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Partners in Play: How Children Organise their Participation in Sociodramatic Play

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How children organise their participation in sociodramatic play

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Partners in Play:

How children organise their participation in sociodramatic play

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Abstract
Partners in Play: how children organise their participation in sociodramatic play.

In Ireland, early childhood learning and the role of play in children's lives is receiving unprecedented recognition in national policy documents (Ireland, 1999c, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2004, N.C.C.A., 2004, C.E.C.D.E., 2006b). This thesis links learning and play and proposes to contribute to our understanding of both.

The purpose of the research is to explicate the significant processes and outcomes of children's participation in sociodramatic play. It takes a qualitative, ethnographic, interpretive approach which follows logically from the aim and the sociocultural discourse of learning constructed. This sociocultural discourse frames the observation and analysis of sociodramatic play in the study. Three key elements of sociocultural theory become the themes that are explored. They are (1) that children's participation in play is mediated by culture, (2) that the processes and outcomes of sociodramatic play are negotiated on the intermental plane at the micro level of face to face interaction and at the macro level of transaction with cultural goals, values, artefacts and practices and (3) that in the process of participation in sociodramatic play, both culture and participants are transformed towards ongoing participation.

The study is conducted primarily through participant observation in a suburban preschool playgroup with a cohort of 22 children ranging in age from 2 years and 8 months to 4 years and 9 months, over an academic year. The data consists of play episodes and field notes documented with the support of video recordings and analysed using Rogoff's (1995) three planes of analysis. These planes align with the three themes of the research and provide the structure for the analysis chapters. The Community or Apprenticeship Plane is used to demonstrate the cultural nature of sociodramatic play. The Interpersonal or Guided Participation Plane serves to identify the interactive processes and outcomes in which children participate, while on the Individual or Participatory Appropriation Plane, outcomes in terms of cultural and personal transformations are considered.

The findings of this research emerge from both the explication of sociocultural theory and the dialectic between the theoretical perspective and the play episodes. The theoretical perspective itself is a key contribution, with implications for early childhood education and the place of sociodramatic play. The study further explicates the processes of learning on the intermental plane and thereby informs the role of the early childhood pedagogue. Key play competencies, particularly emotional intersubjectivity, are identified. The ethnographic approach allows us to follow children's transformations as they reconstruct, through their sociodramatic play roles and stories, their ways of belonging, contributing and communicating within the peer culture.   The findings propose an individual-in-social activity centred pedagogy – a pedagogy of connection - with philosophical and practical implications for the practice of pedagogy.

Declaration:

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in any other Institute or University.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the Institute's guidelines for ethics in research.

The Institute has permission to keep, to lend or to copy this thesis in whole or in part, on condition that any such use of the material of the thesis be duly acknowledged.

Signature _____

Date _____

Carmel Brennan
July 2008

Summary of the thesis:

The title of this thesis is *'Partners in Play: how children organise their participation in sociodramatic play'.* The title proposes that through participation in play roles and activities, children create opportunities for appropriating the culture's ways of acting and knowing. This is a perspective that involves a shift from a view of knowledge as constructed by the individual to the view that knowledge is socially constructed between people and driven by cultural values, systems and goals. The process of learning within this perspective is described as 'guided participation' (Rogoff, 1990), as 'legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and as developing 'intersubjectivity' or 'making sense' by sharing (Trevarthen, 1987). This is the perspective that this study brings to children's sociodramatic play.

The research studies the sociodramatic play of 22 children in a suburban preschool playgroup, taking an ethnographic, interpretive approach. The researcher observed (with video) the sociodramatic play of these children over an academic year and documented over 470 play episodes to produce a rich, thick description that brings the reader into the world of systems, rules, relationships and agendas that children enact in their play. It is a world of competent children, proactively engaging in pretence to create multiple contexts and media for reconstructing the community's way of enacting and constructing meaning. The result is an insight not just into how children learn and develop but also into how the adult world of meanings and truths is constructed.

The analysis of children's sociodramatic play responds to three key research questions emerging from the sociocultural perspective. They are: how does culture mediate children's participation in play? : how do children organise their participation at the micro level of face to face interaction and at the macro level of transaction with cultural values, artefacts and goals? : how are culture and individual participants transformed towards further participation?. The analysis of the data demonstrates the processes whereby children engage the cultural guiding frame, interpersonal interaction strategies and transactions with artefacts, discourses and practices to create shared play stories, and to develop common ground, coordinate their contributions and facilitate agency in each other. The new group dynamics bring together a combination of perspectives that create a new weave of meanings, values and ways of knowing that in turn frames their participation in both the community of peers and the wider world. We follow the children as they reconstruct the system of relationships within the group, as they change the guiding frame for enacting such roles as child, mother, father, friend, and the more technical roles of doctor, astronaut or builder, and for developing a valued identity within the group.

The findings in this study include the identification of (i) the key skills that children use to create play stories and the shared guiding frame for participation within the peer group and the broader communities (ii) core values and practices and ways of knowing that mediate participation in this community and how they are co-constructed (iii) the central role of intersubjectivity and (iv) the implications for pedagogy and sociodramatic play within the early childhood curriculum. The study identifies both concrete interactive strategies and the processes of interpretation and collective reconstruction that children employ in their meaning-making, and that can now inform pedagogic practice. Fundamental skills required involve the ability to communicate and connect at action, emotional and verbal level in culturally appropriate ways and to engage with the growing complexity of shared meanings and relationships and membership criteria within the group. The analysis demonstrates how both peers and adults support this process. The role of the peer group is particularly explicated when we follow the transformation of two children as

they negotiate their identities and their right to belong within and contribute to the group culture. Through this section, the concepts of well-being and identity, belonging and contribution that are central strands of the new curriculum for early childhood education in Ireland (N.C.C.A., 2004) are demonstrated in action. These are concepts that recognise the integrated nature of emotion and cognition. Throughout all the data in this research, the emotional child pushes to the fore and as pedagogues we are invited to reconnect with the role of emotions in the process of learning.

The thesis also develops our understanding of early childhood learning and development at a theoretical level and provides a basis for future reflection and change. It centralises the cultural child and locates children's competence within the values, systems and goals of their communities. It poses questions for pedagogues about the value base of how they define, support and assess children's learning. It relocates pedagogy in a world of uncertainty where the skills of enquiry, of listening, of engaging with multiple ways of knowing are most important.

Learning or meaning-making is a collective process. Pivotal to children's learning, within this perspective, is the role of intersubjectivity. This study identifies intersubjective processes and outcomes in action by focusing on how children organise their participation in sociodramatic play. Particpation in play works at two levels. In the pretend world, the children create multiple contexts and media (1) for developing their intersubjectivity and play skills and (2) for sharing and reconstituting their interpretations of the real world and for rebuilding the cultural matrix of relationships, meanings and symbolic artefacts. The study points to two principal implications for early childhood pedagogy. Firstly, it calls for a shift from a pedagogy of the individual to a pedagogy of the individual-in-social activity, a pedagogy of connection. Secondly, it recentralises children's sociodramatic play as an important mechanism through which children develop the skills and systems for participation and thereby for learning. In this way it makes a very important contribution to the discourse and practice of early childhood care and education in Ireland.

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Chapter 1   Introducing the Study

1.0   Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of the rationale and objectives driving this study. It outlines the key theoretical concepts underpinning the research approach and the formulation of the research questions. The core structure that frames the data collection and analysis is explained. In recognition of the interpretive nature of the research, the researcher offers some insight into her personal background and motivation. The research is furthermore located within the national and international context to explicate its contribution and value to the theory and practice of early childhood care and education (ECCE) and the research and practice world of children's sociodramatic play.

1.1   Objective of thesis

'...culture shapes the mind… it provides us with the toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conception of our selves and our powers' (Bruner, 1996: x).

This thesis is based on a study of children's sociodramatic play in a preschool playgroup. In this case children's sociodramatic play is the context and medium for exploring the processes and outcomes of social participation that are constructed between people as they come together in social activity. Peer play, as Sawyer (1997: 174) tells us *'..is a locus for the intersubjective negotiation and co-construction of voice'*. As children negotiate their participation in shared play, both inside and outside the pretend frame, they explicate the rules, discourses and practices of the adult world and negotiate their reconstruction towards meeting the needs of their play group. The observer is afforded a theatre seat, a participant observer role, and an opportunity to look at life from this spectator perspective. The theoretical lens for viewing the play of these children suggests that the primary context for human learning and development is social relationships, where people engage in shared social activities towards cultural goals, combining their contributions, exchanging views and negotiating a shared

framework for future participation. In this view, the individual is never separate from social activity but lives in a constant responsive, reciprocal relationship with others and as Shotter (1993: 16) tells us *'In living out the self-other relationship... unknowingly by them construct the person-world relationship'*. Ways of knowing the world and of constructing identity are formed and transformed in these relationships. This thesis proposes to explicate the processes and outcomes of these transactions as they occur in children's sociodramatic play.

In terms of the study of play, the research therefore involves a shift from a focus on the structure and form of play to the intersubjective processes and meaning in play and from a focus on how individual children play to how children engage responsively and contribute to the reproduction of a play and real life culture. It treats children's participation in sociodramatic play as a process of meaning-making in the context of and through the medium of play. Play in this sense is part of children's real life meaning-making systems and at the same time is a pretend world that symbolises real life.   The domains of enquiry are therefore intersubjective meaning-making processes and cultural symbolic action.

Meaning is interpretive and neither objective nor conclusive. This thesis is designed to make an argument, to contribute to the conversation, not to prove a point beyond doubt or to exclude other arguments. Like James (1996: 315) the aim is '*not to make claims to reveal the authentic child, but, more humbly, to provide a rendering of what childhood might be like'* or in this case more specifically what participation in sociodramatic play might be like. A lens for reflecting on the process of human learning is constructed and applied to the sociodramatic play of a cohort of children and its importance is argued. What emerges is more than a study of children's participation in play. It is also a study of learning on the intermental plane as it is enacted by this group of children in play. Through its ethnographic approach and rich thick description, the thesis reintroduces the reader to what it is to be a child participating in sociodramatic play in a preschool playgroup and to the processes of human meaning-making and development.

1.2 The 'participation' concept

In sociocultural literature, 'participation' features as a way of describing learning. Dewey (1916/1944) refers to knowledge as a mode of participation; Lave and Wenger (1991) describe 'participation in social activity' and 'participation in communities of practice' to capture the triadic relationship between person, activity and the world in the learning process. Rogoff (1990) uses the terms 'guided participation' to stitch in the co-constructed nature of knowledge and again the invaluable term 'transformation of participation' to remind us of the inextricable learning relationship between the individual and social activity. All share the sociocultural view that through participation in activity with others, children reconstruct, not just the body of knowledge or the system of communication and relationships that exists within the culture but also the cognitive and emotional tools for interpreting, organising and evaluating their ways of knowing the world. Participation concerns *'the whole person acting in the world'* (Lave and Wenger 1991: 49). It is a transformative (Rogoff, 1990; Lave and Wenger, 1991) rather than a cumulative view of knowledge that locates children's learning within the values and goals of their communities. The 'participation' concept underpins Woodhead and Faulkner's (2000) and Rogoff's (1990) conclusion that children's true competencies are revealed only in situations that make sense to them and so we shift from a focus on how children become competent to participate to a focus on how they develop competence through participation.

Participation happens in many ways and at many levels. As the poet John Milton starkly reminds us *'They also serve who only stand and wait'*. Participation does not require an overt proactive approach or continuous engagement in joint activity. Even as the person acts alone, s/he operates with social values and goals (Rogoff, 1990). This research recognises that all children participate but focuses on children's negotiations in shared sociodramatic play where contributions to the collective construction of community practices and ways of knowing are made more explicit.

1.3 Research Questions and Structure

In the process of reconstructing the sociocultural discourse that forms the theoretical base for this research, three core elements are identified. These are (i) that children's

participation in sociodramatic play is mediated by culture; (ii) that the processes and outcomes of participation are negotiated on the intermental plane and in transaction with cultural meaning-making systems and (iii) that the outcome of participation is transformation of person and context towards further participation. These three sociocultural concepts are key to this research, framing the enquiry, the methodology, the collection and selection of data and the analysis. The research questions ask how each of these sociocultural concepts is explicated in the play of the research cohort. These concepts also coincide with Rogoff's (1995) three planes of analysis which structure the data analysis. She proposes that in order to understand human participation in social activity we must analyse it from three perspectives. These include (1) the community or apprenticeship plane which considers the role of cultural context; (2) the interpersonal or guided appropriation plane which describes interpersonal transactions and meaning-making systems and (3) the individual or participatory appropriation plane where the transformation of individuals towards future participation is the focus. While these perspectives are not separate, each can be foregrounded in turn to centralise its contribution. The data is analysed, categorised and selected to provide insight into these dimensions of children's sociodramatic play.

These dimensions also apply to the findings constructed in this study. From the outset, I want to recognise the subjective nature of an interpretive study. As with children's play, this study is also mediated by the cultural experience of the researcher and some insight into this background is offered below. Furthermore the thesis is a co-construction between the research participants, the researcher and the reader/viewer. As one constructs the other in narrative, one also presents the self and so, as the narrator, a self-presence permeates this text. What the researcher sees, documents and analyses is both an emotional and cognitive response to the contributions of the children. The interpretations therefore are just one of multiple possible meanings, however well substantiated. As Denzin (2004: 454) identifies, the researcher *'relives and reinscribes, bringing newly discovered meanings to the reader'*. Staying with the three core themes of this research, the researcher furthermore recognises that the interpretation offered is transformative. The research context, participants and researcher are continuously transformed in the process of interpretation. In this study, the researcher combines previous experience with a perspective gleaned from the discourse reconstruction. Vanderven (2004) calls this

the 'forestructure' of the research. This perspective informs her observations and these in turn inform her perspective. In the process of collecting data, the researcher is brought on an unpredictable journey towards insights that are facilitated by her experiential and theoretical background but are nevertheless new and transforming. In this way the analysis is both abductive and inductive or grounded (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and is both transforming and transformative.

1.4   Setting the research in context

The next section sets the research in a personal, national, international and theoretical context. It explains the personal journey towards the research and locates its contribution and value in a national and international context. Bruner (1996) tells us the model of mind we adopt shapes our pedagogy and so the significant theoretical shift proposed by this study has implications for early childhood care and education.

1.4.1 The personal context of this research

The reflexive researcher recognises that the cultural background, experiences and perspectives of the researcher are central to the interpretation and narration of an ethnographic study.   The researcher is a co-constructor of the ethnography.   This section aims to provide an insight into the historical and cultural background and values of the researcher.

This study brings together two major areas of interest for me: (1) the cultural nature of learning and (2) children's sociodramatic play. These are interests that have emerged from my personal, academic and working life. I entered secondary school as 'free' second level education was introduced in Ireland. I was one of the first cohort of working class females to attend university, an education that prepared me as a teacher, one of the more accessible professions for graduate females. A law degree was my first choice but I was dissuaded from this course by a visiting missionary, the only source of career guidance available in my school at this time. He described law as a closed profession, accessible only to those with family connections and preferably male. From those early days I was aware that cultural values and practices played a significant role in defining one's intelligence and life opportunities. My teaching career began in a boys' second level school in a suburban disadvantaged area where I worked with bright, competent students who struggled with the exam system

largely because they struggled to relate to the subject matter and to formulate their understandings and feelings into the comprehensive abstractions required. The experience continuously prompted questions about the nature of intelligence and the learning process.

I taught 'Man, a Course of Study' (MACOS) designed in the 1960s by Jerome Bruner and colleagues. This is a cross cultural study programme that sought to locate intelligence within the activities of a particular community and their transactions with artefacts, time and place. The educational principle underpinning and emerging from this course was later summarised by Bruner (1996: ix-x): *'How one conceives of education……is a function of how one conceives of the culture and its aims, professed and otherwise'.* A subsequent course in Women's Studies brought me further along the journey to understanding the constructed nature of knowledge and the political and value agendas involved.

Thus began an interest in sociocultural theory and a new perspective on human learning and development. Work and study in the area of early childhood where children's play is a core element of the curriculum followed and involved me in two significant developments. My employer organisation commissioned a research project entitled 'Child's Play: an exploration into the quality of childcare processes' (Carswell, 2002). The research identifies a plethora of contradictions and confusions among practitioners supporting play and learning in an ECCE service. While they propound a theory of the child as an individual, innately driven, self constructing learner, they organise the 'everyday' along adult pre-determined guidelines and towards predetermined learning objectives. *'The fundamental contradiction inherent in the data suggests that organisational responsibilities and relational approaches to ensuring organisational objectives are detrimental to what is described in the data as play and the ideal play and learning environments'* (Ibid: 23). These practitioners describe the conflict between a Piagetian view of learning that advocates a 'laissez faire' approach to children as they individually construct their understanding of the world and their own practices in teaching the child how to behave, how to collaborate with others and how to construct valued domains of knowledge. These are contradictions that I, as a practitioner, had experienced. Carswell calls for the study of

children's play towards informing a more cohesive relationship between the theory and practice of pedagogy that supports play and this thesis is a response to that call.

Carswell also identifies the prevalent view among practitioners of the 'needy, dependant' child (Ibid: 8). This observation informed the production of 'Power of Play: A Play Curriculum in Action' (Brennan, 2004) which I edited and produced with the support of colleagues. The book is a collection of play stories, based on video of children's play episodes in Irish ECCE settings. The question driving the documentation and analysis of the children's play is 'what are the competencies and interests demonstrated by these children and how are they supported?' With my colleagues, I began to document competent, proactive children as they demonstrated, shared and developed their skills in play. The format of the story telling is influenced by a sociocultural view of learning, and by the 'pedagogy of listening' (Rinaldi, 1993) underpinning the Reggio approach of Reggio Children and of course the 'learning stories' (Carr, 2001b) approach to documentation and assessment. We wanted to support two important shifts in perspective: (i) from a deficit view of the child working as an individual to a view of the socially interactive complex child negotiating meaning in a cultural context and (ii) move beyond a focus on cognitive skills towards an understanding of learning as transformation of identity and embracing learning outcomes such as positive learning dispositions and skills. The publication was the catalyst for this research. It whetted an appetite for further investigation and when the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education offered to support research on 'play' towards a PhD, this research was born.

1.4.2 The National context

This thesis comes at a time of extensive debate in Ireland about early childhood education in particular. The debate is prompted by a number of significant developments. In the first place, Ireland has experienced twenty years of unprecedented economic growth and by 2004 ranked as the country with the second highest GDP per capita in the European Union (Central Statistics Office, 2005). The employment opportunities offered has resulted in women entering the workforce in large numbers. The percentage of women of working age in the workforce increased from 41.4% in 1995 to 55.7% in 2004, the latter including 76.8% of women aged 26-34. Consequently, childcare outside the home has become a common feature of Irish

childhood. These developments have fuelled the debate about how children spend their time, the quality of their experiences and the educational opportunities presented. The value of play and its effectiveness as an early education tool features strongly as a core element of that debate. However, as the Audit of Research (C.E.C.D.E, 2003) demonstrates, the level of indigenous research on play is extremely limited. Among the 1,082 publications listed in the audit, four contributions are M.Ed. theses and one, Bannon (2002), is a PhD study of children's play in hospitals. There is an obvious need for further research on play, to (i) support the debate on its role in education, (ii) bring more recent international research on play to the audience in Ireland and (ii) energise the area of play pedagogy in teacher training programmes. This research will contribute a detailed study of children's play with rich thick description of activities and practices that are culturally familiar and therefore accessible to an Irish audience and will identify skills and competencies that children enact in their play and that require pedagogic support. In this way, it can be a catalyst for further study and debate.

State regulation of ECCE services was introduced for the first time in 1996 and around the same time, with support from the European Union, funds were invested towards increasing the supply of childcare places with the expressed aim of encouraging parents, particularly women into education and employment. For some time quantity seemed to take precedence over quality but as the sector matures, issues of quality become more prominent. This focus on quality has been given further impetus by UN and OECD reports. Ireland, for example, was severely criticised by the rapporteurs for UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1998 for what they described as a 'fragmented approach' to children's rights, particularly in its welfare practices and policies. This led to a number of recent policy initiatives focused on children in Ireland. These include:

- Ready to Learn: The White Paper on Early Childhood Education (Ireland, 1999c)
- The National Childcare Strategy (Ireland, 1999a)
- The Primary School Curriculum (Ireland, 1999b)
- Our Children-Their Lives; The National Children's Strategy (Ireland, 2000)

The documents all propose a view of children as citizens with rights and needs. There is a new emphasis on the holistic development of the child in terms of cognitive,

social, physical and emotional development. However the documents struggle with the integration of care and development.   In the White Paper (Ireland 1999a), for example while the integrated relationship between care and education is accepted, nevertheless care is highlighted as important for the under threes and education as important for the older children. In the division, care, it would appear, is about emotional and physical nurturance in the childcare service, education is cognitive and equated with schooling. This research contributes to our understanding of the emotional world of learning and consequently to the critical importance of care as a core element of education. It explicates the role of social relationships in the development of children's identities as participants, contributors and learners and thereby focuses on the holistic nature of learning.

Two developments in particular have energised the debate on curriculum and practice in the early years. The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) was established in 1999 with a remit to develop a national quality framework for ECCE services and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment undertook the development of a national curriculum for ECCE. Both focus on the birth to six age-group and therefore straddle the pre-school and junior school sectors. Both organisations have engaged in consultation with the sector and their work has been accompanied by intense research and policy development and an impressive list of publications. These include:

- Towards a Framework for Early Learning (N.C.C.A., 2004).
- Talking About Quality: Report of a Consultation Process on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education (C.E.C.D.E, 2004c)
- Principles underpinning a Quality Framework for Early Childhood services (C.E.C.D.E, 2004b).
- Insights on Quality: A National Review of Policy, Practice and Research Relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2004 (C.E.C.D.E, 2004a)
- Making Connections: A Review of International Policies, Practices and Research Relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education (C.E.C.D.E., 2004)
- Early Childhood in Ireland – Evidence and Perspectives (C.E.C.D.E., 2006a)
- Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood (C.E.C.D.E., 2006b)

The first document was issued as a consultative document towards formulating a curriculum framework for children from birth to six years. The following six documents were published by the CECDE towards developing a national quality framework for early childhood services. As with the previous policy documents, these reports contribute to the rationale for this research for two reasons in particular. In the first place, the documents engage with the challenge of moving towards a more social and cultural view of learning. Secondly, each document centralises the importance of play in the early childhood curriculum. The following explains how the research can contribute in both of these areas.

The consultative document 'Towards a Framework for Early Learning' (N.C.C.A., 2004) introduces a shift from the subject or domain based learning of the Primary Curriculum (1999) to emulate 'Te Whariki', the New Zealand sociocultural curriculum and engage with such curriculum strands as Well-being and Identity and Belonging. 'Te Whariki' *emphasises the critical role of culturally and socially mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places and things.'* (N.Z.,1996: 9). Its strands are proposed as both the medium and outcome of learning. In engaging with the Te Whariki model, the Irish journey of engaging with a sociocultural perspective has begun but much work remains to be done. The consultative document does not articulate a philosophical or theoretical perspective on learning and consequently what is meant by assessment, development and even the core themes is unclear. For example, the Framework glossary (2004: 2-3) disappointingly explains culture as *'Aspects of culture include language, religion, traditions, education, hygiene, food, diet and eating habits, music, song, drama, literature and art, leisure activities and style of d*ress', a view that penetrates the document and proposes culture as an add-on rather than something that mediates the very way we think. It falls far short of the definitions of say Bruner (1986) or Geertz (1973) that describe culture as a system of meanings and inherited conceptions by which people *'communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life'* (Geertz, 1973: 89) and *'arrive at satisfactory ways of acting in given contexts'* (Bruner, 1986: 65).

The Irish document also emphasises the uniqueness of each child and maintains that *'each child's path of learning is shaped by individual potential and the range of*

experiences he/she has in everyday life' (N.C.C.A., 2004: 20). A more recent position paper 'Children's Early Learning and Development – a background paper' (French, 2007) proposes to articulate a sociocultural theory for the framework, locating the child in relationships as a co-constructor of knowledge. It '*foregrounds the cultural and socially constructed nature of learning'* (ibid: 12) but at the same time the author centralises *'activity and first hand experiences'* and offers an interpretation that places *'activity and self-directed problem solving'* at the heart of children's learning (Ibid: 27). Likewise, while the CECDE National Quality Framework (C.E.C.D.E., 2006) promotes a reflective, consultative approach to quality improvement, the document also emphasises the child as an individual learner. '*The child is an active agent in her/his own development through her/his interactions with the world. These interactions are motivated by the individual child's abilities, interests, previous experiences and desire for independence'* (C.E.C.D.E., 2006). Interactions with others are cited as an important part of children's learning but the interpretation is relational or about how one influences the other, as opposed to the mediational perspective of Vygotsky. The intermental plane does not emerge as the primary locus of learning. Again, in the absence of a stated underpinning philosophy or theory, one is lead to presume a Piagetian perspective. Contemporary developmental psychologists have been very critical of Piagetian theory (Donaldson, 1978, Leslie, 1987, Flavell, 2004). Still, however, Burman (1994) argues that much Piagetian thinking is so ingrained in developmental psychology and early education in particular that it is now largely invisible. Neither the documents themselves nor the research reviews that underpin them engage with the 'deconstructivist' or 'reconceptualist' views that have emerged over the past 20 years and that serve to question child development theories and the politics of childhood (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999: 77).

On the very positive side, the documents create a space for interpretation and reflection and have reenergised the debate on learning and education. In this way they have created a dialogic space to which this thesis can make a valuable contribution. The research will demonstrate such concepts as the cultural nature of learning, the centrality of the child-in-social activity as opposed to the individual child as the unit of analysis and the collective rather than the individual nature of knowledge construction. These are the concepts that require us to confront the

philosophical, political and value issues involved in education and demand not just a stretching or tweaking of a theory but a paradigmatic shift.

The conversation has begun and the sector has demonstrated a real openness and eagerness to 'disrupt' traditional thinking. The early childhood sector is well placed to engage with these changes partly because it is a relatively new and developing sector in Ireland and particularly because there is a growing appreciation of the extensive and critical learning that happens in the first years of life, long before children enter the schooling system. Returning to those early years, foregrounds the emotional connection between babies and the world and the identity issues involved. The sector needs research and contributors who have invested in deconstructing and reconstructing our understanding of learning. Consequently, this research comes at an opportune time to make a significant contribution.

All of the documents listed above recognise the importance of play in early childhood. As Anning, Cullen and Fleer (2004) argue play is a pedagogical given in early childhood education, closely linked to developmental psychology and perceived with that lens. Within the Irish curriculum framework play is identified as a *'critical context [that] can support all aspects of the child's development'* (N.C.C.A., 2004: 44). In describing exploratory play, the framework seems to return to a Piagetian understanding of learning, claiming that the knowledge that children derive through their senses *'forms the basis of all further knowledge and understanding'* (N.C.C.A., 2004: 45).   In describing sociodramatic play, there is a far greater openness to considering how children interpret and reconstruct their ways of knowing through play. It seems that the study of sociodramatic play lends itself more readily to the sociocultural lens and may be a route not only to enriching our understanding of play, as Wood (2004) suggests, but also to engaging with sociocultural theory. In applying the sociocultural lens to the play of a cohort of children, this research purports to concretise the theory and validate it with familiar and credible evidence.   This evidence can support further reflection and analysis among educationalists and others in the sector.

1.4.3 The International context

Internationally, in recent times, there have been a number of developments that impact on the centrality of play and participation in early childhood education. Among these is the UN Convention of Children's Rights (1989), embodying the Convention's commitment (Document CRC/C/137) to the child's right:

- To be recognised as 'holders of rights and capable of exercising them in a manner consistent with their evolving capacity' (article 5).

- To participate in all matters affecting him or her (articles 5, 12, 13 and 17) and particularly the recognition that that participation is a continuous learning process for both adults and children and needs to start at the earliest stages of life.

- To play (article 31): 'Parties recognise the rights of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child' in order to develop the child's potential skills, abilities and personality.

However, there are also grounds for concern that there is a shift away from a proactive role for the child in education services. Research based evidence and recent education policies indicate the endorsement, internationally, of more formal, teacher directed curricula for children at a younger and younger age. Play is not mentioned at all in the American research report 'Eager to Learn' (Bowman, Donovan and Burns, 2001), compiled by the most prominent American researchers within the field of preschool pedagogy (Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson, 2006). In England, as part of the 'Every Child Matters' campaign, we now see the testing of children at age five for literacy and numeracy. The 'No Child Left Behind' campaign in the U.S.A., introduces rigorous testing from age 5 and most recently in Ireland, the Minister for Education and Science has announced the introduction of literacy and numeracy testing from age 7. Such directives can militate against the use of play as a learning mechanism because they often promote a return to formal, transmission style teaching. Anning and Edwards (1999) raised concerns about early childhood education becoming more about subject content and demanding more instructional strategies. Ball (1999) found that this pressure for performance results in teachers narrowing the classroom experience and focussing on students who testify to their teaching ability.

On the positive side, the international context has offered an extensive and growing research base. Of particular interest to this research is the development of sociocultural theories of learning and the application of the theory to children's play and learning by researchers such as Margaret Carr (2001a) and Vivian Gussin Paley (Paley, 1986a, 1990), the Scandinavians (Hannikainen, 2001, Riihela, 2002, Kalliala, 2006, Löfdahl, 2006, Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson, 2006) and the feminists (Davies, 1990a, MacNaughton, 1995, Danby, 1996). The research on intersubjective processes in early childhood championed by Stern (1985) and Trevarthen (1980) in the English speaking world is a major contribution to our understanding of the micro-processes of connecting on the intermental plane. The growing acceptance of ethnography as a methodology and its use by Corsaro (1985), Sawyer (1997), Fernie, Kantor, Klein, Meyer and Elgas (1988) and many of the play researchers above has paved the way for its acceptance as a valid form of research thereby making the study of the everyday practice of play in natural contexts possible and valuable. It is within this rich research base, activated over the last twenty years that this research is located. It broadly shares their theoretical perspective and methodology while taking a distinctive approach. It contributes to the explication of sociocultural theory and at the same time contributes to the pool of ethnographic research so that commonalities and differences can emerge. In particular, it engages the Irish sector with the international debate.

1.5   The layout of the thesis

There are three phases to this research. Phase one involves researching a theoretical perspective and methodology with which to conduct the research. Phase two is the conduct of the inquiry, principally through participant observation with video, and using the theory informed perspective to collect relevant play data. Phase three involves a critical interpretation of the data, with the support of consultation with children and staff in the playgroup and an expert advisory committee. The phases overlap and inform each other.

The thesis contains eight chapters. Chapter One is the introductory chapter outlining the objectives, rationale and context for this research. The discourse development, involving a review of the research and literature underpinning the research is

presented in chapters two and three. Chapter Two reconstructs the theory of learning that informs the research and identifies the three core sociocultural themes that inform the researcher's theoretical lens. It also seeks to concretise the theory into identifiable processes and strategies that children may use in supporting each others participation in their sociodramatic play. Chapter Three reviews the relevant studies of children's play with a focus on the processes and meanings that children construct. Throughout these chapters links are made between theoretical developments and the concerns of the present research. Chapter Four is the methodology chapter which presents a rationale for the design of the research and the methodological approach. It describes and analyses the process and experience of carrying out the research. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and the ethical considerations and dilemmas involved. The analysis of the data is divided into three chapters and addresses the data using each of Rogoff's (1995) three planes of analysis. Chapter Five focuses on the community or 'apprenticeship' plane. The researcher draws on the data to demonstrate the contextual complexity of play themes and participation processes and the relationship with the wider and immediate cultural contexts. Chapter Six focuses on the interpersonal or 'guided participation' plane and explicates the intermental nature of participation. Chapter Seven addresses the individual or 'participative appropriation' plane and considers the outcome of participation in terms of the transformation of both culture and players. The thesis concludes with Chapter Eight which involves a discussion of the findings and implications of the research for our understanding of learning and the role of sociodramatic play in early childhood education. This chapter also makes recommendations for future research, practice and policy.

1.6 Conclusion

The thesis proposes two significant contributions to the development of the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector. It draws on the literature to reconstruct a sociocultural theory of learning and it offers an analysis of children's sociodramatic play, based on applying this theory to an ethnographic study of play.

This chapter provides an introduction to the objectives, rationale and structure of the research. Drawing on sociocultural theory, it explains the concept of participation as

it pertains to the research title and outlines the three core sociocultural concepts that emerge from the theoretical discourse and frame the data collection and analysis. The researcher's motivation and interest in this line of enquiry is located in a personal profile in recognition of the researcher's contribution to the interpretation and construction of the findings of this research. The researcher's life experience brings together an interest in children's play and in the cultural basis of human ways of knowing. The study of children's sociodramatic play offers an opportunity to investigate how ways of knowing are constructed on the intermental plane.

The analysis of the national and international context points to the growing interest and investment in early childhood care and education (ECCE) and the benefits and threats that this makes possible. There is a most definite dearth of research on play in Ireland and it would appear that international research is having little impact on progressing theory and practice within the early childhood sector in particular in this country. This research is intended to fill that gap and at the same time to contribute to the pool of international ethnographic research. The research has the capacity to inform our understanding of what children do in play and how play functions as a learning and teaching tool to support children's participation in the life of the community.

Finally the chapter offers an overview of the three phases of this research and each of the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2   Reconstructing a Discourse of Learning

2.0   Introduction

The purpose of the chapter is to build the theoretical foundation on which the thesis is based. The research explores the processes and outcomes of children's participation in sociodramatic play and this chapter draws together ideas, values, critiques and evidence to formulate a perspective through which we can construct an understanding of the processes and meanings involved. It reconstructs a theory of learning as participation in social activity towards social goals; a view of learning as cultural and collective. Participation, in this sense, refers not just to engagement in activities with other people but to a more holistic process of being active participants in the practices of local communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities. *'Such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do'* (Wenger, 1998: 5).

2.1   Building the Discourse

Sutton Smith (1997: 8) uses the term 'rhetoric' to describe the '*persuasive discourse*' or '*implicit narrative*' that members of a particular affiliation use *'to persuade others of the veracity and worthwhileness of their beliefs'*. The rhetoric or discourse of learning reconstructed here aims to convince the reader of the validity of the underpinning theory for this research and of the interpretative lens on children's sociodramatic play that emerges. The approach recognises that the interpretive lens of the researcher represents a particular way of both observing and interpreting events that is informed, shared and validated by a network of respected researchers and theorists. In reconstructing a discourse of learning for this research, the researcher hopes to contribute (i) an interpretive frame for understanding children's sociodramatic play and (ii) research findings that emerge from engagement with that frame.

2.1.1 Overview of Chapter

The chapter begins with an exploration and critique of the theories of the two main contributors to constructivist and sociocultural thinking, Piaget and Vygotsky respectively. The theories are discussed in some detail because understanding these theories and negotiating the shift from one to the other is a challenge for this researcher and for the early childhood sector to which she belongs. Critically, making the shift from the 'individualist' paradigm of Piaget to the Vygotskian paradigm of social and culturally mediated learning involves a major cognitive and psychological leap. A move beyond the Piagetian concept of the decontextualised child (Donaldson, 1992, Rogoff, 1999), and the Vygotskian concept of 'internalised' knowledge (Rogoff, Mosier, Mistry and Göncü, 1993/1998, Matusov and Hayes, 2000) leads a step further to the integration of the intermental and intramental on the interactive plane and the concept of individual-in-activity-in-society as the unit of analysis. This theoretical development proposes that learning is always intermental, that is, constructed between people. What appears as an intramental process, that is, an internal, individual construction is part an on-going social conversation. Post-Vygotskian educationalists, Rogoff, Wetsch, Cole, and Wenger, with the psychologists, Stern, Trevarthen and Hobson and the sociologists Corsaro, James and others contribute to formulate a theory of learning that proposes that individuals are never separate from the social, that humans are primarily driven by a need to be part of a community, to share thinking with others and that from the beginning of life children are proactively engaged in meaning-making towards the cultural goals of their communities. Bruner (1986: 65) describes culture as the *'implicit semi-connected knowledge of the world, from which through negotiation, people arrive at satisfactory ways of acting in given contexts'.* Geertz (1968, 1973) reminds us that it is historically embedded, and transmitted through the practices and institutions of the society. It is continuously reconstructed through intersubjective processes in which people engage as they participate in social activity.

Intersubjectivity, described by Bruner (1996) as the neglected or 'impoverished' strand of sociocultural theory becomes centralised. Firstly, the theory proposes that in their intersubjective interactions with others, children are learning and contributing to the ways of communicating, thinking and knowing in their communities. Secondly,

these intersubjective communications with others are 'distributed' (Wertsch, 1991) across or mediated by cultural histories, places, people and things and situated in 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998). Learning then is a process of 'transformation of participation' (Rogoff 1990). In the process of participation both context and participants are transformed in ways that prepare them for future participation.

The concept of 'appropriation' (Vygotsky, 1978, Rogoff, 1990, Corsaro, 1993) by which children interpret and reconstruct values and practices from the adult world towards the goals of their new activities, permeates the chapter. It is a concept that helps to explain how the cultural guiding frame is continuously reconstructed and how personal and group identities are simultaneously developed that, in turn, are constrained and afforded by cultural practices and discourses. The discourse suggests that in the intersubjective relationship with community members, children appropriate what is available, purposeful and valued in their communities.

This sociocultural theory of learning and development leads to an interpersonal, meaning-making and symbolic perspective on sociodramatic play. We begin to observe how children reconstruct and thereby explicate in their play, many of the values, practices and structures for social organisation that are implicit in their communities. In this way, children's play is both a medium and context for their participation in the reconstruction of culture. Coming from this sociocultural perspective, this research is an investigation into how children collectively reconstruct the means and outcomes of participation, in and through the play context. The observation lens now focuses on how children develop the discourses and practices that frame their joint participation in play and how they reconstruct the meanings that become their cultural interpretive and knowing tools for further participation. The lens has major consequences for how we in the early childhood education sector have traditionally viewed and valued children's learning and development in general and the role of play in particular.

The image of the cultural child who lives in constant communion with others emerges. S/he is proactively appropriating and contributing to the construction of knowing within their communities and being transformed in ways that are guided by

that learning. This is not a denial of individuality but rather a recognition that individualism finds meaning in the socially constructed world. The key concepts that are vital to this understanding of learning are (i) learning is mediated by context (ii) it happens through intersubjective processes in interactive social activity with other community members and (iii) it leads to 'transformation of participation' (Rogoff 1990).

2.2 Constructivism and Socioculturalism

The threads of thinking underpinning these concepts coexisted and overlapped throughout the 20th century. In the Western world, however, the second half of the 20th century saw educationalists and psychologists focus attention on the behaviour and cognitive processes of the individual child and treat the social and material world as contexts within which the individual operates (Rogoff, 1990, Nicolopoulou and Weintraub, 1998, Dahlberg, Moss et al., 1999). This is the view that has dominated Western education systems until the present day. Its emergence coincided with the growth of industrialisation and capitalism where the emphasis on individualism and individual achievement found a comfortable home.

However, Bretherton's (1993) review of developmental psychology shows that as far back as Baldwin, writing at the end of the 19th century, there was an awareness of the reciprocal relationship between person and environment and of the need to recognise the impact of perception and interpretation on how knowledge is constructed. Baldwin recognised the subjective experience of self and other in first relationships as the starting point in developmental psychology (Stern, 1985). Gesell, in the 1920's recognised the active child and his/her moulding influence on the parents, again a reciprocal relationship. The interactionist theory of Mead (1934) was also having an impact in the field of sociology. The contextual view of development was further supported in the 1930s by Lewin, who saw the need to study children in their everyday lives. At the same time, in the education sphere, Dewey (1916/1944, 1938/63, Dewey and Bentley, 1949) was expounding his 'part-whole harmony' theory, identifying the reciprocal relationship between person and context and proposing the sociocultural view that learning is shaped by the values, practices and goals of social activity. Thus began the debate which is now epitomised, for

constructivists, by Piaget who foregrounded individual cognitive structures in the construction of knowledge and for socioculturalists, by Vygotsky, who foregrounded its social foundation. It seems, therefore, that the 20th century was fated to begin and end with much the same questions about the individual versus the social origin of knowledge. This debate is taken up again in this chapter and begins with a review of both theories.

2.2.1 Introducing Piaget – the Father of Constructivism

It is to Piaget that we are indebted for drawing many strands of constructivist theory together and for developing a comprehensive perspective. This section reviews his theory of learning. It establishes his contribution to our understanding of the constructed nature of knowledge and to the image of the competent, proactive child. It also critiques this theory of learning that has dominated education for half a century and identifies the need to engage with a theory that recognises the mediated, social and transactional nature of knowledge construction.

Piaget's theories of cognitive processes show many links with the thinking of theorists such as Froebel, Montessori and Dewey, specifically in recognising the active child and the pattern of development (Piaget, 1928/74, Piaget, 1936/63, Piaget, 1937/71). His particular success may be attributed to the fact that (i) his scientific background and rigorous scientific approach earned him the respect of the scientific community, (ii) he presented a challenge to the dominant behaviourist model of the time and (iii) he developed a detailed theory of universal stages of development. Primarily, Piaget's interest was in the development of knowledge and the operations of the mind (Piaget, 1946/1962). His work became very influential in both education and psychology in the Western world from the 1960s onwards for the concepts outlined below.

2.2.1.1 Piaget's theory of cognitive development

What are the main elements of Piaget's theory that inform the discourse on early childhood learning? Piaget focussed on learning as an individual process. Combining his biology and epistemology foci, he followed the structuralist view of development and located the cognitive cycle of the mind as primary in knowledge construction. He centralised the individual cognising child, interacting with the physical world and

moving through the process of perturbation to assimilation and accommodation until s/he reached equilibration (Piaget, 1955). By manipulating the physical, and later in the same way the social world, the child builds schema about their properties in an intuitive way. With maturity and particularly as the child grows out of the egocentric stage, the child masters such concepts as 'object permanence', 'conservation' and 'perspective' and comes to the realisation that other things and people exist independently of him/her. This ability to stand back from things creates the space for thought and reason. The growing ability of the child to symbolise and particularly to use language allows him/her to talk about things in their absence, to recall the past and project into the future. Thought and reason therefore originates in action and in the perturbation, assimilation and accommodation cycle that arises, and is the construct of the individual child. Language allows children to represent their thinking and negotiate its validity with other people, to engage with other perspectives. This is the basis of Piaget's concept of learning.

The child's thought processes, as the child matures, proceed through predetermined developmental stages which Piaget identified as universal (Piaget, 1936/63). Each stage, moving from sensori-motor through preoperational and concrete operational to formal operational thinking, describes new thinking capabilities for the child. S/he engages with new conflicts presented in the environment when s/he has reached the appropriate stage of development. For Piaget, *'maturation is viewed as a precondition for learning but never a result of it'* (Vygotsky, 1978: 80). S/he can only negotiate, for example, a concept such as 'conservation', when s/he has reached the appropriate developmental stage. In the same way, Piaget believed that the child was unable to understand the perspective of others until the period of concrete operations, when language is sufficiently developed to allow the child to negotiate the validity of his/her thinking with other society members. This is an element of Piaget's theory that has been seriously undermined because research now provides evidence that children demonstrate the ability to read and follow the intentions of others almost from the beginning of life (Trevarthen, 1980, Stern, 1985, Hobson, 2002/2004).

This concept of 'readiness' for new learning brought Piaget to his focus on the types of relationship that support learning and to his preference for compatible stage or peer

relationships with their quality of equality, above adult-child relationships which he saw as imposing. In equal relationships that are based on cooperation and reciprocity, the child is free to reason and both resolve his/her own perturbations and develop shared meaning. Piaget rarely identified features of the child's cultural world in which the perturbations or responses were embedded, concentrating almost exclusively on the inner cognitive developmental processes of the child (Corsaro, 1985:54).

Piaget's (1928/74: 276) theory of egocentrism, that the child sees him/herself as the centre of the universe and is unable to take the perspective of others, guided his observations and analysis of learning in early childhood. He found that the constraint of egocentrism caused the child to seek self-satisfaction before truth. Consequently, the child assimilates new concepts into existing schema rather than accommodating existing schema to new concepts, irrespective of experience to the contrary. In this egocentric stage, the child *'stands midway between autism in the strict sense of the word and socialized thought'* (Piaget 1928/74: 276; quoted in Vygotsky 1932: 2). This movement from the isolated individual to the egocentric child to the social permeates his work. The biological child becomes the thinking child before becoming socialised and in consistent fashion, language moves from internalised thought to egocentric speech to socialised speech.

2.2.1.2   *Piaget and Play*

The concept of egocentrism also leads Piaget to regard symbolic play as predominantly assimilation rather than accommodation (Hutt, 1979, Dockett and Fleer, 1999). The child in play assimilates reality into existing mental structures resulting in the distortion of reality that is pretend play. Distortion is part of assimilation. The child stretches existing schema to accommodate new discoveries, and reality is thereby altered to fit with the child's immature view of the world. This leads to make believe. He proposes that as the child becomes more able to reformulate thinking to engage with new realities, around the age of seven, pretend play declines and rule based games predominate.

In keeping with his concept of stage development, Piaget describes the stages of play. Beginning with practice or functional play in the sensori-motor stage, the child

manipulates objects for the pleasure of mastery of motor activities. In the pre-operational stage, the child moves to symbolic play and then actions take on new meaning and purpose. The child can now pretend that one thing stands for another. Because of the child's ability to mentally represent objects and situations, s/he no longer needs the object or person being represented, present. Pretend play is therefore a form of abstraction which Piaget (1946/62) proposed contributes to the development of abstract thinking. He also proposed that children process emotional experiences through play by altering the meaning of events. Interpreting Piaget (1946/62), Göncü and Gaskin (1992: 33) tell us that: *'Symbolic play is used for consolidation, for recapturing and reconstituting experience, as well as the pleasure derived from mastery and power of being the cause'*.

These have been Piaget's significant contributions to our understanding of sociodramatic play, as well as his contribution to this research. He regarded sociodramatic play as belonging to the pre-social stage of development when the egocentric child, incapable of taking the perspective of others, reformulates schema in his/her own head to incorporate new information. He showed little further interest in the pretend area, preferring to focus on rule-governed play which he proposes emerges and predominates after age seven. This is the stage of concrete operations, when play becomes more social and children are capable of accommodation (Piaget, 1932/65).

However even at this stage, he rarely discussed accommodation to other children, instead centralising accommodation to physical reality. His followers maintain for example that *'From the ages of 2½ through 7 children focus on their own actions and do not take into account what other children are thinking or planning to do next'*. (Rogers and Sawyer, 1988:52). This theory of egocentrism was a major determinant of Piaget's findings and demonstrates the effect of a theoretical lens on perception. In light of recent work on mother-child relationships (Stern, 1985; Trevarthen, 1980; Hobson, 2002) and children's peer relationships (Corsaro, 1985, Danby and Farrell, 2004, Löfdahl, 2006), it is difficult to understand his oversight but at the time, of course, Piaget was counteracting behaviourist arguments with his radical ideas about the proactive, constructing child.

2.2.1.3   Piaget and the social world

Primarily, Piaget believed that action and conflict was the source of intelligent thought rather than shared communication and feeling (Stern, 1985; Trevarthen, 1980; Hobson, 2002). The social world, like the world of objects, presented conflicts that needed to be resolved. Around age seven, children begin to negotiate the validity of their individually constructed schema with other people. The movement is from the individual construction of knowledge to social collaboration. Piaget believed *'that the social relations involved in cooperation are the same as the logical relations that children construct in regard to the physical world'* (Rogoff, 1999:72).   For him, language and abstract thinking were prerequisites for rather than an outcome of social engagement. He tells us *'This in no way implies that we dispute the social nature of collective meanings, far from it, since we have constantly tried to show that reason implies cooperation and reciprocity. But the social factor is for us a fact to be explained, not to be invoked as an extra-psychological factor'* (Inhelder and Piaget, 1999:5).   He continuously strongly foregrounded individual processes even to the extent that he regarded adult intervention as an imposition and a threat to the child's constructive process. For him, equal status relationships afforded the child's inner cognitive structures to do their problem-solving work and allowed the development of cooperation in the later formal operations stage. His approach, as summarised by Matusov and Hayes (2000) was 'relational', as opposed to the 'mediational' perspective of Vygotsky. His belief that (i) the symbolic function (language, etc.) emerges as an individual mechanism and (ii) that this mechanism is a prerequisite for any communication among individuals led him to underestimate the role of other people and culture in the learning of the child in the early years and in turn, the child's contribution to the adult world. A sympathetic interpretation values Piaget's contribution to our understanding of the process of problem solving. A critical approach faults his disregard for the emotional and co-constructive connection between children and carers and the cultural nature of knowledge.

Many of Piaget's findings proved unreliable because he overlooked issues of cultural preconceptions in his task setting with children. Donaldson (1978), for example, was able to show that Piaget's experiments involved presumptions about children's interpretation of the given tasks. Children may not have understood the problem or

tried to meet what they perceived as adult expectations. Sociocultural theory (discussed below) points to the need to consider interpretation, motivation, cultural thinking tools and goals in any analysis of human activity. Piaget, in the main, disregarded these considerations. An understanding of Piaget's theory is critical to understanding the findings of researchers who worked within the paradigm accredited to him.

2.2.1.4 *Interpretations of Piaget's work*

The interpretation of Piaget's theories has led to a paradigm in which children are viewed as 'individuals', who through active manipulation of the physical world construct their own schematic understandings of reality, when they are developmentally ready. They follow a pre-determined, stage-based pattern that is universally true and independent of context. This theory has been extremely influential and pervasive in early childhood education and is captured in curricula informed by Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Bredecamp, 1987, Bredecamp and Copple, 1997)[1], and in Ireland is reflected in documents such as 'Ready to Learn' (Ireland 1999a) and the primary school curriculum (Ireland 1999c). It continues to permeate recent documents such as the 'Síolta' document (C.E.C.D.E., 2006) and 'Towards a Framework for Early Learning' (N.C.C.A., 2004), although they try to engage with a sociocultural perspective. The shift from the concept of the individual learner to the concept of knowledge being culturally and collectively constructed is challenging for the sector and leaves us struggling with ideas about how to proceed within the new theoretical paradigm. There are, however, issues of justice involved. The focus on the individual child and normal development means that children who deviate from the norm, because of different developmental routes or whose cultural experiences do not match those of the dominant Western or middle class culture, are often described as deficient (Donaldson, Grieve et al. 1983; Lambert and Clyde, 2000). Their ways of knowing are less valued and they must constantly struggle with cultural ways of knowing that belong to another group and serve their

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[1] In the revised edition, the authors tried to redress much of the interpretation of their first publication but the Piagetian image of the child as 'lone scientist' developing through predefined stages persists. This focus on the physical as opposed to the social environment is reflected in the task oriented approach embodied in the 'choose, use and replace' cycle of the Montessori curriculum and more recently in 'plan, do, review' cycle of the Highscope curriculum (Hohman and Weikart, 1995) Hohmann, M. & Weikart, D. P. (1995) *Educating Young Children: Active Learning Practices for Preschool and Child Care Programs,* Ypsilante, Michigan, High/Scope Press..

specific values and functions. The sociocultural theory of learning proposes that the values, practices, learning and transformations that are part and parcel of a particular cultural community are a matter of judgement and difficult for an outsider to recognise or appreciate. What children appropriate is not merely a measure of their intelligence, but a response to meeting the challenges and goals of life in community.

Gould (1972:11) notes that Piaget's *'formulations of mental growth rest on the debatable assumption that affects, being always an accompaniment of thought, can be treated as a constant- hence ignored as a possible systematic variable in his investigations of sequential progression in intelligence'*. Another consequence of this is the tendency, particularly in designing optimal education programmes for disadvantaged children, to treat cognition and emotion as separate.

2.2.1.5   Conclusion

In his response to Vygotsky, Piaget (1962) argues that there has been much misinterpretation of his work, and he apologises for some emphasis at the cost of balance, reminding us that his arguments must be read in context and in totality. He recognises social influence but reiterates his belief that operations of the individual mind form the coordinating structure for both individual and interpersonal action. His concept of egocentrism, he explains, addresses the young child's difficulty in taking the perspective of others rather than the child's immunity to social influence. He accepts that all behaviour is adaptive and therefore at each stage, there is an element of both assimilation and accommodation. Egocentrism in the early years tips the balance strongly in favour of assimilation. The accommodation process becomes easier with the development of language and negotiation capacity in the formal stage of operations. In his later work, he recognised the link between thought and action, that is, that language is not a prerequisite for thought. Most strikingly, in this article (Piaget, 1962), the linkages between Piagetian and Vygotskian theory are clearly established. Many of their conclusions were much the same, the process of getting there differs. Both recognised the active child and the active environment. Both recognised the role of conflict and raised consciousness in learning. Vygotsky recognised a third factor *'the accumulated products of prior generations, culture, the medium within which the active parties to development interact'* (Cole, 1996:1). Piaget focussed on the individual child and saw a fixed pattern of development,

Vygotsky focussed on the mediation role of culture in the formation of mind. There is a sense that they come from very different starting points but share common ground when they meet.

Piaget's invaluable contribution to the discourse underpinning this research has been the concept of the proactive child innately driven to construct an understanding of the world through active exploration of the environment, both physical and social. The process he describes, leading from perturbation to accommodation, offers a tool for thinking about the interactive relationship between child and context. Trevarthen (1998:88) tells us *'He made a significant advance in psychological theory by demonstrating how a child's acts, accommodating to events and assimilating sensory effects, are deployed with increasing strategic wisdom to build up predictive and representational schemata in the mind. He did not however, understand the power of interpersonal or intersubjective processes by which cooperative awareness is achieved'*. This is a gap that needs to be addressed in seeking a perspective that allows us to interpret the purposes and meanings that mediate children's sociodramatic play. How children accommodate to one another and the cultural context so that they can participate in shared play or in sociocultural terms, how they reconstruct the cultural way of knowing through participation in play is the subject of this research.

2.2.2 Introducing Vygotsky – the father of socioculturalism

Sociocultural or cultural-historical theory is most strongly associated with Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1985, Rogoff, 1990, Cole and Wertsch, 1996), although as already mentioned, Dewey, writing in the United States in the early part of the 20th century shared much of his thinking.

This section interprets and critiques Vygotsky's theory. It begins with an exploration of the role of culture in learning and development and the relationship between the intermental and the intramental or individual plane. For Vygotsky's (1978) the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is part of that relationship. The impact of Vygotsky's theory on our understanding of learning and the practice of education is discussed. This is followed by an analysis of Vygotsky's (1933/1976) theory on children's play, particularly his emphasis on the role of emotions, rules and

symbolism in play. The section then concludes by integrating his broader sociocultural and play theory to reconstruct Vygotsky's contribution to our understanding of play. The section that follows reconciles and differentiates the theories of Vygotsky and Piaget before we move on to the work of the post-Vygotskians.

2.2.2.1 *Vygotsky's sociocultural theory*

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development prioritises learning on the intermental plane and stresses that individual intelligence develops as a result of the biological person actively participating in a physical and particularly a social environment with other people towards community goals. It proposes that the formation of mind is inextricably linked to the historical and cultural context. Children develop within a cultural matrix, interconnecting two key elements: (1) a system of social relationships and (2) the cultural conceptual and symbolic system (Nicolopoulou, 1993). Through participation in social activity, the child appropriates the cultural resources accumulated by his/her society, including a language, cognitive frameworks, cultural artefacts and a bank of knowledge. '*The special quality of the human environment is that it is suffused with the achievements of prior generations in reified (and to this extent materialised) form'* (Cole, 1996:2). These reifications, language, tools, rituals, institutions etc. frame how children see and interpret experiences throughout their lives. They are part of the thinking tools that allow children to continue to construct meaning in ways that fit with their communities. Within Vygotsky's theory, children, through the interactive guidance of adults and more capable peers in appropriating these cultural practices and artefacts, progress and develop in ways that are consistent with the adult culture of their communities (Ellis and Rogoff, 1982, Wertsch, 1985). In this way learning leads and frames development.

This is not a denial of individual difference or of universally shared human commonalities. Vygotsky (1960, 1978) recognised the biologically based course of development as interactive with the cultural. Human beings carry distinctively different biological and genetic blueprints that shape the way they grow and develop but these are activated by the cultural environment in ways that are valued and purposeful in their communities. '*Culture… only alters natural data in conformity*

with cultural goals' (Vygotsky, 1960: 200). This of course gives rise to major differences in developmental paths.

This view of learning has been criticised for its emphasis on the active role of culture and what is sometimes perceived as the passive role of the child. Post-Vygotskians, Rogoff, Cole, Wertsch, as we see later, are at pains to redress this interpretation.

2.2.2.2   Vygotsky - Learning on the Intermental and Individual Plane

Vygotsky (1933) maintains that in early infancy the child learns in interaction with the environment. The younger child's reactions are motor-affective, that is, '*the child cannot act otherwise than as constrained by the situation - or the field - in which he finds himself'* (Ibid: 1933: 6). Here, we find some similarities with the sensori-motor theory of Piaget. In contrast to Piaget, however, Vygotsky (1960) proposes that higher mental functions (the development of abstract thought), develop on the intermental plane, mediated by culture and distributed across persons, places and things. '*Both planes of development - the natural and the cultural coincide and mingle with each other. The two lines interpenetrate one another and form a single line of sociobiological formation of the child's personality'* (Vygotsky, 1960: 17). He offers an example at the level of microgenesis (changes that occur in micro-interactive moments). The infant, like a robot, reaches for a ball and fails to grasp it. The mother interprets the hand gesture as pointing to the ball and retrieves it. The child's movement takes on a meaning through the mother's interpretation and response. '*An indicatory gesture becomes a gesture for others'* (Vygotsky, 1960: 160). It changes from unsuccessful grasping movement to a communicative gesture. This meaning is created in the interaction between mother and child and is then internalised by the child. The mother has validated the child's action and added a contribution. The child reconstructs the gesture with intended meaning. It is a co-constructed conversation through which collective meaning emerges.

Vygotsky (1978), again in contrast to Piaget, believed that development moves from the social to the individual. All learning happens first on the intermental plane and moves to the intramental. '*Every function of the child appears twice: first between people and then inside the child. This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory and the formation of concepts'* (Vygotsky 1978: 344). The child is

enculturated into ways of behaving and thinking through communication with more capable members of the community and then negotiates this learning in terms of his/her biology and previous experience to make this knowledge his/her own. Interpreting Vygotsky, Rogoff (1990: 146) tells us: *'This guidance* (of more capable members) *provides children with the opportunity to participate beyond their own abilities and to internalize activities practiced socially, thus advancing their capabilities for independently managing problem solving'*. Appropriation in Vygotskian terms is, therefore, the process of interpreting the meaning of the cultural tools and practices of the community as they are constructed on the intermental plane and internalising them or making them one's own so that one can operate independently. Two things happen: (1) the individual, in internalising the cultural thinking tools of the community continues to think in culturally appropriate ways and (2) s/he can operate independently.

2.2.2.3 *Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*

Vygotsky (1978) distinguishes between development and learning with the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) theory: **'***The zone of proximal development ... is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers'* (Vygotsky 1978: 86). Learning, according to Vygotsky, must be in advance of and lead development and consequently happens in the ZPD. This is congruent with Vygotsky's perception that learning moves from the social to the individual. The child is guided by others on the intermental plane where the communicative, cooperative, meaning-making process between people creates the ZPD. It is within this intermental process that new knowledge and capabilities are created that cannot be created alone. Children learn how to belong within the ways of their communities and this learning in turn directs their development.

2.2.2.4 *Implications for our understanding of learning*

The culturally mediated nature of knowledge and the concept of mutually guided construction on the interpersonal plane are the elements of Vygotsky's theory that do not seem to have any clear counterpart in the theory of Piaget. They underpin the understanding that children are learning what is needed for functioning and belonging

in their cultural communities. Critical to this research, this concept allows us to consider that rather than following universally true and established stages of development, children develop in ways that are guided by the values, goals and activities of the people with whom they live. It locates learning within participation in community activity. It suggests that to understand children's development and ways of being intelligent, we must understand the context and process of acquisition. It further suggests that children grow intelligent in the ways of their communities and that assessing them within the values and measures of another community will always find them wanting. This is an element of Vygotskian theory that has been largely neglected in the Western world and probably sits uncomfortably with the focus on the individual that underpins its economic, political and social values. It is core to the observational and analytical approach of this research and to such guiding questions as: How do children interpret and reconstruct cultural values and practices in play? How do they functionalise them to support their own and others' participation?

Vygotsky's theories, particularly the concept of the ZPD, gave new impetus to thinking on educational practice but have been interpreted in ways that facilitate integration into existing school structures and agendas. While Piaget was seen as an advocate for 'discovery learning' on the part of the individual and a 'laissez faire' approach on the part of the adult, Vygotsky's theory has been largely interpreted as recentralising the role of effective adult teaching in guiding children's learning and consequently has found favour in the education community (Daniels, 2001). The ZPD is the key concept that supports this interpretation. It is often used to describe structured teaching and learning situations where children are guided by adults into new areas of learning along a predetermined, programmed and achievable path. Other core elements of his theory, such as the culturally mediated nature of knowledge construction and the role of the intermental plane, have taken a back seat or survive at the level of theoretical discourse, with little impact on educational practice (Bruner, 1996). This research proposes to contribute to the redress of this imbalance by exploring (1) how children co-construct cultural ways of knowing on the intermental plane through their participation in play activities and (2) how the ZPD, wherein they learn the rules for ongoing participation, is created through their collaborations together. The research therefore relies heavily on Vygotsky's general theory for the research perspective

2.2.2.5   Vygotsky and Play

Fortunately for this research, Vygotsky specifically makes a link between play and learning. Firstly, he recognised that peers could offer each other guidance and secondly he proposed pretend play itself creates the ZPD because '*[I]n play the child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is though he were a head taller than himself*' (Vygotsky 1933: 11). The statement reflects Vygotsky's particular value on representational or symbolic play, best practiced in sociodramatic play. In allocating ZPD status to play among peers, Vygotsky gives new impetus to the role of play in the education of the child.

Vygotsky's (1933) discussion of play addresses two issues in particular: (1) how play itself arises in development and (2) the role of play as a developmental activity in the preschool years. He regarded play not as the predominant form of activity in early childhood but as the leading source of development. His analysis is embedded in his sociocultural theory. Vygotsky proposed that children learn to create, master and give meaning to signs and symbols through play. They go beyond recollection and imitation and reconstruct implicit social rules for their own play purposes. Play is therefore both a medium and context to negotiate and exercise their understanding of cultural relationships, roles and practices. For him, play is always a social, symbolic activity, even when children play alone, because, in play, children are representing and developing their understanding of cultural experiences.

Of further interest to this research is Vygotsky's statement (1933: 1) that '*a definition of play based on the pleasure it gives the child is not correct for two reasons*'. Firstly, he maintains that it does not distinguish play from many other activities that give children pleasure and secondly, play is not necessarily pleasurable in and of itself. Our nostalgic vision tends to forget that in play '*practical jokes, initiation rites, games involving forceful physical contact, racist and sexist joking, nicknaming and taunting, are equally as traditional*' (Bishop and Curtis, 2001:10). Children's orchestration of one another's participation in play often involves rejection, power struggles and domination, all issues of concern in this thesis and important in critiquing a romantic view of the process and outcomes of participation in play. Core

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to evaluating the place of play in children's learning must be an understanding of the lived experience of play for children. This is the rationale for this research.

2.2.2.6 *Vygotsky and the rules of real life and play*

The motivational basis of play, according to Vygotsky (1933/1967), is primarily emotional. Pretend play is the child's way of realising wishes, needs, roles and skills that cannot be realised in the ordinary course of life at present. *'To resolve this tension, the preschool child enters an imaginary, illusory world in which the unrealisable desires can be realised, and this world is what we call play'* (Vygotsky, 1978: 93). In pursuit of this imaginary satisfaction, children are prepared to voluntarily submit to social rules. The rules are both liberating and constraining. They allow children to suspend reality and move into the pretence frame while framing and guiding their collaboration and role development. *'Thus, children learn through play that achieving their own desires requires voluntary obedience to self-chosen rules and that their individual satisfaction can be enhanced by cooperation in rule-governed activities'* (Nicolopoulou, 1993: 10). In the process, rules become internal rules, an internal affect.

Nicolopoulou's (1993) analysis stresses the importance of rules in Vygotsky's position on play. Vygotsky himself (1933) credits Piaget's contribution to his insight. Piaget (1932/65) describes two kinds of rules leading to 'moral realism': (1) rules imposed by adults and (2) rules of self-restraint constructed by children. Vygotsky (1933) applies this thinking to children's pretend play. By voluntarily submitting to the rules of pretend roles, children show self-estraint and adherence to the rules of the situation. They demonstrate their understanding that roles and contexts frame and are framed by rules of behaviour. "*What passes unnoticed by the child in real life becomes the rules of behaviour in play*" (Vygotsky, 1933/1967: 9). In socio-dramatic play the imaginary element is explicit and the rules implicit. In games with rules, such as chess, the imaginary element is implicit and the rules explicit. *'In short, pretence play and games with rules are two poles of a single continuum'* (Nicolopoulou, 1993: 9).

Sociodramatic play, therefore, offers possibilities for an investigation of the rules of social behaviour explicated in play and consequently provides a route to

understanding children's interpretations of the rules of real life. They show us the rules for practising and thinking within the community of doctors, scientists and parents etc. (Brennan, 2004). Within sociodramatic play they renegotiate and recontextualise these rules. How does compliance with rules support children's participation in play? The process is of interest in this research.

2.2.2.7 *Moving from Concrete to Abstract through Play*

Vygotsky argued that the child only becomes capable of pretend play around age three. Like Piaget, he associates pretend play with the abstraction of meaning, a step towards abstract thought. The child separates object and meaning. *'The child sees one thing but acts differently in relation to what he sees'* (Vygotsky, 1933: 6). Thought is separated from object and the child can now pretend that a piece of wood is a horse. In this way, play facilitates the acquisition of language. An experience can be communicated through the use of a symbol leading the child to realise that a word can be used to represent meaning. This transition from concrete to abstract thinking radically changes the child's relationship to reality. The meaning of the object or action becomes the determinant of behaviour. According to Nicolopoulou (1993: 11), Vygotsky saw that *'play helps the child to sever the originally intimate fusion between meaning (word) and perception, meaning and object, and meaning and action'*. Objects are given new meanings, behaviours represent new ways of being, and language creates a past, present and future. All are mediated by culture and negotiated on the intermental plane.

Thought is no longer dependant on the present context. It is this freedom from situational constraints that allows the child to pretend play and so Vygotsky (1967) and colleagues (El'konin, 1971) credit play in turn with the further development of abstract and 'internalised' thought. Vygotsky recognised in preschool play activities a level of abstract thought that Piaget only thought possible at the stage of formal operations when language is sufficiently developed.

Of further interest is Vygotsky's (1933) argument that meaning is the determinant in the structure of play. Actions and artefacts no longer mean what they mean in reality. They carry a pretend meaning. This according to Bateson (1956) is the paradoxical and metacommunicative nature of play. Play is not just play but is also a metamessage

about the world and the pretend 'not real' world. The playful nip denotes a bite but at the same time it does not denote what the bite denotes. It is a symbolic act with a symbolic meaning. In this sense also, sociodramatic play is symbolic.

2.2.2.8   Conclusion

Vygotsky wrote little about play other than his insightful and clearly explicated 1933 article, much quoted above, in which he gives significant educational and meaning-making value to play. His principal contributions to our understanding of play and to the discourse underpinning this research comes from his sociocultural theory, that is, that all knowledge is mediated by historical cultural tools, artefacts and symbolic systems and constructed in social interaction in the ZPD before it is internalised by the individual. The focus of his study was the means, the functions and the processes of participating within a social and cultural system (Moran and John-Steiner, 2003). He said little about the process of individual knowledge internalisation. The particular value of Vygotsky's theory is that it offers a theoretical framework that can be used to examine any area or context of development. In this research it guides the investigation into how children collectively reconstruct the framework for participation in the activity and meaning-making of sociodramatic play.

2.2.3 Reconciling Vygotsky and Piaget

Vygotsky had the privilege of reading Piaget's work but Piaget's access to Vygotsky's work was only granted after his death. Vygotsky (1932) recognises Piaget's contribution to his theorising on egocentric speech and to his understanding of rules and morality for the developing child. Piaget, (1946/1962) on the other hand takes on board Vygotsky's thinking and reaffirms the role of the social in children's development. Both regarded the newborn child as a biological organism whose early learning was sensorimotor. Both emphasised the importance of language in the development of thought. Many would say that the difference is one of emphasis (Berk and Winsler, 1995). Piaget as a biologist foregrounded the biological base of development, identified a human biological pattern and saw the child learning through systematic exploration of the environment where everything has a cause and effect. Vygotsky, as a psychologist and communist, foregrounded the social basis of learning, where shared experience, values, intentions and interpretations are negotiated. Both understood that neither biological nor social explanations were

sufficient on their own to explain development. The crucial difference, however is that Vygotsky finds that human development is mediated by and progresses in ways that are congruent with the culture of the community in which the individual operates. There may be many similarities but this is a significant difference that leads to very different views of the child and approaches to education. It has major implications for our understanding and practice in early childhood education in particular.

The division that Vygotsky seemed to create between the intermental and intramental planes has given rise to much debate (Wertsch 1985; Cole 1996; Rogoff 1990; Lave and Wenger 1991; Matusov 1998; Cobb 1999). How, for example, within the ZPD is knowledge transmitted from the teacher to the student and how does the student integrate new knowledge with previous learning? Cobb (1999) suggests that the process of cognitive restructuring as described by Piaget and the Vygotskian process of internalisation is the same process, involving perturbation and accommodation. In this way the theory of Vygotsky and Piaget are seen as complementary. Vygotsky explains construction on the intermental plane while Piaget describes individual construction. However, as Rogoff (1990) and Wertsch (1985) explain, what links the two planes in Vygotsky's theory is his key insight, that is, that the individual intramentally continues to use the dialogic and reasoning tools learned on the intermental plane. In this way the individual is always, and from the beginning, participating in a responsive, reciprocal relationship with community and therefore whether thinking alone or in company is always operating on the intermental plane. This is a paradigmatic shift in thinking with many layers which we will now explore.

2.3   Developments in Sociocultural theory

Vygotsky died at the age of thirty eight and left us with a collection of rich ideas rather than a clearly integrated and documented theory. This has left his theories open to many interpretations. Post-Vygotskians such as Wertsch, Cole, Rogoff, Lave and Wenger and many others, have helped to develop his thinking into a more integrated theory. The following discusses some of the significant ideas that have emerged.

2.3.1 Learning as a process of transformation

Rogoff (1990, 1995) argues that the intermental and intramental processes are integral to one another, that there is no barrier to be crossed between them. It is a process of 'participatory appropriation' and 'transformation of participation' (Rogoff 1990, 1995). These are the terms that Rogoff uses to reconceptualise Vygotsky's process of 'internalisation'. The individual, through participation with others in social activity, is transformed in ways that allow him or her to participate competently in the cultural ways of the community. This is a perspective that considers individual learning development as a process of transformation not of the individual alone but of the individual's participation in social activity. It emphasises the mutually constitutive relationship between the individual and the cultural environment. Both are transformed in the process of participation. Through participation in activity with others towards community goals, humans engage in the process of reconstructing the cultural meaning and meaning-making tools as they use them and in turn both individual and meaning are redefined or transformed. *'Benefiting from shared understanding does not involve taking something from an external model. Instead, in the process of participation in social activity, the individual already functions with the shared understanding. The individual's use of this shared understanding is not the same as what was constructed jointly; it is an appropriation of the shared understanding by each individual that reflects that individual's understanding of and involvement in activity'* (Rogoff 1990: 195). The individual is never separate from the social but always operates as an individual-in-social-activity. The intermental plane does not change the individual plane. They change each other together. Learning does not change the individual as a separate unit but changes how the individual participates in community. It is a process that may have elements of assimilation and accommodation but it is never an isolated process. Assimilation and accommodation also operate in a reciprocal relationship with the social world. Again this is not a denial of individualism. As Lave and Wenger (1991: 54) tell us, the meanings that are created in the social world are never fully internalised nor is individual interpretation fully externalised. What we understand and project has an element of individuality that is both personal and distinctive.

Rogoff's (1990) concept of 'transformation of participation' is an alternative way of conceptualising the ZPD. It recognises that the individual and the social are never separate. The ZPD is the intermental plane where the individual learns to participate and at the same time contributes to the guiding frame for participation. That cultural world exists among people as the process of participation in shared activity. Their individual agency and the constituents of their inner world are constituents of their participation in the flow of social activity. Their participation generates development which in turn changes their participation. This reciprocal relationship is very clearly demonstrated when we consider how the cultural frame for being a woman and for how women live, think and feel has changed. As women's lives change, the cultural guiding frame for being a woman changes. They create one another. In the same way, the on-going transformation of thought is reified in computer technology and in turn the computer changes how we live, think and feel. Learning as participation is about the way the whole person acts in the world.

This provides clarification about the concept of participation. All children participate to the extent that they have access to the ways of participating. As they participate, their understanding of roles and responsibilities changes and as their understanding changes their ways of participating change. This research is a study of the transformation of participation, both of participants and culture, facilitated by children's shared participation in sociodramatic play.

Rather than describing two stages of learning, Matusov (1998) proposes that the intermental and intramental functions may describe two different types of participation in activity, namely, immediate participation in joint social activity and socially mediated participation in solo activity. The intermental and intramental functions are both social. The child operating alone continues to engage with the thinking of others. For the Western world and thereby for this researcher, this is a difficult concept, again because the concept of individual achievement and responsibility is so ingrained in our psychology. Two important points emerge: (i) without the social framework, the individual cannot make meaning and (ii) the individual and the social are never separate and consequently there is no separate process of internalisation. *'No isolated human child could learn to speak; come to think; have sexuality or a sexual identity, develop a morality; even have any basis to*

stay alive...We are, in this sense so fundamentally social, so shot through with the circumstances of our place in time and space and the otherbodies who placed us there, that the idea that there could be a psychology which was not a social psychology, a learning that was not a social learning, a cognition that was not a social cognition, becomes fundamentally unworkable' (Stainton Rogers *et al*, 1995: 95).

This is the shift that we need to make in the education sector. It recognises learning as a process of participation and transformation that prepares the individual for further participation in the valued activities of the community. The individual learns, not how to work independently, but how to participate differently. It emphasises (1) that learning is a process rather than a product and (2) that the individual in social activity is the only valid unit of analysis. The individual's learning and thought processes cannot be understood other than within the goals of the activity that generate them (Rogoff 1990) and the cultural context that mediates them. This thinking was further developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) with the concept 'communities of practice' and by Wertsch (1991) when he talks about learning being distributed across people, places and things. These concepts are reconstructed below.

2.3.2 Learning in communities of practice

A community of practice, according to Lave and Wenger (1991) is *'a set of relations among persons, activity, and the world, over time and with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice.... an intrinsic condition for the sharing of knowledge'* (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98). Humans always belong to a 'community of practice' and throughout their lives enter many specific but interrelated communities. They may belong to the community of practice of a particular ethnic group or class of people or religious group, and at the same time to the community of the employed or the unemployed and within the former to the community of practice of administrators, labourers or accountants. Each community of practice engages in joint enterprises and has particular goals and values, a way of thinking, talking about and describing its practices, and a matrix of established but changing patterns of conduct. Participation with others in the activities of the community shapes not only what people do within the community, but also how they interpret what they do. In organising shared activity, participants make adjustments and stretch their contributions to attune to

other contributions in order to accomplish the goals of their joint activity. Together, they thereby construct the institutional frame that guides appropriate ways of participating. '….*we produce again a new situation, an impression, an experience: we produce meanings that extend, redirect, dismiss, reinterpret, modify or confirm...'* (Wenger 1998: 52). These meanings become reified in the practices of the community (Wenger 1998) but are constantly under reconstruction.

This leads to a view of learning as situated in the activity and practices of the community, through a process of social participation. Wenger (1998: 5) describes four components that characterise social participation as a process of learning:

1. *Meaning – a way of talking about our (changing) ability - individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful*
2. *Practice - a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action*
3. *Community – a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence*
4. *Identity- a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities*

These four components are interconnected and mutually defining and together describe learning as a process of collective meaning-making and changing identity as learners become more experienced in the ways of the community of practice. Procedures, routines, institutions and artefacts of the community represent the reification of this learning. They are *'forms of memory'* but also the *'channels by which one can influence the evolution of practice'* Wenger (1998: 86). Both participation and reification are fundamental to learning.

Rogoff (1990) coined the term 'apprenticeship in thinking', proposing that learning is about learning how to think within a community of practice. School learning, for example involves specific abstract ways of thinking and problem solving that are valued in the academic community. The 'community of practice' concept also offers a sociocultural way of explaining the disciplines or domains of learning, for example,

art, literacy, mathematics, philosophy, science, which are often divided into subject areas in school. It proposes that children enter communities of practice within which these disciplines and skills have a place, function and value. Vygotsky (1978: 117-118) makes the point that *'Reading and writing must be something the child needs'*. Children enter, for example, the community of practice of the scientist or the reader and move towards more competent participation. Skills, attitudes and behaviours are acquired in the interest of becoming a member of a community and achieving its goals. Each of these domains or communities has particular constraints and affordances to which the learner must attune and which shape the way of working and thinking. Learning is transferred from one community to another because learning in one activity or situation influences one's ability to participate in another (Greeno 1998). The challenge is to learn to think and work within the community and to access, through participation, the store of knowledge that already informs practice[2]. Situated concepts, that is, spontaneous concepts that are enacted within the activities of a community are sometimes contrasted with scientific concepts which focus on the verbal abstraction and generalisation of concepts from everyday practice. Both Vygotsky (1987) and Piaget (1959) believed that the combination of these concepts formed the basis of theoretical and higher forms of thinking.

As in Lave and Wenger's (1991) term 'legitimate peripheral participation' and Rogoff's (1990) concept of 'apprenticeship', learners are viewed as newcomers to a community of practice, operating on the periphery and moving towards more central participation as they become more skilled in the ways of the community. Each community has constraints and affordances, constantly under renegotiation, that 'legitimise' different forms of membership (Lave and Wenger 1991) or inhibit full participation. Learning consequently implies *'becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations'* (Lave and Wenger 1991: 53). This transformation of identity, from beginner through to full membership brings with it new possibilities for the individual, the group and the context.

2.3.3 Learning as distributed
Vygotsky understood that tools, artefacts and practices carry meaning and frame ways of knowing. People, places, objects, language, and our psychological tools carry the

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[2] This is equally true of course, of membership of deviant gangs.

meaning-making of others, both past and present and are an inherent part of the cultural way of thinking. Consequently, cognition is considered as 'distributed' (Salomon 1993) or 'stretched' (Rogoff 1990) across people, places and things. Language is a living example of distributed cognition. It is the product of many minds and conversations and their value systems as they emerge over centuries and is constantly in the process of change. It is not only a tool for communication but in turn it frames our way of thinking. Our thinking is accomplished in part by the tools that we use (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.3.4 Conclusion

This view of learning has major implications for the study of children in sociodramatic play. It proposes that the individual players and play themes can only be understood in the '*context of lived and living traditions*' (Shotter 1993: 2). The distributed nature of players and play themes requires that the research consider that: (i) Play is framed and mediated by cultural artefacts and practices that children inherit. Children must have access to their meaning and practice in order to participate (ii) Players, in coordinating shared play stories, are collectively reconstructing both the ways of participating and the meanings and goals of the community of players and (iii) Players and context are transformed in the process of ongoing collective renegotiation. The research, following these considerations, will explore how participation in play is mediated by cultural practices and meanings, how children organise their joint participation and meaning-making on the intermental plane and how they are transformed by their participation in play in this group and context.

Again, this thinking involves major shifts for educationalists in the Western world (Singer, 1993, Dahlberg, Moss et al., 1999, Fleer, 2006). The mediated nature of knowledge construction and the 'situated' nature of learning (Rogoff, 1990, Lave and Wenger, 1991, Greeno, 1998) have led to the understanding that there is more than one truth, more than one way of knowing. Truth and knowledge are related to community values and agendas and consequently, Bruner (1996) tells us, laden with issues of access, power and control. There is a need, within education institutions in particular, to examine our understanding of knowledge and our concepts of the educated, mature person and to expose the value and power base that underpins them.

This research proposes to explicate many of these values as they are reconstructed by children in play and as they continue to frame their participation.

The view prompts questions about our understanding of child development, developmental milestones and normative development. As Katz (1996:140) says *'...the body of knowledge and principles governing the presumed relationships between early experience and mature development that many of us have long taken for granted are based on evidence gathered largely from a relatively limited sample of human experience',* namely white middle class children. Those who don't share their ways of knowing are often classed as abnormal or deficient. The situated view proposes that children live in different cultural communities which differ in terms of practices and purposes and in terms of how they interpret and give meaning to events. The child develops 'into' and 'out' of a culture (Shotter, 1993). Instead of studying a person's possession of a capacity or an idea, the focus must be on the active changes involved in the emerging events or activities in which people participate. It is a shift from a cumulative view of knowledge and development to a transformative view. It is also a shift from the individual to the individual-in-social activity as the unit of analysis. These are elements of the perspective that frames this research.

Within the Irish education system, this is a new and radical perspective. Some would say that it leads to a sea of confusion and even stagnation. This however is not an excuse for refusing to engage with its validity. The challenge is to re-conceptualise the learning process and to translate this theory into practice. The next section looks at some attempts to date and considers further theoretical contributions to children's peer group collaborations and meaning-making that can inform this research.

