allows for the possibility of forming the potential space. This space when explored through play becomes the third zone. Winnicott states that

> In order to give a place to playing I postulated a potential space between the baby and the mother. This potential space varies … according to the life experiences of the baby in relation to the mother or mother figure, and I contrast this potential space (a) with the inner world … and (b) with the actual, or external, reality. (Winnicott [1971]2005, p. 55)

The potential space involves a state of being that is neither subjective nor objective. This allows for playing in the third space and involves elements of spontaneity, which enhance creativity. Routine tasks can become spontaneous play events when there is confidence in the setting and trust in one another, and the responsiveness that characterises this engagement creates opportunities for play. When this responsiveness is present, circumstances are then opened up and changed in exciting ways as both mother and baby contribute to the creative living that Winnicott describes. The possibility and appeal of playing is the constant element evident in all Winnicott's concepts. Phillips (1988, p. 144) explains Winnicott's definition of playing in this way: 'Playing is the process of finding through pleasure what interests you, but it is by definition a state of transitional knowing, creative by virtue of being always inconclusive'. The interest comes from allowing the child to discover in the world what interests her. By engaging with the external, objective world, the child learns about himself, discovering and contributing to her own internal, subjective world. This allows you to find your essence in what is different, not – you. The idea of being inconclusive and allowing for unpredictable interaction challenges is one that may seem in direct contrast to the current focus in early childhood education on the social exchange model, which values setting and achieving goals in predetermined time frames. The domination of these approaches often negates times of the 'unlimited character' of play for children and adults explained by Fink (as cited by Elden, 2008, p. 52).

Play allows the possibility of change. Winnicott ([1971]2005) argues that play is the mechanism whereby creative living can be achieved; he believes it is a vital state for children and adults and that our whole 'experimental existence' is built on the 'basis of playing' ([1971]2005, pp. 86–88). Experimental existence allows for a responsiveness that is unscripted, alive and not the result of deliberate behaviour

explained through the process of normative social exchange. During times of social exchange, each act is a required way to meet the needs of the other. These are forms of interaction that Martin Buber (1923/1958) describes as ‘I-It’, which also reflects the fight for mutual recognition explained through the Hegelian analysis of the dialectical relationship (Hegel, 1977). Modes of interaction that are responsive and illustrate Winnicott’s notion of creative living are different since defined positions and required behaviour are not needed. These modes of interaction/engagement are what Buber describes as ‘I-Thou’ in which relations are formed through moments of playing in the in-between (à Beckett, 2007, 2010).

Winnicott identifies play as a stimulating way for an infant to explore a potential space. He describes the young infant as initially feeling a magical sense of control, as everything he needs or desires is provided for. When the infant realises that an object exists apart from himself, then he learns that the object can then be played with. It can be thrown away and then returned as the infant and the mother play together. He describes this as

> immensely exciting … [through] the precariousness of the interplay of the personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself, magic that arises in intimacy, in a relationship that is being found to be reliable. (Winnicott [1971]2005, p. 64)

Winnicott describes the whole situation that evolves between a mother and baby as a playground, given that this is where play starts as a potential space is created through the transitional phenomena. Possibilities open up for the baby when the physical and social setting is ‘good enough’ in terms of the provision of materials and access to people when the baby chooses this. This playground then becomes a site of creative living for all, for the infant and the adult alike. Playing in the third zone through the potential space in turn provides the context within which to explain Winnicott’s theory of unintegration.

2.5 The Concept of Unintegration

On Winnicott’s analysis, the third zone and the potential space are interrelated concepts that involve non-purposive or unintegrated states. An unintegrated state is one in which adults and children are freed from the determined constraints of social expectations, but they are not in a state of chaos or disintegration. Unintegration contrasts with the notion of integration, which refers to the bringing together of skills and abilities that allow development to progress. Integration refers to the activity of an identifiable, apparently coherent subject and involves a clarity of action that allows set tasks to be achieved. The unintegration of playing has no such agenda. It develops when there is no set focus on a particular action or required tasks and involves creative ways of being that encompass the whole self. Unlike integration, which identifies and includes certain things as required to allow the achievement of particular purposes and excludes others, the unintegration of play

excludes nothing. Unintegration differs in that is it founded on a sense of faith in the worth of engagement for its own sake, without the need to shape or take control the nature of that engagement for particular purposes and because good things can happen without anyone taking control and making it happen. Winnicott argues that unintegration enables children and adults to play and through this to become creative. As noted above, for Winnicott, it is when and only when these creative times happen that are we truly free to find ourselves: 'it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self' (Winnicott [1971]2005, p.73). Hence, on Winnicott's view, times of play open us to the enlivening possibilities of change and such profound moments of discovery can remain with us.

2.6 Formlessness and the Holding Environment

Another way in which Winnicott helps to explain the relationship between the concepts of unintegration, the third zone, the place of playing and the potential space is by reference to the notion of formlessness. While these are separate concepts, they are at the same time interrelated. Each helps to explain the other. Winnicott explains that the unintegration of play is in part due to the lack of a set focus or agenda and then the usual constraints created by the social expectations of each for the other are no longer evident, and he argues that a quality of 'formlessness' is present. It is about openness and a lack of set requirements imposed by either adult or child. It is not, however, referring to the sheer expression of liberty, as this can result in individual identities each imposing their own requirements or agendas on the other. Rather, the openness to possibility that Winnicott explains is created by a safe and structured holding environment, which does not impose structure.

The holding environment is the secure, dependable setting that provides the context for formlessness. Inspired by Winnicott, Anne Game and Andrew Metcalfe explain this holding space in this way:

> it is not empty or fleshless, and the holder is not a container that holds others like a bowl of peas. Indeed, disrupting this Euclidean space of separate identities, holding consists of a simultaneous holding and being held …. (Game & Metcalfe, 2001, p. 72)

Formlessness is also explained through what has been referred to as the unknowing of the in-between: formlessness and unknowing both being free of the demands of social exchange; both are beyond voluntary recall and can be described as concepts that are more like poetry than narrative. Formlessness can be thought of as an enchanting condition that individuals at play come to recognise and trust, but they do so with unknowing, that is, unconsciously. The condition of formlessness cannot come about through the conscious manipulation of interactive processes. When we do try to create formlessness, it can be counterproductive. As Buber (1923/1958, p. 49) explains, 'it comes even when not summoned and vanishes even when it is tightly held'.

Play is often associated with relaxation or recreation and this is in no small part due to its formless quality. Winnicott ([1971]2005) links formlessness and this capacity for relaxation to trust. For example, tense, structured interactions militate against the possibility of formlessness and relaxation. Only when those involved in the interactions can trust others are they sufficiently comfortable and unconcerned with self to allow the situation to open up through formlessness. Explaining formlessness in this way might suggest that formlessness is a defined entity or thing; however, this is not the case; rather, as Metcalfe and Game (2002) explain, formlessness is a void. As they put it, it is a state in which 'no-body or no-thing holds and brings to life every thing'; it provides the space and openness that engender trust and allow the relaxation that underpins the formlessness and unintegration of play (2002, p. 49). Hence, moments of formlessness have no beginning or ending; we recognise this state when it is present because situations become stress-free and open, but we cannot identify just when this happened or when it has stopped since it is not bound by the logic of chronological time. But it is just this formlessness and freedom from constraint that makes playing in the third zone possible. The inconclusive nature of formlessness is its strength.

The place of playing, of unintegration and of formlessness is not always associated with childhood, but Winnicott demonstrates how important it is for children of all ages to have opportunities for play understood on this paradigm. However, Winnicott also argues that playing is vital for adults. It is during times of play that adults can relax and through this make sense of inner and outer realities. As Winnicott writes

> It is assumed … that no human is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience … This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play. (Winnicott [1971]2005, p. 18)

The case study below explores the way a routine task is transformed into play. In the process a moment occurs in which neither mother nor child knows what might happen. It shows how their inner and their outer world combine and open out through formlessness, as mother and child enjoy time playing in the third zone.

2.7 Case Study Example: Little Kitten

The research project within which this example was observed involved 2-year-old children at home during routine times with their parents (à Beckett, 2007, 2010). Tamara's mother Jill had wrapped her 2-year-old daughter in a big soft towel as it was a cold winter's night. She was drying Tamara after her bath. Jill then helped Tamara put on her pyjamas and they then sat on a warm rug on the floor in the living room. Jill was leaning her back on the front of the couch. Tamara was standing in front of Jill, who was holding out the towel preparing to dry Tamara's hair. Tamara has shoulder-length hair, which is thicker and longer than that of most children of

her age. This means that each night her hair must be properly dried before she can go to bed. Tamara was standing a little out of Jill's reach, so Jill started to make a game out of the task at hand. Jill held out the towel and said, 'Come on little kitten, let me dry your fur'. She said this in a funny pleading voice. The family had acquired a new pet kitten a month before, so Tamara was aware of kittens and what this activity might be like.

When Jill said, 'Come on little kitten, let me dry your fur', Tamara smiled and responded straight away. She sat down on the rug in front of her mother and put her head in her mother's lap. She was making her version of kitten gestures, movements and noises. To each of these, her mother would respond making a comment in a funny voice about her beautiful fur or about her being a good kitten. They smiled and laughed as the game continued. It was a spontaneous pleasurable game, which lasted for a few minutes and was one they both enjoyed.

The start of the routine, drying Tamara and helping her put on her pyjamas, was an easy routine activity that happened each night. Sometimes Peter the father did this, sometimes Jill. On this occasion they enjoyed their roles and each understood what was required. They were happy to be with one another and the boundaries of the task were clear. Things changed when Jill introduced the idea that Tamara's hair was like kitten's fur. There was an unknowing in the idea. The clear boundaries of the task, to dry Tamara's hair, disappeared. They did not seem to know what would come next and this was not important. They were not worried about this as they were both fully present, smiling and laughing together. It was funny to imagine that Tamara's hair was like the fur of a kitten and they both enjoyed the oddness of it all.

The routine of hair drying was transformed into an unexpected moment of dramatic play that had no plan or imposed structure. The formlessness of the event created an exciting surprise for mother and child. Both took great pleasure in it all, although they had no idea of what would happen next. Winnicott would argue that they were confident in one another and the situation because they were both being held and holding at the same moment. As they relaxed and responded, the imaginative and creative aspects of the event developed. Winnicott emphasises how important it is to be open to this condition of formlessness so that the creative collaborations it brings can be enjoyed. He explains that

> It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality, which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation. Compliance carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth living. (Winnicott [1971]2005, p. 87)

The idea of feeling that life is worth living was central to Winnicott's work both as a therapist and paediatrician. Rodman in the introduction to Winnicott's (2005, p. xiv) book argues that Winnicott is famous for asking 'what is there to live for'. The research study, Playing in the In-between (à Beckett, 2007, 2010), records many daily examples that demonstrate how parents and children live for and with one another as they play together in the formless, creative moments of the in-between. Within a holding environment, they are aware of each other, fully present to each

other and able to witness each other's pleasure as they play together, coming to appreciate the worth of relationship and playful engagement in human life. Unknowing, explained by Winnicott in terms of formlessness, is a key element of the related theory Playing in the In-between. This theory draws on Winnicott's theories and includes two other elements, being fully present and mutuality through love. Based on an analysis of observations of parents and their 2-year-old children in the home setting, the research showed that most of the key interactional times were relational and often very playful such as the Little Kitten example. The three elements noted supported times of a creative living as detailed by Winnicott.

2.8 Winnicott and Applications for Education

When staff in educational settings are fully present during times of play, opportunities for creativity arise. As noted above, Winnicott ([1971]2005, p. 67) emphasises the related nature of creativity and play and makes particular reference to teachers when he states that '[w]hen playing involves another person there is a chance of enrichment. The teacher aims at enrichment … responsible persons must be available when children are playing …'. If teachers are to aim at enrichment in the way that Winnicott suggests, they must understand the importance of being available, being generally purposeful about their responsibilities, but at the same time open to purposelessness in the form that Winnicott details.

Winnicott argues that staff do not need to lead or dominate the play as this would imply or suggest that the children are not able to communicate and be creative by themselves. Teachers, like parents, must be available and ready to engage in a particular way: being fully present, unknowing and open to the possibility of mutuality through love means being ready to create a holding environment. This does not mean dominating or leaving children by themselves. It means being with, being close and being in tune with the children and with the situational context, ready to be part of things if opportunities arise, but not always leading or directing activity.

Winnicott's ([1971]2005) commitment to the worth of play and his focus on the development of creativity and mutuality through play have much to contribute to offer educators, in particular those in the early childhood field, and yet his work is rarely included in major publications or policy documents within the area of early childhood education. Of the substantial and well-recognised texts by Johnson, Christie and Wardle (2005); Frost, Wortham and Reifel (2005); and Johnson, Christie and Yawkey (2005), only Johnson et al. (2005) refer to Winnicott and quote him only once in the first chapter.

Throughout his key publications, vital features of the theories are provided in an organic, personal and intricate manner. The organic nature of his explanations gives his theories an unfinished quality and allows scope for ongoing interpretation; this is the strength of the work, but in some respects, it is also its weakness. The theories cannot be presented as fixed explanations of human development and require ongoing engagement with the ideas presented. These challenges may explain why his

analysis of children and play are not evident in the literature in early childhood education, but despite this, his insights are compelling and have the potential to greatly enrich the children's experiences in early childhood settings.

2.9 Future Issues

Winnicott's theories apply beyond the early years and can contribute to education, the arts and related integrated curriculum areas. His theories about play also apply to social, personal and community life at all levels and have practical implications for many areas of education, including the reconceptualisation of child psychology and practices in the arts such as school programmes in the visual and performing arts.

Another contribution that Winnicott's work could make to the literature on play lies in its capacity to enhance the vocabulary used in conceptualising play. In fact, Andrews (2012) calls for a new vocabulary of play, although she does not apply this specifically to Winnicott; however, 'playing in the in-between', 'playing in the third zone, 'potential space', 'unintegration', 'formlessness' and 'the holding environment' are some of the key Winnicottian concepts that could create this new vocabulary. Andrews also argues that 'adults can create conditions for children's play … (by supporting) a stimulating environment (and) adopting playful attitudes …' (Andrews, 2012, p. 171). In one of her concluding themes, she reinforces the strength of Winnicott's analysis with a focus on play as 'a phenomenon that seems to operate at the boundaries of control' (Andrews, 2012, p. 170). Andrews refers to Winnicott in relation to the theme through his notion of transitional space as facilitating creative living to reinforce the notion that play is at the boundaries of control. This focus explains how Winnicott enlivens and inspires both children and adults to share places where everything is possible, a place where life is worth living.

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Chapter 3
The First 2 Years of Life: A Developmental Psychology Orientation to Child Development and Play

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Abstract Recently considerable interest and research has focused on the content and the development of play in infants, toddlers and young children (Branscomb & Ethridge (2010) J Early Child Teach Educ 31(3):207–221; Jung (2013) Early Child Res Q 28:187–198). As one of the few areas that can be reliably and validly observed in children aged from birth to 2 years, collected data can provide evidence to guide and justify play assessment and intervention efforts. This chapter reviews forms of play that usually emerge within the first 2 years of life, collating the available empirical research on this topic in typical infants from a developmental psychological perspective. Consequently, it will not discuss later forms of play, such as games with rules or sociodramatic play, as these skills are known to develop in children older than 24 months. This chapter begins with a section that considers the empirical evidence relating to early solitary object exploration and functional play. The next section examines the social focus of play, investigating the various forms of adult-infant play; readers are also offered suggestions for research and practice on the basis of the material reviewed. It is hoped that the information contained in this chapter will inform early childhood educators and classroom assistants about the complexity of infant play skill development and infant-adult early play engagement. Early childhood teachers will find this information useful regarding expectations for infants engaged in early play.

3.1 The Essential Characteristics of Play: A Developmental Psychology Perspective

In early childhood education, there has been a strong agreement among educators and researchers that children learn and grow through play (Casby, 2003). Although several developmental theorists (such as Vygotsky, 1966; Werner & Kaplan, 1963)

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have been interested in young children's play, much contemporary work on this subject has been based on the work of Piaget ([1945b]1951). Historically, psychologists have attributed great importance to the role of early play and exploration in promoting the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and wellbeing of children and youth (Bruner, 1972; Fenson & Kagan, 1976; Piaget, 1952[1974]), and despite the many explanations and definitions of play, applied to the early infancy period (birth to 2 years) being especially amorphous, there has been a unanimous agreement among educators and researchers that all children learn and grow from play (Fromberg, 2002; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Nind, Flewitt and Theodorou (2014) recently defined play for the birth- to 24-month age group as, '… *an individual and social activity that is shaped by the socio-cultural contexts within which it unfolds*' (p. 345). During infancy, children's play is as much about experimenting with their new-found abilities, as it is about investigating and controlling their real world (Abbott & Langston, 2005; Lillard, 2007). Consequently, from a developmental psychology perspective, an activity may be described as play if an infant within the first 2 years of life is actively engaged in a pleasurable activity that accommodates their interest and stimulates the infant to further explore their environment.

Thus, very early play development can be viewed as having both an 'object focus' and a 'social focus'. The object focus is provided through quality play experiences (e.g. toy manipulation and environmental exploration), while the social focus is provided through functional communication experiences (e.g. choice and request situations with a familiar adult). Clearly, play for this age group is more than a simple inventory of play behaviour and play skills. In addition, teachers have a powerful influence on the quality of children's play experiences. One of the main foci of early play programs is implementing strategies to provide infants with opportunities to engage with interest-provoking toys, to generate informational feedback from the environment and to develop skills that are effective for communicating with a range of partners in typical environments (Jung, 2013). Taking this educational approach maximizes the chance that infants will bring all of their potential to the experience at hand, be it successful play with toys, interactions with people or simply experiencing their body in space. One of the ways in which teachers can support the development of play in very young children is through the creation of opportunities to engage in play activities.

3.2 Dynamic Aspects of Development from Birth to 24 Months

A considerable body of research has focused on teachers' influence on the quality of children's play (Bennett, Wood & Rogers, 2001; Saracho, 2002). Infants and toddlers need adults who understand and can respond to the complexity of their rapid development. Bigelow, MacLean and Proctor (2004) suggest that play is a natural part of what infants do, and having a sound understanding of child development can

enhance teachers' (and parents') roles in facilitating early infant play and exploration. Table 3.1 outlines a developmentally sequenced guide typical of the average child's abilities and potential play activities between birth and 2 years of age, although it is important to note that children will vary widely both in terms of the age of onset of these developmental landmarks and the length of time they remain at one specific stage. This information provides a guide or checklist for early childhood teachers as to appropriate expectations of any infant in early play experiences and in association with an infant or toddler's demonstrated skills (and the use of other assessments); initial general and specific goals can be selected for the implementation in the child's daily program. The next section of this chapter reviews the most prominent theoretical frameworks of play for birth to 2-year-olds.

3.3 The Developmental Theories of Play

3.3.1 Piaget's Views of the Development of Play (Birth to 24 Months)

Much contemporary work on the content and development of play, particularly on symbolic play, in infants and toddlers has been based on the work of Piaget ([1945b]1951, [1945a]1962). Piaget's account of play identified various ordered developmental stages occurring during the first few years of life and classified the play of children aged birth to 2 years into two main types: practice play and symbolic play.

3.3.1.1 Practice Play (2–18 Months)

In Practice play the actions of children of approximately 2–10 months of age, characteristically centre on and involve their own bodies. According to Piaget, in this stage, children develop the ability to combine different sensorimotor action schemes in their practice play (Piaget, 1983), that is, they will try out the same action patterns on different objects and begin to define objects by their use. They also have the sensorimotor capacity to relate one object to another, although in a nonfunctional or non-conventional manner. Put a rattle in the hand of a 3-month-old and the child will 'play' with it by shaking, chewing or simply looking at this object it has been given (Bayley, 1969). Towards the latter part of this stage, children will begin to engage in ritualistic action patterns in which typical actions with conventional objects are not performed (e.g. banging a block on a table). Play actions during this level lack the application of schemes to atypical objects. According to Piaget, as children tried to make sense of their experiences, they would develop 'schemes' (Piaget, 1952[1974]). For example, at 6 months, an infant is likely to drop objects from their high chair by just letting go of the object and watch what happens.

However, by 18 months, a child is more likely to be far more creative, perhaps throwing the object off the balcony, down the stairs, or sometimes even throwing things up into the air. One might also note that by 18 months, the child's 'dropping scheme' has usually become more deliberate, with the child sometimes releasing the object gently, other times much more forcefully. The 18-month-old no longer just acts on the object; the child's 'dropping scheme' has changed (Berk, 2012). It is during the next developmental level that children begin to represent things in their play actions.

3.3.1.2 Symbolic Play (18–24 Months)

Piaget's stage of symbolic play develops throughout much of what has been termed the early preoperational period of cognitive development (i.e. 2–4 years of age) and is specifically defined by its lack of concrete operations. Just as practice play reflects the sensorimotor period, symbolic play is a counterpart of the preoperational period of cognitive development. According to Piaget (1952[1974]), when children make the transition from practice play to symbolic play, they transition from sensorimotor schemes to mental operations/representations. Piaget ([1945b]1951) gave the example of a child who, having played pretending to sleep themself, will now make their doll pretend to sleep. He argued that in projecting the action away from themself, the child's behaviour is now symbolic.

Although several developmental theorists (Vygotsky, 1966; Werner & Kaplan, 1963) have focused on play, Piaget's description of the stages of sensorimotor development, based on observations made over 70 years ago, still remains the most detailed and comprehensive account of the nature of early play and its developmental progression. However, recognizing the critical role of play in enhancing every aspect of a child's development, psychologists are now investigating play behaviour from a variety of viewpoints.

3.3.2 Post-Piagetian Views of the Development of Play (Birth to 2 Years)

Power (2006) claimed that from the 1980s onwards, there has been a move away from seeing play as a topic of interest per se and towards studying it as a context within which other developmental phenomena can be investigated. For example, in a longitudinal study of infants, Sinclair (1970) noted the appearance of several new types of symbolic play activities during the ages of 19–26 months. These activities were characterized by changes in the adult involved in the play, the objects used in the play, and the organization of the play schemes/actions. Following Sinclair ibid., Lezine (1973) proposed a developmental sequence of symbolic play identifying the use of objects ranging from the first stage of simple manipulative actions such as

rubbing, holding, shaking and throwing (9–12 months) through to active other directed play (18–24 months) where the child might feed, hug and kiss teddy bears and dolls.

Rosenblatt (1975, 1977) designed a developmental taxonomy of play. In Rosenblatt's first category (at 9–12 months), the child performed simple sensorimotor actions (e.g. touching, holding, banging), while the second representational-combinations category (at 24 months) was defined as the coordination of two toys in play, as if they were real objects (e.g. brushing a doll's hair, feeding a teddy bear). Like the work of Piaget ([1945b]1951), Sinclair (1970), Lesine (1973) and Rosenblatt's (1975, 1977) researches suggested a regular, orderly progression from undifferentiated sensorimotor action patterns to more conventional use of objects through to more symbolic uses of objects in play. Nonetheless, it is clear that early play skills change dramatically for an infant during the developmental period from birth through to their second year of life.

3.3.3 The Developmental Functions of Early Forms of Play

As can be seen by the section above, researchers are yet to reach a consensus on a single definition of play, preferring to deal with specific forms or subtypes of play. However, as White, Hayes and Livesey (2013) advise, '*types of play should not be interpreted as stage like*, *because children are often interested in several kinds of play at any given point in their development*, *and play styles may emerge earlier or later*' (p. 322). Further, the behaviour of very young children should not be fragmented into isolated segments, since play, exploration and a variety of other activities will continually flow from one to another being both intrinsically motivated and pleasurable.

3.3.4 Exploration Versus Play

During infancy, the literature focusses on the relationship between play and another functional behaviour, known as exploration in terms of both their similarities and differences. However, researchers agree that young children are more likely to engage in exploratory behaviour, before they engage in play (Jung, 2013; White et al., 2013), although this is subject to a child's familiarity with the context and the materials on offer. Exploration has been characterized as a neutral or a tentatively hesitant emotional experience (Honig, 2006), as well as a free-flowing, all-consuming event (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997); while in play, a child is more likely to appear happy and relaxed and hence, is more likely to jump from one activity to another. Hughes (2010) explains, '*…in unfamiliar surroundings a child will explore first*, *and then gradually*, *as the child becomes more familiar and more comfortable with their environment*, *exploration will give way to play*' (p. 46).

When infant children (birth to 2 years) are exploring their surroundings, they are more likely to do so cautiously, approaching the situation with some rigidity. According to Hughes and Hutt (1979), this affect results from the uncertainty they are feeling or the apprehension that goes with directing their undivided attention to a specific entity or event. Further, when infants are exploring, they are likely to examine each item in an almost ritualistic manner – smelling it, tasting it, rubbing it against their face etc. Evidence that these behaviours serve an important information-gathering function. Ruff (1984) and others (Gibson, 1988; Piaget, [1945a]1962) argue that through oral and manual manipulation of objects, infants learn about the properties and classification of different objects, the causal relationship between events and how to influence the world around them. Positive associations have been identified between individual differences in explorative behaviours in infancy and later measures of problem-solving and general cognitive function (Caruso, 1993).

3.4 Object Focus

Within the broad domain of cognition, the focus of this next section is a discussion of the child's exploration and learning about the world and his/her relation to the world through the manipulation of objects during play. '*Initial play with objects involves the intentional manipulation of objects with a definite interest on the part of the player in the results of the manipulation*' (Hughes, 1995, p. 47). Based on a Piagetian model of cognitive development, the concepts of object permanence and of cause and effect are important cornerstones in an infant's understanding of the world.

During the first 10 months of life, the infant is developing the concept of object permanence, moving from simple tracking at birth (Bower, Boughton & Moore, 1971; Brazelton, 1982), to reaching for visibly hidden objects at 8–9 months (Bayley, 1969; Uzgiris & Hunt, 1975). An important part in developing this concept includes the infant's early object exploration. Object exploration provides the infant with information about objects and the relationship between objects.

Research indicates that as early as 1 month, infants are recognizing and indicating preference for novel objects using vision and mouthing as tools (Gibson & Walker, 1984; Meltzoff & Borton, 1979). Mouthing decreases in the first year as more precise motor control makes manual manipulation of objects possible (Palmer, 1989; Ruff, 1984). From 6 to 12 months, the motor actions of infants reflect a steady and remarkably complex development in sensitivity to distinctions among visual, tactile and auditory characteristics of objects (Fenson, Kagan, Kearsley, & Zelazo, 1976; Lockman & McHalem, 1989; Palmer, 1989; Ruff, 1984).

During this same period, the infant is also developing an understanding of cause and effect through the exploration and manipulation of the objects. This begins with

the classic example of the infant's early global movements towards a mobile. With the development of increased motor control, the actions directed at objects become more precise in banging, dropping, squeezing and pushing until by 9 months, the infant is using one object to reach another object (Bayley, 1969; Uzgiris & Hunt, 1975). Bates, Camaioni and Volterra (1975) call this 'tool use' and connect it to communication.

Harding (1984) and Sugarman (1984) delineate several stages in the development of causality in object use from reaching for the object, to using an object to get an object, to finally using the adult to procure the object. With increased understanding about the object, the infant is also developing an awareness of their relation to the object and in their ability to control that object (cause and effect). Interestingly, this occurs simultaneously with the child's awareness of controlling people through communication signals.

Investigations also show that experience plays an important role throughout this process (Harris, 1971; Kopp & Staperman, 1973; Wohlwill, 1984). Infants search more for objects they have explored manually. They also move into more creative play with familiar objects, while returning to more concrete exploratory activities when presented with an unfamiliar object. Elsert and Lamorey (2010) suggest the following developmental order of object exploration: banging appears first, followed by simple and then accommodative relational acts, followed by symbolic acts with behaviour becoming progressively more diverse.

A study by Fenson and Kagan (1976) examined the emergence of an infant's ability to relate to objects in play, the beginnings of symbolic play, and differences in the sequentiality of behaviour (i.e. the cohesiveness of the child's ongoing 'stream of behaviour'). To illustrate, a 6-month-old baby typically plays with one object at a time, and then a few months later, he begins they begin to combine or relate two separate objects, showing an interest in similarities among objects. One type of sequentiality involves performing two consecutive parallel acts (e.g. putting one cup on a saucer, then immediately placing the other cup on the other saucer). Sometimes an infant will engage in variations on a theme (e.g. they might stir the pot, then in a cup or they might drink from both cups in succession). Such acts are counted as a second variety of sequential responses; and by 2 years of age, according to Fleer (2013), some children have even been known to show evidence of pretending.

However, sequentiality appears to develop at a slow pace and is not generally very apparent at 20 months. Although 9-month-olds generally show the ability to relate to objects that they might not have bothered with at 7 months, play at both ages is largely non-relational and non-accommodative, being characterized by close visual and tactual inspection of individual objectives, usually accompanied by mouthing and chewing and the application of more or less indiscriminate motor schemes (shaking, banging, turning the object over and over and shifting it from hand to hand).

Investigating three dimensions of behaviour that undergo change during the first 2 years, Ungerer, Zelazo, Kearsley and O'Leary (1981) proposed a developmental taxonomy of object play in a cross-sectional investigation of the development of early play abilities in children, which claimed that stereotypical play was evident at

9 months, relational play occurred around 12 months and evidence of functional play with objects emerged between 12 and 24 months.

3.4.1 Stereotypical Play

At about 3–4 months of age, infants begin to attend to distant objects, to grasp, manipulate and inspect them (Trevarthen, 1988). Initially, the same few action patterns, such as mouthing, waving and banging (sensorimotor exploration), are employed indiscriminately, but with increasing age, actions vary according to specific characteristics of the objects being manipulated (Uzgiriz & Hung, 1975). Ruff and Saltarelli (1993) differentiate 'active' exploration, (e.g. manipulation accompanied by inspection and mouthing with looks afterward), from sensorimotor behaviours and manipulation or inspection performed in isolation, which are 'non-exploratory'. Experimental evidence using habituation and recovery as indices of learning indicate that the former, which involve focused attention, most effectively extract information about objects (Ruff, Perner, Olsen, & Doherty, 1993). At about 7–9 months, play is largely characterized by close visual and tactual inspection of individual objectives, usually accompanied by mouthing and chewing and the application of more or less indiscriminate motor schemes (shaking, banging, turning the object over and over and shifting it from hand to hand).

3.4.2 Relational Acts

Towards the end of the first year, infants begin to combine objects in relational play, first simply comparing and contrasting them in an unrelated fashion and then putting them together in ways that are socially appropriate and increasingly reflect their functional properties (Belsky & Vondra, 1989; Fenson et al., 1976). Three subclasses of relational acts have been distinguished: Acts involving appropriate associations between objects (e.g. lid on pot, cup on saucer) are accommodative relational acts; acts involving the association of two objects in unconventional ways (e.g. touching a spoon against the base of the pot, touching a lid against the side of a cup) are simple (non-accommodative) relational acts; while acts involving combining two similar objects (i.e. two cups or two spoons) are grouping acts.

3.4.3 Object-Mediated Dyadic Play

From 6 to 12 months with rapid growth in locomotor and fine motor skills, infants' time is mostly spent manually exploring objects (Power, 2006). Concurrently infants' abilities to communicate with others about their dealings with objects and

to alternate their gaze between an object and another person increase (Trevarthen & Hubley, 1978). They use gestures to 'show' what they are handling, and seek eye contact or make 'vocal comment' on what they are doing. They give objects to others, and at about 12 months they start to point things out to create 'topics' of shared attention (Bates, Benigini, Bretherton, Camaiono, & Volterra, 1979).

Collectively, these developments enable infants to enter into joint object-centred engagements with their caregivers, usually mediated by toys and involving both the child's coordination of attention between objects and a parent and the sharing of activity surrounding these objects (Bakerman & Adamson, 1984). The content of most of these interactions consists of attempts by the parent/caregiver/teacher to increase the child's exploration and understanding of the objects focused on by drawing attention to potential attributes they may have or to possible actions the child could carry out on them (Adamson & Bakerman, 1985).

3.4.4 Symbolic Play

Symbolic play first appears early in the second year of a child's life, usually around the age of 12 or 13 months. Its appearance is rather sudden, as indicated by monthly percentage increases of such play observed in children from 10 to 14 months of age (Rubin, Fein & Vandenberg, 1983). In this stage, infants engage in symbolic acts, for example eating (but not mouthing and chewing), drinking, pouring, stirring and spooning (presumably an imaginary substance) from one container to another. While the earliest signs of symbolic play appear quite suddenly, its development follows a gradual and fairly predictable path, often characterized as a series of increasingly sophisticated levels (Fenson, 1986; Piaget, [1945a]1962; Tamis-LeMonda & Bornstien, 1991). Hughes (1995) describes the developmental progression of symbolic play with reference to three underlying elements (refer to Table 3.1) upon which it is based: decentration, decontextualization and integration (Bretherton, 1984; Fenson, 1986; Piaget1945a]1962; Werner & Kaplan, 1963).

3.4.5 Infants, Toddlers and Toys

Once the focus of the child's attention moves away from the activities of its own body to events of the outside world, they are ready to play with objects. However, children also require certain motor skills to grasp and manipulate play materials. According to Bayley (1969), children will not have developed a primitive grasp until they are about 9–10 weeks old. It is useful to hang colourful objects that produce pleasing sounds (bells, etc.) across an infant's cot. Further, if young infants are physically capable, they will attempt to ring a bell if the object is placed in their hands. At first these actions will be accidental, the result of a baby's random movements in their cot. Should the baby consider the consequences of their movements

Table 3.1 Developmental trends in symbolic play during the second year of life

Stage	Decentration	Decontextualization	Integration
12 months	Make believe actions centre on the self, usually occur when the child is alone, and involve familiar rituals from everyday life	Realistic substitute objects are used in a realistic manner	Little evidence of a connection among the various symbolic play activities
18 months	Pretense involves inanimate objects as recipients of make-believe actions initiated by the child	Substitute objects are less realistic in terms of appearance and function	Pairing up of related activities in single-scheme combinations
24 months	Inanimate objects are used as initiators as well as recipients of make-believe actions	Substitute objects may bear no physical resemblance to what they represent and are used in a way that is far removed from their original function	Multi-scheme combinations. Two or more activities, each of which involves a different theme

Hughes (1995, p. 57)

to be pleasing, there is every likelihood that the baby will attempt to repeat their movements. However, for an activity of this type to be considered as play, the child must be seen to enjoy the experience.

Surprisingly to some, toys on their own are not very appealing to babies (Stern, 1991). Goldschmied's ([1989]1992) research reminded us that uniformed adults often looked at grizzling babies surrounded by toys and wondered what all the fuss was about? Unfortunately, for too long, curriculum development, child care courses and early years' practitioners have focused on the 3–5-year group and assumed that developing early play for the very young (birth to 2 years) can be designed by watering down a version of an older child's curriculum. However, Bodrova and Leong (1998) argued that fewer toys and more interactions with people were crucial for infants, since it is the quality of close social interactions between objects and people that enable the development of mature levels of play and complex social skills at this age.

3.4.6 Functional Play

Around 13–15 months, infants start to engage in functional play (sometimes known as 'pretend' play), which involves using an object in accordance with its socially designated function, for example, pushing a toy car along the ground or putting a pan on a toy stove (Belsky & Most, 1981). However, such play does not necessarily involve pretense (as defined by Leslie, 1987) since, as Baron-Cohen (2001) noted, the toddler may regard the toy stove, for example, as a small, yet real, stove. As

Table 3.2 Suggested toys for the first 2 years of life

Age	Suggested play materials
Birth to 3 months: infants are not yet ready to grasp objects	Toys primarily for sensory stimulation: colourful pictures, wall paper, crib ornaments, mobiles, rattles, bells, music boxes and other musical toys
3–6 months: a primitive grasp has been acquired	Toys for grasping, squeezing, feeling and mouthing, including cloth balls, soft blocks and teething toys
6–12 months	Colourful picture books, stacking toys, nesting toys, sponges for water play, mirrors and toy telephones with dials that move. Toys and books that are interactive and especially those which react to the child's activity
12–18 months	Push toys; pull toys; balls to throw; plain and interlocking blocks; simple puzzles with large, easy to handle pieces; form boards; peg boards; stacking toys; riding toys with wheels low to the ground
18–24 months	Toys for the sandbox and for water play: spoons, shovels, pails of various sizes. Storybooks, blocks in a variety of sizes, dolls, stuffed animals, puppets and miniature life toys

Hughes (2010, p. 51)

infants grow older, their functional play becomes progressively more elaborate, integrated and other person-directed (Fenson & Ramsay, 1981).

Below is a generic list of toys that are generally suitable for children at certain ages (birth to 2 years). However, in suggesting these items for this age group, it is not the adult's responsibility, nor role, to demonstrate the various ways in which the infant or toddler may use an object. Infants (birth to 2 years) are not capable of manipulating a toy in the same skilful way as an adult. Consequently, rather than frustrating a baby or toddler, who may be incapable of engaging with a toy as it was originally intended to be played with, infants need to be given time to explore, to manipulate objects and to interact with other babies and adults.

For a newborn, the primary value of a toy is for sensory stimulation. By 6–12 months of age, children's fine motor skill development allows them to use a variety of single objects, and children of this age enjoy toys that react to their own actions. By 12–18 months of life, toys that capitalize on a child's developing gross motor skills are generally favoured. While in the second year of life, with children's gross and fine motor skills continuing to improve, sensory experiences such as sand play, play dough or the water trough become popular play zones. The following list of suggested toys was composed using appropriate developmental guidelines (Table 3.2).

In addition to providing age- and skill-appropriate toys for children, adults can maximize the enjoyment of toy play with very young infants by avoiding the common practice of completing or altering an activity for a baby. For example, stacking a block on top of another or picking up an infant and moving them to another area of the nursery floor without warning, in the interests of offering a 'better' or 'more interesting' toy for the child to play with, may leave the infant feeling bewildered, facing a new piece of equipment of the adult's choosing. An infant might easily experience frustration if, as they try to reach an object during their first journey

towards movement, an unaware adult has picked up and moved that object a little further out of reach. Indeed it might not be surprising that over time, some infants become withdrawn and unresponsive, while others burst into a tantrum out of sheer frustration, after their attempts to play and communicate have been misinterpreted or missed by adults unaware of their changing developmental needs. The next section of this chapter relates to active infant participation in adult-infant play interactions.

3.5 Social Focus

A second domain involved in the development of play for birth to 2-year-olds is social development. According to the research of developmental psychologists Trevarthen and Logotheti (1989), there appears to be a universal three-stage pattern in social development in the first year of life. In the first stage, the focus is on people, with particular interest in the child's mother. There follows a second stage where the focus on people continues, but is supplemented with a strong and separate focus on objects and their properties. By the end of the first year, the third stage emerges in which the people focus is conjoined with the object focus. This joint focus occurs both in the context of early play (object exploration) and in the communication signals of looking at object and adult.

The first stage of people focus begins during the early weeks of life. The infant responds to human faces by tracking and by a pause in breathing that signals special attention (Brazleton, 1982). By 4–6 weeks of age, the infant has established a rhythmical attention/non-attention pattern in interaction with the mother that is smooth and suggests a form of early reciprocity (Brazelton, 1982; Trevarthen, 1986). By 8 weeks of age, the infant is responding differently to the mother compared to a stranger (Fogel, Diamond, Langhorst & Demos, 1982). By 12 weeks of age, the infant is responding to unexpected changes in the mother's response patterns that violate rules of experience (Cohn & Tronick, 1982).

By 3 months of age, while continuing to be quite involved with people, the infant is beginning to also show an increasing interest in the world at large, with the earliest object exploration beginning in mouthing (Trevarthen, 1986; Trevarten & Logotheti, 1989). During the period from approximately 5–9 months, the infant experiences an intense sensory motor focus on object exploration (Kaye, 1982; Trevarthen, 1986). This corresponds to the emerging cognitive abilities and the infant's expanding knowledge of objects and object relations.

Then, at approximately 9 months of age, the infant's interest in objects and in people merges. This merger marks the beginning of intentional communication. According to Trevarthen (1986), the child is now interested in shared meaning. This shift to an interest in the other person's ideas about objects is also noted by other investigators, particularly as it relates to a shift in communication focus (Bates et al., 1975; Harding, 1984; Olswang & Carpenter, 1982; Sugarman, 1984). Generally, this combining of the infant's object world and their people world marks

the infant's graduation from apprenticeship and entrance into the illocutionary stage of communication with all of the social implications of such a partnership (Bates et al., 1975; Kaye, 1982; Trevarthen, 1986).

3.5.1 Person-Directed Play

From around 10 months, infants begin to initiate interactions with the primary aim of provoking laughter or some kind of emotional reaction in their caregivers (Reddy, 1991). This 'person-directed play' includes behaviours such as teasing, clowning and showing off. Teasing involves the performance of acts of obstruction, quasi-aggression or non-compliance in order to provoke a response from another (Reddy, 1991). For example, by 12 months many infants will intentionally offer an object to another person's face with a half-smile. Such interactions may develop into more ritualistic games, such as chasing, or they may stand as isolated incidents.

Provocative violations of prohibitions relating to objects are also seen to emerge in typical infants by 12 months (Reddy, 1991). These may take the form of either watchful, unsmiling testing of the prohibitions not to touch certain things, or of a cheeky, smiling testing. They appear soon after the beginnings of sensitivity to the prohibitions themselves and, like teasing with offering and withdrawing things, may lead to games of other sorts, or may be isolated incidents. Clowning involves the performance of exaggerated acts in order to obtain a reaction of laughter from other people, such as the infant deliberately putting their shoes on their head in order to make someone laugh. Showing off refers to the production of newly learned conventional gestures with the aim of obtaining other people's attention/approval. Such behaviours require both an interest in the emotional reactions of other people and a desire to elicit them, as well as the ability to perceive (and respond to) causal links between one's own actions and the reactions to other people.

3.6 Adult-Infant Play

3.6.1 Face-to-Face Interaction

By 3 months of age, infants' growing capacity to sustain eye contact, to smile and to coo enables them to take a more active role in face-to-face play with an adult. Such interactions are characterized by complex, reciprocal patterns of engagement, in which parents exaggerate their expressions and insert their vocalizations in between those of their infant, as well as imitating the child's facial expressions and motor movements, giving rise to the earliest form of turn-taking (Stern, 1977). In these so called 'proto-conversations', (Bateson 1975) parents scaffold (Bruner, 1978) their infant's participation as a social partner in a conversational exchange,

treating themselves as the listener and the infant as the predominant 'speaker'. The parent maintains constant eye contact with the infant, watches for or tries to elicit a response, asks questions and waits for 'answers', providing one of their own if none is forthcoming (Messer & Vietze, 1984). Experimental perturbations of mother-infant face-to-face interactions indicate that the infant is highly sensitive and responsive to the quality of the adult communication (Cohn & Tronick, 1989).

3.6.2 Conventional Social Games

From around 6–12 months, parent-infant interactions undergo a significant qualitative change. Both mothers and fathers shift from the predominant use of play involving physical stimulation, such as tickling and rough and tumble, to a preference for conventional turn-taking games and toy-mediated play (Crawley & Sherrod, 1984). The ritualized repetition of traditionally defined motor patterns with a clearly demarcated, reversible, role structure characterizes conventional social games such as peekaboo and pat-a-cake (Bruner & Sherwood, 1976). In the case of peekaboo, for example, the basic rules of initial mutual attention, followed by hiding, then reappearance and the re-establishment of contact, can be varied according to whether the parent or infant hides and/or uncovers themselves (Bruner & Sherwood, 1976).

At first, such interactions lack genuine turn-taking as infants show little understanding of the parental utterances and gestures associated with these communicative games (Platt & Coggins, 1990). However, increasing development of sensorimotor and social communication skills allows the infant, from about 8 months onwards, to recognize that the adult's behaviours are linked with the ongoing game and to take a more active role in initiating and executing the different 'moves' required. By 12 months of age, an infant's behaviour is typically no longer contextually determined, and they make increasing use of customary gestures and vocalizations, linked to specific social-action games, to initiate interaction with their parents (Platt & Coggins, 1990).

3.6.3 Social Interactions with Adults

Research also suggests that the acquisition of early communicative and linguistic skills in infants is facilitated by conventional turn-taking games and social interactions focused around objects, both of which typically emerge in the first year of life (Tomasello & Farrar, 1986). According to Bruner (1982), the predictable communicative formats, which emerge between the infant and caregiver in reciprocal back and forth games, structurally underpin many features of language. Empirical evidence suggests that the comprehension of referential language, lexical learning and the appropriation by the infant of the social rules governing conversational

pragmatics are all facilitated by joint object engagement (Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Tomasello & Todd, 1983). Early social interactions that focused around objects have also been associated with the development of some of the abilities required for relating successfully to other people, including the regulation of affect and recognition that other people have minds distinct from one's own (Hobson 1999).

In summary, during the first year of life, the infant moves from a strong people focused interaction through a period of intense object focus and finally to a point at approximately 10 months of age where the interest in objects and people come together in a joint focus. The joint focus marks the beginning of the illocutionary stage of intentionality in communication, which is represented in the pre-linguistic signal of looking that takes account of both an object and the adult. Underlying this developmental progression in communication is the shared involvement of the infant and the adult in a collaborative process of interaction, in which the adult's role is to provide guidance and support as the infant becomes increasingly involved through the development of increasingly complex behaviours.

3.6.4 The Assessment of Play

For some time early childhood educators have recognized the imperative for research to be undertaken on the assessment of play, its procedures and processes (Gallagher, Malone, Cleghorne & Helms, 1997). In particular, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in the use of play as an assessment paradigm in the field of early childhood special education used to supplement the results of standardized tests (Eisert & Lamorey, 2010). Standardized tests such as the Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Bayley, 1969) and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale (Thorndike, Hagen & Sattler, 1986) are commonly used to assess young children. However, there is a growing disenchantment with such measures (Eisert & Lamorey, 2010) since standardized tests administered to young children do not provide relevant information about children's problem-solving strategies, their learning styles, their abilities to organize and structure their worlds or their functional skills in the context of home and school settings (Bailey, 1989; Zelaso, 1982).

Play as an assessment paradigm for the birth to 2-year age-group addresses the shortcomings of traditional assessment protocols. As a dominant developmental activity during early childhood, play provides an authentic and naturalistic context for the observation of skills that are functional to very young children (Linder, 1990); and a play assessment can be done in a nonthreatening and unobtrusive manner (Fewel & Kaminski, 1988). Since play skills follow a regular developmental sequence from infancy through early childhood, play has the potential to become a viable, psychometrically sound and 'child-friendly' tool that offers an ideal opportunity for early childhood personnel to engage fully with the very young children placed in their care (Belsky & Most, 1981). Additional research will be required to illustrate the relationship of play to the major developmental domains.

3.7 Conclusion

Appropriate play encompasses the development of a class of behaviours that embody the skills typical of newborns, infants and toddlers who participate in all early childhood settings. This chapter has been a comprehensive and illustrative review of a psychological orientation to the development of the play, typical of children in the first 2 years of life. A critical analysis of the literature has shown that some investigators propose extensive taxonomies of the development of play for this age group, ranging from the first assimilative interaction an infant has with objects to young children's organized pretend play scenes (Nicholich, 1977; Piaget, [1945b]1951). By contrast, other researchers limit their investigations to very early specific developmental spans (Uzgiris & Hunt, 1975), while a third group covers larger developmental spans ranging, for example, from the presence of sensorimotor exploratory acts through to some early evidence of planned symbolic acts (Nicholich, 1977; Ungerer et al., 1981).

Very young infants' play schemes are initially determined by sensorimotor action schemes such as mouthing and banging. Gradually, their play actions shift to more controlled and coordinated actions on objects. This then gives way to behaviours wherein toddlers begin to use objects more functionally in accordance with their typical conventional purposes and to demonstrate play behaviours that appear to mimic real life activities. Consequently, a major infant accomplishment during the first year of life is the ability to coordinate sensorimotor schemes to achieve a goal, e.g. a child may bang a brush, as well as brush a cup or even a doll's face (Crawley & Sherrod, 1984). However, it is clear that as children approach their second year of life, the quality of their play changes dramatically (Casby, 2003). During their second year of life, toddlers begin to demonstrate a developing symbolic functioning in their play. This is evidenced in their use of familiar objects in a functional manner (e.g. using a brush to brush their hair or to brush a doll's hair), as well as through their use of substitute objects (e.g. pretending that a brush is a telephone).

The value of play lies in its capacities to regulate a child's interactions with the environment, facilitate the development of certain skills (Wolery & Bailey, 1989) and provide an authentic and naturalistic context for the observation of functional skills in young children (Linder, 1990). A commitment to the value of play as a vehicle for young children's early learning and development, along with an appreciation of the particular physical and psychological characteristics of infants, implies that the nature of the infant-teacher's work is complex and unique. Hence, the multidimensional nature of infant teaching and caring must be taken into account in preparing early childhood educators for the role of supporting infant learning through play.

To optimize early childhood programs involving play, further research is needed to address the questions such as whether certain early play behaviours need to be in place prior to the emergence of more sophisticated forms and the extent to which early forms of play underpin the development of language, cognition, social communication and affect. For example, in the case of children with developmental

disabilities, it is clear that certain early developmental skills need to be established and practiced so as to become part of the child's repertoire, before one can expect a child to be able to use or be capable of learning more mature play skills.

Glossary

Attachment Refers to the strong affectionate tie we have with special people in our lives that leads us to feel pleasure when we interact with them and to be comforted by their nearness in times of stress

Basic space concepts Include those of body size and the space required for movement of the body and its parts

Motor development Refers to both fine motor (use of fingers and hands) and gross motor (use of legs and arms) body movement

Perceptual-motor development Means interpreting and integrating movement with what is seen, felt, heard and smelled so that the child can respond appropriately to the demands of the world and can learn basic concepts relative to space and time

Spatial relationships Refer to such terms as: in, out, up, down, under, over, to, away, around, through, inside and outside. Essential temporal or time concepts include terms such as before, after, first, last, next, faster and slower

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Chapter 4
Looking Deeper: Play and the Spiritual Dimension

Cathie Harrison and Christine Robinson

Abstract This chapter investigates the connections between play and the spiritual dimension. Curriculum and policy documents in early childhood education frequently make reference to play and the 'whole child' and holistic approaches which include the spiritual and moral dimension. Such comments reflect both historical influences and philosophical perspectives in early childhood education and current understandings of the importance of play for learning; for physical, social and emotional well-being; and for authentic experience in relationship with others. These perspectives on children's play help to position play as complex and fundamental to the child's emerging sense of self and connectedness. An examination of the literature on the nature of spiritual and sacred encounters during early childhood provides further insight to the multifaceted and complex phenomenon of children's play by drawing attention to aspects of play which may be overlooked. We include vignettes of children's play to illustrate the nature of play and the spiritual dimension, and these examples position children as experts of play and the sacred. The child's spiritual encounters in play are subsequently juxtaposed with the neo-liberalist economic agenda that currently prevails in Australian political discourse. We argue that this discourse threatens aspects of early childhood education that may be the most important for long-term individual and community well-being. We propose that the processes and dispositions evident in play and the sacred are fundamental to human flourishing and are fertile ground for generating community and connectedness.

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4.1 Introduction

The notion of play has a long and significant history in the scholarly literature. This is particularly apparent in relation to the place of play in the early years of human development and learning. From as far back as philosophers such as Plato, play has been identified as a source of learning about self, other and the world. As early childhood education has become increasingly formalised over the centuries, play has been identified as a fundamental tenet of childhood pedagogy. While play has been recognised as integral to childhood experience, it has also been identified as difficult to define and understand (Huizinga, 1950; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Nagel, 2002). Play has been described as ambiguous and paradoxical (Sutton Smith, 1997) and as a complex phenomenon worthy of in-depth examination. For some scholars and theorists, the in-depth examination of play has been primarily linked to development, for others learning and for some the spiritual dimension. The spiritual dimension of play is one aspect of children's play that features less in contemporary pedagogy and practice and although difficult to conceptualise, it is worthy of greater consideration.

In this chapter we explore the connections between play and the spiritual dimension. We position this discussion within the contemporary Australian context of early childhood education and care [ECEC]. Challenges within the current political landscape are juxtaposed with the historical and philosophical traditions that frame play as a complex and profound phenomenon within human experience. The nature of spiritual encounters during early childhood is explored with reference to the academic literature, and several vignettes which describe young children at play are then provided to highlight the qualities of the spiritual dimension of play. The chapter concludes with a consideration of a number of implications which suggest that in play, young children engage their spiritual capacities and demonstrate mindfulness, meditative practices and connectedness that can contribute to individual and community well-being.

4.2 Historical and Philosophical Perspectives: Play in ECEC

Play as fundamental to childhood experience and to ECEC in particular has its roots in early Greek and Roman philosophy. The philosopher Plato (424–347 BC) asserted, 'Let your child's education take the form of play' (Entwistle, 2012, p. 11). Comments by the Swiss philosopher, Rousseau, reflect these ideas and are evident in the following quote (Weber, 1984, p. 28):

> Work and play are all one for him, his games are his work; he knows no difference. He brings to everything the cheerfulness of interest, the charm of freedom, and he shows the bent of his own mind and the extent of his knowledge.

Others, such as the Swiss educator Pestalozzi (1746–1827) and the German philosopher and teacher Fröbel (1782–1852), recognised the value of the child's

intrinsically motivated activity and the integrated nature of learning and development through playful activity; 'through play the child achieves harmony and develops knowledge and skills for life' ([1974]1997, p. 54). Fröbel further described the importance of play in learning:

> Play is the purest most spiritual activity of man at this stage and, at the same time, typical of human life as a whole – of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things. It gives therefore joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world. It holds the sources of all that is good. (Fröbel, [1826]1887, pp. 54–55)

Fröbel identified the significance of unity, the underlying oneness and interconnectedness of man, nature and God (Braun & Edwards, 1972). The spiritual dimension of play outlined by Fröbel was subsequently explored by others such as Steiner (1861–1925) and, to a lesser degree, Maria Montessori (1870–1952).

The educational philosopher Rudolf Steiner emphasised the spiritual dimension of the early years of life as being the most significant. Steiner noted that each person is 'the expression of a divine spiritual being that descends from purely spirit-soul existence and evolves here in physical-body existence between birth and death' (Allen, 1970, p. 23). For Steiner, the spiritual journey of the individual is also fundamentally connected to the spiritual well-being of the whole – in terms of all humanity, with the purpose of evolution being the attainment of divinity:

> Each human life embodies a dual process of personal unfoldment and species evolution. Unfoldment is the growth of the individual toward the manifestation of full potential. Evolution is the same kind of growth for the human species. (Marshak, 1997 p. 36)

Steiner argued that during the first 7 years, the child learns through the senses and by imitation and therefore needs 'love, high quality of care and good examples […] and the child needs to learn gratitude to the spiritual world for the wonders of the universe' (Marshak, 1997, pp. 40–41). Steiner also articulated three qualities essential for teachers: love of fellow human beings, understanding the process of unfoldment including respect of the child's inner teacher and recognition that pedagogy is an art based on thinking and feeling and not a science. He stated that:

> In true methods of education it can never be a question of considering the child just as it is at any given moment, but the whole of its passage through life from birth to death; for the seed of the whole earth is already present from the first. (Steiner, 1928 p. 107)

Early education for Steiner involved the complex interplay between teacher and child in which the teacher influences the child's experiences so that the experiences of education and care are continuous and congruent with the child's own process of becoming (Marshak, 1997). For Rudolph Steiner the process of becoming was a process of unfoldment or spiritual emergence.

The educational methods of Maria Montessori, which focus on practical life skills, are more well known than the spiritual foundations evident in her original writings. Montessori, like Fröbel and Steiner, perceived the interconnectedness of life and valued the harmony evident in nature, with all living things serving a unique cosmic function. 'All things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity' (Montessori, 1973, p. 8) and humanity 'God's prime

agent in creation' (1973, p. 26). Within this view of life, Montessori believed that childhood was a time for the spiritual, commenting 'we must take into consideration that from birth the child has a power in him. We must not just see the child, but God in him. We must respect the laws of creation in him' (1989 p. 98) and further '[i]t was Christ who showed us what the child really is, the adult's guide to the Kingdom of Heaven' (Montessori, 1972a, p. 86). Montessori conceptualised the young child not just in terms of biological or psychological development but as a 'spiritual embryo', a spiritual energy seeking expression in the form of a human body within the physical and cultural world (Montessori, 1972b, p. 29). Montessori believed that the role of education is spiritual renewal and that democratic processes, social justice and community connectedness are the result of the emergence of the divine potential within each human spirit. Education, as an authentic catalyst for social change, must therefore be founded in more than an intellectual commitment. To encompass the deeply spiritual, it must embody genuine love and respect for others and for the world (Montessori, 1973).

In more recent times, the discipline of educational psychology and the theories of Piaget, Vygotsky and Erikson have dominated the early childhood developmental discourses of the West. However links back to the perspectives of preceding philosophers and theorists, whose work was guided by an emphasis on the spiritual dimension of childhood, can be identified. Notions of emergence are reflected in Piaget's emphasis on the stages of development associated with the child's construction of knowledge (Piaget, [1945]1951), the importance of connectedness and relationships are evident in Vygotsky's view of the sociocultural construction of knowledge (1978) and the stages of psychosocial development during childhood as proposed by Erikson (1950) are reminiscent of an emphasis on the emerging self through processes of becoming.

While understandings of children's play continue to be challenged and refined in theory and practice, the implicit complexity of play remains. Scholars such as Johnson, Christie and Wardle note that 'play is fluid and dynamic, with a plethora of meanings which makes it almost impossible to adequately define, almost any pursuit or act could be play simply by how we frame it' (2005, p. 11). Nagel asserts that while play is a common and easily recognised phenomenon in children's lives, 'play is an elusive term which defies all conceptualization, in part because we are already so familiar with it' (2002, p. 1). Such commentary alludes to the importance of retaining an open and inquiring perspective on play, to be surprised and awed by the mystery and inexplicable aspects of children's play and to look more deeply at the spiritual dimensions of children's play. As Heubner noted:

> To say that a person 'has spirit' suggests going beyond the forms and norms of everyday life: To 'have spirit' is to be in touch with forces or aspects of life that make possible something new and give hope and expectations. Spirit refers to the possible and the unimagined – to the possibility of new ways, new knowledge, new relationships, new awareness [...] This going beyond, this 'moreness' of life, this transcendent dimension is the usual meaning of 'spirit' and 'spiritual'. (1999, pp. 343–344)

4.3 The Nature of Spiritual Encounters During Early Childhood

Play is easily recognised, but as suggested in the previous section, it is difficult to define. The elusive nature of play is further complicated when viewed as an opportunity for children to engage their spiritual capacities. The term 'spiritual' is also complex and elusive (Eaude, 2009; King, 2013; Ng, 2012), and there are relatively few studies that investigate this term in relation to very young children (King, 2013). Benson, Roehlkepartain and Rude (2003) acknowledge this difficulty in interpretation by stating that it is a 'definitional challenge'. However, they endeavour to define the term as follows:

> Spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental 'engine' that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices. (Benson et al., 2003, p. 205)

This definition characterises several features of spirituality and also identifies the distinction that exists between the spiritual and the religious. Spirituality is described by Hyde as being concerned 'with a person's sense of connectedness and relationship with self, others, the cosmos, and for many, with a transcendent dimension (God)' (2010, p. 506). Every child has the innate capacity to be spiritual, to be connected and to be in a relationship. Hyde explains that spirituality is a 'natural human predisposition, something that people are born with' (2010, p. 506); however, it can be expressed in a variety of ways (Scott, 2003; Tacey, 2004). Spirituality can be expressed through a connection to the sacred or transcendent and therefore correlated with religious beliefs (Long, 2000). It is also possible that spirituality is expressed without any connection to religion, and so literature on spirituality often attempts to emphasise that a person can be spiritual without being religious (Grajczonek, 2012).

