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

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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 play-world '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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