2.4   From sociocultural theory to practice

The reconstruction of this element of the discourse aims to identify teaching and learning strategies in the sociocultural tradition that may contribute to developing ways of concretising the theory and identifying practical strategies for observing and analysing children's participation in play. The literature tends to focus on adult-child collaborations towards specific and predetermined learning outcomes while this research is more interested in child-child negotiations and emerging constructions.

This section explores the relevance of existing research and any insight it offers into how peers might organise their collaborations in play.

2.4.1 Scaffolding strategies

Scaffolding is not a Vygotskian concept (Wertsch, 2007) but rather a concept developed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) to describe the learning support process in the ZPD. Scaffolding is the process of organising the task in order to bring it within the child's 'region of sensitivity' to instruction. The teacher's role is to respond to cues from the learner and to give help when needed, with the aim of transferring control to the learner as the learner's capacity increases. Wood (1986) emphasised the two rules of 'contingent' support. The first rule dictates that when a child fails to achieve after one level of support is offered, then the support is immediately increased. The second dictates that when a child succeeds, the level of support should decrease. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) describe this as the shift from 'other' regulation to 'self' regulation. Rogoff *et al* (1993/1998) found that in communities where children participate in adults' social and work life, children learned mainly through observation and modelling of skills; that language has a lesser function. Wood attributes the highest levels of control to modelling as a support. Rogoff *et al* (1993/1998) observed that the lower level supports, as described by Wood, involving verbal instruction tend to belong in communities where children are segregated from adults' work. We are reminded by this debate that scaffolding and contingency are culturally defined concepts and that ways of learning are embedded in context. Interpreting the activities of people without regard for their context and goals makes the interpretations meaningless.

The 'scaffolding' concept has been developed in the context of teacher-child relationship. The scaffold holds the building as it moves upwards and in educational terms scaffolding is about supporting children towards building predetermined learning outcomes. This study of sociodramatic play requires a concept that allows for emergent thinking within an interactive dynamic, that does not necessarily follow a logically progressive path. Participants within the dynamic guide one another's contribution through a process of self-other regulation and contingent responses. This brings us to the concept of 'guided participation'.

2.4.2 From Scaffolding to Guided Participation and Intersubjectivity

Rogoff (1990) developed the concept of scaffolding with the term 'guided participation' to emphasise the responsive relationship between participants and *' the active role of children in both observing and participating in the organized societal activity of their caregivers and companions'* (Rogoff, Mosier *et al* 1993: 229). Her interest is in the *'arrangements and interactions of children in cultural communities that do not aim for school-based discourses and concepts'* (Rogoff, 1995:148). This then is a concept that could be useful in the study of children's participation in sociodramatic play. From the very beginning, children guide and are guided by adults and guide one another towards culturally framed, goal directed activity. They are not passive learners. They mutually direct their attentions and intentions and the meaning that emerges. Children and carers are transformed by each other's guidance.

Rogoff, Mosier *et al* (1993/1998) identified culturally variant 'bridging and structuring' strategies, designed, not always consciously, to establish 'mutual comprehension'. Bridging *'involves emotional and non-verbal as well as verbal forms of communication'* (Ibid: 230) and helps to bridge the gap between present understanding and skill and the next level. Structuring is about arranging and structuring children's participation in activities at both macro and micro level. Parents might organise play dates for their children or even suggest a play theme. Children can control by deciding on their level of participation and on the direction of their interests. They can be compliant or resistant. They also bridge and structure adult participation, often in discreet ways. The form of these supports depends on the participants and the context.

Carr (personal communication, 2005) suggests that it might be useful to consider the bridging and structuring strategies that children use to support their participation in play. How do children structure the play context to support participation? How do children bridge the gaps in understanding between them so that they can collaborate in play? However, there are a number of difficulties in following this route. The 'bridging and structuring' format refers to supportive strategies mostly used by adults to teach children some predetermined skill. Firstly, there is a question about whether the ways in which children organise their participation in play can always be

described as supportive in this way. Children in play often struggle for power, identity and friendship and use tactics of exclusion and domination in the process. Secondly, children in sociodramatic play are not usually working towards a predefined end and there is not a clear adult/child divide. The application of the 'bridging and structuring' concept to children's joint participation in play must allow for these differences. There are always, among the children themselves, different levels of experience and capability and this leads to 'bridging and structuring' opportunities. Children do scaffold one another in many ways, including modelling, feedback, questioning, instructing, and transfer of responsibility but not necessarily towards ends that are predetermined or that adults define as progressive.

2.4.3 Conclusion

Ultimately, this research shifts the enquiry from structured teaching and learning situations in which children are scaffolded by experts to an analysis of children's routine interactions with multiple partners in play towards the goals of the activity and the group over time. Children's contributions are guided by their co-participants. They interpret and respond into the collective. They may be working towards personal goals but the outcome is open to negotiation. Furthermore, in children's shared sociodramatic play, the children are not on the periphery of the main practice but are the main players in defining and enacting the practice. They are creating new contexts and practices together. Their learning is constructed in the course of moving the play story forward and negotiating shared understanding en route. The group dynamic among the players and the innovative pretend play context creates new learning for everybody involved. It is a process of guided participation.

The focus on routine interactions towards unplanned learning outcomes finds resonance in the interactive first relationships in early childhood. In the conversations between carer and child, there is often a playful, pretend element and they are usually not working towards a pre-planned learning task or goal. Carer and baby interpret and respond, reading and extending one another's emotional messages in particular. This is an arena of microgenesis, where the intermental plane can be studied to identify the processes of participation in social interaction and the outcomes in terms of meaning construction. Study in this area is greatly facilitated by two developments in research in recent times: (1) the use of video

which allows for moment by moment replay of minute interactive steps and (2) research on autism in young children, where the missing link has been identified as a problem with relating socially and emotionally to other people and with entering imaginative play. Autistic children may develop attachment but they are challenged to develop intersubjectivity with others. The following explores the theory and practice of intersubjectivity.

2.5 Intersubjectivity

From the beginning of life, babies demonstrate an enthusiasm for connecting with other humans. Very quickly they produce two skills which Trevarthen and Aitken (2001) identify as essential to intersubjectivity: (1) they demonstrate that they can control their own actions and (2) that they can coodinate this subjective control with the subjectivity of others. Trevarthen (1980: 530) defines intersubjectivity as *'both recognition and control of cooperative intentions and joint patterns of awareness'* and Cannella (1993: 429) similarly describes it as *'the process of constructing and reconstructing joint purposes between the child and his / her interacting partner'*. Intersubjectivity, therefore, is about coordinating initiatives and intentions rather than about reaching agreement or consensus. It is a process.

The discourse going forward centralises the concept of intersubjectivity in learning and development. It addresses the contributing factors to the development of intersubjectivity at the micro level of human interaction and at the macro level of meaning-making in transaction with people, places and artefacts.

2.5.1 The Central role of Intersubjectivity

What are the processes that allow children to guide and be guided by play partners? What processes give access to the rules for participation and allow agentive contributions to the meaning that emerges? For answers to these questions, we return to the first play scenes in the baby's life, when mother and child work together with the common knowledge available to them to create a framework for developing ongoing sharing and participation. Stern (1985, 1990/98, 2001/1977, 2004), Trevarthen (1978, 1979, 2001, 2005) and Hobson (2002) have all conducted in-depth studies of these routine interaction moments. They describe the turn by

turn contributions of both in constructing shared meaning, identity and emotional connection and develop a theory that locates the development of human thinking in interpersonal, intersubjective relationships. To understand human learning, we are invited to enter the enormously emotional world of *'bodily-anchored relations'* (Hobson 2002: 4) that infants create with the people around them.

This is a theory that does not begin with what is happening in a baby's brain or with how the baby acts on or perceives the world but rather from the beginning focuses on the baby in relation to people and activity. It moves beyond Piaget and even beyond Vygotsky. Piaget centralised the baby's interaction with the physical world and the skills afforded by biological maturation (such as manipulation, imitation and speech) in the development of thought. Vygotsky too focused on sensorimotor learning in babyhood but then centralised connection with other community members[3]. Further research (Hobson, 2002) now endorses and extends his understanding and proposes that the capacity for thought comes through social engagement from the very beginning of life. The ability to think not only involves the separation of self and object but the separation of self from other selves. *'It is not enough that the baby shifts perspectives by herself. In order to grasp that she can move in her attitudes to the world, the movements need to happen* **through someone else***'* (Hobson, 2002:105). Meaning is made between people, in the intermental space. The baby appropriates, interprets and reconstructs the meaning made between people and in the process identifies with them. *'This kind of identifying does more than change a person's actions – it changes the person's subjective experience of the world'* (Ibid: 105)[4]. The baby's perspective and the tools that shape perspective are shared. Most significantly, according to Hobson, the child identifies with another's perspective on him/herself and thereby becomes self-aware through the feedback of others. S/he uses the collectively constructed analytical tools or concepts to understand him/herself. Two things, in particular, happen for the baby: (1) s/he comes to experience the world, guided by the cultural lens of the carer and (2) s/he also becomes aware of his/her own and other's attitudes, a self-other awareness. This

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[3] He recognised, for example, that dysfunction in connecting with other people led to learning problems. *'Isolation from the collective or difficulty in social development, in its turn, conditions underdevelopment of higher mental functions'* (Vygotsky 1993: 199).

[4] It also changes the world, since it changes the function and purposes of the ingredients of the world, although Hobson does not explore this element.

growing awareness of perspectives means that s/he can choose perspectives within the cultural range and apply them to the world.

This ability to separate thought and action and self and other, to use symbols to convey meaning, to take and apply different perspectives, and to understand intentions is core to sociodramatic play and so I am interested in further exploring this area of study. What happens in the interaction moment between people to activate perspective taking? How does the baby come to know him/herself as an agentive person? How do babies come to share control and predict what the other will do? What is the development between these skills and the skills of sociodramatic play among peers? These are questions that drive this research.

2.5.1.1 *The central role of emotions in intersubjectivity*

Through interaction analysis, with the help of video, Trevarthen (1980), Stern (1985) and subsequently Hobson (2002) identified the step-by-step moments in the development of intersubjectivity. All find evidence in babies' behaviour that they are born with minds that are especially attuned to other minds and from very early in life are capable of reading another's intentions. They come into the world ready and eager to communicate and long before they share language, they share in emotional exchanges. With tactics such as crying, smiling, wiggling, gurgling, they teach parents how to respond to their needs and parents in turn share with them their interpretations of the ways of the world. It is as Rogoff (1990, 1995) describes 'guided participation'. Within the dynamic of this new relationship, they together reconstruct, with adjustments and embellishments on both parts, new ways of being in the world.

From the very beginning of life outside the womb the baby shows many of the skills necessary for intersubjectivity. S/he is able to focus attention, to imitate, to take turns. At birth, s/he recognises the mother's voice, knows the mother's smell and uses every muscle in his/her body to engage with the emotion, rhythm and conversational exchange that she allows. The mother responds by interpreting the infant's messages, particularly the emotional messages. The infant makes a sound such as Ahh- the mother responds with bigger sounds such as yeAAAhhh, interpreting primarily the emotion of the sound and feeding back that interpretation with exaggerated tones and gestures. Stern (1985) calls this 'affect attunement'. It is choreographed exchange in

which emotions are a major part of the agency of the contributors because *'..it is in the nature and function of emotions to stir up sympathetic responses in others'* (Reddy and Trevarthen, 2004:3). Both conversants interpret and contribute and thereby draw one another's knowledge into existence. Together they learn how to mean. In this sense meaning is not created on the outside and then internalised. It emerges in social activity.

Murray and Trevarthen's (1985) research finds that infants are more vigilant, focussed and responsive in live interaction with their mothers. When they replayed a video of the mother's responses to the child, the child lost interest and refused to engage. They concluded that the child is innately tuned to respond to the give and take of live, responsive interaction '*regulating their own expression in appropriate complementary response patterns that can be perceived by the mother as particular emotions'* (Murray and Trevarthen 1985: 192). Babies may not plan, understand or reflect on meaning but their initiatives and responses in 'protoconversations' is evidence of their participation in its construction. It is metacommunicative rather than metacognitive (Trevarthen and Aitken, 2001). It is about how the relationship offers opportunity for sharing joint attention and intentions and the emotions that accompany them.

Significantly, the study of early intersubjective processes centralises the emotional quality of exchanges. Adults, when talking to babies use particularly musical tones, with fluctuation in pitch and speed to create mood and communicate emotion. Dunn (1987) in her study of young siblings found that children continue in the early years to attend first to the emotional tone of interactions. She describes a 24 month old who regularly riled her older sister by taking on the persona of that sister's imaginary friend, demonstrating that even at this young age she had both the skills of pretence and the ability to understand the potential for upset. Dunn concludes that the arousal children experience in emotionally charged interactions heightens their vigilance and attentive powers. Trevarthen (2001: 40) tells us that *'The emotional investment of the child in this 'learning how to mean' is of primary importance'*.

Emotion is a feature of human conversations that persists as humans develop and is worth keeping in mind as we observe children in play. We are, as people, '*interpersonal, emotive, relational, intersubjective - concerned not with the truth of a*

context and its constraints or usable affordances, not so much with maxims of speaking, but with impulses and emotions in immediate human contact while imaginations are actively running ahead of purposes'. (Trevarthen and Aitken 2001: 16). Bruner (1999: 161) calls us '*the intersubjective species par excellence*'; Merleau-Ponty (1962: xviii) says that we are '*condemned to meaning'*; that our meanings are not necessarily reflected on but rather are lived. It is a holistic view of communication and shared learning that recognises the role of body and emotions and subtle sensitivity in communication. It situates it in cultural relationships and activities and recognises that emergent knowledge is not necessarily a logical construction but a coordination of contributions that reflects the participation of group members. Research on children's play to date seems to largely neglect these dimensions of participation.

2.5.1.2   *Transformation of identity in the intersubjective moments*

Through experiences of joint involvement the baby begins to build up a story of someone who is seen and heard, who is capable of understanding and sharing feeling. The parent's contingent responses affirm the baby's agency and legitimise his/her communications. Babies experience recognition. The mother learns how to participate in shared activity with baby and feels and communicates the joy of the connection. The baby feels this connection and develops a sense of well-being and belonging. S/he comes to know what is valued in the community, what things mean, how relationships work, how to fit in and how to describe the self appropriately. S/he is transformed towards further more effective participation because s/he enjoys the security and opportunities for agency afforded by coming to know the cultural guiding frame. '*A desire to know more and to gain skills in ways that other trusted people recognise and encourage.... is the defining feature of young, human nature. It is the instinct that makes 'cultural' learning happen*' (Trevarthen, 2004: 29). The experience of intersubjectivity satisfies a basic human need to feel part of community and drives development and identity in culturally appropriate ways.

2.5.1.3   *Intersubjectivity and the ZPD*

Purposeful intersubjectivity towards building relationships and towards engagement in activity and problem solving with other humans, according to Trevarthen (2001), is the driving force and mechanism of development. It involves the creation of new

meaning, a meaning that cannot be created alone, and consequently takes the interactants and the activity into the ZPD. This meaning-making or learning within the ZPD leads development. We come to both know and construct our world through our participation in shared social activity.

2.5.2 Brain Development and Intersubjectivity

This view of the social origin of knowing finds further validation in recent developments in neuroscience where the impact of intersubjective experiences on the brain is confirmed. Trevarthen (2005) tells us that brains are recording and communicating experiences but not in the same way for everyone. From birth, infants show individual preferences and interests guided by innate personal biases that Edelman (1992) calls 'values'. These values are experienced as feelings that serve to prioritise and weight experiences. Consequently, each individual, using collective cultural tools, interprets experiences somewhat differently. Edelman (1992) equates social transaction to a conductor-free orchestra where each player modulates and is modulated by the other to create something new collectively. Players are neither separated nor fused but rather 'in communion' with each other (Stern, 2004).

Sigel (1999) identifies three fundamental principles of brain development:
1. The human mind emerges from patterns in the flow of energy and information within the brain and between brains
2. The mind is created within the transaction between internal neurophysical processes and interpersonal experience
3. The structure and functions of the developing brain are determined by how experience within interpersonal relationships shapes the genetically programmed maturation of the nervous system.

Mind development, therefore, is dependant on transaction with other people. The mind, including memory, emotion and self awareness, emerges from the impact of human connections on neural patterns (Sigel, 1999). Interpersonal experiences directly mediate how we construct reality and are most transformative in the early years. Like Trevarthen, Sigel (1999) tells us that emotions are the central organising process within the brain that shapes the ability of the mind to integrate experience.

Recent research also suggests a neurobiological basis for sharing intentions and for understanding other's emotional states. Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Gallese and Fogassi (1996) discovered the phenomenon of the mirror neuron as recently as the mid 1990s. When studying monkeys, they discovered (by accident) that the same cluster of cells fired when the monkey performed an action as when the monkey saw the same action performed by someone else. The cells responded the same way whether the monkey, for example, reached for something or merely watched as another monkey or a human reached for something. The monkey's brain could read the intentions of another from the context in which it was observed and react accordingly.

Other significant theorists are persuaded by these findings. The human brain, Goleman (2006) tells us, has multiple mirror neuron systems that specialise in carrying out and understanding not just the actions of others but their intentions, the social meaning of their behaviour and their emotions. Stern (2004: 79) proposes that *'We experience the other as if we were executing the same action, feeling the same emotion, making the same vocalisation, or being touched as they are being touched...This 'participation' in another's mental life creates a sense of feeling/sharing with/ understanding the person, in particular the person's intentions and feelings'*. Mirror neurons monitor what is happening and activate the same response in the brain of the observer automatically, immediately and unconsciously. We are so connected to one another as human beings that the brain develops through observation alone. When we watch people in pain, we feel their distress. The injured athlete can continue to exercise his/her muscles by watching others perform because they mentally perform the feats with them (Hartman, 2002). The two-month old infant looks at a person's face and responds sympathetically (Tzourio-Mazoyer, De Schonen, Crivello, Reutter, Auyard and Mazoyer, 2002). The power of observation alone is immense. This emerging evidence from neuroscience is pointing even more convincingly to the social and emotional nature of intelligence and development. There are, it appears, innate capacities that lead to and depend on cultural learning and there are social learning processes that are vital to engaging these capacities.

The emotional quality of learning is further supported by neuro-medicine. The study of patients suffering from damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex area shows that many aspects of cognition including learning, attention, memory, decision-

making, motivation and social functioning are profoundly affected. Two lessons emerge from these studies: (1) that neither learning nor recall are divorced from emotion and (2) when we minimise the role of emotion in learning, we run the risk of developing the kind of learning that cannot be transferred to real life situations.

These revelations combined alert us to three critical components of learning: (1) that learning happens through participation in activity with other community members, whether through observation or active engagement, (2) that we learn what is culturally available to us and (3) that learning on the intermental plane, in social activity, has an emotional quality that is particularly significant in early childhood. Furthermore Goleman (1996) tells us that emotional aptitude is critical in determining how well we can use our intellect and he consequently centralises emotional literacy as the core business of education. It is incumbent upon us therefore to pay more attention to how learning happens on this intermental plane; to how intersubjectivity is established in various communities and groups and to the cultural guiding frame that shapes learning in families and communities. It is core to understanding the cultural nature of learning. This research intends to explicate these processes, as they are demonstrated by children through their participation in sociodramatic play.

2.5.3 Conclusion

The concept of intersubjectivity recognises that the child is a social being from the start, negotiating meaning with other community members and gradually developing more complex communicative skills and a shared framework for collaborating. It brings together the intermental and intramental processes and stitches in the transaction with cultural histories, artefacts and values. In the interactive, intersubjective moment, the partners collaboratively construct meaning, not by a process of argumentation but through the coordination of contingent, pragmatic, emotionally responsive contributions towards achieving activity goals. Both the structure and meaning of the interaction is guided by the cultural frame but remains unpredictable and emergent. Learning within this frame is a process of appropriation, that is, a process of interpreting and reconstructing meaning between interactants as they engage in shared activity. In the interaction moment, the partners not only create intersubjectivity but they also contribute to the frame that guides their ongoing intersubjectivity. They are reconstructing the meaning-making frame and practices of

the community that will guide their future interactions. In the intersubjective moments that they create with their babies *'[P]arents are intuitively helping their infants not only to parse social behaviour but to interpret it in terms of the intentions of others'* (Stern 1985: 4). It is this process of collectively adapting meaning and practices and making them their own that sociocultural theorists describe as 'appropriation' (Wertsch 1985; Rogoff 1990). It is not just a process of socialisation but as Trevarthen (1998) concludes, this inborn human drive to communicate and share with others, to learn in companionship with others is also necessary for the child's emotional and cognitive education. It is a view of learning that brings us beyond the individualistic analysis of cognition and emphasises the importance of collective participation in social interactions and therefore the constructed, cultural and contextual nature of what is learned.

2.5.4 Relevance for Research

Fogel (1993) and Stern (2004) propose that intersubjectivity is a largely unconscious process that, consistent with Piaget and Vygotsky, only becomes conscious when disrupted by conflict and problems. Perhaps for this reason it has been largely ignored in education. We now know however that the experience and skills of intersubjectivity are vital to our ability to participate and belong in the process of meaning-making. In the decontextualised settings of education institutions we often lose sight of these features of human learning. Again as evidenced, in Ireland at least (Ireland 1999a; Ireland 1999b; Ireland 1999c), the curricula and assessment frameworks tend to emphasise the interactions of the individual child with the physical world as opposed to the meaning-making world. Reconnecting with the intersubjective nature of human life is an important contribution of this research.

Children learn the basic skills of intersubjectivity and at the same time build an identity as communicators, contributors and emotionally connected people in their early intersubjective experiences. They then bring these ways of participating to their peer relationships in play. Here we have a lens with which to observe the processes and outcomes of children's participation in sociodramatic play. We are interested then in how intersubjectivity develops among peers in the preschool age group.

Intersubjectivity is also a concept that allows us to study children's play as a process of collective meaning-making. It allows for the emergent nature of play themes and meaning and it recognises the contributions that combine to create the meaning-making frame. It further recognises the emotional quality of children's interactions and the identity formation process involved.

It is a concept that draws together the work of Piaget, Vygotsky and the post-Vygotskians, such as Rogoff, Stern, Trevarthen and Hobson. While each understands intersubjectivity somewhat differently, all of them recognise its significance. Piaget recognised that children come with individually constructed concepts to negotiate their understanding with others, and thereby enter the intersubjective process. Vygotsky understood that the intersubjective process begins in early childhood and frames all learning. Both recognised the importance of having a common system for communication, reciprocity and contingency. Vygotsky saw it as a social process between people and the outcome as internalised by the individual. Piaget saw it as an individual process where the individual tries to make sense of the other's contribution. Hobson (2002) proposes that both neglected the critical role of feelings in the interchange. Rogoff (1990) draws on Trevarthen's definition (1980) and focuses on the coordination of attention and intention. Intersubjectivity is reconceptualised not so much as a pre-planned project or an exercise in problem solving but as the emergent collective co-construction of the cultural frame for knowing. Individuals build on one another's contributions by selecting an interpretation and taking it in one possible direction. Their shared efforts always involve some adjustments to fit with new perspectives as they collaborate to accomplish something together. When conflict arises, the element of argumentation and compromise sometimes enters the scenario and thinking becomes more conscious.

Conscious reflection may not be a constant element of intersubjectivity but interpreting and reconstructing is in itself a reflective process. Children '*weave together the transformation of the known and the new into social forms. What makes the activity particularly salient is the sharing of emotions and the transformative power of jointly negotiating meaning*' (Moran and John-Steiner 2003: 72). Underpinning this research is the view that children in their peer collaborations in sociodramatic play are exercising decisions, choices and interpretations that may be

interpreted as a social commentary or critique and consequently they are enacting *'a reflective relationship with reality'*. (Moran and John-Steiner 2003: 71). Developing intersubjectivity in pretend play is a reflective process.

Intersubjectivity is a complex and challenging concept. The discourse so far proposes three key concepts that this research embraces: (1) intersubjectivity is mediated by cultural context, (2) the process of establishing intersubjectivity is interactive, emotive and reflective and (3) the outcome of intersubjectivity is transformation of meaning, identity and participation.

The particular attractiveness of the concept is that it brings us back to the moment of interconnection and captures the fullness of human interaction. It rings true to experience. We begin to think of the baby not as an individual in search of objective knowledge but one engaged in *'a social life that deepens so swiftly that it serves the eight month old as a fountain of pleasure, a reservoir of reassurance, and a well of mischief. It also swirls that same infant into a whirlpool of pulls and pushes and other emotional currents that….wrest the infant from a kind of self-centredness and liberate the very processes of thought'* (Hobson 2002: 43). The playing preschooler, must engage with a social life further complicated by a motley group of peers and the world of pretence. The challenge for this research is to engage with that complexity.

2.6   The processes of developing peer intersubjectivity

This section discusses how this research will identify the processes involved in the development of intersubjectivity as children move beyond the home environment and begin to engage with the broader community and particularly with peers. Its purpose is to concretise the concept of intersubjectivity into observable initiatives and practices among the children. It begins with looking at the stages of intersubjectivity from dyadic to collective. It then considers elements of the intersubjective process that support children's participation in meaning-making. It further identifies observable concrete initiatives at the micro level of interaction that give children access to both the interpretation and reconstruction of this meaning-making process. These concepts guide observation and analysis in this research

2.6.1 Stages of intersubjectivity

Trevarthen (1979) describes the stages of intersubjectivity from primary, in the dyad between mother and child, to secondary, when mother and child begin to focus on objects and other people in the environment. Both become aware that they are focusing on something beyond themselves. Each is aware that the other is aware of this focus and intention to focus. Babies become aware that they can direct another's attention and communicate about something beyond themselves. All of this happens in the first year of life. As the circle widens to include others, peers become equally interesting and, according to Rich Harris (1998), more influential. The challenge from now on is collective intersubjectivity towards the reinterpretation of adult culture and the co-construction of 'peer culture' (Corsaro, 1985). Tomasello and Rakovsky (2003) describe two significant transitions: (1) at around year one, when babies understand that the actions of others are framed by intentions and (2) towards four years, when children begin to understand collective intentionality and to co-create shared concepts about, for example, money or school and other cultural artefacts and institutions. The first step, they describe as 'the real thing' because it enables children to take and share perspectives and engage in shared intentionality and thereby in the meaning-making process that gives them access to wider cultural knowledge. Through engagement in recurrent joint involvement episodes, children move to the second step of sharing in the collective. The theory has links with developments in the understanding of children's theory-of-mind. Recent studies (Olson, Astington and Harris, 1988) suggest that children as young as three years and certainly by the age of five or six are aware of the similarities and differences in the thoughts and beliefs of people around them. Along with many others, Dunn's research (Dunn, 1999) shows a connection between social relationships and children's theory-of-mind capacity and supports Tomasello and Rakovsky's emphasis on the importance of engaging children in early intersubjective processes.

2.6.2 Collective intersubjectivity or shared meaning-making

In the preschool year, supported by new language capacity, children begin to engage in negotiating shared beliefs and practices about such conventions as relationships, gender roles, power, rituals and routines. Sawyer (1997) talks about the shift from 'monoglossia' to 'heteroglossia' around age three, when children learn to blend their voices together. Tomasello and Racovsky (2003) propose that in the pooling of

resources humans create functions that cannot be created individually, for example, linguistic communication, discourses about mental processes, identity, pretend play. In the process, children learn to make normative judgement: this is the way we use this symbol or tool and in the case of pretend play, this is the way we will pretend to use it. In playing with symbols, artefacts and routines, children demonstrate (1) that they have a reflective understanding of their conventional use and (2) that they can choose to express a particular perspective in any given situation (Tomasello and Racovsky, 2003; Moran and John-Steiner, 2003).   Children are moving from intersubjective understandings created in momentary interactions towards an understanding that there are cultural beliefs and practices, subjective beliefs and intersubjective perspectives which may be somewhat different.

2.6.3 Collective intersubjectivity in play

In play, children representationally describe, through actions and language, their understanding of persons, situations and perspectives. They pretend to do or say things differently and experiment with its acceptability. Children abstract meaning from its reality context and renegotiate it in a new context. It is an exercise in collective reconstruction. The complexity of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives within an institution such as a playgroup makes this exercise challenging. Children must let go elements of their own experience and negotiate common meaning. They must suspend their own perspectives and listen and respond to others. They demonstrate that they have moved into collective awareness and intentionality when they create, for example, the role of mother, not based on their immediate experience but on the more collectively agreed elements or culturally established understanding of the role. Donaldson (1992) describes this function in play as the 'construct mode' where *we are no longer restricted to a consideration of episodes in our own experience - or even those we heard about from others. We start to be actively and consciously concerned about the general nature of things'* (Donaldson 1992: 80). How do children engage in this collective meaning-making?

2.6.4   Three aspects of intersubjectivity (Matusov 2001)

What are the construction processes that allow children to move into this mature construct mode? Matusov (2001) describes three concepts or aspects of intersubjectivity that can inform our observation and interpretation. The first is that

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intersubjectivity involves having something in common, some shared definition of the situation. This may be shared attention, focussing on each other or on an object or on an approach to a problem. It may mean shared interests and motives and this sharedness may expand to include future expectations and past experiences. It involves the concept of prolepsis (Göncü, 1993/1998) whereby there is sufficient commonality to allow the listener to trust the speaker to say what is relevant, authentic, intelligible and informative, either positively or negatively, and for both participants to modify their assumptions and expectations in response to each other's contributions. According to this concept, having experiences in common increases the possibilities for intersubjectivity.

The second concept involves intersubjectivity as the coordination of contributions rather than an overlap in understanding. This concept allows for both agreement and disagreement in establishing intersubjectivity. People's diverse meanings are coordinated by the use of shared objects, routines, problems, or goals rather than shared end visions. What emerges is not consensus but a shared framework that represents the dynamic fusion of the contributions. Sometimes intersubjectivity involves the coming together of oppositional and incompatible voices, creating moments of conflict and raised consciousness. Then the participants may consciously change their ways of participating. Mostly however, it is an unconscious process driven by the desire to commune with others, to accomplish something together. Contributions can only be understood within this collective, interactive process. They are always responsive and therefore always emergent and subject to change.

This concept of intersubjectivity draws attention to the role of group dynamics in determining what emerges from the intersubjective process. 'Forming, storming and norming' (Tuckman, 1965) is part of the intersubjective process in any group. It involves negotiating practices, rituals, routines and relationships among members and constructing a framework that emerges from and guides group dynamics. Commonalities, idiosyncrasies and power relationships play a significant role.

Finally, intersubjectivity is seen as the context and origin of human agency because it involves the process of selecting initiatives that are contingent with and progress the

group activity. By definition agency is a social concept because it is embedded in and framed by the activities both past and present of the community. Agency is always responsive to the initiatives of another and in turn one's actions are defined and given meaning by the responses of another. Consequently, the form and meaning of individual agency is always a collective process.

These three concepts offer a useful observation lens for the study of children's collective meaning-making in play. They lead to the question: How do children establish common ground, coordinate their contributions and generate agency towards creating a play story in sociodramatic play?

2.7 Intersubjectivity Processes at the Micro Level of Interaction

What are the interactive skills that children use to achieve common ground, coordination and agency in their play? Aarts (2000) outlines the intersubjective skills that enable play. Children, for example, must be able to register their own initiatives, that is, make them clear to others. They must be able to suspend initiatives to coordinate with others. They must be socially aware so that they can pick up cues and attune to group goals, practices and meanings. They must be able to contribute ideas and be part of the play construction process. Most importantly, they must be able to show and read emotion and thereby create empathy and make friends.

Aarts (2000) focuses on the interaction moment. Similarly, Trevarthen and Aiken (2001:3), from their study of the interaction between parent and child remind us that it is '*the sympathy and emotional aspect*s *of intersubjectivity exhibited in the looking, gesturing and vocalising'* rather than the content of what is shared which is important. Stern (2004), likewise, in 'The Present Moment in Psychotherapy' proposes that it is the experience of being listened to, of shared awareness and understanding in the interaction moment that allows development. Intersubjective contact establishes that '*I know that you know that I know' and 'I feel that you feel that I feel'* (Stern 2004: 20). Aarts (2000) proposes that the educator must meet these basic needs in the child in the everyday interaction moments, returning to following the child's pointing finger, imitating sounds and using exaggerated emotional tones when remedial action is required. '*In a normal developmental process, the child does not learn things in one*

interaction moment, but by repeating in infinite numbers of interaction moments of the same sort with the same support from parents or other caregivers' (Aarts, 2000: 90). While her focus is on the development of individual children, it is clear that this development emerges from the transaction between child, activity and other persons, towards further participation. It is about helping children to participate effectively. Her work is predicated on her conviction that the human internal structure for intersubjectivity is stimulated in social transaction. By focusing on the successful joint involvement episodes, she identifies strategies that are appropriate and successful in specific relationships, thereby encouraging the participants to build on their success.

Rogoff (1990) warns us against an ethnocentric view of the skills required. They are, she tells us, cultural and changing. She describes the bawdy and humourous lower middle class Irish family in Boston and their 'consistent inconsistency', illustrating that there are cultural ways through which parents and children achieve mutual regulation and empathy. These ways often clash with the valued middle class ways of other communities and institutions. The use of language becomes increasingly important in the literate Western world. People in other cultures may be more adept at reading body language, for example. Kagan, Klein, Finley, Rogoff and Nolan, (1979) studied the Mayan culture and report that Mayan mothers tend to keep their babies in the darkest corner of their hut and protect them from outside stimulation until they are one year old. These children grow up healthy and well adapted to their own communities with no apparent signs of deprivation. Limited interaction with their mothers proves sufficient for healthy development and social communication. Competency in the skills of intersubjectivity, therefore, is about children's ability to manage in their social group, *'to engage in meaningful social interaction within given interactional contexts''* (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998:16).

We may, however, view it as worthwhile to teach the skills of the valued and powerful culture to other groups because they are usually the route to prosperity and privilege. Recognising the discrepancies between cultural approaches means, at least, that we recognise the complexities, value base and challenges involved.

Aarts (2000) finds that play offers opportunities for reproducing and further developing intersubjective skills that promote the development of the child. This

theory further proposes that the access children gain through the use of these skills allows them to contribute to the group meaning-making processes and outcomes and come to more central participation in play. The researcher, with the help of video, will consider the use of these skills and the impact on children's participation.

2.7.1 Challenges in developing intersubjective skills

So what are the challenges for developing intersubjectivity? Why are the skills under-developed or absent? Vygotsky (Rieber, Robinson, Bruner, Cole, Glick, Ratner and Stetsenkio, 2004:209) asks and answers a similar question: *'Why do higher mental functions fail to develop in an abnormal child?....[T]he underdevelopment of the higher mental function is a secondary structure on top of the defect. Underdevelopment springs from what we might call the isolation of the abnormal child from the collective....'* Sometimes children are born with disabilities such as autism or Asperger's syndrome that impede their ability to establish intersubjectivity. The disability triggers a different set of interactions between the child and carers that creates a different culture and identity. Sometimes parents, perhaps a mother suffering from postnatal depression, are lacking in the skills or disposition for contingent parent-child relationships and children's skills are subsequently underdeveloped. Sometimes children from one culture enter a group or institution where the norms of intersubjectivity that are practiced and valued are different. These children have to play catch-up and familiarise themselves with new knowledge and practices as well as negotiate relationships, connection and belonging within the new group. They must 'stretch' to ways of knowing that belong in the new context. These are findings that inform data collection and analysis in this research.

2.8   Intersubjectivity Processes at the Macro Level of Meaning-making

This section considers the processes and outcomes of meaning-making that emerge from participation in intersubjective interaction. It draws on the work of Corsaro (1979, 1985) to describe how children appropriate the cultural guiding frame through a process of interpretation and collective reconstruction. It considers the implications of their reconstructions for individual and group identity, for the individual's sense of belonging and for how children think about themselves and their place in the world.

2.8.1 Intersubjectivity and Collective Reconstruction

As children coordinate their contributions in sociodramatic play, they construct shared practices and meaning that guide their ongoing intersubjectivity. This shared framework provides reference criteria that guide their interpretations and responses to one another's contributions and in this way both constrain and afford shared meaning. Corsaro (1992) emphasises the collective nature of these cultural constructions. His research describes the processes of 'collective reconstruction' and 'interpretive reproduction' (Corsaro, 1992, 1993, 2000). The term 'collective reconstruction' recognises that the reconstruction process and outcome is a collaboration that emerges from the dynamic between the participants, mediated by culture. The term 'interpretive' captures innovative and creative aspects of children's participation. Reproduction captures the reconstructive role of children in transforming existing practices by adapting, extending and embellishing them to meet the needs of the group and activity. While terms such as assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1955) centralise the individual learning process, terms such as interpretation and reconstruction locate the individual constantly in a social relationship.

In the process of interpretation and reconstruction, adult and child cultures are reciprocally related and children participate simultaneously in both by *'creatively appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns'* (Corsaro 2000: 92). They are reconstructing in an ongoing process to meet the needs of the peer culture and are *'actively contributing to cultural production and change'* (Ibid: 92). His 'orb web' model (Corsaro, 1997) depicts a spiral in which children produce and participate in a series of peer cultures. The term interpretive is also reminiscent of Bruner's (1999) 'perspectival' and 'constructivist' tenets. He says that *'[I]nterpretations of meaning reflect not only the idiosyncratic histories of individuals, but also the culture's canonical ways of constructing reality'* (1999: 157). While meaning is subject to factional interests, it only exists when it is shared.

Corsaro (1985: 285) proposes that children's participation in peer play provides a mediational phase in the internalisation of adult culture: *'The information and psychological functions first produced in adult-child activities are now reproduced*

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within peer culture before eventually becoming part of the psychological makeup of the child'. He brings us back into the highly disputed territory of internalisation. As Rogoff's 'participatory appropriation' concept suggests, children through their participation are developing their ways of participation. It is a process of ongoing transformation rather than a fixed, internalised model. It allows us to think of children's peer play as both a context for transforming the players and the cultural framework that guides both the adult and peer world. This is more congruent with the 'participation' model of learning.

The shared history of intersubjectivity becomes the glue that binds the group (Stern 2004), resulting in persistence of meaning, bonding and collective rituals and routines among the participants (Corsaro, 1985, Tomasello and Rakoczy, 2003). It is the cultural frame, constantly under reconstruction, that guides ongoing participation. Corsaro (1985; 1985; 1992; 2001) emphasises the role of rituals and routines, which reify many types of cultural knowledge, in creating the frame. Following Giddens (1984), Corsaro (1992) says that they *'provide actors with the security and shared understanding of belonging to a cultural group'*. They are both constraining and affording (Greeno 1998), designed to facilitate orderly interaction and mutual understanding (Youniss, 1999). Collective routines, in this way, contribute to social, emotional and cognitive structuring and to social organisation within the group.

The frame guides participation but it does not require full consensus or compliance. It allows for diversity because it emerges from the coordination of participants' contribution in joint activity rather than sameness. This is not to say that all voices are treated equally. How individual contributions register in the collective depends on the power of the voice, which in turn depends on the values, discourses and dynamics within the collective as well as individual skill. Both consensus oriented and non-consensus oriented initiatives play a role in the collective construction of the guiding frame (Matusov, 1995). Both demand that participants stretch their contributions and common understanding to fit with other perspectives in order to accomplish something together. In this way meaning is constantly challenged and reconstructed.

In line with Vygoskian theory, the concept of intersubjectivty locates learning and development on the intermental plane. In line with Rogoff and Lave and Wenger, it recognises that individual development is about more complex and more central participation in the practices of a particular community. Corsaro's orb web model, referred to above, tries to capture the dynamic, growing, constantly moving nature of human development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) produced the model of concentric circles to show the embedded nature of development and the reciprocal relationship between the contextual micro, mesa and macro systems and the individual. The model has been criticised as being interactive with a focus on the consequences for the individual rather than being transactive and transactively transformative. '*Context*', Rogoff (1982: 149) tells us '*is not so much a set of stimuli that impinge upon a person as it is a web of relations interwoven to form the fabric of meaning. People create and are part of the context (and vice versa), rather than being separate entities influenced by context*'. It only exists as people see it and therefore is transformed by perception. The difficulty in designing a model to capture the dynamic nature of human development reflects its complexity. The human tool for simplifying such complexity, for making sense of experience is narrative.

2.8.2 Intersubjectivity, Narrative and Identity

Intersubjectivity is supported by narrative because narrative provides a frame for focussing attention and intention. It is a tool for sharing our understanding of life events and our place within them. In our human stories, we locate the characters in social activity and recognise their emotional, cognitive and physical presence. The beginning of our stories is already made by others because each life story transacts with the history, values and practices of a community, a common cultural frame that is appropriated in intersubjective relationships and activities.

'*Who we are, how we see and are seen by others and how others see us – these are shaped and bounded by narratives through which we render ourselves and our worlds intelligible*' (Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson and Stainton Rogers, 1995:35/36). It is by telling stories and by being within stories that people make sense of their world and their place within it. Narrative is therefore a fundamental structure of human meaning-making (Bruner 1986, 1996), the shared human frame for ordering reality and sharing knowledge. It is both a mode of representation and a mode of action. We

use stories to shape and communicate the way we experience the events in our lives. At the same time the narrative genres available to us shape the way we experience our lives and thereby who we are and how we fit in with others. Narratives become the basis of our relationships, the basis of our emotional and relational dynamic that tells others how we want to be understood. They are not individual creations, although they have individual elements. Rather they incorporate a multiplicity of functions, perceptions and voices and this dynamic means that they are constantly revised, changed and reconstructed. They are as Sawyer (2002: 340) suggests *'collaboratively emergent'*.

Children's narratives represent their interpretations of their experiences but they also represent, in pretence mode, how they would like things to be. For children this is a way to communicate their views of the world and at the same time to comprehensively, that is emotionally, cognitively and physically, make sense of things. Children's sociodramatic play is such a narrative. It offers insight into children's past experiences but also into how they wish to be understood.

Identities, Carr and Claxton (2004) tell us, are attached to stories. In telling the stories of our lives, we contribute to the construction of our identity and transformation in ways that are culturally available to us. '*A self making narrative is something of a balancing act. It must on the one hand create a conviction of autonomy, that one has a will of one's own, a certain freedom of choice, a degree of possibility. But it must also relate the self to the world of others - to friends and family, to institutions, to the past, to reference groups…*' (Bruner, 2002:78). We craft our understanding of who we are (which can then become the most personal thoughts and feelings) from out of the culturally available ways of describing experience that are available in our time and place. Different narrative genres select different ways of creating meaning and generate at the same time both insight and blindness. We see what we look for. Richner and Nicolopoulou (2001), for example, show that boys and girls create very different narratives. Girls' stories begin with relationships and then seek something for their characters to do. Boys begin with activity and must find a way for their characters to connect. The child co-constructs his or her personhood by participating in narrative and by identifying with narrative genres. Notions of masculinity and femininity, for example, are maintained in narrative, with some children, with

difficulty, seeking ways outside of it (Jones, 2002). Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) propose that knowledge is created most effectively through participation in narrative because narrative appeals to the whole person and allows us to integrate the new knowledge into our existing conceptual framework. It is a way of making experience both meaningful and memorable.

Stern (2004) warns of the difficulties that arise when the narrative does not match the lived experience and Shotter (1993) tells us that '*To live within a narrative order not one's own is to live in a world not one's own'*. Externalising their stories as children do in play offers an opportunity to review and assess them and even for learners to choose alternative narratives and reposition themselves (Bamberg, 2003).

Paley (1986b) describes play and story acting as two forms of story telling, and a process through which children learn about their communities. This research is interested in analysing children's co-construction of stories in play, how they construct meaning and position themselves and others through stories and how they are transformed by the constructions. The analysis of play episodes will demonstrate (i) the process of interpretation and reconstruction (ii) the reflective, critical nature of reconstruction and (iii) its transformative effect. In particular, play stories offer a way of identifying the significant events and meanings that children interpret and reconstruct from the adult world.

2.8.3 Autonomy and Intersubjectivity

The focus so far has been on the social and collective nature of knowledge and identity. We have established that the intermental and the intramental process are reciprocal and synchronised. If who we are, what we know and how we live are social constructions, then how do we develop a sense of self?

Intersubjectivity requires connection between two separate subjects. *'Two minds create intersubjectivity. But equally, intersubjectivity shapes two minds'* (Stern 2004: 78). In the process of developing intersubjectivity with significant others, the child appropriates the culture's practices and thinking tools but s/he also learns to see the other as separate and comes to recognise him/herself as different. Stern (2004: 95) describes the intersubjective system that '*regulates the spectrum between two poles -*

the pole of cosmic loneliness and the pole of fusion and transparency and disappearance of self'.

Bruner (1999: 172) tells us: *'[W]hat characterises human selfhood is the construction of a conceptual system that organises, as it were, a 'record' of agentive encounters with the world'.* This conceptual system, collectively constructed, moves beyond just knowing what behaviour is appropriate to becoming a self–regulating system and a system whereby we describe ourselves. Through a process of connecting and categorising, a distinctive pattern of responses emerges which is experienced by the infant as a sense of 'self' (Stern 1985). This identity is created in interaction and so is a social construction. *'Rather than speaking out of an inner plan, we speak into a context not of our own making'* (Shotter 1993: 4). Bourdieu (1977) called this context the 'habitus', to capture how the incumbents through their routine involvements, particularly in early childhood, acquire a set of dispositions towards life and learning, for seeing and acting in the world in a certain way. *'The habitus-embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product'* (Bourdieu, 1990:56). The human need for belonging and self-consistency requires that we continuously reproduce these ways of acting and seek confirmation of our preconceptions.

Jones (2002) dismisses the notion of a subjectivity that develops from the individual's inner core and like Stern (2004) tells us that our intentions, feelings and thoughts are born and co-created in dialogue with others. The person-person relationship in turn creates the person-world relationship (Shotter, 1993). We co-construct the psychology that in turn frames our way of thinking and feeling and in this way we re-make and are re-made by our own social worlds. The thoughts and characteristics that we impute to self are facilitated and constrained by collective perception. Even as we sit in isolated, silent contemplation or draw on the mental store of information, Fogel (1993: 4) tells us that *'[T]he life of the mind is a dialogue…between imagined points of view'.* The coordinating framework for this dialogue is culture or the set of tools, media, communication conventions and beliefs that mediate all of our relational experiences. The mind is embodied in, distributed over, co-created by the physical environment that surrounds it and the other minds with which it interacts. It may

emerge from intrinsic, self-organising processes but *'[W]ithout this constant interaction there would be no recognizable mind'* (Stern 2004: 95)

Stern, in his revised introduction (Stern 2001/1977) to 'The First Relationship: Infant and Mother' (1977) explains the progression in his thinking about internalised conceptual development in the intervening years. He begins with the Piagetian term 'mental schemas' to describe the child's learning. In his next book (1985) he coins the term *'representation of interactions that have been generalised'* (RIGs), implying that the transfer of learning is about recalling previous conversations and generalising them to other contexts. Later, to recapture the 'in communion' rather than the interactive element of human transactions, he describes learning as 'schemas of being with' and finally (2001) he moves to the term *'proto-narrative-envelopes'*– stories that are repeated in a packaged way, then extended, embellished and amended in a new context. Here memory is described as recalled conversation. The six month old child who reacts joyfully at the sound of a rattle is recalling an interaction when the joy was shared. '*The infant is being with a self-regulating other in the form of an activated memory of prototypic lived events* (Stern 1985: 114). Shared procedures, for example, for consolation, are recalled and put to use by the toddler as tools for self regulation of their emotions (Singer, 1998). Fogel (1993: 21) tells us that '*[S]killed action, performing knowledgeably in familiar situations, is also a form of cognitive remembering'*. He calls it 'participatory memory' and tells us that '*Every action embodies a relational dialogue between one's past and the present'* (Fogel 1993: 134). The process of introspection is the calling up of memory; memory is narrative of the past and possible futures are imagined based on experience of previous social activity. The meaning we give experience is learned through social activity.

Bruner (2002) tells us that humans are unable to live without both a sense of autonomy and a sense of connection. Corsaro (2003) following Goffman (1974) refers to the human tendency to both adapt to and resist institutional rule. Mintz (1995), Corsaro (1985), Chafel (2003) found that young children tend to seek similarities while older children differentiate more, although one wonders about the cultural motivation underpinning these developments. All these theorists recognise the human need to belong and still to perceive the self as different and consistent.

2.8.4 Contribution, Belonging and Positioning

Psychological belongingness, according to Stern (2004) is unique to humans. It moves beyond physical, sexual, attachment or dependency ties. In order to develop that sense of belonging it is not enough to have certain social competencies or play a routine part in community. One must enter the intersubjective relationship as a powerful co-constructor. One must have a voice, the sense of being heard and of contributing to the social discourses that frame our lives, to the ways '*we integrate language and non-language 'stuff' such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meaning, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others*' (Gee, 1996:13). We live within the constraints and affordances of the circumstances, practices and discourses of our society (Gibson 1979; Greeno 1998; Sawyer 1997; Shotter 1993) and our sense of belonging is dependant both on our relationship to these and our participation in their creation. It is a complex web interwoven with issues of power and politics. As Shotter (1993: 192) says '*[W]e cannot just position ourselves as we please; we face differential invitations and barriers*'.

What are the practices and discourses that emerge in children's play and what is their impact on positioning children in terms of opportunities to participate? How do children collaborate in the reconstruction of practices and discourses and towards what purposes? How are their identities transformed in the process? These are questions that are of interest in this research because they are key to understanding children's meaning-making and learning within the sociocultural perspective.

In the Western world. the concept of discriminatory constraints and affordances is challenging (Rogoff 1990; Stainton Rogers, Stenner *et al*. 1995; Singer 1998; Wertsch and Tulviste 1998; Stern 2004). We promote the idea that individuals are wholly responsible for what they have become, that their lives and those of others are freely chosen. The interpretive approach of this research takes a different perspective and seeks to demonstrate how children use the cultural frame to co-regulate each other's

participation. This requires that we engage with the notion that human interaction is not driven by some intrinsic, individual need but rather by the need to structure our lives together. A central aspect of human learning is that we are social beings.

2.9 Conclusion

In the reconstruction of the discourse underpinning this research there is a sense of what Keliher (1986:42) calls, moving 'forward to fundamentals'. We return to the fundamental way that babies learn and to the fundamentals of human communication and meaning-making. The discourse proposes that the motivation, medium and outcome of all learning is intersubjectivity. Through a process of guided participation, human parents and the wider community activate in their young humans drives and capacities that allow them to engage physically, cognitively and particularly emotionally with the human environment (Stern 1977; 1985; 1990; Trevarthen 1979; 1980; 2001). Meaning always emerges from intersubjectivity and intersubjectivity depends on participation in human activity that engages the artefacts, values and practices of the culture (in which meaning is reified) in the meaning-making network.

2.9.1 Implications for Research

Learning is a process of interpretation and appropriation through and towards participation (Wertsch, 1985; Corsaro, 1997). It involves the biological, proactive, constructive child (Piaget), participating in social activity that is mediated by culture (Vygotsky) and appropriated in intersubjective transactions from the beginning of life. The outcome of this learning is transformation of participation or changing identity embedded in the values, practices and goals of the community of practice. Acting with peers and adults, children are in the process of reinterpreting and reproducing the adult world to both create their own peer culture and recreate an adult culture and consequently both participants and culture are in a constant state of change. This situated perspective views both person and environment in terms of their transaction with activity rather than as separate entities. Children learn, not so much how to be independent and autonomous but rather how to participate effectively.

In Western education, there has been a somewhat singular emphasis on the self-cognising individual abstracting knowledge from individual experience. The

challenge now is to engage with the social nature of knowledge construction while recognising the intrinsic and individual processes involved. Bruner (1999: 162) proposes that the most important gift that a cultural psychology can offer education is a reformulation of the 'impoverished concept' of intersubjectivity. In the work of Stern, Trevarthen, Hobson, Rogoff, and others we can see how intrinsic structures engage with the human environment in a culturally specific transformative process from the very beginning of life. '*We participate*', says Seely Brown (Prusak, 2001:1), in contrast to Descartes, '*therefore we are*'.

The discourse leads to a view of children as proactive and competent participants in their own development (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998/2001, Mayall, 2002, 2003). They seek to connect, contribute and belong in the community. *'It is not just that the child must make his knowledge his own but he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture'* (Bruner 1986: 127). This research will focus on the interactional strategies and discourses that children develop, and the ways of belonging and identities that they collectively construct in the process. This is a timely focus in terms of early childhood education in Ireland because, as mentioned in Chapter One, the new curriculum proposed in 'Towards a Framework for Early Learning' (NCCA 2004) centralises four curriculum strands: well-being and belonging, identity, communication and exploration and thinking. This research will contribute to our understanding of these strands.

The work of previous researchers suggests a number of frameworks for investigating the collective learning processes. How do children assimilate and accommodate to one another in developing the play? How do children scaffold or bridge and structure or guide one another's participation? How do they establish common ground, coordinate their contributions and develop agency towards participation and meaning-making? What are the outcomes of their participation for learning, for personal and group identity and for their sense of well-being, belonging and contribution?

2.9.2 Implications for Pedagogy

This is a theory of learning that is particularly appropriate and perhaps more easily negotiated for early childhood, when children are deeply and more obviously involved in constructing their lives. It recognises that engaging with other players, social

structures and artefacts creates the zone of proximal development through which children learn who they are, what things mean and how to think and communicate. This is learning that is appropriated (i) in the interaction moments between adults and children and between children themselves and (ii) in transaction with the artefacts and practices of the context where meanings and values are reified. The pedagogue who develops both these elements of practice is supporting children's well-being and identity, belonging, communication and exploration and thereby implementing the strands of 'Towards a Framework for Early Learning' (NCCA 2004)

A first step in developing this pedagogy is coming to an awareness that contextual relational dynamics play an important role, if not a primary role, in the learning of the individual. Then the pedagogue understands the significance of creating contexts in which children can implement and develop their participation and co-operation towards joint negotiation of knowing. To support this participation and cooperation among children, we need to understand the meaning-making processes in which they're involved so that we can know as Burton (1999:28) says the '*agency and authorship*' of their learning. This research proposes to explicate the processes and meaning of participation structures in play and thereby inform pedagogy.

2.9.3 Three themes that guide the research

The discourse reconstructed above will directly inform this research, from methodology through data collection and analysis. It offers three significant contributory factors to children's participation in play. Firstly, it recognises that play is mediated by the immediate and broader cultural context of their play. Secondly, it recentralises learning on the intermental plane and the consequent role of intersubjective processes in children's participation in play at the micro level of interpersonal interaction and at the macro level of transaction with cultural artefacts, discourses and practices. Thirdly, it establishes the outcome of their participation as the transformation of both the culture and the individual players. These three elements become the lens for the study and for the analysis of children's participation in sociodramatic play. They link with Rogoff's (1995) three planes of analysis which will be used to frame the analysis of the data in this research and which is discussed in Chapter 4, dealing with methodology

Chapter 3   Reconstructing a Discourse of Play

3.0 Introduction

Chapter two addresses the discourse of learning as participation that informs this research. In particular, it reconstructs a sociocultural perspective that now informs the discourse of sociodramatic play reconstructed in this chapter. This perspective is a core contribution of the research, bringing to the debate, in Irish terms at least, an underdeveloped perspective. Its application to sociodramatic play and the findings that emerge from the process are further contributions.

Chapter three focuses on sociodramatic play. Drawing together research on play from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, sociology and education, the chapter critiques many contemporary understandings and argues for the need to refocus the observation lens, and centralise the processes and outcomes of children's participation in the study of play. The chapter begins with a review of the theories of play beginning with the classical theories and progressing to the more recent attempts at definition within the constructivist paradigm. The work of Hutt (1979) is discussed to demonstrate the impact of a theoretical perspective on observation and analysis. The chapter then draws together research and theory to reconstruct a sociocultural discourse of play, following the three themes foregrounded in Chapter 2. Within this discourse, play is conceptualised as a context and medium for meaning-making that is (i) mediated by context, (ii) reconstructed through intersubjective processes and (iii) resulting in the transformation of culture and individuals towards ongoing participation. The perspective proposes that as children contribute their voices to the play story, they engage in the construction of the practices and discourses that in turn frame their participation and transformation.

The constructivist and socioculturalist perspectives of Piaget and Vygotsky and their consequent play theories have already been introduced. This chapter focuses on the subsequent play research emerging from their contributions to draw together the discourse of play that informs the research. Firstly, however, the chapter sets the

scene for these developments by briefly reviewing the study of play over the past three centuries.

3.1 Reviewing play theories

Children spend much time and energy in play, in playful exploration, playful games and in make-believe play. In colloquial or folk terms, play has been dismissed as 'child's play' or described as 'just playing' and given some support as an occupation for children while adults get on with their more important work lives. In the Western world, the more recent concept of play as important to child development, emerging largely from the work of Piaget and Freud, drove the research of the 1960s and 1970s and resulted in a range of reports that showed that play contributes to children's emotional and intellectual growth. Vygotsky's theory (1933) added to the focus on the educational value of play, proposing it as a medium through which the most important cognitive, emotional and social changes occur. This broad affirmation in turn has led to an emphasis on play in the early childhood curriculum and to the growth of parental support for play and an explosion in areas such as the 'educational' toy industry.

Sutton Smith (1997) however, encourages us to consider that the research finds favour not because of its 'truth' value but because it meets other pressing social and economic needs, among them a need to occupy children and to validate how they spend their time as worthwhile and profitable for their future development. He postulates that every theory of play is a rhetoric located in a time and place and driven by its particular social and economic agenda. The rhetoric constructed here is no exception. Its rationale may be associated with a need within the workforce for a creative and dynamic team approach to generating economic success and consequently a need to redress the strong individual focus in our educational system.

The rhetorics of the classical theories of play continue to influence modern day theory and practice. We are reminded that we stand on the shoulders of giants who have contributed to the meaning-making tools that continue to mediate our interpretations and perspectives. In the light of changing times we can critique their contributions but the critiques are not about banishment or setting up oppositional categories of

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right and wrong. Rather they are about bringing to bear other perspectives and possibilities that cause the narrative *'to stutter'* (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005:28) and support our responsibility to be *'reflective, sceptical and critical'* (Ibid: 32). The following reviews many of these contributions with a view to:

- collecting and connecting the ideas that underpin our understanding of play

- describing the deconstructions or arguments that disrupt the thinking

- rebuilding the discourse that underpins the perspective guiding this research.

It begins with the classical theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which focuss on the physical and instinctive aspects of children's play. The contemporary theories that follow are more concerned with the ways that play affects children's psychological and cognitive development.

3.1.1 Classical Theories of Play

Schiller (1965), a German philosopher, as far back as the eighteenth century proposed the *'surplus energy'* theory of play. He contended that work satisfied the primary energy utilisation needs of animals and humans and play utilised surplus energy. This, he claimed, explains both the physical nature of play and why young animals and children play more than adults. At the same time he considered play to be symbolic, offering the young ways of representing the world. Immediately there are some parallels between his forms of play and Piaget's stages of play, moving from sensori-motor or physical to symbolic. While the 'surplus energy' theory has largely been negated, its influence lives on. We now understand that the quantity and use of energy is related to cultural ways of life. Nevertheless, play is still considered as a means of 'letting off steam' for children, a concept underpinning the routine of 'out to play' in the school day.

The industrial revolution of the Western world in the nineteenth century was accompanied by the development of psychology as a discipline. Spencer (1873), coming from the new discipline but staying with the energy concept, believed that higher animals, humans, had more energy to spend on non-life supporting occupations and he labelled these occupations as play. He believed that play and art exist to satisfy the natural instinct for *'conquest and dominance'* (Rubin, Fein and Vandenburg, 1983) and both are driven by surplus energy in the child. Neither served

any ulterior motive but rather the process in both was an end in itself (Sutton Smith 1997). Bruce (1991) links Spencer's view to the development of technology suggesting that children, like the machines in the factories, needed to let off steam.

In contrast with the surplus energy theory, Patrick (1916) at the beginning of the 20th century proposed that play was about *recreation and relaxation* as a way of restoring energy. As work, in the industrialised world, changed towards more concentrated attention and hand-eye coordinated activity, and mental strain, one needed the relief of play. Again we can see the influence of this theory on the distinction between work and play and on the practice of 'out to play' time in school. The theory, of course, fails to explain why those who engage in hard physical work continue to play and in particular why non-working children need to recuperate through play. Patrick believed that children were following a natural instinct and given the image of the child as lacking in mental skills at the time, their play was considered neither to have cognitive content nor function (Rubin 1983). Nevertheless the concept of play as recreation and relaxation survives and finds some verification in the study of heart rate and stress levels among players (Hutt, 1979, Pelligrini and Smith, 1998).

Groos (1901), a philosopher, proposed the theory of biological *adaptivity*. Following Darwin (1859), he believed that the continuity of play in the species indicates that it has a survival purpose. More complex organisms require a longer period of immaturity and a longer play period. Play, according to Groos, allowed the practice of adult skills and prepared the young of the species for adulthood. It was a forward looking theory that recognised the playing out of adult roles and activities in sociodramatic activities as well as physical play and considered play's intellectual and cognitive benefits for children. Like Schiller, Groos believed that play was about process rather than product. Again, feeding into Piagetian theory, Groos (1901) noted that play activity changed with development. He described firstly experimental play that included sensorimotor play and served to develop self-control; then socio-economic play such as playfighting and chasing; and finally dramatic imitative play that served to develop interpersonal relationships. Vygotsky (1933/67) refers to Groos' understanding that in play children learn to abide by the rules. His theory of play as preparation for the future, however, begs the question as to how the child knows what the future will require. Sutton Smith (1997) responds by suggesting that

play potentiates responses rather than prepares them by keeping us alert and open to change. It is a new slant on an old argument, with support from Edelman (1992) and Gould (1996), as discussed later.

Recapitulation theory also addressed the question about how the child knows what skills will be required later in life. Again, following Darwin (1859), the theory proposes that the life course of the child reflects the evolutionary course from animal to human. Hall (1906) proposed that the child's individual development (ontogeny) follows the same pattern as that of the species (phylogeny). The child goes through phases of climbing and swinging like an animal, then hunting, hiding and seeking like primitive man, followed by the agricultural/domestic stage reflected in digging and doll care, and finally the tribal stage reflected in team games. Play, according to the theory, also allows the expression and management of human instinct. Playfighting, for example, allows the expression of aggression and at the same time weakens the instinct. Again, we can recognise lines of thought that still endure. While the theory has been extensively negated, particularly given its cultural and historical nature, it contributed to the notion that *'how children develop through the stages of play should be central to our knowledge of play'* (Sutton Smith 1997: 35).

Romantic ideology, represented by Rousseau in the nineteenth century has bequeathed significant legacies to the discourses of early childhood. Rousseau proposed that man is inherently good, that childhood is a time of innocence and purity and that children's thinking is distinctively different to adults (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoffe and Eyer, 2003). The child can be nurtured to improve and blossom through giving space to his/her natural behaviours and providing pleasurable experiences of the natural world. Instead of transferring information through rote learning and drilling, the notion that the child could learn through using his/her senses to explore and understand came into being. It also coincided with the growing ideas of democracy and citizenship and individual freedom of choice. First hand experience, investigative play and 'free' play became part of the early childhood vocabulary. Rousseau's philosophy encouraged an appreciation of play as a natural way of learning for the child, a concept that now underpins early childhood practice. Later proponents expanded the idea.

3.1.2 Contemporary Theories of Play

Froebel (1887) in 'The Education of Man' was one of the first educationalists to identify play as an holistic means of learning. He used the analogy of the garden and described the child's development in pre and early schooling as following the 'godly' laws of development. In his theory, children move from primary physical activity to developing cognitive concepts through observation and activity. The child is constantly investigating through play, to find something new in the old and something unfamiliar in the familiar. Froebel proposed play as an effective medium for the development of thought and language and he designed his 'gifts' or materials to particularly promote this learning. The more objects a child creates with these materials, the greater the number of connections made and hence the development of ever more complex language and ideas. Like Montessori and Steiner, he proposed that there were sensitive periods that require sensitive handling for the development of particular facilities. Unlike Montessori, Steiner encouraged free play particularly with natural materials as a way to encourage children to think imaginatively. Similarly McMillan (1919) gave increasing importance to first hand experience and imaginative play as her thinking progressed, particularly because of the value she placed on relationships and emotions. Isaacs (1929) shared this value, believing play offered children the opportunity to express their feelings and thereby free them up for further learning. She emphasised the importance of first hand experience, freedom of movement, involvement of parents and particularly the central importance of child observation, all concepts that continue to impact on the early childhood curriculum.

Freud's (1959) treatment of play is significant, not because of its volume or depth but because of its contribution to later research and theory development. His theories reflect a conceptual shift towards thinking about the psychological and cathartic benefits of play. For Freud, play was primarily about wish fulfilment, allowing a safe context for recreating past experiences and for the expression of feelings that were unacceptable or difficult in reality. He referred to pretend play as repetition compulsion, through which the child re-enacts experiences to gain mastery and control over them. Like Piaget, he believed that play disappears with the development of rational thought or concrete operations.

The concept of mastery was further developed by Erikson (1963). Freud's theory emphasised only internal drives and in response, Erikson drew attention to the way culture and society affect how children develop. He believed that one of the tasks of childhood was to reconcile the individual psychosexual stages of development and the norms of the cultural world. Through their play stories, he maintained, children relived the past, readdressed the disequilibrium that they experienced and emerged with better understanding. They represented and renewed the present and anticipated the future. This therapeutic view of play led to its use as a therapeutic medium (see Isaacs, 1933, Klein, 1975). In the same vein, Gould (1972: 274) tells us from her analysis of data on fantasy play that '*the child's internal well-springs and external world experiences intermingle or oscillate in various ways in fantasy expressions, to the enrichment of both sources of knowledge. The two worlds of reality and fantasy need never be as far apart as is often implied'*. Similarly, Fein (1985) introduced the idea that play is motivated more by feelings than by reflections on reality, represented in the exaggerated and fantastic worlds that children create in their play. She proposed that children are driven by such primary emotions as anger, joy and fear and that the metarepresentation element or the secondary control frame of play allows children security and protection for their expression. It is permissible to express strong emotion when one is only pretending.

Piaget's theories shifted the focus to children's cognition and established play as a significant learning mechanism in early childhood. He shared ground with the psychoanalysts (above) with his view that symbolic play is about assimilation, about tweaking reality to assimilate emotionally significant previous learning. Reinitiating the experience in play has the added benefit of positioning the child as the instigator and master of the reorganised experience. Vygotsky followed a similar line of thinking. He believed that play is driven by emotions and is about wish fulfilment, that '*it emerges from the tension between desires that can neither be forgotten by the child nor be fulfilled by the society'* (Rubin et al., 1983:708). The child pretends to be what s/he cannot be in real life. Both Piaget and Vygotsky propose that the use of symbolism in pretend play supports the development of abstract thought, a higher mental function. '*Within this discourse, play becomes part of the discursive field that promotes what we understand as normal – that is, the rational being'* (Jones, 2005).

Piaget also established the importance of observation for establishing the norm and for monitoring and categorising the child's progress or digression against these norms. This thinking continues to make a significant contribution to pedagogy in early childhood education although we are now often reminded that 'normal' is based on a very small sample of the world's population and that we must have regard to the values and interests inherent in these norms (Sutton-Smith 1997; James 1998).

Power (2000) maintains that within the sociocultural paradigm, play has shifted from a topic of interest in itself to a context in which to study children's thinking, hence the concentration on 'theory of mind', 'emotional regulation' and 'attachment' as subjects of research in recent times. In the present study, the ethnographic and interpretive approach brings us into the world of children's play and to a detailed study of both what children are doing in play and the play stories that they create. The focus is on the process of participation and the real life meaning-making that emerges. Play is therefore of interest as both a context and medium of real life participation. In this way, play is of interest in itself and as a context for development.

3.1.3 Conclusion

The above section outlines some of the classical and more contemporary theories of play. The classical theories tend to emphasise the evolutionary and adaptive importance of play while the contemporary theories dwell on the psychological and cognitive contributions of play to children's development. The review demonstrates how each theory (i) contributes to our understanding of play, (ii) responds to another with new emphasis and shift in perspective and (iii) how ideas resurface in new theories. In particular, we are alerted to the political agenda underpinning discourses of play, for example the drive to use play as a way of establishing normal behaviour. Developmental norms and stages dominate the definitions of play that follow.

3.2   Definitions of play

This section considers the understanding of play in the latter half of the 20th century when theorists seem to have been preoccupied with defining play. The range of definition approaches, the diversity in the kinds of play, disciplinary interests and research methodologies all contribute to our understanding but also to the ambiguity,

contradictions and multiple languages that make shared understanding challenging. Complexity is a feature of play. Fagen (1981) suggests that it is no different to the study of any human behaviour in its complexity. In the first place, the experience and the perception of play involve different and very subjective interpretive tools and secondly, like all human behaviour, play is always in a state of flux. Once we accept this, we no longer pursue fact and truth or a final definition, but rather a range of perspectives. The following reconstructs and deconstructs the perspectives underpinning the definitions of play to demonstrate the complexity and uncertainty involved in defining play and to open the way to other perspectives.

3.2.1 Three categories of definitions

A primary task traditionally, in any research project has been to define the subject area. Consequently, almost all the major developmental theorists who have devoted attention to play, have engaged with its definition (Piaget, 1946/1962, Erikson, 1963, Fein, 1984, Garvey, 1990) but there is little agreement even on basic issues. *'In the course of early childhood development, play almost seems to be a cauldron in which at different times and in different contexts, various proportions of cultural, social, cognitive, linguistic, creative, aesthetic and emotional ingredients blend'* (Fromberg, 1992:70). Rubin, Fein *et al* (1983) describe three dominant types of approaches: (i) the psychological disposition approach which seeks to distinguish play from other behaviours (ii) the observable categories of behaviour in play and (iii) the contexts that evoke play. Fromberg (1992: 43), almost a decade later, divides theories of play into two broad perspectives, '*the more or less psychological and the more or less cultural*', a recognition of the growing acceptance of more sociocultural perspectives. The following discussion is structured around Rubin's categories and draws on sociocultural theory and research to re-open the discussion.

3.2.2 The Psychological Perspective

This section focuses on the psychological dispositions that distinguish play from other behaviours and finds among researchers a general commitment to positively evaluating play. There appears to be, for example, general agreement that play is intrinsically motivated, an activity initiated voluntarily by the child (Bruner, 1976, Garvey, 1977). Bruce (2001:30) tells us that *'[C]hildren choose to play. They cannot be made to play.'* She (1991) modified and expanded the dispositional, behavioural

and contextual characteristics of play into twelve features and included such additions as deep involvement, practice of recent learning, and the coordination of ideas, feelings and relationships. She proposes that, in combination, each element contributes to the attitude of play. These are defining characteristics that emerge when we study play from the Piagetian 'individualist' perspective but are challenged by other cultural, more collective perspectives. Research on play as collective meaning-making, a sociocultural perspective, finds that play themes are regulated by cultural interests and discourses and often driven or dominated by some members of a group (Davies, 1989, Thorne, 1993, Danby and Baker, 1998a). While it may be true that the individual cannot be forced to play, that is, to enter the world of pretence, there is a recognition that children often play because it is expected of them or because they feel pressurised by circumstances, or the threat of exclusion. While recognising that children bring something of themselves to play, the sociocultural or dialectical approach sees the play story as primarily a negotiation between players, mediated by artefacts, places and things, an interpersonal construction embedded in issues of meaning-making, access, control and power. It is difficult to accept that the individual child controls his/her own play but perhaps Kalliala's (2006: 29)) suggestion that '*children's own play culture is the area of childhood where they act most on their own and without compulsion*' is a starting point.

Garvey (1977) further identified the importance of enjoyment and pleasure, the emphasis on process rather than product, the active involvement of the child and finally, the feature which she describes as most intriguing '*play has certain systematic relations to what is not play*' (Ibid, 1977: 10). What distinguishes play from non-play, she maintains, is attitude. For example, jumping or chasing may or may not be play depending on the intent or attitude. Also, play is related to creativity and problem solving but these are not necessarily playful activities. Again all of these criteria can be contested. Vygotsky (1933) himself contested the pleasure principle. Play is not always pleasurable and may be far more about the struggle for power and dominance and involve rejection and unkindness as well as pleasurable engagement. Children sometimes play to make others jealous, to flaunt ownership of some equipment, to create friendship bonds. Perhaps they are *pretending* to play but can that pretence in turn be defined as play? It is important that we see these dichotomies as an opportunity to re-evaluate our thinking and re-investigate the play process.

Rubin, Fein *et al* (1983) also recognise play as an unreal situation and focus on the elements of child control and freedom from externally imposed rules. Vygotksy (1933: 5) calls this *'an illusory freedom'*. How do children come together in play if the control and rules are internal and individual to each child? Nicolopoulou (1993) following Vygotsky (1933) explains that play is always rule bound, bound by the rules of play itself and by the rules of social rituals, routines and behaviours. Play, within a sociocultural perspective, works within the constraints and affordances of the environment and so the principle of individual control and freedom from external rule is contested. Furthermore, in a society where day care is becoming a growing feature of children's lives, many would argue that play becomes more controlled by adults.

Bateson (1956) talks of the paradox of play, the duality of pretence and reality. 'Pretend' play appears to say something about reality and at the same time is at pains to differentiate itself from reality. He differentiates between pretence and reality while Gadamer (1981), on the other hand, locates play *in* the real world and talks of it as a mode of existence, a way of dealing with and in reality. *'Play cannot be divorced from concrete life. Play is part of the whole, the life situation or context in which it occurs'* (Steinsholt and Traasdahl, 2000:78). It is a tool of cultural appropriation and transforms those who participate (Gadamer1981). Pretend play may be a way of managing, changing or reorganising reality. This offers food for thought. Why do children initiate particular themes or roles in play? What are their real life goals in terms of self-positioning, relationships, community structuring, and progressing community activity? Further food for thought arises, according to VandenVen (2004) from the bipolar tensions between: fantasy and reality; work and play; process and product; pleasure and seriousness; rule based and free flowing; choice and requirement; freedom and constraint; past and future; some of which have already been discussed. It is clear that the boundaries between these dualities are open to interpretation and change, each in its own right warranting further research. This deconstruction of play definitions exposes the interpretive and value laden basis of definitions in the 'psychological' category at least.

Sutton Smith agrees. He (1997) defines play criteria as biases and proposes among his own that play:

1. should not be defined in terms of restricted Western values that say it is non-productive, irrational, voluntary and fun because these are not universal concepts
2. is not just an attitude or experience- it is always characterised by its own distinctive performance and stylisation
3. is like a language - a system of communication not in itself good or bad

He identifies metaphors or rhetorics that point to the possibilities within play rather than hypotheses that need to be proved. The metaphors include play as progress, as fate, as power, as identity, as imaginary, as peak experience and as frivolity with play as progress as probably the one most prevalent in early childhood education. He deconstructs each of the rhetorics before proceeding to create another one: the rhetoric of play as the potentiation of adaptive variability. What all play has in common, he tells us, is diversity. He proposes that play demands quirkiness, unpredictability, imagination, creativity, all features that keep us flexible and adaptive; that it potentiates responses rather than prepares them. He draws support from Gould (1996: 44) who says that the key to our evolutionary potential *'is flexibility, not admirable precision'* and from the neurologist, Edelman (1992) who tells us that the brain is more like a jungle than a computer and that connections in the brain are chaotic and flexible but can become stable and fixed through repetition. Participation in play keeps them flexible because it demands new responses, keeps the player alert and is the antidote to the rigidity of successful adaptation. '*Play's engineered predicaments model the struggle for survival….. Play actualises what are otherwise only potential brain and behaviour connections'* (Sutton-Smith 1997: 229). He sells his rhetoric persuasively.

3.2.3 The Behavioural Perspective

This section looks at the categorisation of play in the latter half of the twentieth century in terms of cognitive and social behaviour. Although based on the documented 'objective' observation of children's behaviour, the categories offer no more grounds for certainty. Observations, we now recognise, are shaped by theoretical perspectives and always involve subjective interpretation. Piaget (1962) found, for example, progressive stages of play that corresponded with his theory of stages of cognitive development. He focussed on the individual child. Parten (1932) focussed on the group and developed a taxonomy of social play based on a theory that

children move from independent to cooperative functioning. Before children engage in solitary play, she identified unoccupied behaviour and on-looker behaviour. Then children move on to parallel play, followed by group play, to include associative and co-operative play. Cooperative role play, according to Parten, represents the highest level of development while solitary play represents immaturity. Yet, if we consider contemporary technology culture, we realise there are fast expanding forms of child's play that are purely designed for solitary play. There may be a pattern to the way play develops but it is not as inherently natural as these theorists propose. It is related to cultural context, values and goals.

Smilansky (1968: 5) addressing the cognitive types of play, added the category 'constructive play' again maintaining the child moves from one stage to the next *'in keeping with his biological development'*. The child, in constructive play, processes information in line with his/her mental structures and then constructs meaningful objects that reflect his/her internal thinking and goals. Similarly, she (Smilansky and Shefatya, 1990) related children's engagement in sociodramatic play with their ability to engage with symbolic representation. Following her categorisation, she found the play of children from lower economic status groups showed less imagination and was more repetitive that that of their middle class peers and proceeded to develop a method for teaching play. In the light of sociocultural theory we must revise such conclusions. Social class or cultural differences may arise from motivational rather than ability differences (Schwartzman, 1978, Johnson, Christie and Yawkey, 1999) and researchers from one cultural group may find it difficult to interpret the meaning and purpose in the play of children from another.

Still in categorisation mode, Rubin, Watson and Jambor (1978) and Fein, Moorin and Enslein (1982) found evidence that development may not be organised as Piaget and Parten concluded and amalgamated Parten's social categories and Piaget's cognitive categories into a social/cognitive matrix to capture the interplay between both. Likewise, Howes (1980, 1992) rejected the solitary, parallel, social continuum and identified five developmental levels of sociability in play: (i) parallel play where children engage in similar activities but pay little attention to one another, (ii) in the subsequent stage they show mutual regard, primarily with eye contact but little verbalisation or other social behaviours, (iii) they progress to simple social exchange,

(iv) in complementary play, the children share common fantasy themes or joint activities with a common goal but make no effort to integrate their activities and finally (v) play becomes reciprocal and complementary and children begin to lead and follow one another's initiatives. Howes argued that play is always social, becoming progressively more complex with developing social, cognitive and linguistic competence and as children spend more time with peers.

Howes generalises on the basis of the Western middle class life pattern but as (Göncü, Tuermer, Jain and Johnson, (1999) point out, cultural variation is extensive. In Asian, African, and South American cultures, the child may live as an extended group member from babyhood with different implications for life patterns and development. In mixed group settings generally, from an early age there is much eye contact, offering and receiving of objects, sharing, lending, turn-taking, and even organised cooperative play, which is all categorized within the Howes' perspective as an advanced level of play found in preschool years or older.

Historically, social and cognitive categorisations suggest that the type of play is determined by a child's level of development whereas cross-cultural research demonstrates that social and cultural elements may determine category. The danger in categorisation is that our observations become biased by expecting to see a particular order in development. Already much of the research has been negated because children have been found to be more socially and cognitively competent than, for example, Parten and Piaget described (Donaldson, Grieve and Pratt, 1983, Donaldson, 1992). We are reminded that we have a culturally framed mind-set that may lead us to believe that our ways of seeing things is natural and universal. Cross-cultural research demonstrates that we must consider both other cultural life patterns and contexts and the cultural bias of the researcher in any analysis.

Dockett and Fleer (1999) found that using stages, either cognitive or social, to label children's play was unhelpful. Children show preferences depending on child and context. Consequently they propose the term 'genres of play' to describe play forms ranging from solitary object study to interactive social and power play and other genres. Many researchers suggest that we should go a step further and focus on the play itself and the nature of the interactions that form play rather than on the type and

developmental sequence (Paley, 1997, Sutton-Smith, 1997, Dockett, 1999). This research study consequently focuses on how participation in play proceeds to meet its goals, given the cultural context and the community of players. It is a theoretical lens that will guide both observations and analysis.

3.2.3.1   Hutt (1979) and the theoretical lens

Recognising that we approach every situation with a theory that frames our perceptions is a relatively recent development. The following section aims to demonstrate this relationship, using Hutt's (1979) theoretical framework and exploring its impact on her analysis of children's play.

In her attempt to categorise play and following a Piagetian perspective focussing on interaction with the physical world, Hutt (1979) described two kinds of play responding to the two important questions posed by the child: (1) What is this object and its properties? (2) What can I do with this object? Hutt (ibid) considered that the first question leads to exploration and the second to playful usage. The first is defined as 'epistemic' or exploratory behaviour *'concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and information'* (Hutt, ibid: 222). The second is 'ludic' play, referring to children's imaginative, fantasy or sociodramatic play, when objects become symbols and children create pretend scenarios. The difference between behaviours is in the approach. Hutt (ibid: 222) following Piaget, proposed that new learning happened in epistemic play while ludic play was primarily concerned with self amusement and only allowed for the practice and assimilation of previous learning.