In drawing further on the definition provided by Benson et al. et al. (2003), several features of spirituality can be identified. Spirituality is commonly associated with the internal sense of searching – searching for meaning in one's life – and therefore involves a connection to the self (Scheindlin, 1999; Sifers, Warren, & Jackson, 2012). The notion of 'connectedness' to both self and other is agreed upon as being a characteristic of the spiritual domain (Hay & Nye, 2006). MacDonald (2009) espouses that the spiritual awareness of the self is linked to the development of identity, as individuals seek to answer questions such as 'Who am I?' and 'What is my purpose?' Similarly, Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery and Colwell (2006) explain the relationship between spirituality and identity as the 'persistent sense of self that addresses ultimate questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life, resulting in behaviours that are consonant with the individual's core values' (p. 1269). These ultimate questions draw a person beyond themselves, connecting them with the spiritual nature of their existence.

Connectedness, as a characteristic of spirituality, is also recognised in relation to others and the environment (Benson et al., 2003; Grajczonek, 2012; Scheindlin, 1999). Hay and Nye (2006) express this sense of connectedness as 'relational consciousness', describing the way in which a person engages with others and the environment and locates him or herself in relation to these. The relationship between environmental connectedness and a person's search for meaning is explored by Howell, Passmore and Buro (2013) who discuss the extent to which 'nature provides us with feelings and experiences of self-transcendence, connectedness, and continuity in an unstable world' (p. 1683). Skamp (1991) states that spirituality is 'central to our relationship with the environment' (p. 84) and argues that environmental education is a necessity for our children.

Connectedness to the transcendent or sacred realm is a further characteristic of spirituality (Long, 2000). Spirituality is described as being part of something that is larger than oneself, and when this is associated with religion, it is about the connection with a divine presence – a God (Shaw, 2005). Love and Talbot (1999, p. 4) explain that spiritual development 'involves the process of continually transcending one's current locus of centricity', highlighting the sense of going beyond the self to engage with the sacred.

The need for spirituality to be nurtured and awakened in childhood is not only acknowledged in literature but has become embedded in policy (Grajczonek, 2012). The innate capacity to be spiritual as well as the need for spirituality to be nurtured has been recognised in the early childhood frameworks for practice such as the document, Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009), which mandates practice in early childhood within Australia. The EYLF defines 'spiritual' as 'a range of human experiences including a sense of awe and wonder, and an exploration of being and knowing' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 46) and connects spirituality to the themes of belonging, being and becoming within early childhood.

Scheindlin (1999) describes dispositions that emerge when children have an opportunity to develop their innate spiritual capacity. Building children's capacities for curiosity and experiences of wonder is a means of assisting children to make connections between themselves and their surrounding world. Other dispositions that may emerge include compassion, curiosity and creativity, respect, wonder and awe (Goodliff, 2013; Harris, 2013; Kiesling et al., 2006; Wenman, 2001). Harris explains that children's spirituality is creative and that, when nurtured, encourages both self-awareness and an awareness of others. Goodliff's investigation into the way 2- and 3-year-olds express spirituality found that it was multidimensional in that children's imaginative play provided opportunities of 'compassion, inner-reflection, transcendence and the meaning-making of identity' (p. 1067). Research also indicates that the capacity for resilience and the development of self-identity are supported through engaging with the spiritual dimension of the self (Kiesling et al., 2006), and therefore children need to be engaged with their entire being.

Nurturing children's spirituality involves providing opportunities for 'silence, meaning, questioning, bodily or kinaesthetic awareness, focussing, reflection, use

of one's imagination' (Ng, 2012, p. 183). Such experiences open children to the possibility of the spiritual – to connect with the self, others, the environment and ultimately the sacred. Spirituality, which involves learning new things and relating them to the meaning of life, can only develop in a safe environment in which children feel secure to express their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Jackson, 2012, p. 3). Children's play provides circumstances where these dispositions can emerge, and so play can be viewed as an avenue for an exploration of the spiritual dimension.

4.4 The Current Australian Context

Current curriculum and policy documents in early childhood education in Australia make reference to play and the 'whole child' including the spiritual dimension of learning and development (DEEWR, 2009; Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2011). For example, EYLF, the national curriculum framework for early childhood education, notes that '[c]hildren's learning is dynamic, complex and holistic. Physical, social, emotional, personal, spiritual, creative, cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning are all intricately interwoven and interrelated' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 10). Play is advocated as a context for learning that allows for the expression of personality and uniqueness, enhances dispositions such as curiosity and creativity, enables children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning, assists children to develop relationships and concepts and stimulates a sense of well-being (DEEWR, 2009, p. 10). In the EYLF the well-being of children is highlighted. The document notes that:

> Well-being results from the satisfaction of basic needs – the need for tenderness and affection; security and clarity; social recognition; physical needs and for meaning in life. It includes happiness and satisfaction, effective social functioning and the dispositions of optimism, openness, curiosity and resilience. (DEEWR, 2009, p. 46

The title of the EYLF, 'Belonging, Being and Becoming', emphasises the significance of early experience for long-term individual well-being and community connectedness (DEEWR, 2009). In explaining the title, the following is provided:

> Belonging acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of in defining identities and is central to Childhood as a time to be, to seek and make meaning of the world. Being recognises the significance of the here and now in children's lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life's joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life… Becoming reflects this process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as young children learn and grow. It emphasises learning to participate fully and actively in society. (DEEWR, 2009, pp. 7–8)

This person-centred and multidimensional view of ECEC has its foundations in historical and philosophical perspectives in early childhood education. Such views are also reinforced by current understandings of the early years as a unique time in the life span for neural development (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011; Tierney

& Nelson, 2009), the development of secure relationships and attachment to significant others (Hoffman, Marvin, Cooper, & Powell, 2006), and a time when learning best occurs through play and direct and authentic experience in relationship with others and the world (Brown & Vaughn, 2009; Elkind, 2007; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009; Paley, 2004; Pramling & Carlson, 2008). Bone, Cullen and Loveridge (2007) identify spiritual experience in every day as an aspect of the ECEC holistic curriculum in action.

4.5 Current Challenges

Although the priority given to the well-being of young children is evident in the EYLF published in 2009, the neoliberal economic agenda, which dominates the Australian political landscape, has gained precedence in conceptualisations of education in Australia (Davies, 2014). An increased emphasis on the economic value of the individual and education for future work place productivity is more and more evident in government rhetoric and policy. As Davies comments:

> It suits our current neoliberal governments, in particular, to think of everyone in a community as having measurable and manipulable characteristics, and to this end, to think of community and its members as entities, or objects that can be pinned down, categorised and made predictable. (2014, p. 7)

The 2014 budget, of the current Liberal National Party government, in Australia further established this direction for government policy. As commentator Andrew Hamilton (2014) noted, 'The ideology underpinning the Budget and the understanding of the role of government is that human beings have value measured to the contribution they make to economic growth'. National testing regimes within the school system reflect the neoliberal worldview and the focus on individual productivity through standardised testing of academic performance in literacy and numeracy.

The neoliberal discourse has also contributed to the reframing of the prior to school sector of ECEC in terms of a discourse of economic productivity. The importance of maximising national economic productivity through the provision of childcare services for working parents was particularly evident in the Terms of Reference determined by the Treasurer for the Public Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning to be undertaken by the Australian National Productivity Commission under the new federal government.

The Australian Government is committed to establishing a sustainable future for a more flexible, affordable and accessible child care and early childhood learning market that helps underpin the national economy and supports the community, especially parent's choices to participate in work and learning and children's growth, welfare, learning and development (Hockey, 2011).

As a result of these developments, some aspects of the human experience previously considered fundamental to early childhood experience, lifelong well-being

and community connectedness, such as play-based learning, and the spiritual dimension have been overshadowed by an emphasis on academic skills and performance in literacy and numeracy. The ECEC profession has utilised research regarding the long-term benefits of early education and care as justification for government investment in early childhood provisions and teacher quality (Brown, Sumsion, & Press, 2009). For example, research by Warren and Haisken–DeNew (2013) identified the contribution of a qualified teacher to the value of the ECEC experience for children's school success as measured in national testing. However it was Warren's comment, 'Children who went to preschool in the year prior to their first formal year of schooling had significantly higher levels of academic achievement as measured by NAPLAN scores in year 3' (Warren, 2013) which was most widely reported in the popular press. Research results such as this has contributed to the commitment to the national provision of 15 h of affordable 'preschool' for all 4-year-old children. In preparation for the future individualised testing in literacy and numeracy and childcare for working parents, we suggest shifts in the intrinsic value of the child and notions of 'belonging, being and becoming' (DEEWR, 2009) from the human value of children to current cost and future economic value.

Support for the well-being of all young children and their families and the child's right to play have been subject to colonisation (Cannella, 1997) in international contexts as well. In the United States, for example, Ginsburg (2007) identified the reasons for the reduction of unstructured, child-driven play. The reasons included the demands of an increasingly pressured and hurried lifestyle, the increasing pressure for children to begin building their college resumes at much younger ages, the impact of 'No Child Left Behind' that has shifted focus to teaching and testing 'academic' skills (e.g. reading and arithmetic) and the impact of technology, which has resulted in children being passively entertained by television, computer and/or video games.

The concern regarding threats to play in contemporary childhoods has been recognised internationally and is evident in the call for an international review of Article 31 of the Child's Right to Play, as undertaken by the United Nations in 2012. The resulting report notes the impact of a number of factors including increasing educational demands, which are adversely affecting children's opportunity to enjoy their right to play. The International Play International Play Association (2013) affirms the child's right to play with the following comments:

> The rights embodied in Article 31 are central to childhood itself: they contribute to the joy, fun and sheer pleasure of growing up. Furthermore, their implementation will contribute to children's development, not only as individuals, but also as competent members of society aware of the perspectives of others, and capable of co-operation and conflict resolution. Article 31 contributes to the social, cultural and economic development of society as a whole. The right to play, recreation, rest, leisure and participation in cultural and artistic life is not only a fundamental right of every child, but its realization will bring significant individual and societal benefits.

4.6 Vignettes: The Nature of Play and the Spiritual Dimension in Young Children's Lives

Young children's spiritual sensitivity has been considered in terms of three categories by Hay and Nye (2006) and Nye and Hay (1996). These include firstly 'awareness sensing' which Hay and Nye suggest is evident when young children are totally absorbed in an experience or deep play. This is akin to what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has described as the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). The second category is identified as 'mystery sensing', which includes awe, wonder and imagination that young children demonstrate in response to phenomena they encounter or events in their lives. The third category 'value sensing' can be observed as children make meaning from events, stories and experiences in various ways which Hay and Nye entitle delight and despair, ultimate goodness and meaning. Further, Hay and Nye suggest that children's spiritual sensitivity can be apparent through the close observation of children engaged in play and daily life (Hay & Nye, 2006, 2006; Nye & Hay, 1996). The following vignettes illustrate the nature of play and its engagement with the innate spiritual capacity within young children. The vignettes are offered as illustrations of the child's encounter with the spiritual nature of their being. The work of Hay and Nye has been selected as a frame for considering the spiritual nature of children's play as it is well regarded within the field of children's spirituality. There is limited research that articulates the spiritual capacity of the young child, and the work of Hay and Nye provides the most appropriate frame for viewing the spiritual nature of children's play.

4.6.1 Vignette: 'Self', 'Other' and 'Connectedness'

Ruby and Joshua, both aged 4 years, were playing in a semi-secluded area of the outdoor play space. I sat close by as a quiet observer watching and listening and wondering what would emerge. Screened by high grasses, the two children were busy creating an enclosure using some large vinyl-covered blocks which they had commandeered from another area of the playground. They then collected some lengths of fabric and pillows from the storage shed. The two children worked together creating soft bed-like spaces, almost as if they were creating a safe and secluded nest. After snuggling in Ruby called me closer and asked, 'Can you pat my back?' I quietly and gently complied still wondering about the intention of the play. Josh whispered 'Me too. Rub my back too'. 'Tuck us in', said Ruby. 'Tuck us in tight; make sure the blanket is all around. We need to be snug and tight. The babies need to feel safe'. 'I have a pain, a tummy ache', said Josh and he started to whimper. 'Me too. I have colic. Sometimes I throw up', said Ruby. I continued patting and rubbing the backs of both children tucking the fabric blanket in tight and in a quiet voice hushing the babies. I started to sing quietly. Joshua snuggled further down into this cocoon he had created for himself and started to suck his thumb.

Ruby said, 'That's ok Josh you can suck your thumb. You can be baby too, here with me. I can be a baby here with you', and she too snuggled her body down and continued making a soft whimpering sound.

This quiet snuggling, whimpering, patting and crooning continued. It seemed to have become a space beyond words, a shared sacred space away from the busyness and business of the play that was going on for the other children just beyond the blocks and grasses. The play continued until all the children were called for morning tea. At first Ruby and Josh didn't respond then Ruby said, 'Come on Josh. It's morning tea. We have to go now'. The two children gently disentangled themselves and each other while I watched on in silence. They turned to go and then Ruby looked back at me and said in a quiet but serious voice, 'We have been babies. You were here. Don't tell our mothers'. Josh then seemed to regain his usual stature, standing straighter and taller. He took a deep breath 'Don't tell my mother either. She thinks I am big now because we have a baby'. Both Ruby and Josh had new babies in their families and adults in the centre frequently reminded them both collectively and individually that they were now 'big' sister and brother. This precious encounter demonstrates the contribution of play to the child's emerging understandings of self and other.

4.6.1.1 Comment

The children in this vignette used play to assist them to find their place amidst their changing worlds as they each connected with self and other. The well-known advocate for children's play, Vivian Paley, commented, when discussing the profound value of play for children, 'This is why play feels so good - discovering and using the essence of any part of ourselves is the most euphoric experience of all. It opens the blocked passages and establishes new routes' (1991, p. 6). The vignette lends itself as an illustration of the engagement of the spiritual sensitivity of the children. As McDonald (2009) explained, the concern with identity and sense of self-purpose are central characteristics of the spiritual.

These two children engaged with their innate spiritual capacity as they acted out their lived reality. For the adult observer, this experience was too valuable to be interfered with; indeed it was sacrosanct. Nothing was said to the 'mothers' and so the play remained a private matter as well as a precious memory. This opportunity to bear witness to this mutual exploration and expression of vulnerability, pain and sadness and the gentle nurturing that each child offered to the other was profound.

4.6.2 Vignette: 'Connectedness to Nature'

Three young children were observed as they played on the beach during a summer holiday. The youngest child, aged 18 months, sat on the sand close to the water's edge. She pushed her hands into the sand and watched as the water came up with

each wave, washed the sand away and fingers were revealed. She then grasped handfuls of wet runny sand and raised her two hands into the air and watched as the liquid sand slipped through her fingers and dripped onto her legs. This process continued until two legs disappeared under a wet sandy blanket. Then with a squeal of joy, she clambered to a standing position then ran to the water's edge. Once there she lay down, with her neck stretched and head extended, so that her face was mostly above the water. She watched and smiled as the waves washed the sandy blanket away. She repeated this pattern of play several times, each with intense focus and total immersion of her whole being.

4.6.2.1 Comment

This example of a child's play epitomises Hans' (1981, p. 9) claim that total involvement of the player in play removes the burden of being a discrete subject separate from the object, and in this 'ecstatic self-forgetfulness', both 'subject' and 'object' are inevitably changed.

Connectedness to nature and the dispositions of wonder, awe and curiosity are identified as facets of spirituality. The child displayed the dispositions of wonder, awe and curiosity as she connected with her natural surroundings. In doing so, she emanates relational consciousness within the realm of the spiritual. The young child plays, at one with the water and sand, to place herself in relationship with the environment. As Huebner commented when writing on spirituality and education, 'everyone experiences, and continues to have the possibility of experiencing the transcending of present forms of life, of finding that life is more than is presently known or lived' (1985, p 65).

In reviewing this vignette, the adult can interpret the young child's oneness with the environment and playful experience of these surroundings through the lens of the spiritual. From this perspective, experiences such as this allow the child the opportunity for self-transcendence and the perception of a connection to something deeper and greater than oneself. In his seminal work *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott (1971) describes play in humans as the essential connection between the self and the world that is characterised by full imaginative engagement between inner and outer life. This in-between space of play, which Winnicott calls the potential or transitional space, he suggests is the source of all creativity and health.

For the adult observer, this experience was also spiritual, a deeply felt reminder of the power of holistic presence to the 'here and now'. Witnessing the child's experience of mind, body and spirit together as one, in some inexplicable way, meant that the child acted as a conduit connecting the essence of the adult observer with the interconnected and expansive nature of the universe. The dispositions of wonder and awe were experienced by both adult and child. In the words of Charlotte Zolotow (1966, p. 24) in the children's book, *Big Sister and Little Sister*, '[l]ittle sister had learned from big sister and now they both knew how'.

4.6.3 Vignette: 'Connectedness to Self'

Further up the beach, another child aged four sat near some rocks adjacent to the rock platform. She was creating what she later described as 'a mermaid's palace'. She had created part of the palace with sand but was also using the hollows and crevices in the rocks as rooms and passageways. She had carefully placed small rocks as furniture and seemed to be intently searching through the flotsam and jetsam on the beach for more objects that could be used as decorative items for the mermaid's palace. Different sea objects were examined closely, textures felt and shapes and colours of shells, seaweed and pebbles described in quiet self-talk, 'Smooth, smooth, slippery smooth…You go here and you go there…'. These were quiet words spoken to no one in particular.

4.6.3.1 Comment

A playful encounter with materials offered opportunities for creative and fanciful sensory manipulation and organisation. Over the duration of the experience, a strong aesthetic sense also emerged and was evident in the attention to detail and awareness of pattern, form, balance and symmetry. This is reminiscent of Huizinga's reference to the profoundly aesthetic quality of children's play (1950, p. 20) and his comments regarding transcendence beyond the immediate remands of life:

> Play is more than a mere physiological phenomenon or a psychological reflex… In play there is something 'at play' which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to action. All play means something. If we call the active principle that makes up the essence of play, instinct we explain nothing: if we call it 'mind' or 'will' we say too much. However we may regard it, the very fact that play has a meaning, implies a non-materialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself. (Huizinga, 1950, p. 1)

The aesthetic response seemed to guide the joyous and careful placement of objects, and there appeared to be unity of thinking and emotions as described by Vygotsky (2004). El'koninova's (2001) investigation of the object orientation of children's play and their understanding of imaginary space and time in play and in stories highlights the opportunity to reflect on this possible insight to a child's internal world. She suggests that 'the features of the space and time of actions of children performing in this way give us an idea of their internal world and consciousness (self-awareness)' (El'koninova, 2001, p. 45).

The descriptive words used in self-talk indicated a sensitivity and responsiveness to the sensory qualities of the different materials and also seemed to serve as a reassuring mantra that screened out the world outside and helped to maintain a calm inner focus. There was a quiet meditative contentment evident within this mindful and imaginative relationship with found resources, a serious pleasure which appeared to the adult observer to be an example of the mindfulness that many adults seek through spiritual practice. It was as if time was suspended, as if all the other busyness of the beach setting faded away and the child's imaginative inner world

and the natural environment were one seamless reality. The apparently simple play experience deepened to become an intensely engaging and aesthetic experience, one that engaged the spiritual capacity in the way the child explored the essence of being.

4.6.4 Vignette: 'Connectedness to Mystery'

At the same time, as the small girl created her imaginary mermaid palace, an older child, perhaps about 6 years old, was intensely focused on digging holes in the sand. He dug several holes in a rough line between the water's edge and the back of the beach where the native grasses reached the sand. As an observer I wondered what was behind his apparent intensity of purpose and task commitment. After some time the boy returned to his parents and was heard to say, 'Do you know that when you dig near the water's edge, down by the shoreline you don't really have to dig at all to get water? Further up you have to dig deeper and right up there away from the water you have to dig quite a way down to get to the water table'.

4.6.4.1 Comment

For this child the purpose and motivation was an intellectual wondering and curiosity; a desire to clarify meaning through scientific investigation, to test a personally formulated hypothesis. This experience involved a serious but pleasurable process of self-discovery and subsequent reporting of the findings. The adult witness wondered – was this too a moment of play when mind, body and spirit combined with focussed attention with the same elements of sand and water? As with the previous vignette, the child displays a strong commitment to his own play and intense engagement with a self-directed task and yet paradoxically appeared to be transported beyond self into connection with some greater mystery. The notion of 'awareness sensing' described by Hay and Nye (2006) is recognised in this vignette as the children are inwardly absorbed and self-connected yet also engaged with the world beyond. The educational philosopher, Paulo Freire, describes the search for meaning and connection to the larger world:

> It is this human disposition to be surprised before people, what they do, say, seem like, before facts and phenomena, before beauty and ugliness, this un-refrainable need to understand in order to explain, to seek the reason for being of facts. It is this desire, always alive, of feeling, living realizing what lies in the realm of ones visions of depth. (Freire, 1997, p. 94)

As articulated by Freire, the inner desire, capacity to understand and willingness to be surprised demonstrated by the children offers an example of depth and vitality that can give both meaning and hope not just to the participant children but to the privileged adult observer.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter we have outlined a number of the historical and philosophical foundations of early childhood education and an overview of current context of ECEC in Australia. This discussion highlights some of the shifts in thinking that have occurred in relation to play and conceptions of the role of early childhood education in children's lives in our time and place.

Our discussion of the spiritual dimension draws attention to its place within play and our understandings of development and learning and its significance for the young child. The vignettes provided as examples of play and the spiritual dimension demonstrate that there is much still to be learnt about the spiritual capacity through observing and reflecting deeply about children at play. The examples illustrate that young children are experts at 'being' – being in the moment, being engaged with their world, being connected and belonging to each other and through being and belonging, becoming aware of the transcendent.

Creativity, wonder and awe, imagination, mindfulness and reflection are all capacities that the children in the vignettes displayed openly in play, but which are given little priority in the current Australian educational agenda. Such processes and dispositions are fundamental to human flourishing as well as fertile ground for generating community connectedness, outcomes which surpass individual economic productivity. As Huizinga argues:

> …the purposes it serves are external to immediate material interests or individual satisfaction of biological needs. As a sacred activity play naturally contributes to the well-being of the group but in quite another way and by other means that the acquisition of the necessities of life. (1950, p. 9)

The dispositions that emerge from engagement with the spiritual are a reminder that what is good for the child is good for the society.

The exploration of the vignettes seeks to emphasise the necessity for play in early childhood as it is fundamental to development, learning and well-being. The vignettes also emphasise the value of holistic approaches to education, and, in particular, the spiritual dimension. Providing opportunities for children to play and to engage with the spiritual, while not featured within current discussions of education, can assist in both individual and community well-being. Time given to such encounters is life giving and sacred for the privileged adult observer. The sense of connectedness, oneness and timelessness imprints these experiences so deeply that they are remembered as if etched into the psyche. As Jane Bone comments from her experiences of researching the spiritual aspects of children's lives:

> The spaces that emerged … were those of spiritual withness, the spiritual in-between and the spiritual elsewhere. To be spiritually with someone is to be in a space of intersubjectivity, closeness and shared attention, a space where a sense of connection is obvious. (Bone, 2010, p. 27)

Through the vignettes, young children are positioned as expert practitioners of play and the spiritual. Their openness to the spiritual dimension within daily encounters and connectedness with others and the natural world suggests that they

can be a source of wisdom for adults seeking to develop and practise the attitudes and processes of play, mindfulness and connectedness.

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Chapter 5
‘Muck-about’: Aboriginal Conceptions of Play and Early Childhood Learning

Denise Proud, Sandra Lynch, Cynthia à Beckett, and Deborah Pike

Abstract The personal recollections and reflections on play and playfulness of Denise Proud, a Murri woman from Queensland Australia, are the stimulus for this chapter’s exploration of Aboriginal understandings and attitudes towards play. Recounting her childhood experiences, Proud explains the role and significance of ‘muck-about’ play and making fun in Aboriginal life and introduces the concept of *Darn Najun Burri*. *Darn Najun Burri*, which emphasises empathetic engagement with others and the capacity to imagine oneself in the place of the other, is connected with the concept of grace and an imperative towards gratitude and counting one’s blessings. The significance of these concepts of ‘muck-about’ and of Aboriginal approaches to play in general is explored first within Aboriginal culture and secondly for the contribution they can make to broadening understandings of play, to best practice in early childhood education and to educational initiatives more generally in non-indigenous settings.

5.1 Denise Proud: Personal Reflections on Aboriginal Experiences of Play and Learning

I have always believed in the importance of play, especially for young children. In December 2013, I was invited to participate in a symposium on play entitled ‘State of Play: Birth and Beyond’, organised by academics at the Sydney Campus of the University of Notre Dame Australia. About 25 people attended the 1-day gathering.

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There were five small groups and each focused on a different aspect of play. While I shared many examples of my childhood experiences of play, I want to make it clear that I was sharing my own particular attitudes and understandings. These came from my observations and recollections and may not be representative of the experiences of all Aboriginal people. I have elaborated on some of them here.

I am a Murri woman, born on an Aboriginal settlement originally called Barambah and later named Cherbourg. This is Wakka Wakka country. From the early days until roughly the 1960s, the policies of various Australian governments were to segregate Aboriginal Australians from the rest of the community, and Barambah/Cherbourg was one of the places many Aboriginal people from around Queensland were forcibly settled. While Cherbourg was not an easy place in which to grow up under this policy, I am forever grateful for the memories, cultural protocols and the loving and strong family and community support I was given while growing up there.

In my late teens, I left Cherbourg to study early childhood education at Kindercraft, Brisbane. My qualification allowed me to move back to Cherbourg to open the first ever kindergarten there, with the encouragement and kindness of Ms Peggy Banff from the Queensland Creche and Kindergarten Association, who helped initiate the programme. After that I worked in a variety of early childhood settings throughout Queensland, from Aboriginal communities, mobile kindergartens, to multicultural suburban centres, and eventually I became an Aboriginal cultural advisor for the Creche and Kindergarten Association in Queensland.

While working at Injilinji Preschool in Mount Isa, I met my husband and we moved to Denver, Colorado. There I worked as a volunteer in a charity called 'The United Way' where I became involved in a range of educational settings for children and families. In 1989 we returned to Brisbane. After some time, I started working in correctional centres and juvenile detention centres, as well as occasionally in high schools and universities.

Reflecting on my experiences of play as a child, I recall that like any child from a disadvantaged community, my friends and I explored our surroundings and invented our play based on whatever was available around us. We would use tin cans, bottles, stones, leaves, sticks and bark, rags, strings and other objects. While the boys would play marbles, the girls would play a similar game involving knocking partially buried safety pins and hair pins out of a circle drawn in the dirt. We would look for hours for an ideal flat rock to give us an advantage in the 'bobby pins' game. Another pastime involved pushing an old bike wheel rim around. The child running after the rim would occasionally prod it along using a long stick. We also made a 'pull-along' toy from an old powdered milk tin and wire from an old coat hanger. The tin was half-filled with sand and the wire formed an axle such that the milk tin became a toy roller. Half the fun was in the making.

Art was an important part of our play experiences. We would paint on whatever we could get our hands on – we used natural clays, ochres and other materials. I also loved to draw shapes that could tell stories in the sand. I recall many hours of imaginary play with my friends, including role playing and pretending to be movie stars.

We would go to the local movie theatre in Cherbourg. My favourite star was Doris Day and I fantasised about being her.

One of the liveliest games involved playing with discarded animal innards from the slaughter yard. My mates and I would grab the thrown-out animals' intestines, fill them with water, tie a couple of knots and make balls out of them. We would throw them around or kick them around, and keeping the dogs away from the prize was half the fun.

Animals were an important part of my childhood. My mother would teach me how to recognise different animal tracks. She would often make impressions in the sand or dirt. It was a kind of puzzle in which I had to guess which animal the print belonged to.

Another key aspect of our play involved observation. Observation is a great teacher and helps the young absorb Aboriginal culture and protocols. Sometimes this involved watching adults and the way they walked, talked and acted. Often they made fun, joked and teased. Our play was often referred to as 'muck-about', which to me is simply 'play about' – sending things up – having fun and laughing at ourselves. Humour is a crucial element in our culture. Laughing at our experiences, and sharing our jokes and stories around a fire, was a way of dealing with everyday stresses.

My memory of my play life is that we did not have a lot of toys or play items at hand, but we were innovative and relied on the environment and whatever we could find. I am reminded that many children around Australia and the world have similar experiences to mine, and such experiences suggest that play is essentially something that children do or invent for themselves for the sheer pleasure of it. This is in contrast to 'lessons', which are delivered by adults to instruct children on the correct way of acting or living. I recall that some of our lessons involved play items. When I was 3, my mother Olga spoke softly and gently to me and explained: 'You've played with your doll for a long time now. There are some children who do not have any toys'.

This particular doll had been my only doll. My mother wanted me to share my doll and give it to another child. I remember she held my hand as we walked from the camp area to the girl's dormitory. When we stood in front of the building, she kindly looked into my eyes and said, 'you choose a child you would like to give your doll to'. I gave it to a little girl whom I thought would like it. My mother and I held hands as we walked home. I do believe she knew how I felt. Knowing which child I would give the doll to or knowing the name of the child to whom I gave it was not important. Rather the significance was in being prepared to empathise with another child sufficiently to give something up, even though I was attached to it. There was no expectation of recompense or even of thanks. In fact in Aboriginal culture, there is no word for 'thank you'. Being prepared to give in this way is a cultural expectation since we are all part of the one community and proud of a heritage that takes such giving for granted.

Recounting this experience provides an opportunity to explain an expression that my mother taught me: *Darn Najun Burri*. I know of no equivalent in English, but there is so much feeling in these words. The expression encompasses 'compassion',

Fig. 5.1 Denise as a baby with her doll

Fig. 5.2 Denise aged 3 years with her much-loved doll

'sadness', 'kindness', 'empathy', 'warmth', and 'love'. It includes tenderness for others; it is about walking in their shoes and experiencing their discomfort and their pain. Indeed, to hear this expression is to be taken outside the self and to feel deeply for someone else. This instance, in which a beloved play object is surrendered to another, captures the meaning of *Darn Najun Burri* as I am encouraged and reassured in the process of giving another child the opportunity to play with the doll (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).

5.2 Play in Aboriginal Contexts: Analysis and Exploration

The experience with her doll that Denise describes simultaneously affirms the value and pleasure of play as well as its cultural significance in the Aboriginal context. The preciousness of a play object for a child and her emotional attachment to it is recognised; at the same time, the significance of *Darn Najun Burri* as a central feature of social interaction in Aboriginal communities is explained. Existing scholarship on Aboriginal leisure, games, pastimes, activities and child-rearing, within the fields of early childhood education as well as to sociology and anthropology, supports Proud's reflections on the role of play in Aboriginal communities. In this section we firstly examine the social dimensions of play in Aboriginal contexts and its implications for learning in early childhood before turning to a focus on play objects and activities within that context.

5.2.1 The Social Dimensions of Play in Aboriginal Contexts

One pertinent contribution to sociocultural understandings of Aboriginal play within the field of early childhood studies comes from Aboriginal Australian, Marcelle Townsend-Cross (2004) who explains that the Aboriginal way of play is holistic and reflective of 'holistic cultures [that] are based on the underlying principles of *relationships and balance*' (2004, p. 3; original emphasis). During the December 2013 symposium 'State of Play: Birth and Beyond', at which the writing of this book was initially suggested, Denise Proud drew a quick sketch that reinforces Townsend-Cross' view of play in the Aboriginal context. The purpose of the sketch was to illustrate Proud's perceptions and understanding of some of the differences between Aboriginal play and non-Aboriginal play for other symposium participants (Fig. 5.3).

The straight lines and neat rows in the lower section of the drawing represent playful interaction in non-Aboriginal communities, while the more fluid and flowing lines represent such interaction in the Aboriginal community. Non-Aboriginal play is taken by Proud to exhibit a significant degree of organisation and purpose, but her view is that it does not appear to lead anywhere or towards any end and that there is no real connection between the representations of the individuals or the five groups. There is an attempt by the group, on the bottom right-hand side of the drawing, to join another group, but Proud intends the drawing to suggest that this also does not lead anywhere. This is in sharp contrast to the depiction of the three and a half Aboriginal groups engaged in Aboriginal 'muck-about' play drawn further up the page. Here, the whole approach to 'muck-about' is so playful that Proud portrays it as falling off the page. She shows one group as only half there to evoke the impression that one cannot hold onto play and playfulness; rather they flow like a river, escaping the confines of the page. The drawing shows how Aboriginal experiences of play involve clusters of people, some with a clear centre point and others

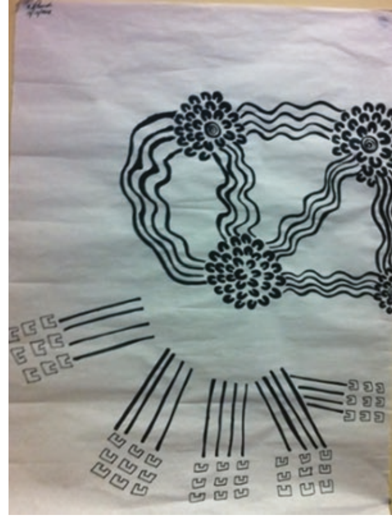

Fig. 5.3 Different worlds of play: art work created by Denise during the symposium

that have no centre point. The shared activity may involve stories, songs or dance but can as easily simply involve 'mucking about'. The curving, winding tracks that link all groups together show how play moves from one group to the other and back again; no attempt to organise or limit play is evident. There is an organic force about the drawing that depicts the 'current' of play as flowing between all groups with no start or end point.

Townsend-Cross' claim that a philosophy of inclusiveness and relatedness guides interaction in Aboriginal communities is consistent with Proud's depiction of Aboriginal play and also with her explanation of the concept of *Darn Najun Burri*. This concept draws attention to the way in which play is to some extent socially constrained since, as Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett (1971) argue, the pleasure that an individual finds in play is closely tied to the pleasure of fellow players. A philosophy of inclusiveness emphasises this and at the same time accounts for part of the ethical significance of play (Lynch, 2016). *Darn Najun Burri* exemplifies that philosophy since it implies an appreciation of oneself as linked with others in a community and recognition that one's membership in that community requires developing the capacity to give and receive freely.

In his book, *Leisure*: *The Basis of Culture*, Josef Pieper focuses on just this capacity to give and receive in the context of play. He argues that this capacity is fundamental to play and leisure, and he is critical of Western civilization's focus on work, on what is acquired through work and on justifying ourselves through work (Pieper, 2009). Thus, the current tendency by some corporations to merge notions of work and leisure would have concerned him (e.g. as design company Camenzind Evolution has done for Google). Pieper's view of being at leisure is that it is founded on the capacity to give and receive – so it is entirely uncommercial and is well illustrated in Denise's description of her childhood play at the Aboriginal settlement of Cherbourg. Her childhood story of giving up her doll clearly demonstrates the

interaction between the capacity to give and receive; at the same time, it presents a play object as providing the means by which the notion of genuine giving and receiving is taught to children and understood by them.

Part of the research by Townsend-Cross (2004) into play in Aboriginal communities includes a case study of a community in the northern central part of Australia. This study led Townsend-Cross to identify other differences between non-indigenous and Indigenous, specifically in regard to child-rearing practices. Among Indigenous Australians, such practices are described as less structured, particularly with regard to feeding and sleeping, and she concludes that young children are treated as 'little people', rather than being considered helpless. They are encouraged and expected to share everything and even to endure teasing. They are rarely reprimanded for 'naughty' behaviour; rather 'laughter is used as a response to misbehaviour and [e]xtended family share discipline responsibility' for their upbringing as well as for helping them to learn about their culture from stories, art, songs, dances and oral histories (Townsend-Cross, p. 5).

As Townsend-Cross notes – and Denise Proud's examples attest – '[i]ndigenous children are encouraged to play freely with whatever is at hand' (2004, p. 5). Her key findings indicate that among Aboriginal people, learning occurs in and as part of a child's environment. She reiterates the point that the notion of relatedness, and in particular environmental relatedness, is essential in understanding the principles that guide Aboriginal communities; a 'whole of person' approach to the nurturing of children is taken, in which learning is seen as a process of experiencing, absorbing and sharing ways of coming to know. Play is interwoven within the process of learning, so that playful interaction occurs within all aspects of the culture: in its orality, iconography, art, songs, dance and drama (Townsend-Cross, p. 3). Learning about communal rituals and ceremonies occurs in such a way that it allows for playful interaction. Townsend-Cross' analysis and Denise Proud's reflections confirm what Marilyn Fleer suggests: 'play in general, when viewed from a cultural-historical perspective, foregrounds the social conditions that give rise to the motives for participation in play' (2010, p. 107). These social conditions include cultural understandings of the individual's place as a member of a clan, the clan's place in Aboriginal understandings of the nature and purpose of life and attitudes towards the seriousness of life.

The discussion here is premised on a distinction between play and playfulness that is made by John Dewey ([1910] 1997). Dewey argues that by comparison with play, playfulness is foundational since it is 'an attitude of mind', while play is 'a passing outward manifestation of this attitude' ([1910] 1997, p. 162). Hence, play is recognised as worthwhile for its own sake, in terms of the pleasure found in playing and our consequent desire to engage playfully, but it also requires the development of capacities and attitudes that in turn sustain it, e.g. attitudes of playfulness and inclusiveness.

In the context of Denise Proud's childhood story, the expression *Darn Najun Burri*, and the behaviour that exemplified it, illustrates the development of such attitudes and capacities as children absorb and share ways of knowing and ways of being that define the social milieu in which they live. *Darn Najun Burri* would seem

to be closely connected with the concept of grace, with an imperative towards gratitude and counting one's blessings – rather than bemoaning one's losses and misfortunes – as Sue Roffey (2013) puts it. We argue in this chapter that this sense of grace also lies at the heart of play, at least in some of its instantiations. The definition of grace being used here differs in focus from the word's theological definition. Here 'grace' is used to embrace an attitude that Martha Nussbaum approaches from a negative perspective; Nussbaum refers to 'disgrace' as a 'freezing of the 'seas of pity' that presents us with a skewed vision of the world. 'Disgrace' is a lack of grace in which the value of others' lives does not receive sufficient attention (2001, p. 400).

Denise Proud and her colleague Cynthia á Beckett (2004, 2011, 2014) have recently used the term 'grace' in reporting research that analysed key aspects of working in early childhood settings with 3–5-year-old children. Both researchers argue that successful teaching and learning in this setting were centred around 'times of connection with young children that could become moments of wonder. One way to explain this is as a position of grace' (2014, p. 196). Proud and á Beckett's research suggests that the virtues of compassion, kindness, empathy and warmth, as well as sensitivity to the discomfort, fears or uncertainties of others that are central to the concepts of *Darn Najun Burri* and grace, are crucial to good teaching practice in early childhood settings. The possibility of making the kinds of connections with young children that facilitate 'moments of wonder' is dependent upon the teacher's commitment to creating and maintaining a climate in which children are free from the burdens of fear and the possibility of ridicule or humiliation. Children must be free to take chances and to experiment under the detached but benevolent guidance of teachers who are imbued with a commitment to creating a climate in which children can play confidently and be open to wonder, exploration and the play of curiosity and imagination. The teacher aims to allow children a free-flowing engagement with ideas, to avoid controlling the nature of that engagement and only to intervene if a child is in danger. Such a climate enables play-based teaching to become 'a creative dialogue in which anything … [is] possible' (à Beckett & Proud, 2004, p. 158) and in which opportunities for all forms of play including spontaneous, planned and sensory play, are taken. We argue on the basis of Proud and á Beckett's research (2004, 2011, 2014) that the climate they recommend must be underpinned by the teacher's commitment to an ethical collaboration with the young child in which empathy, compassion, generosity and an openness to the 'seas of pity' (as Nussbaum might say) temper all interactions. In this sense the teacher's position can be said to be one of grace.

The connection made in this paper between the concepts of *Darn Najun Burri* and grace is made to emphasise the significance in Aboriginal culture of the group and the essential common bonds between members for understanding play in the Aboriginal context. However, what Aboriginal understandings of play have to tell us as educators using play and as members of society interested in the well-being of young children in particular is clearly relevant to teaching and learning in broader contexts. The virtues and attitudes that underpin the concepts of *Darn Najun Burri* and grace impact upon a child's sense of belonging, identity and security. These in

turn condition the possibility of enjoyable experience and of confident, explorative and imaginative play, so that as educators we are able to appreciate both the ethical and the instrumental rationale for taking the concepts of *Darn Najun Burri* and grace seriously in the context of the learning that takes place through play. For example, as Andrews (2012) explains, the security that children require as part of the context for play is not a constraining stability overly concerned with safety, 'but a stability that creates a steady space in which challenge can be faced knowing support is there if needed' (Andrews, 2012, p. 171). Proud and á Beckett's research draws attention to the values and attitudes that underpin the possibility of the development in young children of the 'steady space' and the sense of being a valued member of a community that frees the child to play confidently and to learn through play.

5.2.2 Play and Games in Aboriginal Contexts

There are various studies that focus on Aboriginal toys and the way in which children engage with them (Basedow, 2012; Haagen, 1994; Roth, 1902). Many of the conclusions of those studies confirm the record and the descriptions of toys and games that Denise Proud outlines in the first section of this chapter. For example, Claudia Haagen provided the basis of a detailed catalogue of Aboriginal bush toys collected by anthropologists and historians across the country for an exhibition at the National Museum of Australia held in Canberra in 2014 (Fisher, 2015). Haagen acknowledges the diversity of Aboriginal peoples, the differences between them in terms of cultural expression and the variety of influences that have impacted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and offers an overarching description of bush toys in her introduction:

> A bush toy encompasses the idea of transformation, of taking an object from its original surroundings and giving it a new purpose, a new form, be it a blade of grass made to serve as a whistle or an abandoned rim of a car wheel given a new life as a child's motor car. (1994, p. 1)

In this respect, bush toys are 'do-it-yourself' toys, and given that children create such toys in many human communities, some Aboriginal toys and games can be seen as comparable to European toys or games. According to Haagen, Aboriginal children 'played house' like Western children but used materials to hand in that play, such as leaves and sticks. As she puts it, 'toys in Aboriginal society did not assume the same importance as that given to them by [Western] society' (1994, p. 2). This can be taken to imply a greater focus on relationship and interaction between the players. Such an implication is certainly consistent with Proud's and Townsend-Cross' reflections on play, as well as with Haagen's claim that by comparison with toys and games in Western society, Aboriginal toys and games are generally less materialistic in nature and orientation, regardless of community and location. Indeed, although Haagen did observe some children who carried sticks on

their backs for future use in games (1994, p. 14), Aboriginal toys were often temporary toys, made for the moment and in the context in which the play occurred; they were used by the group and then discarded. This 'discarding' process is consistent with the practices of traditional Aboriginal culture as groups migrated around their country on a seasonal basis to ensure adequate food and shelter were available. Such migration patterns meant that it was not possible to carry other than essential items. In providing examples of Aboriginal toys and games, Haagen describes rattles and rings made of boab nuts, strings and shells; children using sticks to draw in the sand; making dolls with sticks, leaves, shells, cones clay and little branches; playing games with bags and baskets made of twine and cans; and playing with balls made of emu feather, twine or paperbark and clay (1994, pp. 10–13). Roth (1902) also provides another rich account of games, sport and amusements of Indigenous people in North Queensland at the beginning of the twentieth century. His account provides detailed interpretations, diagrams and pictures of what he categorised as imaginative and realistic games using materials to hand.

In Cape York, Arnhem Land and Western Australia, Haagen noted that Aboriginal people played with children while gathering food, using their fire sticks, digging sticks and fishing gear as playthings. With regard to food gathering, Lynch and Veal (1996, pp. 34–35) note research indicating anthropologists' observations that Aboriginal people could have collected enough yams or fish to last for several days but that both men and women preferred to go out after food daily, rather than to hoard. Food expeditions, like craft making and cooking, were also social occasions interspersed with rest, talking and amusement. Haagen's research also describes fighting and hunting games (1994, p. 31) where tree bark might be used as a provisional target for spear throwing, as if to represent a kangaroo. She records the use of play shields, missiles, mud balls, spears, boomerangs, slings and bows and arrows in the context of detailed descriptions of Aboriginal mock fighting games, as well as the use of whistles, slides, boats, canoes and rafts as Aboriginal people played with water and sound (pp. 44, 45, 53). Like the mock fighting games, these water games often erupted during other daily activities, such as food gathering. Roth's (1902) observations of Aboriginal play, games and amusements are similar to those of Haagen.

Lynch and Veal suggest that traditional Aboriginal culture is distinctive for its openness to playfulness, joking and humour; as they put it, 'traditional Aboriginal culture often displayed a playful orientation to the world, involving a willingness to step away from the literal world of events and reframe ordinary activity in a playful way' (Lynch & Veal, 1996, p. 46). Gregory Bateson's theory of play emphasises this notion of framing to explain the way in which play contexts are established and the way players communicate within those contexts or frames. Bateson argues that the evolution of communication is partly dependent on the play context, which is built upon a paradoxical 'real, but not real' premise. Without the play context, 'the evolution of communication would be at an end. Life would then be an endless interchange of stylized messages, a game with rigid rules, unrelieved by change or humour' (Bateson, 1973, p. 166). In fact long ago, Roth (1902), who was appointed as the first northern protector of Aboriginals in 1898 and based in Cooktown, wrote

that he found it difficult to distinguish the playful from what was a serious part of Aboriginal ritual. Roth's comments may well have been reflecting the paradoxical nature of the play context or at least its ambiguity for those not initiated into that particular cultural context. Proud's recollection of playfulness in a more modern Aboriginal settlement indicates that this openness to playfulness and joking remains a feature of Aboriginal life, as does the tendency for non-Aboriginal people to sometimes misinterpret Aboriginal humour. The sacredness and secrecy associated with rituals, initiation rites and ceremonies call for seriousness and propriety, but humour is common and important (Proud: personal communication).

The research findings of Haagen (1994) and Lynch and Veal (1996) on Aboriginal play and the use of play objects concur in a number of other aspects. For example, both approach the study of Aboriginal play from a sociohistorical perspective, recognising that some game playing was functional in traditional Aboriginal culture and some was 'just for fun' (Lynch & Veal, 1996, pp. 34–6); both note that Aboriginal people would 'play house' as well as 'play warfare' with toy spears and toy boomerangs. Haagen and Lynch and Veal (pp. 36, 39) also highlight the importance of the natural environment in Aboriginal play, describing games where the youth would play with pet possums or with rats, frogs and wallabies by tying a string around the animal's leg. Both also record games using mudslides as well as animal imitation games. However, Lynch and Veal (pp. 40, 46, 47) particularly emphasise the fact that daily activities and tournaments would be interrupted with jokes, storytelling and even tug-of-war games for the sheer pleasure of doing so. Like Denise Proud, they also assert that jokes, playful and frank gossip and free talk are very important to Aboriginal people, as it serves to develop common bonds and sociability. They argue that this kind of talk amounts to what the pioneering anthropologist, Malinowski, described as 'phatic communication'; this is a talk that is animated and expansive but 'engaged in for the sake of communicating with others and not to pass on any information. …[it] generated what German philosopher Max Scheler designated as *fellow feeling* – feeling that you have some common bond of humanity with your fellow beings' (Lynch & Veal, 1996, p. 41; italics in the original).

Given that Aboriginal culture has survived for over 60,000 years on the Australian continent, it is not surprising that despite systematic repression since the time of white settlement over 200 years ago, Aboriginal culture remains a significant and evolving aspect of contemporary Australian culture. Windisch et al. (2003) in a Victorian case study remind us of the importance of play in Aboriginal communities. Their study reveals that in contrast to previous studies, the Indigenous parents interviewed, 'placed strong emphasis on early childhood education, and the transmission of their culture through the maintenance of Indigenous-specific play and recreation, toy-making skills, and the use of Indigenous language' (2003, p. 56).

But these authors go on to argue that Aboriginal attitudes to play as well as games and toys offer invaluable potential for enriching our intercultural understandings of play as a whole. They provide a dynamic model for re-evaluating play in an often commercialised, outcome-driven world. Ramsay (2005) argues that play and leisure in pre-consumerist societies, such as traditional Aboriginal communities,

relied not simply on using what was to hand but also on the inner capacities they possessed. As he puts it, '[p]re-consumerist leisure often required fewer external resources and relied more on utilising and developing people's inner resources – imagination, will, intelligence, wit, love' (2005, p. 31).

An example of the importance and continuing cultural and practical relevance of Aboriginal games to Australian culture generally is the publication in 2009 by the Australian Sports Commission of *Yulunga*: *Traditional Indigenous Game*s. In the language of the Kamilaroi people of North-western New South Wales, *Yulunga* means 'playing'. The publication is a curriculum resource for teachers of students from kindergarten to the final year of schooling. Compiled by Edwards and Metson, it includes over 200 games and activities played in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; both traditional and modern ball games, climbing games and games involving jumping, hitting, pushing, tagging and throwing are recorded. This resource was developed to provide all Australians with a greater understanding and appreciation of Indigenous culture, and specifically of the role of games in developing an inclusive and socially cohesive environment (Edwards & Meston, 2009).

5.3 Conclusion: Falling Off the Page

In all cultures children play to explore the world, experiment and learn while at the same time deriving pleasure (and occasionally pain) in the process. Similarly in all cultures, lessons on life can be delivered or reinforced by adults using the child's play objects. In the (predominantly) non-Aboriginal community, where there is greater emphasis on specific outcomes and achievements, lessons and milestones, play is too often devised by adults to be delivered to the child. Consequently, it has the potential to become overly formal, structured and constrictive so that genuine exploration, spontaneity and creativity may be suppressed. The model of play and playfulness that Aboriginal culture offers to non-Aboriginal peoples, as illustrated in this paper and by Denise Proud's recollections and comments, invites consideration. The paper has focussed on those Aboriginal attitudes to play that recognise its intrinsic value as well as its contribution to educational and social development. This recognition comes in the context of a commitment to a more organic, expansive and community-oriented conception of play. This conception includes taking into consideration the effects of cultural beliefs, values and practices on play; the natural environment on play; and a commitment to the concepts of grace and *Darn Najun Burri* on play and playfulness. Significantly it also emphasises the value of not taking ourselves too seriously, of 'mucking about', and 'falling off the page'. The diagram included earlier in this chapter attempts to capture these latter ideas by depicting the freer, more flexible model of Indigenous play as literally falling off the page. Such an orientation offers educators and parents a positive proposition from which to approach child-rearing and education, one that is unapologetically idealistic in its recommendation of embedding play into everyday life, such that in one sense there is never any end to play.

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Chapter 6
Loving Learning: The Value of Play Within Contemporary Primary School Pedagogy

Dee O'Connor

Abstract This chapter draws on established literature surrounding children's play and how children learn. It also presents some topic-specific findings from two recent studies. The social changes in how modern children play are drawn from the 2012 Irish Neighbourhood Play Research Project. This study was carried out by researchers from Early Childhood Ireland and IT Sligo during 2012. The team consisted of D. O'Connor, M. McCormack, J. Angus and P. MacLaughlin. The participants included almost 1700 families and 240 communities throughout Ireland. The generational changes in play were a recurring theme within the findings with the vast majority of parents expressing that they had more freedom and more time outdoors than their children do. The parents were also more than twice as likely to have walked to school, playing on the way, as their children are. In addition, the data shows generational differences in engagement with risk, with nature, with scheduled/timetabled extracurricular activities, with homework, with electronics, with creative activities and with traditional play types and games. The case study is drawn from true recounted stories contained within a 2014 life history study on the development of creativity through childhood education (O'Connor, Bright spark and shining star, love me for who i am and who you are: the development of creativity through childhood education. Doctoral Thesis. The University of Sheffield, UK, 2014b). Pedagogical observations based on the case studies showcased in this study also inform the discussion within this chapter and contribute to the conclusion that a pedagogy of play is a very appropriate and worthy medium of supporting the contemporary child's holistic educational development.

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6.1 Introduction

When adults speak of their most memorable learning experiences, the experiences recounted are often those that have occurred outside of the classroom within play situations. Learning stories involving risk, drama, freedom, fun and friendship are common themes within recounted stories of childhood experience. The learning within the experiences, when scrutinised, reveals deep learning within the domains of problem-solving, inventiveness, innovation, creativity, coping skills, processing skills, emotional intelligence, personal happiness, belonging, identity, confidence, political ideology, ethical formation, interpersonal communication and many others (O'Connor, 2015). These domains are highly valued within the adult population.

Despite this value, social change within modern childhood has resulted in many societies espousing social norms that result in children growing up within highly controlled environments with high levels of adult input, supervision, watchfulness, involvement and interference. The level of time spent indoors as opposed to outdoors has also increased dramatically between the last two generations (O'Connor, McCormack, MacLaughlin, Angus, & O'Rourke, 2014). Are the play experiences that enriched the learning of previous generations under threat for modern children? Not necessarily so. In response, schools could become more playful and act to balance the social changes that are squeezing playtime and experiences in modern childhood. In reality, education is already changing. The age-old image of rows of desks is becoming less common in reality with more schools embracing more progressive styles of engagement (Martlew, Stephen, & Ellis, 2011).

The role of primary school is more nuanced than the development of specific knowledge; it is also the breeding ground of intrinsic motivation, a love of learning, confidence in learning, joy in social engagement and judgement in uncertainty. This broader skill set for learning capacity is central to the experiences necessary within a holistic primary classroom. Educators who centralise play within their pedagogy are responding to a real need for children to learn within the framework of their true cognitive design. Children are built for play, and supportive play pedagogy allows for their learning to evolve in a way that maximises their potential across a multitude of domains and leads to greater engagement, deeper learning and positive associations with lifelong education (Wood, 2009).

6.2 Research and Scholarship Underpinnings

This chapter draws on established literature surrounding children's play and how children learn. It also presents some topic-specific findings from two recent studies. The social changes in how modern children play are drawn from the 2012 Irish Neighbourhood Play Research Project. This study was carried out by researchers from Early Childhood Ireland and IT Sligo during 2012. The participants included almost 1700 families and 240 communities throughout Ireland. The generational

changes in play were a recurring theme within the findings with the vast majority of parents expressing that they had more freedom and more time outdoors than their children do (O'Connor et al., 2014). The parents were also more than twice as likely to have walked to school, playing on the way, as their children are. In addition, the data shows generational differences in engagement with risk, with nature, with scheduled/timetabled extracurricular activities, with homework, with electronics, with creative activities and with traditional play types and games.

This chapter also presents a case study drawn from life history stories contained within a 2014 Irish study on the development of creativity through childhood education (O'Connor, 2014b). The research participant at the centre of this chapter is Dominic. Dominic's childhood experiences within play-based learning are featured within two vignettes on the themes of risk-taking and knowledge acquisition. Pedagogical observations based on the case study showcased also inform the discussion within this chapter and contribute to the conclusion that a pedagogy of play is a very appropriate and valuable medium of supporting the contemporary child's holistic educational development.

6.3 The Importance of Play

Play is the young child's premier medium for learning (Bruce, 2011; Fleer, 2013). It focuses on process rather than product and is shaped by the involvement of active players or actors. Play is integrative: unifying the mind, body and spirit (Henricks, 2008) and balancing all aspects of human functioning (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988). Play becomes increasingly social as the child learns how to be in the world with others and engages in pretence, creating stories and scripts from experience. In play children develop high-level communication skills as they begin to read intention in others (Meltzoff, 1995), focus on others, display joint attention (Bruner, 1995) and engage in social referencing.

The relationship between the child's connection to others and their evolving engagement with learning through play is pivotal. Where children feel secure and valued, they grow and develop a sense of identity and belonging while recognising their separateness: an important part of the learning process (Damasio, 1999). A sense of security and identity and the ability to read social cues, to understand and to imitate the behaviours of others are all facilitated through pretend play. In play the child learns and, as described by Vygotsky (1978), *is a head taller than himself*. Desire and motivation to play and stay in the game promote self-discipline. Children create and solve problems in the process of play and are responsive in managing relationships and situations. In self-initiated play, children take risks, solve problems and test possibilities and boundaries (Sandseter, 2009; Stephenson, 2003). Taking risks is very important for the development of judgement (Sandseter, 2007, 2009). A rich capacity to learn is evident in children's sociodramatic play, which houses the origins of their multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993). Children symbolise not only what is concretely present but can draw on images, wishes and fantasies

(Vygotsky, 1978), expand their cognitive functioning and build their capacity for learning (Fleer, 2013; Osterman, 2000).

In childhood, children's experiences and interactions affect how the brain develops (Della Sala 2012; Cozolino, 2013; Klingberg, 2013; Moiser, 2013). Throughout childhood, play acts as a 'scaffold for development, a vehicle for increasing neural structures, and a means by which all children practice skills they will need in later life' (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002, p. 33). While play may be understood as the *rhetoric of progress* (Sutton-Smith, 1997), a process of *becoming* that signifies play as good for children's holistic development into the future, it is in the here and now in being through play that has value in young lives. The level of time and space afforded to children in these experiences is of great importance within the development of future skills.

Play is the essence of childhood learning and that the richer the play, the richer the learning outcomes for the child (O'Connor, 2014a). This is especially true in relation to play that stimulates the development of learning capacity. Playfulness and an exploratory drive are ignited through being free to play. Self-confidence and self-discipline come through self-directed free play where children learn to regulate their behaviour in order to achieve personal and intrinsically motivated goals (Gardner & Rinaldi, 2001). The abilities to take risks and exercise judgement have their roots in early risky play (Ball, 2002; Sandseter, 2007, 2009). Even knowledge acquisition skills are laid down through a love of learning developed in early childhood through an internalisation of the fun that learning can bring and a lifelong sense of joy through learning by association (Montessori, 1996).

Reflection, the essence of critical and analytical skills, comes through the experience of self-initiated experimental learning. The earlier in childhood that this occurs, the more integrated and developed the reflective abilities of the older child (Steiner, 1981). This capacity exists from birth and possibly even earlier (Gerhardt, 2004; Klingberg, 2013). While a balance of play activities is necessary for holistic child development and learning, in the very early years, the more present the will of the child is within a play activity, the better it is for many types of development, building intrinsic motivation to learn for learning's sake (Broadhead, 2004). Free play where the will of the child is paramount is the most effective play for holistic development in children (O'Connor, 2014a).

6.4 Play in the Modern World: The Reality of the Contemporary Childhood Experience and Key Issues Identified in the Irish Neighbourhood Play Research Project

The research findings from the Irish Neighbourhood Play Project present an interesting portrait of the reality of play within modern childhood in a developed Western society. Through naturalistic observations and parental surveys involving over 1700

families across 240 communities, the findings show dramatic generational changes in engagement with play. Reductions in risk-taking, levels of freedom, play involving nature, child-initiated play and child-directed play have declined over the course of a single generation.

Children are now living much more structured lives. Organised sports, homework and scheduled activities are now exponentially more common features of modern childhood (O'Connor et al., 2014). In addition, engagement with electronics is rising. Watching television (71 %) and playing with electronic games (56 %) both feature within the top four choices of children's most prevalent activities, with boys more likely to engage with electronics than girls, increasing for both genders as they rise in age.

Adult supervision and involvement within children's neighbourhood play is also a common feature of modern childhood. Where the generation before enjoyed greater levels of freedom within their neighbourhood play and greater amounts of time spent outdoors, the modern child experiences the reverse. Limitations on freedom are the result of parental fears about safety, particularly in relation to traffic, abductions and hazards in the environment. While acknowledgement of these fears varied across communities depending on the socio-economic grouping of the family, the data on the decreasing levels of freedom (80 %) show that it is universally experienced by children in spite of this. The more affluent the family, the less they express concerns regarding safety. In contradiction to this, the more affluent the family, the less freedom and free play the children are experiencing, possibly as a result of increased scheduled activities. Homework also creates time tensions. However, this is most true for middle-class children. This focus on homework and academic success reduces the time they are free to spend playing.

