

Title: A multi-dimensional study into the relationships within children's journeys of free play between home and the nursery.

Candidates Name: Yaspia Shakreen Salema

Institution: UCL, Institute of Education

Degree for which the thesis is submitted: PhD

Candidates Declaration:

I, Yaspia Shakreen Salema confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This research examines the relationship over time between children's (aged 3-5) free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. Research questions concern how this relationship was perceived and responded to from multiple perspectives; how these relationships, perceptions, and responses developed over time; and how children's research experiences impacted their free play. In these six months of qualitative research, eighteen children from two state-maintained Nurseries in London used free play provision in the nursery as a participatory tool. Questionnaires and in-depth interviews were conducted with parents and practitioners. The study makes the following methodological contributions to the field of conducting research with children. It offers free play as a participatory tool for children to communicate their perspectives and experiences by engaging in free play. The originality lies in the study's introduction of the researcher to the children, as a learner from a school for adults who studied children's play. It extends the use of participatory research beyond collecting children's artefacts and narratives and includes an examination of children's experiences of conducting research. The study's conceptual framework contributes to the field of conducting research with children in the following ways. It extends ideas related to 'agency'; and combines it with Bourdieu's 'field' to conceptualise children's free play and research experiences that are relationally, contextually and temporally dynamic; and are assigned multiple meanings from adult and child perspectives. Findings showed individuality in children's free play that revealed the dialogic relationship between cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. Developments in play themes, language, play behaviour, and children's agency exercised during free play over time, showed the complex and dynamic two-way traffic of cultures and practices between home and the nursery. The study revealed the development of unique relationships between children's research experiences that included researcher-child relationships and their free play in the nursery.

Impact Statement

The conceptual and methodological frameworks developed for this research and the subsequent findings are beneficial for early years practitioners and researchers, and education policymakers globally.

Findings:

- Whilst children encountered the same nursery provision, their free play in the nursery was unique due to the dialogic relationship between their individual free play cultures and practices at home and those encountered in the nursery.
- Examination of developments in play themes, language, play behaviour, and children's agency exercised during free play over time, show the complex and dynamic nature of the two way traffic of cultures and practices between home and the nursery.
- The study shows developments over time, in the unique relationships that individual children experienced between their free play in the nursery and their engagement in the research process.

These findings provide in-depth insight into children's situated lived experiences of their free play journeys that are characterised by their nuanced meanings. These insights are of value to education policymakers involved in devising initiatives that aim to bridge home-school gaps. The study suggests prolonged research for examining the dialogic relationship between individual children's dispositions acquired at home, and their experiences with the cultures and practices in early years settings. Instead of following predetermined agendas, these learnings should be used as starting points for informing the development of initiatives that respond to children's needs. The study suggests a similar approach to practitioners, as focusing on predetermined goals as starting points that guide their practice, will limit the meanings that practitioners attach to children's free play and lead to partial understanding of what children actually experience.

Impact of Conceptual framework and methodological contributions:

The study extends ideas related to children's 'agency' and incorporates it into its conceptual framework. The study demonstrates value in rethinking the application of Bourdieu's 'field' and 'individual habitus' in children's research; and provides new ways of conceptualising and conducting granular analysis of children's free play and research encounters that are relationally, contextually and temporally dynamic; and are assigned multiple meanings from adult and child perspectives. This framework is beneficial for researchers and practitioners involved in working with children. It provides new ways of conceiving of the complexity of children's free play experiences.

By offering free play provision as a participatory tool, this study shows that researchers and practitioners can enable children to communicate regarding their own free play by engaging in and experiencing free play. This study's critical approach to examining the dynamic interactions involved in process of assigning meaning where children and adults engage in live networks of negotiations is useful for both researchers and practitioners who seek to gain critical perspectives of children's complex and dynamic agency in play and research experiences. The study shows how data that foregrounds children's rather than adults' intentions for the research/inquiry, can be generated through its approach to the introduction of the researcher to the children. It shows value for researchers and practitioners aiming to understand children's experiences, to take a more direct and transparent approach to communicating their intentions; and sharing control over the inquiry agenda with children.

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1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This research examines the relationships between children's (aged 3-5) free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. It answers the following research questions:

1. What are the relationships between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery? How are these relationships perceived and responded to from multiple perspectives?
2. How do these relationships, perceptions, and responses develop over time and impact children's free play experiences in the nursery?
3. How did the research experience impact children's free play?

In the context of this research, the concept of 'free play' refers to child-initiated activities experienced 'relatively free from adult intrusion and direction, enabling them (children) to exercise agency, self-regulation, ownership, and control, and to direct their own' activities (Wood, 2014, p.4). While 'culture' refers to ideas, customs and values relating to free play, the term 'practice' refers to how those ideas materialise in children's play experiences at home and in the nursery.

The findings reveal that whilst accessing the same nursery provision, individuality in children's free play showed that there was a dialogic relationship between the free play cultures and practices encountered within the nursery and those encountered beyond the nursery. Children incorporated aspects of the free play cultures and practices that they encountered, internalised and embodied across diverse contexts. An examination of the developments in play themes, language, play behaviour, and children's agency exercised during free play over time, showed the complex and dynamic nature of the two-way traffic of cultures and practices between home and the nursery. The examination of multiple

perspectives showed variations in the meanings that were assigned to these developments from various standpoints. The study shows the developments over time, in the unique relationships between children's free play experiences in the nursery and their engagement in the research process. The nature of these relationships and their developments over time were influenced by the children's understandings of my researcher role and the study, and my responses to their reactions to me in research.

Through a critical review of the literature, my conceptual framework was developed by combining the concepts of 'free play'; Bourdieu's 'individual habitus', 'field' and 'cultural capital'; 'agency'; 'crystallisation'; 'context'; 'meaning-making'; and 'multiple perspectives'. This framework responds to Tisdall and Punch's (2012) critical perspective on the paradigmatic shift of the 'new sociology of childhood'. Tisdall and Punch (2012) argue that while this shift is important as it recognises children as capable of representing their own lives, it does not critically examine children's 'agency' and does not consider contexts such as 'contexts', 'transitions', 'relationships' and 'change' when examining children's experiences (p.10). My framework contributes to knowledge by extending ideas related to children's 'agency' and applying them to the understanding of children's free play. It creates value in applying 'field' and 'individual habitus' in new ways, that make it possible to conceptualise and make meaning of children's free play and research experiences that are relationally, contextually and temporally dynamic. It conceptualises that children's free play and research experiences are live networks of negotiations that are assigned different interpretations from various perspectives.

The study makes methodological contributions to the field of research with children. Through its approach to the introduction of the researcher to the children as a learner who studies children's play, the study takes a direct and transparent approach to communicate its intentions to the children. This makes it possible to share control over the research agenda with the children. The study enables children to communicate regarding their own free play by utilising the free play provision in the nursery as a participatory tool. This makes it possible for children to communicate through tools that they are already accustomed to as they form part of their daily lives in the nursery, and to choose methods that are best suited to their skills and

preferences. The study contributes to participatory research that examines artefacts and accompanying narratives generated by children. It shows value in also examining children's experiences of generating those artefacts and narratives, by conceiving of the research encounters as live networks of negotiations through the utilisation of its conceptual framework (see Section 2.3).

By accessing multiple adults' (parents, practitioners, and the researcher) and children's perspectives, the study gains new insight into the dialogic relationship between the free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery; and the complex and dynamic two-way traffic between them. These findings locate the study in relation to the existing literature concerning children's free play. In its innovative approach to conceiving of the children's complex relationally, contextually and temporally dynamic agency in free play and the research, the study provides a new conceptual framework that can be applied to future research concerning children's experiences. Methodological contributions show how participatory research involving children can be developed to better understand their perspectives and experiences.

The remainder of this chapter discusses my rationale for conducting this research. It then provides a background for the research that includes information regarding the number of participants, their backgrounds, the duration, and location of the study. The chapter also discusses my research aims and the structure of the thesis.

1.2. Research rationale

The discussion of my rationale for undertaking the research begins with a definition of play that is best suited to the context of this research. Drawing on some critical perspectives in the literature (such as Brown and Patte, 2012; and Rogers, 2010) that express concerns regarding the factors that marginalise children's free play opportunities at home and in the nursery, a rationale is provided regarding why the research on the relationship between children's free play at home and in the nursery is timely and important. An account is then provided of how the initial idea for this doctoral thesis was formed. This is followed by an overview of how the discussion of the

literature informed the development of my conceptual framework utilised to make meaning of the data, and my decision to involve the children's perspectives through participatory research.

While it is challenging to find a universal definition of play, the following is the most appropriate for the context of this research. Sutton-Smith in Brown and Patte (2012) suggests that 'play might be seen as the potentiation of adaptive variability; in other words, the mechanism by which the human species manages to cope with an ever-changing world' (p.16). Brown and Patte (2012) emphasise the cognitive, creative, emotional, physical and social benefits of play; and express concern regarding a number of contemporary 'societal factors' that 'devalu(ing)e' and marginalise children's opportunities of play (p.24). These societal factors impact both practices at home and in educational settings, in the form of 'culture of fear' among parents that limit children's 'access to play spaces' (p.25) and diminishing playtime in school (p.27). Rogers (2010) suggests that "if we take the concept of 'play' in early childhood, we are likely to imagine an activity that is spontaneous, child-led and intrinsically motivated" (p.6). "In contrast, common understandings of 'pedagogy' usually take as their starting point the adult's role" in the designing of provision and facilitation of 'learning' (p.6). Rogers (2010) argues that 'increasingly pedagogic practices' are being shaped by 'economic terms with an emphasis on standards, accountability and testing' which make it challenging for practitioners to 'reconcile' the two (p.6). Wood (2014) parallels Rogers' (2010) claim and suggests that children's free play choices in early years educational settings 'in reality' are restricted within parameters shaped by practitioners' varying interpretation and 'enactment' of 'curriculum' objectives (p.5). Wood (2014) expresses concern regarding the "increasing tensions' in practitioners' provision of free play as they try to reconcile between 'play-based' approaches and the structured curriculum goals in national policy frameworks" (p.4). There are growing concerns that children's free play opportunities at home and in the nursery are being marginalised due to such contemporary 'societal factors' (Brown and Patte, 2012, p.30) and education policies in England (Wood, 2014). This research is timely and important as it addresses such concerns by examining the relationships between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. By exploring the dialogic relationships between children's diverse free play cultures and practices at home and

those encountered in the nursery, the study provides an understanding of how such relationships shape children's free play experiences in early years settings, that are specifically designed to achieve curriculum objectives.

As a reflective early years practitioner keen to engage with advanced theoretical knowledge and contemporary debates, in order to critically reflect upon my own practice and its implications, I conducted a small-scale empirical research for my MA dissertation. The aim was to gain insight into practitioners' approaches to free play and structured activities in the nurseries of four state-maintained schools in London. At the time I encountered Brooker's (2002) work on 'parental ethnotheories and young children's preparation for school' within which she explored children's free play dispositions (Brooker, 2003, p.117). My interest in the relationship between children's diverse free play cultures and practices at home and those they encountered in the nursery, was preceded by Brooker (2002) who examined children's transition between home and the reception. She conceptualised this transition using Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus', 'field' and 'cultural capital'; and inspired utilising these theoretical tools for exploring a gap in knowledge concerning children's free play.

Brooker's (2002) conceptualisation of home and the reception as Bourdieu's (1990) 'field' particularly influenced my research. I also found Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) approach to conceptualising children's every day interactions during structured activities in the nursery as Bourdieu's (1990) 'field', useful. I adapted it to fit the context of my research and conceptualised children's everyday free play interactions as individual 'fields' of dynamic negotiations. I applied Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) approach of conducting micro-analysis of adult-child interactions in structured activities, to my granular analysis of children's free play-related individual research encounters. I developed a framework by consulting Tisdall and Punch (2012) who are critical of the aspects of the 'new sociology of childhood' that oversimplify children's agency and do not consider 'context', 'relationship', 'change' and 'transition' (p.10). My framework responds to such concerns and contributes to knowledge by providing a new way of conceptualising children's free play by building on the existing work of scholars (such as Klocker, 2007; and Clark and Moss, 2011) regarding concepts related to agency, and meaning-making; and applying them to the

context of my research. My contributions include extending the ideas related to the concept of agency such as its relational, contextual, and temporal dimensions that are assigned multiple meanings from various perspectives.

The decision to include children's perspectives through participatory research was influenced by 'recent attention to childhood' (Jones, 2015, p.15) by the 'new sociology of childhood' (Prout, 2005) that 'involved the evaluation of a particular phase of theory related research' (Jones, 2015, p.15). This paradigmatic shift challenged 'traditional' adult-centric approaches to 'exploring childhood' through 'adult lenses and agenda' and ignoring how children make meaning of their own experiences (Jones, 2015, p.15). It called for children's 'own perspectives' to be taken into consideration (Jones, 2015, p.15). My research offered the provision for play in the nursery as a participatory tool. This enabled children to communicate through free play by choosing activities, that they were already accustomed to as they formed part of children's daily lives; and that best suited their unique skills and competencies. While the decision to include children's perspectives was prompted by the 'new sociology of childhood', Tisdall and Punch's (2012) concerns regarding the dangers associated with the paradigmatic shift such as oversimplification and essentialisation of children's agency, influenced my critical approach to problematising my method of involving children in research. Such problematisation led me to examine the contextual, relational and temporal dimensions of the children's engagement in the research.

1.3. A background of the research

This section provides a background of the research that includes details of the participants, the locations, and the duration of the study. To gain insight into the relationship between children's diverse home free play cultures and practices and their free play in the nursery, the study was conducted in the nursery settings of two state-maintained primary schools in two London Boroughs. These Nurseries were attended by children from families of diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. A total of eighteen children, nine from each setting and their parents; and all practitioners from the two Nurseries, as well as senior staff from the schools, were invited to take part in the research. To capture the essence of time in understanding

the dynamic nature of, and the developments in the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery, the study was conducted over six months.

1.4. Research aims

- I. To gain insight into the developments over time in the relationships between the free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. To examine how these relationships are perceived and responded to from multiple adults' (parents, practitioners, and the researcher) and children's perspectives.
- II. To take into account concepts such as change, relationships, transitions and contexts that impact children's free play-related research encounters.
- III. To provide children with access to multiple participatory tools that suit their unique skills and preferences.
- IV. To provide ethically sound research opportunities for children by using a process of ongoing consent enabling children to take part in and withdraw from the research at any time, and taking steps to maintain the anonymity of participants by assigning them pseudonyms.
- V. To consider children's choices as core data; and examine as key themes, what the children communicated through research to be of importance to their free play.
- VI. To avoid imposing an adult (the researcher) perspective of children's experiences, where the children's own reflections were unavailable. By presenting multiple possible interpretations, the uncertainties in the meanings attached to the data related to the children's experiences are acknowledged.

1.5. The structure of the thesis

This section provides an overview of the structure of the thesis with a breakdown of the chapters. The breakdown discusses the content of the chapters; and provides a sense of the layout of the analysis chapters. The rationale for choosing the case study method; the selection of particular case studies; the selection of themes for the analysis in Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven; and the approach to synthesising the overall findings in Chapter Eight are discussed in sections 3.3 and 3.14.

Chapter One introduces the study and the research questions. It provides an overview of the research findings relating to the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery, and the study's conceptual and methodological contributions. These are discussed to show the significance of the study in the field of research with children. The chapter also provides my rationale for conducting this research, a background, my research aims, and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two examines the literature to develop the conceptual framework that is utilised to make meaning of the data. The examination also provides a context for the research, and identifies gaps in knowledge that the research addresses.

Chapter Three discusses the development of my research questions. It shows how the discussion with theories in the literature informed my selection of participatory research; the case study method in qualitative research; and thematic analysis, and led to the development of my methodological framework. The chapter discusses the research methods that I selected and how I utilised them to conduct research. It shows how the discussion of the literature informed the way I generated the data with the participants, and how I addressed ethical concerns. How I conducted a thematic analysis of the data presented in Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven; and presented the research findings in Chapter Eight by consulting the literature, is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Four presents and analyses data to show how children's assimilation of the research task and the researcher-child relationship

developed over time in unique ways. The chapter shows how these, in turn, became meaningful research findings as they impacted the children's free play journeys.

Chapter Five presents a case study of a child named Dave and examines the developments over time, in the theme of friendship in relation to his free play journey. The case study examines the multiple perspectives from which this theme was perceived and responded to. These perspectives include those of children such as Dave and his peer Henry; and adults such as the researcher, Dave's practitioner Ms. Nowak, Dave's parent Alba and Henry's parent Nora.

Chapter Six presents case studies of two children, Naomi and Sophia. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the children's research journeys, and the second focuses on Naomi's father Noah and Sophia's mother Sarah's perspectives of their children's free play at home and in the nursery.

Chapter Seven presents case studies of two children Amy and Rachel. The chapter is divided into two parts. Through the analysis of two practitioner-child interactions related to free play in the mosaic sessions, the first part identifies the factors that impacted the practitioners' responses to children's free play-related research activities. In the second part of the chapter, these factors are then examined as themes across all practitioners' interviews.

Chapter Eight synthesises the study's overall findings answer the research questions by drawing commonalities between the case studies, and by highlighting the nuanced differences within those commonalities.

Chapter Nine discusses how the findings extend the existing knowledge regarding the relationship between children's free play at home and in the nursery. The chapter articulates the study's conceptual and methodological contributions to the field of research with children. A discussion of the study's limitations highlights the areas for development in future research. The concluding remarks articulate the impact of the research both within and outside the academic world.

1.6. Chapter conclusion

This chapter introduced the study and the research questions. It provided an overview of the research findings relating to the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. It introduced the study's conceptual and methodological contributions to show the significance of the study in the field of research with children. The chapter also discussed my rationale for conducting this research, along with background information such as the number of participants, the location, and the duration of the study. It provided an overview of my research aims and the structure of the thesis. In the next chapter, a critical review of the literature develops the study's conceptual framework that underpins my meaning-making of the data. It also provides a context for the research, and identifies gaps in the existing literature that the study addresses.

