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Early Childhood Pedagogical Play

A Cultural-Historical Interpretation Using Visual Methodology

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Foreword

One of the most intriguing characteristics of the development of humanity is its capacity to adapt to changing physical and cultural environments. The plasticity of the human brain in response to current experiences and environmental constraints is now an established fact in educational science. This discovery underpins the power of the environment for human development as a source of experiences that may influence the development of neurological structures. More than ever, this also highlights the question of *which* environments should be created in order to promote optimal flourishing of human beings from the early days of their existence.

This latter question has puzzled academics for more than 20 centuries. In his dialogue on 'The Republic', Plato assertively claimed that for young children, it does not make much sense to impose experiences compulsively onto them in order to promote their learning for future development. 'Enforced learning will not stay in the mind', he says. He advised: 'Avoid compulsion and let your children's lessons take the form of play' (Plato, *The Republic*, vii, 536). For Plato, there was a pedagogical assumption underlying this claim as he supposed that the freedom of play would be the optimal condition for selecting those persons who benefit most from the freedom in play. Pedagogical values, nowadays, would not anymore support such Platonic hidden curriculum in play, but rather conceive of play and its dimension of freedom as a condition for becoming human and a political being (like the German philosopher Schiller suggested 18 centuries after Plato), or for meaningful learning, making sense and developing creative agency.

All these marvellous promises of play as a context for building experiences and promoting learning are nowadays still greeted by many educators. It is, however, not always clear on what grounds such claims are held. It often looks like a matter of belief, ideology or—as Brian Sutton-Smith once named it—'rhetorics' to assume that play is the child's natural way of existence and productive learning. And even though there is a growing body of evidence showing that play can produce culturally meaningful learning outcomes, this does not yet clarify the dynamics of play and playful learning, let alone bring the hidden pedagogical assumptions underlying the rhetorics into the open.

In order to escape from this dead end, play researchers need to invest more in developing a theory of play that can account for the pedagogical values involved, and how they work out on free play and learning and, at the same time, how they can be reconciled with situational demands and mandatory cultural influences without destroying the nature of play (as defined in the theory). In my view, it is a great contribution of the present book to focus on re-theorizing play from a *pedagogical* point of view. In such an approach attention must be given to the child's own feelings and perspectives on (cultural) activities, but also to the influence of modernity on play activity (as in the introduction of digital tools in play). The only way to solve these problems is by consistently and publicly theorizing how to conceptualize play. Early Childhood Pedagogical Play offers this challenge of re-theorizing play and takes a step ahead in understanding play and implementing playful learning in educational practices.

Bert van Oers
VU University Amsterdam

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Contents

1 Introduction 1
1.1 Why Use Cultural Historical Theory for Re-theorising Play? 2
References 3

2 Re-theorising Play as Pedagogical 5
2.1 Introduction 5
2.2 Why Use Cultural-Historical Theory Today? 7
2.3 Political Landscape of Play 8
2.4 Cultural-Historical Conceptualisation of Play 9
2.5 Contemporary Theories of Play: Towards More Unified Opportunities for Learning 11
2.6 Re-theorising Play as Pedagogical Play 12
2.7 Conclusion 14
References 14

3 Examining Play from the Child's Perspective 17
3.1 Introduction 17
3.2 What Do We Mean by the Child's Perspective? 18
3.3 Why Examine Play from the Child's Perspective? 19
3.4 Play—Work Dichotomy: Do Children Still Play? 21
3.5 Reciprocity in Play 22
3.6 Shared Intentions and the Child's Perspective 23
3.7 Play as a Way of Interpreting the Child's World 24
3.8 Role of Adult in Taking Child's Perspective 26
3.9 The Child's Perspective on Worksheets 28
3.10 Conclusion 30
References 30

4 Sustained Shared Thinking in Pedagogical Play 33
4.1 Introduction 34
4.2 What Do We Mean by Sustained Shared Thinking in Children's Play? 34
4.3 The Imagined Play in the Conversation 36
4.4 Joining Children's Play to Use Sustained Shared Thinking as a Pedagogical Tool 38
4.5 The Imaginary Situation and Playful Events 38
4.6 The 'Sustained Shared Thinking' in Children's Play 39
4.7 Adult's Imagination in Baby's Play 40
4.8 The 'Conceptual Reciprocity' in Sustained Shared Thinking 41
4.9 Interactive Support Within the Zone of Proximal Development . . . 42
4.10 Missed Opportunities to Sustain Shared Thought 42
4.11 Conclusion 44
References 45

5 Dimensions of Play Activity 47
5.1 Introduction 48
5.2 Dimensions of Play Activity 48
5.3 Dimension of Play Activity: Affective Attunement 49
5.4 Dimensions of Infant Playfulness 52
5.5 Dimension of Play Activity: Exchange with Human and Non-human Faces 56
5.6 Dimension of Play Activity: Affective Engagement 57
5.7 Affective Engagement Through Symbolic Gesture 63
5.8 Conclusion 67
References 68

6 Play Affordances Across Institutional Contexts 69
6.1 Introduction 70
6.2 The 'Poem Chair' Game 71
6.3 Supporting Children's Learning in Play 73
6.4 Generating Children's Learning Motives in Play from Children's Perspective 73
6.5 Skipping Play 74
6.6 Pedagogical and Playful Affordances of Skipping 75
6.7 Social and Cultural Engagement 76
6.8 Affordances from Skipping—Instructing Family 76
6.9 Skipping Teacher Role 77
6.10 Play Affordances Through Growth and Change 79
6.11 Affordance Complexity 80
6.12 Telenovela Experience Across Institutions 81
6.13 Telenovela in the Family Institution 82
6.14 Telenovela at Preschool Institution 82

6.15 Emotional Attitudes Developed in a Telenovela Play Performance . . . 83
6.16 Agentic Imagination in a Telenovela Play Performance . . . 83
6.17 Primary School as a Site for Playful Affordances . . . 86
6.18 Conclusion . . . 90
References . . . 91

7 Imagination in Play: Space and Artefacts . . . 93
7.1 The Imagination in Children's Play . . . 94
7.2 Real and Imagined Objects in Play Space . . . 100
7.3 Baby's Play Space for Imagination . . . 101
7.4 Creating Play Space from the Child's Perspective . . . 102
7.5 Play Space and Artefacts Affording Agentic Imagination Between Baby and Adults . . . 103
7.6 Possibilities for Educator's Expansion of Agentic Imagination . . . 104
7.7 Agentic Imagination in Play Space . . . 108
7.8 Play Space and the Imaginary Situation . . . 112
7.9 Agentic Imagination in the Market Play Space . . . 113
7.10 The Rich Play Dialogue and the Broad Play Space . . . 114
7.11 Conclusion . . . 115
References . . . 116

8 In the Everyday Moments of Play . . . 117
8.1 Everyday Moments Recalled: Drawing a Play Memory . . . 118
8.2 Imaginative Moments in Play Memories . . . 118
8.3 Embodied and Sensory/Affective Moments in Play Memories . . . 120
8.4 Everyday "Pedagogical Play *Momentitos*" Captured Through Digital Visual Technologies . . . 121
8.5 Recognising Productive Moments—A Parent Educator . . . 122
8.6 A Whole Day of 'Everyday' Moments . . . 125
8.7 Conclusion . . . 129
References . . . 130

9 Recognising Cultural Influences in Play . . . 131
9.1 Dialogue Commentary . . . 132
9.2 Cultural-Historical Analysis Using Authors' Perspectives . . . 133
9.3 Recognising What Culture Means to Children in Their Play . . . 137
9.4 Cultural Awareness in a Toddler's Play . . . 138
9.5 Cultural Affectiveness Embedded in Agentic Imagination . . . 142
9.6 Cultural Influences in Community and Family Play . . . 143
9.7 Planning a Cultural Project . . . 145
9.8 Constructive Play . . . 147

9.9 Cultural and Pedagogical Play Affordances at the Bushland Creek 149
9.10 Conclusion 153
References 153

10 Contemporary Interpretations of Pedagogical Play 155
10.1 Baby/Infant Pedagogical Play—Conceptual Reciprocity 156
10.2 Conceptual Reciprocity and Agentic Imagination Between Infants 158
10.3 Technology Play: Historical Perspectives of Child, Parent and Grandparent 164
10.4 Playing Together Over Time 164
10.5 Representing Holiday Park Experiences 166
10.6 Creating the Possibility of Agentic Imagination in the Preschoolers' Play 169
10.7 Agentic Imagination with Eucalyptus Leaves in China and Australia 171
10.8 Cultural and Community Play 173
10.9 Discussion of Agentic Imagination in Pedagogical Play 177
10.10 Conclusion 179
References 179

Glossary 181

Subject Index 183

Chapter 1
Introduction

Abstract As three co-authoring academics from different cultural backgrounds, (Liang Li from China, Gloria Quiñones from Mexico, and Avis Ridgway from Australia) we find combining our different experiences and perspectives gives us courage to develop new ideas that can support making sense of the contradictions and commonalities we encounter in our field of research: early childhood pedagogy and play. Combining research endeavors and interests through our documented narratives of lived experiences, brings inventive energy to this book. By working together in this way we embrace the pedagogical value of play from different cultural and social histories, acknowledge that play has many purposes for children and thereby open the opportunity for re-theorisation.

Keywords Co-authoring · China, Mexico, Australia · Cultural and social histories · Documented narratives · Pedagogy and play · Conceptual reciprocity

We use and acknowledge our doctoral research (Li 2012; Quiñones 2013; Ridgway 2010b) and lived experiences as early childhood education researchers, tertiary educators and parents, to illuminate and illustrate issues we meet in relation to re-theorising play. We frame our research with original readings of cultural historical theory: (Vygotsky 1929, 1966, 1978, 1987, 1994, 1998, 2004) and later expansions (Kravtsov and Kravtsova 2008, 2009; Fleer 2010, 2013; Li 2012, 2013; Quiñones and Fleer 2011; Quiñones 2013; Ridgway 2010a; Ridgway and Quinones 2012).

Dahlberg and Moss in Taguchi (2010) write about the process of being open to cooperative and collaborative expansion of thought:

> These ideas about thought have consequences for our ideas about quality of life; quality of life comes to mean a way of living that is capable of transforming itself in relation with the forces it meets, always increasing the power and potential to welcome new potentials, opening up for creativity and invention (Dahlberg and Moss xvii cited in Taguchi 2010).

Writing together has been thoughtful, playful and a pedagogical act. We found ideas continuously forming and re-forming in imaginative ways through a process

A. Ridgway et al., *Early Childhood Pedagogical Play*,
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that can only be described as cultural and historical alchemy that crystallized into new conceptualisations of the subject of our research: pedagogy and play. We realise that instead of being thought about separately as '*pedagogy*' (the art and science of education), and '*play*' (variously understood and misunderstood), it is conceptually helpful to think holistically about their relationship, hence we prefer and use the term *pedagogical play* rather than *pedagogy and play*.

1.1 Why Use Cultural Historical Theory for Re-theorising Play?

Our shared scholarship in cultural-historical theory offers us an obvious tool for understanding how learning and playful activity in early childhood are influenced socially, politically, culturally, aesthetically and historically. Scholars of cultural-historical theory (e.g. Lindqvist 2003) see Vygotsky's original work as foundational to understanding play as the source of the child's development of abstract and symbolic thinking (higher mental functions).

> A child learns to consciously recognize his own actions and becomes aware that every object has meaning. From the point of view of development, the fact of creating an imaginary situation can be regarded as a means of developing abstract thought (Vygotsky 1966, p. 17).

Vygotskian scholars bring their own interpretative skills to expand on Vygotsky's original works and this is why re-theorising is so important for advancing contemporary thinking about pedagogy and play in early childhood education (van Oers 1999). Cultural historical theory provides us with an interpretative and experimental space and freedom to re-theorise pedagogy and play in contemporary early childhood education which, for us, embraces the upbringing of young children from birth to eight years. In addition, we keep in mind the demands of relevant framework documents provided through governance structures.

In our research with young children we always take the perspective that children are clever.

Hans Christian Andersen, Danish author of many fairy tales and famous for his literary imagination, writes in 'The Philosopher's Stone':

> Like all children they loved to hear stories related to them, and their father told them many things which other children would not have understood; but these were as clever as most grown up people are among us (Owens 1996, p. 295).

There are many surprises in *Early Childhood Pedagogical Play*. We take a special interest in babyhood and toddler years and include narrative examples covering the whole early childhood period (birth to eight). In Chap. 10 the playful activity of two babies is closely recorded. Their numerous playful exchanges are used to begin theorisation of *conceptual reciprocity* as a starting point for learning about and developing friendship. We frequently examine play from the child's

perspective throughout this book and it culminates with an illustrative conceptual diagram to support our experiences of re-theorising play.

In examining play from a child's perspective through rich examples, our contemporary conceptualisations of pedagogical play are brought to life. As the following chapters unfold we invite all concerned with early childhood education to re-theorise the kinds of habitual play pedagogy present in familiar notions such as free-play, maturational play, or themed play. Our research shows that when play is framed pedagogically children's learning is evident throughout early childhood.

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Chapter 2
Re-theorising Play as Pedagogical

Abstract *Early Childhood Pedagogical Play* re-theorizes the relationship of pedagogy and play as *pedagogical play* which we suggest is characterised by *conceptual reciprocity* (a pedagogical approach for supporting children's academic learning through joint play) and *agentic imagination* (a concept that when present in play, affords the child's motives and imagination, a critical role in learning and development). We bring these new concepts to life using a cultural-historical approach to analysis of play, supported in each chapter by the use of case studies with visual narratives used as a research method for re-theorising play as being pedagogical.

Keywords Conceptual reciprocity · Agentic imagination · Culturally diverse · Playful event · Role play · Play theorists · Institutional practices · Political landscape of play

2.1 Introduction

At this point we draw attention to the Chap. 2 illustration because it represents our cultural-historical approach in action; an approach that involves accounting for inclusive and culturally diverse thinking. Being three authors writing together, we use widely varied examples, including transcripts and visual images from our original research, to narrate, illustrate and support our analysis of play as learning. In the process of collaboratively writing each chapter of this book, the multiple perspectives represented in the illustration lead us to discuss the following question: What is a cultural-historical approach to analysing pedagogical play?

A. Ridgway et al., *Early Childhood Pedagogical Play*,
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When a cultural-historical approach is applied to understanding pedagogical play we always include the whole context of a playful event. We *acknowledge the presence of the child's cultural context in order to bring better understanding of their play.* Children from different countries, will play differently for many reasons that may include levels of provision of resources, local cultural beliefs about play and specific pedagogical practices. The inclusion and acknowledgement of social, cultural and historical contexts gives viability and value to understanding play from both child and adult perspectives which we believe is important for the child's learning and development. In our thinking about pedagogical play we also include the relationships that children and adults have with human and non human others and any connections with artefacts and the material environment.

Over the last decade notable cultural-historical scholars including (Elkonin 2005a, b; Kravtsova 2008; Hedegaard 2005, 2008; Gonzalez Rey 2011; Fleer 2010; van Oers 2013a) inspired by Vygotsky's translated works (1929, 1966a, 1978, 1987, 1994, 1998, 2004) have each turned their research attention to matters around young children's learning and development. It is interesting to note that Vygotsky's theories were formed in a period of great social change that followed the Russian Revolution of 1917. In this time Vygotsky immersed himself in an intellectual and cultural life where his ideas were expressed and exchanged with European and Western cultures. This was also the time of great cultural richness and intellectual flowering in Russia, a time in fact, when Pasternak created poetry, Shostakovich composed, Chagall painted, Diagliev danced, Eisenstein filmed, Pavlov researched stimulus-response in dogs, Nabokov produced novels and Vygotsky proposed his theory of social formation of mind. The growing impact of Vygotsky's legacy and the historical relevance of his work have been written about by many scholars including Cole (1995), Edwards and D'Arcy (2004) and Veresov (2006). Vygotsky's work is based on the application of the Marxist dialectical historical material approach, which focuses on the historical, cultural and social roots of cognition and emotion development, asserting that a person's development must be effective within the cultural-historical environment.

Taking a cultural-historical approach to the task of re-theorising play as pedagogical also means accounting for different environments, cultural beliefs and the effect and affect of these on children's learning and development. Bert van Oers has focused for example on pedagogical value in playful activity. His work showed effective learning in early childhood as being a characteristic of shared playful activity (van Oers 2013a, b). Van Oers re-conceptualised role-play on the basis of cultural-historical theory, rejecting developmentalism and proposed the relevance of role play for cultural development. He urged educators to guide young children, encourage choices and question themselves as to what is the best they can offer to children in their professional work. In order to emphasize the important pedagogical value of educators and children playing in roles (where personal and social rules may be enacted), van Oers also brought attention to the notion of *degrees of freedom* evident in choices made when a role is being played. He showed that playful activity involved negotiation between participants and any negotiation can be a site for pedagogical opportunity.

In thinking about playful activity he wrote:

> it is definitely important to study both adults' and children's perspectives on activities that are theoretically construed as play. In particular, further studies are needed on how decisions and evaluations of rules, allowed degrees of freedom, and involvement are negotiated, both by adults and children (van Oers 2013b, p. 196).

Hedegaard et al. (2012) represent examples of cultural-historical scholars whose research builds on the seminal work of Russian scholar Lev Vygotsky (1896–1938). Hedegaard et al. (2012) found in their research (particularly with children from immigrant families), that learning happens when activities change the social relations in a pedagogical practice and thereby give further possibilities for new activities. She takes the view that development occurs when learning takes place across different institutional practices (and this includes the home as a place of 'institutional practices') and qualitatively changes the relations in all practices the child has participated in. When using a cultural-historical approach in research we look for the changes in context and relations evident in children's play activity in order to find where and if learning happens.

2.2 Why Use Cultural-Historical Theory Today?

One of the strong reasons for using cultural-historical theory is that it is not a reductive or static theory but renewable and expansive. Cultural-historical theory has conceptualized human development in relational and open-ended terms, and this, represents a fresh world-view for research into child development.

The intention of this book is to take a cultural-historical approach to thinking about play and learning. It became clear in our research that learning, as Vygotsky (1978) had proposed, was much more than a process that took place in individual minds; it was a social phenomenon based in the external circumstances of the child's everyday life and times.

Vygotsky argued that the dynamic developmental process resulted from the individual's interactions in the social and cultural context, which is the fundamental difference between human beings and animals (Minick 1987). The social interaction is a key concept of a cultural-historical approach. At times, visual narratives are used throughout this book to help illustrate children's social interaction with others in play and develop our analysis of children's play experiences in their daily life circumstances including participation across different institutional contexts (home, centre/school, community). Our examples help to re-shape, change, enhance, extend and even transform thinking about pedagogical play in its multi-cultural, multi-layered contexts and complexities, and overcome common misconceptions of what play means for babies, young children, families and educators.

2.3 Political Landscape of Play

We understand that early childhood education is a political endeavour because it always reflects particular values, beliefs, as well as economic and social conditions of its time and place in history. Elkonin (2005a, b) who examined the sources and nature of role-play noted that the origin of role play was social, linked historically to community and family life and the child's place in the everyday activities of that life: '*the nature of children's play can be understood only by relating play to the child's life in society*' (2005a, p. 57). In addition, van Oers (2013c) realised the political context of early childhood when he stated that educators had a pedagogical responsibility in their work, to make choices for quality provision but that tensions would arise in the choices made as '*all educational practices should now be considered basically cultural-political constructions*' (p. 180).

The essence of recent guides and texts for early childhood educators (e.g. Allen and Cowdery 2012), is to encourage early childhood educators to give thought to how children are included and what children are learning in play-based curriculum. In Australia for example, outcomes for children's learning are stated in a mandated framework,—the Early Years Learning Framework—developed by the Australian Government through what was then the Department for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR 2009). In other words, the whole notion of pedagogical play is clearly on the agenda for quality provision of early childhood education.

We read in published support booklets, about different types of play e.g. Role Play (Harries and Raban 2011) and Sensory Play (Gascoyne and Raban 2012). In a series of practice based 'how to' booklets published on 'Play in the Early Years' designed to support Australian educators in reframing their work with a mandated play-based curriculum, we noted an emphasis on elevating the pedagogical role of play. For example readers of 'Role Play' (Harries and Raban 2011, p. 8) are informed that '*Play is not a break from learning, it is learning, and there should be rigour in play which stimulates and challenges children to develop their learning*'. In a similar vein, readers of 'Sensory Play' (Gascoyne and Raban 2012, p. 5) are reminded that '*opportunities for children to actually touch or taste are often discouraged, or limited to plastic*'. In these booklets we find efforts directed at rethinking the role of play in young children's learning.

Re-thinking what pedagogy and play means for developing quality early childhood education and care is on the political agenda in Australia, China, Mexico and elsewhere. Early childhood curriculum changes are occurring globally (e.g. Learning and Teaching Scotland 2010) and in Australia have been brought about by the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR 2009).

Political changes to policy and practice always have consequences for early childhood professionals, pre-service teachers and families who are expected to build new understandings about how play-based curriculum may be enacted in daily interactions with young children. The political landscape clearly makes new demands on educators in the early childhood field to reframe their professional work.

It is important to understand play in contemporary times and to understand play we need to have some knowledge about how it has been theorised in the past. Play is variously interpreted (Wood 2013; Singer 2013; Hedges 2014; Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer 2009) and to illustrate this point we have created a brief summary of past influential play theorists and theories.

Table 2.1 overview has follow up references for detailed information, as our intention is to flesh out the new insights brought by cultural—historical views on play and acknowledge influential play theorists

In an historical overview of the foundations of best practices in early childhood education, Follari (2011), wrote that '*Piaget valued the role of experience as well as the internal processes engaged in by the child on his or her quest to know the world*' (p. 41) but that the work of Vygotsky (1978) has taken researchers '*beyond the theories of Piaget*' (p. 41). Contemporary theories of play are characterised by new cultural-historical approaches to research (Hedegaard 2005; Siraj-Blatchford 2007; Kravtsova 2008; Rogers and Evans 2008; Fleer 2010; Singer 2013; van Oers 2013b) that show how children's play is uncultured and institutionally contextualised and therefore lead to thinking more about the pedagogical relationships that exist in play experiences. The potential for the child's learning is at the heart of our re-theorisation of play as pedagogical.

For a useful summary about defining play we found Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer's work (2009) to be both international in scope, and most comprehensive.

2.4 Cultural-Historical Conceptualisation of Play

In thinking about play in cultural-historical terms, we used Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the *imaginary situation* as being a defining characteristic of all play:

> *… in establishing criteria for distinguishing a child's play from other forms of activity, we conclude that in play a child creates an imaginary situation* (1978, p. 934)

We understand that play for children is a cultural and historical construction and that imagination is present and intact in the highly varied situations and spaces that children find themselves in. In different cultures and spaces, play is understood differently. For example, in a rural community in the north of Mexico children have open spaces and very few resources but they are able to imagine and play with the objects available to them.

In order to discuss the pedagogical play opportunities for educators we need to think more about the value of children's imagination. We use a cultural-historical approach to analyse how a young child always learns to play within their own cultural and social context. Their context may include human activity related to cultural signs, symbols, language systems, objects, values and rituals that are best understood '*when investigated in their historical development*' (John-Steiner and Mahn 2006, p. 2).

Table 2.1 Overview of some influential play theorists

John Dewey[a]	Maria Montessori[b]	Mildred Parten[c]	Grusec and Lytton[e]	Jean Piaget[d]	Lev. Vygotsky[f]
Play is separate from work	Play is the work of the child	Stages of play	Typology on cognition	Play as intellectual development	Play as cultural development
Manual education promoted to encourage skills and teamwork	Children's activities as play: "*The delight that children find in working*"	Including: Solitary play (infants) Parallel play (Toddlers) Cooperative play (Preschooler)	Functional play Constructive play Pretend play Games with rules	Related to ages and stages of child development from biological perspective-natural line of development	Link to cultural line of development. Social interaction is major impetus for development. In play child creates an imaginary situation. Play as source of child's development of abstract and symbolic thinking

[a]Dewey (1900)
[b]Montessori (1970)
[c]Parten (1932)
[d]Piaget (1962)
[e]Grusec and Lytton (1988)
[f]Vygotsky (1966b)

We interpret pedagogy as the art and science of teaching and use the term play to describe the *imaginary situation* created by children in the active experiences of their everyday lives. We emphasize that children's lives are lived across home, community, and early childhood settings and pedagogical play can be in all situations. Our research examples are temporally and culturally varied to make the point that young children have their own perspectives whatever their age or circumstance.

In a cultural-historical conceptualisation of play the child's play relationships are mediated by human activity, the language used, and the spaces, materials and artefacts of the present time. Within these contemporary elements, children construct their own imaginary situations and it is in these spaces that pedagogical relations can be formed. When this occurs the child can be supported to learn and develop from their own perspective and in their particular social, cultural, and historical context.

In our examples of play activity we draw on internationalised and essentially westernised approaches to young children's play that occurred in the contemporary settings of our research. Our research has examined cultural–historical factors from social, geographical, environmental, emotional, local and traditional perspectives. In our visual narrative examples we use different and contrasting play activity to re-conceptualise what play from the child's perspective can mean for learning and development. We have taken early childhood to be the period between birth to eight years.

We share our research observations of social, cultural and historical influences in play for example, in a Mexican classroom for three–four year olds, in Australian home life with two cousins (five months and eight years), outdoors in a pre-school (three–four year-olds), in family play with a grandfather and fathers, and in a primary school classroom (six year-olds). These first hand accounts demonstrate that play experiences are fertile ground for children's learning and development. In all instances we build on the understanding that the children '*are embarked on a course of making meaning of the world, a constant process of constructing knowledge, identity and value*' (Dahlberg in Rinaldi 2006, p. 13) and that pedagogical strategies in varied forms are present. Pedagogical play is complex. When time is taken to observe and listen and acknowledge that the child has their own motives and ideas, their own power, their own imagination and their own perspectives, we can better understand why staged theories of play (such as those of Piaget) are debated and should be built on.

2.5 Contemporary Theories of Play: Towards More Unified Opportunities for Learning

Recent publications on play, (Brooker and Edwards 2010; Fleer 2010, 2013a, b; Smidt 2011; Bruce 2011; and Wood 2013) bring wider theoretical framing of play as learning and focus further on 'role-play' and 'imaginative play'. Van Oers (2010)

discussed enculturation through play and his concept of Developmental Education (van Oers 2013c) for young children was foundational to understanding more about enactment of play-based curriculum. Attention given to conceptual development in play by Fleer (2010) advanced thinking about the importance of play for development of science concepts. Bodrova used cultural-historical framing in *Tools of the Mind* (2008), which gave focus to learning to play with developmental outcomes and self regulation in mind, and van Oers' rich ongoing research on *Developmental education* (2013a) brought focus to cultural agency in children's play.

Vygotskian ideas on learning as a social process continue to influence all areas of education. In Holzman's (2009) publication *Vygotsky at work and play*, for example the idea of being and becoming was discussed. This led to further thinking about performative roles and role play. Children and adults learn as they perform or role play as someone else in a situated activity. Throughout this book we also argue that play is a place of learning and therefore a pedagogical experience. Role play for example makes a space where, together, humans can create who they are. We offer examples of where children have experienced the building of shared intentions and making choices and in doing so have become '*collective creators of their emotional growth*' (Holzman 2009, p. 33).

Children are involved in pedagogical play through their relationships with families, educators and cultural communities. The child's motive for play generates and grows when conceptual reciprocity is achieved. We believe from our video data and research (e.g. Trevarthen 2011) that this can happen *from birth* in the child's particular cultural situation. Conceptual reciprocity recognizes the nature of intersubjectivity in pedagogical play. Children are not only seen as a player, but also as a contributor to, and constructor of, the play, showing responsive relationships with each other. This requires that a play event provides an environment responsive to children's interests and knowledge of everyday cultural practices and experience with others. When the child connects their real life and imagined world, agentic imagination is formed and its presence will support children's learning and development. Play only becomes pedagogical when conceptual reciprocity and agentic imagination are present.

2.6 Re-theorising Play as Pedagogical Play

We re-theorise the relationship between pedagogy and play as *pedagogical play* and we suggest two new concepts that characterise pedagogical play: *conceptual reciprocity* and *agentic imagination*. Conceptual reciprocity is when an educator (parent, teacher, more knowledgeable peer or other adult) brings to children's play subject matter knowledge, values the child's perspective, creates shared intentions, looks further, adds on, plans opportunity for activity and thereby builds conceptual connectedness; it is a pedagogical approach for supporting children's learning

through joint play. Agentic imagination simply means that the child has actively connected their real life and imagined world; when present in play, the child's motives and imagination have the opportunity to play a critical role in their learning and development.

In particular, *conceptual reciprocity* is given a detailed explanation in Chap. 3 where play is examined from the child's perspective as well as from the educator's perspective.

Chapter 4 examines how educators actively interact with children and support their learning in play-based curriculum. Siraj-Blatchford's concept of sustained shared thinking is illustrated as effective pedagogy in playful situations where interactive support occurs within Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development will be further explained.

In Chap. 5 the qualities of the interactions between humans, and non-human objects are examined closely and bring forward new ideas about the presence of *affective attunement* and *affective engagement* in pedagogical play right from birth. This chapter also covers the cultural dimensions of play, and discusses the nature of degrees of freedom, roles and rules.

In Chap. 6 affordances for learning that children are provided across the different institutional settings of their daily lives are discussed. Elements of time, continuity and culture in pedagogical practices are examined.

Agentic imagination in pedagogical play is conceptualised in Chap. 7 where we give examples of children actively connecting their real and imagined worlds with adults entering the play. We analysed the pedagogical practice, the play space and in doing so, uncovered the presence or absence of *agentic imagination.*

In Chap. 8 we think more about what visual strategies educators and families can use to support their pedagogical role. When intentional teaching and reflective practice becomes part of re-theorising play as pedagogical, we need to be intentional ourselves in order to frame our documentation methods for capturing pedagogical opportunities in play and recognising those productive opportunities in order to sustain and extend children's agentic imagination.

Chapter 9 brings further understanding of how to recognise relationships and embedded cultural influences in pedagogical play. We use dialogue commentary as a technique to reveal the often invisible personal cultural influences present in community and family play. Examples of planning a project brief involving risk and collaboration between older and younger children, and the provision of an outdoor play program in a bushland setting are also discussed.

The final chapter brings together a collection of research in practice narratives important for showing how pedagogical transformation may occur when play is seen from the multiple perspectives of participants: infants, family members, pre-schoolers, schoolage children, educators and their cultural communities. A past-present dialectic enables us to re-conceptualise pedagogical play with particular materials as being historically influenced so new perspectives are seen.

2.7 Conclusion

We invite educators to examine their relationship with children and we challenge all those who work with children, to think about how to integrate the often contradictory perspectives on play and learning taken by the child and adult. We offer opportunities to build insight into thinking about play as pedagogical and as a leading activity for children (to be explained further) that can bring new processes and changes to their development (Veresov 2006).

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Chapter 3
Examining Play from the Child's Perspective

Abstract We now focus on the child and why we must be able to see play from the child's perspective as well as from the educator's perspective. If, as Vygotsky (2004) suggests play is considered a '*creative reworking*' of the child's impression of an experience, then being able to examine play from the child's perspective has pedagogical implications for learning and development.

Keywords Play-work dichotomy · Reciprocity in play · Child's perspective · Intentional educators · Imaginary situation · Ethical listening · Cultural practice · Sensitive relationship

3.1 Introduction

> A child's play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has created (Vygotsky 2004, p. 16).

From the child's perspective, play is more than reproducing an experience. It involves bringing to participatory interaction with others, an interpretation and personal imagining that requires from educators a special kind of responsive reciprocity with the child, so that learning and development can occur. In this chapter, we use play stories to understand different conceptualisations of play and its relationship with the pedagogical values and beliefs of educators.

A. Ridgway et al., *Early Childhood Pedagogical Play*,
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Drawing on play story examples, we want to revolutionise the way educators involve themselves with play by suggesting a re-positioning and re-thinking of their role.

3.2 What Do We Mean by the Child's Perspective?

The child's perspective on play can include:

- How a child makes sense of everyday ideas and transforms these into new knowledge
- Knowing a child has their own agency and agenda
- Communicating, participating, belonging
- Building a culturally situated identity
- Having freedom to make own choices about with whom, and what, to play

Educators readily re-construct child's play using an adult view. As adults, we imagine we can put ourselves into the position of understanding what we think the child's perspective might be. Our observations, reports, ethnographies and survey data are all used to provide us with tools to give information on what we think the child's perspective might be. For example, when children were interviewed as part of a project to explore their ideas about living sustainably in the world, the extent of the children's knowledge amazed researchers Engdahl and Rabusicova (2011). Listening to children and being amazed by what children know are important starting points but this is different from what we mean by asking educators to examine play from the perspective of a child. When play is examined from the child's perspective the associated pedagogical implications for learning and development are brought into focus.

Listening pedagogies are frequently and successfully applied by early childhood educators to record and document the child's words in active play in order to derive an interpretation of the child's thinking (Dahlberg and Rinaldi 2004). We wish to extend this thinking by taking a closer look at what is meant by 'the child's perspective'. In Australia, a focus on active, capable, and imaginative children in relation to intentional educators has been proposed:

> Viewing children as active participants and decision makers opens up possibilities for educators to move beyond pre-conceived expectations about what children can do and learn. This requires educators to respect and work with each child's unique qualities and abilities (DEEWR-EYLF for Australia 2009, p. 9).

In this chapter, we provide examples of children's play that span the early childhood period from birth to eight years. These examples will help build pedagogical understandings of why play needs to be understood from the child's perspective as play in and across the different settings of the child's life is not always recognised by adults as a vehicle for meaningful learning.

In re-theorising play using a cultural-historical view, it is important to restate Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the *imaginary situation* as a defining characteristic of all play:

> … in establishing criteria for distinguishing a child's play from other forms of activity, we conclude that in play a child creates an imaginary situation (p. 934).

When we recognise the idea that any child is living and experiencing their daily life in a particular social and cultural situation we can also understand that their active experiences are played out in culturally responsive imaginary situations and therefore in differing ways. A small example was noted at an Australian family party. When a toast to good health was proposed, champagne glasses were distributed to the adults. The youngest participant (eighteen months old) observed the ritual way glasses were raised and adults shouted 'cheers'. Shortly after, the young child raised an imaginary glass in hand and shouted 'cheers' exemplifying a playful 'creative reworking' (Vygotsky 2004, p. 16) of a family cultural ritual.

There are many ways that play is interpreted and an adult interpretation of play is a common starting point. In fact, we cannot examine play from the child's perspective unless we also examine it from the adult's view. In practical terms, we understand that this dialectical relationship (child and adult) is formed by the contradictions we find between the different perspectives of child and adult in relation to play. These contradictions provide the educator/adult with a way to understand the relationship between pedagogy and play in early childhood.

3.3 Why Examine Play from the Child's Perspective?

We believe it is important to see children for who they are and not just whom we think they might be. Children's playful and creative imitations today represent the version of their world that is important to them; a world they are brought up in and one that educators share with children but see and experience differently. An example of this follows.

Final-year undergraduate students of early childhood education were asked to conceptualize a model of play that was to come from evidence based on active institutional play practices observed in their placement experience with four to five year olds in kindergarten. One student (RS) volunteered his assignment of analysed observations taken during his placement experience and his work adds to our understanding of play as pedagogical. He noted a recurring theme that he identified as evolution of play.

> I noticed that children would create a new play episode by combining ideas from past play episodes which are further influenced by ideas from other external factors outside of the play episodes including things such as children's home knowledge and practice, and teacher's input into the play.

Student RS noted how one particular play episode evolved:

> Roy is together with an educator in the home corner pretending to be a chef in the restaurant. At the same time four other children: Shauna, Beth, Fiona, and Tina are playing dogs, owners and vets in the book corner which is in the opposite corner of the room from the home corner. Beth, who was acting as the owner, decides to build a house in the blocks corner located between the two play areas. Collin joins in with Beth as the construction worker to build Beth's house. At this point the play has already evolved – the usual block building has been given a purpose as a result of the dog and owner dramatic play.
>
> This play episode evolves further, as the restaurant and Beth's house gradually merge, as Beth orders takeaway from Roy who cooks and delivers food to her new house. Seeing this, the educator adds in telephones into the play space, which allows Beth and the vet, enacted by Tina, still with the dogs in the book corner, to order takeaway over the phone. (Ridgway and Quinones 2012)

We use this example to show the conceptualization of play as an amalgamation of past play episodes—where ideas and experiences merge together to create a new play episode. The example illustrates how our student was able to examine play from the child's perspective. He placed that idea at the centre of his thinking and by doing so, accounted for the often invisible historical nature of child development.