The reduction in time spent outdoors playing is universally acknowledged by all groupings. At 82 %, this generational change is the most stark, not least because of its implications for health and holistic development. Outdoor learning is the most potent, sensory and active learning available to children (Fedewa & Ahn, 2011; Schweizer, 2009). Its decline is of grave concern.

6.4.1 Case Study: Introducing Dominic

Dominic's life history to date is being case studied within this chapter to illuminate the main points through drawing reference to lived experiences. Dominic is currently 20 years old. He is a young entrepreneur. At 15, he identified an import opening in the Irish market and started an import business with a loan from his aunt. He had paid her back double the loan within 6 months. By 18 Dominic headed up his own thriving business, an enterprise that imports a wide range of goods to the Irish and British markets and employs 12 full-time staff. He describes his most prised possession as his ability to see things differently. Dominic feels that creativity is at the base of his entrepreneurial skill. The idea for his business was very obvious to him when he first conceived it. It was difficult to receive backing to start up,

especially as he was so young. Thankfully, his aunt invested in him, and his venture has been successful. Dominic believes that he has long held an ability to look at things differently. This is sometimes interpreted as humour, but generally Dominic is a serious person. He feels his childhood education was relatively uneventful; he got on well with teachers and peers alike, often liking one teacher over another but never experiencing full disconnection from an educator.

His favourite school experiences relate to when a teacher let go a little and worked things through more playful and creatively engaging learning mediums, such as drama or project work. He identifies himself as a planner and feels comfortable envisaging something through to its conclusion before starting and within full knowledge that things don't generally go according to plan. Having a plan to begin with, however, helps Dominic respond quickly and knowledgably to evolving situations. He believes that divergent thinking, coupled with planning and vision, problem-solving, tenacity and commitment are the baselines of his personal success. He is looking forward to exploring it further as his adult life unfolds, and he has the resources, both personal and financial, to explore ideas and express his creativity in currently unforeseen directions. Dominic feels very open to life and optimistic about the future.

6.4.1.1 Vignette: Dominic's Perspective on Risk

The literature on play and risk is intertwined. Playfulness and an exploratory drive are ignited through being free to play. Self-confidence and self-discipline come through self-directed free play (Gardner & Rinaldi, 2001). The abilities to take risks and exercise judgement have their roots in early risky play (Ball, 2002; Sandseter, 2007, 2009).

Risks are an important part of life and so too should they feature in play. Risk-taking develops judgement and helps children develop the skills to see consequences and plan effectively or react quickly. On a creative level, risk-taking plays an important part in developing confidence. It also increases the ability to feel a level of comfort within risk-taking that is essential in later expressions of creativity within multidisciplinary fields.

Dominic recalls:

> I think the best thing about play apart from the fun, obviously, is the risks you take on every level. You are taking physical risks and having falls and learning how to not fall but something deeper happens with risks too, you learn about risks in communication and pushing boundaries too far and pissing people off and what happens if they get too mad with you. There are emotional risks in friendship groups and social risks and physical risks and there are creative risks too when your ideas get shot down by the group and you have to be strong. Without all of that happening while you are a kid, you wouldn't develop the drive and confidence that goes into adult risk taking like taking a punt on a business idea or telling a girl how you feel. It's all risky and you might feel like giving it a miss and not putting yourself through it but where's the fun in that? Life is for living.

Dominic is correct in his assertion that his early risky play is connected to his adult abilities within entrepreneurship. Risk-taking during play is very developmentally important (Sandseter, 2007, 2009; Stephenson, 2003; Waters & Begley, 2007). Physical risk-taking during childhood play is the forerunner of being both comfortable with risk and a good judge of risk. These abilities transfer from childhood playful risk to later balanced and courageous risk-taking within the broader social, emotional and cognitive domains (Smith, 1998).

Risk assessment and management are key life skills (Tovey, 2007). There is a growing body of evidence that children who are not permitted to take risks during play are left vulnerable to physical injury and limited across many domains through their lack of capacity to judge, assess, manage and engage risk and respond to unpredictability (Moss & Petrie, 2002). They are also less likely to engage with dangerous high-risk activities as teenagers and adults. In addition, the research shows that experiencing risk-taking during childhood play is linked to greater social skills, higher levels of creativity, greater problem-solving abilities, stronger mental health, higher levels of resilience and a more positive outlook on life (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012; Little, 2006; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Stephenson, 2003). There is also a clear link between the confidence that children experience during physically risky play and the confidence to tackle non-physical risks within other life experiences (Stephenson).

Taking the concept of risk into the arena of academic development, the research shows that children with a courageous and confident outlook and a positive attitude to task mastery are a key component of maximising educational success (Dweck, 2000). It is also well established that children's attitudes to play and risk are keenly influenced by the attitudes of key adults such as educators and parents as well as the environment in which they are placed (Dweck, 2000). It flows naturally from this that fearful parents and educators who create unchallenging low-risk play and learning environments will produce risk-averse, fearful children incapacitated in the face of physical risk and unable to develop transferrable associated skills for other aspects of life and engagement.

6.4.1.2 Vignette: Dominic's Perspective on Knowledge Acquisition and Reflective Capabilities

Knowledge acquisition skills are laid down through a love of learning developed in childhood through an internalisation of the fun that learning through play can bring and a lifelong sense of joy through learning by association (Montessori, 1996). Reflection, the essence of critical and analytical skills, can only come through experience of self-initiated experimental learning. Although this only appears as the faculty of judgement nearer to secondary school age, the younger this occurs the deeper ingrained the integrated reflective abilities (Steiner, 1981).

Dominic shares his views on his entrepreneurial skills:

> For me, I am always thinking around a problem. I think it's the skill I value most. I have x-ray vision for thinking things through, anticipating issues, problems, putting plans in place so that everything works. It's a critical ability, I think. I am hard on my ideas, in that I really go in to them and around them to identify weak spots. I know my own weaknesses, or some of them at least [laughs]. I find that rare enough in people, or maybe they know them but aren't telling [laughs].

Interestingly, when asked where these skills come from or how he thinks they developed, Dominic gives the following analysis which highlights the centrality of play in broad childhood knowledge development.

> Well, there were a lot of us so we were always busy, playing, building projects and ideas, arguing and even fighting, but that's ok. You know you are ok to do that because that's kids. It's only now that I can look back and see that as kids, we weren't afraid to thrash things out and have heated discussions around the rules of a game we had invented or the design of the den we were building as club headquarters for some secret society. We were always playing and if kids are playing, really playing, then they are often planning and solving problems and working all around the dimensions of their game. If adults are around they often interrupt that and the kids would be better off sorting it out themselves. It's their thing. I don't think that adults always understand. Kids get very involved because they love it. Even if there are arguments, they love it, I'm telling you. Engagement, that's the word. I used to really get into it and be passionate about the game, take it seriously. It was serious. It was everything to us. Life is still like that but now it's business.

Dominic's analysis incorporates a challenge for childhood educators: how to add value within play rather than detract from the learning intrinsic to the activity, a key pedagogical skill within a play-based approach to learning at primary school level.

6.5 The Components of a Play-Based Pedagogy

A play pedagogy starts with a commitment to play which is forged through an understanding of its value within children's learning. It is also supported by the incorporation of a number of principles that underpin it. These are providing for possibility, connection and relationship, freedom, sensory integration and extension. These principles and their application are introduced in this section.

Providing a play-based education means providing opportunities to engage in play episodes with time, space and a supportive environment which reflect an everyday reality that lifts the experience of children and their educator out of the pedestrian and commonplace to enable them to do things that are engaging and imaginative (Bruce, 2011). Play is a natural context for learning and development. It is innate, children love it and it promotes holistic learning like no other medium. Providing for play is providing for educational capacity and the foundations of thinking and doing skills. For learning through play to be supported and developed (Fleith, Renzulli, & Westberg, 2002; Glenn, Knight, Holt, & Spence, 2012), the educator must centralise experience in children's learning. Play creates conditions conducive for intrinsic motivation and educational engagement to develop in both process and

product (Bruce, 2011). Play is the child's vehicle for engaging with experiential learning. The sense of emotional safety achieved through their connection to the educator is an important foundation upon which play and therefore learning can flourish within a classroom environment.

Providing for possibility can occur when the educator can see clearly that play and learning are symbiotic within childhood. This symbiosis is equally true of play that occurs inside or outside of the classroom. Research empowers the educator as an active participant and potential catalyst of play-based learning. Both conceptual and empirical studies (Chappell, Craft, Burnard, & Cremin, 2008; Cremin, Chappell, & Craft, 2013) have indicated that elements of children's cognitive development are guided or driven by possibility thinking, that is, considering the shift from *what is* to *what is possible*. In these studies, childhood play was identified as the enabling context and possibility thinking as an everyday habit or occurrence. In play episodes communication between adult and child drives *possibility thinking* (Cremin et al., 2013).

In their study, Chappell et al. (2008) propose that in play, children generate and extend ideas, act out their intentions, seek out and initiate further possibilities and, in the process, sustain their play. Children take ownership of the play script, considering what if and as if often in the absence of verbal capacity but also in the sphere of developing verbal capacity. However, this deep-level play can only occur where the child feels connected and secure. The educator therefore has a key role to play in its facilitation. Their role is not simply to provide connection, security and a sense of belonging however. Although these things are vital as foundations for what can occur, more is required of the educator to support cognitive extension during play, namely, provoking possibilities, allowing time and space for children's action responses, being in the moment with children and supporting, sustaining and suspending their play by holding the space open for re-engagement.

Connection and a positive relationship with the educator free children to play. Play is the key to their learning, but it is one they can't access fully if they are not well connected to the educator. In this way, connection and learning are actively linked. Learning capacity is developed in the early years through experiences and through the wider spectrum of play. Play is intrinsically educational. It has great value within the child's learning capacity, and holistically developing play has its own set of defining characteristics which serve to intensify its value with their increasing presence (Wood & Attfield, 2005). These essential characteristics of educationally valuable play are first and foremost that it is fun and enjoyable, chosen by the children or invented by the children. It is also essential that it is integrating in nature, involving the minds, bodies, spirits and senses of the children involved (Wood, 2009). Early childhood is a fertile ground for exploration and learning through play. Learning gives the child a sense of satisfaction, and a measure of how successful a play experience has been from a learning point of view is how satisfied the child is by the play experience. This personal motivation gained through truly successful play is both stimulating and exciting for the child as they learn and learn and learn. Learning and knowledge acquisition are key skills that impact on wide-ranging educational goals including motivation, flexibility, deep engagement and innovative responses (Chesbourg, 2003).

Providing for freedom in play begins with the concept that freedom in play does not negate the role of the educator. He/she is an active partner in this process and supports the child's educational growth through freedom, connection, pleasure, integration and extension (O'Connor, 2014a). Freedom is an important ingredient in young children's learning. Children should be free to make choices within their play and be supported in these choices by the educator through pedagogy, engagement and connection and through the environment the educator has created.

Freedom as a principle within pedagogy essentially underpins that children are free to express their intrinsic developmental wisdom within their play choices. Children often understand their learning needs at a deep and natural level, and as such, their choices should hold educational weight with the educator. This wisdom requires support which is expressed through the human connection mindfully offered by the educator and by the preparation and design that they have applied to the learning environment, inclusive of the atmosphere and materials. The principle of pleasure and enjoyment in play requires the educator to be calm, loving and kind within their classroom, freeing the children from external anxiety and facilitating them to engage with learning through play to the extent that supports the children to enter their own flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002) thereby deepening both their cognitive and emotional engagement in the task and their greater learning journey. This will also foster a positive human connection through pleasure and enjoyment. In addition, this human connection establishes a baseline for an inner connection within the child's love of learning which contributes to their evolving knowledge acquisition skills.

The principle of sensory integration acknowledges that learning is best served when it is designed to integrate the senses and the intelligences within experiential learning opportunities. Engaging the senses of vision, aroma, taste, sound and touch and integrating them through play activities which result in greater holistic and integrated development will ignite the intelligences and foster greater breadth and depth of growth within a holistic learning frame. The child's brain is stimulated sensorily, and memory portals to key learning contained within synaptic connections triggered by sensory engagement are key building blocks for the young learner. Sensory-rich activities such as cooking; baking; outdoor play; nature play; play with spices, fruits and oils; building with natural materials; and sensory-themed play will all greatly enhance developing learning capacity.

The principle of extension is contained within the educator's capacity to understand the complexity of the child through a nuanced approach to observation, reflective practice, mindful connection and understanding. The application of the educators' knowledge of child development is key within their planning to allow for the supportive extension of the child's learning opportunities. It is essential within the extension principle that the educator also seeks to incorporate an element of risk into the children's play activities (Ball, 2002; Brussoni et al., 2012; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Sandseter, 2009). Risky play aids the development of a significant number of learning abilities. It also contributes to an evolving ability not only to take risks but to exercise good judgement within risk-taking. Building in opportunities for risk

requires deep knowledge of the children and a level of mutual trust and respect that can only evolve from effective connectivity.

The application of these principles allows the child to progress their learning journey holistically and obstacle-free (Humphries & Rowe, 2001). This allows for strong learning capacity foundations upon which knowledge and skills can be built. In this way, it is the role of a holistically stimulating pedagogy in the primary school years to meet the learning needs of children through a foundation of deep human connection. This foundation can be built upon to achieve mindful environment planning, freedom and meaningful participation, pleasure, sensory integration, risk, observation, reflection and individualised programme planning and implementation to holistically develop learning capacity in children within a primary school programme.

6.6 The Role of the Teacher

Play is well established as a pedagogical approach with early childhood education. However, children do not stop being children at the age of 8. Play as a vehicle for learning is just as potent within the later primary school years. Indeed play as a human faculty for development is a lifelong ability. Its inclusion within pedagogical reflection is always worthwhile.

The concept of play as a learning vehicle beyond the early years poses challenges for educators. In particular, teachers may be especially confronted by the concept of freedom and how it could be possible to provide such freedom within a school environment. It is likely that many pressures impact on the classroom teacher in relation to this. Standardised testing systems which demand certain knowledge sets by a certain age, coupled with parental and school management pressures for high test scores, can lead to a more rigid application of pedagogy while striving to fulfil curricular requirements in this context (Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2013).

There are three main aspects of their role that a primary school teacher can focus on in the achievement of a play-based pedagogy that embraces freedom as a valuable core concept. The first is a proactive and thoughtful approach to providing the best play environment and materials. This includes not only an understanding of what a play-stimulating environmental space is but also a commitment to the provision of open and interpretive materials within the context of understanding that valuable play materials are 10 % material and 90 % child. Secondly, a good teacher should also adopt a principle of attentiveness to the children through both an awareness of their learning and development gained through knowledge, observation and reflection as well as an openness and willingness to being responsive to children's agenda and interests. The third contribution of the developmentally supportive practitioner is to have respect for the child's choices underpinned by an understanding of and commitment to children's wisdom in relation to their learning needs. Inappropriate interventions merely interrupt the children's flow. A supportive teacher understands the powerful transformative power of play and has respect for

the directions the children lead themselves in. Within a primary school setting, the teacher's approach to learning has a great impact on holistic development. A classroom where interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning is encouraged will offer more opportunities for deep engagement (Boden, 2001). Greater focus on transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary teaching and learning at teacher training level would also be a very helpful step in supporting the development of higher-level cognitive functioning for future generations.

Teaching in this way is centred within an ideology of learner empowerment. The themes emergent are student encouragement, value, respect and empowerment. All of these are centred within pedagogy. The pedagogy of the teacher is what underpins the educational experience of the child. The first step a teacher must take is to create a holistic learning environment and atmosphere where the children are comfortable, happy and at ease. Including the children in the environmental design so that they are empowered to impact on their physical learning space can also be an effective method of fostering ownership and thereby facilitating engagement (Carpenter & Burridge, 2013).

The attitude of the teacher and how he/she communicates this to the children is of paramount importance. Creating an awareness in the group that the children can go to far-reaching places within their imagination and within their play is part of this attitude. Nurturing the motivation to be playful is essential. This is achieved through supporting children to find personal relevance in their learning activities, identifying with children what their strengths and interests are and providing hands on opportunities to approach these activities playfully. These pedagogical choices will most likely result inlearning opportunities being utilised by the children in more effective and meaningful ways.

Teacher reflection on the sense of time rather than hurriedness afforded the children, and a resultant time management based on patience and the communication of a sense of time and space will be beneficial for student's processing creative concepts. This is essential even if the teacher is under curricular coverage pressure. Reflection on how to achieve curricular goals and maintain a sense of unhurriedness within the classroom is a key task for the teacher who wishes to support learning through play. The integration of the curriculum within a play-based approach is an important balancing act. This integration, however, will bring learning alive for the children. Alive learning motivates and stimulates the children, helping them to find personal relevance and meaning in their learning which opens up a vast vista of creative potential. Using pedagogical approaches that seek to integrate subjects and bring learning alive through play also results in greater depth of learning and deeper knowledge acquisition. Expanding the horizons of control to allow for the unknown to occur also stimulates interest and curiosity as well as providing unique educational experiences which are beyond the limits of the teacher.

A playful pedagogical approach requires a great deal of skill on the part of the teacher. As such it has repercussions for teacher education programmes as well as in-service and professional development measures for primary school teachers. As the basis of the skill needed for this pedagogical approach is first and foremost based on the attitude of the teacher and their commitment to play, connectivity,

engagement and an openness to student empowerment, its essence lies within reflective practice.

As the concepts held at the heart of play as a pedagogical choice are complex, deep reflective abilities are essential. How to achieve such things as empowerment, democracy, co-participation and children as partners in their education are very individual and nuanced abilities. Every teacher will work differently on this. The results will also naturally be varied. The ability to reflect on their practice and how to improve it will be a key factor in the levels of success. As such teachers need to be highly reflective in their practice. Reflective practice is an essential skill in the evolution of all true pedagogy and is therefore one which should be centralised within teacher and practitioner education and training programmes. Self-reflection, reflective skills techniques and practices, commitment to reflective practice and practising reflective writing are all key elements of educating educators and equipping them with the skills and confidence to embrace the change required within classrooms. This challenge has been brought about by societal changes. Where previous generations developed key skill sets through freedom and play out of school, contemporary children need to be supported to experience such learning within the school. Only teachers can make this happen.

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Part II
Play Beyond Early Childhood

Chapter 7
Cultural Development of the Child in Role-Play: Drama Pedagogy and Its Potential Contribution to Early Childhood Education

Marilyn Fleer and Anna Kamaralli

Abstract Early childhood education theories have generally discouraged adult intervention in children's role-play, in preference for allowing for the natural development of young children from unstructured play. However, the pedagogy of drama assumes ongoing guidance and involvement from the teacher, who provides students with a brief for carrying out exercises of imaginative play within parameters given by the adult. This chapter argues that there is a place for such adult involvement in general imaginative role-play, in expanding children's creative resources. Building on the work of Vygotsky, who argued that drama is closely related to play, and later Lindqvist in her development of the concept of playworlds, it is suggested that the active support of teachers in devising scenarios jointly created by the children and the teachers is of great benefit to children's development. Case studies from both preschool and primary school settings are presented to demonstrate this. Introducing Shakespeare to primary school-age students and introducing various forms of playworlds to preschool children resulted in observably high levels of engagement and creative expansion. A lot can be learned from the drama pedagogue, but there is a need for a mindset change in early childhood education, because early childhood teachers do not traditionally take part in children's play. We argue that carefully crafted teacher interventions in narrative role-play not only develop children's play, but culturally develop children.

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7.1 Introduction

Traditional pedagogical approaches to role-play in early childhood education have de-emphasised the role of the adult in children's play because a developmental view of play determines that the adult could interfere with the natural development of the child's play. This perspective sits in direct opposition to the performing arts, where the adult takes on a central role in expanding children's expressive abilities through role-play. As such, the theatre and performing arts have well-established theories and pedagogical practices for culturally developing children's and adults' role-play.

It is argued in this chapter that in early childhood education, there is room for an improved theorisation of pedagogy for supporting role-play. A lot can be learned from the drama pedagogue and the corresponding literature that underpins the traditions in theatre and the performing arts. However, for this to be taken up, there is a need for a mindset change in early childhood education, because early childhood teachers do not traditionally take part in children's play.

This chapter presents two case studies of drama pedagogy in action. One example is of a preschool setting where children role-play stories and fairy tales with the active support of their teachers in what Lindqvist (1995) calls *playworld*. The second example is taken from a school setting, where role-play is supported through introductory exercises in using extracts from Shakespeare, guided by a specialist drama pedagogue, as a foundation for role-play.

Introducing Shakespeare to children of primary school age as the impetus for role-play obviously requires greater hands-on guidance, but opens up new possibilities for emotional development through play. Similarly, using role-play for actively engaging in representations of narratives from storybooks and fairy tales brings new ways of thinking and emotionally engaging in a story world, where play development is central. In drawing upon cultural-historical theory, this chapter is supportive of Lindqvist's comment that 'Dramatic play must be organized by an adult' (1995, p. 37), and through the case examples presented, this chapter puts forward the view that role-play should not be left to chance, as a self-directed activity of children. But rather, a more theoretically informed view of the role of adults in children's role-play is urgently needed.

7.2 Understanding Role-Play from a Cultural-Historical Perspective

An enormous amount has been written about play over the years. However, much of this research has been informed by developmental theory, where the age of the child is used as a marker of play development. This view positions play in terms of stages

of development and tends to prescribe what play activity is and what it is not (see van Oers, 2013). Usually, the adult is put in opposition to children's play – that is, teachers are viewed as getting in the way of children's play (e.g. Bruce, 2005). In contrast, a cultural-historical perspective of play argues that societies and institutions create the conditions for children's play (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013), where play is a form of cultural expression (see Goncu, Jain, & Tuermer, 2007) and has been shown through extensive research; play is valued differently across cultural communities (see Pellegrini, 2011) for culturally developing children. In a cultural-historical view of play, the adult is central for supporting play development (Vygotsky, 1966).

Vygotsky's (1966) conception of play suggests that children and adults create imaginary situations, where objects and actions take on new meaning. Play develops when children move from using objects as placeholders for meaning, such as a stick representing a hobby horse, to actions, and later words, where rules begin to dominate play actions, as seen in board games or schoolyard play.

Important in a cultural-historical conception of play is how children move in and out of imaginary situations, where they build complexity in play with play partners (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010) using metacommunicative language (Bretherton, 1984), such as when underscoring pretend knife cutting by saying 'chop chop'. We see children inside and outside of the play when, for example, they upturn a cardboard box and declare 'This is our boat' (outside of the play) and then move to being inside the play by thrusting an umbrella into the air, giving it new meaning, by announcing 'Take that you pirate! My sword is really sharp'. In this conception of role-play, a double subjectivity emerges as children are happy in their play, while at the same time experience a different emotion, such as being the pirate and feeling powerful or frightened by the sword in play. Vygotsky stated that 'The child weeps in play as a patient, but revels as a player' (1966, p. 14). Here we see some important connections between role-play and dramatisation. Kravtsov and Kravtsova argue that 'The child learns to view the situation from two perspectives at the same time' (2010, p. 32). That is:

> The 'dual (or two)-positional' aspect of play allows the player to orient him/herself to the role of another, the character or hero being 'represented' in the game. … These two-sides of play (as the player and nonplayer) allow the participant to be the subject of the play, and the child to control the play at will. (p. 33)

What is important to Kravtsov and Kravtsova is that in play there is a performance, where 'a person is able to transform him/herself consciously. It is very important for personal development as well as for performance. The two sides of play do not merge together but coexist in the "space" of a child's personality' (2010, p. 35). In the next section, we examine the relations between these further through a theoretical discussion of playworlds. The idea of playworlds was developed using drama pedagogy techniques specifically for young children.

7.3 Playworld as the Theoretical Foundations for Conceptualising Children's Play and Drama

In her review of the literature on the pedagogy of drama, Lindqvist states that there are three central concepts which capture the phenomenon of role-play. They are 'characterization, ability to live a part, and imagination' (1995, p. 38). She argues that in role-play in early childhood settings, there are also three central concepts, but they are named differently. They are 'imitation, identification and the ability to imagine things' (1995, p. 38). She argues that 'there is a need for an integrated theory of the role of creative subjects in child development, for a nuanced approach to play; a theory which studies the relationship between imagination and children's abstract thinking' and the need to closely study 'the theories of drama pedagogy [and] to be able to develop a pedagogy which stimulates children's play' (1995, p. 38).

Drama pedagogues not only have a tradition of taking a central role in children's role-play, but have longstanding pedagogical practices for developing role-play, and through this supporting the development of the child or adult themselves. Lindqvist (1995) argues that there is a dynamic connection between play and culture, and this is strengthened through a playworld. Playworld is a pedagogical model for creating shared culture between adults and children in preschool settings. Lindqvist states that '[w]hen using *playworld*s as a concept, I mean the fictitious world (context) which children and adults come to share when they interpret and dramatize the theme in the classes' (1995, p. 70; original emphasis). According to Hakkarainen the pedagogy of the playworld is framed through the telling or reading of a story where the children and the teacher work together to create the play. The play evolves through the introduction of new elements where the teacher and children elaborate the basic theme or plot, constructing scenes and enacting specific roles where they 'agree jointly to imagined particular settings and props' (Hakkarainen, 2006, p. 210). Lindqvist says that a 'mixture of fairy-tale and reality should characterize the theme work and we want to show that imagination and reality are not opposites, but depend on one another for their existence'. (1995, p. 74)

In Lindqvist's (1995) playworld model, she conceptualises two dialectical dimensions that are helpful for understanding the relations between play and drama. She suggests that there are two perspectives that are intertwined and concurrently enacted: *the adults*' *perspective* where they seek to make conscious different dimensions of the storyline that becomes a shared culture through actions and objects and *the children*'*s play* and its connections with different cultural patterns and aesthetics.

Teacher perspective: A common fiction is created between the children and the teachers in the playworld. The teachers take an active role in the playworld, in the same way as we see drama pedagogues take. The teachers 'create a *dialogue* and share things with the children, their playfulness…give life to the dramatization and play… [engineering] the *literary content* and *dramatic forms*' for developing play

(Lindqvist, 1995, p. 70; original emphasis). The development of play is supported through drama pedagogy which:

- Considers the aesthetic emotion when developing imagination in play
- Uses aesthetic forms of literacy, drama, music, etc. for creating the imaginary situation
- Uses narrative to introduce new possibilities for interpretation

Children's play: Playworld also focuses upon children's play through drawing upon drama pedagogical concepts of *world*, *action and character*. Lindqvist says 'I seek a link between the pattern of play and cultural, aesthetic forms' (1995, pp. 70–71). *Play actions* occur in the playworld through adventures and journeys, where the different characters are introduced through known literature, and the *world* of reality and fiction are intertwined through how the narrative evolves and problems encountered are solved in the play. Here Lindqvist argues that in the playworld 'play can turn into conscious dramatizations' (1995, p. 71). Important here in the research of Lindqvist was:

> …our *aim* was to suggest that we introduce an all-embracing theme, of an open nature so that the pedagogues at the day-care centre would feel free to make their own interpretation and dramatizations of the contents, and yet have the support of the substantial theme running all through the activities. (1995, p. 71; original emphasis)

An important pedagogical feature of the playworld model is the cultural device of using borders or transitions into imaginary world jointly created by the children and the teachers. For example, in the research of Hakkarainen (2010) where the fairy tale of Rumpelstiltskin was used as the basis for a playworld, he introduced the idea of a spell being placed on the palace, turning it upside down and making everyone walk backwards. To achieve this, the children turned their jackets inside out, with the buttons on their backs, and began to walk backwards. This action marked that they were inside of the palace, that is, inside the imaginary situation (Hakkarainen, 2010). A further example by Hakkarainen (2010) involved the story of Narnia for creating the playworld for 6-year-old children. Here a cardboard box was fixed to a doorframe. This marked the boundary between the playworld and the classroom, and when children went through the doorframe, they were entering the playworld of Narnia.

7.4 Understanding the Relations Between Role-Play and the Performing Arts

According to Lindqvist (1995), Vygotsky argued that drama is closely related to play: 'Drama is linked to play more directly and more closely than any other form of art; play which is the origins of every child's creativity and includes elements from the most differing forms of art. This is partly what makes dramatization so valuable to children, it opens doors to and provides material for different sides of

their creativity' (Vygtosky, 1972, p. 104; cited in Lindqvist, 1995 p. 53). Lindqvist says that 'play and drama are fictitious actions' (1995, p. 53) where drama involves both internal and external actions that are dialectically related. Here objects and actions are charged with emotional meaning that form the dramatic event. Lindqvist notes that:

> Since play creates meaning, it will not simply reflect reality on a surface level, and can never be focused with a realistic portrayal of an action. In the same way as art, Vygotsky writes, play is like a photographic negative of everyday life. The rules are not moral rules, they are rules for self-determination. This freedom of self-determination is part of the form of play. It is a strong feeling-a passion-of an ambivalent nature….This form of play challenges the child's ability to dramatize as well as its creativity. (1995, p. 53)

Vygotsky argued that in drama we can see another kind of emotional experience between the play and the audience, when he said, 'The distinction between the spectator and the protagonist of a comedy is obvious: the hero weeps while the spectator laughs. An obvious dualism is created. The hero is sad and the spectator laughs, or vice versa; a positive hero may meet a sad end, but the spectator is happy just the same' (1971, p. 232). In both the dualism and the double subjectivity discussed previously, the emotional dimensions of role-play and drama are foregrounded, and in both the possibilities for the cultural development of the child are evident.

We now turn our attention to two case studies where drama pedagogy is shown in action. In the first example, drama is introduced to school-aged children. Here drama pedagogy is specifically examined in relation to a complex play script written by Shakespeare. In the second example, the playworld is illustrated to show how drama pedagogy can also be used in preschool settings.

7.5 Case Study: Introducing Shakespeare to Primary School Children

As introduced earlier, there is ongoing disagreement about how much guidance from the adult is of greatest benefit to children's creative development. Teachers have been criticised for 'incorporating play into classroom activities in ways that are excessively adult-structured and lacking in spontaneity' (Nicolopoulou, Barbosa de Sá, Ilgaz, & Brockmeyer, 2010, p. 43). However, the same article cautions that an entirely hands-off approach does not 'fully tap into the potential of play-based activities to promote important skills', and Bodrova goes so far as to claim that a decline in both the quantity and quality of children's engagement in make-believe play is largely due to the 'decrease in adult mediation of make-believe play' (2008, p. 366). While this question is being debated among early childhood specialists, drama teachers as a matter of course expect to guide the play of their students. Intervention is not seen as limiting creativity but as providing tools to expand it.

Sadly, avoiding adult involvement in inventive play in no way guarantees more genuinely creative activity. In their self-generated role-play games, young children

will draw on whatever stories are available to them. Even without direct adult guidance, they are already using narrative and emotive material developed by others, often in the form of movies, television shows and computer games. This kind of reinvention of existing narratives is not invariably frowned upon in all its forms; while drama teachers usually try to deflect children away from the pre-packaged characters and plots of popular culture, it is quite common for drama classes to be developed around responding to a book (Dunn & Stinson, 2012, p. 116). Vivian Paley's (2004) storytelling/story-acting model is also popular (McNamee, 2005; Nicolopoulou et al., 2010). Children's picture books are standard as a resource for these exercises, but the potential is there to introduce the new and the challenging, not just the comfortably familiar, to the mix. Most drama exercises for young children are either non-verbal in nature or rely on the children using their own words. There is a definite emphasis on developing improvisational skills. There is space, in addition to such games, for forms of play that use scripted words, without going so far as to require children to perform scripted drama. Teaching young children to draw on Shakespeare in these kinds of activities, making these words part of their set of resources, is a step towards making the resulting play more, not less, creative.

These are very preliminary experiments, intended mainly to suggest what further tasks to pursue. The children participating came from co-educational state primary schools in Sydney's eastern suburbs and were somewhat self-selecting as predisposed to be interested, as the context was drama classes offered outside school hours. There were three groups, one of 8- to 11-year-olds and two of 5- to 7-year-olds, the latter including numerous non-readers.

The exercises took two main forms, those where children listened to a portion of Shakespearean text and were asked to respond and those in which the children spoke small portions of text themselves. The emphasis in both cases was on connecting the scripted words to emotions the children are already familiar with identifying.

Two extracts were chosen with the aim of creating a mood the children were likely to connect to, with a slightly different emphasis on suitability for verbal and physical responses. The first is from *Richard III*:

> Methought I saw a thousand fearful wrecks;
> Ten thousand men that fishes gnaw'd upon;
> Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
> Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
> All scatter'd in the bottom of the sea:
> Some lay in dead men's skulls; and, in those holes
> Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept,
> As 'twere in scorn of eyes, reflecting gems,
> Which woo'd the slimy bottom of the deep,
> And mock'd the dead bones that lay scatter'd by. (*Richard III* Act 1 scene 4 24–33)

This passage has many words that are archaic, or at least would be new to children of this age, but which are placed within a context that makes them easy to guess at. Children know about shipwrecks, treasure and skulls. The students were

asked for verbal reactions to the passage, specifically what it made them think of and how it made them feel. Responses included 'spooky', 'scary' and 'exciting because it's an adventure'.

The second passage is from *The Tempest*:

> Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
> That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
> The clouds methought would open and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked,
> I cried to dream again. (*The Tempest*, Act 3 scene 2 93–101)

This passage was chosen because it has several moments of change and descriptions of action. Children were asked to respond physically to the piece by performing whatever actions the words made them think of. There were actions of stopping and listening with head tilted, pretending to sleep, looking up at the sky and reaching towards it. In one group the children took coloured scarves from the class dress-ups box and threw them in the air, to show the riches dropping down.

The more challenging task, one not suitable for pre-readers, was giving students actual lines from Shakespeare (and one from Webster) to speak. One version of this was a group exercise, in which a passage from *Macbeth* was divided so that each child in the group got a short portion to say, with some attempt to give the more complex lines to the more advanced readers.

> The night has been unruly. Where we lay,
> Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
> Lamentings heard I' the air, strange screams of death,
> And prophesying with accents terrible
> Of dire combustion and confused events
> New hatch'd to the woeful time. The obscure bird
> Clamour'd the livelong night. Some say the earth
> Was feverous and did shake. (*Macbeth*, Act 2 scene 3 59–66)

There was discussion of the meanings of the difficult words. The children were not asked to learn the lines but could hold and read them. The important thing was that they perform as a group and listen to each other. The students instantly caught the mood of the piece, expressed by shaking voices, wide eyes, huddling together in a close group, trembling and nodding to each other to confirm that they had all heard the bird and felt the earth shake.

The children with more advanced reading skills were given an exercise where they chose an extract from Shakespeare ranging from one to six lines in length. We discussed as a group which emotion each might represent. They were given a little time to prepare, including help from the teacher with any new words and thoughts on what the person saying the lines was experiencing. They then stood up and read the lines aloud to one another. This was not an attempt to produce a 'performance' but to see whether children were able to forge a connection between emotions that they were familiar with and a new means of expressing them.

Drama exercises for children are usually adult-acting exercises scaled down, most often centred on developing improvisational skills. There is a significant difference in the goals of this particular class. Actors are taught never to perform an abstract emotion; they are told it is imperative to play an action, not a feeling. This is sound advice for developing a more dynamic performance, but performance is not strictly speaking the goal of these exercises. Rather, the aim is to give children a broader range of tools of expression. Thus, connecting verbal expressions of feeling to feelings the students already recognise is an end in itself. The expanded vocabulary, and just as importantly the idea that feelings can be expressed in ways not contained by their day-to-day life, can then be built upon in more character- and narrative-based role-play activities. Role-play, by definition, involves creating characters. However, it is too easy to see character creation as solely the designation of 'given circumstances', of giving the student features and situations to embody. In Shakespeare even more than elsewhere, character exists in the language. So the first building blocks of character creation can involve the taking on of the imagined person's means of emotional expression.

The idea that Shakespeare can be a resource to use with primary school-age children is gaining traction in drama teaching circles, due to the enthusiasm of a number of practitioners who work in crossover areas of both theatre and education. Miles Tandy, head of the Professional Development in the Education department of the Royal Shakespeare Company, has published a book that both is an argument for teaching Shakespeare and contains class plans. Pedagogical strategy is both valued and demonstrated, in a case for the accessibility of Shakespeare to even very young children. 'As long as we approach it in a spirit of playful discovery, much of Shakespeare's language can be just as accessible as traditional stories, songs and nursery rhymes' (Winston & Tandy, 2012, p. 42). The book's scope includes working with students as young as four. It is important to remember that, when every day is filled with new words and concepts not previously encountered, children do not necessarily adhere to the same hierarchy of easy to difficult that adults recognise. When asked whether it created problems introducing Shakespeare to a mixed class of native English speakers and those for whom English was still being learnt as a second language, teacher Amy Rogers replied, 'Shakespeare puts all children on a level playing field as those with EAL [English as an Additional Language] are in the same boat as all those for whom English is their mother tongue. It excites us all to learn new words and extend our own vocabulary and understanding' (Tandy, 2013, p. 5).

The 'manifesto' of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and to some degree also the work Tandy and Winston are promoting, along with the recent initiatives in primary school workshops from Australia's Bell Shakespeare Company, regards the appreciation of Shakespeare as in and of itself a goal in these exercises. Certainly there is a good chance that when these students encounter Shakespeare as a set text in later classes, they will benefit from the familiarity they have already developed and will be less likely to find the material intimidating. However, Shakespeare can still be an effective means, even when he is not an end. The exercises outlined here are not necessarily about helping children with Shakespeare, but more about giving them a

broader range of tools for emotional expression. Left to play without adult guidance, children will be drawing on a fairly limited palette of terms of expression. Guidance of this kind offers them tools that will stretch them.

To take Vygotsky somewhat out of context, it is already recognised that children in role-play are expanding beyond their real-life scope: 'In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he is a head taller than himself… it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behaviour' (Vygotsky, 1967, p. 16). There is no surer way to see a child rise to become a head taller than him or herself than to give them lines to speak that are filled with a greater richness of expression than they encounter elsewhere in their lives.

An anecdotal incident illustrates what can be gained by these kinds of extensions. When arriving at school to take one of these classes, the first named author bumped into a friend collecting her children. The first named author showed her eldest boy (aged 9) a line she was planning to use (actually from Webster, not Shakespeare), 'Uncivil sir, there's hemlock in thy breath!', saying 'you'll like this, you can use it when someone's being mean'. That evening my friend rang me. Her son had had a tough day at school spent feeling excluded by children who could play the requisite kind of sport better than him, and 'he wanted to know what that line was you told him this afternoon'. Having the words to respond to what he was going through helped return his sense of control over a difficult experience. The words made him feel powerful.

Left on their own, children can only draw on what they already know. Given what an excellent forum play is for skill development and emotional growth, it makes sense to use play activities to go further and help children to expand into a new world of words, especially if 'the bottom line for all education is a belief in the power of words – written and spoken, to influence and change the way we think, feel and act' (McNamee, 2005, p. 277). It is beginning to be recognised that 'informed and systematic analysis of the socio-emotional dimension of children's relationships must be a key focus of play research' (Nicolopoulou et al., 2010, p. 57). To this end, it would be valuable for further work to examine to what degree the expanded cultural vocabulary generated by guided narrative, and even scripted, play can be incorporated by children into their social and emotional engagement with their world.

7.6 Case Study: Introducing a Form of Playworlds to Preschool Children

In contrast to most schools, preschools are known as contexts for supporting role-play through the provision of materials and time for play. Indeed the purpose of most preschools in Western and European heritage communities is to support learning through play. In this section we examine the introduction of a form of playworld for supporting the cultural development of a group of preschool children through

introducing the narrative of *The Wishing Chair*, through creating a prop for imagining being inside a drop of water and through outdoor exploration and imagining being a spider.

7.6.1 The Wishing Chair

The preschool children attending the preschool who participated in the playworld were predominantly from Vietnamese- and English-speaking backgrounds, with some Hindi speakers. The group was made up of children from two different rooms in the preschool. Sixteen 3-year-old children (3.6–4.2 years, mean age of 4.1 years) came from the first room, and a selection of ten 4-year-old children (4.7–5.9 years, mean age of 5.3 years) came from the second room. The teachers selected the story of *The Wishing Chair* by Enid Blyton (1937), where the focus of the learning programme was on the microscopic world in which the children lived.

Context: The children are seated on a mat in a circle for group time. The teacher is showing the children a very thick storybook. On the left side of the group of children is an adult chair. The teacher invites two children from the group to sit in this 'wishing chair'.

Teacher: …and this book here, is a very big book, with lots and lots and lots and lots and even more stories about children who go on imaginary journeys. This book has so many words in all of these stories that I'm going to invite two of our pirate friends to come and sit in our wishing chair. H and F would you like to come and sit on our special wishing chair over here together? Do you think you can sit on… yeah?

Both children jump up and down as they move towards the wishing chair. They both climb into the chair, smiling, as the other children look on.

H: Laughs and wriggles into place.
Children: The group of children laugh.
Teacher: Hmm, let's see what happens when you both touch down, whoop there's fancies on the spot and there's room for H. Wow, you just fit.

The teacher talks to the children about the wishing chair and invites all the children to imagine going on a journey, as was previously read in the book (Fleer, 2014).

Setting up imaginary situations with children as shown through the introduction of the playworld of *The Wishing Chair* is not a common practice in preschools. Yet through the empirical work of Hakkarainen, Bredikyte, Jakkula and Munter (2013), we know that successful teacher interventions in narrative role-play not only develop children's play but culturally develop children. A successful playworld builds a playscript between adults and children, usually following a well-known story such as *The Wishing Chair*. The children in this example were motivated by the shared play theme. The story was 'brought alive with adults' participation and emotional involvement (in roles, dramatizations, storytelling, etc.)' (Hakkarainen, 2010, p. 79).

Fig. 7.1 Building a microscopic imaginary situation with children – inside a drop of water (Fleer, 2014)

In the next example, a special space is created where there is a need for active adult participation. Hakkarainen suggests that 'Creating environments and spending time for child-initiated play is essential in the development of children's reflection on playworld events, observation of child-initiated play reflecting playworld events offers valuable hints about new turns or further elaboration of joint playworld themes' (2010, p. 79).

7.6.2 *Imagining Being Inside a Drop of Water*

In the research context developed with the teachers (see Fleer, 2014), we created an imaginary situation through inflating a giant plastic bubble (5 × 2 × 1 m dimensions) which was kept inflated by a constantly propelling fan. Figure 7.1 shows the bubble that was created. The children and the teachers went inside the bubble for their joint imagining. The bubble physically created an *imaginary scientific situation* for the children and the teachers. The children entered into the bubble, and the teacher created the imagery by inviting the children to imagine being inside a drop of water.

The bubble allowed groups of children to physically move from the real concrete world to an imaginary microscopic world. This cultural device created the imaginary conditions for transitioning into a microscopic world.

Context: A group of children crawl into the bubble; the teachers ask them what they think of the bubble. (One girl calls it a big block of air). The teacher focusing on them 'imagining the microscopic world', especially the context of being inside a drop of water, the children soon start playing as if they are the microscopic organisms inside the drop of water.

C: Yay (smiling and moving about the bubble)
Teacher: Thanks C, how do you like it in here? It's pretty amazing isn't it?
C: It's like a big block of air.
Teacher: A big block of air?
H: It's so warm (said with real emotional intensity)
Teacher: So you think it's a warm spot to be in.
C: If you've got more time, how about we keep going round and round.
Teacher: C we probably will have a chance to do it another day, but imagine [pause]; you know how that story was imagined; and you imagine sometimes being pirates on a pirate ship; imagine you're some of those tiny little creatures we've seen [in the pond water], but you're inside a drop of water, how would you move inside a drop of water?
H: We'd just break it.
Teacher: You'd just break the drop, but imagine you're so tiny, and this is a big drop of water [pause]; and we're a drop inside a drop of water [pause]; we are a drop inside a bucket of water [pause]; and we are inside the drop!

Both children laugh and move about jumping slowly up and down, moving back and forth along the bubble, as though they are in slow motion, and then they move rapidly and then roll across the floor of the bubble. The teacher reflects this in her narrative:

Teacher: Slowly slowly… it looks like you're getting all shaken up H. Oh a rolling down sort, wow that's rolling right down. Oh and down again. (Fleer, 2014)

It is through the physical presence of the educators that the literary texts and themes being explored, such as microscopic pond water, are brought to life. This is made possible because the children used the cultural device of the bubble and the wishing chair to enter the playworld. Lindqvist says that in the playworld:

> the adults' *characters* have persuaded the children to enter the fiction. The literary characters, dramatized by the adults, step out of their literary texts and invite the children into the world which they represent. The adults become *mediators* between the fictitious world and the day-care centre, and establish a *dialogue* with the children. (1995, pp. 209–210)

7.6.3 Imagining and Dramatising Being a Spider

In the third example, we explore how children continue to use imagination to support the contradictions they experience in their everyday world. In the example that follows, one child spends an extended period of time with a group of children and a teacher in the outdoor play area of the preschool, informally studying a spider that one of the children has found. At the end of the exploration, as the spider returned to its natural habitat, and the children disperse, this child expresses his anxiety about

spiders when he says ‘I’m scared of the spider’ and then goes on to dramatise to another child how the spider camouflages itself.

Context: Several children gather around the teacher, where the children are looking at a spider that has landed on a sheet of paper, still attached to a long thread of web. The spider moves in an attempt to hide from the children who are trying to touch it or blow on it. The teacher gently tries to move the spider to a safe place. The teacher and the children comment on the actions of the spider as the spider falls off the paper and tries to crawl away. The teacher helps the children notice the thread, and they are amazed by the ‘extra sticky glue’ the spider uses to stay on the paper:

Spider investigation:

Child: It’s got extra sticky glue on it.
Teacher: He might have extra sticky glue on him. I wonder how he makes that? You could make the extra sticky glue.
Child: But, but how…when is he going to move?
Teacher: I don’t know, maybe when he’s feeling a bit more courageous or safer.
Child: I think I know why he’s not moving.
Child2: His legs are tucked in. He went off the paper.
Teacher: He’s off now is he, where did he go?
Child: He’s there!
Teacher: Aha so maybe he knows that on the paper we can see him really well and he wants to go where it’s harder for us to see him.
Child: I can still see him. He’s actually trying to trick us that he’s not here.
Teacher: Yeah he’s a bit camouflaged there, so it’s a bit harder to see him now isn’t it? You can still see him but it is just that we have to look closer.
Children: (great excitement)
Child: He’s starting to get a little bit angry.
Teacher: Why do you think he might be a little bit angry?
Child: Because.
Teacher: You just need to be a little bit careful with creatures like that.
Child: He might be a little bit angry because we are being ‘naughty, noisy’ to him (Fleer, 2014).

The teacher suggests that the children should go and wash their hands in preparation for morning tea. The children disperse across the outdoor area, but one child remains and says:

Child: I’m scared of the spider.

This child remains for a few minutes on his own and then walks across to another child who is in the sand pit and calls out to him and begins to role-play being the spider.

Spider Drama

Boy: It’s camouflaged itself, did you see?
Boy2: Eww
Boy: ‘Come and see how it stays still!’ The child then stands perfectly still, lifts up its hands in an aggressive gesture, as though he is a spider ready to pounce and says, ‘What does that say?’ (Fleer, 2014)

This example of the preschool setting, where the children and teachers were using the playworld to role-play the microscopic world they were studying, is illustrative of the dramatic dimensions outlined in Vygotsky's (1971) original thesis on the psychology of the arts, when he wrote that:

> 'The heroes of a drama, as well as an epic, are dynamic. The substance of a drama is a struggle…' (p. 227). 'Consequently, in any drama, we perceive both a norm and its violation; in this respect, the structure of a drama resembles that of a verse in which we have also a norm (meter) and a system of deviations from it the protagonist of a drama is therefore a character who combines two conflicting affects, that of the norm and that of its violation; this is why we perceive him [sic] dynamically, not as an object, but as a process'. (p. 231)

Being frightened of the spider, while also embodying the characteristics of the spider, is representative of this violation, enacted as a contradiction, a dynamic tension, which is supportive of not just learning about spiders but also emotionally engaging with the fear of the spider. The dramatic collision is important for the development of role-play but also for the cultural development of the child. In this example of a common play activity in preschool, we note that this activity is a foundational block in more sophisticated, and eventually adult, forms of role-play: people process what is fearful to them through dramatic enactment.

Together the three examples illustrate the importance of the adult in children's role-play. Each example gives a different role for the teacher – initially for creating the imaginary situation (wishing chair), for being in the role-play with the children (inside the bubble) and in providing the context (spider camouflaging) as a stimulus for role-play.

7.7 Conclusion: Learning from Drama Pedagogy

What is common to both the role-play of children in the early childhood setting and the school context is the creation of meaning by the children themselves through adult-supported role-play. The teacher takes an active role, employing specific techniques to develop children's play but also to culturally develop the children themselves. Instead of children's options for plot, character and expressive style being limited by what they have already been exposed to, each of the case studies shows a situation in which the teacher-initiated role-play provided an opportunity to expand the bank of knowledge that the children have to draw upon. By introducing new words (Shakespeare quotes), facts (spider camouflage) or concepts (microscopic life) that the children could not generate for themselves, expansive new possibilities for play are now available to these children.

What is distinct between role-play in free play settings and drama is 'In role-play, everyone is free to make their own interpretations, whereas in drama, everyone has to be part of the common fiction' (Lindqvist, 1995, p. 37). These forms of adult-led play are highly collaborative and foster a shared experiential style of group play that is dynamic and involving for the participants. Through the empirical

work of Hakkarainen et al. (2013) into successful adult intervention in narrative role-play, seven characteristics were identified and which have been discussed throughout this chapter. They are:

- Coherent and fascinating scenarios to engage the adult as well as the children.
- Dramatic tension and/or emotional stakes in the play script.
- Motivating shared theme.
- Immersed involvement of adults. The teacher is not merely issuing instructions but participates in the *playworld*.
- Dialogic character of interaction (e.g. co-construction of play event).
- Adults have an active 'in role' position in the play.
- Ongoing elaboration of the 'critical' turns in play, such as anticipating potentially boring moments and introducing new characters, events or critical incidents or giving new content (e.g. spider investigation), or adjusting for disparate ability levels (e.g. distributing lines of Shakespeare).

Hakkarainen et al. ask, 'What developmental play interaction must be practiced daily?' (2013, p. 216). The case studies show the fundamental importance of an active educator in supporting role-play. In drama pedagogy this is the norm, as it is in playworlds, but this is not commonly discussed in the early childhood literature. Hakkarainen et al. (2013) have shown that drama creates a new pedagogical context that adults can become involved in.

> Dramatising stories and taking roles motivates adults to step in a joint play-world and take a role, which in turn wakes up the adult's own imagination, helps emotional involvement, and perezhivanie. It changes the adult-child relationship and 'switches' adult thinking from rational to narrative. (Hakkarainen et al., 2013, p. 223)

At the beginning of this chapter, we raised the challenge that role-play should not be left to chance. We said that it should not be solely a self-directed activity of children. Through the case examples and references to the literature, we have presented a more theoretically informed view of the role of adults in children's role-play. Drama pedagogy and the pedagogy of the playworld helped us think differently about the role of adults in children's play. As early childhood teachers, we must not miss the opportunity to develop children's play. By engaging with them in an imaginative space, the teacher becomes a resource for expanding the children's palette of situations to place themselves in, as well as means of expressing responses to that situation to one another. Tapping into the drama pedagogy literature has given us new lenses for thinking about the role of the adult in children's play. We can no longer stand back; we must become involved in children's role-play. Together with children, we can create the imaginary conditions for expanding children's playworld, and through this support the development of their play. Through being collaborative, experiential and stretching outside the familiar, these methods encourage the kind of cultural historically framed learning that results in real conceptual and emotional engagement. This in turn means we culturally develop the child in both school and preschool settings through drama pedagogy.

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Chapter 8
The Playground of the Mind: Teaching Literature at University

Deborah Pike

Abstract This chapter begins with the claim that conventional serious, strictly syllabus- and goal-oriented teaching does not inspire students with confidence in their own capacity to engage critically and creatively with and contribute to interpretations of literature. It poses the solution of employing a playful pedagogy, via games and props. The chapter initially explores the theoretical background of the concepts of play and playful pedagogy, drawing on early learning and, where available, adult learning contexts, as well as literary and philosophical perspectives on creativity and play. It then argues that by appreciating the playful aspects of both reading and writing, literary study becomes more pleasurable. Johan Huizinga's notion of *poeisis*, which 'proceeds within the play-ground of the mind, in a world of its own which the mind creates for it' (Huizinga, Homo Ludens: a study of the play-element in culture. Beacon Press, Boston, 1955, p. 119) is central to the argument, as is Donald Winnicott's notion of the 'transitional object' (Winnicott, Int J Psychoanal 34:89–97, 1953). Extrapolating from these theories and from the author's own teaching experience, the chapter offers a suite of playful activities to enhance playfulness in literary studies in the adult learning context. The possibility of this kind of enhancement can inspire educators to return to this 'playground of the mind' to reanimate student engagement with texts, stimulate imaginative thinking and nuanced analyses, as well to provoke a deeper experience of literature.

8.1 Introduction

> *Literature must be the axe for the frozen sea within us.*[1]

Kafka seems to imply that literature, as the axe, will do violence to the ice of the frozen sea, rupturing the surface, thereby exposing the sea beneath (the sea within us)—

[1] From a letter by Franz Kafka to his schoolmate Oskar Pollak, 27 January 1904, cited in Josipovici (1976, p. 12).

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René Magritte, *The Son of Man*, Oil on Canvas, 1945 (© Rene Magritte. ADAGP/Licensed by Viscopy, 2016)

this released sea may represent the anarchy or beauty of the imagination, our creativity, sensibility, empathy, receptivity, self-awareness, recognition of shared experience or, more radically, reassessment of oneself or one's worldview.[2]

Good literature feeds our imagination and nourishes our intellectual life. It provides a mirror to ourselves and educates us about humanity, history, culture and the diversity of experiences. It uses language in artful ways and expands our notion of what is possible through the written word. Literature entertains us, opens up avenues into other realities and offers new slants on the world. Through it, we encounter 'the other', experience the characters' story and—even in the most experimental of works—are prompted to reflect on reality and our relationship to it.

When I teach literature, I want my students to be moved, thrilled, delighted, saddened and even enraged by what they read. I want their reading to tap into their emotional lives and for them to become absorbed in the narrative in such a way that their identity slips in and out of the words in front of them, so that through this process they weave their own meanings and arrive at their own understanding. I am inspired by reader-response approaches to literary study, like those of Louise Rosenblatt, which leave the reader to derive meaning from the text via a potent transaction between reader and text; literature thus becomes 'a mode of personal life experience that involves a potentially powerful combination of intellect and emotions not available in other areas of study' (Connell, 2000, p. 27). I ask students to interrogate literature's modes and styles and to think about the ways in which language is used to map a moment in time. Ultimately, I wish for them to be transported by what they read—and for part of them, however minor, to be changed. I also want them to bring that to class and to be able to talk about it and tell me why.

[2] The author would like to thank Catherine Heath for her comments and suggestions.

Of course, this does not always happen. Students can find both reading and discussing literary texts extremely difficult. Sometimes they lack the concepts, appreciation of form and literary terminology to respond to what they have read and so cannot even begin. At other times, they have no conception that their experience of the text is what I am fundamentally interested in, as they are quite simply unaware that their point of view matters at all. Indeed, the silence in the classroom can be thick, as students have not made the time to read the text or they have abandoned their reading, impatient for something more familiar, relatable or readily satisfying. Some students may plough through the text stoically and then complain of absent plots, flowery language or unfathomable characters. These are, of course, pertinent responses to literature and worth exploring in class; however, while resistance, negativity and taciturnity can be used productively, they may also make teaching literature daunting and far from enjoyable.

What lies at the heart of this difficulty or resistance? I would like to suggest, in the first instance, that it is not that students do not know anything, but rather that they do not know what they know and therefore struggle to express it. Students of literature possess knowledge that does not always know its own meaning. Plato writes about a related phenomenon in *Meno* when he recounts Socrates's theory of recollection and connects it with learning. Meno poses the question of how one may inquire about a thing when ignorant of what it is. How, then, can literature teachers turn the classroom into a place of enlightening expressiveness where students might 'uncover' some of this knowledge that they 'already know'? What sort of space is necessary for generating lively discussion of texts where rich and original interpretations of literature might emerge? Posing questions and structuring a class in particular ways, using games and props and playful attitudes may provide space and opportunities for students to uncover their own knowledge.

8.2 Playful Pedagogy

In order to discuss playful pedagogy, we must also explore what it means to be playful.

There are a plethora of definitions for play, many of which contradict one another and none of which are universally agreed upon. Some authors focus on the relationship between play and children; one useful notion, for instance, from Friedrich Froebel (the inaugurator of the concept of kindergarten) is his much-quoted idea that 'play is the work of children' and the 'highest expression of what is in a child's soul' (Froebel [1826] 1887, p. 55), while developmental psychologist Jean Piaget ([1945] 1962) argues that play contributes to the child's developing intellect and allows her to self-regulate. Lev Vygotsky ([1934] 1986) argues for the importance of play in developing symbolic and linguistic capabilities in children.

Elsewhere, the focus is placed on the distinction between the realms of play and real life. Johan Huizinga (1955) defines play as a voluntary activity which is imaginary and different from real life; from there he goes on to assert that play creates

order but has no material interest and in that regard is ‘superfluous’ (p. 1–27). For psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, meanwhile, play forms the crucial mediation between the internal and external worlds from which culture and art originate (Winnicott, 1953, p. 231) (a matter which will be explored later in this chapter). Similarly, Victor Turner (1982, p. 83) suggests that play is about being in the ‘subjunctive mood’, in an ‘as if’ state (1992, p. 149)—perhaps one where, as Vygotsky also observes, ‘unrealizable desires can be realized’ (1978, p. 92). This distinction has been of interest to many authors over the course of more than a century: from Herbert Spencer (1873) and Erik Erikson (1963) to Brian Sutton-Smith (1997), it has been argued that play involves preparing for the future and is even a rehearsal for life (Erikson, 1963; Sutton-Smith, 1994). Nor has the distinction garnered a consensus among scholars: later educational theorists such as Janet Moyles (1989) and others (Pellegrini, 1991) critique the binary idea that play is different from real life. Meanwhile, Doris Pronin Fromberg (1987, 1992) posits that play takes place when it is symbolic, meaningful, active, pleasurable, voluntary, rule governed and episodic. The question of rules and play is a matter for debate.

Educationalists often make the distinction between unstructured (or free) play and structured play. Free play is described as something which is pleasurable, involving aspects of make-believe and spontaneity. It can be private and all engrossing and does not generally have a goal. It therefore offers us a counter-space from the world of outcomes, productivity, efficiency and instrumentality. In his *Critique of Judgement* ([1790] 2007), Kant argues that there can be a ‘purposiveness without purpose’ (p. 40–41), a noninstrumental but purposeful engagement in activity. This is a state from which, it can be argued, we may move out of rational logic into intuition, imagination, emotion and even problem-solving. Indeed, there is something in play—and in the use of one’s imagination—that brings about one’s individuality, as well as great satisfaction, which the romantics, such as Coleridge (1907) and Shelley ([1821] 1840), were intent on promoting. When describing how poets work, W. H. Auden refers to St. Augustine’s idea of an ‘acte gratuite’, insisting that play is satisfying because it is an activity that is freely chosen and unnecessary and therefore enhances autonomy (Auden, 1976, p. 638). This idea of play as subscribing one’s individuality is also an enlightenment ideal put forth earlier by philosopher Friedrich Schiller—‘Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and he is only wholly Man when he is playing’ (Schiller ([1875] [1795], 1954; original emphasis). These notions are in keeping with the idea that play is voluntary, which is often in conflict with the idea of games, rule-bound play or the ‘scaffolded’ play which is often part of early childhood learning and much school learning.