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the literature to provide a context in relation to the research questions concerning the relationship over time between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. The discussion of the literature develops the conceptual framework utilised to make meaning of the data and shows how it contributes to knowledge by addressing gaps in the existing literature. The framework combines the concepts of 'free play'; Bourdieu's theoretical tools of 'individual habitus', 'field' and 'cultural capital'; 'agency'; 'crystallisation'; 'context'; 'meaning-making'; and 'multiple perspectives'. It contributes to knowledge by extending ideas related to 'agency' and how they can be applied to conceptualise research involving young children. It demonstrates value in rethinking how Bourdieu's concept of 'field' can be used to conceptualise children's free play and research experiences that are relationally, contextually and temporally dynamic; and are assigned different meanings when interpreted from various perspectives. The chapter begins with a rationale for my approach to conducting the literature review in order to develop the conceptual framework. An introduction to how the framework is conceptualised is followed by a discussion of the literature in each section of the chapter that shows the development of particular aspects of the framework. A critical review of the literature that historicises play theories and problematises 'free play', shows how free play is conceptualised in my framework. In the next section, Bourdieu's (1990) claims regarding his theoretical tools of 'individual habitus', 'field' and 'cultural capital' for sociological research in his seminal text, are examined to show how I interpreted and conceptualised them. A discussion with other authors' (such as Vuorisalo and Alanen, 2015; and Wragg, 2013) utilisation of these tools to theorise their research shows how their work informs my conceptualisation, and how my framework addresses gaps in knowledge. This is followed by a critical review of the literature concerning the paradigmatic shift of the 'new sociology of childhood' and its criticism that have been pivotal in influencing the way children's lives are researched and understood. A discussion between this review and my framework consisting of 'free play' and

Bourdieu's concepts, shows how the critical perspectives concerning children's agency and the contextual and temporal dimensions of their experiences expressed in these paradigmatic shifts, informed my conceptualisation of 'agency', 'crystallisation', 'context', 'meaning-making' and 'multiple perspectives' in my framework. These key concepts form my framework for answering the research questions that concern the relationship over time between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery.

2.2. My approach to conducting the literature review and developing the contextual framework

This section focuses on my approach to critically reviewing the literature and developing the conceptual framework utilised to make meaning of the data. Several authors (such as Boote and Beile, 2005; Cronin et al., 2008; and Maxwell 2006) draw attention to the different aspects of conducting robust literature reviews, such as the selection of relevant literature; and the development of theoretical and conceptual frameworks. According to Boote and Beile (2005), a good literature review consists of a 'thorough and comprehensive' understanding of all work relating to the topic (p.3). They suggest identifying the strengths and limitations of all existing research. Through an extensive study of all literature in the field, researchers can develop sound theoretical backgrounds on their topics; and provide rationales for including specific literature in their reviews (Boote and Beile, 2005). Boote and Beile (2005) claim that identifying gaps in the existing literature is essential for establishing the originality of a proposed study. A good literature review does not simply build on existing theories, but also critically evaluates their research methodologies and the gaps in research techniques; and establishes relationships between different literature (Boote and Beile, 2005). Maxwell (2006) contradicts Boote and Beile (2005) by arguing that a review should focus only on the most 'relevant literature' rather than comprehensively covering a vast range of texts concerning the subject (p.28). This according to Maxwell (2006) helps the researcher build a 'conceptual framework' for their study, rather than producing an elaborate account of all existing literature concerning the topic (p.30). Boote and Beile (2006) respond to Maxwell's (2006) criticism, by suggesting that examination of a wide range of literature is essential for identifying ones that are relevant.

Cronin et al. (2008) and Colling (2003) echo Boote and Beile's (2005) emphasis on 'addressing the inconsistencies and contradictions' within texts, and their strengths and limitations (Cronin et al., 2008, p.43). My approach to the selection of key literature responds to both Boote and Beile (2006) and Maxwell's (2006) concerns, as through the examination of a wide range of literature, I identified texts relevant to my research questions. These include the texts (such as Bourdieu, 1990) that are considered as seminal; and the literature (such as Wood, 2014) that address emerging and contemporary issues. My review reflects Baker's (2000) understanding of 'seminal texts' as materials relating to the original concepts, that are important 'sources most likely to contain a summary or overview of the key issues' pertaining to the topic and are frequently referred to in existing work (p.222). The emerging and contemporary literature include more recent theoretical and empirical texts that utilise relevant concepts, ask critical questions, and identify areas for further development. In my review, seminal and contemporary texts such as James and Prout (1997) and Tisdall and Punch (2012) provide a comprehensive understanding of the developments to date concerning research involving children. A critical examination of such literature that builds on key concepts, sets up opportunities for locating my thesis in relation to existing work by drawing out my areas of contribution. 'Relevance' does not imply that I limited my search to only materials that focus on children's free play. Echoing Boote and Beile (2006), a broadened search enabled me to explore further concepts such as 'agency' and 'meaning-making' that link to my research questions and create a discussion between the literature and my own research. My approach to understanding the relationship between children's play at home and in the nursery is informed by the connections I made between arguments representing the various authors' perspectives; and my critical review of the appropriateness of their methodologies (Hart, 2018; Boote and Beile, 2005). My literature review relates to theories, and approaches to understanding in research.

Several authors (such as Parahoo, 2014; Fain, 2017; and Green, 2017) debate the role of frameworks in literature reviews. The parallels in their claims identify a dearth in the literature where the contributions of frameworks in supporting the authors' approaches to theorisation, are inadequately explained. The authors attribute the frequent interchangeable use of the terms 'theoretical framework' and 'conceptual framework' to the

ambiguities in the differentiation between the two. The authors differ in their distinctions between theoretical and conceptual framework, and in their suggestions for employing them effectively in research. Drawing on various perspectives (such as Fain, 2017; Gerrish and Lacey, 2010; and Parahoo, 2014), Green (2017) provides an understanding of the varying differentiations between the two terms. The author suggests utilising the flexibility present due to the current ambiguities in the differentiations, to define these terms in the context of a researcher's own study. Fain (2017) identifies 'theory (is) as an organised and systematic set of interrelated statements (concepts) that specify the nature of relationships between two or more variables with the purpose of understanding a problem or the nature of things' (Fain, 2017, p.103). Fain (2017) argues that a theoretical framework illustrates how theory underpins a study, whereas a 'conceptual framework' demonstrates how specific concepts within a particular theory contribute to the theorisation of a study. Parahoo (2014) parallels Fain's (2017) claim regarding the purpose of a theoretical framework. However, Parahoo (2014) suggests that a conceptual framework illustrates the development of a study's approach to theorisation by integrating various concepts from more than one broad theoretical framework. My conceptual framework (see Figure 2.1) reflects Parahoo's (2014) categorisation, as it combines concepts from multiple broader theoretical frameworks such as Bourdieu's 'individual habitus', 'field' and 'cultural capital'; and 'agency' and 'meaning-making' in relation to the 'new sociology of childhood'. It incorporates these concepts into a framework, with 'the relationship between free play at home and in the nursery' at its centre.

My approach to developing the conceptual framework was informed by consulting Imenda (2014), Jabareen (2009), and Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009) who suggest various ways of combining concepts to construct such frameworks. I combined the various concepts to form a 'network' or 'plane' to show how I linked them together and related them to free play (Jabareen, 2009, p.49). Rather than providing 'theoretical explanations', this framework provides an 'understanding' (Jabareen, 2009, p.51). These concepts are 'connected to the literature' that 'support the need for the study', are 'relate(d) to the study's purpose statement, and situate the study in terms of previous work' (Rocco and Plakhotnik, 2009, p.1). The process of arriving at this conceptual framework was through 'an inductive process whereby' I

connected the individual concepts 'to tell a bigger map of possible relationships' (Imenda, 2014, p.189). This conceptual framework addresses gaps in knowledge relating to the understanding of the relationship over time between children's free play at home and in the nursery. The following section focuses on my conceptual framework.

2.3. My conceptual framework

My framework combines the concepts of 'free play'; 'field', 'individual habitus', 'cultural capital'; 'agency'; 'crystallisation'; 'context'; 'meaning-making'; and 'multiple perspectives' (of adults such as practitioners, parents, the researcher; and the children) (see Figure 2.1). In this framework and the thesis, children's free play during the mosaic sessions, and all research activities related to their free play are identified as 'free play-related research encounters'. The framework conceives of the following: Free play related individual research encounters are 'fields' of live networks where the children/children and adults engage in negotiations to position themselves, and to assign meanings to materials related to free play generated in the research. Individuals enter into these 'fields' with their 'individual habitus' that consists of their values and dispositions acquired through their experiences over time. They all possess 'cultural capital' consisting of their skills and knowledge that are ascribed differing values in different fields. These values along with the rules in the 'fields' known as 'doxas' are determined by the ones in positions of power. Within these 'fields' individuals exercise 'agency' which is relationally, contextually, and temporally dynamic. Each field can be assigned multiple meanings when interpreted from the different adult and child perspectives. Each of these perspectives is conceptualised to be multidimensional. These dimensions of each perspective can be expressed through the process of crystallisation. This process combines the different aspects communicated through various modes to provide one multi-layered understanding of the perspective (see Section 2.6). The following section focuses on the conceptualisation of 'free play' in my framework.

Figure 2.1 Key concepts in the framework.



2.4. Problematizing and conceptualising free play

A critical review of the literature in this section provides a context for the research questions concerning the relationship over time between children's free play at home and in the nursery. It problematises 'free play' to show its conceptualisation in my framework (see Figure 2.1). First, to trace the evolution of the concept, a discussion is created with the historical roots of dominant play theories that led to critical questions regarding the relationship among theories, and contemporary and future practice. Then the discussion shows how an examination of myriad stances taken on understanding play informed my meaning-making of the children's free play-related research encounters. The discussion with the literature then highlights the factors

leading to diverse children's varying experiences in educational settings. In this manner, the section problematises and contextualises 'free play' in early years settings and in my research; and conceptualises 'free play' in my framework.

Contemporary theorists provide critical perspectives on the history of play or play theories. These can be conceived of as different histories of play as they are interpreted with a particular theoretical positional lens. For instance, Brown and Patte (2012) position this history in relation to free play, Johnson (2015) interprets the history in terms of perspectives of play and play therapy, and Bloch and Choi (1990) emphasise the history of play theory through a lens of play and early years education. A discussion is created with Brown and Patte's (2012) perspective of historicising prominent thinkers' ideas regarding the different functions of play, as they ask critical questions that inform my conceptualisation of free play. Brown and Patte's (2012) questions relate to the relationships between the original theories and current theories and practices; and create the need to ask, how can these ideas be carried forward in our conceptualisation of free play? How do they influence current practitioners' and researchers' practices? And how can they be extended? The engagement with these questions informs my conceptualisation of 'free play'. Brown and Patte (2012) highlight differences across cognitive, creative, emotional, social and physical functions of play. The authors claim that such differences in ideas show the complexities involved in attaching a universal definition to play. The authors provide a critical perspective on Plato's contribution to ancient views by using the term 'adult-centric' to describe his conceptualisation of play as a means for 'preparing children' for 'adulthood' (p.11). They review Locke and Rousseau's contributions to enlightenment views that value 'recreational' qualities of play experiences as a source of 'richer' 'children's education', and 'social interactions' 'between children' during 'games' as 'learning' opportunities (p.11). The authors draw on Froebel's work of creating 'opportunities' for play through the provision of 'gifts' and 'occupations' in the form of resources and tasks in kindergarten, that contributed to romantic views. The work of evolutionary theorists reviewed includes Schiller and Spencer's 'surplus energy', Karl Groos' 'preparation for life' through the refinement of 'survival skill' and Baldwin and Hall's 'race capitulation' in the form of the development of skills through repetition in play (p.12). Among

scientific theories Brown and Patte (2012) draw on, Dewey's view that play 'develop(es) cognitive and social competence' and is a transitory path to the 'work of adults' (p.12); and Montessori's idea that 'play is the child's work' as children experience 'sensory learning' during play (p.13). Freud's psychoanalytic theory 'views play as a mechanism for continually working out traumatic events experienced in the past in an effort to gain mastery of those events' (p.13). Brown and Patte (2012) highlight a key difference between Piaget and Vygotsky's psychological theories. While Piaget viewed play to be a space for 'practi(ce)sing' and 'assimilati(o)ng' 'previous learnings' without leading to cognitive development (p.13), Vygotsky viewed dramatic and make-believe play as opportunities for 'cognitive development' through interactions involving adults or more knowledgeable peers (Brown and Patte, 2012, p.13). Bruner added to psychological theories by 'experimenting with combinations of behaviours' in play that 'lead to (the) development' of 'social communication' and cannot be 'explored' elsewhere' (p.14). With such variety in interpretations of the functions of play, Brown and Patte (2012) argue that how Sutton-Smith defines play captures the complexities that their review illustrates. Sutton-Smith contributes to contemporary theories with his claim that 'play is (was) ambiguous, and the evidence for that ambiguity l(ay)ies in these quite different scholarly ways of viewing play' (p.14). A review of Brown and Patte's (2012) perspective informs my engagement with conceptual questions concerning free play and establishes the challenges in finding a universal definition of play. Saracho and Spodek (1998) and Mellou (1994) historicise play theories. However, in contrast to Brown and Patte (2012) who trace the evolution and show the diversity in the way play is defined, Saracho and Spodek (1998); and Mellou (1994) categorise them into classical- initiated in the twentieth century, and modern theories- initiated after 1920. By doing so, the authors support Ellis' (1973) claim that classical theories are armchair theories that are not supported by research evidence but are important as they provide the foundation for modern theories. Among classical theories, Saracho and Spodek (1998) and Mellou (1994) draw on Lazarus' (1883) recreational or relaxation theory that viewed play to be the opposite of work and attributed an energy restorative function to play, and Schiller's theory of 'surplus energy'. Among modern theories, Saracho and Spodek (1998) identify Piaget and Freud's work as 'dynamic theories' as they are concerned with 'play content' rather than reasons for play's 'existence' (p.5). Theorists such

as Freud, Piaget and Parten 'propose that play has a strong influence on children's development' and 'the influence is congruous with the basic goals of early childhood education' 'implying that play has a strong educational purpose' (p.5). While Freud suggests that play has a 'strong affective undertone', Piaget highlights its 'cognitive functions', and Parten draws attention to the important role of play in the 'socialisation process' (p.5). Other theories categorised as modern by Saracho and Spodeck (1998) and Mellou (1994) are by Singer, Ellis, and White. According to Singer (1973) play is a space for 'arranging experiences' in order to 'develop' one's capacity to 'cope with the world' (Saracho and Spodeck, 1998, p.8). Ellis (1973) defines play as a 'balancing' mechanism that enables children to filter through 'overwhelming information', and 'daydream' to tackle 'boredom' resulting from 'insufficient information' (Saracho and Spodeck, 1998, p.8). According to Ellis (1973), 'children formulate information internally through fantasy play' (Saracho and Spodeck, 1998, p.8). White (1959) suggests that individuals draw feelings of 'accomplish(ment)' from play and that on its own it is 'rewarding' (p.8). Mellou (1994) also draws on Erikson (1950) and Peller (1952). Erikson 'puts forward the idea that play' provides opportunities to 'dramatise' experiences that are 'combination(s)' of 'three aspects of life: the past, the present, and the future' (p.94). Peller's (1952) theory suggests that 'children's role play is based on feelings of love, admiration, fear and aggression' (p.94). Saracho and Spodesk (1998) and Mellou's (1994) historicisation is important as they reveal the shift over time in approaches to developing play theories, from relying solely on 'philosophical reflections' to 'experimental research' (Mellou, 1994, p.93). This discussion shows the diverse ways in which play has been historically defined, and how approaches to the development of play theories have changed over time.

A discussion with the literature (such as Brown and Eberle, 2017; Edmiston, 2008; Henricks, 2009; Parten, 1932; and Smilansky, 1968) that draws attention to the various benefits of play informed my approach to making meaning of children's free play-related research encounters. Brown and Eberle (2017) draw attention to social-emotional development through play. To show the value of play for its role in human development, the impacts of which extend beyond childhood to adulthood, the authors reflect on their psychotherapy analysis of a mass shooter. The authors argue that experiences of abuse and a significant lack of opportunities for free play in

his early childhood, 'thwarted his ability to modify violent impulses' (p.24). Brown (2014) identifies ten developmental benefits that result from the factors in play that include 'fun', 'freedom', 'flexibility', and 'social interaction' and discusses how particular skills are utilised and developed during play. Hughes (2002) identifies sixteen play types such as 'social play' involving interactions and exchange of information, 'locomotor' involving physical movement, and 'communicative play' involving both verbal and nonverbal language. Parten (1932) categorises social participation in play into engagement in 'unoccupied behaviour', 'onlooker', 'parallel activity', 'associative play', and 'cooperative play' or 'organised supplementary play' (p.248). While all these categories individually or collectively do not encompass all the ways in which children engage in play and there is often overlap between the categories, it may be argued that they can aid when planning, observing, and taking part in children's play. These categories have not gone unchallenged. For instance, Marsh et al. (2016) added more types of play to adapt Hughes' taxonomy according to the developing 'landscape of digital play' (p.243). Parten's hierarchy in the different stages of development is challenged by Moore, Evertson, and Brophy (1974) who argue that it undermines 'solitary play' and deems it inferior without considering that it is goal-oriented, involves physical manipulation of muscles, and has educational value. Smith (1978) concurs that 'solitary play' is not an inferior form of play, but rather is an opportunity for children to try out their skills before manifesting them in group play and is, therefore, more sophisticated than parallel play. Vanderburg (1978) suggests that as play should adapt to changing environments, solitary play is crucial as it provides opportunities for exploration of new environment or object, for trying out without any specific goals, and finally applying skills to achieve goals. The author suggests that solitary play is therefore complex. This view is aligned with Smith's (1978) reinterpretation of the function of solitary play that states that solitary play serves as opportunities to realise skills before enacting them in group play. Parten's categories are determined based on adults' observations and take an oversimplified approach to interpreting children's social participation in play. Smilansky (1968) built on Piaget's classification scheme and suggested four levels of play that are developmentally related to increases in prerequisite cognitive skills. These include 'functional', 'constructive', and 'dramatic play', and 'games with rules' (p.68). Takhwar and Smith (1989) critique this classification and claim that there is a 'lack of

inclusiveness in the scheme' as many activities such as 'physical activity play and language play are not so readily assimilated to it' (p.114). The aspect of motivation for play is also contested. In contrast to Garvey's (1977) developmental perspective on intrinsic motivation that suggests that play is internally driven, Elkonin (2005) suggests that play topics emerge from children's lived experiences and environments and is not a 'biological phenomenon' (p.46). This discussion provided insight into how various authors draw attention to the social and cognitive developmental benefits of play.

Several of the dimensions of play discussed above are also included in Fromberg and Bergen (2006) as they 'offer a multitude of perspectives on play, varying from play's relation to cognitive, linguistic, social, and creative development to the communicative meaning of play in a sociocultural context' (p.250). Fromberg and Bergen (2006) also draw on Roopnarine et al. (1994) to caution against the dangers of imposing Western, middle-class bias in dominant play theories and highlight the importance of considering varying conceptualisations of play in other parts of the world. Bruce (1997) echoes this claim by warning against perpetuating 'colonial attitudes towards play' (p.90). Roopnarine et al. (1994) suggest considering the 'changing ecology of childhood' when studying children's play (p.2). They argue that 'studies of Western children have assumed a global orientation' and that there is 'need to broaden conceptual frameworks on play' (p.4). The authors argue that play should be understood as an activity common in the lives of children from all cultures, and be 'viewed to be both a cause and an effect of culture' (p.5). This discussion highlighted the importance of conceptualising diverse expressions of free play among children.

While the above exploration of the literature warns against imposing western attitudes towards the understanding of play, the following discussion cautions against examining play through adult-centric lenses. Henricks' (2009) suggestion that play is 'paradoxical' as it 'exhibits' both 'orderly and disorderly' qualities, is particularly relevant to my stance on agency (p.13) (discussed in section 2.6.3). The author calls for an examination of 'the different ways in which order is observed, challenged, or disregarded during any particular play event', thus arguing that order is open to interpretation and also what we understand by word orderly alters with time (p.13).