He noted:

> From the child's perspective, play is a dynamic and continuous process of challenging ideas and experiences to develop new ideas and experiences. The child is the key driver for play and its development. The child or the group of children decide where the play will progress and what kind of new play episode emerges. This may occur for a number of reasons: they may need to solve a problem they encounter within their current play episode, they may want to demonstrate a newly acquired skill or idea from home and introduce it into the play, they may be interested in another child's play experience and want to join in through their own methods or they may be interested in particular artefacts. (RS)

The complexity of the play noted by our student and the pedagogical relationship the educator may take unfolds in greater detail throughout the chapters that follow. Children learn through problem-solving situations they may encounter in imaginary play episodes (Fleer 2010). What we mean by examining play from the child's perspective is not just about the adult/researcher/educator gathering data on what the child's perspective might be in relation to a given situation. It is far more about understanding why an adult's perspective on play should also include, embrace and encompass, the child's perspective.

The notion of ethical listening involves an active approach where children are viewed as capable, and adults show a responsive interest in their ideas. In trying to ascertain young children's perspectives in a research project on role-play, for example Rogers and Evans (2008) discussed how they used a range of child-focused methods that included elements of ethical listening as described in the '*Mosaic Approach*' by Clarke and Moss (2011). Rogers and Evans later commented: 'we started from the premise that children have as much to tell us as adults if only we would take time to listen' (2008, p. 51).

We wonder how educators would know what ideas children bring to the social situations they live in, if ethical listening does not occur. We wonder if all educators take time to listen to children and participate in their play activities, which can easily be overlooked.

3.4 Play—Work Dichotomy: Do Children Still Play?

In societies like Mexico for example, many adults and children recognize a distinction between play and work (*trabajo*). This dichotomy also shows the distinction adults can make between children playing as an activity where they just pass time, and work, where children learn formal and academic skills. This is similarly seen in Singapore and other Asian countries (Lim 2010) where this play-work dichotomy is evident in early childhood curricula.

The approach we take is thinking of play as pedagogical play because it involves a special reciprocity from educators to enhance play experiences of children. In a cultural-historical perspective, play is the leading activity in children's learning. A leading activity refers to an activity such as play that brings new psychological processes and changes in children's development (Veresov 2006). When children develop in the preschool period, children want to act like adults as they observe adults' relations and actions in their everyday life. Play allows children to meet their motives and "perform an action in the absence of the conditions needed for the actual achievement of that actions' results" (Davydov 2008, p. 56). Thus, play becomes the leading activity for preschool aged children. Play creates a special social situation of development in which the learning activity emerges (Veresov 2006; Vygotsky 1966). As such, play is considered by contemporary researchers (Fleer 2013; Singer 2013) to be a complex activity and culturally driven, and how children learn to make sense of their social and cultural worlds. Therefore, understanding the societies where children live is important in order to know what children are playing, how children are playing and how much time adults give to children's play.

Case Study 3.1: Ten Seconds of Play

Children in a Mexican early childhood centre are doing an academic activity that is based on pre-writing. The goal of the activity is for children to further their 'fine motor skills'. This is the leading activity in this Mexican centre and it is considered to be meaningful learning.

Cesar is doing the fine-motor skills activity and he has to write the letter X. He is three and a half years old. The instructions given are to move his hand from left to right, and from top to bottom. But as soon as his teacher Miss Maya moves, there is a 'momentito' (a special little moment in time) for Cesar and Paola to play. The artefacts used are their crayons.

These ten seconds of play consist of Cesar and Paola taking their crayons to each other's table. They take turns in placing crayons on each other's table. At first, Cesar, places his crayons on Paola's head, then Cesar takes his crayon to the other side of the table. The play is interrupted when Miss Maya appears and gives Paola instructions to continue her activity and they both know it is time to continue with the fine-motor skills activity.

The example illustrates how adult-imposed curriculum requirements limit children's time to imagine and play but children still do interact playfully. Play is not always recognised by adults as a vehicle for meaningful learning.

This play example shows how academic activities are valued over play activities in some Mexican early childhood centers (and many others around the world). The children, Cesar and Paola, have already mastered or achieved their competence in this fine-motor skills activity and they are able to self-initiate play. This ten seconds of play shows the children taking freedom in initiating their own play, and in playing with objects such as crayons so as to make rules about where those crayons are placed. Of course, this example has a lot more complexity to it, and rules are discussed further in Chap. 5, however, the aim here is to show that although children are part of academic activities, the educators setting up such activities take little account of what children are interested in. We suggest that educators need to think more about how to account for the child's perspective and what that means across cultural communities. Children still play even though they only have ten seconds. The challenge in this community (and others like it) is to think more about how to support the relationship between pedagogy and play. In examining play from the child's perspective, educators can think more about play as a learning opportunity. How to support learning in those transitions from academic activities to play activities involves educators in having a good understanding of the child's capabilities in writing and motives in learning, and giving thought to how play can frame the child's academic learning. We show throughout this book that supporting children's academic learning through play activities is not only possible but essential.

The children in Case Study 3.1 briefly engaged in the 'art of reciprocity'. They interacted briefly with the intention of being responsive to one another. We bring this to explicit attention in the next example because educators who are examining play from a child's perspective have already developed an understanding of the pedagogical value of reciprocity and use it in practice.

Significant *pedadgogical play momentitos* were captured in this case study. We refer to *pedagogical play momentitos* as pedagogical activities intentionally captured by educators and researchers at the moment it occurs and then reviewed afterwards for further pedagogical analysis. Pedagogues (educators) need to find momentitos and identify particular interests and intentions of children in play.

Pedagogical play momentitos are those significant activities and moments of observation made by educators which allow them to identify how children are learning so they can further extend, elaborate and plan with children.

3.5 Reciprocity in Play

The art of reciprocity involves having an awareness of the perspective of others. It means actively responding to others in their particular situation or place. It means giving respect and value to 'the other.' In thinking about how to examine play from the child's perspective, the notion of reciprocity (which can be a taken-for-granted assumption) is worthy of examining in practice.

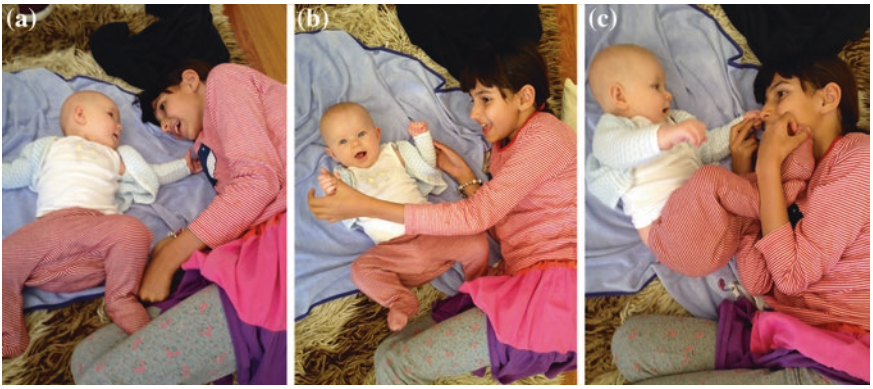

Fig. 3.1 **a**, **b**, **c** Reciprocity in play

When baby Luci (five months) was placed on her back on a floor rug she exchanged glances and smiles with her cousin Em (aged eight), who was immediately drawn to lie down beside her. Here, *the art of reciprocity* in play is put into action and the resultant exchange amplifies the value of possessing awareness of how to engage with others with all parts of your being. How does Em show her awareness of the perspective of little Luci? She does this by lying down beside her and reaching for Luci's hands (Fig. 3.1a–c). Em's past experience that a baby will grip an extended finger is put into action. Em wants to make contact and uses this understanding to initate a playful shared exchange. Through her awareness of *reciprocal exchange* she found a way to interact and communicate wholeheartedly. Using her body position, voice and hands Em and Luci begin a joyful exchange game of touch and talk. Both are equal participants in this reciprocal exchange where each responds to the other by taking cues from gestures, looks, and movement to continue the play. Educators can overlook the value of using the *art of reciprocity* to uncover the child's perspective in play and what that means for learning and development. The shared intentions developed in this play between the cousins help to build knowledge and sense of one another. In Chap. 4, we develop the notion of reciprocity further to include the conceptualisation process that occurs in shared experiences where shared intentions are held. We call this *conceptual reciprocity* and note its presence in examples of play events throughout this book.

3.6 Shared Intentions and the Child's Perspective

> … the child's position towards the external world changes…and the ability to co-ordinate his (or her) point of view with other possible points of view develops (Elkonin 1978, p. 282).

Fig. 3.2 Wedding play (four-five year olds)

Case Study 3.2: Wedding Play at the Kindergarten

The four-five year old children in the pre-school centre are now familiar with being regularly observed during their play activity. On this day, the researcher observes a play scenario that involves three children: James, Lachie, and Eva, as they enact a wedding (Fig. 3.2). With wreath of flowers in her hair and tablecloth draped over her shoulders, Eva plays the role of bride. Lachie acts as the groom by her side. They stand together facing James who is standing on the outdoor stage. He is holding a thick book with black cover, which he has asked for. He opens this book, looks down and in a serious voice pronounces that he is going to marry Lachie and Eva as husband and wife.

3.7 Play as a Way of Interpreting the Child's World

The wedding play episode enables us to discuss what it means to understand play from the child's perspective and why it is important for ***the educator to be attuned*** to this perspective. We understand that the world we live in is interpreted by adults who may not appreciate the child's view of their world and if this is the case, then in order to understand play from the child's perspective we need to ask these questions:

- ***How do children learn to make meaning of their everyday experiences in life?***
- ***How do children learn to interpret their world?***

Case Study 3.2 is an example of three young children interpreting an event that they are consciously aware of as part of their everyday life experiences. From their perspective, they want to be in and act out the experience of a wedding. Over time, the pre-school group these children belong to, has been involved in their teacher's end of year wedding preparations. In creating and participating in the imagined wedding play scenario, the children are learning to interpret their world.

By taking a cultural-historical theoretical perspective on the wedding play example, it can be appreciated that children's experiences and skills are socially, culturally and historically formed.

It is in their play, that children experiment with their enculturated experiences to generate meaning and make sense of their world for themselves. Through this process they transform their knowledge.

Contemporary child development theory recognises '*how the child is located within culture*' (Rogers and Evans 2008, p. 22). In particular, Rogers and Evans (2008) emphasize how their research into role-play showed that children exerted their own agency, using power to shape their participation in imaginary play. They conclude that from a sociocultural perspective: *'learning is, therefore, a result of the individual's active participation and involvement in situated social practices, and not simply the result of knowledge transmission'* (p. 22).

The relationships present in wedding play are reciprocal and involve the formation of *agentic imagination* (where motives and imagination unite) among the three children. In the wedding play scenario (Fig. 3.2), Eva experiments with a way of being a bride, Lachie acts out his version of being a groom, and James (who initiated this play), leads the wedding ceremony in a seriously important manner using a thick black-covered book. Their teacher was to be married later that year. The children were curious. This was the cultural context within which the children were developing and *'into which the child develops'* (Rogers and Evans 2008, p. 22).

We can see that from the child's perspective, the wedding play acts as a way of making sense of their lived-in and to-be-lived-in world; a world which embraces all three children's families, community and institutional experiences (Hedegaard 2005).

For James, Lachie and Eva, the wedding play scenario united their different world experiences. The play combined their personal ideas and feelings and generated through their imaginary participation, a shared experiment that helped them to make meaning and sense of a particular cultural practice, a wedding, familiar to them as interested onlookers of their teacher's wedding preparations.

The imaginary play situation of the wedding invites the children to problem solve together. We notice that the children have agreed on particular roles and rules of engagement associated with what they each think a wedding is. Vygotsky (1966) noted '*there is no such thing as play without rules and the child's particular attitude toward them*' (p. 9).

The children's play reflects the fact that they have some prior knowledge of a wedding. The props they each use to transform themselves in the wedding play are culturally defined. Imagining being a bride, Eva used a lacy table cloth and flower

wreath in her hair to become a bride. Lachie positioned himself next to the bride ready to become the groom in the wedding play. Both children imagined James' role of marrying them, as he stood up on the playground stage with a thick black book. James imagined himself in the position to marry the bride and groom using the thick black book with authority. Fleer (2010) notes Vygotsky (1966) wrote about this: '*A child learns to consciously recognize his own actions and becomes aware that every object has a meaning. From the point of view of development, the fact of creating an imaginary situation can be regarded as a means of developing abstract thought'* (p. 17).

We also notice that these children are each filling character roles that have been collectively agreed upon by them, in order to play out the wedding scenario together.

In the wedding play scenario, the three children had prepared for taking three parts, and played out their three different roles which resulted in a unified moment of meaningful play; a moment of pedagogical play for these children.

When we consider play from the child's perspective (as the educator did when she responded to James asking for a black hard covered book), we realise that in early childhood pedagogical play, the support and sensitivity given by the educator to the important meta-communicative language that existed among the three children, is crucial for their wedding play scenario to occur. Also crucial are the shared intentions developed around their motive to play this wedding game together. Their knowledge was transformed by their interpretation of the social relations in the wedding play. When educators can see the value of looking at play from the child's perspective there is support for enhancement of the child's self efficacy and self regulation which is in direct contrast to the 'ten seconds of play' noted in the example of the Mexican class educating the fine-motor skills of three year olds.

In reviewing the wedding play example, we are able to conceptualise play from the child's perspective as being meaningful learning where each child's past experiences and that of the educator, are filtered through their combined cultural, social, and historical situations.

If pedagogical play practices are framed from the child's perspective, the educator can draw on the child's active engagement in constructing meaning together (e.g. identity, roles/rules, culture) in the complexity of collective play such as the wedding example represents.

3.8 Role of Adult in Taking Child's Perspective

Case Study 3.3: Do You Want Some Lemonade?

Em (two years ten months old) is with her grandparents in Australia. Poppy, her grandfather, is playing with her on the floor. She's using a wooden tone tree toy that tracks marbles down a wooden tree with descending leaves of different sizes and colours. As each marble descends from the top of the toy tree to its base,

different tones are heard. Poppy suggests the tone tree might be in a playground, a familiar place, but Em has a different idea for this playful encounter.

Poppy: *It could be…it could be…it could be…the fence around the playground.*
(*Em dismisses this idea and puts the tone tree toy aside*)
Em: *Do you want some…lyemonade ?*
(*She looks up at Poppy with a smile*)
Poppy: *I would love some lemonade thank you*
(*Poppy enters her game and articulates the word lemonade clearly for Em*)
Em: *I've got some …yemonade*, *lemonade*
(*She responds selecting a small blue toy barrel as her imagined lemonade*)
Poppy: *Lemonade. What do we have it in these little cups here?*
(*Poppy places two small red dice shakers upright in front of Em and she immediately identifies them in her imagination as cups for the lemonade*)
Em: *Yep. One is for Granny and one is for you. That one is for Granny and that one is for you.* (she uses a pointing gesture to clearly identify which cup is which)
Em: *I've got some lemonade* (*she pronounces word easily and clearly now*)
Poppy: *Oh all right. Thank you. I'd love to have some lemonade. Thank you.*
Em: *I'll put some lemonade in for Granny and for you.*
(*Em reaches into basket for something to pour with and pulls out two small hollow shapes. She uses these to pour imaginary lemonade into each cup in turn. Later this play progresses* (*or evolves as student RS noted*) *to a new* '*having a picnic*' *game*.)
Poppy: *Thank you.*

In this playful exchange, the child initiates the imaginary situation and together the adult and child become aware that taking the child's perspective involves a ***sensitive relationship*** between participants. This ***sensitive relationship*** involves Poppy listening and responding to Em with respect, anticipation, and attention. He sustains and enters into her playful imagined idea. The relationship is one where love, trust, and deep interest in the child, all play an important part. The context (Fig. 3.3) includes artefacts and spaces that can support learning. The cultural,

Fig. 3.3 Do you want some lemonade?

historical, and social origins of play are clearly reflected in the concept of lemonade and also in the cultural formation of being hospitable and using polite manners in conversational exchange, which is generally encouraged in Australian society. The exchange involves *conceptual reciprocity*. We elaborate further on this and on the cultural dimensions of play in Chaps. 5 and 9.

3.9 The Child's Perspective on Worksheets

In this next case study, two six-year-old children in an Australian primary school class were given the same worksheet. The example shows how they find their own individualised ways of making meaning of it.

Case Study 3.4: Worksheet Play

All members of a literacy class for six to seven year olds are given the same worksheet. It later becomes clear to the teacher that two observed children (Joshua and Jack) have very different perspectives. The worksheet had three parts: a nonsense rhyme using words ending in 'ank', a crossword puzzle and an outline of an army tank. The children were invited to firstly circle 'ank' words in the rhyme

Frank drove an old tank.
He drove it on a plank.
But the plank sank,
The tank sank
And poor old Frank sank!

The children were then instructed to answer questions (clues for the crossword) using 'ank' words. The children had to write their answers in the crossword to reveal a secret word—fishtank—and were expected to draw a fishtank with coloured fish. Finally, the children were asked to colour in the outlined army tank.

This activity was described by the teacher as 'busywork' (work that keeps all children busy) but with a purpose. The purpose was the teacher's plan to provide skill building in spelling and word usage through a purposefully designed worksheet with which the children could interact playfully.

We can understand that the children's perspectives on this worksheet were quite different from that of the teacher. When Joshua and Jack's worksheets were collected for closer scrutiny (Figs. 3.4 and 3.5) we see how both children sought to make their own meaning. The children all had the same worksheet but they still had choices built on their own perspectives. Wood (2010) questions how choice functions in play provision: *'play provision needs to go beyond surface culture'* suggesting the need for *'further detailed evidence'* (p. 21) of how choice works.

We have evidence from his worksheet that Joshua's choices reflect his particular understanding. He knows what a tank is. He uses the colours of camouflage and transforms it into an army tank. He chooses to tell a story about his army tank in action. Joshua's teacher knows he is adept at spelling, quick to place

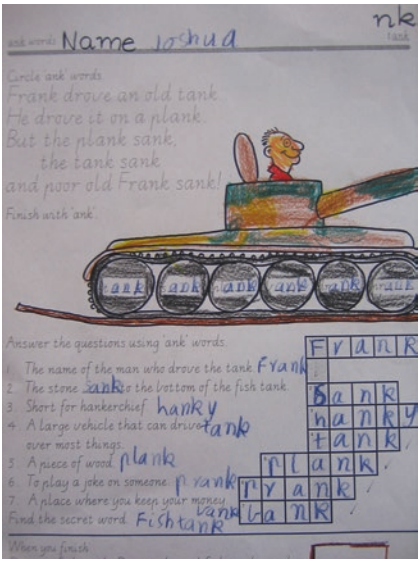

Fig. 3.4 Worksheet play

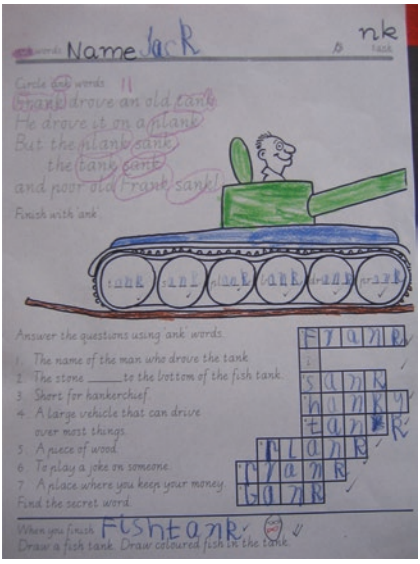

Fig. 3.5 Worksheet play

letters in spaces and follow written instructions and noted that he found time to interact playfully and imaginatively with the worksheet given to all the class. Joshua created something that was exciting to him. It became something for which he could imagine a story. When we see play from the child's perspective, in this

case Joshua's perspective, we can understand how he set about making meaning and extending learning, how he exerted his own agency and control with his own agenda, how he communicated, participated and belonged to the collective class effort, how he built his culturally situated identity, and exercised freedom to make his own choice. He set about transforming everyday ideas into something new.

Jack, in contrast to Joshua, had made less sense of this activity. His worksheet was partially completed by a classmate and with guidance from his teacher. He coloured the army tank in blue and green being unfamiliar with the colours of army camouflage. The worksheet experience for Jack was decontextualised and nonsensical, one that he could not yet make meaningful. Our data show that the worksheet was only made meaningful by the capacity and agency of the particular children who were given it. If a child's play is culturally, socially, and historically situated, then we ask you to consider the primary school class worksheet activity from the different perspectives of these two children and question what understanding the perspective of the child means for worksheet pedagogy and children's playful activity.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered why it is important that the educator accounts for the child's perspective when taking a pedagogical approach to play, learning and development.

Educators of young children may apply pedagogical strategies that:

- Recognize play experiences as fertile ground for children's learning and development
- Observe/listen and acknowledge the child's home cultures and traditions
- Give children opportunities to exercise agency and control in play activities
- Acknowledge the child's perspective

It is educators (adults and peers) who create the learning conditions for young children's orientation to creative and emotional aspects of activities that are considered central to their learning and development. Using a cultural-historical approach to play-based curriculum builds on the social situation of the child. If we cannot examine the child's play from a social and cultural perspective then how can we effectively educate young children?

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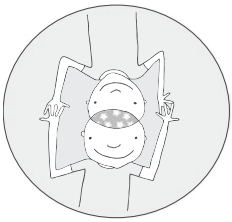
Chapter 4
Sustained Shared Thinking in Pedagogical Play



…an effective pedagogic interaction, where two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, or extend a narrative

(Siraj-Blatchford 2007, p. 18).

Abstract The concept of *sustained shared thinking* is explored as a pedagogical tool used to foreground collaboration, creativity and imagination in children's learning and play. Research by Professor Siraj-Blatchford (2009), on the quality of early childhood pedagogy and curriculum for young children's learning and development, has shown that the most effective learning interactions with children occur when sustained shared thinking is evident. This chapter discusses the relationship between the educator and the child while playing and how educators are able to sustain conversations and thinking with children during episodes of play. We look at the concept of sustained shared thinking as a pedagogical tool in both family and preschool contexts.

Keywords Imaginary situation · Sustained shared thinking · Pedagogical play · Baby's play · Conceptual reciprocity · Zone of proximal development · Pedagogical tool

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4.1 Introduction

We believe that effective educators have a clear understanding of the child's perspective in play but the question that needs to be asked is how do educators engage in children's play? Do educators need to ***interact with children*** **or** ***let children play by themselves***? We suggest that educators may think of their engagement and support in children's play in ***both ways—by interacting with children and letting children play by themselves***. If this is the case, when do educators need to enter play and when are children left to play by themselves? All these questions are related to the role of the early childhood educator in children's play.

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia (DEEWR 2009) emphasizes *intentional teaching* in the early childhood setting, aiming to improve the quality of early childhood education. The concept of *intentional teaching* requires the educator's role to be an active one, where the educator is engaged with children in play-based curriculum. How do educators actively interact with children and support children's learning and development in play-based curriculum? This chapter will focus on the discussion of these questions by using the concept of *sustained shared thinking* and the idea of *intentional teaching* within the context of play and the EYLF, a play-based curriculum.

4.2 What Do We Mean by Sustained Shared Thinking in Children's Play?

The concept of *sustained shared thinking* is a '*useful concept for pedagogy to support children's learning'* (Siraj-Blatchford 2009, p. 77). This concept allows educators to think about sustained and shared interactions and to structure them more formally in playful collaborations with children and helps educators to explore their engagement in children's play by taking a role of *intentional teaching*. When taking the child's perspective, adults can bring their rich past experience into the cultural context to actively engage in the child's play situation. This allows educators to enhance the play experience and support their learning and development. We can see in the examples that follow, that *sustained shared thinking* in children's play is a pedagogical tool to support children's learning and development. Sustained shared thinking is considered an important element of pedagogical play and how educators extend this in play is addressed in this chapter.

The concept of sustained shared thinking allows educators to think about how they can collaborate progressively with children by actively moving towards more interactive purposeful play. Sustained play opportunities lead to more *sophisticated* learning that emerges in different cultural contexts. Children learn and develop in complex and simple interactions and the adult is the one who can observe their interactions and *extend* their play in rich and cultural ways. From the educators' perspective, how to develop sustained shared thinking with children in order to assist their learning and development, is an important pedagogical issue explored in the following example of play.

We believe child's play is not always planned or scheduled, but can randomly happen in their everyday practices. Case Study 4.1 occurred in an Australian home and it shows imaginary play in a dinner conversation. It allows us to think about how to develop *sustained shared thinking* with a child during an everyday activity such as having dinner.

Case Study 4.1: Dinner for Yi's Rabbit

Yi, a four-year-old child from a Chinese immigrant family in Australia, helped her mother set up the dinner table and prepare for dinner. Yi and her father started to eat because her mother was still making a Chinese salad. Yi and her father's conversation began with their dinner dish and later progressed to the following topic. They spoke in Chinese at most times during the dinner conversation. It is noted when they talked in English.

After Yi had some rice and fish, Yi raised her favorite toy-rabbit and said:
Yi: *The rabbit needs to have dinner. The rabbit needs to have dinner.*
Mother: *What do you want to give your rabbit*? *What kind of food can you give the rabbit to eat in Mother's soup*?
Father: *What does your rabbit eat*?
Yi: *Radish.*
Father: *Radish. What else*?
Yi thought, then, said:
Yi: *Carrot* (*said in English*)
Father: *Carrot* (*said in English*) *is a kind of radish.*
Yi: *Carrot.*
She said that, because she thought carrot was different from radish.
It was probable that her father did not understand the English meaning of "carrot".
Yi: *She likes radish. She climbed up the table.*
Yi put the rabbit on the dinner table pretending to eat the soup which is shown in Fig. 4.1.

Fig. 4.1 Yi's imaginary situation 1

Fig. 4.2 Yi's imaginary situation 2

Yi: *But, she doesn't have a bowl. I will get a bowl for her.*
Mother: *You go and get a small bowl for her.*
Yi: *I will get a small bowl which will not be easily broken.*
She held her green rabbit and got a green bowl for the green rabbit.
Father: *Okay*
Yi: *Give the rabbit a green bowl. Green matches green. Green matches green.*
Mother: *Okay.*
Yi put the green bowl *next to her rice bowl. Then, she went to get a spoon and chopsticks for her green rabbit.*
Yi went to get the eating implements for her rabbit as shown in Fig. 4.2.
Father: *She doesn't need to use chopsticks. She also doesn't use the fork.*
Yi: *Oh…What does she use*?
Father: *She uses her mouth. Two hands hold the food and eat.*
Yi: *Okay. Take some food for her.*
Father: *What does she like to eat*?
Yi pointed to the soup and said:
Yi: *This one. Carrot.*
Yi's father picked up the carrot and put it into the rabbit's green bowl…

4.3 The Imagined Play in the Conversation

In Fig. 4.3 Yi held the rabbit's hands, pretending that the rabbit was eating the carrot.

Yi has put her rabbit on the table pretending to eat the soup. Yi initiated this imaginary situation by saying that 'the rabbit needs to have dinner' and bringing her toy-rabbit to the dinner table. She would like to feed the rabbit during the dinner. Her parents did not ignore her actions, but took her perspective by responding to her performance and collectively contributed to the imaginary situation by asking her a series of questions. For instance, the questions of 'What kind of food can you give the rabbit to eat in mother's soup?' from her mother or 'What does your rabbit eat?'

Fig. 4.3 Yi's imaginary situation 3

from her father sustained Yi's thinking of what rabbits eat. Her parents considered this as *a* '**teachable moment**' to sustain Yi's shared thinking about rabbits' food. Yi and her parents collectively imagined the situation that the rabbit had the dinner with them together, which enhanced Yi's development of knowledge about rabbits' habits.

We can see how Yi's father joined her imaginary situation of play and acted as a peer in her play. Both father and daughter contributed to their imaginary play situation and sustained the shared thinking in exploration of rabbits' food and eating habits. Yi initially pretended to feed her green, soft-toy rabbit and have dinner with it. Yi's imagination initiated their conversation, beginning with the rabbit eating, and then progressed to its food, and from its food to the way it eats. This gave her father a chance to join her imagined thinking and share the understanding of feeding the rabbit. It allowed her father to engage in her imaginary situation by asking a series of questions about the rabbit's food and the way the rabbit eats its food. We note that Vygotsky's (1987a) proposition that '*The development of imagination is linked to the development of speech*, *to the development of the child*'*s social interaction with others around him*, *to the basic forms of the collective social activity of the child*'*s consciousness*' (p. 346) is evident in the example. We can see in Example 1 that the collective imagining between Yi and her father during their dinner conversation supported her exploration of the habits of the rabbit, leading her to learn what and how the rabbit eats. Play is considered a leading activity for learning as it requires children to master the relevant skills and knowledge when they take actions of the particular role and perform this in their play (Nicolopoulou et al. 2010). In play, educators can use *sustained shared thinking* as a pedagogical tool to extend children's learning and development. In this example, it can be seen how adults value the child's (Yi) perspective through sustaining conversation with the child through ***intentional questioning*** *and* ***responding collectively*** to the child's imaginary play. Case Study 4.1. Dinner for Yi's rabbit, reminds us that children will invite adults to join their imaginary play *when adults become actively engaged with them*, and this in turn becomes a generative opportunity for developing *sustained shared thinking*.

One of the key features when educators take a child's perspective on play is for the child to have freedom to make their own decisions about what to playwith. Yi has that freedom shown through her parents' questions. As van Oers (2010) mentioned, players need to have some degree of freedom in the play, then they are able to make their own choice of the play and explore what they are interested in. Therefore, educators need to take account of the extent of children's freedom of choice in play.

4.4 Joining Children's Play to Use Sustained Shared Thinking as a Pedagogical Tool

In order to sustain and share play with children, there is a need to step outside the role of teacher, adult or parent and act as a play partner who can show great interest in the imaginary play situation. Ferholt and Lecusay (2010) have explored this ***joint play world*** and advised that '*adults in a play world enter fully into children's play by taking on play roles*, *putting on costumes*, *and entering character*' (p. 61). This is the first requirement for developing sustained shared thinking in interactive play: ***we need to enter the play and take on a role when invited by the child***.

Secondly, ***adults collectively share their thinking with children in play***. By this we mean that children and adults both engage in their play context and contribute to the imaginary situation. Siraj-Blatchford (2007) emphasizes that '*Creativity*, *communication*, *and collaboration are all combined in sustained shared thinking which has been identified as a particularly effective pedagogic strategy*' (p. 3).

How do educators collaborate and sustain their thinking with children in order to support children's learning and development in play? For example, how do educators transform and extend the child's playful activity or event? We believe that educators who have a good understanding of the dimensions of *children's playful events* as well as an idea of the child's perspective are able to create and sustain shared thinking in play-based curriculum. In the following section, the meaning of the imaginary situation found in *playful events* is examined further.

4.5 The Imaginary Situation and Playful Events

Play according to Vygotsky (1966), means that children create an imaginary situation as '*a means of developing abstract thought*' (p. 17). Vygotsky's play concept focuses on three aspects, in that '*children create an imaginary situation*, *take on and act out roles and follow a set of rules determined by specific roles*' (Bodrova 2008, p. 359). Children start with creating an imaginary situation. For example, in the case study Yi's dinner with rabbit, Yi created an imaginary situation of feeding her soft toy-green rabbit at the dinner table. Her parents respected her choice to feed the rabbit at the dinner table and invited her to extend sustained shared thinking about what and how to feed the rabbit. They have collectively imagined the playful event recreating the imaginary situation of feeding the rabbit. Children have opportunities to re-create their

social relations and life which cannot always be achieved in reality. Also, because of the creation of an event in play, it is possible for children to separate the sense field (Children's understanding and feelings of feeding rabbit) from the visual field (green bowls for green rabbit etc.). Vygotsky (1966) has defined that '*in play a child creates an imaginary situation*' (p. 8). In play, children take on the role of adults and act it out in a play situation that they have created. The creation of an imaginary situation becomes the central and most characteristic activity of play (Elkonin 2005).

4.6 The 'Sustained Shared Thinking' in Children's Play

Vygotsky (2004) argued '*the imagination always builds using materials supplied by reality*' (p. 14). Children's imagination and creativity originally comes from the reality of their everyday experience. Vygotsky (2004) further argued that:

> The first and most important law governing the operation of the imagination…the creative activity of the imagination depends directly on the richness and variety of a person's previous experience because this experience provides the materials from which the products of fantasy are constructed (p. 15).

In other words, children's everyday experience offers the foundation and orientations for their imagination in play. For instance, why might a child playing in an Australian playground, typically covered in tanbark, use the tanbark as vegetables and/or fire? The child must first have seen the cooking of vegetables and experienced it. Therefore, '*The richer a person's experience*, *the richer is the material his* [*her*] *imagination has access to*' (Vygotsky 2004, p. 15). This idea has two important implications for educators. Firstly educators need to provide more opportunities to broaden children's experience, and secondly extend their understanding of social relations. Elkonin (1978) notes the most important aspects of play for children are the roles they are taking during their imaginary situation, which orients the way they use play materials and frame their social relations in their playful events. Therefore, children need to have a good understanding of the social roles and relations, which they have observed in everyday life. Educators should offer opportunities for children to experience enriched real life situations (as discussed in Case Study 4.2), in order to motivate children to engage in higher quality play. Educators can apply the concept and understanding of *sustained shared thinking* to broaden experiences for children.

We know that as adults we have accumulated more rich experiences than a child. This means that the educator can draw on a wider frame of reference to encourage imagination in a child. We think it is vital that educators become fully aware of their role in children's learning and make certain they contribute their rich experiences to children's play (Li 2012). For the educator, it is not only facilitating the time, space and resources for the play, but also having awareness of their communication and social interaction in children's play. Fleer (2010) has argued '*the teachers* [*adults*] *need to be able to enter into the children's imaginative world and connect conceptually with them*' (p. 148). This relates directly to the

concept of *sustained shared thinking* where the adult takes the child's perspective when playing and has shared in understanding the imaginary situation.

When educators take the child's perspective to join children's play, sustained shared interaction develops. Educators need to broaden children's experience and sustain and share children's thinking through active engagement in play.

Case Study 4.2: Baby Harry's "Drum" Play with His Uncle

Baby Harry (eight months old) was sitting on his uncle's leg (He saw a container with sunflower seeds on the handle of the sofa, which was next to where they sat. ***He tried to touch*** it. His uncle ***read*** his action and ***responded*** by helping him to hold it. Harry heard the sound of the moving sunflower seeds when he was moving, touching, hitting and knocking the container. His uncle ***understood*** Harry's action and interests in the sounds and used both his hands to tap on the lid of the container with ***quick*** rhythms, which was ***like playing a drum***. His uncle also said "*tap*, *tap*, *tap*…" Harry was ***watching*** his uncle's tapping actions and ***listening*** to the rhythms and sounds. Afterwards, his uncle passed the 'drum' to Harry and let Harry have a try. At the beginning, Harry tried to use his one hand to tap the lid a few times. Then, his uncle ***held his hands*** and supported him to tap the drum. After a couple times of trying, Harry ***was able to tap*** the lid of container with both hands without help and make some simple rhythms like playing a drum.

4.7 Adult's Imagination in Baby's Play

This play episode shows how Harry and his uncle sustained and shared their exploration of the 'drum' play (Figs. 4.4 and 4.5).

When Harry had shown his interest in the sounds of the sunflower seeds, his uncle caught the 'play moments' and saw this as a 'pedagogical moment' to extend Harry's thinking. His uncle interpreted the container as a 'drum' and tapped quick rhythms, which attracted Harry to further explore the sounds Harry was listening, observing and trying to knock the 'drum'. It confirms that '*In the identification of sustained shared thinking*', *the pedagogy* '*Instructional techniques*' *were at first coded with a multitude of subcategories that included* '*Questioning*', '*Demonstrating*', '*Telling*', *and* '*Dialogue*'' (Siraj-Blatchford 2009, p. 78). In other words, educators may apply the questioning; modeling and explaining to broaden the play dialogue and sustain children's thinking in play. 'Demonstrating' and 'telling' categories as pedagogical approaches have been used by Harry's uncle. Harry's uncle extended their imaginary situation into 'drum' play by tapping on the lid of the container. Although Harry at his age may not consciously realize it, he did demonstrate his own imagination through his drum play responses. In this way, the imagination in the play supported Harry's exploration of the scientific knowledge of sounds and rhythm.

Fig. 4.4 Sustained shared thinking in baby’s play

Fig. 4.5 Sustained shared thinking in baby’s play

4.8 The ‘Conceptual Reciprocity’ in Sustained Shared Thinking

To frame play activity, an adult needs to achieve ***conceptual reciprocity*** by taking the child’s perspective, to extend and transform their everyday knowledge through their *sustained shared thinking*. This is a pedagogical approach for supporting children’s academic learning through joint play. In the Case Study 4.2, Harry’s uncle extended Harry’s everyday knowledge of sound to a scientific understanding (knowledge) of rhythm in music. This movement from an everyday concept to an academic (scientific) concept resulted from the participants’ ‘***conceptual reciprocity***’ demonstrated in the drum play. The interaction between Harry and his uncle showed that in play their shared understanding existed in the reciprocal interaction of making the sounds. In other words, the shared understanding was the basis for them to sustain the play experience.