Hutt, Tyler, Hutt and Christopherson (1989) analysed the impact of epistemic and ludic behaviour on memory, on problem solving, on conservation skills and on creativity, from a cognitive perspective. They considered children's ability to recall the behaviours of roles and equipment, to use objects for problem solving and to abstract such concepts as conservation from the play experience. They found, for example, that the ludic possibilities of the materials inhibited exploration; that children, who engage in exploratory rather than ludic behaviour with the materials prior to the problem solving task perform better on the problem-solving task; that in some instances ludic behaviour, far from facilitating children's learning, may actually impede learning. Only in the area of creativity did they find that ludic behaviour *may*

have some positive impact (their italics) because the players produced more non standard uses for objects. Also they found in four measures of linguistic complexity, that three were greater in play than in normal communication. Speech acts associated with intention, announcing, regulating and planning activities, for example, occurred more frequently during fantasy play but they attached minor significance to these outcomes. They concluded that fantasy play is not so much an aid to learning as an aid to 'diagnosis' of past experience and hidden talents and '*primarily concerned with regulating a child's mood state*' (Hutt, Tyler *et al*.1989: 191)

This research is interesting from the point of view of the present project for a number of reasons. Hutt and colleagues seem to differentiate between cognitive development and social/emotional development, defining cognitive development as increased knowledge about the property of materials, roles and events. They focus on the cognising abilities of the individual child as they interact with the physical world and show little interest in learning on the interpersonal plane. They also perceive that epistemic behaviour is '*cued by an external source of stimulation*' and is '*relatively independent of mood state*' while ludic behaviour is highly mood dependent - '*the child plays because she wishes to and simply for the fun of it and if she is anxious it is hardly reasonable to expect her to 'have fun''* (Ibid, 1989: 222). The only constraints they recognise in ludic behaviour are those which the child imposes on her/himself. The image here is of the individual cognising child, for whom cognition and emotion are separate. An alternative view is proffered by Rogoff (1990: 10) when she says '*Problem solving is not 'cold' cognition, but inherently involves emotion, social relations, and social structure*'.

The present research involves a number of shifts from Hutt, Tyler *et al*'s position. It considers learning as collective meaning-making and is particularly interested in children's participation in that meaning-making process in and through sociodramatic play. It recognises that children are motivated by the need to communicate with others and to share in the life of the community and it investigates children's play to explicate its role in their participation. As Katz (1999:147) says: '*How should we take into account the fact that no individual can realize even part of his or her potential without a baseline of group interactive competencies that include adherence to some minimum group and cultural norms?*' The child's learning is dependent on

the context and the cultural way of constructing meaning. What the child learns through exploration of objects in the environment is mediated by culture. Children's sociodramatic play is bound by collectively constructed social and cultural rules (Vygotsky 1933) and framed by the affordances and constraints (Gibson, 1979/86) of the context and the peer group. With this lens, Hutt, Tyler *et al* might have given more weight to their findings about the regulatory and discursive elements of play.

As Fromberg (1989: 56) says '*Depending on one's theoretical position, one sees play as extending cognitive, linguistic and social learning, or as reinforcing what children already have learned through individual exploration'*. The above position does not negate the validity of many of Hutt's findings but suggests another lens with which to view play and proposes that the sociocultural lens allows us to explore the complexity of children's co-constructions, motivations, relationships and cognition within play. The perspective that follows locates many of these in cultural values and goals.

3.3.4 The Contextual Perspective

What is the impact of the immediate and wider interaction and cultural contexts on play? To date the focus has been on the immediate context and the proximal variables (Johnson, Christies and Yawkee 2005) that are most likely to elicit play. These include availability of engaging materials or play partners, freedom of choice, minimum adult direction, secure atmosphere and appropriate scheduling (when children are rested, fed etc). However, the wider cultural context, such elements as the political and economic structures and ethno-beliefs and values shape the belief systems and social institutions and practices that frame play (Woodhead, 1996, Farver, 1999, Göncü, Tuermer et al., 1999). It would appear from research, for example, that in Western industrialised societies children play more and adults encourage them and partake more in play whereas in the Mayan community, for example, play is seen as a naturally occurring behaviour to be tolerated or contained (Göncü 1999). Sociodramatic play may be a universal facet of early childhood but *'culture influences the frequency, expression and social contexts in which children play'* (Farver 1999: 123). In Farver's (1999) research on the play of Korean-American and Euro-American children family roles and everyday experiences were the common themes for the Korean-Americans while for Euro-Americans danger in the environment and fantastic events were common. The latter described their own

actions, gave directions and rejected their partner's ideas while the former's interactions were non-conflictual and focused on developing group harmony. Farver proposes that these behaviours reflect the individualistic and collectivist ethos of both cultures. Tobin, Wu and Davidson (1989) in their 'Preschool in Three Cultures' study, filmed Hiroki, a four year old Japanese preschooler with challenging behaviour and invited an analysis of his behaviour from Japanese, Chinese and American parents and teachers. The Americans regarded him as very intelligent and consequently bored and disruptive, the Chinese considered him spoiled and the Japanese considered that he lacked the skills of 'amaeru', of being part of the group. Hiroki, himself, reconstructing within the 'collective' paradigm of his culture, when ostracised, saw himself as apart because of his 'leadership' relationship with the group. The research demonstrates the impact of the cultural meaning context.

Cross-cultural research also shows the reciprocal relationship between play and the interaction context. In the Mayan community (Gaskin and Göncü, 1992), there is little opportunity for interaction with new children and older siblings act as carers. Consequently, choice of social networks is limited and conflict needs to be avoided. They found *'that predetermined roles and scripts eliminate potential disagreements and ...one is expected to conform to the social guidance of one's older siblings'* (1992: 34). In these communities, children work to contribute from an early age (Gaskin, 1999) and play tends to be more imitative of adult work (Johnson, Christie et al., 1999). Without such adult role models, children often draw on television themes and characters (Singer and Singer, 1992). The cross cultural research alerts us to the cultural contextual impact on the themes, forms and levels of play and on the observation, interpretation, and thinking tools of the players and researchers.

3.2.5 Summary of the Psychological, Behavioural and Contextual definitions

Within the psychological category of definitions, play has been regarded as largely the domain of children where they are removed from adult influence and in control of their own activities. However, such concepts as voluntary engagement, child initiation and freedom from rules are strongly contested within a sociocultural understanding of play. In the same way, the behavioural definitions that view children as independent operators who only become social when developmentally ready have been contested.

The study of play definitions, above all demonstrates that each researcher comes with a theoretical lens that ultimately guides their findings. The analysis of Hutt's work exemplifies this. The contextual perspective suggests that the interaction and the cultural context mediates and frames children's participation in play. The themes, format and role of players vary with the cultural way of life.

This awareness of the mediating role of culture provides the basis for moving towards a more sociocultural perspective on play, that is, a concept of play as a medium and context for meaning-making.

3.3   Moving towards a sociocultural interpretation of play

The central rhetoric of play within sociocultural theory is play as a process of collaboratively reconstructing meaning (bringing interpretations from previous collaborations and contexts to new collaborations and contexts) and as an agent of change or transformation. Vygotsky (1933/67) and Piaget (1946/1962) both propose that play activities and artefacts act as pivots for abstracting, transferring and reconstructing meaning across contexts and situations. Bruner (1990: 20) also suggests that the quest for meaning drives children's activities and Fromberg's (1992: 49) review concludes that *'Young children amass experiences that they then play out together within a combined process of shared predictability and collaborative novelty…'.* She sees play as an integrator of experience in which children collaboratively participate to create meaning.   How children organise their participation in this meaning-making process is the question driving this research.

The next subsection introduces Gregory Bateson's (1956) work which signals a shift from the study of play based on cognitive and social categories to a study of how children organise participation and create meaning. His finding that play roles involve interpreting and communicating the rules of real life, is an important contribution to theory reconstruction in this research.

3.3.1 Bateson and Role Construction in Play

Bateson's (1956) theory captures two sociocultural elements of play, one proposing that roles and relationships are contextual and culturally framed and the other that

roles are both rule governed and flexible. '*I am not interested in the fact that he learns how to be an archbishop from playing the role; but that he learns that there is such a thing as a role*' (Bateson 1956: 264). This involves an implicit understanding that people do not behave according to some innate drive but rather that roles are guided by the affordances and constraints (Gibson 1979/86) of the context in which they operate. Roles have purpose, function and meaning within the social activities of a community. The child in play, according to Bateson, is learning that repertoires of behaviour and ways of knowing are related to the frame and context of behaviour. The children recognise that they must operate within the frame of the role for that role to be intelligible to others. They may negotiate an extension or embellishment of the role but it must remain recognisable within the collectively agreed frame. Together, they develop a repertoire of procedures and techniques for meta-negotiating roles, stories, actions and objects in play and so, their sociodramatic play reveals an inherent rule system that is often shared through meta-communication (Bateson 1956).

3.3.2 Play, Communication and Meta-communication

Bateson (1956) proposed that the message '*This is play*' is a meta-communication that produces a paradox. It implies that what is done in the context created by this message no longer means what it means in reality. The play nip denotes a bite but it also meta-communicates that '*this is play*'. Without it, the co-player may interpret the nip as an attack. Play behaviour, therefore, involves at least two levels of communication, each essential to understanding the other. The message '*this is play*' creates the psychological frame within which the play behaviours are understood. It is sometimes communicated explicitly outside the play frame with artefacts or talk such as '*Pretend I'm the mother*' or implicitly inside the play frame by carrying car keys and or with lines such as '*Hurry up and eat your breakfast. It's time for school*'.

This focus on communication spawned a range of research foci. Garvey (1977) researched children's communication within play and found that children's play life has its own distinctive gestures and language. Schwartzman (1978) explored communication within play across cultures. Following Bateson she found that children use play themes to format and comment on their relationships with one another, thereby identifying the interconnectedness between play and reality. Leslie (1987) focused on children's ability to differentiate between pretence and reality.

Children demonstrate that they recognize differences in intentions and perspectives among co-players which he identified as a key indicator of a theory of mind.

Bateson's term 'frame' offers a way of talking about the movement between play and non play, although Sawyer (1997) argues that terms such as script (Schank and Abelson, 1977) and to a lesser extent, frame, suggest a level of prescription and structure that is not there. He (Sawyer 1997) rejects the Piagetian notion that children come to play with social scripts or schema that they test against social models. He suggests that the play theme is a narrative that emerges from children's 'improvised' contributions. Nevertheless the terms inside and outside the play frame are useful, if we accept, as Bateson (1956) demonstrates, that what happens in play is decided not just in the play frame but also in the structuring of the frame.

3.3.3 Communication and Intersubjectivity

Pretend play, following Bateson's insight, demands that children are competent communicators, are socially aware, and are tuned into the goals, functions and meaning of social rituals, routines and structures. Kalliala (2002) suggests that membership of a play group requires commonly shared knowledge and values, and shared ways of thinking which give coherence to the action. This focus on shared ways of communicating and the management of coherence or coordination in play resonates with the 'intersubjective' lens of Stern, Trevarthen, Hobson and others, discussed in the previous chapter. They draw our attention to the baby whose primary drive is to be part of a culture, to make meaning with others and suggest that the child's innate eagerness to communicate functions towards accessing and reconstructing with social partners a meaning-making system that guides and coordinates collective thinking. Negotiating intersubjectivity with other like-minded people, they propose, is the central objective and leading activity in early childhood and the driving force of human development or transformation.

3.4   Intersubjectivity and Play

The next section centralises the role of intersubjective processes in children's play and draws together the findings of researchers who share this lens.

Most studies of intersubjectivity have been in the area of mother-infant (Stern, Trevarthen) or adult-child (Rogoff 1990; Bretherton 1991) interactions. Others (Rogoff, 1990, Lave and Wenger, 1991) have studied how intersubjectivity is supported between children and adults working within the shared values, practices and ways of knowing of particular communities of practice. While both groups (Trevarthen, 1989, Rogoff, 1990) propose that play is inherently intersubjective, there has been very little research on the development of intersubjectivity between peers in play with some notable exceptions. Among these, some researchers such as Sawyer (1997), using a social interactionist approach, focus on the micro or face-to-face level of interaction. They see the successful child as having to read the moment and the immediate context. Others such as Corsaro (1985) take a broader sociocultural view and analyse children's interactions for their meaning-making and their transactions with cultural ideologies. Most recognise that the levels are linked and dynamically interdependent. One needs access at interpersonal level to participate in meaning development. One needs to be attuned to the cultural discourses and knowledge base of the group, the role expectations and behaviours, to gain entry in the first place. To enter the role of mother, teacher or doctor, a child must have some appreciation of the social and cultural meaning of the roles. Yet, it is not sufficient to have the cultural knowledge, one must also have the social and communicative competence to produce that knowledge in culturally appropriate ways (Kantor, Elgas and Fernie, 1993/1998:147). Rogoff (1990) proposes that children draw on their knowledge of the world in their interactive contributions and at the same time, children's co-constructed meaning and context making shape their ways of knowing the world. Both are transformed towards ongoing participation.

Cannella (1993:429) explains that in the emergent narrative of pretend play the activity goals are constantly shifting and consequently she defines intersubjectivity as *'the process of constructing and reconstructing joint purposes between the child and his/her interacting partner'*. Children are constantly negotiating the direction of the story. At micro level, players are challenged to connect and collaborate. They must negotiate areas of joint interest and forms of communication linked to their activities (Bateson 1956). At the macro level, children are negotiating the rules and status of roles, and their position, power and identity within the play story and group. The following describes research at both levels. It begins with the micro level studies.

3.4.1 Research at the micro level of connecting in Play

Fernie, Davies, Kantor and McMurray (1993:95) identified a major leap in the demands that preschool makes on children's intersubjectivity skills. The skills, adequate for playing with friends at home '*now must be expanded to negotiate play and friendship among large groups of competing peers*'. How do children connect with peers in play? What are the intersubjectivity strategies that children use?

The questions have been addressed in many ways. Howes, Unger and Seidner (1989) coming from a Piagetian perspective and taking a long term view describe the growth in intersubjectivity in children's play over the first three years, moving from separate activity through grades of similarity and sequencing of themes before adopting complementary roles. Garvey (1975) studied the interaction moments and finds that children connect in play by repeating partners' utterances and complementing them. Repetition expresses acknowledgement while complementing with additional information shows accurate interpretation and extension. Göncü and Kessel (1984) found a development from unlinked utterances to demands and then responses and at the highest level of intersubjectivity, turnabouts, which complement the other's intention. Turnabouts become more frequent with age. Flewitt (2005) found that learning how to be included and how to follow playgroup routines included learning when to be silent and how to observe and imitate, with talk used for a more limited range of functions, such as expressing specific personal wants or imitating other's utterances. '*In every 'action' line, the meaning intentions appeared clear to both producer and observer of the signs*' (Flewitt 2005: 216). She warns us against 'pathologising' the absence of talk and the need to understand children's 'multimodal' approach to meaning-making and cooperative relations. Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl (2000) and Nadel (2002) emphasise the significance of imitation in sustaining communication. Nadel finds that imitation peaks at around thirty months when children begin to master language but suggests that children revert in unfamiliar situations. Bretherton (1984) identified metacommunicative statements that children used, including formation, connection, rejection, disconnection and maintenance statements. Garvey (1974) also identifies the role of explicit metacommunications in negotiating, maintaining and directing play activity. Göncü and Perone (2005) found that the use of common dialogic practices, avoiding irrelevant statements or negating

partners, and the use of 'yes and' statements convey the commitment of the partners to the dialogue. Sawyer (1997) also emphasises the strategic importance of 'yes and' statements in building dialogue. They are a feature of improvisation that indicates that the actor has interpreted the previous contribution and is about to extend it.

Cannella (1993), again focusing on the level of the immediate encounter between children, emphasises their interactive, interdependent relationships. She identifies the following steps in developing intersubjectivity in play.

- Children come to the activity with prior experience and perspectives.
- Artefacts, actions or talk from one or both parties establish common reference points, tasks or direction.
- Each partner adapts to the other.
- During the interaction, partners share purpose and meaning that neither can create alone.

Rogoff (1990) reminds us that both relationships and activity must be managed. Her research finds that in the second year, children's interactions attend to both.

We can see that researchers in both the Piagetian (Howes and Garvey) and Vygotskian (Fernie, Göncü, Flewitt, Sawyer) traditions, despite their differences, have identified similar strategies that children use to connect to one another. Piagetians however work on the presumption that children connect to test the validity of their personally constructed concepts; that they seek to find out how other children think so that they can make the necessary adjustments to their own concepts. Vygotskians, on the other hand, believe that children are, from the beginning, guided by and collaboratively reconstructing the social frame for knowing within the group. The challenge is to both attune to the group cultural frame and to collectively reconstruct it towards accomplishing their shared cultural goals.

3.4.2 Research at the micro level of collaborating in play

How do children construct collaboration in play? Sawyer, following his 'improvisation' metaphor and staying in social interactionist mode, suggests that collaborative play narratives emerge from *'the successive actions of all participants'*. Children's initiatives are coordinated and their shared meaning is reconstructed in their collective narratives (Sawyer, 2002:340). The narratives are unpredictable and

emergent but they recognize and respond to a guiding meaning-making frame. Sawyer compares children's play 'motifs' to the jazz musicians' 'riffs'. They offer a common frame and at the same time, opportunities for repetition, variation and further development. Some 'motifs', such as the 'approach-avoidance' games described by Corsaro (1985), offer a very tight frame. These motifs generally set in train a flow of predictable initiatives that guide children's participation. Other 'motifs' such as playing 'house' or 'pirates' provide a looser, more flexible, less predictable frame.

Children's coordination of contributions within play is supported by metapragmatics (Sawyer 1997), a term that describes metacommunication strategies that are embedded in or distributed across the interaction. For example, one might use tones or emphasis or artefacts to metacommunicate role or status. With phrases such as '*Ok, friend, let's go to work*', the insertion of the word 'friend' communicates the relationship and serves both a regulatory and denotational function that informs the future direction of the narrative (Sawyer 1997: 38). Through a process of *'indexical entailment'*, each child's utterances, through tone, manner, words etc. suggest a possible direction for the response, moving towards heteroglossia, when voices combine to create coherence in the emergent play. Together they produce an '*analytically irreducible phenomenon*' (Sawyer, 2002:341), a new creation that emerges from this heteroglossia. Bakhtin (1981) reminds us that heteroglossia does not mean harmony. He focuses on the struggle for dominance among coexisting voices and the power invested values and views that they seek to contribute. Gender, age, friendship and group size all have an impact on the power of voice.

Interestingly, Sawyer (1997) proposes that social play with peers becomes redundant at around age six because children can now proficiently use their interactional skills in everyday conversation. Corsaro in his introduction to Sawyer's book (1997) refutes this suggestion and argues that lack of pretend play opportunities as children enter school may actually result in the loss of improvisation skills for lack of practice.

While Sawyer (1997) emphasises improvisational skills and the role of play 'motifs' in providing a guiding frame, Göncü's (1993/1998) most significant contribution has been his application of the concept of 'prolepsis' to children's play, thereby centralising dispositional or affective qualities. It is elaborated below.

3.4.3 The centrality of affect in supporting intersubjectivity in play

Göncü (1993/98) in his much cited research (Cole 1996; Sawyer 1997; Kantor, Elgas et al. 1998; Dockett 1999; Löfdahl 2006) studied transcripts of play talk and correlated children's competency with age. He draws on the work of researchers referred to earlier, particularly Trevarthen's (1980) definition of intersubjectivity[5], to guide his research. He finds that the centrality of affect in establishing intersubjectivity between carer and child remains applicable within peer play. Skills learned in early childhood in supportive interaction with family pay dividends in terms of dispositional competence. Göncü (1993/98) uses the concept of 'prolepsis' to describe a dynamic process of continuous knowledge exchange and negotiation between play partners underpinned by two presuppositions: (1) that the dialogue is sincere and the participants trustworthy and committed to understanding one another and (2) that the listener has knowledge to contribute that is essential to the topic.

How do children, in play, establish this proleptic relationship? Göncü's description of the process is similar to Cannella's (1993) above, but he emphasizes the forward looking connotations of children's contributions. All parties work on the presupposition that they have experiences in common and something to contribute. Each interactive turn is an act of faith in the interpretive and knowledge capacity of the other. Players must be able to induce and anticipate others' contributions and generate a relationship of trust. It is a growing interactive process that organises the contributions of the players into an evolving, guiding frame that helps the participants to share an understanding of the situation under construction. It involves predictability, contributing ideas, flexibility and emotional cooperation. It requires personal and social awareness and self-other regulation skills. It is as much an emotional message as a cognitive one. The play frame helps by offering relatively greater freedom to diverge and innovate because of the agreed pretence element. One can either pretend to think differently or go with the flow for the sake of the play.

Aarts (2000) also proposes that the skills of prolepsis, the ability to be attentive, trusting and agentive in play, are co-constructed in the interactive moments between carer and child in infancy. These are also the proximal processes that Bronfenbrenner

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[5] Trevarthen (1980: 530) defines intersubjectivity as 'both recognition and control of cooperative intentions and joint patterns of awareness'.

and Morris (1998) propose are the engines of human development which give rise to 'generative' dispositions, such as curiosity, agency and empathy and trust. Carr (2001a) calls these 'dispositional' competencies. They make children more attractive as play partners and are often more easily identified in their absence than in their practice. Research on children in the autistic spectrum has highlighted their significance (Trevarthen and Daniels, 2005). Aarts (2000) proposes that these dispositions can only be reconstructed within interaction, that is, through participation in the proximal processes that create them. While the adult can co-construct some skills with the child, the child must co-construct peer group ways with the peer group to gain access to peer group meaning and identity. Their discursive competence (Löfdahl, 2001, 2002), that is their ability to access and contribute to the cultural frame, depends on having the interactive skills for participation and on enacting them in culturally appropriate ways. The case of William demonstrates the connection.

3.4.4 The impact of micro on macro levels: The case of William

Kantor, Elgas *et al* (1993/1998) (using Corsaro's 'peer culture' framework) observed a stable sub play group of four year olds over time. They found that William was consistently excluded from the group because he lacked both social skills and social knowledge and consequently developed a social history of being difficult. He failed to read the cues of his peers and to reproduce cultural knowledge appropriately. He talked at others without reading cues, he grabbed their toys and intruded on their space in a way that presented as confrontational and he persisted with his initiatives even when they were rejected. His behaviour was out of tune. Kantor, Elgas *et al* (1998: 151) conclude that *'Successful participation (in play) requires children to access and to display cultural knowledge, to determine implicit rules for membership, and subsequently to adapt their behaviour to fit the existing theme and social context'*. Discursive competence (Löfdahl, 2002:9) is about knowing what the other children are doing, what is usually played in the peer-group and what are usually accepted utterances in certain play themes and how and when to use them.

Kantor, Elgas *et al* (1998: 147) compare William and Lisa, both of whom had limited previous experience of playing with other children. They conclude that Lisa '*could not have learned to be in-tune with peers through her interactions with adults'*. Stern, Trevarthen and Aarts however propose that it is in their early interactions with

primary carers that children first develop the skills and dispositional and discursive competence to play with peers. They learn the skills of connection and then reconstruct them, by tweaking, extending and embellishing, to meet the needs of the peer group. The problem for William, coming from this understanding, is that he requires remedial teaching in these early lessons while at the same time learning the cultural knowledge of the group and developing an identity as a group member. He needs adult guidance to learn the skills of self-registration, social awareness and collaboration. At the same time, to be part of the construction of the cultural play frame, he must participate in play with peers. Without appropriate help, William is likely to be further excluded.

Corsaro (1985) found that children generally compensate for exclusion by creating other networks and William did this. He engaged more with the adults. William, however, may learn the basic intersubjective skills in interaction with adults but he must move back into the peer play group for *'learning and grasping the rules, seeing that they form a system, elaborating them, and mastering the possibilities of the form of practice they constitute'* (Nicolopoulou 1997: 198). It is the kind of learning experience that is difficult to duplicate in other settings and activities (Ladd, 1989).

3.4.5 Conclusion

This section identifies interaction strategies, from observation and imitation to leading and following initiatives that allow children to negotiate common ground in play. Children improvise in play and therefore their play themes are emergent. They use repeated motifs or routines to help coordinate their contributions. They build on one another's contributions and they guide responses with 'metacommunicative' and 'indexical' statements that suggest direction for their co-players. Critically, Göncü (1993) identifies that collaboration demands the ability to communicate sincerity, trust and commitment. These abilities are related to the skills of social awareness and self-other regulation identified by Aarts (2000). The work of these researchers offers both guiding questions and concrete examples that will help to identify how the research participants construct their participation in play in this study. The concepts of improvisation and heteroglossia prompt questions about how children induce, anticipate and co-regulate one another's contributions. How do these children agree a shared focus of awareness and intention? (Trevarthen 1980). Following the concept

of prolepsis we ask: How do children potentiate trust and trustworthiness? How do they convey that they can contribute worthwhile knowledge to the play theme?

The above section focuses on interpersonal interaction. The next section focuses on the sociocultural concept of play as an appropriation tool.

3.5   Research at the macro level of meaning-making

How does play facilitate children's shared meaning-making and their appropriation of the cultural ways of knowing? This section responds to the question beginning with a review of research on (i) play roles and themes and the reconstruction of systems of social organisation and ways of knowing and (2) the findings about children's meaning-making. It considers the existential dimension of play (Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson, 2006) that allows children to come to know the world from a pretence position and to review the real world one step removed (Paley,1986).

The researchers discuss some of the transformations that take place, in terms of individual identity and cultural discourses and practices as a consequence of children's collective meaning-making in play.

3.5.1 Play and appropriation

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of appropriation and Sawyer's (1997) notion of heteroglossia propose that in collective reconstruction with other voices, children combine their interpretations and in this new dynamic, amend and reconstruct adult discourses. Rogers and Sawyer (1988) propose that play offers children the opportunity to turn passive experiences of things done to them into activity directed by them. Löfdahl (2005) uses Moscovici's (2000) terms, 'objectifying' and 'anchoring'. Children, through their play, objectify thoughts and actions into something more concrete, thereby testing different meanings and they 'anchor' them in context to make them pragmatic, intelligent and familiar. In the pretence context, children reflect on them, change them and make them their own. This is reflexivity (Bruner, 1990) in action. Children transfer the learning from previous experience and then project themselves and their learning into different social and emotional possibilities, thereby changing them and transforming cultural ways of being.

Building on these theories Duncan and Tarulli (2003:283) propose that this 'dialogising' potential of play comes from two features; *'[T]he first is that play affords children the necessary distance or otherness from which to objectify and comment upon adult spheres of life; and the second is that play can be structured so that it self-consciously challenges the propriety of, or pokes fun at, adult forms of discourses and behaviour'.* This is a position supported by Moran and John-Steiner (2003: 71) who propose that sociodramatic play demands that children are *'in an oppositional, critical and reflective relationship with reality'* and engaged in the transformative process of jointly re-negotiating meaning. Children begin to see themselves from a perspective other than that created by adults. At the same time, they often exaggerate adult practices in a way that makes them very visible and even exposes them to ridicule and consequently to change.

3.5.2 Play, roles and themes

The play roles define the way that the characters relate to each other and demonstrate children's observation and understanding of the subtle features of adult communication and behaviour. Engagement with roles facilitates the appropriation of the corresponding cognitive and emotional structures and relationships involved in them (Leont'ev, 1981). Paley (2004) tells us that children's play scripts and story - telling, like theatre and novels, often follow such universal themes as someone is lost and finds a friend, is unloved and finds love, confronts life and death, is weak and then strong. Children are not aware that they wish to express these abstract thoughts. They do not think first and then devise a play script. They think, play and use their imagination all at once (Lindqvist, 2001). While their play stories are emergent their roles and themes provide a frame. Within role, one follows the commonly accepted rules of the role. The waiter delivers the food, the customer remains seated at the table. The teacher gives directives, the children obey. A birthday theme involves waking up to discover a birthday and sharing a cake with candles. Themes involving accidents, crises or conflict follow a routine that involves initiation, the enactment and fall-out of the event and the resolution. These frames provide an element of predictability while allowing for new dynamics, imagination and creativity.

3.5.3 Corsaro and the Construction of Peer Culture

Corsaro (1985, 1997, 2003) describes appropriation as 'interpretive reconstruction' to capture the idea that children are not simply internalising culture, but are actively contributing to cultural reproduction and change while working within the cultural guiding frame. He (1985: 61) sees play as *'something children do together'* because they want to achieve a *'becoming at home'*, a sense of belonging, by sharing in interactive experience with their peers. They are driven to gain control of their lives and to share that control with each other. In their sociodramatic play children interpret the adult culture and collectively reconstruct social values, norms, rituals, and rules specifically to meet the needs of the peer culture. It is a process of grasping, refining and extending their interpretations of the adult world to fit the new context.

The logistics of children's behaviour are embedded in the peer culture. It is '*situated knowledge'* (Corsaro, 2003:89). Children's concepts, such as the concept of friendship, are anchored in the interactive demands and organisational features of the playgroup. Friends, therefore, are people you play with, and one needs to develop a number of stable friendships that one can call on when access to a group is denied. Disputes are a recurring feature of play-group friendship and an inherent part of the system of keeping social order, of bonding among friends and creating group identity. Corsaro (2003) found that children worked collaboratively to settle disputes when outsiders threatened their identity. Paley (1991) also found that the need to share fantasies, make friends, and meet the rules of fairness provided reasons for settling disputes and sharing goals and procedures.

Children work hard to establish shared play themes and then must work hard to protect it from intrusion and disruption. This, according to Corsaro (2003), explains why they often resist the entry bids of other children. It is not a refusal to share but an attempt to retain control and continuity. The players find ways of refusing entry, often by adapting adult rules to their own interests. The intruders have to sharpen their interactive skills and prove to be positive contributors. Corsaro proposes that this results in a win-win situation and that *'All the kids end up having fun'* (Corsaro 2003: 65), a position that seems remarkably naïve and is seriously contested.

3.5.4 Play and the transformation of identity

Many researchers (Thorne, 1993, MacNaughton, 1999) maintain that Corsaro paints an over romantic picture and fails to recognize that experiences within the peer play culture are often traumatic and damaging. MacNaughton (1999) tells us that play is dangerous precisely because it plays a significant role in the construction of children's social worlds and identities. Power and control are significant motivators in children's play and children can learn to be unfair, to compete for power and to fear social diversity as well as the opposite. Their play roles can reproduce powerlessness for some (MacNaughton, 1992, Danby and Baker, 1998b). The tensions between individual expression and group alliance, between equality and hierarchy can '*create a delicate framework around which children's identities are strung*' (James 1996: 323). Corsaro (1997) claimed that hierarchies and exclusion patterns were not stable among the Italian and American preschoolers in his studies. Others (Walkerdine, 1987, Chafel, 2003) however found that many children are regularly excluded or victimised by their peers in preschool and experience rejection, aggression and domination. Others (Kelly-Byrne, 1989, Paley, 1989, Paley, 1990, Thorne, 1993, Danby and Baker, 1998a) find that children's social reputations are constructed through play and negative experience can have a lasting impact on their sense of belonging and agency. Children who emerge as popular, assertive leaders are not necessarily cooperative, helpful and obedient. They are often manipulative, deviant and controlling (James, 1998, Goodwin, 2002). Hymel, Bowker and Woody's (1993) long term study shows that rejected children, in particular are at risk of developing psychological problems and antisocial behaviour and Schaffer (1996) maintains that poor quality peer relations in childhood are predictive of psychological maladjustment. Rubin, Coplan, Fox and Calkins (1995) studied children who were group outsiders during preschool and found that poor social skills are a strong predictor of loneliness, peer rejection and negative self-esteem in later childhood. Exclusion also seems to predict poor academic progress with more negative effect for boys than for girls partly because solitariness or teacher companionship is more acceptable for girls than for boys (Coplan, Gavinski-Molian, Legace-Sequin and Wichmann, 2001) and therefore not as psychologically damaging. The impact on identity depends to some extent on the cultural psychological tools used to assess and interpret the meaning. Play, consequently, is a serious business.

3.5.5 Play and positioning

In the play process, children explore possible identities and social discourses and practices (Kyratzis, 2004b, 2004a) and they reconstruct the cultural values and goals that underpin them. Sociodramatic play offers children opportunities to position themselves and others in multiple ways, to enter roles and adopt performance styles and possible selves (Bruner 1996) and to organise activities and relationships that frame their participation. They '*need access to imaginary worlds in which new metaphors, new forms of social relations and new patterns of power and desire are explored*' (Davies, 1989:41).

Through play children construct shared understanding for themselves and they '*develop and test their constantly evolving interpretation of what is and is not possible for them as social actors*' (Gallas, 1998:7). Löfdahl (2002: 3) tells us that '*the status relations they express in play exist within the peer group*' but they are reconstructed anew in play as children learn to position themselves and others. She (2006) found that children refer to sex, age, appearance, clothes and other personal traits to establish their right to a desired position. These are more than the outcomes of interpersonal dynamics. They are features of the adult culture that children import as a basis for power distribution, that is, adult discourses that children reconstruct in play. Consequently, the play form allows for a kind of 'metasocial' (Geertz 1973) commentary on the society. It carries powerful symbolic and emotional messages and enacts an important role in communicating, implementing and reconstructing social practices. The play story is a public performance, a reification of what is being reconstructed and entering practice (Donald, 2001).

Davies (1990b) found that the child's sense of who they are becomes more defined through the discourses of play roles and contexts. It is not solely dependant on individual agency, that is, the individual's ability to take action and to control or make decisions. It is also about the collective construction of discourses which frame agency, the discursive practices which make it easy or difficult for particular persons or categories of persons to be agentive in society. Particular discourses give agency to particular children in play. When children move outside the accepted discursive practices, they are quickly pulled back into line with rules that state, for example

'Girls don't'…' or 'Only big people do…'. Such discourses are very controlling because as James (1996: 327) reminds us, children *'may dally with the bounds of good behaviour but do not overstep the boundaries set for belonging'*.

3.5.6 Conclusion

This section addresses how participation in play is facilitated by and facilitates children's interpretation of the adult world and the reconstruction of the peer world. Children relocate their interpretations in meaning scenarios in play and thereby revisit and collectively reconstruct their meaning. They reconstruct the rules, status and positions of social roles. The pretend element allows them to make these elements of the roles explicit and thereby critically reflect on them through their re-enactments. One's position and power in play is decided by individual agency but also by social discourses that afford and constrain ways and levels of participation.

Play is neither neutral nor benign (Jones, 2005). Children's participation in play has implications for their identity.   It is a transformative practice in which individuals are positioned for better or for worse. Some enjoy positions of power in play and others experience powerlessness and oppression. Exclusion is a painful and damaging experience with potentially long-term implications. Through participation in play children contribute their voices to the construction of the system of meanings and relationships that frame their on-going participation. When this system reflects their values and interests, they have a sense of well-being and belonging within it.

These issues will be further explored later but two points emerge at this stage of importance to this research and to pedagogy. The first is that our interpretation lens is framed by the cultural paradigm in which we operate. Within the early childhood education sector, we often work on the basis of play as progress and learning and turn a blind eye to the politics of play. We think of play as children's fun and frivolity when James (1998: 104) finds that it is '*a serious medium through which children conduct their social affairs'.* We reinforce traditional cultural discourses. We, for example, generally think in terms of male and female differences and categorise on the basis of two separate cultures (Gilligan 1982; Goodwin 1990). Much research however shows that there are far greater differences within the male and female categories that there are between them (Thorne 1993). This research review points to

the need to explore, recognize and name the many ways of being powerful or different as opposed to creating '*oppositional dichotomies*' (Thorne, 1993: 158). Secondly, power is appropriated through participation. It is not something one can decide to distribute fairly. James (1996, 1998) finds that children's power status in the real-life group transfers to their roles in play. The study of play offers insight into how children position themselves powerfully and create opportunities for sharing power. If we consider play as an agent of change and transformation, then there are possibilities within play for repositioning.

3.6 Discourses of power, gender and rules in play

The following addresses the findings of research that show both the positive and troubled in children's participation in the construction of social discourses. It focuses on children's construction of peer culture and how they position themselves in terms of power relationships, gender categorization and adult and institutional rules.

3.6.1 Play and Power

Power themes and power struggles feature strongly within play (Davies 1997; Schwartzman 1978; Paley 1992). Löfdahl (2006) identifies two recurrent themes, survival and hegemony. Kyratzis (2004b) reviews recent research on the construction of peer culture and again identifies power and hierarchy as central concerns. Children create behaviours, rituals and talk patterns designed to identify group members and assert their power to exclude others (Kyratzis 2004; Corsaro 1997).

Themes, props and roles such as babies, baddies or animals, are used in play to transform the most powerful into the least powerful. Mammies, Daddies, Bosses and Superman are powerful roles. This is an example of social reproduction (Löfdahl, 2002). By adopting power roles in play, children appropriate the 'authoritative register' (Kyratzis, 2004a) associated with the role and manage the others' play identities (Goodwin 1993). Children use affiliating devices such as turn-taking, imitation and humour (Corsaro 1985) and conflict (Corsaro 2003; Kronqvist 2002; Paley 1990) to display expertise and assert power. Conflicts serve to '*construct social identities, cultivate friendships and both maintain and transform the social order of the peer group*' (Corsaro and Maynard, 1996:163).

A central concern for children is to fit into the play or to draw others into their play. Kyratzis (2004b) found gender dichotomies in their strategies. The leaders among the boys were usually the ones who started the play activity whereas girls tended to create alliances, often bonding by excluding a third party. Boys look for the possibility of showing strength, speed and courage to impress those who control the game. Girls tried to strengthen alliances by praising and inviting each other home and being agreeable to the others' ideas and having the same things and sharing secrets. James (1996) found that girls' friendships were more excluding than boys' friendships.

3.6.2 Play and gender categorisation

Gender categorization is often used to organize the social structure of the classroom. Danby and Baker (1998) found older boys teaching younger boys how to be masculine in the block corner through intimidation and bullying. Thorne (1993: 96) identifies that maleness is often created by the strong boy in the playgroup, *'not everyone has an equal hand in painting the picture of what boys and girls are like'*. Maleness furthermore is often constructed in opposition to femaleness. Corsaro (1985) on the other hand points to the fact that children engage in role play that crosses gender divides or that blur gender boundaries, including animal role play and television characters. MacNaughton (1995) found that girls experience power in domestic role play. Mum decides whether the group continues to cook the dinner or prepares for school. Boys tended to resist the power of Mum by being uncooperative and disruptive, for example, by throwing babies etc. In areas such as block or outdoor play, boys dominate. They play superhero games and display speed and physical aggression. In these themes, girls need saving. Boys tend to compete for power while girls tend to negotiate. In girls' play the biggest common denominator is human relationships (Kalliala 2002; Nicolopoulou 1997) although Kalliala (2002) finds that the caring role no longer dominates girls' play reflecting, she maintains, the decreasing value on caring in the adult world. Girls' play is still however full of emotion. Any notion, however, of the female as pacifist or apolitical is refuted by Goodwin (1997). Her study of African-American and Latino girls shows that females are capable of intricate and influential forms of political activity. She found that *'their dispute processes were far more elaborate, complex, consequential and enduring that anything among the boys'* (1997: 3)

Nicolopoulou (1997) found two very different genres in boys' and girls' storytelling and acting. Girls' stories begin by defining the relationship between the characters and then look for activities to occupy them while boys' stories begin with activity and then seek ways of connecting the players. The story styles become more gendered as their year in preschool progresses, indicating the learned nature of their identities.

3.6.3 Play and rules

Children learn to participate with adults in sustaining discourses and at the same time to be outside adult discourses (Davies 1989). They construct their own peer cultures that differentiate them from adults. Goffman (1961) describes the human tendency to comply with and resist institutional rules. Miller and Sperry (1988) identified such accommodation and resistance among even toddlers. They defied adult control by sneaking out of teacher's view while her back was turned. They often engaged in elaborate strategies to get around the rules and to thwart adult arrangements. Corsaro (1985) tells us that while children don't have a clear sense of self, they do have a sense of group identity. When individuals deviate from the norms, they are quick to cite the rules and pull them back into position. He calls this 'boundary maintenance'.

3.6.4 Conclusion

Children reconstruct together social values and practices in play and in the process they change and embellish them. This section reconstructs the discourse that suggests that children appropriate cultural practices and values through play and that both culture and children are transformed by their participation towards ongoing participation. It reviews research on the power structures, gender categorisation and rule management in play, emphasising the constraints and affordances of particular discourses for different children. In the process it disrupts the romantic rhetoric of play that suggests that play is always good for children and suggests rather that the benefits of play are related to learning and identity construction in play.

In order to understand why children choose play roles and relationships we need to understand what goals and purposes they serve in the cultural community and in the power relationships of the peer group. This research review suggests that the complexity of what children construct can best be understood by the study of their

sociodramatic play in natural settings where children have some latitude to pursue their own agendas. This is the intention in this research.

3.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter reconstructs the discourse of play that informs this research. It begins by reviewing the classical and contemporary theories of play and then critically analyses the definitions propounded over the last century, including psychological, behavioural and contextual perspectives. Moving towards a sociocultural perspective on play, the work of Bateson (1956) is discussed. His interest in communication mechanisms supporting coherence in play leads to a focus on intersubjectivity. The theories of intersubjectivity (Trevarthen, Stern, Hobson) linked to the sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, Rogoff, Lave and Wenger) explicated in Chapter 2, are brought to the discours in this chapter. The research on how children develop intersubjectivity in play at the micro level of interpersonal interaction and at the macro level of transaction with cultural values, practices and discourses is reviewed and interpreted. The findings are discussed and related to the objectives of this research study.

3.7.1 Implications for the Research

At the micro interaction level the research engages with the interaction strategies children use to connect and coordinate their contributions and at the macro discursive level it engages with the concept of interpretive, collective reproductions. It centralises the concept of intersubjectivity and explores how intersubjective processes proceed to create a frame that is collectively binding but not a consensus. How do children build the rituals, routines and discourses that frame their lives together? How do children become powerful and belong within these discourses? How do children transform or become transformed by the discourses of the peer culture? How do they reconcile collaboration with issues of power and hegemony? For answers, we need to shift from the focus on the individual to a focus on how children reconstruct discourses and identities through the locally organised relations and practices in which they participate (Danby and Baker, 1998a, 1998b). We must examine play from the perspectives expressed through the activities of the participants to find evidence of their participation strategies and outcomes. This is the task of this research.

3.7.2 Implications for pedagogy

The discourse constructed here proposes that children participating in play are (i) developing intersubjectivity with a new group, (ii) reconstructing a peer culture and (iii) developing the tools for interacting on the intermental plane through which they collectively construct their sense of identity and their ways of communicating and belonging. Sociodramatic play offers a context for these developments.

3.7.3 The theoretical lens

The discourse proposes a sociocultural lens for the study of children's sociodramatic play. It involves a shift from traditional perspectives that emphasise individual developmental process and categories of play related to these stages of development to a consideration that play is about collective meaning-making and that children participate in ways that are consistent with their cultures. The most important factor concerning the development and learning of the child becomes his/her transactions in social relationships and cultural activity. The theory does not deny the importance of individual biological and genetic traits. It recognises that learning is equally framed by individual biological make-up that decides to some extent one's learning abilities and that genetic make-up may predispose individuals to think, feel and behave in a certain way. However, it emphasises that children learn to think in ways that are congruent with their cultures through the process of participation in social activity.

Play is an important tool within this learning perspective. In reconstructing social contexts and activities in their sociodramatic play, children create multiple and varied scenarios for participating in the interpretation and reconstruction of the cultural ways of knowing. Play thereby becomes both a tool and a context for participating in making sense of the world.

Through an in-depth study of children's collaborations in developing play stories, the research will follow and analyse children's participation in interpretating and reconstructing their cultural frameworks and the impact on their meaning-making. In Irish terms, using this theoretical framework is an innovative approach but its application within the context of a specific group of players is a challenge that will further generate innovation.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology employed in this research. The qualitative, ethnographic approach proposed follows logically from the sociocultural theoretical perspective reconstructed in chapters two and three. Both recognise that meaning is neither objective nor agreed truth but rather part of and inseparable from intersubjective negotiations and social discourses.

The chapter is structured as follows. It begins with a brief discussion of the rationale for the qualitative, ethnographic, interpretive approach. The approach is now well documented and justified in the literature and need not be fully reproduced here. The selection of the research participants is then explained and the research setting is described. The four overlapping stages of data processing are discussed, including collection, documentation, analysis and reporting. The main research method used to collect data was participant observation (with video) and the discussion here includes a reflexive account of the positioning of the researcher within the setting. The main issues highlighted include access, field entry, the benefits and concerns about using video and the research limitations. This leads to a consideration of the ethical issues involved in working with children. The chapter then addresses the documentation of data and the analytical procedures employed. It draws on the literature to propose criteria for assessing the validity and reliability of the research and describes the additional research methods used that also serve to triangulate the data. The reporting format and style is then described and the chapter conclusion includes a summary of the above and a brief review of the sociocultural journey permeating this research.

4.1 The Research Design

This is a qualitative study designed to capture how children, in a playgroup, interpret and reproduce ways of participating that allow them to engage in play with this group of players in this context. It takes the situative perspective, that is, according to Greeno (1998:5) a focus *on 'interactive systems of activity in which individuals participate, usually to achieve objectives that are meaningful in relation to their more*

general identities and memberships in communities of practice'. It situates children's play activity in the sociocultural context of their everyday lives and allows us as James, Jenks *et al* (1998/2001) argue to gain insight into the processes of cultural reproduction as they take place. The approach requires that we appreciate children as *'competent witnesses'* (Danby and Farrell, 2004) and contributors to their own lives and as integrated cognitive and emotional beings. It assumes that the human experience is complex and dynamic and that people collectively engage in a process of interpreting and reconstructing the world in which they live.

The choice of methodology ultimately depends on the objective of the research (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, Hammersley, 1993). Quantitative research has been traditionally concerned with causality, prediction and the generalisation of findings. Qualitative research is interested in the process, in understanding the complexity of the experience and making links to other situations. Therefore it is a way of operationalising sociocultural concepts. Qualitative methods allow researchers to get close to the data and to engage with the uncertainty and unpredictability of human experience. They do not seek objective truth but rather an interpretation of events in the context of their motivation and purpose. As Harre (1994:27) says *'The meaning of anything in the domain of human consciousness is revealed by asking what role it plays in some human practice'.*

For these reasons the qualitative approach has been criticised for its subjectivity and for *'Self doubt and soft data'* (Ball, 1990:151) but these are also proposed as the strengths of the approach. It operates within a paradigm that argues that the ways we know the world are cultural and intersubjective and consequently tentative and context dependent. The researcher recognises biases and has the responsibility to ensure checks and balances that do not deny subjectivity but that offer sound and reasoned argument for the validity of his/her perspective. The reader has an obligation to be critical and in his/her own practice to continue the dialogue because as Geertz (1973: 29) says *'Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete'.* The qualitative researcher does not aspire to consensus or conclusion but does hope to significantly contribute to the debate.

4.1.1 Interpretive Ethnography

The fundamental goal of this research is to understand children's participation in sociodramatic play from the contributions of those engaging in the play. For this reason the ethnographic methodology has been selected. It begins by reconstructing a theory that is then tested and developed, in this case mainly through the description and explanation of the social transactions situated in children's sociodramatic play. This approach is validated by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), Jenks (2000) and others. James (2001: 246) tells us that it is the *'new orthodoxy in childhood research'*.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note the difficulty in precisely identifying the distinctive features of ethnography. They summarise its characteristics. It involves:

- The study of participative behaviour in everyday activities
- Emergent and unstructured data, collected mainly by observation
- Engagement with detail in a small number of case studies
- The analysis of data involves the interpretation of the meaning emerging from human action as it is described or enacted by participants

Willis and Trondman (2000) offer further valuable insights. They propose that ethnography is a set of methods that all involve direct contact with the research cohort towards capturing and representing the complexity of human relationships and experiences. It locates human experience within the institutions, practices and discourses of a culture and tries to describe it. It also recognises the creative dialectic between participation in social activity and the construction of culture and consequently describes the process of both continuity and change. They describe four features that can form a common bond between ethnographers across the many branches of sociology. Firstly, they propose that theory is the 'precursor, medium and outcome' of ethnography, that is, theory is employed to help us identify patterns in ethnographic evidence and understand social phenomena. The emergent ethnography in turn plays a role in re-shaping theory. Secondly, they emphasise the centrality of culture. Ethnographers are interested in issues of power and control that are reified in cultural practices, institutions and discourses. Even individualisation and diversification are a product of collective social processes. This leads to the third feature, the need for the ethnographer to be critical and to strive to understand and

make explicit the interests and agendas that drive social practices. Ethnography consequently has a role in informing how we understand our lives and in extending the knowledge base on which social policy is founded. Therefore, as Fernie (1988) proposes, it is both a research process and a research perspective intended to make visible and sensitise stakeholders to critical social processes.

In this study, children's sociodramatic play offers a context and medium for gathering empirical evidence of these processes in action. The data does not speak for itself. Rather it is informed by and in turn informs a theoretical perspective and thereby creates the possibility to extend, deepen and change our understanding of the world and ourselves.

The focus on complex transactions means that most ethnographies are, by their nature, case studies (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2005:203). They require keen observation, detailed data and contextual analysis. Participant observation is the hallmark of ethnography. The researcher gains understanding and insights through (1) close observation and consultation with participants and (2) detailed analysis of observations of everyday interactions and interpretations (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). It involves rich thick description (Geertz 1973) which Denzin (1989:83) describes with *'It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings'*. This describes the objective of the research methodology used here.

Meaning is understood as interpretive, intersubjective and therefore collectively constructed and in a process of ongoing change. Participation in activity is never fully completed or self-contained but rather is negotiated, contextual and distributed over people, places and things. This understanding applied to play calls for the interpretive approach of this research. As Corsaro (1992: 161) suggests, it sees development as '*reproductive rather than linear'*, that is, responsive to cultural demands rather than following universally true stages of development. His 'interpretive reproduction' approach recognises that every step of the research process involves interpretation, including the collection and transcription of the data, and the categorisation and selection of the data for further analysis. The interpretation is

subjective and includes *'emotionally-sensed knowledge'* (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer, 2001:135) but it is based on careful analysis of rich ethnographic material. The intent is to bring an enlightening perspective and to create the conditions that will allow the reader through the writer to observe and converse with the research participants. It contributes to an on-going conversation but it recognises that *'any phenomenon has multiple meanings.... any knowledge is perspectival, all experience is subject to interpretation'* (Moss, 2006: 26).

A number of ethnographic studies have been conducted on children's play since the 1970s. For example, Corsaro's studies (1979; 1985; 1997) have been based in preschools and focus on children developing peer culture through play. Feminists (Danby 1998; Davies 1989; MacNaughton 2000) concentrate on children's construction of discourses of gender differentiation. Göncü, Tuermer *et al* (1999) and others consider cultural differences. Wood and Attfield (1996), Brooker (2005) and Carr (2001) apply a sociocultural perspective to children's learning through play. Paley (1986; 1990) looks at how children's identity is negotiated through play. Goodwin (1990; 1997) moves outdoors and through the study of play researches the use of language and social networks. All have contributed to the establishment of ethnography as a valuable and authentic methodology in the study of play.

In this research, we follow children's construction of play stories. We study children's interactions with each other and with the practices and artefacts of the culture and context. The focus is on the dialectic between the participation strategies that the children employ and the guiding frame for on-going participation that emerges through the process. This involves layers of interpretation. The children are interpreting the meaning embedded in the context and in each other's contributions, their interpretations are co-ordinated to create new possibilities for on-going interpretation and the researcher and readers are in turn interpreting what they observe. The ethnographic approach strives to describe events so that the layers of interpretations become visible and meaningful.

The interpretation process in this research involves a shift from a focus on children's participation and meaning making as an individual process to a focus on participation and meaning making as a collectively constructed process. The children arrive in this

setting with individual personalities, competencies and interests. Taking an individualist perspective, I could study how these individual characteristics mediate their participation. However, my theoretical lens suggests that in order to understand children's participation in any social activity we need to consider not merely individual children, but importantly the mutual contributions of others, their communication, collaboration, and interrelationships (both proximal and distal), and the contextual factors, values and traditions in which their activities are embedded. Each is inherent in the other. This focus on the social forces that support children's participation in sociodramatic play offers different insights.

I sought to identify and categorise these social forces in order to understand their role and make them more visible. Thus begins a conversation between a theoretical perspective and the empirical data. This led to many dilemmas and questions resulting in further review of the theory and more nuanced theoretical understanding. Details of this dialectic relationship between theory and empirical data are further discussed under Data Analysis in section 4.4.2.

4.1.2 The Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this research therefore goes beyond the individual and concentrates on the individual-in-community-in-activity and as Wertsch (1991:12) says 'individuals-acting-with-mediational means'. Carpendale and Lewis (2004) offer the term 'triadic interaction' and Chapman (1991:34) describes the 'epistemic triangle' through which children construct a new conception of reality by coordinating their *object-orientation operative interactions with those of other people by means of their communicative interactions with the individuals in question'* (emphasis in original). Their development and learning is mediated by their social relationships in social activity and a framework for interpreting one another's contributions and for participating in shared social activity is constructed between them. This thinking is further found in the concepts of 'dynamic systems approach' (Smith and Thelen, 1993) or 'activity theory' (Engestrom, Meittenen and Punamaki, 1999, Farver, 1999). In all these approaches, the system or the activity is the connecting point for individual and community, traditions and artefacts. None of these elements exist separately. Each transforms the other and so for understanding any transformation *'[U]nderstanding process becomes essential'* (Rogoff 1990: 29). This thinking underpins the approach

in this research. It focuses on the participating child, in the activity of sociodramatic play. Children's transactions are considered as responsive to the contributions and goals of the other participants and the context, mediated by cultural interpretations.

4.1.3   Conclusion

This research takes a qualitative, ethnographic, interpretive approach and sets out to describe behaviour and explicate meaning. Ethnography is well established as a research methodology that recognises the complex and unpredictable nature of human meaning-making and the dialectic between a theoretical perspective and data. This dialectic is an important contribution of this research.

In keeping with a sociocultural perspective, the unit of analysis in this research is the child-in-social activity and participation is understood to be: (i) mediated by cultural artefacts, values and goals (ii) negotiated on the intermental, intersubjective plane and (iii) transformative. The approach has consequences for data collection, documentation, analysis and findings.

The next section provides further background information to set the context for understanding the analysis.

4.2   Research Participants and Setting

The data in this research consists of approximately 470 play episodes collected in a preschool playgroup between May 2005 and May 2006 (See Appendices 7, 8). In Ireland, children generally attend playgroup in the year before they start primary school. I began attending the playgroup in May 2005 to familiarise myself with the setting, and the staff and the children who would be the participants in this research, although I was aware that the majority of the cohort of children would change in the new academic year beginning the following September. I also wanted to develop my skills as an observer and videographer. I considered this the pilot phase. I documented approximately 28 play episodes between May and June which I studied over the Summer months towards clarifying my focus and my approach and improving my research and documentation skills. Two of these episodes, 'The Kiss' and 'Don't correct the Mammy' feature in the analysis.

4.2.1 Research participants

The research cohort involves the nineteen children who attended the playgroup in the academic year 2005 to 2006 and three children from the pilot research term bringing the total to twenty-two children. Seven of the children were returnees from the previous year. The total age range was from two years and eight months to four years and nine months over the course of the research. These children and their relationships are described in more detail in chapter five.

All of the children feature in the data to some extent, but a core group dominate. This group was not pre-selected. Rather they were the most regular frequenters of the sociodramatic play areas. I began on the basis that any play episode could be used to demonstrate sociocultural theory. The purpose in sample selection was therefore (i) to capture the diversity within the setting so that a rich picture of children's participation in play could be presented, (ii) to find play episodes that made the theory visible and accessible and (iii) to follow players to track progression over time. Selecting where and what to observe is challenging within the complex environment of a playgroup. There are often a number of simultaneous interactive sociodramatic play episodes to be observed and the researcher is forced to choose. I regularly experienced the 'elsewhere syndrome', that is, that the most interesting things seem to be happening somewhere else (Bird, Hammerley, Gomm and Woods, 1996). I confined myself largely to the end of the room that contained the home and book corners and the construction and floor play areas and moved to the sand or water area when the former was quiet or to follow a particular episode.

In the pilot research, I found I was drawn to follow one or two characters who could be relied on to generate interesting and lively activity. Being aware of this, it was important, particularly in the early stages, to keep an open mind and to collect a range of episodes that evidenced the participation of newcomers and oldtimers, boys and girls, younger and older, successful and more challenged players. Further decisions depended on following what I came to consider to be interesting play or relationship developments and to offer most potential in terms of exploring the emerging themes. Inevitably I became involved in the on-going dynamics between particular children

and as I came to know them well I was in a better position to interpret the layers of meaning and agendas in their play stories.

The play of a core group consequently permeates the analysis with three benefits in particular. Firstly the reader becomes familiar with a small group and secondly there is a sense of continuity as we follow their play through three chapters. In the final analysis chapter, I select two children from this core group to analyse their transformation over the period of observation, by which time the reader is well acquainted with many of the group dynamics and play patterns. Of course, any of the children in this playgroup have interesting narratives to contribute but all could not be followed with the same intensity and so I had to select. My commitment to spending significant time in the playgroup and to documenting both fieldnotes and videotapes ensured a generous sample of play episodes from which to identify representative patterns for analysis and also to provide data for future stories.

The playgroup employs three staff members, two of whom I already knew. The third teacher began work in the playgroup in September, as the research proper got under way. For short periods during the year they were supported by trainees. They are all referred to as teachers in this research.

The children and teachers in this cohort were the principal participants with me in this research through their engagement in the play episodes that constitute the main data. The data was supplemented by conversations with them and with parents and other expert advisors. The process is further explained under data collection and analysis and this contribution is interspersed throughout the analysis. I realise that there was further untapped potential in this element. I was constrained by time and in particular because I wanted to work within the established routines and practices of the setting, in the interest of both keeping the data natural and respecting these ways of working. My original plan to engage the children in reflective conversation about their play stories by replaying the video was aborted after pilot attempts because it was disruptive. I was constrained in my conversations with parents because I was cautious about difficulties that I might create for the service providers. I did not wish to detain the parents or to initiate concerns or questions among them that would revert as additional responsibilities for the teachers. I also recognised that the teachers were

busy and their time for conversation during and after the sessions was limited. The research advisors were busy people too. My engagement with all of these research participants is a strength of this thesis but our conversations were limited and in the case of children and parents in particular were largely confined to fact finding, clarification and checking permission issues.

4.2.2 The Research Site

The research is located in a preschool playgroup in a large housing estate in a suburban area of Dublin. The service is accommodated in a community centre. Playgroups generally operate for two and half to three hours four or five days per week. This playgroup operates from Monday to Thursday from 9 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. with a second session in the afternoon. In the Western world, playgroups tend to share a common structure (Singer, 1998, Dahlberg, Moss et al., 1999) in the form of rituals and routines and this includes a 'free play' period for thirty to ninety minutes as part of the session. The term 'free play' refers to a period in the playgroup session when children are allowed to choose their own activities and are encouraged to engage with play facilities provided in the playgroup. These include sand and water play, creative art materials, table top toys, construction materials and role play equipment in the home corner. Carswell (2002) found that there is a consistency in the provision of a 'free play' period as part of the daily routine in Irish preschools and that the accepted role of the adult is to prepare the environment and to facilitate play, that is, to follow the child's lead but not to control or direct (Carswell 2002). The playgroup in question works within this general ethos. It veers towards a particularly strong emphasis and commitment to play. The environment is organised to promote sociodramatic play. They provide cooking, clothing and domestic life artefacts as well as artefacts for trades such as doctors, builders, firefighters etc. and they allow ninety minutes on arrival in the mornings for children to choose and negotiate their own play themes. Later activities include lunch, outdoor play and exercise, storytime, music and small group structured activities. This could be described as loosely typical of the playgroup culture.

I originally intended to locate in the home corner but while boys featured regularly in this area in the pilot study, girls were in the majority. This gave rise to concern that the home corner may be a predominantly female venue with gender specific

interactions. Consequently, the observed sociodramatic play takes place not only in the homecorner area but also as children create imaginary situations in the book corner and with blocks or miniature castle and toys on the floor or at the tables. The sand, water and craft areas were observed less frequently because they were located at the other end of the room. This diagram shows the layout of the playroom.

Home corner	Table-top activities		Sand Water	Toilets
				Paint
Door to garden	Train tracks		Playdough Arts and crafts	
Book corner	Building area Castle Miniature house			entrance
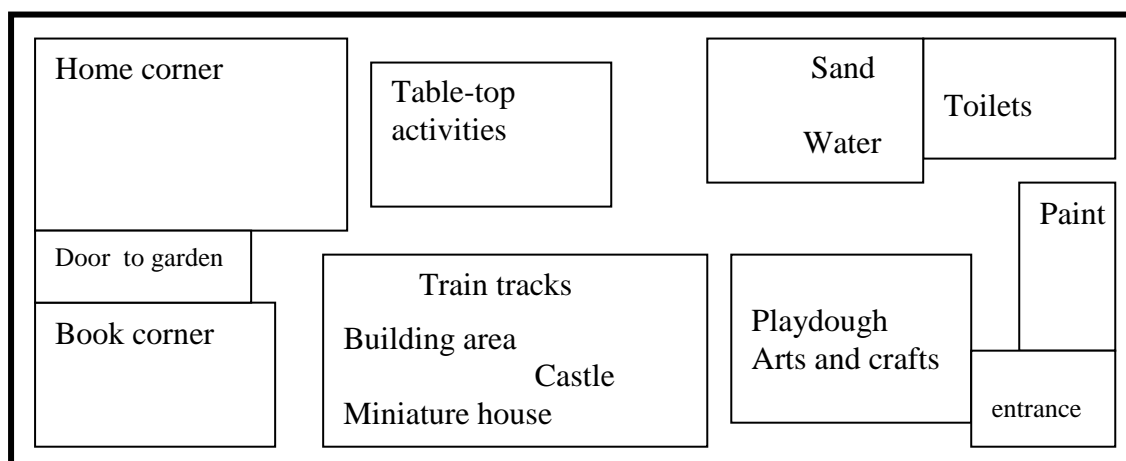
The playgroup offers an opportunity to observe children as they move into a setting away from reliance on parental direction towards negotiating participation with mostly unfamiliar peers in a new context (Corsaro 1985). While the children have had a myriad of experiences and encounters already, they are new to this group experience and are challenged to participate with new children and new activities in new contexts. Fernie, Davies *et al* (1993:96) make the point that on entering preschool *'[C]hildren as young as three years are faced with the challenge of integration into a complex organization…..Children's interaction skills, adequate for playing with one or two friends on home turf, must also be expanded to negotiate play and friendship among large groups of competing peers'.* In the first place therefore, the playgroup offers a particular opportunity to study the ways of participating that children construct together. Secondly, as they enter the pretend world, children themselves create new and diverse contexts that further stretch their participation skills and at the same time make the rules of participation more explicit (Vygotsky, 1933). Kalliala (2002: 11) suggests that play is the area where children act most on their own and so we can observe children as they largely take control of their own negotiations and reconstruct a play culture.

The playgroup, in contrast to a laboratory, offers a setting where children's participation in play can be studied in a reasonably natural state. However, it is important to remember the impact of this context too on children's participation. James (1999) suggests, for example, that many of the divisions in children's groupings, such as gender, age and ability, may be a function of the institution and untrue of children in the home or on the street. The ethnographic approach and sociocultural perspective takes cognisance of the affordances and constraints of this immediate context and allows the researcher to study how children interpret the broader cultural world and reconstruct the rules of social organisation within it.

This playgroup was chosen because of its generous attention to play and its accessibility. The researcher knows the staff and they were very open to her presence for as long as she wished. The service has engaged with several training programmes, which involve on-site visits and mentoring, including the use of video for transactional analysis and feedback. Consequently the researcher was confident about the quality of practice and the capacity within the service to cope with an observer and camera. The researcher's familiarity with and understanding of the culture of the service and the community comes from many years of working in the area and was further enriched during the pilot phase. Following that phase, for the children and families who returned in September 2005, I was a familiar and accepted element of the playgroup and our friendly exchanges eased my introduction to the new families.

4.2.2.1   *One site and Generalisability*

This research is limited to one site and a relatively small cohort of children giving rise to questions about the value and generalisability of the findings. A number of factors contribute. Firstly, Bryman (1988) proposes that within qualitative research the focus is on the generalisability of cases to theoretical propositions rather than to populations or universes. This research seeks to apply a theory of learning to a particular context and thereby, as Hammersley (1999:13) says, to present theoretical phenomena *'in new and revealing ways'*. Such theoretical phenomena as the culturally mediated nature of play or the intersubjective nature of meaning are generalisable, as are such emerging themes as the role of group dynamics or the cultural guiding frame in children's participation in play. How the research participants interpret culture in their play or how they achieve intersubjectivity or organise group relationships is specific to this

context. The research, in this way, demonstrates the dynamic between universality and differences. The in-depth study and thick description of specific contexts and behaviours offers new insights and new ways of describing the general theory and therefore the emerging themes can be described as theoretical description rather than new theory (Hammersley 1999).

Secondly, the site can be considered 'typical' (Schofield, 1993) on a number of dimensions, including age group, the 'free play' session, the play supports offered and the play themes. Schofield argues that when typicality is combined with thick description that interprets activity in terms of context and meaning, then the possibilities for generalisation are increased. The propositions from this research can be tested in other milieux (Silverman, 2005). '*When wedded to other studies which share your theoretical orientation, one site contributes to the generalization*' (Silverman 2005: 132). The data from this research can combine with data from other research to create an archive that further generalises theory about children's participation in sociodramatic play and is available for reinterpretation and testing.

Ultimately the reader decides on the transferability of the findings. If the phenomena described resonate with the reader's experience, then the reader may find implications for their personal context or for future study (Merriam, 1998). As Denzin (1997:12) writes '*Ethnographers can only produce messy texts that have some degree of verisimilitude; that is, texts that allow the readers to imaginatively feel their way into the experiences that are described by the author*'.

I attended the playgroup regularly during May and June 2005, on a daily basis from September until Christmas 2005 and then on a twice-monthly basis until May 2006. A vast amount of data was generated and the challenge for this research is careful and detailed analysis. Consequently it was only feasible to engage with one setting.

4.2.2.2   Limitations

This is, at the same time, a limitation of this research. Doubtlessly, to work with more than one site would greatly extend and enrich the data and findings. It would be particularly helpful to study children in a cross section of playgroups, including settings with different socio-economic catchment groups, and settings working with

families from different ethnic backgrounds. This would allow the different ways of constructing participation in sociodramatic play to emerge. It would also be interesting to study play in the neighbourhood setting where different rules of social organisation may apply. Furthermore, more than one researcher would allow more detail to be observed and ensure that the complexity of relationships and negotiations can be more comprehensively described.

4.3   Research Methods for Data collection

The interpretive ethnographer has basically three ways to gather information about activities in natural settings: observation, interviewing and document analysis (Walsh, Tobin and Graue, 1993). I used the first two of these and combined them with fieldnotes, including personal perceptions, and video recording of events.   The interviewing took the form of informal conversations with children, parents and staff and more formal meetings with staff and with parents. The next section describes the processes of collecting, documenting and analysing data and is then followed by a discussion of the methods engaged to triangulate the data and analysis.

4.3.1 Defining a play episode

The focus of the research is children's sociodramatic play, also called social pretend or role-play or fantasy play (Sawyer 1997: xviii). Corsaro (1985: 77/78) describes role-play as play in which children enact roles that exist in society. He differentiates between role-play and fantasy play. The latter involves roles that children cannot reasonably be expected to encounter in real life or a role that they allocate to representative objects such as blocks or toys (Corsaro, 2003). In this research I use the term sociodramatic play to include both forms of play. It includes real life roles and fantasy characters, sometimes embodied by the children themselves and sometimes created by animating objects, because all are mediated by real life meaning-making tools. Children use their experiences and cultural ways of knowing to create the pretend scenarios and functions for even their fantasy characters. Paley (1986: 79) regularly quotes children's integration of real life roles and fantasy: *'She's Supergirl and Emily is the mother and Mollie is the big sister and Wonderwoman'* and later Molly says to the toy cat *'No fighting in this class Kitty. Go to your room'.*

Corsaro (1981:12) defines interactive episodes *'as sequences of behaviour that begin with the acknowledged presence of two or more interactants in an ecological area and ends with the physical movement of interactants from the area, which terminates the originally initiated activity'*. Within these episodes children interact towards developing shared meaning about the emerging activity. Adapting Corsaro's definition, an episode in this research refers to a scenario where children share initiatives at action, emotional or verbal level towards connecting in a play story. Like Strandell (1997) I have difficulty with Corsaro's description of the beginning and end of an episode. I too find that interactions and activities sometimes begin separately and grow into one another or split, often unnoticed. Sometimes play themes are dropped and reinitiated later in a new episode. Sometimes themes from different groups merge and form a new episode. Some episodes involve two or three interactional turns, others continue for up to forty-five minutes. Ultimately a play episode is a series of interactions between children towards engaging one another in a play friendship or story, a situation according to Goffman (1963;89) where one senses *'mutual activity entailing preferential communication rights'*. The data includes interactive scenarios from both inside and outside the pretend frame because they are often linked and each can contribute to our understanding of the other.

4.3.2 Observer as Learner Participant

The key method used was unstructured observation over a long period so that I could become familiar with the dynamics within the setting and follow transformation over time. Observation involves all the senses including interpretation of what we see, hear, smell etc. Our thinking processes are involved and we are actively making sense of our observations. Time to check meaning, to re-evaluate, to affirm or contradict is an essential element (Hammersley and Atkinson 1989). The latter was greatly supported by consultation with children and staff and by rechecking video recordings in the light of later revelations.

Observation took place during 'free play' period from 9.00 to 10.30 a.m. The aim was to study children's play with a minimum amount of obstruction and intervention and to capture their lived experiences as they construct their play stories. Long-term observation allowed me to contextualise the transactions in events before and after.

Ethnography draws heavily on observation and participation. The observational techniques vary from the detached observer who observes from an invisible viewing point to full participant observation, in which the observer takes on an established role within the setting. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) identified four types of observer (1) complete observer (2) observer as participant (3) participant as observer and (4) complete participant. Corsaro (1985: 2003) became a full participant in the children's play and claims that this gave him real access to children's perspectives. My previous experience and pilot study dictated against this approach. As a lone observer, I had to deal with observing, taking notes and operating a video camera. I did not wish to invite too much interaction with or attention from the children. I was prepared to answer children's questions about my activities but I wished to keep my interactions to a minimum during their play. In the pilot study, I sometimes showed the children a piece of video in order to invite their interpretations of the play episode or to glean further information or clarification. Sharing the small video screen led to jostling, disrupted viewing and competition to feature on the video and then repeated requests to see or handle the camera. Consequently I abandoned this strategy and confined myself to choosing quiet moments to ask questions of clarification. When I wanted information about play characters or artefacts or activities, I prefaced my questions with *'You know I'm trying to learn all about play'*. Children responded with very helpful information. On one occasion in the pilot study, for example, two girls were sitting together, apparently praying. Later I asked them *'In your game, I see you were praying. I'm wondering about what you were doing'*. It emerged that they were grandmothers in the Holy God Place in a local shopping centre and were waiting for the Luas, a new rapid rail system. When this theme arose the next day, I was immediately tuned in. Other conversations are reported throughout the analysis. Sometimes children made it clear that I was interfering. When I enquired at the wrong moment I was told *'The babies are going to sleep and I need it to be quiet'*. When I enquired about Greg entering the mermaids' den, after he explained to me that only girls could be mermaids, he suddenly felt a headache coming on and when I asked about a particularly angry exchange between Mairéad and Greg, Mairéad responded with a silent smile. Taking on board Boyden and Ennew (1997), Brooker (2005) and other's ethic about communicating to children their right to opt out of interview, even in informal conversation or questioning I tried to respect their choices and withdraw. I also learned that wondering aloud (Brooker, 2005) and consulting

with a group rather than direct one-to-one questioning (Carr, 2000) encourages children to talk and rebalances the power relationship between adult and child.

Kalliala (2002) reports that in her conversations about play with children she tries to indicate that (i) they know something that she doesn't know and (ii) what they know is important and interesting. '*In this way children were defined as experts of their own play culture and this was to characterise the interaction between us*' (ibid: 12). I wanted to do likewise but I also wanted to remain as inconspicuous as possible, to position myself and establish an identity as someone who is a friendly information gatherer but neither teacher nor playmate. This role might best be described as 'observer as learner participant', an identity, which balances power in favour of the children and encourages them to be informants/teachers. I recognised that as an observer I must be continuously aware of my participation status and my impact on the interactions within the context. This status was brought home clearly to me when I returned one day to the playgroup following an absence for a few days. I was surprised at the children's welcome, their pleasure at my return and their eagerness to talk to me and show me things. I was reminded of Stern's (2004:xvi-xvii) contention that '*what is shared in the moment of meeting is an emotional, lived story. It is physically, emotionally and implicitly shared not just explicated*'.

At the same time I would say that with very few exceptions, my presence as a researcher interfered little with the play. Smith (1981) notes that children involved in play are keen to ignore distractions and to sustain the play at all costs. He says that minor reactions to an observer do occur but it is unlikely that they have a significant effect on the progress of play. My experience echoes that of Smith. Sometimes when observing I made eye contact with children and I think they sometimes found it momentarily discomforting but quickly recovered. On one occasion, Mairéad was pretending to eat a sandwich and noticed me watching. She continued to eat but turned her face away and covered her side face with her hand. She was obviously embarrassed. This was unusual. Sometimes too, particularly in the early days, children asked me to tie or open something but compared to the teachers, they rarely called on me for help. Also, I usually tried to recruit a teacher in times of trouble but at times I stepped into the breach myself and rescued or restrained a child. Sometimes they wished to draw my attention to their achievements. On such occasions they

might call me with *'Teacher, Teacher'*. When I reminded them that I was not a teacher, they often readdressed me as 'Learner'. Greg sometimes reminded the others that I was a learner and would say to me *'Hey, Learner, look at this'*. David once argued my status with me. When I declared that I was a learner, not a teacher, he insisted that I was a teacher. When I asked why he thought that, he said that I looked like a teacher. As time went on, contact during play was reduced mainly to moments when something verging on the devious happened. Then children often look to see if an adult had noticed. If I was the closest adult, they looked to me. I tried not to react or appear to notice. (The impact of video recording is discussed later.)

Their questions certainly had an impact on me as the following note from my journal on 18th October indicates: *Greg has taken to calling me 'Learner'. 'Learner, learner, did you see this?' he asks. I'm certainly a learner. Their questions alone offer food for reflection and warrant further research. Question such as 'Can I play? 'Are you my friend?' are complex and challenging. Totally unprepared I was asked 'Can boys and girls have pink?' How do I explain that colour and its meaning is a social construct? So, I play for time. Why do you ask? 'Cos there's a pink car in the box' 'And do boys play with it?' Yeah. 'That makes sense' I say. Phew! I look around - 5 girls and 3 teachers wear pink - no boys. Should I encourage Greg to embrace the colour pink? Of course, I need not be concerned because I'm confident that he has worked the answer out for himself. So why does he ask me? After all, as Rich Harris points out, it's not my opinion that counts; it's a peer group thing.*

The critical issue is whether or not the observer causes serious distortion. Mercer (1991: 48.) suggests that all one can do is *'(a) try to employ observational techniques which will obtain suitable data with the least possible disruption of the processes under observation and (b) use participants' own views and those of other informed sources to help judge the representative quality of what has been observed and recorded'.* I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible and in the case of the latter my conversations with the children and staff in particular and with colleagues and Advisory Group members working in the field were very helpful. I also strove to be very rigorous in the collection and documentation process. Participant observation has been criticised by some researchers as impressionistic, biased and lacking precision. Consequently it is important to apply rigorous procedures to ensure that

claims and concepts are well founded and justifiable. The counterbalances include triangulation, ethical sampling, documentation, appropriate claims, reflectivity and a tightness of fit between data collection, analysis and concept formation (Piantanida and Garman, 1999). Ultimately, research is always a construction and the researcher's role as observer and interpreter must be part of the account.

Brewer (2000) argues that the participant observer selects records influenced by his/her own life experiences and therefore only compiles a partial and highly autobiographical portrait of a way of life. There is much validity in this. Many events, interactions, initiatives happened in this setting that I did not capture. While I tried to remain open and true to the research aim of studying how children organise their participation in sociodramatic play, I was constantly drawn to relationship issues and the emotional world of the children. I can say that this was indeed the most surprising discovery about children's participation for me but it may also be true that I was drawn to these concerns because of the relationship issues and emotions that I have encountered myself. The reader must be aware that this researcher's focus and interpretive lens is guided also by her personal experiences. To quote Yeats (1958) *'How can we know the dancer from the dance?'*

The researcher plays the central role in qualitative research. Success largely depends on his/her personal skills and knowledge. Interpersonal skills that allow the researcher to build trust and rapport with both children and adults are vital to this research. She must also make things happen and so management skills in terms of finding time for conversation, organising meetings and parental video viewings and discussion groups and the capacity and confidence to establish these groups is called for. All involved a learning curve.

Particular skills are needed for observation, including a 'loose neck' (Aarts, 2000) for scanning scenes and an ability to discern and select significant moments and interactions for scrutiny and closer definition. Similarly, skills are needed for conversing with children if the researcher is to gather authentic information and perspectives. These include 'active listening' to ensure the speakers that you hear and take on board what they are saying; keeping the conversation focused on the subject; and checking for accuracy, rephrasing, summarising, pressing for clarity etc. I think

my education and experience in working with children and as a tutor/trainer, group facilitator and committee chairperson working with adults, supported this work.

4.3.3 Field entry and developing relationships

Field entry is of crucial importance and in the case of this research calls for a balance between being open and transparent and being sensitive to children's anxieties in a new situation. Fortunately, the long-term nature of the research, one of the most important features of ethnographic research (Rizzo, Corsaro and Bates, 1992), allowed time to take an incremental approach. Because the pilot phase happened in the Summer term I was confident that the children were well settled and able to cope with my presence. I introduced myself saying '*My name is _____, and I want to learn more about how children play so that I can tell other grown-ups about it. So I'm writing down all the things I see in the playgroup and I'm going to take photos. Is that alright*?' I began with observation and note taking and later, the camera. In the beginning the children were curious and wanted to see what I was writing but quickly lost interest. The camera in turn attracted no more interest than the note taking. When playgroup opened in September and new children entered the scene, I was keen to study how children make initial contact. This meant that I was collecting data from the first day and therefore must introduce myself in the new group, while collecting data. Again, friendly exchanges with the 'oldtimers' eased my introduction to the newcomers. Aware that they were very young, separating from their parents, dealing with a new scene and maybe feeling overwhelmed or vulnerable, I gradually explained myself to groups of children as I moved into their play area.

I also needed to ensure that the teachers were comfortable with the process. I explained to them that the focus of the research was the participation strategies of the children and that while the adults played a part in this, my focus was on the children, not on them. I stressed my appreciation of any advice they could give me about approaches to data collection and analysis and about reducing obtrusiveness. Formal meetings with the teachers in October, November and January proved very helpful. I checked with them about the impact of my presence on their work. One teacher began by asking if I wanted her to be honest and voiced her uncertainty about how she should behave, particularly in front of the camera: *'Last week, when you were videoing, I didn't know if I should go in or not and I was a bit concerned that I was*

doing the wrong thing'. Another said that *'I let things go that I mightn't otherwise'* because I seemed interested in what was happening. She quoted an incident when children were play fighting with pretend knives. They normally would not allow that kind of violence, even in play but because I was observing with camera she did not stop it. I was aware at the time that my videotaping might appear to condone the incident. I explained that I wanted to work within any rules they established and that I understood that they had to create a safe environment for all the children. I assured them that whatever they decided I was confident that I would get plenty of data so they should not concern themselves with my needs.

During our meetings, I shared some of the insights that were emerging for me as an observer, particularly around how children develop their identities as playgroup students and come to appropriate the ways and rules of behaving that characterise playgroup attendance. We discussed a number of children and their transformation. We used a 'group dynamics' lens to discuss elements of social organisation within the peer group and talked also about how children use adults to get what they wanted. Our shared experience of being in the playgroup and coming to know the children created the possibility for everybody to contribute and enrich each other's understanding. I also shared with them any articles that I wrote.

I found our conversations very enjoyable and the staff expressed similar feelings. The meetings helped to alleviate concerns and to develop a good working relationship. I also found the meetings very informative. They, for example, expressed their surprise at details captured on video that had escaped their attention and at how unaffected the children were by my presence and my camera, even when I was up close to them. They also provided extra information about the children, their backgrounds, lives and relationships that threw light on the children's meaning-making in play.

I was conscious that my presence, the sharing of my observations and my requests for information alerted staff to previously unconsidered points of interest in children's play and consequently had an impact on practice. Shared glances or remarks about moments of particular interest were a source of satisfaction and motivation and many moments that hitherto may have been lost or forgotten became memorable or worthy of note. Teachers often drew my attention to occurrences and were able to repeat or

contextualise what children said for me. Over the course of the research we developed very friendly and mutually supportive relationships that I am confident added to the pleasure we each found in our work. While impacting on practice within this service is not a direct aim of the research, it can be a positive ripple effect.

Field entry is a process and requires that the researcher checks for concerns and interpretations on a regular basis. Meetings, regular conversations and sharing articles offered a way of checking with adults. Whenever the children seemed conscious of my presence, I explained what I was doing and asked their permission.

4.3.4 Using Video

As recommended by Corsaro (1982) I first tried to ensure that my presence was accepted in the setting before introducing the camera. This happened very quickly. In the first week, I scanned the room to capture activity and gradually over the second and third week I began to follow particular play episodes. I used a hand-held video camcorder (JVC GR DV700EK) because of the need to be mobile. There were a number of good locations from which to film. The homecorner is enclosed on one side by shelving where I could rest the camcorder and note pad and be within earshot of activities in that corner while retaining a view of the whole room. The rotating lens on the camcorder allowed me at times to look downwards while filming and to scribble notes. At other times I had to opt for one or other activity. Keeping the subjects in focus with a hand held camera is difficult with very active children and demands the observer's full attention. At other times when the battery failed or the tape ended in the middle of an episode, I reverted to note taking.