Structured play therefore involves an internal paradox: it is designed to encourage play, but within certain limits. It might involve a particular goal that is designed to stimulate a student’s curiosity and exploration. A teacher may provide particular games, objects or stimulus activities in order to foster it, with particular outcomes, skills or experiences achieved in mind. This kind of play is still not without risk in that students may not always respond constructively, and there is no guarantee that ‘authentic play’ will take place. The role of the teacher in this instance is to provide the optimum conditions for play to occur and thus enhance the creativity and autonomy of the student as well as her developmental capacities.

Jacques-Laurnet Agasse, *The Playground* (*Der Spielpatz*), Oil on Canvas, 1827

Using play as a pedagogical tool is by no means new. There is an abundant body of research in the field of early childhood studies demonstrating that playful approaches to teaching young children are beneficial for developing cognitive functioning and literacy and language skills and for enhancing social and emotional aptitudes as well as physical coordination (Moyles & Adams, 2001; Moyles 2010). Through playful pedagogy, children learn how to make choices, negotiate and initiate ideas, develop independent thought and rehearse imaginatively different situations and thus acquire the capacity to solve problems and become more confident. Through play, it is argued by numerous theorists and practitioners, children learn how to explore and investigate ideas, adopt new behaviours and function symbolically and numerically (Anning, Cullen, & Fleer, 2008). Janet Moyles (2010) argues that play in teaching is crucial, especially in early childhood. This is partly because scientists have come to understand that learning takes place via the sensory experiences which assist the brain in making certain connections (Greenfield, 2008, p. 6) and play assists in making such connections. While adult learners are clearly at a different developmental stage than young children and possess brains that are arguably less malleable or absorbent, there is no reason why playful pedagogy should not be constructive and valuable, especially when it comes to developing the capac-

ity to initiate ideas, problem-solve, improve language skills and interpret language, all of which are relevant to the literature curriculum.

There is a paucity of research on playful teaching in higher education. Pauline Harris, an early childhood teacher educator, has stressed the importance of learning about play for young children through play with adults (2007). On the other hand, there is a small body of research on pedagogical practices in teaching English literature as a subject in colleges and universities, some of which promote imaginative and 'soulful' approaches to the task. Abram Van Engen argues that students long to be changed via their reading experiences and that they have a 'deep passion' and a 'desire for substance' which they find through the reading and study of literature alone (2005, p. 9). In his reflections on 'What Do We Read When We Read English?', Rick Gekoski suggests that while teaching, especially when reading across a wide range of material, 'we [English professors] transmit a culture, a set of texts and practices and memories that touch us' (2006, p. 10).

While we may think of pedagogy as a formal activity which is designed to assist students in achieving particular learning outcomes, playful teaching need not, strictly speaking, stand in conflict with the achievement of these outcomes, nor should it be dismissed as 'mere play'. Graduate outcomes for a major in English typically include demonstrating a knowledge and understanding of different literary periods, forms and genres, as well as historical, theoretical and critical ideas in literature. Students of literature are expected to be able to analyse texts in terms of their scholarship as well as their historical, critical and cultural frameworks and to argue for their point of view using textual evidence. Assisting students in meeting these outcomes need not be a painful or clinical process if the playful elements of language, story and meaning—all essential elements of literary encounters—can be mobilised.

8.3 Literature and Play

The relationship between play and literature is a strong one and is connected to story making. According to the much-quoted anthropologist Johan Huizinga, every act of imaginative play is a narrative one, as it involves imposing a story on objects and thereby entails making meaning. Huizinga calls this 'mythopoesis', which refers to the way in which a child makes stories, or metaphors, as she plays. Huizinga writes:

> as soon as the effect of a metaphor consists in describing things or events in terms of life and movement, we are on the road to personification. To represent the incorporeal and the inanimate as a person is the soul of all myth-making and nearly all poetry. (1955, p. 136)

Huizinga emphasises this imaginative translation from the real to the imaginary (poetic). Thus, from a very young age, children engage in 'myth-making' through play. Huizinga states, '*Poiesis*, [that is storytelling,] is in fact, a play-function. It proceeds within the play-ground of the mind, in a world of its own which the mind

creates for it' (p. 119). Huizinga argues that all poetry is born of play, and all stories and personification are modes of play. This idea constitutes very fertile ground for literary scholars and educators who may assist students to tap into this imaginative playground.

In *The Ambiguity of Play*, play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith claims that all forms of literature are to some extent play: there exists literature with playful content, and there are play forms that are themselves literature—storytelling and drama that people make up—as well as literary tropes and metaphors that are a kind of play (1997, p. 142). Literature with playful content might include any kind of comedic literature, like satirical works such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* ([1735] 1971), or Shakespeare's subversive plays, such as the *Twelfth Night* ([1602] 2004), where roles of men and women are reversed and playfully performed.

In keeping with these ideas, Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin ([1930s] 1981) shows that the novel is an example of play par excellence. It is an endless dialectical play within the human imagination, as the reader must develop sensitivity to an often immense plurality of characters. As readers, we freely engage in a task which we experience as pleasurable. We might think of those great Russian novels, such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* ([1869] 1978), where readers must become acquainted with a vast array of personalities: their lives, identities, qualities, flaws and moral systems. As readers we are asked to imaginatively rehearse and travel with them on their journeys and take ethical positions as to their choices and actions. Using Bakhtin's ideas, Brian Edmiston (2008) argues that children can develop their ethics via reading fiction, which encourages them to adopt and review various ethical decisions characters have to make. The act of reading thus immerses the reader in an imagined world, engaging them in a game of make-believe, and is therefore a form of play.

Virginia Woolf reminds us that the act of reading can be as pleasurable unstructured play; it can be an impressionistic activity, a process of receiving meaning by absorbing and assembling imagery, emotions, impressions and isolated thoughts or incidents, rather than a goal-driven, teleological interpretation of a series of events as plot:

> If a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his own work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style … Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit ….' (Woolf [1919] 1984, p. 160)

When reading a Henry James or Virginia Woolf novel, the reader can build up a deep sense of the emotional and sensory experiences but can have difficulty recounting conventional plot/events if they pause to analyse 'what has happened', because so much of what 'happens' occurs in the space of characters' thoughts, perceptions and changing attitudes to surrounding people and events. Much may 'happen' internally in the course of an outwardly brief or trivial event. It can be easier to gain a holistic sense of the novel's meaning by reading quickly and continuously rather

than methodically delving into the plot detail, like running quickly over ice, skimming a stone over water or viewing an impressionist painting from a distance. This reading process is very much in keeping with the goal-less experimentation encouraged by Kant and Coleridge, mentioned earlier.

This chapter explores the notion that literature itself is playful and argues that drawing on the inherent playfulness of the literary is essential in the playful teaching of literature. In the same way as children might play around with objects, either real or imaginary, in the playground, adults can do the same in the classroom when it comes to working with literary texts. This 'playing around' can give rise to productive and innovative responses to literature by providing students with both structured and unstructured opportunities to access a knowledge which is latent or, indeed, a knowledge which may not at first 'know its own meaning' and thus provide a space and opportunity for students to explore and articulate their autonomous thought. As Tom Griffiths explains:

> [literature and story] is actually a piece of disciplined magic, of highly refined science. It is the most powerful educational tool we possess; it is learning distilled in a common language. It is also a privileged carrier of truth, a way of allowing for multiplicity and complexity at the same time as guaranteeing memorability. (Griffiths, 2007)

This chapter suggests how the teaching of literature can become more engaging through play, proposing playful activities which may be introduced in the literature classroom to mobilise the playful potential of literary texts. Each of these is designed to help students experiment and develop independent thought in literary studies. Removing the serious mood of the classroom can liberate students from conventional modes of articulation and encourage more innovative ones; moreover, incorporating playful techniques can stimulate students to present creative readings of literary texts and thus help them evolve into autonomous scholars.

8.3.1 Play and Flow

In his book *Flow*: *The Psychology of Optimum Experience*, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argues that by putting in place elements which enhance one's ability to focus and enjoy an activity, the chances of a flow experience occurring increase. Flow involves focusing on the present moment, being aware of one's actions while at the same time losing self-consciousness during those actions. People experiencing flow possess a sense of control over what they do and a change in temporality and generally find the activity they are undertaking deeply rewarding and pleasurable. While a state of flow can arise at any point, the chances of its occurring increase when someone is wholly absorbed in a task which has a specific purpose or goal. Although straightforward results are not guaranteed, playfulness can bring about a more 'flowing' literature classroom, which would likely not only enhance the quality of learning but would also be more enjoyable for students and teachers alike. While play and flow are not necessarily the same phenomenon, play can certainly give rise

to experiences of flow. Setting playful activities within the literature classroom provides students with something purposeful, and it also provides a space where they can test their skill.

Eliciting student engagement in the literature classroom today requires manifold approaches, as each person learns in varying ways: some verbally, some visually, others experientially and most with a combination of these. Playful teaching takes these different modes into consideration and provides an atmosphere in which more experimental and expressive ways of thinking, and perhaps even flow experiences, can come about.

The connections between play, flow and literary pedagogy are evident in the acts of reading and writing. The act of reading itself, which is necessary for the study of literature, involves a particular kind of absorption which we enter into via play and may be seen as exemplifying the flow experience. Once we start to read, usually as young children, we commence our own symbolic, literary and intellectual life; we enter into 'the playground of the mind'. Reading becomes an escape from reality, a freedom from imposition and a purposeless but still purposeful activity. In his meditations on the pleasure of reading fiction, French writer Marcel Proust famously wrote: 'There are perhaps no days of our childhood we lived so fully as those we believe we left without having lived them, those we spent with a favorite book' (Proust [1905] 1994, p. 3). Being lost in the imaginative universe which fiction provides allows another vivid life to take place in the reader's mind. In her short story 'Eleanor Reads Emma', contemporary Australian writer Gail Jones (1997) describes her protagonist Eleanor Bovary's experience of reading Jane Austen's *Emma*. She asks herself:

> What is it, to read? They are paper wings you fly on. They are spaces of mysterious black on white rarefaction. You travel through air to the last page. You do not actually exist. You are carried along, a kind of symbol, a useless kind of symbol. Integrating all that is there, predisposed, overdetermined, to some destination that is both precious and a total nothingness. It is a cunning procedure. Impersonating and depersonating. And you are lost. And you are found. And you have been everywhere and nowhere. Interiority itself is traduced and shanghaied. Think of it: how strange! What a peculiar absorption. (p. 44)

A peculiar absorption indeed when one really contemplates it, a book is simply black marks on a pile of paper, or an electronic file, sitting there until someone picks it up, brings herself to the text and makes meaning of it. Literature is therefore the object of our aesthetic experience. This idea applies to many works of art; indeed, art and literature are objects or events that take on an aesthetic existence *only* in transaction with human consciousness. The marriage of story and reader is thus a productive one, and meaning cannot exist until this very important and playful act takes place.

There is also a strong connection between creative writing and play. In his essay 'On Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' ([1907] 1995), Sigmund Freud makes explicit the connection between adult writers and the experience of play:

> The creative writer does the same as the child at play. He creates a world of fantasy which he takes very seriously—that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion—while separating it sharply from reality. (p. 437)

According to Freud, therefore, the writer is engaged in an imaginative rehearsal, akin to the myth-making of childhood. Creative writing is a mode of 'representation' which brings immense joy and pleasure to the writer.

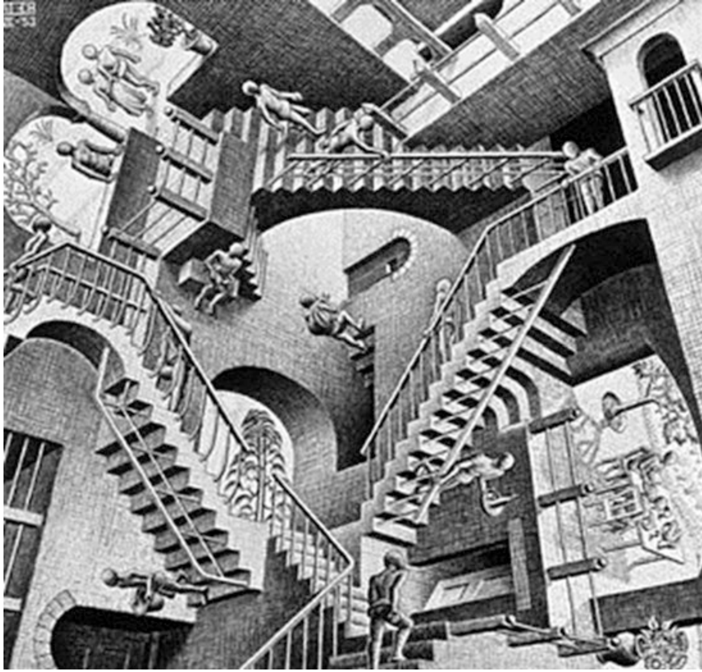
Freud then discusses the transition from childhood play to adult fantasy life:

> As people grow up, then, they cease to play, and they seem to give up the yield of pleasure which they gained from playing. But whoever understands the human mind knows that hardly anything is harder for a man than to give up a pleasure which he has once experienced. Actually, we can never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another. What appears to be a renunciation is really the formation of a substitute or surrogate. In the same way, the growing child, when he stops playing, gives up nothing but the link with real objects; instead of *playing*, he now *fantasises*. He builds castles in the air and creates what are called daydreams. I believe that most people construct fantasies at times in their lives. (p. 437–38)

An analogy between children and students can thus be drawn. As a teacher, then, the key is to tap into students' fantasy lives via literature. Although this chapter does not address creative writing explicitly, but rather literary analysis, creative writing is one of the most playful and useful ways of summoning students to express their relationship to texts, ideas and experiences and to extract the meaning from their lives via writing exercises.

What is clear from looking at the playful aspects of reading and writing is that each process requires an exchange between inner and outer worlds. Both Winnicott and Huizinga see play as the production of culture. In his celebrated essay 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott develops his theory of play which appears in his book *Playing and Reality* (1971). Winnicott demonstrates how a child's relationship to its pacifier, blanket or doll is a 'transitional object' of play which anticipates the role of culture in the adult world—a way of connecting internal life to an external, material world. This object is the first object the child differentiates as separate from him or herself and is symbolic of the breast (Winnicott, 1953, p. 231, 233). This object occupies a space that is both subjective and objective in the mind, becoming 'the intermediate between the dream and the reality, that which is called cultural life' (Winnicott, 1965, p. 150). The transitional phenomena of infancy become the cultural life of the adult.

Using Matin Heidegger's notion of 'the thing' (1971), cultural theorist Bill Brown develops his 'Thing Theory' (2001) which explores how objects become tings 'once they stop working for us' as their 'thingness' or use value changes, and they no longer do what they were designed to do. Brown writes: 'the story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relationship to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation' (Brown, 2001, p. 4). These theorists show how objects and props are useful for artistic life as they assist us in negotiating the internal and external worlds as well as subject-object relations, as our changing relationship to objects may also inflect our evolving subjectivities. Playing with objects and things is thus potentially useful for the study of literature.



M. C. Escher, *Relativity*, lithograph, 1953

8.4 Where Literature, Play and Pedagogy Meet

In the same way that literature, as mythopoesis, is produced through imaginative acts which appear on a page, the study of literature also involves playful processes. In the study of literature, one must first read the text, or 'encounter' the text, to use a phenomenological term, and then respond to it as an aesthetic product. This response may begin intuitively, emotionally or cognitively; it should then develop into interpretation or analysis expressed through writing or speaking. All of these processes are inherently playful ones, and if we amplify and draw attention to these playful dimensions, we may assist students in understanding and responding to literary texts.

Philosopher Mikel Dufrenne sees the role of educator as someone who 'initiates the student into faithful perceiving as a means for them to accomplish their tasks, from their own standpoints, against the background of their own awareness' (1973, iii). Thus, when students are being taught how to approach a literary text, they must learn to read in a way which entails what Dufrenne terms 'faithful perceiving'. However, faithful perceiving is not straightforward; any work of art which is faith-

fully perceived will make a demand upon us, as Maxine Greene (2001, p. 44), inspired by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, insists. Often students resist the demands literature makes. Literature professor Calvin Thomas argues that the study of literature is so demanding that it is actually masochistic. He argues that to do well at literary studies, you have to enjoy the transformative pain of uncertainty, provisionality, nonidentity and ambivalence—qualities which are the very essence of play. He writes:

> What is required for the student of literature or theory is in my opinion expert training in the art of making sure that one never knows exactly what one is doing, that one never feels at home or at ease. That one isn't seduced by the comforts of familiarity, identity, certainty, or mastering terms of one's own response, and continued responsiveness, one's openness to the texts, the body and the world. It is only through resistance—refusing to be one—which is revelling in the truth of self-division—that discovery and invention, what Lacan calls 'conceiving … the encounter with strangeness, with the other, with literary art,' in the strongest sense, are possible. (2005, p. 28–29)

Thomas suggests that these playful and uncertain positions are at the very heart of literary study and that resistance to fixity is paramount. This may be incredibly challenging for students. There is also an inherent difficulty for literature students in learning about psychoanalytical criticism, symbolism and other branches of criticism that rely heavily on their own development of, and introspection about, their own jargon, which can make their meaning circular, 'slippery' and fragmentary and their techniques hard to penetrate. Playful approaches in the classroom can help us make sense of these demands.

Both reading experiences and teaching processes are dialectical: they involve conversations, firstly between text and reader and then between student and teacher. In fact, the conversations are multilayered as, according to Bakhtin, there may be multiple conversations going on within the literary text and multiple responses from the student which are then multiplied in discussion with other students and with the teacher and which thus give rise to a galaxy of potential interpretations.

Maxine Greene, a leading thinker on the philosophy of aesthetic education, notes that 'teaching is about finding openings'. In a classroom, 'there will be a play of differences … through which meanings can emerge'. Greene writes, '[t]here will be moments of recognition, moments of doubt, and endless interrogation as diverse persons strive to create themselves in their freedom' (1995, p. 21). It is the idea that the students are striving to create themselves in their freedom in the classroom which is the most useful for play pedagogy in literary study: playfulness gives them space to find the freedom to question, contest ideas and make mistakes. The teacher of literary studies must first mediate the relationship with the literary text, and then students will develop their own relationship with the text; this is the ideal. In a sense, the teacher must then disappear in order for the class to be successful.

It is crucial that playfulness in the classroom be noncoercive. Factors outside the immediate relationship of text, teacher and student may affect students' attitudes

and participation. For example, if participation itself is assessed, students are likely to display a range of confidence in class participation from timidity to egotism, sometimes influenced by rivalry and usually by the desire or imperative to prove individual competence in class discussions. Students are conscious of being marked by the teacher and judged by their peers for the quality, content and amount of their class participation when they choose whether to speak. Some forge ahead with comments to ensure they pass a participation benchmark, while others are too uncertain to venture an opinion.

8.5 My Philosophy of Literature Pedagogy

As reported by Bérubé (1998), the discipline of English as I understand and practise it is intrinsically promiscuous, as it engages with areas such as history, sociology, psychology and linguistics. Where relevant and illuminating, I draw on other disciplines in my teaching. A significant dimension to this interdisciplinarity involves a change in the frames of reference a person may have, which includes points of view, worldviews and habits of thought. Students begin to understand that knowledge is constructed by the context in which a person lives. Interdisciplinarity also means making connections across different paradigms, structures and modes of thought. It is an integrating approach rather than a fragmented one.

At the same time, however, I also believe in assisting students to develop traditional skills in literary analysis and interpretation, which includes close reading. My experience teaching in the French university system, at both large public universities (Paris VII) and elite selective schools (Sciences Po), has made me aware of the different possibilities of teaching texts and the benefits and richness of focusing on small extracts of literary text for study as well as drawing on other schools of thought such as psychology, anthropology or social science for reading and interpretation. Therefore, while I believe in considering literary texts within their historical, political and philosophical contexts and orientations, I remain a firm believer in the traditional skills of close reading and practical criticism.

Above all, I believe in conveying to students the mobilising potential of literature: its power to destabilise fixed categories of meaning and ways of perceiving the world and its potential to disrupt and unsettle. In this respect, the 'play' in my classroom, while often pleasurable, is not trivial or frivolous. Rather, it creates a productive space for new meanings to emerge and competencies to develop.

My literary games thus involve a twofold logic of encouraging students to develop the skills of both close reading and contextual analysis.

Federico Zandomeneghi, *Children's Games in the Parc Monceau*, Oil on Canvas, 1841–1917

8.5.1 Case Study: Playing Games in the Literature Classroom

Games take away the serious atmosphere of the literature class by introducing an element of chance and spontaneity and perhaps even an opportunity to benefit from a flow experience as discussed above. Noncoercive game play liberates students from the conventions and strictures of learning that they remember from school and even reconnects them with the creativity of early childhood. The games chosen are often inspired by a combination of my own inventions and surrealist games, which were often drawn from nineteenth-century parlour games, while some games entail the use of props and images to stimulate a variety of responses.

8.5.1.1 Automatic Response

The surrealists played games in order to unleash free thought, produce fresh art and generate ideas for their poetry that were free from constraint and rational order. One of their first principles was automatic writing. In the *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924, Breton defined automatic language as 'monologue spoken as rapidly as possible, on which the subject's critical spirit brings no judgement to bear, which is subsequently unhampered by reticence, and which is, as exactly as close as possible to spoken thought', therefore providing 'a true photograph of thought' (Nadeau [1966] 1968, p. 89). It is evident that automatic writing was inspired by Freud's 'free-association' therapy, a technique of accessing an individual's unconscious thoughts so as to heal

the patient. While free associating, a patient speaks of whatever matters or images come into her head, without censorship or self-correction. Similarly, in the literature classroom, simply writing down whatever comes into one's head without censorship or interruption can be a highly valuable practice for students, freeing their mind of too much conscious control. This process may begin with a question about the text—its themes, politics, form, genre, characterisation, tone, style or point of view, for instance—and students must simply write down (in silence, for 5 min) whatever comes into their head. In another instance, students may be asked to read an extract of text and simply respond with no instructions. Some students may wish to share their responses; others may not. The class will then be asked to identify one point which another student shared and which struck them as illuminating. In this sense, students engage in meaning-making processes which are larger than their own and can thus come to appreciate the multiple ways in which meaning may be made. This mode of learning is both experiential and verbal and provides students' key starting points from which they may develop their own critical voice as textual analysts.

8.5.1.2 Exquisite Text I

A favourite surrealist game was known as *le cadavre exquis* (the exquisite corpse). Another variation on this involves simply cutting out quotes from the set text (I personally often use Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* 2001) and then putting them into a hat and asking students to choose a quotation at random. The paragraphs or passages of text are strategically chosen in the sense that they offer important insights into characterisation, form, theme, style, politics, language or point of view—in the case of the Dangarembga work, an excerpt of dialogue between Nyasha and her father, or Tambu's observations on her brother. Students work either alone or in pairs and are given time to comment on this scene in relation to the rest of the novel. They annotate the extract for its language, ideas and literary features. They may be asked where the extract fits in the novel and what it might reveal about character or theme or its use of language. Specific questions about literary technique can be written on the back of the extract, and students are asked to respond directly, or a more philosophical question may be posed. This particular activity is very helpful in honing skills in close reading which are essential for success in literary study. The exquisite body becomes a compendium of shared findings.

8.5.1.3 Exquisite Text II

In this activity, a number of literary terms are cut up and placed in a hat; these could, for example, be synecdoche, internal rhyme, incantation, conflation, collapse, allusion, intertextuality, suggestion, symbolism, metaphor, obfuscation, repetition, personification, onomatopoeia, personae, voices, ventriloquy, polyphony, heteroglossia, quotation, impersonality and citation. Students are then asked to pull a term from the hat. The student may wish to check the definition of the term first, before having

to identify an example of it in the set text or extract. Students then explain to the class the meaning of the literary term and what they have come up with in their responses in relation to the text. It helps them develop their critical terminology and then apply it where relevant. This is a good exercise for the study of poetry.

8.5.1.4 Exquisite Text III

Another way of carrying out the previous activity is simply to distribute a word to the students. This could be a word connected with the themes of the set text or a word from the actual poem or text itself or some word which is a description of the text's form or formal properties. Students are then asked to comment on the 'work' of the word—what does it do to, and in, the text and why did the author put it there? How does it bear on the text in a broader sense? Students may even learn a new word! It is helpful to either use a word which is particularly characteristic of the author (e.g. 'agreeable' in a Jane Austen novel) in order to elicit an exploration of that author's style or to focus on the unusual significance or meaning an author may apply to a particular word in context.

8.5.1.5 Coupage

Another, more lateral, game involves the use of shapes, a game which stimulates students' visual memory. Students are asked to form groups and are given a particular shape which may have anything from 6 to 12 sides to it. They are asked to fill the shape with a puzzle of parts made from paper. These parts should represent key aspects of the text which they are studying. They may decide on these aspects or themes, or they may be given to them. It is up to the students how they do this. The act of assembling the puzzle means that students will then need to elucidate connections between the aspects on each piece either through writing first and then speaking. Sometimes the aspects of study are set out; other times the students are asked to make them up for themselves. This assists students in making links between the different elements of a text and to appreciate paradoxes and contradictions which emerge from that. Each student would need to speak to each part to the class as a whole after the activity. Such an activity also encourages multiple points of view and perspectives.

8.5.1.6 Aesthetic Immersion

This creative play approach involves immersing students in the aesthetic associations which great works inspire so as to stimulate their senses and deepen their response to the topic of study. An effective stimulus game is to give students either electronic or paper copies of artworks connected to the particular area of study in question.

For example, for a unit in literary modernism, a striking painting is Marcel Duchamp's 'Nude Descending a Staircase'. This might be combined with a poem by T. S. Eliot or an extract of text from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* ([1927] 2006); both media work together, with one text refracting through the other. For example, the shattered figure in Duchamp's painting could represent not only the author or poet but also a particular character's sense of self or an idea of plot; it may also provide an image which helps the reader conceptualise the linguistic experimentation being employed in the work. For a subject on African American literature, for example, pictures by Lawrence Jacob might be offered in conjunction with Ralph Ellison's classic, *Invisible Man* (1952). The two texts may speak to one another. For a course in romantic poetry, one might compare William Blake's (2000) etchings of *The Chimney Sweeper* with his poem of the same title. Students may be asked simply to comment on how the two texts collide and comment upon one another.

Aesthetic immersion can be used in several ways. There may be one picture for a whole class, individual pictures could be distributed to each student, or the class could be split into groups or pairs with a picture each. The group as a whole would listen to a variety of responses formulated on the basis of different pictures in each group. This creative collision creates a space through which new readings can emerge via an encounter with two aesthetic planes and multiple aesthetic experiences—and also appreciating the broader context of the set work via art.

The stimulus technique can also be used with film clip and audio devices. A piece of music can be compared to a text or a film extract. I have shown video extracts of ballet and asked students to find associations between the music and a poem on the same theme. I have used Gluck's Baroque music from *Orpheus and Eurydice* in conjunction with ballet choreographed by Pina Bausch in order to help students respond to Rainer Maria Rilke's poem, 'Orpheus and Eurydice'. Each artwork, in this instance, is born of a different context, which also becomes a fruitful point of discussion itself, as students debate these images over the ages, taking into account changing contexts and perceptions as well as artistic forms involved the themes of myth, loss, music and storytelling.

8.5.1.7 (Transitional) Objects

In keeping with the ideas of Winnicott (1953) and Brown (2001), as discussed earlier, the use of props in the literature classroom can assist students to articulate their thoughts and impressions as the prop may function as a symbolic point of contact between their internal perceptions and the external environment of the classroom, which requires them to respond to what they have been asked to read. It is a mode of experiential learning which may rouse, remind or inspire the student; it may also deflect and absorb her anxiety about speaking, as the object is what bears the symbolic weight of meaning throughout class rather than the student herself; however, it can also be seen as a toy and so lighten the atmosphere—particularly appealing since the atmosphere in such situations is far too often tense. Props might include a

small ball, a pair of socks, a piggy bank, an apple, a bell or a small figurine. It may be relevant to use a prop to evoke the text or period of the text, or it could be any prop unrelated to the text, used, for example, to formalise taking turns at contributing to the class.

I often use a 'literary hat'—that is, a nineteenth-century bowler hat—in the classroom offering it to the student who elects to respond to a random question I pose. Students who don the hat, however, do not necessarily speak as themselves; rather, they speak as someone wearing the hat, and this allows them greater flexibility and licence with what they say. An option for using the hat is to invite students into a 'hot seat' at the front of the class and for them to speak on a question or issue, not as themselves but as a character from the novel studied, or as the speaker from the poem studied, wearing the hat, as the hat is both performative and representative of the character. Students may also be asked to speak as if they were the literary critic they have been asked to read while wearing the hat—the critic's hat. This encourages them to use some of the language, terms and points of view of the critics they read. Students may also be asked to speak with the hat from the point of view of a literary critic of the time in which the text was written or from that of a young reader at the time. In this way they can try to imagine cultural and historical positions other than their own. When they do this, they draw on knowledge gained from the lecture or background reading; failing that, they may even put on a character's voice and cause a comic stir.

The hat-as-prop lends itself to role-playing as a theme within the literature classroom. Using evidence from the text being studied, the students may be asked to debate the ethical considerations of a particular character. A point in the novel may be identified where a character makes a decision, or fails to do so, or acts in a new way, and students may be asked to debate the actions or problems of the character from different points of view. For example, in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, as Pip has come into his fortune, left his family in Kent, and gone to London, he begins to become a 'snob' and adopt new attitudes and manners ([1861] 1979). This may become a point of debate for students, some of whom may wish to defend Pip, while others argue that his behaviour is morally reproachable. This leads to a discussion of aspirational society in London during the industrial revolution, as well as interrogating the idea of 'gentlemanly' behaviour, along with issues tied to the broader theme of class. It may also connect students to the language of Dickens and the ways in which his tone and humour serve to mock and even ridicule the pretensions of young Pip and shed light on his characterisation.

8.5.1.8 Find the Question

Another way of performing the above activity is simply to cut up key sections of text, once again, and ask students (in groups) to choose one from a hat, one extract per group. However, this time they must come up with a key question connected to the extract. This is where they need to identify what is at stake in a literary work,

encouraging them to become aware of the constructed nature of literary language as well as authors' and characters' ideological or philosophical positions. Students are then asked to exchange passages and questions with another group. The group will have to respond to the other group's extract and question. The class will thus become familiar with at least two important parts of a set text.

8.5.1.9 Creative Marriage

This particular activity involves 'marrying' theory and criticism with primary sources. It is common in literature classes for students to be set both a primary text, such as *Great Expectations*, as well as a critical text, such as Steven Connor's essay on the same text (1985), which offers a deconstructive reading of Dickens's novel. Students may select from the literary hat a random quotation from Dickens's text in the first instance and then a quotation from Connor's essay in the second instance. In such an activity, they would need to identify Connor's theoretical positions and apparatuses and not only comment on the Dickens text itself but also on the critical reading of the text, with which they may or may not agree and which they may or may not even grasp. All such possibilities offer opportunities for clarification and discussion in the classroom. The two extracts together maybe catalyst for an interesting discussion, intensified by additional contributions.

Christopher J, *Fine Art*, 2015 (Reproduced with permission of Chris Rivera)

8.6 Conclusion

Just as there is an element of risk involved in any game playing in a learning setting, there is an element of risk in playful teaching. However, I argue that it is precisely that element of risk which makes the class worthwhile. Huizinga refers to this as the 'tension' (Huizinga, 1955, p. 11) necessary for true play and, I would argue, true learning. Nothing in a lesson which employs games and playful attitudes and exercises becomes commonplace or dull. As students are asked to work with texts and images in front of them, they have little excuse not to take part, so this is also a democratic process which encourages the participation of as many students as possible. Student feedback has been positive, with several remarking on the playful and stimulating nature of the class. A typical comment was, 'The class was always playful and really got me thinking' (student feedback, June 2014). Others appreciated the philosophical orientations and aesthetic offerings: 'Always equipped with questions on text to stimulate thought. Was made to see different perspectives' (student feedback, June 2009). 'I … really liked the inclusion of art and music to extend my knowledge of context of texts and observe the connections' (student feedback, June 2011).

There are significant benefits to introducing playful activities within an adult learning environment; while play may be enjoyable, it also leads to substantial gains in the classroom. Play performs a slightly different role in adult learning than in child learning because of the increased awareness in adult learners of the fact that they are playing; however, it nonetheless has a significant role to play, particularly in a subject as complex as literary study, and the notion of flow sheds further light on the extent to which play can influence any learner's degree of engagement with their subject. Students are frequently intimidated by literary studies, and innovative pedagogical techniques are therefore desirable in an attempt to show them what they are capable of knowing and/or unwittingly know already.

Playful approaches to learning in the university literature classroom are one way of creating the optimal conditions for learning and maximising the playful possibilities of literature itself, so that students may not only meet curricular outcomes but also enjoy themselves in the process. It certainly makes the task of teaching both more rewarding and more joyful.

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Chapter 9
Gamestorming the Academy: On Creative Play and Unconventional Learning for the Twenty-First Century

Bem Le Hunte

Abstract Studies show that businesses the world over are looking for more creative managers, and creativity requires an innate ability to play with problems, scenarios, methods and possibilities and to make mistakes whilst doing so. Moreover, the new generation of knowledge workers will be required to fathom and negotiate more complex, networked, dynamic and open problems. They will need to navigate unknown spaces and challenges that currently don't exist. This chapter looks at how tertiary institutions can respond to the needs of the future workforce by creating a more creative curriculum that goes beyond the teaching of expert knowledge and fact: a curriculum that uses play, and frameworks for discovery, to educate students in that ability to navigate the unknown. If students can begin to feel comfortable within the liminal, divergent phase of discovery, and liberate themselves from thinking only in the standard convergent, linear ways privileged in universities, they would be far better prepared for the big challenges ahead.

9.1 Gamestorming the Academy: On Creative Play and Unconventional Learning for the Twenty-First Century

> In different words, every [creative] person we interviewed said it was equally true that they had worked every minute of their careers, and that they had never worked a day in all their lives.' Creative people experience 'even the most focused immersion in extremely difficult tasks as a lark, an exhilarating and playful adventure. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 106)

Creative people know how to play, as observed by psychologist Csikszentmihalyi, who researched over 800 creative thinkers across the arts and sciences, from poets

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to scientists to visual artists and novelists, to uncover practices that may be common to all of them. One of his most striking observations was that creative people overwhelmingly report that they don't feel as if they're working at all – indeed, they can devote years of their lives to fruitful 'labour' that is of great value to our society, yet still feel as if they haven't 'worked' a day in their lives. His ensuing provocation is that we could all have the ability to enjoy our work as if it were play, and our lives would be transformed in the process, but we rarely do (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

This chapter focuses on the ability of our tertiary institutions to rise to Csikszentmihalyi's provocation above and provides an understanding of how to make learning within the university environment more playful and therefore more fulfilling. In order to do this, it is necessary to examine the ways of thinking that enable a more playful approach and discover the value of these practices in the future workplace.

As we move into the twenty-first century, there has been increasing discussion about the importance of the knowledge worker. Knowledge workers are defined as people whose tasks are nonroutine – they have to combine divergent and convergent creative thinking skills to solve atypical problems that arise on the spot with increasing regularity (Reinhardt, Schmidt, Sloep, & Drachsler, 2011).

The world needs more of these types of thinkers, as evidenced by the 2010 Global CEO study. IBM interrogated 1500 CEOs from 33 industries to 60 countries before claiming that creative thinking skills were the most important qualities required for businesses in the twenty-first century. In drawing conclusions, IBM stated that 'more than rigor, management discipline, integrity or even vision – successfully navigating an increasingly complex world will require creativity' (IBM 2010). So if we know that creative intelligence is of utmost value to our workforce, and we also know that the world's most creative people see their work as 'play', then perhaps it might be worth promoting play in our schools and universities.

Yet play has an awkward place in the academy. In pre-school it's welcomed – children are in a veritable Garden of Eden, where play is necessary, even and encouraged. These are the years when learning takes place so rapidly, yet our young learners are blissfully unaware that they are learning anything at all. They haven't yet taken a bite at the apple of knowledge, which changes everything forever. The apple hangs, waiting for its moment to come, knowing the inevitability of its allure. Once bitten, the child is then banished from this garden of play and sent off to 'work', and there is a sense of punishment that accompanies the departure from Eden, as work comes with a raft of concomitant demands, rules and a process of knowledge acquisition that is often needlessly arduous. A few years down the track, as students proceed to their various high schools and universities, the learning environment for most students becomes far less playful, as does the educational delivery model, a fact that has been sadly noted by many critical observers such as Robinson (2007) and Seelig (2012).

There are many reasons for this expulsion from the Eden of play. Most significantly, once the apple has been bitten, we have entered the world of knowledge, and left the world of pure being, and our institutions haven't yet developed a curriculum to nurture being, which is too intangible – too hard to test and quantify. When this

world of being is left behind, students are taken out of themselves and into the domain of others. Knowledge requires experts, and their expertise needs to be protected and valued and commoditised. Play does not sit well within this paradigm, as it is harder to quantify, justify or own.

The ‘work’ of the academy has traditionally required logical, linear thought processes. The academy prides itself on its rigour, and yet creativity is often purposefully lacking in rigour, at least in its initial stages. According to Nachmanovitch (1990) in his book, *Free Play*, when you improvise or play, the rules have to relax. If rules were to relax at most educational institutions, there would be a sense of disorientation too great for the system to bear, because embedded in these rules is the notion of a struggle to achieve, as evidenced in student assessments, exams, lectures and tutorials. Here we have the traditional notion of ‘work’ – of labour borne of late nights, tears, deadlines, benchmarks and harsh criticism. It is hardly surprising, then, that creative play is discouraged. Indeed, degrees that celebrate a less rigorous, rule-bound educational approach, such as creative doctorates, have been described as the ‘gatecrashers at the university’s dinner party’ (Paltridge, Starfield, Ravelli, & Nicholson, 2011, p. 92).

When ‘playing’ you often have to unlearn what you’ve learned through years of a more traditional education, and this can be challenging. Freeing up the process of playful thinking is a little hard if students are used to delivering mostly structured, convergent ideas that travel down regular, well-worn paths. One of the hardest things to overcome for students is the need for right/wrong answers. Educators have noted that students want to be guided to right/wrong answers, even when learning a subject such as creative writing (Brophy, 1998). And yet, creators and innovators, at least in the early stages of play, truly need to let go of the notion of correct or incorrect solutions in order to explore the full gamut of possibilities.

A new degree that challenges traditional pedagogy and teaches students to play with problems and possibilities is the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation (BCII) at the University of Technology, Sydney, and it is this degree that will be used as our data set – or at least as a way of understanding how play can be introduced into the university environment. The BCII combines with over 18 disciplines so that students from every faculty at the university, from science to engineering, business, law, information technology, health, design and arts and social sciences, can immerse themselves in the capabilities that innovators, rule breakers and change makers, as well as blue chip companies the world over value today (IBM 2010). With a mandate to ensure that no student graduates the same, and an aversion to right/wrong solutions, BCII students are introduced, for example, to mistake-ism – the notion that mistakes have often driven innovation –the mindset that we have to allow ourselves to make mistakes and take risks in order to create anything at all. Innovators play with possibilities rather than putting up with the first obvious solution and will often make mistakes in the name of progress. In the words of De Bono (2010, p 76), ‘The need to be right all the time is the biggest bar there is to new ideas. It is better to have enough ideas for some of them to be wrong, than to be always right by having no ideas at all’.

So in the BCII, students are taught the importance of resilience, occasional failure, calculated risks and the implications of failing faster across the disciplines. They are taught to map their ignorance, not just their knowledge (an approach that some in the academy might consider positively heathen), because without ignorance we wouldn't be able to delight in the play of discovery.

Yet our more progressive industries, like those in Silicon Valley outlined below, are breaking the mould and embracing play. Why? Because they're realising that play sparks lucrative innovation. Seeing the necessity of play, they have installed it in their policies. Play has become a statement – a differentiator. Workers can come down the stairs on a slide if they wish at Google's headquarters in San Francisco. Silicon Valley has been ahead of the rest of the world in formulating an environment that fosters play, possibly because they can see that creating a more alluring, meaningful environment, rich with possibilities, might bring more meaning to work – might even help companies attract and retain staff. Google has also promoted the ability for staff to 'play' whilst at work through their '20 % time' policy, which allowed employees to devote 1 day a week to play with innovative projects of their own design. Allegedly this brought us Gmail and Adsense, which now account for 25 % of Google's $50+ billion annual revenue, and is described by many commentators and tech bloggers as Google's most famous and imitated perk (Tate, 2012).

According to one of the grandfathers of sociology, Max Weber, capitalism was founded on the Protestant work ethic. Work and conservative attitudes to labour and profit played a major part in the western world's success ([1904] 1958). And yet, in the age of knowledge workers, it appears that play can be equally profitable. According to Huizinga, in his classic treatise on play, *Homo Ludens*, 'play only becomes possible, thinkable and understandable when an influx of mind breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos' (Huizinga, 1955, p. 3). Similarly, the absolute financial determinism of 'work' must be broken down in order for businesses today to experience the innovative potential of play.

Another reason why play is becoming more important is that businesses no longer have straightforward goals, but rather 'fuzzy goals', where answers are unknown and new solutions are always being sought (See Fig. 9.1). Play allows businesses to explore the unexpected – what innovation expert, Johnson (2011), explores as the adjacent possible. Gamestorming in the business world is proposed as a way of discovering these fuzzy goals.

Goals are not precise, and so the way we approach the challenge space cannot be designed in advance nor can it be fully predicted. Whilst a business process creates a solid, secure chain of cause and effect, gamestorming creates something different: not a chain but a framework for exploration, experimentation and trial and error. The path to the goal is not clear, and the goal may in fact change (Gray, Brown, & Macanufo, 2010, p. 5).

Organisations today are discovering that convergent ideas that travel down regular, well-worn paths are no longer working in the contemporary, networked, complex, open environment of constant disruption (Dorst, 2015), so play provides a new model for accessing solutions sideways – connecting with the adjacent possible. The notion of fuzzy goals is expressed in the diagram below by Gray et al. (2010)

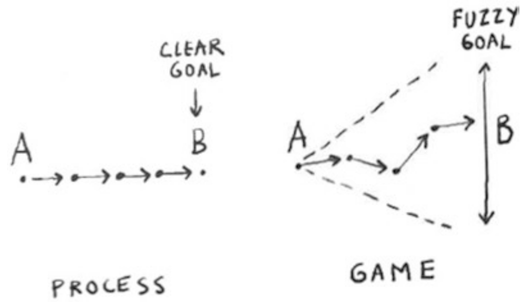

Fig. 9.1 From Gray et al. (2010, p. 6)

(Fig. 9.1). Play is the ideal way to access these unknowns in the future workforce, and there are many businesses and governments worldwide that have invented, adopted and adapted 'gamestorming' techniques to help them explore possibilities and uncover innovative ideas. Indeed, Gray et al. have made it their mission to track down the origins of these games in business and find their inventors. Similarly, Michalko's (2006) book, *Thinkertoys*, explores creative games or 'methods' that uncover unusual solutions, and he has taught these games to corporate and military clients. Interestingly, the notion 'play' and creative intelligence are particularly relevant to the military, who have to deal with ambiguous and volatile environments and understand that straightforward thinking only delivers standard outcomes that can be easily predicted and foiled. Ideas such as these expressed in *Gamestorming* help forge new ground, and as education should foster an ability to go forward into new ground fearlessly, it's worth exploring innovative ways to trial gamestorming in the academy.

In the BCII, students are encouraged to explore the problem space in multiple ways that subvert regular, linear thought processes. Students play by constructing their own methods to tackle complex client briefs, for example. They are encouraged to take ideas 'for a walk' – to make conceptual leaps in their thinking. They trial speculative 'what-if' scenarios and construct 'straw man' proposals and thought experiments. They do *think tanks* and *hot housing days* to explore problems in teams at greater depth. They experiment with problematisation – a method from cultural studies that enriches the problem space rather than simplifying it, for example – all to slow down the process of getting to the 'right' answer too quickly. This, in turn, allows students to explore a playground of possibilities.

9.2 The Game as Journey

Play is often random and unstructured (Huizinga, 1955), but the game, as deployed by innovators, gives loose, informal structure to the random, unstructured process of play, without restricting its possibilities. Give play structure and it can find acceptance more easily in the academic or business context. Gray et al. (2010), after collating games used to innovate around the world, came up with a three-act structure

Fig. 9.2 From Gray et al. (2010, p. 10)

to describe the phases of a game (see Fig. 9.2). The gamestorming process, according to them, is as follows: the opening of the game – the first phase of the journey – is the expansive or divergent moment. The exploring phase is set aside for playing with questions, methods and concepts and seeing how ideas and possibilities connect and combine. Once this has taken place, a third and final phase takes place – the game needs to be closed. At this moment in time, we need to hone our ideas – it's a time for convergent thinking.

The interesting thing about this three-act structure is that it mimics the narrative journey of discovery used so successfully by Hollywood, as described by Vogler (2007). The three-act structure allows for a powerful exploration of human potential through storytelling.

It also allows a certain freedom in the exploration phase – a liminal space where anything can happen. French ethnographer, Van Gennep ([1909] 1960), used a similar map to describe ritual space, whereby tribal rituals allow for 'players' to be taken out of their usual context into a kind of liminal space. For example, in a tribal context, a young boy may be removed from his tribe by an elder for an initiation. With both ritual and the 'game', the discovery of something new is the aim, together with an exploration of the unknown. Similarly, Campbell (1993) describes the ordeals of the hero in mythologies worldwide as a journey of discovery. The hero leaves the known world to enter a liminal space where the usual rules no longer apply, and only once they have discovered their purpose in that space do they return, often with a gift they can share with humanity.

A game has a similar structure. A context is created for discovery – the kind of discovery that cannot be explored through linear, rational, convergent, everyday thinking alone. This context is not ordinary. Like a ritual that takes an initiate into unknown territory, it has to allow the people having the experience to make discoveries for themselves. Like the journey described by Campbell, the person in the 'game' (in this context a learning experience) is able to return with some knowledge

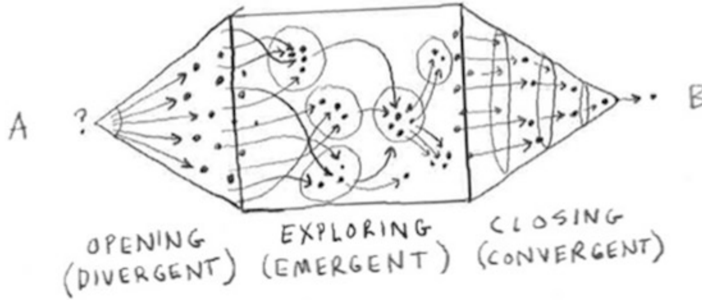

Fig. 9.3 From Gray et al. (2010, p. 12)

that is uniquely useful for them. What is discovered is versatile, enlivened knowledge that's fit for purpose. And so play becomes a powerful way to capture the unknown and explore innovative new territory in a business or an academic context.

In the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation, students are exposed to a host of playful methods and practices from across the disciplines that cater to all stages of this 'gamestorming' process. They are also presented with the provocation that there are some ideas that can only be expressed visually. The map that Gray et al. (2010) have produced in *Gamestorming* (Fig. 9.3) visually identifies some of the forces at work in all three phases – including the liminal 'free play' that takes place in the exploring or emergent phase.

In the BCII, in the 'opening', or the divergent stage of discovery, students are introduced to diverse ideas of how to solve problems, for example, the notion of problematisation or proliferation from cultural studies, as mentioned earlier – the idea that a problem space is enriched rather than reduced to prevent over-simplistic enquiry. Students examine the causes of problems using a wide variety of lenses. They unpack the problem space through deeper questioning. For example, Gray et al. (2010) write about 'fire starting' questions that might allow for divergent ideas. These include the following types of questions:

- What kinds of things do we want to explore?
- How would you define the problem we are facing?
- What are your biggest problem areas in your institution/corporation?

Opening (divergent) questions, according to Gray et al. (2010), are all about opening up to possibilities – they are posed as a way of putting cards on the table and including many 'players' to tackle the task at hand. The notion here is that games help to source the best ideas of the group by exploring the potential of that group to ideate in this liberating, divergent space.

In the BCII, students are introduced to 'beautiful questions' as described by innovation expert, Berger, in *A More Beautiful Question*. Berger describes how these questions should be actionable and related to something that intrigues you, as

a researcher. He describes ‘beautiful’ questions that have led to great innovations, such as the following (Berger, 2014):

- Why should you be stuck without a bed when I have a spare air mattress? This is the question posed by Airbnb, now a company worth over $10 billion.
- What if countries competed on playing fields instead of battlefields? This is described as an Olympic-worthy question.
- Daddy, why do we have to wait for the picture? This was the question asked by the 3-year-old daughter of Edwin Land, the inventor of the Polaroid camera.
- ‘What if we could paint over our mistakes?’ This was a question asked by Bette Nesmith Graham, who worked as a secretary by day and an artist at night. She invented Liquid Paper, which she later sold for close to $50 million.

The next phase is that of exploration – the emergent phase that allows players to connect and combine ideas, look for patterns and see old situations with fresh eyes by liberating themselves from the standard methodologies and allowing for a sort of ‘free play’. This is where surprising and delightful concepts, ideas and ways forward can emerge. Questions in this phase can be experimental. For example, you can ask ‘what ideas here connect’? Or ‘is it possible to make random connections’? Or ‘how can we ask our question in a new way’? Or ‘how can we reverse and challenge assumptions’?

Gray et al. (2010) also explore the notion of ‘examining questions’ that allow for exploration, such as:

- Which ideas are working well?
- Can we take any of these ideas further?
- Can we create an example of that?
- Can we apply a creative method that would help us explore that concept any further?

In the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation, students play with a series of exploratory methods from across the disciplines in this expansive phase, such as the following:

- Paper prototyping – a method from IT and engineering that involves prototyping processes using Post-it® notes.
- Mapping and visualisation – everything from cartographic mapping using metaphor, to data visualisation of statistics to prompt discovery.
- Method cards – a compilation of observational methods from the seven faculties at the university and a large combination of disciplines.
- Framing – a design thinking methodology whereby a problem is reframed to present and provoke lateral solutions.
- Empathy – using methods such as ‘a day in the life’ to imagine the needs of users.
- Sandpit experiments with a random mash of techniques – here students are encouraged to create their own methods through a ‘bricolage’ or combination of

different methods and then explore which methods from the various disciplines are best for tackling the issue at hand.
- Thought experiments – whereby students use their imagination to test hypotheses.
- What-if scenarios – a way of challenging assumptions and ideating by imagining new possibilities
- Speculative research proposals – a way to test and iterate an idea through conceptual thinking alone.

As part of a mapping session, BCII students also differentiate between the 'explorer' and the 'guide', a notion introduced by Peter Turchi in *Maps of the Imagination* (2004). As an 'explorer', you are free to make mistakes, to not know, to discover by trial and error. Only further down the track are you obliged to become the guide, who is able to lead others through the same process.

The ability to 'not know' is considered vital by educational theorist Barnett (2004), who writes about the challenges of a post-modern world where super-complexity is the new norm. He writes about the necessity to train students for an unknown future, with unpredictability at its heart. According to Barnett, students will be entering 'a world that is radically unknowable: even though we may make modest gains here and there, our ignorance expands in all kinds of directions…we never can come into a stable relationship with the world' (Barnett, p. 68). The emergent phase of the game, and the concept of the student as explorer, helps students to overcome the limitations of knowledge and prepares them for the radically unknown.

Finally, the convergent phase allows us to close the game. This phase is about moving towards conclusions, decisions and follow-up action. It's about applying the critical eye, choosing which opportunities would be worth exploring further – in creative writing, for example, it's about 'killing your darlings', those beautiful words that ultimately aren't useful to the overall narrative. BCII students play with techniques that allow for this type of closure.

9.3 The Road Ahead

With its silo departments and faculties, the academy is ill-prepared to equip students for an environment of super-complexity – an unknown future, where graduates are predicted to be moving through up to 14 different jobs by the time they turn 38 (GrrlScientist, 2010), with many of these jobs yet to be invented. In this environment, knowledge becomes far less important, according to Barnett, and we should be educating students in 'being' not just 'knowing'. There needs to be a major shift from epistemological models of education to ontological models (Barnett, 2004). Play provides the opportunity for students and ultimately, graduates in the future workforce, to move from the limits of knowledge to pure being – back to the Garden of Eden and its creative potential. It allows them to sit more comfortably at the precipice of the unknown and manage the uncertainty of those future spaces.

The revised Bloom's hierarchy states that creativity is the highest achievement in learning, well above memorising, evaluating or analysing (Anderson et al., 2001). Industry also states that creativity is the most important quality for senior management to nurture (2010). If this is the case, then we have a duty, as educators, to allow for the possibility of play in our institutions, because it develops a mindset that allows creativity in all disciplines to flourish.

It's all too easy to divide learning into so-called 'creative' and 'uncreative' subjects, but with a future that demands transdisciplinary practices, and where innovation is said to take place between fields, not just within fields, it's important to ensure that everyone graduating today understands the potential of play and the power of creative thinking.

It's easy to leave creativity to the creative types and say to yourself, 'I'm just not a creative person'. The fact is that in a complex, dynamic, open, competitive knowledge economy, it's no longer acceptable to take this position. If you are a knowledge worker, you must become, to some degree, creative (Gray et al., 2010, p. xvi).

It takes a lot to disrupt the academy, but given that disruption is rampant in the workforce (Christensen, 2013), it's probably time that more institutions begin teaching transdisciplinary, creative degrees that nurture graduates for a future that is more unknown now than it probably ever was. A future where finite knowledge will be less useful, and a playful ability to adapt and innovate will make all the difference.

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Chapter 10
Designing for Serious Play

Fiona Young and Genevieve Murray

Abstract The value of playful learning environments and spaces that support them has been well documented in early childhood and primary school contexts. The literature in the secondary school context is less extensive, and while there is much discussion outside schooling contexts, little quantitative research is available. Curiously, this is the case even though workplaces that support creativity and innovation through the development of informal learning spaces are becoming increasingly commonplace. The possibility of implementing the use of playful learning environments at the secondary school level may be hampered by a lack of quantitative research to support its benefits. This paper addresses this barrier, reporting on a survey undertaken with the students and teachers of two Australian secondary schools, both of which have traditional and contemporary learning spaces. The survey found that perceptions of 'play' and the skills or willingness of teachers were the primary impediments to successfully integrating playful learning environments in this context. Among both teachers and students, there was resistance to using these spaces, which were perceived as failing to provide the necessary solitary, concentrated learning environment required for exam-focused learning. Although less significant than the teacher's role, the nature of the physical space was a contributory factor to perceptions of its success as a playful learning environment. The key facilitating spatial qualities identified were ease in changing spaces, availability of diverse learning spaces, and inclusion of undefined, nontraditional spaces.

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10.1 Introduction

Play, it has been said, will be to the twenty-first century what work was to the twentieth century (Kane, 2004). The future of the western knowledge economy and its potential strategic advantage lies in its ability to creatively innovate and develop unique solutions to ever-changing and increasingly complex problems. Since Ken Robinson's TED talk of 2006, there has been a slowly simmering revolution in education, and creativity has been identified as the preeminent leadership competency in our complex global marketplace (Turckes & Kahl, 2011). Recent movement in the sector has seen creative learning environments emerge such as the Blue Valley Center for Advanced Professional Studies, Kansas (http://www.bvcaps.org/s/1403/hs-redesign/start.aspx), and High Tech High, San Diego, California, a publicly funded independent school (http://www.hightechhigh.org/).

The drive for innovation in the sector is born of a shift in the increasingly complex and globalised work environment students find themselves upon graduation. 'We can no longer afford to teach our kids or design their schoolhouses the way we used to if we're to maintain a competitive edge' (Turckes & Kahl, 2011). Groves and Knight (2010) discuss creativity and innovation in business, arguing that the design of playful spaces is one aspect crucial to the development of workplace environments that promote creative thinking and problem-solving. Turckes and Kahl (2011) explore the ways in which schools can learn from innovative corporations in which playful cultures are recognised as catalysts to creative thought and practice. As they put this point,

> the process of planning and designing a new school requires both looking outward (to the future, to the community, to innovative corporate powerhouses) as well as inward (to the playfulness and creativity that are at the core of learning). (Turckes & Kahl, 2011)

Within traditional literature, learning through play or play-based learning is seen to provide 'a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they actively engage with people, objects and representation' (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2009, p. 46). Playful, as opposed to rote learning, has been proven to achieve better creative outcomes, enabling students to approach subject matter in an open-minded way and hence to consider and engage with new possibilities (Brown, 2008). Although research has predominantly been focused within the early childhood and primary sectors (Andrews, 2012; Broadhead & Burt, 2012; Moyles, 2010), contemporary adult learning environments are now developing spaces that foster and support play-based learning. These changes are driven by an increasing need to create 'sticky' environments, which fascinate – or at least appeal to – students in an increasingly competitive university sector. Kangas (2010) argues that 'creating a playful learning context requires fostering activity, creativity, imagination, and group work skills, along with academic achievement, and [working] to integrate … a playful learning environment in teaching, studying and learning' (Kangas, 2010, p. 1).

Research into the development of playful learning environments is increasing and is built on convictions about the correlative relationship between creativity,

freedom and play. The Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creativity (InQbate.co.uk, 2012), a joint initiative between the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton, provides an example of the sophistication of this research. InQbate was established to encourage, teach and use creativity to transform teaching and learning. It brought together groups of individuals within a high-technology environment who worked together to develop two Creativity Zones, within which they communicated their ideas and generated their designs. The context within which these individuals worked was an adaptable multimedia learning environment with moving walls, positioning curtains and moveable and casual seating. InQbate was intended to provide 'technologically rich, but not technologically driven learning spaces' that liberated teachers and students from the constraints of the traditional classroom. The emphasis was on providing an environment that encouraged collaboration, reflection and student self-direction. While InQbate did not specifically focus on play, its objectives and its assumptions had much in common with views about the role of playful spaces and a playful culture in the development of creativity, expressed by Groves and Knight (2010) and Turckes and Kahl (2011).

Within the field of architecture, there is little quantitative research into the design of playful learning spaces for adolescents at senior secondary school level; and in fact significant contributions to the literature on designing learning environments for schools make little mention of play spaces, particularly in the secondary school setting. For example, of the 20 case studies Dudek (2000) reports, eight report on the construction of schools for students between 11 and 18 years of age, but play spaces are not specifically mentioned. There is a predominance of literature within the educational context that favours conceptual and psychological investigation over the study of the physical or material nature of spaces for learning (Cleveland, 2011). The OECD report, 'Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation', published in 2000 focused on the technical aspects of spatial design rather than innovative practice related to the physical and material nature of the spaces (Cleveland, 2011).

The psychological literature includes considerable research indicating that optimal learning environments at all levels of schooling are both playful and challenging. As Shernoff and Csikszentmihalyi explain:

> Almost all of the research available tends to converge on the observation that meaningful engagement is composed of two independent processes – academic intensity and a positive emotional response – and that optimal learning environments combine both in order to make learning both playful and challenging, both spontaneous and important (e.g., Andersen, 2005a; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005a; Shernoff et al., 2003; Turner & Meyer, 2004) (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 143).

This chapter argues that from an architectural perspective, the key to an understanding of the nature of playful educational spaces at the secondary level lies in understanding the role that the design of these spaces has in fostering and supporting a playful approach to learning. The chapter establishes, and then investigates the principles required in the design of successful playful learning environments for adolescents and identifies hurdles to the successful operation of these spaces.

The current definition of playful learning is grounded within some established definitions of play. Much has been made of 'fun' and 'play' in contemporary workplaces such as that of Google (illustrated, for example in the 'outdoors-in' environment at Google Tel Aviv, designed by Camenzind Evolution to provide a stress-reducing atmosphere). But firstly, there is a distinction to be made between what is called playful learning and the notion of 'play' or 'fun' in the school context. 'Fun' through play is facilitated in an effort to cultivate morale, increase employee satisfaction and improve customer or client service in the workplace (Gordon, 2012); and in the school context, 'fun' spaces encourage technological innovation and creative potential of students (Bower, 2007a).