We think *sustained shared thinking* can also be considered an effective pedagogical tool to support baby's learning and development as both educator and child can achieve *conceptual reciprocity*. The educator needs to apply *sustained shared thinking* to motivate children in exploring the scientific concepts through their everyday practices.

4.9 Interactive Support Within the Zone of Proximal Development

We noticed that in this play example, Harry's uncle has played a **quick** rhythm to a young baby. But, Harry was not able to catch and imitate such a complex rhythm. This leads us to the idea that when educators take the child's perspective to join their play practices, it will only work effectively if it is within the child's zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development means '*what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow*' (Vygotsky 1987b, p. 211). The zone of proximal development is the collective activity in which children and adults interact and share their understandings of tasks by using cultural tools such as language (Li 2012). In other words, the zone exemplifies the ability of children in imitating adults' actions and words, which helps the educators assess children's developmental zone. In Case Study 4.2 when Harry's uncle held his hands to support him to imitate the knocking actions with a slow rhythm, Harry was able to interpret and imitate the action. But when the uncle tapped on the top of the container-'drum' in a quick rhythm, Harry was not able to imitate although he was trying hard to do that. An educators' assistance only works effectively when it is within the child's zone of proximal development. We believe that educators should develop their *intentional teaching* in order to extend the *sustained shared thinking* within children's zone of proximal development.

In this case, the uncle used the opportunity to extend the *sustained shared thinking* and this is an important point for educators. We know that educators can try to catch those *teachable moments* when children show their motives and interests in free play activities.

4.10 Missed Opportunities to Sustain Shared Thought

Case Study 4.3: Skateboarding in a Mexican Kindergarten

In a rural community in the north of Mexico, a young educator is playing with four children, Mayra (five year old girl), Anna, Mario and Miguel who are four years old. Mario, is riding on a skateboard; he is the first one to ride it. He brought the skateboard from home to the kindergarten. Everyone is participating in this play. Children are taking turns in playing with the skateboard. On one side, is the educator pushing Mario and on the other side is Mayra, receiving Mario. Anna

and Miguel are in the middle waiting for their turn and they help 'push' Mario to the other side. The children's interest in this play event is about pushing, receiving, responding and enjoying the moment (Fig. 4.6). They share their interests and explore their skateboard experience.

First, Mario (the owner of the skateboard) is pushing Miguel with Anna and together Mayra and Anna are waiting on the other side to receive Miguel. Then, Mayra pushes Miguel, she hurts her shin and the educator moves to see how Mayra is doing. Anna and Miguel take new roles, which are negotiated silently and non-verbally. Anna moves to the educator's position and Mario to Mayra's position. Children continue playing as they sustain their interest in pushing and enjoying the play (Fig. 4.7). This play continues for a few minutes as children take turns in riding the skateboard. The educator continues to observe children and stays outside their play. He is not involved anymore in pushing any children. He does not act as a play partner inside the children's play.

This example shows how the educator is able to extend and sustain children's thinking by being involved in pushing children. But, this play only stays at an everyday level of being a free playful activity where children take turns and take roles. It is important for the educator to consider the child's ability to imagine what pedagogical activities any play can bring to children's learning. Sustaining, extending and progressing children's thinking in pedagogical terms is something '*adults do to support and engage children's learning*' (Siraj-Blatchford 2009, p. 86).

This free playful activity is sustained by the educator but the educator misses the opportunities to further extend children's thinking. This can happen many times across many different settings when the educator is busy with their own agenda. When the educator considers the children's perspective and what their interests might be, an essential opportunity occurs for developing, extending, sustaining and progressing children's learning.

To progress this everyday play of just skateboarding with others, we should also think about what children are already learning in that situation. We think the children are interested in the experience of 'feeling the movement' and learning

Fig. 4.6 Sustained free play

Fig. 4.7 Sustained interest of pushing

how to 'balance' their movements when on the skateboard. These represent missed opportunities for the children's conceptual learning because this play event stayed at an everyday level (free play) when it had potential to go further. In progressing play pedagogically, educators need to think about creative play activities where they could keep sustaining and sharing children's interest.

As children initiate play activities it is also important for educators to initiate activities, extend them and assess how children are performing in these play activities (Siraj-Blatchford 2007). This will lead educators to think more about taking an interventionist rather than non-interventionist role (Siraj-Blatchford 2007), as was seen in the rural community skateboard example in Mexico. It is also about moving beyond free play and recognizing (not missing) play opportunities where children's learning could be extended.

This example shows the importance of the educator's ability to collaborate with children. The educator acts as a play-partner and collaborates by playing with children. However, the educator takes a non-interventionist approach towards play by not extending or sustaining this activity further. This is a pedagogical play moment where the educator could have built sustained conversations with children by **being explicit and provoke further thinking**. An important pedagogical strategy that could be used by educators is to identify pedagogical play moments to discuss and *extend activities* (Siraj-Blatchford 2009). The educator has already collaborated and has been engaged in children's play, therefore, the educator's awareness of recognizing the interest and children's intentions is important in making 'free play' into 'pedagogical play'.

4.11 Conclusion

Siraj-Blatchford's (2007) definition of *sustained shared thinking*, and Vygotsky's (1966) concepts of *imaginary play* and *zone of proximal development* provide a frame through which to directly address early childhood education. ***Sustained***

shared thinking, ***in particular***, ***is a pedagogical tool that can be applied*** in play-based curriculum. Using these concepts, educators can easily sustain and share their thinking and achieve ***conceptual reciprocity*** when they engage in children's play.

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Chapter 5
Dimensions of Play Activity

For the child, in play any thing can be every thing
(Vygotsky 1997, p. 135).

Abstract The child is never alone and we cannot examine play by just looking at the child, without also looking at the child's world. *Relationships and the world the child relates to are important dimensions in child's play.* Children are able to relate and collaborate with each other while playing with objects.

Keywords Dimensions of play activity · Affective attunement · Newborn playfulness · Infant play · Exchange gaze · Affective engagement · Symbolic gesture · Affective attitude

When children start to relate to their world, objects and artefacts become familiar as they play with them. The child in play has purposes and intentions, which are intellectual and affective, and develop as their play progresses. This chapter explores different dimensions of play activity. We interpret these dimensions as creative and affective influences in children's learning and development. As such, dimensions of play activity are worthy of consideration in relation to the pedagogical practices involved.

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5.1 Introduction

We take a cultural-historical approach to affective and emotional drives that children experience and communicate during play. Vygotsky explained how there are different qualities to our full stop after affects. For example, the child relates differently to people's sounds such as the 'affective colour of the human voice and to changes in facial expressions' (Vygotsky 1998, p. 235). Emotions and affects have different forms of being expressed and communicated during play. Vygotsky (1966) explained how in play children have a purpose when playing. Children express their own wishes and desires; he called this an affective attitude,

> Play is a purposeful activity for a child. Purpose as the ultimate goal determines the child's affective attitude to play (Vygotsky 1966, p. 16).

In this chapter we focus on how children relate affectively to objects and people, and how their purposes and intentions are communicated to others full stop. This happens through movement, language and non-verbal language that children affectively and imaginatively relate to an object (such as the illustration puppets) and they are able to imagine the roles their puppets take. When we examine play pedagogically, we look to include the child's perspective, and consider the relationship the child has with their social context which involves interaction with people and to the environment. This context can involve objects, space, place and the child's relationship with others.

In this chapter we discuss two affective dimensions of play—affective attunement and affective engagement. *Affective attunement* consists of educator eliciting reciprocal exchange with babies (and children) through communicative and affectively exchange creating a sense of togetherness, curiosity, delicacy and emotion in playful interactions.

Affective engagement is an important dimension of play activity that we wish to acknowledge for its vital place in the child's development.

Affective engagement consists of the child agentic capability to jointly engage the educator. The educator's recognition of this agentic capability is important in creating an intentional and affective attitude on how they jointly imagine play to be.

Affective attunement consists of educator eliciting reciprocal exchange with babies (and children) through communicative exchange creating a sense of togetherness, curiosity, delicacy and emotion in playful interactions.

We begin by thinking about the affective dimension of play activity with an example of new parents who captured first moments of a playful exchange with their new born baby. We name this harmonious relationship *affective attunement.*

5.2 Dimensions of Play Activity

The choices that educators make are important when we examine play. Educators make particular choices as part of the dimensions of play. Rogers (2010) suggests explicit and visible adult choices that involve:

(a) the selection and combination of *materials,* what the children play with;
(b) the *location* where play occurs: where children play;
(c) the *playmates*: with whom children will play;
(d) the *outcome*: what children will play;
(e) the *temporal*: how long children will play.

These dimensions are important for planning and organizing play spaces that encourage interaction. In addition, choices made influence how children themselves will choose with whom, how, when and where to play, depending on what is available in their social spaces. The educator's imagination is important to consider in relation to how he/she might imagine how materials and time-space dimensions are created in collaboration with children.

The next two case studies with two babies focuses on dimensions of play activity from Roger's (2010) explanation of adults' choices and focusing on babies affectivity in play.

5.3 Dimension of Play Activity: Affective Attunement

Affective attunement occurs in coordinated playful interaction when educator/parents elicit reciprocal exchange with baby (or young child/children) through communication that is characterised by being attuned to one another though feeling a sense of togetherness and delicacy of movement and shared emotion.

In interactive play, Vygotsky (2004) makes clear that learning occurs as children imitate actions and produce their own imagined responses, which in turn generate new development. We believe that this occurs from the moment the child is born and find it important to challenge the commonly held misconception that newborns are physically not capable of seeing and responding. An Australian study of a family's interactive practices with their newborn infant, suggests that intentional playful interactions can begin from birth and constitute dynamic coordinated activity of infant and parents.

Case Study 5.1: Playing with a Newborn Baby

As scientists (and new parents), both father and mother (audiologist and speech pathologist) have deep professional interests in communication and share the profound experience of being parents for the first time. In becoming a new family, they venture on an interactive journey of emotional joyful discovery, and intentionally record their first experiences with newborn daughter. Unaware of what their newborn child brings to them, they initiate a communicative exchange after baby is fed and settled. The father holds his baby daughter whilst mother films and makes a commentary on the playful interaction. The baby is twelve hours old. The scene is filmed with only new family present in the hospital room. Father is holding his newborn daughter. She is held in a way that father's hands support her head and this allows close face to face contact. Father cradles his daughter's

head and watches her every movement intently responding to each facial gesture and movement in particular, and anticipating the exchanges as first moments of communication and the dimension of affective attunement between them, unfolds (Fig. 5.1). Mother videos the playful exchange from the hospital bed, and gives a running commentary at the same time expressing what she is thinking, feeling and seeing. Her vocal communication is in the field of action too. There are suggestions made to the father as the scene unfolds. The parents have observed the baby's tongue movements after feeding and particularly want to record if she is able to imitate the father's playful action of poking his tongue out

Mother's video commentary: *J. (Father) is going to show some imitation.*

Mother, a speech pathologist says 'She's concentrating. Do your tongue I haven't got that on video yet.'
(Father sticks tongue out in a game he started playing with his daughter earlier, and a game mother wants captured on video)
Mother: *Let's see this…*
(*Baby gazes intently towards father's face)*
(Father is in synchronized movement with baby and there is rhythmic head turning for example as if both are inquisitive about each other)
Mother: *She's thinking, thinking—can you do that?*
Mother: *There she goes…Ah watch daddy.*
Father: *There she goes. (Baby starts to stick tongue out in apparent response to father's tongue being poked right out)*
Mother: *Ah there she goes, she's mesmerized. Is her tongue going to come out?*
Mother: *That's …Look at that! Good girl. (Baby's tongue comes right out in what appears to be a coordinated response to father's gesture.)*
Mother: *Oh yeah…. I'll zoom in on her. Look at you—you did that for daddy.*

Fig. 5.1 Playful imitation (at day one)

(Baby has slept and fed for most of her first day but parents reported that her brief moments of lucidity and focus had intrigued them hence their wish to record evidence of gaze and imitation in those times of playful interaction.)
Father: *Ohh, you're a clever girl aren't you? Clever girl, clever girl.*

What we see happening is that the father is deeply attuned to his new baby's every movement and he smiles, holds, ooohs and ahhhs, and expresses delight '*clever girl, clever girl*'. Human culture is being created in this moment. The baby authors her own brief response; her own moment of action; and uses her own initiative to do this (Kudryavtsev 2006). Although baby is not yet able to realise it, the relational quality of the exchange builds her volitional activity which is seen in the shared construction of movements—the father's head moves sideways and baby immediately follows the same pattern; the father sticks his tongue out playfully and the moments of baby's vitality and lucidity are evident in her corresponding poking out of tongue. The actions merge with the infant fully engaged and embodied in living each moment of the interactive experience with her father. This social interaction is an act of intimate communication characterised by affective attunement and conceptual reciprocity and foundational to learning in and through pedagogical play.

The choice the family made to have this playful exchange with their baby involves them all in the art of reciprocity. The interactions that occur reflect shared feelings of wonderment and curiosity. The playful exchange actually forms into a dynamic conversation where baby responds to father and imitates him and father responds to baby and imitates her. Baby initiates action—although she may not realise it or even be aware she is doing so—she enters very briefly into a playful and reciprocal exchange.

Awareness of the nature of such reciprocity is rarely recorded however research with older children 3–5 years by Singer and de Haan (2007), who examined verbal strategies of a child over a two year period from three years of age in a day care centre suggested the language used to construct a sense of togetherness was built on both imitation and repetition. From this, they concluded, a growing sense of cooperation and care built the common ground needed for a child's affective and cooperative relations with others. In the Australian example the family used imitation and repetition to build this common ground with their child from birth. Both transcript and video capture images reflect the affective dimension of the playful exchange recorded in the first hours of family life. The exchange shows how a shared narrative is constructed between family members within playful activity 'Ah *there she goes, she's mesmerized. Is her tongue going to come out?*'. *Parent and family reactions to baby are interactive in nature not simply reactive. The playful and intentional exchanges are joyful and amazing moments where it is possible to realise where a child's cooperative and affective relations with others can begin.*

In this study it was seen that the first time imitation experiences of the newborn infant with her parents were closely integrated through the family's initial curious, delicate and emotional interactions. In order for a baby to imitate we argue that

the parent's stimulating and playful responsiveness engaged the baby's interest and with some conscious awareness baby copied what she had seen. This cultural-historical view does contradict a purely biological maturational view of a newborn infant but adds to our knowledge of infant capacity for imagination. We recognise curiosity, delicacy and emotion as further dimensions of this playful interaction. Mother comments as she films father holding their new baby, '*Okay now here we are, magic moment—a little bit of imitation*'. The father sticks his tongue way out and then smiles at his daughter who in the video clip maintains an intense gaze towards father's face. Father raises his eyebrows looking intently and at this moment baby pokes her tongue out in a coordinated response. These interactions form part of a new social situation of development for all the participants, (father, mother and infant). The baby's responses invite parental interaction which in turn anticipates reciprocity. The first moments of family life (such as this represents) are rarely captured in naturalistic settings and have been insufficiently studied in relation to the role of playful interaction as a foundational dimension for learning and development of communicative language. We find that affective attunement in playful activity is a recognisable dimension of play in this communicative exchange.

In this playful interaction with babies we raise two important questions: Are reflexes and communication different components of an integrated process, and how do natural responses to a newborn predispose parents to building a culture of pedagogical play?

5.4 Dimensions of Infant Playfulness

When Holodynski (2009) addresses the question of how human emotions develop in infancy he raises the idea that caregivers interpret infant actions as an expression of their current feeling, indicating that the infant's expressive reactions have a mediation role in the '*regulative function of emotions*' (p. 142). The mechanisms that Holodynski suggests, such as mirroring by the caregiver, he considers act as '*natural biofeedback training*' (p. 147) and such shared functions, as in the example of a prompt response to unfocused infant expression, reflect, in his view, enacted co-regulation of shared meaning for infant and caregiver. The notion of playfulness or the dimensions of playful activity in the dynamic exchange between infant and parent are not acknowledged. We bring this idea to the attention of those interested in the dimensions of play because Vygotsky (1978) described interactions between children and adults or more capable peers as central to children's learning and development. Any mediating interactions fall within the zone of proximal development, which for the newborn infant includes the affordances for learning that a family and environment can bring.

In language studies by Miall and Dissanayake (2003) awareness of '*infant social abilities*' (p. 339) highlighted that infant responses in interactive engagement with others will influence the behaviour of others towards the infant, but

neglected '*the exquisite and subtle interactive co-ordinations of emotions and behaviour between very young infants and adults*' (p. 339). But in their rich study Miall and Dissanayake (2003) focus on '*the poetics of baby talk*' (p. 337) and draw attention to the elements of episodes of baby talk, with their efforts directed at illuminating the importance of understanding '*the nature and function of human language*' (p. 355) along side acknowledgement of emotional states and enculturation. There are references to relationships between infant and parent all through their study, but no reflective examination of the cultural-historical context of the parent/s and what was brought to their interactions in the new situation.

If seen through the lens of Piagetian theory, Case Study 5.1 relates to his notion of the 'Sensori-motor' period 1 i.e. (0–1 month) a time of reflex activity (e.g. sucking, crying, grasping). The sensori-motor period 1 is defined in terms of physiological behaviour of the infant on its own, that is, what we would describe as a 'laboratory' infant studied biologically with no dynamic family relations or reciprocal interactions articulated. Dimensions of playful activity such as affective attunement are absent from this theoretical view.

As part of his theoretical re-evaluation of imitation, Vygotsky (1987) discounted an essentially mechanistic view of imitation that was '*rooted in traditional psychology, as well as in everyday consciousness*' (p. 209). He was also wary of the individualistically biased inferences drawn from such a view, as for example, that '*the child can imitate anything*' and that '*what I can do by imitating says nothing about my own mind*' (1987, p. 209). In its stead, Vygotsky (1987) posited that imitation is a social-relational activity essential to development: '*Development based on collaboration and imitation is the source of all specifically human characteristics of consciousness that develop in a child*' (p. 210).

Gajdamaschko (2005, 2010) considered that while discussing cultural development Vygotsky (1987) had noted surprise about absence in Piagetian theory of culture and history in a child's development, and, *'ironically, absence of the child himself, the personality of the child, in the process of development' (vol. 1, p. 87). 'What is missing then, in Piaget's perspective, is reality and the child's relationship to that reality. What is also missing is the child's practical activity and the child's perspective. This is fundamental. Even the socialization of the child's thinking is analyzed by Piaget outside the context of practice*' (Vygotsky 1987, vol. 1, p. 87).

When thinking about dimensions of play activity we should be focusing on what the child's perspective is. What is the child doing in their playful activity right from birth? In case Study 5.1, the mother's commentary, father's response and baby's actions, present us with an integrated picture of using inborn reflex and intimate social communication in a zone of proximal development that includes the dimension of *affective attunement*.

Case Study 5.1 shows that the dimensions of play activity include *affective attunement* and can begin from birth when educators/parents are aware of pedagogical strategies. This dimension of play constitutes harmonious coordinated activity of baby and parents. The family's pedagogical role as a coordinating influence in play activity is seen as dynamic in form and involves reciprocal

relationships. The fun of playful imitation activity in our example suggests that this dimension of play involves purpose and intention as part of *affective attunement* and this may also constitute an effective way to build pedagogical relationships.

Case Study 5.2: Baby Silvana's Affective Attitude While Playing

We previously discussed that an important dimension of play is the selection and combination of materials where children play. In the following example, the adult (mother), selected a particular material (the playmat) for Silvana to play on in the family home. The play dimension of having an outcome developed as Silvana mastered how to grab and interact with the playmat objects. She played purposefully (having a goal of reaching) and affectively developing intense emotions of enjoyment and laughter while playing. In the temporal dimension of play, Silvana made the choice and decided how long she would play. She was playful, smiled and laughed as she enjoyed and found interest in first grabbing the soft toys and second in looking at them. She exchanged looks because in other observations she had looked at the soft toys like they were real people (they had eyes). This experience was shared in mother's group and other mothers commented how at this time in their babies' lives they also enjoyed looking at soft toys with faces and eyes that were human like. This was seen in this example.

This experience was shared in mother's group and other mothers commented how at this time in the babies' lives they enjoyed looking at soft toys like a human like person.

Adults provided choices of material and selected a play space. In mother's playgroup, mother had chosen a space where babies could socially interact and be playful whilst they in turn affectively communicated through smiling at each other. It is important to reflect on what choices adults make, for example in how they encourage babies to relate to others and interact with objects as seen in the next case study.

Silvana, a four month old baby, is playing on a mat, in her home and at mother's group with other children, Fleur and Nate, who are three and four months old. She has an affective attitude in play—a purpose and intention of grabbing and exploring an object (soft toy) and secondly in learning how to relate to others affectively (Figs. 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4).

When analyzing play from the child's perspective it is important to consider what the play activity means for the child—the affective attitude in play-, for example learning to interact with other babies.

In Figs. 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4, we can see how baby Silvana is able to play through 'looking at' a young age to human and non-human faces (soft toys with a human face). Goodfellow (2012) explains how infants engage in complex social relationships for example with peers and educators. It is important to understand how they make meaning (understand their everyday worlds) through 'looking and listening—in' (p. 25). Infants communicate their intentions and goals through their actions, and visual narratives allow educators to understand these complex relationships.

Fig. 5.2 Affectively relating to objects

Fig. 5.3 Affectively relating to objects

Fig. 5.4 **a** Silvana plays and exchanges looks with her mother (Gloria) Fleur **b** and Nate **c** in Mother's playgroup

5.5 Dimension of Play Activity: Exchange with Human and Non-human Faces

The images in this section show the complexity of how babies relate and engage with each other while beginning to play through 'looking in'. In the images Silvana exchanges looks with her mother and with another child Fleur, and another child Nate (Fig. 5.4c) exchanges looks with her. When Silvana is on the play mat space, it allows for interactions and relationships with human and non-human faces. Babies like Silvana, Nate and Fleur interact creatively with objects and exchange looks and express interest in others.

In Figs. 5.2 and 5.3, Silvana learns how to touch and grasp the objects. Play has an affective dimension when babies relate to human and non-human faces. Vygotsky (1966) explains how the nature of play is affective and that imaginary situations contain affective incentives. In play the child relates to an object and creates a meaning; actions are conceived in an imaginary situation that affect the situation in which the child plays. For Silvana, she creates a meaning in recognizing people and objects. When Silvana plays with an object with a non-human face she grabs objects which are familiar to her and which she has learned to recognize. These non-human objects are of interest to babies because they have human features such as eyes and mouth that babies are able to touch and grab. Non-human objects hold a special place for babies as they interact everyday with them and become familiar play objects.

Play also has a purpose and for babies like Silvana it means to enjoy exchanging looks. Silvana moves into reality when she exchanges looks with her mother—adult. Silvana observes her mother's eyes for comparison. Babies are aware at a young age about the difference between human and non-human faces while playing. We call this an example of play because it involves a creative process as Silvana concentrates and pays attention to the sound and look of the non-human objects on the playmat and then directs her gaze at human eyes to interact with in reality.

Another dimension of this play is about choice. The educators, in this case her parents, have made choices for Silvana at this very young age, however she can act in this play activity according to her own interest. This is because Silvana (as young as four months) has her own purpose and goal when playing on this play mat with these objects. Vygotsky (1966, p. 16) explains, '*play is a purposeful activity for a child. Purpose as the ultimate goal determined the child's affective attitude to play*'. Silvana's purpose develops as the play progresses; she interacts affectively not only with the objects but through observing her mother who gives encouragement for her to keep playing. When babies are together on the playmat, as shown with Fleur and Nate, they look out for faces and exchange looks, This can be seen where Fleur and Silvana look at each other (Fig. 5.4b) and when Nate looks at Silvana (Fig. 5.4c).

5.6 Dimension of Play Activity: Affective Engagement

This section explains a dimension of play in relation to what kind of choices educators make for children (Rogers 2010) and how play is a cultural activity that involves rules, roles and imaginary situations (Vygotsky 1966). Further, we note that the quality of the children's play activity is important as they choose and allow the involvement of other children in their play. van Oers (2010) explains three important dimensions in play: (a) the nature of rules, (b) degrees of freedom and (c) levels of involvement. In the nature of rules, participants make implicit rules, which may be hidden rules. This happens when participants in play do not verbally make the rules clear to other players. Children also make explicit rules in their own play script through their conversations about what role to take or what they choose to play with. In the dimension of play named as degrees of freedom van Oers (2010) refers to how participants make choices about play, how to act and what the goals of the play activity are. In discussing levels of involvement, participation and engagement in play are thought about in relation to how children affectively engage with adults and other children. We call this dimension of play *affective engagement*. This involves the affective emotional incentives and goals of participants as they play and these are shared with other play participants through rule and role making.

Case Study 5.3 examines *affective engagement* between a child and his grandfather as the child negotiates and engages his grandfather in playful activity.

Case Study 5.3: Mario Plays Chase and Hide with Abuelo

Mario is a four and a half year old boy who lives with his grandfather (Abuelo) and parents in a rural community in Mexico. The researcher, Gloria, is filming the everyday life of Mario. Mario and his grandfather are outside their house in the afternoon. Abuelo (grandfather) has had a shower after he came back from work. Mario is playing on the slide and his grandfather is pushing him. Mario eventually moves from playing on the slide and suggests Abuelo plays with him. Mario initiates and invites Abuelo to play 'catch me' and it takes Mario some time to negotiate with his grandfather to join his play. Eventually Abuelo plays with Mario and their play changes and moves from 'catch me if you can' to 'hide and seek'. Mario is playful and embodies affectively and creatively as he energetically engages with his grandfather in his play and through his body, gestures and postures shows his affective purpose in play (Fig. 5.5).

Mario: *Come catch me, let's see catch me if you can Abuelo*
Abuelo: *Yes, I can* (he looks tired and continues to chat with Mario).
Mario: *Let's see I say ready, set, go* (moves closer to Abuelo as he is some distance away) (Fig. 5.6)
Abuelo: *Go and play with your mother, what's the name?*
Mario: *ready, set go, run Abuelo…*
Abuelo: (he does not join in) *when you play with your mum…* (Figs. 5.7 and 5.8)
Mario: *run Abuelo, let's see run* (moves hands, jumps and changes tone of voice and pitch)

Fig. 5.5 Mario calling out abuelo to catch him

Fig. 5.6 Mario runs closer to abuelo

Fig. 5.7 Mario enthusiastically moves to engage abuelo in his play

Fig. 5.8 Mario enthusiastically moves to engage abuelo in his play

Abuelo: *with your mum* [play with your mum] *so you can make your mum run* [laughs]
Mario: *Let's see your aunty* (researcher)
Researcher: *I am recording you…*
Abuelo: *She's recording you…*
Mario: *You Poppy you!* (He takes his hand)
Mario: *Ready, set…* (Fig. 5.9)
Mario and Abuelo laugh as Mario runs and Abuelo follows Mario. Mario runs very far and Abuelo runs slowly.
Abuelo: *over there not fair…*
Mario: *Yes you can…*

Mario changes the game and quickly engages his grandfather: Better to play hide and seek, you count… (Fig. 5.10)

Abuelo: *you tell me when* (tells to researcher*) he is going to come running running. I am coming* (walks towards Mario)
Mario: (shouts) *NOW!!*
Abuelo: *Ok, I am going to look for you…*
Mario: (shouts) *catch me* (screams and runs to a wall)
Mario: *catch me boto* (*boto* means he is safe in a game where children run to catch each other and arrive to a safe place. In this case, the safe place is the wall)

Mario and Abuelo laugh continually.

Abuelo: *now you count…* (Figs. 5.11 and 5.12)
Mario: *one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, say now Poppy.*

Abuelo runs slowly (Fig. 5.13).

Fig. 5.9 Abuelo plays and runs to catch Mario

Fig. 5.10 Abuelo walks to find Mario

Fig. 5.11 Mario counts

Fig. 5.12 Abuelo hides

Fig. 5.13 Mario touches (catches) Abuelo

Abuelo has not hidden and Mario counts again and runs to find him. They laugh all the way and Mario finally touches Abuelo, meaning he caught him.

Mario: *you lose…*
Abuelo: *I lost little son, it is because you run fast…*
Mario: *yes and you don't* [win]…
Abuelo: *you are a deer* [meaning you run fast like a deer]
Mario: *you are next…*
Abuelo counts: *two, four, six, eight, ten…*

Mario runs and grandfather says: *all right…*

The game continues and Abuelo looks for Mario twice. As Abuelo chases Mario they both laugh as Mario arrives at the wall, the safe place where he cannot be caught. Play ends as Mario suggests another game and plays with his bike.

Play is a '*meaningful context for learning and development*' (van Oers 2010, p. 195). In a cultural—historical view, play is characterized as a creative activity where children create rules, roles and make meaning of their worlds. In relation to rules, these can be explicit or implicit. In Mario's case, he explicitly showed the rules of this play to Abuelo by his repetitive movements and actions, which led to communicating his motives and purposes in play in a non-verbal way. The rules and roles were also explicit in play script (van Oers 2010). A play script involves conversations between participants while playing; in this case it included explicit non-verbal language such as gestures and verbal language for example as Mario constantly said 'ready, set, go' for his Abuelo to act upon these rules which were to run. Later, Mario explicitly showed the rules of hide and seek when he told his abuelo that it was his turn to count and when Abuelo will take the turn to hide and Mario look for him.

In the hide and seek game, Mario also had degrees of freedom (van Oers 2010). These degrees of freedom were important for Mario and Abuelo as the play progressed. Rules and roles present a tension between players/participants/actors as they set conditions to accomplish them or oppose them. In the play example, it can be seen there are some tensions in Abuelo accepting the roles of play. Mario had to *affectively engage* his grandfather in playing. Mario *affectively engaged* his grandfather in a playful way. He creatively and playfully showed his motives and intentions to Abuelo. At first, Mario moved playfully and tells Abuelo to catch me if you can. But, as his grandfather is not as interested as Mario is, Mario had to make an effort to further affectively engage him. This *affective engagement* consisted of the adult taking up the child's perspective and valuing the child's play. This is what Abuelo does, he eventually without agreeing verbally, moves to catch Mario as he says 'you Abuelo… ready set…' and Abuelo chases Mario. Eventually this play changes from chasing to hide and seek. Mario establishes the rules of play and Abuelo learns to accept them. In this example, affective engagement consisted of the child communicating his affective attitude and how he imagined what play might collectively be with his Abuelo.

We consider this play is collective because it is shared by Abuelo and he shows interest in not only playing with Mario but also in being with him. There are playful exchanges as they enjoy being with each other, laughing continuously. Vygotsky (2004) explained how '*the best stimulus of creativity in children is to organize their life and environment so that it leads to the need and ability to create*' (p. 66). In play the child is creating thoughts and emotions that are significant in the conditions that life and the environment bring to the child. For Mario, playing outside and moving and running in a big space is important. Mario lives with his grandfather and their relationship deepens as they interact in their everyday lives through playing together. This serves Mario well for learning how to negotiate in other situations with Abuelo.

Vygotsky (2004) mentions how the child is a creator. The child is able to express through play his/her deep intentions to others both creatively and affectively. Mario, had strong motives and intentions that he communicated to Abuelo.

5.7 Affective Engagement Through Symbolic Gesture

Case Study 5.4: Airport Play

In a city preschool in Mexico, the children's age ranges from three-and-a-half years to four-and-a-half years. The researcher is filming the everyday life of children in their preschool. Children in this preschool have a very formal curriculum. Play occurs at recess time. Children play outside their classroom. The play space has several plastic cubby houses, shared bikes and plastic grass and the teacher's role is to just be vigilant and check children while they play. Before this play occurs, Miguel aged four has a confrontation with Maria (aged four) as he says she stole his bike. He asks her why did she steal his bike and Maria does not answer back. Miguel moves and insists on having the bike back but there is no response from Maria. Miguel eventually moves away. He is cross with Maria and runs, as he cannot get the bike. Explaining this relationship first is important, as Maria is not welcomed into the following play scene.

Miguel calls out: *Who comes to the pirate ship?*
Rebeca: *yes I will come to the pirate ship… pirate ships…*
Miguel (looks at Maria): *goodbye Marianita piggy!*
Miguel starts using a steering wheel and drives what seems to be the pirate ship.

Miguel: *Goodbye Maria!* (to another child that is above them) *we are going out of here…*
Rebeca: *goodbye Monterrey (*waves hand).
Rebeca: *Goodbye Monterrey! We are going to Mexico.*
Rebeca tells Maria: *You can't get up here. Adios a Monterrey ya nos vamos a Mexico…*
Miguel: *This is not a pirate ship, it is an airplane!*
Rebeca: *yes!*
Miguel: *let's go!*
Rebeca: *and you can't come in…*

Maria tries to join in and gets out of her bicycle.

Rebeca: *get into your bike! You can't!*

However, Maria suddenly gets into the space as Rebeca blocks her out. Miguel continues driving and making noises *uuuuhh*.

Miguel tells another child: *you cannot because the plane closed* [the door]
Rebeca continues: *goodbye to Monterrey!* [waves]

Sergio, another child joins in.

Sergio: *this is the country of the bad ones!*
Rebeca: *yes of the bad ones!*
Mario continues driving and says: *goodbye Monterrey!*

Maria does not talk but waves goodbye too.

Researcher: *where are you going?*
Miguel: *To Mexico! Uuuhhh makes noises… we just arrived to Mexico! gets down from the cubby house…*
Rebeca: *Look at the characters of Mexico!*
Miguel: *yes… we arrived in Mexico…*
Rebeca: *wow!*
Miguel: *let's go to the house in Monterrey!*
Miguel gets up into the space and continues with noises uuuhhh….
More children join in and Miguel continues using the steering wheel.
Miguel: *we are going to the house of Monterrey!*
Children get down.
Miguel: *let's go to the house!*

They run to a cubby house and recess time is over.

Vygotsky (1997) explains how children make meaning through gestures in play. Symbolic function is created in the child's play and is produced and represented through gestures. '*The child's own movement, his own gesture is what ascribes the function of a sign suitable to an object, and this imparts meaning to it*' (p. 135). In this play example, children are learning to participate in symbolic meanings which have a meaning and role in play for the child. Gestures acquire meaning and words in play. In this play example, it is about playing first in a pirate ship then in a plane. The roles are created, Miguel is the pilot (Fig. 5.19) and Rebeca is a passenger, these however are implicit roles. Rebeca explicitly says goodbye to everyone (Figs. 5.14 and 5.15) and Miguel flies the plane and represents the noise of the plane through a 'rrr' sound (Fig. 5.16).

As mentioned previously, Vygotsky (1997) suggested that play can be every thing and any thing. The forms of representing play differ as the child brings their everyday experiences to the play activity. Rebeca states how they are going to Mexico and knows they are in Monterrey through constantly repeating goodbye Monterrey. Miguel agrees and says to the researcher we are going to Mexico. It is very probable these children have had everyday experiences of flying in a plane and know that goodbye is represented through waving. The action of waving becomes affective as children have an emotional connotation to the word goodbye. Rebeca enjoys waving to everyone and Maria and Miguel (Figs. 5.17 and 5.18) who wave goodbye observe this (Fig. 5.19).

Case Study 5.4 shows how important it is to pay attention to the ways children make meaning through *affective symbolic gesturing*, which is an important dimension of play. *Affective symbolic gesturing* involves non-verbal movements and embodiment of action in the play situation children are in with themselves and other children.

In this example space is important. Rogers (2010) explains the choices made by adults relate to the selection and combination of materials as an important aspect of play. In this preschool even though play involved plastic materials it allowed for

Fig. 5.14 Rebeca waves goodbye

Fig. 5.15 Rebeca waves goodbye

Fig. 5.16 Miguel excludes another child from the airplane play

Fig. 5.17 Miguel and Maria wave goodbye

Fig. 5.18 Miguel and Maria wave goodbye

Fig. 5.19 Miguel as the pilot in the steering wheel

children's imagination but it limited the possibilities for pedagogical involvement. The space, a plastic cubby house allowed children to imagine and be involved with the space chosen by adults.

5.8 Conclusion

There are dimensions of play activity that are influential in young children's learning and development. The dimensions discussed involve us in thinking more about the subtle relational nuances in our pedagogical approaches to babies and young children as we engage with their playful activity.

We named *affective attunement* as a dimension of playful activity observed between a new born baby and her parents. The notion of *affective attunement* is understood in this example to mean the harmonious and loving first interactions shared between father, mother and their baby daughter that formed the first secure moments of family life. In the playful activity observed, *affective attunement* between baby and family generated communicative gestural language and formed conversational exchange suggesting this dimension of play is one way that language comes to children.

We expand the notion of exchange as a dimension of play activity when it involves babies in *exchanging gazes between human and non-human faces* and in doing so, start to recognise the face as human or non-human. In the puzzlement that only eyes can reveal, baby Silvana exchanges looks with her mother and begins the process of considering reality and representation of reality. Both our examples indicate dimensions of play activity with very young children that involve the *art of reciprocity* and place importance on the social dimensions in adult/child interactions with babies. The examples of pre-school play activity outdoors bring the dimensions of cultural and historical location, choice, space and imagination into our discussion.