A supplementary unidirectional microphone was attached to the camera to improve voice pick-up, but with limited success. Hearing what the children said continued to be challenging because (i) children's speech at this age can be very indistinct and disjointed (ii) children often do not project their voices outwards when they are engaged in activities such as cooking etc. and (iii) background noise and other voices make it difficult to hear. Again, fieldnotes are important here to document speech, and other initiatives and clues not captured on camera. This involved quick notes as I filmed and supplementing them with more detail sitting in the car after the session. Further information, requested from children and staff, embellish the field notes.

4.3.4.1   *Advantages and Disadvantages of Video*

Adler and Adler (1992) identified that video recording can at times be very intrusive in natural settings and cause children and adults to act in unnatural ways. They nevertheless valued it for the opportunity it offers to re-examine and analyse play episodes repeatedly and to pick up on subtleties that escape the observer in the moment. As already mentioned, the teachers in the early stages were very aware of the video and hesitated entering its range and the children were curious about it and wanted to see how it worked and what was filmed. They also behaved self-consciously at times in front of both the camera and me but such reactions appeared momentary and decreased with time. This phenomenon of decreasing awareness over time is well documented. Mercer (1991) found that children are no more than 'temporarily' and 'superficially' affected by the use of a camera. Corsaro (1985) recorded twelve questions that the children asked about the video equipment, only two of which were asked after the third day of recording. He found no disparity between videotaped episodes and episodes recorded by fieldnotes. Like Corsaro (1982), I consulted the teachers on this issue. They were confident, indeed surprised, by how acclimatised the children became to the video and how oblivious they appeared even when I filmed up close in order to catch voices. They were convinced that the activities and behaviours recorded were typical of the children.

The use of video has been a major contribution to this research. I used it constantly to recheck what happened and to review the scene with all the complexity of the interaction. This is not to say that the camera is objective. It is an extension of the observer, guided by his/her hand and eye. S/he interprets and reconstructs and in that way re-presents events in a biased way. S/he controls the video and therefore the video is an accomplice in transforming what has happened. However, it loses less of the detail and produces data that is closer, more descriptive and richer than any other form of re-presentation. This is particularly important in research that focuses on human interactions. I could never have gathered the level of detail without the camera and I could not have revisited the scenes with the same sense of being there.

Replaying video was a major part of my life for three years. For the year of data collection I watched video on a daily basis for hours. A year after leaving the

playgroup I could still watch the video and relive the experience. It engaged family and colleagues and sharing with them was part of the processing. A major advantage of video is that different perspectives, sometimes coming from different disciplines can be applied to the same raw data. Because the video can be viewed often as required, it supports detailed analysis and analytical decisions can be delayed until the researcher is confident about his/her approach and the aspects to be highlighted.

Being there, observing and taking fieldnotes is a vital accompaniment to video. Fieldnotes can capture events off camera that impact on the main scene and record many events when using a camera is not appropriate. I noted, for example, absences and the impact on social organisation within the group. On the 3rd October when Greg declared his intention to drive to the 'merry-go-round' I could link it to a reference that Amy made earlier. When Spencer treated his 'pretend' friend Woofie in hospital, my fieldnotes registered teacher's explanation, and when Greg greeted him first thing in the morning with 'Hey you get off my roof', my notes captured the layers of communication involved. They were also a way of capturing the subjective experience of being part of the events. I noted, for example, my concern when children were excluded or my pleasure in witnessing their creativity or bravery. Yet at the same time, I find when I review video to check details, I am surprised to see things not noted previously or that I understand something differently in the light of new developments. Re-presentation of data is always flawed but the combination of being there, taking fieldnotes and filming certainly improves accuracy.

4.3.4.2 *Further Limitations*

I used a small hand-held camera with limited range. Using a number of cameras, at least one that was fixed and focused on the homecorner area and that could capture all events in that area, would have enriched the data. A more professional camera and more professional camera skills would have allowed me to follow the children more comprehensively and with better quality video. These facilities would have incurred costs beyond my budget and have further implications for organisation and intrusion. The lesser quality technology demanded more work in deciphering the children's contributions and particularly their language. Nevertheless I am confident that the video-recordings are a valuable contribution in this research and may even encourage the research sector in Ireland towards further investment in technology.

4.3.5 Ethical considerations

The use of video raises important ethical considerations for research of this kind. Ethical concerns need to be taken into consideration in any research project, but particularly those involving young children. Many of the ethical dilemmas that arise when conducting research with children were highlighted for me in the process of analysis and writing. I now recognise the need to question the assumption that researchers have the right to use children as research participants. I realise that I was privy to the conversations of these children while they were largely unconscious of my presence. I asked and rechecked their permission but they did not understand the possibilities within this research nor were they in a position to defend their rights. At the same time, my motivation was clearly to carry out research that would inform our understanding of children's lives and contribute to thinking and practice that would enhance their learning. I wanted to be honest and transparent with them and their parents but at the same time I realise that I did not want to jeopardise the research project. As Singer (1993) reminds us, it is difficult to be the guardian of ethics when self-interest is involved. This dilemma continuously drives my reflexivity about my intentions and about best practice in ensuring children's rights to privacy and confidentiality. I understand that it is imperative that I treat them with due regard and dignity as co-participants in the research and in particular that I respect their entitlement not to be judged, stigmatised or exploited. The following outlines some of the ethical dilemmas that arose in this research and the safeguards that I engaged.

My first commitment was to be respectful and open with the research participants. Clark (2004) outlines three main starting points for her research approach, each based on concepts of competency. They are the view that (1) children are 'beings not becomings' which leads to an acknowledgement that children can contribute perspectives on their own lives (2) children need tools to give them a voice and (3) learning is a collaborative process in which adults and children search for meaning together. These are three valued starting points that inform the ethics of this research.

I sought permission from staff and parents to observe and video children and staff in playgroup and to use the video for reporting purposes. (See appendix 1). The service provider already seeks this permission for her own documentation and this familiarity

with the practice made it easier for parents to grant permission. In this way I am the beneficiary of the trusting relationship between the parents and service providers and carry the responsibility to honour and not jeopardise that trust. I informed the parents about the aim of my study and their right to refuse or withdraw or seek information and clarification at any time. Only one parent showed some reluctance to give initial permission but when I assured her that refusal was a valid choice she gave consent. I was a permanent feature of the playgroup as parents arrived with their children in the morning and engaged in conversation with them. They often sought opportunities to talk to me when they were concerned about their children's happiness or progress within the setting and with the permission of the owner, I often shared observations with them. I also showed video excerpts of all the children to the parents on 'Parents' Day' at the end of term. I purposefully included episodes that I considered sensitive to further inform them and assess their reaction. They were charmed by the playing children and amazed at the competence they displayed. Again I reminded them that if they had any concerns they should talk to me. I wanted to check and recheck with them and offer information that would inform their consent but I also realise that many of the problems arise in the analysis and in the interpretations of others and they were not privy to that. Our conversations also lead to some discussion of their children's contributions to the data and offered an opportunity to check their consent. Parents were inclined to dismiss my concerns with comments such as 'they're only children', a perspective that seems to conflict with the perspective of children as people with the same rights as adults. Further dilemmas arise. Is the parents' comment fair? Do I have a responsibility to introduce these parents to another perspective with the possible effect of making them more concerned and suspicious or do I accept the difference in perspectives? I explained that I wished to respect the children's right to privacy and confidentiality. They in turn invested their trust in me to do that. However, the exploratory nature of ethnographic research means that it is not possible during the observation period to be clear and open about the findings or the data that will eventually be used in evidence. It was too difficult to return to parents for further discussion at this stage because the children had now left the preschool. This is why the first commitment to being respectful and confidential and to engaging an analytical framework that recognises competency and collaborative meaning-making is so important.

I also asked the children's permission to observe them, video and write about it. Should children object I intended to do my utmost to avoid them and commit to ensuring that they did not feature in any documentation. However, as Löfdahl (2006) identifies, informed consent is very problematic when dealing with young children because of their limited understanding of research and their difficulty in refusing adult requests. Informed consent may as well be 'educated' consent according to David, Edward and Alldred (2001) because children are accustomed to following the direction of adults. Again, I recognise the responsibility to respect their trust in me.

With this responsibility in mind, I have been vigilant in ensuring the anonymity of the children in this thesis. In the text, they are given pseudonyms and I have revised each chapter again and again to ensure privacy. I have decided that my original proposal to present video as part of the thesis is too problematic. While the video excerpts would serve to remind the reader of the complexity of every situation and in particular the holistic and embodied nature of children's interactions, it poses problems for anonymity. I also need to reconsider the use of the video in other situations. When separated from the text of the thesis and the characterisation involved, it may be ethically possible to use excerpts as examples of children's participation strategies and competence. While I have parental permission to do this, I think the usage needs to be time-limited and that children's permission needs to be rechecked when they are in a position to better understand. As they move into middle childhood at about eight years of age, they may wish to withdraw or they may see a value in being participants in engaging adults, and particularly pedagogues in a view of children as competent contributors. My commitment therefore is to recheck permission and to use the video data judiciously and sensitively with particular attention to any negative possibilities.

4.3.5.1   *Research Ethics Committee*

The DIT Research Ethics Committee has given approval to this research on the basis of ethical considerations including information, consent and confidentiality. (See Appendices 2, 3 and 4 for application, submission and approval.)

4.4   Data documentation and Analysis

Nias (1993) provides an insightful account of the process of data documentation and analysis in qualitative research. She gives a sense of how overwhelming the volume of data generated can be, the life choices and commitments she had to make, the importance of ongoing analysis and reflection and particularly the value of thinking time. Again we can see some of the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research. It can negotiate meaning, deal with feelings and work with complexity and change but it is emotionally taxing and enormously time consuming.

I spent approximately two hours in the playgroup on each visit and made 68 visits over the academic year. Combined with preparation and note-making time in the car immediately afterwards and travel, this was an enormous time commitment. While present, I took notes of observations, insights and conversation with parents, staff and children, and about an hour of video most days. Each afternoon, the data from all sources was transcribed and combined with reflective commentary and analysis. (See Appendix 9 for sample of one day's documentation.) Processing the data can be taxing. Learning to use computer software, replaying video again and again, making back up copies, labelling and logging, demands much time and patience. Learning to edit, to title and subtitle and record was full of hiccups. While up-skilling occurs over time, the lack of a comprehensive understanding of computer operations causes error and frustration. Transcription is extremely labour intensive. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) talk of the long hours involved in analysing one hour of video. Tizard and Hughes (1991) found that each hour of audio-tape took nine hours to transcribe. Reviewing video operates in real time. Storing images on the computer slows the computer mechanism and everything takes more time. I purchased Adobe© Premiere© Pro software to edit, store and produce video and struggled to come to terms with its complexity. (See Appendix 10 for description of technical processes in editing video.) These new skills are all outcomes of this research.

Video has proved invaluable in supplementing detail and particularly in retaining a focus on the complexity and layers of transactive strategies and messages and the real world of multiple interactions, interjections and intentions. Riihela (2004) notes that when converting film into written text, one loses the multidimensional aspects of the

interaction. In transcribing, I concentrated on what the children said and included details of other initiatives but one can review the video time and time again and notice new detail, depending on the lens applied. The process of replaying (and replaying) video and transcribing to text allowed me to become very familiar with the data.

Play episodes were numbered, dated and given names that further prompted recall. The children's turns were numbered, transcribed and accompanied by annotations that give contextual detail. I tried to give the episodes memorable titles and include prompt cues, for example 'Diving lessons on holidays pay off' or 'Moments of power for Judy but still on the outside' to help recall. I then compiled these episodes into a matrix where the documented episodes from each day's observation were named. (See Appendix 7 for matrix of play episodes.) This meant that I could search the matrix for the date of the episode and locate it on the videotape. I reviewed the data each week to make links between episodes, identify themes and follow developments. (See Appendix 8 for list of play episodes used to address the key questions.) I researched the use of N-vivo Nudist© for Qualitative Analysis but following advice and the experience of negotiating the video software, I decided against it.

4.4.1 The effect of documentation

In documenting the episodes, the play narrative is imbued with a sense of structure, prearrangement, predictability and coherence that is not there as the play unfolds. Many details are omitted for the sake of brevity but also because the researcher is interpreting and constructing a particular narrative and meaning. Narrative by nature is selective. There are many elements of any recalled event that are neither documented nor remembered. Also, the benefit of hindsight results in links and meanings that are not predictable in the performance of each play episode. They emerge from unforeseeable contributions, albeit that these contributions are made within a guiding frame. I became extremely conscious of this selective process when editing video for sharing with advisory groups. In order to focus attention on identified themes and meaning, one very purposely cuts and connects, to make links and meaning more obvious to the viewer. Riihela (2002) used such editing devices to combine multiple episodes under themes. She calls it 'intensifying reality' (ibid: 41), an appropriate term if one recognises that it is a collectively constructed reality in which the researcher has a powerful voice. Every narrative involves this process of

selection, emphasis and implied meaning, designed to guide the listener's cognitive and emotional response. The process seemed more obvious in editing video.

4.4.2 Data analysis

The analysis in this research is guided by a sociocultural theory of learning. It is now widely accepted that all observation is framed by a preconceived concept or theory. Coffey and Atkinson (1996:153) tells us that *'methods of data collection and data analysis do not make sense in an intellectual vacuum'*. Eisner (1991) maintains that we see what we seek and we seek that which we have language to describe. The researcher's perspective leads him/her to see elements in the data that might not be visible otherwise or would be different with another theoretical lens. In this way the analysis is both abductive and inductive. It begins in abduction mode which means that *'we start with theory, make an observation and draw an inference from that observation consistent with the theory'* (Dey, 2004:91). The research is therefore, from the beginning, a form of dialogue with the participants and their social activity.

As previously explained I wanted to focus on the social forces that support children's participation in sociodramatic play. I examined the play episodes to identify the elements that helped children to make meaningful contributions. Guided by my theoretical lens, I identified shared practices and meanings and interactional strategies that children employed. In the analysis of episodes from the pilot phase, I found that children shared an understanding of roles and relationships and the usage of artefacts. I was then interested in how newcomers, for example, come to share this understanding. Returning to the research site the following September, at the beginning of a new playgroup year, offered an opportunity to pursue this question. Two key questions were posed: How does the cultural context mediate and support children's participation in sociodramatic play? How is participation organised at interpersonal level? I collected data to address these questions. The data responded by offering thick description of complex processes and behaviours, which then required categorisation. Relationships, equipment, social discourses, interpersonal skills, in-group practices, began to emerge as important contributors to the practices of participation for these children. A core group of children demonstrated particular expertise, while some newcomers presented as keen learners. I shared my questions about others with the teachers. They told stories of how children change and adapt.

New questions for the data emerged. How do individuals change and what impact do these changes have on the practices of participation? I returned to the literature for guidance and engaged with Rogoff's (1990, 1995 respectively) theory of appropriation and transformation. Rogoff focuses on cognitive development. I brought the concept to the study of sociodramatic play and broadened the search to investigate the process and impact of appropriation on children's emotional, social and cognitive development. I then added a third question and its sub-questions to the study: How do individuals and culture transform in the process of appropriation? What is the impact of transformation on cultural practices and on individual contributions? How do these transformations contribute to participation? I reviewed the data and found evidence of children appropriating the practices of others, adapting their practices and interpretations to fit with in-group think and negotiating more powerful positions within the group relationships and activities.

This insight influenced the collection of further data. I sought evidence that would help to describe these transformations and subsequently categorised the findings under the themes: power, rules and gender differentiation: identity, belonging, contribution and well-being. Throughout the process I grappled with the shift from an individualist perspective to a sociocultural perspective, often prompted by questions from consultative groups. Why not, for example, interpret the process of appropriation with Piaget's (1955) terms 'assimilation and accommodation'? Are the practices of these children, in say the area of gender differentiation, not congruent with established stages of development? Further study of the data demonstrated for me that the dialectic between children's experiences and the cultural context is on-going and in a constant state of responsiveness and change. The process is more one of interpretation and reconstruction (Corsaro, 2003) with community, guided by the goals of social activity. I identified significant moments in the appropriation process that describe why and how gender, for example, is constructed in a particular way in this group. A particularly significant revelation, supported by Matusov (1995), was that this is not a process of argumentation and consensus but rather a co-ordination of contributions mediated by issues of power and agendas. These insights contribute to the formulation of the themes that emerge from this dialectic between theory and data and that are used to structure the analysis. They are outlined in the table below.

My observation lens proposed that children want to communicate, to participate not in some solitary information processing but rather in social activity that is meaningful both to themselves and others. I had observed collaborative and extended play episodes in the pilot phase but the disjointed play in early September and the sense that children were in self-protection mode made me wonder at times if perhaps, as Piaget (1955) suggests, these children did not yet have the communication skills and particularly the language to share their meaning with others. I needed to look more closely at how these children were participating in the activities of the setting. I observed them drawing on learning from previous activity and using utensils and practices such as setting tables and making beds in culturally appropriate ways. They progressed within this setting by borrowing, as it were, competence from more seasoned players through observation and imitation. They tentatively initiated or contributed to a story and waited to see how it was interpreted. It struck me, that when I read theoretical manuscripts I too interpret and reconstruct. Indeed reading the same manuscript some months later can be a totally different interpretive experience. By borrowing competence from others and with a clearer framework for meaning-making, I find it easer to connect with the author. From this conversation came the concept of connection. I understood that learning, from infancy to adulthood is about connection. We connect at emotional, physical and cognitive level in activity with others and with the practices and meanings of the community and together, in a new activity or group, we bring the meaning to a new place. Pedagogy therefore must be about helping children to connect. This 'pedagogy of connection' recognises the role of the individual, others and the context in the connection process and allows for the many interpretations and reconstructions that can emerge. It is a key concept that comes from the dialectic between theory and data in this research.

The findings in this research are both abductive and inductive because they are both theoretically informed and at the same time emergent from the data. Abductive and inductive reasoning are both elements of 'grounded theory' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, Charmaz, 2000), although traditionally it has been more associated with inductive theory. Coffey and Atkinson (1995: 155) however point out that *'abductive reasoning lies at the heart of 'grounded theorizing''* because the theory of the researcher is always part of any interpretation. Grounded theory proposes a system of generating theory from data through a process of constant comparison. It has,

according to Atkinson, Coffey *et al* (2005) become very prescriptive. In an effort to return to more heuristic principles they propose three flexible principles for data analysis, including (1) active interpretation, (2) the production and modification of ideas in the light of data collected and (3) the further collection of data in accordance with the emergent ideas. Walsh, Tobin and Graue (1993) describe three phases. These are (1) transcribing and becoming familiar with the data, while simultaneously analysing it (2) data reduction when the researcher seeks to categorise the data and to detect links, patterns and progressions and (3) selecting and highlighting particular patterns for in-depth discussion. They are frequently simultaneous processes, each stage impacting on and informing the next. Lacey (1976) refers to this as 'escalation of insights' and promotes the practice of regular analysis of data to avert the risk of becoming swamped by it. This was the approach used in this research. The data was transcribed from video and notes to computer and continuously questioned and re-questioned, prompted by dilemmas and questions generated by the data and the views of other advisors.   The emergent themes were then integrated, reduced and categorised to respond to the three key theoretical research questions (See Appendix 5), subsequently reorganising them as key themes and sub-themes (See Appendix 6). The matrix below outlines the key research questions and emerging themes.

Key Theoretical Questions	Emerging themes
How does culture mediate and support participation in sociodramatic play?	- Social networks and group dynamics - The cultural guiding frame

How is participation organised in
 	
  (1) the micro space of person to person interaction?
 	
  (2) the macro space of meaning making?
	through the intersubjective processes of
	- Establishing common ground
	- Co-ordinating contributions and
	- Generating agency (Matusov 2001)
	
	through the meaning-making processes of
	- Interpretation and reconstruction
	- Participation in Communities
	   of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991)
	- Coordination rather than consensus

What are the transformations emerging through participation in terms of : (1) Culture?	Discourses and practices are transformed: - Power - Rules - Gender differentiation

(2) Individuals?	Transformation of participation towards developing: - Identity - Belonging - Contribution

4.4.3 The research questions and Rogoff's (1995) three planes of analysis

The key sociocultural theoretical questions find resonance with the three planes of analysis proposed by Rogoff (1995). Building on Vygotsky's theory of the integrated relationship between individual, community and cultural activity, she proposes that in order to get a comprehensive picture of the individual's participation in social activity, we must engage three different lens or planes of analysis. Each plane foregrounds a perspective but recognises the integral role of the other planes.

The first is the Community or Apprenticeship Plane, focussing on the community and institutional aspects of activity, such as the economic, political, spiritual and material aspects (Rogoff 1995). The analysis considers in particular the mediating role of group dynamics and the broader and immediate cultural systems or guiding frames.

The second plane is the Interpersonal or Guided Participation Plane and it addresses *'the mutual involvement of individuals and their social partners communicating and coordinating their involvement in socioculturally structured collective activity* (Rogoff 1995: 146). This includes both the micro level of face-to-face (or side by side) interaction and the more distal macro transactions with cultural values, goals and practices. The research identifies at the micro level that children establish common ground, coordinate their contributions and develop their agency (Matusov 2001) towards negotiating participation in play, demonstrating in concrete terms how children accomplish this. At the macro level it addresses how children develop a frame for participation through a process of interpretation and reconstruction, participation in communities of practice and collective co-ordination.

The third plane is the Individual or Participatory Appropriation Plane. *'[P]articipatory appropriation is the personal process by which, through engagement in an activity, individuals change and handle a later situation in ways prepared by their own participation in the previous situation'* (Rogoff 1995: 142). Through their

shared efforts the players stretch their understanding to fit with other perspectives in order to accomplish a play story together. This involves the transformation of both the contextual practices and meanings, and the individuals in the process of participation. Specifically we consider the construction of the discourses and practices of power, rules and gender. Finally, we follow the transformation of two children in terms of their identity, and sense of belonging, contribution and well-being, emerging from their participation in the sociodramatic play of this cohort of children.

In applying Rogoff's approach to the study of sociodramatic play I have engaged with a number of differences. Rogoff, using the activity of Girl Scouts, focuses on (i) the evolution of the structures and goals of the activity and how these support cognition (ii) how children, as apprentices, proactively use these arrangements and more capable others to support their learning and participation and (iii) how children become more expert in the skills of the activity through the process of participation and appropriation. This research uses the planes for both similar and different purposes. In particular it extends each lens to focus on the responsive dynamics between the children themselves and between the children and the resources of the context. Each lens searches to identify the moment-by-moment contributions of the cultural community, the individuals and the activity to the construction of the collective frame for participation. Because the research engages with children's sociodramatic play, each lens also works at a meta-observation level. The process of participation is put on a stage and presented as a narrative that captures children's reflections on the community's way of organising participation, offering it to viewers for further reflection. As already cited, each lens also views participation as holistic and looks at the role of relationship and power agendas in framing participation. The three planes are used to structure the analysis, as a vantage point for foregrounding the view from each lens while at the same time recognising their inseparable nature.

4.5   Research Reliability and Validity

The subjective, interpretive nature of ethnography is a positive force in bringing new insight to the human condition but it also causes questions of validity and reliability to be central to its critique. How does the researcher promote subjectivity and at the

same time assure the reader of the trustworthiness or validity of the research? How does s/he manage subjective bias and ensure that the account presented accurately represents the phenomenon it describes? Bird, Hammersley *et al*, (2000) propose that the two criteria for assessing educational research are validity and relevance. Validity is about plausibility, credibility and sound evidence while relevance is measured in terms of the purpose of the research and its interest to the intended audience. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer four criteria for establishing the validity of qualitative research based on reinterpreting criteria from quantitative research.   In terms of validity, internal validity is replaced with the criterion of credibility and is assured by checking the analyst's accounts with participants and informants.   External validity or generalisability in quantitative research is translated as transferability and depends on providing *'sufficiently rich and recognizable accounts of social settings that readers can discern their transferability to other social contexts* (Atkinson, Coffey *et al*, 2005: 156). These processes have already been described.

The third criterion is reliability, which translates into dependability when assessing qualitative research and requires that the process of collecting and analysing data is transparent and available to other researchers. The final criterion is objectivity, a concept that is much contested in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) replace it with the notion of confirmability, which is interlinked with the interpretive nature of the methodology.   The active and subjective role of the interpreter is recognised and interpretations are presented as open to negotiation and reinterpretation. The research report reflects these commitments.

Johnson (1997) describes three types of validity.   They include descriptive, interpretive and theoretical validity.   The first involves factual accuracy and is supported by accurate reporting of the data.   The second depends on producing sufficient evidence to support interpretation. The third is about a fit between the data and the theory that is credible and defensible. Sound and sufficient evidence, rigorous analysis and critical examination (Phillips, 1992) are the responsibility of the researcher and again place the qualities of the researcher at the core of valued research. I believe that this research has been rigorous in pursuing these types of validity and presents a valid perspective that contributes to the on-going conversation.

In recognition of this interpretive and multiple-perspective nature of ethnography, researchers seek to triangulate the evidence, that is, to gather other perspectives on the data and try to expose and rebalance any biases. The next section outlines the triangulation methods employed in this research. They are designed to enrich the data collected through observation and to support validation.

4.5.1 Triangulation

In qualitative research, triangulation is achieved by obtaining perspectives on the data from other sources, including other methods, investigators and theories. Atkinson, Coffey *et al* (2005) warn about the language of justification and prefer to think about triangulation processes as 'heuristic devices' (Ibid: 162) that we use to generate and extend ideas. Their purpose is *'to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand'* (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 3). Most importantly, triangulation methods should *'respond to the intrinsic forms of social life – being attentive to the systems and conventions of talk and action, performance and rhetoric that constitute everyday life'* (Atkinson, Coffey *et al* 2005: 164). Otherwise they generate a different set of data.

In this research I engaged with a cross section of triangulation supports while at the same time managing feasibility so that the research thesis could be completed. Feasibility involves managing one's resources, controlling the amount of data generated and ensuring that methods do not over-intrude on the children's play or on the work of the teachers and their organisation of the daily routine.

While the central and by far the most significant tool in this research is observation, triangulation supports include:
- **the use of video**: this verifies events and transactions and at the same time makes the data available for re-interpretation and other perspectives
- **other theories**: they are brought to the analysis and both provide alternative perspectives and generate conflict. A Piagetian perspective, in particular, is regularly presented to both relate analysis to perspective and to illuminate the shift involved in a sociocultural approach. This was accomplished both through literature review and through dialogue with others. Tina Bruce (personal communication 2006) read (and later published) one of my conference papers and reported '*I suppose we have a disagreement which is quite far-reaching in its philosophical consequences. You*

state that all learning is contextual and mediated by cultural and historical tools. I would argue that, important though this is in that nurture shapes nature, nature is also of paramount importance. We are also biologically driven. This is the fascinating difference between those coming from biological and evolutionary perspectives (Darwin, Balwin, Piaget, Bowlby...) and those coming from socio-cultural perspectives (Vygotsky, Dahlberg, James and Prout...). I have therefore found your paper challenging and often rather uncomfortable, but also could not put it down whilst reading it on a train journey when I was tired, so it held my interest which is great to report to you!' It helped me to reconsider data from another's deeply held perspective and to remain open to cultural and theoretical differences. I also met, for example, with the research team in the Pengreen Centre for Children and Families where the interpretive lens focuses on individual children's well-being, involvement and schema. (See Appendix 11 for attendants.) Again, the experience alerted me to the dangers of taking a very certain and convinced position when engaging with a new perspective (Broadfoot, 1999) and to the relationship between perspective and what one sees. '*I suppose what you are pursuing is how the 'outer' affects children – I think I am interested in how the 'inner' affects children'* (Dr. Cath Arnold, personal communication 2007). I could see that both perspectives have the capacity to enrich our understanding of children's lives. They also found the research and analysis enlightening, relevant and credible. I was greatly enthused by their feedback and particularly by the sense that the research brought a new perspective to them and invigorated the debate. A further endorsement in the form of a collaborative research project with Pengreen, to be presented at EECERA 2008 ensued.

- **informal conversations with children, staff and parents** (as already discussed). These served to gather additional information, for clarification and checking understanding. They also developed relationships between the participants. These additional insights are interspersed throughout the analysis.

- **collaborative dialogue with experts**: Fernie, Davies *et al* (1993: 95) demonstrate '*how researchers with different but compatible theoretical research perspectives may widen their interpretive lenses through collaborative dialogue, the yield being a more multifaceted vision of young children's social competence'*. Following this model, I established a multi-disciplinary group of eight people. The group included five researchers, who were also psychologists and educationalists from three third level

colleges, two pedagogic mentors and the research site owner/manager (See Appendix 11). Various combinations of the group met three times during the course of the research and individuals made themselves available for further consultation. At these meetings, we reviewed video clips of data episodes and discussed possible interpretations in terms of children's participation strategies and experiences. Like Fernie, Davies *et al* (1993: 97) I found the cross section of disciplines represented informed the analysis but also enriched my observation lens. The researchers among them alerted me to issues such as relevance and innovation, categorisation and generalisation, researcher impact, ethics and sufficiency of evidence. The pedagogues considered typicality and transferability and the relevance and value of the research in terms of practice within the early childhood education sector. The owner/manager came into focus as someone who also knew the children and the context and the data collection process and could both offer other perspectives and corroborate evidence. Between them they brought together expertise and experience about theory, research, practice and context to inform this research.

- **Other 'sounding boards'**: I made multiple presentations to the academic staff of St. Patrick's College and the CECDE, seminars including EECERA, CECDE and OMEP and to peer reviewed journals including Early Years and OMEP (see Appendix 12). My discussions with supervisors, co-students and work colleagues were further sounding boards that contributed regular and valuable feedback.

4.6   Research Report

The thesis employs two reporting methods in particular. The first is narrative, described by Bruner (1996: 90) as an empowering way people have of *'organising and contextualising essentially contestable verifiable propositions in a disciplined way'*. Narrative presents one way of telling a story while allowing for alternative interpretations. It positions the participants as agents and they, in dialogue with the narrator and the reader, are the constructors of meaning. '*And it is through this dialogic, discursive process that we come to know the other and his points of view, his stories. We learn an enormous amount not only about the world but about ourselves.'* (Ibid: 93). This makes it an appropriate way of presenting findings from ethnographic, interpretive research. The report presents children's play stories and locates them within the broader context of practices, relationships and events. In this

way the situatedness and complexity of the events is conveyed. Participants' dialogue and initiatives are generously and accurately reported, although in the interest of brevity, clarity and readability, episodes are edited and abbreviated. As discussed, this is a selective and purposeful process, designed to present a perspective.

Bruner (1996: 93) proposes that while the aim of narrative is understanding, the aim of theory is explanation. The second method used in this thesis is explanation or theory development. I interpret the actions and events, guided by my theoretical lens. The play episodes are linked to theory, both existing and emerging to orient the reader towards shared meaning-making. There is, of course much more that remains to be said in the future about the play of these children. The journey has only begun.

4.7   The sociocultural journey

Wertsch (2007) talks of his difficulty in coming to understand Vygotksy because as an American, steeped in an individualist paradigm, he had the wrong 'mental habits'. I relate to this experience. The concept of individuality is deeply entrenched in the western psyche, particularly in our conceptions of the ideals and goals of education. Creating independent, autonomous people who are authors of their own lives and identities are significant goals. In this way education is a powerful contributor to constructing the psychological tools that frame our identities as independent individuals. Sociocultural theory offers an alternative view but shaking off the grooves or ruts of thinking and moving outside the individualist to a sociocultural paradigm has been and continues to be a challenge. Insight seems to come in layers, each layer demanding a review of previous interpretations. The tendency is to assimilate sociocultural thinking into my 'individualist' schema and to get bogged down in nature-nurture types of debates that create the dualisms of mind and body and individual and society and look for causal or interactive relationships. Coming to terms, particularly with the concepts of mediation and cultural thinking tools, and locating the individual firmly and consistently in the social world is difficult. The reward has been not just a meaningful perspective on children's learning but a new way of thinking, a new perspective on the self, identity and truth. The process has been both a professional and personal journey. These children have taught me far more than I could possibly capture here. They have reshaped how I see the world.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have documented and reflected on the research process, beginning with a rationale and a brief justification of the methodology. The ethnographic approach emerges from the underpinning sociocultural discourse and is particularly suited to the study of children's participation in play. The chapter then moves from describing the research data and site to explaining and evaluating the research methods, from data collection to documentation and analysis. Throughout, my intention is to be open about the interpretive nature of the process and my role in co-constructing the perspective and findings. At the same time, I argue for the generalisability and transferability of the underpinning theory and findings and propose that even the processes, which are very specific to the context, may ring true and find relevance among other observers of children's play. I discuss the limitations of the research and the methods used. The complex issue of ethics is debated and the considerations and revisions involved in developing an ethical approach are outlined. Ultimately as a researcher, I commit to vigilance and protection from harm.

The system of analysis is described and the dialectic relationship between abductive and inductive theory explained. I asked the data three questions and extended Rogoff's (1995) three planes of analysis to focus (i) on each question and (ii) on play both as a social activity and meta-meaning-making tool. The responses are categorised under a number of themes and sub-themes. Further sub-themes permeate the analysis, which is presented in chapters 5, 6, and 7, each addressing one of Rogoff's planes. The research report employs two approaches, narrative and theoretical explanation. They are intended to complement one another to make the report readable, and to bring the reader into the world of children's play while at the same time taking him/her on a challenging theoretical journey. This is a long and taxing route that the researcher herself, has trod and has resulted not only in a new perspective on children's participation in play but in a new way of knowing the world.

Chapter 5: The Community Plane

5.0   Introduction

The purpose of the analysis in this research is to identify the significant processes by which children organise their participation in sociodramatic play. Chapter 5, 6 and 7 present the analysis of the data using Rogoff's (1995) 'Three Planes of Analysis' (described in chapter four). They include (i) the Community or Apprenticeship Plane, used to analyse the cultural, institutional and group context that mediates children's participation in sociodramatic play, (ii) the Interpersonal or Guided Participation Plane which identifies the interactive process of participation at both micro-interpersonal level and at macro meaning-making level and (3) the Individual or Participatory Appropriation Plane which considers how individuals and cultural practices are transformed through and towards ongoing participation in social activity.

This chapter engages with the 'Community or Apprenticeship Plane'. I ask the question: How does the cultural context mediate and support children's participation in sociodramatic play? I begin by sharing my first impressions of the target group and their activities and then introduce the reader to the complex, chaotic and emotional world of new relationships and contexts that comes into view when one uses a sociocultural lens and ethnographic approach. This is followed by introducing the research participants and some of the personal characteristics and group dynamics that mediate their participation in sociodramatic play in this group. A play episode, 'The Kiss', is presented to explicate how the broader and immediate cultural context, including artefacts, practices and discourses, are reconstructed to frame participation in play. The analysis foregrounds moments of raised consciousness when the process of appropriation is more visible and we can see the transformative power of collectively negotiating meaning in play. We begin with first impressions.

5.1   First impressions: Finding a place as an ethnographer

The analysis starts with a description of the first days of the playgroup term to give the reader a sense of the daunting challenges posed for children, teachers and

particularly the researcher by transition into playgroup. I remind the reader that these children range in age from two years and eight months to four years and for the majority this is their first solo journey away from home.

It's Monday the 5th September 2005 and the playgroup hosts an introductory morning for eleven newcomers. (Lilly is on holidays and joins the playgroup two weeks later.) The session lasts an hour and parents accompany their children. The girls make for the home corner, the jigsaws and the arts and crafts, the boys for the castle, the train, the blocks and the cars. There is very little contact between the children, other than furtive glances. Parents sometimes ask the child next to them for their name and try to introduce them but newcomers are reticent to make contact. They are surprisingly unfriendly and fearful of one another. They spend the time exploring the artefacts.

The following day, seven children from the cohort of the previous year return and join the newcomers to begin the new term in playgroup. I focus on the home corner, as a likely site for sociodramatic play. The new teacher locates herself here among a group of children that fluctuates between three and eight at any time. The equipment dominates as both the focus of interest and the connection between the children. The newcomers, in particular, seem intent on doing their own thing and are only interested in other children when they collide, intrude or threaten possession. It is a tentative scene. The staff are tentative, unfamiliar with personalities and idiosyncrasies, anxious that the children will settle, conscious of the possibilities for conflict and upset, keen to establish a framework for order and hopeful that the children will find a pleasure that lures them back over the next few days. The children are tentative, unfamiliar with each other and their surroundings, unsure of what they can or should do, unsure about possession, about how to connect, about what is expected of them. Observation, imitation and repetition of domestic routines preoccupy them. They open presses, remove everything, transport them to the table, return some of them, collect more and create a scene that seems uncoordinated and pointless. Oldtimers search the dress-up rack and don this outfit, then that outfit, with decisive action and seeming intent and then just abandon them. I am taken aback by the sense of chaos. It seems impossible to identify any play episode of more than two minutes duration and interaction appears based on furtive glances at one another. The noise level is

high and the children only seem to mutter. I wonder how I'm going to follow their play themes or document anything they say.

I am also conscious that this is a very difficult situation for the children. They await their introduction to playgroup with a great deal of curiosity and excitement, and of course, some apprehension. This is a milestone in their development. They are now 'big enough' to be preschoolers. Attracted by the 'going to school discourse', the setting and the wonderful materials and equipment, they generally hurl headlong into this new world and find themselves ensconced long before they are in a position to weigh the pros and cons. They quickly experience the lack of a framework or directions for behaviour in the new situation. They have come from the security of home and familiar neighbourhoods to a scene that is shared mostly with equally inexperienced recruits and some rather intimidating 'oldtimers'. They are here to play and they must decide between them what form this play will take. I am conscious that adults would find this extremely challenging and unsettling.

My purpose is to investigate how children organise their participation in this development. While the setting, in theory, offers a good opportunity for such a research proposal, the task of finding order in the chaos is daunting. I am encouraged by evidence from the pilot research that patterns will emerge and I'm surprised at how quickly the scene begins to change[6]. Within a few days, the children seemed more settled and as soon as I begin to use the video camera, I have the luxury of revisiting my recordings and being able to examine the events for causes, linkages and patterns.

5.1.1 Applying a sociocultural lens

There is an understanding, in this playgroup, influenced by Piagetian theory, that these children are (i) driven primarily by innate individual emotional and cognitive interests (ii) building schema and concepts about artefacts and procedures and (iii) that adult intervention brings a power relationship that stifles children's own thinking processes. Consequently, the adults in this playgroup believe that children should be allowed to follow their own interests and they take a largely nondirective approach.

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[6] My notes of 8th September, the last day of the first week, record : '*Noticeable growth in communication over week – today children seem much more relaxed and familiar with one another– certainly helped by teacher chatting and referring to all the children and encouraging mutual awareness and sharing*'

Using a sociocultural lens that focuses on children's desire to be part of a culture, we see alternative motivations. With this lens, the primary aim of these children becomes to connect with others, to fit in and be part of the group, to understand and to be understood. We are drawn to see children's activities, not as individual exploration of the world of artefacts but as collective attempts at shared meaning and relationships so that they can participate more effectively. The challenge of collectively negotiating meaning seems far greater than that of pursuing one's own interests.

The perspective invites us to engage with the complex world of communication and relationship dynamics, a world that is difficult to capture in text. Reviewing the video allows me to view and review the connections, the faces and body gestures, the emotions of self registration and companionship, of anxiety and pleasure that populate a typical September (beginning of academic year) scene. My notes of 21st of September recall my observations and impressions.

Episode 1

The teachers are in the home corner. The children flock around. They want to connect and the presence of the adults and their guidance offers security. Teacher is helping the girls to dress up. Kylie dons a wedding dress while Judy watches. Judy reaches for the head dress and Kylie protests. Teacher says 'She picked it first. When she's finished with it you can play with it, OK?' The dispute is settled. Judy moves her head to follow the to and fro of conversation. She shrugs her shoulders as she giggles. Leah comes with another piece of cake and smiles at Teacher's reaction. Teacher admires Kylie while Leah and Judy watch. In the background, Amy and Mary are at the table with the student-teacher. Thomas arrives and asks her if she needs anything fixed. He's shy but he likes talking to her. She touches his arm to indicate that she'll respond to him when she's finished talking to Amy. Stan passes by in a firefighter's suit. Thomas looks after him and follows. David comes in and pretends to steal Teacher's cake behind her back. He tells her he's a builder. Leah brings Teacher some food and waits for eye contact and recognition. David returns and Judy blushes coyly, conscious of her fancy dress when he looks at her. Judy moves to the cooker. Tracey arrives pushing a buggy and advances towards Teacher. She approaches, trips, and imitating Leah, gives Teacher several pieces of pretend cake. Teacher thanks her. Tracey is amused. She loves Teacher. Leah brings salt and projects a sense of competency. Thomas and David return. Thomas talks to the student-teacher. Teacher tries to move but she's recalled by Judy. Leah brings her more food. Susan moves in shyly.

By contrast, Greg arrives and immediately seeks attention. As he leaves, Kylie asks him to find slippers for her. She likes him and she wants to connect. Greg says 'I don't have any time...Ok, I'll find them for you'. She wants pink ones. He's flattered to be asked, feels recognised as knowledgeable and powerful and adopts the air of an elder. Stan follows to search with him. Greg announces that he

cannot find them. Teacher thanks him for his help. He's pleased. He has an argument with Mairéad over something that happened on holidays in Santa Ponza. Mairéad is extremely assertive and annoyed. He tries to re-establish good feeling. They are familiar cousins and friends and often argue. I'm curious about the exchange and enquire. She responds with a silent smile.

Meanwhile in the background, Mary is playing doctors and she's joined by Susan. Susan takes over as doctor and Mary distributes food. They are joined by Leah and Judy and demonstrate that in a supportive atmosphere, they can connect. Niamh arrives and taps Teacher, who is sitting with her arm around Stan. Teacher makes her welcome with 'Hello you'. I'm touched by the warmth of the welcome and its significance for Niamh, who is often excluded. She immediately hands Teacher the telephone, re-initiating yesterday's scenario and Teacher tells her friend on the phone that she can't come to her house because she's busy playing with all the children. She names each of them, creating a sense of community and happy togetherness. Tracey watches closely.

All this activity happens within a three square meter area in a fifteen minute time span and without the review possibilities offered by video, it would be nigh on impossible to find any order in the events. The play appears chaotic and other data shows that without the focus and structure offered by the teachers, conflict would reign. Here, the children are connecting. The atmosphere is cooperative, because the teachers generate a value around helpfulness and sharing. The children are chuffed by every degree of attention that the teachers offer. Their reactions speak of the pleasure of being seen and recognised, of self-other registration and cooperation. Reviewing the video to find connection and shared meaning-making, the children appear to be saying *'see me, see me'*. Their initiatives seem intended to establish common ground so that they can co-build a story. Over the next few weeks the children come to know one another and the system of social organisation within the group better. They become familiar with the institutional practices and procedures and they test the viability of their previous understandings and meaning-making tools in the new collaborative. These are the key processes that come into view with a sociocultural lens.

5.2   The Cultural Context

Using the apprenticeship or community lens as an analytical tool directs our attention to the cultural context in which sociodramatic play is embedded and the reciprocal relationship between the real and pretend worlds. The intention here is to use this plane to introduce the cohort of children and their interpersonal relationships and to

explicate elements of the broader cultural community and immediate institution that frames their participation in play.

To some extent, this is background information that sets the context for understanding later play developments but there is also an understanding that these contextual features themselves are not static. They exist in a dialectical relationship with the children's play and are in a constant process of transformation.

5.2.1 The Social Network

The social network within this playgroup, like all social networks, is distinctive. I came to know some of its participants over a twelve-month period because they were part of the pilot group and others over the nine-month academic year. I feel that I came to know them well, not only because I spent long periods of time in their company but also because I revisited those moments time and time again through my fieldnotes and video-recordings. These extended periods of observation allowed me to develop an understanding of their personalities, relationships and networks. More than that, it reintroduced me to what childhood is like in this cultural community and to the complex world of politics and deep emotions involved. This is a world that I had re-experienced to some extent with my own children but had largely forgotten and with time perhaps romanticised. From the beginning, I was intrigued and amazed by the social dexterity of these children who were on average, at the beginning of the Autumn term, less than 43 months in the world. They displayed amazing emotional and cognitive intelligence, particularly in their ability to read the intentions of others and to negotiate and manipulate relationships.

A key element in recognising this competence results from a focus on the process rather than the outcomes of group participation. Outcomes tell us little about the complexity of negotiations whereas following the process opened my eyes to the layers of meaning and identity issues involved. Some of the children seemed relatively oblivious to the complexity; others lived through an emotional and cognitive rollercoaster that demanded an almost constant state of alertness and responsiveness. The latter feature strongly in this analysis because they were key contributors to the construction of practices and meaning within this group and their negotiations seemed to make the rules of participation more explicit.

Some children had little opportunity to contribute to the group process because they were often rejected by the sub-groups they tried to enter. They suffered various degrees of isolation. Corsaro (1985) found that none of the children in his research cohorts experienced ongoing rejection when they attempted play entry. My research did identify such children. Three children had significant connection problems. One child repeatedly broke the rules of play and consequently was repeatedly expelled by the players. Another child lacked connective social skills and following many experiences of failure largely gave up trying. Another was often rejected because she appeared controlling and distrustful. It was difficult for these children to build any consistent relationships or to gain status as competent powerful people but it was the sense that they were isolated from the group process that seemed particularly painful and a cause of concern. At times, I personally felt the pain of rejection and was concerned for the impact it may have for the child. For some children, it seemed that the combination of personalities and events was fortuitous and for others they were less than ideal and I found myself wishing that I could intervene and encourage helpful adjustments. I witnessed the pleasure and joy that children experienced when they managed to connect and develop a play story but I was also taken aback at just how difficult it was to reach this level of coordination and sharing.

5.2.2 Introducing the children

All of the children in this playgroup participated in some way in the group activities. Three children, James, Noel and Cathy, were present for the pilot phase of the research and left the playgroup in June 2005. They each only feature in one of the episodes used in the analysis and I do not intend to introduce them in any further detail. Instead I concentrate on the cohort of 19 children who attended the playgroup between September 2005 and June 2006. I first introduce the Oldtimers, who are returnees from the previous year group and then the 'newcomer' girls followed by the 'newcomer' boys. I describe some of their personal and relationship characteristics that impact on the practices of participation in sociodramatic play in the playgroup.

5.2.3 The Oldtimers

Greg, Mairéad and Sarah are among the children who appear most in the documented sociodramatic play episodes, featuring in the data each day that they were present.

They exert a strong influence on the social and play developments throughout the research. This is their second year in this playgroup and consequently they are familiar with the setting and operate as carriers of the playgroup culture from one year to the next. Mairéad and Greg are cousins and their families have a close relationship. Their conversations regularly recall family occasions and holidays. Consequently, they know each other well and often enjoy playing together. They both also have a network of neighbourhood friends and bring their extensive street-play experience to the playgroup. They both have the capacity to cross the gender divide without social sanction and to bring other children with them.

Mairéad and Sarah are 'best' friends and the most constant play partners. Sarah has an older sister and a wide family network to which she often refers. She brought news of her aunt's new baby, her uncle's new girlfriend, her cousins' travels abroad and regularly talks to her Grandad on the pretend phone. In one conversation, she announced *'My Dad is my cousin's uncle'*. It took me a while to figure out the validity of the statement. She has a particular facility with language and seems to really enjoy the sound of words, rhymes and quotes. This facility often gives her an advantage in disputes and certainly, combined with her pretty features and her extensive wardrobe, gives her an air of confidence and know-how.

Sarah resents the relationship between Mairéad and Greg because she feels excluded[7]. From the beginning of the observation period, she refuses to play with Mairéad when she engages Greg. At the same time, she appears to like him and is regularly entertained by his antics. A play visit to his house in November, a significant milestone in children's friendship development, offers a temporary, half-hearted reprieve. Otherwise, the conflict persisted in some form throughout the year and had a major impact on the development of play. It features in a pilot research episode on 1st June 2005 and amazingly it is the subject of the final episode I documented and filmed on the 17th May 2006. On the latter occasion Sarah speaks to me, eyes glistening with tears:

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[7] In November 2005, when I asked Sarah why she did not like to play with Greg, she said: *He always wants to get Mairéad on his side.* I understood from her that she competed with Greg for Mairéad's attention.

Episode 2

Speaker	Quote	Annotation
Sarah	*Greg is getting Mairéad to be on his side*	Red face- eyes glistening
Me	*and whose side should she be on?*	
Sarah	*She should be on my side*	
Me	H*ow did that happen?*	
Sarah	*That's their base (bookcorner) and Mairéad wanted to go in there to read a story and Greg said OK.....and now the girls are on his side*	
Me	*So what are you going to do about it?*	
Sarah	*I'm going to get Mairéad back on my side...and Now she is gone in*	She swallows hard
Me	*Why don't you join on their side?*	
Sarah	*'cos I don't want to*	
Me	*Is there a reason why you don't want to?*	At that moment Mairéad comes out and approaches Amy. Sarah moves to join her.

She is clearly upset and concerned that Mairéad is abandoning her. This conflict not only causes her personal pain and makes it difficult for Mairéad and Greg to play together but it has implications for the whole group. Their play and particularly the divide between the boys and girls and the construction of the gender discourse in the setting could have been significantly altered had that conflict been resolved. Of course, there is evidence that this divide is cultural and somewhat inevitable. However Mairéad and Greg, given their relationship and history of companionship, combined with their social and leadership competence had the capacity to offer resistance to the discourse of gender division if circumstances had allowed them to play together more frequently. This is particularly significant when one considers that these gender divisions often become ingrained in the group culture and in individual participation patterns and transfer down through the years and into other contexts. This was one of the issues that drew my attention to the significance of group dynamics in framing participation.

Liam, Niamh, Judy and Amy joined the playgroup at various stages of the 2005 Easter to Summer term and together with Greg, Mairéad and Sarah they make up a group of seven 'oldtimers'. Liam is quiet and somewhat timid and generally on the periphery of the group. He admires Greg enormously and seeks his attention and company. Throughout the next playgroup term, he goes through stages of exclusion, loneliness

and upset when he no longer wants to attend. He features only sporadically in the sociodramatic play episodes throughout the year, always in Greg's shadow and usually because Greg's relationship with David and Thomas becomes difficult. Niamh, also, has difficulty negotiating play partners. She is one of the older girls and has an air of aloofness and efficiency. She busies herself constantly, minding babies, cleaning house, playing alone with miniature figures or at the craft table. It strikes me as an adult-like way of camouflaging her uneasiness. In company, she seems to feel threatened that others will take things from her and consequently rebuffs and alienates people. Most of the time, she gives the impression of being self-sufficient and not needing company. Her mother did, however, enquire if she had any friends. Obviously, Niamh is aware of and upset by her isolation. She features in the play episodes in the early stages but gradually begins to withdraw to other areas.

Amy is steady, generally relaxed and self-confidant and one of the foursome that includes Mairéad, Sarah, and Judy. Within that group she negotiates various combinations and permutations for play partners. Judy, who loves to role-play, is her closest play partner. Each and every day Judy becomes excited by the prospect of a new play episode. She tries hard to please and struggles to break into the Sarah-Mairéad partnership. She is one of the children whose transformation is documented on the 'Participatory Appropriation Plane'. The negotiations of this foursome, who were dominant players in the sociodramatic play area, opened my eyes to the politics of play. Sarah explains the friendship scene to Teacher as follows:

Episode 3   Sarah is jumping on the trampoline while Judy stands in front of her

Speaker	Quote	Annotation
Judy	*Are you my friend?*	Concerned that Amy is playing with Mairéad
Sarah	*Mairéad, you and Amy are my friends*	Jumping
Teacher	*There are lots of friends in this playschool aren't there?*	Encouraging inclusion
Sarah	*I've got 3 friends, Judy, Mairéad and…eh...*	
Teacher	*You know I have hundreds of friends*	
Sarah	*I got 3 friends, Judy, Mairéad and Amy*	
Teacher	*..and Susan*	Speaks quietly because Susan is nearby
Trud	*Mairéad doesn't like Susan so…*	turning up her nose…

	But…Lydia is my friend	to impress Teacher
Teacher	*And what about Greg?*	Prompted by me
Sarah	*em…he's over there*	Pointing to Greg
Teacher	*And is he your friend?*	
Sarah	*He's not…he..see, he's over there at the playdough table*	
Teacher	*I heard you saying he's not your friend today …why?*	
Sarah	*no, 'cos he's playing over there and I'm playing over there*	
Teacher	*and would you like him to play over there with you?*	
Sarah	*no, I'd like him to play over there and I'll play over there*	pointing to Homecorner

Sarah is proud that she has a network of friends in playgroup, because having friends is important to her. Judy's opening question, however, implies that the friendships are sometimes questionable. She is prompted because Amy and Mairéad are now playing together and she feels excluded. Sarah's understanding of friendship is very advanced. Susan is not a friend because Mairéad doesn't like her and Lydia is her friend, although they very rarely play together. For preschool children generally a friend is someone you play with (Corsaro 1985). Here Sarah implies that friends have personal qualities that she likes. In describing her relationship with Greg, she opts for the less mature definition of friend, that is, someone you are presently playing with, because she needs to appease Teacher with some explanation. The relationship between her and Greg is complex. She won't admit to not being his friend but doesn't want to play with him. The control she has over what she reveals to Teacher is remarkable. Despite further questioning, she refuses to reveal or explain her feelings and resists any pressure to play with Greg. The three friends she names are 'oldtimers'. Only one newcomer, Lydia, makes the grade.

5.2.4 The Newcomer Girls

Mary, Susan, Leah, Lydia, Tracey and Kylie and later Lilly join the cohort of girls the following term, bringing their number to twelve. Mary is a keen observer who rarely speaks aloud to others in the first six months. She seems nevertheless to enjoy playing, dressing up, going hither and thither and studying the drama-queens of the group. She reproduces their activities but she rarely openly negotiates with them. When I visited the playgroup on 2nd March after an absence of three weeks, I was astonished to hear her speak aloud. My notes record:

Episode 4

> *Mary is in the home corner. Her movements are very frenetic. She puts slices of pretend bread in the microwave, takes them out and gives one to Susan*
>
> Mary   *That's a piece*
>
> *She dithers in front of me and then hands me a piece*
>
> Mary to me   *That's a piece*
>
> I'm amazed to hear Mary talking. Apparently she started the day before. She had been outside with the boys but running around on her own and it seems that the exuberance of the exercise prompted her to forget her inhibitions and talk directly to people. The talking in turn seems to have had an enormous effect on her behaviour. She finds the courage to engage openly with others and to register her own initiatives. She says-'I'm going shopping' - 'That's a piece' -' I need to get back home' - 'I'm going to bed' – 'I'm being the doctor (very clear)' – 'You (Susan) be the doctor now' –' How about my arm?' – 'I'll have a turn (with mask) – 'you sit down' –' (to me) I just can't put this on, will you help me?'-' I take it off'. When her actions are accompanied by naming, they slow down.

She arrives every morning with her mother, and younger brother by the hand, and all three seem to share the same shy but happy demeanour. She enters the home corner on arrival and immediately engages in domestic chores, with a mixture of frenzy and enthusiasm. As the year progresses she develops a limited play partnership with Susan because they meet in the home corner and neither has a regular friendship network. Susan tends to be on the defensive and closed to compromise, which makes on-going connection difficult. She also frequently suffers rejection from many of the oldtimers and is disliked by Mairéad and consequently Sarah, as Sarah discloses above. In the following episode, from the 13th October, she plays with Leah who is six months younger than her. They are playing beside one another, sharing a box of miniature fairytale characters. The interaction captures elements of the personalities and experience of both girls. They are connected but the atmosphere is competitive rather than collaborative.

Episode 5   The girls are taking characters from a box in turn. Susan takes a fairy.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Leah	*I need that*	She points to the bed
Susan	*You can't get it*	
	They play their own individual games with the dolls but are conscious of one another, particularly of what each other takes from the box. Leah takes a bed, Susan a princess.	
Susan	*She (the princess) owns the big bed*	
Leah	*No*	Shaking her head
	Susan returns to her story, narrating it aloud. Leah watches	

Speaker	Quote	Annotation
Susan	I want that bed	
Leah	You can't have it	
Susan	I want it for her	
Leah	No	Leah shakes her head
Susan	She have it…she do have it...she do have it..she do have it	Tapping the table
Leah	'Noooo,….I need it'	shaking her head and very definite
Susan	And *I need it for her..and the King has to mind her and kiss her...she can't sleep on the floor...she can't sleep like that...she need that*	She demonstrates all this with the dolls
Leah	*No, 'cos I need it*	
Susan	*Her boyfriend's going to get it*	approaching with the Prince and casting a coy glance at Leah
Leah	*No*	
Susan	*Yes*	
	Leah looks sullen. The girls return to their individual games, still attending to one another's moves. Leah removes the box. Susan drops a doll. Leah retrieves it.	
Leah	*There you go*	
Susan	*Thanks*	
	The atmosphere lifts but the two girls never negotiate a play theme together.	

Both girls struggled with developing a dependable play network throughout the year. They seemed to be caught in a cycle of negativity and to need help to make the shift towards generating friendlier, more cooperative interactions.   The following episode between Judy and Susan shows the impact of someone who generates good feeling on Susan's negativity.   On the 21st and 22nd of November Amy is absent and so Judy chooses Susan as a replacement friend. As with Susan and Leah in the previous episode, they are sitting at a table, playing with miniature characters. Susan begins in the same possessive and competitive mode but Judy wants to connect and generate interactive pretend play. Susan's pleasure in the connection is obvious.

Episode 6   Judy and Susan sit at the blue table with miniature characters. Susan is playing her own game and projecting a protective 'hands off' attitude but Judy is trying to connect.

Speaker	Quote	Annotation
Judy	*Let me see her face*	Susan shows the character's face but then withdraws him.
	Judy then brings her cowboy character over to another of Susan's characters	
Judy	*Heehaw….hello..hello…hello*	
Susan	*No….you have to say hello to them*	pointing to the row of characters
	Judy then says hello to all the characters finishing with 'Hello Lightyear[8]'. Susan is amused. Judy persists with 'Hello..hello Cowgirl'. Susan lifts	

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[8] Buzz Lightyear is a character from Toy Story

Speaker	Quote
	the cowgirl to engage and begins to project both enthusiasm and pleasure in the encounter.

The play partnership continues intensely for two days. On the second day, Sarah meets them at the pretend shop and tries to encourage Judy to join her and Mairéad. Susan fights to retain Judy, an indication that she enjoys having a consistent play partner. The following episode gives a sense of the relationship politics.

Episode 7

Speaker	Quote
Sarah	*Judy, do you like soup? Judy, come on and play with us*
Judy	*No, you come and play with me and Susan*
	They pull and tickle one another in a friendly way but Mairéad, feeling threatened, intervenes and grabs Sarah from behind.
Mairéad	*Sarah, stay*
	She turns Sarah around so that Judy can't tickle her. Judy tentatively tickles Mairéad
Mairéad/Sarah	*Do you want a jockey-back?*
Sarah	*Yeah*
	With this move, Mairéad isolates Judy and retains Sarah for herself. Sarah stretches to tickle Judy to keep contact but Mairéad carries her away. At the same time, Susan pulls Judy's arm and begs her to come with her to play. This move, for Susan demonstrates an unusual level of persistence. Judy opts to follow her.

Susan is not sufficiently astute to contend with the foursome and so she must content herself with Judy's company when Judy, as today, in the absence of Amy, feels unable or unwilling to deal with Sarah and Mairéad. The following day, Amy returns and resumes her play partnership with Judy but Susan seems more upbeat and open to friendship. She teams up with Mary and they play together for most of the session. On Monday, Susan arrives late and Teacher greets her with *'Hurry up Susan, your friends are waiting for you'.* She points to Judy, Amy and Mary who are waiting in line for the trampoline. Her face lights up and I can see how much she desires friendships despite her often-uncompromising behaviour.

Leah is the second youngest girl at just 2 years and 11 months when beginning playgroup in September. She stays largely in the home corner and connects sometimes with Lydia, Amy, Judy or Stan for short periods. Her favourite occupation is pretend talking to her mother on the phone and there is a sense that she is never

totally present or committed to peer relationships. On the 1st December, however, she is involved in a prolonged play episode with Amy that she really enjoys. Mairéad is absent and Judy and Sarah play together. Amy opts to play with Leah.

Episode 8   I first document (with video) Leah and Amy as they team up at 9.32. At 9.50 they sit together on the floor playing with the crib and characters. They loll on the floor and compare shoes. Amy makes fun and Leah joins in her giggling. There is a sense of companionship between them. Sarah and Judy move their block construction to be closer to them

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Sarah	*Amy, hear this - text talk, text talk, text talk*	Speaking in robotic language
		Leah is now included.
	Leah, hear this – text talk, text talk	They all giggle
	Amy leaves to find something	
Leah to me	*Teacher I don't have a best friend to play with*	
Me	*I saw you playing with Amy*	
Leah	*She's gone now*	
	I advise her to follow her and they reconnect. Amy suggests that she will chase Leah with the toy dog. She shows her how to pretend-run, in order to comply with school rules. They continue to play for the rest of the session. I record them again in the homecorner at 10.09 a.m. and they stand in line together for outdoor play at 10.20.	

I have never seen Leah so alert, happy and attentive to another child. She seemed to experience a sense of belonging in the group for the first time. She identified the long spell playing with Amy as the basis of 'best friendship' and was very downhearted when it threatened to terminate. She was usually very welcome to play with Lilly and Lydia whom I considered as compatible play partners for her but unfortunately she seemed to be more interested in playing with Sarah and Mairéad.   Sarah and Mairéad rarely engaged with her and were very likely to openly reject her.   She was also one of the children who particularly sought adults as play partners because she found it difficult to coordinate her intentions with those of her peers.

Kylie is three months younger than the oldest girls. She talks of dinner parties and royal weddings in a very grand voice. Her role-play has more the tone of pantomime than drama, lacking the quality of authenticity. She tends to insist on full control.

Consequently, she does not have consistent play partners but rather picks up people who are at a loose end and prepared to follow her lead. In the early days, Greg seemed fond of her which placed her strategically well among the most progressive group, but she lacked the cooperative skills to avail of the opportunities offered.

Lydia features among Sarah's friends in episode 3 above, although they weren't frequent play partners. She is outgoing, gentle and good humoured, the qualities of a cooperative player but not necessarily of a leader (Goodwin 2002). She seems to see good intentions in people even when they are dubious. In this episode she manages to ignore the oppositional elements in the conversation and lift the atmosphere.

Episode 9   Leah and Lydia are in the home corner eating a pretend meal. Sarah and Mairéad arrive in and immediately confront the girls, claiming to be bigger and more privileged.

Speaker	Initiaitve	Annotation
Leah	*My mam said that I can …*	responding competitively
Sarah	*My mam said I can get..*	Coming very close
Mairéad	*My cousin said…my uncle said*	
Lydia	*And my uncle said..*	Friendly tone
Mairéad	*Stop…my uncle said..*	coming very close and speaking sharply
Lydia to Mairéad	*I got an uncle…* *I got an uncle as well* *You got an uncle as well*	Speaking timidly Speaking louder and good humouredly and laughing
	Mairéad and Sarah look at one another and dismissively leave. Lydia and Leah stare after them for some seconds, then Lydia lifts the atmosphere.	
Lydia to Leah	*Guess what, my cousin and my mam made* *popcorn and burned it….and we took off the box…* *we didn't like the burned though*	She laughs.
Sarah	*Lydia, these are Mairéad's* *Leah, these are Mairéad's* *And no one's to touch them*	She walks in with Mairéad's shoes
Leah	*We're playing sisters….and you're not the mam*	With surprising defiance
Sarah	*Well my sisters goin' to be six when it's her birthday*	Aggressively
Leah	*No, it's goin' to be my birthday after my brother*	
Lydia	*Shane is bigger than me*	Friendly tone
Sarah	*I don't even have a brother*	up close to Leah's face
Leah	*I do and he's……*	Competitively

Lydia	*My uncle is nearly goin' to be big* *He's... and he's this big*	she demonstrates with hand
Sarah	*My sister's goin' to be 6 when it's her birthday*	responding to her friendliness
Lydia	*It's goin' to be my Mam's birthday tomorrow*	
Sarah	*Oh…My dad says when its my sister's birthday it's goin to be….*	Laughing
Lydia	*And my mother…….*	engaging with the humour
	They both laugh in a big way and enjoy the banter	

Lydia associated easily with everybody and developed a friendship with Lilly in particular. Lilly is also an outgoing, confident child who started two weeks into the first term and fitted easily into play groups from the beginning. She falls in with the play of both boys and girls and gently registers her own initiatives in a collaborative rather than competitive way. Tracey is the youngest child in the playgroup being only 2 years and 8 months starting playgroup. The age difference was very obvious. She found separation from her mother difficult and took several weeks to settle. I was surprised that the older children, Greg, Sarah, Mairéad, Judy and Amy, who were so astute in other areas, didn't seem to recognise or allow for the age difference and often teased and dominated her.

To summarise, among the newcomer girls, Lydia and Lilly are both easy companions and gentle players. Mary is a keen observer and play student. Susan, Leah and Kylie all appear to have connection difficulties but at the same time make their pleasure in companionship obvious. Tracey is the youngest child in the group. Among the oldtimers, Niamh remains quite isolated. Mairéad and Sarah are close companions and central figures. Judy and Amy form a play partnership and often team up with Mairéad and Sarah to make the 'foursome' that generates much of the meaning-making in this research.

5.2.5 The Newcomer Boys

There were only seven boys in the group, five of whom were newcomers. Their smaller number meant that the boys had a more limited choice for play partners and consequently, even the less skilled were needed at times. For the first two weeks of term, there were only four boys present, Greg, Liam, Thomas and David, and so barriers were quickly broken down. Greg and Liam have already been introduced

among the oldtimers. Thomas lives in a commuter town and attends this playgroup because he is cared for locally by his Grandmother while his parents work. For him the transition to preschool in this locality is difficult. His transformation is documented on the 'Participatory Appropriation Plane'. He particularly likes to play with the blocks and builds very intricate structures. His principal play partners become Greg and David. David enjoys role-play and moves between the macho builder role and the caring parent. He fights for position with Greg but often opts out of this struggle and plays with Shane or Stan. He shows a remarkable ability to adapt and develop a sense of camaraderie with these younger, relatively immature boys. In this episode, he plays with Shane, responding to his requests and empathetically using Shane's particular way of pronouncing, for example, 'baby' and 'fire'.

Episode 10   *Shane and David are playing with Duplo blocks and characters.*

Speaker	Initiaitve	Annotation
Shane	*My baby's swing is on fire for my baby so I need your help*	
David	*I'll get you…where's your baby?*	His pronunciation of 'baby' picks up on Shane's distinctive version
Shane	*I need the fireman to put it out*	
David	*Do you want your.. hot…of the fire*	Again, he picks up on Shane's distinctive version of 'fire'
Shane	*My baby's swing is on fire*	
David	*zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz* *Now it's all nice and fresh*	imitating a water hose
Shane	*Thank you.. Mr. Fireman* *Where's the baby…in here?*	Looking in a box
David	*Fire them all out*	David seaches in the box, empties it and looks through the contents
David	*I don't know where it is Shane*	
Shane	*There's lots of babies…will you share your people?*	
David	*Do you want that?*	Getting a character from his box
	Thomas, an older and regular play partner for David, approaches and points to a structure he has created	
Thomas	*David, do you want to play with that?*	
David	*I'm playin' with Shane*	
To Shane	*We're buildin' a house……………………..*	

It's surprising that David refuses Thomas's offer because Thomas is a more exciting play partner but sometimes he seems to enjoy the simpler stories and perhaps the guiding and giving role. In the above episode, Shane treats him as the more knowledgeable and competent peer and he responds by being helpful.

As we can see in this episode, Shane has a good command of language and is very energetic but he is obviously younger that the others in terms of emotional regulation and speed of response. Consequently the older boys often reject him. They are also very wary of Stan. Stan seems to feel the need to take very big initiatives in order to be seen. This combined with his limited language means he doesn't introduce his intentions and the children don't know how to interpret them. The following episode from Sept 14th, the second week of term, demonstrates a typical exchange.

Episode 11

> David and Greg select outfits from the dress-up rack in the homecorner. David dresses in the 'police' jacket. Greg is sitting down as Teacher helps him to put on the Firefighter's overalls. Stan selects the 'pirate' outfit and pushes it at Greg who reads the gesture as intrusive and confrontational and shoves him away.
>
> Teacher (very gently)   *That's not nice Greg – he was only showing it to you. You were wearing that yesterday and he thinks you want it again*
>
> Greg's attitude changes and he helps Stan to put on his dress-up jacket the right way round. Later in the morning Greg again misinterprets Stan's approaches and appears annoyed and intimidated.

From this episode, we can see that Stan has been following the play pattern in the group and his intentions are connected to the dress-up theme. His initiative is just too big. He needs to use smaller gestures, make eye contact and offer the outfit. At other times, however, he presents as unpredictable. When wandering alone and particularly during transition times when other children are tidying up, preparing to go outside or waiting for lunch, he finds it difficult to manage. He grabs from others, throws things and sometimes hits and kicks random children. Consequently the other children find him threatening and often alert one another to his whereabouts and protect themselves and their play or constructions as he approaches. This conversation offers insight into how he is viewed:

Episode 12

Speaker	Initiaitve
Greg	*Stan wrecks my head..he makes me angry*
Sarah	*and Stan wrecks mine and that makes me angry*
Mairéad	*When Stan hits me I hit him back*
Sarah	*Yeah Stan kicks me and I kick him back*

Over the course of the Autumn term, Stan develops an identity as someone who is intrusive and annoying. He becomes positioned as the troublesome one who must be controlled. In the next episode he is even be blamed convincingly when not at fault.

Episode 13   Greg is building a structure with planks and has difficulty getting it to stand.

Speaker	Initiaitve	Annotation
Greg	*Oh oh- ..it keeps stupid falling*	
	He glares around and puts his hand on his hip. Thomas and Stan look and say nothing. Stan picks up a cone. Greg takes it from him. Stan does not react. Then, Stan rather idly picks up a plank	
Greg	*Stop it …..*	Greg takes the plank and connects it to the structure
	The structure wobbles again	
Greg to structure	*ah you…stupid eejit*	
	Stan is kneeling on the other side of the structure, watching Greg. He picks up a plank, which he places on the floor to connect with Greg's structure. It tips Greg's plank and the structure falls.	
Greg	*Will you stop touching everything…..*	Coming to Stan's side
Greg	*Leave everything…you've broken everything down…*	
	He places the planks very carefully, his tongue between his teeth, against the structure. The third plank knocks a plank and it looks like toppling but doesn't.	
Greg	*Oh..I don't want you to break down…you stupid road thing..Stan..it's all your fault..you made it all broke down..*	This is untrue
	Greg briefly looks to me, the nearest adult, to check if his lie has been detected. Stan is kneeling there, silent and obedient.	
Greg	*If somebody breaks this down they're not playing 'cos I'm the boss of…*	He's trying to reconstruct a playgroup rule
	The structure falls.	
Greg	*See….*	He stares at Stan
Thomas	*Stan's not playing*	
Greg	*You're not playing*	a sense of power and punishment
	Stan doesn't respond	
Greg	*Teacher….em..our road keeps falling down and Stan made our road fall down..*	
	There is a sense that Greg understood he would be believed if he blamed Stan. His tone of voice and way of speaking suggests that he himself is good and innocent.	
Teacher	*Was it an accident?*	
Greg	*No..*	Shaking his head
	Greg, in a less convincing tone, continues to insist that Stan knocked the structure purposefully.	

On the positive side, Stan often exudes friendliness, spirit and good humour and sometimes the children warm to him and are amused by him. He is insuppressibly energetic and retains a keen interest in participating in sociodramatic play. He idolises Greg who at times is very kind to him and from whom he learns many play

skills. Because of the boys' numbers and limited choice of networks and sometimes due to teacher's intervention, he often manages to be included in their play.

Finally, the youngest boy is Eoin, whose third birthday was the first to be celebrated in the new academic year. He is very quiet and regularly absent. He rarely features in sociodramatic play, tending more towards water and sand play.

To summarise, among the boys, Greg and Liam are oldtimers. Liam is shy and seeks Greg's attention. Greg joins with the newcomers David and Thomas and they become key players. Stan follows Greg and loves to play but is very disruptive. Shane is one of the younger cohort and very imaginative and language-rich. Eoin is the youngest, very timid and often absent.

Here I present a table listing the children by name (not real names), sex, age and as 'oldtimers' or 'newcomers'.

Name	Sex	Age in Sept 2005	Status
Noel	M	4 years plus	Left June '05
James	M	4 years plus	Left June '05
Cathy	F	4 years plus	Left June '05
Greg	M	4 years	Oldtimer
Amy	F	4 years	Oldtimer
Thomas	M	4 years	Newcomer
Mairéad	F	4 years	Oldtimer
Sarah	F	4years	Oldtimer
Niamh	F	3 years 11 m	Oldtimer
Liam	M	3 years 10 m	Oldtimer
Kylie	F	3 years 10 m	Newcomer
Judy	F	3 years 9 m	Oldtimer
David	M	3 years 8m	Newcomer
Lydia	F	3 years 6m	Newcomer
Lilly	F	3 years 6m	Newcomer
Susan	F	3 years 6m	Newcomer
Mary	F	3 years 3m	Newcomer

Stan	M	3 years 2m	Newcomer
Shane	M	3 years 2m	Newcomer
Eoin	M	2 years 11m	Newcomer
Leah	F	2 years 11m	Newcomer
Tracey	F	2 years 8m	Newcomer

5.2.6 Group dynamics

Group dynamics feature significantly in androgogy[9] but have been neglected in the study of young children's learning groups. (See Rogers (1992), Brookfield (1986) and Tuckman (1965) for the role of group dynamics in adult education). The sociocultural lens of this research, with its focus on culture, context and the intermental plane in learning, brings group dynamics to the fore.

As we can see from the above profiles, the success of play partnerships and play themes often depended not just on the skills of the individuals but also on the personality dynamics that generate connection or disconnection. Leah manages co-ordination with Judy or Amy but not with Susan or Mairéad and Sarah. Susan comes to know the joy of connection with Judy. Choice of play areas, play practices and themes are largely dependent on the combination of play participants. As already mentioned, the close relationship between Mairéad and Greg and their competency and enthusiasm create possibilities for cross gender play but these are often stymied by Sarah's resistance. Sarah on the other hand is often open to including others but Mairéad is reluctant to share her company. Thomas, David and Greg, although very different, regularly play together and develop shared themes and routines because their choice of partners is limited. The significance of group dynamics further impressed me on days when key players were absent. This often resulted in shifts in play partnerships that had consequences for the social organisation of the whole group. It first struck me forcefully on the 29th September. There were only thirteen children present and so I expected a quiet and peaceful day. However, the changed dynamics resulted in new tensions and a particularly challenging day for children and adults. My field notes record:

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[9] Androgogy is the science of adult education. See Rogers (1986); Brookfield (1983); Tuckman (1965) for role of group dynamics in adult education

Episode 14

Six children are absent today, including Mairéad and Kylie. Sarah is still on holidays. Lilly and David have returned. Teacher has brought her ten year old son, John, to playgroup because he has an unexpected day off school. Greg arrives with Mother and sister. He sees John and is very upset. He doesn't like big boys in playgroup, he tells his Mam. He cries and wants to go home. Nothing will dissuade him. His Mam says that he will have to stay at home and do nothing, that he'll be sorry. She goes through the dress up clothes with him and tries to interest him in a variety of things. Nothing works. She concludes that he's not too well and takes him with her. Even the strong and brave and popular have off days and difficulties.

The presence of John and the absence of key players has an enormous impact on group dynamics.

- *Some followed John around. Tracey examined him from head to foot and seemed suspicious. David tries to impress. Thomas tracks him closely. Shane asks if he has brought his lunch box and explains the routine to him. Thomas, David and John form a group as do Judy and Amy. The absence of Mairéad and Sarah seems to make the homecorner less intimidating and Niamh is accepted by Amy and Judy into their game of dressing up and going to a party. Thereafter, they tend to forget about her and she retires.*

- *The morning routine is now far less predictable. Superman, workers or firefighters do not feature today. Instead, the children flit from one activity to another and vie to impress John..*

- *Susan seems particularly lost within the changed atmosphere and Stan's behaviour is more challenging. He seems to really miss Greg, and Thomas and David are unavailable to him because they're preoccupied with John.*

Why am I so surprised? I just hadn't thought about the consequences of changed group dynamics. Now I can see that the group has returned to forming and storming. Playgroup, where children largely organise their own activities and relationships is very dependent on group dynamics, unlike school perhaps, where teacher is in control and more directive.

Subsequently, I regularly noted the impact of group changes. They affected even those who appeared strong and confident in normal circumstances. Mairéad cried and clung to her mother when Sarah was absent. Sarah cried and complained to teacher that no one would play with her on an occasion when Mairéad was absent. Judy was less inclined to risk joining Sarah and Mairéad when Amy was absent. Other children benefited from her companionship on such occasions. These shifts in play partnerships renewed the forming and storming (Tuckman 1965) within the groups and brought the politics of participation to the forefront again.

5.2.7 Conclusion

Each child arrives in playgroup with his/her own individual personality and experiences. Each has a genetic and biological make-up that distinguishes him/her

from all others. Each arrives with a personal narrative and sense of identity that has been created through experiences in interaction in previous groups and communities. They now bring their idiosyncrasies and experiences together to create a new fusion. This is the peer group with which each child will transact and within which they must develop a sense of belonging. The new combination of individuals creates a new group dynamic that becomes a vehicle for new meaning-making. They must now stretch themselves to engage with other perspectives and together reconstruct a group culture that will frame their ways of transacting and belonging. Children's place and identities within the emerging social organisation, culture and living history of this group position them in terms of opportunities for action. They are transformed, that is their individual capacities and previous meanings are transformed towards further participation in the activities of the group. They contribute and respond with their individual genes, skills and both previous and broader experiences to the new meaning-making dynamic. Another group, another time, another place would activate other transactions and produce different transformations. Consequently the dynamics within this group are a vital part of our understanding of the processes and outcomes of participation for these children. In terms of their personal and group identity, their experiences with this group are very significant.

The next section explicates some of the other cultural elements that are foregrounded on the 'Community or Apprenticeship Plane'.

5.3   The cultural guiding frame in play

There are many other cultural elements, some from the wider community and some from the immediate context that mediate and frame the children's participation in play. The following episode serves to explicate the role of (i) cultural artefacts such as commuting and work practices, equipment, rituals and routines and (ii) social discourses and practices about power and gender, in the construction of the play story and in the social organisation and participation practices within the play community.

In this episode, Noel and Greg first opt to be workers, extended to include 'Daddy' roles, so that they can engage with Mairéad and Sarah as their two daughters. In the emerging play narrative, the two Daddies go to work and leave their daughters at

home in bed. On their return, one father greets his sleeping daughter with a kiss, a source of embarrassment to the other father. Mairéad slips into a housekeeping role, but Greg retains his fatherly presence by showering her with gentleness and kindness. James intrudes and is delegated the role of 'kid'. He is disruptive, steals a father's phone and has to be managed. Greg decides that he no longer wants to leave his friend Mairéad to go to work so he changes role and becomes a brother. Subsequently the plot changes and a game of robbers and pursuers is initiated by Greg and Mairéad.

There are a number of details in the episode to which I wish to pre-alert the reader. It is particularly salient because of the obvious moments of crises involved in transactions such as 'the kiss' or 'James' intrusion' or 'I'm the brother now' that generate consciousness and transformation and explicate the appropriation process and the reflexivity involved in reconstructing cultural practices in new contexts.

As in real life, there are many concurrent plots and goals, and intersecting narratives in this play episode. Sarah again rejects Greg and tries to negotiate a play contract with Mairéad that excludes him. On this occasion it remains a sub-plot. On other occasions, their conflict fragments the main plot. James and other recruits are interested in a game of chasing. Noel wants to retain his play partnership with Greg whereas Greg is more interested in playing with Mairéad. These individual agendas are activated and shaped in the collective dynamic and transform identities and ways of participating within this group.

This episode lasts for some forty minutes. Here it is abbreviated and reconstructed to 'intensify reality' (Riihela 2002), that is, to select and foreground critical exemplary moments while relating the core story. This is the longest episode quoted in the thesis because I particularly want to include examples of the cultural practices, discourses, relationships and complex agendas that the children are reconstructing.

Episode 15   Greg and Noel move to the homecorner. They are dressed as 'Darth Vader' and 'Superman' respectively and have previously been playing 'spaceships' together. Mairéad is nearby, observing and eager to play. Noel and Greg find the toolboxes in the cabinet.