Distinctly different to these 'fun' or 'play' spaces are playful learning environments. They employ characteristics of fun or play spaces but maintain a firm pedagogical goal to their design. The spatial characteristics of these spaces, as distinct from a traditional or 'single-use' classroom, are the integration of cross-pollination spaces that encourage exploration through a variety of disciplines. For example, a math class can intersect with a computer technology class, which can also involve physics lessons. The format for the delivery of such diverse and intersecting subject matter is supported by the design of the space. Unlike a traditional classroom, these spaces incorporate a 'wide range of activities, tools and materials' (Cooper, 2013; Educause, 2013). Much of the design characteristics of these kinds of playful learning environments within the school context have been borrowed from the modern 'Maker Movement'. Schools are increasingly drawing on design innovation from spaces such as 'Makerspaces', 'STEAM labs' and 'Fab Labs' (fabrication laboratories: http://www.thesteamroom.org) that employ characteristics as listed above to engage students in learning through play.

Play – at least as it is theorised and in principle – does not appear to have the instrumental focus that is assumed in the explanation of the function of the creative 'fun' or 'play' spaces in workplace and school contexts. This lack of instrumentality is evident in Johan Huizinga's seminal 1949 work, *Homo Ludens*: *A study of the play-element in culture*, which defines play as an enterprise that exhibits five characteristics.

The first main characteristic of play Huizinga identifies is that it is voluntary; as he puts it, play 'is in fact freedom' (1949, p. 8) given that it cannot be mandatory or forced. Not unconnected with the notion of freedom is the second characteristic that identifies play as neither 'akin to ordinary' nor 'real' life, since it steps outside these, being unconstrained by the demands of everyday life. Thirdly and more specifically, play is distinct from ordinary life both with regard to its locality and duration. It occurs within certain limits of time and place and emerges as a temporary world within the ordinary world that has 'its own course and meaning' (1949, p. 9). A fourth positive feature of play is that it creates order, bringing a temporary and limited perfection to the world, but only via an order that is fully respected; consequently the players must not deviate in a way that would 'spoil the game' and break the play frame. The final of Huizinga's characteristics of play, its lack of instrumentality, distinguishes it from activity undertaken in the 'fun' spaces noted above; play is noninstrumental in the sense that it is unconnected with any material interest and not an activity from which profit can be made.

The successful application or facilitation of these five characteristics within a learning environment is largely dependent on the teacher, as regards the role adopted and the attitudes taken toward learning. However, evidence suggests that the fundamental success of innovative learning environments is also dependent on the pedagogical approach taken being consistent and integrated with the design of the spaces (Cleveland, 2011). It has also been found that the greatest educational benefit occurs at the intersection of playful and serious learning (Goodman, 1994; Shernoff, Beheshteh, Anderson, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). The agent responsible for shepherding activity at that intersection is the teacher, whose attitude impacts upon possibilities for both free engagement and peer-directed teaching within a learning environment. The aims of open plan movement of the 1960s and 1970s were undermined by the fact that the pedagogical approaches adopted were not readily influenced by innovative design; an integrated approach in which the design of spaces was supported by the pedagogical approach was required but not successfully implemented (Angus, Evans, & Parkin, 1975).

A distinction between environments such as the playground in primary schools, which is designed for children's pleasure as a 'fun' space and those designed for playful learning, is the presence and role of the teacher as facilitator. The purpose and function of the space in which learning occurs is therefore to be thought of in terms of its capacity to enable and support the role of the teacher. Beyond the role of the teacher, the space in which learning takes place has been identified as the 'third teacher', which must have characteristics that engage, empower and encourage collaboration (Stonehouse, 2011). This space, somewhere between the traditional classroom and the playground, is a dynamic, agile, structured but playful context or space, where both students and teachers take a role in achieving learning outcomes. However, the recognition that they are not driven by a necessary result or specific outcome has been identified as the most significant factor contributing to the success of a playful learning environment. As Stonehouse argues,

> [t]he way the environment is setup and maintained contributes to the overall atmosphere of the setting, which affects children, families and educators. (2011, p. 12)

From the perspective of Huizinga's focus on play, several of the characteristics he identifies are apposite to supporting the role of the teacher as facilitator of playful learning. Huizinga saw play as distinct from ordinary life as regards its locality, as able to create order and as distinguished by the voluntary nature of its activity. Hence the design of learning spaces will enhance or undermine the teacher's efforts to encourage playful learning to the extent that those spaces reflect these characteristics. Clearly there is some tension between Huizinga's focus on freedom and lack of instrumentality by comparison with the purposes of school education; and we must acknowledge that beyond the role of the teacher is the larger structured context within which educational enterprises are conducted. Institutional rules and regulations, government policies, physical boundaries or constraints and cultural expectations will affect what can be achieved with regard to the use of space in educational contexts. However, the design and use of space can either encourage or discourage exploration, movement and group activity as Groves and Knight (2010) suggest.

Since few examples of playful learning environments designed specifically for adolescent and senior secondary school students exist in Australia, little research supporting playful learning and specific to this sector is available. As noted above, research in the area of psychology focusing on this age group draws attention to the unique student profile in this demographic. This suggests that educators and architects might be wise to consider the implications of this student profile for the design of spaces specific to adolescents. By comparison with young children in early childhood contexts or adults in the context of workplace learning environments, adolescents are at a period of development during which they are energetically and sometimes desperately engaged in establishing their own identities. This often leads them to resist traditional expectations and to challenge aspects of the culture and context within which they find themselves. Peers can become more important to young people as they move into adolescence and they often demand a greater degree of independence from family and authority figures. Research indicates that privacy and the use of unencumbered space for exploration and learning are generally important to adolescents (Bower, 2007b).

This chapter does not examine the specific and unique psychological profile of this age group, but it does suggest that this profile – along with factors such as institutional regulations and the sociocultural factors that were noted above – is relevant to designing an effective playful learning environment for students in this demographic. Nonetheless the study on which this chapter reports takes an architectural perspective. It explores the key design principles found to support playful learning in the secondary school context and identifies significant hurdles in the design and creation of these spaces.

10.2 Methodology

Two surveys were undertaken with senior secondary school students and teachers. This study group was identified as users of contemporary learning environments. To establish criteria against which to measure the success of these spaces within a playful learning context, thirteen practising architects, five of whom had practical experience in designing learning environments, were surveyed in the context of a workshop on this topic. A set of key qualities of learning environments which were perceived to support a playful approach to learning were developed.

The two Australian schools which took part in the study, Ravenswood School for Girls and Methodist Ladies College (MLC), Burwood, were located in Sydney in the state of New South Wales and were selected for the diversity of their learning spaces and in particular for their divergence from traditional classroom design. Recently completed contemporary spaces had been designed to support less traditional pedagogies including self-directed, project-based and collaborative learning. The Mabel Fidler Centre at Ravenswood School for Girls, which was completed in 2011, is a new building comprising a learning resource centre (LRC), classrooms and administration spaces (Fig. 10.1). The LRC is a large-volume, light-filled

Fig. 10.1 Mabel Fidler Centre, Ravenswood School for Girls (Reprinted with kind permissions from the Australian architectural firm, BVN. Photographer: John Gollings)

environment with a timber-clad interior. The principal feature of the space is a large staircase that acts as a forum for formal and informal learning. Colour has been introduced into the space through the addition of soft furnishings.

MLC Enlightenment was also completed in 2011 and was a refurbishment of traditional classrooms to create a suite of connected learning spaces with different scales and characteristics (Fig. 10.2). The spaces include *the workshop*, *the café*, *the cinema*, *the boardroom*, *i-Space* and *the retreat*. These spaces together acted as a set of diverse learning environments, ranging from open and hands-on spaces to more enclosed, private and reflective spaces.

A survey designed to collect data on student and staff attitudes toward these relatively new and innovative learning spaces was conducted in November of 2014. Targeted participants for the survey were senior school students in years 9–12 and their teachers. The survey was emailed to 537 students at Ravenswood School and posted on the year group intranet portals of MLC to which 534 students have access. As the surveys were conducted in November (2014), they occurred during the final external examination in the state of New South Wales (the Higher School Certificate). Consequently, the researchers were advised by both schools that it was unlikely that year 12 students (294 students in total, 145 from Ravenswood School and 149 from MLC) would be able to participate, due to the pressure of their examination schedules. In total 1,071 students from the two schools and 280 staff members (150 from the Ravenswood School Staff and 130 from the MLC staff) were invited to participate in the survey. However, due to the reasons explained above, only 777 of these students would have been likely respondents. In fact, the total number of respondents to the survey was 288, of which 253 were students (32.5 % of likely student respondents) and 35 (12.5 %) were teachers.

Fig. 10.2 The Enlightenment Centre, MLC School Burwood (Reprinted with kind permissions from the Australian architectural firm, BVN. Photographer: John Gollings)

The first section of the survey asked respondents to rate general criteria which included teacher's attitude, teacher's approach to lessons, the way in which space is used, the type of pedagogy employed (which may have focused on self-directed learning, collaborative learning, hands-on learning or technology-rich learning) as well as the impact of physical space on learning.

The second section of the survey used specific criteria that explored perceptions of internal and external areas within each particular school by users, in relation to the potential of these spaces to support playful learning. The third section focused on collecting comparative data as to whether or not the newer and more contemporary learning spaces better supported playful learning than more traditional learning spaces within the school. Respondents were then asked to rate the common design criteria that architects suggested were important elements in supporting playful learning environments.

10.3 Findings

10.3.1 Physical Characteristics of Playful Learning Environments

This paper identifies 13 qualities of physical space that support playful learning, which were rated in the following order:

1. Can be changed easily by the teachers or students to suit a class.
2. Include a variety of areas in which to learn.

3. Include non-defined areas that can be used for anything that people feel like.
4. Use different types of furniture, e.g. bean bags, sofas, high chairs, cushions or steps.
5. Include areas of different sizes and dimensions, e.g. small intimate spaces as well as larger volumes.
6. Include areas to relax.
7. Connect to the outdoors.
8. Incorporate a variety of colour.
9. Offer a variety of light and darkness within areas, so that some rooms or spaces are more enclosed than others.
10. Have walls that can be drawn or written on.
11. Use materials that might be different than a typical classroom.
12. Incorporate different heights/levels.
13. Make it possible to see other areas/learners.

These qualities include those already proven to impact on learning outcomes such as flexibility, complexity and colour (Barrett, Zhang, Davies, & Barrett, 2015). Responses from the current study are shown in Fig. 10.3 (below).

These qualities can be distilled into spatial principles that loosely relate to Huizinga's characteristics of play and provide support for the value of playful learning (Table 10.1).

When asked in the second section of the survey to rate internal spaces in the school for their contribution to playful learning, respondents nominated only areas that were not regarded as traditional classrooms. Many of the areas identified were larger and more open than traditional classrooms. Respondents nominated rooms that were described as 'not occupied by tables', or where 'furniture can be moved easily, making lessons innovative'. Many of the learning spaces were perceived by respondents as having a sense of 'openness', which was seen to 'make it [the room] an easy place to collaborate', or as being 'versatile and multipurpose'. The extent of the flexibility and variety that these spaces offer distinguish them from 'ordinary' or traditional classroom formats and suggest a connection with the first and second of Huizinga's five characteristics, as indicated in Table 10.1.

Newer contemporary learning spaces rated highly as places that were supportive of playful learning, with 48 % of MLC respondents nominating the areas of the Enlightenment project and 58 % of Ravenswood School respondents nominating the Mabel Fidler Centre (LRC and classrooms) as playful learning spaces. As indicated in Fig. 10.3, the qualities that respondents from both schools rated most highly were the ability to arrange spaces in different ways and the provision of a variety of types of spaces available for use. MLC students felt the Enlightenment spaces were 'very flexible and allowed groups of students to explore ideas and ways of approaching a problem'; and a number noted that the spaces provided a lot of room to do both interactive and individual work that does not cause disruptions between other students'. Some Ravenswood students felt the LRC was a playful space as 'you can write on the walls'. This was also noted by an MLC student referring to the Enlightenment spaces where 'the whiteboard walls help to inspire that sense of open

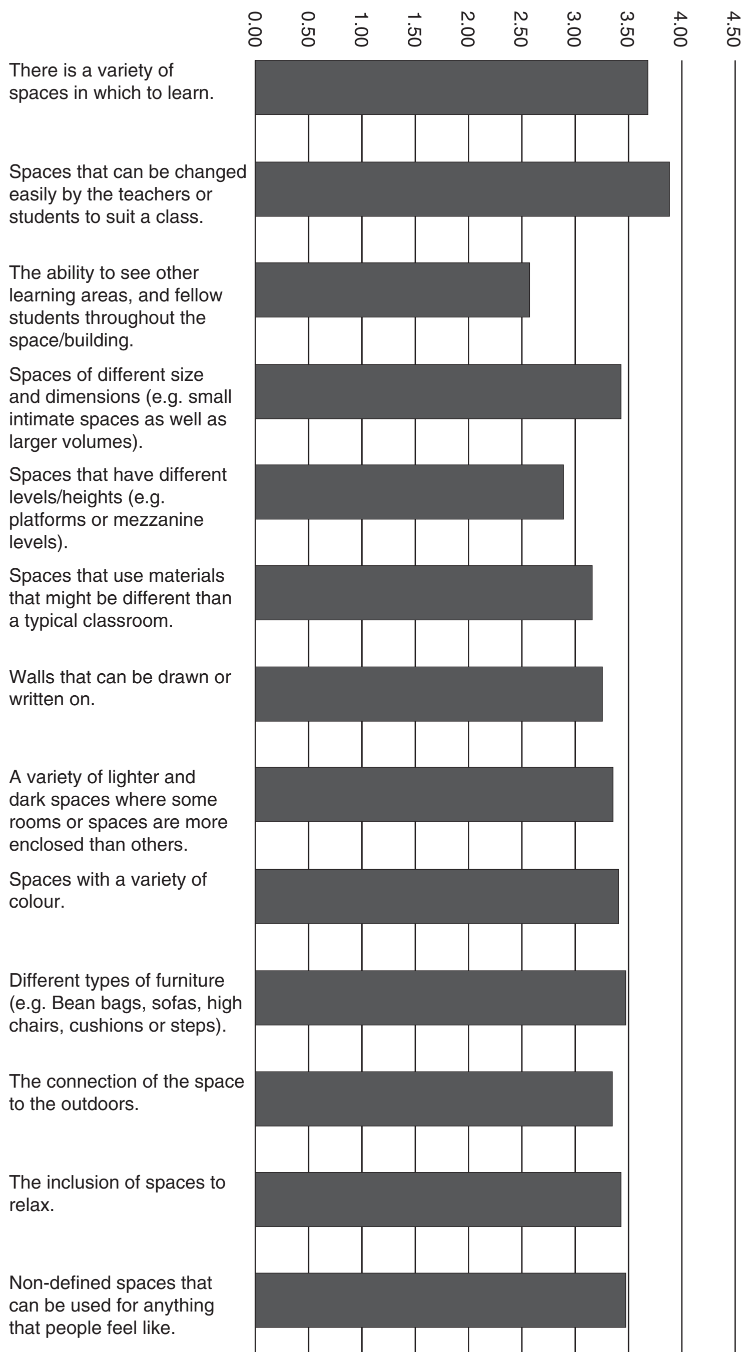

Fig. 10.3 Respondents' ratings of the 13 spatial qualities in playful learning spaces

Table 10.1 Relationship between spatial and pedagogical principles and Huizinga's key principles of play

	Pedagogy relating to playful learning	Spatial principles
1. Play is voluntary	Activity is voluntary: self-direction, choice and exploration of possibility is encouraged	There is a diversity of learning spaces that can be used in whatever way the user decides
		Learning spaces are non-specific and open to interpretation
2. Play is not 'ordinary' life and is secluded and limited	Activity is unconstrained by the demands of 'ordinary' school life: movement and imaginative engagement is encouraged	Learning spaces differ from traditional classrooms in ways that offer a variety of opportunities (secluded areas, performance areas, open or enclosed areas, large areas, sunken or raised areas, outdoor or indoor areas)
3. Play creates order	Engagement is ordered and guided by principles	Learning spaces include areas for collaboration, hands-on learning, relaxation and reflection
4. Play is free from any material interest	Activity is intrinsically motivated and at least to some extent noninstrumental	Learning spaces are student centred, flexible and non-hierarchical

and fun learning'. The connection between Huizinga's fourth and fifth principles and the nature of the playful learning places that were the focus of this study is not direct. However, the recognition that play creates a particular kind of order allows us to recognise in the design of playful spaces a set of principles that transport or absorb students into a different world of learning, one which is guided by what they find intrinsically interesting.

In relation to responses to spaces, 59 % of Ravenswood and 48 % of MLC respondents stated that while not currently used for learning, outdoor spaces could be suitable as playful learning environments. Student comments reflected positively on outdoor learning. One student commented that 'everybody loves working outdoors', while another felt that outside areas could be 'special learning spaces for play and experimentation'. While 90 % of teachers felt that outdoor spaces could be used to support playful learning, it appears they are infrequently used as learning spaces. As one commented: 'I really enjoy having class outdoors, but many teachers are very reluctant to teach outside of classrooms'. These comments are supported by Dudek, who states that 'outdoor spaces should not be separate from the educational experience because they can play a unique role in the process of developing knowledge' (Dudek, 2000, p. 42).

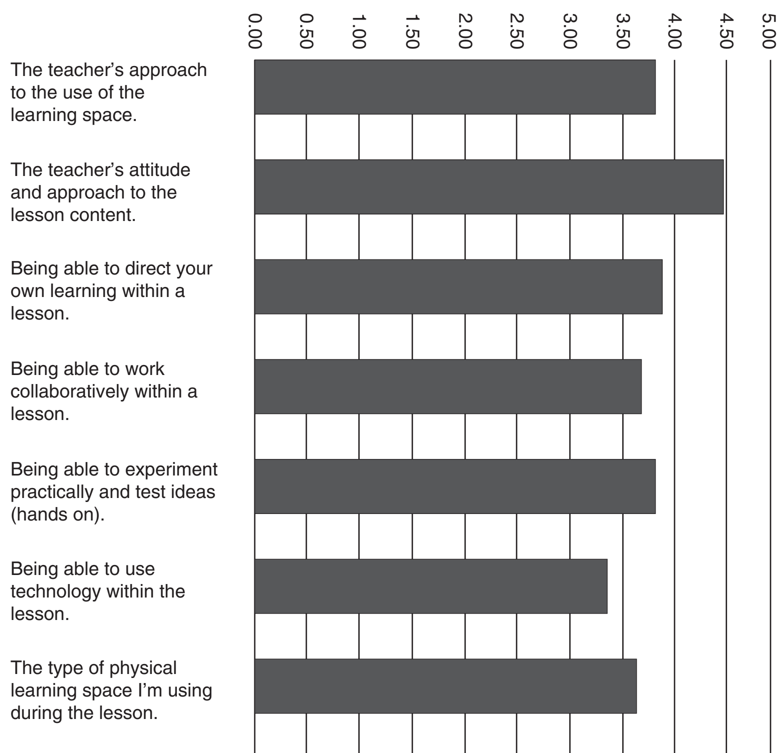

Fig. 10.4 Elements contributing to a playful learning environment

10.3.2 General Factors Contributing to Playful Learning

While this paper seeks to explore the impact of physical space on playful learning, respondents rated other factors as of greater importance in stimulating playful learning. As suggested above, the teacher's attitude and approach to the lesson was rated as the most important factor contributing to a playful learning environment and was significantly more highly rated than other factors. It was followed by the ability for self-directed learning, the ability to experiment practically and test ideas, and the teachers' approach to the use of learning spaces, respectively. Rated fifth was the ability to working collaboratively within a lesson and this factor was closely followed by the nature of the physical learning space itself in sixth place. Use of technology during the lesson was rated as the least important factor (Fig. 10.4).

Another factor respondents recognised as making a contribution to playful learning is having a school environment in which students are encouraged to take risks. As one teacher explained, a playful approach to learning needs to be supported by 'the ethos around learning in the school'; such an ethos is one in which 'all students are supported and happy to take risks' and 'encouraged to try and make mistakes, alleviating pressure to perform well in new topics or learning'. Some respondents

also noted that 'the attitude and input of students is also important to the learning environment'.

Some students' comments on playful learning reflected a gaming approach, which was evident in comments that drew attention to '[a]ctive peer participation, fun games and group challenges or activities' and 'learning activities that foster learning through play through the use of tangible rewards for achievement'. Having enough time for playful learning was raised in several instances by teachers who felt that time, and being able to use it flexibly was necessary if students are 'to play and to experiment with ideas and materials'. This concept is explored by a white paper, 21st Century Learning Environments, published by Partnerships for 21st Century Skills, in which they note:

> Flexibility of design needs to extend to time as well. Twenty-first century learning cannot fully flower when embedded in a rigid 19th century calendar. More malleable units of time than the typical 50-minute class period are required for project-based work or interdisciplinary themes.' (P21 Partnership for 21st Century Learning, n.d., p. 13)

Teachers also identified a need for 'access to resources that support a lesson of an impromptu nature', such as adequate equipment and materials. While 48 % of teachers rated the physical environment as very important, and 28 % rated it as extremely important for playful learning, one teacher stated that, 'you could make any classroom into a playful learning space – it is to do with your teaching rather than your environment'. This reinforces the importance of teachers' attitudes and their approaches to learning in relation to encouraging the development of playful learning environments.

10.3.3 Perception of Playful Learning

The comments of a number of respondents implied that they perceived a dichotomy between play and learning. It was suggested that the word 'playful' was 'not a term that is normally associated with a classroom, nor necessarily should it be'. One teacher commented, 'you need to be able to appreciate that meaningful learning can take place simultaneously with fun. Some teachers see this as mutually exclusive'. Clearly, there is an assumption that not all educators appreciate the value of playful learning or are interested in facilitating it. Other teachers suggested that using different terminologies for playful learning would be more appropriate; the view of the word playful in the context of learning was that:

> It [playful] can be seen as a negative word in the sense that it can be seen as trivial. So some people may not see 'playful' as being appropriate, although they would support the idea of creative and explorative and engaging learning etc., which [is what] playful [learning] is about.

Some student responses to the survey topic were similarly related to terminology, as indicated in the following comment:

> I would consider my school's science labs fun because of experiments and interest in the subject, but they are by no means playful. A varied space, a pleasant space, a relaxed space, an adaptable space, a well-equipped space, an interestingly-made space, and a variety of spaces which suit different people's needs is what's important. 'Playful' has nothing to do with any of that.

The perception of learning as serious and exam-focused at senior level, rather than playful, is supported by student comments such as 'learning places should not be playful, rather, it is for learning and studying', and:

> As a junior/middle school student I appreciated the playful learning spaces that the school provided in order to make lessons interactive and enthusiastic. Although, now as a senior student, I value the traditional learning spaces as it [sic] allows you to keep concentrated and comfortable while learning vital things needed for exams.

The common association of playful learning with 'fun', rather than an established pedagogical approach to learning, has an impact on perceptions of, as well as, the possibility of playful engagement in learning in the secondary school context. The notion of order described by Huizinga (1949) as inherent in play is a nuanced one. As Andrews (2012) has argued, referring to the work of Battram and Russell (2002), play occurs in a space between order and chaos, comfort and challenge. Consequently, it occurs in a risky space in which 'objective reality is tempered by imagination leading to the creation of a *transitional reality* in which one can experiment with different ways of being and relating to others' (Andrews, 2012, p. 170). Hence we ought not be surprised that in the face of the challenges of major external exams, senior school students and their teachers might reject the benefits of engagement in risky playful learning spaces in favour of a more traditional and narrowly instrumental learning context. However, this rejection and the rationale on which it is based are critical factors undermining the inclusion and adoption of playful approaches in adolescent learning environments. Juliet Kinchin accounts for some of the scepticism about playful learning by referring to 'the overlay of adult nostalgia, sentiment, and angst onto anything to do with children, which inhibits dispassionate and rigorous analysis'; in this context, she also argues that 'in our work-centric culture, is a deep-rooted sense of play as trivial – just messing about, with no serious rationale or quantifiable outcomes – and of children and childcare as part of predominantly domestic and therefore lesser worlds' (Kinchin & O'Connor, 2012, p. 16).

The scepticism of those critical of the inclusion of playful learning spaces in secondary schools can be juxtaposed to Huizinga's focus on the absorption and engagement characteristic of play, which suggests a connection between playful learning and 'flow'; 'flow' is a concept that the psychologist, Csikszentmihalyi, coined in the context of exploring creativity, motivation and learning. It refers to a state of optimal engagement, 'the subjective buoyancy of experience when …the challenge of an activity is well matched to the individual's skills' (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009 p. 132). This notion of the possibility that students can reach the level of engagement described as 'flow' has led us to reconsider some of our respondents' comments. Comments about science labs being 'fun' but not

'playful' or about the appeal of creative, explorative and engaging learning, which is seen as distinct from playful learning, suggest that the respondents' understandings of the relationship between learning and playfulness could usefully be explored and challenged.

10.4 Conclusion

The value of playful learning, and spaces that support it, is well documented particularly at early childhood and primary school level. While there is less research on playful learning environments in 'post-compulsory' educational contexts, workplaces that support creativity and innovation and informal learning spaces are becoming increasingly common, which suggests that an increased focus on playful learning spaces in secondary schools is apposite. One potential barrier to the implementation of playful learning environments at secondary school level is a lack of research. More research is required regarding the use of playful learning spaces in secondary school contexts and regarding users' understandings of the rationale that explains and justifies the use of those spaces.

Our survey of two secondary schools, which include both traditional and nontraditional learning environments, found a disparity between the perceptions of playful learning environments at secondary level by comparison with those in early childhood, primary and certain 'post-compulsory' educational contexts. Our data revealed some resistance to these playful learning spaces from some students and teachers because they perceived playful learning environments as lacking the seriousness required to focus on preparation for examinations. The data also indicated that some respondents were uncertain about the nature of and justification for playful approaches to learning and about the value of playful learning spaces.

The importance of the physical space to the development of a playful learning environment, although it was rated below other measures, still ranked highly. Our research found that many factors contribute to a playful learning environment. The key characteristics of successful playful learning environments identified in the survey derive from spatial principles supportive of pedagogy reflecting Huizinga's characteristics of play, at least to some degree. The spaces can become temporary spheres of activity with dispositions of their own; they allow for interludes in more common daily activities (Huizinga, 1949). Thus these are spaces that can be changed easily by teachers or students; a diversity of learning spaces, which have different levels, are of different scales and have colourful furniture, are offered. Some of the spaces are undefined; others are set aside for relaxation. Spaces such as these that are seen to support playful learning were generally considered to be nontraditional in nature and to generate a sense of freedom in learners. While outdoor spaces provide opportunities for playful learning, they were used infrequently during class time. Further research could explore whether this is due to environmental, design or

management issues. Given the acknowledged reluctance to use outdoor areas as learning spaces in the contexts studied, the impact of environmental factors and the specifics of space design, from an architectural perspective, would be a worthwhile area for further research, particularly in adolescent learning environments.

This paper has not explored the ‘real’ versus the digital world in the adolescent learning context. However exploring the opportunities for creative learning offered by the digital age, at the interface with the ‘hard’ or ‘real’ world context, could have major benefits for creative and playful learning for adolescents (Larson, 2000); research into alternative visions of learning may also assist such exploration (Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016). While technology use was rated least important in relation to playful learning environments in the survey conducted as part of this research, these opportunities for further investigation nonetheless exist for this age group.

The most important criteria in the facilitation of playful learning at the senior school level were teacher’s attitude and approach to learning. Where there is an increasing focus on exams, playfulness and learning can be seen, both by educators and students as mutually exclusive. While such reactions are understandable, they do not diminish the force and applicability of claims about the value of playful learning and of a configuration of space that enhances such learning. Given that the process and outcomes of a playful approach to learning are seen as desirable, further research could explore tensions identified in relation to playful learning. These may reflect confusion in terminology employed, rather than or in addition to barriers to implementation, such as a school’s ethos in relation to learning, which is influenced by curriculum and examination-based assessment.

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Chapter 11
The Power of Play-Based Learning: A Pedagogy of Hope for Potentially At-Risk Children

Marguerite Maher and Stephanie Smith

Abstract In this chapter, the authors explore the preliminary findings of a qualitative action research study into the effects of a play-based program in a primary school, which focused on improving knowledge and skills in the key areas of science and mathematics for a cohort of potentially at-risk children. The findings of the study suggest the need to counter teacher prejudice against the notion of play as a vehicle for learning for school-aged children; the need for parents to be encouraged in a different way to be partners in their children's education; and they highlight the pivotal role of professional development for participant teachers. The authors use the work of Freire on the pedagogy of hope and its interaction with literature on play to illustrate a number of advantages of this play-based program. First, it had cross-curricular advantages given its correlation with improved literacy and numeracy scores obtained through the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy; second, children demonstrated an increased ability to drive learning content; third, it had positive impacts on student confidence and engagement; fourth, the children developed a complement of twenty-first-century life skills; and finally, the acquisition of cultural capital and social skills proved a powerful tool to student engagement. This chapter seeks to explain those impacts in terms of the playful nature of the program.

11.1 Introduction

The two authors of this chapter have contributed significantly in a number of initiatives in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, Australia, where starting with Aboriginal people's knowledge was vital and where it was found that having their ways of knowing, being and doing as a key pillar for learning was

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pivotal to success (cf. Maher, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). These authors had also been part of an initiative to provide play opportunities for the children of boat-people, while they were incarcerated (cf. Maher & Smith, 2014). In the current study, these experiences, together with the principles underpinning Paulo Freire's 1970 book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and his subsequent reflection on that work in *of Hope*, written in 1992, informed the thinking and approach within the current study. To explain the focus on Freire, while he wrote in the context of political oppression of the working class, nevertheless, the sentiments he expressed are applicable to marginalised groups within Australia. He provided a framework for a 'progressive educator' (Freire, 1992, p. 3), which allowed us to identify key elements for success within the current study. It should be noted that these elements, such as parental involvement and the maintenance of children's power within their learning, for which Freire (1992) coined the term *pedagogy of hope*, were put into action. This was achieved through a play-based program, but the examples and findings are provided tentatively. We seek further scrutiny and debate as we follow Freire (1992) who holds that '… the educational practice of a progressive option will never be anything but an adventure into unveiling. It will always be an experiment in bringing out the truth' (Freire, 1992, p. 1).

11.2 Context of the Current Study

The current study took place in School X in a low socio-economic region of Western Sydney. Approximately 10 % of the students at the school were Aboriginal and around 80 % were refugees from a variety of countries and cultures, bringing with them a multiplicity of languages. Of the students in the current study, ultimately including preschool children (aged 4), and Kindergarten to Year Two children (aged 5–7), 95 % had English as an additional language or dialect.

School X had 500 students in 16 regular classes. Those with behavioural or severe learning difficulties were segregated and taught in 'support classes', which became an integral part of the current study. Student attendance at the start of the study, in 2012, was poor with some students in the junior years attending less than 50 % of the time. Student achievement on National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was extremely low. As noted by the Australian Mathematical Sciences institute in 2014, '[m]ore worrying still is the fact that there is significant inequality in performance among Australian students' (Wienk, 2014) and that this correlates with socio-economic status (SES). Demonstrating this correlation, the achievements of students across New South Wales (NSW) in 2011 (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011) are shown in the figure below together with those of students in similar low SES schools. These also show the achievement of School X students as lower than the low socio-economic status (SES) achievement across NSW – and also as declining (Fig. 11.1).

		Reading	Persuasive Writing	Spelling	Grammar & Punctuation	Numeracy
Year 3	School	353	356	343	321	346
		335 - 371	341 - 371	326 - 360	302 - 340	331 - 361
	SIM	381	388	376	384	373
		372 - 390	380 - 396	367 - 385	374 - 394	365 - 381
	ALL	416	416	406	421	398
Year 5	School	436	470	469	468	451
		421 - 451	455 - 485	454 - 484	451 - 485	437 - 465
	SIM	459	453	457	465	462
		450 - 468	445 - 461	449 - 465	456 - 474	454 - 470
	ALL	488	483	484	499	488

SIM Schools serving students from statistically similar backgrounds
ALL Australian schools' average
- Student population below reporting threshold
Year level not tested

Selected school's average is
substantially above
above
close to
below
substantially below
these schools' average

Fig. 11.1 A comparison of NAPLAN results broken down to show School X, similar low SES demographics and average results across Australia

In 2012 one of the authors was appointed to teach Year Two (7-year-old children), and she brought with her a strong belief in the power of play as a vehicle for learning.

11.3 Play-Based Pedagogy

11.3.1 The Secret Is Out!

Some, including Maria Montessori (1995), have argued that play is children's work, but we would say that it is far more than this. Play is their 'self-actualisation, a holistic exploration of who and what they are and know and of who and what they might become' (Broadhead, 2004, p. 89).

Play-based learning is an integral part of children's development, and its positive implications for young children have been the focus of many major research papers over recent decades. Henniger (2002) describes play as a crucial way for children to learn about language, develop intellectual concepts, build social relationships and understanding, strengthen physical skills and deal with stress. Overall, play is a key element in enhancing children's all-around development (O'Connor, McCormack, MacLaughlin, Angus, & O'Rourke, 2014; OECD 2002).

A key individual who has significantly influenced the way we view play is Piaget ([1945]1962). His constructivist analysis of play-based learning has laid a solid foundation for authentic experiences that incorporate interactions with other children and adults, and hands-on manipulatives. The purpose of hands-on objects and

materials in play is to provide children with opportunities to assimilate new knowledge within existing schemes. Heidemann and Hewitt (2010) believe Piaget intended for adults to fulfil an indirect role in play-based experiences and only introduce new information as needed. This proved an important aspect in the play-based program in the junior primary classes in the current study.

Another strong advocate and visionary in the realm of play was Vygotsky. He believed play to be a vehicle that would help children to reach their potential level from their actual current level of development, which he referred to as the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1987). The ZPD shifts as children learn and understand information. Through interactions with a more competent peer or adult, children can extend themselves and achieve and enjoy the experience. Bodrova and Leong (2007), co-authors of *Tools of the Mind*: *The Vygotskian Approach to Early Childhood Education*, add that when young children pretend, they often use bigger words than they normally would and extend themselves to attain more advanced skills of self-control, language use, memory, attention, cognitive skills and cooperation with others. Claxon and Carr (2004) offer a dynamic interpretation of learning dispositions by suggesting a series of adverbs that broaden the term's universal interpretation by advocating robustness, richness and breadth which are promoted through developmental play. These terms refer to children's ability to respond to learning in a positive manner despite the challenges, explore a wide variety of activities and spread the application of skills across different tasks.

A central component to the Vygotskian theory, and one which was pivotal in the planning for learning in the current study, is the link between children's social and cultural upbringing and their development (Henniger, 2013). Interactions with adults and other children directly shape the way a child learns about the world around them. Agreeing with Piaget, Vygotsky relates children's development of cognitive concepts to interactions with peers and adults. Bodrova and Leong (2007) describe the adult role as consisting of scaffolded support in the form of questions, demonstrations and modelling. A significant element to a successful Vygotskian play program is a conscious promotion of language development, through the provision of engaging experiences. Scaffolding and questioning also have a strong emphasis on fostering in children the ability to communicate and express their thoughts and feelings with others.

In the case of children with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D), the vast majority of students in the current study, the acquisition of language is vitally important to their social inclusion and overall learning. This is critical in order for them to 'belong' (Australian Government Department of Education, 2009) and to see themselves as an integral part of this progressive community of learners. This aligns with Freire's view that:

> The reading and writing of the word would always imply a more critical rereading of the world as a 'route' to the 'rewriting' – the transformation – of that world. … Hence, also, the need in literacy projects conducted in a progressive perspective, for a comprehension of language and its role … in the achievement of citizenship. (1992, pp. 32–33)

A major component to second language speakers' acquisition of a new dialect is providing authentic opportunities for talking and listening to occur between both peers and teachers. According to Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010), speaking is considered one of the central elements of everyday communication, and thus mastering speaking ability should be an ultimate goal within the classroom. In the case of EAL/D learners, play provides an opportunity for children to interact in real-world situations with other children, to practise sentence structure and grammatical features. It also places them on a level playing field where they have a platform to provide evidence of their cultural capital with other children.

11.3.2 Play, Play, Play!

In the past decade, a number of countries including Norway, Sweden, New Zealand, Britain and Japan have emphasised the significance of play by embracing its place in formal curricula. Although this may also be true in Australia with the introduction of The Early Years Learning Framework for early childhood settings, the conundrum for classroom teachers in formal schooling is how to fit this sort of play program into a set curriculum.

As the Wong, Wang and Cheng (2011) study indicated, the assumptions that play is beneficial to children's learning is well-established in the realms of research, academia and in some educators' belief systems. There has not been the necessary acceptance across society in general, nor, importantly, amongst parents that play is a legitimate vehicle for learning in the formal school setting. Parents present a common view of society towards play:

> In a society where academic achievement is highly valued teachers and parents hesitate to think of play as essential to child development; they are more likely to see it as an obstacle to children's academic success and future career prosperity. (Wong, Wong, & Cheng 2011, p. 166)

The challenge for early childhood professionals and advocates of play is how to alter the perceptions of society. As suggested by a recent British study, we should capitalise on children's inherent desire for learning and practical experiences when they enter formal schooling, and not dent their enthusiasm and confidence (Stephen, Ellis, & Martlew, 2010) by 'schooling them' in a factory-like setting (Whitby, 2013). But surprisingly, theory is not enough; people need to see appropriate, well-executed play-based programs in action if they are to believe in the value of play as a vehicle for learning.

Play as a learning tool has been an academic focus for well over a hundred years now. Throughout this time, it has moved in and out of favour with teaching professionals. Saracho (2011) describes play as a means through which young children are provided with an opportunity to express their own ideas and symbolise and test their knowledge of the world around them with others. Figure 11.2 outlines the diverse range of benefits associated with play-based learning for children. Although this

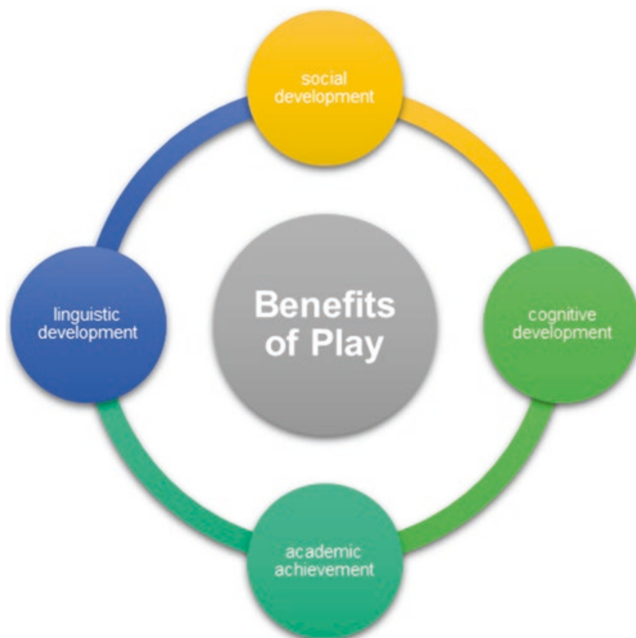

Fig. 11.2 Benefits of play

diagram looks simple, it shows how play influences every aspect of a child's development which Synodi (2010) explains is linked to social, personal, linguistic, physical, cognitive, moral, creative and artistic growth.

In the classroom, play-based programs have the potential, as Saracho (2011) argues, to provide children with an entry into basic inquiry in literacy, science, social sciences, mathematics, art, music and movement. Play-based programs have the ability to promote and foster personalised learning and create experiences for the diverse capacities of each young Australian as envisaged in the Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). Expanding on this, Lillemyr, Sobstad, Marder and Flowerday (2011) declare that children are able to engage in experiences in which have a strong sense of relatedness and therefore contribute strongly to intrinsic motivations for learning. For all learners, young and old:

> [t]he act of studying, teaching, learning, knowing, is difficult, and especially, it is demanding, but it is pleasant … It is crucial, then, that educands discover and sense the joy that steeps it, that is part of it, and that is ever ready to fill the hearts of all who surrender to it. (Freire, 1992, p. 69)

For lower primary, Wood and Attfield (2005) believe a well-developed play program has the capacity to enhance children's content knowledge across the curriculum. They explain that successful curriculum planning requires creating an approach which is based on both curriculum-generated play to support the development of

specific skills and knowledge and a play-generated curriculum based on teachers responding to the interests of the children.

Recent studies (O'Connor et al., 2014) illustrate that play promotes problem-solving, inventiveness, innovation, creativity, coping skills, processing skills, emotional intelligence, personal happiness, a sense of belonging, identity development, confidence, ethical formation and interpersonal communication. These dispositions for learning are imperative for all children but specifically those of low SES, and it is possible that a developmental play program will foster these skills.

Play-based learning allows children to take control of their learning and the direction in which they want to drive it. At the end of the day, as Freire (1992, pp. 57–58) argues,

> … teaching is not the pure mechanical transfer of the contour of a content from the teacher to passive, docile students. Nor can I resist repeating that starting out with the educands' knowledge does not mean circling around this knowledge ad infinitum. *Starting out* means setting off down the road, getting going, shifting from one point to another, not *sticking*, or *staying*.

So, we needed to get going. We believed that play-based learning creates a dimension through which all children and teachers can be learners. It creates an environment where every person in the room is able to contribute to the learning through the use of knowledge, skills, prior experiences and/or risk-taking. Given that student engagement and attendance were extremely poor and therefore concerning at the start of the study, the impetus for so strongly promoting a play-based approach to learning and teaching was derived from Vygotsky who claims that,

> Thought is engendered by motivation, i.e., by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency, which holds that answer to the last 'why' the analysis of thinking. (1986, p. 252)

It was vital that children first be engaged and eager and, second, have every opportunity to improve their English. We therefore use a definition of play-based learning that is founded predominantly on Vygotsky's (1986) definition of play-based learning where 'the interaction between the adult and the child is like a dance – the child leads and the adult follows, always closely in tune with the child's actions' (Berk & Winsler 1995, cited in Davis & Tu, 2008). However, it also includes elements of mediated learning which emphasises the importance of teacher-child interactions, without the reliance on every aspect being teacher directed. A study undertaken by Fleer (2009) supported findings of previous studies (cf. Karpov, 2003; Kozulin, 2003; Tzuriel, 1996) demonstrating the vital importance of teacher-child interactions; for example, when 'teacher-child interactions were not focussed on scientific concepts within these playful contexts, ...children drew upon their prior experiences and created imaginary narratives from their use of materials' (Fleer, 2009, p. 1085). This meant that children were not necessarily making connections to arrive at an understanding of a scientific concept. In the current study, we took cognisance of this and professional development for teachers provided them with the skills and questioning techniques that would further children's understanding

and concept development. With practice, the teachers became increasingly confident and skilled at doing this.

In the current study, there were a number of aspects that needed to be considered and obstacles to be overcome. The main one of these was the views of teachers in the primary school and parents that play was something children in the prior-to-school setting engaged in; it was used for learning before they came to formal schooling where *real* learning would take place. Teachers and parents did not consider play as a legitimate vehicle for learning in their primary school. Undaunted, the current study was undertaken.

11.4 The Current Study

The play-based program evolved over the course of 2 years in four distinct phases.

11.4.1 Phase One

The innovative play-based learning program began with a single Year Two class, in a big school, as Friday afternoon activity. Over the course of a term, the program evolved and developed as the researcher and 22 children participated in a range of curriculum-based play activities. Although the activities covered all elements of the curriculum, there was a heavier focus on mathematics and science. This was in direct response to the lack of quality hands-on teaching experiences being offered in these areas of the curriculum and the disengagement of the children towards learning. Children lacked the ability to transfer skills and knowledge to hands-on mathematical problem-solving scenarios. Science on the other hand was predominantly an afterthought only covered intermittently as an isolated activity.

11.4.1.1 Examples of Activities

Play-based activities conducted throughout the four phases cover a wide range of subject areas including literacy, science, mathematics, creative arts humanities, physical education and health and information technology. Below is a snapshot of some of the activities conducted.

Literacy

Children were able to write and post letters to each other; design e-books using iPads; craft procedures for new experiments and cooking workshops; read experiments, magazines and interactive texts; and follow digital drawing and craft step-by-step guides.

Mathematics

Children explored angles using the Angry Birds iPad app; calculated the weight and number of carrot pieces they could balance on a paper bridge; used positional language to design treasure maps; built strong shapes and towers using marshmallows and pasta; used fruit and vegetable stamps to paint with and discuss 2D and 3D shapes; and played board and card games for counting.

Science

Children made predictions about and conducted experiments on colour changing, chemical reactions (vinegar and bi-carb) and density; built mini greenhouses; explored floating and sinking by making lily pads and bugs with paper; designed and tested water crafts and cars using recycled materials; tested various paper plane designs and made slime.

Creative Arts

Children designed and participated in role-play activities involving a supermarket, doctors/vet surgery, safari hunters and a news station. They danced to music, wrote songs, played a variety of musical instruments and crafted their own instruments. Children also had access to a mystery box containing recycled materials to create anything they could imagine such as animals and transportation. Additionally they created artworks using chalk, painting, charcoal, bubbles, lead pencil, play-dough, clay and crayons.

Information Technology

Children used computer coding software to build moving Lego animals and people; played with and explored various apps using iPads including Minecraft, Wheel of Fortune, celebrity heads, story cubes and Cut the Rope; read Kids National Geographic and Horrible Histories online magazines; and used cameras and Apple technology to record clips and take photographs to record their learning.

11.4.2 Phase Two

The completion of phase one culminated in the formal establishment of a play-based learning program as a demonstrably quality curriculum-linked learning experience. The trial had been an overwhelming success with the children, from an engagement and enjoyment perspective, and also with executive staff as they observed and evaluated the documentation related to quality learning in the key learning areas (KLAs). The support of Teacher A as a collaborative partner and sounding board meant the majority of potential problems had been resolved. The next cycle was the program's expansion into all three Year Two classes. It was at this point Teacher B joined the team and bought the total number of children participating up to 55. It was also during this phase the teacher participants teamed up with the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher.

The play-based program involved a range of activities linked to various KLA curriculum outcomes and indicators. Anecdotal notes, footage and photographs of the children were used to provide assessment information for formal reporting, as well as feedback for the teachers and the establishment of reflective practices.

In this phase, the knowledge gained by the participant teachers fuelled the expansion of the program into other learning areas. In literacy and numeracy sessions, children were given greater choice in their activities, more perspectives were made available which linked to the real world and children's interests, and the number of practical experiences increased.

11.4.3 Phase Three

In this phase, the program expanded to incorporate all of lower primary and two support unit classes from Kindergarten (age 5) to Year Two, ten classes in total. The growth of the program created the requirement for formal teacher professional development sessions, which were conducted in a lesson study format across 3 days. The lesson study involved a research presentation, demonstration and collaborative planning session and culminated in the running of a session by the participants with feedback. Once all teachers had completed the official training package, the principal approved the active learning program as a compulsory teaching component. Then came the challenge of packaging the program for individual teachers, including dealing with the issue of supplying good quality resources, which arose predominantly due to differing needs of teachers, such as the divide between collaborative teaching and those preferring to work independently. The sustainability of the program was also a major consideration when planning resource allocations.

11.4.4 Phase Four

In the final phase of the program, we returned to an earlier stage of interaction with the collaborative team, which included the researcher, Teacher A and ESL teacher. By the time the rest of lower primary had come on board with the program, the original three classes had advanced to a completely new platform of play-based learning. The children and parents had evaluated the program as so successful that the teachers decided to run two sessions a week. The major change was in the way the program was presented, but more important was the fact that children took over control of the play-based learning sessions making them completely child driven. Children suggested stations they were interested in running themselves; in preparation, they participated in trial runs to make sure they had a sound understanding of the concepts behind the activity before leading other children.

11.5 Findings

The play-based learning program exceeded the expectations of the researchers. Not only were the children engaged and motivated, and learning through choice and interest, but also there was a resounding commitment from other teachers who became interested and inspired by the program. Some of the key outcomes have been improved attendance on the part of the children, increased engagement with the school on the part of the parents and improvement in NAPLAN results.

11.5.1 Children's Engagement

Given the low SES backgrounds and high migrant status of children participating in the program, the majority had experienced at least one or more of the following challenges, which influenced their schooling experience:

- Parents with low-level education and negative attitudes towards formal schooling
- Parents who didn't verbally interact frequently or buy educational toys in the early years
- Lack of preschool or early childhood learning experiences
- English as an additional language
- 'Schooling' via teacher-directed learning, worksheets and irrelevant activities
- Lack of teacher confidence in the specific areas of play-based learning, science and mathematics

Throughout the study, children displayed heightened levels of engagement and motivation towards learning in many ways. These illustrated in their simplest form by their smiles and the constant references they made to experiences they had had in the program, but also by children asking interesting open-ended questions and displaying a sophisticated thirst for new knowledge. They began researching topics of their choice and suggesting stations they could run to showcase experiments, origami skills, drawing skills, computer knowledge and to present drama workshops as well as much more. Children were reading because they wanted to access information on dinosaurs, frogs, African animals and soccer skills; they wanted to know how to complete activities such as making craft items or executing a specific experiment. They began writing more to record how they made their milkshakes, to send handwritten letters to each other filled with kind words and drafting scripts so that they could record plays using digital technology. Children would even request items to help them complete activities they had researched at home but couldn't complete without resources, or they would bring in projects constructed in their own time of which they were proud.

From children's increased engagement came a flow-on effect of other significant successes such as increases in their attendance levels.

11.5.2 Improved Attendance Levels

Children were genuinely excited to come to school. They asked when the play-based learning program would be run every other day. They talked about their favourite activities and constantly made suggestions for the next session. Over the course of a year out of 55 children, 39 had attendance levels over 90 %. Parents struggled to keep children at home when they were sick as they worried about missing out. As an example, one little boy's attendance in Kindergarten where there was

focus on play ran at 85 %; by Year One, it had plummeted to below 80 %. Most mornings this child would sit outside the classroom on a little wooden bench, after the bell had gone, because he was disengaged with learning and had no interest in being inside the classroom. When the play-based learning was introduced to his class in Year Two, this same boy had an attendance level of 93 %. He was engaged in learning, building strong relationships with other children in the class, and had an increased level of confidence.

11.5.3 Heightened Social Skills

This is an important place to reiterate some of the disadvantages these children face as they enter formal schooling such as dealing with English as an additional language, little or no preschooling and a lack of quality verbal interactions with other children and adults. Within the classroom, despite having already completed 2 years of formal schooling, we found these children struggled to think independently, work cooperatively, value skills that other children offered and generally communicate effectively with each other.

The play-based learning program allowed children to interact on an even playing field. It promoted an atmosphere where children needed to communicate to gain necessary information and complete activities. Those who were not so confident in one area were able to shine in other areas. The program built pride in their cultural heritage and promoted positive interactions between children and between children and teachers, as everyone wanted to ask questions and hear about the learning-taking place. The children moved freely throughout the space during sessions, often interacting with children outside their social circle. This process helped to build an inclusive learning environment where children were eager to work with each other and called on and valued specific skill sets offered.

11.5.4 Acquisition of Twenty-First-Century Skills

Although the acquisition of increasingly appropriate social skills was a significant development throughout the program, there were also a number of other key twenty-first-century skills children established along the way. Activities, included a range of challenges, promoted both collaboration and problem-solving. Children built bridges to hold a specific weight, using only cardboard, sticky tape and newspaper; they created boats to float on a small body of water using only recycled materials; and they designed tall, stable towers using spaghetti and marshmallows.

These activities and experiences may seem like good, sound pedagogy which educators would expect to find in the early years of schooling. But the evidence of this case study indicated that the broad perceptions or prejudices of teachers towards

the value of developmental play in formal schooling determined that traditional teacher-directed learning would have predominated without this initiative.

The case study also illustrated the veracity of concerns about teacher attitudes toward and a lack of grounding in the curriculum areas of mathematics and science. Poor student results in national and state testing, particularly in the area of numeracy, along with a perceived concomitant lack of teacher confidence and knowledge in the curriculum areas of mathematics and science prompted the Department of Education to act to appoint a senior instructional leader (at the deputy principal level). This instructional leader was to assist in the professional development of teachers from Kindergarten to Year Two at School X, although School X was not the only school to receive this form of support. In fact fifty such instructional leaders were appointed to schools in the state of New South Wales in 2012 and an additional twenty six were appointed in 2013 to work with teachers and school leadership teams to improve numeracy and literacy results in underperforming schools.

Data gathered in this study from teachers indicated that science had formerly been taught in isolation from other subject areas and often hurriedly just prior to reporting periods. Thus science was not central to student learning and in addition, a significant proportion of the experiments undertaken in science lessons were highly structured and had predetermined outputs so that meaningful steps in the learning process were omitted. In addition to giving instruction in isolation from other key learning areas, teachers of mathematics and science at School X, had stuck close to traditional and explicit teaching practices, conducting whole class teacher-led sessions and utilising worksheets without providing students with opportunities for the 'hands-on' application of skills.

By comparison the play-based program provided active learning sessions that gave children deep-learning experiences and real-world contexts, allowing them to apply a variety of mathematical concepts to a single task. The program included a wide range of activities which provided children with an opportunity to explore and expand their creativity. As noted above these included: themed drama stations such as a doctor's surgery and jungle safari; crafting and playing a range of musical instruments; exploring the use of mediums such as chalk, acrylics, oil pastels, charcoal, lead pencil and watercolours; and conducting dance workshops.

The sessions took the learning out of the hands of the teachers and placed it in the control of the children. They were able to independently suggest and design their own activities, explore specific child-designed questions and recognise there can be a variety of solutions to real-world problems. They were also able to employ a range of strategies and self-select tools to help them solve problems and draw on the knowledge of experts to help them, be they children, teachers, parents or community members.

As children completed activities or during the wrap-up at the end of the play-based learning sessions, they were given the chance to talk about what they had done and critically reflect on their work. Children vocalised to each other and/or a teacher in many different formats, including iPad recordings and photography, how they felt about their pieces of work, how they could improve and what they loved about the session. Children became so familiar with this process that it led to them

interviewing other children independently and also putting more effort into their projects, often taking a number of weeks to complete them.

Children became very comfortable using PC and Apple technology to record drama, musical and dance pieces and taking photographs of their own and other children's work. They used programming software to build moveable Lego robots and explored a diverse range of apps to create e-books, puppet shows and digital art. They were invariably keen to have access to technology so that they might capture their own moments; show their work or create documentaries, for example, news reports or a footy show commentary; and present using a Smart Board.

The reality of this case study showed that prior to the active learning program being implemented, children were not able to apply explicitly taught skills across tasks, which was evident in their best start, NAPLAN and general assessment results. As noted above, they were disengaged with learning and they could not think for themselves, because they were so used to playing *guess what's in my teachers' head*. Active learning had the dual role of increasing children's independence and ability to think for themselves, and allowing them to positively engage with learning and collaborate with children across the class; it also had a similar positive effect on teachers.

11.5.5 Child-Driven Content

The more comfortable children became with the program, the greater the involvement they were able to have in the design of activities. Ideas came in many forms: some were conceived through questions children asked, others were developed as a result of experiences they had had at home or skills they wanted to share and many were the result of experimenting with resources. Often children then ran the activity themselves with the backup support of a teacher, especially if it was an experiment, to make sure they had accurate terminology, understood key concepts and that they were facilitating the experience for others rather than doing it all themselves.

11.5.6 Improved Literacy and Numeracy Results

Children were encouraged to write letters to each other, create procedures and use them to make items; they also independently designed surveys to question others and wrote descriptions about animals. Some children built Angry Bird towers using place value blocks to knock down, while others added up money at the supermarket or café. The program allowed children greater freedom to express themselves. They appeared to be increasingly able to transfer skills from everyday classroom activities into the play-based learning sessions and vice versa. This transferability was reflected in the increased scores achieved in both numeracy and literacy NAPLAN

results. In many cases, children moved at least one band higher than children at the same level in previous years.

These outcomes for children became infused into everyday classroom activities making for an intensely purposeful learning environment. Children were more inclusive of others in the completion of tasks, choosing to work with others. They showed greater awareness of quality work with substance and could manage their own time and learning. They demonstrated superior independence and could locate resources, reference materials and access technology by using their own background knowledge or that of another child. In this classroom, the teachers became true facilitators in these children's learning journey as the program evolved and they released control.

11.6 Discussion

The findings noted in the previous section relate to children; however, the impact on teachers and parents was as positive within their contexts.

11.6.1 Teachers

In Australia knowledge and the content of the curriculum are generally delivered in a top-down model. School leadership teams usually ensure planning from the curriculum prior to the learning and teaching taking place. Friere holds that educators and curriculum developers 'claim to be progressive, and they regard themselves as proprietors of knowledge, which they need only *extend* to the ignorant educands' (Freire, 1992, p. 112). At School X, this approach to learning and teaching was evidenced on two levels. The curriculum has been written by subject experts keeping in mind students who would have Australian English as their home language. Often the New South Wales (NSW) curriculum, and teachers' interpretation of this curriculum, did not take into account children such as those in School X. At the local level, teachers, who had studied through traditional teacher education courses, were inclined to teach these children as they would children of Australian heritage of middle or high SES. This had had disastrous results evidenced in poor attendance, behavioural problems in class, devastatingly low achievement by children on NAPLAN tests and extremely limited liaison between school and parents.

Despite data showing poor achievement, attendance and engagement by the children, teachers were so entrenched in their pedagogy that they were extremely and vociferously reluctant to attempt another model at first. As noted by Freire:

> The task of educator would be all too easy if it were to be reducible to the imparting of content that would not even need to be treated aseptically, and aseptically 'transmitted,' since, as the content of a neutral science it would be aseptic. … The subject or agent of a neutral practice would have nothing to do but 'transfer knowledge,' a knowledge that would be itself neutral'. (Freire, 1992, pp. 64–65)

Teachers in the current study considered themselves, at the outset, competent and progressive in their teaching; they therefore found it confronting when a new approach was mooted as another option to be tried. Indeed, they were reluctant even to consider the questions Freire notes as fundamental to effective content:

> [W]hat content to teach, in behalf of what is this content to be taught, in behalf of whom, against what and against whom? Who selects the content, how is it taught? What is teaching? What is learning? What manner of relationship obtains between teaching and learning?…If being a teacher means being superior to the student in some way, does this mean that the teacher must be authoritarian? Is it possible to be democratic and dialogical without ceasing to be a teacher, which is different from being a student? (Freire, 1992, pp. 116–117)

It took weeks of discussing with other junior primary teachers at School X the challenges to their approach, weeks of letting them observe the children engaged and retaining the power over their learning in the play-based program before they began to appreciate the way children then undertook the concomitant responsibility for their on-task behaviour and for their learning. As the study progressed and the teachers, falteringly at first, increasingly incorporated play-based learning into their classrooms, so in the professional development sessions, teachers began to ask the same questions as Freire, noted above, and to answer them for themselves. A conversation during one session shows this clearly:

T 5: It's not just the skill of being able to put play-based learning into practice, it's also the thinking that goes on behind it, like, who says we have to start with planning from the curriculum? Why can't we start from children's interests and map back to the LOs (learning outcomes) in the curriculum?

T2: I mean, the results (NAPLAN) speak for themselves now.

The above excerpt, from one of the professional development sessions, demonstrates the change in attitude as teachers increasingly found it possible to relinquish control to the children. The principal's comment as he viewed the play-based learning in action in early 2013 summed it up: 'It's so scary to see you teachers let go and give the children free reign to follow their interests. It is just so amazing, really, that there is nobody mucking about. Not one. They are actually engrossed and clearly learning'.