When Mario *affectively engages* his grandfather in his game of hide and seek we can understand the child's negotiating power and freedom of expression played out in a community space. The role of the educator, in this case the grandfather, had choices to participate in play. Mario affectively engaged his grandfather to join his play in a creative way through making affective movements and requests to his grandfather. These movements and non-verbal language showed another dimension of play: *affective symbolic gesturing.* Case Study 5.4 was another demonstration: the children's play involved learning to relate and share the same goal, which was waving goodbye.

In Case Study 5.4, the role of the educator was to be vigilant rather than to actively listen and be involved in the children's play. One of the pedagogical challenges in this preschool was how the educator could observe and make play pedagogical.

In all the examples given in this chapter it can be seen how dimensions of play activity will affect how children affectively and creatively imagine what play can be with others and with the objects selected for them.

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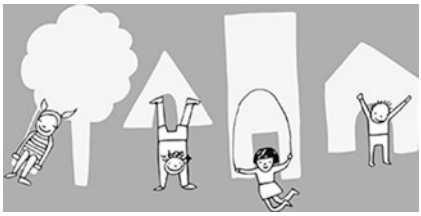
Chapter 6
Play Affordances Across Institutional Contexts



Children participate in different educational settings/contexts such as family, school and community, where they interact, imitate and model other members' activities…
…children have to investigate possibilities for participation, for engaging and for influencing situations in their daily lives
(Hojholt, in Hedegaard et al. 2012, p. 210).

Abstract 'Affordance' was a term first used by Gibson (1979) to mean: *…something that refers to both the environment (and what it offers) and the animal… the term implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment* (1979, p. 127). In this chapter we use the term affordance to examine the elements of time, continuity and culture of pedagogical practices in play offered across institutional settings in contemporary Australian and international contexts. In terms of affordance our illustration suggests that a tree is an opportunity for the child to learn to swing; an outdoor space a playful chance to try handstands; a school playground a place to learn skipping games; and a home may give freedom for the child to greet the day with a stretch. We ask what affordances can pedagogical play offer the child in terms of learning across institutional contexts?

Keywords Play affordances · Across institutional contexts · Learning motives · Agentic imagination · Social and cultural engagement · Emotional attitudes · School play

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6.1 Introduction

The way playful activity experienced by children in their social settings of family and community as institutions is the subject of cultural-historical research into learning. The concept of affordances brings new thinking to how humans operate, think and decide in a given setting and for pedagogical play it draws attention to what is embodied in the human and material forms of everyday institutional practices that may affect play activity.

We use the concept of affordances because we find that affordances exist in artefacts and practices in relation to the playful learning activity children experience across institutional settings. For example we understand the changing affordances of an artefact such as an ipad (as camera, as game etc.) in relation to different practices in playful contexts.

The notions of *affective attunement* and *affective engagement* discussed in Chap. 5 help us to understand how a child is involved in an ongoing process of personal relationship with the subjects and objects present in their daily life. But a child's life is lived across different institutional settings and each setting provides a child with various play opportunities. For a child, play is part of their purposeful daily living and it is in their playful activity that opportunities for learning and development arise. '*Play creates a 'space' to perform imagining, and imagining involves challenging the assumptions of everyday 'reality'* …' (Holzman 2009, p. 101). The different institutional settings of the young child's everyday reality and the places the child lives in, imagines in, and in turn learns in, include family and home life, community life and life in pre-school and/or school settings. Children move across these settings in everyday life and as each setting brings its own set of practices (including rules and routines), children have opportunities to express themselves playfully or not (Case Study 3.1 showed how young children will engage playfully even if it is only for a brief ten seconds).

Affordances in the school setting can be examined from the perspective of environmental aspects. A school's facilities, layout, organisation of routines and provision of artefacts can all be affordances for the child's learning (Bang 2009). Each institutional setting, be it the community, the home, the pre-school or school, provides different affordances and thus different opportunities for the child's learning in daily life.

In the last chapter we noted how the relationships between the child and their personal world form an important part of the child's learning and development. We now examine how those relational dimensions of play activity—*affective engagement* and *affective attunement*—are experienced across the whole fabric of the child's daily life and are linked into the pedagogical intentions of parents, peers, and the educators encountered over time in various institutional settings.

An institutional setting can mean the child's home and family, their community, school, pre-school, and all the different places where young children live their daily lives. How play affordances develop across a child's environment in each institutional setting relates to the qualities (dimensions) of the encounters and exchanges within them. Children play where they are and with what there is, or with what extra is made available to them. In play activity, young children perform and transform their realities

with feelings and imagination. Whatever the child can imagine to be, is what the child can be. Whatever the adult can imagine to be is a vital pedagogical practice for the child's learning in play. When pedagogical practices in the home are closely aligned to that of the pre-school or school setting, from the young child's perspective the process of learning can have greater continuity and consistency. In an example of using technology to support transition from home to childcare with her baby son, Liang used her iPhone to take photos of his first playful activity in a childcare setting. Before returning she showed these images of playful activity to her son and talked about what she saw. He gave his full attention to the iPhone images as she spoke. Reviewing activity in this way was used to give reassurance and continuity to her baby son's time in childcare and added to our understanding of new affordances for technology.

Pedagogical practices make different demands on young children (Hedegaard 2009). When pedagogical practices across institutional settings are mis-aligned, discordant and inconsistent, affordances for learning in playful activity may be limited. Thinking about family as an institution, and home as an institutional setting, understanding the institutional practices within different cultural settings helps to support children's learning. In Case Study 6.1, we see what happens when an educator uses a familiar game from home as an affordance for learning in the pre-school setting.

6.2 The 'Poem Chair' Game

Case Study 6.1: The 'Poem Chair' Game in a Chinese Language School

This playful activity occurred in a Chinese language school located in Melbourne, Australia. The preschoolers come to the Chinese language school over the weekend. In this class, the Chinese teacher taught children a Chinese children's poem: '*Yao A Yao, Yao A Yao; Yao Dao Wai Po Qiao; Tang Yi Bao, Guo Yi Bao; Wai Po Kua Wo Hao Bao Bao*', a very popular children's poem in Chinese culture (In English the poem could be translated as: '*Row, row, row the boat to grandma's bridge; one bag of candy, one bag of fruit; grandma says I'm a good child*'.). At the end of the class, the teacher offered a '*Poem Chair*' game for five children to play together, a version of the game known as 'musical chairs.' They put four chairs in a circle in the middle of the classroom. The five chosen children walked around the chairs and the others in the class participated by reading the poem they had just learnt together. When the teacher said, 'stop', the five children had to stop and race to a chair and sit down (Fig. 6.1). The one who was left without a chair to sit on was eliminated from the game. The teacher then moved out one chair. The remaining four children started playing the same game again (Fig. 6.2). This game is played until in the end, the one child who gets to the last chair to sit becomes the winner. All the children were quite excited about this game. The audience clapped their hands, sang along, and later cheered for the remaining players. The players were engaged in the game, and showed their enthusiasm for becoming the 'winner'.

The Chinese teacher wanted to encourage the children to remember the poem. The game here is considered as a learning tool to help the children to remember

Fig. 6.1 Four children left

Fig. 6.2 Winner to sit first

the poem. All the children have the chance to read and recite the poem when the game is on but we notice that most children in this game become concerned about who is the winner in the end rather than trying to remember the poem.

Chinese language school normally borrows the regular primary school classroom to teach in. Therefore, the learning materials are very limited for instructing and supporting children's language learning. Within the limitation of the resources, the educator integrated the *Poem Chair* game with learning the Chinese poem, which enhanced the children's affective learning of Chinese.

6.3 Supporting Children's Learning in Play

Children's learning and development occurs through participation in different institutional practices such as family, preschool, after school institutions and so on (Hedegaard 2009). Chinese immigrant families send their preschoolers to the Chinese language school over the weekend in order to support their children's learning. The aim of the Chinese school is to meet families' demands and teach Chinese language through different activities. In this case, the teacher also has his or her own teaching plan aiming to master the Chinese children's poem. This shows the teacher's demands on the children. However, children have their own motives in learning language and we see this in the moment when the teacher understood the children had started to lose interest in learning the Chinese poem. We recognise this as the crisis/conflict that occurred between the demands of the teacher and the motives of children in learning language. '*When the child enters into a new relation to other people in her everyday life, crises can arise between the child's own motives and the motives and values of others in the social situation*' (Hedegaard 2009, p. 76). How this conflict is dealt with is an important pedagogical issue. In this case, the teacher considered the playful game as a pedagogical tool to enhance the children's motives in learning the poem. The rules of the play activity have been instilled in the children's learning and those who did not engage in the game needed to recite the poem. The reciting of the poem is like using music (in a standard game of musical chairs) as the prompt for children in the game to look for a seat.

Most of the children did not try to recite the Chinese poem; rather, they focused on who would be the winner of the game, although the play was intended to be used as a pedagogical tool to support children's learning.

6.4 Generating Children's Learning Motives in Play from Children's Perspective

As the teacher mentioned, 'the limited resources could not encourage children to learn Chinese through play at Chinese school'. This was a true situation in the current Chinese school, but if the variety of play objects, space and freedom and the affordances they offered can be considered from the child's perspective, the learning experience could be changed. In this case, a Chinese poem used as the teaching content, tells a story about how a grandma praises her grandson as he visits her with candy and fruit. If the pedagogical tool can be introduced by role-playing grandma and grandson and taken from young children's everyday knowledge, then the learning experience will be different. Children's learning motives will be generated through their engagement in the role-play activities.

Children need motives to engage in institutional social practices. According to Leont'ev (1978), as opposed to having an internal source, motives are determined by cultural practice, and in turn influence how practice is structured. In this case, how play offers opportunities for the generation of children's learning is a key pedagogical issue.

When children make sense and become conscious of the world through exploration with adults in activities, they '*generate new networks of subject senses and possibilities for the subject's actions*' (Gonzalez-Rey 2011, p. 36). Preschool children in play-based activity are interested in the adults' world. As evidenced in play, preschool-aged children initially imitate familiar social roles such as mother and baby, teacher and student, doctor and patient. In this sense, children develop their motives when performing these social roles in play and gain access to the social meaning and aims of adults' activity through their play activities. Thus, motives develop as a relation between children and the activity they engage in (Hedegaard and Chaiklin 2005). In this case, role-play performance of the Chinese poem may be afforded from the children's perspective to generate children's motives in learning Chinese, through access to the social meaning of the poem. The everyday knowledge of the social relations between grandma and grandson can be activated through role-play to learn this particular Chinese poem. As capable children and full of their own will and agency, the children in Chinese school had focused on playing and winning the poem chair game rather than focusing on what the teacher had planned. The Chinese poem and understanding its meaning, can finally be afforded by providing role-play opportunities for the class where they played out their ideas and feelings. In that way they came to learn the expressed cultural values in the poem. In this new pedagogical situation *agentic imagination* was present in the playful activity. We see that a cultural alignment in the pedagogical practices of home and at pre-school brings the children at the Chinese school towards creating their own pedagogy in play.

6.5 Skipping Play

Case Study 6.2: Skipping at Home and School

> The different demands, expectations, and activities that a child experiences across the institutions (educational contexts) shape their motives and create new possibilities for development (Fleer 2010, p. 197).

When Em (aged six) started primary school, her family were curious as to what really interested her. What Em chose to talk about at home, in relation to school, were her friendships and playground skipping games. Of all the things that school life can offer it was skipping in the playground that had most captured her attention. Joyful discussion about skipping games and skipping moves filled her conversations with her family at home (Fig. 6.3). The family took an interest in her school activity and she was motivated to re-play the schoolyard games at home with her own skipping rope.

Fig. 6.3 Skipping conversations at home

6.6 Pedagogical and Playful Affordances of Skipping

> Children's interaction with their social and physical world as mediated by the family or the institutions the child attends, determines the developmental trajectory (Fleer 2010, p. 193).

We noted earlier in this chapter that in play activity, demands are generated by the child's involvement, and motives develop as the child interacts with their surroundings. Opportunities may or may not arise for the child's learning. The trajectories for development in young children involve the affordances present in playful activities across institutions including home and school. Not all play activities are transferred across institutions to grow and extend the way that Em's sustained and shared skipping did. The skipping had motivated Em's interest and provided her with a number of affordances for learning and development both in the playground with peers and in her family life. Firstly, it was family realisation that Em was passionate about skipping that was an important pedagogical starting point. The family listened and encouraged her to share ideas and school experiences. Family also provided her with a small skipping rope and mother played skipping games with her. This acted as an acknowledgement of her interest and gave further opportunities to play skipping games at home. In addition it greatly encouraged Em's *affective engagement* with and *affective attunement* to, her skipping. Em's play activity was documented by her family (in images and stories) and this documentation stabilized her playful experiences giving the chance to better understand the play in pedagogical terms and discover what activities around skipping supported her learning.

6.7 Social and Cultural Engagement

Initially, skipping play gave Em scope for engagement with others in the playground. It was a way of belonging to her peer group and was a playful activity in which to collectively share and express ideas. Later, Em's joy of skipping was demonstrated at home. In every spare moment she practised skipping, aligning this activity with her varied school experiences. Skipping play is often the result of planned spontaneity. This oxymoron 'planned spontaneity' aptly describes how skipping games initiated by children in the playground can develop collectively within a group and link into further playful expressions such as chants or rhymes or rope competitions of how many, how fast, and how long. The planned spontaneity of skipping games provided dynamic and rich play that Em really responded to. Over time, she demonstrated to her family how to whizz a rope fast, cross over arms to change the shape of the rope, and keep the rhythm of skipping without missing a counted beat. She changed timing of the rope movement from single to double skips, she counted the landings of her feet, she hop skipped and alternated feet all whilst moving the rope in time with her choice of skipping moves. She sang skipping rhymes, created silly chants and invited friends (and family) to skip in tandem with her as she spun the rope. She had participated with skipping games in the schoolyard and brought these experiences home to share and to try out with family and neighbourhood friends.

In contemporary society, education of young children around the world means acknowledgement of the practical resources that surround them. Em and many of her friends had skipping ropes; a situation that afforded the play activity a motive for children to participate. The question of what happens in interactive play and what opportunities are brought to the playful daily encounters made in a child's world, involves the child developing a motive. Valuing the notion that for young children, play in their daily activities means learning, we challenge educators and families to think more about how children's active play affords them the motives, new knowledge and opportunity for concept formation (Fleer 2010, pp. 62–67).

6.8 Affordances from Skipping—Instructing Family

On one particular day when visiting extended family, Em brought out a long skipping rope to play with and encouraged family to join in her skipping games. The long rope needed a person at each end to turn it and so Em became the instructor explaining to family members, the different ways she knew to swing it low for jumping over (Fig. 6.4) or ways to turn it for running into and out of. The swing rope low game had a chant attached to it and family members had to avoid 'crocodiles in the river' as they jumped over the low wriggling rope. The skipping rope activity afforded Em her own enjoyable imaginary challenges such as 'avoiding crocodiles in the river' and it also involved her in carefully timing jumps, evenly

Fig. 6.4 Swinging the rope low

sustaining rhythmic jumping movements which reflected her growing physical dexterity developing in the playground at school. Em had most fun however in taking on the role-play of being 'skipping teacher' and inviting her family to join in the fun and learn her skipping rope games.

6.9 Skipping Teacher Role

Em invites her uncle to take a rope end and start turning the long rope with her. She darts into the turning rope herself and deftly skips over it then quickly returns to the end position of turning the rope with her uncle (Fig. 6.5).

She suggested uncle try this deft move.

Em: *It's your turn* (Fig. 6.6)
Uncle tries the skipping move but is too tall. His height stops the rope and Em collapses into laughter (Fig. 6.7) then offers to help.
Em: *I'll show you, I'll show you. I can show you how*
Uncle: *Sorry …I'm not very good at this.*
Em: *The trick is you have to go in here, in the middle, just jump in and over the rope.*
Uncle: *Let me try again* (he tries again but can't fit into the rope)
Em: *I'll try a double spin*
Uncle: *No really slow*
Em: *I'm not used to really slow—we need to do it medium.*

They try once more. Together the rope is turned end to end and Em demonstrates again how to enter the skipping space and dart out of it quickly. Uncle tries a second and third time to dart in and out but is defeated by his size and timing. All family including uncle and Em are laughing together. Other family members try to join Em's skipping game but with the same results. The look on Em's face

Fig. 6.5 Em showing the skipping turn to uncle

Fig. 6.6 Uncle's turn now

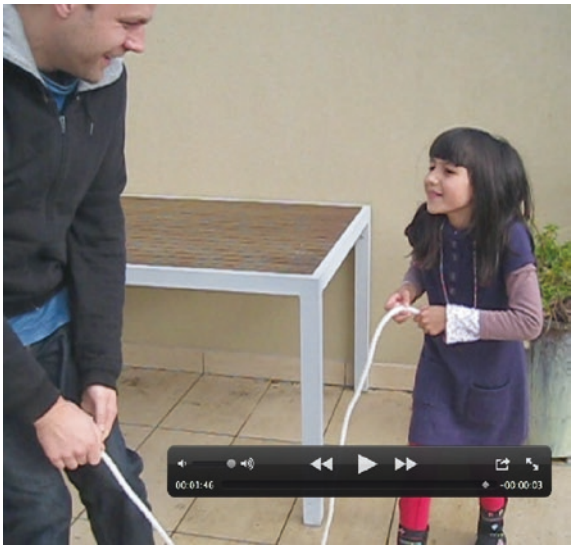

Fig. 6.7 I'll show you how

(Fig. 6.8) shows her realisation that from her perspective the family are not quite up to her expected standards and that she and her friends at school are skilled at this skipping game.

This joint play between uncle and Em extends her knowledge. It reminds us of the pedagogical value of achieving *conceptual reciprocity* (Chap. 4). In this example of *conceptual reciprocity*, the adult (uncle) takes the child's perspective through joint play. Their playful skipping activity offered Em an opportunity to transform her everyday experiences of skipping into new and valued cultural knowledge where she can be a teacher to older family members using skills they do not have.

6.10 Play Affordances Through Growth and Change

Em knows the skipping rope needs to be of a certain weight and quality to move properly. She explains to her family how various handles or knots have to be made along the rope when different lengths are needed. Also understood were the different tensions in the rope that allowed it to be swung low and wriggled for jumping over the imaginary crocodiles. In Em's first year of primary school she (and many of her class mates) had undergone rapid growth with changes to height and their skipping rope lengths had also grown and changed (Ridgway 2011). Her shared imaginings had grown as well.

The school playground and home were the places where Em's skipping interests were being fully played out with participating friends and family. We agree with van Oers (2010) who argued strongly for reinstating and rehabilitating '*the*

relevance of play for school learning' (p. 195, see also Wood 2010, p. 14), especially in the current climate that mandates early childhood play-based curriculum outcomes. These contemporary ideas about affordances of play invite us to look carefully at the pedagogical practices in play-based activity in early childhood and think further about the skipping play example and the affordance of 'planned spontaneity' that it offered.

In Sweden, Olsson (2009) has railed against the intense governing of the learning child and investigates processes required for a re-evaluation of education systems' current emphasis on predetermined outcomes and fixed positions. New perspectives with new ways of being with young children are needed she suggests. Does this strike a familiar chord for those who work in the early childhood field in other countries too? Olsson (2009) noted that linking to outdoor environments and constructing problems in projects for children that move away from the '*logic of transmission and imitative reproduction*' (p. 16) invites educators to look at where the affordances for learning might be. Significantly, Olsson (2009) proposed the choices that '*teachers and researchers collect*' for children, should '*take into account what kind of problem the children seem to be closest to*' (p. 17).

In skipping the affordances for children's learning were evident. Em counted this play as important to her and became closely attuned to the discourse of school playground skipping. She used this cultural knowledge to construct her own imagined problems (such as avoiding crocodiles) to solve with friends in the schoolyard and family at home. Olsson (2009) wondered how and where problems for investigation may be constructed. '*In mathematics, for instance, there is a range of different problems; patterns, rhythm, the conception and symbolic function of numbers, addition, subtraction and multiplication etc.*' (2009 p. 16). Learning in Em's activity lay in her playful experiences and investigations around skipping. Affectively engaged with others, she was joyful, inventive, acquired cultural knowledge and in particular, actively demonstrated conceptual understandings of measurement and timing through her skipping play.

6.11 Affordance Complexity

We wonder is it the play activity of skipping that offers Em affordances for learning or is it the artefact, (the rope) that does this? Or, could it be the peer group who affords her a new language of skipping play developed with others in a shared and imagined playground activity, or is it the moment where she enters role-play and becomes the teacher demonstrating and explaining skipping to her family. Is this where her skills at skipping provide her with new opportunities to imagine herself differently?

When we see the large number of possible affordances (affordance complexity) that surround all children in their early childhood, we begin to see that noting play affordances has as much to do with the child recognising them as it has to do with the educator also being aware. We can understand why making an analysis of

potential affordances is useful (Bang 2009). Through studying the child's activity so as to '*reveal tensions, resistance, coping with the inevitable,* etc. *as well as how different positions can contribute differently to the development of the child*' (p. 172), the educator may develop shared intentions with the child/ren. In the skipping play example, Em is an active agent in her own learning and development and this happens when motives and imagination are linked—*or when agentic imagination is present*. *Agentic imagination* both drives and informs the potential affordances of Em's skipping play and as a conceptualisation of pedagogical play it gives the child's motives and imagination a critical role in learning and development.

6.12 Telenovela Experience Across Institutions

In play, we should always consider the spaces and institutions where children participate. We need to consider children's diverse conditions and everyday activities to understand how they develop as they participate in different institutions, such as family and preschool. In different societies, there are conditions in place for children's development, which build on values of a '*good life*' (Hedegaard 2009, p. 68). We argue that in children's everyday life, values such as a '*good life*' consist of what educators consider ideal and important for children which also relates to how they view play.

There are activities that dominate institutions and it is important to understand how these influence children's learning (Hedegaard 2009). These different perspectives (both the childs' and educators'), are important for understanding what possibilities societies, family and preschool institutions, afford for children's participation in them.

Adding to the importance of everyday experience, Vygotsky (2004) explains how past experiences are essential for the individual's generation of creativity. Creative activity, he believes, is the ability to combine new elements called imagination in psychology. Imagination is important for creative activity and for any aspect in cultural life (Vygotsky 2004). In play, the child uses elements of their experience. Therefore, we think it is important that educators inquire as to what everyday experiences children have in each of their cultural communities. For example, each family will value the importance of watching television or not, as this depends on what families think is important for children.

We know that *agentic imagination* relates to children's own ability to organize play spaces according to their own interests and motives and involves children's ability to freely express and act in play through imagining different roles and rules while playing and creating imaginary spaces. Children have the capacity to affectively engage and affectively attune adults and other children to what they are imagining, creating a collective agreement whilst playing. Therefore, the pedagogical role of adults is important in agreeing with children as to what they are playing. The

pedagogy of play across children's daily life settings demands careful appraisal of the role of those who participate with children in their different institutional settings.

Case Study 6.3: Anna and Mayra, Telenovela Stars

In a rural community in the north of Mexico, two girl friends Anna a four-and-a-half-year-old child and Mayra, a five-year-old watch the telenovela (soap opera) every day. Telenovelas are a common cultural practice in Latin American and Mexican societies where households and families share their time to observe and interact with the telenovela and discuss the stories and characters (González 2003). Telenovelas are valued in this rural community and influence children's everyday play: they are seen as an important institutional family practice. One family even held a community party with a jumping castle where all the children who came could dance to the familiar telenovela songs.

6.13 Telenovela in the Family Institution

Families were given a digital camera to capture Mayra's and Anna's everyday life. For both girls the telenovela was an important aspect of their lives. In one of the images provided by Mayra's family, Mayra watches the telenovela (soap opera) at home and closely observes her favourite character Antonella. Antonella is a teenager who is part of a popular singing and dancing group. In the image provided by Anna's family, Anna also watches the telenovela, both at her mother's community store and in her family home.

6.14 Telenovela at Preschool Institution

In the observations made in the kindergarten both Anna and Mayra engage with singing, dancing and playing the role of Antonella. Teacher Leo lives in the community and he is seventeen years old. Teacher Leo has his views about the telenovela, which is very popular at the time, and he shared his views with the researcher:

> I go to the store and this girl [Anna] screams and I can hear her, teacher, teacher, and I turn back and she says hello like they do in the telenovela, she says hello exactly, she has the backpack, the stamps, letters, everything. I think it doesn't affect them, the problem is what it does to their brain… there is a sense that everything is being recorded, it records everything, and the space in the mind, it takes everything to do with the telenovela, everything she copies…

As mentioned by the teacher, he is aware of how Anna learns to copy or imitate the character of Antonella. In one of the observations taken at the kindergarten, teacher Leo played the telenovela song on his mobile phone for Anna to dance. In this example, both Anna and Mayra dance and two boys are also there. Through observing the telenovela both Mayra and Anna have learned the choreography and the lyrics of the telenovela song. The teacher and the two boys Felipe and Miguel observe Anna and

Mayra who began to perform their song individually and collectively when it was played on their teacher's mobile phone. Anna performed Antonella's role, while Mayra, although also dancing, took a secondary role in the performance.

6.15 Emotional Attitudes Developed in a Telenovela Play Performance

In analysing the telenovela play we can see how it is part of Mayra's and Anna's everyday experience and an important cultural event in Mexican society and others. Anna and Mayra have an *emotional attitude* towards the telenovela and the character Antonella, and they role-play being Antonella. Children not only need to learn a specific set of ideas but need to experience formation of *emotional attitudes* to their surrounding reality and people that directly relate to the goals and ideals of the society in which they live (Zaporozhets 2002). For Mayra and Anna, the goals and ideals in this Mexican society are to know about telenovela, so they can discuss it with others and this provides a sense of belonging to their community. This sense of belonging is similar in essence to the knowledge Em formed in relation to skipping games in her school playground and home life.

Mayra and Anna (her school classmate) performed the telenovela across institutions. They both perform the same character (Antonella) as they participate in the different institutions, of family, preschool and a community birthday party. Singing and dancing is play performance for children. Children like Anna and Mayra perform and dance to an audience, their families and other children. Mayra related to the Antonella character and was able to perform, dance, play and imagine a role that allowed her to belong to a specific imagined ideal, where she becomes part of the world of telenovela.

6.16 Agentic Imagination in a Telenovela Play Performance

The telenovela play performance was present in the everyday life of Mayra and Anna. This play was a collective creative performance, which involved Mayra's and Anna *emotional attitude*. Through play, the child is able to create and pretend to be someone else, using elements from their everyday life (Vygotsky 2004).

Anna and Mayra learned the social and cultural value of the telenovela. As they played, (Figs. 6.8 and 6.9) they performed a role and imagined being the telenovela character Antonella. In the home, their families showed *awareness* and engaged in an act of reciprocity. They entered into a *collective agreement* and acted as an audience and the children learned how to perform to an audience. The role of the educator is to support children's interest in play. Mayra's mother explained that Mayra loved the telenovela: '*she likes it [telenovela] a lot; she doesn't miss it*

Fig. 6.8 Anna and Mayra play at performing Telenovela for their families

Fig. 6.9 Anna and Mayra play at performing Telenovela for their families

[daily episodes]'. Mayra's mother was aware of how Mayra took an interest in the daily episodes of the telenovela, which consisted of stories that could be further discussed with Mayra. To further extend this play the educator has to provide rich opportunities. These rich opportunities can extend to discussing more about the telenovela and understanding the meanings of the lyrics that Anna and Mayra sang.

The educator's perspective is important in the way they can pedagogically interact with the child. In the case of Mayra and Anna, the pedagogical roles taken by mothers was to support an interest and take the role of spectators watching play rather than actively interacting with pedagogical possibilities to extend and sustain Mayra's and Anna's play.

Children have agentic imagination in their family institutions as in these play spaces it involves family understanding of their own interest and intentions. Mayra and Anna are agents of their own play; *agentic imagination* acts as a catalyst for developing affective imagination while performing a role, and acting on it produces in the child an intention to play a cultural role. This cultural role relates to the importance of being and becoming Antonella, the telenovela character, that everybody in the community is familiar with.

This telenovela play continued in the kindergarten institution. The teacher, Leo, supported the girls' interest and had particular views of what telenovelas meant for children. However, Mayra's *agentic imagination* changed when Anna was present in the same play scenario.

Each child individually re-created a new imagined reality and danced differently and at the same time they collectively shared an audience. But, their *agentic imagination* was produced and sensed differently by Anna and Mayra. Anna *positioned* herself in the authority role of being Antonella, which is a role both Mayra and Anna, *affectively engaged* with differently. In this play exchange Mayra changes her position into an observer of Anna's dance play and Anna becomes the main player of the dance play. To understand the positions children take in play and how this affects their *agentic imagination* is important for understanding how, in the everyday life of kindergarten, they relate to each other. For example, the teacher is aware Anna is the one interested in the telenovela and this is the reason he plays the telenovela song on his mobile phone. Mayra passes unnoticed by the teacher as the focus of his attention is to the individual child—Anna, rather than to the larger collective. Even so, these relationships are important for understanding children's play and for the teacher to be aware of these complex interactions while they play. Children such as Anna and Mayra remain with their own personal *agentic imagination* creating their own spaces and rules and roles, and so, the teacher agreement and awareness of their interest, is important for children in order to generate pedagogy in the kindergarten classroom.

Children shape pedagogical practices (Rogers 2010) and this can be seen in this example. But the telenovela play performance stays at an everyday level as the role of the educator, (the young teacher), only extends to playing the famous song on his mobile phone. Teacher Leo has a particular view of this play: he sees it as copying and taking up all the space in the child's mind. Leo explained Anna has an emotional attitude towards the telenovela and this is seen in her play performance. But her play performance offers more than her teacher Leo realises. Children do not just copy; children combine experiences to create new ones (Vygotsky 2004). The two children's play performance enables them to create a new reality through not simply reproducing what they see by watching the telenovela but by creating a new imagined reality from what they have experienced.

Both Anna and Mayra are creative in their play performance as each of them has an individual and collective emotional attitude towards the telenovela and it provides them with an affordance: the opportunity to re-create their dance in a new reality. The pedagogical role of the educator is to see how children are able to combine and construct this new reality in play as children bring experiences from their everyday practices.

The young teacher Leo sees learning as recording and copying which can be seen as a passive view 'children copy' but children actively learn and play roles that are important to their societies, in this case the telenovela in the Mexican culture. In order to see children's creative reworking of impressions across their participation in different institutions it is important to understand their perspective of how and why they enact everyday play experiences.

Across the institutions of family and kindergarten, the children play performed through dancing and singing. Children perform roles because it affords them the chance to belong to a group and to their communities. Educators must recognize children in their whole context—they belong to families and communities and when they enter the kindergarten they bring rich experiences to play and enact. In this Mexican society a 'good life' involved valuing the world of telenovelas. Children experienced watching telenovelas everyday and in a new reality they were able to re-create and interpret rather than just copy their roles as Antonella, the telenovela character. In this new imagined reality both Anna and Mayra not only played a role but this play gave them the opportunity to belong to their community.

6.17 Primary School as a Site for Playful Affordances

Case Study 6.4: Why Does the Leaning Tower of Pisa Lean?

Teacher Shane was an experienced Australian primary school teacher with an interest in the arts. His capacity to infuse a playful approach into curriculum activity with his class of seven-year-olds was highly regarded by the Principal, children in his class and their families.

When portable class rooms, moved onto his school's site to temporarily accommodate students until permanent classrooms were built, Shane used an adjoining storage space and verandah to create a small studio space and develop inviting ways to store materials for children's self expression; a place where they could build relations, have playful conversations and be actively listened to. In this physical environment and with the affordances of material resources of a primary school classroom, children's playful engagement in meaningful learning was envisaged. Teacher Shane imagined small groups of children could extend their ideas through using art materials such as clay, paint and paper in the newly transformed storeroom where their thinking could be recorded and documented for sharing and assessment.

When teacher Shane returned from professional development and a holiday in Italy he was inspired to invite his class of seven-year-olds to consider why the Leaning Tower of Pisa actually leaned. Shane shared with his class, a beautiful book of Italian buildings, opened to a page of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. He told a funny story of when he was really there in Italy and had tried to walk up the stairs inside the leaning tower. When Shane asked his class: '*Can you draw the Leaning Tower of Pisa and why do you think the tower leans?*', they were quick to go into action. On their classroom tables Shane had placed plain white paper with black fineliner pens ready for the children to draw their impressions. All the children in his class of 25 were keen to do this. He promised once their ideas were drawn, they could use their design to make the tower in clay and that their theory about why the tower was leaning, would be listened to in the small studio space he had recently arranged.

Over time the children's spoken ideas were recorded word for word and later shared with the whole class. Final documentation for this project pulled together each child's drawing and their theory about why the tower leaned and formed a booklet shared with families.

Two boys, Andy and Dom, had shown their drawings to the researcher who listened and recorded their descriptions and theories word for word. Andy explained his theory in a very succinct way '*Maybe because they built it that way*' and described his drawing using mathematical perspectives. '*It has arches on it and diamonds. There are eight layers. I wouldn't use that word layers when I'm writing*.' In this explanation and description we note Andy's realisation that he can speak and draw more than he can write down. '*I wouldn't use that word layers when I'm writing.*

Dom describes his drawing and theories in the studio space*: I've no idea why it leans…perhaps it's because the ground is soft*. (Dom burps loudly)
Oohhh I actually did have pizza for breakfast this morning with pineapple on it.
(He pauses and looks at his drawing again and comments)
I suppose if you were stupid enough you could bungy jump off it.
This aerial at the top (he points to his drawing) *is there so you won't be electrocuted. It goes up in the sky and catches electricity, and so whatever electricity goes near it, goes to the aerial and not the building.*
If you wanted to hit the stairs you could use the leaning tower to bungy jump.
I'm doing the ramps inside so you can get to the top.
How do you spell reached?
(Dom made a talking box coming from the figure at the top of the stairs. In it he writes the word 'reached' that I had just given him on a slip of paper.)
I've reached the top… see?

Dom had presented a range of ideas together with a playful sense of fun such as when he deliberately burped and used words playfully like pizza, (Pisa). His drawing was highly personalised, with inclusion of the staircase that his teacher Shane had talked about, and the figure representing himself placed at the top. In drawing a talking box coming from the figure's mouth, Dom emphasized an achievement '*I've reached the top… see?*' one he was confident to state.

Shane had taken the children on a creative journey with him; one that engaged the whole class and enabled shared intentions to be built. They were all motivated to think more about why the Leaning Tower of Pisa, leaned. Dom had been completely immersed in imaginatively living the experience he represented in his drawing. The detailed inclusion in Dom's drawing of the lightning rod at the highest point of the tower, and his knowledge of why it was there and how it worked, was made very clear in the transcript. Teacher Shane realised that Dom (Fig. 6.11) was interested in science and had scientific knowledge of electricity. In the same way he had discovered that Andy (Fig. 6.10) showed great precision with drawing shapes and understanding proportion.

The boys (both 7 years old) had different ways of acting and thinking, which are clearly reflected in their drawings. Making a drawing affords educators a

method for investigating the way a subject may be conceptualised, perceived and imagined. A drawing can provide further opportunity for sharing and relating ideas both visually and orally. These drawings created an affordance: a means of communication for the children, researcher, teacher and families.

The children's understandings became available for discussion and inquiry through being documented (Rinaldi 2006) and in this way supported the teacher's growing understanding of each child's identity construction (Carr and Lee 2012), which is an easily overlooked aspect of learning and development in the early years of primary school.