Speaker	Initiaitve	Annotation
Noel to Greg	*Pretend we're workers OK?*	Giving him a toolbox
Greg to Mairéad	*We're the Daddies*	Looking up at her

Mairéad	*I'll get Sarah.*	
Greg	*OK-it's two daughters*	
	Mairéad is very excited and runs to get Sarah, who is in the book corner	
Mairéad	Dad, s*he won't come to bed*	Returning alone
	Greg goes to book corner, directing Sarah with 'Let's go to bed', and for some reason she follows him obediently though looking reticent and sullen	
Greg	*You're the children –go to bed*	
Meanwhile	He waves his index finger and gives the children further elaborate instructions. Mairéad and Sarah nod in agreement. They go to bed where Mairéad tries to initiate a sub plot about doctors but Sarah refuses because she is annoyed that Mairéad is playing with Greg. Both Daddies take the toolboxes and go to work. They hammer and plane the wall. James follows them and they order him home.	
Noel	*You're not coming to work*	
Greg	*Yeah, you're a brother*	
Noel	*You are a kid*	
Greg	*yeah, kids don't come to work* *Kids don't come to work....Go back home*	
	James brandishes a phone and wood plane at the workers. Noel claims to own the phone and asks for Greg's help to retrieve it.	
Noel to Greg	*Get my phone off him*	
	Greg tries briefly and then takes Noel by the arm	
Greg	*I'll get you…-I'll buy you a new phone...I'll buy you a new phone*	
The Kiss	The Daddies return home. The two children are in bed.	
Greg to Noel	*You kiss Sarah, OK?*	
	Greg moves to the bed. Noel shakes his head, says 'No' and refuses to kiss. Greg kisses Mairéad. Noel covers his face in embarrassment and then catches Greg's eye. Greg is very embarrassed. He shouts at the girls to save face.	
Greg	*Wake up you smellies…. Wake up…Wake up…Wake up, you deadhead*	His tone is aggressive
	His embarrassment stays with him and he finds it difficult to respond when Mairéad, in a baby voice, tells him some story about her 'blankey' (baby comfort blanket)	
Mairéad to Greg	*I'm going shopping*	She gets a bag.
	Greg joins her and they pick up goods from the shop.	
Greg	*Here's slippers, Darling…I'll show you how they fit*	
	Mairéad tries the slippers. Greg sees a shopkeeper.	
Greg to Mairéad	*Look, the shopkeeper's there..the shopkeeper's there*	in gentle high pitch
	He pursues her with another pair of slippers calling her 'Darling' again. Mairéad then helps Greg to find his phone and tries to hold him in play with her. Greg decides to change role and stay in the kitchen.	
Greg to Noel and James	*You're a Daddy and you're a Daddy*	
Noel	*And you're a Daddy*	Negotiating
Greg	*No, I'm the brother now*	Noel protests and then accedes
Noel	*Greg, go to bed*	

Greg	*OK, Dad*	
Noel	*I buyed you a new phone*	
	Greg's option to play 'brother' was really a decision to play with Mairéad rather than Noel. He even forgoes the authoritative position of father and enters the equal status relationship of brother to Mairéad. Greg pleads with Mairéad to be the 'monster' and she connives with him to steal his phone. Mairéad orders *'Everyone go to sleep….I want to see this phone'*. She steals the phone and a game of 'cops and robbers' ensues until Teacher intervenes.	

From the beginning, we can see that children are in the business of interpretation of the context, roles and artefacts. The boys are searching in the press and find two toolboxes that suggest workers. They know where to find them and the tools already reify practices from the broader community that are reconstructed to fit with the playgroup context. Noel's suggestion *'We're workers'* is immediately extended by Greg to mean 'Daddies' and shows that both boys have been integrated into a particular discourse on the role of males. Two Daddies is suggested by the presence of two toolboxes and doesn't present a dilemma. Sometimes social rules, about, for example, the number of Daddies who can live in one house, are set aside in the interest of cooperation and harmony. There was no suggestion that one of the boys might be 'Mammy' or the girls a 'worker' because females rarely go to work with a toolbox in this culture. Besides, it involves crossing the gender divide, a risky business. 'Daddies' suggests a relationship with other roles and Mairéad interprets this as an invitation to play. She calls Sarah. The girls could be children or Mammies but the tone of the boys' language and demeanour suggests they are in 'power' rather than in 'equal' or 'submission' mode, so the girls take up roles as children. These roles then determine their interaction styles. Mairéad, as child, reports the non-compliant Sarah to the Dad and speaks about recognised baby accoutrements in a baby voice and language. What these children, who use duvets at home, normally call a 'cover' is now called a 'blankey'. They stay at home in bed, presumably because Daddies leave for work very early in a suburban setting. The fathers go to the far end of the room to work. This arrangement involves the notion of commuting a long way but in turn allows for other interruptions and contributions en route.

The children seem to share an understanding of the power and status of particular roles. In the first scene, the workers adopt a powerful demeanour. The toolboxes

imply certain trades and activities that carry with them status and clout. The tone of voice, the ownership of tools, the order to the 'kid' to go home, the decisive stride and threatening approach to the annoying children gives the workers a tone of authority and importance. They exhibit no indecision about their work venue or about how to start or what to do. They give directives-'go to bed'- 'go home' -'give me the phone', - a standard method employed by children to establish positions of control and subordination between characters, constantly demonstrated in pretend parent-child relationships. Noel, when he becomes Greg's father, immediately moves into power mode by ordering him to go to bed. While Mairéad seems to recognise the subordinate position of the child, she cannot resist becoming powerful in the domestic scene. She seems to slip into the role of 'mother', except that Greg repositions her as 'child' by bending down and speaking to her in a patronising way. He calls her 'Darling'. He presents as more knowledgeable in the way he offers her the slippers and demonstrates how to wear them and then draws her attention to the shopkeeper in the tone of an adult speaking to a child. She subsequently asks him if it's time to go to bed, contributing to the power relationship. The temporary confusion about her mother or child role is interesting in the discourse of power and caring in family relationships. The transactions could equally happen between husband and wife but the tone of the exchanges differentiates them. The pretend father's use of the endearment 'Darling' to address his daughter is interesting here in terms of the construction of fatherhood in this culture. This is a term that has made an impression on Greg and which he now uses liberally in his play role, with the possible effect of making it culturally more acceptable in the future.

The children demonstrate their awareness that body and verbal language convey status. Greg struts as the worker while Mairéad shrinks and giggles as the child. Such tangible features as clothes, tools, money and responsibilities further identify status for them. A stolen phone means that Greg must go to the shop and purchase a new one. Some phones carry more status than others and recognising technical and style features is important knowledge in this community. Noel is not impressed with the substitute phone. He wants a sleeker model.

The children have interpreted these concepts of power and relationships from the wider community and are reconstructing them here in a play story. They do not

consciously reconstruct or reflect on these relationships but in the performance of the role they display an active knowing that this is how things are and they contribute to the collective reconstruction of how things will be. It is not just imitation because in each play story there are distinctive dynamics and unpredictable events that demand that they tweak and embellish their responses. Each performance brings an element of renegotiation that changes their world and their perspective on the world, however slightly. They do not operate as isolated individuals but rather in a reciprocal relationship with the collective arena. It is thinking and feeling expressed in action that is necessarily accompanied by shifts in consciousness and practice. These shifts have a transformative effect on the players, the context and the culture.

Their common cultural background in real life offers a shared guiding frame and allows the children to produce familiar initiatives at action, verbal and emotional level appropriate to their roles. It is essential knowledge for participation in sociodramatic play because it allows children to operate within the rules. They are familiar with beds, cookers and mobile phones. They go to work with toolboxes and shop in supermarkets. The play clothes and equipment are representative of a distinct cultural milieu. The roles the children adopt reflect a way of life. These roles operate within the constraints and affordances of the social discourses that guide their forms of agency. The fathers are skilled and powerful and go to work. Children don't go to work. They are obedient, cajoled, chastised. These are elements of the cultural frame, a frame of reference points that guides and helps to coordinate their initiatives.

5.3.1 The Playgroup Institutional frame

The playgroup as an institution also provides a frame for behaviour. Areas of the room are used for different play purposes, the playgroup rules establish which behaviours are permitted and children share many rituals, routines and play themes, generated over the years in this community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991).

As the children become more familiar with one another, they also recognise each other's capacities and limitations within the group. From the moment, for example, that Greg becomes a brother there is a sense that the Daddies are about to play a minor role. Greg and Mairéad are recognised within the group as leaders and core players. Stories develop around them so that while they may opt for subordinate roles

in the play, they continue to lead its direction. They are both popular and powerful participants in the real life group and carry their power and agency into the play role.

Mairéad expects Greg to respond proactively when she reports '*She won't come to bed*' and Sarah reluctantly complies with his directive. Noel seems to support Mairéad's view of Greg. Within the play frame, he reports James' misdemeanours to him and expects him to resolve the conflict, even though their roles enjoy equal status and Greg, in reality, is the younger child. The episode contributes to Greg's identity as an agentive and assertive individual, valued attributes in this culture.   Children's identities transfer to the play world and play, in turn, supports identity development.

5.3.2 Rules and discourses from the broader cultural world

The children recognise that there are social rules and discourses that afford and constrain the agency of particular persons or categories of persons in social contexts. These are the implicit rules of the real world that are made explicit in sociodramatic play. They guide and coordinate the behaviour of the players and create a predictable but flexible framework. The children submit to the rules even when they conflict with their real life impulses.   Both Greg and Mairéad contribute to the discourse of knowledgeable adult and ignorant child. She pretends not to know how the slippers fit or when it's time to go to bed. He explains and directs. Children can operate in these discourses anywhere on the spectrum from acceptance to resistance. *'Kids don't come to work- go back home'* is an attempt to pull into line someone who has stepped outside an accepted discourse in this culture. James resists his position as a non-working child but he pays the price because he is treated as a nuisance. He persists and is later offered the role of father, which he accepts. Sarah demonstrates passive resistance and foregoes a proactive voice in the construction of the play story.

In enacting the varied responses children are learning lessons that are situated in action. These are discourses in action and through their enactment children demonstrate an understanding of the subtleties of social organisation. They become part of and contribute to the reproduction and transformation of these discourses in the process of reproducing them in play contexts. The very process of interpreting and transferring them into new situations, requires, albeit unconsciously, that children

reflect on and critique them. This process of appropriation and transformation is more obvious in moments of crisis or conflict, as we see in the next section.

5.3.3 Crossing boundaries in play

The pretence play frame allows for exaggerated expression and testing the limits of meaning. In play children can behave in ways that may not be acceptable in real life, particularly within the peer culture. They can take risks because they are *'only pretending',* as they regularly remind each other. Their roles as 'Daddies' involve exaggerated expressions of power and wealth. They give non-stop directives, walk with a strut and spend money easily. As pretend children they feign fear and submission. Mairéad talks like a baby. Greg calls her 'Darling'. These are actions that could leave one open to ridicule in real life but are acceptable in play. One suspends reality and abandons certain inhibitions but there must be collective commitment to this pretence.

Crossing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour as when Greg kisses his pretend daughter, can momentarily suspend the play frame. This is a kiss but it does not intend what a kiss intends. It has a pretend meaning. While these children are agreed that a pretend play message is to be interpreted as such, sometimes the limits of pretence are overstretched. Here a crisis is induced and the children become highly conscious of transgression. Noel and Greg both show their embarrassment. In this moment, there is an understanding between Greg and Noel about the relationship between boys and girls. Greg learns that kissing girls is taboo for boys. It is his social alertness that allows him to tune into these discourses. He notes Noel's hand cover his eyes and he quickly makes connections. The transaction is part of the developing discourse of gendered behaviour within this group, an interpretation from the adult world and reconstructed here. It is an implicit social contract raised to consciousness maybe for the first time for these children. Through their participation in this event, both the individuals and the meaning of the event are transformed towards further attuned participation with this group of players. In the interaction moment between Greg and Noel, mediated by strong cultural messages, they negotiate the cultural meaning of a kiss and in the same moment they appropriate life-changing lessons about acceptable behaviour.

In this moment of raised consciousness Greg and Noel are learning what is permissible within the culture – the code for deciding what is right and wrong or for moral and social regulation. Greg is shamed by his faux pas, a strong emotional reaction that will ensure that he does not repeat the mistake. He immediately projects himself back into the public arena, where he instinctively knows that identity is created, to correct the identity misconstruction. This is not individual soul searching. This is meaning and identity that must be negotiated on the intermental plane, in collaboration with others in joint activity. He camouflages his discomfort by moving into action mode. He speaks aggressively to the girls. He wants to communicate his masculinity and authority. This is lived identity building. Through his actions, Greg is demonstrating how he understands the world. The moment of perturbation he experiences in the crisis instigates conscious readjustment.

I am reminded of a day seventeen years ago when I dropped my four-year-old son to his second week of school. As I bent to kiss him, he said '*You know, Mam, how I kiss you at home? Well I don't mind that but I don't like kissing you at school*'. Children recognise that behaviours are interpreted in context, mediated by discourses prevalent within specific groups. They know they can be different people in different contexts, that their identities are multiple and responsive to specific group norms and values. Greg demonstrates when he changes to an aggressive approach with the girls that within this context he chooses to construct a more culturally acceptable 'masculine' identity. This is an agentive choice on Greg's part but his agency is responsive to group interpretation and positioning. He transforms and is being transformed by sharp lessons about the domains of intimacy in his community, at only three years of age, following specific cultural experiences. His development in these terms does not necessarily follow any predetermined path. Rather its form and direction is dynamically co-constructed in cultural social activity.

There are other moments of raised consciousness in this play episode. James' intrusion causes a crisis that leads to conflict about whether kids should go to work. Later again, Greg's change of role to 'brother' alerts the players to the group dynamics, with consequences for the position, feelings and identities of other players. Noel knows that he has prioritised his close relationship with Mairéad. The issues are not consciously abstracted and discussed but are argued and negotiated at the level of

activity. They do not become disruptive issues because the children wish the play to continue but nevertheless rituals and identities are being reconstructed.

5.3.4 Conclusion

The episode illustrates the cultural nature of sociodramatic play and the reciprocal relationship between play and reality in terms of cultural reproduction. It is interpreted to demonstrate how cultural artefacts and values mediate and are reconstructed in children's play. In particular the discourses and practices of roles, power and social organisation are noted and key moments of appropriation in and through the play identified. The analysis foregrounds the role of the cultural frame in guiding how children participate in sociodramatic play. It provides a referential system for social relationships and transactions and for understanding, making and representing meaning. Children read and communicate this cultural guiding frame at action, verbal and emotional level and use it to regulate self and others, and to guide their individual contributions to the public context. This allows them to be part of its interpretation and to share in its communal reconstruction. Their shared experience and knowledge, gained in the process of participation in joint activity, positions them in terms of power, agency and participation.

In this chapter, I have discussed elements of the broader cultural and institutional frame in which the play of these children is embedded and which the children reconstruct. In particular I have identified that these children's play is situated within the dynamics of a particular group and these very specific group dynamics have a profound effect on children's opportunities, style of participation and meaning-making. The significance of the cultural guiding frame as a guiding force for children's participation in play stories and as a co-ordinating mechanism for their contributions is also a key emerging theme from this data.

In the next chapter, we move to the 'interpersonal or guided participation plane' (Rogoff 1995) where we study the data to identify the interpersonal and transactive process of children's participation in sociodramatic play.

Chapter 6: The Interpersonal Plane

6.0 Introduction

While the previous chapter puts the field of research into context with a description of the cultural context and social group that frames the play of these children, this chapter contributes to the thesis by analysing the children's interpersonal transactions and meaning-making. This is the Interpersonal or Guided Participation Plane, where person to person interactions and transactions with cultural values and artefacts are foregrounded (Rogoff 1995). The chapter is premised on the sociocultural understanding that knowledge is intersubjective. It is co-constructed between people and framed by their shared cultural understanding and symbolic and thinking tools. Trevarthen (1980) and Matusov (2001) offer similar definitions of intersubjectivity that identify three core elements. Participants have something in common, supported by artefacts and their reified meaning, and they share foci of awareness. They coordinate their intentions and contributions and generate agency that is contingent and responsive to the context, meaning and goals of participants.

This plane is described by Hamo and Blum-Kulka (2004: 73) as a 'double opportunity space'. The first space focuses on micro-intersubjective processes and the co-construction of cultural practices and meanings that allow for group membership and participation in sociodramatic play activity. This perspective locates the individual in the micro-interaction moments in goal directed situated activity. It uses an interaction analysis approach to find the purpose, order and pattern in children's interactions.

The second space focuses on the macro-cultural arena that engages with the artefacts, discourses, meanings, bank of knowledge and the social organisation of the wider society, which children interpret and re-construct towards collective meaning-making. The children, through their play, demonstrate that cultural appropriation is not an abstracted process of mental reasoning but rather a process of coordinating their interpretations of these more distal forces and creating a revised framework of meaning and practices towards meeting the shared goals of the new group.

Both spaces are mutually responsive and reciprocal. Micro interactions lead to micro developments such as the construction of local peer group identities, practices and meanings that transact with macro practice and meaning systems. In this way, micro interactions are a critical component of the macro culture. The combination of the micro and macro perspectives contributes to give a richer, deeper understanding of the process and outcome of children's participation in the relationship, knowledge and discursive world of sociodramatic play.

The questions arising are: How do children establish intersubjectivity in sociodramatic play (i) in the micro space of direct interpersonal interaction and (ii) in the macro space of collective meaning-making? In more concrete terms, in the micro space, how do children establish common ground, coordinate their contributions and develop their agency (Matusov 2001) towards negotiating a play story? In the macro space, how do children interpret meaning from the adult world and collaborate to collectively reconstruct it in play? How is this meaning situated in their play activities and distributed over their goals, relationships and practices?

The chapter, following Hamo and Blum-Kulka (2004), is divided into two parts. In the first part, Matusov's (2001) three elements of intersubjectivity are used to organise the analysis. Beginning with section 6.1 we consider how children successfully establish common ground. Firstly the data is used to demonstrate key interpersonal intersubjectivity skills that support children's co-construction of play stories. We then consider the challenges for newcomers who join the group in September and follow their progress in developing a shared frame for participation. The focus then shifts to the oldtimers and their comparative achievements in terms of participative competence. In section 6.2, we consider how children coordinate their contributions and respond to the integral demands of managing self and community, competition and compromise, reality and pretence. As they coordinate their play stories, they must negotiate the complex goals and relationships that mediate both their real and pretend roles and activities. Section 6.3 locates children's agency in a responsive relationship with cultural practices and group dynamics and goals.

Part One

6.1 Establishing common ground

In this section, key interpersonal strategies for establishing common ground as they are successfully employed by children are identified. This is followed by an exploration of how children come to know and practise these strategies.

As I observe the children play and interpret their initiatives (with the support of video replay) I soon realise how helpful their naming[10] is, even for the researcher. In Episode 15, use of artefacts, exaggerated actions and naming their initiatives with *'Pretend we're workers' 'We're the Daddies' 'You can be the doctor'* makes their intentions public. *'Let's go to work'; 'It's time to go to bed'; 'How do these slippers fit?'* convey messages about intentions, roles and relationships in an indirect way. With these phrases the children register themselves and their actions and present them to their co-players for interpretation and extension. Demonstrating one's initiatives in this way serves, often unintentionally, to connect thinking and intentions and make the agent predictable.

Play partners read social cues. Their awareness of each other's initiatives allows them to respond by following and extending the initiative, sometimes cooperatively, sometimes uncooperatively. In Episode 15, Greg responds to Noel's presentation of the tool boxes and his suggestion that they become 'workers' with *'We're the Daddies',* because he is also aware of Mairéad's eagerness to join them. 'Daddies' suggests further roles. Mairéad suggests recruiting Sarah and he responds with *'OK, it's two daughters'*. These children are alert to opportunities around them and are quick to communicate their intentions to others. They communicate interest, enthusiasm, sincerity and authenticity and an agreement to enter the pretend frame. They draw on tone of voice, emotional expression, gesture and language to share these intentions and feelings and thereby make them easy to read and follow. At the same time they can suspend their own initiatives and make space for tuning into the

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[10] Rogoff (2006) shows that in literate society we become more dependant on language at the expense of other ways of communicating. This explains to some extent the researcher's value on the children's naming in this research. The children used body language and artefacts of all kinds in making their initiatives legible, a phenomenon that is not always clear when we document play episodes with an emphasis on conversation. The video is consequently a helpful tool.

subtle messages being communicated around them. It is through this process of leading and following, of give and take that children can contribute and attune to the collective story frame.

These interactive skills, turn taking, making one's intentions obvious, taking initiative and following the initiatives of others, being socially aware, and using cooperative tones, and especially the sharing of emotion, all skills learned in first relationships, (Stern, 1985) are key to developing intersubjectivity (Stern, 1985, Trevarthen, 1979, Aarts, 2000) and to successful connection in play. The children in this pre-school regularly talked themselves through their actions, unconsciously regulating their intentions and awareness and at the same time registering their presence and communicating with others. The cooks produced a running commentary on their dinner making procedures, the tradesmen talked about what they were fixing and the doctors talked about their use of implements. Naming their own initiatives even to themselves seems to help children to both stay with them and to be in control of them. This control means that they can select them to fit with their roles and other's contributions. It gives initiatives a structured, predictable quality that contrasts with the impulsive, unpredictable quality of other children's contributions. It certainly helped the researcher to follow events.

The children demonstrate the reciprocal relationships between interpersonal skills and access to cultural knowledge. The ability to register one's initiatives clearly at action, verbal and emotional level and to read and respond contingently to the initiatives of others gives access to the co-construction of cultural ways of knowing. At the same time contingency depends on familiarity with what is culturally appropriate. The children in the above episode connect with the layers of meaning and intention because they have the interpersonal skills and familiarity with a shared cultural framework. It is difficult to establish intersubjectivity without both elements and so entering unfamiliar groups and contexts is difficult. Children need to find some common ground to further establish common ground. The next section describes the process for this group of children. We examine the data to see how children are inducted into the cultural frame that allows them to establish the common ground and trust that in turn guides their coordination and agency. We begin with the newcomers.

6.1.1 First tentative connections

In the early days of the term children are definitely in self-protection mode. They are moving from the smaller home circle, from the security of their intersubjective relationships with parents and family to a new group scene, where shared meaning and practices must yet be constructed. They are unfamiliar with one another and are challenged to read other's intentions in this strange and busy context. Almost every attempt at connection is stalled by fear and suspicion. They are reluctant to trust and their reluctance creates an air of tension that in reciprocal fashion contributes to the distrust. A newcomer is offered pretend dinner in the home corner and warily questions the implications. Things fall on the floor and in the absence of familiarity with a routine for dealing with the incident, insecurity pervades. Newcomers depend on the oldtimers and adults to share the practices of this community.

To date they have insisted that most things in the immediate environment are 'mine' and enjoyed the security of a nearby carer who ensured them protection from possible predators. In the homecorner now, they guard their possessions and often interpret the advances of others as attempts at confiscation. This however demands keeping a sharp eye on the activities of others, interpreting them and responding to them, although warily. Imitation is also part of the game, another indication of connection. The following episode was documented on the 6th Sept, the second day of term. Niamh (not a newcomer but one who struggles to gain access to shared play) is in the kitchen with the recent arrivals, Kylie, Tracey and David. Observation and imitation are their key ways of connecting. Suspicion and distrust however limits their efforts.

Episode 16   Niamh joined the playgroup last term but remains on the periphery of the group's shared sociodramatic play. The presence of equally peripheral newcomers seems to give her courage. Kylie and Tracey are beside her in the homecorner. Kylie is at the dining table. Niamh and Tracey work silently in the kitchen area, filling baskets and stirring pots. Niamh has a wooden spoon with which she stirs. She deposits it on the worktop. Tracey reaches for it, intending to imitate her. Niamh grabs it, immediately suspicious of Tracey's intentions.

Speaker	Initiaitve	Annotation
	David (another newcomer) arrives for the first time and surveys the scene.	
Kylie	*Where's my knife*?	to no one in particular
David	*There's a knife*	
Kylie	*I'm making dinner*	encouraged by the connection

David	*What's this?*	moving to where Niamh and Tracey are working
Tracey	*That's a microwave*	
	Kylie lifts a phone. David notices and picks up another one.	
David	*I'm coming soon, goodbye*	Speaking on phone
	Kylie doesn't reply. She moves to the table where Tracey is now standing and reaches for a basket of dolls' feeding bottles. Tracey declares: *Them bottles are all for my babies.* She pulls the basket towards her and puts a protective arm around them, suspecting that Kylie will steal them. Kylie responds: *We're goin' to share them.* Tracey refuses and takes the basket to the kitchen worktop. She gets a tea-pot and eggs and returns to the table. Kylie is dressing a doll. She removes her own shoes. Tracey is watching and removes her shoes also. She now seems to recognise Kylie as a possible play-mate.	
Tracey/Kylie	*I'm taking off my shoes.*	She gets into bed
	Kylie interprets this as Tracey undermining her plans by taking the bed and she sticks out her tongue. The two continue to play their own games but also continue to watch one another and imitate one another's ideas.	

The children are alert to one another's presence and initiatives but are suspicious of one another's intentions. Their keen mutual observing, their covetousness of the other's possessions and their pre-empting of the other's intentions all indicate that they are connecting and reading intention. They focus on the equipment, some of which they recognise and which prompts recognisable activity and intention. Cutlery, phones, babies' bottles and beds initiate routines that make sense to others. They imitate one another's usage as though saying '*I recognise what you are doing and I intend to follow the same course of action'.* The imitation affirms both commonalities in their previous experience and in their intentions. It also indicates that their initiatives are legible to the other and of course this is helped at times by their naming: *'I'm making dinner'; 'I'm taking my shoes off'.* The naming is a mode of self talk but is also communicative and supports a shared focus. On several occasions in this episode, imitation also brings them to the point of collaboration. David imitates Kylie and lifts the phone. Like Kylie, Tracey removes her shoes. We can see that their imitative actions establish common ground and lay the foundations for intersubjectivity. They already have many skills for connection.

However, they seem unable to either recognise their cooperative intentions or coordinate them. There is a conflict between the desire to connect and the desire to self-register and protect their individual space. Niamh suspects Tracey's motivation,

Tracey suspects Kylie, and Kylie in turn suspects Tracey. She also seems too preoccupied with her suspicions to respond cooperatively to David. They continuously misread each other's emotional tones and intentions and build further distrust. The atmosphere among the newcomers is tense and unhappy.

6.1.2 The Shared Frame among Oldtimers

The Oldtimers demonstrate the confidence that emerges when children become familiar with the social climate, physical layout, practices, and expectations of the institution. They know what to expect from old colleagues and they already have a shared frame for relating. This takes the form of shared rituals and routines that are quickly re-established in the new term. The records for September 7th demonstrate the contrast and the divide (discussed later) between the oldtimers and newcomers.

Episode 17   Mary (a newcomer) enters and chooses the doll's buggy and bottle. She then finds the doctor's set and proceeds to investigate. She dresses the doll. Meanwhile Tracey (newcomer) arrives and tentatively takes a buggy, watching Mary and wondering, without asking, if this is permissible. She goes for a walk. Mary gets another buggy and follows. They make eye contact but they say nothing. Mary moves forward, Tracey stands, looks around to take in the scene, and returns to the homecorner. She seems oblivious to Mary's connected responses to her initiative. Mary, somewhat abandoned, becomes distracted by the children at the playdough table.

The oldtimers, Amy and Judy, agree to dress up. They put on slippers. Judy comments to Amy 'I like your shoes'. She engages in 'membership'[11] conversation by way of connecting and establishing good feeling. They select dresses for going to a party and approach Teacher for help. Sarah joins them when they return to the homecorner, immediately reads the play theme and declares her intention to follow their lead. They are almost always pleased to include her.

Speaker	Initiaitve	Annotation
	Kylie (newcomer) comes in and has designs on Amy's bag. Amy secures ownership.	
Amy/Mary and Tracey	*I'm having these* *I'm the mammy. I take care of the babies.*	Taking hat and bag
	This is a statement of ownership, but it also opens the circle for Mary or Tracey to respond. They don't. Mary returns to the doctor's set, Tracey cares for her doll. Kylie then takes Amy's bag. Amy invokes a playgroup rule saying '*I'm not finished with that*'. Kylie refuses to return it. Amy doesn't insist. Kylie gathers the toys she has commandeered, doll, doctor's set and bag, to establish with Tracey that these are hers. The two girls play silently and separately but keenly aware of each other.	
Judy/ Amy	*I'm ready to go to the party now*	

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[11] Mairéad uses this conversation style with Judy in Episode 31, Page 20 below.

Amy	*Will I ask my Mam can I go to your party?*	
Judy	*When it's my birthday*	
	This is the second day of term and the first mention of parties that I've heard. Invitations to birtday parties were a significant milestone in forming friendships in the previous term and group. The oldtimers are re-establishing the ritual here and I'm reminded of the constant overlap between pretence and reality.	

The oldtimers' established play partnerships allows them to confidently invite one another to play. They have shared routines about dress up and roles. They, for example, know the party dresses and that the one looking after the babies is the Mam. They are familiar with school rules and group values about fashion accessories and birthday parties. They trust one another, when they've established a cooperative play contract, to respond contingently. The newcomers on the other hand do not. Their connections are unconfirmed, unspoken, and tentative. Like the oldtimers, these children need a common frame that guides both their agency and their collaboration; a frame that establishes appropriate behaviours and ways of interacting as well as goals and values; a frame that gives them a sense of know-how and belonging.

6.1.3 The indirect guidance of oldtimers

The foursome, Mairéad, Sarah, Amy and Judy, often dominate the sociodramatic play spaces, partly because they are enthusiastic and competent players and partly because they are oldtimers and exude the confidence of people familiar with the rituals and routines. Their play roles are delivered with panache and style and draw the 'intent observation' (Rogoff 1990) of the newcomers. They regularly stand to watch. Tracey is so impressed with their acting skills as they enact a medical scene that she comments aloud *'that's not a real bed'; 'you're not a real doctor',* as though she must remind herself that this is pretence. Even in the midst of their own relatively engaging play, newcomers are drawn to the antics of the more experienced, particularly to their dramatic, emotional quality. On 23rd November Lilly and Lydia are in the homecorner, dressing to go to a 'dancing club'. The foursome are on the floor enacting a dramatic relationship story between Barbie dolls:

Episode 18

Speaker	Initiative
Lydia	*We're going to a dancing club*
	Lydia stares at Mairéad, Sarah, Amy and Judy who are on the floor playing with Barbies. She then comes back to the play and with Lilly they admire one another's shoes.
Lydia /Lilly	*Put my hairbrush in too, will ye?... You fix it right?*

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	They move around the foursome on the floor and retire to the bench where Lydia begins to drive. The two girls then appear mesmerised for some time by the foursome
Lilly	*We're here…. Will you just carry these, will ye?*
Lydia	*Is it heavy for ye darling?*
Lilly	*Yes it is*
	The two girls again stand for a minute to tune into the foursome.

Throughout the data there are many examples of children intently observing and then reproducing the learning later. Mary, for example, is a keen observer. She doesn't attempt to engage with the oldtimers but she re-enacts their play routines for herself. I have seen her, post intent observation, adopt their dress-up style, paying strict attention to accessories such as handbag and keys and taking a seat on the pretend bus where she adopts the same bus passenger pose[12] that they have modelled and the same conversations with pretend characters.   Imitation also often involves immediate engagement. Here, Greg and David are playing a kicking game observed by Stan:

Episode 19

Speaker	Initiative
	Greg and David pretend fight. They swing punches but purposefully miss one another. They lift their legs in big movements but do not physically connect. Stan watches. He moves in. His kicks connect gently. He does not intend to hurt but Greg knows that he is impulsive and feels threatened.
Greg	*No fighting*
	Stan persists because he wants to be part of the action. He threatens Greg with his fist. Greg threatens back. David reports to Teacher that Stan is kicking
Teacher/Greg	*Do you know where he saw other children kicking?*
Greg	*Yeah*
Teacher	*Where*?
Greg	*………………(makes some suggestion)..*
Teacher	*No, he thinks it's ok to kick because he saw other children pretend kick. Where did he see other children pretend kick?*
Greg	*He needs to kick like this….*
Teacher	*No, we have to say there's no kicking at all, no real kicking, no pretend kicking*
	Greg continues to demonstrate
Teacher	*No, 'cos some children don't know what's pretend and what's real*
Greg / Stan	*I'm only pretend kicking…like this*

Between Greg and David, there is sufficient prolepsis (Göncü 1993). They are able to trust one another to read intentions and respond appropriately. In their pretend fighting, they focus on one another's faces as much as on their kicking so that they continue to read the emotional tone and intent. It is more difficult to read Stan's

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[12] The bus passenger pose intrigued me. Mairéad for example would cross her legs, place her handbag on her knees with her arms crossed over it and look straight ahead. I was aware that I might not be able to describe that pose but when I saw it I recognised it as a perfect representation of how women-shoppers often sit on a bus. Her poise in a car was different.

intentions. Besides, impulsivity and rough behaviour are already part of Stan's group identity. Greg can't trust him to honour the pretence frame or to manage his emotions. Stan imitates but imitation at action level does not always give access to the subtle and complex goals of the activity. In the removed, supervised non-play context, Greg is prepared to teach him how to pretend kick. However, Stan must also connect interpersonally to access the understanding that while pretend fighting may involve competition and pretend aggression, it is really an exercise in bonding (Pelligrini 1989). Stan must master these skills. He must learn to recognise and respond to the actions and emotions of the pretend antagonists.

The oldtimers play a significant role in integrating the newcomers. They are the carriers of tradition and expertise. The newcomers learn the rituals and routines from them that in turn help them to move to more central participation in the community (Lave and Wenger 1991). In the above episodes we see that participation through intent observation, imitation and engagement are key teaching and learning tools.

6.1.3.1 The direct guidance of oldtimers

The oldtimers, as demonstrated by Greg above, also give direct guidance. They are the more capable peers who know how things are done. Sometimes they organise the younger children for the sense of power and control they gain and in these situations they often focus on what is not permitted. They regularly quote school rules, not as teachers but towards manipulating situations for their own purposes. On the 12th September, Greg is in authoritative mode. On his way back to the homecorner with David and Thomas, he notices Susan playing with the train

Episode 20

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Greg to Susan	*I made that*	
Susan	*Well I'm playing*	(newcomer)
Greg	*If someone says to me can I play...Others made it ....*	Authoritatively
	He is trying to explain and invoke the preschool rule that the constructor has first call on the construction and that one must ask permission to play with it. Tracey then approaches the homecorner.	
Greg to Tracey	*This is work… where the blue table is.. that's the house now..*	the boys want the homecorner for building
	In this way he moves the normal domestic play to another venue and at the same time he is developing the gender	

	discourse that boys go to work and girls play 'house'.	

Greg reconstructs the institutional rule for Susan and takes advantage of Tracey's inexperience to create a new rule. He draws on his 'oldtimer' status to be authoritative and positions the newcomers as 'learners' and 'biddable'.

Sometimes the oldtimers take a more empathetic approach. On these occasions they demonstrate an amazing capacity both to engage and manage their apprentices. We have already seen this relationship as Judy plays with Susan (Episode 6, Chapter 5) and as Amy connects with Leah (Episode 8, Chapter 5). Stan's admiration of Greg and Greg's ability to guide him was also both remarkable and touching. He regularly showed him how to do things. Stan often waited for him in the morning, followed him to the dress-up area and tried to access his play ideas. He struggled to maintain intersubjectivity with him but sometimes Greg took the time to engage with him and Stan was remarkably attentive. Mairéad tended to manage Stan rather than engage him. She was very aware of his impulsivity and often teased him to encourage his challenging behaviour. In this brief episode, she has decided to take an encouraging approach, so that he doesn't disrupt her activity. Four months into term, and building on the adult practices, she seems to realise that her best chance of success with Stan is to placate and praise him.

Episode 21

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Mairéad is preparing dinner for Judy and Amy. Stan joins her in the kitchen. She explains to him what she's doing. He takes something and she corrects him and tells him 'You're a good boy'.	
Stan	*I'm 4*	
Mairéad	*You're a good boy*	Repeating
Mairéad	*Back in a sec*	She leaves
	She returns and finds him using the whisk	
Mairéad	*Could you stop Stan, please?*	

Mairéad reconstructs the approach of a teacher. The oldtimers often displayed knowledge superior to the teachers, especially when it came to the details and requirements of play roles. They liked to display their knowledge of how things should be done and corrected teachers, for example, who were encouraging unacceptable flexibility and creativity in the use of artefacts. In the next episode,

Teacher offers Thomas the police jacket as he goes to work on a building site. Thomas rejects the offer.

Episode 22

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Greg	*Teacher, that's not for builders... this one, Thomas...Look Thomas... Do you want this?*	
Thomas	*Yeah*	
	Thomas puts on a red helmet	
Greg	*That's not a builder's hat ... this is*	He gives him a yellow helmet
	Shane puts on a police suit and yellow helmet	
Greg	*No, that's not a builder's suit*	Differentiating between a builder's and police helmet

Two points in particular emerge from this data. In the first place, the guidance of the oldtimers ensures that the practices of the playgroup are shared and perpetuated as they share the institutional frame for practice. The newcomers move towards more expert participation as they are inducted into the preschool routines. Secondly, the oldtimers themselves are strategic in their sharing of knowledge and demonstrate a growing dexterity in their understanding of the learners and how to manage them. We are reminded of the master-apprentice relationship (Rogoff 1991) and the ongoing learning involved in both positions.

6.1.3.2   Rifts between oldtimers and newcomers

I am surprised at the rift that exists between some oldtimers and newcomers, a rift that seems to become ingrained in the group culture. The oldtimer girls in particular, because their numbers allow the divide, are reluctant to engage the newcomers and I again have a sense that, like the gender divide, this is a group dynamic that enters the practices and psychology of the institution, transferring to the cohorts of the following years. As already noted, the boys need one another and so the rift does not often appear. Greg found most compatibility with the two newcomers, David and Thomas and these relationships often brought him into play with the newcomer girls. It was the treatment of the youngest cohort of newcomers by the oldest cohort of oldtimers that I found most astonishing. I have documented six episodes when the older girls, accompanied by Greg on two occasions, take a hostile approach to Tracey (who was 16 months younger than them), as though they considered her fair competition. They laughed at her when she, for example, danced and they banished her from the homecorner and took pleasure in outwitting her. The following episode from the 28th

November is typical of several confrontations. Here we can see that they seem to recognise her as a 'little' girl but regard it as a position of ignorance and disdain. This contrasts with other cultural contexts (Göncü 1999) where older children have responsibility for younger children and engage them in their play as a way of exercising their responsibilities. This episode demonstrates the perspective of Sarah and Mairéad.

Episode 23

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Mairéad and Sarah are playing 'shop'. They've already pushed Lilly aside. Tracey approaches and they begin to laugh at her	
Sarah	*You're only little and we're big girls*	Teasing antagonistically
Tracey	*I'll tell my Daddy*	
Sarah	*But he doesn't even know our names ...he doesn't even know where we live, doesn't he not Mairéad?*	Full of drama
Tracey	*Well…*	
Sarah	*And I'm not telling you where I live* *Anyway, he doesn't know my big sister's name and..*	
Mairéad	H*e doesn't know my……….name...*	
Sarah	*You don't even know where I live, my name, where* *my house is,.. your dad doesn't even know my name..*	
Mairéad	*He doesn't know my name.*	
Tracey	*I'm telling teacher*	
Sarah	*And you don't know the number on my door*	
Mairéad	*And you don't know where I live*	
	Tracey leaves and tells Teacher	
Sarah	*And you don't know my age...*	shouting after her
Mairéad	*You don't know what my age is.*	
Sarah	You *don't know my sister, my dad or my mam or.. me*	She looks to Mairéad
Mairéad	*or not me..*	
Sarah	*Or not your mam or..*	she's smiling now, enjoying a connection with Mairéad
Mairéad	*Tracey Macy..*	
Sarah	Trace*y Stacey*	
Mairéad	*Tracey Macy*	
Sarah	*Tracey Macy*	
Tracey	*I telled on you*	Returning
Sarah	*Tracey, you don't even know my nanny, my granddad...*	
Mairéad	*Tracey, you don't know anything..*	
Sarah	*You don't know anyone.*	

Mairéad and Sarah are very proud of their recently acquired ability to know such details as their age, birthdays, addresses and the first names of their close relatives. The rejection of Tracey is an exercise in friendship for them, involving what Goodwin

(2000: 14) calls the *'artful orchestration of a range of embodied actions'*, culminating in their shared mocking rhyme. They engage one another in shared language formats that knit them together as a unit and emphasise Tracey's ostracism. They show little concern for her age or immaturity and lesser skill. They also behave in this way towards Leah, as evidenced in episode 9, Chapter 5, but not as often or as belligerently. When I discussed Tracey's predicament with teacher, she took the opportunity, following another episode, to speak to Judy and Sarah. She explains that Tracey is a 'little' girl and they are 'big' girls and asks for suggestions as to how they might be helpful. Sarah suggests that she could '*talk kind to her'* and Judy proposes that she could read her a story. Both suggestions have the tone of another dramatic performance. When I returned to the playgroup in May 2007, while Tracey was in her second year, the teachers reported that she had found a colleague among the new arrivals and was engaging in this kind of rejecting behaviour herself. These ways of being establish a dynamic that often becomes part of the culture of an institution.

6.1.4 Guidance from Adults

Particularly in the early days of the school year the teacher's presence in the sociodramatic play areas facilitates familiarisation with the institutional guiding frame and consequently the establishment of common ground. The dynamic between the newcomers changes in her presence and their interactive skills emerge. They relax and find the confidence to trust and share initiatives. Consider the following on the third day of term.

Episode 24   The teacher enters the homecorner and sits on the side bench. Immediately she becomes a focal, connecting point. Kylie approaches, in doctor role.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Kylie /Teacher	*See if this* (blood pressure pad) *fits around your arm*.	
	Teacher complies. Kylie then tries to take the stethoscope forcefully from Tracey who resists. Teacher encourages her to ask Tracey for it. Tracey declines. Teacher suggests that they trade implements. Niamh arrives and gives a phone to Teacher who explains to the caller that she is at the doctor's. Niamh then answers the phone.	
Niamh / Teacher	*It's your friend....She wants you to come to work*	Offering the phone
Teacher	*I can't, I'm sick*	
Kylie/ Teacher	*You be the doctor*	
Teacher/ Kylie	*What's wrong with you?*	Taking stethoscope
Kylie	*I'm sick*	
Teacher	*Breathe in.*	

	She then looks in her eyes and ears, and reads the blood pressure meter aloud. Lydia arrives.	
Teacher	*Here's another doctor. Will we let this doctor do it?*	Looking to Lydia
	Kylie insists that Teacher continue in the role. Lydia moves to the cooker. Niamh tunes into the medical theme.	
Niamh	*I'm sick. I didn't have any breakfast*	
Teacher	*Why don't you help Lydia to make some now?*	
Niamh	*OK*	
	Kylie leaves the homecorner with a baby buggy and camera	
Niamh/ Lydia	*I want to be the Mammy*	
Lydia	*OK, you be the Mammy*	
	Niamh proceeds to lay the table. Susan watches and then takes a seat. Niamh distributes food.	
Teacher	*What's for lunch?*	Addressing Niamh
Niamh	*This*	
Teacher	*I see. What else?*	encouraging her to detail her activities
Niamh	*Donuts, toast*	
	Lydia is just standing and watching	
Teacher	*Do you want to play with the girls?*	
Susan	*There's plates for all the kids*	an invitation to sit
Niamh	*Everybody sit down and have lunch*	
Teacher	*See Kylie, all the girls are playing together.. sharing .. that's nice to share*	When Kylie returns

Teacher's presence creates a focus. She suggests ways of resolving conflict, she responds contingently to play initiatives, she encourages the children to name their initiatives, she models and extends their knowledge of role behaviour and she opens the circle to include new arrivals. With her help, the children manage to construct a connected play story. Her agenda is relatively straightforward. She is there to support the children. She helps to keep relationships simple and secure. Most of the direct verbal interaction is between her and each of the children but as she talks she draws the attention of all the children to the central activities and helps them to stay focussed and connected. Each of the children takes initiatives and advances the theme. Niamh initiates the phone theme, tunes into the doctor theme and then takes over as 'Mammy'. Kylie plays patient and then takes the baby for a walk. Susan gains access and helps Teacher to include Lydia. Teacher names the underlying value, the missing link that escapes them in her absence. She demonstrates in action that they must recognise their mutual cooperative intentions and coordinate their contributions.

Piagetian theory proposes that children's development is driven by their individual innate cognitive processes and interests and suggests that children come together to negotiate the validity of their understanding. This has been interpreted to suggest that

adult interference impedes children's negotiations. The Vygotskian perspective proposes that thoughts and practices are co-constructed between people in social activity and that adults and more capable peers play a significant role in guiding newcomers in the ways of the culture. In the above episode we can see the adult working to guide children's enculturation into the practices of the playgroup. She teaches them collaboration and gives them cultural tools for self-registration, for responding contingently and making intentions legible. At the same time she promotes a pleasurable atmosphere so they know the joy of togetherness.

One might also say that children are proactively managing the adults as a resource to meet their own individual and group needs. They use the adult to help them to register and connect. The data records continuous requests for adults to read and respond to their initiatives, to help with dress-up clothes, to find things, sort out problems efficiently and of course, to publicise their achievements. *'Teacher, look what I did'* inevitably accompanies achievement rather than failure. They use teacher to help them practice turn-taking, to gain access to the play and to make collaboration safe. They like to perform in her presence and love when she makes them the centre of attention by naming them and their activities. When Teacher wondered *'What is Stan making?'* and Susan replied *'He's making rice'*, Stan rewarded their attention with a big smile. When children fought over equipment, they called on Teacher to reinstate their rights. When Judy wanted a seat at the 'clay' table beside Mairéad, she asked Teacher to procure it. They recognise adult skills and power zones and are quick to use them as functional aids to progress their own activities.

They also recognised that some adults make pliable and biddable play partners. Teacher regularly had to juggle multiple cups of pretend tea, dinner and a phone call while having her hair styled. This adult play partner role is particularly prevalent at the beginning of the playgroup year. Later, when children have the skills and knowledge for peer intersubjectivity, they are less likely to need the adult as interpreter and connector. However, children, who experience difficulty developing cooperation with other children, continue to seek adult company. In such cases, as demonstrated in the following episode, adults are often used to compensate for the inability to engage peer play-partners. This is Niamh's second term in playgroup but she continues to rely on Teacher as her play-partner.

Episode 25   Niamh takes Teacher by the hand and leads her to the empty homecorner. She indicates that Teacher should sit on the bench and brings her a doll to nurse.   Immediately, the home corner becomes a hive of activity. Two others arrive and give teacher babies to nurse, while Niamh gets dressed up and performs her domestic chores. Teacher is then required to mind her baby while Niamh goes shopping. She calls her on her mobile phone.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Niamh	*Hello, what's the baby doing?*	Speaking on a mobile phone
Teacher	*Baby's crying, what will I do?*	On phone
Niamh	*Give her a bottle*	
Teacher	*And if she still cries – what will I do?* *Will I give her a cuddle?*	Pause
Niamh	*Tell her everything will be alright and put her to bed. I'll be home in an hour.*	

Niamh finds it difficult to engage play partners from among her peers. She likes to play with Teacher because she complies with her bidding and knows how to respond appropriately.   Unlike her peers, Teacher allows Niamh to control developments. Playing with peers can be much more difficult because the accomplishment of joint play requires children to work responsively to achieve and maintain intersubjectivtiy, an exercise in *'..making their intentions known and understanding the intentions of others'* (Rogoff 1990: 187). With peers, one must be prepared to take initiative but also to follow the initiatives of others to achieve interpersonal focus, interpersonal contingency and cooperation (Marwick 2001).   For Niamh, this is difficult.   Her initiatives have a private rather than a shared quality. In interaction with Teacher, she can learn the basic skills of self-registration, turn taking and agency. She can build an identity as one who is seen and heard and who shares emotions. In this way adults can scaffold children towards engagement with their peers, but they must know that ultimately children need to participate in the construction of the peer culture, '*in its creative reproduction and sustenance as a living tradition of argumentation'* (Shotter 1993: 16), in order to have a sense of belonging within it.

6.1.5 Conclusion

This section documents how newcomers, in particular, come to know the guiding frame that has been constructed and is undergoing reconstruction within this group. From the beginning they share some common ground. They know for example the function of the materials and equipment and these become a common focus of attention and a major support for reading one another's intentions. The newcomers

spend time observing, imitating and tentatively engaging with others but the oldtimers and adults are key players, largely unconscious, in inducting them into the knowledge and practices of the preschool. The combination of interactive skills and familiarity with the cultural guiding frame, supported by more competent peers and adults, helps children to establish common ground and to share their initiatives and intentions. The next challenge is to coordinate their contributions towards creating a play story.

6.2   Coordination of contributions

In this section, to begin with, key interpersonal strategies used by children for guiding and coordinating one another's contributions are identified. Subsequently, successful coordination and the difficulties and challenges are discussed.

Every initiative children take at emotional, action and verbal level seems to serve the dual function of registering their own intentions and at the same time communicating those intentions to others. Some children seem to get the balance right and their play provides examples of the collaborative progress that can be made when self - other management creates a supportive dynamic. Lydia is a case in point. In episode 9 we have seen her work to lift the atmosphere when Sarah is confrontational. She purposely shifts the focus of attention to similarities rather than differences:

Episode 9 revisited

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Mairéad	*Stop…my uncle said..*	coming very close and speaking sharply
Lydia	*I got an uncle.....* *I got an uncle as well*	Timidly now louder and good humouredly
Lydia	*You got an uncle as well*	To Mairéad, laughing

Even Sarah falls for Lydia's charms and follows her cue. Her agenda is to co-operate. She doesn't seem to get embroiled in self-promotion politics even though she recognises the competitive tension. In the next episode, she and Lilly are going on holidays. Lilly herself has an easy cooperative manner but we can see that she adopts Lydia's style of checking for agreement, an indication that projecting cooperative intention can be contagious.

Episode 26

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Lydia	*And we got magazines to go*	Points to books. Lilly is reading the magazine
Lilly	*I got a little pig magazine*	
Lydia	*And I got a little Santa.. a big Santa magazine*	
Lilly	*And we got a suitcase*	
Lydia	*Yeah, we are going on holidays, aren't we?*	
Lilly	*The aeroplane is here*	Shouting
Lydia	*Alright*	
Lilly	*Don't forget the baby. Wait for meee*	
Lydia	*This is it –*	moving towards the bench
Lilly	*Nooo –*	Leading way to bookcorner
Lydia	*We're going to get the tickets. Whee..we're goin'..goin..goin..*	
Lilly	*This is it*	
	She struggles to enter the bookcorner with the buggy and moves towards the doll's house instead	
Lilly	*Pretend we're looking at these and then we're going on our holidays*	Lydia moves over to join her and plays with dolls
Lydia	*This is only for looking at before we go on holidays, isn't that right?*	She checks that the holiday theme continues
Lilly	*Yeah this is ………………before we go on holidays.*	
Lydia	*We're goin' to Portugal, isn't that right?*	
Lilly	*Will you carry these for me?*	Nodding
Lydia	*Put them in there*	Very obligingly
	They move on and Lilly reminds Lydia of the suitcase. Lydia sits in the book corner (aeroplane) for a minute	
Lydia	*We're here now*	
	Lilly proceeds and Lydia bids *'Bye bye everyone'*	

These girls make co-ordination appear easy. They establish warm emotional tones and generate good feeling. They name their initiatives so that each knows what the other's actions mean. This is particularly important in play when actions have a pretend meaning that must be mutually understood. With time and collective experience, this symbolic meaning may be taken for granted but here the girls are developing a new play story and are careful to establish shared interpretations. Their utterances are designed to communicate their initiatives but also to justify what they are doing. Lilly declares *'The aeroplane is here'*. Lydia announces *'This is it''* to explain her move to the bench and to transform the bench into a ticket office.

Coordination is supported because both girls are familiar with the concept of going on holidays and know about airport procedures. This contextual frame guides their knowing, their agency and contingency. They share the bag packing; they declare their intention to buy tickets and browse in the bookshop before departure. Each step of the journey is named and they check with each other, with *'isn't that right?; aren't*

we?' in a way that is both within and without the pretend frame. Their responses, particularly their connective glances and nodding heads recognise the contribution of the other. They extend each other's contribution with contingent, although not always consensual initiatives. Lilly objects to the location of the airport, for example, but the tone is cooperative, trusting the other's play commitment and so the children continue to share the construction of the story. Living within the rules of the roles and the activity, clearly registering their initiatives and using defining artefacts as reference points are basic links that make this coordination possible.

6.2.1 The emotional quality of connection

However, more than anything else, what connects these players is the sharing of emotion. It emanates from their body movements, the intonation and their language. They convey warmth, friendliness, excitement and frustration as they try to over-pack their bags and buggies and helpfulness as they carry things for one another. Their emotions are easy to read and in this case mostly affirming of the other. Both parties receive clear messages that they are liked and valued play partners. It is also the emotional tone of their interactions that engages the other. Robotic interactions, whatever their content or contribution cannot continue to engage. The children read emotional messages and respond emotionally and many of them demonstrate an expert level of sophistication at emotional communication.

As we will see throughout the data, children tune into subtle undercurrents and expertly manage multiple and complex relationships. In their play roles, they enacted authority, pride, sulkiness, defiance, empathy, sympathy, joy, sadness, anger, the whole gamut of emotions. Children, who are emotionally attuned, so quickly read and respond to a situation that it appears natural. At times this researcher wondered if it was a facility more practiced in this age group than in adulthood. It was certainly the emotionally astute quality of their relationships and meaning-making that I found most surprising and that reconnected me with that experience of being a child. This is an element that is difficult to capture in text because it is in the movement of the head, the carriage of the torso, the eye contact, all minute details that combine to communicate emotional messages. Consequently, the researcher wishes to alert the reader to its pervading presence. It is so much part of our everyday interactions that we can forget its significance. It is visible only to those who remember to seek it.

The data records children's constant efforts to register themselves as agentive and powerful individuals in the community. They want to be seen by teachers and particularly by peers with whom they seek to develop friendship networks. They also want to share their world with others, to do things together. The objectives are interlinked and reciprocal. Contributing to social activity is an interactive skill. It is a process of each party registering actions and intentions in ways that are visible and comprehensible so that one guides the participation of the other. They must both *'co-author and co-authorise'* (Hall, 2006:1) each other's contributions in a process of guided participation (Rogoff 1990, 1995). Linking contributions involves the skills of improvisation (Sawyer 1997), using 'yes and' (or indeed 'no and') statements to affirm, build on and extend play ideas. It involves the skills for prolepsis (Göncü 1993), which requires that they engage with the dialogue and pretence sincerely and that they trust the listener to make related contributions. The challenge to mutually guide participation, to manage the balance and the relationship between self and other, between agency and collaboration is represented throughout the data that follows.

6.2.2 Self-other regulation: Emphasis on self

Children must court the attention of others in order to self-register but in order to collaborate with others they must operate responsively. The experienced and competent players manage a balance between the drive to push their own agendas and to connect their stories. This is a negotiation that brings them into the world of power and hegemony and relationships. The power structure within the group transfers to the pretence scenario and vice versa. In the next episode, the girls are both negotiating roles and theme and their power relationship. Mairéad takes the powerful role, Sarah negotiates concessions and Amy tags along.

Episode 27

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Sarah and Mairéad walk along, and Amy follows:	
Sarah	*Now we're at work* *Mm.. I want some of this*	The three sit at playdough table pretending to nibble dough
	Amy takes car keys from her bag	
Mairéad	*I have the car keys-I'm the Mam*	
Amy	*Pretend I have keys too*	
Sarah	*Pretend I'm the big sister and my name is Megan Mac*	
Mairéad	*Pretend I'm the Mam and I was at work and you don't go to work –you don't*	

Sarah	*No,... pretend we were at school – I was at school*	
Amy	*And me too*	
Sarah	*Pretend I was already at school*	

The girls seem mostly concerned with registering their own roles in the drama. Each and every verbal contribution includes the first person pronoun and yet each contribution recognises the others. The emphasis is on individual registration but the tone is cooperative and the children are clearly speaking into the collective construction of a play theme. They are responsive to other's initiatives and to such subtleties as the implications for role of producing keys[13]. Their familiarity with one another means that they know what can be negotiated without fragmenting the play. Amy does not vie for position with Mairéad as long as she is allowed to also have keys. Sarah accepts Mairéad's positioning of both of them as long as Sarah can translate that into a proactive role for herself. She doesn't go to work but she does go to school. There is a sense that Mairéad allows certain concessions but retains the controlling role and the girls recognise that power. The play theme that develops centralises her powerful 'mother' role.

6.2.2.1   Coordinating with others

As the episode continues, the children move into role. They share different perceptions of what should happen emerging from their real-life experiences but any conflict is resolved because they submit to the power structure of their roles.

Episode 27 continued

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Sarah to Amy	*School is over.....time to see how Mam is getting on*	Sarah gets up to leave
	Mairéad is approaching the school as Sarah emerges	
Mairéad	*Ye have to go back to school*	Sounding annoyed
Sarah	*Yeah pretend I was...but always in school the girls come out for their Mams*	
	Sarah has an older sister attending school and knows the collection routine	
Mairéad	*Go in, 'cos I have to collect ye*	Alarmed tone
Sarah	*But all the girls come out for the Mams*	Negotiating tone
Mairéad	*My brother doesn't*	Assertively
Sarah	*Alright pretend I was sitting and waiting.......*	
	Mairéad comes into the school and Sarah departs for home with her, beckoning Amy to follow.	
Sarah	*Pretend this dress is my morning clothes and now its night time and I change into my night time clothes.*	Clothes are always an issue for Sarah

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[13] Keys indicate status and power in this group culture

Amy	*Pretend it's night*	
Sarah	*Pretend it's just night time*	
Mairéad	*Wait 'til I fix the bed*	
Sarah / Mairéad	*Pretend you went to the shop last night and you bought a new baby*	
Mairéad	No	
Amy	*Will I sleep in the bed?*	
	Mairéad nods. Amy gets into bed beside Sarah and they snuggle together.	They seem to bond as sisters
Sarah/Amy	*Goodnight Mam*	
Mairéad	*Go to sleep…go to sleep* *I'm getting a baby..go to sleep*	She leaves

The conflict establishes the authority of the 'Mam'. Mairéad and Sarah provide a rationale for their positions but as competent players they are able and willing to submit to the rules of their roles. Sarah can give way to Mairéad because within the pretend frame, 'Mam' knows best. Mairéad takes the lead role although Sarah constantly refocuses the lens on herself, by describing what she herself is doing: *'..pretend I was sitting and waiting'; 'Pretend this dress is my morning dress….'.* Mairéad is alert to the others' intentions. They agree that it's night-time and she follows that intention with a role-appropriate contribution. She gives a directive and retains control. She builds on Sarah's suggestion about a new baby. They all understand that babies arrive secretly in the middle of the night and so this motif sets in train a predictable series of events which again frames developments.

In this scene, coordination is managed because the children adhere to the affordances and constraints of the roles and theme. They register their own initiatives and link them to the theme and the contributions of others. There is a strong sense of *'both recognition and control of cooperative intentions and joint patterns of awareness'* (Trevarthen 1980: 530) even though this is at times a struggle because the real life characters compete for recognition. The satisfaction of coordination with others is their reward for living within the social rules. This according to Vygotsky (1933) is the particular benefit of role play.

Power management is also part of the learning here. The pretence frame may camouflage the power issues and make their arrangements appear temporary and reversible but these children are negotiating their real world positions and identities through their play world. Mairéad's power is striking and sometimes threatening.

She carries control and power convincingly but she knows that collaboration depends on sustaining amicable relationships and so her authority is tempered by the need to be inclusive. She is kept in check also because Amy offers Sarah an alternative alliance should she and Mairéad disagree. This is borne out in other play episodes where Sarah shares the child role with others and their equal status and shared activities become a source of bonding. This balance of power is a further force in the coordination of the children's contributions.

6.2.2.2   Self-other regulation: Emphasis on other

In the above episode the familiar play roles and network provide a frame for coordinating contributions. In the next episode the roles are new and more exploratory and so the players directly regulate what the other play partner does. The emphasis is on action and the coordination of initiatives and there is a clear understanding that this involves leading and following. Thomas and Greg are engaged in fantasy[14] play with miniature characters.

Episode 28

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Greg	*Pretend I have 50 poisoned arrows*	
Thomas	*You can't come in here….*	Hiding his man under base.
Greg	*Help, help it's a battle…isn't it?*	
	Greg removes the bricks with big arm movement	
Greg	*I'm lifting these off*	
Thomas	*Now you're a big robot liftin' them, aren't ye?*	
	They make scary and aggressive sounds as the baddies come out and they attack them	
Thomas	*Now this'll be the trap*	taking plastic box
	More shooting and attacking sounds follow.	
Greg	*I shot the prince by an accident*	The prince is on a horse
Thomas	*He's dead now 'cos you shot hi*m	
Greg	*No, he's still alive 'cos he has a robot in his belly*	
Thomas	*No, he didn't die 'cos it went through here, didn't it?*	pointing to horses legs

Greg and Thomas produce a running commentary that tracks each other's actions and how they correspond. Each initiative is named for the other's information and for synchronisation. They contribute exciting ideas; '*you're a robot liftin' them; he has a robot in his belly*'; they check for cooperation with '*isn't it*? '*aren't ye?; didn't ye?*';

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[14] Fantasy play involves roles which children are unlikely to encounter in real life, enacted through doll-like fantasy characters.

they use *'yes and/ no and'* statements, *'He's dead now 'cos you shot him'; 'No, he's still alive'*, connecting both contributions. They are alert to other social information and cues including action, use of equipment and emotional tones. Greg makes big arm movements to imply weight. Thomas spots clever hiding places. Both respond to the action base of the story and feed the excitement with sounds and intonation. Actions and sounds speak as loudly as words and are critical to fantasy play. The combination offers greater clarity and here serves to keep both players engaged and connected.

6.2.3 Committing to coordination

The drives to self-register and to share combine to be at one and the same time the source of connection and disconnection. Children may wish to share but they may not be willing or able to subject their own desires and initiatives to the desires and initiatives of the other. They may have difficulty committing to cooperation or trusting the other. In the following episode, the children want to connect but Kylie's style lacks authenticity and Leah is not committed to the play frame.

Episode 29

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Kylie is talking on phone, watched by David and Leah. Leah, in a connective move, picks up a phone and Kylie responds	
Kylie	*Can I speak to…(inaudible)……. Dad, please?* *Is that you Darling?*	Kylie's tone is very pretentious
Leah	*No, I'm not a man…..I'm a girl…..you're not the Mam – you're a girl and I'm a girl, two girls*	
Kylie	*You be the girl child*	
Leah	*No, I'm ringing my own Mam…..Hi Mam..*	Sulky tone
Kylie	*….hello Darling*	Kylie laughs loudly
Leah	*No, I'm not your darling…I'm my Mam's darling*	
	Kylie continues and when Leah tries to interrupt again she says	
Kylie	*Hello, hello….*	Imposing her voice
	Leah refuses to compromise and Kylie leaves.	

Leah seems to enter Kylie's telephone play theme but her collaborative intentions are abandoned when Kylie shouts 'hello' and laughs too much. Her highly dramatic style is very foreign and appears insincere. Leah's tone is insistent rather than cooperative. There is an absence of trust. Kylie tries to negotiate with '*You can be the girl child'* but Leah rejects this and disconnects. This is a recurring problem for both players. Kylie pursues her own agenda, somewhat oblivious to the other's emotional response and intentions and Leah finds it difficult to commit to a cooperative pretend frame.

The need for personal recognition minimises their ability to suspend their initiatives and follow the lead of others. They want to share but struggle with cooperative skills.

Children with the skills of self-registration and collaboration can establish common ground, coordinate their initiatives and move forward agentively. Newcomers often need the support of adults until they gain more experience of the context. For the more experienced, their agency is afforded and guided by the collective frame. They know what is possible and they trust each other to respond contingently, and they enjoy it. Nevertheless collaboration is an ongoing challenge. Why is it so difficult? The reasons appear both developmental and contextual.

6.2.4 Coordination challenges

Some of the reasons may be developmental and may indicate that children need more guidance in developing communication skills, as in the case of Kylie and Leah (Episode 29 above), or with emotional regulation, as in the case of Stan (Episode 20) and Shane. In Shane's case, his language and imagination skills surpass his years. He gave the best performance of a doctor that I saw all year and presented a knowledgeable account of his knightly confrontation with the mean and friendly dragons that he created. Episode 10 (Chapter 5) with David demonstrates that he is a skilful connector. However, in moments of conflict, he was easily riled and upset and he projected big emotional responses that were difficult to manage.

The need for recognition sometimes prompts children to take bigger and bigger initiatives to attract attention. Stan, for example, often knocks, throws or takes children's equipment and lashes out or shouts at them. Others, who experience invisibility, often give up too quickly and retire from the interaction. Susan, for example, sometimes quits at the slightest suggestion of frustration or rejection. Other children internalise their responses making them difficult to read, thus depriving the play partner of feedback and terminating the interaction. The following records an exemplary incident between Niamh and Mairéad, sitting at the pretend kitchen table.

Episode 30

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Niamh is at the table with a basket from which she is collecting pretend food items, intending to make a pretend sandwich. Her head is down and she is extremely focussed on her own activity.	

	Sarah is at the table across from her bouncing a little doll	
Sarah	*Niamh, look*	
	Niamh, head bent, remains oblivious. Mairéad arrives with dishes and prepares to eat her breakfast	
Sarah	*I'll get my breakfast*	
	Mairéad sits opposite Niamh. She looks across at her and proceeds to tell a story	
Mairéad	*I got.........................*	
	She moves her hands expressively. Niamh looks at her, nods and several seconds before Mairéad has finished her story, bends her head down to focus on her sandwich making again.	

Niamh's bent head makes her response impossible to read and Mairéad's face registers the void that she experiences. There is no recognition, no smile, no answer from Niamh. The interaction terminates. Niamh must learn to stay connected, to lift her head and give emotional feedback so that others are encouraged to engage with her.

Some of the challenges may be cultural. Within some cultural groups, there is a high dependency on language for communication. Among others, observation skills are honed for other communicative signs. Rogoff (2006) demonstrates that in less literate cultures children tend to follow others' actions and communicate more through gesture. Sometimes this creates a cultural divide and misinterpretation. Mary, for example, was very silent and tended to communicate through gesture. Latterly she succumbed to the need to talk, established in this group.

Many of the challenges are contextual. Children are challenged to produce the cultural knowledge, to manage the permutations and combinations of personalities and relationships and to negotiate the complex goals that vary with the context. These goals are not just about collaborating in pretend play but also about negotiating their identities and relationships in contextually appropriate ways. The discussion of 'agency' in section 6.3 that follows locates children's agency within these group dynamics and goals and in the process explicates many of the complexities.

6.2.5 Conclusion

Observing these children at play, we can identify the basic interactive skills that promote coordination in shared sociodramatic play. Successful children make their initiatives clear and visible at emotional, action and verbal level. They can select and

control their actions and stall them to pay attention to others. They are socially aware and attentive to communicative cues. They respond with 'yes and' and 'no and' statements, extending or redirecting the story in complementary fashion. They are confident that their own initiatives are seen and recognised and that puts them in a position to welcome and trust in the contribution of others. To sustain the story they generate good feeling and act in good faith so that they invite responses. They give positive feedback and use cooperative tones, projecting their emotions and, in particular, good feeling. They commit to the pretence and stay with the theme. Their initiatives are guided and coordinated by the rules of their roles and their themes. They demonstrate, in action, the skills of give and take, leading and following. These are the intersubjective skills that allow children to coordinate their contributions and develop a play story. They prescribe an important role for the pedagogue, that is, helping children to develop these skills and experience connection with community.

Children in their play demonstrate the tension between the desire to self-register and to work collaboratively with the other. They want to be powerful but at the same time they want the pleasure of togetherness. Finding the balance between these desires is challenging. Insecurity, unfamiliarity, poor communication or an imbalance between self registration and collaboration results in breakdown. The children are new to this group and context and the multiplicity of goals and agendas and relationship poses challenges. There is much for them to learn within the peer group as they negotiate play roles and stories and the complexity continues to grow as children become more skilled and knowledgeable. Children's collaborations are interwoven with these issues and goals. How do children decide on forms of agency within such complexity?

6.3   Agency

Shotter (1993: 4) tells us that '*Rather than speaking out of an inner plan we speak into a context not of our own making - not under our immediate control….For the actions of others are just as determinate of our conduct as anything within ourselves'*. People do not act as isolated individuals. They act on the basis of how they perceive a situation and their reading of how others view it. Our agency is a response to our culturally guided interpretations of developed and emerging situations. Selecting agentive contributions requires that we attune to the affordances and constraints of

each situation, described by Shotter (1993: 6) as *'knowing of a third kind'*. We cannot predict the outcome of our agency but nevertheless individual agency is intentional. It is our way of making things happen but at the same time we create opportunities for others and the dynamic makes the outcome unpredictable. What we construct together in turn guides future construction. '*In living out the self-other relationship we unknowingly by them construct the person-world relationship'* (Shotter 1993: 16).

This section focuses on the embedded, responsive, collective and emotional nature of agency as demonstrated in children's play. The play episodes are used to explicate its cultural expression and the competencies required within this group.

6.3.1 Agency and emotional literacy

It is to the core group of Sarah, Maireéad, Amy, Judy, Greg, Thomas and David that we turn for insight into children's competence and responsiveness in exercising agency. These children are able to employ subtle reasoning, quick thinking and sophisticated language when sufficiently motivated. They are able to read emotion, predict thinking and act with speed. They are intentional beings who interpret the intentions of others and co-ordinate with them. In this example, David and Greg are building together, using play building tools. David demonstrates the relationship between agency and intentionality.

Episode 31

Shane takes their drill. Greg is alarmed and David tries to retrieve it. First he requests its return and then tries to force it. Teacher intervenes and rules that if it was left on the floor, Shane is entitled to use it. When teacher leaves, David takes one of Shane's favourite cars as ransom. Shane drops the drill and reaches for the car. David drops the car so that Shane must move to retrieve it and then he quickly grabs the drill. He is very proud of his trick.

David outwits Shane, partly because he can predict how Shane will react and partly because he has the ability to control his agency to both appease teacher until she leaves and to emotionally manipulate Shane. On video we can see that while Shane focuses on the car, David focuses on reading Shane's reactions and intentions. When Shane drops the drill, David places the car far enough out of Shane's reach to allow time to retrieve the drill. The strategy shows a remarkable ability to read a situation, to reflect on the psychological state of others and to manipulate them. It is an emotional literacy that as Goleman (1996) suggests is the critical key to cognition.

David achieves this because he is motivated by his commitment to the building activity but also by his desire to position himself positively in Greg's eyes.

Children also demonstrate an ability to consider real life and play story issues at the same time and to integrate both in their initiatives. For example, they purposefully employ the rules and power invested in their roles to manage real life conflict. In the next episode Judy wants to be the mother and to brush Lydia's hair. Lydia has tight curls and doesn't like to have her hair brushed and she is also keen to 'mother' the babies. Consequently she is resisting both of Judy's initiatives.

Episode 32

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Lydia	*No, don't brush my hair*	
Judy	*Alright but you can't go to the party*	Stalling
Lydia	*Alright* (you can brush my hair)	Conceding
Judy	*Now eat your breakfast*	brushing gently
Lydia	*Pretend this is my baby*	picking up doll
Judy	*No, pretend that's a pretend baby*	
Lydia	*Ok and this is my real baby*	She picks up another doll
Judy	*No, they're two pretend babies 'cos you're goin' to be the child*	
Lydia	*I'll feed the babies*	
Judy	*No, it's time for bed now…come on…bring your dollies*	

Judy takes a leading role. She gives Lydia an option. She can refuse to have her hair brushed and forego the party or the opposite. She then tells her, with authority, what is not permissible and gives her clear guidance, keeping the directions in positive mode. The result is that Lydia follows instruction. It is particularly impressive that Judy can demonstrate such mature 'leading' skills (Aarts 2000) while producing complex and imaginative initiatives ('*You can't go to the party': ' ..pretend that's a pretend baby'*) to create a logical and within-rules play story.

Greg prided himself on his facility for coming up with good ideas in difficult situations. His quick thinking combined with his ability to present an idea in a way that invites others to share the excitement often amazed me. He seemed to see himself as a problem solver and to be positively inspired by the challenges he met in the play world. In this episode Mairéad is playing witches. Greg dismisses the game to Thomas as '*just a girls' game'.* They bond in opposition. Mairéad invites Greg to

join her, a proposal he finds attractive but that now instigates a dilemma. He must find a solution that honours his oppositional stance with Thomas and at the same time allows him to play with Mairéad. This is it.

Episode 33

> '*How about we're your enemies and …we didn't saw the button[15] and we stepped on it and we turned into your helpers…You tell us to go and fight…I've my shooter on …*'.

This was quick thinking[16]. The device allows the boys a position as 'enemies' in opposition to the girls, an accidental event through which they inadvertently become their allies, followed by an active male role. The boys can retain their 'macho' identities, shift the play into action mode and Greg can play with Mairéad, a favoured play partner. Complex problems demand complex agency and Greg regularly rose to the challenge. I was continuously reminded of children's competency and creativity. Sutton Smith's (1997) suggestion that vitality, flexibility and 'adaptive variability' are potentiated by play comes to mind.

In each episode above, children show their ability to be cleverly agentive when motivated by the desire to participate in play stories and it was this kind of agency, this ability to be socially and emotionally aware, subtle, shrewd and manipulative and also the ability to produce exciting play ideas that made them popular play partners.

6.3.2 Agency that guides and responds

Agency has a dual role - it both responds to and guides the contributions of others. It directs and follows. Individual agency carries a personal agenda but to sustain connection, agency must create opportunities for others to interpret and reconstruct. These are features of agency that are often forgotten when we focus on individual action. Agency must contribute to intersubjectivity. In the next episode, Greg and Thomas work to establish these intersubjective supports. They are playing with a miniature farm on the floor. Here I present a short excerpt from a 25 minute dialogue.

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[15] Later Greg explains to the others that there's a good button and a bad button which makes people either good or evil.

[16] Greg told me that he made the 'button' idea up. The other children seemed unfamiliar with it and consequently I presume it is not a feature of a popular television series.

Episode 34

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Each boy has a pretend character.	
Greg	*I will shoot you off*	demonstrating
Thomas	*I will shoot you off*	
	They knock one another's character down and then Thomas knocks an animal so Greg attacks his.	
Greg	*No, you don't kill the animals*	
Thomas	*Yeah I just bash them ……you just show me what …*	putting character into barn
	Greg takes Thomas's character and throws him aside. Thomas is happy with this	
Greg	*I just bash you off*	
Thomas	*Yeah you just bash me off the roof and I go flat on my face in there….You come up and you lock me in like there*	

Both boys are agentive in guiding one another's participation because this is fantasy play and more unpredictable than other forms of sociodramatic play. They frequently repeat one another's lines, affirming each other and allowing time to consider an extension. Their actions and commentary are closely synchronised and accompanied by paralinguistic cues such as voice pitch and intonation. They try to initiate predictable routines that will pre-empt a flow of events. Greg suggests he'll bash him off the roof to initiate a fighting routine. Thomas suggests events such as kidnapping, initiating a routine of lock up and escape. Then he proposes that Greg be guilty of allowing the lamb escape so that they can put in place a sequence of pursuit and punishment. These guiding supports allow the boys to share attention and intention.

Continued

Speaker	Initiative
Thomas	*In the game we'll….And you say.. you let that lamb run away didn't you?*
Greg	*You let that lamb run away didn't you?*
Thomas	*In the game you want him back where he belongs to*

The routines reduce the need to interpret each initiative anew, allowing for fast and furious but contingent responses. There is a constant build up of tension and then release, marked by slamming doors shut and 'phew' expressions. They seem to invent chaos and fear for the experience of bringing it under control. There is an acceptance throughout that one does not need to understand all the details and that seeking too

many details will spoil the excitement. There are even times when the boys seem surprised by the plot that emerges from their mutually guided contributions.

Continued

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Greg	*I'll open it and I'll say will you be good…*	
Thomas	*No, I'll never be good* *Greg – before I say that you say – You're grounded for a month*	using character to open doors
Greg	*You're grounded for a month*	
	Thomas slams the doors closed and they're both chuffed by this turn of events.	

The outcome is a sense of togetherness, of compatibility. This was confirmed the following morning when Greg arrives and immediately says to Thomas: '*Hey you, get off my roof*', a reference to a point of conscious intersubjectivity between them in the game that was particularly memorable and an indication of the significance of the repartee and the connection for him. Thomas recognised the reference and beamed. I am reminded of Stern's (2004: 75) contention that in the intersubjective moments, we communicate that *'I know that you know that I know'* or *'I feel that you feel that I feel'*; an experience that satisfies the most basic of human desires. Intersubjectivity, reciprocity, companionship is pleasurable and consequently children who experience it seek it again and again. As I observe the boys in this play episode, I am conscious that they have reached a level of pleasurable flow, a harmonious balance between challenge and mastery (Czicksentmihalyi, 1979). Their agency has an improvisational quality that children seem to manage with far greater ease than adults.

6.3.3 Agency and complex goals and relationships

Paley (1991) identifies the three Fs of play as fantasy, fairness and friendship. They provide reasons for agreement on goals and procedures in play. This reasoning is clearly explicated in the following episodes but in particular the sophistication of children's cognitive and emotional agency is demonstrated.

In the first episode, the players, Mairéad, Sarah and Greg negotiate play themes, relationship conflicts and reconciliations in the context of their play stories. The episode seems to be more about how three children work to reorganise their relationship than about the story that emerges. Mairéad and Greg want to play together and include Sarah, a challenging proposition as we will see. The goal is integrated into the story and in so doing the children display a level of cognitive and

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emotional competence that seems to belie their years. The episode, abbreviated here, lasted for forty minutes with many twists and turns.

It begins with a 'fantasy' play theme between Mairéad and Greg. Mairéad gives Sarah some characters to include her in the play. They compare the characters' size. Sarah seeks Greg's opinion. The atmosphere is cooperative and even the shouting is good humoured. Greg has visited Sarah's house and Sarah is keen to engage with him, an interesting development given their longstanding antagonistic relationship.

Episode 35

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Mairéad	*Pretend she left the door open and the witch flied in*	
	The witch casts a spell and some characters are declared dead	
Greg	*Pretend this is the spaceship*	
Sarah	*Pretend all their friends came to their house*	Amicably
	Her princess sits on Greg's tiger. Mairéad pretends to fall off the seat, lands on the floor and invites Sarah to join her.	
Mairéad	*Sarah, Sarah you do it*	
Sarah	*No, no*	Playfully, to stay in play with Greg
Greg	*These are dressed up as a prince*	
Sarah	*and these are dressed up as princesses*	Closely coordinating
	Greg stands his characters on blocks. Mairéad, lying on floor, kicks the table and makes the characters wobble. Sarah shakes the table.	
Greg	*Mairéad, teacher says don't put feet on the table*	Shouting
Sarah	*I'll stop it Greg*	Compliantly

Sarah affirms and extends Greg's initiatives. Mairéad defies Greg, all in good humour, but Sarah concedes and tries to please him. Mairéad departs to *'do pee pee'* and Niamh arrives. Greg and Sarah bond, in opposition to Niamh.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Sarah to Niamh	*and we're playing on our own*	
Niamh	*Anybody can play here if they ..*	very quietly and nervously
Sarah	*Well you can't play*	
Greg	*Yeah, you can't play*	
Greg to Sarah	*'Cos we got them first...we buyed them in the shop didn't we?*	Looking, at Sarah
Sarah	*Yeah and I spilled them all out for us*	

They support and repeat one another's position, conspiring in the lie about ownership of toys. They are both tuned into their new bonding goal. When Greg then refuses to play with David and opts to stay with Sarah, there seems to be a moment of mutual

recognition of their previous antagonism and new companionship. Both are simultaneously chuffed and embarrassed. The researcher is also charmed by this intensely intersubjective interlude. Greg takes a risk and names what is happening in another *'I know that you know that I know'* (Stern, 2004) moment.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Greg hesitates, looks at Sarah, grins and leans forward, recognising the changed dynamic and says	
Greg	*We're playing on our own….me and you*	very pointedly
	Sarah leans forward and smiles to communicate that she is pleased. Greg turns to his game to cover his embarrassment	
Greg to toy animal	*Hey you….get out of my cage*	

When Mairéad returns, she tunes into this atmosphere of friendship and confidently proposes a game of Mammies, Daddies and Sisters which significantly she negotiates with Greg rather than with Sarah.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Mairéad	*Greg do you want to play Mammies and Daddies and Sisters*	Confidently
Greg	*I want to be the Daddy*	Enthusiastically
Mairéad	*Ok..I'm the sister…………………..These are my toys*	

Sarah responds immediately and refuses to play. For the first time, I am aware that Sarah feels sidelined and understand the logic of her refusal to play in the threesome. What I previously interpreted as awkwardness, grumpiness and lack of cooperation, now appears as proactive resistance to being positioned as an outsider. She resolutely refuses to be coaxed into an unwanted situation.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Sarah	*Mairéad I'm not playin'*	Crossly
Mairéad	*Please…please Sarah..*	Pleadingly
	Both girls look at one another. Greg is on the pretend phone	
Mairéad	*I wont' play so…what do you want to play?*	
Sarah	*I just want to play nothing.*	

Mairéad recognises Sarah's reluctance to play with Greg and moves to reassure her of their close friendship. Sarah does not name the problem but refuses to play the game. Greg tries to appease Sarah, offering to return to the game where a few minutes earlier they were best friends. He tries to amuse her. Twelve turns later, as the situation relaxes and Sarah tells a story about her Dad, Mairéad tries to reintroduce Greg.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Mairéad	*Sarah, pretend I was the Mam and pretend I said to Greg………OK.*	
	Sarah reacts angrily	
Sarah	*Mairéad..I told you I don't want to play*	Shouting
Mairéad	*Sarah!*	
	All three stand looking at one another.	
Sarah	*I don't even want to be your friend*	Sulkily
Mairéad	*Sarah..*	Mairéad forces tears
	Sarah is resistant and equally pouting	
Mairéad	*I'm sad 'cos you're not my friend…please be my friend*	Rubbing her eyes

Sarah forces Mairéad to choose between herself and Greg. Mairéad must explain the situation to Greg who first tries comedy to break the tension and then announces that he will go outside (the homecorner) to play. Sarah insists on a game with only *'mams and sisters'*. Good relationships are restored between Sarah and Mairéad. Mairéad is now the Mam and Sarah, the child, is in bed. Then, unexpectedly, Greg strides back into the scene as the father who is returning with the groceries. Mairéad looks to Sarah, fearfully. Greg opts to be the brother and asks the Mam if he must also go to bed. He wants to join Sarah in the bed but he presents it as a parental directive. Given the preceding exchanges, this is either a very brave or foolhardy decision. Sarah rises to object to Greg's return but changes her mind as he approaches the bed, perhaps because she calculates that as siblings they will share both activity and subordinate positions, in which case, she is unlikely to be peripheral to Mairéad and Greg's relationship. Greg tentatively approaches the bed. He seems aware of the possibility of rejection and still he persists. She appears friendly. He lies down. He is being more docile and compliant than usual. There are moments of uncertainty but ultimately Sarah accepts him as a bed companion. They lie face to face. Their physical closeness presents as a stark contrast to the tension experienced earlier.