Henricks (2009) suggests that the concept of 'orderly play' is often misinterpreted as people's understanding of 'what is proper' and 'implies that people feel assured about how the social situation will unfold and about their own role within it' (p.15). This understanding of order as subjective reflects how I conceptualise children's agency in their free play-related research encounters. I conceive of children's agency to be assigned multiple meanings from various perspectives, and these meanings to change over time. Henricks (2009) also draws on Edmiston (2008) to suggest that Vygotsky's zone of proximal development should not be misinterpreted as adults supporting children to achieve 'some pre-established adult vision of success' (Edmiston, 2008, p.140). Rather they suggest that it be considered as creative opportunities for children to use their 'current capabilities' collaboratively with those of others (Henricks, 2009, p.24). As Broadhead (2006) discusses her observation-interpretation tool known as the 'social play continuum', she cautions by illustrating 'how adults' preconceptions can cloud their understanding of young children's capabilities and potential' and marginalise children's intentions (p.202). This discussion led to the prioritisation of children's intentions and perspectives in my conceptualisation of 'free play'.

The following discussion explores Delorme's (2018) and Sturrock and Else's (1989) perspectives that are critical of the contextualisation of play in relationship to early years education driven by adult agenda. Saracho and Spodek (2006) argue the importance of social interactions during play for the acquisition of literacy skills. They draw on the work of constructivist theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bronfenbrenner as major contributors towards the understanding of the interactions between literacy and play. The authors suggest that both in spontaneous play and literacy, children must draw upon their recollection of 'facts and experiences' in order to apply their 'mental schemes' and 'generate new contexts' (p.710). They discuss how the interaction between play and literacy extends beyond cognitive development and how social interactions during play can lead to the development of 'literacy knowledge' (p.711). Delorme (2018) cautions against the dangers of such contextualisation that can marginalise what Sheridan (2011) defines as 'spontaneous play', where children 'provide their own motivation to play and act without prompting or intervention by an adult' (p.4). Sturrock and Else (1998) suggest adults be 'resources' for children's

'self-directed play' (p.3). They argue that 'work in play is increasingly presented in the forms emerging out of playcare practice and is based on early year's education' (p.3). This argument could be applied to the perspective of Saracho and Spodeck (2006) who emphasise the value of social communication in play for acquisition of literacy skills, as such a stance on play 'promote(s) content interference in the play process' and can marginalise children's 'spontaneous play' (Sturrock and Else, 1998, p.3). Similarly, Karrby (1989) and Nicholson et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of including children's intentions in the understanding of child-initiated play. Delorme (2018) argues that Hughes' (2002) taxonomy of play presents 'the play types (that) are simply terms to describe play behaviours exhibited by children' and were 'never intended to be a tick list of behaviours that playworkers should strive to ensure are performed' (p.251). In the same vein, I refrained from choosing one perspective on play to make meaning of children's free play-related research experiences. Sutton-Smith's (2009) seven rhetorics reflect seven particular opinions of play and he suggests that unconventional types of play are often not valued. As research findings are shaped by the rhetoric that researchers choose, I avoided taking an adult-centric agenda and prioritising any one or a number of dominant theories on play. In light of the above discussion, in my meaning-making of the data, I focused on the dynamics and contexts of play-related interactions instead of interpreting the meaning and benefits of play choices using the dominant theories of play.

A discussion with critical perspectives in the literature (such as Brooker, 2002; Knight, 2015; and Wood, 2014) highlights the factors leading to diverse children's varying experiences in educational settings. This discussion is used to contextualise free play in relation to early years settings and my research, and show how 'free play' is conceptualised in my framework. Brooker (2002) argues that children's unique free play repertoires enculturated through diverse cultures and practices at home can lead to inequitable free play experiences in early years educational settings. Brooker's (2002) use of 'habitus', 'field' and 'capital' in her analysis of the impact of the home-school relationship on children's learning and free play dispositions, inspired incorporation of Bourdieu's theoretical tools in my conceptual framework (see Section 2.3). Brooker's (2002) argument regarding diversity in children's free play experiences is echoed by Knight

(2015) and Wood (2014). Knight (2015) identifies children, whose dispositions acquired at home contrast the predominant cultures and practices of educational settings, as 'fish out of water' (p.99). Wood (2014) problematises and challenges the notion of equity in free play for all children by highlighting a range of factors in addition to cultures and practices at home (Brooker, 2006; Göncü et al., 2000) that can lead to varied free play experiences. Such factors include, children's perceptions of their own gender roles and those of their play-partners (Blaise, 2005; and Fabes, et al., 2003); perceptions of peers' ethnicity, race and sex (Fishbein et al., 2009); and disability (Kim, 2005), that lead to variations in 'children's repertoires of choice' during free play and their resultant experiences (p.16). Wood (2014) suggests that with such diversity among children, the 'freedom to choose may advantage some, but disadvantage others' (p.16). She claims that such differences are experienced as provisions for free play in educational settings 'reflect practitioners' varying understandings regarding play; interpretation of curriculum guidelines for facilitating play, and accountability and assessment tools that provide fixed and partial meaning and interpretation of children's free play' (p.16). Wood (2014) is of the opinion that individual children's expressions of agency in their free play repertoires are unique. According to Wood (2014) practitioners' interpretations of such expressions of agency based on their own understandings, school cultures, and curriculum guidelines, also vary. Based on these claims, Wood (2014) calls for the problematisation of children's agency in free play. She suggests a 'microanalysis of play' to gain insight into the 'multiple meanings and interpretations' in order to examine how diverse free play is experienced within practitioner designed provisions in educational settings (p.16). My conceptual framework adopts Wood's (2014) perspective of 'microanalysis of play' and conceives of children's individual free play-related research encounters as live networks of negotiations within varying contexts. It conceives of children's diverse expressions of agency within these encounters to be contextually, temporally and relationally dynamic (see Section 2.6.3). My research conceptualises that these encounters that are micro analysed, are assigned multiple interpretations from the various adults' (parents, practitioners, and the researcher) and children's standpoints. The following section focuses on the conceptualisation of free play-related research encounters using Bourdieu's theoretical tools in my framework.

2.5. The conceptualisation of Bourdieu's 'field', 'individual habitus', and 'cultural capital' in my framework

My conceptual framework conceives of children's free play related individual research encounters as Bourdieu's 'field'. It conceives of 'doxas' in the form of rules to operate in these fields, where children and adults enter with their individual habitus and cultural capital; and negotiate their own positions.

In the first part of this section, particular claims that Bourdieu (1990) makes regarding 'field', 'individual habitus' and 'cultural capital' in his seminal text, are critically reviewed to show how I interpreted and conceptualised them in my framework. The second part focuses on a critical review of other authors' (such as Vuorisalo and Alanen, 2015; and Wragg, 2013) theorisation of their research using these particular tools. Within this review, a discussion is created between my conceptualisation and those of other authors. It highlights the parallels between the areas of strength in their work and my conceptualisation, and the gaps in knowledge that my framework addresses.

2.5.1. A critical review of Bourdieu's claims regarding his theoretical tools in his seminal work, and their role in my conceptual framework

a. **Field**, doxas and symbolic power

Bourdieu suggests 'field' to be a live network of power relations where dynamic interactions take place among agents who negotiate their position within it (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1998, p.39). Bourdieu (1990) considers 'doxas' to be the pre-established rules within a 'field' that are set from positions of power within that 'field'. These rules are ingrained in 'practice between a habitus and the field to which it is attuned' (p.68). Bourdieu suggests that unchallenged acceptance by other agents, of 'doxas' convert them into 'symbolic power' (p.68-69). In my conceptual framework, children's free play-related individual research encounters are conceptualised as live 'fields' that consist of the children and the adults' negotiations to establish their positions. The unchallenged nursery rules established in the cultures and practices by the practitioners; as well as the rules devised by the

children in their self-initiated and self-governed play, that others joining in later adhere to without questioning them, are conceptualised as the 'doxas' that operate in the 'fields'.

- b. Habitus, **individual habitus**, the genealogy of habitus, embodiment and bodily hexis

I interpreted Bourdieu's (1990) concept of 'habitus' as the 'values' (p.68), perspectives and 'inclinations' (p.49) encountered during past experiences, that become embedded within us in the form of lasting 'dispositions' (p.59); and they frame our reactions in our subsequent experiences. My conceptual framework considers all children and adults (parents, practitioners, and the researcher) to have their individual 'habitus' that comprises their sets of values and dispositions acquired through their experiences over time.

Bourdieu makes the following claims regarding 'individual habitus'; the 'genealogy', 'durability' and 'transposability' of habitus; 'unique integration'; 'embodiment' of habitus through 'bodily hexis'; and 'cultural capital' as a component of habitus.

Individual habitus

Bourdieu (1990) attributes the commonalities within the cultural experiences of individuals who encounter similar contexts, to their positions within the same class. Such commonalities lead to the acquisition of similar habitus by individuals in the same class; known as 'class habitus' (p.60). However, Bourdieu (1990) suggests that as no two individuals even within the same class have the exact same experiences and encounter an identical sequence of events, they each acquire an 'individual habitus' within the 'class habitus' that differ from one another in nuanced ways (p.60). My framework conceptualises there to be nuanced variations even within the 'individual habitus' of children belonging to the same family, as their experiences across the same contexts may differ due to a multitude of factors (for example their parents' attitudes towards their age and sex); and as no two children encounter the exact same experiences in the same order.

The genealogy of habitus

Bourdieu (1990) suggests that there is a non-linear relationship between the changes in one's habitus and their experiences across various contexts over time, as the level of influence each experience has on the habitus is different. While the earliest experiences determine the fundamental elements of one's habitus, their deep-rootedness leads to their persistent influence on how one internalises the aspects of new contexts encountered (p.60). Bourdieu (1990) suggests that although later experiences impact habitus to a certain degree making it 'transposable'; habitus being the stronghold of dispositions acquired through the earliest experiences is 'durable' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53). He suggests that within a 'field' one's habitus is not only impacted by their own immediate physical and social environment, but also to a degree by factors that shape the habitus of other individuals that one encounters within a context. Therefore, as Bourdieu (1990) delves deeper into the 'transposability' of habitus within an experience, he draws attention to the complex synthesis of elements from various 'individual habitus' that lies both within and beyond the context of the individual's particular experience (p.60). Bourdieu (1990) defines this complex synthesis as 'unique integration' (p.60). My framework conceptualises children's habitus to be durable and transposable as suggested by Bourdieu (1990) by conceiving that each child's accumulation of their primary individual habitus began through their experiences at home which in turn shaped the way they encountered and internalised aspects of new habitus in the nursery. Through play interactions in the nursery, the framework conceives of children's individual habitus to change through 'unique integration' as they encounter the habitus of their peers and adults, as well as to an extent, the aspects of the habitus of others that these individuals interacted with in the past (Bourdieu, 1990, p.60).

Embodiment and bodily hexis

Bourdieu (1998) suggests that the 'embodiment' of habitus is its expression in one's 'body, taste, selection, and language' (p.81). He draws particular attention to the ways in which one's habitus manifests in the ways their body reacts within particular contexts, and defines it as 'bodily hexis' (Bourdieu,

1990, p.69-70). Bourdieu (1990) suggests that much like perception, bodily hexis is also durable and is inscribed in an individual's repertoire of 'stand(ing), speak(ing), walk(ing), and thereby (of) feel(ing) and think(ing)' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.70). As the individual moves across different contexts, their habitus influences how their body interacts within 'fields' and internalises and embodi(ment)es new dispositions of the social world it encounters. My framework conceptualises children's and adults' 'individual habitus' to be manifested in their bodily gestures as they engage in social interactions within 'fields'. As the individual habitus evolves through the internalisation of aspects of new habitus encountered across varying contexts while being structured by the primary habitus, the framework conceives of the resultant changes in the habitus to also be embodied and communicated through the individuals' mannerisms.

c. Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1990) defines cultural capital as an individual's knowledge and skills acquired through their previous experiences, that attains them advantages in social situations (p.64). As the value that is assigned to cultural capital varies across fields, an individual's ability to benefit in a field by successfully converting their cultural capital into 'symbolic capital', depends on whether their specific cultural capital is valued within the field that they enter into; and if those valued skills are scarce in that field (Bourdieu, 1990, p.175). My conceptual framework conceives that the value assigned to a child's skills and knowledge that constitute their cultural capital in the sub-field of free play is determined by their alignment and contrast with the cultures and practices of the field (home or the nursery) they experience play in. While cultural capital that parallel predominant cultures and practices can be converted into 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.175) in a field, a child is considered to be able to exchange cultural capital to gain an advantage more successfully if the particular form of valued cultural capital is rare in the field.

This section has focused on how my review of Bourdieu's (1990) seminal text and interpretation of his particular arguments in relation to 'field', 'individual habitus', and 'cultural capital' informed my conceptualisation of his theoretical tools in my framework. Bourdieu's tools enable conceptualisation

of children's free play journeys as contextually, relationally and temporally dynamic. Conceiving children's free play related individual research encounters as 'fields' is new as previous research (see Section 2.5.2) does not consider the above-mentioned dimensions of children's free play. The following section shows how a discussion with the existing research that theorises their findings using Bourdieu's theoretical tools informed the development of my conceptual framework. The discussion also highlights the gaps in knowledge that my framework addresses.

2.5.2. The discussion of the literature that interprets and theorises research using Bourdieu's 'field', 'habitus', and 'cultural capital' in different ways

A number of authors (such as Ang and Flewitt, 2015; Brooker, 2002; Vincent and Ball, 2007; Vuorisalo and Alanen, 2015; and Wragg, 2013) theorise their research findings concerning children's diverse backgrounds and their experiences in educational settings, by creating different discussions with and interpretations of Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'habitus', and 'cultural capital'. While Wragg (2013) specifically focuses on interpreting children's free play, Brooker (2002) as part of her investigation into the influence of cultures and practices at home on children's learning dispositions, also explores the impact on children's free play disposition. Others use Bourdieu's concepts to examine issues such as, children's ways of 'draw (ing) upon social and cultural networks to negotiate their identity and position as learners' (Ang and Flewitt, 2015, p.145), children's interactions with practitioners at structured time in early years settings (Vuorisalo and Alanen, 2015), 'parental strategies' for 'class reproduction' through children's 'enrichment activities' (Vincent and Ball, 2007, p.1), experiences of 'social inequalities' in the classroom (Reay, 2006, p.288), and experiences of children who commute beyond their local communities to attend secondary school (Knight, 2015). This section shows how a discussion with the nuances in the ways that some key authors (such as Brooker, 2002; Wragg, 2013; and Vuorisalo and Alanen, 2015) develop Bourdieu's thinking in relation to children's experiences in the early years, informs my conceptualisation. Reay (2004) expresses concern regarding what she observes as the contemporary practice of 'overlying research' with Bourdieu's concepts, instead of researchers 'making the concepts work in

the context of the data and research settings' (p.431). Through a discussion with the nuances in the literature that theorises Bourdieu's concepts in different ways, the remainder of this section shows how I developed the conceptualisation of 'field', 'individual habitus', and 'cultural capital' to fit the context of my research questions relating to the children's free play journeys over time between home and the nursery.

a. Brooker (2002) and Brooker (2015)

Brooker (2002) utilises Bourdieu's 'habitus', 'field' and 'capital' in her ethnographic study to examine parents' practices and attitudes at home towards the children's reading, writing and towards the use of play as a learning tool; and their impact on the children's learning dispositions that affected their transition between home and school. Brooker (2002) conceptualises home and school as 'fields', and considers 'doxas' in the two fields to represent adults' (parents and practitioners') perspectives. She attributes the differences in children's learning dispositions and the resultant varying experiences in the reception, to their possession of diverse cultural capital that formed part of their habitus. She argues that this habitus was shaped during children's experiences with their families at home. Brooker (2002) incorporates Bourdieu's premise that the value of cultural capital can differ across fields, into her theoretical framework, to examine how some children's habitus were compatible with the field of the reception, while others' cultural capital acquired at home were of little value. Brooker (2002) influenced my framework for conceptualising the home-school relationship using Bourdieu's (1990) 'field', 'habitus', and 'cultural capital'.

My framework parallels Brooker's (2002) approach to understanding the multiple adults' (parents, practitioners, and the researcher) and children's perspectives. Brooker (2002) highlights variations among parents' attitudes towards learning to read and write, play and family practices. She draws parallels and differences in parent-practitioner perspectives and practices that impacted the children's transition between the two 'fields' of home and school. In contrast to Brooker's (2002) conceptualisation of home and the reception as 'fields', my framework conceives of children's free play encounters and related interactions during the research as dynamic 'fields'. In contrast to Brooker's (2002) selection of the data based on her own

ethnographic observations, my process of selection of the data to be conceptualised as 'field' is child-centric as it represents children's choices expressed in the research during their free play (see Section 3.3). My framework adopts Brooker's (2002) conceptualisation of rules established by the practitioners in the school and by the parents at home, as 'doxas' in the two fields. It conceives of these 'doxas' established by the adults to impact the sub-field of free play encounters. My framework extends Brooker's (2002) application of 'doxas' by also using it to conceptualise the rules devised by the children in their self-initiated and self-governed free play (see Section 2.5.1a). While Brooker (2002) perceived only adults to be in positions to determine the value of 'cultural capital' in 'fields', my framework also conceptualises children to be agents with the ability to determine the value of 'cultural capital' in the 'field' of their self-initiated and self-governed free play.

In her more recent work, Brooker (2015) uses Bourdieu's concept of the 'accumulation of cultural capital'. She uses it to critique the policy initiatives and enrichment programmes that are implemented by the UK government. These initiatives are aimed at bridging the home-school gap by filling the areas of skills and knowledge that their research identifies as lacking amongst disadvantaged communities. Brooker (2015) argues that such accelerated programmes misrecognise diversity in 'cultural capital' as a deficiency; and families' 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' that differ from those of dominant groups are treated as weaknesses for not conforming to a standardised criteria. She criticises such structural issues within these initiatives for failing to recognise the significance of Bourdieu's claim regarding the 'accumulation of capital'. Bourdieu (1997) states that accumulation starts from birth, 'at the outset, without delay, without wasted time, only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital' (p.49). Brooker (2015) expresses concern that viewing diversity as a problem and designing short term initiatives to address them, further marginalise children from families experiencing social inequalities. Instead, she suggests that children's 'individual habitus' needs to be understood through prolonged studies to gain deeper insight. My framework responds to Brooker's (2015) call for in-depth prolonged research and conceptualises the temporal aspects of children's free play journeys. My six months long qualitative study examines the relationship over time between children's free

play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. It examines the multiple perspectives from which children's free play is perceived and responded to over time. In response to Brooker's (2015) concern regarding the essentialisation of widely accepted forms of cultural capital, my thesis includes the case studies of children who deviate from the mainstream in terms of play repertoires and expressions of agency.

b. Vuorisalo and Alanen (2015)

Vuorisalo and Alanen (2015) conceptualise children's 'everyday interactions' with practitioners during the structured time in the classroom as 'micro-fields' or Bourdieu's subfields and examine how practitioners responded to children's use of 'conversation capital' (p.81). The authors' focus on single instances of adult-child interactions as Bourdieu's 'field', informed my granular approach to conceptualising free play related individual research encounters as dynamic 'fields' for conducting 'micro-analysis' (Wood, 2014, p.16). As discussed above in response to Brooker (2002), my framework conceptualises children's free play-related individual research encounters as 'fields' by adopting Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) concept of 'micro-field'. I conceptualise these 'micro-fields' to lie within the 'larger social field' of the nursery (Almquist et al., 2010, p.33).