Teacher Shane used pedagogical documentation (taken from the child's perspective) as a narrative form that offered him both a process and a path for making the children's learning and development visible to the children themselves, staff and

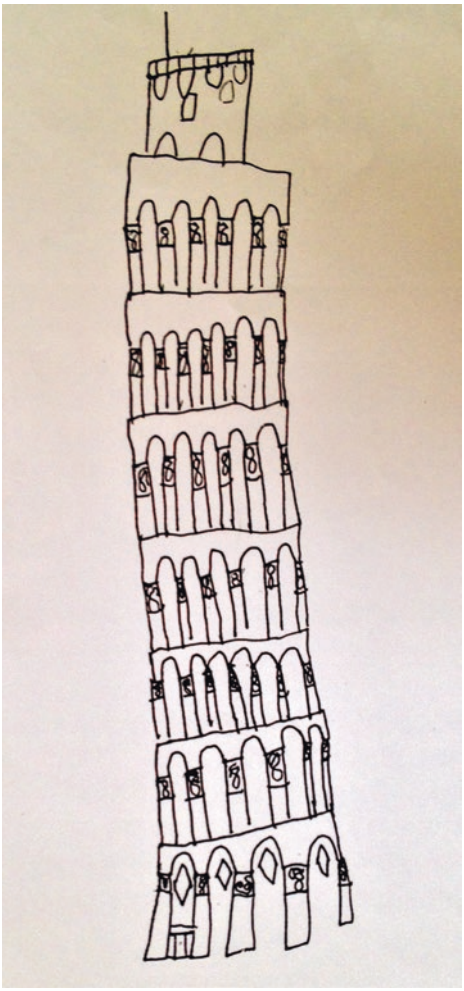

Fig. 6.10 Andy's drawing of the leaning tower of Pisa

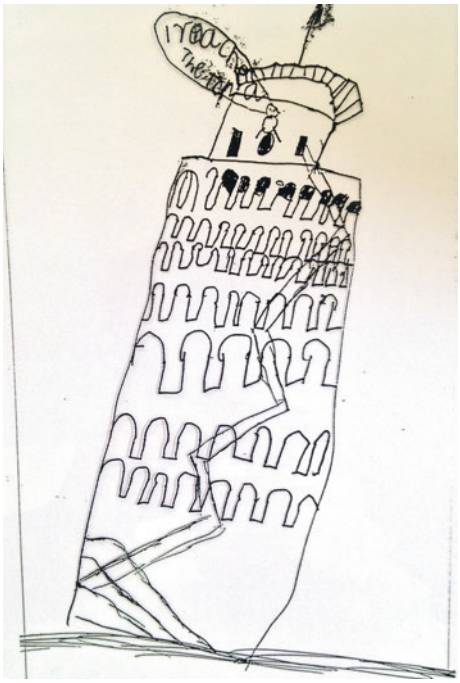

Fig. 6.11 Dom's drawing

families. Pedagogical documentation as Shane understood it, used the child's perspective and included the child's actual words not just the teacher's interpretation of their ideas. As Rinaldi (2006) suggested, documentation '*is the genesis of assessment, because it allows one to make explicit, visible and shareable the elements of value (indicators) applied by the documenter in producing the documentation*' (p. 72).

For teacher Shane, the drawn and verbal documentation created by the children opened further understanding about affordances for learning through provision of integrated and immersive conditions for mathematical and literacy learning in a primary school setting.

Shane had access to richly detailed data for all children in his class and used this as an affordance for primary school assessment requirements.

This example identified how Shane successfully created a pedagogical play activity that drew on conceptual reciprocity, sustained shared thinking and stimulated in particular, Dom's agentic imagination.

When planning integrated primary school curriculum in visual arts, language, mathematics and science, Shane had framed questions to guide his teaching program. He listed several pedagogical questions in order to meet language and mathematics curriculum planning outcomes.

1. Can the children create an image of the tower which shows its essential features, *reflects proportion, dimension and relative position*?
2. Can the children use *descriptive language* to describe the image and present their theory?

3. What *previous experiences* do children bring to their task at hand?
4. Are children curious to develop their theories and *explore further perhaps in 3D forms?*

   (Teacher Shane's final question offered possible future directions and the children did go on to use their drawings as designs for clay models of the Leaning Tower of Pisa.)

By using examples of documented drawing activity, extra data for assessment was provided. There is evidence that feedback from visual narratives has potential to be a strong informant in developing dynamic pedagogical practices (Ridgway 2006; Edwards 2009).

In this primary school narrative we can see that the playful affordances of 'art' in a co-constructed classroom using an integrated education program such as teacher Shane's, becomes more than producing an object. 'Art' can be an expansive way of solving problems and challenging learning in a playful atmosphere.

> There are a number of fundamental premises which are visible within the constructivist approach, particularly once the subject-object dichotomy can be recast as a spatio-temporal problem (Peers 2008, p. 91).

For Shane the playful affordances achieved through using art materials in his constructivist approach to Primary school education, were re-cast in the form of provision of a spatio-temporal problem. The abstraction of the Leaning Tower of Pisa into a two dimensional drawing (and later made into a 3D clay model) to be used as a tool for creating a theory about why it leans, related not only to his classroom assessment requirements, but more importantly to his pedagogical awareness of building relationships and encouraging full and shared engagement in learning. He was attuned to the importance of each child's capacity for imagination. He delighted in the children's joyful subjective interpretation of symbolic use of line and language as a way of getting to know and understand them better.

As an example of Primary school affordances that a playful teacher can offer, we are shown how Shane attributed value to the children's motive to participate in meaningful activity that included relationships with their peers and with him, and the experiences and intentions he shared and built with his class.

6.18 Conclusion

Affordances for play are culturally constructed by the demands of the institutions in a community and the motives and imagination of participants. We keep in mind the child's wholeness of participation in playful activity across institutions and find that we cannot separate the child's learning and development from the cultural affordances offered in their different daily activities. For all the children in the case studies, different cultural affordances are carried internally by the child and applied playfully to whatever they find in their situated reality.

The Chinese school poem chair narrative guides us to thinking more about how the teacher used the poem chair game as a pedagogical affordance for her class to learn a poem in a playful way.

The affordances provided by primary school teacher Shane indicate the presence of *agentic imagination* as a powerful pedagogical motive for building shared intentions with children, who in turn, became fully engaged in creating their own theories in their newly created studio space. The affordances offered by the documentation process for assessment and future planning were evident in this example, as was the skill of the teacher in framing questions for pedagogical inquiry.

In both the skipping and telenovela play narratives, we paid attention to parents, educator and family members who have all encouraged the children in play or engaged themselves in play with their children as part of learning to belong to a cultural community. Parents' value of play can vary within or across communities (Göncü et al. 2007) and in our examples we found some common ground in Australian and Mexican communities. We noted that the complex nature of the playful activity involved the child's physicality and imagination, and most importantly the affordances of participation in a popular cultural activity and belonging to a community.

We are developing new understandings, recognising that when *agentic imagination* is present in the pedagogy and play relationship, learning and development happen in a dynamic way. When *agentic imagination* is absent either on the part of the child or from the educator, learning and development are static.

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Chapter 7
Imagination in Play: Space and Artefacts

The basic criterion of play is the imaginary situation, which is the space between the real (optical) and sense (imaginary) fields.

(Kravtsov and Kravtsova 2010, p. 29).

Abstract This chapter presents the importance of play space that is created by educators and children to enact and imagine the possibilities of play. In particular how and why educators need to account for the child's perspective in creating play environments and space in order to support children's formation of agentic imagination and their imaginative thinking. The relations between imagination and play will be more explicitly explored, alongside the questions of how this is linked to pedagogical strategies for supporting children's learning and development and how the children's agentic imagination is generated in play space.

Keywords Agentic imagination · Space and artefacts · Real and imagined objects · Child's perspective · Rich play dialogue · Optical field · Sense field · Social worlds

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7.1 The Imagination in Children's Play

Many researchers have demonstrated that educators almost always act on behalf of children to make sense of children's play experience and take the adults' perspective and agendas (Nicolopoulou et al. 2009; Rogers and Evans 2006, 2008). As a result, the educational practice is adult-structured and oriented. Under these conditions, educators are not able to take a valid account of children's social experience and may not provide effective learning contexts for children's imagination and personal initiative in play. It is therefore a real challenge for educators to represent the child's perspective in the pedagogical practice of creating play space for children. To gain greater insight into how play space can be created to support children's learning and development, it is necessary to achieve a deeper understanding of imagination in play.

Based on observations '*a piece of wood begins to be a doll and a stick becomes a horse*' (p. 12), Vygotsky (1966) argued that '*Play is a transitional stage…when a stick—i.e., an object becomes a pivot for severing the meaning of horse from a real horse…the child cannot yet sever thought from object; he must have something to act as a pivot*' (p. 12). Play is illustrated as a tool for operating with meaning. This can be seen when play provides the impetus for a child to separate the originally intimate fusion between meaning and the reality perception, meaning and object, and meaning and actions (Nicolopoulou 1993). Taken from this perspective, in play a child separates the meaning of a horse from a real horse, whereby meaning is transferred from a stick to a horse, and from riding a stick to riding a horse. This is the way imaginary situations are created by the child in play.

In children's play, '*two kinds of subjectivities appear in which, initially, the child imbues objects* (*optical field*) *with new meaning* (*sense field*) *and through this are enabled to consciously know their feelings of happiness while playing out the character who is expressing quite different emotions*' (Fleer 2010, p. 127). Kravtsova (2008) has developed a model to explain this as seen in the following Fig. 7.1.

In play, the child can change the space of his/her optical field to the sense field through their imaginary situation. For example, a child can be playing the role of a patient with a broken arm. While the 'doctor' places a 'bandage' on their arm, they may act as though they are in pain, while in actuality the child is enjoying him/herself. Although the bandage is a real object, such as a tea towel, it is given new meaning in the imagined situation. The tea towel creates an affordance to support children's meaning making in the imagined play. It can be seen that the child is

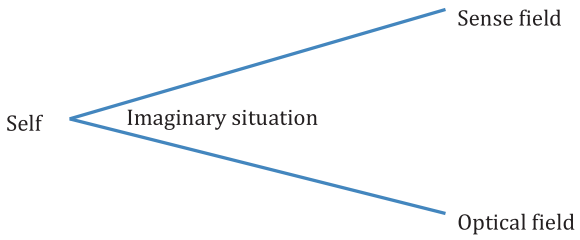

Fig. 7.1 Kravtsova's model of the imaginary situation in play

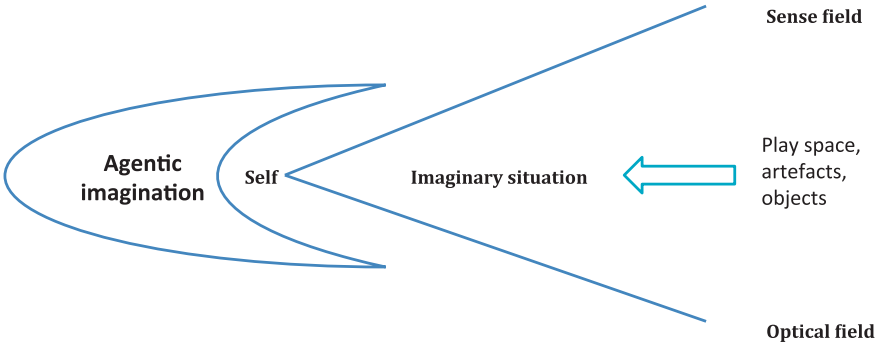

Fig. 7.2 Agentic imagination in children's play

both inside and outside the play. Imagination enables children to independently act out their perceptions through using their affective senses (such as free expressions of pain in a real field and feeling enjoyment in an imaginary field) by interacting with their surrounding reality.

> The basic criterion of play is the imaginary situation, which is the space between the real (optical) and sense (imaginary) fields (Kravtsov and Kravtsova 2010, p. 29).

In other words, with the help of the play space and artefacts, children are able to perform their sense field through imagination and affectively engage in an imagined situation. The children's agentic imagination is creatively produced within this process. Children have experienced the clinical doctor's visit situation in their everyday social life. When we refer to the child's agentic imagination it means that the child has actively connected their real life and imagined world. Therefore, in play, children are able to express their awareness of the social world through engaging in play space and communication (Winther-Lindqvist 2010). This has been confirmed by Vygotsky's (1966) argument that '*Internal and external action are inseparable: imagination, interpretation, and will are internal processes in external action…and the internal transformations brought about by play in the child's development*' (p. 15). In this sense, children's agency has been afforded by the play artefacts such as sticks in horse riding or a plate being a car's steering wheel, which are pivotal tools for children's meaning making within their imaginary world. Therefore, children's agentic imagination in play can be indicated by the following Fig. 7.2.

When children engage with artefacts and play space, they are able to make meaning of the world through changing their optical field to sense field. Therefore, their agentic imagination is formed and produced within the imaginary situation.

Case Study 7.1: Preschooler's Library Role-Play

Em (aged five years) has been taken to libraries since she was a baby. She regularly plays library games in her bedroom at home. These games include making a display

of her books and creating a place in the corner of her bedroom to record who borrows her books.

Em has arranged the floor space in the bedroom with a rug and books. She uses a stickit note and pen for recording borrowed books and a table and chair for a library work station. She plays this game frequently with family and friends. In this game she is the librarian and her bedroom the imaginary library (Fig. 7.3).

On holiday with her parents and grandparents she continues a version of her library game in the holiday house. She is attracted to a stair case (optical field) in the house that affords her new opportunities for creating a different library play space (sense field). From what there is in the holiday house she gathers soft rugs, puts books on the first landing, places cushions on a higher stair for visitors to sit down on to read, and uses a small table at the base of the stairs to represent a librarian's counter (Fig. 7.4). These artefacts and objects are transformed in the imaginary situation generated by Em.

In her library play space, she has a place where selected books can be brought to the counter for the librarian (Em) to agree upon for being borrowed.

Em invites her father to visit the library she has set up on the stairs.

Father enters the play as himself but also as a library customer who will choose and borrow a book.

Fig. 7.3 **a** Library in bedroom. **b** Recording borrowed books. **c** Here's your library card

Fig. 7.4 Stairs afford a library play space

Father: *I'll choose a book to read. My favourite. Ant and Bee. Can I please have the green Ant and Bee book?* (Father selects the little green book)
Em: *I have to see if you can get it or not. You can borrow more if you want. You can borrow more than one.*
Father: *I'll just borrow one book at a time and then that's fair on others who want to borrow books.*
Em: *Oh…… okay.*

Father hands book to Em kneeling at the librarian's table, to process the book.
Em reads a sticky note on the book (Fig. 7.5).

Em: *This book belongs to JR.*
Father: *You'd better scan it and stamp it to make sure that I return it on time.*

Em pretends to scan and stamp as father has suggested. She is making a noise and facial gestures while moving her index finger along the book (Fig. 7.6).

Em announces: *I might say no that you can't borrow it.* She looks up for father's reaction and lifts her shoulders. When she sees his face she teases: *but I might say yes.*
Father asks: *Why wouldn't I be able to borrow it?*
Em: *If I say no or yes.*
If I say no it means it's new and you can't borrow it but if it's old I might say yes you can.
Father: *Yes, I see……oh …* father ponders then says*: I think that's a very old book.*
Em: *Mmm …this one's very old* (Fig. 7.7 looks at old book).
Father: *That means I can borrow it?*
Em: *Okay yes.* Em/librarian agrees (Fig. 7.8) and hands book over to father (Fig. 7.9).

Fig. 7.5 Librarian reading note on book

Fig. 7.6 Librarian scanning

Fig. 7.7 This one's very old

Father: *Thank you. I promise I will return it.*
Em: (ready for another customer) *Hey, who wants to borrow another book?*

In her organisation of this play space we see an example of Em using what we refer to as '*agentic imagination*'. By this we mean that she has deliberately created a whole play space for an ongoing scenario that involves possibilities for generating new exchanges between family members. In constructing a play space on the stairs for role-play as the librarian, Em shows awareness that her family have tacitly entered into a collective agreement with her. Family understands that they will be invited into her imaginary (yet very real) library play space game. This game develops family rules of engagement and has roles to be played. In this library role-play, Em positions herself in authority by taking the role of librarian. In this role she takes some negotiating power in the family choice of books and their possibility of borrowing a book.

Fig. 7.8 Okay yes

Fig. 7.9 Hands book to father/customer

In the playful exchange, father goes to 'the library' to borrow a book and this borrowing involves negotiating some unexpected challenges with the librarian. Power and choice become distributed between the real and imagined world formed within the relationship between father and daughter. Both use agentic imagination in the imaginary library scenario. Father is both 'father and customer' and in the dual roles that he plays, we can understand how play from the child's perspective is important for Em's cultural and familial learning. Em is both 'daughter and librarian' and in her dual roles where she moves in and out of reality and

imagination, we find examples of dimensions of play such as affective attunement and affective engagement used in the conversational exchanges. When agentic imagination is present, as in this example, we find that wholehearted and dynamic learning occurs. If agentic imagination was absent however, play space, artefacts and objects would generate much less meaning for the participants.

7.2 Real and Imagined Objects in Play Space

Imagination is necessarily associated with reality. What a child can imagine is what can become a reality for them. For shared intentions to develop in role-play, *affective engagement* is needed. Em's knowledge is socially constructed in her family and community experiences and by her own provision of different library play spaces that afford her further interaction which gives sustenance to her growing interest in books, libraries and reading. Em lives near a library and over the last five years of her life she has been taken there by her parents to borrow books for reading. Visiting a library is a familiar experience in her cultural community. She plays library games in her bedroom. She is read to often and she reads independently. She continues the familiar library play in other spaces such as when she is on holidays, and imagines herself as the librarian.

Vygotsky (1966) has argued that the roles children act, the rules children follow, and the imaginary situations children create are the characteristics of play. In the library play example, the stair space (optical field) was transformed by Em into an imaginary library (sense field). Here, she uses objects in their real form (e.g. the books she chose to place on the stair landing), however she also uses transformed objects in her library play such as the little table imagined as the librarian's counter (Fig. 7.5), and her index finger as the book's bar code scanner and stamper (Fig. 7.6). Imagination comes from an accumulation of prior experience.

The father's polite exchanges and direct naming of the library processes of scanning and stamping help to conceptualise the play experience for Em. We see in this library play example how the child's imagination can be played to and expanded by adult encouragement and interaction. Em is able to change the space of her optical field (the real objects, stairs, books, the cushion, soft rugs, etc.) to the sense field of imagined objects (library work station) through the imagined library situation. When children engage in the role-play, '*one of the things they are doing is presenting to the world around them information about their current understandings and their priorities for making sense of their experience*' (Goncu and Gaskins 2011, p. 55). We can notice that Em's imaginative thinking comes from her everyday cultural experience with her family and community. That is, Em's play is identified as being culturally organized. Therefore, educators should consider the pedagogical practice in relation to '*how play is seen by children's own communities*' (Goncu and Gaskins 2011, p. 55). In Em's library play, her father understands her imagined situation and takes Em's perspective to join in her play. He sustains and expands her play space by giving the suggestions and asking questions, which supports her

development of imagination in the library play. Thus, in this case, we can see how the preschooler changes the space to afford their imagination in play and also how adults engage in children's imagined play to sustain children's learning.

It is important that educators are aware of the importance of creating play spaces that consider and support the child's perspective. It is important to take a pedagogical approach to understanding what optical and sense field means for children learning as they create agentic imagination.

7.3 Baby's Play Space for Imagination

Case Study 7.2: Harry Flies a Plane

Harry, a one year old boy and his mother visited his auntie's house. There are not many toys for Harry to play with at his aunt's house. Harry's mother saw some pens in the study room. She brought the pens for Harry to play with. He held two pens in the sky by using two hands and tried to make some sound. His mother noticed his action and helped him to hold two pens to make an 'airplane'. His mother smiled and said, "Ah, your airplane is dropped again" when he failed to make it by himself. Then, his mother showed him how to make an airplane with two pens by using two hands and flying with sounds "woo…" in the 'sky' (air). Harry grabbed the two pens and tried to make it and hold it up in the sky. His mother made the sounds like "Woo…Woo…" and said, "Oh. Flying is like that" Then, Harry tried to make a similar sound like a flying airplane. Then, his mother said again, "Ah, your airplane is flying so high." Harry's airplane dropped again. His mother showed him how to make it and said to him "Harry, look at Mum's airplane. Flying, Flying, Flying, woo…woo… Flying to Harry"(Fig. 7.10). Harry was looking at his mother's actions. Then, his mother gave the airplane to Harry and Harry started to imitate his mother to fly the airplane and make sounds like "woo…woo…".

Fig. 7.10 Harry flying airplane with his mother

This play episode has explained how the baby developed an initial imagination in play with the support of an adult. This can be discussed from two aspects to see how play space and environment are generated from the child's perspective to support children to enact the possibility of agentic imagination in play.

7.4 Creating Play Space from the Child's Perspective

Harry held two pens in the sky/air by using two hands. It seems that he tried to make an 'airplane' by using the two pens. However, he could not do it by himself. His mother observed his action and helped him to hold two pens to make an airplane. His mother interpreted his actions by playing two pens in the sky as flying the airplane. The interpretation is taken from Harry's perspective and creates his new play space as it reflects Harry's everyday experience at home. He had an everyday understanding of an airplane. According to his mother, Harry has observed airplanes quite a few times with his grandma at home when they walked outside. His father has also made an airplane for him by using the pegs (Fig. 7.11).

Fig. 7.11 Harry's airplane

For Vygotsky, '*everything in the behaviours of the child is merged and rooted in social relations, thus, the child's relations with reality are from the start social relations, so that the new born baby could be said to be in the highest degree a social being*' (Ivic 1989, p. 429). Therefore, it is valuable that the play space has been created from the child's own community and agency and in this way supports the development of imagination or agentic imagination. This can be seen through Harry's engagement in the pilot play with his mother. The play space (two pens) has been created based on Harry's understanding of the airplane he has observed.

Play reflects reality on a deeper level (Lindqvist 2001). It is not just a simple representation of children's actions or the ability to use real objects in an everyday sense. Children are able to create imaginary situations which draw on abstract thinking. This reflects their ability to imagine new creative ways to use real everyday objects and act upon this new imagined reality. In his play Harry showed his interest in the pens. His mother took this playful moment from Harry's perspective, and dramatized being a 'pilot' with him. Their imagination made the meaning of an airplane by using two pens in the hand. On the one hand, the two pens created a space for them to imagine the situation of flying the airplane. On the other hand, agentic imagination enhanced Harry's abstract understanding of the object of airplane and being a pilot. Furthermore, play creates children's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1966). Adults may provide more advanced directives, supporting children within their zone of proximal development. In this case, mother initially appeared to provide the ideas for what to play, play materials, and how to make/fly as an airplane by using the two pens. It becomes a more directive pedagogical practice when mother is taking Harry's perspective. In this way, adults can take a role in play and dramatise the actions to support children's creative thinking.

Lillard (2011) has discussed pretend play between mother and child in her research on baby and toddler's play and she argued that 'early pretending is charaterised by the mini-moves into the fantastic realm that mothers are willing to make, and thus their scaffolding of those moves does advance the play of young children' (p. 287). Harry's mother mediated Harry's mastery and internationalization of the imaginative actions of being a pilot and understanding the airplane through her modeling and their shared exploration. The play space has been considered as a psychological tool to support children's learning and development. This echoes Karpov's (2005) argument that children can master the use of psychological tools only in the context of their shared activity with adults' assistance in performing an associated task.

7.5 Play Space and Artefacts Affording Agentic Imagination Between Baby and Adults

According to Vygotsky (1966), play provides a space for the conscious understanding of concepts. In this case, Harry played with two pens at his auntie's house. The two pens were play artefacts provided by his mother for Harry to play

with. Here, these two pens can be seen to afford the generation of agentic imaginative acts by playing the game of flying the airplane. Therefore, playing with the two pens as an airplane, but not the pens themselves, served Harry's imaginative thinking. Moll (1990) concludes that humans use cultural signs (language, literacy, codes, toys) to mediate their interactions with each other and their surroundings. In this case, both Harry and his mother played together as a pilot flying the 'airplane'. The play space has afforded Harry an imaginary situation. His mother created the play space and interacted with Harry in pilot play. She also creates the play space for him to explore the world around him, which supports his imagination. We notice here that the play artefacts, 'two pens', afforded the form of agentic imagination between the mother and Harry in the 'flying airplane' situation.

7.6 Possibilities for Educator's Expansion of Agentic Imagination

In order for educators to take the child's perspective in play, they also have to understand the childs' agentic imagination while playing. Intentional educators support children's agentic imagination and development through expanding children's play space and using play artefacts. However, sometimes educators might miss the moments of play becoming pedagogical. Being an intentional educator involves the ability to affectively engage with children and imagine what play can become.

The following example shows how the educator does affectively engage with children's play. In this situation there are two children who are both in the same *agentic imagination* space and therefore find it difficult to have other children join their play. Children set up the play space using just one artefact, a soft mattress.

Case Study 7.3: A Soft Mattress Can Be a House

Children are playing at the end of the day. They attend a Mexican rural kindergarten from nine in the morning to twelve noon. They have a snack and recess around eleven to eleven thirty and in this scenario they have just come back from recess. The children are playing between themselves and are free to choose whatever they want to do. The teacher is away from them reading something. Two of the children Anna and Felipe, are cousins and are both four and a half years old. They are playing by themselves with a small soft mattress. Mario wants to join in their play but he is excluded as Anna and Felipe just want to play together. The pair also excludes Mayra. This example shows how with just one artefact available (a mattress), the children can imagine many different things but their play does not progress because the teacher does not join in and or see the value of extending it. The narrative describes the different play children create across a period of thirty

minutes. The play is stopped as mothers pick up their children. Teacher is sitting down reading something. Children are sitting on a mat.

Eventually, Felipe lifts the mat and Anna stands up:

Anna: *let's lay down here*.
Felipe: *where are you Anna?*
Felipe jumps and looks at Ana
Mario: *me too!* (*he wants to join in*)
Anna: *no*
Felipe and Anna roll on the mattress and Mario observes them and begins a playful game of words.
Mario: *quickiri quicki (chuck sound) sit down here! (Anna and Felipe don't pay attention to Mario)*
Anna suggests to Felipe: let's make a house…
Felipe is making the house under a table by pulling the mattress underneath it (Fig. 7.12).
Anna gets distracted and Felipe waits for her.
Felipe: *Anna!! Let's get inside* (Fig. 7.13).
However, the teacher discourages children and tells them to get off there.
Teacher: *Let's see get out of there…*
Teacher takes mattress but Anna and Felipe persist with having the mattress.

As the play continues for Anna and Felipe, they take off the mattress cover and begin to build a roof to their house.

The play continues and children move materials around. Anna and Felipe keep moving the mattress and they look for a place where the mattress can hold itself. As Mayra and Mario are excluded they make their own houses or beds with chairs. Eventually Anna and Felipe move closer to where Mario and Mayra are and they pretend to be asleep (Fig. 7.14). It takes time for Anna and Felipe to collectively agree for others to play. As the play develops Mayra and Mario respect Felipe's

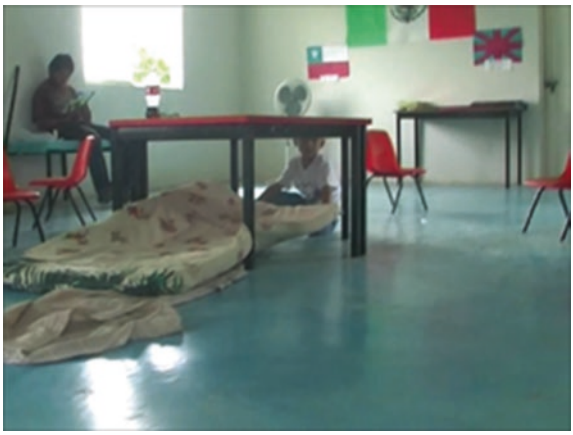

Fig. 7.12 Felipe makes a house under the table while the teacher is reading

Fig. 7.13 Anna and Felipe inside the house

Fig. 7.14 Children pretend to be asleep

and Anna's intentions of keeping the mattress and they also develop their own *agentic imagination* as they imaginatively create a bed using chairs (Fig. 7.14).

It can be seen what 'potential' this play can have on children's imaginative learning but adult support and engagement was very little as the children began to develop their agentic imagination. The teacher does not notice how he can work together with children in an 'effective pedagogic interaction' (Siraj-Blatchford 2007, p. 18) and collaboratively agree with what children are imagining.

Anna and Felipe are able to make new meaning with objects in this play space such as a table and a mattress. As Vygotsky (1966) explains, in play children give meaning to objects, and actions are carried out when the child gives meaning to play. In this example, children have agentic imagination as they are active in bringing their own ideas to play and are able to imagine and create a new reality with the affordances offered by the mattress being part of a house.

It is difficult to see a *collective agreement* as children have different purposes and intentions from those of the teacher. This play is not encouraged by the teacher. The teacher can see the conflict between children, as Anna and Felipe do not allow other children such as Mayra and Mario to play. Instead of helping children resolve the conflict and exploring the possibilities for playful collective agreement the teacher discouraged this play. Anna and Felipe take action; they take the mattress away from the teacher (Fig. 7.15). These thirty minutes of free moments of play remain a lost pedagogical play moment for the teacher as he is unable to engage in the complex interactions between children in the classroom. Children's learning through play is a 'result of complex interactions' (Jordan 2010, p. 105). In this rural social community in Mexico, the teacher has little training with regard to how to interact with children in play and how play can be a pedagogical tool for children's learning. In this example, the teacher is unable to imagine or has not seen the potential in this play.

We can see in this space with one main object (the mattress) that children are able to play and create collectively imagined situations. We have argued that adults need to share their thinking with children and can creatively enter children's play. As this does not happen here, the children's play remains an everyday experience of play. Children in this classroom are makers of pedagogical opportunities but we believe that seeing lost moments like this will enable educators to consider their pedagogical role. In this example, the teacher is not aware of how he can contribute to children's imaginary situations or experience the excitement this play has for Anna and Felipe, and how amazing it is to make a house (Fig. 7.16) from just one mattress and a table!

Children have strong *agentic imagination* when they persist in playing and when they create their own agendas for playing with others. Children are imaginative and able to create imaginary situations such as building a house and sleeping in a house. Children have the ability to create and imagine new realities with few objects such as seen in this example of chairs and mattresses, but a pedagogical

Fig. 7.15 Teacher takes mattress away

Fig. 7.16 Building a house

approach to play would be more effective in extending the children's knowledge. The importance of intentional teaching is in how educators transform, join and include all children in pedagogical play activity.

7.7 Agentic Imagination in Play Space

Case Study 7.4: Lin's Play with Her Father

Lin, a four year old girl and her sister, Meimei, one and half years old played the market play at home with their father. At the beginning of the play, Lin brought her new toy, (a cash register) to the living room, placed it on the coffee table at which her father and sister were sitting and started to play (Fig. 7.17).

Lin: *What do you want to buy?*
She started selling things to her father
Father: *What are you selling?*
[*Her younger sister was sitting on her father's leg and watching*.]
Lin: *Dad, are these what you would like to buy?*
[*She took some toys, such as Mickey and Minnie plush toys, to her father*.] (Fig. 7.18)
Father: *I don't like playing with these kinds of things. I want to drink something. Do you have any drinks? Also, I am hungry*.
Lin: *Okay. Here*.
Father: *What do you have to sell?*
Lin: *You come with me*.
Father: *Coming!*
[*She went to the corner and picked up one Coca Cola bottle*.] (Fig. 7.19)
Lin: *This is the drink. Daddy, this is for you*.

Fig. 7.17 Lin initiated the market play

Fig. 7.18 'I want to drink something. Do you have any drinks?'

Fig. 7.19 'This is the drink'; 'This is for you'

[*She did not give it to her younger sister*.]
Father: *Thank you.* [*He got the bottle from Lin*.]
Father: *Well, I am still hungry. What else do you sell?*
[*Lin's father gave his scan card to Lin. Her younger sister Meimei was standing and held by her father. Meimei grabbed the scan card. Her father took it from her and gave it to Lin*.]
She walked to the toy basket again. She found a bag.
Lin: *A money bag* (Fig. 7.20).
Father: *Can it be eaten?* [*Lin shook her head in disagreement*.]
Father: *We can't eat it*.
Lin: *This is for you and your money. Scan your money*.
Father: *But I am hungry. Do you have anything I can eat?*
Lin: *But where is your money?*
Father: *Money. I don't have money. Oh, I have this. It's a card. Scanning the card.*
[Lin started to put all the money into the bag.]
Lin: *Your money*.
Father: *Do have anything to eat?*
Lin: *Yes*.
Father: *I am hungry. What do you sell? Or, will you cook anything?*
[*Lin walked to her desk near the window*.]
Father: *Please be quick*.
Lin: *Cook anything?*
[*Lin is looking for her drawing pens*.]
Father: *Do you have anything to sell? Quickly. I am so hungry I could die*.
[*Lin walked around*.]
Lin: *Wow, Hungry*.
[*Lin walked to the table behind the sofa and looked for something in the drawer*.]
Father: *I'm hungry*.
Lin: *Do you want to draw?*

Fig. 7.20 A money bag

Father: *I don't want to draw. But, I want to eat something*.
[*Lin pointed to the kitchen*.] (Fig. 7.21)
Lin: *You can eat there*.
Father: *Aren't you selling things to eat?*
Lin: *Yes*.
[*She walked to the toy basket. She found a yellow ball and gave it to her father*.]
Father: *What are you selling now? What is that? Can I eat it?*
Lin: *A watermelon*.
Father: *Oh. Watermelon. Thank you. Why is the watermelon yellow?*
[*They are laughing*.] (Fig. 7.22)

Lin tried her best to look for something to eat in order to meet her customer's (father's) needs. Here, Lin suggested that her father draw. However, her father did

Fig. 7.21 Eat there (in the kitchen)

Fig. 7.22 'Watermelon!'

not want to draw, as he still wanted to eat. Her father explained the meaning of eating, in detail.

Father: Do you have anything I can put in my mouth and eat?
[*Lin kept looking for something to eat. Meimei followed her and looked in the basket as well*.]
Father: Okay. What do you want to eat for lunch?

According to her father, at this time he wanted to ask Lin what she would like to eat for her lunch. This question made their play move towards reality. This is outside of the play.

7.8 Play Space and the Imaginary Situation

This is a market role-play which enhanced Lin's Chinese vocabulary and helped her experience a market conversation. Lin initiated the market play as she was very interested in her new toy cash register and wanted to show her father how to use it. This play-episode turned into a market social situation, where Lin acted as a salesperson and her father pretended to be her customer. In this way, their play reproduced a real market scenario. The situational play space has been created and expanded through their shared engagement.

It can be seen that Lin initially sold her toys to her father in the imagined market play. However, her father did not like the toys and wanted to buy something to eat. This is the *first conflict* between her demands and her father's needs, which instigated their play and expanded their imaginary play situation. Their imagination possibility has been extended here with Lin's father's support. Her father has different needs by asking for something to drink, which made their play environment not limited to around the coffee table. This enriched their imaginary situation. All this occurred because the father as educator took Lin's perspective by motivating her learning of the selling and buying situation as a social event. That is, Lin's father introduced new problem situations that took her into a complex imaginary situation that went beyond her original imagining. Her father then had another need; he was hungry and wanted something to eat. This was another task for her to sort out. She found a bag and pretended it was a money bag for her father. However, it was not what her father was after. This is *the second conflict*. The *third conflict* in their play that led to negotiation, occurred when Lin suggested drawing. When her father declined, Lin suggested her father eat in their kitchen. This suggestion shows her thinking moves from fantasy to reality. In order to meet her customer's request, Lin found a yellow ball which was considered a watermelon. Her father accepted it, although he still needed more to eat.

Lin's engagement with the extended play space and artefacts such as the yellow ball, drink bottle, drawing material etc., supported her imaginative development. The rich real life experience has significant meaning for children to stimulate their role play and orient their imaginative thinking (El'konin 2005). In other words, the

social environment around the child is the source and conditions for the development of children's play. Lin's father helped her to create a richer and more complex play experience by consciously requesting something to eat again and again, and introducing new concepts and words such as 'change' and 'money' in this case.

Lin performed her role as a salesperson and tried to meet her father's needs. As a result, by resolving conflicts, Lin enhanced her imaginary play and language use by imitating her father's words and actions, and regulating her behaviour through self-talk. For instance, she said '*This is your money. Your money, your money*', which broadened her role as a market owner and her understanding that the customer needs to pay if they want to buy something.

7.9 Agentic Imagination in the Market Play Space

Children's play has been considered in the context of understanding imaginary space-time in play and in stories, to further confirm the child is at the boundary line between a real and imaginary world in play (El'koninova 2001). Fleer's (2014, p. 7) research has indicated that children stay connected to reality and that '*it is the borderline between the imaginary situation and reality where an emotional tension arises*'. In Lin's case, the affective sense brings the dynamic integration of imaginary space and reality in play. Lin's agentic imagination has been generated within the process of the integration. Lin has experienced the selling and buying situation in the market in the reality. Therefore, she brought her social experience into her imaginary situation, which formed her agentic imagination. She brought her ideas and understanding of everyday experience to the play.

Furthermore, when Lin's father asked for something to eat, she tried to offer a few things to her father such as *watermelon, a money bag, drawing*, etc. Finally, she brought the reality about eating in the kitchen to meet her father's needs. Her agency directs her attention to both the imaginary situation of customer service and the motive development for solving the problem of meeting her father's needs. Later, her father also asked what she would like to eat during the lunch, as it was time to cook lunch. Both Lin and her father were moving between the real world and the imaginary situation. The play space (the living room and kitchen area) has been provided to expand Lin's agency in play to meet the father's needs. The agentic imagination has been actively shaped by Lin and her father through creating the whole play space of a selling and buying situation. Also, another important point to note is that Lin's father took Lin's perspective and considered her motives in selling service in the market, where their agentic imagination has taken place. Compared to the last narrative of free play time with a mattress, where the educator did not offer attention to children's motives in playing with the mattress or their agency of everyday life in play, we can see missed opportunity

to generate agentic imagination together through support of children's imaginary play. Therefore, when educators engage in children's play using the child's perspective, agentic imagination between children and adults is collectively generated and acted upon intentionally.