The story has all the elements of theatre, from the moment of conscious friendship between Greg and Sarah to the pain of rejection when Mairéad tells Greg to leave, to the return of the protagonist and the moments of tension, to this scene of acceptance and then the subsequent action, fun and release of tension. As a researcher I am on tenterhooks throughout the episode. These are very delicate negotiations with all the elements of seat-gripping drama. It has a sequel.

When the atmosphere relaxes, Greg moves back into action mode. Unlike Sarah, he never lies still in the bed for more than a few seconds. The girls, Sarah and Mairéad invest most of their energy in developing the play relationships, just as they do in real life. Their focus is on who's who and how their roles relate. Greg wants more activity. He changes beds, organises the quilt, gets the keys, answers the door and now he initiates a new action-based theme, all within the play frame. He announces a robber's arrival. Mairéad is excited and leads Sarah into the action. Again, we can see that Greg and Mairéad have the capacity to cross the gender divide. They represent the argument that the commonalities and possibilities for play between boys and girls are far greater than the growing gender divide would suggest.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Greg	*Mam, I hear someone at the door*	Rising
Mairéad	*No*	
Greg	*I do – I hear knock knock*	He gets the keys
Greg	*It's a robber…he's goin' to break in*	
	He takes the headboard and drops it on the floor	
Greg	*He'll fell into this pool Ok? and he'll sink* *Come on, come on ..lets go under*	
	The three go under the quilt. There is a sense of bonding and collaboration among the threesome hiding together.	
Mairéad-Sarah	*We're the bold sisters*	
Greg	*How about I'm the guy who comes in?*	shaking quilt
Sarah/ Mairéad	*Yeah*	
	Stan arrives and joins the fracas and things get a little rough. Teacher terminates the game.	

Children's negotiations, as we can see, are highly sophisticated. The shape and pacing of their agency is responsive to their reading of other's emotions and intentions. The episode demonstrates the complex and fast shifting transactions. All three players negotiate difficult relationship challenges. They may not be able to verbalise or abstract these concepts but they most certainly enact them. A core group of children were capable of this level of political and emotional sophistication and they featured as the most popular players and assertive leaders in the group. The success of children like Greg, Mairéad and Sarah seems to emerge from their emotional attunement and their competent agency within the complexity of multiple agendas.

This is again demonstrated in the next episode where once more the pretence element functions as both a pivot and camouflage for real life politics and makes enormous

demands on children's agency skills. Throughout this episode it is difficult to differentiate between the pretend and real frames. Judy appears to have a real life agenda that dominates and determines her play initiatives although to what extent she pre-plans is questionable. Does she introduce the conflict to reorganise the relationship between her co-players or do her preferences emerge with the story?

Amy and Sarah have been playing together with Sarah's 'Marcy'[17] dolls. Judy joins them but is on the periphery. She proposes that they play 'house' and adopts the role of Mammy while Sarah and Amy play 'sisters'. Judy suggests that the sisters pretend to fight over a doll and she then confiscates it, in school rule style, until the girls find a resolution. When they agree to stop fighting, she opts to return the doll to Sarah, thereby using the play conflict to show favouritism and to court Sarah as a play partner. Amy is not pleased, although it is difficult to tell whether she spots the real life agenda and whether her response is in the real or pretend frame. She storms off in protest saying *'I'm not going to play with you'*. Sarah interprets this as part of the pretend play conflict and intends to follow and placate her. Judy obviously suspects that Amy's protest is real and steps out of the pretend frame to plead with Sarah to stay to *'play the game'*. Sarah seems confused about what is going on.

Episode 36

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Judy to Sarah	*Don't go… Could you play the game … .please could you Sarah….please could you…please could you Sarah ….please could you*	She blocks her way
	She turns Sarah around and says *'come on'*. Sarah sits on the bench and agrees to play	

Amy returns and Judy greets her, in mother role, ordering her inside. Amy claims her doll, Judy continues to refuse it. She wags her finger and insists *'You're not getting it'*. Amy's stride and head throw indicates her fury when she storms off a second time but the phrase *'I'm going to think about it'* is borrowed from teacher[18] and suggests that she is in role. Judy tries to calm things down by responding in frame with *'See you later'* and saying to Sarah *'I wonder where your sister's gone'*. She shows amazing presence of mind. Sarah again wants to follow Amy. Judy, despite her real anxiety that the girls will leave her, retains the wit to reposition Sarah as the child,

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[17] A 'Marcy' doll is similar to a Barbie doll. Amy explained to me that she wears different clothes and 'talks cool'. Talking 'cool', she tells me, involves saying such things as *'Let's go to the mall'*.

[18] Teacher often suggests that the children *'have a think about it'* when they cannot find a resolution to their arguments.

insisting that she's not allowed to go out. Eventually, the sisters, Sarah and Amy resolve their argument by organising exchanges and compensations between them. Their negotiations exclude Judy and again, she feels threatened. Her agenda becomes clearer. She steps outside the play frame to plead with Sarah to return and play *with her.* Amy reassures her that their initiatives are part of the play story but she remains concerned that she is losing control. Her real objective is to befriend Sarah. She abandons the play frame to plead:

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Judy	*Come back Sarah ..I want you to play with **me**..I want you to play with me, Sarah*	
	Sarah and Amy root in the box on the shelf for other dolls	
Amy to Judy	*We are playing*	
Judy	*But you're not comin in there..Ok..go back into the house now*	pointing to homecorner

As they return to the homecorner, she resumes her role. She suggests they replay the argument over the doll but Amy redirects the initiative. The scene ends with the girls hugging each other in a love triangle but I'm conscious that this is a fickle arrangement and recall James' (1996: 322) finding that '*As they argued, teased and embraced each other so the bonds which tied them threatened constantly to dissolve'.* The girls describe their play as 'a game of Mammies and sisters'. Their shared goal, they tell me, is to play the game together and have fun[19] but it is clear that Judy, at least, has another agenda. She wants to bond with Sarah and generating a rift between Sarah and Amy, though presented as pretence, seems part of the plan. Sarah and Amy recognise her concern about being excluded and try to reassure her that they can all play together. The hug-in at the end celebrates this contract.

One of the significant features of this conflict is the dramatic gestures. Corsaro (1985) tells us that children are drawn to routines that involve conflict, tension and resolution because they offer a familiar guiding frame for co-constructing stories. They also seem to offer them a context for initiating many patterned, ritualistic ways of saying and doing things that they enjoy. In the above episode, the girls enjoy the competitive banter in argument, the confiscation ritual, the storming off accompanied by shoulder shrug and hair flick, the use of such appealing phrases as *'I'm going to think about it'.*

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[19] I asked them, afterwards, to tell me about the game they were playing.

They are like 'social schema' that become identifying features of a social group. In this playgroup, there are particular ways of talking on the phone, of sitting on a bus, of queuing, and particular phrases such as *'You're wreckin' my head'* and *'Oh man'*, which have been appropriated by the children and are frequently replayed for their social effect and for the practice and pleasure of becoming more proficient with them. They feature repetitively throughout the data as they are appropriated by the players.

As both the above episodes demonstrate, threesomes often present problems among the more socially aware girls and boys in this group, because power distribution and negotiation is more challenging when there are combination options. Resistance to other's control and feelings of insecurity are prevalent among them. Sarah, as we see above, struggles for recognition when she plays with Greg and Mairéad. Judy struggles in the trio with Sarah and Amy. Mairéad resents any bonding between Sarah and Judy and Amy also feels threatened when Sarah and Judy lead the game. Thomas, David and Greg engage in power struggles when the three play together. Managing a threesome is difficult but the children are drawn to the possibility of more complex play arrangements and more fun. Yet threesomes almost inevitably involve conflict and these moments of raised consciousness sometimes appear emotionally painful and critical in identity formation. On the positive side, the children undoubtedly carry with them the benefits of resolved relationship problems and happy play encounters. In their moments of conflict however, I also see children's insecurities and hurt and I wonder about the narrative that they construct. They can be stories of rejection or of problem solution. I am conscious that how children narrate and structure these experiences, to themselves and others is of critical importance to their construction of identity. I also wonder how much of the competition and need for ownership is cultural. Are these features we see in more collective cultures?

6.3.5 Conclusion

In this section the children demonstrate their agency and their ability to be responsive at both cognitive and emotional level. Their agency may be designed to progress their own agendas but they also seem to recognise the need to guide and follow their play partners towards co-constructing a play story. The agency is complex in response to the complexity of their goals in play and to the culturally valued practices of the group. The episodes quoted leave us in no doubt about the integrated nature of

emotion and cognition. These children activated high levels of cognitive functioning when motivated by the emotional world of power and relationships.

This complexity keeps their play challenging but it also exposes the possibilities within play for hurt and damaged identities. Sociodramatic play has the advantage of offering multiple and varied opportunities for children's experimentation and negotiations and the element of pretence may offer a safer place for practice. Nevertheless the benefits of sociodramatic play for children can only be assessed in terms of what children learn through their participation and some children experience negative lessons. The experiences do not necessarily end with the pretence. The relationships and practices that they construct in play also contribute to the social realities that frame their lives and identities. This is a further dimension of reciprocal relationship between pretence and reality. Play is both a medium and context for the appropriation process.

Part One of this chapter has focussed on children's participation in interpersonal interactions to explore how they establish common ground, coordinate their contributions and generate agency (Matusov 2001). The next part looks at the process of appropriating cultural meaning and practices.

Part Two

6.4   The macro space of meaning-making

The focus in part two is on the process of interpretation and collective reconstruction. In the macro space of meaning-making, the data is analysed towards an understanding of how children share their interpretations and coordinate perspectives towards new meaning. The aim is to explicate key elements of this process as they are demonstrated in children's play drawing on sociocultural concepts such as appropriation, communities of practice and collective construction. It is an explication not just of the world of sociodramatic play, but also of the process by which we all, as humans, collectively construct the cultural worlds that frame our lives.

Many of the play episodes so far demonstrate that the world of relationships is a world of intense emotions and conflict for children and consequently is very accessible to consciousness. Much of what children learn however, although equally significant to their lives, is relatively unconscious. Appropriation by its nature is gradual and subtle and because it is situated in everyday social activity, it is largely an unconscious process. It is about 'participative appropriation' (Rogoff 1990); a process of interpreting and reconstructing, through participation in social activity, the knowledge and ways of knowing of the community. Children and adults learn how to interpret, and operate within, the social order, institutions, discourses, and practices of their culture and how to engage with others in the ongoing construction of these ways of thinking. The study of children's sociodramatic play, as proposed by this researcher, is akin to putting this process on a stage and making it more visible to the audience. The researcher presents an interpretation and invites the audience to co-explore a perspective. This is the aim of this section.

On Thursday, 16th February 2006, a letter to the Irish Times entitled 'The Long Goodbye' reads: Madam,- A new way of ending a telephone conversation has crept in. It goes something like this: Bye, bye, bye, bye, bye, bye, bye-spoken at speed and filtering out to the click of the phone being hung up before you have a chance to reply, leaving a feeling of extreme irritation. Where did this come from?

The research data records a telephone conversation between Lydia and Santa Claus.

Episode 37

Leaving gaps for Santa's responses, Lydia says: *We've got new books for ye, called Santa Claus…..come up soon, will ye…..okey dokey ….are ye ready….see Judy's pieces…..Ok..bye, bye, bye, bye, bye, bye, bye* (waving her finger and nodding her head). *Santa's gone off the phone*, she announces to her play partner *I'm goin' to get him*.

The connection is a reminder that the process of appropriation is constant and continues in the world of both adults and children. Constructions in either world infiltrate both in a reciprocal and responsive relationship. This is the focus of the macro sociocultural level of analysis. Here we ask the questions: How do children appropriate cultural ways of knowing in and through sociodramatic play? How do they develop shared meaning? How do they coordinate their diverse perspectives, garnered from varied previous experience*?*

The data demonstrates that participation in sociodramatic play facilitates children's collective meaning-making. As children develop a joint focus within their play, they coordinate their contributions and in the process they construct a frame for thinking and acting that guides their further participation. This is a frame for understanding and being understood. '*For five years an intuitive programme called play has worked so well that the children learn the language, mannerisms and meaning of all the people with whom they live*' (Paley 1997: 1) and in the process change them. Observing children in the appropriation process brings insight into the constructed nature of our adult lives also and in this section I propose to demonstrate that appropriation is best understood as a process of reconstruction of and within the social, cultural and institutional contexts in which it takes place.

6.4.1 Reconnecting with the lived experience

As I review the data presented to date, I am aware that I present the more co-ordinated and complex play episodes that I observed and create a profile that is in many ways different to the experience of being present in the real life context. The video recording may give a better sense of the often chaotic world that I experienced but nevertheless it too is a selective product that brings together the more connected, sustained and involved episodes. The play episodes did become more prolonged and complex as the children became more familiar with one another's interests and idiosyncrasies and more skilled in coordinating stories. The researcher also became more adept at finding the possibilities for successful connections. The data represents children's more successful efforts. For this reason, I take this opportunity to remind the reader of the often chaotic and frustrating experience for both the children and the researcher as they tried to generate cooperative play and to offer examples of episodes that appeared boring, routinely repetitive, unchallenging and even futile in the doing.

Establishing and sustaining play stories is a challenging task for children. Many play episodes are instigated but never take off, sometimes because of the lack of commitment of at least one of the play partners or because the level of activity in the area is too great and it is difficult to stay with a theme or because the children go walkabout within the play theme or leave to get assistance in dressing or fixing something and forget to return. They may initially share a focus of attention but lose interest in sustaining a joint pattern of intention. The following episodes demonstrate:

Episode 38

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Greg gets the tool box and is immediately in role, demonstrated by his facial expressions and his exaggerated walk. David follows suit. Mairéad is also in the homecorner, cooking.	
David /Greg	*Come on, we'll go and find our own dinner*	
	They leave the homecorner and go to the playdough table followed by Mairéad. David returns to the homecorner and begins to cook something in the microwave. He calls Greg in a loud deep voice	
Greg	*I'm coming now – just makin' a pancake.*	
Greg	*Where's the tools?*	As he arrives
	David points to the tools and then leaves and asks Teacher to help him to make the train	

Their interaction terminates and the researcher is left wondering why David went to the trouble of calling Greg, only to abandon the play theme. On other occasions, the researcher followed children as they invested much time and energy in elaborate dressing up processes only to witness them scatter and forget their original purpose. This often resulted in children roaming around, looking for other opportunities and then running out of time for further play development.

Sometimes they invest time in organising roles and props and then something as simple as an accidental fall or the knocking over of equipment prompts hilarity and the play erupts into bursts of high energy, physical jostling. The children are then unable to restructure the chaos or they draw the attention of concerned adults who terminate the play. In the next episode Kylie is on the phone. Greg walks in.

Episode 39

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Kylie	*Hello, who is it?*	On phone
Greg	*Dr Maher*	On phone
Kylie	*You're my husband – husband...*	Establishing relationship
Greg	*Darling*	
Kylie	*What?*	
Greg	*Pretend you come to look for me*	Wants action
	Kylie leaves for a reason that is not obvious to the researcher	
Greg	*Kylie, Kylie I want Kylie*	
	Mairéad arrives	
Greg	*Go to sleep*	
Mairéad	*Pretend this is my pyjamas*	
	Greg lies on the couch and Mairéad lies on the bed. They smile at one another	

Greg	*I've no pillow*	
	They laugh and she brings one secretively. He throws it.	
Greg	*There you go*	
	She returns it to him	
Greg	*No, you have to throw it to me*	
	They begin to throw things and create general chaos in the home corner. Teacher comes along and insists on tidying up.	

We can see from these examples that life in the preschool is not a series of easy to follow, structured, continuous play stories. The preschool room is a busy environment, populated by children, not just with varying play skills, but children who arrive with different moods and levels of energy from day to day and whose objectives and motivations are often generated by events outside the playgroup. On occasions, some children's principal aim can be to make noise and attract attention or to flit and fragment. There was often competition for space or equipment which resulted in antagonistic and competitive disruption. Like Corsaro (2003), I found that play is extremely vulnerable to interruption by other children who might want to play or take some play equipment or indeed by the routines of the institution such as clean up time. Furthermore, the repertoire of play stories is in many ways limited, limited by tradition, artefacts and space and children often appear bored by the routines. Sometimes I suspect that their street play of the previous afternoon was more exciting or the availability of video games and television programmes makes home play more attractive. Greg and Thomas on occasions indicated that they would prefer to play at home, where they could choose their own activities in relative peace and quiet without the stress of having to negotiate with this large motley group. Greg's mother discouraged this option by warning him that he would soon get bored in the absence of someone to play with. When Thomas was reluctant to return after a bout of illness or when Greg was going through a particularly unsettled time or when Leah was loathe to allow her mother leave, it struck me that the level of conflict and challenge from play mates, the busyness and noise level in the classroom and the freedom of choice and lack of structure could be difficult for the children. Learning to adapt to group norms, to transform one's way of being and attune to other people's stories, to find ways to influence and construct a strong identity, to manage confrontation and stress, was challenging and required energy and emotional and physical well-being. At the same time, as the next episodes demonstrate, children managed on a daily basis to derive much pleasure from their activities, to sustain long play episodes and to

engage in very complex negotiations at emotional and cognitive level and these they found extremely rewarding. The next section analyses their participation in these episodes to follow the process of children's meaning-making through play

6.5   Meaning-making through play

Within the sociocultural perspective, children's play becomes a tool for checking and validating the meanings and purposes that they have understood to be implicit in their previous dialectical experiences and at the same time for reconstructing and changing these meanings and purposes to meet the experiences and needs of the play group. This is the process of appropriation through which children adapt, embellish and change meaning and at the same time reconstruct their own thinking tools in ways that are appropriate to the cultural group. This is the perspective that guides the analysis of the data in this section.

6.5.1 Appropriation through a process of interpretation and reconstruction

Children in their play roles enact key behaviours appropriate to the role. They have agreed parameters for what one is allowed and not allowed to do when a baby, a big sister or a brother, for how bosses and baddies are treated, and for the routines for birthdays, burials and school. They share a repertoire of responses that one can draw on when, for example, the 'kids' are creating a racket, when they want to wrestle power from controlling adults, when danger threatens or for making and breaking friendship. Children interpret the meaning of these behaviours as they have experienced them in previous scenarios and relocate them in multiple contexts in their play, in this way testing their meaning and adapting them to fit with new dynamics. The next episode demonstrates how easily children fall into roles that are familiar and at the same time revise and adapt them to incorporate new experiences.

Episode 40

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Amy	*I'm the child… I'm Stacey*	Establishing relationship
Judy	*I'll be the Mam…You take the baby for the walk.. ..don't go far ..only to the corner, 'cos you'll get lost*	Giving directives
Amy	*OK Mam*	
Judy	*I'll cook the dinner*	
	Amy leaves, walks around, comes back	
Judy	*It's not ready yet*	

	Amy sets the table	

Amy and Judy are well acquainted with the role of mother and child and coordinate their contributions in an easy flow. Here Judy introduces a new dimension. She draws on a detail from a story, told recently by Teacher, about the little girl who failed to follow her mother's orders to stay close to home. She anchors (Löfdahl, 2005) this detail in her construction of the mother's role, using the language and performance of the teacher. Amy is comfortable with this development and so they build into their roles a concern for safety, and practices that embody that concern. Mothers issue warnings and children limit their excursions. A psychological tool of this community is being reconstructed, a tool that promotes a view of the world as dangerous and that justifies adult rules and practices that are aimed at protecting children but also restrict them (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Built into this kind of governance and situated here in the pretend roles is the notion of power relationships that allow for directives and control. Between them, on the intermental plane, they draw this way of knowing into being, thereby creating the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978).

Sometimes however children draw on experiences and introduce practices that are foreign to their play partners and that pose problems for shared meaning. The following episode demonstrates.

Episode 41

Speaker	Initiative
	Liam, Greg and Thomas are in homecorner and dressed as workers. Liam leaves and Greg and Thomas are hammering the wall
Greg	*Let's go to work now*
Thomas	*Ok*
Greg	*We're the Daddies aren't we?*
Thomas	*No you're the Daddy, I'm the teenager*
Greg	*No, you're a Dad as well*
Thomas	*No, I'm a teenager*
Greg	*Pretend you're my friend*
Thomas	*No, I'm a teenager*
Greg	*No, you're my friend*
Thomas	*No, I'm the teenager*
Greg	*OK, you're the teenager and you come to work with me*
Thomas	*Ok*
Greg	*You're the teenager and I'm the teenager's boss, the teenager boss*
Thomas	*No, you're the Dad*
Greg	*teenager boss…teenager boss*
Thomas	*No*
	Greg wants Thomas's hat.

Greg	*Pretend we swop*
Thomas	*No, pretend we get in the truck and we drive home*
	Greg seems challenged to understand Thomas's focus and loses interest
Thomas	*Your car broke down*
	Greg wanders to the Hallowe'en table and the play disintegrates.

Thomas's father works with a teenage apprentice and this is the experience that Thomas is recalling[20]. Greg is unfamiliar with this practice and consequently his responses are inadvertently non-contingent. He understands that Dads and friends and workers and bosses go to work together but cannot reconcile the teenager and father relationship. Thomas fails to clarify. He continues to reconstruct the experience of his father and teenage apprentice when their truck breaks down but he has lost Greg in the confusion. They lack a sufficiently shared frame for this complex meaning-making and there is a sense of frustration and annoyance.

However, the idea is not lost. It re-emerges on 17th November when Thomas and Greg are playing with sharks in the water basin and Greg says '*Pretend I live with you and I'm a teenager'.* As though conscious of the antagonism generated on the previous occasion, here Greg chooses an amicable moment to re-introduce the idea that he will be the 'teenager'. There is a sense that the idea is being situated in another context to proactively explore its comprehensive meaning, including its relationship, status and role meanings. By relocating the concept in a shared activity Greg hopes to concretise it and arrive at some shared meaning about its function and purpose. For him, learning about being a teenager is an outcome of participation in the practice of being a teenager. This is the process of appropriation, of interpreting and reconstructing holistic shared meaning within this cultural community.

6.5.2   Appropriation through participation in 'communities of practice'

Children seem to recognise that roles operate within 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991). They know that within each community of practice, be that the community of practice of parenting or technicians or witches or book readers, there are cultural ways of thinking and of representing knowledge. They appropriate these ways of acting through participation in the activities of the community, moving from 'legitimate peripheral participation' to more central, expert participation (ibid, 1991).

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[20] I acquired this information from Thomas's grandmother.

In some communities of practice, such as academic communities, thinking, argumentation and reflection are abstracted from activity and formulated in abstract concepts, language and thesis writing that are valued features of the appropriation process. In other communities thinking, argumentation, reflection are embedded in action. Whatever the community of practice, appropriation involves a collective and reciprocal process of interpretation and reconstruction within its guiding frame. It is a process where particular language, practices, rituals, and tools are employed in the community and embody practices and thinking. As participants transact with these cultural elements in their daily activities, they adapt and change them to meet the revised values and goals of their communities. In this way they come to know them.

In the next episode, Sarah and Mairéad enter the community of practice of shopkeepers and customers and combine their experiences to reconstruct a shopping scenario. However, they must explain, for example, why they are now working girls and not children and negotiate the tweaking of authentic practice to incorporate the sale of phones (since they are immediately available) in a shoe shop.

Episode 42

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Mairéad is the shop keeper and Sarah the customer.	
Mairéad	*Pretend we're at work*	
Sarah	*Pretend my name is Jade and I'm 13 and…pretend our Mam and Dad are dead and we're working girls.*	Establishing relationship
	This does not seem to be an upsetting detail but rather a way of explaining parental absence and the girls' need to work and take care of themselves.	
	Mairéad offers Sarah a shopping bag. Sarah asks for milk shakes and Mairéad packs them into her bag.	
Mairéad	*Pretend this is a shoe shop and you buy shoes. What kind of shoes do you want?*	
Sarah	*Yellow ones, please*	
Mairéad	*Sorry we don't have yellow ones, we'll have to order them in*	Contrives plot to enact this line
Sarah	OK.	
Mairéad	*Pretend we sell phones*	
	Mairéad answers the pretend mobile phone a number of times	
Mairéad to Sarah	*That's Sarah, she keeps ringing me ..Sarah stop ringing me .....I'm busy*	Very convincing conversational tones
	Mairéad sounds extremely annoyed. Sarah buys a mobile phone and offers a credit card which Mairéad inserts in the register.	

Both girls represent their understanding of this community of practice and the types of people who inhabit it. Sarah proposes age thirteen as an appropriate age for working

girls but to explain their liberation from parental constraint, she proposes that their parents are dead. This allows her such liberties as buying her own shoes or phone and owning a credit card. Both girls imitate shopping behaviours that they have observed but they also demonstrate an understanding that these behaviours embody meaning about ways of relating, about power and status. As Wenger (1998b: 52) says *'Our engagement in practice may have patterns but it is the production of these patterns anew that give rise to an experience of meaning'*. This must be one of the particular values of sociodramatic play for this cohort.

Sarah chooses the name Jade. Jade and Sasha are popular pretend names with both girls, borrowed I understand from the Bratz © doll collection[21]. According to the Bratz.com official website '*Sasha is not afraid of confrontation. She knows what she is, what she wants and how to get it'* and Jade is *'always on the cutting edge of cool..the ultimate fahionista'*. This is the persona that Sarah adopts as she positions her character in this community of practice. We are reminded of the forces that compete and collaborate to create 'possible selves' (Bruner 1996; Carr 2004) for children.

Mairéad organises the story in order to relive her experience of having an item 'ordered in', a suggestion that obviously appealed to her. She then creates nuisance phone calls so that she can re-enact the part of the young woman who is far too busy for idle chat. This is a way of being that she chooses to enact, partly because this is how she interprets the role within the community of practice and partly because she imagines a persona type to which she is drawn. She may be described as experimenting with 'possible selves'; a process that seems to depend on her knowing how this identity is positioned in the community of practice but also on her being able to imagine how that person perceives herself and how she is perceived by others. Finding a place in the world, Bruner (1999: 176) tells us *'is ultimately an act of imagination'*. So in enacting this play role, Mairéad demonstrates the language and practices of this community of practice and at the same time how this role is positioned within the community and how she personally imagines herself into the persona. This is a complex feat of appropriation involving both intersubjective

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[21] On 10th October, Mairéad brought her Bratz© doll collection to playgroup. They included Jade and Sasha

processes and imagination. We can see in the play episodes that sociodramatic play offers opportunities for engaging imagined and possible selves within social activity.

This is also the process of transformation. There is an element of recall and imitation in the children's reconstructions but in each turn the children are also manipulating details to fit with new goals and emergent events. This is the first time, in my observations, that the 'ordering in' practice has been introduced to shop play or that a shoe shop sells phones. These are more obvious examples of new development that the girls must stretch their contributions to accommodate but the more subtle dynamics of relationships and contexts in play also initiate change. The girls are transformed by their experiences within these roles. They know themselves and know each other with new dimensions and possibilities and at the same time they are reconstructing and reinventing the practice of shopping and being a shop assistant.

6.5.3 Appropriation as coordination rather than consensus

In play, the children agree for example, to initiate a game of 'Mammies and Daddies', thereby establishing an intersubjective focus of attention and intention. They respond and contribute into the collective arena to create a play story and what emerges is a collective frame to guide their ongoing meaning-making. In their body gestures, in their emotional tones and verbal language, in both the initiatives and interpretations that they offer, children contribute their distinctive voices to shared meaning. It is a way of knowing that is distributed across the bank of knowledge, tools and practices that grow into the meaning-making systems of the community. The children interpret these systems and coordinate their interpretations to co-construct new meaning. The data demonstrates that this is not a debate towards consensus or seeking agreed and fixed conceptual units. Rather the process of establishing common meaning involves building on one another's initiatives in a 'yes and' or 'no and' process that involves interpreting, complementing and extending the contributions of others. It is a collectively constructed way of knowing, in which some voices may be more powerful than others but which co-ordinates all contributions. It becomes a referential frame that guides behaviour. These children, in their play, voluntarily comply with the referential frame as the route to achieving intersubjectivity and 'maximum pleasure' (Vygotsky 1933: 9).

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In the following play episode the children, Sarah, Judy and Amy co-construct models of motherhood and pre-schoolers as they develop the theme of 'drop off' and 'collection' at a preschool playgroup. The model of motherhood that they reconstruct between them signifies a shift from a more traditional authoritarian model, sometimes seen in play. It may or may not be the personal experience of the children but it is the model of motherhood that emerges from their combined contributions. The construction offers them a perspective and a way of practising that may change how they position parents or are positioned themselves as children or as parents in the future. By sharing ways of being, they raise consciousness and make alternative practice possible. The shift in meaning is not the decision of an individual or a pre-planned outcome but rather a collective emergent construction to which the girls contribute and attune. It becomes part of the guiding frame that influences how motherhood is constructed in play and even in real life. Consequently we see that the concept of motherhood in any community is distributed over the contributing members of the community, past and present, because it is constructed in interaction.

By contributing to the construction, the model that emerges is more likely to be a model with which they can identify and to which they can belong. These are children, for example, who are familiar with being escorted by a 'working' mother in a car and who frequently go to parties. They are quick, on other occasions, to reject other constructions such as the possibility of a mother working with a tool box or being an astronaut. Others might feel excluded in the profile constructed here. We can see the reciprocal connection between play and reality. Children bring the rules of their real worlds to their play but their play, in turn, may be an important element in recreating reality. This is the story of transformation through appropriation. What is appropriated, in terms of culture and identity, and the artefacts, and institutions that support them is partly a product of their participation in these play interactions.

Episode 43

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Judy, the mother, is taking Sarah and Amy to playschool	
Judy	*Pretend you're on the inside and you're on the outside….and we're in the car ..Ok, let's go. Now we're at playschool.*	She turns the key and pretends to drive.
Sarah	*Come on, we're at playschool*	
Judy	*Now sit down there*	

Sarah	*I'm goin' to play with this*	
Amy	*Judy..*	
Judy to Amy	*Now say me mammy...What are you goin' to play with?... I'll put it down for you, will I?....Ok, now I need to go to work..*	
Sarah	*Bye Mam*	
Amy	*Bye*	
Judy	*Bye*	
	Judy drives the car and stays in role, while dealing with several interruptions. She returns to collect 'the girls'.	
Judy	*Hiya girls....it's time to go, OK?*	waving the keys
Sarah	*OK, I'll tidy up*	
Amy	*Can we stay for a few more minutes?*	
Judy	*OK, you can*	
Amy	*We're allowed stay for one more minute*	Pleased and smiling
Sarah	*Yeah*	
Judy	*Only one more minute, OK?*	
Sarah	*Alright…(pause)...what about two minutes?*	
Judy	*No, only one minute and then we have to go to the party...remember we do? And now, now it's time to go now In the car...it's time*	She waits waving the keys

Pretend mother and pretend children collaborate to construct the identity of mother and children in this context. Mother controls the situation because mothers, by social status, are powerful, and partly because the mother, in the play, must leave for work. There are tensions between Judy and Amy which explode later but here Judy uses her 'mother' power to keep Amy in role. These are both peer group and play role positioning dynamics. Mother softens her approach with explanations such as '*I have to go to work*' or by showing kindness with '*Will I put it down for you*'? '*Will I stay for a minute?*'   The children show a degree of deference and recognition of maternal responsibilities by accepting her guidance and complying with her directives. A version of motherhood emerges from these group dynamics that might be very different if Mairéad, for example were present. Mother might be far more directive and children might be more subversive or defiant as we will see later.

The children are playing, and in tandem reconstructing, a version of themselves as children and preschoolers, as though from the outside looking in, a position that allows them to reflect on themselves from an outside perspective. They share identity reference points or rules of behaviour to which they all attend and that form the basis of their intersubjectivity. Choosing games to play with, remembering to tidy up, the use of such phrases as '*we're allowed*' and going to parties are all agreed elements of the life and identity of the 'child' and 'preschooler'. Judy's directive '*its time to go*'

sets in motion a routine of resistance and bargaining, another element of peer group culture that often functions to ensure that children have a voice and experience power (Corsaro 1990; Kronqvist 2004). Their resistance represents their struggle to master adult practices and be like adults and at the same time to establish the validity of their own world, a struggle that generates a creative tension that contributes at the same time to continuity and change in both the child and adult world. Resistance is often therefore a device for changing practice and meaning but its form depends on and is shaped by familiarity with the cultural guiding frame.

6.5.3.2   Collectively reconstructing fatherhood and friendship

A very different model of parenthood emerges in the next episode where the boys are actively negotiating the constructs of masculinity. Greg is the Dad and policeman, Thomas is the son and Lilly is the Mam. David arrives as a workman but Greg tries to position him as a son. He constantly gives directives and speaks very gruffly. There is a sense also that he is genuinely annoyed because his co-players are out of control and usurping what he considers to be his jobs. He complains that they're *'wreckin'* his head. David rejects his orders and hits him. Greg relocates his annoyance within the play role by reporting David to Lilly, the Mam, but the 'whinging' tone he uses implies that he has slipped into a 'child' role and initiates a renegotiation of roles. He re-establishes that he's the Dad because he's wearing the police officer's outfit. In this role he contacts his friend by phone to tell him about his family problems. His interaction style varies with his roles as father, husband, child and friend because he recognises their distinctive guiding frames for behaviour.

David switches to his favourite friend role. Pretend male friends in this group usually enact their relationship with invitations to go to work, football or the pub together, elements of the broader guiding cultural frame that gain significance in the play roles. David talks to his friend Greg on the telephone. Like Greg, his kids are *'wreckin' his head',* a way of being he adopts to ingratiate himself with Greg, but that appears inconsistent with his treatment of the baby dolls some minutes earlier. Now he wants to establish similarity with Greg in order to link as friends and so he buys into Greg's attitude towards the 'kids'. Both boys adopt deep tones and stand with one foot on the bench to represent their 'men' persona. Greg in particular adopts a 'big man' strut as he heads to work. These men are astronauts who work in a spaceship.

Episode 44

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Greg is dressed as a policeman and is eating dinner with son Thomas and the mother Lilly. David arrives and refuses to eat. He's intent on fixing things. Thomas joins him to fix the clock	
Greg	*All of you are wreckin' my head……I'm going to ring my phone….Hello..hello….yeah..my kids they're being … they won't leave me alone.. .they're wrecking my head*	He dials the number He hangs up
	He hears David on the other phone. (Meanwhile Lilly repeats the phrase *'you're wreckin' my head'*)	
David	*Hello, hello..are you comin' to my house today?*	
Greg	*Not yet*	
David	*What are you doing? ………..They're wreckin' my head. Bye*	
Greg	*Bye bye*	
	Greg puts on the gold bangle, his power strap. Thomas washes dishes. Greg gives the power strap to Lilly, as her bracelet.	
Greg	*There you go ..that's your bracelet*	
To David	*Don't feed the baby*	David hits him
Greg-Lilly	*Mam, he wanted to feed the baby*	Sulkily
Lilly	*What's wrong with that?*	
Greg	*Kids don't feed babies…..I'm the biggest brother*	
Lilly	*yeah ..and I'm the big sister*	
David	*yeah and I'm the biggest Dad*	
Thomas	*I'm the Dad*	
Greg	*I'm the Dad. If you have the police things they're the Dad*	
	David comforts the baby.	
Greg	*Are you goin' to your friends? Are ye?*	fixing the wall clock
David	*Yeah*	picking up tool box and baby
Greg	*No, you're not…you're grounded*	
	David goes to the blockcorner with Thomas and returns	
David	*Hello, friend…Friend where are you going to work?*	picking up phone and foot on bench.
Greg	*I'm goin' to my friends. Bye*	replying on phone
	Greg looks very serious and speaks in a deep voice. David and Thomas follow him and they do a 'man-walk' up to the door / spaceship. Greg, as spaceship commander frisks them.	
Greg	*Spaceship phone*	Standing very erect
Thomas	*Spaceship phone*	Also standing erect
Greg	*123 blastoff*	
	David breaks rank , leaves and returns	
Greg	*1234 blast off..rocket shoes*	The touch their boots
	And they follow Greg, doing a pretend lunar jog. They return to spaceship and repeat the exercise three times. Greg tries to control his team, at times manhandling David.	

The model of fatherhood here is one who gives directives, is exasperated by his children, and does important work. Parenting is only one element of his role, his friends and work feature strongly. The distinctive characteristics of the grown-up male are expressed by (i) the way he stands with his foot on the bench and hand on

hip as he talks on the phone, (ii) his deportment and strut that indicates size and bulk (iii) his accoutrements, including mobile phone and how it's carried and the bangle which on the male wrist Greg describes as a 'power strap' and on the female wrist as a bracelet and (iv) the deep voice and forms of expression. The boys are reconstructing the stereotypical cultural male, with some embellishment, but this becomes the guiding frame to which they temporarily, at least, attune. It is not a fixed model but in this play episode, among this group of children, it becomes normalised as a way of being and introduces these children to possible perspectives and identities.

6.5.3.3   *The psychological tools for constructing play roles*

The scenario is very different to the previous one and invites a consideration of the psychological tools that boys and girls use to construct their play stories. These boys want to connect in play but each is too busy actively promoting his own agenda. Each wants to engage others but they struggle to find a way to coordinate their activities, largely because of the power issues involved. David is not prepared to concede to Greg's control. When they agree on a relationship, that is, to become friends, coordination is easier, although David continues to resist Greg's leadership. By contrast with the girls, their interactions are far more openly acrimonious, even involving shouting at one another and physical jostling. At the same time, they don't seem to experience the same level of rejection and hurt that Amy for example experiences when Judy shows a preference for Sarah. For the boys these behaviours do not carry such meaning. Corsaro (2003: 73) also notes the relative absence of friendship disputes among boys. The cultural psychological frame for the girls is different and they in turn interpret and reconstruct it differently. Their relationships take central stage. They spend time deciding on who is who, their names and relationships. They are sensitive to relationship difficulties and construct conflict in terms of friendship and rejection. For the boys, in this episode, conflict seems to centre on who controls as opposed to personal feelings of being liked or disliked. Good ideas, rather than personal preferential treatment instigate good feeling. These boys are appropriating different psychological tools to those of the girls earlier.

6.5.3.4   *Stretching to coordinate perspectives*

The next episode is interesting because like the boys in the previous episode, the girls are at times openly confrontational. In a way that is unusual among the girls,

Mairéad, in this episode, is physically aggressive. Sarah experiences physical hurt but does not retaliate. Instead she stretches to knit the episode into a play story. The story they construct is about emotional manipulation in mother-daughter relationships and the discourses of 'care and control', 'love and anger' and 'punishment and revenge' feature prominently.

Mairéad and Sarah bring with them different models of motherhood and the mother-child relationship to this play scene. Sarah suggests a scenario where her mother has been cross, interpreted by her as 'mean'[22], and she has a plan to make her feel sorry. There is a sense that Sarah, in particular, is revisiting a recent event of emotional significance to her and organising it this time so that she is in command. However, the new interactive dynamics create an unexpected scenario. Mairéad responds as a 'mean' mother who is further angered by her daughter's revenge tactics. Because they come from different perspectives, they must constantly negotiate the next 'pretend' initiative with one another and stretch their understanding to incorporate the different perspectives into a connected story. This stretching and coordination of different perspectives creates the conditions for new shared meaning as to how the mother and child roles can relate. As in so many of the episodes, when the children manage their coordination successfully, they reinitiate the theme, as though confirming their shared understanding.

Episode 45

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Mairéad is the mother, angry with Sarah, her daughter who has misbehaved.	
Sarah	*Pretend you're still mean at me…And pretend I took the books……*	
	She takes some books and the mother follows her to retrieve them. She is cross and hits her, pushing her roughly against the wall. Sarah looks genuinely hurt and scared but recovers.	
Sarah	*Pretend I go to my room and stamp on the book* *When you weren't lookin…*	Moving to pretend room and stamping She stamps again
	Mairéad hits her again and again Sarah seems genuinely upset for a few seconds.	
Sarah	*Pretend I walked out of my room..for..because you..because you smacked me*	Mairéad nods, in agreement
	Sarah climbs over the seat, cocking her head and shrugging her shoulders in a sulky, indignant pose. She crawls under a table, hiding behind a chair	

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[22] I interpret the pretend mother's behaviour as angry or cross, while Sarah interprets it as 'mean'.

Sarah	*And you said, Darlin' where are you gone?..And you were sorry for me..*	
Mairéad	*Darling,…Darling….Darling*	walking around
	Sarah comes out of hiding and returns home	
Sarah	*Pretend I generally calm down and you look up* (at me)	Sitting beside Mairéad
Mairéad	*You're grounded!*	looking up
Sarah	*Yeah…and pretend I was…goin' to get my boots.*	
	She leaves to get her real boots, interpreted by Mairéad as an in-frame move. Mairéad jumps up and follows her	
Mairéad	*Come back this minute*	Grabbing her and dragging her back
Mairéad	*That's it ..go to your room*	Ordering with stretched arm
Sarah	*Pretend I climbed upstairs and went to my room*	
Mairéad	*Yeah and pretend I locked your room door and all the windows*	
Sarah	*Yeah and pretend I couldn't open them…….And pretend I was named Jade in the game and I was 13*	
Reinitiating the theme	The play continues, re-initiating the theme of misbehaviour and punishment	
Sarah	*And pretend I took the book…Pretend in the morning you were sorry*	
Mairéad	*No, pretend I'm still mean at you*	
Sarah	*Yeah, pretend you're still mean at me*	
Mairéad	*Yeah… Pretend when it was dark you were still awake when I fall asleep….And you popped out.. and you hided*	

The scene opens with what appears as an enormous breach in understanding. Sarah takes the books to punish her 'mean' mother and Mairéad, as mother, reacts very aggressively. Sarah is visibly shocked. The breach continues when Sarah tries to manipulate the mother into feeling guilty. A sympathetic, apologetic response is not forthcoming. However, despite these different perspectives, they manage to establish sufficient common ground and cooperative intention for the story to continue. This is not a straightforward process. Such real life issues as their interdependency as play partners and the balance of power between them pervade their play. This morning, they have already jointly rejected Tracey and preyed on Amy's game, incurring the wrath of Judy. At the same time they have been testing their own relationship. At this stage, Sarah is keen to please while Mairéad retains her arrogant tone.

They create their play characters with improvised initiatives which they name and preface with 'pretend' to ensure clarity. They are creating a frame that both affords and constrains the practices of both players so that the story can flow. This involves not just managing their contributions but managing difficult emotions at real and pretend level. It is not a process of debate or argumentation about role behaviours or about the propriety or logic of the behaviour. Rather they achieve a coordination of

perspectives or a guiding behaviour frame so that the characters in the story can relate. In this way they co-construct a new perspective and new ways of relating. Here we gain some insight into our lives as adults also. As we engage with others, we rarely enter argumentation and debate towards consensus. Rather we respond to each other and develop a space where our perspectives combine to create a frame that guides our future contributions. The process is demonstrated in children's play.

By the time these girls reinitiate the theme, in this episode, they know what to expect from one another and how to take appropriate initiatives. New elements creep in to drive further change, such as the reference to darkness which heightens the emotion in the scene but the girls now have shared routines, such as hide and seek and infringement and punishment routines that regulate a series of behaviours and guide contributions. The 'naughty' child and 'mean' mother personas become familiar.

Corsaro (2000) proposes that children, in their play, reconceptualise the 'objective structures' of their everyday lives. In the above episode, the logic of being mean or sorry or worried is named and embedded in a meaningful situation so that it is no longer the impulsive reaction of an adult. It makes sense. The children storm out of a room in response to a rebuke, disappear to create anxiety and initiate regret and guilt or feign concern to lure the offender back. They are playing with social and emotional rules and in the process they find a way of knowing the place and role of the rules in social organisation. Rather than abstracting the thinking for discussion, they locate it in activity and test the meaning possibilities. They 'anchor' (Löfdahl, 2005) the meanings in logical action making them useful and intelligent. In the process both the practices and thinking framework become more familiar, as in the above episode.

It is also a process of change. As they exercise and collectively reconstruct social rules children reflect on them, change them and make them their own. The element of pretence allows children to express or reorganise their own experiences and perspectives and engage with perspectives that extend or even contradict their own experience. The above episode demonstrates this reflexivity in action in that it both revisits the children's previous experiences and at the same time combines their experiences to allow for different ways of knowing to be developed. By projecting themselves into pretend social and emotional possibilities, children abstract elements

of their experiences and contribute them to new constructions and in the process they reflect, reconsider, alter and embellish cultural ways of being.

Very striking in this episode again is their facility for emotional management. It appears that these children are comfortable, for example, with the concept of punishment and revenge. They seem also to have already a repertoire of strategies for dealing with anger and manipulating guilt. It is even possible to consider that they sometimes consciously engineer real situations, just as they do in this play episode, for the challenge and satisfaction of enacting these strategies. They demonstrate a degree of agility with emotional manipulation that suggests that what often appears in real life as impulsive, reactionary behaviour may be more intentional and controlled.

6.5.4 Collective Intersubjectivity

Cultural frames, be they institutions, roles, practices or languages or symbolic systems are constructed collectively. They are a coordination of the contribution of their participants, a heteroglossia of voices (Sawyer 1997), a multiplicity of motives and logics. With practice, they develop a coherent pattern that frames their function and meaning and gives them a planned and logical appearance when in fact they emerge from particular group dynamics and contexts and represent the vested interests and power of their contributors. This is a key insight that emerges from the application of a sociocultural lens to this data, a reflection on real life afforded by children's play.

According to Tomasello and Racovsky (2003), from around four years, children enter a phase of collective intersubjectivity, an awareness of collective attentionality and intentionality. Children's representations of people, places and perspectives in play facilitate this process because they construct and experience shared points of reference. They demonstrate that they have moved into collective awareness and intentionality when they create, for example, the role of mother or father, not based on immediate experience but on the more collectively constructed elements of the role.

In this episode, Tracey, not yet three years old, generalises a rule that until recently she probably regarded as very specific to her situation. She is playing alone but she is drawing on previous conversations and here she demonstrates that she has attuned to a collective rule in her community.

Episode   **46**   *The baby's in the Mam and Dad's bed…*

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Tracey is playing with a miniature doll's house and characters. She is putting the baby to bed.	
Researcher	*Is she going to bed?*	
Tracey	*She's goin' to the Mam and Dad's bed*	
	The Mam and Dad dolls return home and go upstairs.	
Mam and Dad	*The baby's in the bed!*	Shocked tones

Tracey demonstrates an understanding that this is not normal or acceptable behaviour, not just in her home, but out there in the general scheme of things. The episode affirms Tomasello and Racovsky's (2003) point but demonstrates that the process emerges at an earlier age. As Tracey reconstructs the rule for these babies, she moves beyond the realm of personal experience and draws conclusions about the general nature of things. This is a feature of sociodramatic play among these children. Their narratives and roles draw on elements of their experience that are likely to find commonality with others. While each child wants to feel powerful within the cultural frame, they also want to share it with others. This is also a dynamic that fuels the appropriation process.

6.5.5 Conclusion

'Tell me your story and I'll tell you mine; we'll put all our stories on a pretend stage and then we'll know who we are.' (Koshewa and Paley, 2002). In the play episodes cited we can see the significance of Paley's statement. Who we are is as much a collective story as it is an individual story. In bringing their stories together, children collectively construct an adapted story that continuously redefines who they are. In the process of appropriating, they are collectively interpreting and reconstructing, with variation, the 'knowing' rules and tools of their culture. It is not passive transference but active negotiation. Their play offers both an insight into their interpretations of experiences and into their negotiations as to how they will be and know together. Likewise, this research proposes that in negotiating and reconstructing rules in play, children are exercising decision, choice, interpretation and change that may be interpreted as a social commentary or critique and consequently demonstrates a reflective relationship with reality. It is reflection through action. Children may not be consciously reflective but the creative process of reconstruction and adaptation to new contexts is a reflective process. *'In their own ways, the children do as we do in*

our papers about play: they examine, expand, interpret, speculate, bring in new characters, go in new directions...' (Paley 2006: personal communication).

In their play, children operate roles and identities that function within the constraints and affordances of the communities they create. They imagine themselves into roles and live by the rules that are implicit in them. Vygotsky (1933) sees play as a medium though which children learn to voluntarily submit to social rules. Living by the rules offers a frame that guides their behaviour and brings with it a sense of security and mastery and the pleasure of knitting into and belonging to the social fabric.

The data demonstrates the collective nature of cultural reconstruction. Through intersubjective interaction in social activity, children establish common ground, coordinate their contributions and generate agency. The process is not a search for consensus but the coordination of contributions towards achieving multiple and complex cultural and contextual goals. It is an ever-changing, dynamic, unpredictable learning process that emerges from participation. In the pooling of their resources, these children create functions that cannot be created individually. They create, for example, social rules and organisation, rituals and routines, identities, discourses and knowledge and of course communication and thinking tools themselves. This is why participation in the reconstruction process is important to one's sense of belonging. Through participation we both contribute and come to know and share collective meaning. In the process of reconstruction in play, children demonstrate that they have a reflective understanding of the conventional use of these constructions, that they can knowingly contribute and that they can engage with multiple perspectives. These are the skills required to participate in sociodramatic play as demonstrated in this data.

Ultimately, this analysis offers insight into the constructed nature also of our adult societies and ways of knowing. Through the study of children's play and meaning-making we see the process of appropriation and come to understand how tools of knowing are reconstructed in ways that are consistent with the values and practices of the community and at the same time contribute to their ongoing transformation.

In the next section, I propose to discuss elements of transformation, transformation of culture and individuals that emerge through children's play.

Chapter 7: The Participatory Appropriation Plane

7.0   Introduction

The third plane of analysis is the Individual or Participatory Appropriation Plane. In Chapter 5 the play of the children is situated in its immediate and broader context. In Chapter 6 the interpersonal transactions, through which children construct intersubjectivity at both the micro level of person to person interaction and the macro level of transaction with cultural ways of knowing, are analysed. In this chapter we ask the question: What are the outcomes of participation for culture and individuals?

Transformation is a concept described by Rogoff (1995: 142) as *'..the process by which individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own participation'*. In the process of participation by the individual-in-social-activity, the individual and the context are transformed towards further participation. As they interpret and reconstruct the practices and discourses of the adult world, the children contribute to their transformation by adjusting them to fit with the dynamics and purposes of their peer group. Their ways of thinking about and perceiving the world change. At the same time, they themselves are transformed towards becoming more expert and at home within the new community of peers.

The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, the transformation of the cultural frame is explored, focussing on the practices and discourses of power, social rules and gender differentiation. The second part explores the transformation of participants, focussing on two particular children, Judy and Thomas, and explicating central elements of their transformation. The parts are reciprocally interlinked. As Thomas, for example, appropriates the discourse of gender within the group, both he himself and the cultural discourse are transformed. The concept of transformation embraces the transactive, co-constructing relationship between person and culture.

The discussion draws on previously presented and new data as evidence of children's participation in constructing ways of knowing the world. Already, we have seen in the data many examples of children's practice of social organisation, of interpreting and positioning roles and activities, of sharing experiences and learning and co-

constructing peer group practices and valued knowledge. At this stage of the analysis, the reader appreciates that these children are not just involved in enacting play stories but also in the appropriation of practices and discourses of the broader community, in the process appropriating the integral thinking habits and tools and making them their own. With these thinking tools children continue to construct ways of knowing the world that are consistent with their communities and that meet the needs of the peer group. They learn to operate and construct their sense of identity and belonging within the ways of describing, ordering, understanding, valuing and thinking about the world that are culturally available to them. These are the discourses, institutions and practices that give direction and shape to their lives and that present affordances and constraints that allow opportunities for some and barriers for others. They are played out and negotiated in day to day transactions with each other and the context. In the process, the practices, discourses and participants are transformed.

We begin with part one where the sections address the outcomes of their participation in sociodramatic play in terms of the transformation of their ways of knowing and enacting power, social rules and gender differentiation.

Part One: Transforming Culture

7.1 Power among children

Piaget's (1932/65, 1959/2001) theory proposes that the power relationship between children and adults results in adults imposing perspectives on children and reducing the child's need to reason for him or herself. It considers peer relations as more egalitarian and cooperative and this theory combined with a romantic and nostalgic view of childhood often leads observers to overlook children's power struggles. The data in this research however suggests that power relationships are a significant issue among children. In this section we focus on children's expression of power in play roles, on their management of adult power and their empowering of the peer group.

7.1.1 Children's understanding of power as enacted in their play

The play episodes already presented provide many examples of children interpreting both values and practices from the adult world and reconstructing them to position themselves and others in terms of power relationships. For example, being bigger and

stronger is recognised as a basis of power among children and often argued as the source of authority, as demonstrated here:

Episode 47

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Tracey	*No – that's my cake*	assertively
Greg/Tracey	*You're not the boss of us*	teasing
Mairéad	*You're not the boss –we're bigger*	Full of bravado
Greg	*'Cos she's doing her homework*	
Tracey	*My Dad can beat you up and put you in jail*	
Greg	*You're only little Tracey….I'm four….and your Dad doesn't know where I live*	

The children reconstruct the concept 'boss' here as someone who is bigger and in control. Greg and Mairéad consider that they fit the description because they're four and do homework. Being male and big here also implies a threat of physical strength.

In their inter-role communications, children constantly adapt their communication strategies in recognition of the power status, rights and responsibilities of the roles. Mothers, fathers, workers and police officers for example, are high status power positions. They spend a lot of time maintaining control over lower status roles. The lower status people, in turn, spend time reminding them of their management duties. The power of Mother is demonstrated in the following episode. Mairéad is the Mother and Judy and Sarah are the children.

Episode 48

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Judy	*Mam – after dinner can we go to the park?*	
Mairéad	*Yeah*	
Judy - Sarah	*We're going to the park*	Jumping in pretend excitement.
	They go to cupboard, get cups and drink tea	
Sarah	*'Cos we're big girls*	Continuing to jump
Mairéad	*Don't jump on those beds, won't ye not?*	
	Sarah jumps.	
Mairéad	*No!*	waving her finger and shouting
	Sarah is naughty again	
Mairéad	*No! you're not going on holidays with me*	
Sarah	*Are we going on holidays?*	
Mairéad	*Yeah – tomorrow*	

We can see that it is not necessarily Mairéad as an individual who carries power here but rather power is a dimension of her role. Between them the children contribute to

positioning her as powerful. Mairéad gives directives, sometimes presented as requests, other times as imperatives. She offers inducements such as holidays and withdraws them as punishment. The children respond by complying, resisting, or using their childish appeal but they never give orders to their superiors. They ask the parent about their birthdays, their ages, what Santa will bring, when it is time to sleep or rise and in this episode what mother plans for their entertainment. They look for permission and decisions because lower status people in play require a relationship with a carer or boss that emphasises their dependency, vulnerability and incapacities.

It is strange that these children, who in other circumstances are adamant about their capabilities, enter and enact the discourse of competent adult, deficient child in their play. In real life they invest much energy in displaying their competencies and yet repeatedly they position children of their own age as helpless and vulnerable in play. As another typical example, when the witch attacks the dog in play, Sarah speaks for the princesses and calls for help with *'We're just little girls, we can't do anything'*. This is not the real life character profile that emerges in the data, so there seems to be a discrepancy between the profile of the child-in-family represented in play and the profile projected with peers. The children themselves contribute to creating the *'mythic country called childhood'* (Dunne, 2006) where children are powerlessness and needy. As they appropriate a range of psychological tools for defining and positioning themselves and constructing their lives, it seems that images of themselves as weak and dependant co-exist with images of competency and strength.

Older children are presented as very powerful. Sarah explains to me that big sisters, like her sister aged six, can do whatever they want. In play they spend time in their rooms, chat on their phones, go to a friend's house and make independent decisions, unlike little children, including their own age group, who are totally under the control of parents. For big sisters to become 'working girls' they have to eliminate parents. *'Pretend the Mam and Dad are dead'*[23] explains how children become self-sufficient workers. Their work becomes important and not to be dismissed like children's play. When Sarah orders Amy, her child, to clean up her mess, Mairéad differentiates herself as a working girl whose construction is work, not a mess.

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[23] Noted in episodes on 28th Nov., 29th Nov., 5th Dec.

For the boys, in particular, power and status is embedded in size, work tools and physical skill. Once they don the builder's jacket or the firefighter's suit or the multiple outfits of such characters as Darth Vader or Power Rangers they seem imbued with their characteristics and power. They make a point of adapting their walk and voices to imply size and gravity and they engage in physically demanding work. Episode 15, 'The Kiss' and Episode 45, 'Father and Friends' demonstrate this.

Their play recognises the power of strength, physical force and aggression. Many of the characters and play episodes that the boys construct are based on popular media characters and involve 'goodies' and 'baddies' and the struggle for domination. Their attempts to introduce this play caused on-going dilemmas for the teachers who disapproved of violence based games. On 25th October, teacher is trying to integrate Stan into a fantasy play episode based on warriors. When Greg explains the game, teacher says *'I don't like fighting'*. But the fantasy play of the boys almost always included fighting of some kind, even when the theme was based on farm animals or cars. They could link almost every activity to fighting. Straws or 'stickle bricks'© turned into armour. The treasure maps became swords. The 'goodies' saved people while the 'baddies' caused harm. In the next episode, the baddy follows form and as Greg enacts the role, he exudes very convincing aggression and toughness. The *'cool dude'* dark glasses and his 'power' suit prompt the criminal persona.

Episode 49

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Greg/ Mairéad	*I'm not Barry, I'm with him. We're the bad guys- pretend you told your Mam- pretend we stole your car*	
	He bounces on the trampoline, looking very 'cool'. They move to the homecorner and he announces to Teacher *'We're bad guys'*. He's looking for trouble. He poses in front of Tracey who pushes him away. He pretend kicks her. Getting more and more into role, he bounces on the trampoline with Liam, his partner-in-crime, and it sways.	
Liam	*Careful Greg*	
Greg	*I will*	
	David passes by with a toy dog	
Greg/Liam	*Let's get the dog*	
	David and Greg play-fight. Greg tries to take the dog and David reacts aggressively	
Greg	*No, pretend we took your dog*	
	David doesn't resist now and Greg takes the dog.	
David/Mairéad	*Now what will we do?*	
Mairéad	*Go after them*	

	Greg returns to the homecorner and again David and Greg engage in a very realistic play-fight. Their moves are poorly coordinated and they trip and seem in danger of banging against things. Both look intent and aggressive but neither calls for help nor seems overly concerned. Teacher intervenes.	
David	*This baby's crying now*	Recovers quickly and picks up the doll
	Greg continues to appear aggressive and when Stan laughs, he shows him his fist.	
Greg	*It's not funny*	
Greg/Liam	*That guy's after beating me up……he tried to kill me*	Returns to trampoline
	He puts on his dark glasses again and returns to the homecorner and pretends to punch Mairéad who is on the bed	
Greg	*Pretend you're dead …pretend I stuck a knife in you*	
Mairéad	*Pretend you putted the knife in my belly*	
	David swings a pretend punch at Greg who responds likewise. They both fall and Teacher intervenes again.	
Mairéad	*Pretend you sticked the knife in my belly*	Interrupting
	Teacher holds the boys to explain that fighting isn't allowed	

Stealing, fighting and killing is depicted as the work of the 'baddy'. The children make several suggestions as to how to manage his power. Greg himself suggests telling one's mother as a solution, Mairéad suggests that the baddy must be confronted and David fights the baddy.

Greg appears so aggressive in this role at times, that the researcher has difficulty differentiating between reality and pretence. The children on the other hand seem less concerned. He approaches Tracey and pretends to kick her but she just pushes him away. While his fighting with David appears aggressive and at times out of control, David does not at any time seem upset. When Teacher intervenes David immediately moves back into his baby-caring role, an indication that he can easily shed the aggressive persona. Greg remains in aggressive mode and threatens Stan. He suggests that their exchange is 'not funny' but he obviously wants to continue the 'baddy' play because he returns to the homecorner and pretend-attacks Mairéad. Mairéad encourages him. David relaunches into the affray.

I am reminded of Pelligrini's (1989) finding that play-fighting very rarely becomes anything more serious and is important to the development of children's emotional and physical regulation. In the episode Greg suggests to Mairéad that she report the baddy's presence to her mother and also takes on board Liam's fears for their safety.

This level of caring concern co-exists with his aggression and suggests that Greg is in control of his behaviour. At the same time displays of physical prowess are an important element of voicing power for these boys and there is a sense that they are ready to defend their pride to the bitter end. When Stan, for example, laughs at Greg, his pride is threatened and he responds threateningly, raising questions about the real or pretend frame. Of course if play fighting is about testing the limits of emotional and physical control (Pelligrini 1989) then what we are seeing is the delicate line between control and loss of control. Like the teachers I was concerned that things could turn nasty but like Pelligrini, I did not observe loss of control. As the play progresses there does not seem to be any residue of bad feeling and Greg even takes time to show Stan how to pretend fight.

The debate about fair expression of power and aggression arises here. When I showed this and other video excerpts to a research advisory group in April 2006 the divide between the male and female interpretations of the boys' behaviour emerged. A female educationalist and mother of two adult sons considered Greg's behaviour to have a bullying quality. A male educationalist and father of three young boys considered it typical and acceptable boy's behaviour and spoke of the differences of opinion between him and his wife on the subject. In the research setting, as the data demonstrates, the teachers were inclined to intervene whenever physical fighting entered the play. The female facility to use language in a power struggle as demonstrated by the linguistically and politically very capable foursome (Sarah, Mairéad, Judy and Amy), seemed more acceptable even though the possibilities for hurt and damaged identity can be greater. The differentiation raises issues about the power discourse that is constructed in preschool environments that are largely female managed and the consequences for social organisation, valued identities and the distribution of power within education institutions. The discourse and practices of power are transformed by the values of the time and place and participants. This is the dynamic that continues to transform in this setting.

However it is not an isolated conversation and the children demonstrate in their play that they are also appropriating the power discourses of the wider world. Throughout the data, children clearly demonstrate that they recognise that power and ways of negotiating power are embedded in roles and contexts. It is particularly interesting to

observe how they use their knowledge and skill to get power, not just for themselves as individuals but for the groups to which they belong. This is demonstrated in the following sections where children's management of adult power is discussed.

7.1.2   Managing Adult Power

Adult plans often get in the way of children's peer group plans and children need to orchestrate both. The children are very rarely openly defiant but rather operate institutional rules to their own ends. As we see in this section, the children find the loopholes in adult rules and use them in unintended ways, or deviate secretly to avoid adult censure. Deviance from adult rules or 'secondary adjustments', according to Corsaro (1985) is an integral part of gaining power in the peer culture. Adults, as these examples show, also often make adjustments to rule implementation in response to children's resistance. For example, Liam takes 'connectors'© from a table top game and brings them to Greg for his block construction. They share and bond in the conspiracy. Liam's furtive glances alerts teacher and she checks the rule. The rule dictates that table top toys should remain in one area, but the teachers are impressed by the use of the 'connectors' and change the rule. Lydia sneaks water from the bathroom in the play-kettle and surreptitiously skirts the adults on her return to share it with her friends. Teacher, on discovery, returns the water but accepts the cup of tea that Lydia offers. Mairéad throws a hoolahoop in the air. Teacher approaches. She knows she is not allowed to throw things. She adopts a friendly tone:

Episode 50

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Mairéad	*Teacher, do you know how to catch a hoolahoop?*	Innocent demeanour
Teacher	*No – show me*	

In these episodes and many others, the teachers know that the rule has been broken but are persuaded or, one could say, manipulated by the children into a level of compliance with the deviance. These dynamics instigate changes in understanding and practice that transform the guiding frame within this institution. For example, connectors become a regular feature of floor play and other children experiment with throwing the hoolahoop with teacher's approval. At the same time children are establishing group strategies for wrestling power from teachers. These children show

a remarkable ability to predict the response of adults. They know how to induce good will and sympathy. The following episode demonstrates.

Episode 51

Tracey is playing by the bed in the homecorner. Mairéad and Judy move in and commandeer the bed.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Tracey	*That's my baby's bed*	
Mairéad	*No*	
	Tracey continues to stare at them. Mairéad and Judy stare back for several seconds and then join together in laughing at Tracey.	
Tracey	*I'm going to tell my teacher*	Annoyed
Mairéad	*She's not your teacher*	Teasing
	Tracey moves. Mairéad jumps up and followed by Judy, overtakes Tracey and approaches teacher	
Mairéad	*Tracey won't let us play with the bed*	
Teacher	*Oh, I'm sure she will…….You three girls can play together*	
	Mairéad and Judy return to the bed.	

The children have demonstrated an ability to read the situation and to predict the adult interpretation and reaction, a level of 'decentering' that Piaget (1937/71) considered only possible around age seven. Setting observations found it in abundance among these preschoolers. They are aware that being the first to recruit help and to lay the blame improves one's chances of being heard and believed. The victim is usually the one to complain and seek justice. Here, Mairéad and Judy omit to explain that Tracey had the bed first. Children know how to use adult power to their own ends.

The art of deceit involves calculating what the other is likely to believe but it also involves the emotional skill of being convincing. These are skills that children used in negotiating power-sharing with adults. Greg, in the next episode, demonstrates. No weapons of any kind, particularly guns and knives are allowed in the playgroup, even for play purposes. The children are aware of this rule. Teacher responds to a commotion in the home corner and finds both Greg and David with knives. Greg is visibly playing at stabbing people.

Episode 52

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Teacher	*What did Teacher say the other day about knives? She said knives are not allowed in playschool….Now what are they?*	Reprimanding tone
Greg	*Knives*	
Teacher	*And what are you going to use them for?*	
Greg	*Em.. eh… chop*	His whole demeanour

Speaker		
		suggests innocence.
Teacher	*No, you're not allowed to chop anyone*	
David	*No,..chop..eh.. these*	
	He moves to the cooking area and indicates that he will chop food	
Teacher	*Oh, that's a good idea ..to do the food preparation?*	
	Teacher turns her back	
David-Thomas	*I'll chop your head off*	Thomas is in the bed

We can see how the children devise an explanation to satisfy the adult. David picks up the explanation and bonds with Greg in deceit. Together they create an 'underlife' (Corsaro 1997: 133) that at the same time satisfies the needs of the adult and the children. Rather than direct defiance, they find gaps or flexibility in adult rules that allow them to develop their own activities and gain kudos among their friends. It is particularly a feat of reading emotions and measuring risk. While Greg is conciliatory, he manages to retain the knife.

Two weeks later, Greg again is playing knives and agrees with Mairéad that he will be the attacker. Judy is protesting that she doesn't want knives in the game.

Episode 53

Speaker	Initiative
Teacher	*Greg, Greg, listen to Judy- what did you say?*
Judy	*I don't like games with knives*
Teacher	*See, she's scared of knives*
Greg	*Nooo…, not real knives*
Teacher	*I know it's not real knives – but I don't even like talking about knives and cutting people*
Greg	*I'm not talking about that..*
Teacher	*Well then, what are you talking about?*
Greg	*I'm talking about peels ..knives for cuttin' peels..*
Judy	*I don't want him to have…*
Teacher	*Oh peels – it's a vegetable knife…well, Judy, you tell him what you don't want*
	Judy notices that Lilly has a knife in her hand. She finds one and they approach Greg surreptitiously. Teacher realises that the girls have changed tack:
Teacher	*They're the things you don't want him to use, right?*
	The girls begin to innocently chew on the knives.

Greg is intent on breaking the rules but he also wishes to fool teacher. He tries to persuade her that she has misread his intentions and that he is innocent and well meaning. He expects from previous experience that she will accept his vegetable-cutting explanation and since he is pretending he can rename his actions and intentions. While on this occasion, Greg may have initiated the activity, the complainants also join in both breaking the rule and fooling teacher. They are

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induced to join in the deception partly because Greg has Mairéad's support and she is a popular ally and partly because deceiving teacher is a respected ploy among the children. Co-engaging in this behaviour, that is, in conspiring to take control through resistance to the rules and deceiving teacher, is a way of constructing their identities as preschool students and of building power within the group (Corsaro 1985).

If getting and sharing power is a driving force in the peer group then we must consider how children manage this in a world where children's lives become more and more supervised by adults. Perhaps children become more skilled in managing authority. Perhaps the restrictive context transforms them into more strategic and political thinkers. As their lives become more supervised, it may be that control becomes more subtle, that adults are positioned differently and that children devise new strategies for resistance, divergence and autonomy. Certainly, this researcher was amazed at the insight and competence of some of these children. At the same time, in contrast to my own school experience, it seemed that the teachers in this playgroup constantly worked in negotiation and conciliation mode. They rarely implemented rules in a hard and fast way. Rather they listened to the children and allowed as much flexibility as they could cope with in the context. Consequently they were less likely to be perceived as threatening or adversaries. The nature and practice of power transforms and is transformed as the context changes.

7.1.3 Group Resistance and Shared Power

Children's resistance to adult authority, at times, seems to permeate the group and to gain momentum as they sense collective power. This is particularly obvious at transition times when children are waiting to go outside or preparing for lunch. Sometimes they collectively begin to bang the tables or make noises that thwart the adults' efforts to organise them and get lunch routines completed. This group resistance creates a sense of group bonding and power among the children and establishes them in opposition to the adult group.

On several occasions children are observed taking school rules and using them for unintended purposes in a way that undermines the rules and confounds the adult's authority. The rule structure itself seems to offer them a tool for sharing power. In this

episode, by way of demonstration, Greg and David are arguing over roles and reject Shane when he tries to joins them. Shane draws the teacher's attention to his plight.

Episode 54

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Teacher	*Well what can Shane be in the game?*	Supporting Shane
Greg	*Nothing – he's bold*	Adamantly
Teacher	*No he's not. Are you bold Shane?*	
Shane	*No*	
Teacher	*You tell them – you tell them you're not bold*	
Greg	*We're not ready to share*	
David	*We're not ready to share*	
Teacher	*But Shane has already been in here playing with you – you can't just say you're not ready to share now*	
Greg	*We're not ready to share*	
David	*Yeah we're not ready to share*	
Teacher	*You can't say..*	
Greg	*We're not ready to share*	

If you don't wish to play or share your equipment with another, the school rule dictates that you say 'I'm not ready to share'. Here the children work the system to exclude Shane. They reconstruct the teacher-constructed school rule. The rule is well established and so it is familiar and shareable. This same rule has been constructed by the teachers as a tool for conflict resolution and assertiveness. The children use it exactly for that purpose but towards their own ends and in the process they seem to steal teacher's power. The nature of pretend play means that they cannot be forced to play with Shane and so teacher cannot really insist. They later seem concerned about the powerful stance they have taken and move to return her power by softening their tone, complying with instructions to tidy up and telling her that Shane can now play. They seem keen to re-establish themselves as 'good' boys. There is again a sense that confrontation with an adult prompts children, even momentarily, to think consciously and strategically. Also, in moments when the power system is threatened, it becomes more apparent that the social order is dependant on voluntary compliance with the rules. Should these children become accustomed to defiance the dynamics within the institution may be dramatically changed.

The *'I'm not ready to share rule'* was regularly misused, in ways that at times appeared particularly cruel. As already noted, Niamh suffered frequent rejection in

her attempts to join the play and this seemed especially painful when children used the school rule to unite and gang up against her, as in the following episode:

Episode 55

Speaker	Initiative
	Judy, Amy and Lilly are kneeling on the floor, on each side of the wooden castle. Niamh joins them at the other side, but makes no further attempt to join their game.
Judy	*No, no, we're not ready to share yet…..*
Amy / Lilly	*Aren't we not, no*
	She flaps the side of the castle and the others join her, flapping and chanting *No, no no, no.* Niamh stays in situ. Teacher enquires as to what is going on.
Amy/Teacher	*Teacher, we're not ready to share yet..*
Teacher	*Niamh might feel very sad if you didn't want to share with her*
Amy	*We're not ready to share*
Teacher	*But there's loads of room on all sides*

The girls use the school rule to collectively reject Niamh but also to justify their action with teacher. When the latter fails they appear to comply with teacher's requests. However, while Niamh's presence is accepted at the castle, she never manages to play a part in the game. Actually, the girls give her a redundant character and when she tries to activate it, she is told that it is dead.

This is an opportune reminder that play can be a negative experience for children and that rules about cooperation which the teachers promote are very different to the interpretation of rules that are embedded in the power discourses of children. This episode demonstrates that power is not a commodity to be distributed but rather an attribute that becomes part of children's identity. Teacher may insist on fairer practices but to be powerful children must have access to the conversations and activities in which the rules of participation are constructed. Niamh must develop the skills of intersubjectivity so that she can connect and develop trust and companionship with other children and thereby contribute with a more powerful, confident voice.

7.1.4 Conclusion

Throughout the data, children demonstrate their awareness of the subtle power relations invested in roles and contexts in everyday life as part of the system of social organisation. They are not just interested in the activities involved in a role but also and probably more so in the status and power invested in that role. They enact a knowing that power is not just about individual identity but a dimension of a role and social position and situated in systems of social organisation. The data demonstrates

the different ways in which play, both inside and outside the pretend frame, facilitates these power relationships to be articulated and negotiated. In enacting power, its properties and rules enter the frame for participation within this context and become reified within its practices. Both the context and the participants are transformed.

In testing adult rules, children seem to gain insight into adult organisation and goals and in turn use this insight to develop their own group culture. The children manipulate adult rules to meet their own needs and as the data shows they are very clever in the way they twist these rules to encourage adults to compromise. This seems to be a particularly effective way of supporting one another and sharing group power. In particular we can see that that the children are not passive subjects of adult power, but rather are active transformers of power relationships.

Children's lives are dramatically changed by new demands in adult lives and by the care arrangements that adults make for them but children also become more adept at managing these care institutions and find ways to develop their own power and skills to regulate their lives. The changes are transformative. The children experience life differently. Values and purposes change and the collective way of understanding the experience changes. They learn to see the world and participate in it differently.

7.2   Rules

The construction of rules is the subject of the next section. The analysis not only addresses children's understanding of the rules of behaviour for specific play roles but also addresses such questions as: What are the intended and unintended functions of rules that children appropriate? How do they cite rules and what are the emotional messages that they reconstruct?

7.2.1   Rule Compliance and Construction

Episode 56

| Kylie to Lilly | *No, no, no, don't eat that fast….Eat with your fork, little child* |
| | *Now remember the rules, OK?* |

Kylie's directive introduces us to a primary rule of sociodramatic play, that is, that the player must know the rules of behaviour. Rules and rule making play a significant

role in children's play. Vygotsky (1933) considered play as an exercise in self control, whereby the child voluntarily submits to the rules towards achieving the satisfaction of coordination with others. Throughout the data, children display a remarkable ability to comply with the rules of the play role even in very demanding circumstances. On one occasion for example, Amy, Judy and Sarah are playing birthdays. Amy as mother is making a cake. The sisters await the surprise. I stood with the video camera for twelve minutes while Amy attended to the finer details. Still they waited although their patience was stretched and when the cake eventually arrived, they greeted it with appropriate surprise.

But children not only learn the rules, they also construct new rules with construction tools that they appropriate from the adult world. These new rules are invoked and embedded in the children's activities towards regulation of the peer world where they expose many of the subtle properties, goals and outcomes that are often inherent in rules and rule making. To begin with we look at the rules that children reconstruct and the meanings and functions that they make explicit and at the same time we observe how children adapt the rules to fit their own agendas. In the first episode here, Sarah tells us that rules often come in threes and usually indicate what one cannot do. Her facility to play with and ridicule the rules indicates a familiarity with rule quoting.

Episode 57

Sarah is playing 'house' with others in the homecorner. She is trying to amuse Mairéad.
Sarah *First rule is ..don't get my clothes dirty. Number two rule..no fighting and no kicking and number three is.. no pooing on the ground*

Rules, when broken, carry consequences and the constructing of consequences seems to be of particular interest to the children. They regularly reported or threatened to report one another for breaking the rules and seemed to recognise that some children can be more rule-governed that others. Stan is often the subject of transgression-reprimand routines because of his disruptive behaviour. Here, Greg is reconstructing the rules for dealing with Stan, that is, forewarning him of the consequences of transgression and then upon further provocation, implementing the punishment.

Episode 58

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Stan says something to David in a teasing manner	

	and sticks out his tongue	
Greg	*Stan.. if you stick out your tongue I'll take that (a miniature toy) off you*	Speaking authoritatively
Stan	*I'll take it off ye..if ye*	Trying to repeat
	Greg hits Stan with his elbow and Stan hits back but they don't really connect.	
David/Stan	*Put it* (your tongue) *out again*	
	Stan sticks out his tongue a few times	
David	*He sticked out his tongue*	
Greg	*I'm gonna take it off ye – gimme it…*	Forcing the toy from his hand
	They return to play and then David, untruthfully, reports Stan for sticking out his tongue again.	

As Greg moves towards more central participation in the community of practice of preschoolers, he enacts new understanding of authority. Although Stan's actions are not directly interfering with his play, he takes responsibility for ensuring his good behaviour. David recognises Greg's authority and provokes Stan repeatedly for the pleasure of seeing the transgression-punishment routine enacted. Stan is positioned as powerless in the transactions, as someone who must be taught the rules of good behaviour. The episode demonstrates that the position and identity of these children is being transformed within the group.

7.2.2 The functions of rules

As the children move towards more central participation, they also construct many of the complexities of rule making, in terms of not only their format but also their function. These may not be conscious reconstructions but nevertheless they enter the practices of the culture. They include understandings that rule making is about: power and persuasion; bonding and exclusion; creating 'us' and 'them'; rule makers are powerful but so is resistance and deviance; rules can be interpreted or misinterpreted and used for unintended purposes; not everyone has an equal voice in making the rules and even the most vociferous supporters have not necessarily reflected on the veracity or value of the rule. Many of these elements are demonstrated in the next episode. Here, Sarah proposes that eating uncooked flour is bad for your 'tummy'. Mairéad, her best friend, goes a step further and insists that if you eat flour, you'll die. Sarah supports this proposition. Lilly reaffirms, motivated, I suspect, by her desire to align with the girls rather than by any conviction. She tries to engage teacher's authority. Shane refutes the rule and the girls restate it with absolute certainty. Collective construction is in process as the individual contributions and agendas of the children are coordinated.

Episode 59

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Shane	*Yummy sugar, yummy sugar*	
Sarah	*That's not sugar…it's flour*	
Lilly	*It's flour*	A newcomer, keen to be one of the girls
Sarah	*Yeah…and it's not nice for your tummy*	
Mairéad	*No- it'll make you die…it'll make you die*	with more emphasis
Sarah	*It will make you die, yeah*	
Shane	*It won't make you die, it's sugar*	
Lilly	*No, it will make you die*	with increasing vigour
Sarah	*Yeah, it'll make you die if you eat it*	
Mairéad	*Yeah*	
Lilly	*Yeah*	
Shane	*I really like it – it's yummy stuff*	
Lilly	*And you're not supposed to eat flour*	
Sarah	*No, you're not supposed to eat flour*	
Lilly	*He's eatin' flour…Teacher…Teacher…he's eatin' flour*	
Lilly / Sarah	*You're not supposed to eat flour*	confirming agreement
Shane	*I eat flour*	
Sarah	*You're goin' to die*	
Susan	*You'll die if you eat flour*	now joining the group

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'If you eat flour, you'll die' is a rule constructed here towards the goals of the peer group, among them the need for a sense of togetherness (De Haan and Singer 2001; Hannikainen 2001; Rayna 2001) and shared control (Corsaro 2003) and the pleasure of banter and conflict (Goodwin 1990). It is not so much the truth of the suggestion but the desire to register themselves as knowledgeable and capable and therefore powerful, that establishes the rule. Sarah and Mairéad wish to display their seniority and authority. Lilly wants to belong to their group. Shane enjoys the resistance. There is a sense that the rule is tested and strengthened by his opposition. The process is not a search for abstracted agreement or consensus but the construction of a rule to meet multiple social objectives. I am reminded of Trevarthen and Aitken's (2001: 16) contention that as humans we are '*interpersonal, emotive, relational, intersubjective - concerned not with the truth of a context….but with impulses and emotions in immediate human contact while imaginations are actively running ahead..*' The rule 'If you eat flour, you'll die' is constructed in this vein, using tried and tested cultural tools but it carries the conviction of an undeniable, objective, rational truth.

The children also articulate many of the rules that are implicit to social organisation in the peer group. In one of the many stand-offs between Sarah and Greg, Mairéad tries to implement an undocumented rule of the peer culture:

Episode 60

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Mairéad	*Now he* (Greg) *came to your house…so you have to play with him*	Pleading
Greg	*And I was being very good…..I was very good*	
	Sarah looks at both of them hesitantly but refuses to comment or play.	

When parents organise for other children to make play visits to their house, it is a recognised milestone that establishes friendship and here the children articulate the rule. Greg asserts that he also passed the behaviour test on that occasion so that Sarah has no grounds for reneging on the implicit contract to be friends. Articulation makes the rule more explicit and established.

In the next episode, Sarah explains the socially understood relationship between the rules of behaviour and age. Judy the mother is putting Sarah and Amy to bed. Sarah points to the Halloween ghost on the wall and proposes that being scared is permitted for a particular age group.