In contrast to Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) selection of adult-child interactions observed from the researcher's adult perspective for analysis, my framework selects play instances as 'fields' that reflect the children's agenda for their free play (see Section 3.3). My framework also conceives that these 'fields' of free play related encounters that represent the children's choices and actions, have multiple interpretations from the researcher's, parents', practitioners' and where available, children's peers' perspectives. Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) conceptualisation of 'field' is limited to taking into account and giving meaning to only adults' responses to children and does not engage directly with children's subsequent reactions to those responses by adults. My framework responds to this area of limitation in the authors' adult-centric framework that chooses to ignore children's perspectives, by exploring the ongoing dynamic interactions that follow adults' responses; and conceives of these 'fields' to also include how the children, in turn, react to the adults. My framework incorporates Bourdieu's

(1990) idea of 'unique integration' to conceptualise that the past, present and the future of individuals (children and adults) relate to one another when the 'habitus' of individuals come into contact during free play related interactions (Bourdieu, 1990, p.60). Unlike Vuorisalo and Alanen (2015) who do not examine the impact of the researcher's presence on 'field' dynamics, my framework examines how children and adults reacted to my presence in my researcher role and situated me within the 'field' of the research context.

Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) recognition of 'conversation capital' as a valued form of 'cultural capital' in the 'micro-field' of practitioner-child interactions during structured time, provides impetus to identify forms of 'cultural capital' in children's free play in my research such as 'philosophical nature' and 'perceptivity'. Furthermore, my research shows parallels and differences among multiple (practitioners, parents and children's) perspectives from which such forms of 'cultural capital' were perceived, interpreted and assigned values. The authors briefly discuss 'habitus' as one of Bourdieu's concepts in the introduction of their work. However, they do not apply their interpretation of the concept in their examination of the relationship between children's 'habitus' and their utilisation of 'conversation capital' to negotiate their positions within social fields of adult-child interactions. This is identified as an important gap and is addressed in my research. My framework conceives of a relationship between children's 'individual habitus' and the use of their diverse 'cultural capital' in negotiating their position within free play encounters. It conceptualises that children's cultural capital is assigned varying values when perceived from multiple (child and adult) perspectives.

By conceptualising children's reactions to adults' responses to be part of the 'field' of free play-related research encounters, my framework builds on Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) use of 'micro-field'. Such conceptualisation enables a granular analysis of children's free play that Wood (2014) calls for.

c. Wragg (2013)

Wragg's (2013) framework uses 'habitus', 'field' and 'doxa' to conceptualise an illustrative example of children's free play in a primary school setting. He argues that a gap in practitioners' theoretical knowledge; an 'adult's own

relative physical decrepitude'; and the 'deficit model' of an adult-dominated classroom, were factors that led practitioners to disrupt children's free play (p.288). My framework parallels Wragg's (2013) in the way we conceptualise 'doxas' to operate in the 'field' of the nursery; and practitioners' practices to be shaped by their 'individual habitus'. Differences exist in the way we conceptualise 'field'. Wragg's (2013) conceptualisation of only the nursery as 'field' inadequately addresses the ongoing negotiations within individual free play-related research encounters. In addition to paralleling Wragg's (2013) conceptualisation of the nursery and home as 'fields', my framework also conceives of children's free play related individual research encounters as live 'fields' of negotiations. My framework addresses gaps in Wragg's (2013) approach of limiting the analysis of adult-child play interactions to the point of adult's intervention in play. This is achieved by conceptualising free play encounters as dynamic 'fields' of ongoing negotiations that extend beyond the adult interruptions and include children's reactions to those adults' responses.

Wragg's (2013) illustrative example involves his observation of children's re-enactment during free play, of images they gained exposure to through media coverage of the events in New York from 11 September 2001. Wragg (2013) argues that the children's initiation of play involving the use of paper planes and their own bodies to crash like planes into makeshift towers they built out of cardboard Boxes, was integral to making sense of the events that left the adults around them visibly distressed. Wragg (2013) reports observing repeated interruptions by the supervising adults who deemed such play to be 'offensive' and 'in bad taste' (p.288).

Wragg (2013) conceptualises the setting as 'field' within which 'doxas' accepted as norms did not take into account children's perspectives and represented adults' agenda only, and decisions relating to 'doxas' were shaped by the adults' 'habitus'. Wragg (2013) uses the dissonance between the adult and the children's agenda to argue that children be 'recognised as a cultural group with their own set of values, norms, practices, and behaviours which are different from, but of equal value to those of adults...' (p.290).

Wragg's (2013) approach of ending his account of the children's play encounter with adults' intervention, oversimplifies the dynamics in a 'field'. Wragg's (2013) one-dimensional focus on the adults' co-option of play perpetuates adult-centric tendencies of excluding children's perspectives; and their 'innate strength' and responses to adults (p.285); a tendency that the 'new sociology of childhood' criticised and Wragg (2013) intends to challenge. In contrast, my framework conceptualises 'fields' of play encounters to be more complex; and recognises the value in, rather than ending the account at the moment of adult intervention, exploring children's adaptation of their play in their subsequent responses to adults' interruptions. Wragg (2013) takes an adult-centric approach to the selection of data based solely on adult observations. In contrast, my framework conceives of free play related individual research encounters that represent children's choices, to be 'fields'. It conceptualises that these 'fields' are assigned layers of meanings from multiple child and adult (parents, practitioners, and researcher) perspectives. By conceptualising children's complex play interactions (see Section 2.5) as 'fields' my framework addresses concerns raised by Tisdall and Punch (2012) who challenge the 'new sociology of childhood' for considering children's experiences to be 'static' and for ignoring the impact of contextual factors (p.10). Widening the scope of 'field' beyond adult decisions on to children's responses to adults' interventions enables taking into account live negotiations within the dynamic 'field'. It also enables the conceptualisation of developments in children's free play 'fields' over time and across varying contexts, by considering the continuities, transitions and changes in their free play. A strength in Wragg's (2013) work is his examination of the possible reasons behind adult actions that can be conceptualised using Bourdieu's (1990) 'individual habitus'. My framework parallels this strength and builds on it. This is achieved by delving into adults' (parents' and practitioners') perspectives, as my framework conceptualises adults' making meaning of and responses to the children's free play at home and in the nursery, to vary, and to be shaped by their unique experiences and resultant 'individual habitus'.

d. Vincent and Ball (2007)

Vincent and Ball (2007) draw contrasts between middle and working-class parents' approaches to class reproduction in their children. The authors frame parents' interpretations of the changes they observed in their children's repertoires of bodily gestures by building on Bourdieu's 'bodily hexis' and using it to conceptualise developments over time. My framework adopts their interpretation and use of 'bodily hexis' to conceptualise constants and developments over time. It is applied to the children's cultures and practices of free play that were expressed through their bodily gestures in the research. My framework adds to Vincent and Ball's (2007) conceptualisation of children's 'bodily hexis' in relation to time, by also considering its relational and contextual dimensions. It conceives of children's 'bodily hexis' to be dynamic in relation to people; and in relation to contextual factors such as physical space and resources. My framework conceives of children's 'bodily hexis' to be reflective of aspects that remain constant and ones that change over time in children's embodied individual habitus. Vincent and Ball's (2007) adult-centric approach focuses on parents' perceptions of change in their children's 'bodily hexis'. In contrast, my framework engages directly with the children's manifestation of such developments over time in their free play-related research activities. This is achieved by conceptualising that children utilise their bodily gestures to express and negotiate in play interactions; and that such expressions are assigned multiple interpretations and responded to from various adults' (parents, practitioners, and researcher) and children's perspectives.

A discussion with the work of authors who interpret Bourdieu's concepts in particular ways to theorise their research, informed my adaptation of 'individual habitus', 'field' and 'cultural capital' to suit the context of my research questions. My conceptual framework contributes to the gaps in knowledge identified through the above discussion in the following ways. My framework demonstrates the value in considering the complex nature of 'doxas' in the 'field' of free play during which children's activities are relatively less adult-directed and more child-governed, in contrast to structured time. In its granular approach, my framework conceptualises individual free play encounters as 'fields' that are live networks of negotiations. It expands the scope of the existing use of 'field' and includes children's reactions to adults' responses. My framework shows the value in considering the relational, contextual, and temporal dimensions of children's

'bodily hexis' embodied in their free play journeys. It conceives that 'fields' of free play-related research encounters are assigned differing interpretations, and responded to from both adult and child perspectives. It also conceives that new forms of 'cultural capital' are identified and assigned different meanings and values in 'fields' from various adult and child perspectives. A key gap in the literature that my research addresses (in Chapter Four), relates to the absence of consideration of the researcher's presence and its impact on the dynamic 'fields' of free play interactions. In the following section, the discussion of literature concerning the paradigmatic shifts in the field of research with children shows the development of 'agency', 'crystallisation', 'context', 'meaning-making', and 'multiple perspective' in my conceptual framework.

2.6. The conceptualisation of 'agency', 'crystallisation', 'context', 'meaning-making', and 'multiple perspectives' informed through the discussion of literature concerning the paradigmatic shifts

This section focuses on my conceptualisation of 'agency', 'crystallisation', 'context', 'meaning-making' and 'multiple perspectives' informed through the discussion of the literature (such as James and Prout, 1997; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; and Tisdall and Punch, 2012) on the paradigmatic shift of the 'new sociology of childhood'; and its subsequent criticism. These paradigmatic shifts are relevant to my framework due to their pivotal role in influencing the way children's lives are researched and understood. Qvortrup et al. (2019) suggest that engaging in discussion with such shifts are important because while childhood that is the 'framework within which children lead their lives' (p.28) is 'a permanent segment' as a 'structural form' (p.25) that all children must go through in order to become adults, childhood as a 'social space' (p.26) also continues to 'develop' and varies across time and space (Qvortrup et al., 2009, p.35). The authors claim that research into such 'continuity and change' can provide an understanding of how 'structural parameters' influence how 'childhood develops' and how 'children as a social group fare compared with other generational units' (p.31). Through a critique of such shifts that impacted research, theorisation, and understanding of the complex nature of children's agency, this section shows their role in informing my conceptualisation of 'agency', 'crystallisation', 'context' and 'meaning-making' in my framework for

analysing children's free play journeys. The discussion of the literature positions my research in relation to others in the field by highlighting its agenda to contribute to the ways in which children's agency in free play can be understood. My framework contributes to knowledge by building on existing concepts such as 'agency', 'meaning-making' and 'multiple perspectives', and utilises them in new ways to conceptualise children's free play. It also addresses the gaps that emerging literature identifies as requiring further examination.

The literature review in this section shows how the concept of 'tradition' has been used in literature to challenge adult-centric approaches to conducting research with children. It discusses the new ways of relating to concepts such as children's rights, their participation, inclusions of their perspectives in the meaning-making of their own experiences and their agency, that resulted from the paradigm shift. A discussion is created between, the arguments of those involved in the articulation of the 'new sociology of childhood' and in questioning it, and my response to them to show how I conceptualised 'agency', 'crystallisation', 'context', 'meaning-making', and 'multiple perspectives' in my framework for analysis.

2.6.1. The emergence of the 'new sociology of childhood'

Authors such as James and Prout (1997); James, Jenks, and Prout (1998); and Prout (2000) used concepts such as 'tradition' to describe and challenge long-established adult-centric approaches to researching children's experiences; and articulated the paradigmatic shift of recognising children's capacity to communicate their own experiences. They were critical of constructs of children and childhood, such as the ones highlighted by Mills (2000). These include John Locke's metaphor of 'tabula rasa' that viewed children, as blank slates for adults to inscribe on and mould into adults over time; and Durkheim's understanding of childhood as a stage of development that children go through in order to graduate into adulthood, and defined it as a period of 'becoming' (p.150). Such positioning of childhood as subordinate to adulthood was prevalent in theories, as well as in empirical research (such as Smilansky, 1968 and Rubin et al., 1978) where adults' perspectives alone were adequate for exploring issues concerning children. What is problematic is that such adult-centric approaches are still employed in

contemporary research into children's experiences (by authors such as Vuorisalo and Alanen, 2015, see Section 2.5.2.b). The criticism of this tendency to consider adults' perspective to be inherently superior to that of children contributed to a shift in the field of research involving children, known as the 'new sociology of childhood'. The tenets and implications for research of this new approach are examined below.

The 'new sociology of childhood' provided new ways of relating to concepts such as children's rights to participate in research and their agency. 'Agency' is interpreted as 'situated practices, or the temporal capacity of individuals to take actions' by Rigby et al. (2016, p.295) who draw from Archer (1996) and Meyer and Jepperson (2002), to discuss the relationship between concepts of 'agency' and 'structure'. Giddens (1979) defines structures as 'rules and resources' (p.64) that define how we 'understand, how things should be done (; and) practices organised around those understandings'; and suggests that these structures are contextual factors that can 'enable' and/or 'constrict individuals' actions' (Rigby et al., 2016, p.295). A more 'agency-focused' approach emerged from the 'new sociology of childhood' that values what children choose to communicate about their own lived experiences as meaningful findings, providing an authentic insight into their lives (James and James, 2004). The introduction of the participatory paradigm played a vital role in providing children access to various verbal and non-verbal mediums suited to their unique skills and competencies, to express themselves; and in the process, promoted recognition of children's agency. Class and Moss (2011) and Veale (2005) suggest that this participatory paradigm has the 'advantage over traditional' research approaches due to the new and numerous ways of 'engaging participants in knowledge production, and involving their participation in the interpretation and the analysis of that knowledge' (Veele, 2005, p.254). Clark and Moss (2011) argue that the aim of 'different modes of communication' is not to achieve one truth, 'but to reveal the complexities of lived experiences' through Richardson and Adam St. Pierre's (2008) concept of 'crystallisation' that 'looks at the world that is multi-dimensional' (p.6). Clark and Moss' (2011) 'mosaic approach' as a participatory method for research with children was pivotal in the development of my framework that adopts their child-centric approach of using participatory tools and recognising children's agency. My framework adopts Richardson and Adam St. Pierre's (2008)

notion of 'crystallisation' and conceptualises that as children express their perspectives and experiences through multiple modes of communication, they provide multi-dimensional insight (see Section 2.3). In addition to Clark and Moss' (2011) incorporation of 'agency' and 'crystallisation' into their 'approach which begins from the starting point of' children capable of representing themselves (p.8), my framework also adopts their use of the concepts of 'meaning-making' and 'multiple perspectives'. Drawing on Vygotsky (1986), Connery et al. (2010) define 'meaning-making' as the 'construction of knowledge into an understanding with others within and across a variety of contexts and codes' (p.12). Clark and Moss (2011) use the concepts of 'meaning-making' and 'multiple-perspectives' to create space for children to 'co-construct' meaning of their generated data, through discussions with peers and adults (parents, practitioners, and researcher) (p.38). Similarly, my framework conceptualises children's discussion with peers and adults during free play and regarding free play-related materials generated in the research, as their co-construction of 'meaning-making'. These meaning-making encounters are conceptualised as live 'fields' where the children and adults negotiate to attach meaning to the data related to free play from their own perspectives. Rather than cross verifying these adult and child perspectives to find one truth, my framework conceptualises that these perspectives in synergy provide access to the layers of meanings assigned to children's free play. Albeit significant in changing the ways of viewing children as capable of representing themselves, the 'new sociology of childhood' has not gone unchallenged. The next section shows how the discussion of the literature that critiques the 'new sociology of childhood' (Tisdall and Punch, 2012) informed my critical approach to incorporating the concepts of 'agency', 'meaning-making', and 'context' into my framework.

2.6.2. A criticism of the 'new sociology of childhood'

Tisdall and Punch (2012) involved in the shift that challenges the 'new sociology of childhood' influenced the conceptualisation of 'agency', 'meaning-making, and 'context' in my framework. The authors argue that 'within childhood studies, many empirical studies provide examples of children...competent social actors and emphasise their agency...but often do not question or problematise what such agency really means for different groups of children and young people' (p.12). They argue that this tendency

has become ubiquitous; and that children's agency is not adequately challenged, nor is it seen as complex and affected by different contexts (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). By drawing on literature (such as Bluebond-Langner and Korbin, 2007; and Gallagher and Gallagher, 2008) concerning complexities within agency in childhood studies, Tisdall and Punch (2012) argue that shallow understandings of 'agency' can lead to the marginalisation of certain groups of children as the meaning of agency and its implications vary across space and time. The authors raise concerns that the idealisation of agency can marginalise children whose expressions of it do not align with widely accepted forms of agency. Bligh (2011); Markström and Halldén (2009); and Wood's (2014) parallel this claim and recognise children's diverse agency expressed through practices that contradict adults' agenda and widely accepted forms of agency. Such practices include children maintaining silence, and declining or withdrawing their participation in research. The authors highlight parallels and differences between socio-cultural perspectives taken by researchers and practitioners in interpreting children's diverse agency expressed in educational settings, to reveal the complexities involved in interpreting children's agency; thus echoing Tisdall and Punch's (2012) call for problematising agency.

2.6.3. Problematising agency

The discussion of the literature (such as Bordonaro and Payne's, 2012; Robson et al., 2007; and Rosen, 2007) that Tisdall and Punch (2012) engage with, informed my critical approach to considering aspects such as the 'nature' and 'degree' of agency while conceptualising it in my framework. While the parallels in the discussion highlight the aspects of their work that my framework adopts, the differences illustrate how my framework develops their ideas further and makes clear my position on the concept of 'agency'. Rosen (2007); Montgomery (2009); and Hecht (1998) problematise the portrayal as victims, of children whose expressions of agency contradict widely accepted forms. They draw on Rosen (2007); and Bluebond-Langner and Korbin (2007) regarding discourse concerning child soldiers, that highlight the challenges in reconciling between recognising children's agency to make decisions, and perceiving them as vulnerable and in need of adult protection. Hoggett (2001) cautions against 'smuggling normative assumptions into our thinking (here), as if agency is good and absence of

agency is bad' (p.42-43). Bordonaro and Payne's (2012) suggest that children's actions and decisions that are in contrast to the standards and expectations set by dominant agenda and western perspectives, be conceptualised as 'ambiguous agency' (p.365).