7.10 The Rich Play Dialogue and the Broad Play Space

The play experiences and space helped Lin master her individual imagination and imitation, and in this case gave meaning to the yellow ball as a watermelon, the empty bottle as a drink, the toy cash register as a real cash register, and the round chips as change. It encouraged her to develop the concept of 'money', and her ability to use the cash register. Her father also continually asked for something to eat, which extended their play and enhanced her market experience. The idea of looking for something to eat was relevant because they would soon have lunch, which was reflected in the question her father asked, *What do you want to eat for lunch?* This also meant that they moved in and out of reality in the play situation.

The conflicts concerned Lin's father's needs and what was available at the market. Lin tried to solve the problem and gave many suggestions. For example, she suggested her father draw instead of eat. Her father's continued requests and engagement then further extended their play dialogue, demonstrating that these conflicts drove the progression of interactions and imagination in their play. Furthermore, the progress of Lin's service as a salesperson helped her to understand the job of a salesperson and see how important it is to meet the customer's needs. This is a kind of collaborative process which Lin and her father cooperated in together and one which enhanced her historical knowledge of markets. The collaboration reflects the dynamic process of crystallising reality through collective imaginative play. Agentic imagination has been enhanced and developed through this process.

This reflects Vygotsky's (2004) argument that collaboration with more competent partners, adults or peers, is beneficial for children's development. As a result of Lin's play with her father, her understanding of customer service was able to develop, reflecting how the dynamic process of converging imagination and reality enhances children's higher mental functions. O'Brien (2010) has argued that '*careful adult involvement in play benefits the level of children's play as well as children's social and intellectual development*' (p. 186). Lin's father's questions extended their play dialogue and enhanced their negotiation in a complex imaginary situation, which results in the play environment becoming much richer and the play space much broader. The more artefacts involved in the play, the more space has been created from children's perspectives. The more opportunities children have to think and express their ideas, the more agentic imagination is generated.

7.11 Conclusion

In play, children are able to change the space from an optical field to a sense field in order to make new meaning of the objects, which create their imaginary situation in play. Adults need to take valuable account of the child's perspective and social world to create and expand their play space, which makes their play much richer and more complex. The pedagogical strategies used in creating play space to broaden the possibilities of children's imagination in play then support children's formation of agentic imagination. Pedagogical strategies such as the points made here can be used when educators engage in creating and extending children's play space.

- *Respecting children's voice and choices by supporting children to design their play space*.

This can be shown through Lin's market play with her father. Her father respected Lin's decisions to design her play space as market and collaboratively imagined the market situation with her. He asked for something to drink, which expanded Lin's agentic imagination in play.

- *Creating sustained shared thinking conversations with children by active engagement in their play*.

This can be seen in Em's library play with her father. Her father actively engaged in Em's imagined library situation. His responses extended Em's sustained shared thinking. His questions drove her to expand the library play by changing the play space from the optical field to the sense field.

- *Taking children's perspective to invite and encourage them to join the imagined play situation*.

This is like Harry's mother who took Harry's interests in the airplane and invited him to join the imagined situation of flying an airplane using two pens. Compare this to the mattress play, where the teacher missed the opportunities to encourage children to extend their imaginary situation. The pedagogical moment was missed as the teacher did not take the children's perspective. Children in this situation could not generate and extend their agentic imagination and make rich play for learning.

Adults create and broaden children's play space through introducing dialogue, questioning and discussing, in order to collectively support children's generation of agentic imagination in play, which transforms the joint play into a rich learning opportunity.

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Chapter 8
In the Everyday Moments of Play

The traces that children leave us of their lives and thoughts cannot be enclosed in words alone, but need something more: images, drawings, writings and above all narratives.
(Spaggiari 1997, p. 10).

Abstract This chapter discusses ways adults can recognize the teachable moments within children's play in order to support learning in a scientific way. The ability to capture *pedagogical play momentitos* (which is an original term used to describe moments of intense emotion and thinking that are significant to children and adults) will be explored. In addition, the use of digital visual technology to access and stabilize pedagogical relations in play is discussed as a form of documentation or '*visible listening*', that '*promotes dialogue about teaching and learning*' (Ridgway 2006). We use early childhood pre-service teacher drawings of a play memory to introduce the idea that perceptual embodiment of personal meanings and cultural values exist within all educators' understanding of children's play. We suggest that an awareness of such embodied influences requires acknowledgement of cultural and historical sensibility.

Keywords Everyday play momentitos · Play memories · Capturing productive moments · Digital visual technologies · Visual narrative documentation

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8.1 Everyday Moments Recalled: Drawing a Play Memory

In preparing pre-service early childhood teachers, one visual methodological tool we use is that of conceptualising an early play memory by first drawing and then writing about it. The drawing is a perceptive process that can open up ways for each participating pre-service teacher to enter discussion on pedagogy and play. Drawing acts as a starting point for re-imagining, reinterpreting and generating further thinking about what play personally meant in the past, and how that lived experience may now be embedded in current thinking about the relationship of pedagogy and play. Each of our pre-service teachers recalled a memory of play; abstracted and conceptualised it in a drawing, and went on to produce a written description of the drawing to frame their thinking about play. By involving the pre-service teachers in a creative and imaginative process, an expanded capacity to communicate ideas through individual perceptions and senses became possible. The need for reflection on personal beliefs, values and broader contexts occurred when we were able to '*provide the space for this to happen*' (Boon 2011, p. 78).

The provision of a visual strategy to support our pre-service teachers' professional development offers a tool for building some theoretical and practical connections to their future pedagogical role in working with the everyday moments of play-based curriculum. It is important in teacher education to see teaching as an '*imaginative encounter*' (Fettes 2005, p. 8) where the pre-service teachers could imagine beyond the real world and become more imaginative in thinking about play-based pedagogy.

Play memories allow us to further understand adult's experience of play. Adults model their own ideas of play through interacting with past personal experiences (Jordan 2010). Drawing and recalling a play memory is a cultural-historical approach we use to enhance awareness of pre-service teachers' past play experiences. It can support conscious and deliberate reflection on play practices from different background experiences in varied cultural contexts and offers affordances for creating new thinking about pedagogical play.

8.2 Imaginative Moments in Play Memories

Example 1—Roads

> As a child I grew up with two older sisters. In our backyard we had a series of 'roads' and traffic signs. I remember my oldest sister making us do a test to get our driver's license before we could ride our bikes on the 'roads'. She then became the 'police', fining us for 'speeding' or not obeying the made up road rules. When we broke the rules we had to go to 'jail' in the cubby house. I remember playing this game for hours as we got taken into our imaginary worlds. It gave us the opportunity to mimic an 'adult world' but with our own rules too (JT).

Our pre-service teacher JT relates an example of children's enculturation through play (van Oers 2010, p. 195) in her play memory. In addition she acknowledges the playspace, the artifacts, the rules, the roles and the collective agreement that

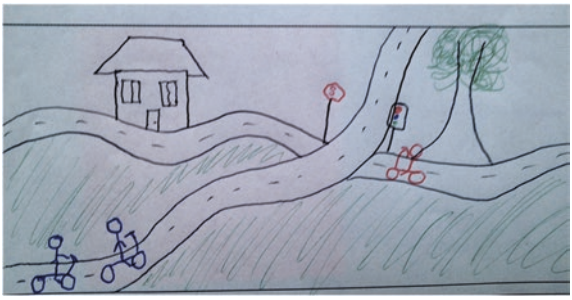

Fig. 8.1 Play memory—roads

is embodied in *agentic imagination* in the memory of shared play with her sisters (Fig. 8.1). Starting with the drawing, her narrative grew in detail and together the drawing and written memory represent the complexity and richness of what happens in the everyday moments of play (Jordan 2010, p. 98).

Example 2—Girls in the Glue

> One of my earliest memories of play was with my older sister. I believe I was around five which would have made my sister seven. It was a game led by my sister which she named 'girls in the glue'. The game took place in our parent's bedroom during the day. We would take the blankets off the bed and place them on the ground between the end of the bed and the cupboard. In the game one of us would fall into the 'glue' (blankets) and the other would try to save them. If you didn't get saved, the glue would turn you into an animal and then you would role play as this animal and get back onto the bed acting as an animal. We took turns in the 'glue' as well as us both going in together. This was a recurring game which we played many times with my sister leading and making the rules for the game. It is a good memory which I remember enjoying even though I'm sure it would end up with me and my sister arguing on occasion when I wasn't listening or following her rules (EW).

What we notice most about these two drawn recollections of momentarily captured play memories are the relationships involved and the use of *agentic imagination* by the participant's collective agreement that the blankets are glue (Fig. 8.2) and the road play has rules. These play memories represent two quite different social scenarios where the concept of *agentic imagination* is present. In common, both scenarios show a shared understanding with older sisters (peer educators) that resides in an imagined space with representative artefacts (e.g. roads, blankets). In addition, these two examples indicate pre-service teachers interpreting play as an imaginative and creative act.

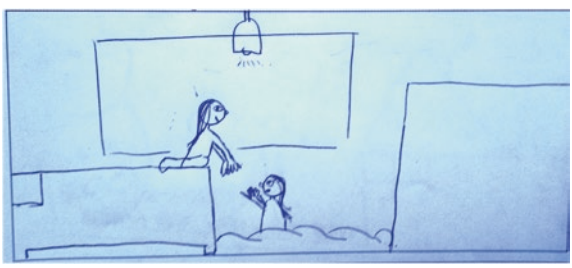

Fig. 8.2 Play memory—girls in the glue

When the examples of recalled everyday moments of play were examined, it was found that pre-service teachers recalled their play memory moments in two quite distinct forms. The first form was where imagination was developed in shared play with an older sibling or adult and the second form related to the embodied experience recalled; such as exhilaration, freedom and feelings of fright or excitement. These were grounded in personal and affective moments recalled in the play memories.

8.3 Embodied and Sensory/Affective Moments in Play Memories

Example 3—Beach Play

> A memory I have of a play experience would be when I was maybe four or five. My family and I would regularly make trips to the beach and we would look into all the rock pools in search of any life. I remember being happy—loving to be around the ocean! I collected all different shells and remember running from crabs that tried to nip me. There were beautiful colours—blue and pink star fishes and jelly fishes on rocks (LW).

In this example (Fig. 8.3) we can see how the pre-service teacher explains a play memory that involves how she 'felt' in a significant place with others. This shows the importance of play as an embodied affective experience for her; something that can also be the case for children when affects are shared with others (Blackman 2010). In the example, this pre-service teacher shares a memory of the family which indicates that play is a collective and affective endeavor for both adults and children. It is important to consider how play has affective qualities and, how children are able to affectively engage with others in important experiences. The affective qualities portrayed in the beach example show that the pre-service teacher focused on her recalled feelings—of being in a place where she was happy and loving being around the ocean. Feelings are an embodied experience of affect. Further, affect brings affective qualities to what we experience through '*its own textures, colours, complexities, multiplicities and contradictions*' (Henriques 2010, p. 82). The way the pre-service teacher envisions this beach play memory as an affectively embodied sensory experience is by focusing on the beauty of being at the beach and describing the beautiful colors such as blue and pink in the artefacts of the place surrounding her.

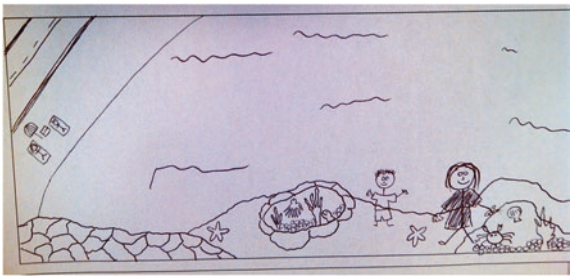

Fig. 8.3 Memory—beach play

Example 4—Lake Ice Play

> When I was six or seven years old. It was near my grandma's house with a group of children. There's no adults watching while we're playing. We played in a natural area near a lake with frozen water in. We tie a rope to a big stone, and throw it in the lake to break up the frozen surface. Then we took a huge piece of frozen ice and carried it around till it melted up. It sounds silly, but we had a really good time. We laugh and laugh, and felt a little bit proud of what we've done at that time (SM).

As in Example 3, the pre-service teacher focuses on the body as being central to her play experience. She explains how she breaks up frozen ice and how it melted, showing that the affective qualities of the objects were important in the play. The sensory elements (affective qualities) of feeling the ice are important because she became aware of them and that developed her capacity to become affected by the experience. Blackman (2010) explains how humans have the capacity to make affective connections with non-human things. This example shows how the pre-service teacher is affected by the experience and has the ability to understand the affective qualities of feeling the ice melting and, more importantly, the feeling of being happy with others. This example shows similar affective qualities to Example 3, but this pre-service teacher focuses more on the embodied action this play memory brings.

We note that these play memories have pedagogical implications for educators (Sandberg and Vuorinen 2010). Personal play experiences provide educators with the ability to conceptualize and be more aware of how they will act pedagogically. As a result, adults' awareness and impressions of their own play memories are deciding factors for the conditions and opportunities that can be generated for children's play (Jordan 2010).

8.4 Everyday "Pedagogical Play *Momentitos*" Captured Through Digital Visual Technologies

> What counts in education is often that which escapes being photographed or tape recorded, because it belongs to the world of possible interpretations (Spaggiari 1997, p. 11).

Digital technologies can serve educators as a tool for unpacking and documenting play. Through digital visual methodologies (video and still cameras), play and learning can be made visible (Fleer and Ridgway 2014). Through *pedagogically capturing* play, interpretations of what the play experience means from the child's perspective, can be considered by educators. *Pedagogical play momentitos* are those significant activities and moments of observation made by educators. Educators need to visually capture pedagogical moments in order to identify how children are learning and developing through particular cultural play activities.

Pedagogically capturing refers to the educators' intention to capture an image for further analysis of children's play. Educators are familiar with capturing images from film or digital cameras. But, in order to pedagogically capture the educator needs to have a pedagogical intention and understand 'why' that captured image reveals itself as a productive moment for extending children's learning through play. An example would

be in educator's planning activities for children to further extend and sustain their learning in something that they keep playing over a period of time. Educators who question 'why do I choose to take this moment (through reviewing images of the moment) are able to question their intentions and goals of how the images will help them understand the child's perspective in play. Digital technologies support the educator's role as a play researcher seeking to understand play from the child's perspective.

In previous chapters, we (as researchers) have documented play through video observations and images in order to demonstrate how play can be pedagogically captured. Everyday 'momentitos' (those little moments of time), can be stabilized to show the pedagogical value of what children are playing; how they are playing; how they affectively and creatively imagine; and what affordances spaces and artefacts bring to their play. All the case studies in this book have been based on video and still digital images, pedagogically captured by researchers and children.

Through the use of disposable digital cameras educators can enter the world of children. In Case Study 6.3, Anna and Mayra were given a disposable camera to show the researcher what kind of significant play experiences were found by children in their communities.

In Case Study 6.3, we discussed an example of Anna and Mayra performing the telenovela in the preschool and how they were able to use everyday experiences to imagine and create new situations. Children are pedagogical makers and we give very little reference to how children make pedagogy in classrooms and how they might shape these practices (Rogers 2010).

But, how can educators know more about children's everyday lives? Through the use of disposable cameras, the researcher recognized how the telenovela was a significant event in Anna and Mayra's lives.

Once the images are received by the educator, or the researcher in this case, they can reveal significant everyday experiences showing how children extend their play with peers (e.g. Anna and Mayra performing Antonella role). The educator did recognize the telenovela as important in these two children's everyday life but, there was very little pedagogical planning for how he could use this experience. Educators need to re-think pedagogical ways to extend and sustain children's everyday experience.

The researcher's experience of having the children's pedagogically-captured images is vital because children and families were able to show by visual means what practices were important to them in their life. The images taken and explained by Anna, Mayra and their families revealed how every image has an intention, and the educator, such as the parent in this case, makes visible the captured momentitos in time and embodiment of a play performance, seen for example in how both children are playing the role of Antonella at home.

8.5 Recognising Productive Moments—A Parent Educator

The following narrative shows how parents as educators can capture the everyday moments of life to document children's play and use their documentation to promote opportunities to understand and support their children's learning.

Case Study 8.1: Supermarket Visit Documented

Since Harry's birth, his parents have captured his everyday moments of life experience intentionally using their mobile phones. They try to make good quality time with their baby son every day and visually record and document their real life. One Saturday morning, Harry, his parents and his grandma went to the supermarket for grocery shopping (Fig. 8.4).

[Harry walked to the shelf of pears and wanted to buy some pears. Father picked up one pear and talked to him.]
Father: *We have some pears at home.*

Fig. 8.4 Harry is shopping in the supermarket

Harry: *I want.*
Mother said to his father: *Please just give one to him and buy one*.
[Harry put one pear into his shopping trolley. They continued shopping.]
Mother suggested buying some grapes. Harry quickly walked to the grapes section and picked up a bag of grapes.
After that, Harry found two grapes on the floor and pointed to them.
Mother: *These dropped on the floor.*
[Then they kept shopping.]
That night at home, mother and Harry watched the video and photos together.

Harry's mother, as a secondary school teacher has her own view about images in their son's life and learning. When she was asked why they video record their son's everyday activities, she shared her thoughts with the researcher about the grocery shopping experience.

> I have three things to share. First, I think it is a very good documentation of memory for my son. These visual technologies supported showing my son's growth and changes. Also, it is part of our family life too. Second, we enjoyed watching the photos and videos together and discussed what happened in the images. My son loves to watch the videos and photos. I don't know why he likes this. But, I think it is a good moment to teach Harry and improve his language learning words such as 'watermelon', 'grapes' through watching the shopping video. Third, the visual images remind me to reflect and think further about my son. For example, during the supermarket shopping, when Harry would like to buy the pears, his father told him that we had some at home. I told his father to pick one up for him as he wanted. His father questioned what I did when we watched the video again that we cannot allow him to buy what he wants as we have some at home. I rethought about this and what we should do next time. Also, when Harry pointed to the two grapes on the floor, I did not give him a suitable response and simply mentioned that they were on the floor. At that time, I did not think of this from Harry's view and actually it is a good moment to teach him when he questions. I think I will change the way of communication with him next time. So, I think reflection is very important to parents and the visual images promote the opportunities to do this. Without the videos, I would not rethink what we experienced.

It can be understood from this interview that Harry's mother not only considered the images to document and understand her son's everyday life, but used them as a pedagogical tool to teach her son. Harry's mother used iPhone images to show and talk to Harry about what they have experienced. The iPhone images helped Harry to develop his learning motives.

The everyday moments of play experience are visualized to support educators to develop intentional thinking and pedagogically support children's learning and development. Children and educators are able to review their play and daily experience together, which provides the opportunities to support the learning that occurs . Educators can also reflect on their teaching experience and recognize the teachable moments through capturing visual images in order to promote the quality of intentional teaching.

In the interview, Harry's mother has also mentioned another important point:

> Also, I found another interesting thing. I am not sure whether you love to hear about it. Sometimes Harry's play shows what he experienced during the daily life. For example,

> Harry always observed and cooked with me at home such as washing the rice and fruits. He clearly shows his interest in the kitchen toys in the toy library and played what we did everyday.

Visual documentation of Harry's play experiences is important for his parents as through re-visiting the experience together they are able to see the qualities of the play event. We refer to 'pedagogical play momentito' as an interactive experience where the educator (parent) is able to take the child's perspective in an intense 'momentito' of concentrated interaction with the child. This also promotes the moments of *agentic imagination* in the play.

How do educators effectively communicate with children about real life situations and extend sustained shared thinking in play? Pedagogically capturing the everyday moments of lived experience and play is very important as Harry's mother's comments suggest. The pedagogically captured images can be an effective tool for educators to explain and discuss the social relationships and the consequence of doing things, which includes explanation of the purpose of the behaviour, and the cause-effect relationships between different behaviour (Bodrova 2008). In this pedagogical practice watching the video supports discussion of the social roles children are interested in. This helps to make children aware of their roles in everyday life and enables them to act these out in their play. Pedagogically capturing (by documenting) everyday moments of play experiences also gives evidence of the conceptual reciprocity present in teaching and learning.

Pedagogically capturing productive moments in play, gives educators capacity to reveal the children's learning not just to themselves but to the child, family, teachers/educators and others in their community.

8.6 A Whole Day of 'Everyday' Moments

> Elemental, these small moments of boundarylessness, of finding your place beside butterflies in the order of things (Curtin 2013, p. 431).

In her novel *Elemental*, Curtin (2013) writes about the continuous flow of moments that accumulate as meaningful life experience. For a child each small moment of their day adds to life experience and helps create meaning in the order of things in their own life. Visual narrative methodology can document such moments for later analysis. Looking for the pedagogical play moments of children's playful activities in an Australian long-day kindergarten setting, the researcher's role was to take observation notes and try to document the ebb and flow of everyday moments that comprise a teacher's *whole day* with young children. By documenting a series of everyday moments in a site where the teacher used play-based curriculum, it became possible to see the extent of affordances in the teacher's active role of creating pedagogical play experiences with young children. The teacher in the case study showed how play-based curriculum may be enacted.

Case Study 8.2: A Whole Day of Everyday Moments in an Australian Kindergarten

By using a digital camera over a whole school day from 8.30 am to 3.30 pm, data were gathered to capture pedagogical moments of play in a group of nineteen three-year-olds with their teacher and assistant teacher. The data captured and traced visually an interconnected playful and continuous narrative that was created between staff, children and families. Several pivotal small moments (pedagogical play moments) of children's learning in everyday play were recorded on digital camera to make this evident. A visual narration of the pedagogical threads that knitted the day into a meaningful whole for the young children was formed through using visual narrative methodology (Ridgway 2014). It is possible of course, to generate from such data several visual narratives, but for understanding more about the impact and importance for children of everyday moments in play, the instances described provide an example of how educators bring both imagination and affective engagement together for children, and in doing so, meaningfully unite the lived experiences of a whole day.

A week before the researcher's visit to the long day kindergarten setting the teachers had introduced a well-known Australian picture storybook, *Possum Magic* by author Mem Fox, to engage and sustain the young children's interest. They created both collective and individual opportunities for children who simultaneously engaged in generating their own collective and individual interpretations from their active perspectives.

In play-based programs that acknowledge the child's perspective teachers will seek ways to support the creation of imaginary situations for children to extend (Fleer 2013). The whole class of three-year-olds with their staff entered into a playful series of imagined, felt and embodied experiences together: generating sustained shared thinking over the day. The development of prolonged shared intentions requires great pedagogical skill with an attuned sensitivity to the child's perspective. The staff considered that taking on a team mentality was vital, because, their pedagogical work was about supporting self-regulation in children and embodying their activity into a collective whole (Monash University 2011). Children (a week before) had created their own Possum Magic puppets, using paper plates and junk materials. Early in the morning of this day the puppets were secretly hung by the teacher in trees in the rear yard (Fig. 8.6). By the time the children sat together with her in a circle for storytelling there was a surprise already planned. A magical imaginary journey was announced by the teacher. She used a Possum Magic character puppet, 'magic dust' (fine glitter) and an old wall map of Australia placed on the floor to raise anticipation of an imaginary journey for the whole group of children. These artefacts had affordances for engaging the group's interest. Working at floor level with class sitting in a circle around the map, the children followed the teacher's possum magic puppet as she moved it from different map locations around Australia (Fig. 8.5). Children took turns to sprinkle magic dust onto the puppet as it was moved along by teacher on an imaginary journey around the Australian map. Later when children moved to outdoors play

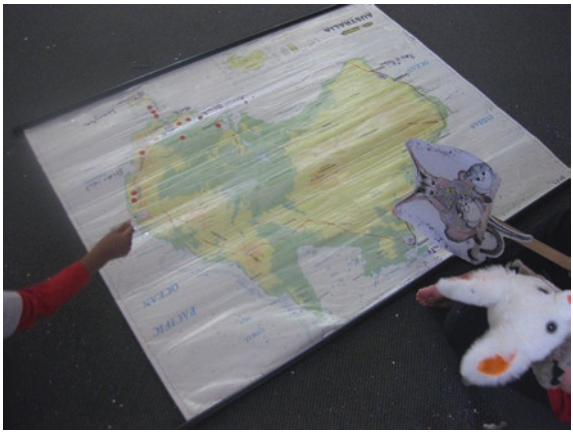

Fig. 8.5 Possum magic journey

Fig. 8.6 Possums hung in tree above picnic rug

in a sand pit, three children took their own journey making a playful imaginary map of Australia created with playground affordances of sticks and leaves. Well before lunch time, staff further encouraged children's anticipation of a picnic on the imaginary journey by involving them in cooking. Plans were made for preparing picnic food. Ingredients were provided for both real (eggs, sugar, corn-flour) and imagined food (playdough) as well as cooking equipment; bowls spoons and beaters and a recipe for making pavlova (a special meringue with topping of cream and fruit). Children prepared real food (and imaginary food), licking fingers from mixing bowl adding whipped cream then fruit to a cooked pavlova base.

Teachers also made playdough for imaginary play and with this children made pretend pavlova from playdough adding coloured beads to represent fruit.

In addition children made a magic birthday cake for a child using playdough, sparkling dust with pipe-cleaners for candles. A parent later provided real birthday cakes for their child to share with the class group. In the afternoon the teachers

packed a picnic tub with both real and imagined food (and magic dust) and took the class of children on a magic journey into the rear yard. The children experienced a joyful moment of surprise when they arrived to sit under the tree and looked above their heads to where their possums had been hung earlier (Fig. 8.6). They shared picnic food with staff and threw fairy dust into the tree. These children were fully embodied in their imaginary Possum Magic journey that had been sustained, shared and imagined over a whole day of playful meaningful activity.

The documented pedagogical play moments show how the children's imagination became embodied in a 'magic journey' that was anticipated over a whole day. The children first entered the teacher's game when they were welcomed into their class that morning. The pedagogical routine of this classroom operated fluidly and spontaneously in playful ways. Each child was warmly embraced by one of the educators and each parent who brought their child into the classroom engaged in a short conversation with the educators. Stories were shared, birthday party plans discussed, and an immigrant child, newly enrolled was scooped up, hugged, smiled at and introduced to other children playing in the meeting area. How educators create an environment that facilitates children's play engagement is the subject of a study led by Singer (2013). Noted in particular in this study were teacher patterns of facilitation of play. As this example demonstrates, the teacher's presence in and out of the children's play builds shared intention and is positively related to learning. The staff involved in taking the *Possum Magic* journey sat down for different everyday moments with the children. Sometimes this was with a whole group, as at the start of the day (with the map Fig. 8.5), and also at the end of the day when the whole class followed their teacher outside on a magic journey to sit on a picnic rug with dangling possums overhead in the tree (Fig. 8.6). In addition, they sat with small groups, as children came and went from the different food making acitivities provided. This nearness and physical contact, according to Singer's research, provides important emotional security and opportunities for responsive conversations for children.

The use of explicit language (examples of literacy and numeracy) by teachers elaborated and linked the children into ideas, to one another, to discoveries, to each other's feelings and all this interaction through many shared everyday moments built a shared experience as the day proceeded. One of the teachers joked later and said of her active style of play-based teaching '*it's actually my exercise for the day*' (Ridgway 2011, field notes).

The pedagogical play moments were chosen purposefully by the researcher to illustrate how children play along with others to make collective sense of plans and activities experienced with, and independent of, their teachers. The children were taken on a wonderful magical journey into the rear yard of their school ground by their teacher. Totally immersed, they entered into the reality and fantasy of the anticipated journey that culminated in having a real picnic together under the trees with picnic food and magic fairydust prepared earlier. A day of pedagogical play where *agentic imagination* was evident in the collective relations that grew through the accumulation of meaningful everyday moments was experienced and documented on digital camera by the researcher.

The teacher commented she had found play-based curiculum hard to plan for but in pedagogically analysing/considering/reading the documented experience, the researcher had evidence that her whole day involved flexible examples of pedagogical importance:

1. Children were teacher directed and demonstrations were given in a whole group,
2. Spaces were set up for children to do things in small groups,
3. Children had freedom of expression and choice in their playful activity.

8.7 Conclusion

Visual documentation of moments of daily play can support educator's work in reviewing and recognising pedagogical play. Pre-service teacher play memories, drawn and narrated, recalled everyday moments which showed both imaginative and affectively embodied play experiences which can be re-generated in new ways and influence pedagogical practices.

We identified special 'momentitos' (pedagogical play moments) of emotional and intellectual play in the way children interacted with their families and educators. It is helpful for educators to identify pedagogical play moments through visual documentation, for further analysis and discussion that can sustain and extend children's *agentic imagination*.

A child's learning, competence, and understanding of information, Vygotsky argues (2004 p. 9), is based upon the child's previous learning experiences:

> The brain is not only the organ that stores and retrieves our previous experience, it is also the organ that combines and creatively reworks elements of this past experience and uses them to generate new propositions and new behaviour.

Therefore, recognising and capturing pedagogical play moments through visual documentation allows educators to re-work children's significant previous experiences and generate new propositions in their planning for children's learning in play. In Case Study 6.3, the parents and the researcher were able to identify repetitive moments of engagement (in the Telenovela play) that were important for children but it is not enough to just capture the moments; is important to pedagogically analyse/consider/read the potential in the everyday moments of play for generating new behaviour, actions and creative extensions of play.

For children's learning and well being, the importance of the teacher/educator seeing and interpreting the pedagogical value of the everyday moments of play is vital. These moments can be invisible to some educators and pass unnoticed when there is no documented record of them.

> the real essence of things is invisible to the eye. In other words, what counts in education is often that which escapes being photographed or tape recorded, because it belongs to the world of possible interpretations (Spaggiare 1997, p. 11).

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Chapter 9
Recognising Cultural Influences in Play

Play is basically a cultural phenomenon, rather than a developmental expression of young children
(van Oers 2013, p. 240).

Abstract In this chapter we explore how cultural perspectives can influence thinking about pedagogical play. In everyday practice, children demonstrate their awareness of cultural values and differences as they play, which gives educators a challenge to consider children's everyday cultural knowledge in their play-based curriculum. This chapter discusses how educators might attune their awareness of pedagogical opportunities available in everyday cultural moments of play. Personal attunement to particular spaces, cultural artefacts and relationships mean there are different ways of experiencing the differently constructed and dynamic realities of children's play. The term '*spheres of reality*' is used by Winther-Lindqvist (Children's play and development: cultural-historical perspectives. Springer, The Netherlands, p. 33, 2013) to describe the different and quite distinct ways the reality of a play situation is experienced by those who participate. We emphasize that the cultural elements and traditions in a child's family home are diverse and, according to Brooker and Edwards (Engaging play. McGraw Hill Open University Press, Berkshire, 2010) can and will '*influence their orientation to play*' (p. 18). Reading different interpretations of a play situation in an Australian home is one way to provide some insight into our differing '*spheres of reality*' and see the diverse cultural influences present in pedagogical play experiences.

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Keywords Cultural awareness · Dialogue commentary · Cultural-historical influences · Agentic imagination · Planning cultural project · Play affordances · Outdoor play experiences

9.1 Dialogue Commentary

We begin with a dialogue commentary built around our cultural interpretations of a play sequence which is a research technique used in case studies for showing many views and can sometimes highlight the often invisible personal cultural influences present in our daily lives.

Case Study 9.1 Hum Drum Play

The living room area encloses the play activity. Family members and friends are present at great grandfather Bob's house and include Bob, grandmother Avis, her two sons, (the fathers of cousins Em and Luci), the children's mothers and friend Gloria, with her baby daughter Silvana (aged 6 months). In the play activity Em (aged 8) plays an instrument familiar to her; the Hum Drum. She plays with two mallets with her cousin Luci (aged 1) who sits next to her. Luci uses outstretched hands to feel the vibrations made by Em playing the Hum Drum. With Em, Luci's mother demonstrates to Luci how to use the mallet to bang on the Hum Drum. Luci and Em share mallets. Luci's father joins the floor space to watch his daughter and Em play together. Luci is handed a mallet by her mother to play the Hum Drum herself. Em watches on. Silvana (aged 6 months) joins the group with her mother Gloria and is handed one mallet. Playing the Hum Drum is new to Silvana. Em watches on to see if the two babies will play together. Luci in playing position, reaches for the other mallet. Her hand gesture asks gently for it. She has seen Em play with two mallets. Silvana holds the mallet firmly. Encouraged by Em and Gloria, Luci and Silvana then play together with one mallet each (Figs. 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4, 9.5 and 9.6).

Fig. 9.1 Luci is introduced to the Hum Drum

Fig. 9.2 Luci is introduced to the Hum Drum

Fig. 9.3 Luci is introduced to the Hum Drum

9.2 Cultural-Historical Analysis Using Authors' Perspectives

Avis: My father Bob has set up his living room carefully for everyone's enjoyment, and the comfort and safety of the young children. He is ninety-two years old and has taken special care to separate the young children's play away from his fireplace by placing couches and chairs to enclose a space for the young parents and the little ones to be together. He places a favorite object (in his home for more than thirty years) in the enclosed play space. The Hum Drum, bought for his children, grandchildren and now great-grandchildren to play with, is a handcrafted percussion instrument, cut with tongues of different length and width. He knows that both adults and children play with the Hum Drum. I see the ways the family and friends join in the play. My granddaughters Em and Luci play together often.

Fig. 9.4 Luci playing Hum Drum with father and cousin

Their parents and Em are familiar with this instrument but in this play they all find ways to introduce the Hum Drum to baby Luci. Em loves to show her little cousin how to do things and she plays as a teacher for Luci. Music making is a family passion and so is teaching. The simple act of hitting the Hum Drum with the mallets gives opportunity for experimenting playfully with sounds and experiencing sound in an embodied manner (e.g. through Luci's hands). Luci's father is a composer and musician. When baby Silvana is brought to the Hum Drum and given a mallet Em watches as Luci reaches out for the other mallet. It surprised me that baby Luci reached for two mallets to play the Hum Drum. Baby Silvana, younger than Luci had not played with this instrument before and had only just met Luci. Baby Luci knew from cousin Em and her father, to play with two mallets. I think this could be why she reaches out to Silvana for the other mallet. I see from the position of her hand and look on her face that it is a friendly reach. Silvana firmly and quite determinedly holds the mallet indicating that she wants it. Luci accepts this and plays the Hum Drum with one mallet. There is a complex play of relational reality here as the action is watched and experienced. There is no interference by onlooking family and young cousin Em who has taken an educational interest in Luci since her birth, was interested in what might happen rather than intervening. She continued her interest in the way the babies played together making sense of how to relate to the Hum Drum and one another.

Fig. 9.5 Luci playing Hum Drum with mother and cousin

Fig. 9.6 Luci playing Hum Drum with cousin and Silvana

Gloria: It is very interesting to read Avis' comments as she focuses on everyone's view of this play event. As Silvana's mother, I add on how I can see Silvana's perspective in this play event. I remember joining in with Silvana and Luci's mother gave us the mallet to join in; by giving us the instrument it was implicitly communicated that we were welcome and acknowledged into this play. I find interesting not only focusing on the instrument itself but also the interactions between baby Luci and Silvana. At the beginning of this play event, the Ridgway family is playing and eventually both Silvana and I joined in and I positioned Silvana next to the instrument. For Silvana, she is learning to be in a new space and with new people. Silvana and Luci are quickly able to play peacefully. They are taking into account each other's perspective, by being together in the same place. They both have strong motives, Luci for grabbing the other mallet and Silvana for holding it closely. I do remember that eventually they are able to play together with their own mallets with the help of Em and myself. Em and I watch this interaction carefully. While thinking of how Silvana at that stage plays at home she has a strong will in knowing what she wants and is able to keep the mallet close. I think Luci also shares this willfulness while playing. Their gestures and non-verbal language are a playful dance of acknowledgement of each other being in the same space.

The play instrument 'Hum Drum' brings everyone together in a shared space and provides relationship building while learning to play. Play is a cultural act where children act playfully according to how cultural spaces are planned for them. Children learn to play with any kind of cultural objects that are available, in this case great grandfather Bob's house and the Hum Drum. I also find it mesmerising how Bob is able to account for the child's perspective because he has carefully thought of his family and friends being together in the same place. He is able to imagine two babies coming together in his house and spent time arranging the space for mothers, babies Luci and Silvana, and Em.

Liang: What a beautiful family event! As an outsider of this Hum Drum play event, I see the importance of *positions* and *relations.* It is very interesting to see how Luci has been positioned. We note the position of Luci physically at the center of this play event. She has clearly shown her interest and attention in the Hum Drum play. Also, the family did not ignore her interest, rather, they took Luci's perspective and put her in the center and in front of the Hum Drum. The cousin, Em and her parents have also intentionally introduced this play to Luci and shown their demands that Luci needs to know this Hum Drum as this is important to the whole family. As the great grandfather set up this play, he also considered this instrument as an enjoyable family cultural play passing through the generations. As Avis has mentioned, this play has supported Luci's experience with sounds and experimenting with the mallets on the Hum Drum. Further, this also encouraged her interests in music and enriched her awareness of family cultural value in the play. Therefore, the Hum Drum play enhanced the family's close relations.

Silvana as a family friend was welcomed to join in with the Hum Drum play and learned to be in a new environment. The Hum Drum play can be considered

as a vehicle by her mother Gloria, to assist her to be part of the new place and feel comfortable with new people and friends. The relationship with new friend Luci, has been built when they shared the Hum Drum play.