Episode 61

Speaker	Initiative
Sarah	*Mam, I'm scared…pretend we weren't scared..'cos we're too old to be scared*
Judy	*Why don't you go to bed like I told you now*
Sarah	*Mam, I'm not scared of that..'cos I'm too big to be scared of it*

7.2.3 Citing rules with feeling

The style of invoking rules and asserting power is significant among the children and demonstrates their growing sophistication in appropriating the subtleties of body movement, tone of voice, phrasing etc. acquired through participation with adult and peer groups and largely reserved for peer transactions. The data records how they frequently introduce phrases and rituals from the adult world and while the wording may be wrong, they still deliver them with the required style and panache. Greg tries, I suspect, to recall the rule 'Finders keepers, losers weepers' in this exchange.

Episode 62

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Judy and Lilly return to their play in bookcorner. Greg,	

	Thomas and David are now there with toys	
Judy	*We're playing a game here*	
Greg	*So what? – you lose it, you can't get it*	With style and drama

He delivers this with an air of street credibility and experience that is intended to impress and to suppress any opposition. In the same way, in another episode, Sarah in angry mode wants to accuse Mairéad of not following the 'tidy up' rule. Her energy is invested in the emotional message, communicated through delivery style, rather than in sentence construction:

Episode 63

Sarah:	*And before I tidy up who made this mess I suppose it's you Mairéad*

This is accompanied by folded arms, big facial gestures and a strong argumentative tone. Mairéad, Judy, David, Amy and Thomas were also capable of this style of interaction because their participation skills allowed them access to the meaning, emotion and power invested in the rituals and they had the competence and confidence to reproduce them. These skills make them popular players and respected leaders in the peer group and at the same time position them as leading contributors to the transformation of ways of knowing and participating within this group.

7.2.4 Conclusion

These children appropriate rules from the adult world and reconstruct them towards building a sense of community and shared control for the peer group (Corsaro 2003). Rules of the institution and roles, implicit social rules and peer group rules create a frame of reference points that guide their interpretation of the contextual affordances and constraints. Compliance with the rules of roles is a basic rule of play. It makes behaviours meaningful and predictable and guides contingency. Rules change as they are adapted to the context and activities but children also like to construct rules. They are actively developing their own organisational rule systems. As they relocate rules and rule-making within their own social activities, they foreground many of the complex functions of rules, thereby transforming both the rules and the rule makers.

Rules seem to have emotional significance for children possibly because rules often invoke power and enforcement and resistance. They are often quoted in conflict and the style of delivery speaks volumes about the issues of authority and power involved.

Children demonstrate that they are eagerly observing, playing out and appropriating how the world works, and most importantly how they can make this learning work towards their own empowerment. These are the findings that emerge when we engage with children's competence and agency. As children relocate power practices and rule making in play, they come to understand and appropriate the subtle workings of the system and the mind tools that go with it.

The themes of power and rules also permeate the next section when we look at how children collectively construct gender-appropriate behaviour within this context.

7.3 Gender categorisation

Nowhere is the nature nurture relationship more strongly argued than in the area of gender differentiation. Boys and girls are different. Their bodies are constructed differently towards different reproductive functions and their brains are suffused in hormones from conception that influence their behaviour emotionally, physically and cognitively. Here, however, we focus on meaning and values given to these differences that lead to gender categorisation and create oppositional categories that translate, in turn, into specific constraints and affordances for both sexes. The differences between the sexes that are demonstrated on a daily basis are discussed but the analysis is also interested in how children stitch gender differentiation into systems of social organisation as they participate in sociodramatic play.

7.3.1 Group differences

Consider the following:

Episode 64 : Teacher brings in the foam bench. It becomes a boat. The boys sit on it and the driver drives with full engine sounds, to the beach.

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Greg	*That's the girl's boat, isn't it?*	pointing to bench.
Teacher	*Where are you off to on the boat?*	Trying to control the level of activity
Greg	*To kill bad guys on the beach*	
Teacher	*Oh, you could row there*	
Greg	*No, I'm driving…It's a speeding boat*	
Teacher	*Wow…hold on tightly*	
	He fills his cheeks and makes the sound of a boat speeding. There is a sense of high energy and boisterousness.	
Greg	*We're there now…We're here now*	
Liam	*Let's kill the baddies*	

	They run around the room and return with gusto to the boat.	
	Teacher is anxious that they are behaving dangerously and tries to introduce some order with the song 'Row, row, row your boat'. The boys join in. A male passenger boards the girls' boat.	
Sarah	*This is the girls' – get off the girls'*	
	The girls nurse the dolls. Sarah tunes into the boys activity and begins to bounce but not on the same scale as the boys. Teacher tries to introduce another song but the boys are difficult to contain.	

The boys' and girls' boats, in this episode support a very stereotypical view of both sexes. The girls are sedentary and talkative, the boys are active and rowdy. The dynamic among the boys constantly promises to explode and create a level of activity that threatens the order and safety of the playgroup. The teachers are watchful and trying hard to contain them. In my total period of observation I never saw the girls create this kind of energy. There was, of course, major variation among both the individual boys and girls. Liam, for example, was quiet and reserved, while Mairéad as we have seen could be extremely forceful and loud. Many of the girls ran and jumped or pushed and shoved at times but as a group they were more disciplined and contained and this is the significant difference between the boys and the girls in this setting. They create different group dynamics. The boys together create bigger movements and sounds. While all the children are constrained by the space and the safety requirements of the setting, the girls easily manage to adapt their movements but the boys are at times seriously challenged. Their play themes contribute to their difficulties. The most popular social pretend play theme among both the girls and boys was family role play but the boys often turned the home into a tent, a swimming pool, a robber's target, a site of accident or crisis. Their family roles as workers frequently took them to the sand, water and block area or equipped with work tools or power-suits to various work locations, all involving relocation and noise.

As in Nicolopoulou's (1997) research on children's narratives, the data in this research shows that girls tend to focus on relationships in their play while the boys focus on activity. The girls begin with establishing roles and relationships- who will be the mother, the sisters, the child and what their ages and names will be – and then must find activities for the roles. This usually involves housework, shopping, and in particular, dressing up, undressing and retiring to bed. They travel to other venues, school, shops, and doctors' surgeries and then return home. They introduce elements of surprise such as birthdays, excursions to the park or parties and going on holidays.

The activities are an accessory to the role, a way of enacting the relationships. For the boys, the activity is primary. They begin by declaring their individual intentions and immediately launch into action: I'm the builder; the fireman; Power Ranger; and then they try to find a way to relate and co-ordinate. They come together around shared activity rather than relationships. In the above episode Greg is the driver and he leads the hunt for 'baddies'. The others follow his leadership but their relationship is never discussed. Their common mission coordinates their activity. The level of energy they exude seems a distinctively boys' phenomenon.

It is not that the girls are more compliant and cooperative or that the total spectrum of activities that engage them are very different but their system of social organisation among themselves and its psychology is different. They developed one-to-one relationships. The boys were more open to operating as a group and more action-oriented. As individuals, of course they sometimes cross the gender divide both in activity and psychological terms. Mairéad, for example, played 'action based' games with the boys and engaged in rows and rifts without any apparent significant psychological interpretation in terms of friendship. Likewise, Greg often invested interest and energy in determining pretend names and relationships for the games. However, as two groups their play styles and relationships were very different and this difference became more pronounced as the year progressed. The boys' tendency towards activity, for example, becomes more accentuated and poses problems for order in the playgroup, an issue also identified by Whalley (2000) who refers to the *'marauding gangs of four year old boys'* that emerge in the latter half of the playgroup year. The profile of Thomas in section 7.6 follows his transformation as he is inducted into this 'male' genre.

7.3.2 Policing gender boundaries

Throughout the data, the children regularly remind one another of the boundaries between the sexes. As Niamh dresses up, Lydia reminds her that some of her accessories are for boys and others for girls. When Judy and Amy express an interest in playing with the pirate ship, they are told that *'it's only a boy's boat, not for girls'*. Greg invests much time and energy in displaying his physical strength and bravery. He raises bulky pieces of equipment above his head for exhibition purposes. He dips his face in the water basin and describes it as 'diving', and accredits the lessons he

took on holidays for his skill. He often takes responsibility for policing the boundary between appropriate behaviour for boys and girls. He explains that only boys can be pirates and the girls can be mermaids but the life he describes for pirates is much more exciting that that allowed by the limited repertoire of mermaids. When it suits him, as when the mermaids create a clever den outdoors and he wants to join them, he temporarily changes the rules. However, he does not allow everyone this latitude. He is a powerful voice in prescribing appropriate behaviour, but at the same time a strong force in coordinating play themes between the sexes. His close relationship with Mairéad and his own competency allows him to engage with both boys and girls and to bring others with him. As the data shows (see episode 33 and 35) he often manages to integrate his 'male' play style and roles into the girls' stories.

The mermaid and hairdresser roles were the only role that I observed being censored for the boys. They never pretended to be girls but otherwise they engaged in the same roles as the girls. The girls' range of roles was limited largely to domestic roles, shopkeepers, medical practitioners and teachers and their fantasy and media characters. The boys managed to combine the above list with a range of skilled jobs, such as bus driver or mechanic, and more exotic roles such as astronaut and terrorists. The girls never entered the roles of mechanics or carpenters although they did build with the blocks on occasion. They seemed to recognise the gender boundaries and not risk transgression. In the next episode Kylie demonstrates her awareness that transgression is dangerous. She checks with Teacher about the legitimacy of her playing a 'builder's' role and wearing a builder's hat and even with Teacher's support is embarrassed to be seen by her peers in the role.

Episode 65

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Kylie/Teacher	*Can girls be builders?*	Helmet in hand
Teacher	*Of course girls can be builders – there are lots of girl builders*	
	Stan brings teacher a pan of food.	
Teacher	*Thank you Stan – can I have a spoon please?*	
Teacher/Kylie	*That's right Kylie – you have to put on a hard hat when you go to a building site, don't you?*	
	Kylie dons the builder's helmet but is embarrassed when Tracey returns. She shrugs her shoulders, giggles and removes the hat.	

Here Kylie carefully tests the boundaries of acceptability. Already, she has appropriated a gender discourse that constrains her choice of roles and the evaluators that she fears most are her peers. As the children reconstruct a gender division in roles and a gendered way of enacting their roles, they teach one another how to belong within social practices and discourses and their sense of who they are becomes more and more defined. These are discourses that can be disrupted but not without risk and so children often need support to pursue this kind of argumentation.

7.3.2 Conclusion

The data, viewed with a 'gender differentiation' lens points to significant differences between the boys and girls, not so much as individuals but as groups. As individuals, the spectrum of their activities and behaviours are not so dissimilar. Neither group (with the exception of Judy on two occasions) ever pretend to be the other sex but they shared a core range of roles and activities. The boys seem to have a broader spectrum of roles that include work roles. But there are major differences between the two groups. They create a different dynamic and operate within different play genres. The girls are drawn to relationships, the boys to action.

The discourse of gender differentiation is interpreted and reconstructed by children in their play. The children seem to recognise the role boundaries and the risk involved in crossing them. Some children resist but tread carefully and others police the boundaries. This presents as an area where children need adult support to disrupt the broader social discourse.

Children's participation in sociodramatic play is a medium for appropriating cultural ways of knowing. The data provides evidence of the process of reconstructing such cultural discourses as the discourse of power, rules and gender, even at this young age. It is a process that engages children in reconstructing the cultural frame that not only guides their practices and identities but provides the thinking and psychological tools and structures for its ongoing reconstruction. The context is transformed because the context also participates in children's meaning-making. It is a reciprocal relationship. As children construct and become more expert in accessing and exercising the criteria for practicing within this context, in many ways the frame for participation becomes more defined. As they become more aware of the rules and the

group values, they are less inclined to transgress. Participation offers opportunities to contribute one's voice to the reconstruction but some voices carry more clout than others and some children are more compromised than others and consequently make bigger transformations through their participation. At the same time, the constructed nature of the discourse means that it can change.

Piaget (1969) described stages of development that were unidirectional and universal. Biological development may be universally similar but the data demonstrates that development in cultural ways of knowing emerges through participation in the social activities of specific groups. Another time, another place, another group will lead to different ways of knowing. It is a reminder that knowledge and our ways of constructing knowledge are embedded in the communities and community activity in which we participate and largely account for the different ways in which we experience and construct the world. Children transform towards further participation in the activities of their communities. These developments are further discussed in the next section when we look at the transformation of individuals.

Part Two: Transforming Individuals

7.4   Introduction

This section addresses the questions: What are the experiences of the individual-in-social activity within this cultural context? How are the children transformed by their participation? The concept of transformation proposes that development is about becoming more expert, responsible and skilled in the practices of the community, in ways that make sense and are valued in the specific community. It recognises the human drive to share intersubjectivity with other humans, to belong within and contribute to community and the inextricable relationship between interpsychological and intrapsychological functioning (Vygotsky 1978).

The analysis focuses on two individual children to track the development of their participation and their transformation as they 'stretch' (Carr 2001) themselves over people, artefacts, discourses and activities in their play in this setting. The lens is informed by three key concepts. Firstly, we understand that through participation,

people change in ways that engage with the discourses and practices of the community, towards ongoing participation. Secondly, in the process of participation, they contribute to the ongoing construction of the cultural discourses and practices both by their own contributing and by stretching themselves to engage with the ideas of others. Thirdly, they use the knowing tools of the community in the construction process, in co-constructing social activity and their own identities within it. In this way the boundary between the individual and the social is always 'porous' (Wertsch, 2007) and community, context and individual change in a dialectical relationship.

In this section, we follow two children to understand how they transform towards belonging within and contributing to the collective construction of identities and practices within the play of this group. We track their progress as they engage with challenges and conflict and make adaptations on the road to developing their identities, making contributions and thereby generating a sense of belonging and well-being. These are particularly interesting transformations in the Irish context because they feature as significant learning strands in the curriculum 'Towards a Framework for Early Learning' (NCCA 2004). They frame the profiles of both children. The profiles are a possible narrative and not a complete picture of their transformation. In particular, drawing on the data, the researcher describes how Thomas transforms to belong in the practices of masculinity within this group and how Judy transforms to meet the challenges of developing play partnerships. We begin with Judy.

7.5   Judy's transformation

Judy joins the preschool playgroup in April 2005 when she is three years and nine months old. She is an only child, whose parents both work outside the home and they regularly bring her to school together. From the beginning she demonstrates a keen interest in sociodramatic play and an eagerness to make friends. The first play episodes in the data provide many examples of the challenges she faces as she tries to pursue these goals. Significant among these are issues of friendship, competition and power among the girls. Over the following year, Judy co-constructs her identity as a player and transforms her ways of participating though her negotiations with others in shared play activity

The following reconstructs, drawing on Judy's participation in sociodramatic play and play partnerships, elements of Judy's experiences – a reconstructed narrative that is co-authored by Judy, her co-players and me, as researcher. The aim is to raise awareness of the possible identities available to children within a particular context and the tensions involved in negotiating the contextual constraints and affordances. These are exemplified here by Judy, as she co-constructs her identity.

The reconstruction recognises that Judy's story begins long before she arrives in this playgroup and appears on my radar. It is reliant on my observations and interpretations (and supportive conversations with staff, and children) within the field of the research and can only propose a perspective and possibilities but not certainties. My perspective is a major contribution to this reconstruction. I, for example, arrived in the playgroup, to begin the pilot phase, on the 18th May 2005, steeped in the study of ethnographies of children's peer relationships and play and with Corsaro's (2003) 'We're Friends, Right?: Inside Kids' Culture' in my bag. Through my participation in the ethnography conversation I am developing a perspective and language for seeing, experiencing and interpreting the research setting. Nevertheless, as I enter and speak to teacher, I am surprised to be interrupted by:

Episode 66

Speaker	Initiative
Amy / Judy	*I won't be your friend if you don't let me have it.*
Judy /Teacher	*She won't be my friend*
Teacher	*Maybe if you let her have a turn later, she'll be your friend again*

Over the following weeks, a pattern evolves in Judy's real life and play explorations which provide some insight into her narrative making. Her contributions feature strongly in the data because of her passion for sociodramatic play, the focus of this research. We have already reviewed many of her contributions, notable in particular for her agency in locating her real life relationships and goals in her play stories. (See episodes 32, 36 and 43 in particular). Reviewing the data from the first weeks towards reconstructing Judy's profile prompts such questions as (1) how does Judy choose between the possible selves available to her in this context? (2) how does she appropriate the practices of this community? (3) what are the consequences for Judy's transformation and personal narrative? The profile engages with these three lines of enquiry and is premised on the understanding that identity is constructed between

people in social activity and undergoes ongoing reconstruction in new contexts and relationships; that it is mediated by and distributed across cultural tools and resources.

7.5.1 Towards building identity and belonging: ' possible selves'

From the beginning Judy works hard to build an identity as a key player in many of the sub-groups in this setting, some of which welcomed her easily while acceptance and belonging in others was more challenging. We can identify at least three types of relationships that Judy develops during the research period which frame three ways of being that are available to her within this community. In the beginning, in particular, she regularly organises play stories with Amy, where intersubjectivity is quickly established and goals are shared and easily progressed. This is a very equal partnership that allows Judy to experience acceptance and cooperation. At other times, she engages with newcomers and moves into the role of more competent peer, often leading the activity. She is however also constantly drawn towards engaging with Sarah and Mairéad who are oldtimers and key players with much know-how and expertise and are well established as exciting, sophisticated play partners. They contribute a significant voice in establishing the criteria for being 'big girls' and trend setters in this group. This was a very difficult network to enter and Judy experiences multiple conflicts and challenges, with consequences for her other relationships, as she tries to engage with them. Depending on the play network she chooses, her position as equal, more competent peer or outsider / follower becomes foregrounded.

When Judy plays with Amy she enjoys a relatively cooperative relationship, where conflicts are minor and can be resolved with manageable compromise. They both understand friendship as an agreement to share and play together as evidenced above and in this exchange:

Episode 67

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Judy	*Amy, you're my friend*	
Amy	*When I'm finished my picture, I'm goin' to play with you*	

Their friendship dates back to their first term in playgroup together when they form what continues to be a stable play partnership. They are close in age and from the beginning share an interest in dress-up and engaging in role play. Both enjoy 'homecorner' play. This episode of the 29th September is typical of their arrangement.

Episode 68

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Amy and Judy play at the playdough table. Judy has the keys and plans to go to the pretend car. Amy asks her to wait for her while she washes her hands.	
Judy	*Let's get dresses*	
Amy	*Where is the fairy dress? Let's play Mammies and Daddies*	
Judy	*I'll be the Mammy and you be the child*	
Amy	*Judy is being really cheeky today*	playful, on phone,
Judy	*Pretend you be the sister*	
Amy	*We don't have any Mam then*	
Judy	*That's OK*	
Amy	*OK..*	
Judy	*We'll be sisters, OK*	

Left to their own devices, most of the time, they had an easy relationship. Judy however sought more excitement both in terms of relationships and role play. Her relationship with Amy is compromised and challenged when she tries to engage with Sarah and Mairéad because of the favouritism she shows them as she tries to establish a friendship. Her best chance for befriending Sarah arises when Mairéad goes on holidays for two weeks. During that time, they regularly meet in the homecorner where Judy responds with excitement to the prospect of shared domestic role play. She particularly enjoys the 'mother' role although as we will see later, Judy will be very flexible in order to please. The following episode (from the pilot study) played out between Judy, Amy, Sarah and Cathy captures some of her excitement and demonstrates her play skills and her ability to immerse herself in her role. In this episode, she establishes her authority as 'mother', she allows the 'big sister' her freedom and regularly relocates the 'child' as subservient. She employs sophisticated metapragmatic (Sawyer 1997) strategies to do this. With lines like *'Big sister..are you going out somewhere?'* she reminds Sarah of her role and the affordances of that role. She checks Cathy with *'I'm the mammy'* thereby reminding her that subordinates do not correct parents. Judy is almost always cognisant and compliant with the rules and so she has a supportive frame for setting the scene, organising the players into action and getting the drama going, as we see here.

Episode 69

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Sarah	*I'm the big sister – Mairéad's gone and I have to be the big sister for her*	
Judy	*Can I be the mammy? And who will Amy be?… I'll tell her that I'm the*	

	mammy and you're the big sister	
Sarah	*I'm going to our aunties*	as big sister
Judy	*You be the little sister*	to Cathy
Cathy	*Where will I sit?...I'll sit there*	
Judy	*No, that Amy's seat....You can sit here*	
Judy	*I'll get your dinner ..I don't have time today...I'll just make coffee, ok? Big sister ..are you going out somewhere?*	
	Judy explains to Cathy that big sister is going out. Sarah leaves with a doll and returns.	
Judy	*Here's your sister. Big sister will you give the child a doll?*	
to Sarah	*Give me a hug... Give the child a hug... You sleep there.*	
Cathy/Judy	*Your dress is all messy – you've got paint all over you*	
Judy	*I'm the Mammy!*	Emphasising her status
	Cathy opens presses	
Judy	*You're not allowed....You're only the child. I'm goin' to make you dinner ...here's your bottle*	

As 'mother' in play Judy is very much in control. In her real-life relationship with Sarah and Mairéad, however, she becomes the pursuer. During Mairéad's further absences, twice for illness and for another holiday, Judy works hard to develop her relationship with Sarah. Sarah was a willing partner on these occasions because her own play network was limited. As demonstrated in episodes 36 and 43, Judy manipulates the play story to foreground interactions between herself and Sarah, showing a preference for Sarah's ideas and organising the script so that their roles are centralised and coordinated. Her ploys are very complex. In episode 36, she introduces the idea that Sarah and Amy as children fight over a doll and then resolves the conflict in favour of Sarah. The ploy backfires because Sarah and Amy bond as children and find their own resolution. Judy feels excluded and is reduced to pleading with Sarah to be her friend. In episode 43, Judy collects her children from playschool and proposes taking them in her car to Dublin. Amy is aware that her contribution is being sidelined and when they arrive at their destination, she ignores Judy's directive to alight and opts out of the play. Judy is conscious of the conflict and later tries to compensate. In such situations, she is challenged to reconcile two possible selves - one where she enjoys a reliable relationship with Amy and the other whereby she engages with more exciting relationships and stories. The route to the latter is stormy.

7.5.1.1 Meeting challenges

Her efforts to develop a friendship with Mairéad were less successful. Mairéad managed to cross the gender divide and often played with the boys. Consequently she had many play options. She had little interest in Judy except to ensure that she didn't

usurp her position with Sarah. She would engage her when she needed company and abandon her when something more interesting grabbed her attention. This episode from the first weeks of data collection is repeated throughout the following months.

Episode 70

Mairéad / Judy	*Let's go and paint*
Judy follows enthusiastically to the painting easel but Mairéad changes her mind and joins Greg.	

When Judy tries to join the Sarah-Mairéad relationship, she enters very difficult territory. She often becomes a pawn, used to negotiate their friendship. On the most difficult occasions they bond in opposition to her and rejected her in a cruel fashion. For example, when Sarah leaves for a week-long holiday, Judy targets Mairéad and manages some play episodes with her but on Sarah's return on the 3rd October, she is again ostracised.

Episode 71

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	On arrival Sarah and Judy meet in the home corner	
Judy/Sarah	*Sarah, are you coming down to the playdough?-come on*	
Sarah	*I want to wait for Mairéad*	
Sarah	*I want to talk to Paul – Hi Paul- Bye Paul*	On phone
	Judy follows her and imitates her	
Sarah	*Stop copying me – don't copy me again – and I'm not playing*	
	Judy sits down and watches, taking the order seriously. Mairéad arrives and Sarah gives her a present. Judy observes. Mairéad empties a bag of Barbies that she has brought from home. Mairéad, Sarah and Judy kneel to play with them but Judy is largely excluded from their interactions. She is watching them, looks uncomfortable and begins to root in the dress up boxes as though camouflaging her discomfort.	
Mairéad/Sarah	*What's your name again?*	Pointing to doll
Sarah	*Stacey*	
Mairéad	*No, it has to be Sasha or ....* *Sarah, pretend it was your birthday today*	
	Judy kneels down beside them and relates some story. They listen momentarily but then return to talking to one another	
Mairéad	*I was 4 at my birthday*	
Sarah	*And I'm still 4*	
Greg	*Are you playing?*	Entering
Mairéad	*I'm the sister*	
Greg	*What's your name? - Aine ?- and my name's Pat- Postman Pat, Postman Pat*	Singing
	Sarah leaves to avoid playing with Greg.	
Mairéad	*Where's Sarah?*	she follows her with a book
Judy	*Where are you going Mairéad?*	
	She follows Mairéad who follows Sarah. Mairéad and Sarah take up the two remaining seats at the playdough table, ignoring	

	Judy. She approaches teacher.	
Judy	*Teacher I want you to sit with me*	

Judy is visibly upset. She looks lost and despondent and calls on Teacher for company. I feel concerned for her but I'm reassured that she can find comfort and reinvest her energies in activity with teacher. She soon re-enters the fray and demonstrates her resilience. She continues to pursue the relationship with Sarah and Mairéad. On the 6th October, their rejection appears even crueller.

Episode 72   Sarah, Mairéad and Judy are in the homecorner where a workman arrives to install Hallowe'en decorations. The three girls feign fear and hide under the table. Susan and Teacher are sitting at the table. The girls emerge and begin hugging and jumping together. Judy looks extremely pleased to be one of the threesome. The interaction is interrupted when something falls and the conversation takes a different turn. Sarah reminds Mairéad that she's coming to her house. They hug and call one another friends. Now Judy is excluded and looks dejected.

Speaker	Initiative	
Teacher/Sarah	*Judy is sad – can you think of anything we could do to make her happy?*	
Sarah	*No*	
	Mairéad and Sarah leave and Judy sits dejected on the bench. Teacher asks her why she's sad.	
Judy	*Mairéad and Sarah won't be my friends*	
	Teacher puts her arm around both Judy and Susan. Lydia arrives and takes off her shoes. Teacher notes that there are 'love hearts' on them. Judy looks. She asks Teacher to help her put them on and Teacher refers her to Lydia for permission. Lydia agrees.	
Judy	*Thanks Lydia*	
Lydia/Judy	*I'm your friend*	shyly
	Judy leaves to show the shoes to Sarah and Mairéad but changes her mind and returns.	
Judy/Lydia	*I'm your friend*	

Judy's position in the Mairéad-Sarah network is always fickle and her ultimate exclusion often appears inevitable. She tries very hard to please them and to register in their transactions and consequently their rejections seems very hurtful. At the same time, she demonstrates that she can proactively manage the support options available to her within the context. She shares her sadness with Teacher. Her other strengths come into play. She can recover quickly, largely because she is welcome in other play networks and has the facility to redirect her interest to their activities. She can play with less demanding children such as Lydia, Susan and Shane where she can relax and avoid complex agendas. One wonders why she cannot content herself more often with these easier relationships and the play opportunities offered. However she is continuously drawn to more challenging engagements and at times she manages to

locate herself powerfully between Mairéad and Sarah. Their conflicts offer her opportunities to take sides and create a bond with one or the other. On these occasions, she can hold the balance of power.

Episode 73

Speaker	Initiative
Mairéad/Sarah	*Let's go to the shop*
Judy	*I'm going with Mairéad*
Sarah	*I'm going somewhere else*
Mairéad	*Come with me, I'm the mam*
Sarah	*I don't want you to be the Mam*
	Sarah folds her arms and Judy copies her
Sarah	*Me playing with Judy*
Judy	*Me playing with Sarah*
	Sarah partners with Judy and they hug. She suggests that Judy follow her and struts by the homecorner, looking in to check that Mairéad is watching and intending to make her jealous. It works.
Mairéad	*Are you not playing with me?*
Sarah	*No, I'm playing with Judy*
Sarah to Judy	*Do you want to see pictures of me in my swimsuit on the beach on my holidays?*
Judy	*I was on the beach on my holidays as well*
Judy	*I have a dolphin and you can put it in the water and get on his back and….*
	Mairéad interrupts and tells a story about a paddling boat. Sarah responds and tells a story about her family's trip on a boat. She is eager to tell her story to Mairéad. Judy is incidental and gets the least hearing. Mairéad moves to the playhouse and picks up a miniature character. Sarah follows and Judy takes up the rear.
Mairéad	*I have the Grandad*
Sarah/Mairéad	*You're the mam*
	She is now complying with Mairéad's previous wishes, the original source of conflict.
Mairéad	*No, I'm the child*
Judy / Sarah	*I want to be her friend*
Mairéad/Sarah	*You be the mam…or be the Godmother*
Judy	*Who will I be?*

As the episode demonstrates, the moments of power are temporary. Mairéad and Sarah are interdependent and their long relationship history means that they share common ground and interests. Mairéad is able to manage Judy's intrusions. In many play episodes, she manipulates the story, sometimes to foreground her preference for Sarah's company and sometimes to exercise her resentment of Judy. On the next occasion, while she allows Judy the more powerful role in the play, she undermines her role by being uncooperative and thereby repositions her as the outsider.

Episode 74

Speaker	Initiative
Mairéad	*You're the mam* *Pretend my name's Stacey*
	Mairéad leaves with the buggy saying *'I'm taking the baby for a walk'* and runs away from Judy as she calls dinner. She meets Sarah in the Book Corner and

	they laugh together
Judy	*Dinner's ready.. Dinner is ready.. Come back here*
	Mairéad returns the buggy.
Judy	*Here's the dinner now*
Mairéad	*I hate dinner*
	She abandons the buggy and runs away to join Sarah. Judy is forced to quit her role and fall in with Mairéad's next play suggestion.

Judy is committed to her role in the story but Mairéad rejects her control and Judy must respond good-humouredly in order to stay within their friendship network. So while the conflict is camouflaged by pretence, one suspects that there are moments of consciousness that have implications for meaning-making and identity formation. Her relationship with Mairéad continues to be the source of much tension and stress over the following weeks but the repercussions are not one way. They are pervasive and impact on the group dynamic with consequences for Mairéad's positioning also within this play network. These transformations are often played out in their sociodramatic play stories, as demonstrated in the following.

Episode 75

Speaker	Initiative
	Mairéad puts a birthday cake on the table and warns the children, Sarah and Amy, not to touch it.
Sarah	*I'll leave it Mam*
to Judy	*Don't touch the birthday cake*
Judy/Mairéad	*And Mam..Mam…Mam ..pretend it's my birthday too*
Mairéad	*Nooo*
Judy	*Yeah*
Mairéad	*It's **their** two birthdays*
Judy	*No*
Mairéad	*You're grounded*
Judy	*I'm going*
	She walks off, half smiling, unsure of how to manage her protest and watching for Mairéad's reaction. Mairéad ignores her. Judy really wants to stay in the play. She walks around and reports the incident to Teacher who advises her to negotiate. Meanwhile:
Amy	*There's cherries on this cake*
Sarah	*I love cherries*
Amy	*Mam can I have some?*
	Mairéad gives a slice to each of them and allocates the fourth piece for Dad, thereby further excluding Judy
Sarah	*When I'm finished this I'm going out*
	She leaves just as Judy returns
Judy/Mairéad	*It's my birthday too, Teacher says*
	Mairéad ignores her and speaks to Amy
Mairéad	*Can you fix this* (the pizza) *in?*
Judy	*I'm going to play with Sarah*
	Mairéad looks after her, as though aware of the implications. She leaves to ask teacher to fix something and meets Amy and Judy.
Amy	*I'm goin out Mam*

Judy	*Mam, can we go and play on the trampoline?*	
Mairéad	*Yes*	
	Amy follows	

Within the play frame, the issue is negotiated and resolved without being named. Judy aligns with the children. She leaves to play with Sarah and this relationship has consequences for Mairéad's ability to exclude her. By asking the mother's permission, she grants Mairéad her role power but she also positions herself with the children and creates a separate relationship with them. Mairéad is threatened by this possibility and encouraged to recognise her. In this episode we see how relationships carry from the real to the pretend frame where pretence allows for their negotiation and resolution. The children use the rules of play roles to resolve a real life conflict.

7.5.1.2   *Drawing on strengths*

Many of Judy's fortes are demonstrated. In the first place she can attune to the play frame and theme and therefore take appropriate initiatives that give her access and a role. In the above episode, she makes the mistake of asking to be included (Corsaro 1979) as a birthday girl and opens the possibility for rejection. On re-entry, she takes a more successful initiative. She identifies a role that is contingent with the play theme and operates within it. Furthermore she complies with the rules of the play roles and this allows her to accept Mairéad's power and to behave in a subordinate manner. Again her resilience comes into play. She recovers from the hurt of exclusion and re-engages with the activity. Again I am concerned for her feelings and the emotional impact of rejection but I am hopeful that she retains the courage and confidence to meet the challenges. Her key skill in developing play networks and supportive relationships features again. Her friendship with Sarah and Amy gives her options and encourages Mairéad to compromise.

When the birthday theme is repeated a few weeks later, the play network has transformed and the story evolves differently. Judy is in a stronger position within the group. Her stable friendship with Amy is in tact, and Sarah is engaging more with her. Mairéad is now inclined to be more inclusive.

Episode 76

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Mairéad	*Don't look, don't look over there…Don't look – move all your dollies*	spreading a table cloth

Sarah	*Ready Mam*	
Mairéad	*Yeah.. it's goin to be a birthday.. all of yours*	
Sarah	*and it was my birthday*	
Judy	*And mine*	
Mairéad	*Yeah....all of yours*	

Judy's own agency contributes to these transformations. The other children respond to her enthusiasm and the foursome is gradually reorganised to allow for new combinations and permutations and new play possibilities. Not content with easy relationships, she works hard to be part of challenging play networks and stories. She builds an identity as a significant player and achieves recognition as an in-group member although these are never fixed positions or identities that can be taken for granted. Like James (1996: 322), they appeared to me as *'identities at risk…. mere tentative statements* of *belonging'*

Many new practices become part of the group culture. Within this group, for example, birthdays (in play stories) are now shared between all the children. The next section addresses other cultural practices that Judy accesses and contributes to establishing as part of her participation in play.

7.5.2 Towards contributing: Judy proactively appropriates cultural practices

Throughout the data, Judy is a proactive contributor in the process of appropriation. She engages in the interpretation and reconstruction of play roles and through her participation in such sociodramatic roles as mother, child and friend, in particular, is a key voice in how these roles are constructed in this play group. She reconstructs the mother role, as powerful but caring, investing energy and resources in assuring the welfare of her children. She is gentle and solicitous but keeps order. In the 'child' role she is respectful and cooperative and projects an expectation that the daily routine will bring pleasures such as visits to friends, shopping, holidays and parties. She reconstructs friends as people who spend time together. Dressing up and ensuring that each has the appropriate accoutrements for image creation is a major focus.

Judy reconstructs many of the valued rituals and practices of this group. Throughout the data she employs such access strategies as establishing similarity and engaging in valued conversation about clothes and possessions and lifestyle. She tries to impress Mairéad with talk of her 'Barbie' bed and what Santa will bring and she aligns with

Sarah and Amy's preferences for foods and shops, for example. She projects a 'cool' image, by wearing fashionable clothes and referring to popular videos and toys. Sometimes, she appears over eager to please and irritates by copying. Establishing similarity is a key strategy for bonding within this group but 'copying' is a derisory term used to describe those who steal others' ideas, as we have seen in episode 72.

She also borrows the funny antics of Mairéad and Sarah, in particular. Being funny involves risk because success depends not only on cultural practices and the individual's skill but also on the receptiveness of the others. Sometimes they find Judy funny and sometimes she is dismissed as stupid. Her eagerness to please and be cooperative also brings her into dangerous zones and positions her precariously in terms of identity. She is the only child, for example, that I observed crossing the sex role divide. She was prepared to be the Dad or the brother in order to engage in the play but these roles were never allowed by the others. Judy consequently learns to attune to such group norms. She particularly engages with group values and criteria for being one of the 'big' girls. She enthusiastically joins in conversation about age and courts attention by telling about her 'boyfriends'. When she plays the baby role, she adamantly refuses to cry, since this might jeopardise her identity as a 'big' girl. When Mairéad dabs her face with lipstick, she is careful to demonstrate to teacher that she has taken it in good spirits and refers to Mairéad playfully as a 'scallywag'.

She appropriates many of the group's strategies for rejection and uses these towards creating stronger bonds with her friends. She joins with Mairéad in teasing Tracey and with Amy in isolating Niamh, each time using established group techniques, such as citing age and size or school rules. In the next episode she bonds with Sarah as they argue with Mairéad. The language is disjointed but the meaning is conveyed by *'fully embodied practices'* (Goodwin 2000: 26) that show that she has appropriated such subtleties as intonation, timing, facial expression and body movement. Judy follows Sarah's lead and they orchestrate their contributions to create a cultural display of opposition and bonding.

Episode 77

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Mairéad has Sarah's 'ponies' and refuses to return them when asked politely. Sarah becomes annoyed:	
Sarah	*And one of moving toys not grabbing them off them*	Arguing with Mairéad

Mairéad	*Someone might come and steal it.*	
Judy	*and…and…and like if you're goin' to grab it off them*	agreeing with Sarah
Sarah	*Yeah and like even if you're goin' to start pinching someone*	getting angry
Judy	*And like you're goin' to start pulling them off them*	sticking out her tongue
Sarah	*And if you don't let me have those ponies back I'm goin' to pinch ye*	Dramatic expressions and body movements
Judy	*Yeah, even if you're goin' to hit somebody*	
Sarah	*Yeah, come on Judy. Come on Judy, I have lots more ponies… I'm goin' to empty these bags – I have lots*	rejecting Mairéad

Judy also demonstrates that she recognises the social organisation within this group. Mairéad returns to the group in October following a week's illness. Sarah is very happy to see her and they get together immediately. Amy and Judy, despite the fact that they have played constantly with Sarah during the week, immediately accept that their friendship now takes priority. When I discussed the impact of Mairéad's return with them, Judy told me that she was pleased that Mairéad had returned because she was Sarah's friend. As they play two separate games in the homecorner, Judy tries to be involved with both groups but opts for the safety of Amy's company in the end. She seems to assess the possibilities and recognise the limitations even though at times she chooses to push the boundaries. In this way we see that Judy's transformation transacts with the affordances, practices and resources of the context.

7.5.3 Towards well-being: Judy's personal transformation and narrative

As Shotter (1993: 16) tells us *'Not only do we constitute and reconstitute our own social world but we are ourselves made and remade by them in the process.'* Judy is proactive in pursuing her desires and in reconstituting herself towards a sense of well-being within the group. Her well-being seems to require that she engage with challenging play stories and relationships and seek a key position within them. Although her level of anxiety often suggests deep insecurity, nevertheless her enthusiasm rarely wanes and she willingly engages with challenge and complicated agendas in pursuit of excitement. Through her participation in play with the foursome Judy is afforded opportunities for negotiating complex relationships and play themes. While her relationship with Mairéad, in particular, appears constantly challenging, the rewards are sometimes exhilarating for her. Mairéad often brings her into the imaginary and exciting world of thieves and witches and princesses and into action-packed play with the boys. These are worlds that Judy loves and might otherwise not experience. Many of her most engaging and prolonged play episodes involve

combinations of Amy, Mairéad and Sarah and these experiences enrich her play with her 'best' friend Amy and the various others with whom she plays on occasions.

Judy is agentive in introducing themes of conflict, rejection and friendship to the play world and one wonders if she is revisiting experiences of conflict and repair in relationships and checking previous interpretations. Relocating these themes in play may be a way of sharing her experiences and feelings with the others. It may also be that re-enacting the experiences in new relationships and activities offers an opportunity to master her fears. Perhaps also the exercise allows her to learn from feedback and become more expert in the skills of developing friendship. One wonders in particular about the personal narrative that Judy is reconstructing. Is she constructing a narrative of herself as the outsider who struggles to be accepted and belong or is it a narrative of one who engages with challenge and finds ways of accessing desired friendships and play stories? Her anxiety levels at times are a cause of concern and suggest the former while her resilience, persistence and enthusiasm make the latter a real possibility. The narrative she constructs will be a key contributing factor to her sense of well-being.

Her resilience is further evidenced by her displays of courage. As she becomes more familiar and relaxed with the politics of the foursome, she learns to be more assertive in her dealings, particularly with Mairéad. In this episode, she valiantly defends Sarah, despite the threatening approach of Mairéad.

Episode 78

The foursome are playing with dolls. Sarah is saying some nonsense words and Mairéad accuses her of using 'bad' words and threatens that Santa won't come. Judy refutes the interpretation and Mairéad shouts at her. Judy remains defiant saying 'it's not a bad word'. Mairéad hits her. There is a prolonged silence and Judy and Mairéad stare at each other. Judy bravely holds her stare and Mairéad is forced to deflect.

Two weeks later, she again shows remarkable courage, this time taking on both Sarah and Mairéad in defence of Amy and fair play.

Episode 79

Amy is playing with the crib. Mairéad and Sarah approach and begin to play with the characters, changing the game. Amy is annoyed and storms off shouting 'That's my game'. Sarah and Mairéad proceed to enact a fairy tale theme together. Judy approaches Amy who explains that she's not friends with Sarah and Mairéad *'because they ruined my game'*. Judy goes directly to Mairéad and Sarah: Judy   *Em..em..em..You ruined Amy's game. That's not fair.*

Judy's agency shows not only her courage but her sense of fairness and loyalty and her growing ability to manage confrontation. Her relationship in the foursome emerges from the storming stage (Tuckman 1965) and becomes less contentious. After Christmas, she also spends more time playing with the other children and engaging with other playgroup activities. I have a sense of growing competence and security. One wonders what identities she brings with her to the new context of 'big' school and school-going colleagues.

7.5.4 Conclusion

This profile of Judy locates her transformation in terms of identity and belonging, contribution and well-being in her participation in peer relationships and activities. The findings resonate with the theory of Rich Harris (1998) who suggests that peer relationships play an extremely important role in the child's development. Judy invests significant emotional, cognitive and physical energy in stretching herself to participate more centrally in the activities of this group of children. While she brings with her skills and dispositions from her previous experiences, her transformation towards participation in this preschool context is largely guided by peer practices and values. She is, according to Bruner (1999: 172), developing a narrative about her possibilities based on her past perceptions '*a record that is related to the past, that is, 'autobiographical memory' so called but that is also extrapolated into the future-self with history and with possibility'*. One can only speculate as to how Judy will extrapolate her meaning into the future. Extending the research to engage more with Judy's past, present and future contexts would be extremely interesting.

The next section profiles Thomas as he appropriates the male way of being in this group, a transformation journey that, given his quite different background, brings him on a relatively steep learning curve.

7.6 Thomas's transformation

Thomas arrives among the newcomers on the first day of playgroup in September 2005, one of the three children accompanied by both their parents. He stays very close to them. He is four years old and I note that he is tall for his age and looks bigger and older that the other newcomers, particularly the two boys who attend that day, David

and Stan. He has the demeanour of a carefully groomed and sheltered child. Neither he nor his parents appear to know any of the other families.

Thomas lives in a commuter town. He has one older brother who is his regular play partner outside school. Both his parents work and both children are cared for by their grandmother during working hours in this suburban neighbourhood. Thomas appears reserved and shy among his new group of peers. On subsequent mornings he arrives with his grandmother to playgroup and hugs and kisses her as they part. From the beginning, he has mixed feelings about attending, as though he could foresee the difficult route to belonging ahead. This section presents a perspective on Thomas's transformation, again tracking his journey towards belonging and well-being within the group and towards building an identity as a powerful contributor.

7.6.1 Beginning the journey: settling in

In the first week only four boys attended playgroup.   From the beginning two of the other boys, Greg and David, seem to capture Thomas's interest and attention. Both are close to him in age but appear much more assertive and street-wise. Thomas is timid and very polite, constantly checking what is allowed and appropriate with teachers.

He does not feature in the documented play episodes during the first week although a review of the video locates him playing with the cars, jigsaws and blocks, intent on his own purposes. On Monday 12th September, he follows Greg into the homecorner. Greg finds a mobile phone and races around the room as a robber while Thomas stays and explores the equipment. Later in the morning, he returns with Greg and David to play 'workers'. He asks teacher's permission to remove his shoes and don builder's boots. Greg shows him where to find a tool box and then leaves with David.

On the 13th, 14th and 15th September the camera finds him playing with the train track, at the sand basin, the table top toys, the craft table and several episodes of painting. He is operating mostly alone and interacting with children when they enter his space. On the 15th September, as he plays nearby with a robot transformer, he is attracted by the dramatics of David and Greg building a structure with the wooden blocks. They're swinging the hammers and feigning injury. Teacher moves in to supervise and Thomas comes to watch. He suggests that they make a house but the boys seem

more interested in what Danby and Baker (1998a) identify as teaching each other to be masculine. Thomas, as later data confirms, is more interested in designing and building complex structures. When teacher calls for 'going out' time he joins the two boys in the line. Outside he follows them as they run up and down the slope, pretending, as Greg suggests, that they are running into the sea and being chased by sea monsters. Greg calls for help when the imaginary sea monster catches him and threatens to eat him. Although Thomas appears to contribute little, as we see later Greg registers his involvement and remembers it as a shared pleasurable experience.

On Monday 19th September he re-enters the homecorner and sits at the table with Tracey, looking dejected and lost. Tracey (as is her wont during this settling-in period) is talking to her Mam on the pretend phone. He picks up another phone.

Episode 80

Speaker	Initiative
Tracey	*That was your Mam*
Thomas	*No, it wasn't…..You don't know my Mam. You don't even know where I live*
	Tracey makes another call
Tracey	*I ringed your Mam again*
Thomas	*I'll ring my own Mam – blah blah blah blah*

This is the beginning of his third week in playgroup and he has explored much of the equipment and toys on offer. He has demonstrated an ability to take an interest and to entertain himself but he is finding it difficult to enter the pretence frame with other children. They seem more of a hindrance than a help to him. Today, he seems bored and frustrated and so reacts antagonistically to Tracey.

7.6.2 The road to belonging

Later, outdoors, in his first major step on the road to belonging, Thomas meets challenge. Accessing the running and chasing games seems relatively easy and so during outdoor play time he again joins Greg and David as they run down the hill. They return to the den under the tree where Greg suggests a new game.

Episode 81

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Greg	*That's the evil castle*	points to the tree
	Thomas pretends to climb the tree making animal sounds. Greg is annoyed	
Greg	*We're not monkeys, we're terrorists. We're terrorists and we're going to bomb the monsters*	Exasperated

Thomas	*I...I..I don't want to be a terrorist*	Nervously
Greg	*It's just pretend – just pretend, you idiot*	exasperated tone
	Thomas stalls his activity and waits. He follows Greg and David as they run down the hill again. Greg is throwing bombs. David falls down dead. Thomas observes. Greg talks into a wrist watch, a pretend phone	
Greg	*Come quick, my friend's dead*	
	David recovers and they all run towards the sand pit. Mairéad and Sarah and Kylie see them and run away. It now becomes a game of 'baddies' chasing the others.	

Thomas looks shocked and embarrassed by both the suggested 'terrorist' role and by Greg's rebuke. Greg dismisses his reluctance and he is left with the option of remaining under the tree or following the boys. He chooses the latter and manages in the 'follower' role. This involvement seems to register him as a group member. The following day he appears more at home. He enters a long sociodramatic play episode with David and Greg. Again he is attracted to the homecorner by their shouts *'Jump off into the water..jump off into the water'*. The boys and Mairéad are jumping from the table onto the mattress, the pretend swimming pool.

Episode 82

Speaker	Initiative
Greg	*Thomas, you have to take off your shoes*
Thomas/Teacher	*Can I take off my shoes?*
Teacher	*You can*
	Thomas however is more interested in the equipment and proceeds to play with the kettle and cup. He drinks tea. The others run around the room. Thomas takes photographs when they return. Greg goes to bed. David jumps from the table. Thomas locates a doctor's set. Greg and David join him on the floor. Greg tries to take the stethoscope but Thomas asserts ownership. David and Greg play 'dead'.
David	*Pretend I'm dead*
Greg	*Pretend we're dying*
	Thomas examines David's ears
Greg	*Remember we were playing that game – and we were dying and the seamonster eats us up*
Thomas	*Yeah*
Greg	*We have to play that again*
	David offers to be Thomas's helper and they both examine Greg. Thomas gives a report on his findings. He helps Greg to apply the blood pressure pad.
Greg	*I'm already better*
Thomas	*You have to test me now*
	Greg reads the blood pressure meter. The activity and conversation continues to focus on the medical treatment, lasting six minutes, as they take turns with roles and equipment. The theme then turns to dogs. David builds a dog house, Greg announces that he's a dog and Thomas extends with *'I'm making dinner for the dog'*. This was the longest sustained period of indoor sociodramatic play that involved Thomas so far, and was interrupted by 'tidy up time'.

The episode demonstrates some of Thomas's differences and at the same time many of the competencies that give Thomas access to the group activity. He is a reserved child who treads carefully. In this episode, he asks adult permission to remove his shoes and refrains from the less structured, highly active boys' play. His energy levels are very different to the other boys. He is calmer. He likes structure and predictability and so he is drawn to artefacts and roles to guide the play action. In this way his play seems to belong more to the female 'genre' with its emphasis on roles and relationships rather than action, as described by Nicolopoulou (1997). Here, Thomas is comfortable in the role of doctor and follows procedure with great attention to detail. David and Greg soon want to move on to more physically active play and so they become builders and dogs. Thomas manages a contingent role in this activity also that allows him to remain part of the group.

While different, Thomas at the same time identifies with the boys and is attracted by their loud antics. He wants to be with them and has the skills for gaining access and engagement. In the above episode he demonstrates his intersubjectivity skills. The boys respond to his 'doctor' initiative and play 'dead'. He responds consistently and contingently to their initiatives. It is difficult to hear what they say but it is clear from their movements that they are sharing attention and intention responsively. Thomas prolongs the engagement by suggesting that they take turns as the doctor.

Greg recalls their previous play with pleasure and so Thomas's brief but successful play experiences with them lays a foundation for becoming a play network. This is the beginning of a shared group history and a collective play repertoire that contributes to constructing the criteria for group identity and membership.

7.6.3 Towards well-being and membership

The following day, Thomas overcomes his shyness and finds the courage to approach the student teacher. He arrives in the home corner with a tool box and asks her if she needs anything fixed. Outside, he insists on taking a 'power' role, all indications of his growing confidence and familiarity with the practices of the playgroup.

Episode 83

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	It's a sunny day and the children enjoy an extended period outside.	

Greg	*We're going outside..we're going outside…. I've an idea – there'll be the boys' boat and the girls' boat. Is that a deal?*	entertaining the masses
	Outside, some children run around, others play in the sand pit, among the latter Thomas is digging. The girls, Sarah, Mairéad, Judy and Kylie tease the boys, waving and sticking out their tongues, and encouraging a chase. The girls run to the slides and the boys, including Thomas, mount the climbing frame/boat	
Sarah	*I'm going to the mermaid slide.*	
Greg	*This is the boys' boat*	
Thomas	*I'm the driver*	
Greg	*No, I'm the driver*	
Thomas	*OK. This is the driver's seat* (on top of slide). *I'm the driver…*	pretends to drive
	They chase the girls but Thomas is awkward and slow to descend. He follows them. They return to the boat and jump around to make it vibrate. Thomas nervously imitates.	

Thomas follows the boys and tries to attune to their antics. His energy levels and assertiveness is increasing. He insists on the powerful driver role. It takes him longer however to negotiate the physical challenges and so he constantly takes up the rear. The boys are keen to impress one another with their physical feats and risk taking. Rich Harris (1998) tells us that shy boys change because it is less socially acceptable for boys to be shy. It also appears imperative to be physically active and competitive. This is the practice that Thomas must follow to belong among the boys.

7.6.4 Further lessons in maleness

The fourth Monday of term sees Thomas, Greg, David, Mairéad and Judy help teacher make playdough and spend time playing with the end product. They are core leaders in the playgroup and Thomas now takes his place among them. He is a comfortable contributor particularly because this is a semi-structured activity, guided by teacher. He then follows Greg and Mairéad to the book corner, now a bus taking them home. He brings the tool box and finds a seat beside Greg. Teacher joins them.

Episode 84

Speaker	Initiative
	Thomas, David and Greg begin to tell Teacher about what they have at home
David	*I have three Power Rangers…..*
Greg	*Me too, and I have a fireman suit and I have a batman*
Thomas	*My Nana has a witches costume*
Teacher	*And when she dresses up is she scary?*

Thomas's contribution is of interest to the teacher but not to the other boys. They talk about Power Ranger suits. Thomas has yet to learn to differentiate between adult appropriate and peer-impressing dialogue. Further lessons follow. Thomas arrives

into the homecorner to a play episode that is already under way. Greg is in bed and Thomas begins some cooking activity. Greg rises and speaks to him as the child:

Episode 85

Greg   *Look, you're the kid right and you have to be quiet 'cos you're wreckin' my head.*

Thomas looks stunned, unsure how to interpret and respond. This is gruff talk and Thomas seems uncomfortable with it. He returns to cooking. Later, as David dresses for his building job, Thomas locates hairstyling equipment and styles David's hair.

Episode 86

Thomas works like a professional hairdresser, cutting, styling and drying David's hair. David is putting on his boots and paying little attention. Greg arrives and stands in horror, looking at Thomas: Greg (shouting very gruffly)   *That's for girls, you idiot.*

Thomas stops and looks down. Greg leaves. Thomas mooches in the clothes rack as though taking time to recover from his embarrassment and then follows Greg. Thomas is learning the subtle distinctions, the very thin boundary between acceptable and unacceptable male behaviour. The boys cooked, bathed babies, changed nappies and performed many traditionally female jobs but Greg clearly establishes here that hairdressing is taboo. I never saw Thomas play this role again.

7.6.5 Identifying with Greg

The following day, he finds the girls and Greg in the homecorner and requests access to the game.

Episode 87

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Thomas	*Can I play?*	
Greg	*It's just a girl's game*	Dismissively
Thomas	*What are they playing?*	
Mairéad	*Mammies and Daddies*	
Greg-Mairéad	*Can I be the Daddy?*	
Mairéad	*Yeah*	
	Thomas moves to the cooker but Greg continues to show his ambivalence to the 'girls' game by throwing the dolls around.	
Mairéad	*You stop throwing babies*	
Judy	*Would you stop that….*	

Thomas leaves with Greg, aligning with him. The difference between their energy levels becomes obvious again in the bookcorner/car. Thomas is placid and slow, Greg's movements are comparatively frenetic. However, Thomas constantly seeks a

seat beside Greg, as though recognising that this is the route to acceptance. They move to the homecorner where Mairéad suggests a killing game. They stab herself and Judy as they lie in bed. Thomas hesitantly engages in the stabbing until Tracey scolds him and threatens to report him. He watches Tracey leave, concerned. Teacher arrives and suspends the game. Greg and Thomas leave. There is a sense that Thomas has experienced the risk and worry of incurring teacher's disapproval and managed it.

Revved up and still in 'macho' mode, Greg wants to display his strength to the girls, constantly calling them to observe his feats. He lifts a major plastic toy structure above his head. Mairéad is impressed.

Episode 88

Speaker	Initiative
Mairéad to Teacher	*Greg is very strong*
Thomas	*Look at me, I can do that*
	Teacher is nervous and lays the structure on the ground and the boys kneel together to play with it

Thursday, Greg leaves with his mother because he's unwell. Monday he returns and Thomas becomes his regular play-mate. Greg is the leader, taking most of the leading initiative but Thomas follows one step behind, becoming a more active participant. I document him playing 'Dad' with Greg in the home corner, going with Greg and the boys on the trampoline/car to the merry-go-ground, playing 'Pirates of the Caribbean' outdoors and joining with Greg in the following as they dismiss the girls' play.

Episode 89

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
	Greg and Thomas are looking in at Mairéad and Sarah as they preen themselves in the homecorner. Sarah cocks her nose in the air.	
Greg	*You think you're great*	
Thomas	*They're not, are they?*	
Mairéad	*We don't think that don't we not Sarah?*	
Greg	*Mairéad, that is gay*	A term for stupid, Teacher tells me
Thomas	*No, it's boy with boy, that's gay…If I kissed a boy, that's gay*	

Again Thomas supports Greg in opposition to the girls. He also offers an 'adult' explanation for 'gay' but Greg is more comfortable with his own understanding. By identifying with Greg, Thomas is not only appropriating his practices but he also becomes positioned as one of the 'lead' boys in the eyes of other group members.

Tracey blames him for the fighting scene even though he was a hesitant participant. On that occasion he showed concern but in the next episode we can see that he is learning to take the knocks.

Episode 90

> *Tracey pours tea for everyone in the homecorner. David comes and drinks from all the cups. Thomas follows suit, presenting as greedy and nonchalant. Teacher, Lucy and Tracey are watching. Tracey is very annoyed and launches an attack on Thomas. He shrugs her off and moves on with David.*

Being one of the boys also requires a degree of physical toughness. A couple of days later, Greg and Thomas are play-mates.

Episode 91

> Greg finds a plastic Bat on the nature table. He swings the Bat and hits Thomas, marking his forehead and causing some pain. Thomas yelps:
> Thomas   *Ow –why did you do that?*
> Teacher enquires about what happened but Thomas refuses to say.

Thomas, who previously consulted Teacher with all problems, now does not report this more serious incident. Belonging in this friendship network requires that he refrains from telling tales and complaining about the odd wound of war.

The road to becoming one of the boys is not a smooth one for Thomas. He continues to struggle with the unstructured, unpredictable play that David and Greg often practice and that regularly involves jumping or fighting with the risk of censure. He shows a preference for building complex structures with blocks and integrating this into a play story or for fantasy games with miniature characters, particularly when his co-players are cooperative. When he is unwell one day, he continuously requests to be allowed to go home to play with his own 'lego'©. The company seemed too demanding for him. Teacher organises a table top activity for him which he pursues alone. He is absent for the following week. On return, he is reluctant to stay and his grandmother allows him another day of recovery. My notes of 17th October record;

> *Thomas's reluctance to return reminds me that there are some rather punchy lessons to be learned at playschool about what one can and cannot do if one wishes to identify with the 'male' group. Today, he returned from sick leave, still not feeling the best. He refused to stay and I was left with the sense that being in playschool is hard work and one needs to be in full health to cope. Playgroup lessons are perturbing at a cognitive level, but also at an emotional level. As an adult observer I'm becoming more and more aware of stormy relationships and challenging learning experience and that I'm revisiting the site where so much identity is constructed.*

7.6.6 Building an identity as a powerful contributor.

Greg is absent when Thomas returns and he only enters the sociodramatic play areas to listen to teacher tell stories. When Greg returns, there are two noticeable developments. Firstly, Thomas becomes more daring in his behaviour. For the first time I notice him kicking some toys on the floor and grabbing a toy from David. He later tells David to 'piss off'. Secondly, his partnership with Greg moves to a more equal footing because Thomas's play strengths emerge as they engage in fantasy play. Fantasy play, a skill well practised in play with his brother at home, is Thomas's forte. The style of play suits him because the number of participants is limited and the space is easier to protect from intrusion. The artefacts and a range of play motifs give the story a structure. Episode 28 and 34 provides examples and demonstrates his confidence and competence. Over the next few weeks he initiates many such episodes and builds a play repertoire with Greg that creates a further bond between them. The following conversation captures their growing mutual respect.

Episode 92

Speaker	Initiative
Greg	*If you had a blue coat, are you a pirate?*
Thomas	*You're the Red Ranger, 'cos you've got red. I'm the Blue Ranger*
	Teacher tells them of a friend who got stung by a jellyfish.
David	*Was there sharks?*
Greg	*Me and Thomas got a snake*
Stephe	*Yeah, but do you want to play a game*
Greg	*Yeah, Power Rangers*

Thomas's building becomes more and more sophisticated and the boys increasingly respect his better judgement in these matters. He leads the building of a vehicle with blocks, a very clever contraption, using cones as driving sticks and a horizontal cone as a telescope. The design required considerable thought and planning. On the 15th November, he builds a contraption that he calls Woofie, whom he introduces to me as his imaginary friend. I could see the frame of an animal with a trunk and he tried to add a tail but it wouldn't stand. He tells me that Woofie is sick and builds a wall of cones around him which he refers to as the hospital. He borrows a stethoscope to listen to Woofie's heart and then exchanges that for a blood-pressure meter. Later Teacher informs me that his Grandad had been taken into hospital the previous day. These imaginings may be part of coming to terms with the event.

My notes of 16th November comment:

> *Thomas has very good play ideas and David and Greg are guided by him. He has come a long way.*

This follows a remarkably long fantasy play episode that day between himself and Greg. They construct a highly dramatic, action based, tense, improvised story between them. Thomas leads in developing the plot and sustaining the tension.

Episode 93

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Thomas	*No no..you felled into that trap*	
	He takes Greg's character and drops him in a hole	
Thomas	*Now you fired these…this was a man..This is man….Don't let him get you. We'll stay there forever ..OK?*	Shouting and covering the hole with blocks
	Greg mounts blocks high above the hole	
Thomas	*We broke the thing down and then we locked the baddy in forever*	
Greg	He*lp, help it's a battle*	
Thomas	*phssss, phsss……* *We knocked the baddies in the cave…we're safe..OK?*	His character knocks the blocks slowly

This becomes a regular play pattern between them, often including David and sometimes Stan, Shane or Liam. In this way fantasy play becomes established as part of the playgroup culture. The following episode of 17th November includes Shane and is telling for a number of reasons:

Episode 94 Thomas and Greg (and Shane) play at the water basin. Greg follows Thomas's lead

Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
Greg	*Sharks are littler like that aren't they?*	
Thomas	*And they're littler like that aren't they? No, they're not ..they're huge*	
Greg	*They're not huge*	
Thomas	*They're not that size, honest*	Gently
Greg	*Dinosaurs are huger*	
	They transfer water from the pool	
Greg	*Pretend I live with you and I'm a teenager*	No response
Thomas	*These are in the game…but these guys are in the game because they be our pets*	
Greg/Teacher	*Teacher do you want a shark pie? Thomas says that sharks are free*	
Thomas	*They're free to go*	Clarifying
Greg /Shane	*Thomas's coming to my house.*	
Thomas	*and not pretend for the game*	He is nodding
Greg	*I have lots of toys for boys*	
Thomas	*and not for girls*	
Greg	*My sister always plays with Barbies*	
Thomas	*Not us*	

Firstly it appears that Thomas has earned Greg's respect as a knowledgeable contributor. Secondly, he returns to the 'teenager' concept that Thomas had

introduced three weeks earlier (episode 41), which Greg could not seem to grasp at the time but which obviously left a lasting impression. Here he tries to explore the concept with Thomas again. Most significantly, the boys have reached a new milestone in their relationship. They are planning a play visit to Greg's house. Greg proudly informs Shane of their intentions, thereby defining himself and Thomas as best friends. Thomas establishes that this is a real, not a pretend suggestion and they register themselves clearly as boys by defining themselves in opposition to girls.

Thomas was on sick leave for a further week, returning on the 5th December. As though he needs to gently re-acclimatise, he spends much time making Christmas cards and decorations. On 7th December, Greg is absent and he re-enters fantasy play with David. On the 12th December, he plays a prolonged game of 'trolls and orks' with Greg, David, Liam and Stan. Planks from the block area serve as weapons which they carry inside their sweaters on their backs. Thomas is a significant contributor to the play theme, even defying teacher's orders to abandon the weapons and replace the planks. He has definitely moved into action mode. After Christmas, he inveigles Greg and Stan to leave their exploration of the new toys and join himself and David in role play as builders. On the 23rd January, in what might be considered role reversal when we remember the *'That's for girls, you idiot'* incident (Episode 88) the previous term, Greg seems to need Thomas's approval before agreeing to play with the girls. Thomas takes up position as 'expert' in the practices of male group.

Episode 95

Mairéad/ Greg	*We're playing witches and princesses. You can be the prince*	They are dressed in capes and look excited
Greg	Says nothing	Gets 'superman' cape and returns to Thomas
Greg-Thomas	*I'm not playing with them – They just want me to play with them*	
Thomas	*Don't play with them girls*	Thomas projects his bottom in a gesture of disdain
Greg	*We could be the bodyguards..*	
Thomas	*I'm……. (inaudible)*	moving to return a toy to the shelf
Greg /Thomas	*Do you want to play the game they're playing? We could be their bodyguards.*	Tries to make eye contact to check his response
Thomas	*Yeah, OK.*	

7.6.7 Conclusion

As they follow Mairéad as bodyguards, I hear Greg say to Thomas '*Brother, I'm goin' to give you some special powers'* and I'm amused at the possible layers of meaning in

the statement. He has indeed given Thomas special powers because he has been a major force in enculturating Thomas into the ways of this group.

Thomas's identity has undergone major change. He enters the group as a reserved boy who likes to consult with teacher and ask permission to do things, who doesn't like unstructured, highly active play and who is very much at home in solitary play. Through his transactions with this group of players, he grows more agentive in the style of the male cohort of children, transforming his identity and position within the group.   He moves towards more central and expert participation, taking more responsibility for organising group activities and becoming a strong voice in establishing the play criteria valued in this context. As we can see from the data cited, Thomas is transformed in ways that help him to belong within the values and practices of the group and at the same time his transformation allows him to become a significant contributor to the culture created by this group of children.

Thomas is a competent communicator but he must gain access to the group culture and contribute to its construction to become a significant player. His ability to read social cues, to select contingent initiatives, to present his initiatives in visible, comprehensible ways and to connect both cognitively and emotionally are the skills that give him access to the guiding frame for operating within the group. It is his drive to share understanding and to belong that propels him on the journey. The image of the cultural child who lives in constant communion with others emerges. As he gains acceptance, he becomes repositioned and his identity both in terms of his own narrative and his public persona seems to change. He is proactively appropriating and contributing to the construction of knowing within this community and being transformed in ways that are guided by the values and practices that he is party to constructing.

Chapter 8   Discussion and Conclusions

8.0 Introduction

The previous three chapters record the application of central sociocultural propositions to the study of children's sociodramatic play. They address the following questions: How does culture mediate and support children's participation in play? How is participation negotiated in the micro space of person to person interaction and in the macro space of transaction with more distal cultural artefacts, discourses and practices? How are both context and individuals transformed toward on-going participation?

The underlying aim of the thesis was to explore how children organise their participation in sociodramatic play from a sociocultural perspective. This was addressed by conducting an ethnographic enquiry in a preschool playgroup setting. The sociocultural theory driving the research leads to this methodological approach and provides useful concepts and tools for the study. What emerges is a perspective that offers an alternative and innovative way to understand children's play participation. The dialectic between the theory and the data generates a focus on the social forces that frame and support children's participation. While these insights themselves are not radically new, giving them renewed emphasis can radically inform education policy and practice.

This final chapter discusses the key findings emerging from the study and considers the implications for pedagogical practice and policy development in the early childhood sector. Tangible links between theory and practice are drawn to inform early education practice.

8.1 A Pedagogy of Connection: An important contribution

The data, as interpreted in this research, tells the story of how children organise their participation in sociodramatic play. The children send us a very clear message. They want to belong in community and to register as valuable and powerful contributors.

As they come together in a new context and group, they tentatively investigate the rules for participation and belonging. They observe, they imitate, they test meaning, borrowing competence from more capable others and from the cultural artefacts and practices around them and growing in confidence as they become more familiar with the rules of participation. Their sociodramatic play presents as a very useful tool in helping them to become more expert. They practice the art of connection and coordination and in the pretend world they explore the ways of knowing in many roles and contexts. They draw on the support of the meaning and functions embedded in the artefacts and practices of the group to help their meaning-making. They show us that successful players read the rules and thereby can be trusted to contribute contingently. At action, verbal and emotional level, they connect with others and collaborate to create play stories. It involves being attuned to the goals of the activity, including the relationship and power agendas.

Throughout the data, children demonstrate two critical and mutually responsive skills. Firstly, they engage in intersubjective dialogue, that is, they share a focus of attention and link with one another's intentions. They lead and follow, they are agentive and responsive. Secondly, they are players in the interpretation and reconstruction of the cultural frame for participation within this group. The context affords them opportunities to become involved in valued group activity and to contribute their voices and they actively pursue these opportunities. Connection for them is both the medium and outcome of participation.

Within this perspective, the role of pedagogy is to help children connect to other people and to the historical and cultural meaning and ways of knowing that are reified in the artefacts and practices of their world. This is what learning is about. Learning in any domain or in any community of practice is a process of interpreting, responding and reconstructing with others, a connective process. Primarily, therefore, the findings suggests a shift from a pedagogy of the individual to a pedagogy of connection, a pedagogy that centralises the child's need to connect with others, cognitively, socially and emotionally, and to contribute to the development of the culture in which s/he participates. This is an important contribution of this research to the body of emerging theory in Ireland.

In embracing a pedagogy of connection, we immediately acknowledge the integrated nature of care and education. The data firmly establishes the relationship between emotional literacy, cognition and participation. The level of emotional literacy that these children demonstrate and the competency they achieve, particularly in situations where their identities are at stake, is one of the major insights offered by this research. Helping children to connect at an emotional level is critical to their development as learners. When we describe learning as the process of changing identity (Lave and Wenger, 1991), we recognise that becoming, becoming a preschooler, a reader or a scientist or an artist, involves the whole person, emotionally, cognitively and physically entering the role. We also recognise that children enter roles and practices that are valued and made possible in their communities. They learn what the community constructs as valued and functional knowledge to support the goals of community activities. The data demonstrates this. These children are busy constructing the relationships, practices and valued knowledge that frames their participation in the playgroup context.

This explication of sociocultural theory through the data has the potential to inform the debate in Ireland in a number of important ways. Firstly, it can support the integration of care and education throughout the education system. Secondly, it focuses attention on the socially constructed nature and value base of what we consider worthwhile learning. It offers the perspective that the individual child's ability and potential may not be so reliant on age and stage of development or on individual ability but rather a product of the values and tools that we use to define it.

These theoretical challenges point to a concern in the Primary Curriculum (Ireland, 1999b) and the early childhood curriculum (N.C.C.A., 2004). Both documents need to articulate the theoretical approach or approaches that underpin their views of learning. These theoretical debates must happen if we are to genuinely engage with issues of learning, inclusion, diversity and inequality in our education system. This research suggests that we need to articulate the difference between constructivism and socioculturalism and integrate the latter into our philosophy. In so doing, we begin to engage with (i) the concept of learning as changing identity (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and consequently the integrated nature of care and education and (ii) the cultural child and the values and functions of what s/he learns within community.

These findings and others are further explored and explicated throughout this chapter as we review the implications arising from a focus on the context, the interpersonal transactions and the individual and cultural transformations. A significant contribution of this research is the adaptation of Rogoff's (1995) three planes of analysis to engage with the study of children's sociodramatic play and particularly to capture the dialectic between participants, participation and meaning-making. As we follow these children through three planes we observe them working through the self-other-context relationship and in the process constructing the meaning or knowing system that frames their lives. In this section, I review each plane and discuss the key findings and the implications for pedagogy.

8.1.1 Community or Apprenticeship Plane

Beginning with the Community or Apprenticeship plane, the cohort of children and their relationships and styles of participation are discussed. A play episode (Episode 15) is used to demonstrate the role of artefacts, practices and social discourses in the play story. The analysis foregrounds two central contextual elements that mediate children's participation in play and these are briefly reviewed in this section.

8.1.1.1 *The cultural guiding frame*

From this first plane, but permeating all planes, the concept of the 'cultural guiding frame' emerges. Shared values, purposes, meanings, practices and symbolic systems, both from the broader culture and the immediate context create a weave that offer these children a reference frame to guide their contributions and support contingency. They are reified in the artefacts, discourses and practices, of the contexts, institutions and communities of practice that children enter. We see how this frame operates and is reconstructed in episode 15 and begin to recognise a particular advantage of sociodramatic play from a sociocultural perspective. In play the cultural guiding frame is made more explicit for the children. The players demonstrate that they do not do as they please or follow a lone, innately driven path. They are careful to attune to the rules and affordances of each play context. In the pretend scenario, they often make this explicit by naming or exaggerating what they are doing, in the process self-registering their own initiatives but also making them legible to others. Children work to share the guiding frame so that each player knows and works within the constraints of the roles and thereby coordination benefits from the guidance offered. They

operate the rules, adapting them to new purposes, even playing with them and resisting them in demonstration of their competence but ultimately enjoying the mastery, power and connection possibilities that familiarity allows. In their play roles, they emphasise and even exaggerate the key reference points. Mothers are directive and solicitous about care routines. They prepare food, dress children, send them to bed, organise their parties. Fathers are also directive but they spend more time working outside the home and with friends. They speak in deep, gruff voices and walk with a determined strut to convey bulk and power. Partygoers, Firefighters and workers wear identifying clothes and carry tools of the trade. In the family, in school, at work, at the doctor's clinic, players engage with practices and behaviours that are congruent with the culture of that community and context. Even their way of sitting on the pretend bus is specific to that context. Those who transgress the rules are often called to rank. Their pleasure in playing with others who work within the cultural guiding frame in a sustained way was palpable.

In the new group context, children struggle to access this frame. The data documents the struggles of newcomers and connection-challenged children and demonstrates the role of more competent peers and adults in their induction. As children grow more familiar with the frame they are better placed to contribute to its reconstruction. This relationship between familiarity with and contribution to the cultural guiding frame is a dialectic that is often most obvious in its absence. Children who do not master the frame struggle to gain access and group membership. Ongoing exclusion from the group means that the facility to powerfully contribute to the frame is reduced and the problem of access is exacerbated.

That communities and contexts develop and operate within a guiding frame for behaving and thinking is a concept that poses challenges for many within the early childhood education sector who, following Piaget (1937/71), believe that children work to an inner code and interest trajectory and that the freedom to construct their own knowledge is essential to their self-actualisation (Carswell, 2002). This research suggests that the cultural guiding frame within every role, institution and context acts as a guiding, coordinating force while at the same time allowing for flexibility, resistance and change. One chooses and is positioned within the affordances and constraints of the cultural guiding frame but it is collectively constructed and

therefore contestable and changeable. The skills of accessing, operating, contributing to, critiquing and changing the frame are important for children's sense of well-being, identity and belonging.

Helping children to read and contribute to the cultural guiding frame is therefore a significant role for the pedagogue. Her/his job is to make the frame visible, while at the same time questioning its values and practices and making a space for children to disrupt its discourses and contribute to its regeneration. Social practices and discourses, as enacted in play, can be reconstructed. Pedagogues can make space to revisit the practices and discourses of play and present them for argumentation among the children. Observation and documentation helps in this regard. In reviewing observations and documentation, the pedagogoue identifies practices and discourses that can be re-presented to children as a provocation for further investigation and enquiry. '*Today, Kylie asked if girls can be builders. What do you think?*' might be a way of initiating a worthwhile discussion. They can be relocated in alternative play stories, for example where the mother becomes the police officer or the princess saves the prince. Paley (1997) also suggests 'story acting' as a way of presenting play-narratives for reflection and renegotiation.

Again, key to taking a sociocultural pedagogical approach is the recognition that as a community we operate within a cultural guiding frame that is interpreted and reconstructed between community members. Sociodramatic play offers a context and medium for the reconstruction process and for pedagogical guidance.

8.1.1.2   Group dynamics

Perhaps because research on pedagogy, as evidenced in the report of Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden and Bell (2002), often focuses on individual children or on child-teacher relationships, the area of group dynamics between children has been largely neglected. This research found it to be a significant contributor to the affordances and constraints for children's participation in shared sociodramatic play. All of the children in this cohort participated and connected to some degree but the combination of personalities was more fortuitous for the participation and synergy of some than for others. As children developed play networks they also negotiated power and trust and mutual understanding and acceptance with varying degrees of

success. Group dynamics and the psychological tools that mediated them seemed different for the male and female cohort. Furthermore, particular personality combinations seemed to spark high levels of action, repartee and innovation. Patterns and practices arising from specific group dynamics were seen to affect not just the functions of the particular group and individual identities but to have possible implications for the on-going culture of the institution. The conflict between Greg and Sarah presents an example. This conflict could have been resolved but continued, in some form, throughout a second year with consequences for the gender divide in the play of the group. The influence of group dynamics was brought to the fore when play networks were disrupted by changes in mood or activity or by absences. These often had a significant effect on group dynamics and generated renewed 'storming and norming' (Tuckman 1965) among players, creating both challenges for children and adults and possibilities for reorganisation. Ultimately, we are reminded that children construct their ways of knowing and identities with their companions and so companions and the group dynamic are important players in what is made possible.

The issue has implications for how pedagogues support group formation and membership access and how change and conflict is used as a learning and meaning-making opportunity. Pending changes, for example, in group structure or daily routines, the implications can be named and discussed. Children can be mentored towards developing intersubjectivity with children from different backgrounds and skill bases. The pedagogue identifies children's own positive connections and supports their interpretations of one another's meanings. In the case of Greg and Sarah, the pedagogue can draw attention to their commonalities and collaborative successes and may even offer suggestions as to how Sarah might be more included in the decision making of the trio. These are the kind of strategies that emerge when we observe and document children's collaborative play and when the objective of pedagogy is to help children to connect.

8.1.2 The Interpersonal Plane: Intersubjectivity

The cultural guiding frame as a cohesive force that mediates and coordinates group transactions supports intersubjectivity. The children in this research demonstrate that establishing intersubjectivity is a proactive process. It happens at two reciprocally responsive levels: in their interactive moment to moment communications through

emotional, verbal and action exchanges and in the collaborative play-story space to which children bring their interpretations from the broader and immediate context and pool their contributions to construct shared meaning. In the first space, they (i) establish common ground (ii) coordinate their contributions and (iii) activate agency. How do they do this? The data suggests that artefacts are often an early point of contact. Tools and equipment, for example, not only provide a shared focus of attention but they embody practices and functions that indicate how to proceed and what to expect. Observation, ranging from furtive glances to intent observation is another tool employed to communicate interest, to follow another's attention and intention and to learn how things are done in this place. Children also imitate, because in the doing, they embody the motives and intentions of the actions and they establish commonality with another. More competent peers and adults model expertise and guide the newcomers into the practices and values of the new setting. In this interactive process, they each stretch to engage with the other's perspective and between them they construct something that is changed and adapted to new purposes.

Building on the strategies that children themselves use in play and supported by the work of Aarts (2000), we can identify concrete pedagogic strategies for adults supporting intersubjectivity in the interaction moments. They can:
- identify the initiatives and intentions of the players by naming and describing them and in this way coordinate attention and intention within the group. Here the adult acts in a supportive role as interpreter, guide and coordinator.
- for those who struggle with connection, the adult works to keep them connected by consistently registering, often naming, their own and other's initiatives, using exaggerated emotional tones and gesture to communicate affect in particular, and connecting the children to the layers of meaning that must be communicated between them. Children who are challenged also need more direct guidance as to what they can do, rather than cannot do, within the constraints and affordances of the context. Key to managing intersubjectivity in any context is the ability to read its guiding frame.
- for children who struggle to imagine and contribute ideas, the adult can offer suggestions: *'John is cooking the dinner, you can set the table'*. In this way we support children's awareness of others and at the same time bring them into contingent responses and coordinated play stories.

- contribute positive perspectives and tools for reading the behaviours and intentions of others. In the data, teacher, for example, reinterprets Stan's intentions for Greg. This strategy supports awareness of children's many ways of connecting and begins to build trust.
- observe, assess and give feedback on children's ability to collaborate, guide and share competence, build on other's contributions, and generate interesting ideas

These are examples of concrete intersubjectivity strategies that emerge when we recognise, following Vygotsky, that learning is constructed on the intermental plane. Further development of possible pedagogical strategies within a sociocultural curriculum is a task for another time. Two points require emphasis. Firstly, within the sociocultural perspective the pedagogue is repositioned as a 'connection' support between children and 'contributor' to their meaning-making and secondly, this perspective points to pedagogic ways of working as described briefly above. The pedagogue helps children to connect, to find common ground and coordinate their contributions. S/he supports their interpretations and reconstructions. Corsaro (1985) calls this 'boundary' work. S/he stands on the boundary between the adult and peer culture. Her/ his job is to equip children with the ways of knowing and ways of constructing knowledge that are valued in the adult world and to support them as they collectively reconstruct these ways towards the purposes of group activity. As a guiding participant, the pedagogue also works at meta-level to support children as they connect with and guide one another, reconstruct the practices and discourses that frame their lives together and develop their world narratives and their place within them. Bruner's (2004: 694) conclusion is a reminder of the crucial importance of this work: *'In the end we become the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about our lives'.* We want children to build narratives that are about meeting challenge and finding solutions, about constructing frames to which they have a sense of contribution and belonging and about engaging with pleasurable activities and encounters. It is essential that the pedagogue sees her/himself as a co-contributor to these life narratives.

The sociocultural perspective leads us to reconsider the interaction space as the locus for the transformation of meaning and identity. This is the space where the learning that drives development is supported. Children develop identities as significant and

valued community members when they experience being seen and heard and responded to. In collaborative activity, the participants value the contributions of others and feel valued themselves. When children's contributions are valued, they learn that they can contribute and belong. When the shared initiatives bring pleasure and connection, the players have a sense of well-being and communication. In these interaction moments, emerging from the reciprocal responses of others, the child's identity is constructed. Greg demonstrates this in episode 15. He recognises that in the interaction between himself and Noel an unacceptable identity is being constructed and so he re-projects into the group arena a profile of himself as a tough male. Children want to belong within the values and goals of their communities. They want to explore the valued ways of knowing that are part of the varied contexts that make up their world and to feel competent and responsible within them.

Bruner (1999: 162) says of intersubjectivity: *'I believe that one of the most important gifts that a cultural psychology can give to education is a reformulation of this impoverished conception'.* This thesis supports Bruner's suggestion, both through the reconstruction of a sociocultural theory that centralises intersubjectivity and through the research data that shows intersubjective processes and outcomes in action. It calls for the reformulation of intersubjectivity as a core aim in early childhood education – a pedagogy that I call a pedagogy of connection.

