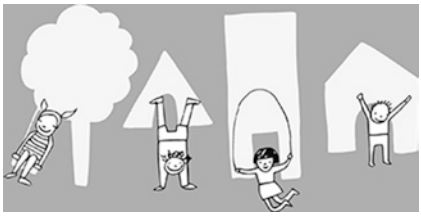
Chapter 6
Play Affordances Across Institutional Contexts



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

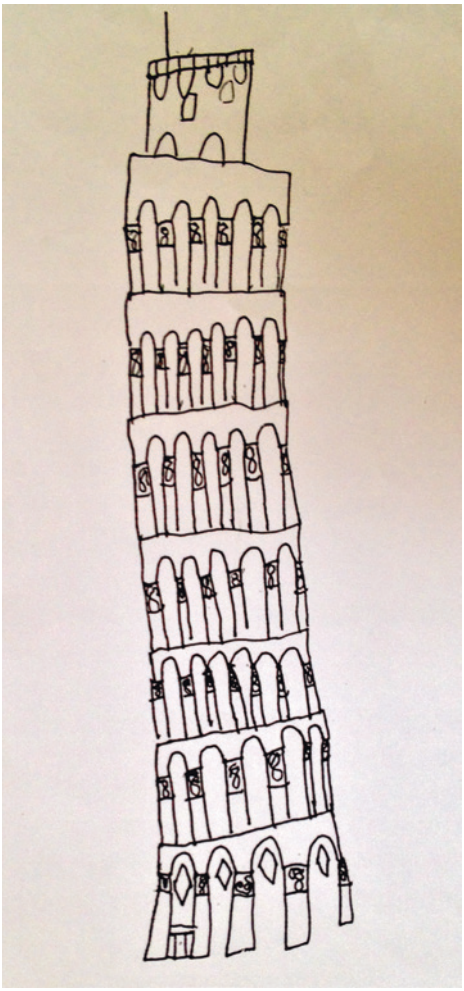

Fig. 6.10 Andy's drawing of the leaning tower of Pisa

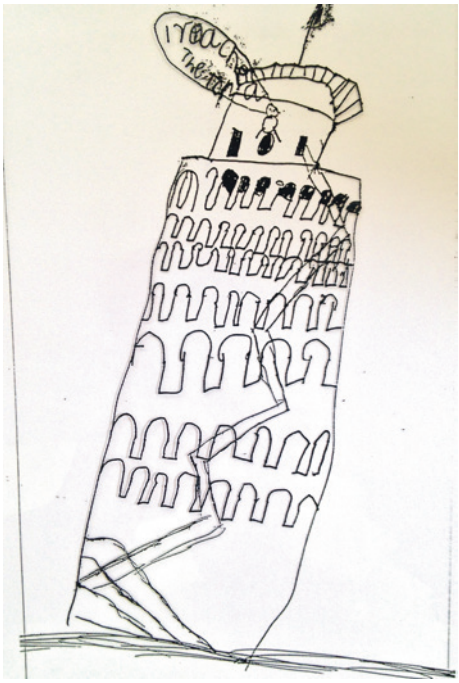

Fig. 6.11 Dom's drawing

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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