From the pedagogical perspective, this playful event has indicated an important strategy. Educators make sensitive use of cultural influences in play when they intentionally extend a moment of pedagogical play with children. It is just like the Hum Drum play. Everybody in the Ridgway family enjoys and has experienced the Hum Drum play at great grandfather's house. This is an important cultural event for this family. With the support of Em, Luci's parents and great grandfather, Luci has a new motive for learning to play the Hum Drum, which supported her development in music. This playful event also supported her development in building friendships. Educators need to take into consideration the importance of the community culture in play, which supports children to be aware of their culture and also develop their *motives for learning.*

9.3 Recognising What Culture Means to Children in Their Play

> An educational place for young children should constitute a meaningful context, in both its relational and cognitive aspects. (Musatti and Mayer 2001, p. 167)

In pedagogical approaches to play, the ways that educators are sensitive to what culture means from the child's perspective, deserves greater recognition. We have discussed the relations between imagination and reality in play events in order to see how adults sustain and share their thinking together with children. We looked at how *agentic imagination* in play can support children's learning and development, how imaginary play is culturally formed, how to capture everyday moments of children's play and have suggested that educators need to acknowledge the cultural differences which impact on children's play.

Children's play in a given community varies from one context to another and such play is considered in relation to its cultural milieu. In other words, '*play is a common childhood activity across cultures, but at the same time play typically expresses concerns that are culture specific*' (Göncü and Gaskins 2006, p. 113). This means that while play may be a universal activity, it is culturally diverse. Therefore, without the educator being sensitive to cultural influences, it won't be possible to fully understand children's play or take into account their perspective in order to support their learning and development.

When educators are aware of how children demonstrate their cultural values and differences in play, it becomes possible to understand what culture means from a child's perspective.

We suggest that educators develop pedagogical approaches to play that integrate the child's perspective with their everyday social and cultural engagement. Over time, children's social identity is influenced by family and community activity.

9.4 Cultural Awareness in a Toddler's Play

Case Study 9.2: Harry and the Moon Cake

Harry, a twenty-month-old boy and his mother had a moon cake together at home after lunch. The following narrative shares their conversation during eating the cake. The communication was in Mandarin. It was on Moon festival day for Chinese people. Mother asked Harry about what we eat at mid-Autumn festival (the moon cake had been first introduced to Harry when he went shopping with his mother). Harry pointed to the moon cake box. Mother opened the moon cake box and let Harry take one piece of moon cake (Fig. 9.7).

Mother: *Wow, Harry likes moon cake. The cake seems very soft. We eat moon cake during moon festival.*
Mother: *Is it round one or square one?*
Harry: *Round.*

Fig. 9.7 Harry touched the moon cake

Mother: *Round means happiness. Wow, it looks delicious. Shall we use the knife to cut it?*
Harry smiled and said: *Okay*

Mother went to pick up the knife and Harry tried to cut it. He could not cut it by himself. Then his mother held his hand and they cut it together into different pieces.

Mother: *Look. What is inside the moon cake?*
Harry: *Egg*.
Mother: *Wow. It is egg. The egg in the moon cake*.

Harry tried to use his chopsticks to pick up one piece of moon cake and eat it (Fig. 9.8). He did not use the chopsticks in a proper way at first. His mother showed him how to hold the chopsticks. Finally he could do it easily by himself.

When Harry was eating the moon cake, his mother sang the song of moon cake. Harry enjoyed his moon cake.

Fig. 9.8 Harry using chopsticks

After Harry's nap time in the afternoon Harry and mother played together to make a moon cake using playdough.

Mother: *What do we eat today?*
Harry: *Moon cake*
Mother: *We had a moon cake. Harry loves that. Shall we make a moon cake?*
Harry: *Okay. [Harry put his playdough in his hand.]*
Mother: *What does the moon cake look like? [Harry looked at this playdough.]*
Mother: *Is it a square one or a round one?*
Harry: *Round*.
Mother: *Yeah. Let us make a round ball first. [Mother showed him how to make a ball.]*
Mother: *Rolling it, rolling it, rolling it.*

Harry looked at what his mother did when his mother was making a round ball. After that, his mother gave the ball to Harry and asked Harry to keep rolling the ball (Fig. 9.9).

Harry tried to roll it. It seemed a little bit hard. His mother held his hands and they rolled the ball together. Then, they put the ball on the table and pressed the ball together. Mother said, '*Wow, it is a moon cake. Do you want to give it to Mum to taste it?*' Harry gave one to his mother. His mother pretended to taste the moon cake and said '*it is so Yummy. Do you want to taste it?*' Harry picked one and pretended to eat it (Fig. 9.10) like his mother. Mother asked him what is inside the moon cake? He said, '*It is egg*.'

Then, they put their moon cake into the box. Mother suggested to let Daddy eat it when he comes back from work. Harry put the moon cake into the fridge to keep fresh for his Daddy (Fig. 9.11).

Fig. 9.9 Harry rolling playdough ball

Fig. 9.10 Harry pretending to eat playdough mooncake

Fig. 9.11 Harry saves mooncake for Daddy

9.5 Cultural Affectiveness Embedded in Agentic Imagination

Harry and his mother enjoyed the moon cake. This happened on the Chinese mid-Autumn festival. Chinese family gets together during the festival and have moon cake to celebrate the happiness. Harry and his mother had a moon cake together after lunch. Harry started to understand what moon cake is and tasted moon cake for the first time. With his mother's guided support, he has his first view that the moon cake is round, with eggs and has a sense of eating moon cake for moon festival. Harry's mother then tried to support Harry's understanding of moon cake through play.

Harry has shown his interest in moon cake. Harry's mother took his perspective and understanding of moon cake and she set up the play experience to support his learning about Chinese food. The play has been considered as a pedagogical tool to support Harry's understanding of a cultural event. The play we note, has been manipulated by the rules of cultural activity. For example, the moon cake is made as a round shape to make the meaning of happiness for Chinese people. The moon cake is specially made for mid-Autumn festival. This echoes van Oers' argument (2013) that '*play is basically a cultural phenomenon*' (p. 240). Harry's learning activity as a cultural practice is carried out in a play form.

The cultural values have been embedded in their play. In the play of making moon cake, Harry has shown his interests and motives in making the moon cake and the *cultural affectiveness (emotional connection with cultural knowledge and practices)* has been embedded. Harry's mother intentionally set up this play experience with Harry after they had moon cake at the day of Mid-Autumn festival. Adults' guided participation is highly valued in Chinese culture, and uses explicit and direct support for children's learning.

Mother has guided Harry from his perspective to make moon cake using playdough (Fig. 9.9). In play, Harry tried to imitate his mother in rolling the ball, and pretending to eat the moon cake, etc. Through the questions, Harry has been invited into the agentic imaginative situation. Within their agentic imagination, the playdough was made into a moon cake, which is round, with eggs and made for Harry's daddy. This has shown Harry's awareness of moon cake. He has developed an affective sense of the moon cake and Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival. He knows eating moon cake means happiness and has felt that his family value the cultural festival food such as moon cake.

Harry's mother also taught him to use his chopsticks to pick up the small pieces of moon cake (Fig. 9.8). The chopsticks are the technical cultural tools employed in Chinese everyday life. It would be more productive if Harry's mother could sustain their imaginative thinking to include chopsticks in their play. Harry would have another chance to practice his skills in using chopsticks. Cultural values in chopsticks will be embedded in their play too.

Therefore, being sensitive to such cultural events and values, requires other pedagogical strategies in play to support children's development and learning.

As Rogers (2010) has argued, '*the social and cultural diversity shapes the lives of young children and their families*' (p. 153). Sue Rogers discussed the powerful pedagogies of play where play is considered as a powerful tool for children to learn adult skills and relations which are culturally influenced. Educators' awareness of the nature of culture influences in children's everyday life may enable them to provide a play experience responsive to children that is representative of their deeper interests. This means educators take children's perspectives and invite children to be active partners in making pedagogy in play. This may enrich agentic imagination and sustained shared thinking in play to support children's learning and development.

Harry's social identity forms in daily life through his parent/educator's cultural knowledge and awareness of '*how children participate in shared activities and how they form relationships*' (Winther-Lindqvist 2013, p. 29). Harry's making moon cake experience really shows his enculturation into family life where, with his mother's guidance, he understands his place in the family and what he can do.

For educators to be culturally competent in a multi-cultural country it is vital to be aware of the highly varied family and community contexts. Educators can make no assumptions about children and family life. We can see that it is very important for educators to recognise cultural influences in early childhood settings and build an attitude of openness to, and awareness of, encultured skills and knowledge that children and families possess.

As discussed earlier, cultural influences are embedded in children's everyday practices. Educators need to be aware of the importance of cultural influences. In Australia the former national Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations offered early childhood educators the advice that '*Children belong first to a family, a cultural group, a neighbourhood and a wider community*' (DEEWR 2009, p. 7) and urged reflection on how we understand culture, suggesting that '*As culturally competent educators we need to think deeply about how our work can support each child's developing identity and self worth*' (DEEWR 2009, p. 22).

9.6 Cultural Influences in Community and Family Play

> Communities and families value play differently, and they set up different kinds of spaces, structures, and resources, including time, for their children (Hedegaard and Fleer 2013, p. 102).

It is important to take a closer look at what the physical and material conditions and everyday contexts may afford for children's learning and development. The following case study shows what affordances a space creates for children to play, and how culture influences what children and families can play.

Case Study 9.3: Mayra Plays on the Swings

In rural Mexico, Mayra's everyday play encompasses playing outside. The play takes place on an Autumn afternoon in October. The researcher is visiting Mayra's home and after a visit to their home all the family walk to meet with Mayra's

Fig. 9.12 Family playing together

uncle who lives next door. The family visit their uncle, and the researcher walks with the family around the piece of land. There are two swings that were built by Mayra's uncle. In this family, being together and playing on the swings is a cultural event that takes place several times in the week

Gina, Mayra's mum tells Mayra, '*look there is the swing*'.
Mayra quickly runs towards the swing.
The researcher asks: *she likes swings*?
Mayra's mum quickly says: *she loves it! She likes the movement*.
Mayra asks her mother: *Can you please push me?*
Mayra's brother John is close and he pushes her.
Gina sits and swings in the larger swing.
Mayra: *yes, come on*! And laughs. *Uuhhh...*

At the same time, Gina smiles and uses the swing (Fig. 9.12). The uncle is in the middle and is talking to the researcher. Mayra plays on the swing and John waits for his turn and Mayra moves.

Mayra swings for a minute and John asks Mayra is it his turn?
She quickly replies *no.*
John: *one time each. Come on go with mum* (points).
Mayra runs and sits with her mum and Gina swings with Mayra on top of her.
John stays for a while and then Mayra swings by herself.
The family narrate stories about their dogs and Mayra listens and participates with her family.

This example is a cultural event in everyday family life. Each member of the family is able to contribute and participate in a playful activity and provide opportunities to develop skills, competence and motives for movement in play.

The role of the mother is to offer an invitation to Mayra to play and swing in a space that she loves—this feeling shows how affectiveness is embedded in play. The family collectively and affectively relate to each other. This family values

outdoor play and the play space created takes into account the family's interests. The uncle built the swings thinking of 'who' was going to use them. There is one smaller swing, where John and Mayra swing and another larger one where adults (like Mayra's mother Gina) swing. The appearance of the swing is simple; a rope and a piece of wood built in the open yard area for everyday access.

Mayra and John learn to negotiate whose turn it is to use the swing and John convinces Mayra to swing with her mother. Mayra and Gina enjoyed their time and this play was about being together sharing and playing in the same space. Everyone took a role and a position in this play scenario. The uncle stayed in the middle and as the researcher was a guest in his house, he took the time to talk further with the researcher.

This play situation is an example of collaborative, affective and embodied play, where being together requires the ability to imagine how each participates in this play. As explained by Blackman (2010) affects are shared by others and we have the ability to make affective connections with others. In this example, play is embodied by feeling the movement of the swing and affectively sharing with others the same experience. Cultural affectiveness is embedded in play through embodiment of a feeling of togetherness created by the family, especially between Mayra and her mother Gina. This is a spontaneous everyday play activity and through this, families are able to affectively connect with each other which is important for them. Families have intentions that may or may not be pedagogical, and this example shows that by spending affective cultural moments and connections with others, children do learn the art of reciprocity.

This play example provides particular cultural conditions for children to learn how to negotiate as seen with John and Mayra who closely share a space, like Mayra and her mother do. The play-based pedagogical event we discuss next, also has a focus on affective connections but in different cultural circumstances.

9.7 Planning a Cultural Project

Case Study 9.4: Mini-Awesome—Line of Fire

Mini-Awesome—Line of Fire, (Ridgway 2012) was a local cultural project planned in an Australian school, inspired by an Australian artist Tim Storrier and generated by two teachers (Barb and Sue). Giving the project the name of 'Mini-Awesome' reflects the strong image of children held by the two teachers who organised it. Barb worked with a pre-primary class of four- and five-year-olds and Sue with a visual arts class for fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds. Sue was inspired by Tim Storrier's painting series '*Burning Rope*' and the mythic dancing flames of his night time '*Fire Line*'. She could see potential for her students to work with Barb's Pre-primary class. The project involved the physical co-construction of a Line of Fire and would be planned to meet required curriculum outcomes and build a culture of family relations between both classes. Sue's project brief involved planning, building of the sculpture, installation and photography, all undertaken in

partnership with the younger Pre-primary children and their teacher Barb. The brief prepared for the Mini-Awesome project involved planning a number of playful pedagogical strategies with sustained shared thinking in mind.

These included the following actions to produce outcomes:

- ***Imagine*** starting points for a story from mystery objects put in a bag
- ***Tell*** **story** from child's perspective
- ***Create*** drawing from story
- ***Design*** wire around drawing
- ***Build*** installation using wire and candle wicking
- ***Install*** framework for firing
- ***Celebrate*** and ***Photograph*** as a school family community
- ***Document*** for reflection
- ***Experience*** objects transformed by fire
- ***Relate*** different ages playing together

The learning through positive relationships that formed between the younger and older children (four-five year olds with fourteen-fifteen year olds) and staff

Fig. 9.13 Families filming lighting the Line of Fire installation of wire sculptures

Fig. 9.14 Families filming lighting the Line of Fire installation of wire sculptures

and families in this project, reflected transformational participation over the three month exchange period and culminated in a spectacular Mini-Awesome—Line of Fire event celebrated with children, their families and teachers (Figs. 9.13 and 9.14).

9.8 Constructive Play

Constructive play involves the building or creation of something symbolic, spatial, representational and multi-dimensional (Smilansky and Shefatya 1990). In this project, drawings and stories from the four–five year old Pre-primary students were inspired by mystery objects selected from a bag as starting points to imagine, design, create, fire, and photograph the *Line of Fire* sculptural installation.

An evening celebratory barbeque with family, staff and all student participants was planned. The culmination of the project was igniting and filming the *Line of Fire* installation on the school playing fields and watching as it burned, flared and flamed against the night sky before turning to ash (Fig. 9.17). Documenting the event watched by families and children was an important element for later reflection and evaluation. Visual arts teacher Sue imagined the class exchanges and peer support would build technical knowledge as well as communicative skills.

Contemporary play-based curriculum, '*highlights the role of play in the transmission of culture through social interaction and communication*' (Wood 2013, p. 40). For pedagogical strategies to be both effectively and affectively supportive of children's learning in play, educators need to culturally frame the learning by making and communicating pedagogical decisions about organisation of the environment. The shared project brief, showed how Sue and Barb framed their practices strategically for co-construction of playful joint learning activities.

Pedagogical dilemmas can arise if play is not taken seriously by educators as a place where cultural learning happens. Framing play through a continuous process of being informed by pedagogically intentional goals '*is not just a technical practice but an ethical practice which is intrinsically bound with positive images of children*' (Carr and Lee 2012, cited in Wood 2013, p. 140). Active and constructive practices involve children's use of imagination. The active practices listed below by visual arts teacher Sue, show careful inquiry based planning that would sustain shared thinking over time. The active practices listed include children telling their own stories as starting points for what they would make with the support of their older 'buddies' (the children they were paired with). These practices are planned to stimulate the children's agentic imagination and provide a transformative cultural experience. This can enable the formation of the individual participants personal and group identity within their large school setting.

Interviewed after the Mini-Awesome—Line of Fire project, the teachers Barb and Sue, reflected on their practices and outcomes of the collaborative playbased project. They commented:

Fig. 9.15 Drawings wired, candlewick bound

> The early years of education are fertile nurseries of minds which, when nourished, remain creative, productive, energetic, engaged and positive (Barb).
>
> The best part of the project was that all participants (students involved, parents, siblings and teachers) really enjoyed it. IT WAS FUN! It was then a valuable educational experience in addition to fulfilling curriculum requirements (Sue).

Those who live in Australia know how much fire is part of the culture. Bush fires are frequent and dangerous, and both exciting and terrifying. Understanding what fire does is important to know. The Mini-Awesome—Line of Fire project gave children the chance to see what happens when the objects they had made over time from wire, were set alight. In an environment where rules for safe conditions were made with peers and families, seeing fire and what it can do, was an intense experience. With families and staff watching and the older group filming, the firing of the sculptures on the school football oval in evening light was an exciting yet safe experience for the younger children. The awesome vision of seeing flames in the darkness was captured on video for later reflection. Staff, children and their families who participated, experienced a fiery, awesome and embodied reality of both the beauty and destruction that fire can bring.

The cultural conditions for 'Mini-Awesome' related to creating a 'school family' project, motivated by the wish of the teachers (Barb and Sue) to build affective connections between two different age groups of children in the same school and to use challenging materials (like fire) in an outdoor environment. The project framed by the collaboration of the two expert teachers and supported by the children and their families was seen in reflection, to be playful, unpredictable and pedagogically intentional but no one fully anticipated the pure enjoyment and emotional excitement that participants felt as their installed creations went up in flames, burned and turned to ash (Figs. 9.15, 9.16 and 9.17).

Children are brought up within their own cultural milieu and this is likely to represent a strong cultural influence in their lives. Materials and artefacts, ways of communicating, family practices and community conditions, afford children

Fig. 9.16 Drawings wired, candlewick bound, ignited in *Line of Fire*

Fig. 9.17 Drawings wired, candlewick bound, ignited in *Line of Fire* and turned to ash

various opportunities for learning as they play and participate in their daily lives in different cultural settings.

9.9 Cultural and Pedagogical Play Affordances at the Bushland Creek

Case Study 9.5: Kindergarten Children's Outdoor Experience

Visiting a pre-school surrounded by eucalyptus bushland that smelled wonderful, Avis found 25 children and three staff preparing for a day playing at the nearby creek. The group of four-year-old children were dressed in red waterproof overalls, wore gumboots, had back packs with lunch boxes and helped each other get ready

Fig. 9.18 Backpack shelter at creek with water container

to leave the classroom. Staff wore waterproof clothing and gumboots. A sense of excitement and anticipation filled the air even though it was a very rainy day. Staff prepared a bucket of soapy water, a container of fresh water and took some scissors with a ball of string to carry to the creek. Later we all walked along a gravel pathway that lead to the little freshwater creek (shallow and clear with gently running water). A feeling of calm descended and sounds of running water and bird calls filled the air. This was a peaceful place, wet, green and with filtered light that enclosed the children and staff. Halfway down a steep pathway to the bushland creek one teacher told Avis that staff loved this time in nature with the children. Teacher believed that staff all learn a great deal about what the children can do and what they choose to play and who they interact with when they come to playfully explore this creek area. Stopping on the pathway at a tree stump with its core hollowed out, the teacher put her hand into the core and said playfully '*I'm recharging my batteries*'. This was a game she had learnt from the children. The children hung all their backpacks in a special shelter (Fig. 9.18) and returned there whenever hungry or thirsty. It was a home base with collective presence reflected in the group's hanging backpacks and the large water container with tap where they came for a drink and washed hands if needed.

Avis watched children during this day as they walked up to the stump mentioned previously, and playfully pretended to recharge a stick or their hand which they said represented something imagined (like mobile phone or battery toy). After 'recharging' they walked back down to the creek bank and continued their play. The reality of this outdoors situation was that the children came and went to the backpack shelter when they chose to. They were part of a group sharing an adventure with their teachers nearby. The freedom of choice that the children and staff had as they participated in this common activity was liberating. Children drank when they were thirsty, ate when they were hungry and moved in and out of imaginary roles when the moments arose. This was an ideal situation that provided both educators and children with self regulatory opportunities in a play space that strongly influenced their imagined play scenarios.

Fig. 9.19 Cubby house and fishing line—finding and using sticks at the creek

A number of children started looking for sticks to build with and bring their ideas to life (Fig. 9.19). One child said: '*I'm looking for a middle sized one (stick) with a bendy curve it it*'. With staff help string was attached to the chosen sticks and some were used as bows to pull on and project pretend arrows. Jack said he was shooting arrows from his bow into the creek to catch a fish with a yellow stripe on its face. He said that '*the arrow that went over the creek would catch a tiger in the zoo or maybe an elephant*'.

Later when reflecting on what was observed, the pedagogical moments captured on digital camera were used for deeper pedagogical analysis and given to preschool staff for further shared discussion.

In the creek visit children's imaginary play drew on what was in the environment and play was happening everywhere; both in small groups and individually. For example a stick with string was imagined and used as a fishing line (Fig. 9.20).

Fig. 9.20 Cubby house and fishing line—finding and using sticks at the creek

Other children made fishing lines too and joined together to play catching fish together games. Some children playfully jumped into the shallow creek and used water and mud from the banks to make mud balls to throw into the creek water. These dissolved into the clear water making it muddy. Their teacher sat on a rock next to them having a timely conversation about what happens when dirt and water mix and how it dissolves. Children were full of conversation about the light shining on the water and how it showed it was moving slowly and flowing. Other children found vegetation to float on water as it travelled slowly down the creek. The story tree was introduced. Taken by the hand Avis (researcher) was led to a weeping willow tree, where three children put their hands on the tree and then put their ears to the trunk to listen for stories. They were saying the tree was magic and asked if there was another story for them. A travel story unfolded and the children sat together on a nearby fallen tree trunk and used it as an aeroplane for travelling away to Bali where one of the children had recently holidayed.

Noted by Wood (2013):

> The guiding principle is that adult interactions should tune into what is happening and should respect the flow and spirit of the play (p. 121).

We would add here that the flow and spirit of play that happened between the small group of children sitting along the log/aeroplane near the story tree, was also cultural.

> The heart of culture is constructed from elements of drama, joyous improvisations, jokes and humour, competition and contests, making images of reality. Without play the life disapears from culture (Singer 2013, p. 177).

This play grew from the children's *collaborative agreement* that they were flying on a holiday to Bali, which is something that some Australian families do.

The children invented many stories on the day at the creek including what lived in the hole found on the creek bank and who might shelter in the house of branches and vines they had built together.

A quote from Custodero (2005) resonated in relation to this preschool nature program at the creek that was shared with staff and children:

> Becoming is determined by the individual: through engaging with and transforming materials in the environment children contribute to their own growth (Custodero 2005, p. 188).

Children in this outdoor setting had engaged with and transformed materials in their environment and constantly demonstrated *agentic imagination*, becoming powerful interpreters of the roles they created for themselves.

We can understand how the children's outdoor play is imagination in action, a creative process where children's agentic imagination draws on what is present and real and transforms it into a new reality for them (Lindqvist 2003). This new reality holds children's feelings, interests and emotions, which are real (Fig. 9.21). The children are creating their own imaginary worlds of play that allow them to interpret real life (Lindqvist 2001). They are living their everyday life in a situation that demands they make choices. Therefore, educators need to acknowledge children's everyday life when they create conditions and spaces for children to play.

Fig. 9.21 What lives in the hole?

When educators take the child's perspective, they are being responsive to children's deep interests.

9.10 Conclusion

We have argued for the importance of the educator finding the pedagogical moments in play, being affectively attuned to the children's interests and encouraging their *agentic imagination*. We have also tried to bring the stories of cultural influence in play to life. When it comes to understanding the cultural influences in play and seeing these from the child's perspective, educators who organise such cultural opportunities as a day of play at the creek, moon cake making, installing sculptures into a line of fire and making family connections on a play swing, are using pedagogical means for children's learning.

Such play may have appeared at first to be free range but it becomes pedagogical play when the educator/teacher adult or peer includes subject matter knowledge, values the child's perspectives, creates shared intentions, looks further, adds on, plans opportunity for activity and thereby builds conceptual connectedness, that we have named '*conceptual reciprocity*'.

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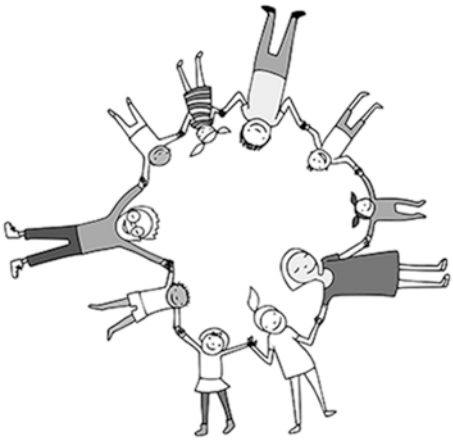
Chapter 10
Contemporary Interpretations of Pedagogical Play



Abstract The role and development of play has been interpreted from individual, sociocultural and educational perspectives in the last decade (Wood 2010; Goncu and Gaskins 2011; Fleer 2013). This chapter of contemporary interpretations of pedagogical play brings together a collection of research in practice narratives we consider important for discussing pedagogical transformation through the development of play in children's learning. We include six case study examples of pedagogical play in order to acknowledge the widely different perspectives of participants in their play. We start with a visual narrative of two babies who are familiar with each other. We discuss how they play together and how familiarity is an important element for them to be reciprocal in a play situation.

Keywords Complexity of pedagogical play · Baby/Infant conceptual reciprocity · Technology play · Historical perspectives · Agentic imagination · Teacher's play · Play quality · Visual narrative

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10.1 Baby/Infant Pedagogical Play—Conceptual Reciprocity

Case Study 10.1: Silvana and Fleur

In Australia, first time mothers are invited to join a 'mother's group' organized by the local council (municipal government). Gloria and Silvana joined their local mothers' group when Silvana was six weeks old. The mothers in the group meet regularly to play with their babies and share information about being first time mothers. In mother's group, babies interact and play with each other and mothers share experiences about life with a new baby.

Silvana and Fleur (another baby from the group), have become familiar. Fleur's mum joined the group when Fleur was two weeks old. The mothers, with their babies, meet regularly and, on some occasions, the two fathers, Jorge and Catran, also join in.

Infants according to Vygotsky (1998) require maximum interaction with adults for their development. In this case study the significant adults, Silvana's and Fleur's mothers, share the desire for their infants to interact with each other. Through these interactions, the infants become familiar with one other. They are able to 'be' together and 'become' individuals who share similar interests (such as toys) and are able to co-exist in the same space. An important aspect of conceptual reciprocity in play with babies is learning to be with one another as later on this creates different cultural forms of participating while collaborating in play.

The following visual images tell the story of two little babies who are curious and interested in each other (Figs. 10.1, 10.2, and 10.3). Infant ages are indicated.

Over time Silvana and Fleur develop into infants who are curious and interested in each other (Fig. 10.4). This curiosity is essential in children developing '*the art of reciprocity*', that involves playful moments of interactive exchange. This also involves the value of possessing awareness of how to engage with others with all parts of your being—including how children feel and think about each other and what they play.

Fig. 10.1 Playgroup (2/3 months)

Fig. 10.2 Silvana's home (4/5 months)

Fig. 10.3 Fleur's home (6/7 months)

Fig. 10.4 Two curious friends Fleur and Silvana (12/13 months)

The parents visually document 'pedagogical play momentitos' of this exchange as they are interested in capturing the awareness of their babies being together. Both mothers and father, see the development of the children's awareness of one another through meeting regularly and playing together. In this way, they have built familiarity and a sense of one another. This familiarity has been noted by the parents when the babies both seem excited to see each other, affectively touching, and even sharing a kiss on one occasion. Gloria, Silvana's mother and Michelle, Fleur's mother, have been sensitive and interested in this relationship and captured their babies' interactions on camera.

10.2 Conceptual Reciprocity and Agentic Imagination Between Infants

Case Study 10.2: Silvana and Fleur Play with a Toy

The next example shows Silvana and Fleur playing with Fleur's toy, which is new for Silvana. Silvana has been to Fleur's house before. Silvana is curious and interested in feeling and observing Fleur intently; Fleur is curious about Silvana's father. For Silvana, there is an awareness of someone playing with her or being like her. We think this awareness of the other begins as young as these two infants and is the genesis of knowing each other, which in turn creates reciprocity that later will be a basis for *conceptual reciprocity* in play.

Parents meet at a local hardware store and Silvana's parents are invited to have a coffee at Fleur's house which is nearby. Silvana's dad (Jorge) is sitting on the stool and chatting with Fleur's mother about babies crawling. Fleur (eight months old) has already started crawling and Silvana (nine months old) hasn't yet.

Silvana and Fleur are sitting on the floor and are positioned next to each other (Fig. 10.5). Some toys are given to both infants. Fleur is looking at Silvana's dad and Silvana holds a toy that belongs to Fleur. While Fleur is looking at Silvana's dad, Silvana looks at her and lays down to touch her leg. Fleur notices Silvana has her toy and then they both look at the toy.

Fig. 10.5 Silvana looking at Fleur and Fleur looking at Jorge Silvana's dad

Fig. 10.6 Fleur and Silvana observing adults

Fig. 10.7 Interacting with the toy

While Silvana is with the toy she looks at Fleur to make eye contact. Silvana expresses herself very enthusiastically and shouts Ehhh Ehhh and looks back again at Fleur.

Silvana moves her feet and then looks at her mother, Gloria, who is filming. In the meantime, Fleur is observing Silvana's dad. Silvana looks again and sees Fleur and Fleur is still looking at Silvana's dad (Fig. 10.6).

Silvana says: yeahhh and reaches for Fleur's feet… Then Silvana says: arggg!

At this point, all the adults are silent and looking at what the babies are doing. Silvana's dad imitates Silvana: arrrr! Silvana leans forward and looks at the toy (Fig. 10.7). Fleur continues looking at Silvana's dad.

Silvana has a strong motive seen through her actions by showing that she wants Fleur to look at her, while she plays with the toy (Fig. 10.8). The toy makes noise when it's touched and Fleur listens to this as Silvana touches it. Fleur observes how Silvana is playing with the toy for a period of five seconds.

Fleur is interested in the toy. She leans forward and reaches towards the toy (Fig. 10.9). Suddenly, the toy slips from Silvana's hand. Fleur quickly takes it away from Silvana. Silvana observes the object being taken from her; she moves her legs and waves her arms and shows her discontent through non-verbal gestures and takes a big breath when Fleur takes the toy. Fleur observes the toy and plays with it (Fig. 10.10). When Fleur takes the toy Silvana says: Ahhh!! Silvana's dad says: Silvana!

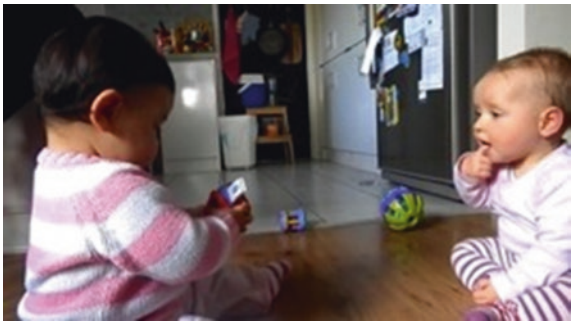

Fig. 10.8 Fleur observing how Silvana plays with toy

Fig. 10.9 Playing with each other

Fig. 10.10 Playing with each other

They both keep looking at the toy. Silvana tries to take the toy slowly away from Fleur (Fig. 10.11). Silvana's dad notices and touches Silvana with his feet. Fleur tries to keep it with her. Fleur turns when Silvana takes it. Fleur then looks at Silvana's dad as the conversation between adults begin. Silvana points to the toy's tag to take it and moves it using one finger. Fleur keeps listening with attention to Silvana's dad (Fig. 10.12).

Fleur does notice that the toy is taken away. Fleur keeps pointing her finger and Silvana plays with one finger as the toy jumps (Fig. 10.13).

Then, Fleur looks at the toy. Silvana keeps pushing the toy and there is a moment where they both have their fingers on the toy.

Silvana takes the toy while Fleur is about to point her finger into the toy (Fig. 10.14). Silvana grabs it and Fleur keeps her finger pointing at the toy.

Fig. 10.11 Silvana grabbing toy from Fleur

Fig. 10.12 Different interests

Fig. 10.13 Sharing the toy

Silvana keeps looking at the toy and very quickly Fleur turns as if she is going to move away but she turns around and looks at the object (Fig. 10.15).

Silvana looks at Fleur. She acknowledges she is there with her. Fleur turns around, Silvana continues studying and looking at the toy's wheels and Fleur is now crawling away (Fig. 10.16). Silvana stays in the same position and Fleur comes back. For another few minutes, they stay together playing with each other and then Fleur's mum joins them and reads them a book. It is through using visual documentation that

Fig. 10.14 Reciprocity between Silvana and Fleur

Fig. 10.15 Silvana takes toy, Fleur moves around

Fig. 10.16 Interests changing

allows us to see the different gestural language used by Silvana and Fleur and also understand the motives they develop as the shared play progresses.

In taking a pedagogical perspective on the play, Cecchin (2013) explained how children connect with each other in meaningful ways through concrete expressions that become visible through documentation which becomes pedagogical documentation when made from the perspective of the child. In this case, Gloria as the parent and educator, is able to take into account through her pedagogical documentation, the infants' perspective and observe how they participate and create an emotional and cognitive reciprocal interaction.

Michelle, Fleur's mum offers some interpretation of the babies actions based on her relationship with the family. She comments, *'in terms of Fleur keeping an eye on Jorge, she is still very cautious of all men who aren't Catran (Fleur's father). But she usually relaxes quite quickly once she realises they aren't scary. I think Silvana and Fleur were taking turns playing with the toy. I think Silvana is more intense in her play, there is a lot of expression and passion in terms of what she wants to express and what she wants others to do to join in. I think Fleur's concentration is shorter than Silvanas. Fleur is quite carefree, you could come or go and it would all be fine and dandy'*.

Michelle comments on an important element of conceptual reciprocity in play. She is aware that both infants have distinctive personalities and ways of moving and positioning themselves in play. Silvana takes the position of being more intense and able to concentrate more on the object in play. Silvana in her gestural language communicates to Fleur her desire for her to join in. Fleur is still getting to know the social space and concentrating on knowing who Jorge is; a new male person in her house. Even so they are concentrating on different aspects and while playing they are able to share the toy and learn different ways of participating which is important when playing and creating conceptual reciprocity.

Looking at both the subjectification and socialisation of Silvana and Fleur as they enter the roles of relating to each other with their parents nearby, we find rules of engagement (Rogers 2010) are being applied with great subtlety. Note in the narrative, when Silvana's father is thinking about whose toy it is, he gently nudges Silvana with his foot to encourage an understanding of sharing.

How can the idea of sharing be conceptualised? From this detailed example we see that it takes many relational exchanges to show that sharing a toy involves conscious awareness of cultural rules of engagement and it is only by participating in playful exchanges that children can learn specific rules that support friendship from a very young age and *conceptual reciprocity* is involved.

Babies are effective communicators because through non-verbal gestures, shouting and vitally moving they are able to continue with their own interests and motives and keep playing. They both have agentic imagination because this consists of being in the same space, each infant creating rules of playing, and learning to participate by continuing with their own individual imagining of what the object is and participating when they want to. Imagining involves thinking and babies are able to do this through sharing what they want to do with the toy and through expressing what they expect from others with them. Silvana shows a strong motive for playing with the toy and sharing it with Fleur. However, Fleur is interested in the adults around her and is able to acknowledge Silvana and interacts with her briefly. The interpration of this event shows how the world of babies is subjective to the eye of the person who interprets the event. Parents are able to make an interpretation such as Michelle did because they have seen their babies interact over long periods of time and have come to know the babies well.

10.3 Technology Play: Historical Perspectives of Child, Parent and Grandparent

In using contemporary interpretations of play we are able to acknowledge that cultural and historical influences are present. We can use visual narratives to document the everyday moments of play over time, in order to illustrate an understanding of child development in its historical sense by looking to the past to understand the present. Case Studies 10.1 and 10.2 are examples, showing the growth of the relationship between Silvana and Fleur over time.

The social qualities and artefacts that create play affordances in early childhood usually reflect what the culture has produced in a particular time. In the 1970s children J and M were eight and five years of age. They enjoyed playing with the world famous Danish invention Lego. Lego continues to engineer sets of hard plastic modular and interlocking blocks of various dimensions that are configured with accompanying representative parts and figures. These, in a market economy, are manufactured to relate to current popular events. And when we think about Lego play, capturing its historical dynamic implies a need to see changing play practices in action, iteration and transformation over time.