The following discussion of the role of agency in my framework provides insight into my position on 'agency'. In my framework, I adopted Bordonaro and Payne's (2012) 'ambiguous agency' to conceptualise children's decisions and actions that contradict forms of agency that are widely accepted by practitioners and parents in the nursery and at home. In my framework, I conceive of 'ambiguous agency' to include the expressions of agency in children's evasive tactics to initiate, sustain and develop their play by challenging the boundaries established by adults; and their decisions to withdraw and refrain from the activities that adults perceive as meaningful play (Wood, 2014). In the development of this framework I built on the concept of 'ambiguous agency' and the framework contributes to knowledge by conceiving of it to encompass variability in individual adults' (parents' and practitioners') interpretations of particular children's situated agency across differing contexts, based on the adult's knowledge of the child in question's play repertoire. This application that my position regarding 'agency' suggests, is relevant where adults interpret a child's same expression of agency in varying contexts, differently. I conceive of 'ambiguous agency' in my framework to also encompass the differing interpretations by adults of agency of the same nature expressed by different children. This application is relevant where an adult's knowledge of individual children's unique play repertoires leads them to assign varying interpretations to the same expression of agency exhibited by different children within the same context. My framework examines parents' and practitioners' interpretations of agency to gain insight into how adults enforced enabling and/or restricting contexts, within which the children's experiences took place. My conceptualisation of 'ambiguous agency' captures the multidimensionality of children's situated agentic play moments, as the children's decisions in varying contexts were assigned different meanings when interpreted from multiple perspectives.

Tisdall and Punch (2012) create a discussion with Klocker (2007) and Robson et al. (2007) and emphasise the importance of considering contexts within which children's experiences take place, to gain deeper insight. The

parallels among these studies relate to their attention on the effects of contextual factors; and they differ in their focus on drawing attention to different aspects of agency such as 'degree', 'nature', and 'impact' (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin's, 2007, p.242). Bluebond-Langner and Korbin (2007) claim that examination of such aspects of agency is imperative for understanding how individuals (both children and adults) exercise agency within structural parameters of particular contexts. Tisdall and Punch (2012) support their suggestion to consider 'relationships', 'transitions', 'change', and 'contexts' while examining agency, by referring to Hutchby and Moran-Ellis' (1998) work (p.10). Hutchby and Moran-Ellis' (1998) claim that 'children's competence' is 'a constantly negotiated dynamic, a phenomenon which is stabilised, to greater or lesser degrees, in and through the interactions between human actors and the material and cultural resources which are available' (p.15). Similarly, Tisdall and Punch (2012) suggest that children's agency is constantly negotiated and varies relationally, contextually, and temporally. Klocker (2007) highlights the varying nature of agency resulting from dynamic contexts and applies the concept of 'thin' agency to children's decisions made in their everyday lives within situations that allow 'limited flexibility' and few 'feasible alternatives' (p.85). She applies 'thick' agency to 'having the latitude to act within a broad range of options' (p.85). Klocker's (2007) 'thick' and 'thin' agency are discussed further in the next paragraph.

Klocker (2007) applies 'thick' and 'thin' agency to her research with children from disadvantaged rural communities in Tanzania who migrated to urban locations for domestic work. Klocker (2007) uses these concepts to provide insight into how contextual factors such as children's families' financial situations and their working conditions, had a range of consequences on children's ability to exercise agency and negotiate favourable terms of employment for themselves. In my framework, I adopted Klocker's (2007) concept of 'thick' and 'thin' agency to conceptualise variations in the nature and degree of agency across constricting and enabling contexts.

Conceptualising 'thickening' and 'thinning' in my framework enabled me to challenge the simplistic analysis of children's agency as duality in free play encounters interpreted in the form of its presence or absence. I conceive of 'thick' and 'thin' agency to provide a way to recognise that children's agency is variable and situated, as contextual factors such as space, physical

resources, relationships, social interactions (with children and adults) have 'layering' and 'eroding' impacts on children's agency (Klocker, 2007, p.85). Robson et al. (2007) suggest locating the degree or magnitude of children's variable agency 'thinned' and 'thickened' by contextual factors, along a 'continuum of agency' (p.144). The authors suggest terms such as '(almost) no agency', 'little agency', 'secret agency' and 'public agency' along the continuum to indicate the degree and type of agency; and the nature of contextual factors within which agency is exercised (p.144). Although these particular terms developed in relation to agency of children in rural contexts by Rosen et al. (2007) are not incorporated in my framework, the concept of agency along a continuum is important as it encompasses the variability of children's agency within individual free play encounters, as well as across play encounters experienced over time. I incorporated 'agency along a continuum' in my framework as it makes possible the conceptualisation of consistencies and developments in agency over time. Robson et al.'s (2007) particular claim that even in the most constricting circumstances, children's agency is not absolutely absent, is a key aspect of my position in relation to 'agency'. Adopting it in my framework enables the conceptualisation of children's agency in free play experienced within constraining contexts. This discussion concerning my position on 'agency' provided insight into how I conceive of children's agency in free play-related research encounters to be contextually, relationally and temporally complex and dynamic. My position on agency is further reinforced in section 9.2, in the discussion of my study's contribution to knowledge through the development of the conceptual framework. In addition to problematising agency, Tisdall and Punch's (2012) call for considering the impact of contextual factors also influenced my critical approach to conceptualising 'meaning-making' in my framework for analysis. This aspect of the framework is examined in the next section.

2.6.4. Conceptualising 'meaning-making'

This section creates a discussion with theories of 'meaning-making' to show how it is conceptualised in my framework. 'Meaning' is a concept that represents/articulates how we conceive an object, people, action, event or experience, i.e. aspects of reality (Krauss, 2005). In addition to problematising 'agency', the 'new sociology of childhood' also caused a shift in approach to meaning-making. This shift was towards the inclusions of

children's perspectives, from a previous adult-centric focus. The previous focus had adults' perspectives as its most important aspect. Adults either assigned meaning to children's actions solely from their own perspectives, or adults interpreted the meaning that children made with peers. As Clark and Moss (2011) upheld the tenets of the 'new sociology of childhood' by recognising children as capable of representing their own experiences and perspectives, their inclusion of children in the meaning-making of the data generated through multiple participatory tools, influenced the conceptualisation of meaning-making within my framework (see Section 2.3). Connery et al. (2010) highlight the importance of the inclusion of children in the meaning-making of their own play, by drawing on Vygotsky's (1978;1986) theory that meaning-making takes place during children's interactions with more knowledgeable others within the 'zone of proximal development'; and the way meaning is internalised and understood is determined by children's 'individual prism of prerezhivanie', a concept that refers to children's situated lived experiences that are characterised by their nuanced meanings (p.12). Accepting Connery et al.'s (2010) notion, my framework conceives the meanings attached by children to the data they generated through free play to be unique to those children, as the meanings they assigned were shaped by their individual experiences. In responding to Tisdall and Punch's (2012) call for considering context in analysis of children's experiences, my framework also parallels Hall's (2010) approach to 'meaning-making' which builds on Anning and Ring (2004) and Brooks' (2005) post-structural theory that examines the 'influence of context on young children's drawings (and) meaning-making' (p.97). Hall (2010) aims to not 'seek to interpret meaning in the isolated content of the children's drawings, rather in the retrospective discussions' children shared with the researcher (p.97). Similarly, rather than considering meanings attached to the data generated in free play, that children co-construct with peers and adults, as the sole outcome of meaning-making, my framework additionally analyses the meaning-making interactions. My framework further builds on Hall's (2010) approach by conceptualising these interactions using Bourdieu's dynamic 'fields' where the different agents (adults and children) negotiate to position themselves and assign the children's free play-related data meanings from their own perspectives (Bourdieu, 1990). My framework echoes Hall (2010) and Tisdall and Punch's (2012) attention to context, by examining how factors such as space, physical resources, relationships,

social interactions, participant's awareness of my presence and perception of their role in the research, and other structural issues (such as school culture and ethos; and accountability tools in the form of curriculum and assessments) impact the co-constructed meanings. Additionally, my framework applies its conceptualisation of the aspects of agency (discussed in section 2.5.3) such as 'degree' and 'nature' developed through the discussion with Bordonaro and Payne (2012); Klocker (2007); and Robson et al. (2007). This discussion enables my analysis of how the children engage in dynamic negotiations during the meaning-making process. Through such conceptualisation of the meaning-making process, the framework examines both the meanings that are co-created; and the experience of creating the meanings, as research outcomes. This section focused on my conceptualisation of 'agency', 'crystallisation', 'context', 'meaning-making' and 'multiple perspectives' in my framework for analysis, through the discussion of the literature. The following section focuses on how my conceptual framework contributes to knowledge in relation to understanding children's dynamic free play journeys over time.

2.7. Contribution to knowledge

This chapter showed how my conceptual framework contributes to knowledge in relation to understanding children's dynamic free play journeys over time. It builds on Brooker (2002); Wragg (2013) and Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) conceptualisation of children's environments at home and school; and their everyday interactions in educational settings. My framework adopts Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) use of Bourdieu's 'field' to conceptualise everyday interactions during structured time in the nursery, and applies it to the micro/granular-analysis of the children's individual free play-related research encounters. It creates value in the revised thinking of children's free play as more dynamic and ongoing; and expands the scope of Vuorisalo and Alanen (2015) and Wragg's (2013) 'field' by, instead of only conceptualising adults' responses to the children's play, including the children's subsequent reactions to those adult responses. Through sensitivity to context, the framework considers the temporal and contextual factors that set the boundaries within which children's free play develops and they exercise complex and dynamic agency (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). My framework builds on Bordonaro and Payne's (2012) 'ambiguous agency' and

shows the value in using it to conceptualise how children's complex agency in free play is interpreted differently in relation to contexts, relationships and time.

2.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the literature review that led to the development of my conceptual framework used to make meaning of the data, relating to the relationship over time between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. The review of theoretical and empirical literature in seminal and contemporary texts; and the discussion with authors who theorise their research using the key concepts that I incorporated, showed how the literature review informed my conceptualisation; and highlighted the gaps in knowledge that my framework addressed. The next chapter discusses the development of my methodological framework and the rationale for the selection of and the steps taken to utilise the research methods.

3. Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the development of my methodological framework; and the selection, design, development, and use of research methods. These were utilised for answering the research questions concerning the relationship over time between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. The chapter discusses the development of my research questions. It shows how the discussion with theories in literature informed my selection of participatory research, the case study approach to qualitative research, and thematic analysis approach in the development of my methodological framework. The chapter discusses the research methods I selected and how I utilised them to conduct the research. It shows how the discussion of literature informed the way I generated data with the participants, and my ethical considerations. How I conducted a thematic analysis of case studies and presented the findings in the thesis by consulting the literature, is also discussed in this chapter.

The chapter highlights the following as the study's methodological contributions to the field of research with children. The study offers free play as a participatory tool for children to engage in experiential research, and share aspects of their free play at home and in the nursery. The chapter shows the study's originality in its approach to the introduction of the researcher to the children as a learner who studied how children played at home and in the nursery. The study extends the current use of participatory research, by showing value in examining children's experiences of engaging in the research process. This is achieved by conceptualising children's research encounters as live networks of negotiations using the framework developed in Chapter Two (see Section 2.3).

3.2. The development of the research questions

My approach to developing the research questions was informed through a the discussion of the literature (that include Agee, 2009; Flick, 2018; Green and Thorogood, 2018; and Kross and Giust, 2019) that discusses how to formulate research questions in qualitative studies. Kross and Giust (2019)

suggest that ‘research questions, data collection methods and interpretation (of) results are all interrelated’ (p.24). While the initial overarching questions guided my research design, ‘refining’ them over time narrowed down my focus (Green and Thorogood, 2018, p.52). I followed Flick’s (2018) suggestion of not limiting refinement to the initial stages, and approached it as an ongoing ‘reflective process’ (Agee, 2009, p.431). This was achieved by revisiting the research questions during various ‘stages’ such as ‘conceptualisation’ of ‘research design’; ‘data’ ‘collect(ion)’; and ‘select(ion)’ of ‘cases’ the for analysis and the discussion of findings (Flick, 2018, p.98). ‘The development of (a) new question(s)’, emerged from the participants’ engagement in the study (Agee, 2009, p.436). This process of development echoes Agee’s (2009) suggestion that ‘initial’ ‘research question(s)’ can be inadequate for ‘fully address(ing)’ ‘phenomenon’ that results from developments over’ time in the research (p.436). The development of the third research question ‘emerge(d) when (,) through the lived experience of research’, I realised the significance of my researcher role ‘in the inquiry process’ (Agee, 2009, p.432). Within this process, how ‘participants’ ‘position(ed)’ me in the research context became meaningful data as it impacted their engagement in the research (Agee, 2009, p.432). The first two of the following research questions are refined versions of what was formulated (see Appendix A) at the design stages, through literature review conducted to identify gaps in knowledge, relating to the understanding of the relationship over time between children’s free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. Question three was developed to encompass findings that resulted from the participants’ engagement in the research over time, which in turn had meaningful implications for the overall research findings (see Chapter Four).

1. What are the relationships between children’s free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery? How are these relationships perceived and responded to from multiple perspectives?
2. How do these relationships, perceptions, and responses develop over time and impact children’s free play experiences in the nursery?
3. How did the research experience impact children’s free play?

The next section focuses on the development of my methodological framework in response to the research questions.

3.3. The development of the methodology framework in response to the research questions

This section focuses on my methodological framework which was the 'strategy that outlined the way(s)' in which the various stages of the 'research' were 'undertaken' (Howell, 2012, p.1). This framework was developed to respond to the research questions concerning the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. My ontological assumptions regarding the nature of reality and my epistemology relating to the positioning of myself in the research formed the philosophical knowledge base for this framework. A discussion with theories in literature and my responses to participants' reactions over time influenced my philosophical position. They also influenced my selection, design, and development over time of the research methods; my approach to the analysis of the data and presentation of the findings in the thesis.

In this section, a discussion of my ontological and epistemological positions show how I located my research within the interpretivist paradigm, which in turn led to my selection of the qualitative research methodology. This is followed by the exploration of literature concerning the paradigmatic shift of the 'new sociology of childhood and its subsequent criticism (see Section 2.6) that developed my philosophical knowledge base further and led me to foreground in the research, children's perspectives on their free play at home and in the nursery. The remainder of the section shows how such foregrounding was made possible through the selection of the case study approach and thematic analysis for the methodological framework.

I. The ontological and epistemological positions that led me to choose the qualitative methodology

This section discusses the role of my ontological and epistemological positions in locating this research within the interpretivist paradigm, that influenced my choices of the qualitative research methodology. Ontology 'specifies the form and nature of reality and what can be known about it'

(Atwi and Hamza, 2015, p.218). Drawing on Neuman's (2013) work, Atwi and Hamza (2015) discuss the 'two broad contrasting positions' of 'objectivism and constructionism' (p.218). While they suggest that objectivism assumes that there is 'an independent reality', in contrast, constructionism holds that 'reality is the product of social processes' (Atwi and Hamza, 2015, p.218). They argue that at an ontological level, 'positivists assume that reality is objectively given and is measurable using properties which are independent of the researcher and instruments' (p.218). In contrast, Searle and Willis (1995) suggest that interpretivists believe that there is no one correct method for obtaining knowledge. Deetz (1996) adds that interpretivism 'attempts to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them' (p.218). My ontological position reflects Deetz's (1996) interpretivism, and 'embraces the idea of multiple realities' (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.20) as my study examines the multiple meanings of children's subjective free play assigned from various perspectives.

My epistemological position presents my view regarding the nature of knowledge and the ways in which it can be created and communicated in response to my research questions concerning children's free play at home and in the nursery. It assumes that 'knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of people' (Creswell and Poth, 2017, p.21) and stresses the need to examine personal meanings that individuals attach to phenomena that are context-specific. Observations and interpretations from multiple perspectives were key in my research as they foregrounded judgement and inferences made by the individuals, in contrast to positivism that aims to find one objective truth. All interpretations were based on specific moments that were located in particular contexts and points in time. These interpretations were assumed to be open to re-interpretation and negotiation through discussion. To gain insight into the multiple interpretations from various standpoints, I adopted a qualitative methodology that is discussed in the next paragraph.

The qualitative and quantitative methodology can be understood in a variety of ways and the following are facets that are of particular importance in relation to the responses to my research questions concerning children's free play. Several authors debate the purposes, generalisability, nature of

settings, and the roles of researchers in both quantitative and qualitative research. For instance, while Yilmaz's (2013), and McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) focus on their purpose; Taylor et al. (2016) and Leung (2015) focus on the generalisability of findings; Eisner (2017) and Holloway, and Galvin (2017) focus on the nature of settings within which research is conducted; and Eisner (2017) and Silverman (2016) focus on the role of the researcher. Quantitative research is concerned with presenting the outcome that is one truth and is quantifiable; and aims to make generalisations regarding larger samples or populations (Taylor et al., 2016). In contrast, qualitative research aims to provide in-depth insight that only represents the participants' perspectives (Holloway and Galvin, 2017). In qualitative research, researchers' interactions with participants in naturalistic settings are considered as crucial contextual factors that impact the nature of research outcomes (Holloway and Galvin, 2017). As my research questions pertained to the multiple perspectives and experiences of children's free play at home and in the nursery, the qualitative methodology was selected and the research was conducted in the naturalistic setting of the nursery. As my presence as a researcher impacted the data due to its influence on the children's engagement in research (see Chapter Four), I chose qualitative methodology which considers researcher-participant relationships as an important contextual factor. The following subsection shows how a discussion of the literature concerning paradigmatic shifts in the field of research concerning children (see Section 2.6), led me to foreground children's perspectives by adopting a participatory research approach and a process of provisional consent in my methodological framework.

II. The selection of participatory research methods and the process of obtaining provisional children's consent foregrounded children's perspectives

An exploration of the literature (in section 2.6) led me to foreground the children's perspectives by incorporating the participatory research approach in my methodological framework. The 'new sociology of childhood's recognition of children as agentic and capable of representing their own lives, and its subsequent criticism by Tisdall and Punch (2012) informed my approach to foregrounding children's perspectives. Tisdall and Punch (2012) argue that the 'new sociology of childhood oversimplifies

children's agency and essentialises widely accepted skills, without considering concepts such as 'context', 'transition', 'relationships', and 'change' (p.10). Within the variety of methods that are available for qualitative research such as participant observations, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, my framework adopted the participatory research approach with the children to respond to Tisdall and Punch's (2012) concerns (Creswell and Poth, 2017). Control over the research process and agenda was shared with the children as they communicated regarding their free play, by choosing free play activities as participatory tools that best suited their unique skills and preferences (Clark and Moss, 2011). Children whose parents consented to their participation in the research were invited to express their provisional consent prior to every research session and within each research session. This shifted control over from adults to the children as they were able to accept and decline the invitation and withdraw from the research at any time. By interpreting both consent and dissent as expressions of the children's agency, my framework responds to Tisdall and Punch's (2012) concerns regarding the oversimplification of agency in this respect. My decisions to incorporate the case study approach and thematic analysis into my methodological framework further responds to Tisdall and Punch's (2012) concerns by foregrounding children's perspectives. This is focused on in the following section.

- III. The selection of the case study method and thematic analyses to foreground children's perspectives.