Essentially what had happened over the implementation of the program, and as it developed, was that teachers used children, their cultural mores and specific interests as the starting point for planning and providing learning experiences. The practice of using children's interests as the starting point resonates with Freire's (1992, p. 166) response to a poster he saw in Chile, which stated that 'those who know must teach those who know not'. He added the following:

> But for the one who knows to be able to teach the one who knows not, … first the one who knows must know that he or she does not know all things; second, the one who knows not must know that he or she is not ignorant of everything. Without this dialectical understanding of knowledge and ignorance, it is impossible, in a progressive, democratic outlook, for the one who knows to teach one who knows not. (Freire, 1992, p. 166)

This view that teachers need the humility to know the limits of their knowledge and to hold high expectations of children was illustrated in the current study where

a truly a child-centred approach developed as the children increasingly became partners with the teachers and drivers of content. Having the children as partners and directing the learning reflected adjustments in the frameworks and underpinning beliefs of teachers. They had to come to believe that play-based learning is a legitimate pedagogy. They had also come to conceive of the children as efficacious and capable learners – and not limit them by a discourse that framed them as having limited potential because of their historico-social and cultural background. This way of thinking became foundational to the way the teachers interacted with the children and, importantly, their parents.

11.6.2 Parents

The vast majority of parents of the children in School X appeared to see themselves as almost completely powerless in relation to the education of their children and, indeed, to determining their own futures. This was evident in their responses to survey questions, the absence of a school parent and community organisation or volunteer program and extremely poor general attendance at school events and classroom activities. The legacy of the ex-refugees having been incarcerated for a length of time, the fear that they would by word or deed somehow jeopardise the acceptance of their children, was discernible in their interactions with the school and the staff. As Freire emphasised in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 'the fear that fills the oppressed, as individuals and as a class, and prevents them from struggling' (Freire, 1992, pp. 107–108). At the start of the program, parents almost never came to school, never responded to newsletters or never attended parent-teacher conferences. In no way did they see themselves as partners with the school in the education of their children, nor as important to their development. They were all by then Australian permanent residents or citizens, but their sense of powerlessness was palpable. Participant teachers in the current study came to understand what Freire notes: 'No one leaves his or her world without having been transfixed by its roots, or with a vacuum for a soul. We carry with us the memory of many fabrics, a self soaked in our history, our culture…' (Freire, 1992, p. 23). The challenge was to find ways to assure parents that the school understood this and truly valued their knowledges. Parents seemed to want to hope for better things for their children and themselves, but felt so burdened and disempowered in a new land and culture, and facing an unfamiliar language, that they appeared paralysed in the context of their children's schooling.

With the implementation of the play-based learning program, children became excited about school; they wanted to participate as was shown by improved attendance. They would take partially completed projects or experiments home and complete them there, their enthusiasm contagious. Children were so proud, for example, of the wetlands they helped develop; the vegetable garden they had dug and planted; the chicken coop they had sourced, ordered, paid for, built and tenanted with five chickens and four ducks that they insisted their parents come to school to see. This allowed teachers to start to build relationships and garner parent input, support and

advice on the activities to offer to children. Gradually parents came and ran traditional dance sessions, baked traditional recipes with the children and taught everyone snippets of their home languages where, of course, their own children were the experts. They brought artefacts from their cultures to school and their children explained their significance to everyone for by then, the children's English was well in advance of their parents.

11.6.3 Play-Based Learning Compared and Contrasted with Traditional Teaching

Although the experiences described above may mirror sound classroom pedagogy, there are two significant differences: student choice and direction. For example, a group of students decided they wanted to design and build a bird feeder. When the lower primary teachers were asked what they would have done next, the majority responded simply that they would have chosen a location in the garden and put birdseed in it. Instead our children separated themselves into different groups, and other children floated in and out based on their interest as they guided the learning experience to consider: specific colours birds are attracted to, which paint was the best to use and most durable in the elements, which birds were native to our location, what bird sounds would attract them and what birdseed would be appropriate, in addition to questions of managing the long-term costs and sourcing birdseed locally.

Below is a table outlining the key differences between this play-based learning strategy and traditional pedagogical practice:

Traditional teaching	Play-based learning
Role of teacher = instruct, direct, explain, control and assess	Role of teacher = facilitator of learning, to question, extend thinking with challenges, scaffold as children plan and execute experiments
Teacher dominated/directed	Child dominated
Predetermined learning outcomes from curriculum decided by teacher prior to undertaking activity	Power of learning lies with children
Activities provided by teacher to children in a structured manner	Activities provided on children's request and according to their interests
Children move from station to station on teacher instruction	Children choose what they do, when they do it and how they do it
Frequent use of worksheets to keep children on task and for evaluation	Children are the experts and teach each other scaffolded by teacher
Independent work or teacher selected groups based on ability levels, mixed or focus	Children select groups, modify them and make collaborative choices based on interest and expertise
Assessment by teacher	Children decided on mode of learning, recording and evaluating their work, often using twenty-first-century skills

It is difficult to single out any one most important positive message to emanate from the play-based program, but parental engagement with the school, and through that with each other, was certainly, even if tangentially, highly significant for their own ability to fit into the community. That engagement saw them begin to form a group with a common understanding of the new society in which they found themselves and of the way their children were engaging in learning in their new environment. It saw them form networks of support for one another and saw them socialise and connect with each other through their children. They began to see the real desire of the school and the Australian educational system to include them as valued participants in their children's education. This dawning awareness provided for them what Freire so aptly describes:

> An understanding of the world which, conditioned by the concrete reality that in part explains that understanding, can begin to change through a change in that concrete reality. In fact, that understanding of the world can begin to change the moment the unmasking of concrete reality begins to lay bare the 'whys' of what the actual understanding has been up until then. (Freire, 1992, p. 19)

Parents previously had some little hope for better things, but that hope 'demands an anchoring in practice' (Freire, 1992, p. 2), and this is what the play-based program offered them – a concrete way forward. The parents, through this program, were given the means, the 'permission' they called it, to relinquish their attitude of 'adhesion to the oppressor' (Freire, 1996, p. 27) in order to play their part effectively in this new society of theirs.

It was as if the 'culture of silence' was suddenly shattered, and they had discovered not only that they could speak but that their critical discourse upon the world, their world, was a way of remaking that world (Freire, 1992, p. 30).

What the play-based learning program offered parents was the means to engage, to speak, to critique, to come to a better understanding of the educational system their children were engaged in and to play a significant and positive role. 'It was as if they had begun to perceive that the development of their language which occurred in the course of their analysis of their reality, finally showed them that the lovelier world to which they aspired was being announced …' (Freire, 1992, p.30).

The play-based learning program had seen their children develop from burdened, quiet, reluctant attendees at school to keen, bright-eyed, confident equal participants in the learning endeavour with the teachers. Little by little the parents were drawn into this. Their own engagement, tentatively offered at first, became increasingly important in the development of the program. Their suggested content, their donated items and their treasured stories, when recorded, were utilised not only by their own child but by others who then asked questions of that child, placing her in role of expert.

11.7 Conclusion

We, as authors, have used a lens of some elements of Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* to think about and explain the findings of our study. We could have written this purely from the perspective of advantages of play-based learning for improving children's outcomes. It seemed to us, however, that the effects on parents and teachers would then be diluted and we wanted those to hold equal prominence.

Certainly, for the children the findings section of this chapter provides evidence of enormous growth and achievement on the part of the children, effectively demonstrating that '[t]eaching someone to learn is only valid … when educands *learn to learn*' (Freire, 1992, p. 68, original emphasis). Children took the initiative and drove the content of their learning; it was the teachers who had to adjust their pedagogy and, to a point, their belief systems around effective pedagogy for this specific cohort of children. Teachers' buy-in to the play-based program has flowed into 2014 to the point where they have been able to continue it in the junior primary without the researcher any longer leading the process. She has now moved to the middle primary and is beginning to introduce this pedagogy with older children (aged 8–10) and a new learning community of sceptical teachers.

For us, the authors, it was most specifically in relation to parents that elements of Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* were applicable. Their initial disempowerment changed over time, through 'anchoring in practice', to positive, purposeful interactions with the school, their children, other parents and the wider community and this was potentially the most significant positive outcome of the initiative. As noted by Freire, hope is not enough, it needs to be channelled, leading to action:

> … my hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water… The essential thing … is this: hope, as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice. As an ontological need, hope needs practice in order to become historical concreteness. That is why there is no hope in sheer hopefulness. The hoped-for is not attained by dint of raw hoping. Just to hope is to hope in vain'. (Freire, 1992, p. 2)

It would be arrogant to suppose that the play-based program alone was responsible for the positive outcomes reported for the children, teachers and, importantly, the parents. We believe, however, that it played a central and important role. Consequently, we have the intense hope that the positives evident in this play-based program and reported in this chapter will be a catalyst for others with similarly at-risk students to have the confidence to try this pedagogy of hope.

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Part III
Sociocultural Context, Technology and Consumerism

Chapter 12
Gendering the Subject in Playful Encounters

Bronwyn Davies

Abstract This paper engages in a Deleuzian analysis of play and its relation to the assemblage of gendered subjects. It explores the way gender and play *intra-act* with each other, asking how playful encounters might create and maintain the gender order and at the same time how they might also play a part in disrupting that order. Drawing on small stories of children in Sweden, the paper examines the emergent entanglements of gender and play.

12.1 Introduction

Children interact with each other, with the teachers, and with their physical environments. What I will explore, in particular, in this paper is the intra-action between gender and play. What gender can become and what play can become emerge in multiple *intra-active encounters*, where play affects what gender might become and gender affects what play might become. *Intra-action* is a term introduced by Karen Barad (2007) to refer to forces that change in their encounters with each other, like two waves meeting in the ocean. Gender and play, like two waves, intra-act with each other affecting what it is possible to become as gendered beings at play.

Play in relation to gender has (at least) two very different movements. The first stratifies and conserves the gendered status quo, territorializing subjects and the events they are caught up in. The second is made up of multiple lines of flight that have the potential to destabilize the status quo, rupturing it, creating a new event in which anything might change. These movements of territorialization and de-territorialization should not be understood as separate or discrete, as either/or. Rather, they depend on each other and affect each other (Bergson, 1998; Davies, 2014a). As Malins so beautifully explains:

> For Deleuze, following Leibniz, the relationship between bodies and spaces is one of folding. The world around us folds into our bodies; shaping not only our movements, postures, emotions and subjectivity, but also the very matter of which we are composed. We are

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> folded by our genes, the food we consume and the air we breathe; by sound, texture, light and taste; by our relationship with others, and our interaction with the spaces around us. At the same time, bodies continually fold out into the world: shaping—and transforming—the spaces and places around them. (Malins, 2007, p. 157–8)

Play traces out multiple possible assemblages of desire, simultaneously assembling the gender order *and* dismantling it. It works to fold children into the existing world, territorializing them, *and* it folds them out into the world in ways that potentially transform it.

12.2 Territorializing Movements

A great deal of play involves endless repetitions through which embodied subjects become skilled at taking up their allocated position within the gender assemblage. Those repetitive practices, both epistemological and ontological, generate the normative body anticipated by, and required within, the binary machines and apparatuses of power. The modes of enunciation within those machines and apparatuses 'make sense' of the gender binary and of the positioning of individuals within it. They make it seem both normal and natural when girls are 'feminine' and play games that invent and reiterate material and relational order in shops and kitchens and when boys are 'masculine' and play team games developing the intimate knowledge of risk-taking and tribal warfare between one group and another. Each subject, singly and in intra-action with others, practices modes of enunciation and bodily practices through which the perfectly honed subject becomes recognizable within the gendered lines of force that run through the collective body (Davies et al., 2013).

In becoming recognizably gendered subjects, each child is subjected within repressive binary machines or apparatuses of power, which 'constitute a whole formalization of order' (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 23). 'It's a girl!' is not information given so much as the production of an imperative. Language, which characterizes those apparatuses of power through which order is established and maintained:

> is not made to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience… [Such] Language is not life; it gives life orders. Life does not speak; it listens and waits. Every order-word, even a father's to his son, carries a little death sentence—a Judgment, as Kafka put it. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 76)

Gender is a binary *identification* and mode of enunciation that runs through the social body, ordering it, composing it, and calling individuals to order within binary machines and apparatuses of power. The body of each subject is progressively territorialized—made to make sense within existing modes of enunciation. The potency of the lines of force through which order is created cannot be underestimated. Children who have been sexually "misassigned" at birth may become emotionally disturbed if reassigned after the age of two (Kessler & McKenna, 1978).

The accomplishment of self as that which one has been assigned becomes real very quickly.

Through play children rehearse the skills necessary to ensure recognition of themselves within the gender order, enabling them to live out the identification of self within the binary stratifications, endlessly rehearsing the specificity of their positioning within that order. Active participation in the intra-active territorialization of bodies is a vital work that play performs.

These stratifying lines of force 'are comforting: they enable the chaos of the world to be reduced to discrete categories of meaning and structure. They are also necessary, for they enable us to interact with the social world; to form relations with others and to have a political "voice"' (Malins, 2007, p. 153). But they also 'reduce the range of connections a body can make with the world around it; diminishing its potential for difference and becoming-other' (Malins, p. 153). It is, then, to the second movement we must turn for opening up new possibilities for becoming other than those that are laid down inside the gendered status quo.

12.3 De-territorializing Movements

Although I am separating them here on the page, in practice territorializing and de-territorializing movements are impossible to separate. They are emergent and entangled in every intra-active encounter, and it is not possible to predict what line of force will dominate or what will emerge from any specific entanglement:

> It is not that these lines are pre-existent; they are traced out, they are formed, immanent to each other, at the same time as the assemblage of desire is formed, with its machines tangled up and its planes intersecting. We don't know in advance which one will function as a line of gradient, or in what form it will be barred. (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 133)

Play makes the gender assemblage real through its repetitive practices, and it also has a vital role to play in creating possibilities of de-territorialization and becoming other, what Deleuze calls the room for molecular movement—a movement away from compulsory obedience and toward an infinite number of shifts and minor innovations through which transformations might take place and through which the specificity/singularity of any one event is constituted. '"Singularity" is not the individual, it is the case, the event, the potential (*potential*), or rather the *distribution of potentials* in a given matter' (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 161, my emphasis).

The distribution of potentials that open up the possibility of transformations cannot be specified in advance. Change is usually of a molecular kind, not putting an end to stratifications, but finding the movement possible within them. The gender assemblage, like any other assemblages, depends on molecular shifts to keep it alive and in motion. Absolute stasis, as Bergson points out, is equivalent to death. Stratified systems, no matter how rigid they seem, need movement. Play holds enormous potential for difference and becoming other. A child can become, in play, a

mythical hero, a mother, an uncle, a father, a princess, an animal, an engine, an acrobat, a baby, an artisan, a teacher, a leader, or an inventor—infinite possibilities of becoming can be unfolded (imagined, lived, and negotiated). In this sense play provides the perfect mode of encounter, between one being and another and between a child and the clothes in a dressing up cupboard, a pot of paint, a sandpit, a swing, a rock, etc. since it opens up encounters, acts of differentiation or becoming, or what Bergson called creative evolution (Bergson, 1998; Davies, 2014a).

Creative evolution, Bergson argues, rests on a capacity to let go of the status quo. That letting go creates a deep opening for new possibilities when fixed identities and fixed patterns no longer hold everything the same: where what one understands by oneself and the other are vibrant, emergent materialities engaged in mattering (Bennett, 2010). Life becomes, in this understanding of it, 'mobility itself' (Bergson, 1998, p. 127). Those moments when everything changes and when time and space open out into something new, Deleuze calls *haecceities* or 'capacities to affect and be affected' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 261). Fixed lines become mobile, and the space they once dominated is no longer linear and stratified but becoming 'smooth space':

> Haecceity, or just-this-ness, is integral to what Deleuze calls de-territorialized, smooth space—the space that escapes over-coded striations. Smooth space enables an immersion in the present moment, in time and in space, that often eludes us in the press of normative expectations, of habitually repeated thoughts, and practices and structures. (Davies, 2014a, p. 26)

12.4 Stories from Trollet in Sweden

The small stories that I draw on to explore the dynamic complexity of gender and play come from my observations at Trollet, a Reggio Emilia-inspired Swedish preschool that has a reputation among the local schools for producing both strong girls and boys. I have written at length about children at Trollet in my book *Listening to Children* (Davies, 2014a). In the playground at Trollet, the teachers are simultaneously companions who play with the children, adults who contribute new ideas for play, leaders who resolve disputes and regulate the forms play will take, and also judges, who intervene when they deem the play to have become dangerous or otherwise unacceptable—using order words to re-territorialize the event that has begun to emerge. As well, they are careful observers who make spaces in which the children can work things out for themselves.

The stories I have chosen focus on Francesca:

> When Francesca first came to Trollet she looked very much like her older sister and her mother, both with long blonde hair and elegant feminine dresses. But now she looked very different. I mistook her for a boy when I first saw her running through the forest with her short hair, blue jeans and striped purple t-shirt. Her mother had told the teachers that Francesca had been caught mid-cut in the act of cutting off her beautiful hair, causing her mother serious distress. Her mother had taken her to the hairdresser, who created a stylish,

> androgynous cut that made her look like a girl from one side and a boy from the other. On the day I first saw her, she also had on pink nail polish.

The action of cutting her hair was in Barad's (2012) terms an agential cut: 'differentiating is not merely about cutting apart but also cutting together as one movement: cutting together-apart… There is no fixed dividing line between "self" and "other", "past" and "present" and "future", "here" and "now", "cause" and "effect"' (Barad, p. 46). Francesca's cut was a 'cutting together apart' of the gender binary—cutting herself apart from the princess-style femininity of her mother and sister and cutting male and female together on her own body.

Barad explains that the agency does not lie in the individual's intentions—in what Francesca *intended* when she cut her hair—but in the intra-action of all the entangled elements: a family in which princess-style femininity is valued; a school community that values strong girls; a preschool playground that provides space for girls to swing high on the swings and to scale giant rocks and find sticks to play war with in the forest; the possibility that girls can wear jeans and t-shirts similar to the boys where boys' clothes signify masculinity, courage, and strength; an available pair of scissors; a space that is private enough for the act of cutting to go briefly undetected; and a history of mother-daughter encounters with the brushing and management of hair. All of these forces were at work to produce a playful moment of hair cutting and out of that emerged a girl who looked ultrafeminine no longer and a very upset mother who reiterated in her upset state the power of those locks to signify a desirable femininity.

The moment of the cut was a haecceity creating a smooth space in which Francesca could move outside the space-time of her family, becoming someone they, and perhaps she, did not yet know how to recognize. At the same time, the event of the cut included a reiteration on the part of the mother of the desirability of a particular kind of feminine appearance: two waves meeting on the ocean of gendered possibilities. Francesca folds herself out into the world differently and encounters the force of her mother's emotional attachment to her shorn locks.

The movement between being strong and competent and pretty and feminine forms a complex dance in between the multiple forces that territorialize and deterritorialize bodies. The complexity of this dance is partially captured in a story Francesca told some time later as she engaged in a series of paintings. The salience of princess-style femininity is played out in her paintings; she re-creates the familiar romantic story line in which the princess is rendered totally passive by the wicked witch and then saved by the prince/father who marries her (Walkerdine, 1984). Her beauty and passivity are what lead the prince to save her, though there is also a fairy godmother who helpfully intervenes. The alternative story line of strong girls/women with agency is thus cut together with this traditional storyline.

The painting's story begins with a visit to Francesca's friend's place:

> The first painting began as a map of Francesca's place and Jenny's place and the long road in between. Then a story unfolded about a chocolate croissant that she shared with Jenny. There was a purple camera, which Jenny wanted to keep, but Francesca liked it too much and would not let Jenny have it. This first story melds pleasure, friendship and forceful

self-assertion. But the self-assertion is problematic it seems: suddenly Francesca was Francesca no longer. She was Princess Aurora and had fallen into a very deep hole.

In the second painting Aurora is dead. The nasty witch has locked her in the tower and she has been lost forever. The witch laughed and cast 100 spells on her and she couldn't get out. A handsome prince came riding by on his horse to save Princess Aurora, who was dead and couldn't go home. The loss of home is her prevailing fear.

In the third painting we are 'at the end of the rainbow' and Princess Aurora isn't dead any more. 'A strong handsome Prince came to rescue her. Her Dad rescued her. He was so proud of his daughter'. Then there was a Diamond Princess Fairy godmother and Princess Aurora was married. And suddenly there was a naughty witch. The prince gave the witch a big smack. He pulled her cape off and it was Jenny dressed up for Halloween. Francesca was so excited to see Jenny. There were icecream and lollies. But 'Jenny was dead as a ghost. She had a new coat and the other coat was the dead one. She had a new coat. BUT my friend…'

The story begins with a fun-loving Francesca who shares delicious treats with her friend but does not give her the purple camera. Then, Francesca is turned into a princess who falls into a hole, dead at the hands of a wicked witch. She no longer has any power and must wait passively, as if dead, to be saved. It is in the nature of princesses with witch's spells on them, to be saved, and so the prince/father rescues her, gives her life and a home, and disposes of the bad witch. The witch's power in the end is illusory, since it is only her friend dressed up, though it falls to the prince to reveal this. The coat with transformative powers opens up another possibility for the princess, and although Francesca's imagination fails her at this point, there is clearly an exciting alternative waiting to be discovered.

This story is a crisscrossing of the conservative gendered status quo, in which girls become princesses in a hole waiting for life to happen to them, life that can only be granted by men, and girls who can enjoy delicious food with their friends, lay claim to purple cameras, and put on a coat that opens up yet-to-be-imagined possibilities. It is also a crisscrossing of the everyday world and the fantasy world, where anything, if you can imagine it, can happen. Lines of flight are possible, though there are inevitable dangers along the way.

The last story takes place on the day of a picnic. I wrote in my field notes:

We are going to the 'big hill', approximately 10 minutes' walk away from Trollet. We walk in file through open fields and bushland, some children holding hands and some helping carry the picnic mats and bottles of juice. One bigger girl is carrying a stick and a stone and a mat and holding the hand of a smaller girl. She manages all of this dexterously until almost at the hill, but they are lagging behind, so she lets go of the hand of the smaller girl and tells her to run after the others, which she does joyfully.

On top of the hill teachers and children settle onto the mats spread in a semi-circle and teachers hand out drink and food. Together they point to things and talk about what they can see. Some children form pairs and talk to each other—Francesca with her best buddy Liam. Then Francesca talks and jokes with one of the teachers. Luke and 3 other boys play with their crusts which have now become wild animals.

One of the teachers turns the water jar into a drum and three small children sing. Suddenly seven children swarm down the hill to explore a large broken branch. This turns into a game of running up the big hill and down again many times. They seem to know how far away they can go, and they mill at that invisible boundary on the hill-side of the footpath.

Then two girls burst over the boundary, across the path and into the field. A teacher goes after them and re-establishes the boundary of the picnic space.

Three boys tumble together in a tangle of wrestling bodies. The bottom one squeals. The teacher intervenes to say the wrestling must stop. Four boys become a lion and some dragons. Liam is a lion chasing three other squealing boys into the forest and then out of the forest and down the hill. The squealing spreads to three other boys. Then the lion gets chased by two other boys. They land again in a wrestling tangle.

Francesca goes alone to the forest and is playing with a stick. The boys join her. They run out of the forest with Francesca running out in front looking powerful with her stick.

Francesca goes back into the forest alone with her stick and Liam runs after her. He is puffing from all the running. Then he needs to pee so a teacher takes him over behind a tree. Francesca is now with three girls with sticks.

A lion comes over to the girls roaring, but no-one is scared and they ignore him.

Francesca is leading the other girl with a purple striped shirt through the forest. They both have sticks. Liam joins them with a stick and a plan! It is to be a war with guns. You must point the gun and yell *hey jo*.

But picnic time is over. Francesca is in the forest collecting sticks. A teacher tells her to pick up her jacket. Francesca says 'never in my life' and looks at me as if to say 'I know it's ok that you hold the jacket for me.' I carry her jacket.

The picnic expands the territory of the preschool out of the school gates and onto the hill, the forest, and the open field. The act of walking in a file, hand in hand, the setting out of picnic mats in a semicircle, the distribution of food and drink by the teachers, the reassertion of the boundary at the footpath, and the management of the boys' rough play are all lines of force reiterating the status quo—its limitations and striations. The small lines of flight or de-territorializations include crusts of bread becoming wild animals, the water jar becoming a drum, the girls bursting across the pathway to expand the territory, the boys becoming wild animals, being dangerous, and being in danger, the boys' wrestling, the sticks becoming guns, and a refusal to pick up a jacket. The play is rhizomatic, moving rapidly from one possible scenario to another. The territory of the picnic can potentially become anything, though it is rapidly re-territorialized when boundaries the teachers define as unsafe are crossed. Francesca momentarily appears to lead the boys in running with the sticks: a moment of haecceity, creating a smooth space inside of which anything might happen. In that moment the potential is realized for her to be the leader of the boys, but that potential just as rapidly disappears. She realigns herself with the girls and the moment of haecceity seems lost. But no, when a boy comes roaring, embodied as lion, the girls ignore him completely. They are collectively powerful, and the lion rapidly retreats. Liam, Francesca's special buddy, joins the girls and they re-territorialize their play as (masculine) war play. Francesca's 'never in my life' can be heard as a further trace of the power she has just experienced.

Francesca's position appears to be similar to that of Joanne's in my book on preschool children and gender in Australia (Davies, 2003). Joanne wanted to be part of the dominant group of boys, but they almost never let her be the leader, she told me, and pressed her into being the princess who needed to be saved. She emphatically rejected that position and so would entice her special buddy, Tony, to leave the boys to come and play together with her in ways that enabled them to take over high-status

places, such as a new tree house, making it into their own strongly defended territory.

How we come to desire and go on desiring our recognizability in the gender order, or outside of it, is not either a matter of culture or of nature: 'What counts in desire is not the false alternative of law—spontaneity, nature—artifice; it is the respective play of territorialities, re-territorialisations and movements of deterritorialisation' (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 99). Francesca de-territorialized her body by cutting her hair and refusing to wear the feminine dresses her mother desired for her. But she cannot simply become one of the strong boys, as they are more likely to position her as hunted rather than hunter. Using the forest, and the sticks the forest provides, she can become a leader, she can ignore the power of boys/lions, and she can draw the other girls and her buddy Liam into games of power similar to those played by the boys.

Risk-taking and disruption of the social order are most often engaged in by boys—most of the reprimands go to the boys whenever their play appears too disruptive of the assemblage that is Trollet. This then is a double movement. Risk-taking opens up potential lines of flight, and lines of flight are vital for life, even in the most stratified organizations. That risk-taking plays itself out differently within the gender order. Risk-taking generates lines of flight that may enliven and potentially change rigid patterns, and risk-taking is integral to the accomplishment of oneself as masculine. What is vital for life is affirmative of masculinity even when it is disapproved of. The risk-taking engaged in by the girls in these stories, in contrast, does not affirm their femininity, except insofar as it places them in terrible danger from which only men can save them.

12.5 Conclusion

Both boys and girls engage in play that affirms the status quo that folds them into the fabric of the world as recognizably gendered beings. *All the children are multiple in that folding*; they engage in repetitive physical activity that makes them strong, with some boys and some girls stronger and more competent than others; they both take up helpful and caring roles that facilitate the play of others; both boys and girls engage in daring and imaginative activity, creating lines of flight that are sometimes, though not always, reined in. The world folds itself into their bodies, shaping 'movements, postures, emotions, and subjectivity, but also the very matter' they are made of. 'At the same time, bodies continually fold out into the world: shaping—and transforming—the spaces and places around them' (Malins, 2007, p. 157–8). In this paper I have explored the tension between these two movements and shown how agency, or the agential cut, is not an individual matter, but an event in space and time made up of intra-acting bodies and forces.

One tension in particular, for girls, is that between princess-style femininity on the one hand, which is a dominant fold of today's world, and, on the other, courageous lines of flight that fold out into the world, transforming what it is possible for

girls to do. Boys' lines of flight, or transgressions, in contrast, are generally of a kind that emphasizes masculinity; indeed, risk-taking and masculinity often affirm each other. When the teachers rein them in, placing limits on the masculine excess, the masculinity itself is affirmed. They are brave as much because the teachers don't like it, as because they do (Davies, 2014a, 2014b). Girls' de-territorializations of their bodies are moments of cutting masculinity and femininity together and apart. In the scene of literal cutting that I have explored here, the act of cutting led to the mother defining the transgression as incompatible with what it is she wants her daughter to be.

To the extent that risk-taking and de-territorializing acts are life giving, where life is 'mobility itself' (Bergson, 1998, p. 127), this difference is significant. Today's girls are often encouraged to be assertive and courageous, and they are also encouraged to cut this together with heightened femininity; this is a cutting together that can be the source of a great deal of tension and potential loss of power—a loss that Francesca characterized as falling into a hole and dying, not able to return home until saved by the handsome prince/father.

The boys' agency cuts masculinity together with life; taking risks folds them out into the world as masculine. Girls' agency often involves cutting life and risk-taking apart from femininity, making this a tension in constant need of management and resolution as they are folded into the world and fold themselves out into it. This tension *matters*; it is material, and its ethical implications *matter*. 'Iterative intra-activity configures and reconfigures entanglements [and] … *Entanglements are enfoldings of spacetimematterings*' (Barad, 2012, p. 41, original emphasis). The children's play and its emergent intra-active folding with gender both reiterate the gendered world and open it up to changes through space and time; these are changes that matter; as adults we need to be mindful of blockages to those changes, the materiality of them, and the ways they come to matter.

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Chapter 13
Toys and the Creation of Cultural Play Scripts

Anne Kultti and Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson

Abstract This chapter aims to discuss play in early childhood education (ECE) practices in contemporary societies through a study of objects as mediational tools in children's play. The chapter builds on Vygotsky's theory of the development of play and the way in which meaning comes to dominate objects and actions. In the empirical study, the use of objects in play with four children is analysed. The analysis reveals the complexity of creating cultural play scripts (narrative scenarios). The study found that it is the objects available and used rather than the children's ideas and fantasies that co-constitute the meaning of the play. The study actualises the need to view teachers as more knowledgeable others in acting within imaginary framings and creating a proximal zone of development in play-based practice. This issue is discussed in terms of teaching in and through play in ECE. The role of ECE in supporting children to appropriate cultural tools of a general character is considered fundamental to creating equal learning opportunities.

13.1 Play and Play Objects as Taken-for-Granted Dimensions of ECE?

Play as an aspect of pedagogy within early childhood education was introduced in the nineteenth century by Fröbel ([1863]1995). However, in everyday ECE practice in many western countries, there is a long tradition of teachers being in the background of children's play, rather than participating in it (Pramling, Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2009). According to Cheng and Johnson's (2009) review of 1000 early childhood research articles, there is a need for a 'more careful use of the term play' (p. 249), one that involves a more developed conceptualisation of play. They also found that only a small number of the studies reviewed primarily investigated play. Against this background in research and practice, in this chapter we will discuss how teachers can learn from observing children's play including the toys, objects or

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other props used and from observation of their experiences take a stand on how to support and challenge the development of children.

The democratic idea that every child has a right to play in his or her own way characterises early childhood educational contexts. However, children in ECE contexts may be expected to participate in play activities that are maintained over time in collaboration with other children, regardless of the play materials offered. The challenge for those wishing to create *sustained ongoing play activities* (Kultti, 2012) is to communicate what needs to be established for developing a mutual play script (a narrative scenario), including role characters and rules (e.g. what a child in the role of mother can do in the play). Mutually established play scripts are considered to be culturally based on what kinds of activities and communication are enabled by ECE practice and familiar to the children (Kultti). In this study of 2-year-old children, with various linguistic backgrounds, the spatial organisation and the materials offered framed the play activities the children engaged in. Commonalities between the nature of the objects and the content of play and children's experiences in and of the practice were evident in their play scripts. For example, they enacted mealtimes in their play as modelled on previous preschool practices.

Toys, games, books and furniture are some of the materials offered in the physical spaces of ECE practices for children to play with. The meta-study by Cheng and Johnson (2009) mentioned above implied that materials or objects were not noticed in the studies of play. However, Kultti and Pramling (2015a) investigated how 2-year-old children were socialised in early education practice with and around toys. The analysis showed that the toys offered in the particular ECE practice could be used in individual ways, while, at the same time, the children could be included in a mutual activity with others, for example, when using a rail track with engines and carriages. Several copies of the same toy or toys that are related (such as engines and carriages in the study) provided learning opportunities through participation within what Vygotsky (1998) refers to as a sphere of imitation. In other words, the play activity can then occur within a potential zone of development. Kultti and Pramling concluded that children's actions with and in relation to toys are informative about what possibilities for participation children are offered in ECE practices.

The importance of play to children's learning and development today tends to be moved to the background of attention due to an emphasis on more academic teaching practices (Fleer, 2011). Play is neither problematised nor discussed in relation to learning in numerous ECE pedagogies (see Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, in press, for a review and discussion). Teachers often claim that children learn when they play (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2006). But what do they learn, and how is this learning related to experiences of a more general nature?

Early childhood education practices undoubtedly offer several opportunities for learning. However, it is the awareness and knowledge of the teachers that make a difference to how these opportunities contribute to each child's learning (Sheridan, Pramling Samuelsson, & Johansson, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford, 2007). In an overview of play theories, Johnson, Christie and Wardle (2005) argue that preschool programmes of a high quality manage to integrate play and learning. Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson (2008) reason in a similar way, using the concept

of 'the playing-learning child' as an idea to which teachers can relate when considering the developing child.

The aim of the original study presented in this chapter is to investigate how cultural play scripts are created in communication about and with play objects. The research questions are:

- What objects are used by children in and to establish the play?
- How do the objects structure the kinds of play and communication that evolve and move in and out of imaginary framings?

13.2 Theorising Play and Learning

From a cultural-historical perspective, children learn within, and contribute to maintaining and developing, their everyday social practices (Hedegaard, 2009). According to Vygotsky (1978), development needs to be understood on two levels, the actual level and the potential level, with the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as a developmental space between these levels. The nature of interaction with more knowledgeable others within the ZPD is of theoretical interest for understanding play and learning in ECE. From this theoretical perspective, teaching becomes an activity that aims to take children slightly beyond their experiences and the level of their knowledge (i.e. the activity required is ahead of the child's actual level of development; what he or she can do unassisted) and therefore challenges a child's understanding of the concepts or tasks to hand.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory describes development in terms of changes of psychological functions and relations between these functions. The higher mental processes are developed through the use of tools, and learning is conceptualised in terms of the appropriation of cultural tools for sense making and communication (Wertsch, 1998). These tools mediate culturally situated values and norms. Children appropriate tools, language and other sign systems and artefacts through participation in discursive practices. For example, by writing down something, signs are used for actively remembering, which indicates that remembering is a higher mental process. The concept of appropriation explains how learning is a dynamic activity that requires active sense making by the child. The child does something to remember, understand, perceive and so on. In other words, children and all people understand the surrounding world through cultural tools. The social context and phenomena appear to us *as something* important, interesting, useful and so on; that is, they have meaning to us. Expressed in Vygotsky's words (1978, p. 33): 'I do not merely see something round and black with two hands; I see a clock'.

Vygotsky's theorising of play is useful for conceptualising teaching for learning in play-based practices. According to Vygotsky:

> [i]n finding criteria for distinguishing a child's play activity from his other general forms of activity it must be accepted that in play a child creates an imaginary situation. This is

> possible on the basis of the separation of the fields of vision and meaning which appears in the preschool period. ([1933]1966, p. 8)

With the advent of speech, during what Vygotsky ([1933]1966, 1978) refers to as the preschool age, children become able to disconnect words from objects. Whereas objects previously delimited the child's activities, the relationship is now reversed and meaning comes to dominate object. That is, rather than collapsing word and object and the object being what it is, the child in play becomes able to ascribe another meaning to the object. One of Vygotsky's own examples is the use of a stick for a horse. Play then, according to this reasoning, proceeds in a movement in the field of meaning rather than in a visual-spatial field. This means that objects can acquire new meaning and be used in new ways.

From this perspective, play is considered 'the leading source of development in the preschool years' (Vygotsky [1933]1966, p. 6). Play, as a leading activity, is understood as creating psychological processes that lead to development (see also van Oers, 2013). In play, imagination creates a zone of proximal development. However, imaginary situations in young children's play are close to the more concrete situation and this is reflected in their experiences of it (how they recall it), given that on Vygotsky's view '[i]magination is a new formation which is not present in the consciousness of the very young child' ([1933]1966, p. 8).

As already mentioned, in play children confront what is before them and their perceptions are also mediated by understandings that have arisen outside the play. However, their actions in play are based on rules and are not determined by the conventional meaning of objects, and hence meaning can be changed to create something new. Through imagination, the child can broaden his/her experiences (Vygotsky, 2004). An imaginary situation can be understood as a means of developing abstract thought (Vygotsky [1933]1966). In play, children move in and out of imaginary situation, that is, they interchangeably engage and disengage with reality (Fleer, 2011, 2013). The dialectic nature of imagination is in this sense similar to the process of concept formation. The imaginary situation, for example, being a mother in play, contains rules of behaviour the child needs to obey in order to participate in the activity (Vygotsky). The child needs to attend to the rules that are accepted when acting as a mother in order for the play to work with other children. When playing, children communicate *in* as well as *about* their play. This means they are both doing something and talking about their actions (i.e. meta-communicating). Imaginary situations therefore provide opportunities to use and demonstrate language knowledge and skills (Li, 2013). A question for ECE practice in relation to this theoretical reasoning is how teachers scaffold for children in participating and communicating in imaginary situations.

13.3 Study Overview

In this section of our chapter, we present an original empirical study. The study examines an activity between four children, two boys (referred to as Aron and Ben) and two girls (referred to as Cate and Diane), aged 4–5 years. The setting is as follows: the children are in a room for play with some toys, a table and chairs, tableware, a mattress and some pillows. At first glance, the interaction consists of involvement in several activities of which some are playful and in the use of different toys. The interaction also seems to include a conflict between the children. A teacher is actively included by the children on two occasions during the play.

The activity was documented using a video camera and the videoed observation was later transcribed to text. The videoed observation lasted merely 6 min. However, this is in itself significant. During this brief period of time, the children's interaction displays rich complexity, as we will show. Taking a sociocultural perspective, the unit of analysis (Säljö, 2009) is a tool-mediated activity, and the underlying analytical premise assumes a focus on the *object* as the site for change. However, the relationship between objects and activities is dialectical rather than unidirectional. The first step in the process was an analysis of what objects were used as *play objects* by the children. What we will refer to as *scenes* have been analytically discerned by identifying when there is a change in the set of the play objects used or when those objects receive a new function. The activity is therefore presented in five scenes. The second step involved analysing play objects as *tools* in relation to three factors: communication in and about the activity; rule-based actions; and moving in and out of imaginary framings. The analysis as presented aligns with the transcripts and the study adheres to the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council.

13.3.1 Cultural Play Scripts Created in Communication About and with Play Objects

The objects used as the site for change are a guitar, two cell phones, tableware, two dolls and medical instruments as well as pieces of furniture: a mattress, a table and chairs. One or both of the dolls mediate the interaction in each of the five play scenes discerned. Similarly, the table, the chairs and the tableware mediate the interaction in four or five of the play scenes. The cell phones and the guitar repeatedly mediate the interaction (Scenes 1, 3 and 4). The medical instruments mediate the interaction at the end of the analysed activity (Scenes 4 and 5).

The way in which the play objects are related to the evolution of the play and communication is analysed in the five scenes below. Actions interpreted as communicating *in* play, in line with play rules, and/or as the play character are interpreted as acting in the imaginary framing. Actions communicating *about* play and actions that are not directly connected to the play are interpreted as acting out of the

imaginary framing. The analysis shows how play proceeds through communication in, about and out of the imaginary framing.

Scene 1: The play objects used are a mattress, two cell phones, a guitar, a table, chairs, tableware and two dolls.

Aron and Ben are lying on a mattress. Aron has a guitar and a cell phone. Ben has a cell phone. They are holding the phones in a manner as if they were each playing a digital game on them.

Aron: Yes! Now I won. I won.

Cate and Diane are laying the table with tableware, holding a doll each.

Cate: Big brother, come; it's time to eat.

Aron and Ben bring the guitar and the cell phones and gather around the table with plates, mugs and saucepans of plastic.

The communication about and with the objects in this scene occurs within an imaginary framing. The choice of object and the way the children use the objects mediate their understanding of the play characters: big brothers, a mom and a sister, in the particular cultural context. The interpretation the children offer with regard to the rule of acting within the particular play character is consistent with what Vygotsky (1933/1966) argues when discussing sisters playing sisters.

The actions within the imaginary framing are going on simultaneously in two spaces. A mattress, two cell phones and a guitar with the actions of Aron and Ben co-constitute one of these spaces. The mattress as a play space symbolises a room; (this is clearly articulated when Aron in Scene 4 asks, 'Do I have to go to my room again?'). The communication about the table creates another play space.

The objects available and chosen by the children determine their actions, and the meaning of the play character dominates the use of the object. The guitar and the cell phones used are 'designed' toys. In the make-believe gaming, the object (the cell phone) is used symbolically as a tool for a digital game. In other words, the meaning of the toy is interpreted in line with the designed meaning, but it is also expanded, mediated by the children's experience of cell phones. The actions are similar to the use of a smart phone in real life. Cell phones today are not only used for making a call but also for entertainment.

The actions of Cate and Diane occur about and around the table and the tableware. The table, the tableware and the dolls mediate their play characters as a mom or a sister in this cultural context. The use of these toys is kept close to the use of tableware in real life.

Scene 2: The play objects used are a table, chairs, tableware, dolls and medical instruments.

The children sit at the table.

Aron: Now I got blood.
Cate: No-o.

Cate moves back and forth between the table and the rest of the tableware.

Cate: Baby [directed to Diane]!

Aron: Why don't I have…

Diane lets the doll she is holding drop on the floor. She goes to Cate.

Aron: I love blood.

Ben picks up the doll lying on the floor.

Ben: I dropped baby.
Diane: No-o.
Ben: Yes.

Aron starts laughing loudly. At the same time, the doll's skirt falls off.

Ben: Grr…
Aron, *laughing*: Are you kidding?

Ben hits Aron with the doll he is holding.

Cate: But stop fighting!

Aron puts his hands on his head.

Aron: I go and tell miss [a teacher].

Aron stands up.

Cate: Ben, then you cannot be here.
Aron: Leave [directed to Ben]!

Aron sits down. After a short while, Aron puts his hands back on his head.

Aron: [inaudible] go and tell miss. Hurt.

Aron holds his head.

Diane: No, I, I run!

Diane leaves the room. Cate serves soup. Ben leaves the room, taking the doll with him.

This scene illustrates points on a communicative continuum in and out of imaginary framing and how the children communicate about the play. When sitting at the table, acting within an imaginary framing, a new content in the play is introduced: blood. This content is not clearly related to the play characters or the objects used. Neither is it extended by the others. The communication moves away from the imaginary framing.

The play content co-created using the dolls goes on simultaneously, first initiated by Cate and then by Ben. Cate and Diane communicate within the imaginary framing, by using the tableware and relating to the play characters ('Baby!'). The communication of dropping the baby may occur in and about the imaginary framing. It is not explicit whether these actions are expressed by the play characters or by the children as Diane and Ben.

Ben picks up the doll. The communication, starting with Aron laughing, moves out of the imaginary framing. It seems likely that Ben interprets Aron's actions to occur outside the play and outside his play character as a big brother. The use of the doll then breaks the rules of the play but also the preschool. These actions have consequences, for example, whether to include the teacher.

When Cate tells Ben to stop fighting, the communication could be understood as taking place outside the imaginary framing. Alternatively, when taking the play character of Cate, the mom, into consideration, it could be understood as within the imaginary framing. Cate continues saying that Ben is not allowed to be in this play space. This is, however, interpreted as a communicative act outside of the imaginary framing because Cate uses Ben's real name.

Similarly, Aron communicates out of the play frame when holding his head and stating that he will tell the teacher. He stands up but sits down again, confirming the effectiveness of Cate's threat that Ben is not allowed to share the play space. After a while, Aron again holds his head, saying that the teacher needs to be involved, because Ben hurt him. Diane offers to get the teacher and runs off to do so. Ben leaves the room taking the doll with him. During this, Cate goes back to acting within the imaginary framing, serving soup.

Scene 3: The play objects used are cell phones, a guitar, a table, chairs, tableware and dolls.

Cate picks up the guitar.

Cate: Can I borrow your rock guitar?
Aron: Yes.

Aron picks up the cell phone. The teacher comes to Aron and asks what has happened with him. Aron explains the hitting accident. Cate feeds the doll.

Aron: I call a doctor; she's [the doll] bleeding all over her head.
Cate: Yes, she is bleeding.

Aron holds the phone to his ear.

Aron: Doctor, come here. We have a baby who is ill and she bleeds all over the head.

Aron and Cate sit at the table, which indicates that the play is not finished even though two of the participants have left the room. The objects used and their actions occur within the imaginary framing. Firstly, the guitar next to Aron is attended to by Cate. The play character big brother is explicitly pointed out as the owner of the play object. Secondly, Cate acts within the rules as mom when feeding the doll. Thirdly, the cell phone is used by Aron. After verbally explaining what he will do: 'I call a doctor, she is bleeding all over the head', Aron holds the phone by his ear.

Aron again introduces blood and bleeding as contents for the play. The content relates to the object he is holding and the hitting accident with the doll. The talk continues within the imaginary framing when he uses an expression that reveals that the call is answered as expected: 'Doctor, come here. We have a baby who is ill and

she's bleeding all over the head'. The cell phone is used within the frame of an established function of a phone.

Only when the teacher asks what has happened does the communication move out of the imaginary framing.

Scene 4: The play objects used are a guitar, a table, chairs, tableware, dolls and medical instruments.

Ben comes into the room.

Cate: Miss, miss, we need the doctor's bag!

Ben and Diane sit down at the table.

Teacher [*directed to Aron*]: Ben says that he has said he's sorry. Is that right?
Aron: Yes.
Cate: We need the doctor's bag; we need the doctor's bag.

Ben eats using the tableware.

Cate: Here.

Cate gives back the guitar to Aron.

Diane: It's Ben!

Cate feeds the doll.

Aron: Not, it's the baby bleeding all over the head.

Diane: Aha.

The teacher puts down the toybox.

Aron: And me, right?
Cate: Diane! You'll be the doctor!
Diane: I'm not gonna be the doctor!
Ben: I can be the doctor. I'm the doctor!
Diane: No, I!
Aron: Both can be the doctor.
Cate: You're to Aron [directed to Ben].

Cate points at Diane. Cate and Diane press the doll's head with a piece of fabric.

Aron: I've finished eating now. I've finished eating now. Do I have to go to my room again?

Aron holds his head.

In this scene, the communication occurs in and out of the imaginary framing and about the play. The communication concerns the new play content (bleeding, illness and doctor), the play characters and the earlier hitting accident.

When back in the room, Ben and Diane communicate in the imaginary framing. They gather around the table and sit down on their chairs. Ben acts in his play

character when eating at the table, continuing where he left the play. It is not clear if Cate gives the guitar back to Aron or to the big brother. In other words, she does not make the actions explicit as occurring within the imaginary framing or about it (cf. the expression of wishing to borrow the 'rock guitar' in Scene 3). Diane comments on the use of the medical instruments ('It's Ben!'). Aron replies by explaining the connection between the medical instruments and the doll that the baby (and not Ben) is bleeding in her head. This expression, similar to the reply of Diane ('Aha'), works both in and about the play.

The communication between Aron and the teacher occurs out of the imaginary framing. The teacher's response to the children's actions to contact her was to solve the conflict verbally. However, the development of the play leads to a changed focus for the children. Aron is not interested in the hitting accident or whether Ben has said sorry. Yet, he confirms the teacher's proposed solution. The actions are in line with the rules in the preschool context: saying sorry is expected and accepted as a way to move on. Simultaneously, Cate makes clear to the teacher that they will need the medical instruments that are in the room but beyond their reach.

Cate gives Diane a new play character, a doctor. Diane is not happy about it at first but changes her mind when Ben takes on this character. Aron responds to the change of characters by saying that both can be doctors. Cate develops their idea further by explaining who is taking care of whom. In this coordination of perspectives, communication occurs within the imaginary framing. The move from talking about the play (negotiating the change of the play characters) to the play occurs through the actions of Cate and Diane taking care of the doll and of Aron asking what he will do, holding his head. Aron refers to the two play spaces used, around the table and the mattress, as big brothers' room (see Scene 1).

Scene 5: The play objects used are a table, chairs, dolls and medical instruments.

Cate: No, you have to go to the hospital.
Aron: No, the doctor is here.
Diane: Come.

Diane takes out a chair while holding the doll. Cate points to Diane.

Aron: Yes.
Diane: Come and sit here.
Aron: No, it's my doctor.

Aron points at Ben but sits down on the chair.

Diane: Aha.

Ben picks up an instrument from the bag.

Diane: Doctor, do on the head [directed to Ben].

Ben examines Aron. Diane participates in the examination. She takes out a chair and puts the doll on it. Ben and Diane examine Aron together. Cate joins them.

The chairs co-create a new, third play space (a doctor's appointment room). The communication occurs mostly within the imaginary framing. However, some of the actions, such as 'No, you have to go to the hospital', 'No, it's my doctor' and 'Aha', function as explanations of the contents or within the play character mom telling her son to go see a doctor. Diane as a doctor continues to create opportunities for the participants to act within the imaginary framing when moving to the new play space. The objects and actions mediate a mutual understanding of the play script. The coordination of actions within the play space, a doctor's appointment room, seems to be in focus.

13.3.2 Implications and Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to investigate how cultural play scripts are created in communication about and with play objects. The research questions that guided the analysis of play between four children asked what objects were used by the children in and to establish the play and how the objects structure the kinds of play and communication that evolve (moving in and out of the imaginary framings).

The most recurring feature of the play analysed in this chapter is that the objects co-constitute the evolving play (the content and the characters) rather than the children's ideas and fantasies. The children moved from the imaginary framing when they could not use objects to communicate their ideas. Therefore, the findings imply that the ECE teacher has an important task in creating learning opportunities by pointing out (see also Kultti & Pramling 2015a, 2015b) how to move in and out of imaginary framing. The capacity to use the imagination could be facilitated by teachers participating in and expanding children's repertoires of experience as to what may be possible. Being able to separate word and object transforms the child's use of language, as the child moves from initially seeing the object conventionally through language to becoming able to use language for play purposes to create new meanings. This playful separation of meaning and object thus also works to make the child conscious of language and how it can be used dynamically so that the child then becomes able to move towards and away from reality, in Fleer's (2011) terms.

Communicating in and about the play, and in and out of the imaginary framing, is intertwined (see also Schousboe, 2013) within the interaction of several distinct spheres of reality that are characteristic of pretend play. Obviously, communication *in* the play activity occurs (*with*)*in* the imaginary framing. However, communication *about* the play occurs both *in* and *out of* the imaginary framing. Rules about the roles and functions of play characters (cf. Vygotsky [1933]1966) seem to make this possible. For instance, when acting as a mom, expressions and actions about the play can also be interpreted as occurring *in* the imaginary framing. This means that children do not need to be explicit in expressing themselves within the imaginary situation, for instance, by saying 'But stop fighting, *my children*!'. Not needing to be explicit supports children's participation within imaginary framings.

One implication of our argument in this chapter is that the cultural, institutional and social organisation of early childhood education can empower or expand children's use of tools for play activities. Most of the objects used by the children were objects known to them from their everyday lives, but they also 'designed' toys (used objects to represent something). As noted earlier, the toys were often used in accordance with their conventional meaning. For instance, a phone was used for making a call and a spoon was used for eating. However, the chairs created other possibilities for play and communication. The chairs were not only used for sitting but also for creating a play space (cf. the use of props at a theatre), that is, a frame for the play script. The chairs as cultural artefacts mediate an understanding of the physical play space. The room (space) and objects become something else – a home becomes a doctor's appointment room, as in the analysed play above. One conclusion that could be drawn here is that 'designed' toys, objects representing something, might not challenge children to imagine new play scripts.

A second implication of our study and argument is that the interpretation of children's actions, interests and knowledge should be a starting point for interaction in ECE practices (Fleer, 2014; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2007). We argue that adopting the children's perspective as the starting point can be approached in different ways. For example, observing the actions of a child can inform a teacher of the child's existing areas of skill and allow the teacher to make inferences about the kinds of skill development and experiences that would be usefully included in the ECE practice to support the child's development. Another approach is to focus on the child's skills and knowledge in the context of mutual play activities with a teacher and other children, perceived as a ZPD. The child's expressions and engagement will then create a starting point for teaching. Thus, from both a theoretical and methodological perspective, we argue that observing children's imaginative activities and taking these as a starting point for teaching and play-based learning in preschool contexts are crucial for creating optimal learning opportunities. According to Fleer (2011, p. 229):

> imagination and consciousness must be viewed as significantly important components of a child's learning and development, and therefore playbased programs which support imagination will make a difference to children's capacity in existing and future cognitive tasks, including priority areas such as literacy and numeracy.

To conclude, the complexity of creating mutual play scripts requires that ECE teachers make visible children's different suggestions and offer every child opportunities for participation (cf. Kultti & Pramling, 2015a, 2015b). Through this, children can develop an expanded understanding of the play content, roles and rules involved. Analysing children's learning in play is an essential professional skill for a preschool teacher. On the basis of such theoretically informed observation, teachers can participate with children in play to create imaginative activities. Teaching, in the sense of offering children appropriate cultural tools and experiences of a general character (Vygotsky, 1978), is a way to create equal learning opportunities for all children in and through ECE. This is important against the background of contemporary multilingual societies where ECE for many children may be the primary context for using and learning the majority language.

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Chapter 14
Pretend Play and Technology: Young Children Making Sense of Their Everyday Social Worlds

Susan Danby, Christina Davidson, Maryanne Theobald, Sandra Houen, and Karen Thorpe

Abstract Games and activities, often involving aspects of pretence and fantasy play, are an essential aspect of everyday preschool life for many young children. Young children's spontaneous play activities can be understood as social life in action. Increasingly, young children's games and activities involve their engagement in pretence using play props to represent computers, laptops and other pieces of technology equipment. In this way, pretend play becomes a context for engaging with matters from the real world. There are a number of studies investigating school-aged children engaging in gaming and other online activities, but less is known about what young children are doing with online technologies. Drawing on Australian Research Council funded research of children engaging with technologies at home and school, this chapter investigates how young children use technologies in everyday life by showing how they draw on props, both real or imaginary, to support their play activities. An ethnomethodological approach using conversation analysis is used to explore how children's gestures, gaze and talk work to introduce ideas and activities. This chapter contributes to understandings of how children's play intersects with technologies and pretend play.

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14.1 Introduction: Children's Games

Understanding how young children organise their social worlds requires studying the activities in which children engage without adult involvement. Children's games and activities present opportunities to prepare for and practise everyday social life (Butler, 2008; Corsaro & Tomlinson, 1980; Danby, 2009; Goodwin, 1990; Sacks, 1995; Sawyer, 1997). Games provide children with opportunities to learn the fundamental organisation of their peer culture. In this way, play becomes a context for engaging with matters from the real world, and children's games and spontaneous activities can be understood as social life in action.

Children use games to explore and test relationships and expectations of the context in which they are interacting. In other words, playing games is how children participate in and learn about cultural matters associated with interaction in their social worlds. Sacks' (1995) attention to children's games rested on his interest in showing how the techniques for membership of the games were accomplished. Throughout the course of a game, however, locally produced rules are negotiated and frame the production of the local culture in action (Baker, 2000; Cobb-Moore, Danby, & Farrell, 2009). A 'category set of game events' is produced, and rules are produced in order to follow these game events (Sacks, 1995, Vol. I, p. 493). Rules can be used to observe and also produce infringements. Those with authority within the game can announce rules, whereas, for others, an announcement of a rule may be challenged and invoked, treated as a game violation (Sacks, 1995, Vol. I). The nature of the game attests to the collectivity of the process and, at the same time, the individual contributions of the participants.

Children's games can be observed to be a series of alternating actions. Sacks noted that 'the simplest of children's games have two parts' (1995, Vol. 1, p. 496). When there are two players and an alternating action, there is one action per player (Sacks, 1995, Vol. 1). He provides the example of two children kicking a ball to each other, with one kicking and the other catching, and then the actions are swapped and repeated – the players expect this to happen. Significant in these types of children's games is this notion of 'expectable next event' (Sacks, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 497). Children draw upon this notion in the organisation of their social interactions.

There is another type of game that young children play that relies less on already formulated expectable events and is a type of spontaneous activity known as fantasy or pretend play. Sawyer (1997) describes pretend play as a form of spontaneous activity that requires improvisational performance, where there is typically no script, including no script for how to successfully initiate entry into a shared activity or how to bring to a close the activity at hand. A well-known example of this type of spontaneous activity is when children initiate fantasy play that incorporates everyday activities such as playing families (Björk-Willén, 2012; Cobb-Moore, 2012; Sheldon, 1996). Often thought of as a 'simulation of adult activity among members of children's culture' (Speier, 1973, p. 155), this assumption suggests that

children are incompetent or 'unsocialised' if their performance of adult life does not match adult expectations. When considered from a talk and interaction approach, the activity of children playing families, for example, is seen not as an imitation of adult life, but considered an 'interactional and cultural activity in their own right' (Speier, 1973, p. 157). At other times, children's spontaneous activities use cultural and material resources in ways not possibly anticipated by adults, often involving a combination of pretence and 'reality analysis' (Hester & Francis, 1997).

Children organise their social worlds as members of the locally assembled and practised culture. Studying how children establish spontaneous activities, the nature of their local conditions and rules and how players negotiate and observe these can give outsiders, including adults, information about children's activities as social occasions and the ways that participants organise them (Cromdal, 2009; Danby, 2002; Speier, 1973). The practices of children's games are dominant in the production of children's culture and are 'occasion[s] for sociability in children's culture' (Speier, 1973, p. 155). Often, children incorporate objects into their activities, an additional dimension to be negotiated and accounted by the participants.

14.2 Objects in Children's Pretence Activities

Examining children's actions when using objects, and noting how objects are drawn upon and used in sustained spontaneous activity, can show how objects are used as resources in spontaneous activity. This kind of inquiry has implications for understanding young children's construction of their local social structures and relationships (Kidwell & Zimmerman, 2007). For example, children use physical objects in spontaneous activity to organise and accomplish collaborative activity using board games (Whalen, 1995) and wooden blocks to exclude members from the shared activity (Cobb-Moore, Danby, & Farrell, 2010). Alongside the uses of objects, there may be moments where the talk lapses when the focus is on the activity at hand. Participants' actions take into account their assessment of the object, such as whether it is usable within a pretend or reality frame.

Researchers with interests in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have studied the social life of objects (Bruni, 2005; Goodwin, 2000; Heath & Hindmarsh, 2000; Law & Singleton, 2005; Suchman, 2005). Objects are 'constituted always through specific sites and associated practices' (Suchman, 2000, p. 381); that is, the meaning of objects is dependent upon how they are used in social contexts – 'objects are not neutral or innocent but fraught with significance for the relations they materialise' (Suchman, 2000, p. 379). Talk and conversation are also social objects (Sacks, 1995, Vol. 1). The focus of the single case presented here shows how the meaning and use of objects is jointly constructed by two children within their local social context.