8.1.2.2 *The emotional world of play*

A key rediscovery in this research is the significance of emotions in the being and communication of children. Working within the education system and particularly within the Piagetian paradigm as translated in early childhood education, one tends to focus on children's interactions with the world of materials and logical concept formation. Consequently, the level of emotional literacy and dexterity that these children exhibited was a revelation. They were able to read and predict one another's emotional initiatives and in the instant devise complex responses. We saw how Greg managed to integrate the male role into the girls' game without losing face with Thomas; how Sarah managed teacher's enquiries into her relationships and how Mairéad gives Sarah a 'jockey-back' and physically separates her from Judy. These children employed advanced cognitive processes but it was their emotional literacy that seemed to both motivate and inspire them.

From the very beginning, the data in this research tells of emotional journeys. In the early episodes, we encounter the newcomers struggling to find security and mutual trust. They are challenged to learn to give and take, to lead and follow, to manage the self-other relationship. Their first attempts at connection are tentative and open to misinterpretation. The proleptic quality, the establishment of authenticity and reliability, takes time. Operating in new contexts among strangers without adequate direction or guidance can be very stressful for children (or indeed for adults). They do not stride carelessly into play stories. They are concerned about behaving appropriately and about understanding and being understood. The more competent are on high alert to the emotional messages, the power struggles, the relationship implications. These children, at only three and four years of age, enacted this knowing in their everyday interactions. They read the multiple agendas and demonstrate an on-going *'subtle awareness of moods and purposes, of instantaneous shifts of interest and emotional reactions'* (Trevarthen 2002: 8). Again, Trevarthen, whose contribution to our understanding of the emotional world of infants has been enormous, ventures to say that from toddler to advanced learner, learning is located in '*embodied, embedded, passionate experience, and companionship'* (Ibid: 11). His research, and that of Daniel Stern, however, concentrates on the world of infants and their first intersubjective connections. This research on children's sociodramatic play extends the research of Trevarthen and Stern to the world of preschoolers and play, and finds parallels and continuity. It captures beyond doubt the emotional world of communication and relationships and involvement in activity and the level of sophisticated cognition achieved by this older age group.

The findings also extend the insights that emerge from Corsaro's (1979; 1997) research by again identifying and emphasising the emotional quality of participation in play. While Corsaro identifies the emotional themes in children's play (life and death, danger and rescue) and the challenges of access and the role of conflict, he seems to avoid any discussion of the identity issues emerging. Indeed, Corsaro does not identify any on-going rejection or worrisome hurt. Mindful of Prout's (2003) warning that when we expose the challenges and risks for children, adults begin to see them as in danger or dangerous and move to pathologise their behaviour, this thesis endeavours to avoid both scaremongering and romanticising children's experiences.

Dealing with everyday conflict, relationship power and politics and knocks and hurt are part of human development and many of these children not only managed well but seemed to relish the challenge. They created contexts in play where their experiences, constructs and concerns could be revisited and renegotiated. However, this is not to say that play in itself is necessarily beneficial to all children. Rather, the benefit of play in children's lives is directly related to what children learn in play and how they are supported in managing that learning. It is a context and medium for meaning-making but the meaning created does not always support a child's well-being and sense of belonging. Some of the play episodes reported in this thesis indicate that children often experience rejection, powerlessness and oppression. It seemed that one child's identity as disruptive was being constructed, another's as an outsider. The boys often shared blunt lessons in maleness while the girls shared more subtle messages about model female personas. Contributing voices from the broader community and from the media and commercial interests joined in their constructions and these constructions, supported in children's play, often privileged some over others. The lesson is that play has enormous potential as a context and medium for meaning-making but it is not harmless.

In this playgroup, three children in particular were identified, who needed additional support, specifically adult expertise in supporting them to connect and participate. These are not children who are categorised as 'special needs' but whose lives and learning could be enormously improved with appropriate intervention in this early childhood institution. Here, they can learn, with a supportive adult, in everyday play with others, how to connect and belong. The playgroup offers an opportunity for such intervention and this research suggests that at policy level, we need to commit additional resources at this stage, when they are most effective, rather than later.

Furthermore, it is time to acknowledge the integrated nature of emotion and cognition, of care and education. The children in this research demonstrate that it is the facility to be emotionally attuned and responsive that afforded and energised their cognitive abilities. As Trevarthen (2002: 11) so eloquently says *'[t]he thread of imagination, and the companionship of experience must be kept intact if understanding is to retain confidence in that link to reality - the being in the world we share, to which all discovery, invention and creation must return'.* Learning, whether in play with peers

or in the more formal school setting is situated in relationships and motivated by the desire to master skills and knowledge to contribute to activity in valued communities.

8.1.2.3   *Play as context and medium for exercising competency and complexity*

The facility to be emotionally attuned and alert is a key element of children's agency in play. The data provides delightful examples of quick strategic thinking and shows the remarkable ability of these children to anticipate and align with the intentions of others. They show initiative, but also guidance for the other and an ability to follow. The importance of the latter is often forgotten. Here again we see the advantage of sociodramatic play. When their play is exciting and challenging children are inspired to new heights of vigilance and cleverness. Sociodramatic play is improvisational so responses must be quick, contingent and still progressive.   Some of the play episodes recorded suggest that their improvisations skills actually outshine those of adults. These skills seem to belong and be best exercised in the world of pretend play and seem to wane for lack of practice as people get older. Watching and empathising with the teachers as they tried to engage in fast moving fantasy play, in particular, certainly contributed to this conclusion.

Also made very visible in children's play is the reciprocal relationship between reality and pretence and the complexity created by that relationship. In play, Judy introduces the theme of conflict to frame a story but also to drive a real-life rift between Amy and Sarah. Greg changes from Dad to brother to find a way into the girls' story but also to create a space for repairing difficult relationships. When these children were threatened with the loss of leadership and control, they regularly came up with innovative ideas and introduced them with excitement and conviction to reposition themselves. Their agency had multiple layers of complex meaning and agendas. They wanted to progress their play stories but they were also negotiating issues of power and relationships. Consequently, we are reminded that the pretend element in play should not be interpreted as flippant but rather the element that allows children to introduce serious relationship and interpretation issues for further exploration. The core group, Sarah, Mairéad, Greg, Thomas, David, Judy and Amy provided examples of the heights of sophisticated negotiations that can be reached.

The insights confirm the image of the competent child but they also alert us as pedagogues to the issues and concerns that are re-anchored in play stories and to the possibilities created in the pretence world for children to reintroduce the issues to the public domain and reconstruct and change their meaning. Perhaps as pedagogues we can help Judy to hear the reassurances of her play-mates and help Sarah and Greg to identify the solutions that will allow them play together. For the pedagogue, orienting her/his eye and ear towards children's meaning-making is the first step. Recognising their interpretations and attempts to renegotiate reconstruction is the next.

Play is both a context and medium for learning about the rules of participation in real life. The rules can be narrow and exclusive and operate in ways that favour some over others but they are contestable. We have seen how children construct roles and relationships and thereby create possible selves and identities. Children can develop narratives that identify them as competent, powerful and valued members of the group and contributors to social activity through their play. Adults, therefore, need to be aware that play is a context and medium for constructing identity. Adults can support this process both in the play and by creating other fora for reflecting on play stories.

In play, children get a feel for the system within which the roles operate and they experiment with the technical skills required for the role. Parents cook and care for children, builders use tools and fix things, shopkeepers price and package things and astronauts wear special clothing and explore new surroundings. Adults can facilitate a broad range of play themes, scenarios, roles and contexts as learning places for children and build on their familiarity with these contexts to interest them in progressing the technical skills involved. Children can be taught the skills of cooking or a counting system or the details of habitats and in turn can bring their advanced expertise to be shared in play.

Adults too are major contributors to the affordances and constraints of the play context. They can construct environments that reflect children's cultures and promote familiarity and inclusion of diversity. Such play contexts allow children to be competent and powerful. They can help children to reflect on cultural practices and values and to construct alternative ways. They can promote play opportunities that allow children to contribute and reconstruct their everyday experiences, for example,

possible ways of extending, changing or amending the role of a mother or a father or of dealing with anger and power, cognisant that play is a tool for reflection-in-action for children.

8.1.2.4   *The Process of Appropriation*

Appropriation (Rogoff 1990) is the sociocultural term for this process of interpretation and collective reconstruction.   The term involves a shift from a concept of the child acquiring culture to the concept of the child co-constructing culture as s/he engages in activity with others. The term also involves a shift from thinking about how change impacts on children to considering how children collectively reorganise themselves to engage with change. How do children, for example, organise themselves to manage all-day adult supervision and control? It would appear that adult control does not prevent children from agentively seeking control of their lives. Rather children learn its more subtle workings and use the strategies for their own empowerment. The children in this study used adult strategies to get and share power and they actively managed adults so that adults too made 'secondary adjustment' (Corsaro 1985). Greg, for example, reinterpreted his actions so that they were more acceptable to teacher. He knew how to present as innocent. Mairéad engaged teacher in her hoolahoop throwing, thereby removing its deviant quality. Children in turn use the adult control strategies that they themselves experience. Rather therefore than just considering the impact of new work-life patterns, technology and commercialisation on children, the image of the competent, agentive, emotionally astute child that emerges from this data suggests that it is valuable to consider how children interpret and reconstruct these developments towards creating, controlling and making sense of their own lives. In this shift we begin to engage with the concept of appropriation whereby practices and meanings and the psychology that we use to construct, explain and understand our lives are continuously amended to fit with new dynamics and purposes. We are reminded that appropriation is a process of change not towards an end but towards participating in and engaging with new practices and purposes. Practices, meaning and the psychological tools we use to explain them change.   As pedagogues we must be aware that children not only appropriate the cultural bank of knowledge and practices that we as adults share with them but also the very thinking tools that we use to construct them.

Further sociocultural concepts that explain how children appropriate culture in and through play are 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and the concept of coordination rather than consensus (Matusov 1996; Tomasello and Racocsky, 2003). Children enter the roles and activities of a community of practice and reconstruct the rules of the practice to guide their activities. They stretch to engage with and build on one another's contribution and thereby create a flexible weave that represents multiple perspectives. Mothers, for example, can operate anywhere on the spectrum between 'mean' and angry to sorry and guilt-ridden. Children can be sweet and compliant or resistant and delinquent. The frame that is constructed through the coordination of perspectives does not demand consensus – only that children operate within some recognisable rules.

And children most certainly recognise the rules. As we watch the children reconstruct the community of practice of shopkeepers or astronauts, we see them enact the practices, discourses and forms of knowledge that are specific to these communities. In play children enter many communities of practice and construct possible selves (Bruner 1996) within them. They engage with a way of knowing that is distributed across the context, the role and the contributions of others. The possible selves are thereby a collective construction – a combination of contributions.

This understanding raises questions about the 'laissez faire' approach prevalent in early childhood education in Ireland (Carswell 2002). Who has the right to contribute to creating 'possible selves' for children? How do we decide whose values and goals should be prioritised? The data analysis raises our awareness of the issues of identity construction and powerful contributing voices. For example, Jade *'a popular fahionista'* and Sasha who *'knows what she wants and how to get it'* are characters created by Bratz.com. They present as possible selves for the 'foursome' who regularly reconstruct these personas in play. When we take a 'laissez-faire' approach, other powerful voices, often using very powerful media, become major contributors. The data should caution pedagogues against complacency and raise many questions and dilemmas for them about competing values and agendas. We are reminded that identity, both personal and public, is a collective construction, involving multiple contributions and agendas.

Doing nothing is not 'laissez faire'. It is a proactive stance. Again, the data clearly demonstrates that children interpret from the adult world and use adult practices and meaning-making tools to understand and reconstruct their worlds. They tell us, for example, about power and rules and how they are used to include and exclude. A 'laissez faire' approach may be interpreted as condoning the status quo. As pedagogues we need to work continuously in reflective mode, particularly examining our own perceptions and feelings because, as the data demonstrates children are tuned into the emotional messages. The teachers in this data were often alert to children's exclusion tactics and supported them to reflect on their impact on others. There is also evidence that many questionable practices and values creep in and become part of the playgroup culture both at real and pretend level. The pedagogue has a responsibility to contribute to constructing a frame for knowing within the group that respects the rights and dignity of all participants. Children need guidance. The pedagogue is both a contributor and facilitator of the conversation.

8.1.2.5   *Play as a reflexive tool for children and pedagogues*

The data in this research, viewed with a sociocultural lens, suggests that these playing children are constructing their play and real world and their place within it in the here and now, and at the same time they are major contributors to the broader culture and play a key role in constructing how adults and children alike know the world, both now and in the future. Childhood is not separate from adulthood. They live in a responsive reciprocal relationship to one another. As adults guide children in the ways of community, children guide adults towards new constructions. It is a process of both continuity and change. As we observe children participating in play in this research these connections become more visible. These playing children demonstrate that in interpreting and reconstructing the adult culture for their own immediate purposes, they contribute to the regeneration and reconstruction of a shared culture. They reconstruct, for example, how mothers, fathers and friends relate and behave and create possible new ways of being within these roles. Play therefore becomes a reflexive tool for children, a way of reflecting on and changing the adult culture.

The pedagogues too are invited to reflect on children's constructions and to question the value base of their adult practices and the messages that they communicate. The messages about status, identity and power relationships are not fixed. They can be

changed. Educators must question for themselves and teach children to question. A prerequisite for such a questioning pedagogy is an understanding of what is going on among children, what kind of cultures they construct. This research provides some insights that can inform the reflective practitioner. Further insights come from knowing children's families and communities and the values, practices and goals that children are interpreting and reconstructing with them. A key aim in developing partnerships with parents is to engage them as parents and as a community, in the process of reflection and conscientisation (Freire 1972) and to give them their rightful voice in the construction of the values, practices and goals and possible selves made available to their children through the curriculum.

8.1.3 Participatory transformation

The research provides empirical examples of how children use play stories to actively transform culture and their own participation and identities simultaneously. We see how the social discourses and practices of power, rules and gender are practiced, experienced and transformed by relocating them in play roles and stories with play partners. The new dynamic instigates change. The learning in turn transforms children's ways of participating and consequently their identities. The research follows Judy and Thomas as they transform towards more central participation in the play of their friendship networks. They attune to the practices of the peer group. As they gain access to the valued cultural knowledge and practices among group members, they use this knowledge to behave like members. Judy works to reorganise the social structure within the group and to position herself powerfully among desired companions. Thomas aligns with Greg whom he recognises as a significant voice in how the male group should behave. These children want to belong, to connect with others, to develop valued identities within the group and to contribute to the collective guiding frame that affords and constrains their lives. This drive to belong and contribute is a key force in their transformation. With this perspective, we begin to see change, not as developments to be measured against developmental milestones but as transformations that prepare children for more central participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) in the world as they perceive it.

Well-being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration are the strands, that is, the intended processes and outcomes of Te Whariki, the New Zealand early

childhood curriculum. The Irish 'Framework for Early Learning' (NCCA, in preparation) borrows from this curriculum and proposes four strands: well-being; identity and belonging; communication; exploration and thinking. This research demonstrates elements of this curriculum in action in children's play. It offers insight into how identity and belonging are inter-related and collectively constructed in group activity. It demonstrates how the basic human drive to belong, to be part of community, works to bring children into the collective cultural guiding frame of the group. As we follow the transformation of Judy and Thomas we understand the transformative power of shared activity. Through their participation in play with peers these children appropriate the values and goals of the group and transform in ways that position them as valued members and contributors. The aim of a sociocultural curriculum is to support children to *'grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society'* (N.Z., 1996:9). The challenge for the curriculum and the pedagogue is to create opportunities and possibilities for children to develop such identities. The process involves supporting children's access to the intermental plane where valued knowledge and practices are shared and at the same time, through reflexive action, expanding the group criteria for membership so that it allows for diversity and inclusion.

The analysis focuses on how children reconstruct valued cultural knowledge and ways of knowing through their play. Corsaro (2003) describes it as a process of socialisation and emphasises children's proactive constructive role. Nevertheless, there are difficulties with the term because of the implied passivity – the implication that being socialised is something that is done to a child. The concept may be construed as something other, and perhaps less valuable, than learning. The sociocultural perspective emphasises that children are learning to participate holistically. Rogoff (1990) describes the appropriation of the community of practice of weavers and Lave and Wenger (1991) describe tailors and quartermasters among others. We might ask: how do children appropriate the practices of the community of practice of readers, or mathematicians or philosophers or scientists or artists? Within the sociocultural perspective, children enter communities of practice within which these practices and skills have a value, function and purpose. For example children enter, as peripheral participants (Lave and Wenger 1991), the community of readers.

They take an interest in stories, they associate them with books, they follow pictures, they recognise words, they pretend to read, they interpret the content and they reconstruct stories. They integrate the practice of reading and writing into their play and recognise its value and function. In this way, and with the guidance of the more proficient, they become more expert in its practices and move towards more central participation. They recognise the rules, the affordances and constraints of the community and reconstruct its practices with reference to the rules. They take pleasure in exhibiting their achievements because they know that it is recognised as a valued characteristic of competence. These practices are as important to the function of reading as the study of phonetics. This is the process of appropriation that is demonstrated in this research.

This is a helpful concept for pedagogues in bridging the gap between the early childhood curriculum and formal school learning. As we see in children's play, children negotiate the values and practices of a community long before they understand its operations and meanings. They begin to appropriate the values and practices of parents, shopkeepers, builders and astronauts, long before they understand the technicalities of the trade. They are enthusiastic recruits into these practices. They are working, Vygotsky (1933) tells us, within the ZPD, behaving a head taller than themselves. This first-hand experience may be a prerequisite and certainly provides the motivation for learning the technicalities of practice in an academic way. Vygotsky himself (1934/94) argued that academic concepts by their very nature presuppose a function within some system. This research shows that sociodramatic play presents as a route to becoming familiar with the system by reconstructing it in play and at the same time coming to engage with the valued and functional skills of the system. The pedagogue can motivate the child to engage with skills, such as literacy, numeracy and science by ensuring that they are valued and purposeful within children's play stories and by encouraging their families to give them a value and purpose within the home. Storybooks, shopping lists, birthday cards, doctor's prescriptions, weighing scales, cash-desks, magnifying glasses, categorised implements, as well as routines about using symbols, sounds and letters or birthdays and calendars and counting when buying bus tickets or icecreams or identifying plants and animals –are all practices that stitch these skills into play as valued and useful. The basic concept that children learn what is valued, functional and

purposeful in their communities has implications for all domains of learning and for developing identities as skilled members of their multiple communities.

8.2   A theoretical shift

So far the findings have been discussed in terms of practice. What are the broader implications emerging from the sociocultural discourse underpinning this research?

Exploring and reconstructing sociocultural theory is an important contribution of this research. The application of a theoretical perspective to children's play demonstrates that theoretical perspectives direct our observations and insights, opening our eyes to some developments and blinding us to others. The theoretical perspective offered here has its blind spots but it comes with a valuable insight, that is, that we shape and are shaped by the communities and activities in which we participate. This is a position that is unlikely to meet much opposition and yet it has been conspicuous in its absence in the practice of early childhood education in Ireland, where emphasis on universal patterns of development and individual learning dominates. Carswell's (2002: 22/23) research on the perspectives and practices of Irish pedagogues finds that *'The dominant view highlights play as a…self-determined process of self-teaching...'* As already discussed, this Piagetian perspective has been the pervading influence in the early childhood education sector resulting in two very distinguishing characteristics (i) an emphasis on the child's need to pursue his/her own learning needs and personal concept formation and (ii) a 'laissez faire' approach on the part of the pedagogue, on the basis that intervention in children's learning interferes with the individual's right to self-determination. Following her study of four year olds in Irish Primary schools, Hayes (2004), proposes a shift to a more interactive and social view of learning and development and suggests a bio-ecological, multi-theoretical approach that provides a framework for linking the biological and social and environmental aspects of learning. This is a perspective that retains a Piagetian developmental psychology with a focus on the individual child and normative development while considering the impact of wider cultural forces on these developments. This research proposes a further theoretical shift, that is, that the child-in-social-activity becomes the unit of analysis in research and education and that consequently the child is viewed always in terms of her/his participation in community activity. Secondly that

development be viewed not only as a product of biology and experience but as mediated by the values and goals, affordances and constraints of the community. Thirdly, that we recognise that the individual, community and environment actively work together, in collective collaboration, to generate transformation. This is a shift from the cause-effect model to an understanding that development and culture are collectively constructed and dialectically emergent. It proposes a core theoretical principle, that is, that children learn how to think in ways that are congruent with their communities and that serve the function and goals of community activity. These thinking tools are cultural and guide the way children perceive the world. This research is particularly indebted to Rogoff (1990) for the understanding that the individual is never separate from the social, that meaning-making is always a dialectical process. Within this perspective, diversions from the valued practices of educational institutions are no longer considered deficits, but may represent valued ways of coping and thinking within a particular community. This is a perspective that has major implications for the theory and practice of pedagogy.

8.2.1 Celebrating uncertainty

When we disrupt the developmentalist discourse of certainty that underpins pedagogic practice as we know it, we enter the world of uncertainty. This research opens a world of uncertainty but here uncertainty is offered as a methodology for change, a liberation rather than a limitation. When we are uncertain then we have to enquire and be open to listening to the views of others, open to the experience of the other and to the possibilities of multiple truths and multiple ways of knowing. We can engage with other perspectives and possibilities that cause the narrative 'to stutter' (Dahlberg and Moss 2005: 28) and make decisions with some awareness of the values and agendas that guide them. The pedagogue becomes aware of his/her own role in the construction of cultural ways of knowing and the institutions that represent it. This is a process of politicisation that embraces opportunities to be *'reflective, sceptical and critical'* (Ibid: 32) about such fundamental matters as what constitutes knowledge, what is an educated person, what should learners learn, how should it be learned, taught and assessed (Alexander 1992: 184).

Underpinning these considerations is a recognition that worthwhile knowledge and learning outcomes are not determined solely by individual capacity and everyday life

experiences (NCCA 2004), but by the value system we use to measure them. This theoretical perspective brings us into the world of shared and differentiated cultures, into the world of values and interests, of power and politics. It proposes that truth/reality/objectivity is a construct that emerges from the coordination of voices for particular purposes. It recognises that the goals of the education system, specifically, are determined by powerful voices within the community and represent vested interests. In redesigning a sociocultural curriculum there is a job of both deconstruction and reconstruction to be done. The reconstruction must give voice to the full range of participants, particularly those who have been traditionally excluded. It is not an easy task or one that can be accomplished and fixed. It is an ongoing process that accepts uncertainty and change as constant. Fleer and Richardson (2003) found the shift to such a sociocultural perspective to be extremely difficult for teachers. Nevertheless, this is the essential challenge that faces us if we are to create the possibilities for a more just society and provide greater opportunity and possibilities throughout the care and education system for children, families and communities.

There are many philosophical and practical questions to be asked. There is the question, according to Singer (1993: 80), of *'which truth' and 'whose judgement' counts the most-at once an ethical question and a question of power'*. There are question about how we give voice to the other, so that the systems recognise their contribution. As Bruner (1999: 156) says these questions *'..will inevitably involve us in an never-ending assessment of the fit between what any particular culture deems essential for the good, or useful, or worthwhile way of life, and how individuals adapt to these demands as they impinge on their lives'*. Sociocultural theory does not answer these questions but offers a theory that helps to explain why some groups in our society tend to be less successful in our school systems and challenges us to find ways of recognising, supporting and evaluating the multiple ways of knowing of children from different communities. Pedagogy therefore must be about questioning.

8.3   Conclusion and Recommendations

This research identifies the key processes in children's participation in sociodramatic play from a sociocultural perspective. It locates children's participation in

collectively constructed intersubjective processes that are mediated by cultural and historical contexts. It describes how children access and reconstruct these processes in their interpersonal negotiations and in their transactions with the cultural guiding frame. What emerges is a view of the competent child embedded in a dialectical relationship with community and using her/his dialogic skills to contribute and belong within its frame. The thesis demonstrates how children use sociodramatic play as a medium and context for their participation as community members. This is a view of the child that has major implications for pedagogy, for the place of play in the curriculum and for broader social policy perspectives.

The contribution of the research can be summarised as follows:

1. Emerging from a sociocultural perspective on children's sociodramatic play, the research finds that that the desire to connect and to belong in community is the driving force of children's learning. The ability to sustain intersubjective connection gives the child access to the essential meaning-making tools and framework of the community. The finding mandates that we engage with a pedagogy of connection, connection with others and with the social activities and ways of knowing that are valued in our communities.

2. The theory, and its explication in children's play, is opportune in terms of early childhood care and education in Ireland. It throws light on curriculum strands such as 'well-being', 'belonging', 'identity' and 'communication', as established in 'Towards a Framework for Early Learning' (N.C.C.A., 2004). It reminds us that in order to have a sense of belonging within a community one must have opportunities to contribute to the development of its social practices and discourses so that one's voice is represented.

3. The research guides a shift from child-centred theories which position children as individual learners and apart from adults and community towards child-in-social activity theories that recognise that the child lives and learns in dialogue with others. Within a dialectic perspective, the opportunities for shared meaning-making and for developing valued discourses, practices and skills become the significant resources for learning. The data demonstrates that they abound in children's play.

4. The research rediscovers the emotional child and foregrounds the role of emotional literacy in learning. The concept of learning as transformation and

changing identity supports the integration of emotion and cognition, of care and education

5. It recognises that children are contributors to culture as children, that they are citizens of the micro and macro communities in which they live. Pedagogues can empower them in that role by modelling and guiding the skills of active participation. They can create opportunity for children to express their views, to raise their voices, to listen and build on each other's contributions, to make visible, reflect on and critique the practices and discourses of the community. It is a role that requires reflexivity and a commitment to a just society on the part of the pedagogue. S/he must challenges the status quo, mindful that there is no such thing as an apolitical theory.

6. It demonstrates that these skills are negotiated in the everyday interaction moments between adults and children and children themselves. It identifies many of these intersubjectivity skills and thereby explicates concrete pedagogic strategies for the adult working with children. These strategies are particularly helpful for working with children with 'additional needs'.

7. It presents reliable evidence that children's sociodramatic play is both a medium and context for developing identity and community membership.

8.3.1 Implications for further research

In this research I have applied a sociocultural perspective to children's sociodramatic play in one setting. While the study is an important contribution, the body of research within this paradigm is limited and in need of extension. In Chapter 4 where the methodology is presented, I have discussed the limitations of the research. Here I outline the implications for further research prompted by this thesis. They include:

1. taking a 'competent child' perspective, to research the competencies of children growing up in various settings including socio-economic and ethnic groups to identify competencies that must be represented and valued within a fair curriculum.

2. taking a sociocultural perspective, to research sociodramatic play within other settings (neighbourhood, school, home) and among other social and ethnic groups (disadvantaged neighbourhood, immigrant groups).

3.   to apply this sociocultural lens to other types of play and activities, including structured play, games with rules, reading, art etc.

4.   taking a sociocultural perspective, to research the ways that children access and progress in the community of practice of readers, mathematicians, scientists, artists, philosophers, particularly through play.

5.   focussing on the perspectives of the children themselves and or their parents on their own play. This research involved some consultation with children and children but involving them in an analysis of the play episodes would be extremely valuable.

6.   a longitudinal study that follows the transformation of a number of children as they participate in subsequent contexts.

And finally…

This thesis contends that the individual lives and learns in a connected, collaborative relationship with the social world. This view calls for a shift from a pedagogy of the individual to a pedagogy of connection. The perspective centralises the child's need to connect with others and the critical importance of interactive skills, cultural knowledge and cultural goals as both the medium and outcome of learning. The pedagogue's principal role becomes helping children to connect, to communicate and to belong, supporting them in the interactive moments when these skills and identities are constructed. With these skills and adult support children gain access to the construction of cultural knowledge and cultural ways of thinking. Sociodramatic play offers both a rich context and medium for this learning. The research consequently re-values and re-centralises the role of play in an early childhood curriculum that focuses on connecting on the intermental plane.

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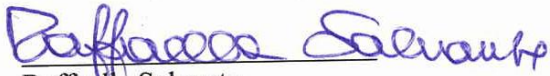
Re: Application for Ethical Clearance Ref. No. 15/05

Dear Mary Carmel,

Thank you for submitting a Research Ethics Form in relation to your research project *"Children's Participation in Sociodramatic Play"* (ref. no. 15/05) to the DIT research Ethics Committee.

I am glad to inform you that the Research Ethics Committee has agreed to grant ethical approval to the above project.

Kind regards,

Raffaella Salvante
Office of Graduate Studies

CC: Dr Noirin Hayes

Appendix 5

Categorisation of themes under three research questions and planes of analysis:

Community	Interpersonal- micro	Interpersonal macro	Participatory appropriation Power, rules, gender	Participatory appropriation Judy / Thomas
Culture	Emotional literacy	**Appropriation**	**Power**	**Judy**
Rejection	Blending voices	Collective intersubjectivity	Status	Contributing to the narrative
Gender Divide /rules	Rules of play roles	Reinitiating themes	Adult power	identity belonging
Chaos/ tentative	Adult play partner	Coordinating different perspectives	**Gender** policing	Identity risks
Oldtimers/ newcomers	Self-other regulation	Psychological tools	Rules of playschool	Manipulating play episodes-real life politics
Social networks	**Common ground**	Interpretation/ reconstruction	Psychological tools	Friendship
Relationship dynamics	Artefacts (practices)	Reflective	emotions	**Thomas**
groupsize	Naming initiatives Self talk	Objectifying/ Anchoring/ relocating	Power roles	Fantasy play
competition	Reading cues Social awareness	Intensity of interaction	Style of delivery	Patterns of be - haviour/interaction
Cooperation/ leadership	communicate emotions	imagination	Bigger, older, knowledge	Gender bonding
Group dynamics	Yes and no and… **Coordination**	Possible selves	**Consequences / function of rules**	Stretching over experiences
Friendship	guidance	Not consensus	deceit	Peer guidance
Misinterpreting	Reasoning	Communities of Practice	Group resistance	enculturation
discourses	routines		compliance	Settling in
Status	rifts		Group differences	
guidance – peer, adult	Insecurities and hurt			
Pretend pivot	Pretend camouflage			
artefacts	Registering			
identity	prolepsis			
	Dramatic gestures			
	Agency			
	Complex goals/relations			
Cultural guiding frame	Guiding/ responding			

Appendix 6

Key research questions or planes, themes and sub-themes

Chapter 5 - The Community Plane

Question	Emerging themes
How does culture mediate and support children's participation in sociodramatic play?	**Social network/ Group dynamics** **Cultural guiding frame**

Sub-themes to Social Network/Group dynamics Chaos/ tentative relationships; Oldtimers/newcomers; Relationship dynamics; group size; competition; cooperation/ leadership; forming, storming, norming; friendship; Misinterpretations **Sub-themes to Cultural Guiding Frame:** Artefacts; discourses; status and power; guidance from peers and adults; Pretend pivot for real politics; identity

Chapter 6 -Interpersonal Plane
Questions   **Emerging themes**

How is participation organised in   through the intersubjective processes of

- Establishing common ground

   (2) the micro space of person to   - Co-ordinating contributions
      person interaction?

- Generating agency   (Matusov 2001)

                                     through the meaning making processes of

   (2) the macro space of meaning   - Interpretation and reconstruction

         making?   - Participation in Communities

                                       of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991)

- Coordination rather than consensus

Sub-themes to **Micro interactions** Establishing common ground: Naming initiatives; self talk; reading cues; social awareness; communicate emotions; self- registering; routines; artefacts (practices); Coordination: Yes and…no and; guidance; self-other regulation; rules of play roles; blending voices Agency: Emotional literacy; Guiding/ responding; Complex goals/relations **Sub-themes to Macro transaction** **Appropriation:** Interpretation/reconstruction; Communities of Practice; Not consensus; possible selves; imagination; intensity of interaction; objectifying/anchoring/ relocating; play as reflective; psychological tools; coordinating different perspectives; reinitiating themes; collective intersubjectivity

Chapter 7 - Participatory Transformation Plane

Questions	Emerging themes
What are the transformations emerging through participation in terms of :	**Part One**
	Discourses and practices are transformed:
	- Power
(2) Culture?	- Rules
	- Gender differentiation
	Part Two
	Transformation of participation towards developing:
(2) Individuals?	- Identity
	- Belonging
	- Contribution
	- Well-being

Sub-themes – Part One
Power: Status; roles; real and play life power; adult power; bigger, older, knowledgeable; group resistance
Rules: compliance; functions; style of delivery; rules of playschool; emotions
Gender: Group differences; Gender policing; psychological tools

Sub-themes –Part Two
Judy: identity; belonging; manipulating play episodes towards real life politics; identity risks; narrative; friendship; well-being; contribution

Thomas: Settling in; belonging: well being and membership; identity; contribution; peer guidance; enculturation

Appendix 7

Matrix of 476 Play Episodes documented from May 2005 to May 2006

Colour code

--------   **Chapter 5 – culture and group dynamics mediate play**

-------   **Chapter 6 (1) – Interpersonal intersubjectivity**

-------- **Chapter 6 (2) – Appropriating meaning**

---------   **Chapter 7 (1) – Transforming Power, Rules, Gender**

---------   **Transforming Judy**

---------   **Transforming Thomas**

Date	Pilot Phase -May/ June 2005 – 36 episodes
18th May 5 episodes	Friends, I won't be your friend – I need to put on my crown for the party – Greg and friend play babies –Mammies and babies (I won't be your friend if you don't play shop) -I'm bigger than you; are you my best friend
19th May 5 episodes	Mairéad is upset – I'm the big sister, I'm bigger than you – Greg produces a dress as surprise – Wizard, please make me beautiful- taking babies for a walk
25 May 3 eps	Teacher's treasure game – get off our spaceship – Doctor treats the shark bite -
26 may 2 eps	Tea and cake for researcher -Cathy knows about friends -
31 May 5 eps	Amy's new baby – managing, cajoling and amusing Sarah – Barbie doll kills Darth Vader –Spaceship is a boy's game – Liam as doctor and Judy as mammy, give me a hug sweetie
1st June 4 eps	2 big sisters –Mairéad leaves Sarah - The Kiss – The Bold man
7 June 4 eps	6½ is really big – 'cos I was here first – Mammies and Princesses – Don't correct the Mammy -Mammy big sister child, tell the big sister you're sorry
8 June 4eps	The kindness of children – Knowing how to be placatory and cooperative – Cathy asks permission to join (not such a good idea), Niamh finds a way of letting her in - Determined to play doctor / You're the bestest girl/ baby throws a tantrum
13th June 4 eps (36)	Play and politics, you're stupid– Let's get the robbers - From bed to baddies to breakfast- Sarah hugs Amy to upset Judy
Date	September to December 2005
Week 1	14 children – 4 boys – another 2 girls and 4 boys due next week
6th Sept 2 eps	Tracey finds security, integrates home and playgroup – chaotic play, intersubjectivity is difficult for newcomers, imitation, observation, misinterpretation , suspicion in hc
7th 6 eps	Suspicion and distrust, Mary and Tracey make eye contact, tension over toys, Kylie is suspicious –Newcomers and oldtimers, contrast – Adult supports connection, Niamh plays with Ann, Kylie, Tracey and Lydia, very connected because of teacher- Niamh doesn't connect with Lydia but retrieves Ann as she tries to leave -Sarah refuses to play doctors – Greg won't allow Susan to play
8th 5 eps (12)	Ann supports play, Stan makes rice (Susan, Kylie) –Niamh minds baby like a professional- Can girls be builders?, wear hats – they're boys glasses – Kylie joins Sarah and Mairéad at house and laughs and arouses suspicion The courage it takes for newcomer to be a contributing voice in argumentation

Week 2	
12th Sept **7 eps**	Tracey goes outside –-Greg helps Stan(only 4 boys) -Good improvisation between Mairéad and Sarah (no lets pretend, you can't call a baby Mairéad - Mairéad gives Sarah a line, the effects of naming - Sarah won't play with Greg-, Greg reconstructs playgroup rules for Susan – Sharing know-how, Greg displays his knowledge about role clothes, has a sense of ownership of Superman outfit- Friends as play partners, when I'm finished my painting
13th **5 eps**	Tracey asks teacher to take her outside - Lydia and Mary play, Mary action only- pretend our trains are friends - Tracey comes to watch with baby in arms. -Greg explains that girls can be girlfriends, boys are boyfriends
14th **9 eps**	Suspicious of T -Stan shows the need to name initiatives – Ann helps Tracey to settle, Tracey talks to her mam on phone –Teacher links Tracey and Amy- Teacher, as doctor extends the play – Stan pushes glasses – S and R ignore Lilly the newcomer and Sarah leaves when Greg comes in – Uncoordinated play, David and Greg, sometimes episodes are initiated and dropped – Stan arouses suspicion because he doesn't name
15th **9 eps** **(30)**	Lydia and Lilly connect easily, both in hc, Lydia suggests they make dinner, Lilly agrees. -pretend its raining- Lydia uses cooperative tones -setting up responses, Lydia-Amy, Tracey-Mairéad, stand and stare at older girls; -Mairéad gives Sarah her lines – Lilly sets the table – Lydia takes stethoscope from Amy and looks at me, equipment use more important than script-Secondary adjustment, Mairéad and hoolahoop – masculinity in the block corner (David gets hat for Greg), I built it by myself
Week 3	
19th **14 eps**	Tracey screams as mother leaves – role of dressup clothes - David puts on the police jacket and hat and brings a hat to Greg, assumption that they will play together - is pink for boys and girls – David outwits Shane, Shane, no hitting, David demonstrates very good manipulation in conflict between David and Shane– power of possession of artefacts – my cousin says 'oh maan' – Boredom for Thomas, Tracey rings Thomas's mam - Tracey nurses the dolls and asks 'what's the matter?' –Judy, Mairéad, be my friend 'cos she won't be – Sarah I'm not playing -Greg tries to retrieve phone within the frame – Unmanageable chaos, Kylie, you're my husband, not Dr Maher – Terrorists
20th Sept **10 eps**	Ann as play partner, Niamh, tells teacher as babysitter how to comfort baby –Niamh internalises her response, Niamh drops her head as Mairéad talks to her - Sarah I'm not playing if Greg's playing –Thomas, Leah, Niamh play with train , questions re their future dev. – Marathon 'lets pretend, cooperation and hyperactivity with boys in domestic scene , David could be a granddad – Greg, jumps off table and looks to see adult – Thomas as doctor, Greg, can I be the nurse, boys, pretend dead, play doctor – dog play —Thomas Leah Niamh play with train- Leah and Lydia begin to play with doctors set
21st **10 eps**	Greg, Mairéad and Sarah at doll's house, Sarah doesn't want to play with Greg, Mairéad likes Greg's play but ultimately is influenced by Sarah's rejection and leaves with her, annoyed with Greg - chaotic play, with Ann in middle –Thomas and teacher -Friends, I'll miss you when you go on hols - tool boxes are put out – Niamh needs teacher – Greg has to find everything, Mairéad won't tell me what Greg said – Kylie rejects Judy – Kindness, Thomas, Stan – Lilly serves Mairéad and Sarah in bed – the mermaid's boat
22nd **11 eps** **(45)**	Judy tries to bond with Sarah and Mairéad with talk of boyfriends – David, wrong entry strategy – Judy tells of boyfriends, valuable social knowledge, -Judy is fearful that she has told on Mairéad, Judy misses seat, Judy does everything to please, even be a boy – The power of mother, 'cos we're big girls, no holidays, -Mairéad ignores, Sarah dismisses Susan, the power to decide the theme-Sarah dismisses Mary, she's getting off bus – Amy tries to connect with Leah – Greg jokes about Stan at blue table -Greg, there'll be the boys boat and the girls boat – mermaid girls tease boys for chase, Thomas's energy level and assertiveness increase

Week 4	
26th Sept **13 eps**	(Sarah on holidays) Tracey, Teacher will you bring me out –Mairéad drops Judy, Judy courts Mairéad – Tracey makes slippers connections between home and playgroup – Peer group conversation, witches or Power Rangers - Greg befriends Stan much to his pleasure, keeping people within the frame – Greg tries to please, cooperative –Greg and Mairéad play with David and Thomas, they make bed- Greg tries to retain both Kylie and Mairéad, she's my 2nd sister –Responding within the play frame, You're wrecking my head– Thomas as hairdresser, that's for girls – Greg reads to Stan – Tracey and Amy in hc, no joined up action –Mermaids outside- Becoming registered as a boy, Thomas on boat – Eoin's 3rd birthday
27th **7 eps**	Predicting teacher's response, Mairéad and Judy report Tracey to teacher first- Judy follows Mairéad – Teasing Tracey, Greg and Mairéad are mean to Tracey, Tracey threatens her Daddy - Greg, what's wrong Mairéad – Greg tells Mairéad not to be mean to Liam – Greg to Thomas, its just a girls game, can I play –Following Greg, just a girl's game, Greg messes in homecorner having dismissed it as a girls game– Boys are strong, Greg and Thomas lift toy - Tracey defends 'my teacher' – Judy as Daddy
28th **11 Eps**	Participant observer talks on phone – Judy has Mairéad cos Sarah 's on holidays and rejects Kylie – Thomas overcomes his shyness with teacher – Greg is messing in hc – Mairéad and Judy go somewhere in car, shows remote control – Greg and Mairéad play car but Mairéad demands a compromise 'you have to bring baby' – Attack with knives, you must play dead – Tracey scolds Thomas – intense driving, stickle bricks as pedals, 20cm face when wants to be heard – newcomers work silently in hc – Boys are pirates mermaids are girls
29th **12 eps** **(42)**	Greg is upset, sees John, seems unwell, leaves with mother, absences and changed group dynamics – Taking the knocks, Tracey is annoyed with Thomas – Niamh retains teacher – newcomers need adult – Stan's impulsive behaviour frightens Shane – Judy and Amy play, Niamh tries entry strategies, they invite her to dress and come to the party– Judy and Amy like similar foods, role of similarity –Judy, Amy and Niamh at trampoline party-Mary observes with interest-– I need it nice and quiet now, C. – Mary enacts bus scene alone , misses Susan as she joins her in bus– Amy and Judy reject Susan in HC and again outside
Week 5	
3rd Oct. **14 eps**	Judy as outsider to Mairéad and Sarah, Sarah returns, waits for Mairéad, Judy stop copying me – Sarah and Mairéad greet, Judy looks for keys as something to do to cover her discomfort – Judy, Teacher I want you to sit with me – Again I chat to Leah and Mary via phone – Mairéad feels rejected by Sarah – Judy makes a choice between Mairéad and Amy – Thomas, David, Stan, Greg on trampoline, this is our car going to merry go round –Physical strength and force, Greg picks up merry go round theme dropped by Lilly earlier and plays cool dude and baddy - pretend fighting – David smells baby –Tracey is upset when David shouts at Ann and Ann has to go to doctor- Greg bids Thomas to follow him as he returns to car - Sarah and Mairéad, chips are made from potatoes – Judy watches S and R and arrives hand in hand with Amy , very tentative scene– Pirates of the Caribbean explained to me
4th **8 eps**	Tracey runs in and hugs teacher and starts cooking – Judy and Susan play with train and tracks on floor - stand off between boys and girls – Thomas explains gay – Sarah and Mairéad sulk with one another - Niamh tries to join them but is easily rejected, no resilience 'don't put salt on plates, she leaves- Transgression and punishment, Greg to Stan if you stick out your tongue- play power struggle between Sienad and Greg - Thomas imitates Greg with 'will you piss off '
5th **11 eps**	Greg, Liam, pretend our cars are friends – Mairéad does homework- Bigger, older, stronger and more knowledgeable, Greg, Mairéad, Tracey, power, size and homework, Tracey my teacher, Greg and Mairéad tease Tracey-Tracey laughs at Greg's antics – Susan remembers the experience of friendship yesterday and joins her 'friends' – Tracey seeks ann's comfort with I'm scared' use of adult – Holding the balance of power, Sarah and Mairéad use Judy to get at one another, moments of power for Judy but always the outsider – Mairéad steals playdough – -Mairéad gives Judy mother role but frustrates it – Pretend you put me in the castle for a week – Judy

	parrots Sarah, Sarah embraces Judy to retain her bargaining power – David mows lawn, pretend I 'm dad
6th **9 eps** **(41)**	Thomas, it doesn't hurt when you're friends (Pellgrini)- Kylie and Sarah fool, Sarah tells family news, Friends measure and are the same size – Greg, am I not cool – Niamh, no boys allowed- From Dogs to Dads, David and Thomas take babies for walk – Mairéad and Sarah hug and exclude Judy – Judy and Lydia become friends – Lydia steals water for tea - Teacher helps Stan name his initiatives
Week 6	
10th Oct. **5 eps**	Mairéad and Greg flit in and out of a shared theme – pretend I'm a butterfly – Thomas is unwell – Tracey and Lilly play together, progress- Sarah's Rules 123
11th **7 eps**	Tracey, see you later mam, Pamela, I'm going to talk to the baby's teacher –Finders keepers, Greg quotes rule for Judy and Lilly- Greg, that's a boys car – Boys' boat, girls' boats, adults give more attention to boys boat – Can we do Irish today, Learner – Greg, I made a caterpillar (from Hungry Catepillar) – Stan and Kylie, Princess and maniac – Greg drives boat off to kill baddies on beach
12th **6 eps**	Greg in bad form, you weirdo – Sarah, Mairéad and Amy argue over age – Sarah's monologue on doggie heaven – Kylie scatters table –Mairéad when you're finished, school rules – difficult day for Greg
13th **3 eps** **(21)**	Sarah lives in Dublin, Ireland – David serves chips from sand tray- Susan and Leah, Parrallel and connected
Week 7	
17th Oct. **7 eps**	(day before assessment) Thomas returns reluctantly– drop off and collection at playschool, rules, staying in role, telling stories from real life – Copying girls, Judy tries to please Sarah by being similar – David dresses the babies and notes the colour of skin – Boy dolls, girl dolls, Eoin, he has no willy –Niamh plays and talks alone-Sarah, Shane and Judy play with train – Amy asks Judy to play and she pleasantly tells her she will later
18th	Assessment Day
19th **5 eps**	Stan and David play at table - Since Mairéad's not here, the long birthday cake –Rules of behaviour, too old to be scared – story telling in the dark – Judy and Amy reject Sarah -
20th **8 eps** **(20)**	Kylie tries to engage Sarah - Thomas and David repair clock – Niamh demonstrates social nature of lone play – cooperative tones between Sarah and Mairéad, very amenable, girls, clothes and beauty, you have to have Halloween at your house, social pressure - Mairéad drops dresses and looks to me – Big sisters –Rules construction, Mairéad and Sarah make mixture and make rules about flour- outdoors Susan organises a trip to Portugal and finds she has no friends
Week 8	
25th Oct **9 eps**	Greg returns, very bossy and volatile - -only 2 can play with keys, Amy – Relocating meaning in play, Judy, only go to the corner, from teacher's story – Judy to Kylie, she (Amy) is my friend – Agency and intersubjectivity, Improvisation episode between Thomas and Greg with farm – Dele tries to integrate Stan into game with Greg – Judy at trampoloine tries to establish similarity with Sarah to hold on to her (fridge etc), Mairéad grabs her attention- Mary observes- Teenager and boss, Greg and Thomas - Thomas hammers David on the hand and annoys him (can see that Thomas takes on many of these playgroup flippant behaviours)
26th **8 eps**	Mary and Lilly, Mary shows she can follow intentions –The foursome split into twosomes and play beside one another –Birthday for 2, Mammy Mairéad is boss, only 2 birthdays, – Judy is anxious to be included – Mairéad to Judy, its not your birthday –Three friends for Sarah, not Greg – me helping Kylie to play - Kylie 'now remember the rules'-The price of friendship, Greg swings the bat and hits Thomas
27th **4 eps** **(21)**	Halloween party -Ann encourages Judy to get somebody else to play with and links her with Lydia and Lilly- Sarah resents Mairéad and Amy partnership (good video) – Learning about friendship –
Week 9	

7th Nov **7 eps**	new shop, new activity – Lydia manages Sarah, Sarah and Mairéad take a very superior approach with Lydia and Leah –Kylie and Leah try to connect, I'm not your darling – Lydia and Leah chat as friends and agree to go to the pub – Lydia saw a black girl with baby carrier– Girls play with small world, prince etc.-Growing respect, conversation in the sand pit
8th **11 eps**	Greg very frustrated 'cos structure won't stand, blames Stan, a sense that he would be believed, Thomas tries to humour him, if somebody breaks this down they're not playing rule construction–Greg fights with girls and explains that his mam shouted at him- sense of friendship between Tracey and Stan –Shane and Stan play with Duplo– Stan 'I don't like you' school rule -sharing is caring Shane and Tracey, Tracey tells me that Shane would like her to go to his house very pleased becoming a preschooler –Sarah calls granddad – Registering self, registering other. Amy, Sarah, Mairéad play going to school, new baby - friends who pinch- Thomas and David play house – getup off your arse, Thomas amused
9th **10 eps**	Greg cries when mam leaves, very cross, friendship network is very turbulent – Bratz are cool 'Let's go to the mall' – Teacher I'm not running, I'm just skipping' Sarah – Foursome allows options, S, R, E K. –Amy explains game to me– Boys play together –Liam steals connectors for Greg – Thomas builds a clever vehicle – girls build a clever structure – Niamh on periphery
10th **7 eps** **(35)**	Mairéad is the mam, they go shopping – Implicit rule he went to your house, Greg connects with Mairéad and Sarah doesn't like it – Sarah and Mairéad fall out - Sarah leaves and joins Amy at the mini house, Judy follows, Sarah has options and Mairéad has to negotiate, Sarah tries to keep Judy and Amy on board. -Because of the stand off between Greg and David, Greg is playing with Liam and Stan joins in- Thomas builds a vehicle, This was a very clever contraption built with blocks and cones. - Judy and Susan play with the Duplo
Week 10	
15th Nov **10 eps**	Woofie is sick –Sarah tries to manage Mairéad, Amy and Judy -Amy and Judy grow more assertive –Stroppy arguing, rules about grabbing and pinching, they're my best friends and you are too- Mairéad uses humour (fart) to break tension – Birthday for everyone, another birthday episode but this time Mairéad is afraid to exclude Judy , the power of networks– Mammy Mairéad tells what Santa can and can't bring – Mammy Mairéad reads stories – Greg teaches Stan the script via teacher – Mary makes a Christmas cake
16th **9 eps**	Greg still looking for extra hugs from Mam –Teaching preschool rules Greg-Tracey 'you have to stay with the girls not with the boys – Thomas explains his imaginary friend woofie and builds Big Foot, Liam unknowingly hammers his toes – Interesting episode when David seems to stretch himself and partly through imitation fit in with Shane – Fantasy play, Thomas and Greg fantasy exciting story begins, lock ups and tyradactals – girls seem to be susceptible to advertising - David, Thomas Greg fantasy at house -Lydia and Leah play with Duplo - Lydia 'nice to meet you routine'
17th **5 eps** **(24)**	Greg greets Liam with I have your game ready – Sarah to Lydia 'Excuse me, excuse me' -Come to my house, Greg Thomas Shane play sharks, exchanging info, Thomas's coming to my house boys toys girls toys, my sister has dolls–-Greg takes diving lessons in S ponza – Judy to Amy, are you my best friend as they exclude Sarah
Week 11	
21st Nov **6 eps**	Amy is absent and Judy plays with Susan- Girls play with castle and princes, boys with superheroes – Santa comes to Barbies – Naming each other's initiatives, Thomas and Greg build structures – Sarah and Mairéad play with castle and Greg builds link – Going on holidays, Lilly and Lydia go on hols with new case –
22nd **11 eps**	The policeman has to tell Santa – Greg in aggressive mood –From competition to collaboration, Judy. plays comfortably with Susan but works hard to engage her – Shane and David, sand , red bull – Greg returns to HC - Sarah very compliant to Mairéad – Relationship politics, bargaining among friends, R, S, K, Rosin, Susan pulls Judy way –She who made the mess, Sarah doesn't want Greg and leaves reminding Mairéad of her tidy up duties,–Thomas and Greg play doctor - Mairéad and Sarah play kidnapped princesses, father, spell etc, fantasy play, we're just little

	girls we cant do anything – Stan kicks Tracey
23rd **5 eps**	Amy returns and Judy wants her to leave T and M and play – Niamh brings doll – Kylie and Stan play mammies and daddies with my help -Judy defends Sarah against Mairéad –Mesmerised by the foursome, Lilly and Lydia going to dancing club –
24th **7 eps** **(29)**	Using school rules for unintended purposes, castle play with Judy, Amy, Lilly, Niamh tries to join we're not ready to share -Castle play with Mairéad, Sarah and Judy, Judy has difficulty being heard by Mairéad in particular - Teacher guides Stan the repairman – Kylie won't allow Tracey be the shopkeeper – Thomas and Greg make a very complex structure – Amy and Judy play house and check each other's understanding – Greg, Thomas, David, Stan play with blocks, Greg distributes tools –
Week 12	
28th Nov **18 eps**	Greg's pirate ship that he got yesterday when he was born, David arrives, I'd like to play with you, no ugly boys can play – its only for boys - the character said shut up – Hurry up Susan, your friends are waiting - Amy-Judy I'll be your friend if you play with me, Amy abruptly storms off – Mairéad and Sarah at shop feign disinterest – S and R tease Tracey (Tracey macey) and bond – Judy defends Amy bravely with Sarah and Mairéad – Mairéad and Sarah can be so cooperative when they want to - Greg rejects and then includes Liam and makes it seem easy, cooperation on call – Liam, I burnt my arse, saying naughty things to impress, finds it hard to tune in -Tracey Macy– Judy defends Amy against Sarah and Mairéad - Pretend you're still mean at me and I stamp on the books – pretend I'm 17 and I'm strong. –pretend I'm a working girl, this is work not a mess – pretend we're goin on hols –Learner are you a teacher? – Fathers and friends, boys construct male father and friendship roles, the kids are wreckin' my head – David, Thomas and Greg play space ship, the lunar jog, they turn into animals – Say Mozarella –
29th **10 eps**	Mairéad and Sarah play castle – give me 5 Tracey - – Darlin' watch out for witches – dialogue between Mairéad and Sarah pretend they're all dead and buried, praying at graveside – Sarah very mean to Lydia- The baby's in the mam and dad's bed, Tracey plays alone – David introduces Shane, Jessica and Lilly to playing house, 2 mammies – S and R not nice to Shane and Tracey – David and Greg play house and Santa, Liam on the side – R and S have major fight –
30th **10 eps**	(Thomas absent) Judy, Amy will you play with me, I'm playing with Susan and Lydia – We have to dash back to earth – Amy and R play house, somethings are too hard and too dangerous for the babies to do- Sarah is going to Greg's house today –– importance of eating – Santa brought a bag of coco –Appropriating the long goodbye, Lydia's adult routine on phone – You can't go to party unless you let me brush hair, this is my baby and pretend baby –Managing the play within the play, Judy manages Lydia and Leah – Reality and pretence, pretend you 2 are fighting over Marcy
1st Dec **13 eps** **(51)**	(D is at wedding and afternoon teacher replaces her. It's a very busy day.) Mairéad is absent and so Judy and Sarah play with Barbies and Amy and Leah team up, Leah has a friend in Amy, happy, they play with crib on the floor and then Amy chases Leah with a dog. - Greg plays with the boys, castle and blocks - Greg and Liam play with blocks, David comes in -Sarah and Judy give Tracey a hard time, lots of body language – Shane and magic bracelet and dragon - Shane as v precise Doctor, long episode – Pink or brown baby – Teacher does ballet with Tracey –– Greg, when its my birthday tomorrow (after that) I'm goin' to be 6, then I'll go to bed on my own – Stan kicks down Leah's construction -David checks with teacher if her dinner plans are real or pretend (in the game)- Stan and Greg put teacher in jail
Week 13	
5th Dec **7 eps**	Thomas returns and spends time at water and crafts –Mairéad and Sarah play shop, pretend mam and dad are dead and we're working girls – Mairéad is annoyed at Sarah ringing – Mairéad sneaks out carefully unlocking door – Sarah removes jacket to go to bed to draw attention to it – Newcomers connect but with little talk – Niamh grabs resentfully – Judy plays with Lydia in Amy's absence and content
6th Dec **2 eps**	(Greg and Amy are absent) Judy and Lydia play – Mairéad and Sarah witches and badness – Mairéad scuppers Judy's mother role
7th Dec	(Greg absent) difficult for newcomers to keep up with dialogue, Mairéad and Leah –

5 eps	Sarah establishes ownership of Mairéad – Shane tries to comfort Leah – Mairéad, You shouldn't hit Santa, you shouldn't say that to Kylie (very aggressive), as Sarah dismisses Kylie from shop – (Mairéad's conversion continues following day)- Thomas moving back into fantasy with David
8th Dec **4 eps** **(18)**	(Greg returns) Jonathan arrives, Thomas befriends him game of chasing -Death and life – Reactions to Stan-Complex relationships and goals, Sarah, Greg, Mairéad, rejection of Niamh and bonding of Sarah and Greg, Mairéad, 'you shouldn' be angry', Mairéad in middle between Sarah and Greg, a diplomatic crisis – Greg wants more activity in hc – difference between bold men and bold girls
Week 14	
12th Dec **1 eps**	Very good play of orks and throlls, Thomas among the boys, defies teacher and continues to use planks as weapon – as throll shooting invaders
14th Dec **8 eps** **(9)**	Niamh tries to befriend Sarah but hurts her finger – David, Lilly, Greg and Thomas play house – Thomas 'I hate shopping' – David changes role 'cos he likes the action – bunk beds solve the conflict - Mams and Dads must sleep together –significance of sleep and morning – Managing teacher, knives for chopping not weapons, resisting rules – David is kind to Tracey
Jan - May	January 2006
9th Jan **7 eps**	(Kylie has left) New tool box, boys play on floor with new tools – Thomas leaves with David and tool boxes and returns to encourages Greg and Stan to join them with 'Come on, let go play' -Greg's influence on Stan – Greg I don't want to be the manager or the good leader – Greg, I'm so lucky – Judy plays with Shane– mention of Dad seems to bring an echo
23rd Jan **7 eps**	Managing Stan, Mairéad tells Stan he's a good boy – Greg tries to control the game- Greg asks Thomas's permission to play with girls – Mairéad organises a game of witches with Judy and Lilly-Agency towards multiple agendas, Greg and Mairéad join up and organise witch and helpers, stand on the good button- treasure maps – Bending the rules, knife episode with Ann, Judy is scared – Thomas plays all morning with boys, particularly David and Greg
7th Feb **3 eps**	Greg and Thomas play fantasy – Jade and Sasha go to party – queuing for the cash register
23rd Feb **3 eps**	Sarah's characters kiss 'because he's my boyfriend and they're older- girls manage their movements within the constraints of the space- Sarah and Mairéad, pooh,pooh and bum bum (the kind of story you never get from storytelling)- Boys and treasure maps and managing the space by contrast with girls
2nd March **5 eps**	Greg explains about power rangers and bosses – Liam this is my game isn't it Greg – Mary talks profusely – teacher, learner – Leah I have no friend
21st March **3 eps**	Travelling on the bus – boys build major construction and play with dinosaurs – pretend we're at school
5th April **3 eps**	Manipulating school rules, David and Greg reject Shane with we're not ready to share rule(using the rule to break the rule)- David, Greg Shane play power rangers –Greg appeals to Shane for support –Greg offers compromise, David 'Yeah partner' appropriating school solution
26th April **4 eps**	Girls play fairies and princesses, father save me…- outdoors chasing – giant steps - wolf
6th May **3 eps**	Outdoors, girls den – building a house – mowing the lawn
17th May **4 eps** **(42)**	Thomas and Leah have left- Amy tries to engage Susan in Judy's absence – Greg leads a game of power rangers and they explain to Ann – boys fall out with Liam (not just girls)- Persistent conflict, Sarah explains her dilemma with Mairéad and Greg – another episode begins but I'm finished
Total	476 episodes

Appendix 8

Table of data episodes used and colour coded to chapters

Episodes	Titles	Dates
Chapter 5		
1	Chaotic play	21st September-
2	Persistent conflict Sarah and Greg	17 May
3	Three Friends	26 Oct
4	Mary talks	2 May
5	Susan and Leah	13 Oct.
6	From competition to collaboration –Judy/Susan	22 Nov.
7	Relationship politics – Sarah and Judy	22 Nov.
8	Amy and Leah team up	1 Dec.
9	Lydia manages Sarah	7 Nov
10	David plays with Shane	16 Nov
11	Misinterpeting Stan	14 Sept
12	Reactions to Stan	8 Dec.
13	Blaming Stan	
14	Group dynamics- John's day	29 Sept
15	Episode 15 '*The Kiss'*	1 June 2005
Chapter 6 Part One		
16	Suspicion and Distrust	7 Sept
17	Newcomers and oldtimers	7 Sept
18	Mesmerised by the Foursome	23 Nov
19	Pretend fighting	3 Oct
20	Teaching preschool rules	16 Nov
21	Managing Stan	23 Jan.
22	Sharing know –how ; Greg and Thomas and builders' gear	12 Sept.
23	Teasing Tracey	27 Sept
24	Adult supports connection	7 Sept
25	Teacher as play partner	20 Sept
26	Going on holidays	21 Nov
27	Registering self	8 Nov.
28	Naming each other's initiatives towards co-regulation Greg/Thomas fantasy	21 nov
29	Kylie, Leah and David try to connect. - video	7 Nov.
30	Niamh internalises her response	20 Sept
31	David outwits Shane	19 Sept
32	Managing the play within the play, Lydia/ Judy	30 Nov
33	Agency towards multiple agendas, Greg and the good button	6 Feb
34	Agency and intersubjectivity Greg and Thomas and fantasy	25 Oct
35	Complex relationships and goals – Sarah, Greg, Mairéad	8 Dec
36	Reality and Pretence – Judy, Sarah, Amy	30 Nov
Chapter 6 Part two		
37	Appropriating 'the long good bye'	30 Nov
38	Uncoordinated play	14 Sept
39	Unmanageable chaos	19 Sept
40	Relocating meaning in play –*don't go far*	25 Oct
41	Teenager and boss, and revising understanding	25 Oct
42	Mairéad and Sarah play shop	5 Dec
43	Drop off and collection at playschool	17 oct

44	Fathers and Friends	28 nov
45	Pretend you're still mean at me…	28 Nov
46	*The baby's in the Mam and Dad's bed…*	29 Nov
Chapter 7 Part One	*Power, Rules, Gender*	
47	Bigger, older, stronger and more knowledgeable	5 Oct
48	The power of mother	22 Sept
49	Physical strength and force	3 oct
50	Secondary adjustments-the hoolahoop	15 Sept
51	Predicting teacher's response	27 Sept
52	Managing teacher	14 Dec
53	Bending the rule	6 Feb
54	Manipulating school rules	5 April
55	Using school rules for unintended purposes	24 nov
56	Remember the rules	26 oct
57	Rules come in threes	10 oct
58	Transgression and punishment Greg and Stan	4 oct
59	Rules construction-flour	20 Oct
60	Implicit rules	10 Nov
61	Rules of behaviour – *too old to be scared*	19 Oct
62	Finders keepers	11 Oct
63	She who made the mess must tidy	22 Nov
64	Boys' boat, girls' boat	11Oct
65	*Can girls be builders?*	8 Sept
Chapter 7 Part two	*Judy*	
66	Friends	18 May 2005
67	friends as play partners	12 Sept
68	Amy and Judy play	29 Sept
69	Don't correct the mammy	7 June 2005
70	Mairéad drops Judy	26 Sept.
71	Judy as outsider to M and T	3 Oct
72	Judy and Lydia	6 oct
73	Holding the balance of power	5 Oct
74	Mairéad scuppers Judy's mother role	6 Dec
75	Birthday for 2	26 Oct
76	Birthday for everyone	15 nov
77	Stroppy arguing	15 Nov
78	Judy defends Sarah	23 Nov
79	Judy defends Amy	28 Nov
Chapter 7	*Thomas*	
80	Boredom for Thomas	19 Sept
81	Terrorists	19 Sept
82	Thomas as Doctor	20 Sept
83	Becoming registered as a boy	26 Sept
84	Peer group conversation- witch outfit	26 Sept
85	Responding within the pretence frame - kid	26 Sept
86	Thomas as Hairdresser	26 Sept
87	Following Greg-just a girls' game	27 Sept
88	Boys are strong	27 Sept
89	Standoff between boys and girls	4 oct
90	Taking the knocks	29 Sept
91	The price of friendship	26 Oct
92	Growing respect	7 Nov
93	Fantasy play	16 Nov
94	Come to my house	17 Nov
95	Greg asks permission to play with girls	23 Jan

Appendix 9

Sample documentation – Data of 17th October 2005

Monday 17th Oct, 2005

Mairéad and Greg are absent.

Diary notes:
Yesterday, I considered taking a day off to prepare for today. Fortunately I didn't. For one, Thomas returned but left again. He's a carefully groomed, sheltered, only child from commuter belt town. He comes into this housing estate to be minded by his grandmother while his parents both work. He is fast learning about being a boy among the more street wise. Thomas's reluctance to return reminds me that there are some rather punchy lessons to be learned at playschool about what one can and cannot do if one wishes to identify with the 'male' group. Today, he returned from sick leave, still not feeling the best. He refused to stay and I was left with the sense that being in playschool is hard work and one needs to be in full health to cope. Playgroup lessons are perturbing at a cognitive level, but also at an emotional level. As an adult observer I'm becoming more and more aware of stormy relationships and challenging learning experience and that I'm revisiting the site where so much identity is constructed.

Later I witnessed Judy as Mammy leave her 2 children, Sarah as Stacey and Amy as Sophie (pretend names) to playschool and watched the rules of drop-off and collection being explicated. Can we play for longer, Mam? Ok, just one minute'. No, two minutes mam. No, just one minute, Mam insisted as she waved the car keys.

Twice, Sarah congratulated Judy on two wonderful play episodes 'That was great fun playing Mammies and Daddies'- 'That was great fun playing trains'. 'We must play it again'.

Episode 1 – the rules of drop-off and collection
Video: 17th Oct: 9.18 a.m.

Turn	Speaker	Initiative	Annotation
		Judy and Sarah are in the hc. Amy arrives, pleased to see them. She waves her 'jingle' teddy at Sarah	
1	Sarah	Get that out of my face	Sarah picks a dress – talking and singing to herself
2	Amy	I'm going to wear this dress	
		Judy gets a dress and they all go to Dele for help with the dresses. Then they put on veils.	
3	Judy	Judy laughs at Amy	
4	Amy	Judy I wont be your friend if you don't stop laughing at me	
5	Judy	I..I..I was laughing at that	points to something beyond Amy
		Where's my handbag….where's my keys?	
6	Amy	Judy can I have them after you?	
7	Judy	You have to get shoes on 'cos we're going on holidays. Wait for me…Now come on girls	
		The girls see someone and they hide. (I suspect it's A.) Tracey sees something suspicious in their behaviour and says	
8	Tracey	I'm going to tell my teacher on you	
		Judy seems a little alarmed and all three stand around Tracey for a minute	
9	Sarah	Come on	She's excited. They leave, still watching
10	Judy	There she is quick – will we get into that car?	
		They go to car – Judy has the keys and drives –they	

		discuss names	
11	Judy	And..and. ..and I'm a mam and.. and I'm Mary	
12	Sarah	Oh no I know better names…Stacey	
13	Judy	Oh yeah, good idea…I'll be Stacey, Ok..come on I'm the mam ok?	
14	Sarah	I know, we can have Stacey and..Sophie..Stacey and Sophie there goin to be the sister's names	
15	Sarah to Amy	Stacey and Sophie, they're the sisters names	
16	Amy	I'm Stacey…I brought in the Jingle teddy	
17	Judy	I'm goin in the car now ..I just need to get my handbag.. are you ready?	
18	Sarah	I just need to get my shoes on	
19	Judy	Ok	They move to the bookcorner
20	Sarah	Pretend this is the car…pretend this is the bus	
21	Judy	and.. and.no this is the car and pretend you're on the inside and you're on the outside…yeah…and we're in the car	She turns the key and drives
22	Sarah	Come on, we're at playschcool	
23	Judy	Now sit down there	
24	Sarah	I'm goin' to play with this	she takes a game from the shelf
25	Judy	Do you want me to stay for a little while?	
26	Sarah	yes mam- will you play this with us?	
27	Amy	Judy..	
28	Judy	Now say me mammy…What are you goin' to play with?... I'll put it down for you, will I?....Ok, now I need to go to work..	
29	Sarah	Bye Mam	
30	Amy	Bye	
31	Judy	Bye	
		Judy drives the car and stays in role, while dealing with several interruptions. She returns to collect 'the girls'.	
32	Judy	Hiya girls….it's time to go, OK?	waving keys
33	Sarah	OK, I'll tidy up	
34	Amy	Can we stay for a few more minutes?	
35	Judy	OK, you can	
36	Amy	We're allowed stay for one more minute	Pleased and smiling
36	Sarah	Yeah	
38	Judy	Only one more minute, OK?	
39	Sarah	Alright…(pause)…what about two minutes?	
40	Judy	No, only one minute and then we have to go to the party...remember we do? And now, now it's time to go now In the car…it's time	She waits waving the keys

Amy tries to tell Judy a real life story – Judy insists on being called Mam – Amy can't deal with this – 'no, can I call you Judy cos I want to tell you in real life' – Sarah calls her 'Mam' and manages to tell

her story in about her real Mam and real auntie going to a fair and buying something for her real sister and she' allowed this because Judy works hard to please and retain her. They return to the car and Sarah realises she has taken the toy box and left her crystal. Judy says she will return for it and tells Amy to stay there for a minute. They return with crystal and Amy wants to feel it. Sarah negotiates very dramatically that they won't break it if she gives it – and then makes them wait until they get home

Episode 2 – 'copying girls': Sarah and Judy compose songs: Lets play

The 3 girls return to the house. Sarah shares the crystal. They discuss the 'movie' Madagascar. Then they head off in the car again to go to Dublin. This time Amy stays in the car because she is protesting. The other two girls tour around and arrive at the blue table and take out toys. They begin to sing to their actions – Judy is following Sarah and extending her songs a little – a sense that Judy is trying to please by being similar – very amicable interactions as they play with the magnetised connectors. 'Let's play copying girls' says Sarah to accommodate Judy's copying. Copying is normally an insult.

Sarah begins a few monologues – talks about a time Greg came to her house and said 'Can I be David, please, please' and I (Sarah) said 'Of course you can – I wonder when Greg is going to come' – this is interesting because she usually seems to resent him.
Judy suggests that it's time to leave and as they do they happen upon Teacher planting bulbs. They join in for a while and then go to trampoline and Sarah jumps saying ''

Video 9.42

1	Sarah	Copying girls, copying girls	She jumps on trampoline
2	Judy	Copying girls	but her heart isn't in it
3	Judy	lets play….	she goes to homecormner, ready to play again
4	Sarah	I'm finished doing copying girls	She follows her but begins to take off her dress up
5	Sarah	I'm finished playing this	
6	Judy	and me – these are very heavy aren't they?	
7	Sarah	Yeah That was great	
8	Judy	Yeah that was great fun	
9	Sarah	Yeah that was great …playing Mammies and Daddies…	
10	Judy	Yeah	
11	Sarah	we must play that again some time	she hangs up the dress
12	Judy	You must come to my house sometime, mustn't ye?	
13	Sarah	My Mam doesn't know where your house is	
14	Judy	It is….You go to the left and go to the right and you go for a second and you go up a big hill and that's where it is	
15		Sarah picks up a builders hat	
16	Sarah	Builders hat ..	She puts it on tentatively/jokingly.. it's not appropriate
17		She sees David and she gives the hat to him	
18	Sarah	Here's a builders hat	he takes it
		Judy finds another one- puts it on her head, but is unsure and gives it to Sarah	
19	Judy/ Sarah	You can have this	

20	David	You're not going to work with me	
		The girls leave	

Episode 3 - Derek dresses the babies and notes the colour of skin
David is a little lost for someone to play with – he teams up with Lydia, in hc. He removes nappy from doll and then picks up black doll

Video 9.48

1	David	I got…..this one	He looks at Lydia as though he making a connection between the skin colour but he says nothing
2	David	I'm getting lots of babies	He gets more dolls
3	Lydia	Are you goin' to call the police?	
4	David	No….(can't hear) comin'	
5	Lydia	……… comin'?	
6	David	Only pretend	
		Lydia phones	
7	Lydia To David	Hello A…. My cousin's name is Abby she lives in…..	On phone
		David puts the babies to bed and sits to remove his boots	
8	Lydia	Long authentic conversation with Abby on phone finishing with Bye, bye, bye, bye, bye, bye	
9	Lydia	What are you doing… are you taking something off?	
10	David	yeah..I'm not going to work – its Wednesday and Thursday	

David spends a long time undressing the babies – he has a conversation with Lydia – who suggest that they call the police – David doesn't agree but she wants to call someone so she calls her uncle – they put all the dolls on the table. David heads to bed – he is so caring about the dolls.

Episode 4   Boy dolls, girl dolls

Teacher comes in and joins Lydia at the table which is covered in dolls. Eoin strolls in and picks up a doll:

Video 10.05

1	Eoin	He has no willy	
2	Teacher	That's right – he has no willy cos he's a girl	
		Eoin shows Teacher the boy doll and shows his willy	
3	Lydia	That's a pecker	
4	Teacher	That's right – you call it a pecker, some people call it a willy and some people call it a penis	
5		Luca and Lucy come to have a look. Eoin makes the doll stand. Lydia tells them that boys stand up when they're going to the toilet. Her cousin - - is a boy and he stands up	

6	Teacher	That's right, boys stand up when they're going to the toilet	
7	Lydia	And he sits down when he's doing a poo	
8	Teacher	Everybody does that	
		Eoin is toilet training at present and obviously very interested in the male anatomy. He looks again at the female doll	
9	Teacher	What's that – is it a girl?	
10	Lydia	yeah, it's a girl	looking

Episode 4   Niamh plays and talks alone
Niamh plays on her own and talks constantly about what she and the characters are doing – she seems content.

Video 10.08

Episode 5   -Sarah, Judy and Shane play with Thomas, the train engine

This is a long episode of play involving the three – with Sarah as leader – and Judy taking some initiatives - -there is a sense that they start out as three voices and merge into one as they pick up one another' style and develop a shared way of playing. Later Sarah comments again that it was great fun.

Video 10.10

Episode 6 – Amicable refusal
Amy arrives

| | Amy | Will you play with the Lego with me? | |
| | Judy | I'm playing with Sarah now – later | It's very amicable and accpetable |

Reflections - Issues arising – themes

|	
Sensitivity to ridicule	**Colour of skin**
Girls' emphasis on names and clothes	**Phone manner**
Rules of roles	**Father cares for babies**
Rules of context	**Male/female anatomy lesson**
Mother – directive, compromising, using inducements	**Eoin's interest linked to toilet training?**
Children compliant, resisting	
Judy pursues Sarah more than Amy	**Niamh plays alone**
Listen's to Sarah's story, not Amy's	
Judy stays in role despite interruptions	**Train play – merging of styles and voices**
Judy talks about 'Madagascar' and similarities with Sarah	**Great fun again**
Conflict between Amy and Judy	
Amy opts out	**Amicable refusal**
Imitating to be establish similarity	
Copying: from insult to play	**Changed group dynamics because of absences**
That was great fun – wait until Mairéad returns	
Builders' hat – not appropriate	**Resistance strategies- do children use them in a calculated way in real life?**
Invitation to visit – a milestone in friendship	

Appendix 10

Description of technical process and skills in editing vide

## Collecting, Editing and Making video
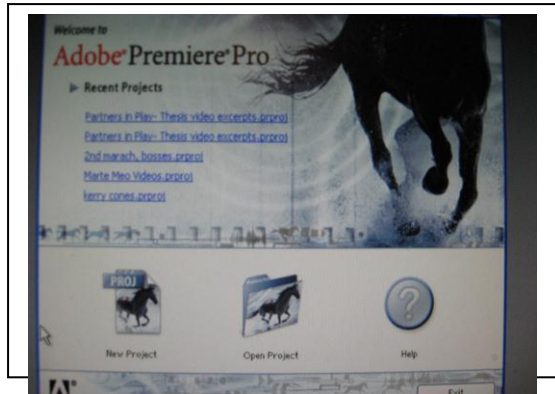
Adobe Premier Pro 1.5 © is a professional software application that allows the user to capture, edit and produce video. It is a somewhat difficult application to master and the process involves much trial and error arising from both the package and computer difficulties. The skill is one of the outcomes of this research process.
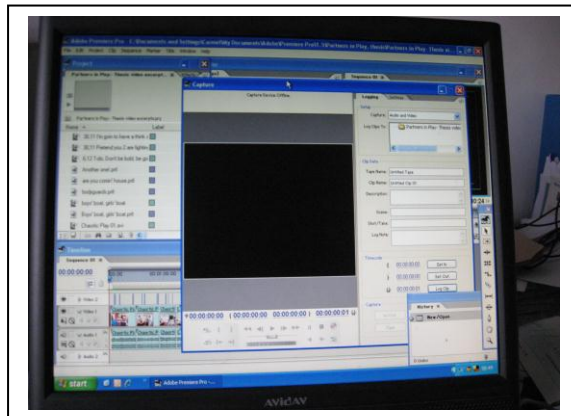
The video camera is connected to the computer and the software allows the user to view the video and capture video excerpts. Each excerpt is titled, described, and date and location on video tape is noted. Excerpts are then collected and stored in a Sequence file.
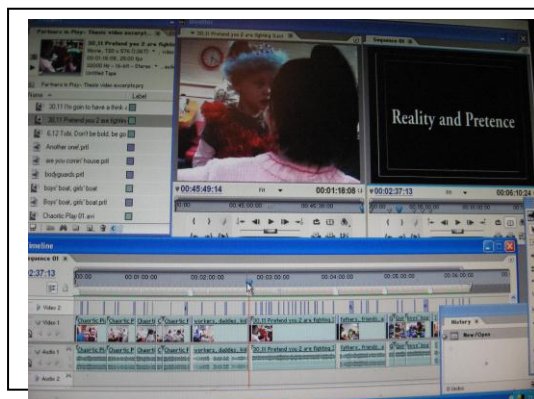
Each excerpt/clip is further edited by viewing and cutting using the 'monitor' window. The edited clips are them imported into the timeline window to compile the sequence. Titles and subtitles can be added. The episodes compiled on the timeline widow are saved as a complete sequence and can then be exported to DVD.
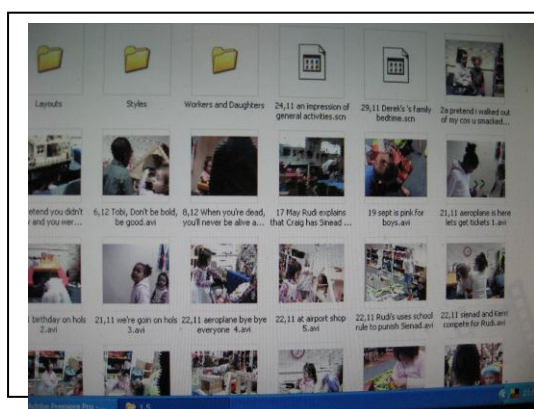
The clips can be stored on computer under dates or themes etc. and can be imported into any future sequences that the user may wish to compile. However storing video clips uses computer memory and one must be selective. It is important to retain the original video tapes so that un-stored video is always available.

Appendix 11

Research Advisory Group Members

Meeting dates - **17th Nov. 2005**
                          - **18th May 2006**
                          - **24th Jan 2007**

Dublin Institute of Technology
Anne Fitzpatrick
Annemarie Halpenny

St. Patrick's College of Edcuation
Philomena Donnelly
Anne McGough

Trinity College, Dublin: Children's Research Centre
Jean Whyte

IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation
Irene Gunning
Lilian Joyce

Research site Manager/Owner
Eileen Keogh

Pengreen Research Centre Advisory Group

Meeting: 22nd February 2006

Members from Pengreen Research Centre
Dr. Cath Arnold
Collette Tait
Eddie McKinnon
Kate Hayward
Helen Pearson

Other Advisory Groups

DIT Assessment Board – 3 meetings
CECDE Advisory Board – 4 meetings
Staff members– 5 meetings

Appendix 12

Paper presented (i) at conferences and (ii) published

(i) Conference presentations

OMEP 2005

Partners in Play: children's participation in sociodramatic play.

OMEP 2006

'Give her a bottle and tell her she'll be alright…': How children manage adults to get what they want.

OMEP 2007

'The kids are wreckin' my head': reconstructing the cultural frame in play.

EECERA 2005

Children's Participation in Socio -dramatic Play

EECERA 2006

Pretend you're mean to me and I…: Reconstructing social rules in play

EECERA 2007

Complex Agency: Crossing the borders between reality and pretence

CECDE 2004

Supporting play - supporting quality

CECDE 2007

From a Pedagogy of the Individual to a Pedagogy of Connection: the place of play

Researching Children's Worlds: Galway 2008

Engaging with complexity: Observing children's sociodramatic play

(ii) Publications

Brennan, C. (2004). "Playing the Way into Communities of Practice." In The OMEP Ireland Journal of Early Childhood Studies: 192-207.

Brennan, C. (2006). Partners in Play: A Research Project. In IPPA <u>Children@Play 6-8</u>

Brennan C. (2005) Supporting Play-Supporting Quality in CECDE 'Questions of Quality: Conference proceedings' Dublin 202-212

Brennan, C. and Hayes, N. (2007) Pretend you're mean to me….Collective Reconstructions in Play in Early Childhood Practice: the Journal for Multi-Professional Partnerships, 9, 1, 6-25

Peer reviewed

Brennan, C. and Hayes, N. (2007) "Give her a bottle…Tell her everything will be alright..": How children manage adults/teachers to get what they want. <u>In</u> An Leanbh Óg: The OMEP Ireland Journal of Early Childhood Studies, 1,1,150-164