Within qualitative inquiry, Creswell and Poth (2017) identify several methods such as narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case studies. While narrative research 'explores the life of an individual', phenomenology focuses on 'understanding the essence of an experience' (p.35). Grounded theory is an approach taken in 'developing a theory' that is 'grounded in data from the field'; ethnography aims to 'describe and interpret the shared patterns of culture of a group'; and the case study approach provides 'an in-depth understanding of a case' (p.35) or 'comparison of cases' (p.75) that is/are context and time-bound. In this research, the case study approach was adopted into the methodological framework as it was the most suitable for foregrounding the children's perspectives. Such foregrounding enabled me to respond to Tisdall and

Punch's (2012) concerns regarding 'context', 'change', 'transition' and 'relationships' (p.10). The following paragraph provides a rationale for my choice by creating a discussion of the literature that draws attention to the values and challenges of the case study approach.

The exploration of the literature (such as Creswell, 2007; Gerring, 2008; Hancock and Algozzine, 2016; and Yin, 2003) regarding values and challenges of case study analysis, informed the development of my approach to the case studies in the thesis. Gerring (2008) and Creswell (2007) discuss the aims of using case studies. On the one hand, Gerring (2008) argues that case study analysis aims to 'provide insight into a larger population' by focusing on 'one or several cases' (p.1). However, Creswell (2007) suggest that rather than focusing 'predominantly on the individual (and their stories)' case study analysis focuses on a particular 'issue' in relation to the 'individual case selected' (p.245). In my thesis, each case study presents data from an individual child's play journey, and provides insight into multiple perspectives from which the relationship between the child's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery were perceived and responded to.

Hancock and Algozzine (2016); and Yin (2003) focus on the nature of findings presented in case studies. Parallels exist in the way they emphasise the importance of including details of; and considering in analysis, 'contextual conditions' (Yin, 2003, p.13), by studying 'the phenomenon' 'in its natural context, bounded by space and time' (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016, p.16). The decision to conduct research while children utilised the free play provision that was regularly available to them in the nursery, was driven by the aim to study their free play in a naturalistic setting; and take into account the impact of contextual factors on their choices and play engagement. A contrasting design of using reflective tools such as interviews with the children would have failed to encompass contextual conditions within which they experienced free play. Furthermore, Hancock and Algozzine (2016) argue that 'case study research is richly descriptive because it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information' (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016, p.15). This argument regarding various sources is supported by Clark (2017) who takes a 'layered approach' (Clark, 2017) by showing how materials were generated, revisited

and reflected on over time by the participants who expressed their various perspectives using multiple participatory tools (p.148). My approach to case studies parallels Clark's (2017) 'layered approach' as, in a case study, multiple perspectives are collated to show how a child's free play journey over time was experienced, perceived and responded to by different individuals. This approach is particularly useful for the following reasons. Presenting single (child/adult) perspectives expressed at a given point in time would be inadequate for encompassing how the different individuals perceived and responded to, the relationship between a child's free play at home and in the nursery (Clark, 2017). In my approach to the selection of the case studies within my methodological framework, I addressed Tisdall and Punch's (2012) concern regarding the essentialisation of widely accepted forms of agency. This was achieved by presenting cases in Chapters Six of children who expressed agency in diverse ways (for more details see Section 3.14). The decision to adopt thematic analysis into the framework; and my approach to the selection of the themes to be presented within the case studies in the thesis, was also driven by the intention to foreground children's perspectives. This is discussed in the following paragraph.

There are a variety of ways in which qualitative data analysis can be conducted, such as thematic analysis, qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis (Williamson et al., 2017). They all identify patterns and themes and 'regard context as important' (p.471). The most appropriate one was designed to meet the needs of my research, 'methodology and outcome'. Qualitative content analysis is 'communication-centric' (Williamson et al., 2017, p.464). It focuses on 'interpreting and describing, meaningfully, the topics and themes that are evident in the contents of communications when framed against the research objectives of the study' (p.464). Discourse analysis 'acknowledges that our world is shaped by social interactions and by the range of texts available to us'...it extends beyond 'counting instances of a phenomenon' and 'explores the underlying meaning of that phenomenon', 'including its social implications' (Williamson et al., 2017, p.467-468). Similar to content analysis, thematic analysis 'analyses content'. However thematic analysis is particularly suitable than the other approaches for analysing 'interaction(s) between (the) researcher and the data' which emerged as key findings from the way participants

engaged with me and the research process (Williamson et al., 2017, p.455) (Chapter Four). In thematic analysis, it is important to ‘immerse’ oneself ‘in the data’ and try to relate to participants’ perspectives’ (p.458).

Furthermore, a thematic analysis of case studies enabled me to foreground the children’s perspectives by presenting data related to the themes that they communicated in the research as important to their free play (see Sections 3.14 and 3.15 on details of how I conducted thematic analysis).

Adopting the thematic analysis approach enabled me to consider context and the researcher’s epistemology in my analysis. Smith (2015) refers to “Big Q” and “small q” as the two main approaches to thematic analysis. While the “small q” approach uses positivist paradigm, my approach to thematic analysis paralleled the “Big Q” approach that uses qualitative paradigm and ‘reject(ion)s (of) the possibility of discovering universal meaning, because meaning is understood as always being tied to the context in which it is produced’ (p.223). My research aimed to examine the ‘cultural and contextual variations’ within which, ‘change, transition, and relationships’, influenced how children and adults interacted and created complex relationships; and made meaning of free play experiences (Tisdall and Punch, 2012, p.254). My approach further paralleled the “Big Q” approach, in its acceptance of the role of researcher’s epistemology in the ‘organic’ process of ‘coding and theme development’ (Smith, 2015, p.223). Throughout the thesis, my acknowledgement of multiple possible interpretations of play encounters where children did not explicitly communicate their intentions, illustrates that the analysis was not conducted in a vacuum free of subjectivity; and that the impact of my epistemology on my meaning-making of the data was considered consistently. My acknowledgement of the multiple possible interpretations of Henry’s meaning-making interactions with Nora in section 4.4, is a case in point.

Brannen (2017) suggests that ‘the practice of research is a messy and untidy business which rarely conforms to the models set down in methodology textbooks. In practice, it is unusual, for example, for epistemology or theory to be the sole determinant of method’ (pp.3-4). The particular aspects of ontology and epistemology that relate to the kind of interpretivist position taken in this research align with Brannen’s (2017)

suggestions regarding the messiness involved in research. Chapter Four illustrates how I encountered and responded to such messiness in my research. In my response, my interpretivist position was not limited to the understanding of knowledge; it influenced my understanding and position within the way I conceived of the research and how I practised it. It shows that in my approach, I was not limited by the confines of my design. Rather, I remained flexible and engaged with the complexities and messiness of the reality that I encountered over time. The key aspect of flexibility in my methodology is discussed in the next paragraph.

Flexibility was a key aspect of my methodology. An ever-changing environment in which individual children developed and relationships (between the children and the researcher; and among children) evolved over the six months of research, demanded an approach that allowed room for responsive adjustments and modifications. The objective was to design a participatory research that catered to the individual competencies and preferences of young children of ages three to five and enable them to share aspects of their free play at home and in the nursery. This was achieved by creating mutuality between a structured approach that could develop in relation to diverse and dynamic situations. This meant that the aims of the research and methodological position were predetermined, whereas the use of the research methods, as required by the methodology, was flexible and responsive to the children's choices. Necessary adjustments also resulted from my encounters with the school culture communicated to me by the practitioners (see Section 4.2). The steps taken to develop my methodology are discussed in the next section.

3.4. The steps taken to develop the methodology and select the research methods

The following five steps were taken to develop the methodology and research design (see Appendix-J).

- i. The discussion of literature led to the development of the methodology and a range of data collection methods, and to the engagement with theories that underpinned seminal and recent research involving children.

- ii. Visits to the Nurseries prior to the commencement of data collection to establish contact, gain access, build rapport, and share research intentions with school management and key nursery staff.
- iii. The formulation of an initial Design 1.0 (see Appendix-K) that was tested in a pilot study.
- iv. The lessons learnt from the pilot informed the development of Design 2.0 (see Appendix-L).
- v. Subtle changes to Design 2.0 were made throughout the data collection as I incorporated new information encountered during the research and responded to changing circumstances, and developed Design 3.0 (see Appendix-M).

The research methods that were selected are listed in the following section.

3.5. The research methods for all participants

The following research methods were used with the children, parents and school staff that included nursery practitioners and head-teachers.

Participatory research methods (research encounters) with the children

I adopted Clark and Moss' (2011) 'Mosaic Approach' for conducting participatory research with the children and modified it to suit the nature of my research questions and the particular research context. The following were aspects of my participatory research method.

- I. Free play provision in the nursery was utilised by the children as a participatory tool for communicating regarding their free play.
- II. Children were provided access to cameras as an additional tool that was not part of the nursery provision.
- III. Scheduled meaning-making with:
 - a. Parent

- b. Practitioner
 - c. Researcher
- IV. Child-conferences with the researcher which at times included their peers (see Appendix-B).
- V. Group feedback sessions (see Appendix-C)
- VI. Photography at home

Methods for parents

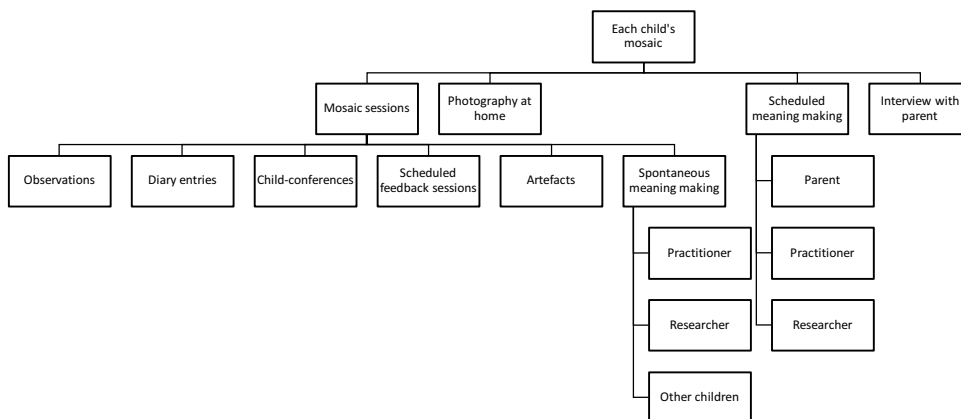
- VII. Semi-structured in-depth interviews (see Appendix-I)

Methods for practitioners and other school staff (See section 3.5, 3.8, and 3.9 for details of my approach to conducting these)

- VIII. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with practitioners (see Appendix-G)
- IX. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with other school staff (see Appendix-H)

Figure 3.1 shows how the data collected through various participatory tools was collated to form individual children’s mosaics.

Figure 3.1 A child’s mosaic



The following section focuses on how I conducted participatory research with the children.

3.6. How the various methods were piloted and validated

A discussion with the literature (such as Kim, 2011; Kelly, 2007; and Sampson, 2004) that focuses on pilots for qualitative research, informed my approach to conducting the pilot to test and validate the research methods. The methods I piloted included mosaic activity designed for the children and in-depth semi-structured interviews with parents and practitioners. As suggested by Proulx et al. (2009), the pilot was used to validate the research instruments by ensuring that they were 'feasible', 'adequate' for answering the research questions, 'reflect(ed) underlying theory', and were 'sensitive to change' both when conducted with different participants and when used with the same participant at different points in time (p.172). During the pilot, the methods were tested with a parent, a child and two practitioners from one of the two nursery settings. This small sample was used for the pilot as the sample for the main study was small, and the participants in the pilot were excluded from new data collected during the main study to avoid contamination (Leon et al., 2011). The interview was not tested with head-teachers as there was only one participant from each setting for the main study. Piloting the methods enabled me to 'assess and prepare' my techniques of conducting research (Kim, 2011, p.193). Kim (2011) suggests that this is particularly beneficial for 'novice researchers' as it enables them to try out their technique (p.193). Kelly (2007) and Sampson (2004) argue that a pilot can flag up ethical concerns. Piloting methods such as the mosaic activities with the children and the interviews with the practitioners revealed concerns related to the physical locations where the methods were tested. The interview with one of the two practitioners was piloted in the nursery at playtime in children's presence, as she was unable to leave the classroom to interview due to the lack of an adequate number of adults in the nursery on that day. During the interview, the practitioner was uninvolved in children's play and was merely physically present to ensure safety. As not all the children in the nursery were participants whose parents provided consent for the study, audio recording the voices of those in the vicinity while recording the practitioner's interview, would have posed ethical concerns. As a result, I relied on recording the interview by hand instead of an audio recording. This process of documenting simultaneously distracted my focus away from listening. An advantage of interviewing in the setting

was that the practitioner was able to refer to play resources in the surroundings as prompts in her answers. However, our interview was also repeatedly interrupted by children who asked questions and drew attention to display artefacts that they created during their play. The disadvantages of interviewing in the nursery in the children's presence outweighed the benefits. As a result, I ensured that all practitioners in the main study were interviewed in a quiet area such as the office or the kitchen, at a time when they were able to provide undivided attention.

Ethical concerns, as well as 'epistemological issues', were flagged up during mosaic activities with a child participant and I was able to then 'affirm, sharpen, (or) and revise' the researcher position I intended to assume (Sampson, 2004, p.193). The following two concerns emerged during the pilot. First, the pilot raised concern regarding how to document the data related to the participant's play that involved non-participant children. After the pilot, in my main study I decided to seek non-participants' consent before including them in my observation notes. The events encountered during the pilot led me to reflect on my behaviour as a researcher during children's play. This pertained to my reactions in situations of conflict arising out of children's play. After the pilot, I decided that the attention of the practitioners would be sought in the main study only in cases of safety concerns. In all other situations, I would refrain from intervening, as observing how children negotiate and resolve disagreements during play was part of my research agenda.

3.7. The sampling strategy used for selecting the settings, the participants, and the case studies

Authors such as Etikan et al. (2016); Acharya et al. (2013); Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007); and Marshall (1996) suggest nonprobability sampling techniques such as convenience sampling and purposive sampling 'when the researcher has limited resources, time and workforce' and 'does not aim to generate results that will be used to create generalisations pertaining to the entire population' (Etikan et al., 2016, p.1). I used the convenience sampling technique for selecting the settings as 'they meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity..., (and) willingness to participate' (Etikan et al., 2016, p.2; and Marshall, 1996). I

approached schools that were near my residence to ensure that the commute time was feasible, as my data collection plan involved frequent visits to the settings over six months, in addition to volunteering at the nurseries to build rapport. Assuming that not all schools would respond, I contacted up to twenty schools, of which three responded and agreed to offer me opportunities to volunteer. Two of these schools were selected for the research, based on their proximity to my location and level of cooperation from the staff. The convenience sampling technique was utilised in terms of selecting participants within the two settings who were 'easily accessible' and were willing to take part (Etikan et al., 2016, p.2; Acharya et al., 2013; and Marshall, 1996). Information and consent forms were sent to the parents of all children in the two nurseries. Of all the signed consents, the intention was to select participants whose parents agreed to the maximum number of activities on the form. The process of selection was not required as I did not receive consent for more than eighteen children's parents.

The purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of case studies for Chapters Five, Six and Seven, and examples from cases to illustrate themes discussed in Chapter Four. The purpose of these case studies was to provide insight into how my conceptual framework contributes to the understanding of children's free play journeys (Etikan et al., 2016). This technique 'is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses' (p.3). I 'identif(y)ied and select(ed) the information-rich cases' based on my decision of what needs to be known to understand the findings of the study in response to the research questions (Etikan et al., 2016, p.3).

3.8. Conducting participatory research with the children

This section focuses on how participatory research was conducted with children to gain insight into their free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. It includes my agenda for introducing the purpose of the study and my researcher role to the children; an overview of how the mosaic sessions were conducted with the children; the format of various types of data that formed children's mosaics; and my approach to

generating these data with participants that were then collated into individual children's mosaics.

3.8.1. My agenda for introducing the purpose of the study and my researcher role to the children

I intended to be introduced to the two Nurseries by the key nursery staff. The design listed the following details regarding the study, my identity and role to be communicated to children:

- A learner who attended a school for grownups
- There to learn how children play in the nursery and at home, as part of her 'study'
- Not a teacher

I intended for all children including the nine from each nursery who took part in the study, to be aware that there was a project underway. The rationale behind this step was to communicate to the children that the participants were children whose parents consented, and the selection was not based on a certain criteria. This measure was intended to address unintended consequences such as feelings of exclusion among non-participants. I anticipated curiosity among children regarding my presence, my behaviour, and the participants' engagement in the research. The induction was intended to provide opportunities to answer children's questions regarding the aforementioned issues. Such dialogue would minimise the frequency of questions and interruptions during the mosaic sessions that were to follow. To differentiate myself from the practitioners in terms of power and authority, I intended to communicate that in my role of a learner, I would not behave as a practitioner. In instances that required practitioners' attention and assistance such as settling disagreements between children, concerns were to be addressed with practitioners, even in my presence (see Section 4.2). The following subsection provides an overview of how the children's mosaic sessions were conducted.

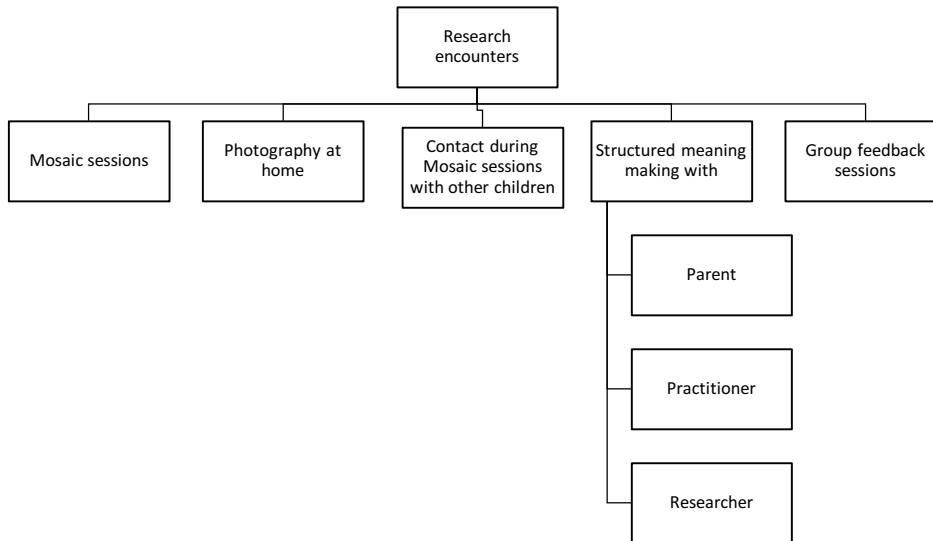
3.8.2. Children's engagement in the mosaic sessions

Each month, one mosaic session was conducted for an hour at playtime (according to the nursery schedule) with each of the eighteen child participants in the two nurseries, over six months (see Mosaic schedule in Appendix-N).