14.3 The Study

The data presented in this chapter are drawn from a larger Australian Research Council project that explored how young children engaged in web searching and other uses of digital technologies in home and classroom settings. This episode discussed here was selected from 29 h of video recordings of preschool-aged children engaging in everyday digital technologies at home (also see Danby et al., 2013). In the study, 14 families was invited to video-record their children's use of digital technologies over 1 week, and each family gave their consent. Observing practices in the home setting was made possible by each family choosing what to video-record and when to video-record their family practices, often practices that are not easily accessible to researchers. The single case discussed in this paper is an episode involving two brothers: Jai is aged 4 years and playing a phonics game on the computer, and Jed is aged 3 years, and he is standing beside his brother with a toy truck in his hand. Their mother video-recorded their activity, but she was not present during the episode. Multimodal analysis (Mondada, 2008) explores how the elder brother (Jai) initiates his younger brother (Jed) into a dramatic play activity (vocalised gun sounds) that incorporates the computer speakers and Jed's prior vocalised actions with the toy truck. The video recording made visible the spontaneous activity underway, making it 'public' in nature (Mehan, 1993; Sacks, 1995, Vol. 1) so that others can observe the very features and actions that enabled them to make sense of and build their interactions.

A single extended sequence can show the 'complex systems of action' (Psathas, 1992, p. 99), such as how participants enter and exit out of the shared talk, how they initiate topics and the interplay between their talk and actions. Such close analysis provides for noticing details that may be significant in the 'ongoing production of singular sentences in the talk and interaction' (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 120). A single case analysis shows the context of the interaction and can show the complexities of social interaction (Whalen, 1995). The multimodal focus is on body orientation and use of physical space and objects and the children's actions in situ.

Analysis informed by ethnomethodological understandings and conversation analysis methods offers fine-grained analysis of children's interactions, including digital technologies, an emerging area of activity for young children (Danby et al., 2013; Davidson, 2009; Plowman, Stephen, & McPake, 2010). Analysis affords insights into interactional practices associated with objects used for technology (Hutchby, 2001).

14.3.1 The Interplay of People, Objects and Play

The episode begins with Jai engaged in playing a phonics game called Reading Eggs (http://readingeggs.com.au) on the desktop computer. The game consists of images of three planets on the screen, each with a different word located above

them. One of the words is presented as the 'target' word located in the centre of the screen above the planets. The purpose of the game is to click on the image of a space ship to shoot down a planet with the word that matches the word on the screen. When this happens, there is an explosion sound similar to the sound of a gunshot or rocket launch.

Extract 1 (Begins at 11:44 minutes into the video recording)

```
27  Com  shot/rocket sound
28  Jed  ((looks at screen, moving toy truck back
         and forth
29       on top of desk))
30  Jai  hey Jeda,=
31       =((turns to Jed))
32       ((right hand still on mouse))
33  Jed  yeh_
34       ((looks at Jai))
35  Jai  ((touches Jed's right arm lightly with
         his left hand
36       before lifting it and gesturing towards
         the toy truck,
37       right hand still on mouse))
38       just- (1.0)
39  Jed  ((looks towards toy truck, one hand
         still on it))
40       ((looks back at Jai))
```

```
41  Jai  [grab on this hole, ]
42       [((lifts left hand towards speaker on desk,
43       cups hand over speaker))]
44  Jed  ((looks at the speaker and Jai's hand))
45  Jai  ((turns back and looks at the screen))
46       I'll shoot (0.3)
47       I'll shoot a [gun for you](.)
48  Jed                [hand over speaker, right hand
           on truck))]
49  Jai   ((brief look at speaker; moves hand
           in front, then away))
50       so:o_ ((looks back at screen))
51  Jai  you can get (one) for your fire truck
52       so you can shoot someone.
53       ((moving the mouse with his right
         hand while looking
54       at the screen. Clicks with the mouse))
55         ((screen shows rocket shooting toward planet.
            Planet
56       is hit by rocket))
57  Com  shot/rocket sound
```

When Jed arrives with a toy truck and stands beside Jai, he quietly moves his truck back and forth across the desk. Jai first appears to acknowledge Jed's presence with a summons using an address term, his nickname, to which Jed minimally responds. After gaining his attention, using gesture, pointing to the truck, Jai begins with an imperative (line 41), 'built as a telling, rather than asking' (Curl & Drew, 2008, p. 423). The 'hole' refers to the computer's speakers from whence the sound is coming. Unlike other children's activity where the children explicitly name the activity as being one of pretend, such as the fairy game (Butler, 2008) and the teacher-student game (Theobald and Danby (in press) 2016), games that show children explicitly identifying the activity as within a pretend frame, this explicit identification does not occur here. As Jai proffers the imperative, he reinforces it with an action that displays what he means, as he cups his hand over the speaker. This action works to demonstrate what Jai intends for Jed to do. Jed's gaze follows Jai's actions.

At this point, Jai has not given any indication where this activity is going. There has been no explicit identification of the game. Jai offers another clue; as he looks at his screen, he voices what he's going to do next, which is to shoot a gun for Jed (lines 46–47). He makes an elongated 'so:o' at the same time that he aligns the mouse ready to click on the image on the screen, which works to indicate that something is to come (line 50). Jai then finishes by pointing out how his actions of shooting a gun for Jed, using the speaker sounds, is to attach the gun/sound to the truck (line 51), and he suggests to Jed what it can then be used for, 'to shoot someone' (line 52). Just as he finishes his explanation, he clicks on the mouse (lines 53–54),

and the computer speakers make the whooshing sound (line 57). This moment was finely timed, as the 'gun' was launched immediately following Jai's explanation of the game.

In this extract, Jai initiated an activity, directing Jed what to do to get the gun (the whooshing sound) and what could be done with the gun in relation to attaching it to the toy truck and using it to shoot people. There is a reality/pretence frame here where the activity of the game (the rocket sound shooting down words) now becomes the pretend frame of making a gun (from shooting sounds) to shooting someone (line 52). While the object of the truck is visibly and physically present, the gun is only present through sound and is not actually a physical object. If we return to Sacks' (1995, Vol. 1) example of two players with a ball, one kicking and the other catching, we can see that Jai has thrown the metaphoric ball and now it is up to Jed to catch it. If so, he now has the opportunity to be a player in the game that Jai initiated and played the first move. Extract 2 continues almost immediately.

Extract 2 (Begins at 12:00)

```
71  Jai    you've got you've got a gun now.
72         ((turns back to look at screen,
           thumb in mouth
73         and right hand on mouse))
74  Jed    °ok° ((moves his hand from speaker;
           puts it on truck
75         moves truck slightly))
76  Jai    ((takes thumb from mouth, looking at screen))
77         you can get (your own)[guns.
78                                [((turns slightly to Jed))]
79  Jed    ((moves right hand towards the speaker))
80         °she::w°
81        ((moves the hand back to the truck,
82        as though lifting something from speaker
          into truck))
83  Jai   ((watches Jed)) no (0.3)
84        ((looks at screen)) when I click on it.
85        ((turns back to screen briefly, uses mouse
          and clicks))
86        ((screen - rocket launches and hits planets))
87  Com   shot/rocket sound
88  Jed   ((moving truck away from speaker along the desk
89        back towards himself))
90  Jai    look u:p! ((turns and points towards
           the speaker,
91         holds his hand over the speaker hole,
92         pulls hand away as though carrying something
93         turns his hand up, still cupped
```

```
94          holds hand out towards Jed and the truck))
95   Jai    here's another gun.
96          ((passes something from hand to Jed's hand,
            as if
97          transferring sound from speaker to
            Jed's hand))
98   Jed    ((moves truck with L. hand; R hand near
            Jai's hand))
99          s-thanks
```

Extract 2 shows Jai informing his younger brother about the structure of the game he has devised and directing him how to play the game. Jai begins with a formulation (line 71) of the state-of-play at the moment, led by his description of the event and his actions. After Jed's minimal receipt and acknowledgement, Jai provides an upshot: 'you can get (your own) guns' (line 77). The shift here is from Jai leading the activity to Jed now being held accountable and also competent to participate in undertaking the actions himself. Jed's imitation of the whooshing sound of the gun (line 80) indicates his involvement. In line 83, Jai issues Jed with a rebuke, as Jed attempts to lift an invisible something from the speaker to the truck and provides his justification in line 84 that Jed has to wait for Jai to click on the screen (which is what makes the sound to be used for the gun).

Jai does not leave Jed to initiate the gun sounds by himself, as he walks him through the steps involved. Jai undertakes this form of scaffolding, from the more expert player to the less expert, from the leader to the follower, in a series of steps:

1. You can get your own guns (line 77).
2. When I click on it (line 84).
3. Look up (line 90).
4. Here's another gun (line 95).

Jai requires attention from Jed to listen to what he is saying and doing, to listen to the computer sound and to act at the appropriate times. This requires Jai to finely coordinate the game that he is playing with the instructions he's giving Jed, and for Jed to finely coordinate the sound from the speaker to his action of shifting the sound (the invisible gun) to the toy truck. Following Jai's directives and guidance as shown in Extract 1, Jed takes up the role of follower, invoking the membership categorisation of leader-follower (Butler, 2008), and he displays his appreciation with an act of thanks (line 99).

Jai's actions had rendered noticeable that the gun sound could be a pretend gun, but to Jed it may not have been noticeable and visible, as he does not take up this activity. Despite Jai continuing to make rocket sounds while playing the game, Jed initiates a new activity of tipping the 'rubbish' out of his toy truck, although there is no actual physical rubbish. This activity is not included here as there is no shared talk between the two boys, although Jed does account for his actions ('I just need to tip the rubbish out') while Jai continues with the computer game. At this point,

however, it is worth noting that when he does talk, Jed is not constrained to the follower role and that he now extends the frame of the game to a new topic.

Extract 3 (Begins at 12:32)

```
122  Com  shot sound
123  Jed  ((pushes the toy truck onto the top corner
124       of keyboard, moves it forward over keyboard))
125  Jai  ((turns slightly and looks down for a moment
126       at the truck on the keyboard. He removes
          his left hand
127       from his mouth and pushes the truck back
          slightly))
129       can you no-
130  Jed  ((looks briefly at Jai))
131          schhhhh_ ((starts to lift the tray of
            the toy truck))
132  Jai  ((looks back to the screen and uses mouse,
133       clicks, puts L. thumb back in mouth))
134  Com  ((screen rocket is launched and flies towards
          planets))
135  Jed  ((turns truck around on the keyboard))
136  Jai  ((moves left arm away slightly from Jed
137       and truck and rubs it across his face))
138  Com  shot sound((screen rocket collides with
          planet;
139       explodes))
140  Jed    ((moves truck off keyboard)) I'm just
            (gunna move) off.
141  Jai  ((looks towards truck))
142  Jed  ((turns truck around again on keyboard,
143       moves it off the keyboard))
```

Extract 3 begins with Jed initiating a new activity that involves running his toy truck over the keyboard, initiating further talk between the two boys. Once again, they are engaged in shared talk and interaction. In line 129, Jai initiates a corrective (Antaki & Kent, 2012; Curl & Drew, 2008) that works to suggest that this class of action is illegal (Sacks, 1995) and shifts his gaze to Jed. Jed looks briefly at Jai and vocalises a noise that suggests he is emptying his rubbish at the same time he lifts the tray up on the truck. Jai continues with his activity on the computer and does not respond to Jed's continuing action of shifting the truck around on the keyboard. Finally, Jed, in line 140, indicates his intention to move the truck off the keyboard, and Jai briefly glances down before Jed removes the truck.

Jed's attempt to reengage with Jai in a new activity of pretence is not taken up by Jai, who continues to orient to the computer game. Jed's actions suggest a continued

display of wanting to engage with Jai in a shared activity. There is, however, no uptake of the sound/gun activity but, rather, Jed's substitution of an activity of emptying pretend rubbish from the toy truck.

Extract 4 (Begins at 12:43)

```
145  Jed    I'm going ho:me.
146  Jai    ((looks slightly at truck, R. hand
            on mouse))
147  Jed    ((moves truck backward, until sitting
            beside speakers))
148         psssh here I comes.
149  Jai    ((turns and looks back at screen,
150         clicks with right hand on mouse))
151        ((screen rocket is launched and flies toward
           planet))
152  Jed   ((moves truck slightly and lifts hand
           off truck))
153        ((places hand back on truck))
154  Com   shot sound as rocket hits planet
           and explodes
155  Jed   ((looks towards screen))
156  Jai   ((thumb in mouth, right hand on mouse,
157        looks at screen, clicks mouse))
158        ((screen rocket is launched and flies
           toward planet))
159  Com   shot sound as rocket hits planet
           and explodes
160  Jai   ((thumb in mouth, right hand on mouse,
161        looks at screen and clicks mouse))
162        ((screen rocket is launched and flies
           toward planet))
163  Com   shot sound as rocket hits planet
           and explodes
164  Jed   ((pushes truck back slightly,
           while looking at screen))
165  Jai   ((thumb in mouth, right hand on mouse,
166        looks at screen and clicks mouse))
167        ((screen rocket is launched and flies
           toward planet))
168  Com   shot sound as rocket hits planet
           and explodes
169  Jai   ((still watching screen, pushes truck
           towards speakers))
170  Jai   ((thumb in mouth, right hand on mouse,
171        looks at screen, and clicks mouse))
```

```
172         ((screen rocket is launched and flies toward
            planet))
173  Com    shot sound as rocket hits planet
            and explodes
174  Jai    ((still watching screen, thumb in mouth,
            right hand on
175         mouse, clicks mouse))
176         ((screen rocket is launched and flies
            toward planet))
177  Com    shot sound as rocket hits planet
            and explodes
178  Jed    ((left hand, moves truck forward,
            towards himself))
179         I'm going a:way
```

Extract 4 begins with Jed driving his truck up to the speakers, announcing his arrival (line 148). He continues by moving the truck slightly and moving his hand on and off the truck. Jed looks towards the computer screen twice, each time after the rocket is launched (lines 155, 164). Despite a brief glance at this action, Jai continues to play the computer game and does not initiate talk with Jed, nor does he engage in any actions to include Jed. Finally, in line 179, Jed announces that he's going away, but he continues to stay and watch.

Jed has primed the toy truck to be close to the speaker. His gaze suggests his orientation to the screen, but he does not actually initiate any actions that make possible the loading of the sound onto the truck. His rubbish dumping displays knowledge of pretence, but he did not engage in the gun game. These actions suggest that he was ready to engage in the game, but, as Jai did not become involved again, Jed did not pursue this activity. For Jed, the gun object could be observed within the social world when Jai was initiating that activity, but not alone. As Bruni (2005) points out, objects 'always stand in relation to a social world, so that 'observing … means looking at the relations of which it is part, the contexts in which it is located, [and] the practices that construct it socially' (p. 362). In other words, objects are held together through social engagement and practices (Suchman, 2000). For Jed, he engaged in the gun activity using the strategies devised by Jai. When invited by Jai to do this without his involvement, Jed did not continue this activity. A changed relationship and context, the self-withdrawal of the player and initiator of the game, meant the local conditions had changed, resulting in the practice stopping.

14.3.2 Discussion

Within the episode examined here, this interaction sequentially shows the integration of spontaneous activity and fantasy play, to reframe the computer speaker as a resource/machine for 'making guns' to attach to the toy truck; there was no actual

gun or object used as a gun. Both participants accomplished the collaborative activity with the elder brother pointing and demonstrating what to do and the younger brother imitating and elaborating on these suggested actions. The younger boy's actions demonstrate his acceptance and uptake of his elder brother's idea for the game. When the younger brother attempted to put his truck on the keyboard, this was shown to belong to a class of actions that are illegal (Sacks, 1995). Both boys strategically used the arenas of 'pretend' and 'real'; such actions do not suggest that they could not separate fantasy from reality, but rather they were able to interact and make sense of what each was doing in frames of reality and of pretence. The episode shows how objects are not incidental to the character of the game or activity, but their purposes can be assessed and remade in a multitude of ways to accomplish social interaction.

The social organisation of children's spontaneous activities typically has been described as play or games, viewed from perspectives that investigated why children engage in the activities of play and the purposes of play (Fleer, 2013; Garvey, 1990). As a consequence, the focus has not been on how the interaction was accomplished as a mutually constructed event, and thus what has not been attended to are 'the details of what children actually do and say…, or to the nature of the organization of social action in play, including its "complexity"' (Whalen, 1995, p. 317). Within this approach, even less attention has been given to children's use of objects in these activities, particularly their use of technology resources within the social organisation of activities.

The analysis discussed in this paper documents empirically what has been accomplished through interaction within the activity. As Sacks (1995) points out, 'children's games are describables, and in deeply interesting ways' (Vol. 1, pp. 497–498). Such describables include how children 'display their ongoing engagement with the game as well as their competences in recognizing, reproducing and creatively reshaping the available linguistic resources in their own activities' (Piirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2009, p. 167). These complexities are evident in how this game was played. Before Jed arrived, Jai's computer game consisted of:

1. Locating the target word on the screen.
2. Using the mouse to click on the rocket that will 'hit' the planet that has the word that matches the target word on the screen. When this happens, a whooshing sound is heard on the computer speakers.
3. Being alert to the new target word that will appear.

After Jed's arrival with a toy truck, Jai initiated a new activity that consisted of:

1. Locating the target word on the screen.
2. Using the mouse to click on the rocket that will "hit" the planet that has the word that matches the target word on the screen. When this happens, a whooshing sound is heard on the computer speakers.
3. *Explaining the steps of the game as he grabs the actual sound.*
4. *Handing over the imaginary sound to his brother to attach as an imaginary gun to the toy truck.*
5. Being alert to the new target word that will appear.

These additional activities required focused attention on the computer screen, talking through the steps, accurate manipulation and fine-tuning by clicking on the mouse with one hand and also grabbing the sound from the speaker with his other.

Objects, including the sound itself as well as the speakers, mouse and the toy truck, became strategic and contingent resources to undertake the game. The boys used the pretend and real objects of the computer game and speakers within complex content-specific practices. Actual sounds, designed for one purpose (playing a phonics game), had been overtaken by the boy's own social agenda, that of making toy guns from that sound. The pretend objects located within this physical space could be noticed as such only within this particular play activity that the boys had collaboratively constructed. The boys' interactions made possible the use of existing physical objects with pretend objects, all constructed within a network of action, practices and shared meaning-making.

14.4 Conclusion

Investigating children's engagement in spontaneous activities highlights how relational encounters are shaped. As Shotter points out, these encounters are 'so momentary and fleeting, so intricate and elaborate, so spontaneous and immediate, that we find it difficult to attend to them' (1996, p. 404). Close observation afforded through repeated viewing of video-recorded children's activities offers insights that are not otherwise possible.

We saw how the children acted spontaneously with each other to create their own shared local meanings out of the sounds and activity at hand. Yet, it is possible that future encounters may be implicated from the relational encounters of this one. A mutually shared and displayed understanding of what the play objects are is a necessary relevant condition for the game (Theobald, 2013). This investigation of young children's engagement in spontaneous activities involving objects provides an understanding of how children use talk and embodied action to orient their actions to take into account the observed qualities of objects. In this instance, the boys formulated their actions in situationally relevant ways that involved fantasy and incorporated them into the ongoing interaction.

Examining the moments sequentially shows the integration of spontaneous activity and fantasy play, to reframe the computer speaker as a resource/machine for 'making guns' to attach to the toy truck; there was no actual gun or object used as a gun. Both participants accomplished the collaborative activity with the elder brother pointing and demonstrating what to do and the younger brother imitating and elaborating on these suggested actions. Evidence of the serious nature of children's pretend worlds shows how children take advantage of their pretend role of authority to construct their social orders. Real and pretend arenas of action show depth and insight of children's talk in their pretend play and provide exciting possibilities for the study of children's activities and social worlds.

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Chapter 15
Play, Virtue, and Well-Being: Is Consumerist Play a Bad Habit?

Angus Brook

Abstract The concept and activity of play has been a recurring theme in ethics and moral philosophy, particularly in the normative theories of natural law and virtue ethics. This paper explores the moral dimensions of consumerist play–forms of play in which objects or means of play are designed to be purchased and consumed–from the perspective of virtue ethics. The paper will test out a hypothesis that consumerist play leads to bad habits of playing and thus hampers or is detrimental to human well-being. As a whole, the chapter intends to provide justification to support the argument that we have genuine grounds for concern that a person whose play is predominately an engagement in consumerist play is likely to fail to grasp the meaning and nature of play and thus fail to appropriately fulfil its function in their attempts at playing. Like a person in the grip of greed, who takes wealth as an end rather than a means, a person in the vice-like grip of consumerist play is likely to take the point of play as a means or object to be consumed rather than to engage in a free exploration of identity, re-creation, and renewal within the context of human well-being.

15.1 Play, Good Habits, and Well-Being (Eudemonia)

15.1.1 A General Overview of Virtue Ethics

The easiest way to enter into an overview of virtue ethics is via the standard academic accounts of virtue ethics, exemplified by the approach taken by Rosalind Hursthouse in her excellent entry on virtue ethics in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Hursthouse (2013) defines virtue ethics as one of the three main approaches to normative ethics and as an approach distinguished from the other main approaches by its focus on virtue, practical wisdom, moral character, and happiness (*eudemonia*).

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A virtue, in the most general sense, is a good habit or disposition; a deep seated and ingrained character trait which disposes the person to act and live well (Hursthouse, 2013). Hursthouse (2013) notes that 'to possess a virtue is to be a certain sort of person with a certain complex mindset'. Virtues, as such, are dispositions that get expressed, not just in particular virtuous actions, but also in certain kinds of attitudes and associated acceptance of reasons for action or inaction (Hursthouse, 2013). Virtues also dispose the person to certain kinds of social interactions, e.g., an honest person will chose honest friends and an honest job (Hursthouse, 2013). There is, within classical accounts of virtue ethics, a general acceptance that there are degrees of virtue attainment: perfect virtue, where there is no conflict between the disposition to act\live well and psychological\emotional states and imperfect virtue or continence, where the person will struggle with inner conflict of the will over contrary desires (Hursthouse, 2013). The point of virtue ethics and the point of the pursuit of virtues in this general sense, is to fulfil the basic human desire for happiness (*eudemonia*).

15.1.2 Happiness\Well-Being (Eudemonia)

The primary point of virtue ethics is not per se the development of virtues for their own sake. In fact, the way many approach virtue ethics, by starting with virtue and building up to an account of *eudemonia* (which will be translated as well-being for the purposes of this chapter), proceeds in the opposite direction to most classical virtue ethicists. Aristotle, Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, and other classical virtue ethicists for the most part begin with the question of what it is that humans desire and answer immediately, via common sense, that we all plainly desire to be happy (Annas, 2000, pp. 37–43). The primary point of virtue ethics, as such, is not to be virtuous for the sake of virtue, but rather, to work out the moral dispositions, intellectual and practical habits, and learned character traits *'in virtue of which'* humans will be truly and properly happy (Annas, 2000, pp. 43–46). To work this out, however, we need to first get a basic grasp of human nature and what we mean by a natural desire for happiness.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle argues that what we really desire when we desire happiness is to achieve a state of complete human excellence; that is, we desire to be excellent humans who live and act well as humans ($1098^{b}9$–$1098^{b}29$/$1101^{a}14$–$1101^{a}21$). Happiness is an 'activity of the soul in accordance with complete (human) excellence' ($1102^{a}5$). The term 'well-being' works well in this respect as a translation of *eudemonia* because it wards off one danger: that of thinking that happiness is merely an emotional or psychological state, and it points towards the key issue at stake in our desire for happiness, i.e., that we desire to live, act and 'be' well as human beings. Well-being, according to Aristotle, can be understood via an analogy between function and excellence\goodness (Parry, 2009). For

example, a teacher has the function of teaching or enabling a student to learn, and we say, in this respect, that a teacher is an excellent teacher if she functions well in her work, i.e., her students really learn or are really engaged in learning. In an analogous way, Aristotle argues, if we can work out what the function or work of human nature is, then we will be able to understand that 'in virtue of which' humans are enabled to excel as human beings and therein achieve well-being (1097^{b}23–26). In short, Aristotle claims, if we work out the primary functions of the human soul, then we will know the moral dispositions, intellectual and practical habits, and learned character traits *'in virtue of'* which humans will be truly and properly happy.

Aristotle argues over a range of his works that there are at least three functions of the human soul: the first is the human intellect, the second our sociability, and the third those characteristics and purposes (understood as Aristotelian 'ends') we share with other animals (*De Anima*, 402^{b}1–403^{a}2; *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139^{a}17–1139^{a}18, 1160^{a}9–1160^{a}31; *Politics*, 1253^{a}3–1253^{a}7). The intellectual is the characteristic that defines us as a species and will therefore be the foundational characteristic of human functioning upon which all other functions will depend. For this reason, all virtues are marked out by the rule of the intellect (the rule of reason) over human action. This is also why the cardinal virtues, those good habits that all other good habits depend upon, are all ways in which practical reason rules and guides human action: practical wisdom (prudence) – the habit of excellent thinking in relation to action in general; fortitude (courage) – the habit of acting well in the face of contrary emotions\psychological desires; temperance – the habit of acting well through the restraint of excessive emotions\psychological desires; and justice – the habit of acting well in relation to other human persons. In addition to the cardinal virtues, which are good habits in virtue of which we are disposed towards well-being in general, there are other intellectual virtues such as art\production, science\knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (Book 6). The general meaning of well-being (*eudemonia*) is to live a fully reasonable life with respect to our actions and to flourish in being human in all areas of life in a moderate and balanced way.

Another basic function of human nature is our sociability and there are virtues which correspond to the domain of social function, which in turn, refers to our well-being as relational and communal individuals. Justice is a foundational virtue in this domain, but there are a whole range of other moral virtues that signify good habits in virtue of which we are disposed towards well-being in this domain of human living, such as: virtues of work, virtues pertaining to our function as citizens, the virtues of being a family member, a friend and the like. The final domain refers us to human functions associated with the general animal character of human life. Aristotle at times calls these functions natural and\or external goods (1099^{a}32-1099^{b}8). The importance of this particular domain of human function for this chapter is its relation to the phenomenon of play, for many species of animals aside from humans play, and it would seem therefore, that play is an expression of this domain of human functioning. I will address this particular issue a bit later in the chapter.

15.1.3 The Nature of Virtue

Virtue, in the most general sense, is a disposition or habit that makes its possessor good and enables *eudemonia* (Hursthouse, 2013). To put this another way: virtues are that 'by virtue of which' a human acts and lives well in accord with human function (1097^b20–28). As we noted previously in the discussion of well-being, virtues can be divided up in accord with human function (our intellects, our sociability, and natural\external goods) with the intellectual domain of human function foundational to all the others. The nature of virtue needs to be unpacked and explained in a little more depth if it is to be a helpful parameter in testing out the hypothesis of this chapter.

Thomas Aquinas defines virtue as the perfection of a power (the human potential for function) that expresses itself in act and activity (I–II, Q 55, A1). However, insofar as the human intellect is indeterminate in relation to action, e.g., the intellect may do well or badly, may be directed to one object or another, or may select one means of action or another, we need to repeatedly practice and improve our power to act well through habitual activities (I–II, Q 55, A1). A very basic example of this is learning how to drive a manual car. When we first begin to learn we are generally very bad at it, and further, need to be hyper-conscious of all of the various actions required in driving; we need to be aware of every instrumental feature of the process of driving, e.g. changing gears, using the pedals, indicators, and other instruments. We also need to be aware of all of the external processes in driving, e.g., watching out for all of the signs, using our spatial awareness of our vehicle in relation to others, and so on. However, the more we practise, the less we need to actively reason through every process and action. Eventually, after much practice, we develop (hopefully) good habits of driving that enable us to function well as a driver without too much active or conscious thought. This example illustrates two important points about virtues: (i) that a virtue is a good habit embedded in our power to make reasoned decisions that guide our actions in relation to human function, and (ii) that we define a virtue as a habit because it must be acquired through repeated intentional, reasoned acts and practice for the sake of human function (1099^b9–1099^b24; I–II, Q.51–53).

15.1.4 The Nature of Vice

Once we understand the nature and infrastructure of virtue, the nature and infrastructure of vice is fairly easy to understand. A vice is a bad habit that disposes a person to act in a way contrary to or destructive of human function and is thus harmful to human well-being. Vices, as such, will tend to be mirror contraries to virtues and will contain the same internal structure, i.e., reason, function, practice. Take for example the vice of greed. Greedy persons will not have an appropriately reasoned understanding of wealth, possessions, or money, i.e. they will not understand that wealth is merely a means (not an end in itself) and\or will be ruled by their desire

for it. They will either misunderstand the function of wealth within human life, or alternatively, will not be able to use reason to rule their desire for wealth (or both). A greedy person, as such, will engage in activities for the pursuit of wealth even at the expense of other human functions, e.g. family, friendship, justice, leisure, knowledge, etc., and will do so repeatedly and habitually. Therefore, a person in the grip of vice has acquired\learned a bad habit that not only impairs or damages particular human functions, but also impairs and damages the person's capacity for well-being as a whole.

15.2 A Brief Exposition of the Nature of Play

It is the purpose of this section to provide a brief exposition of philosophical accounts of play as a basis for further analysis and exposition of whether it makes sense to talk about good and bad habits of playing with respect to human well-being. As such, this section will begin with the most general philosophical accounts of the concept of play and move from there to accounts more explicitly oriented towards human play. In working from the general to the specific, this section of the chapter will attempt to show that the concept of play in its specifically human sense is compatible with virtue ethics.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, provides one of the most generic philosophical accounts of play in the process of using play as the basis for his discussion of all that is aesthetic, arguing that play is a general mode of being shared by all physical things (2004, p. 102). Play in the most general sense, Gadamer argues, is self-presentation; the act of sheer self-presentation of things inasmuch as they move and interact with other entities, e.g. the play of light on water, the play of the wind on leaves, and so on (Gadamer, 2004, p. 105). Play, therefore, is a basic natural process evident in the way in which all physical entities show themselves through a process of pure activity, self-presentation, of self-renewing, and self-re-creation (Gadamer, 2004, p. 105). According to Gadamer, this basic reality of the phenomenon of play suggests that freedom sits at the foundation of the way all things show themselves through self-presentation; that is, the freedom of movement, self-possession, self-renewal, and self-representation (2004, pp. 483–484).

One of the classic accounts of play in its own right, provided by J. Huizinga, begins with an argument that play is first and foremost a function of all animal life characterised by fun, pretence, enjoyment, and freedom from ordinary biological function (1980, pp. 1–3). Play, in this respect, is a significant and self-contained purpose of all animal life; a purpose that cannot be explained away by reference to biology (Huizinga, 1980, p. 3). Huizinga goes on to argue that there are two primary features of the play of animals: (i) that it is a voluntary activity; play is superfluous, leisurely, and is enjoyed or for enjoyment, and (ii) that play is distinct from ordinary practical life; play inherently involves stepping out of the everyday reality through the use of pretence and imagination (1980, pp. 7–9). Huizinga's account, as Gadamer notes (2004, p. 112) is consistent with Gadamer's more generic arguments about

play; the freedom of animal play mirrors the freedom of self-possession and movement of play in general; pretence and imagination mirrors freedom of self-presentation – of having fun in playing with possibilities of movement and function.

When this general notion of play is applied to specifically human play, according to Huizinga, we find a number of additional features to the freedom and imagination\pretence that constitutes animal play; a set of rules or order is added to the play, which creates a space of limited perfection in which humans are able to test their ideals and their possibilities for being (Huizinga, 1980, pp. 10–12). Moreover, given the sociable nature of humans, we also find in Huizinga's account the argument that play builds community and it does so in three senses: firstly, play is a building block of animal (and thus human) sociability; secondly, the act of playing builds shared experiences that enable community; and finally, secrecy and mystery in play build particular communities, especially sacred communities (1980, p. 12). Huizinga then sums up his account of play, arguing that play is (to paraphrase): a free activity, standing quite consciously outside ordinary life as being not serious but absorbing the player intensely and utterly; play is an activity with no material interest or profit, which proceeds within its own space\time boundaries and operates according to strict rules and order (Huizinga, 1980, p. 13).

There have been two main responses to and in effect, two main critiques of, Huizinga's account of play as the basis of culture. Both react against what they see as the overly broad conception of play provided by Huizinga. The first, from Roger Caillois (2001), focuses on the specifically human character of play and attempts to provide a checklist of features of play that can serve as the basis of entering into theorizing about games. The second, from Bernard Suits, attempts to pare back the ubiquitous scope of Huizinga's account of play by appeal to a basic definition. Caillois provides the following list of characteristics of play: (i) Free – play is non obligatory and desired activity; (ii) Separate – play differs from work\practical life and is circumscribed within spatio-temporal limits; (iii) Uncertain – the course of play cannot be determined in advance; (iv) Unproductive – in its evolution play did not intentionally give rise to external goods or wealth; (v) Governed by rules – play follows a pattern that orders and sanctions its activity; and (vi) Make-believe – play is marked by a free unreality or defined in opposition to real life (Caillois, 2001, pp. 9–10). Bernard Suits' account is even more basic: play can be defined as any autotelic activity whatever, such that 'X is playing if and only if x has made a temporary reallocation to autotelic activities of resources primarily committed to instrumental purposes' (Suits, 1977, pp. 118/124). Suits' account of play has been quite influential in modern game theory but has also received substantial critique, especially with respect to whether autotelic activities (activities which are ends in themselves) can be restricted to the concept of play and whether it is true to say that play involves re-allocation of resources (Royce, 2011, pp. 96–97).

I would suggest at this point that the accounts of human play discussed thus far are all consistent with Gadamer's more general thesis that play is a mode of being of physical entities tied up inherently with the way in which such entities show themselves through a kind of 'free' movement, self-presentation, self-renewal, and

self-possession. We can make sense of human play in light of this as a phenomenon expressive of our own unique functions – our intellectual life, our animal functions, and our sociability – : that is enacted through self-presentation, movement, self-renewal, and self-possession.

We can say, therefore, that human play will intrinsically involve an intellectual testing out of ways we can be human and who we are as humans, i.e. it contributes to the formation of identity via self-presentation, self-renewal, and self-possession (MacIntyre, 2009, p. 85; Winnicott, 1999, p. 54). Human play will involve imagination and creativity as we not only test out our identities, but at the same time freely use our intellectual capacities in such a way that we are renewed and restored. In turn, we play through self-presentation, movement, self-renewal, and self-possession with respect to our animal and social functions; we test out our capacity to freely move and enact our capacities to relate to others, and so on. In summary, my thesis – taking inspiration from Gadamer – is that the meaning of play, especially the meaning of human play, is to test out our identities and to do so in such a way that we act, present, possess, and renew ourselves as humans. Play is 'autotelic' as Suits puts it; it is not just an end in itself of human action, for all goods are properly speaking ends in this way, but moreover, the end of play is can be seen as the development of ourselves.

15.3 Virtue Ethics and Play; Good and Bad Habits of Play

A commonly proposed argument is that morality does not apply to play in any essential way or at least that play has no moral function (Huizinga, 1980, p. 6). However, if we concede that play has a function or that play is one of the main bases of civilised human life, then – from the point of view of virtue ethics – we must also conclude that play is an important feature of human well-being and thus has moral dimensions. Likewise, inasmuch as play is a basic feature of human life, it follows that humans will be capable of playing well or badly and therefore of forming good and bad habits of play. In this section, I will briefly investigate some of the philosophical arguments about the nature of play with respect to human well-being, to playing well or badly, and to good and bad habits of play.

15.3.1 Play and Well-Being

One of the most important medieval accounts of the moral dimensions or import of play was provided by Thomas Aquinas, who argued that play is a basic good and that there must therefore be corresponding good and bad habits of play (Ramsay, 2005, p. 14). A basic good, within Aquinas' natural law theory, is any basic reason for human action that cannot be reduced to or explained by some further reason for action (I–II, Q.94, A.2. C.f. Finnis, 1980; Grisez, Boyle, & Finnis, 1987, p. 103).

All basic goods are basic purposes or basic functions of human life and as such, according to Aquinas, are all equally necessary for human well-being (Ramsay, 2005, pp. 14–15). A human who does not engage in the pursuit and attainment of all basic human goods in a reasonable and balanced way, including play, will not be able to achieve complete human well-being. It is not enough, of course, to simply play in any way one chooses; play is a good because it has its own intrinsic purpose(s) and inasmuch as it contributes to human well-being. The moral dimension of play becomes evident when we begin to look at actual playing and ask whether the means of playing are oriented appropriately towards human well-being, and whether the play actually contributes to the well-being of the player. I will pick up on this moral dimension of play shortly.

There are, I would suggest, three important intrinsic and interrelated features of play that are relevant here. The first is the way in which play can involve the free testing out of our identity: in play we explore our possibilities for being, we encounter our limits, and in this we discover ourselves or who we want to be. Play, in this first sense, is a bracketing off of space\time which enables the positing and testing of ideals. Play can also involve the re-creation of identity as we find rest and renewal in activities which are free from practical demands (Ramsay, 2005, p. 3). Finally, play can involve renewing ourselves with respect to our 'practical lives', whether that be a replenishing of energy, a renewal of our commitments to live in a certain way or a renewed and new sense of who we want (or ought) to be (Ramsay, 2005, p. 4).

15.3.2 Good and Bad Play

The characteristics of morally good and bad play will follow from this chapter's commitment to Gadamer's and Thomas Aquinas' views of play. For Gadamer, play is a basic natural process in which human beings actively present, renew and recreate themselves (Gadamer, 2004, p. 105), while for Aquinas play is a basic human good that contributes to the attainment of our well being. Thus, on these views, play can be seen as serving a cultural function and, as Huizinga noted, it is only when play serves a recognised cultural function that it is bound up with moral notions, such as obligation and duty (Huizinga, 1980, p.8). However, it is important to note at this point that play also has important effects in the life of the player, e.g., play is fun, enjoyable, or pleasurable; and this adds to the complexity of evaluating the characteristics of good and bad play. These effects of play will become particularly important when it comes to talking about virtues and vices of playing.

We can turn to Thomas Aquinas for help in relation to the task of defining the characteristics of good and bad play. Aquinas argues that there are three key questions to ask with respect to good and bad playing in relation to the effects of play: (i) whether the pleasure or enjoyment derived from play is for the sake of well-being in relation to one's-self and others, (ii) whether our play is moderated by the intellect so that we do not play too much or too little and in that destroy the moderate and

balanced life required of well-being, and (iii) whether our play is conducive of good conduct and not so free as to allow or promote bad conduct (II–II, Q. 168, A. 2).[1] In short, we can distinguish between good and bad play inasmuch as the play fosters and promotes well-being in ourselves and others (good play) or harms, detracts, or destroys human well-being in ourselves or others (bad play). I would suggest, on the basis of the arguments provided in the chapter thus far, three basic rules of identifying good and bad play.

Good play is any form of play that:

(i) pursues the moral dimensions of or virtues inherent in playing;
(ii) enables human well-being (both of the player and other humans);
(iii) is pursued in a reasonable and balanced way.

Bad play is any form of play that:

(i) undermines the moral dimensions of or the virtues inherent in playing;
(ii) And\or utilises means of play that harm or destroy human well-being (of the player or any other);
(iii) And\or is pursued in an unreasonable and unbalanced way.

15.3.3 The Virtues and Vices of Play

Given the earlier definition of virtue (as a good habit in accord with human function that disposes a person to act and live well) and the definition of play provided above, it follows that the virtues and vices associated with play will be good or bad habits with respect to the function of playing in human life and with respect to human well-being. These good or bad habits of play will be grounded in conscious decisions to play for particular reasons, which are repeated and practised until the objects and means of play become habitual. Before turning to a more detailed discussion of virtues and vices of play, it is worth first briefly investigating the specific virtues and vices associated with play in the philosophical systems of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

Aristotle's account of the virtue of play, which he calls '*eutrapelia*', begins with the assertion that play and leisure are necessary for human well-being (1127^b33–1128^a17). The virtue of play, by definition, will be a mean between extremes, e.g., with regard to humour, between excessive vulgar humour (buffoonery) and deficient humour (the boorish and unpolished) (1127^b33–1128^a17). Therefore, Aristotle concludes, there is a virtue of play – *eutrapelia* – the 'ready witted' or those who take appropriate pleasure in play. Thomas Aquinas agrees with Aristotle, but also adds to his account, arguing that play is a species of temperance, i.e., the use of reason to temper excessive or defective appetites, desires, and emotions\psychological states (II–II, Q.168, Art.2). Aquinas goes on to argue that the virtue of play involves the

[1] Thomas Aquinas borrows heavily here from Cicero's *On Duties*, Book 1.

use of reason to have fun in an appropriate way and for the sake of well-being (II–II, Q.168, Art.2). The virtue of play, as such, must involve the use of reason to find a mean between excessive and defective play. This virtue, as a form of temperance, can be called a 'happy turn of mind' (II–II, Q.168, Art.2).

These accounts of the virtue of playing suggests that whilst play for humans is a matter of the perfection of an activity via choice, reason, and moderation, the activity of playing itself is a function associated with all animals and will therefore have similar basic principles to other functions associated with all animals, e.g., nutrition, reproduction, and so on. That Thomas Aquinas posits the virtue of a happy turn of mind; the virtue of play, as a species of temperance suggests that play is a basic function of human life closely connected with our appetites and desires. Thus, it also follows that vices, or bad habits, associated with play will tend to be habits of acting under the influence of immoderate (excessive or defective) appetite or desires and further, that habitual engagement in play grounded in defective or excessive appetite or desire will constitute the basic character of the vices of play.

Virtuous play and good habits of playing will be marked out by the following characteristics:

- Moderation with respect to the resources dedicated to play, and with respect to the degree of passion with which play is engaged in; and balance with respect to other important functions of human life. This characteristic of good habits of playing follows from its nature as a species of temperance.
- The achievement of excellence with regard to the morally intrinsic purposes of play: enabling appropriate formation of identity, enabling re-creation, and enabling renewal of commitments (alongside the social and animal functions of play).
- Means of play conducive to good moral action and human well-being, and in particular to the recreation and rest of the soul, as Aquinas puts it (II–II, Q.168, Art.2).
- And finally, by appropriate effects, e.g., fun, enjoyment, and pleasure that foster and promote the well-being of the player (and that of any other person affected by the playing).

Vices, or bad habits of playing, will be marked out by the following characteristics:

- Lack of moderation (either excessive or defective) with respect to the resources dedicated to play, with respect to the degree of passion with which play is engaged in, and a lack of balance with respect to other important functions of human life;
- The destruction, disabling, or harm to the morally intrinsic purposes of play: disabling the appropriate formation of identity, disabling re-creation, and disabling renewal of commitments;
- The promotion of what Aristotle refers to as vulgar and morally disabling action, which is harmful to human well-being;

- And finally, by corruptive side effects, e.g., fun, enjoyment, and pleasure that harms the well-being of the player (or other persons affected by the playing).

It is not too difficult to identify examples of bad habits of play in this sense. Adults who spend a disproportionate amount of their time playing WOW online such that it prevents them from engaging in other important functions of human life have clearly formed bad habits of playing. Someone who habitually engages in play which does not enable (or disables) her potential for free exploration of identity or which does not enable a restoration and re-creation of self with respect to human well-being has formed a bad habit of playing. Someone whose passion for football is not moderated by reason such that he is intentionally violent towards others has formed bad habits of playing. Someone who takes pleasure or enjoyment in play by means of ridicule or harm to other persons (or other living things) has clearly formed bad habits of playing. With these characteristics and examples of good and bad habits of play in mind it is time now to enter into a discussion of the hypothesis of the paper.

15.4 A Hypothesis: Consumerist Play Leads to Bad Habits of Play (and Are Thus Detrimental to Human Well-Being)

15.4.1 The Nature of Consumerist Play

The most appropriate place to start on any attempt to define or at least analyse and unpack the nature of consumerist play is with the philosophical-anthropological underpinnings of the concept of consumerism or consumption. As such, we need to start with Marx's materialist thesis about human function and economics. Marx's basic thesis about humans is that we are natural animals with the capacity for self-objectifying activities, or labour (Patterson, 2009, pp. 42–44). A further element of Marx's theory of human nature is his argument that as '*animal laborans*' everything that humans do and think can be reduced to a material cause and he proposed a biological metaphor to characterise his view of human nature which he called 'the metabolism of the human animal' (Arendt, 1998, p. 89). Marx used the idea of metabolism to argue that all human activities can be constituted as either productive labour or the consumption of products for the purpose of furthering the human life process (Arendt, 1998).[2] In short, everything that humans do and think can be reduced to the function of labour, and in turn, labour can be reduced to a causal life

[2] It is important to note that the first use of 'consumption' in economic theory appeared earlier than Marx in the writings of Adam Smith and other theorists of Capitalism. Karl Marx, however, appears to have explicitly developed the philosophical-anthropological explanation of the use of the term in economics (Graeber, 2011, p. 492).

cycle of production and consumption (Marx, 1975, p. 274, 1976, pp. 717–719, 1045–1046).

Most theories of consumption and consumerism are embedded, one way or another, in Marx's view of human persons, his analysis of capitalism, and his views of class conflict; Adorno and Horkheimer, other members of the Frankfurt school, and their intellectual descendants provide examples (Graeber, 2011, pp. 489–490). The notions and phenomena of consumption and consumerism have given rise to whole new fields of study in the areas of moral and political philosophy, anthropology, economic theory, and cultural studies. It is not important, for the purposes of this chapter, to delve deeply into the concept of 'consumption' or 'consumerism' or to explore the possible ethical dimensions of the phenomena associated with them. Rather, all that is required here is the identification of the central characteristics of 'consumerist goods and services' associated with what might be called consumerist play.

15.4.1.1 Consumerism and Consumerist Goods and Services

Consumerist goods and services can be defined as:

> any product or service that has been consumed for personal satisfaction by individuals and families. Some consumer goods and services are used immediately (e.g., food) while others are consumed over a long-time period (e.g., dishwasher). Demand for the product or service depends on whether consumers view it as meeting their needs and desires. (Shim & Siegal, 1995)

Consumerist goods and services are products and services explicitly oriented towards the immediate and short term satisfaction of appetites and desires (Bauman, 2007, pp. 31–32, 36–37; Rojek, 2004, pp. 293–295). When conjoined with a capitalist economic system, consumerist goods and services are intentionally designed to give immediate satisfaction of some appetite or desire, which is then quickly consumed, and\or encourages further appetite and desire for a replacement of the same or similar good or service. In sum, consumerist goods and services are designed explicitly to pander to, manipulate, and generate human appetite and desires, generate means of briefly satisfying those appetites and desires, and include planned obsolescence, e.g. shortened durability which then requires further consumption (Cooper, 2010, pp. 3–4).

15.4.1.2 Consumerist Play

Play, inasmuch as it can be produced or offered as a service in a consumerist society, will have the same basic characteristics of other consumerist goods and services. As such, a basic definition of consumerist play would be: any produced means of play or provision of play as a service, whereby the objects or means of play are explicitly designed to be bought and consumed. Further, consumerist play will be

characterised by objects or means of play designed explicitly to appeal to, manipulate, or generate human appetites and desires, to offer immediate but short term satisfaction; and it will include planned obsolescence and required replacement within a short duration.

15.4.2 The Hypothesis: Consumerist Play Leads to Bad Habits of Playing and Thus Is Detrimental to Human Well-Being

It has come time to test out the hypothesis that consumerist play leads to bad habits of playing and thus is detrimental to human well-being. As mentioned previously, this chapter will test out two forms of the hypothesis: a weaker hypothesis that consumerist play leads to bad habits of playing inasmuch as it manipulates and appeals to mere appetite and desires, thus weakening the capacity of human play to be moderated by reason; and a stronger hypothesis that consumerist play in and of itself fosters bad habits of playing and is thus detrimental to human well-being. I think, given the very definition of consumerist play provided above, that the weaker hypothesis will be fairly easy to prove. The stronger hypothesis, however, will take a little more argumentation.

15.4.2.1 Testing the Weak Form of the Hypothesis

I would pose the weak form of the hypothesis in the following standard form argument:

P_1. The virtue(s) of playing involve – at the very least – the use of reason to moderate our desires and appetites with respect to the object and means of playing.

P_2. Consumerist play is designed to appeal to, manipulate, and generate appetites and desires and thus explicitly attempts to manipulate human appetites and desires to induce persons to consume it.

P_3. Inasmuch as Consumerist play is designed to induce persons to act solely in accord with their appetites and desires, to pursue immediate satisfaction of those desires, and is designed with built in obsolescence, consumerist play will also have the effect of weakening persons' capacities and opportunity to use reason to moderate their play and achieve excellence in play.

Therefore, consumerist play may lead to the formation of bad habits of playing.

That consumerist play may lead to the formation of bad habits of playing inasmuch as the person succumbs to the manipulation of their appetites and desires (and thus may fail to use reason to temper their appetites and desires) does not mean that all consumerist play in and of itself fosters bad habits of playing. At worst, the argument above simply suggests that the danger of persons succumbing to their appetites

and desires is exacerbated in consumerist play by comparison to other forms of play which have not been designed explicitly to appeal to, generate, and manipulate human appetite or desire.

15.4.2.2 Testing the Strong Form of the Hypothesis

The stronger hypothesis to be tested is the argument that consumerist play in and of itself fosters bad habits of playing and is thus detrimental to human well-being. To test this hypothesis, we will need to look at the basic characteristics of consumerist play in relation to the functions of play in human life, and the moral import of play in human well-being. The focus of this stronger form of the hypothesis will be on the inherently corruptive character of consumerist play and the way in which consumerist play – by its very nature – tends to attack the intrinsic moral purposes of play.

Argument 1: consumerist play is inherently corrupting of moral character inasmuch as it undermines the intellect, prudence, and temperance.

One of the themes in the literature regarding consumerist societies and culture is the claim that consumerist culture undermines the intellectual life of persons through the creation of an environment in which consuming in accord with appetite and desire is constituted as the sole or primary function of human life (Bauman, 2007, pp. 31–32). Bauman, for example, argues that early modern Capitalism was marked by the production and ownership of goods that were, for the most part, long lasting and secure (2007, p. 29). The desire for these goods was embedded in a long-term view of human life; a view grounded upon an account of human nature in which prudence, balance, and life-long and even multi-generational planning were valued (Bauman, 2007, pp. 29–30). Consumerist culture, on the other hand, associates happiness (or human well-being) with the immediate gratification of desires and with an 'ever rising volume and intensity of desire' (Bauman, 2007, p. 31). Consumerist culture, as such, intentionally undermines the capacity of the human intellect as it bears on practical matters and action, and especially the virtues of prudence and temperance (Bauman, 2007, p. 144). Consumerist play, it follows, in pandering to, generating, and manipulating short term appetites and desires will also undermine the bearing of the intellect on the act of playing, and thus prudential and temperate playing. Thus, consumerist play is inherently corrupting of moral character.

Argument 2: consumerist play by its very nature tends to undermine the intrinsic moral purposes of play:

There are, I would suggest, four interrelated ways in which consumerist play tends to undermine the intrinsic moral purposes of play: by attacking intellectual freedom, creativity, and imagination; by attacking the free exploration of personal identity; by attacking re-creation and renewal; and finally, by undermining the *autotelic* character of play. I will provide each argument in standard form one by one below:

One: Consumerist play, by its very nature, undermines intellectual freedom, creativity and imagination.

P_1. ‘When children are flooded with stimuli from television, computer or video games, they have fewer opportunities to learn to initiate action or to influence the world they inhabit, and less chance to exercise creativity’ (Hill, 2011, p. 352).

P_2. ‘Consumerism has led to a host of seemingly endless needs for sophisticated electronic media technology, making it increasingly difficult to provide children with an environment that allows for creativity or original thinking’ (Hill, 2011, p. 352).

P_3. Consumerist play undermines the bearing of the intellect on the act of playing (see argument above).

P_4. In consumerist play, the freedom of persons to use their intellects in the act of playing is diminished (P_3), their capacity for intellectual creativity in playing is diminished (P_1), and these factors make it difficult for children to use their imaginations to engage in creative or original thinking (P_2).

Therefore, consumerist play undermines intellectual freedom, creativity, and imagination.

Two: Consumerist play has a detrimental effect on the free exploration of personal identity.

P_1. The free exploration of personal identity requires intellectual freedom, creativity, and imagination, to be brought to bear on the activity of playing in a self-referential way.

P_2. By the first way of argument (above) consumerist play diminishes the capacity to exercise their freedom, creativity, and imagination.

Therefore, consumerist play has a detrimental effect on the capacity of persons to engage in the free exploration of personal identity.

Three: Consumerist play undermines re-creation and renewal.

P_1. Re-creation and renewal are attained through play in which persons are able to: a) freely explore their personal identity, and\or b) able to engage in free play involving the intellect, movement, or social function.

P_2. Consumerist play diminishes the capacity for free play in both senses inasmuch as it attacks intellectual freedom, creativity, and imagination.

Therefore, consumerist play undermines re-creation and renewal.

Four: Consumerist play is no longer *autotelic* and thus it undermines the human person’s possibility of fulfilling the intrinsic moral purposes of play (as described by Gadamer and Aquinas).

P_1. (Some) consumerist play is solely or primarily a means of consumption.

P_2. Play, properly speaking, is *autotelic* – an end in itself and not a means.

Therefore, (some) consumerist play are non-autotelic and inherently improper forms of play.

P_3. (Some) consumerist play, as inherently improper play, undermines the human person's possibility of fulfilling the intrinsic moral purposes of play in human life.

Thus, (some) consumerist play harms the person's capacity to develop good habits of play and accordingly their ability to achieve well-being.

This final argument, I acknowledge, is somewhat overstated. Of course, even consumerist play is only play inasmuch as there is some kind of 'play' involved and this suggests that consumerist play must have some autotelic element and cannot become purely a means of consumption as posited in the argument above. However, while the argument is overstated, it does indicate clearly the point at which certain objects or means of play become bad or corrupted kinds of playing; namely, at the point at which the play becomes primarily a means to something else other than playing itself. It is clear that there are games currently being offered to consumers (e.g. certain computer or smart phone games) which are without doubt consumerist services dressed up scantily clad as games to play, i.e., the games that are free but then require the player to spend lots of money or sign up for other consumerist goods or services to be able to play with any freedom or enjoyment.

The four ways of demonstrating that consumerist play undermines the intrinsic moral purposes of play when put together suggest that a human person who forms the habit of playing consumerist games; or who habitually engages in consumerist play, will tend to form bad habits of playing. At the very least, a person whose play is predominately an engagement in consumerist play is likely to fail to grasp the meaning and purpose of play; that is, they are unlikely to achieve the benefits that I have identified as the intrinsic moral purposes of play, but which are in fact products of engagement in play for its own sake. These have been described as the formation of identity via self-presentation, self-renewal, and self-possession and the recreation and rest that contributes to achievement of human flourishing and well-being. Like a person in the grip of greed, who takes wealth as an end rather than a means, a person in the grip of consumerist play is likely to take the point of play as a means or object to be consumed rather than a free exploration of identity, re-creation, and renewal within the context of human well-being.

15.5 Conclusion

As a philosopher and metaphysician my interest generally lies in metaphysical questions, rather than applied or practical issues bearing on ordinary human life. However, as a parent of children who have grown up playing within a progressively more pervasive consumerist culture, I recognise that developing the virtues and good habits that might challenge the consumerist mentality to which children are exposed is a task of sisyphean proportions. At the same time, as a teacher of philosophy in the tertiary context, I recognise a tendency toward the reduction of

knowledge and learning to consumable bites and the corresponding lack of intellectual creativity and imagination that accompanies a consumerist focus within education. Rigorous thinking and philosophical inquiry in this area takes place by moving to and fro over the boundaries of play and leisure; of re-creation and reflection. The chapter is not intended to be a call for an outright rejection of consumerist play, but rather, an exploration that points out the possible dangers to human well-being of a society in which all goods, including the basic good of play, are conceived of in terms of mere consumption. The chapter is intended to serve as a reminder of the importance of the conscious and deliberate formation of good habits of play with respect to the pursuit of human well-being.

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Chapter 16
Lego, Creative Accumulation and the Future of Play

Camilla Nelson and Ari Mattes

Abstract This chapter examines the 'future of play' as it is writ large in the mediatisation of the global toy industry, with a focus on the commercial operations of the Lego Group and their flagship *The Lego Movie*. It provides an analysis of the operation of play within the film, the commercial play products it has been designed to market and the mediatised play practices of the many Lego fans who have engaged with the franchise. In so doing, it examines the transformation of play in the political and economic context of contemporary post-industrial society.

16.1 Introduction

All play has a purpose. (Huizinga)

The first Lego brick was patented in 1958. With its now iconic tubes inside and studs on top, the brick was a single element in an expandable building system designed to encourage extended play, develop fine motor skills and foster creativity and imagination in children. Today, approximately 20 billion Lego pieces are manufactured every year. This is equivalent to 2 million pieces an hour, or 35,000 a minute. Lego estimates that the world's children spend around 5 billion hours a year playing with Lego bricks. Indeed, if the total number of Lego bricks manufactured every year was laid end to end, they would circle the world five times (Lego Group, 2014a).

From modest beginnings, the Lego Group has grown into the largest toy manufacturer in the world. In 2014, it posted a profit of over 2 billion dollars, surging ahead of Mattel and Hasbro on the strength of sales deriving from its wildly successful motion picture, *The Lego Movie* (Lego Group, 2014b). Today, the Lego Group's assets include not only the iconic building system but also a diverse range of shorter films, television shows, theme parks and computer games. Lego remains

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a privately held company, but its reach has been extended through a range of high-profile licensing arrangements and cross-promotional ventures with media partners including Disney, Lucasfilm and Warner Bros. Less publicised is its intermittent partnership with Shell petroleum dating from the 1960s, which has been heavily criticised by environmental groups including Greenpeace (Vaughn, 2014a, 2014b). The Lego Group owns Lego Education, which provides literacy and learning games such as 'Story Starter' to primary school classrooms. It has also ventured into more unusual terrain with the launch of Lego Serious Play, a subsidiary that provides strategic consultancies to business corporations, including professional development for CEOs that involves the playing out of creative scenarios with the characteristic Lego brick.

Despite the diversity of its holdings, Lego is very much a 'one-brand company'. It is less the iconic brick than the core message of 'play' – that is, the *value* of play that the Lego brick has come to represent – that binds the multifaceted galaxy of the Danish toy manufacturer together. Just like those other powerful brand messages (such as Apple's 'Think Different' or Nike's 'Just Do It'), Lego's play mantra – its claim to be constantly 'Inventing the Future of Play' (Lego Group, 2014c) – has endowed the company with astonishing strength and flexibility. Indeed, the concept of play peculiar to the Lego brand – once defined and abstracted – has been applied to a wide range of objects beyond the original construction sets, added as a layer to media franchises from Star Wars to Harry Potter, applied to educational products or, indeed, to business consultancies. Lego's strength is that its bricks can be built into anything, providing the company with a fluid exchange of construction possibilities. It is for this reason that Lego can claim to have adapted rather than departed from the logic of the children's brand as it was initially shaped by the company's founder Ole Kirk Christiansen, when he took the first two letters of the Danish words *leg* and *godt* – meaning 'play well' – and put them together (Nipper, 2012, p. 26–30).

Indeed, far from conflicting with the public image of the family-friendly toy manufacturer or registering in the public mind as preposterous or improbable, corporate adventures such as Lego Serious Play have more commonly been perceived as a surprisingly successful match. 'Companies from Nokia to Tetra Pak are now sending senior staff to learn what Lego can do for their corporate ethos', claimed a reporter in The *Guardian*, 'and management consultants are even specialising in running Lego sessions to meet the demand' (Rowan, 2002). The Lego Group has also become a high-profile pioneer in the world of 'fun' and 'flexible' corporate workspaces. Lego's London office, featuring an entranceway cut into the shape of a giant yellow minifigure, is claimed by Lego boosters to be at the vanguard of the new generation of 'playful' work spaces, a product of a burgeoning new philosophy of 'managed play' as work and work as play. The office is marked by a total absence of fixed seating (not even the CEO has his own private office), fostering a logic of temporary associations built around projects. Much like the iconic building system itself, the office has been designed in order to allow the Lego workforce to be rapidly pulled apart and reassembled. Workers absent from a desk for more than 1.5 h must take their belongings and put them back into a locker, to allow space for more Lego workers and other projects. Despite the provision of circular bedlike modules,

ostensibly for 'power naps', the space has been deliberately engineered to enforce a dynamic of fluid and constant motion, with an alleged payoff in enhanced creativity through the logic of chance encounters (Lego Group, 2014d).