10.4 Playing Together Over Time

Case Study 10.3: Lego Play Through Generations

In the 1970s the age of space exploration reached a new level. Man had landed on the moon. Space Lego sets in boxes with instructions were mass produced and in family homes. Together with their father, sons J and M played with the materials to create a space station.

The space station was quickly dismantled by young sons and made ready for a different kind of construction, one where the sons own imagined cultural expressions could be supported. Lego today (forty years later) remains one of the most used toys around the world and is still sold in sets with instructions and still played with in a multiplicity of ways by another generation.

Em comes each year to her grandparents home for a summer holiday. From the age of five years she took an interest in playing with her father and uncle's old Lego collection stored for years in a cupboard. Poppy brought out the Lego in assorted bags and containers and these included some pieces that Em's father J had made with poppy when he was a young boy. Em's curiosity was raised about how her father had related to these materials many years ago. She could see little trucks, wheels, boats, and space action figures that her father (and Poppy) had played with together. In this circumstance a *past-present dialectic* exists for her (Ridgway 2014). By this we mean that the past is present in the material forms of the father's constructed trucks, cars, rocket ships and boats. Em relates to these historic pieces and asks her father to rebuild his spacecraft (Fig. 10.17).

Fig. 10.17 Showing father's spacecraft

Her father J re-made a spacecraft recalled from his childhood whilst Em watched. She then showed it to family members and in that moment (captured on camera) we see a special look on Em's face. We see the way she holds the spacecraft forward to show it and how she stands so closely to her father. These gestures reveal Em's alignment within a continuum of family pedagogical play using Lego materials. In this situation where Em's playful experiences with Lego materials are embedded in the larger meaning for the family there exists a shared cultural continuity over time of imagining scenarios using Lego as a tool for thinking and expressing ideas. Em plays in present day time and learns that her Poppy and father J had made trucks with the lego pieces because long ago they had been interested in trucks and space travel. At the same time, Em also understands that she has free choice to make what interests her too. As van Oers (2013) proposes, children need to learn about the tools they use in the role they choose to play. She learns to find roof, window and wall pieces to join onto flat boards in order to build the houses and fences she has in her mind. These pieces fit together with and within the old constructions her father had made years ago. We see how Lego play is pedagogical when Em starts to select the particular shapes and colours she wants from the material tools available to her with a particular purpose in mind.

10.5 Representing Holiday Park Experiences

Em's summer holiday experiences include visits to the beach, playground, amusement ride and local park. She plays with sand, swims, climbs playground towers, slides and steps, enjoys the car ride and balances with Poppy on the see-saw.

Later these real experiences are replayed in imaginary abstracted scenarios using the historical Lego materials. Em uses the Lego to build her own ideas. Agentic imagination is evident in the recorded response of her reimagining and narrating her real and lived holiday experiences that are now alive in her imagined Lego material scenario (Fig. 10.18).

The video transcript that follows, reveals that Em's recent holiday experiences are used for an imagined play scenario that is materialised in Lego and comes to life with her explanation.

We know that children are social beings born to be responsive and '*Very early in life, children demonstrate that they have a voice, but above all that they know how to listen and want to be listened to*' (Rinaldi 2006, p. 67). Em's grandmother, Avis, is curious to hear what Em has been making with the family Lego material and video records the following conversation.

Avis: *Do you want to show me what you have been making Em?*
Em: '*Yes! Here…is a little door and this, this moves the whole thing aound and this is the toy hiring place so that you can hire a little toy—you can go in and back and that's (pointing) only for parents and that's (indicating) only a museum of grown up stuff and that's if you have kids and they don't want to go in ….so they can just come and play here and its free and there's this place where kids can sit on and then they can get a push around the park…and then this is the thing for the sand pit… they can dig up stuff and this is a skinny spinning around thing, a thing you turn around or you can sit on it and turn it around and you can make stuff with it like little shapes and this is a car they can go around in. If you do this you are finished with it.*'

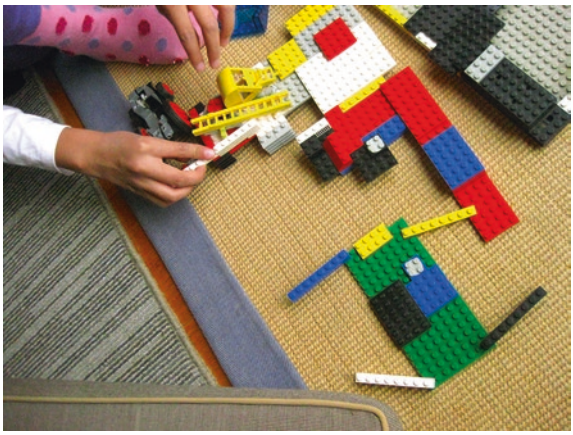

Fig. 10.18 Freedom to build holiday park

Over time Em tells us new stories. From original ideas new thoughts begin to shape the materials and cultural transformations are seen and felt. Em adds more Lego materials to her holiday park and over two years this is transformed into an adventure park. Her sustained and shared narrative is directly related to a new experience of visiting an adventure park in United States of America with her parents. To her original adventure park, Em now adds elements of her U.S.A. holiday experience such as surveillance cameras for security (once these Lego pieces were satellite dishes in the space Lego set) (Fig. 10.19) control monitors for security staff (formerly panels for space ships) (Fig. 10.20) and a swimming pool (Fig. 10.21).

When listening to Em's explanation and watching her activity of playing with Lego on video, it is astonishing to realise what Em is imagining. We have a sense of her intentionality, full engagement and physical dexterity using the materials. Em is undoing old truck and boat pieces that her father and Poppy had made. She

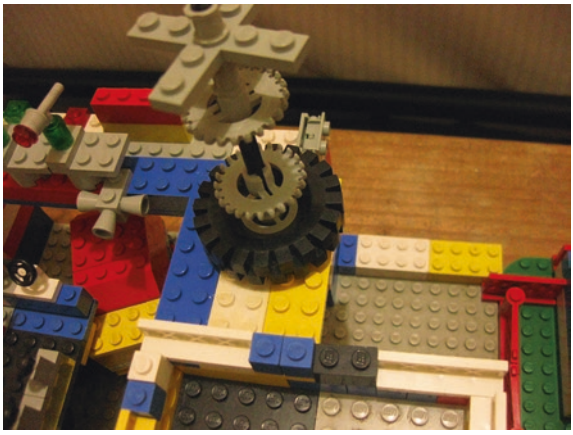

Fig. 10.19 Surveillance camera

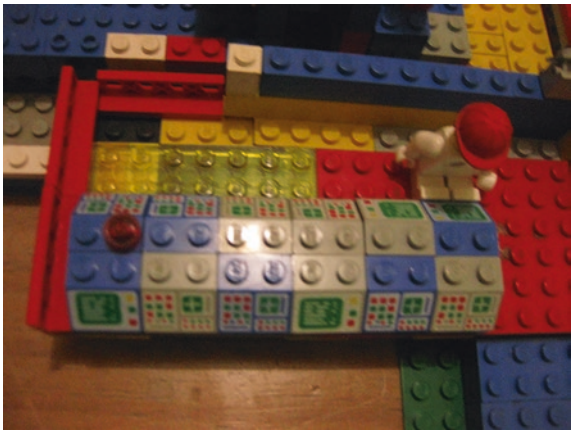

Fig. 10.20 Control monitors

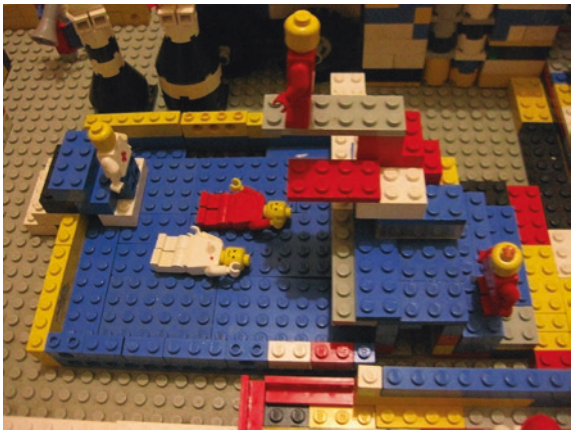

Fig. 10.21 Swimming pool

is also selecting particular pieces she has in mind for her new construction. Some pieces are so tiny and require fine coordination of fingers and eyes in order to make what she has in mind. We note great deliberation and purpose and no exasperation. She is very skilful with the tools she is using and with this skill comes the feeling of affective attunement and freedom to generate imagined scenarios. Her choices are made personally and materials are experimented with. She undoes older constructions and readily seeks help from Poppy nearby if some flat pieces cannot be prised apart. Her family keep these constructions over time and in this way demonstrate to her that imaginative efforts are valued in this family. Later during other summer holidays, Em adds to the holiday park and slowly transforms it whilst continuing her narratives in ways that reflect new life experiences (Fig. 10.22). Her constructions are never dismantled but placed on a table and stored in a space for safe keeping and further anticipated transformations. In this way her stories are sustained, shared, alive and growing and this fact highlights what can happen if supportive pedagogical space is made available to children.

Fig. 10.22 Adventure park

Pedagogical play can develop in an historical continuum and studying historical changes in use of toys can be difficult (Elkonin 2005) but if the researcher looks at the toy the child uses, new functional perspectives are seen in their play. In the case study a toy (Lego) is known in relation to two generations of children whose playful use of it changes according to culturally constructed meaning over time. Poppy and his sons J and M were in a situation of conceptual reciprocity as they built the Lego space station together in the 1970s. When re-used in the 21st century the materials are newly imagined in different ways that reflect the players' life and times which demonstrates their ongoing use of agentic imagination in playful learning, that we understand as pedagogical play. Em, a generation later, is identifying strongly with the rich affordances that playing with family Lego material offers.

Transformative play perspectives in this case study are guided by lived experiences in different environments with parents, grandparents and child. Historic Lego materials are shared with a sense of family belonging and are the tools used for pedagogical play.

By considering what the contemporary interpretations of pedagogical play are, we can see two things clearly: There is ongoing *conceptual reciprocity* in the use of Lego materials and there are historical and cultural constructions of meaning through ever present *agentic imagination* in the relations between child, family and materials.

10.6 Creating the Possibility of Agentic Imagination in the Preschoolers' Play

Case Study 10.4: Structured Play or Pedagogical Play in a Kindergarten

Each group of preschoolers (four–five years old) in a Chinese kindergarten was asked to fill up their table by finding the relevant products such as vegetable, meat or drinks from a leaflet. For example, one of the groups was asked to find the vegetables from the leaflet. They needed to cut the pictures of vegetable from the leaflet, and paste them on the vegetable table. Children did this by looking at the pictures, the words, and thinking of the ingredients of the products on the leaflet. A competition occurred among the groups. The teacher started this and checked which group had done the most within the limited time. The following figures show that children were very busy in searching for the products, and cutting, and pasting. When the teacher was asked about why they set up this play activity, she mentioned that it was a very good experience to help children learn cooperative skills and team work, and improve their literacy skills, and fine motor skills in cutting and pasting. The teacher expected that children could negotiate their role in the task; for example, who would look for the products on the leaflet, who would take responsibility for cutting, who would take a role of pasting in the group. It was observed that in one of the groups, two children wanted to use the scissors

Fig. 10.23 Structured cutting and pasting game

to take the role of cutting but each group was only offered one pair of scissors. They were finally requested to stop playing and wait for another group completion because of the safety of using the scissors. This was the reason one of the tables could not show a lot of pictures.

This is a structured play activity (Fig. 10.23). The teacher expected children to negotiate their role in the team work and promote their development of cooperative skills and literacy in play. But children did not have opportunities to extend their agentic imagination in this matching play. Their learning and development in play was quite limited. Children's interests in play were only for winning the group work in the competition rather than learning and play itself. Educators need to generate children's motives in play from the child's perspective.

As pedagogical play, this activity could be expanded upon to invite children's conceptual reciprocity through their team work and thus, allow children to open their minds and build their agentic imagination in play. For instance, taken from the child's perspective, the play activity could be set up into creating a shopping list and grocery shopping in the household. Different groups could take different roles in play. Group 1 could be imagined as a household, and group 2 could take roles of supermarket services. Group 1 could finish their shopping list and go to group 2's supermarket for grocery shopping. In each group, children would also need to negotiate their role of the imaginary situation. The shopping list, the leaflet, the supermarket materials here would help children to negotiate with others for creating shared play meaning. Every one in play could take a role of importance in the imaginary situations. Once they take their role in play, they would be able to expand their imaginary space and imagine what they should do with their roles. In other words, children's imaginary situations in shopping and house keeping are shared and sustained when they are able to develop their conceptual reciprocity. When players are able to develop a common understanding of themes and play objects, they are able to extend the sustained shared thinking in the imaginary situation to achieve conceptual reciprocity. The shared meaning in the imaginary situation can be developed. The focus of play had moved from the individual to the expansive group agentic imagination. In this suggested pedagogical play scenario, the incident of an argument about using scissors, may not have happened as such

play activity would sustain and share the children's thinking about shopping in everyday life practices. The development of literacy and physical skills would be embedded in their created agentic imagination.

Comparing the two experiences of this play, the most important difference is whether children are able to position themselves in the imaginary situation in play. This affects children's motive generation in play and extension of conceptual reciprocity. How to support children's creation of agentic imagination can be exemplified through the above analysis of the matching game.

10.7 Agentic Imagination with Eucalyptus Leaves in China and Australia

In learning to be sensitive to the importance of taking children's perspective in play we choose to examine what happens in play from the adult perspective. In a playful imaginative adult response to playing with materials (Eucalyptus leaves) teachers demonstrate and express their cultural sensitivities and skills. We suggest that being sensitive to the existence of cultural perspectives in agentic imagination applies to both children and adults alike.

Case Study 10.5: Teacher's Play

Australian teachers, as part of their professional training were asked to examine the qualities of the materials (Eucalyptus leaves) and use them to support an understanding of the pedagogically effective concept of sustained shared thinking and how conceptual reciprocity is being generated in the play. Use of the leaves showed that such materials can expand endless possibilities for learning in play:

> Creativity, communication, and collaboration are all combined in 'sustained shared thinking' which has been identified as a particularly effective pedagogic strategy (Siraj-Blatchford 2007, p. 3).

In their playful interaction with peers, the small groups of Australian pre-service teachers were given practice in considering how to substitute the real leaf (object) for an imagined symbol. Initial discussion about the eucalyptus leaves and their qualities/properties raised questions that the teachers recorded in their groups: What does it smell like? Look at the shape, it's huge and you can bend it. Where do they come from? What can we do with them? Can we make a sound with them? Are these food for insects and koalas?

Pedagogical play is fertile ground for imagination. When asked to draw the possibilities for use with young children, the teacher groups used agentic imagination to come up with multiple ideas. These related at first to taking physical action with the leaves including crushing, folding, bending, waving, and rubbing them. From this, other ideas grew around sensory features of the leaf such as the eucalyptus smell, and its varied colour, shape and texture. As to how the leaf might be used, teacher suggestions included: for cooking, printing, making new shapes (like the

moon) collage and patterning. When each group was asked to create a drawing on the floor using the leaves, the Australian teachers' choice of symbols drew on cultural references. The teachers showed in their floor drawings that leaves could be used to draw a bunch of bananas, a koala, a child with curly hair, a sail boat, a kite, a fan, personal headdresses and decorative jewelry like necklaces.

A similar activity was played at a rural Chinese kindergarten teachers' professional development session in China. The Eucalyptus leaves were introduced to the teachers. The teachers were also asked to imagine how they could use the leaves to play with their children. As with the Australian teachers (Fig. 10.24), Chinese teachers brainstormed their ideas based on their cultural knowledge. The leaves could be used for dancing, collage, recognizing the shape of the leaves, floating in the water, as a music instrument or a scythe cutting the paddy rice. The teachers were asked to draw an animal together on the floor by using the leaves. The idea of drawing a rabbit together came out (Fig. 10.25). When they were asked why "rabbit" was their first choice, they mentioned that rabbit is very familiar to their children and they have a lot of Chinese stories and movies about rabbit. Also, it was noted that rabbit is one of the animal years for Chinese. The Koala was not present in any of the Chinese symbolic representational reworking of eucalyptus leaves.

This short comparative narrative exemplifies that everyday cultural practice is very important for people's imagination. As Vygotsky (2004) argues, '*everything the imagination creates is always based on elements taken from reality*' (p. 13), and therefore depends on what people experience and are familiar with. Thus, children's agentic imagination in play comes from what they experience in cultural practice and show interest in. Children need to be offered opportunities by imaginative teachers to explore their knowledge of everyday practice in play. Taken from the child's perspective pedagogical play is hence a powerful tool for children's learning and development.

Fig. 10.24 Leaves in floor drawing of koala

Fig. 10.25 Leaves in floor drawing of rabbit

10.8 Cultural and Community Play

Case Study 10.6: Mayra Plays House

In researching Mayra's everyday life in a rural community in Mexico, household life remains an important cultural activity. Mayra spends her day with her mother and she observes and learns that an important event in her life is her mother cooking meals for the family and her uncles. Figure 10.26a shows how Gina cooks meals and how Mayra's brother closely observes her mother cooking.
Mayra is able to re-tell and share her family life with the researcher. The following narrative shows how Mayra recounts her everyday life with her uncles.

Mayra: *My uncle G is in the kitchen, then there is my uncle's room and I help him to pick up things, to mop, to sweep, to take all that dirty stuff, cut the grass, cut the… and then sweep…I have to do a lot of things wash, wash, wash the table, wash everything…*

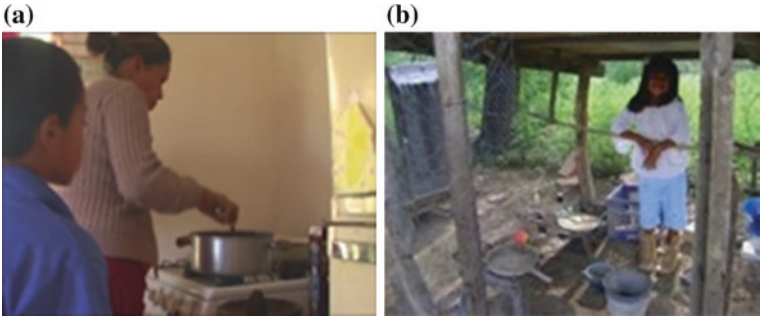

Fig. 10.26 **a** Mother cooking—real space. **b** Mayra cooking—imagined space

In this community, everyday activities such as cooking and washing clothes are important. Members of the community talk about their day in relation to household chores. Everyday experiences are important for children as this is part of their real world. When they play, children enact everyday roles in order to understand their cultures. In Mayra's case, her play includes pretending to be a mother, where she creates a house space and acts in the role of cooking meals (Fig. 10.26b).

Mayra: *This is my Little house! Look at all the dirt!*
Researcher enters the imaginary space: and what do you have in your house? (Fig. 10.27)
Mayra: *I have toys, I have water, I have clothes, I have everything! I have a toilet, a ground toilet…*
Researcher: *You have everything, it's well equipped…*
Mayra: *a hole as a toilet, trash (laughs about comment of toilet)*
Mother: *toilet oh Mayra!*
Mother and uncle: *Mayra's house.*
Mayra walks to another part of the little house and uncle comments.

Fig. 10.27 Mayra's imagined house with kitchen

Uncle: *She gets lost there playing by herself…*
Mayra: *who wants some cake?*
Mother: *she says who wants cake…*
Mayra imagines she closes her house (Fig. 10.28)
Researcher: you are going to close the house!
Mother: just right for her level…
Mayra: I cannot (close door)…
She takes a book from the house and the fan and then she says to herself: *fan come here! so you can give me some air!*
Mother: *Give me air, ohh Mayra!*
Mayra moves outside the house. She positions the fan in front of her.

She sits outside the house and says: *ahh! So nice!* and imagines she is reading (Fig. 10.29). Adults, mother, uncle and researcher observe Mayra. Gina, Mayra's mother laughs and finds it funny that Mayra is pretending to read. Researcher

Fig. 10.28 Mayra imagines she is cooking

Fig. 10.29 Mayra's agentic imagination—Playing house with fan

enters into the imagined space asking: *Are you going to read?* Mother repeats what researcher asked, *are you going to read?* There is no response from Mayra.

Researcher asks: *Is that the bible?*
Uncle: *Yes, it's the bible, she (Mayra) asked give it to me, you (uncle) study it*.

Uncle tells stories and while this happens Mayra throws the book inside the house and moves the fan. Mayra stands up and plays with dogs.

This play example shows Mayra's agentic imagination, as she affectively engages with creating an imaginary situation, shows the ability to give new sense to everyday artefacts from her uncle's house and has taken ownership of them. But, there is little conceptual reciprocity in Mayra's play. This play does not continue as adults do not follow and reciprocate Mayra's interests in play; instead adults find it funny that Mayra acts and performs. They are amused for example, by how she sits down outside the house and expresses how nice it is to be relaxing. They do not take her play seriously and do not use this play experience as a pedagogical opportunity. Mayra has learned by observing and re-creating her own experiences and performing this in her play scenario but for her it does not extend to become pedagogical play.

In this case, Mayra has used artefacts from her everyday life and she has the agentic imagination to re-create a new space. Mayra has shown through her agentic imagination the ability to create and imagine new spaces for play. Adults have also given freedom for Mayra to do so, but we can see that the adults needed to be educated about the importance of play and its pedagogical potential for extending her learning.

In this community, adults take the role of spectators of children's play and do not join children as play partners. Pedagogical strategies such as sustaining conversations allow children to think abstractly about what they are playing. In this example, the researcher Gloria enters into the imaginary situation by provoking questions through wanting to know more about Mayra's play. The researcher asks *questions*, including one about a significant cultural artefact: for example, *is that the bible?*

Pedagogical play in this example can be strategically used by adults through sustained conversations *with* children *while* playing and continuing and progressing play scenarios when play has ended. A cultural–historical view of play accounts for the importance of tomorrow's possibilities '*the formation of a creative personality projected into the future is to prepare a creative imagination embodied in the present*' (Vygotsky 2001, p. 98). In accounting for children's agentic imagination we need to recognize future possibilities and the educator's ability to imagine what the child might learn tomorrow. Educators, such as parents and families, need to be interested in sustaining conversations with children by using explicit verbal strategies such as questioning and focusing on significant cultural artefacts which will help educators to begin on the journey of discovering what the child might potentially do and imagine in the future.

10.9 Discussion of Agentic Imagination in Pedagogical Play

In the different case studies examined, we can see how agentic imagination has been developed to support children's sustained shared thinking and learning together, and children's conceptual reciprocity has been achieved. How does the relationship between children's agentic imagination and conceptual reciprocity form in children's play? And, how do educators create conditions to support children's creation of agentic imagination in pedagogical play? The following model draws upon the Fig. 7.1 to show how children's conceptual reciprocity is achieved in pedagogical play and answer these questions.

Figure 10.30 indicates the complexity of pedagogical play. Firstly, it shows what play is for children. Play provides the opportunities for children to transform their space of optical field to sense field through their agentic imagination. Objects and artefacts created affordances for children's agency through play. In this process, children engage with the play space, objects and artefacts to create their agentic imagination of everyday experience. For instance, in Em's Lego play, her agentic imagination has been created when she was playing with the Lego materials. In her agentic imaginary situation, the affectivity of her summer holiday (in her sense field) has been transformed and constructed in reality by playing with the abstract objects created from Lego.

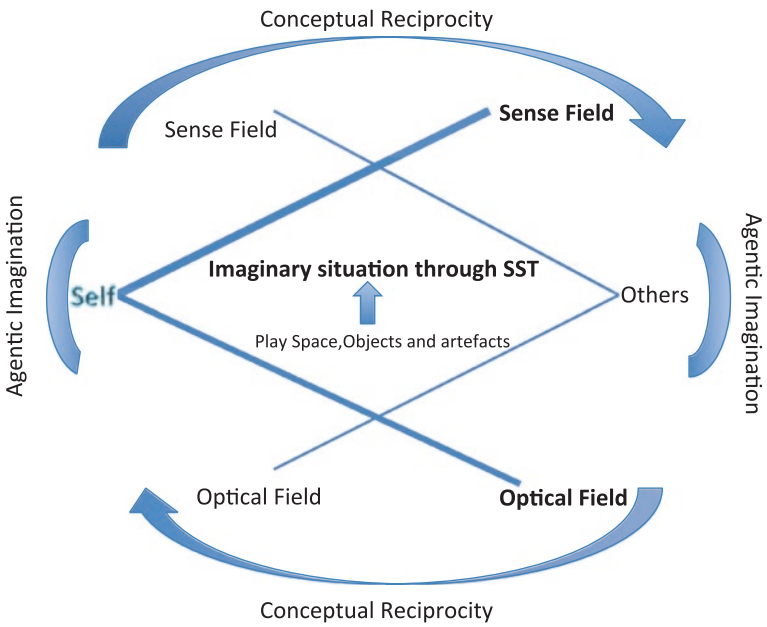

Fig. 10.30 Complexity of pedagogical play

Secondly, Fig. 10.30 highlights that the child's perspective needs to be taken in the creation of play events which allow children to feel freedom to engage with the play objects. The child's motive and interest is central to pedagogical play. In Em's Lego play activity; the Lego was introduced to Em as an intergenerational family artefact. It drives Em's motives to play with Lego. Also, Em's Lego constructions were stored carefully and reworked over time. It indicates that family acknowledged Em's play and valued her stories in play. This supported Em's continuing motives in playing with Lego. Furthermore, children feel more freedom when they have opportunity to create their own play space. In the example of Silvana and Fleur the play space they created for themselves offered freedom to choose what they liked to play with and was supported by the adults. Within the shared play space, they started building their friendship and learning how to share with each other. The degrees of freedom in play orients the level of children's involvement; it thus impacts on the quality of the play (van Oers 2010). This is exemplified through the Chinese kindergarten matching game. In the play game, children did not feel free to use their imagination. They were only allowed to negotiate their role in the play. For example, who would use scissors for cutting, who would paste the picture on the table etc. The level of children's engagement was quite limited. Their focus was on the individual purpose in using the scissors rather than the play itself in a collective sense. The creation of children's agentic imagination was not encouraged in play. The opportunity for extending with a pedagogical play moment was missed. These factors all impacted on the quality of this play. Therefore, we can say that taking children's perspective determines the quality of their play.

Thirdly, conceptual reciprocity is built in the process of sustained shared thinking within the interaction between the child and others. Em's Lego play illustrates that sustained shared thinking with her family supports the transformation of her experiences on summer holiday and in the adventure park to the imagined scenarios in Lego play. Conceptual reciprocity has been achieved between Em and her family. Fleer (2013) says that a play scenario started by an individual child's interests can become a collective play scenario when it combines with another's. This is an important part of the play as it takes the child's imagination to blend the two different scenarios into one. Individual and collective experiences and cultures affect, guide and influence how children play. In pedagogical play, play partners including educators contribute their agentic imagination to make a new collective meaning of the objects and actions together. This is the process of sustained shared thinking. Furthermore, children achieve conceptual reciprocity in play by mostly negotiating their ideas with one another, discussing their roles and rules of play and extending their sustained shared thinking. The conceptual reciprocity formed, results in children's collective agentic imagination.

Fourthly, educators need to provide the play space, objects and artefacts to afford children's extension of agentic imagination. Children's everyday life needs to be acknowledged in their play. This has been discussed in Chap. 7. Children need to be able to engage within a play space to extend their agentic imagination together. In the Chinese kindergarten children's play, originally the play space was structured, not open-ended which did not allow children to make a new meaning of

the object in their sense field. Children could not create their imaginary scenarios based on their everyday knowledge in that situation. In the narrative of Mayra's play, household activities were quite important to every family in her Mexican rural community. Her imagination in play obviously reflected her everyday life. The imagined house, kitchen and cooking activity came from her real life experiences. From the Vygotskian perspective, in '*the forms of imagination that are directed toward reality, we find that the boundary between realistic thinking and imagination is erased… Imagination is a necessary, integral aspect of realistic thinking*' (Vygotsky 1987, p. 349). Case Study 10.5 confirmed that everyday cultural practices are very important to people's creation of imagination in play. Therefore, we suggest that when developing pedagogical play, it is the educators (parents, teachers, peers) accounting for the importance of children's everyday life, who can best create opportunities to stimulate and extend children's agentic imagination.

10.10 Conclusion

Throughout this book on early childhood pedagogical play we have consistently shared our thoughts and perspectives about where, when, why, what and how young children are learning as they play. Visual narratives that illustrate case studies, bring original evidence to play activity analysis and enable us to share lived examples of pedagogical play. We have come to the conclusion that pedagogical play is characterized by the presence of agentic imagination and conceptual reciprocity. Through the development of a pedagogical model (Fig. 10.30) we anticipate support for stronger understanding of the complexity of play and thoughtful use of new pedagogical strategies for all those who make time to play and imagine with clever and capable children.

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Glossary

Affective attunement deeply felt harmonious relationship

Affective engagement when emotional incentives and participant's goals are shared

Affective symbolic gesturing where non -verbal gestures embodied in action can acquire and convey affective meaning in play

Affordances in play existence of multiple opportunities for learning and development across situated contexts

Agentic imagination evident when play is framed by shared intentions and when child has actively connected their real life and imagined world. The concept of *agentic imagination* involves children's ability to freely express and act in play through imagining different roles and rules while playing and creating imaginary spaces

Art of reciprocity involves having an awareness of the perspective of others

Child's perspective in pedagogical play involves bringing to participatory interaction with others, child's personal imagining and meaning

Conceptual reciprocity a pedagogical approach for supporting children's academic learning through joint play

Children's learning motives are generated through their engagement in role-play activities

Culturally situated identity how over time, children's identity is influenced by family culture and community activity

Dialogue commentary a technique used for showing many views that can sometimes highlight the often invisible personal cultural influences present in daily lives

Leading activity concept referring to an activity such as play that brings new psychological processes and changes in children's development

A. Ridgway et al., *Early Childhood Pedagogical Play*,
DOI 10.1007/978-981-287-475-7

Momentito a special little moment of time where intense emotion and thinking is significant to both child and adult

Pedagogical play is characterised by *conceptual reciprocity* (a pedagogical approach for supporting children's academic learning through joint play) and *agentic imagination* (a concept that when present in play, affords the child's motives and imagination, a critical role in learning and development)

Play episode sometimes referred to as a play event or a playful activity

Visual narrative methodology where images and transcripts are provided to support analysis of data and bring case studies alive for the reader

Subject Index

A
Adult's imagination, 40
Affective attitude, 48, 54, 62
Affective attunement, 13, 48–50, 52, 53, 67, 70, 75, 168
Affective engagement, 13, 48, 57, 62, 63, 70, 100, 126
Affordance complexity, 80
Agentic imagination, 5, 12, 13, 25, 74, 81, 83–85, 91, 95, 98–100, 103, 104, 106–108, 113, 114, 119, 128, 129, 137, 142, 147, 152, 158, 163, 166, 169, 171, 172, 175–179
Agentic imagination in children's play–model, 95, 104, 115
Analysis of play, 5
Australian Kindergarten, 126

B
Babies play, 56
Baby/infant pedagogical play, 156
Baby's play space, 101
Broad play space, 114
Bushland creek, 149–151

C
Case study, 21, 22, 24–26, 28, 35, 38, 40–42, 49, 54, 57, 63, 64, 71, 74, 82, 86, 95, 101, 104, 108, 123, 126, 132, 138, 143, 145, 149, 156, 158, 164, 169, 171, 173
Children's outdoor experience, 149
Child's perspective, 2, 11, 12, 17, 18–20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 34, 40, 42, 48, 54, 71, 94, 102, 104, 115, 125, 126, 170, 178
Chinese language school, 71–73
Co-authoring academics, 1
Collaborative expansion of thought, 1
Community, 7, 8, 22, 42, 57, 70, 82, 90, 103, 107, 137, 173, 174, 176
Complexity of pedagogical play-model, 177
Conceptual reciprocity, 2, 5, 12, 13, 23, 41, 45, 156, 158, 163, 169, 170, 176–178
Constructive play, 147
Contemporary interpretations, 155, 164, 169
Contemporary theories of play, 9, 11
Contradictions, 1, 19
Creative imitations, 19
Cultural affectiveness, 142, 145
Cultural and community play, 173
Cultural awareness, 138
Cultural-historical approach, 5–7, 9, 30, 118
Cultural-historical conceptualisation of play, 9, 11
Cultural historical theory, 1, 2
Cultural influences, 13, 137, 143, 153
Culturally constructed, 90, 169

D
Degrees of freedom, 6, 57, 62, 178
Developing friendship, 2
Dialogue commentary, 13, 132
Digital visual technology, 117
Dimensions of play activity, 47–49, 53, 67, 70
Documented narratives, 1
Documenting, 121, 125, 147
Dynamic developmental process, 7

E
Early childhood educators, 8, 18, 143
Early years learning framework, 8, 34

A. Ridgway et al., *Early Childhood Pedagogical Play*,
DOI 10.1007/978-981-287-475-7

Educator's role, 34, 122
Embodied and sensory/affective moments, 120
Emotional attitudes, 83
Eucalyptus leaves—China and Australia, 171
Everyday concept and Scientific concept, 41
Everyday moments of play, 118–120

F
Family, 8, 11, 35, 49, 51–53, 71, 74–77, 79, 81, 82, 86, 98, 132, 136, 142–144, 147, 164, 165, 168, 169, 173, 178
Field research, 1

H
Historical nature of child development, 20
Historical perspectives, 164
Holistic thinking, 2
Human and non-human faces, 54, 56, 67
Hum drum play, 132, 136, 137

I
Imaginary situation, 9, 11, 19, 36–40, 56, 94, 100, 104, 107, 112, 114, 126, 170, 176, 177
Imagination between infants, 25, 103
Imagination in play, 39, 94, 101, 102, 115, 170, 179
Imagined objects, 100
Infant playfulness, 52
Influential play theorists, 9
Institutional context/setting, 7
Intentional educators, 18, 104
Interactive support, 13, 42
Interpreting child's world, 24

J
Joining children's play, 38
Joint play world, 38

K
Kravtsova's model, 94

L
Leading activity, 14, 21, 37
Learning in play, 8, 13, 71, 73, 129, 147, 171
Learning motives, 73, 124
Listening pedagogies, 18
Lived experiences, 1, 169

M
Material environment, 6
Mexican Kindergarten, 42
Mini-awesome–line of fire, 145, 147, 148
Momentito, 21, 121, 122, 129
Motives and imagination, 5, 13, 25, 81, 90
Multiple perspectives, 5, 13

N
Newborn baby, 49

O
Optical field, 94–96, 100, 115, 177

P
Participatory interaction, 17
Past-present dialectic, 13, 164
Pedagogical affordances, 69
Pedagogical play, 2, 3, 5–9, 12, 13, 21, 26, 44, 69, 70, 81, 107, 117, 125, 128, 129, 149, 155, 169–171, 176, 179
Pedagogical practices, 6, 13, 69, 71, 74, 80, 85, 90
Pedagogical strategies, 11, 53, 93, 115, 142, 146, 147, 176, 179
Pedagogical tools, 169
Performance role-play, 74, 83
Planning a cultural project, 145
Play affordances, 79, 80, 164
Play-based curriculum, 8, 12, 30, 45, 125, 147
Playful affordances, 75, 86, 90
Playful events, 38
Play memories, 118, 119, 121
Play performance, 74, 83, 85, 122
Play script, 57, 62
Play space, 13, 63, 81, 84, 94–96, 98, 100, 102, 103, 104, 108, 112, 113, 115, 177, 178
Play theorists, 5, 9, 10
Play–work dichotomy, 21
Political landscape, 8
Preschooler's role-play, 95, 169
Primary school, 11, 28, 30, 72, 74, 86, 89–91

Q
Quality provision in early childhood settings, 8

R
Real objects, 100, 103
Reciprocity, 12, 17, 22, 23, 51, 145, 158, 162, 163, 177

Re-theorising play, 1–3, 5, 12, 13, 19
Recognising productive moments, 122
Rich play dialogue, 114
Role of adult, 26, 39, 81

S
Self-initiate, 22
Sense field, 39, 94–96, 100, 101, 115, 177
Sensitive relationship, 27
Shared intentions, 12, 23, 26, 87, 91, 100, 126
Skipping play, 74, 76, 80, 81
Social and cultural engagement, 76, 137
Social phenomenon, 7
Space and artefacts, 93, 95, 103, 112
Sustained shared thinking, 13, 33, 34, 37–42, 44, 143, 146, 170, 171, 178
Symbolic gesture, 63
Symbolic thinking, 2

T
Teachable moments, 42, 117, 124
Teacher's play, 171
Technology play, 164
Telenovela experience across institutions, 81
Toddler's play, 103, 138
Transitions, 22

U
Unified opportunities for learning, 11

V
Visual methodology, 125, 126
Vygotsky's theories, 6

W
Worksheet play, 28, 29

Z
Zone of proximal development, 13, 42, 44, 52, 53, 103