All research-related activities at playtime were referred to as 'doing the study with Yaspia/Ms. Yaspia' by the children, the practitioners, and the parents ((Children's ways of addressing me varied between the two Nurseries and developed over time (See Chapter Four)).

With a child-centric focus, I followed the children's agenda and shadowed them during their free play by accompanying them, as they availed the resources within practitioners' nursery provision. Children self-governed their spontaneous transitions between activities; engaged in solitary and/or collaborative play with their chosen (adult/child) play-partners. Free play also included children's spontaneous interactions with peers ((research participants and non-participants (see Section 3.13 for ethical measures) and adults (practitioners and the researcher)). As children moved through the nursery generating wide-ranging materials by creating artefacts; engaging in different forms of play; photographing; exploring toys and multi-sensory materials; and exploring spaces, they communicated to me through their play and/or through dialogue, aspects of their free play in the nursery and at home. Additional research provisions (such as the camera, child-conferences and meaning-making interactions) were used by the children if and when they preferred. My contact with the children with their permission during mosaic sessions conducted with other children in the same nursery, were all considered as research encounters (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Researcher encounters



Children also engaged in photography at home to communicate aspects related to their free play. At home and in the nursery, children’s free play choices were shaped by their own agenda which was limited within the provision provided by adults (parents and practitioners). During the research, in addition to the provision for play in the nursery, the children accessed to the camera. The following subsection focuses on the format of the data generated as mosaic pieces.

3.8.3. The format of the mosaic pieces

- i. **Artefacts** included drawings, writing, photographs and other materials created by the children with resources available in the nursery; and photographs taken in the nursery and at home with the camera provided for the research.
- ii. **Observation notes** consisted of the researcher’s perspectives on children’s activities during playtime. They also included the researcher’s documentation of children’s meaning-making in the form of narratives and dialogue with the researcher, relating to the artefacts. These narratives and dialogue were either created simultaneously while the data was generated or when the data was revisited at a later time.
- iii. **Meaning-making** took place when children were invited to join a practitioner, the researcher and one of their parents individually in scheduled meaning-making sessions. Adults and children were

individually informed that the children would choose materials from a thumbnail menu in an electronic file that consisted of visual materials collected over time during their research. Children were familiar with this process as they previously completed this task with me at playtime. My question to the participants during meaning-making sessions was ‘what’s happening here?’

- iv. **Diary entries** consisted of the researcher’s reflections, as well as conversations with the practitioners, parents and the children that took place beyond scheduled times for research contact.
- v. **Child-conferences** included children’s answers to a short interview consisting of structured questions. These questions pertained to aspects of their free play experiences at home and in the nursery, such as their likes and dislikes concerning people, play resources and spaces.
- vi. **Group feedback** sessions consisted of a list of structured questions that led children to reflect on their experience of taking part in the research and suggest developments for the remainder of the research.
- vii. In **parents’ interviews**, they provided insight into their children’s play environments and practices at home, and reflected on their perceptions of their children’s play at home and in the nursery.

The following subsection focuses on my approach to generating the mosaic pieces with the participants.

3.8.4. My approach to generating data with the children, parents, and practitioners that were collated to form individual children’s mosaics.

I. Artefacts

All tangible artefacts created by the children were returned to them after being photographed and digitised. With time, drawing in my notepad became a research practice initiated and sustained by the children. These materials were retained with their verbal consent.

Children were able to access the camera as a research tool, in the nursery, and at home. At the beginning of each mosaic session, children were

informed/ reminded that the camera was available to them. While some showed prior knowledge of how to use cameras, others who were unfamiliar were provided a short demonstration on how to use them. Three cameras were made available. While one was circulated among the children for taking home with a request to return within two to three days, the second was used by the participants during their mosaic sessions in the nursery. A third camera was shared among other children in the nursery to avoid feelings of exclusion. As part of my ethical practice, once returned, all memory cards were backed up and emptied before re-circulation, to ensure that the photos taken in the nursery and at home were not accessible to other children and adults (see details on anonymity in Section 3.13). Children were invited to set their own agenda regarding their use of the camera, and were reminded that I intended to learn about their play at home and in the nursery. All children who took the camera home had already experienced using it at least once in the nursery, and did not require demonstration.

II. Observations

During the hour-long mosaic sessions, key observations of children's play and research engagement were recorded in a notebook in shorthand notes to avoid interruptions. These were elaborated while still fresh in my memory immediately after the sessions ended, and eventually digitised for coding. The observed material included children's dialogue with their peers, the researcher and practitioners; as well as my observations of children's immersive play where they did not verbally communicate with me. Notes included how children played; and how they generated artefacts. To avoid impacting the children's play choices as much as possible, they were reminded at the beginning of each session that they did not need to limit themselves to solitary play and to researcher-child interactions.

Observations of the children's play with their peers were documented as data by seeking consent (see Section 3.13) from accompanying children. The level of details at which the accompanying children's information featured as research data was determined by their participant/non-participant status. The data was written up accordingly to maintain

anonymity. For example, see how Sophia's playful inclusion of Marianne in pretend research was written up in Box 6.7).

Spontaneous practitioner-child interactions were also recorded as observations. Practitioners were informed that they were to continue with their work as usual while I conducted the research. Adult-child interactions during play provided insight into the practitioners' practices.

Practitioner-researcher interactions initiated by the practitioners were recorded within my observation notes. When uncertain of whether practitioners were aware of my intention to record their actions, or if they thought my observations were limited to children only, I verbally ascertained with the practitioners that I had their continued consent. For instance, Ms. Smith's intention of contributing to the research was clear in the way she spoke about Amy's play (see section 7.2). Whereas, Ms. Kent's, informal remarks to me on several occasions, were recorded as diary entries as I felt unsure as to whether she was aware of being observed and recorded in my notes. I upheld my ethical commitments by revisiting these notes with Ms. Kent at a later time; and by consulting with my supervisor before including/excluding them as research data.

III. Meaning-Making

In nursery A, scheduled practitioner-child and researcher-child meaning-making took place within the nursery where the desktop computer was located. In nursery B, some were conducted in the classroom, while others were conducted in the office, and the location was determined by the availability of space and computers. While I aimed to make the research experience equitable, these were situated ethical issues that arose as I knew that the location and surroundings can have a potential influence on the participants' interactions.

With the parents, all meaning-making sessions took place at the same location where their interviews were conducted. This happened in nursery A in the staff room or other rooms that were provided by the school for privacy. In nursery B most meaning-making sessions were conducted in the office and some in the kitchen (meetings among practitioners and circle

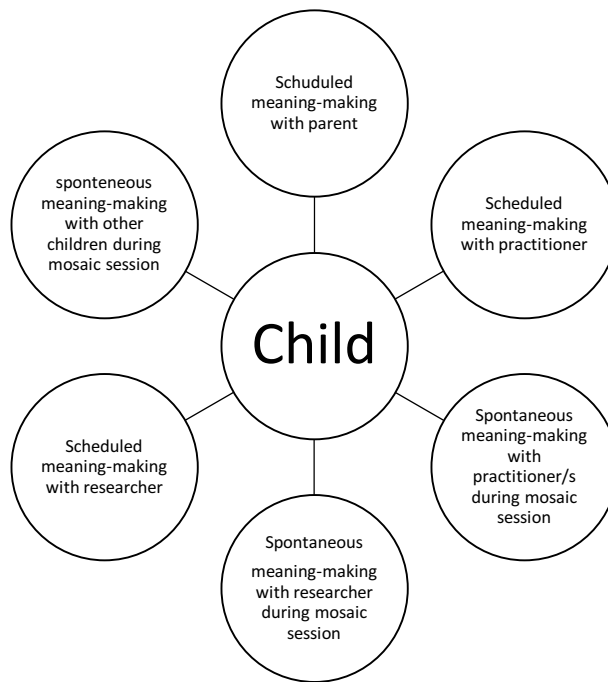
time were occasionally conducted here due to a lack of space). Being in these spaces that the children rarely had access to in their daily nursery lives, made the activities novel experiences and affected the associations they made with the spaces. For example, after conducting meaning-making in the office during a mosaic session, Naomi informed practitioners that she needed to access the office to speak to Ms. Patmore concerning her work for the study. This was an example of how Naomi related to spaces she was able to access with her rights in the research. Similar to practitioner-child meaning-making, parents and children were informed that they would be talking about the photographs and answering my question-‘what’s happening here?’

I intended to remain present as a facilitator who tried to avoid influencing or directing the discussion and limited my involvement to only assisting with navigating the computer. However, there were instances when the children and the adults made eye-contact with me, or while talking to each other they addressed me and included me as part of the conversation. Over time, I became a part of the complex web of relationships that impacted children’s experiences. I tried to keep my participation in these sessions to a minimum by only responding with phrases such as ‘I see,’ to acknowledge and convey that I was interested and attentive. I refrained from asking follow up questions as I tried to gain insight into the dynamics of their interactions. Meaning-makings that took place within the classroom were recorded in my observation notes.

Audio recordings inside the nursery were prohibited by the schools for ethical reasons as not all children were research participants, and I did not want to restrict non-participants’ access to areas near the computers. Additional information about context, reactions, and tones was written up immediately. Meaning-makings that took place in locations with more privacy were audio-recorded with permission from the children and their parents.

Figure 3.3 shows a child’s meaning-making experiences in research.

Figure 3.3 A child’s meaning-making encounters



As part of meaning-making in the nursery, children were also able to select materials from their learning diaries and special books (where practitioners documented materials related to children’s activities in the nursery and at home) to communicate non-verbally with visual material; as well as to utilise as stimuli during their discussions with me.

IV. Diary entries

Verbal consent was obtained in each respective instance that conversations were documented as data in my diary. For example: Ms. Nowak’s perception of Dave’s friendship with Henry that she shared with me in an informal discussion in the staff lounge (see Box 5.2) was recorded in my researcher’s diary as data with her consent.

V. Child-conference

Child-conferences were scheduled structured interviews conducted with the children at the beginning, middle and final stages of the research. All participants were asked the same questions in the same order (see Appendix B). The aim was to capture consistencies and developments in their answers over the six months, and to gain insight into their perceptions of their experiences through a more structured medium of communication.

Although intended to be conducted during the mosaic sessions, as these sessions were self-governed by the children, in cases when children declined to engage in the child-conferences, I approached them with a repeat invitation at a later time. Children who declined two consecutive invitations to engage in conferences were not approached again for ethical reasons. One such example was Daisy, who established over time that she wished to remain non-verbal in our researcher-child relationship and limited her engagement in research only to my observations of her play. She consistently declined the invitations to conduct child-conferences and all other methods that entailed verbal communication, with the exception of the first child-conference. Some children chose to engage in child-conferences with other participant/non-participant peers. For instance, Dave and Henry chose to conduct child-conferences together as they wished to spend play time in each others company (see Box 5.3). At the end of the child-conferences, children were able to paste smileys in the yes and no column to indicate whether they liked or disliked the activity. Each interview ended with an open-ended question that provided an opportunity to add any additional information.

VI. Group Feedback

Two Group feedback sessions were conducted with the children (see Appendix-C) in March and in July. The children were invited to join me and the key nursery practitioner in an activity to reflect on their experience of being involved in the study. As the children sat in a circle, the practitioner asked them the questions listed on the feedback activity chart and the children were requested to take turns to answer. The activity involved reflecting on their research sessions that they previously experienced, and communicating suggestions that they felt could improve the future sessions. Each activity was completed with an open-ended question which gave children an opportunity to add any further comments regarding their experiences. The activity took place during playtime. The children were provided time prior to the commencement of the activity to gather their thoughts. They were reminded that similar to the rest of their involvement in the research, this activity was optional and they were able to withdraw participation at any time. For example: Paul decided to withdraw from the activity after completing the first two questions and Daisy who was

immersed in play in the mud kitchen, declined the invitation to take part in the activity.

VII. Parents interviews

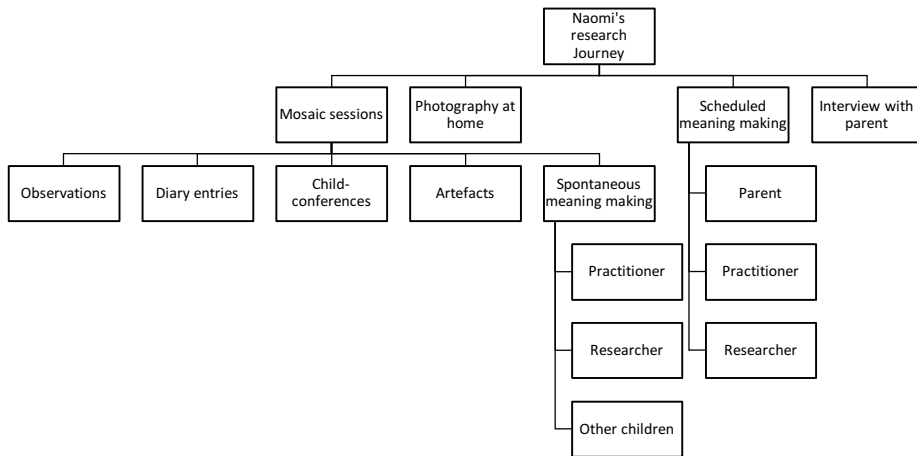
Parents qualitative interviews were guided by an interview schedule to ensure that all key areas related to the research questions were addressed. However, the semi-structured nature of the process enabled participants to direct the conversation in their intended path according to what they perceived to be relevant in relation to their children's free play at home and in the nursery. The interviews were conducted in spaces provided by the nursery according to availability and were audio recorded. The length of the interviews were determined by the amount of time parents were able to commit, usually lasting between twenty to forty minutes. All data generated with the parents were added to their children's mosaics. Instead of exploring all themes in parents' interviews, only ones that were of relevance to the themes that the children communicated in research as important to their free play, were analysed and have featured in the thesis. This selection of themes in parents' interviews and their analysis in relationship to children's perspectives, was part of my child-centric approach that aimed to share control over the research agenda with the children. The following paragraph provides details of how children's mosaic pieces were collated.

3.8.5. Collating the mosaic pieces together

Children's act of making choices and the accompanying narratives shared with me were central to the process of compiling all information generated in relation to their free play. This process is described by Clark and Moss (2011) as 'piecing it together' (p.38). Rather than allocating separate time for research, the children were invited to utilise their free play in the naturalistic setting of the nursery, and use the provision as a participatory tool to communicate about their free play. The methods of communicating during mosaic sessions emerged from the children themselves through their choices made during play within particular contexts. The data generated by the children were collated in the form of their experiential research, as they made choices while they engaged in free play. As the opportunities within free play sessions were open-ended, it is not possible to categorise all the

activities that the children engaged in. Naomi's research journey in the diagram below is an example of how the data related to her free play was compiled by her through the choices she made, to form her mosaic (see Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4 Naomi's research journey



The selection of information as data, reflected children's decisions. For example, from Naomi's pool of drawings and photographs, only the ones that she selected to assign narratives to and make meaning of during mosaic sessions; and structured and spontaneous meaning-making experiences, were included in her mosaic. It is important to remain cognizant that these decisions were influenced by her understanding of the purpose of her role in the research. It is also impossible to claim that children's decisions were free of the practitioners' agenda as they were accustomed to adult intentions shaping their everyday experiences in the nursery. The following section shows how the discussion of the literature informed my approach to conducting participatory research with the children.

3.9. How the discussion of the literature informed my approach to conducting participatory research with the children

This section show how the discussion with the literature informed my problematisation and rationale for utilising the methods (Section 3.5). The section provides illustrative examples for each method; and where there are more nuanced aspects of data collection methods to be communicated, more illustrations are provided than for methods that are more straightforward.

i. Children's free play as a participatory tool with children

I adopted Clark and Moss' (2011) mosaic approach and modified it to fit the context of my research. This approach was adopted for answering the research questions pertaining to the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. The approach was suitable for gaining insight into consistencies and developments over time, in children's free play; and in the meanings they were attached from multiple child and adult (parents, practitioners and researcher) perspectives. This approach was adopted as my research sees value in 'engaging participants in 'data generation' and 'interpretation'; and children were included in the meaning-making of the data that they generated at play time (Veale, 2005, p.254). The following paragraph focuses on the role of the discussion of the literature in informing my approach to using free play provision in the nursery as a participatory tool for the children.

Several authors (such as Clark and Moss, 2011; Fargas-malet et al., 2010; and Crivello et al., 2009) debate the use of participatory methods for involving children in research. By highlighting parallels between my approach and the authors' claims; and their concerns that my research addresses, a discussion with such literature shows how it informed my utilisation of free play provision in the nursery as a participatory tool with children. While the authors agree that participatory research is appropriate for children due to the availability of wide-ranging verbal and non-verbal methods that suit children's individual preferences and competencies, they vary in terms of their attention to the different aspects of the participatory paradigm. These aspects include epistemological issues (Veale, 2005); benefits of using participatory tools over other research methods; problematisation of participatory tools (Fargas-malet et al., 2010); and the role of reflexivity in addressing power differentials within researcher-child

relationships (O’Kane, 2008; Pain, 2004). My research paralleled Clark and Moss’ (2011) approach of making multiple verbal and non-verbal methods available for children to choose from, in order to make research more accessible to children with varying skills and capacities. Furthermore, offering resources that the children were accustomed to in the nursery play provision, made the research more accessible as they were not required to learn how to utilise new methods. Fargas-malet et al. (2010) call for a ‘critical reflection’ through the ‘problematization’ of various participatory tools and examination of the complicated and varied nature of data they generate (p.175). They argue that ‘data generated through participatory tools are impacted by researchers’ awareness and understanding of implications of using such tools’ (p.175). The following subsections respond to such concerns by revealing how the use of various tools such as drawing and photography were problematised. This was achieved by considering how factors such as children’s awareness of the adult-agenda, and their previous experiences of engaging with those tools in structured tasks, could potentially impact their engagement with the tools during the research.