Ultimately, the genius of Lego's claim to be 'Inventing the Future of Play' from childhood through to adult life – including 'new ways of playing, play materials and business models of play' (Lego Group, 2014c) – has as much to do with the logic of post-industrial capitalism and its regimes of flexible accumulation as it has to do with the strength or flexibility of the Lego brand. As theorists such as Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) have argued, the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist production processes has been at least partly dependent on the harvesting of hitherto unused resources from people's recreational lives, redeploying such resources for the allegedly more 'serious' purposes of making money. A specific example is the free labour – or 'playbour' (Kücklich, 2005) – of 'modders' (i.e. people who creatively edit the code of a computer game to change its look, appearance and behaviour and allow their 'mod' to be downloaded by other players for free), a phenomenon that has turned games such as Mojang's Minecraft into an asset that was eventually sold to Microsoft for $2.5 billion. In recent times the Lego Group has also worked to harness the creative energies of Lego fans, including adult fans of Lego (AFOLs) and the still more coveted positions of Lego Certified Professionals (LCPs), who – like the illustrious band of Master Builders recently depicted in *The Lego Movie* – participate in an increasing range of Lego's corporate activities from advertising and marketing through to product development as a form of 'play' and 'fun'. 'An amazing number of grown-ups like to play with Lego', says Lego Group CEO Jørgen Vig Knudstorp. 'While we have 120 staff designers, we potentially have probably 120,000 volunteer designers we can access outside the company to help us invent' (quoted in O'Connell, 2009, see also Lego Group, 2014e). Styled as a form of 'play', it appears that this labour – like the work of 'modders' in the computer game industry (Kücklich, 2005) – does apparently not need to be remunerated. But Lazzarato's work also draws attention to more diffuse if less obvious ways in which forms of playfulness, including 'creativity, communication, emotion, cooperation, and values', have been, and continue to be, 'put to work', making such activities no more than a means to guarantee the stability and reproducibility of market relations (Lazzarato, 1996 p. 146). As Lazzarato argues, 'immaterial labour' sits at the 'crossroads' of a 'new relationship between production and consumption'. He writes:

> It gives form to and materializes needs, the imaginary, consumer tastes, and so forth, and these products in turn become powerful producers of needs, images, and tastes. The particularity of the commodity produced through immaterial labor (its essential use value being given by its value as informational and cultural content) consists in the fact that it is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the 'ideological' and cultural environment of the consumer. This commodity does not produce the physical capacity of labor power; instead, it transforms the person who uses it. Immaterial labor produces first and foremost a 'social relationship' (a relationship of innovation, production, and consumption). (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 137)

If, as Donald Winnicott has argued, it is 'only in playing' that a human being 'is able to be creative and to use the whole personality' (Winnicott, 1991, p. 54), then

perhaps what makes the culture of 'managed play' so appealing to corporations is the belief that blurring the boundaries between work and nonwork experiences encourages employees to see their work as an extension of their own volition (Fleming, 2005, p. 289). Far from opening up a realm of freedom within work, game theorist Julian Kücklich (2005) has argued that the practice of play, especially as it congregates in and around the creative industries, is better understood as a symptom of a wider social and economic shift from 'disciplinary societies to societies of control'. In other words, it might be argued that Lego's 'fun' and 'flexible' corporate play space is in fact dependent on a new 'regime of self-discipline' that allows workers to be placed in unceasing motion and incidentally permits this new and onerous form of labour to be described in terms of 'play'. The new corporate ethos of play as work and work as play can only be said to represent the 'deregulation' of Fordist regimes of work in so far as the 'primary source of coercion' is no longer the corporation for which the individual works, but the individual subject who has internalised the new regimes of work in the guise of play (Kücklich, 2005, p. 3; see also Goggin, 2011).

This chapter examines the 'future of play' as it is writ large in the operations of the Lego Group. It pays particular attention to the characterisation of play within the recently released *The Lego Movie*, a film that is not only designed to promote Lego's most recent range of play products, but whose narrative is structured around the tension between order and freedom that mirrors the historic transition from Taylorist-Fordist modes of production towards neoliberal regimes of flexible accumulation. This shift is also one in which *Homo Ludens* is continually hyped as linked not only to technology, creativity and innovation but also as offering respite from the drudgery of the on-the-clock style of labour of *homo economicus* (even if such 'playful' and 'creative' impulses are always already located within the logic of established models of production). In this sense, an analysis of the film and the commercial play products it has been designed to market gives clues to the transformation of the theory and practice of play in post-industrial society. The chapter also progresses the argument a little further, specifically by interrogating the practices of the many Lego fans who have engaged playfully with the film franchise, analysing the ways in which fans have used play to rework the logic of the film's narrative, perhaps retrieving something of play's emancipatory potential.

16.2 Play as a Mode of Creative Accumulation in *The Lego Movie*

The narrative of *The Lego Movie* appears, at first glance, to be radical for a mainstream Hollywood film targeted at a family demographic. A band of disenfranchised workers engage in a collective struggle against the ruthless attempts of Lord Business to dominate their lives. The character of Business, delightfully voiced by Will Ferrell, constitutes a comically piquant reflection on the workings of

'turbocapitalism' in his governance of the world-building corporation Octan (mostly 'peopled', it appears, by robotic 'micromanagers' and police under his pay) and its generation of products for popular consumption: movies, TV and surveillance cameras. Octan effectively parodies the tentacular reach of the global corporation, diversified into different revenue streams, a café with an apparent monopoly on $37 cups of coffee, a Rock FM radio channel to which everybody listens, television sitcoms replete with canned laughter on high rotation as well as the massive engineering projects and housing developments that are characteristic of the popular Lego City line of toys. As an arch capitalist – known as 'President' to the public but as 'Lord' to the viewer and the ragtag band of Master Builders who are the movie's heroes – Business' role is, clearly, to generate profit and expand his business without consideration for human life, quality of living or the environment.

This function of business – by definition, to generate a surplus through the exploitation of labour and to expand this surplus through reinvestment – which is personified in the character of Business, is self-evident in the opening sequences of the film. The Bricksville society in the Lego Universe is imagined as a kind of modernist utopia that is in actuality an autocratic dystopia – though only the band of disenfranchised heroes recognises the fist-pumping vacuity for what it really is. On waking, Emmet picks up a document resembling a set of Lego instructions and reads *Instructions to Fit In*, *Have Everyone Like You*, *and Always Be Happy*. A close-up ensues featuring a picture of a Lego man smiling to the reader/viewer from the jaws of a massive shark and is followed by Emmet's narration of the list of 'instructions' that function as a kind of playful critique of social control in the society of the spectacle, in which, as the film's line motif goes, 'Everything is Awesome!'

> Step 1: breathe; Step 2: greet the day, smile and say 'good morning city!'; Step 3: exercise; Step 4: shower, and always be sure to keep the soap out of your eyes; shave your face; brush your teeth; comb your hair; wear clothes; Step 9: eat a complete breakfast with all the special people in your life; Step 11: greet your neighbours; Step 12: obey all traffic signs and regulations; Step 13: enjoy popular music; always use a turn signal; park between the lines; drop off dry cleaning before noon; read the headlines; don't forget to smile; always root for the local sports team; always return a compliment; drink overpriced coffee.

This sequence effectively satirises the experience of the consumer under contemporary capitalism, down to an acute Frankfurt School-style barb about the mind-numbing, myopia-inducing function of mass entertainment. It recalls the Frankfurt School vision of a commodified consumerist society, populated by a mass public who mindlessly follow the rules and are kept satisfied by a perpetual supply of spectacle. As Erich Fromm wrote, the 'reality of present-day Western capitalist society' is that:

> The majority of people are motivated by a wish for greater material gain, for comfort and gadgets, and this wish is restricted only by the desire for security and the avoidance of risks. They are increasingly satisfied with a life regulated and manipulated, both in the sphere of production and of consumption, by the state and the big corporations and their respective bureaucracies; they have reached a degree of conformity which has wiped out individuality to a remarkable extent. They are, to use Marx's term, impotent 'commodity men' serving virile machines. (Fromm [1961]2003, p. 2)

Fromm's virile machine is personified in the character of Lord Business, from whom Emmet receives a televisual transmission, as he eats his breakfast.

> Hi, I'm President Business, President of the Octan Corporation and the world. Let's take extra care to follow the instructions [lowering voice to a whisper] or you'll be put to sleep. [voice resumes fast but relaxed gait] And don't forget Taco Tuesday's coming next week that's the day every rule-following citizen gets a free taco and my love. Have a great day everybody.

Emmet responds enthusiastically ('You have a great day too President Business. Man, he's such a cool guy!'), before breaking off in surprise as he recalls the President's not-so-hidden aside. He is stumped for a moment, as if realising, for the very first time, the insidious truth behind the official corporate-political ideology beamed to him through his cathode ray tube. 'Wait!', he exclaims, 'did he say put to sleep?' But before Emmet can adequately process this subversive thought, let alone open up a realm of critical thinking – the becoming of Emmet as Marcusian 'Two-Dimensional Man' – he is bombarded with a loud advertisement for yet another television sitcom, whose velocity of appearance, and mind-numbing idiocy, negates the *time* necessary for Emmet to locate and develop this critical thought. The sitcom called 'Where Are My Pants?' is deliberately vacuous, but Emmet, along with the studio audience featured on the small screen, bursts into fits of hilarity. Emmet falls off the couch and, in the process, completely forgets the (un)coded message regarding the fate of the disobedient in the Lego world. 'What was I just thinking?' Emmet asks himself. He concludes, 'I don't care'.

In this way *The Lego Movie* clearly and self-consciously situates itself as part of a range of classic intellectual traditions that figure popular culture as a soul-destroying apparatus, even if its tone is essentially comic throughout. Yet, as Emmet meets and falls in with Wyldstyle, Vitruvius and the rest of the Master Builders (a motley bunch, including Wonder Woman, Robin Hood, the 2002 NBA All Stars, Michelangelo the Painter and Michelangelo the Ninja Turtle), the film enacts a striking departure from classic expectations of this subversive political genre, turning what is essentially an existential struggle into a mere matter of aesthetics, of *style*.

Lord Business' villainous aspirations, as it transpires, have little to do with his economic, ethical or ontological status as a capitalist – or the idea of capital accumulation – but are seen to revolve entirely around his *aesthetic* impulses regarding design and development. Lord Business, upset with the aesthetic 'anarchy' he sees around him (the kind that occurs when people are free to 'build without instructions'), wants to permanently reconfigure the Lego world into a vision of static, segmented and eternal order. Having colonised the minds of the inhabitants of the Lego Universe, Business now wants to colonise their bodies, restricting their last bastion of freedom – physical mobility – by using Kragle (Krazy Glue) to stick them in place. It is stasis that horrifies the 'creative' Master Builders with whom 'ordinary' Emmet falls in. They are, however, conspicuously *not* horrified by the foundations of Lord Business' order – based upon the rapid accumulation and expansion of capital. Questions regarding the control of the means of production or

the distribution of space for the lives of the many are disregarded. Questions regarding the benefits of the omnipresent Octan housing developments and engineering projects (who does it benefit, how and why?) are similarly jettisoned. The idea of limitless development is never challenged – just the *style* in which this development occurs.

In this way, the film rapidly veers away from what initially appeared to be a radical critique of what Benjamin Noys (2014) calls 'capitalist accelerationism' to the aestheticisation of daily life through the fetishisation of play as *style*. The celebration of individual expertise under the guise of the ludic explicitly marks the film as an absolute affirmation of the operations of capitalism in the contemporary age, as well as the strategies of creative accumulation applied therein ('building without plans'), rather than, as critics such as Noel Gittell (2014), Bilge Ebiri (2014) and Ben Walters (2014) have oddly suggested, some kind of neo-commie collectivist oneiric.

Indeed, the views of the film's critics are telling. Bilge Ebiri (2014), writing for New York magazine's Vulture site, claimed 'The Lego Movie is Practically Communist'. Noel Gittell (2014), writing in the *Atlantic*, described the film as 'shockingly subversive', with an 'anti-capitalist bent'. In The *Guardian*, Ben Walters (2014) declared the film to be 'Hollywood's answer to the Occupy movement', a reference to the well-known protest action that started in a park in Wall Street's Financial District and turned into a mass movement against social and economic inequality worldwide. Others were a lot more perspicacious. Heather Havrilesky (2014), writing in the *New York Times*, called the film a 'counter-intuitive sleight of hand' with a self-ironising advertising line motif that takes branding to a new and heinous level, while Philip Kennicott (2014), writing in the *Washington Post*, declared the film to be 'an affront to childhood'.

Eventually, it is the characters' desire for the recognition of their individuality – their quest, in plot terms, to be 'The Special' – that eventually becomes the driving force of their struggle against Lord Business. Each character's desire to be 'the greatest, most interesting, most important person of all time', as Vitruvius says in the prophecy – as well as each character's sense of *individual* style and fashion, created by the designers of the film from traditionally countercultural elements (such as Wyldstyle's 'graffiti' outfit) – becomes their primary weapons against Lord Business, rather than any kind of politically conscious or collective struggle.

The film's emphasis on the individual 'creativity' of *Homo Ludens* obfuscates the necessarily uneven geographic development of the Lego Universe that, as David Harvey has argued with respect to post-industrial society, is intricately tied up with the capitalist urban enterprise, specifically as a means for remedying economic crises through the absorption of surplus capital (Harvey, 1990, p. 186). Indeed, Lego (as a toy) could even be said to function as a kind of reification of the myth of heroic building – of building in a vacuum outside any economic or social relations. Lego is, after all, regardless of how the toy is actually used, designed for the most part to be a solitary toy encouraging the design, control and mastery of space. This aspect of the toy is, unsurprisingly, amplified in the mania for building in the film. The film ultimately reifies rapid urban development. 'Build! Build! Build!' is its mantra as

much as 'Play! Play! Play!' – a 'building without instructions' that will perhaps lead to a more diffuse acceleration of capital, even if the film celebrates a kind of architectural anarchy that *could* potentially open up new avenues of play in everyday life, new rhythms of play, of the kind suggested by Henri Lefebvre (2003).

The film pivots around a tension between structured and unstructured play – between order and 'playful' or 'creative' freedom. The entrepreneurialism and technological dynamism entailed by the concept of 'building without instructions' are, in fact, a cornerstone of, to use Mandel's ([1972]1999) phrase, 'late capitalism' and one of the hallmarks of flexible accumulation (Harvey, 1990, p. 180). The film's critique of ordered development at the expense of the 'playful' and the 'free built' is in fact remarkably similar to that launched by neoliberal postmodernists against the urban projects of high modernists. 'Your robots are no match for a master builder', as Vitruvius says to Lord Business in the opening scene. Hence, the film paints the shift from Fordism to 'creative accumulation' in a joyous, playful light. In contrast to 'creative destruction', a feature of industrial capitalism, in which the new entrants with new technologies displaced previously dominant firms, and late capitalism more often operates via a logic of 'creative accumulation', whereby technological competition assumes a cumulative form. This requires established firms to source new knowledge – including subversive knowledge – from 'below', before integrating it with their own established knowledge into functioning products and processes. The end result is that *everything*, indeed, is apparently 'awesome!' The only conflict worth fighting is that between creative order and creative freedom, understood as a conflict between structured and unstructured play. The fact that material production still occurs, more brutally for the productive worker than ever before, just out of sight of Bricksville – or indeed, the real-world economies of the North and West – is 'playfully' elided.

By the end of the film, all the quirky quips, the jolly jibes against conformity and the eccentric styling of the characters, story and image appear to have amounted to little. If play – broadly conceived as 'building without instructions' – is in fact ultimately authorised by the corporation, then all the bluster about liberty and individual expression by Emmet and the gang ends up serving little more than augmenting the power of Lord Business. At the end of the film, Lord Business reigns with a plastic fist that is stronger than ever before. This reality is in fact mirrored directly in the film's narrative, specifically in Emmet's acceptance of Lord Business and his offering of an olive branch – in the form of his Lego hand claw – to Business at the end of the film. Emmet tells Lord Business, 'You don't have to be the bad guy. You are the most talented, most interesting, most extraordinary person in the universe'. Hence, with a playful guile, and a kind of ideological vertigo, the evil geniuses of business are told that they never have to worry about being the bad guys again.

The positioning of the subversive element represented by the Master Builders both at play with – and as a part of – the corporation enacts classic methods of contemporary business innovation. Indeed, the play economy depicted in *The Lego Movie* recalls Baudrillard's description of the operations of capital in terms of ceaseless circulation and perpetual play. As Baudrillard writes:

> The rationality of capital is a joke: capital is a challenge to the natural order of value. This challenge knows no limits. It seeks the triumph, at any price, of (exchange) value, and its axiom is investment, not production. Everything must be re-played and put back in play. (Baudrillard [1984]2014, p. 26)

In short, building with or without instructions, in fun or in utmost seriousness, makes little or no difference when the very basis for such an order remains intact. When the villains of Octan are defeated by the Master Builders, it is by working collectively – ironically, by following the 'instructions' – because this is, as Emmet argues, the very last thing that Lord Business would expect. But even as the robotic micromanagers are exploded into bloodless parts, so is the world of Octan playfully reassembled. Subversive impulses are channelled back into individual styles, the power of dissent is diffused through an obsession with individualism, inequality is masked through the claim that everybody is 'The Special' and the collective being of the Lego world's humanity is once again fragmented. *The Lego Movie*, deadly serious in its playfulness, in its self-masking (through the revealing) of its ideology and in its self-conscious and irritating 'cool' (mirroring, perhaps, 'cool memories' of real-world social and historical forces and processes), enacts what is perhaps one of the most profound evacuations of the political in recent Hollywood cinema.

16.3 Play as a Mode of Advertising in *The Lego Movie*

The region one DVD of *The Lego Movie* opens with an advertisement for Legoland theme parks in California and Florida. Children and adults alike laugh, hold hands and go on rides. Over the top of the images, a male narrator informs the viewer of the benefits, 'Legoland is where you can drive cars and get your own driver's licence! And knights and princesses conquer dragons! Fight fires and save the day! Splash and play in 10 million gallons of fun!' The advertisement is brashly immersive, using a typical albeit colourful array of advertiser's tricks to engage its viewer. And yet, for the second-, third- or nth-time viewer of *The Lego Movie*, the opening line of the advertisement ought to strike a troubling chord. The narrator claims, 'Everything is awesome on more than 50 rides and attractions at Legoland parks in California and Florida'.

The advertisement can use the same line motif that has been deployed in the film as the basis for its putative critique of contemporary consumer culture because the line, like the film, is 'playful' and therefore not to be taken seriously. It is explicitly self-effacing through the revelation of its own mechanism, in its playing with its own forms. And yet this playful attitude, whether in the advertisement or the film, is unable to entirely mask the reality of the process in which the viewer is participating – the Lego Group is, after all, essentially selling a line of expensive play products to the consumer.

Toy companies are a long way from being oblivious to that fact that it is adults who are the proxy purchasers for their children. *The Lego Movie*, which is essentially a feature-length toy commercial, is aimed at the purchasing power of adults as

much as children and sets to work to disarm the more experienced adult viewer with advertising strategies that are more wily and convoluted than the instruction manual for a Lego robot. Rather than seeking to imbue its play products with magical qualities (like Apple's 'Think Different' or Nike's 'Just Do It'), the advertising strategy that operates within the film is aggressively self-aware and ironically self-referential. Not only does the movie celebrate the seductive qualities of the Lego Universe – delighting in its own world of play, fun and creativity – it simultaneously mocks the same world for its corporate credos. In this way, the film both establishes its credentials and deliberately undercuts those qualities in acts of 'playful', albeit, surface-level, subversion. The effect is to slip under the adult viewer's brand-wary prejudices.

The new forms of ironic and playful advertising such as those that pervade *The Lego Movie* also draw attention to the ways in which Lego's increased reliance on media has transformed the original logic of the toy, and indeed the toy company, which, in the process of 'mediatisation' of its activities, as Stig Hjarvard (2004, 2013) argues, has begun to conform to the logics of media production, distribution and reception. In this process, as Hjarvard (2004) argues, a toy that once had no storyline has been increasingly 'narrativised', so that the construction set, due to the design and marketing of an accompanying media text, tends to motivate play with narrative qualities. These narratives have tended to take on increased forms of 'imaginisation', relating less to world of adults and more to worlds populated by wizards, monsters, superheroes and magical creatures. These processes have also been accompanied by increased 'virtualisation', a process whereby the bricks lose their physical and tactile qualities, and are ultimately transformed into digital icons in CGI-animated play worlds, like the digitally generated images of bricks out of which *The Lego Movie* has been created. Underlying these changes is a process whereby the media has begun to act as the central driving force of both the corporation and its play products. The corporation is constantly forced to renew the entertainment component of the toys, generating more and more licensed story franchises and more and more cross-branded platforms, to satisfy a constant demand for the creation of new characters and new play worlds. Just as the symbolic content of entertainment products begins to shape the manufacture of toys, so too the company begins to become dependent on the cycle of hyper-consumption that characterises the media-entertainment sector (Hjarvard, 2004, 2013).

The mediatisation of toys, a process whereby toys cease to be regarded as solid objects and become digital and immaterial, is, as Hjarvard (2004) points out, not identical with the commodification of play. Rather, it is in practice and application that these processes tend to become coextensive. Strong forms of mediatisation often result in cultural and social activities (work, leisure, play) being subsumed to commodity form, which is then exploited for commercial purposes. One of the most troubling aspects of mediatisation is that it pushes children further into consumer culture because the content of their play becomes invested with the consumer values that drive the media-entertainment sector. The toy is no longer a fire truck or cement mixer that mimics trucks and cement mixers in the real world but a Lego City fire truck or Lego City cement mixer (or indeed a Fireman Sam truck or Bob the Builder

cement mixer) – that is, products that specifically attach the child to the values of a branded story universe.

The dimensions of this process can be charted in the works produced by the numerous fans of *The Lego Movie*, through their lives on social media, on fan fiction and fan art sites or on Vimeo and YouTube. Indeed, Lego directly invites children and young people to 'play' with and for the Lego corporation, hosting extensive 'fanvid' competitions, for example, 'The Emmet Awards Show!' (Lego Group, 2014f), in which viewers are asked to construct their own advertising trailers via the Lego-hosted website. The play, dreams and social lives of young fans seem to have become the direct product of (and therefore continue directly to market) the entertainment products not just of Lego but of any given entertainment company, constituting a form of spontaneous large-scale user-generated advertising, free of charge.

And yet, any study of the large-scale outputs of media fans cannot avoid the fact that there is something about the energy generated in and around this work that might be seen to contain the seeds of critical and even of emancipatory action. This is especially apparent in those works of fan art or fan fiction that rework the film's narrative, often reframing the political and ideological contents of the film.

16.4 Playing with *The Lego Movie*

Fan sites such as FanFiction.Net and DeviantArt.com host a range of proto-feminist or so-called 'gender-flipping' narratives that attempt to rework the film's male-centred storyline. 'In His Place', for example, asks, 'What if Wyldstyle was the Special instead?' (Holy Spirits 2014) Similarly, 'The Special and Her Sidekick' draws attention to the shortfall of female-centred Hollywood films by setting up a storyline in which 'Emmet is just the poor schmuck who gets dragged along for the ride' (Boredparanoia, 2014). Also common are instances of 'race flipping', fan art that takes issue with the way in which the Lego minifigures appear to be invisibly marked White or Caucasian, producing fan art that redraws the heroes and heroines of the film as Black or Asian (Nonespark, 2014; Terepeta, 2014), including one featuring a black Wyldstyle with a cross-dressed Emmet (Sharonaparadox, 2014). In addition to both gender and race flipping, slash pairings are also common in fan works, with same-sex character pairings that aim to undercut the heteronormativity of the narrative, such as one animated fan work featuring Good Cop/Bad Cop tucking Benny the Spaceman into bed (Nashvillianous, 2014; see also ReggieEmma, 2014). Yet other slash pairings – either deliberately or accidentally – draw attention to what may be described as the grim clinch of crony capitalism at work in the film, featuring the central pairing of the protagonist and antagonist, 'Emmet X Lord Business' (PiccolaNikezampano, 2014). Oblique critiques are also discernable in the creative work of fans who have produced HISHE ('How it Should Have Ended') scenarios, playfully registering the circular logic of the narrative by setting the hero characters to fight the Octan Corporation all over again. Other oblique endings include ones in which Emmet – far from being happily reconciled with Lord

Business – blasts Business and his Octan Corporation to pieces. One short animation with high production values by Kevin Ulrich (2014) and the Brotherhood Workshop features Lord Business being shut up in jail, after a lengthy enumeration of his crimes. Business whimpers as the jail door slams, 'But I've changed, that makes everything okay, right?'

Fan works, despite their limitations, often contain subversive strategies that ought to be analysed as points of ideological struggle. The playfulness inherent in fan works could potentially be understood in terms of what Baudrillard calls a 'fatal strategy' (Baudrillard [1983] 2008) that out-machines the media machine through a combination of its commitment and its otherness. Fan engagement is – in most instances – less slickly managed than the official corporate production, even as they are encouraged by the company's marketing machine and encouraged to play with an array of sophisticated media tools provided by the marketing machine. Play, in this sense, has become more ambiguous than ever. The potential for subversion always exists within play, even when, as in *The Lego Movie*, the context in which playful transactions are conducted is somewhat fraught. Terry Eagleton captures the complexity of this relationship between 'free consent' and the 'seductive' forms of 'collusion' in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, arguing:

> There is a world of political difference between a law which the subject really does give to itself, in radical democratic style, and a decree which still descends from on high but which the subject now 'authenticates'. Free consent may thus be the antithesis of oppressive power, or a seductive form of collusion with it. […] In one sense, the bourgeois subject is indeed mystified into mistaking necessity for freedom and oppression for autonomy. For power to be individually authenticated, there must be constructed within the subject a new form of inwardness which will do the unpalatable work of the law for it, and all the more effectively since the law has now apparently evaporated. In another sense, this policing belongs with the historic victory of bourgeois liberty and democracy over a barbarously repressive state. As such, it contains within itself a genuinely utopian glimpse of a free, equal community of independent subjects.

And yet, there are some kinds of playing with *The Lego Movie* that have been less easily assimilated, not least because they imply the need for – or, indeed, demand – political action. One such example is the viral video campaign mounted by Greenpeace (2014), targeting Lego's alliance with Shell petroleum, and a contract signed in 2011 which has seen Shell-branded Lego placed in the hands of children at petrol stations worldwide. Focusing on Shell's plans to drill for oil in the Arctic, the 'Everything is Not Awesome' video campaign featured a pristine Arctic, built from 120 kg of Lego bricks, being covered in oil. Toy dogs, fish and polar bears are inexorably drowned in black ooze alongside Emmet and Wyldstyle and all the other Lego characters, to the mournful strains of *The Lego Movie*'s theme song 'Everything is Awesome', sung ballad style. Greenpeace protestors also unravelled posters featuring the slogan 'Don't Let Shell Play with the Arctic' and placed protesting Lego minifigures at Legoland theme parks across Europe, photographing them and posting the pictures on Facebook. YouTube temporarily removed the 'Everything is Not Awesome' video following a copyright complaint by Warner

Bros., the studio behind the film, which was subsequently withdrawn when the Lego Group released a statement pledging not to renew their $110 million contract with Shell. Greenpeace (2014) promptly posted another playful advertisement, 'Lego dumped Shell. Everything is Awesome Again!'

Of course, Greenpeace's slogan 'Everything is Awesome Again!' is – just like the line motif in the film – not to be taken seriously. The battle being waged by environmental groups against Shell's plans to drill for oil in the Arctic is far from over. There is also a further layer of irony that is no doubt known to the Lego Group, to Greenpeace protestors and to many other participants – that is, that the output of Lego bricks that circles the world five times each year is also manufactured from crude petroleum. Asked to explain the thinking behind its tactics to would-be supporters, Greenpeace gave the following playful advice: 'Be disruptive and cheeky' (Polisano, 2014).

16.5 Putting Play Back into Play

In his 'comically accelerated history of play', Steven Connor (2005, p. 1) argues that play, despite its metaphysical heritage in the works of writers from Heraclitus to Friedrich Schiller, is not a transhistorical phenomenon, but a cultural construction that shifts and changes over time. The idea of play, in short, has constantly adapted to the social, cultural and economic imperatives of its age. 'The idea of play as a realm of freedom, separate from work, is a creature of industrial capitalism', writes Connor, 'as much as the colonization of play by work (and work by play) is a creature of late or post industrial capitalism' (Connor, 2005, p. 6). In other words, it was precisely because of the expansion and systematisation of the domain of work that play became marginal and was therefore increasingly credited with special powers. 'In one sense, the world of play was a kind of accidental byproduct of the world of work', writes Connor. 'In another sense, it could begin to be seen as vestigial, all that was left of a fragile, vanishing world of spontaneous, unchecked, self-delighting impulse' (Connor, 2005, p. 6). The rapid expansion of Lego's empire of play would seem to suggest that there is nothing innately liberating in the powers of play. Perhaps play, as Connor argues, is better understood not as a means of free self-unfolding but as a condition of ambiguity that covers, or is coextensive with, every aspect of human existence, as a form of potency or ambiguity that can therefore erupt in any sphere at any moment. Connor writes:

> In a condition of *jeux sans frontières*, when the empire of play can no longer be clearly demarcated, play can no longer be reliably or decisively claimed for the principle of free self-unfolding on the one hand, or for the grim clinching of systematicity on the other. When every instance of play deepens the reach of organised complexity, simultaneously loosening and consolidating, when the place of play is no longer self-evident, the effects of play are themselves put into play. (Connor, 2005, p. 10–11)

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Appendix

Developmental Stages of Development (birth to 24 months)

Child aged from birth to 2 months	
Language skills	
1.	Cries
2.	Non-crying vocalizations: grunts, coos, gurgles and squeals
The child who has reached developmental level 1: **mental age 3 months:**	
1.	Demonstrates good head control when held over an adult's shoulder
2.	Lifts head and upper chest when place on stomach
3.	When lying on back, usually moves both arms together and both legs together
4.	Rolls from back to side and returns, moving to both sides
5.	Usually has hands closed into a fist and does not reach for or grasp objects. When the child's hand is touched with an object, the child's arms wave about and hands open or close. Will not hold rattle placed in hand
The child who has reached developmental level 2: **mental age 4 months:**	
1.	Lifts head and chest and pushes up on elbows when placed on stomach
2.	Begins to open hands
3.	When lying on back:
	When pulled towards sitting, assists by raising head, but head still lags
	Observes dangling toy and makes generalized but unsuccessful movements towards reaching it
	Watches hands. Hands meeting at midline
	Accepts rattle or ring, looks at it, puts it to mouth, approaches it with free hand but does not change hands
4.	When sitting with support, takes small block from table using a crude grasp. The child scoops block from little finger side of hand. Does not use the thumb
Language development (2–4 months)	
	Attends to other's voices
	Offers consonant-vowel like utterance shapes
	May participate in vocal exchange with caretaker

(continued)

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The child who has reached developmental level 3: **mental age 5 months:**	
1.	Begins to roll from back to stomach
2.	When pulled towards sitting from black lying position, maintains head in alignment with trunk
3.	When lying on stomach: (a) pushes up on hands lifting upper body off floor, head well back, elbows straight, (b) tries to move and get to something, (c) may pivot around middle, moves arms and legs with back arched (swimming), kicks both legs like a frog or uses arms to push self backward
4.	Uses both arms and hands together to pull things towards self
5.	Has begun to use the thumb when trying to hold an object. Uses fingers and thumb to hold object against palm (palmar grasp)
The child who has reached developmental level 4: **mental age 6 months:**	
1.	Rolls over from back to stomach in both directions
2.	When pulled to sitting, lifts head and actively cooperates by pulling with arms
3.	Sits well when propped
4.	When placed, sits alone briefly, using hands for balance
5.	Takes some weight on legs when supported at trunk
6.	Approaches and grasps object with one hand. Movement is not smooth or coordinated
The child who has reached developmental level 5: **mental age 7 months:**	
1.	Sits alone for longer periods. Back is still rounded but the child no longer uses hands for support
2.	When lying on stomach and propped up on straight arms, child begins to push back onto knees
3.	When held in a standing position, actively bends and straightens knees (stamping)
4.	Begins to crawl on stomach, pulling with arms and pushing with legs. Movements of arms and legs are haphazard. Child later begins to use the right arm and leg together and the left arm and leg together
5.	Reach and grasp are now smooth and coordinated. Objects are held more towards the thumb. Tilts hand over on little finger side to grasp objects, but is unable to use the thumb and forefinger to pick up small objects
6.	Transfers objects from hand to hand, turns them over and puts them to mouth
Language development (4–7 months)	
	Responds to human voices by turning the head towards source
	May be disturbed by angry voices
	Usually stops crying when spoken to
The child who has reached developmental level 6: **mental age 8 months:**	
1.	Sits erect, without support and with good balance
2.	From lying on stomach, pushes to the hand-knee creeping position, rocks forward and back in this position, may push self backward
3.	Crawls more efficiently, usually progressing from pulling and pushing with the arm and leg on the same side to pulling and pushing with the opposite arm and leg
4.	Rolls from stomach to back in either direction
The child who has reached developmental level 7: **mental age 9–10 months:**	
1.	Begins creeping on hands and knees but with a variable pattern. Often pulls knees under body at once in a kind of ‘bunny hop’. Develops a better creeping pattern
2.	Moves from lying to sitting independently
3.	Moves from lying position to the hand-knee position independently

(continued)

4.	Pulls self to standing, but does not know how to let self down again. Can roll onto stomach, push self up on hands and knees and, from there, pull to stand with support
5.	Has become more skillful in grasping objects. Is capable of placing thumb and forefinger in opposition to form a precise pincer grasp. Picks and plucks and uses forefinger to poke and probe
Language development (9–10 months)	
	Imitates self-perpetuated sounds that interest him/her
	Evidence of comprehension, e.g. a question such as ‘Where is Daddy?’ produces the response of looking towards father, or the child will hand over a toy upon request
The child who has reached developmental level 8: **mental age 11–13 months:**	
Locomotion skills	
1.	Creeps on hands and knees. Performance is rapid and efficient
2.	Begins to walk, progressing through the following stages:
	Side steps (cruises) along playpen, rail or furniture
	Attempts to stand alone
	Walks with one hand held, weight evenly distributed on both feet
3.	Rises from hands and knees to hands and feet and from there to standing – without assistance
Hand dexterity and hand-eye coordination	
1.	Uses the thumb and forefinger deftly and precisely to pick up small objects, can poke a finger in a small hole
2.	Can drop a small block in a container, has almost acquired the capacity for placement and voluntary release
3.	Takes one block after another and places them repetitively on the table, but without any particular pattern
4.	Holds a toy in one hand while picking up another
5.	‘Throws’ a ball with a pushing movement
Language skills (10 months through 1 year)	
	Imitates babbling sounds of others
	Comprehends ‘bye-bye’ and ‘pat-a-cake’ or similar recurrent routines
	Responds to simple commands (e.g. ‘No!’)
	First word may appear
The child who has reached developmental level 9: **mental age 14–18 months:**	
Locomotor skills	
1.	Walks independently, progressing as follows:
	Takes a few steps at a time with feet wide apart, hands at shoulder height. Falls by collapsing
	Walks flat-footed but with better balance, feet closer together, hands held about waist high
	Achieve a heel-toe gait. Rarely falls. Hands are no longer needed for balance
2.	Begins to negotiate stairs, progressing as follows:
	Creeps up stairs on hands and knees but cannot come down stairs without help
	Walks up stairs, one hand held, bringing both feet to each step, creeps down stairs feet first
3.	Sits on child’s chair with fair accuracy
4.	Climbs into an adult chair unaided

(continued)

Hand dexterity and hand-eye coordination	
1.	Places one block on top of another on the first try
	Voluntary release is exaggerated. Takes repeated attempts to build a tower of three blocks
2.	Collects and holds approximately eight blocks handed one at a time
3.	Throws a ball with one or both hands
4.	Turns pages of a book or magazine, usually turning several pages at a time
5.	Holds large crayon in fist and scribbles spontaneously
	Imitates a vertical stroke, but without regard for direction
6.	Holds glass of milk in both hands, somewhat precariously
7.	Feeds self with spoon, holding spoon with palm down
Language skills (1 year to 18 months)	
	Responds to a variety of commands
	Makes self understood through reporting and requesting
	Has about 10–30 single word vocabulary
	Identifies familiar objects and some body parts when named
The child who has reached developmental level 10: **mental age 19–24 months:**	
Locomotion skills:	
1.	Has learned to run – stiffly at first, then for ten feet or more without falling
2.	Walks up and down stairs alone, still bringing both feet to each step in turn
3.	Squats to play
4.	On command, walks up to a ball and kicks it
5.	Jumps down one stair step, one foot leading. Usually lands on all fours or in a deep squat
6.	Rides a kiddie car
7.	Broad jumps over a line or small object
8.	Climbs into and stands up on an adult chair
Hand dexterity and hand-eye co-ordination	
1.	*Block play*
	Builds a tower of up to six blocks
	Places three blocks in a row to make a train then pushes train
2.	*Drawing*
	Holds crayon in fist
	Scribbles more spontaneously
	Imitates vertical and circular strokes
3.	*Form boards/puzzles*
	Correctly inserts all large-sized pieces when forms are presented opposite to the correct place
4.	*Picture books*
	Turns the pages of books or magazine one by one. Points to pictures. Names some pictures
5.	*Feeding*
	Holds spoon with thumb and fingers – palms up or with over hand grasp
	Holds glass of milk securely, often with one hand, but with the other hand ready to help

(continued)

6.	*Dressing*
	Pulls on simple articles of clothing: socks, hat
	Removes shoes but often needs help with laces
	Cooperates well in dressing, standing, turning, putting out arms or legs, etc.
Language skills (18–24 months)	
	Names objects and pictures upon request
	Two-word combinations occur, may be quickly followed by three-, four- and five-word utterances
	Can follow many one- and two-part commands
Social skills (20–24 months)	
	Plays beside other children, but not with them
	Apt to snatch, push and kick, rather than to give and take in a polite fashion
	Imitates domestic events in play (e.g. putting teddy to bed)

Adapted from: Wabash Centre for the Mentally Retarded, Inc. (1977). *A Guide to Early Developmental Training* (p. 40)

Index

A
Aboriginal approaches to play
  Darn Nudgen Burri, xiii, 81–87, 90
    sense of grace and, 86
  games and, 90
  personal reflections on, 79–82
  playfulness and, xiii, 83, 85, 88–90, 96, 98
  social dimensions of, 11, 83–87
    importance of in cultural communication, 83, 85
Adult-infant play
  conventional social games, 52
  face-to-face interactions, 51–52
  role-play (*see* Role-play)
  social interactions with adults, 52–53
Aquinas, Thomas (Saint), xvii, 3, 248, 250, 253–256
  good and bad play habits and, 254–255
Aristotle
  eutrapelia, 3, 255
  functions of human soul and, 249
  Nicomachean Ethics, 3, 248, 249

B
Bakhtin, Mikhail, 135, 140
Barad, Karen, 2, 207, 211, 215
Bateson, Gregory, viii, xiii, xiv, 51, 88
Baudrillard, Jean, x, 272, 273, 276
Blyton, Enid, xiv, 121
Brown, Bill, 68, 69, 138, 145, 154, 164
Burman, Erica, 2, 13, 14, 17, 18
Bush toys, 87

C
Caillois, Roger, x, xvii, 252
  charcteristics of play, 252
Canella, Gail, 17
Child development. *See also* Human development
  dynamic aspects of, 40–41
  dynamic systems theory, 15
  language development, 184, 281–283
  link with social and cultural upbringing, 184
  Piagetian stages of, 13, 15, 17, 28, 44
  zone of proximal development, 14, 16, 184, 219, 220, 228
Child development and play. *See also* Early childhood and play
  adult-infant play (*see* Adult-infant play)
  brain development and, 96
  face-to-face play, xiii, 51–52
  functional play, xiii, 46, 48–50
  game-play, xiii, 142, 148
  imaginary situations and, 14, 113, 115, 121, 122, 125, 219, 220, 227
  imaginative play and, 14, 66, 87, 134, 135
  learning capacity and, 94, 96, 101–103
  object directed play (*see* Object focus play)
  person-directed play, xiii, 51
  play based learning and, vii, 69, 95, 101, 164, 181–201, 228
  social focus, three stage pattern in, 40, 50–51

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Children's games
digital technology use study
integration of spontaneous activity and fantasy play, 241, 243
interplay of people, objects and play, 234–241
fantasy or pretend play, xvi, 232
game events, 232
objects in pretence activities, 233
use of, 232, 233
Children's learning and play
research and scholarship
underpinnings of, 94–95
risk and, 102
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 132, 136
Consumerism and play, xi, 257, 258, 261
The Lego Movie and (*see Lego Movie, The*)
Consumerist play
consumerist goods and services and, 258
definition of, 258
human well-being and, 259–262
immaterial labour and, 267
nature of, xvii, 257–259
Courcoult, Jean-Luc, ix, x
Creative play
formlessness, xii, 17, 26, 28, 32–36
holding environment, viii, 17, 26, 32–36
role of in university, 152, 153
unintegration (*see* Unintegration)
Creative writing, 137, 138, 153, 159
Creativity, x, xiv, xix, 4, 11, 25, 27, 30, 35, 66, 67, 72, 75, 90, 93–95, 97–99, 115, 116, 130, 133, 142, 152, 153, 160, 164, 165, 176, 177, 194, 253, 260, 261, 263, 265, 267, 268, 271, 274
Csikszentmihalyi, Mihalyi, x, 13, 43, 70, 84, 102, 136, 151, 152, 165, 167, 176
Flow: The Psychology of Optimum Experience, 136

D
Darn Nudgen Burri, xiii, 81–87, 90
sense of grace and, 86
Deleuze, Gilles, x, xvi, 207–210, 214
Developmental psychology and play character characteristics. *See* Play characteristics, developmental psychology and
Dewey, John, 7, 85
Digital technology. *See* Technology
Drama
distinction from role-play, 9
relationship to play, 2, 85, 114–115
Drama pedagogy. *See also* Role-play
learning from, 125–126
Shakespearian extracts and primary school children, 116–120
Dramatization, 114, 115, 121
Dressing-up, 9, 210

E
Early childhood and play. *See also* Child development and play
developmental functions and, 43
exploration *vs.* play, 43–44
object focus and, xii, 44–46
relational play, 46
stereotypical play, 46
symbolic play, 47
Early childhood education and care
current Australian context, 67–68
current challenges in, 68–69
historical and philosophical perspectives of play in, xiii, 62–64
nature of spiritual encounters in, 62, 65–67
play and play-objects in, 217–219 (*see also* Toys)
play-learning child' and, 63, 67
role-play in (*see* Role-play)
Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), 66–68, 185
Education
application of Winnicott's theories to, 35–36
decline of outdoor education, 97
early childhood (*see* Early childhood education and care)
importance of play in, 95–96
playfulness in (*see* Playfulness in education)
primary school pedagogy (*see* Primary school pedagogy)
secondary (*see* Secondary education)
tertiary (*see* University)
English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners, 182, 184, 185
components to acquisition of new dialect, 185
Erikson, Erik, 64, 132
Eudemonia, xvii, 247–251
Eutrapelia, 3, 255
EYLF. *See* Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

F
Facilitation of playful engagement
adult/teacher involvement in imaginary role play, 13
potentially at-risk primary students (*see* Play-based learning)
secondary education and (*see* Secondary education)
university undergraduates and (*see* University)
Fan works and engagement, 275, 276
Flexible toleration, xii, 28
Flow
literature classrooms and, 136, 137, 141–147
playful learning and, 174–177
Formlessness, xii, 17, 26, 28, 32–36. *See also* Playing in the in-between
Little Kitten case study, 33–35
Frankfurt school, 258, 269
Freire, Paulo
Pedagogy of Hope, xv, 181–201
Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 182, 198
Freud, Sigmund, 137, 138, 142
"On Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," 137
Froebel, Friedrich, 10, 131
Education of Man, 10
Fromm, Erich, 269, 270
virile machine, 269, 270
Fuzzy goals, 154

G
Gadamer, Hans-Georg, xvii, 251–253
Truth and Method, 251
Games. *See also* Children's games
Aboriginal approaches to play and, xiii, 79–90
convergent phase, 159
emergent phase, 157–159
as journey, 155–159
Gamestorming, xiv, 151–160
process of, 156, 157
Gender and play
deterritorialization and, 214
disruption of binary gender concepts, 208, 211
intra-act between, xvi, 207
lines of flight and, xvi, 207, 212–215
territorialization and, 207, 209
Gender, intra-action with play
de-territorializing movements, 207, 209–210, 213, 215
distribution of potentials, 209
molecular movement, 209
stories from Trollet, Sweden, 210–214
territorializing movements, 208–209
Good and bad play habits
basic rules of identification of, 255
characteristics of, 256
consumerist play and, 247–263
Good enough environmental provision, 29

H
Haecceity, 210, 211, 213
Holding environment, viii, xii, 17, 26, 32–36
Huizinga, Johan
characteristics of play, 166, 171, 177, 252
critiques of, 252
Homo Ludens, 4, 154, 166, 268, 271
mythopoesis, 134
Human development. *See also* Child development
formlessness, 26, 28
good enough environmental provision, 29
holding environment (*see* Holding environment)
potential space, 26–28, 30–32, 36
third zone, 26–33, 36
transitional phenomenon, 27
unintegration (*see* Unintegration)
Human well-being. *See* Well-being
Hursthouse, Rosalind, 247, 248, 250
Husserl, Edmund, 6

I
Intra-active play encounters. *See* Gender, intra-action with play
Irish Neighbourhood Play Research Project, xiii, 94, 96–100

K
Kant, Immanuel, 13, 132, 136
Key learning areas (KLAs), 190, 194
Knowledge workers, 152, 154, 160. *See also* Work

L
Lambert, E. Beverley, 11, 14, 15
Lego bricks
'narrativised,' 274
strength of, 266
value of play represented, 266
'virtualisation,' 274

Lego Group
creative energy of fans and, 267
future of play and, 265–277
Lego Education, xvii, 266
Lego Serious Education, 266
managed play and, 266, 268
political action against, 276
Lego Movie, The
fan works and engagement, 275, 276
slash pairings, 275
as mode of advertising, 273–275
play as mode of creative accumulation in, 265–277
purchasing power of adults and, 273
structured and unstructured play in, 272
Lila, 15, 18
Literature classroom
'faithful perceiving' and, 139
flow and, 136–139
free association, 142
inherent playfulness in, 136
playing games in
aesthetic immersion, 144–145
automatic response, 142–143
coupage, 144
creative marriage, 147
Exquisite Text I to Exquisite Text III, 143–144
find the question, 146–147
transitional objects, xii, 145–146
reading and, 134
relationship to play, 136–139
Locke, John, 10
Love of learning, 94, 96, 99, 102

M
Marx, Karl, 257, 258, 269
'metabolism of the human animal,' 257
Mediatisation, 274
Modders, 267
Montessori, Maria, 63, 64, 96, 99
Mythopoesis, 134

N
Nagel, Mechthild, 4, 62, 64
National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numercay (NAPLAN), 69, 182, 183, 191, 195–197

O
Object focus play
object-mediated dyadic play, 46–47
relational acts, 45, 46
stereotypical play, 45, 46
symbolic play, 42, 47
toys (*see* Toys)

P
Parents
play-based learning and, 69, 95, 101, 164, 181–201, 228
view of play, 185
Pedagogy of hope, 181–201
Pellegrini, A. D., 7, 113, 132
Piaget, Jean
developmental theory of play
practice play, 41–42
symbolic play, 42
stages of child development, 39–55
Pieper, Josef, 3, 8, 84
Leisure: The Basis of Culture, 84
Plato, 3, 19, 62, 131
Play
Aboriginal approaches to (*see* Aboriginal approaches to play)
adult-infant (*see* Adult-infant play)
adults and, 5, 18, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 51, 112, 113, 126, 134, 136–138, 148
animal, 4, 81, 89, 190, 212, 249, 251–253, 256
assessment of, 53
as basis of culture, 252
businesses and, 154, 155
characteristics of, 5, 6, 8, 9, 39–40, 166, 171, 176, 177, 227, 252
childhood knowledge development and, 100
commodification of, 274
connection to spirituality (*see* Spirituality)
consumerism and (*see* Consumerism and play)
consumerist (*see* Consumerist play)
as creating order, 8–9
creative (*see* Creative play)
creative evolution and, 210
creative living and, 10, 26, 27, 30, 31, 35, 36
creativity and, 27
as cultural phenomenon, 4, 217–228
definition of, 3–5
definitive characteristics of, 5, 6
developmental theories of (*see* Theories of play)
development of human relationships and, 15
drama and, 2, 85, 114–115
dramatic, 6, 7, 34, 112, 234
as dynamic phenomenon, 3

early childhood and (*see* Early childhood and play)
early childhood education and care and (*see* Early childhood education and care)
essential characteristics of, developmental psychology and (*see* Play characteristics, developmental psychology and)
exploration *versus,* 43–44
fragility of, 8
free, 96–98, 125, 132, 153, 157, 158, 261
freedom for, 97
functional, 46, 48–50
as function of all animal life, 251
fuzzy goals and, 154
gender and play, 207, 210
good and bad habits of, 251, 253–257
human, 7, 251–253, 259
imaginative, 14, 66, 87, 134
importance of, 63, 79, 89, 95–96, 131, 218
during infancy, child development and (*see* Child development and play)
innovation and, 94, 154, 187, 209, 272
intra-action with gender (*see* Gender, intra-action with play)
literature classroom and, 136, 137, 141–147
make-believe, 116, 132, 135, 252
managed, 266, 268
manipulation of objects during (*see* Object focus)
meaning of, 253
as mode of advertising, 273–275
as mode of creative accumulation, 268–273
in the modern world, 96–100
moral dimension of, 253, 254
nature of, 5, 15, 16, 26, 61, 65, 70–74, 251–253
neither 'ordinary' or 'real,' 6–7
object focus (*see* Object focus play)
parental view of, 185
as pedagogical tool, 133
person-directed, 49, 51
Piagetian treatment of, 13, 15, 17, 28, 44
pretend, 48, 54, 95, 227, 231–243
primary school pedagogy and (*see* Primary school pedagogy)
putting play back into, 277
relational, 46
relationship to drama, 2, 85, 114–115
relationship to virtue ethics (*see* Virtue ethics and play)
right to, 69, 218
risk and, 102
role-play (*see* Role-play)
Sanskrit concept of (*see Lila*)
secluded or limited nature of, 5, 7
as self-representation, 251
sense of grace in, 18, 86
sociability and, 89, 233, 249, 250, 252, 253
societal view of, 69, 105
socio-cultural aspects of, 40
spirituality and (*see* Spirituality)
spontaneous, 30 (*see also* Children's games)
stereotypical, 45, 46
structured, 13, 132
as style, 271
as surrounded with secrecy, 9–10
symbolic, 12, 41, 42, 45, 47, 48
technology and (*see* Technology and play)
theories of (*see* Theories of play)
toys and (*see* Toys)
use of objects in (*see* Play objects)
value of, 14, 16, 17, 54, 71, 93–105, 185, 266
vices of, 254–257
virtue of, 255, 256
virtuous, 256
voluntary nature of, 5, 167
well-being and, 18, 19, 25, 62, 67, 69, 86, 247–263
as work, 266, 268
work and, 62
Play-based learning
benefits of, 186
child development and, 96
compared and contrasted with traditional teaching, 199–200
parents and, 185
pedagogy, 95, 181–201
place in formal curricula, 185
potentially at-risk primary students and, 181–201
qualitative research study into
acquisition of 21st century skills, 193–195
child-driven content, 195
children's engagement, 192
context of, 182–183
definition of play-based learning and, 187
heightened social skills, 193
improved attendance levels, 191–193, 198
literacy and numeracy results, 195–196
Phase One to Phase Four, 188–191
teachers and, 103–105, 185, 187, 190

Play-based learning (*cont.*)
value of, 93–105
virtue ethics and (*see* Virtue ethics and play)
work as, 266, 268
Playbour, 267
Play characteristics, developmental psychology and, 39–40
Playful educational spaces. *See also* Playfulness in education
for adolescents, 165, 168, 176, 178
application of characteristics of play, 167
architectural perspective
study findings, 170–177
study methodology, 168–170
differences to play spaces, 166
rejection of by senior students, 176
role of teacher as facilitator in, 199
special characteristics of, 166
as 'third teacher,' 167
Playful engagement, 13, 16, 19, 28, 35, 176
facilitation of (*see* Facilitation of playful engagement)
Playful learning
association with 'fun,' 17, 166, 167, 175, 176
definition, 166
flow and, 136–139
general factors contributing to, 174–175
intersection with serious learning, 167
perception of, 175–177
role of teacher in, 199
spaces (*see* Playful educational spaces)
Playfulness, vii–ix, xiii, xiv, 2, 7, 13, 83, 85, 88–90, 96, 98, 114, 129, 136, 140, 164, 177, 178, 267, 273, 276
Aboriginal culture and, 81, 86, 88–90
Playfulness in education. *See also* Playful educational spaces
research into, 164, 165
voluntary nature of play and, 5
Playful pedagogy, xiv, 104, 131–134
Playful teaching, 134, 136, 137, 148
non-coercive, 140, 142
Playing in the in-between, 26, 31, 34–36
Play objects. *See also* Toys
in children's pretence activities, 233
cognitive and linguistic capabilities and, 67
empirical study into
creation of cultural play scripts in communication about, 221–227
implications and conclusions, 227–228
structure of play and communication and, 227
transitional, 26–28, 129, 138, 145–146 (*see also* Theory of the transitional object)
used to establish play, 217–219
Play spaces. *See also* Playful educational spaces
outdoor, opportunities for secrecy and, 9
workplaces, 166
Playworld. *See also* Drama pedagogy
borders and, 115
children's play, 36, 40, 62, 64, 67, 70, 71, 73, 94, 102, 112–115, 121, 125, 126, 215, 217, 220
play actions, 113, 115
as foundation for children's play and drama, 114–115
pre-school children, cultural development and
being a spider, 121, 123–125
inside a drop of water, 121–123
The wishing chair, 121–123
teacher perspective, 114
Potentially at-risk primary students. *See* Play-based learning
Potential space, 26–28, 30–32, 36
Primary school pedagogy
components of, 100–103
freedom for play, 94, 95, 97, 100, 102, 103, 105
love of learning and, 94, 96, 99, 102
play-based learning (*see* Play-based learning)
possibility thinking, 101
principle of extension, 102
role of teacher
main aspects of, 103
reflection on sense of time, 104
role-play (*see* Role-play)
sensory integration, 100, 102, 103
Proud, Denise, xiii, 26, 79–87, 89, 90

R
Rahner, Hugo, 3, 8
Role-play. *See also* Drama pedagogy
central concepts of, 114
character creation in, 119
characteristics of successful adult intervention in, 126
connections to dramatization, 114, 115, 121
cultural-historical perspectives of, 112–113
distinction from drama, 116
drama pedagogy and, 111–126

playworld (*see* Playworld)
relationship to performing art, 112, 115–116

S

Schutz, Alfred, 6, 7
Secondary education
playful educational spaces in (*see* Playful educational spaces)
self-directed and collaborative learning spaces, 168, 170
Self, ix, xi, xiii, xv, xviiii, 12, 18, 19, 27, 31–33, 48, 62, 64–67, 70–74, 82, 145, 198, 209, 211, 282–284
Shakespeare, William, xiv, 112, 116–120, 125, 126, 135
Smith, Linda, x, 10–16
Spirituality
definition of, 65
early childhood education and care and (*see* Early childhood education and care)
Steiner, Rudolf, 63, 96, 99
Suits, Bernard, 252
Sutton-Smith, Brian, x, 4, 62, 96, 132, 135
The Ambiguity of Play, 135

T

Teachers
awareness and knowledge of, early childhood education and, 218
in background of children's play, 217
as facilitators in playful educational spaces, 167, 196, 199
imaginary role-play and, 121
play-based learning and, 103–105, 185, 187, 190
playful learning and, 167, 174
playworld and, 114
primary school pedagogy and, 103–105
'third,' 167
Technology and play
children's games use study, 232–133
interaction between, 3
playful learning and, 166
Tertiary education. *See* University
Thelen, Ester, x, xii, 10–16
Theories of play
cultural-historical, 219
developmental
Csikszentmihalyi, 43
Froebel, 10
Lambert, 11, 14, 15
Piaget (*see* Piaget)
postconstructuralist critiques of, 17–18
reconsideration of, 2
Smith, 10–16
Thelen, 10–16
Vygotsky, 10–16
Winnicott, 25–28
philosophical and socio-historical perspectives
Dewey, 7, 85
Huizinga, 3–5
Nagel, 4
Pellegrini, 7
Schutz, 6, 7
Sutton-Smith, x, 4
post Piagetian, 42–43
Theory of the transitional object, 26
'Thing Theory,' 138
Third zone, xii, 26–33, 36
Thomas, Calvin, 3, 140, 248, 250, 253–256
Townsend-Cross, Marcelle, 83–85, 87
Toy companies, 273, 274
cycle of hyperconsumption and, 274
Toys. *See also* Play objects
in Aboriginal contexts, 87–90 (*see also* Bush toys)
infants and toddlers and, 40, 41, 54
Lego bricks (*see* Lego bricks)
mediatisation of, 274
socialisation in early education practice and, 218
Transitional object, xii, 26–28, 138, 145–146
Transitional phenomenon, 27

U

Unintegration
adults and, 26, 31, 32, 36
association with enlivening aspects of play, 32
concept of, 31–32
development of human relationships and, 26, 28
University. *See also* Playful teaching
Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation
'beautiful questions,' xv, 157, 158
'examining questions,' 158
exploration, 154, 158
creative play in, 151–160
creativity and, 164–165

University (*cont.*)
literature studies, 129–148 (*see also* Literature classroom)
play and, 151–160
playful pedagogy and, 104, 131–134
research on, 134
'sticky environments,' 164

V

Vices in play habits, 250–251, 254–257
characteristics of, 250–251
Virile machine, 269, 270
Virtue ethics
eudemonia and, 247–248
general overview of, 247–248
primary point of, 248
Virtue ethics and play
consumerist play and (*see* Consumerist play)
eudemonia and, 247–248
good and bad habits of play and, 251, 253–257
identification of, 255
moral dimensions and, 253, 254
Virtues
cardinal, 249
definition, 3, 248
nature of, 250
sociability and, 249, 250, 252, 253
vices as mirror contraries to, 250
Virtuous play, 256
characteristics of, 256
Vygotsky, Lev, x, xii, xiv, xvi, 2, 10–17, 39, 42, 64, 73, 95, 96, 113, 115, 116, 120, 125, 131, 132, 184, 187, 218–220, 222, 227, 228
ZPD, 14, 16, 184, 219, 220, 228

W

Weber, Max, 62, 154
Well-being. *See also* Eudemonia
consumerist play and, xvii, 247–263
play and, 247–263
Winnicott, Donald. *See also* Early childhood and play
applications of theories to education, 35–36
Playing and Reality, 26, 72, 138
Woolf, Virginia, 135, 145
Work, x–xix, 2–4, 11–18, 25–36, 40, 41, 43, 54, 62, 64, 68, 70, 72, 84, 98, 100, 105, 114, 119–121, 125, 130–132, 135, 137, 139, 143–146, 148, 152–154, 157, 164, 166, 171, 175, 176, 182, 183, 191, 193–196, 199, 208–211, 220, 226, 227, 236, 239, 248, 249, 251, 252, 266–268, 274–277. *See also* Knowledge workers

Z

Zone of proximal development (ZPD), 14, 16, 184, 219, 220, 228