Crivello et al. (2009), based on their own experience of participatory research with ‘very young six year old children’, emphasise ‘scaffolding’ and ‘guiding’ measures as essentials for effective use of the tools (p.68). Such concerns were addressed by offering tools that children were already accustomed to, such as free play provision in the nursery. Additionally, opportunities for dialogue to co-create meaning with the children of the materials they generated during free play, also addressed such concerns. The use of the camera was demonstrated for children who were unfamiliar with the equipment. O’Kane (2008) expresses concern that regardless of the stance taken by the researcher, the imbalance of power in adult-child relationships are inevitable. I addressed such concerns by carefully considering the power differentials in the design of the researcher role, and by practising constant reflexivity during the research process (Pain, 2004). My researcher role is discussed (see Section 3.11) in relation to literature. As the experience of establishing and developing my researcher role impacted children’s free play significantly, it emerged as a meaningful research finding and is explored in further details in Chapter Four.

ii. Artefacts

Children's artefacts varied vastly in nature, as they were generated through child-initiated engagement with all resources available within the nursery provision and with the camera as an additional research tool. The exploration of the literature (such as Barker and Weller, 2003; Punch, 2002; and Ring, 2006) that debate the benefits and limitations of participatory tools such as photographs and drawings, informed my critical reflection on how children's engagement with the resources available for research impacted their free play and the data they generated. Punch (2002) suggests that the inaccessibility of cameras makes it a 'novel' item and can be advantageous for attracting children's interests (p.16). However, she also suggests that such scarcity can lead to disagreements among children regarding sharing. Similarly, as practitioners' cameras used for documenting observations, were inaccessible to the children, my camera (initially one was provided in the nursery) attracted significant interest from children leading to disagreements. In response, I made an additional camera available to be shared among all children. Echoing Barker and Weller's (2003) claim, assigning responsibility of cameras to the children enabled me to establish a relationship of trust with them. Cook and Hess (2007) suggest that adults' absence can ensure elimination of adults' influence on children's photographs. However, children such as Henry, through their photographs taken at home (see Section 4.4) showed that even in my absence, children and their parents' agendas were influenced by their understanding of the purpose of the research and my expectations from them. Furthermore, the absence of adults (parents and practitioners) was not intended as the aim was to study children's free play within naturalistic contexts that resembled their everyday experiences as much as possible (see Section 3.3). Punch (2002) expresses concern regarding what she identifies as a disadvantage of photographs. She argues that children's choices may not reflect their own agenda only, as they can be influenced by photographs taken moments earlier by other children. Rather than considering this aspect of photographs as a disadvantage, I considered such influences as important contextual factors that provided deeper understanding of children's choices. For instance, during Clare's second child-conference that she shared with Irene, Clare followed Irene's footsteps and photographed the same resources in the nursery that Irene

selected moments earlier. In the analysis of Clare's play, Irene's influence was taken into account as contextual factor that impacted Clare's decisions. The same principle was applied to the analysis of all artefacts that were generated by the children, by considering the impact of contextual factors on children's choices and play behaviour during research.

iii. Observation

A number of authors such as Bonner and Tolhurst (2002); Caldwell and Atwal (2005); and Spradley (2016) debate the role of a researcher as observer, and discussions with their research informed the measures I took to conduct observations. Through the research process, the nature of my role as an observer changed alongside my relationship with different individuals and with the organisational culture in the two nurseries (see Chapter Four). As the data collection commenced, I tried to assume a 'detached role' as a 'non-participant observer' in order to minimise the impact of my presence on the data as much as possible (Caldwell and Atwal, 2005, p.43). However, I remained cognizant that my existence would be noticed as it would be physically impossible to take a 'fly on the wall approach' (Caldwell and Atwal, 2005, p.43). My initial approach to observation involved occupying the 'least intrusive' spaces 'slightly out of the way' as I recorded children's play, similar to Flewitt's (2003) stance (p.119). Overtime, that remained unchanged with some children, while with others it developed as they included me as an active participant in their play. For instance, most of my non-participant observations of Aleksy doing sand play were conducted standing outside the sandpit. Whereas upon being invited by Henry and Dave to join their game of hide and seek, I assumed 'the (role) of an active participant (who) s(seeks)ought to do what other people we (a)re doing, not merely to gain acceptance, but to more fully learn the cultural rules for behaviour' (Stradley, 2016, p.60). I engaged in the activity with Dave and Henry because over 'prolong(ed) observations' during the months of data collection, they grew accustomed to my presence and we developed unique researcher-child relationships (see Section 5.4) (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002, p.12). The following section focuses on the role of my diary entries.

iv. Diary entries

Several authors (such as Coffey, 1999; Pellatt, 2003; and Punch, 2012) contest the use of diary entries for recording researchers' reflections. The authors differ in their views on the benefits of such documentation. Punch (2012) argues that there is need for 'awareness of the ways in which the self and the personal affect both the research process and outcomes' (p.92). This claim is supported by Pellatt (2003); Coffey (1999); and Carolan (2003), who suggest that reflecting on emotional experiences in diary entries can help a researcher address tensions within multiple roles that they may be assuming. My diary entries provided rationale for my responses, and contextualised data during the analysis and write-up at a later time. The entries acted as reminders regarding issues that required revisiting, consulting my supervisor, and reflection (Punch, 2002). For example, my diary entries from Sophia's first mosaic session enabled me to recall how I interpreted her decision to sit on the carpet and rest, and how I reflected on my own decision to sit on Ms. Smith's chair and considered its implications on how that may have impacted how the children perceived me (see Box 6.2). These were issues that I felt uncertain about at the time of data collection and flagged up to be discussed in supervision (Widdowfield, 2000). While the researcher diary entries consisted of my reflections on my feelings and other contextual details encountered at the time of data generation, the observation records consisted of details of children's engagement in the research during free play (see previous sub-section). The following subsection focuses on my approach to conducting child-conferences and group feedback sessions.

v. Child-conferences and group feedback

Literature (such as Clark, 2010; Clark, 2017; and Punch, 2002b) that discuss child-conferences include the use of structured questionnaires. Murray et al. (2009) parallel Psaila's (2017) suggestion to revisit a list of structured questions with children, and draw comparisons across data generated over time to identify consistencies and developments. However, the authors focus on different aspects of such structured activities. The discussion of the literature informed my design of the child-conference, where I asked children question relating to their favourite toys and people

they liked playing with at home and in the nursery. The discussion also informed my design of the feedback questions that asked children about their experience of taking part in research. The format of these questionnaires such as number and length of questions, contexts for conducting the interviews such as during play time and as a group activity, and process of documentation, were considered carefully by consulting relevant literature. Short questions written in 'simple language appropriate' for the children's age, made the conferences 'child-friendly' (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010, p.186). Records over time showed consistencies and developments in children's answers (Clark and Moss, 2011; Murray et al.2009). While the questions guided the conversations, the open-ended nature of the tasks enabled children to determine the level of details they wanted to share (Turner, 2010). I responded with follow up questions only if I sensed children's eagerness to share further details. For instance (see Section 5.5) as my researcher-child relationship with both Henry and Dave developed over time, they shared details of developments in their friendship and play with me during child-conferences and responded to my follow up questions. The child-conferences and feedback questions were completed verbally with the researcher during mosaic sessions (Psaila, 2017). The following subsection shows how the discussion of the literature informed my approach to understanding children's meaning-making.

vi. Meaning-making

The process of meaning-making in research with children is a contested topic (Einarsdottir et al., 2009; Maine, 2015;and Wright, 2007). Several authors agree that meaning-making is suitable for including children's perspectives in research. However, they differ in their focus on the different aspects such as the role and nature of the meaning-making process. For instance, while Maine (2015) discusses levels of awareness in children during the activity; Wright (2007) and Einarsdottir et al. (2009) focus on researchers' role in meaning-making; and Barthes (1967) problematises drawing as an accompanying tool to meaning-making. Children's free play choices and accompanying dialogue in my study, such as Irene's overt verbalisation of her engagement in the research (see Box 4.9), paralleled Maine's (2015) argument regarding two levels of awareness. These levels pertained to how children showed awareness regarding the purpose of the

research, and awareness of the quality of their own engagement in research. For example (see Section 4.4) as Irene completed her play in response to the child-conference question relating to her play at home, she asked me 'how was that? Was that alright?' Irene then asked if she needed to repeat her play in order for me to document it. I interpreted these questions as indication that, Irene showed concern regarding the quality of play she exhibited for the purpose of the research, and assessed her own performance in her engagement with the research process. The following subsection focuses on the particular stage of participatory research that combines data generated through multiple participatory tools.

3.9.1. Interviews with parents, practitioners and other school staff

One semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted with each adult participant (parents, practitioners and other school staff). Participants' lack of time for interviews; and unavailability of space to conduct interviews, were the challenges that I faced while scheduling interviews. In order to 'avoid background noise' and ensure that interviews were 'audible', I consulted practitioners to identify quiet areas, and checked for their availability prior to scheduling each interview (Kvale, 2008, p.93- 94). In nursery A, the interviews were conducted in the staff lounge, and in nursery B they were conducted in an office that was attached to the nursery and in the kitchen.

A number of authors (such as Britten, 1995; Cohen et al., 2000; Longhurst, 2003) highlight various aspects that are essential for conducting robust interviews. Cohen et al. (2002) argue that interviewing '...involves the gathering of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals' (p.351). While, such direct contact makes the process of collecting data thorough and can generate in-depth data, Cohen et al. (2000) remind interviewers to be mindful of their own 'subjectivity and bias' (p.352). As an interviewer, this required constant reflexivity on my part, and acknowledgement of my epistemological assumptions (see Section 3.3). Britten (1995) discusses factors that differentiate structured, semi-structured and in depth interviews. Unlike 'structured interviews' that are conducted by interviewers who 'are trained to ask predetermined questions 'in a standardised manner', semi-structured interviews are more flexible

(Britten, 1995, p.251). Such flexibility was particularly important for my research, as the research questions were designed to gain insight into the experiences and understanding of participants, and it was imperative for participants to be able to direct interactions in the ways that enabled them to communicate their ideas and opinions. My interviews were guided by a predetermined list of questions that helped me ensure that all aspects of children's play I was interested in researching, were covered. However, the interviews varied in the way they progressed due to the flexibility in the way they were conducted. Such flexibility enabled participants to redirect the discussion to areas related to their children's free play, that they considered to be of relevance to their understanding of the research (Britten, 1995). My experience with gatekeepers and of gaining access to the Nurseries is discussed in the next section.

3.10. The way in which the methods were collated and used in relationship to each other, and the response rates

This section focuses on how the mosaic pieces generated through multiple methods were collated together for each child and where the meaning emerged from the different components of the research. It also provides the response rate for parents, practitioners and children's engagement in the six mosaic sessions over the course of the project. All practitioners and head-teachers in the two nurseries interviewed for the study. All practitioners engaged in the collaborative meaning-making activity with the children. Among the eighteen children, sixteen took part in all eight mosaic sessions. Although from time to time some of these children declined the invitation to take part, these sessions were postponed to a later time of their preference instead of being cancelled altogether. One child took part in three mosaic sessions as his family relocated to another country in the middle of the research. Another child Aleksy did not consent to taking part in the study for the first few months (see Box 4.6). It is not possible to report what the response rate was among all child participants for any particular activity (for example: pretend play) as children were not required to choose from a specific set number of methods. Instead, they were invited to choose resources and activities from the entire nursery provision. Fifteen out of eighteen parents were interviewed, as three were unavailable.

The stage of participatory research that combines data generated through multiple tools is debated by authors such as Clark and Moss (2011); and Robinson et al. (2011). The exploration of the literature informed my approach to collating the mosaic pieces together. An advantage of Clark and Moss' (2011) approach is that their focus on a narrow topic guided children's generation and collation of data. As a result, drawing links between the themes emerging from the data and the research aims was straightforward. In contrast, the children in my research set their own agenda for the wider scope of the topic of free play at home and in the nursery. The nature of themes that were identified in children's mosaics collated through their free play choices, varied vastly. This made the process of categorising themes complex and challenging. A possible disadvantage of Clark and Moss' (2011) approach is that such a specific focus may not suit the interest of all children. In my research, the methods of communicating during the mosaic sessions emerged from the children themselves, through their free play choices made in particular contexts. Children's act of making choices and accompanying narratives shared with me were central to the process of compiling all information generated in relation to their free play. As a limitation, Crivello et al. (2009) argue that compiling all materials and artefacts together can potentially resemble structured tasks that tend to be adult-directed in the nursery. In my research, given the time available and the volume of observation notes recorded over the course of the research, reviewing all records of play with the children as Clark and Moss (2011) have done, was an unrealistic goal. Children were only able to revisit tangible data such as visual materials and artefacts. This also addressed Robson et al.'s (2011) concern that choosing from large amounts of data can overwhelm participants. The researcher-child relationship was central to collating the mosaic pieces in my research. The children selected materials based on their understanding of the purpose of the research. There were instances, when the children chose to contribute aspects of their play that contradicted adults' (practitioners and parents) agenda for the research. For instance, a lack of response from Rachel to Ms. Khan's repeated attempts to direct their shared meaning-making of Rachel's drawing towards assessment of numeracy skills, revealed the differences between their adult and child agendas (see Box 7.3). A key aspect of my approach to collating mosaic pieces together was to develop the mosaic gradually over time as the children added individual

pieces along with attached meanings. For example, the understanding of Dave's developing relationship with Henry was collated over the course of the research (see Chapter Five). Reflecting on all materials at once towards the completion of the project would provide insight into children's thinking in relation to the material at one point in time. In contrast my approach of gaining insight gradually over time, reveals the aspects of children's play that developed and those that remained unchanged over the course of the project. Clark and Moss (2011) focus extensively on the purpose of collating the mosaic pieces together, which was to elicit the several dimensions to the findings, as the methods provided insight from multiple perspectives. However, a limitation in their approach is that there has been little focus on the experience of collating the pieces together through co-construction. This is an area that my research addresses by taking into account the context within which collaborative meaning-making occurred. For instance, Clark and Moss's (2011) research lacks attention on areas such as the dynamics of children's interactions with their parents, practitioners and the researcher during meaning-making experiences. Their focus is limited on the themes that emerged related to the topic, the parallels and differences between them, and the layers of details that were added regarding the theme from multiple perspectives. Additionally, my research analyses the experience of conducting research by examining meaning-making interactions as live negotiations between individuals who position themselves within the 'field' to attach meaning to data from their own perspectives (see Section 2.6.4). The following section focuses on my approach to conducting research with the parents, practitioners and other school staff.

3.11. My intended research role

In debates concerning the researcher role, authors (such as Mandell, 1998; Corsaro, 1997; and Swain, 2006) focus on their own perspectives and experiences of assuming various researcher roles while conducting research with children. Through an examination of these debates, drawing out the similarities and differences in their approaches highlights the complexities that I considered while designing my intended researcher role. In her 'least adult role' Mandell (1998) intended to immerse herself in children's activities once the children invited her to join, and claimed to

enter 'into their world', after setting aside her 'adult assumptions based on age and cognitive maturity' (p.435). Prior to commencing her study, Mandell (1998) conceived of her 'least adult' role, to be one where she would 'play with the children and merely observe the teachers at work; and say little on site' (p.440). Corsaro (1997) made similar claims regarding his immersion into children's activities using tactics such as waiting to be invited by the children. However, rather than Mandell's (1998) 'least adult' role in which she attempted to engage in activities as the children did, Corsaro (1997) intended to be perceived by the children as an 'atypical adult' who was 'incompetent' (p.29). These differences in approaches bring to attention the need to consider the subtle variations in the ways that researchers can embody aspects of their intended role and can communicate to children how they want to be perceived. A key issue that Mandell (1998) and Corsaro (1997) disagree upon concerns the challenges posed by the difference in physical appearance between the researcher and children. According to Mendall (1998) in a least adult role, 'the physical differences can be so minimised when participating with children', that they can be 'inconsequential in interactions' (p.435). Conversely, Corsaro (1997) acknowledges that the physical differences within the researcher-child relationship cannot be ignored. James (2007); and Waller and Bitou (2011) concur with Corsaro's (1997) argument that such differentials need to be recognised as inevitable. They criticise Mandell's (1998) 'least-adult' role for underestimating the impact of 'physical and social factors' on how children perceive the research, and consequently impact their engagement in research (Waller and Bitou, 2011, p.13). As an alternative to a least-adult role, Waller and Bitou (2011) suggest a 'least teacher role' as they draw on Swain's (2006) experience of switching between 'more like a pupil/peer' and 'more like a teacher' role (Swain, 2006, p.13). They suggest that in the least teacher role, a researcher can set aside assumptions of authority and duties of monitoring children, which in turn enables children to perceive the researcher to be different from the practitioners. Swain (2006) is of the sound opinion that the researcher need not remain in a static role and can shift between the two, and that being in this dynamic role was possible for him because children were able to grasp that adults 'performed a variety of roles' (p.13). Warming (2005); and Ebrahim and Muthukrishna (2005) support this claim and suggest that the nature of a researcher's role should be adjustable to changing circumstances. The design of my researcher role

reflected Swain (2006); Warming (2005) and Ebrahim and Muthukrishna's (2005) views as although I started in a role that was predetermined, I took a responsive approach where my involvement varied with time according to how children reacted to me. In my philosophical position in the interpretivist paradigm (see Section 3.3), it was impossible to set aside 'adult assumptions based on age and cognitive maturity' as done by Mandell (1998, p.435). Instead these assumptions required acknowledgement in my researcher role. I did not intend to be perceived as 'incompetent' (Corsaro, 1997, p.29) as that would undermine children's ability to understand that adults can assume a variety of roles (Swain, 2006). In my agenda for communicating the nature of my role to children, I followed Swain's (2006) suggestion of setting aside assumptions of authority and duties of supervising the children, which in turn was intended to enable children to perceive me (the researcher) to be different from practitioners. As the experience of establishing and developing this role emerged as a complex factor that impacted children's free play significantly and in unique ways in an ongoing manner, it was considered as meaningful research findings and discussed in Chapter Four. Chapter Four also shows how my researcher identity was communicated; and experienced and responded to in different ways by individual children over time. The following section focuses on the steps I took to gain access into the Nurseries.

3.12. Access and gatekeepers

The tensions related to access and cooperation between researcher and gatekeepers are examined by authors such as Barker and Weller (2003) and Fargas-Malet et al. (2010). At the design stages of the research, I contacted schools via email introducing myself as a doctoral research student and expressed my interest in volunteering in their Nurseries. Bearing in mind that I was the sole researcher in this project, I contacted a list of schools that were located within a comfortable travel time of twenty minutes from my area of residence. Assuming that not all schools would respond and have availability of volunteer positions, I contacted up to twenty schools, of which three responded and agreed to offer me opportunities to volunteer. Two of these schools were selected for the research, based on their proximity to my location and level of cooperation from staff upon. To build rapport with staff, I volunteered in the two schools for a term. Upon

establishing contact, I shared my intentions of conducting my doctoral research in the schools with the management and key nursery staff by sharing electronic and hard copies of information sheets and consent forms prepared for all participants (Fargas-malet et al., 2010). These provided detailed information regarding the purpose of the study and the level of involvement that was expected from each participant (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). Confirmation in documents that the research design was approved by the university ethics committee helped establish a relationship of trust with the schools. I was granted access and permission to conduct my study in the two schools and experienced my first encounters with gatekeeper parents when I approached them to obtain consent for their children's participation in research. These experiences were similar to the ones highlighted in Barker and Weller (2003) where parents referred to their partners as decision makers. In contrast to the literature discussed above that only focuses on the role of gatekeepers at the time of gaining access to schools, I experienced gatekeeping behaviour from staff communicated in the form of school culture, at later stages of the research project. How I negotiated and adapted my research in response to them is discussed in details in Chapter Four. In the following section, the discussion of the literature shows the development of my approach to ethical considerations.

3.13. Ethical considerations

Through the discussion of the literature, this section provides insight into the development of the steps taken to address ethical concerns.

3.13.1. Planning and situated ethics

Upon completion of Design1.0 and prior to conducting a pilot, an application prepared in line with the university's ethics guidelines and BERA ethical guidelines (2011) was submitted to the university ethics committee. The application outlined my intended measures in response to anticipated situations, and emphasised the importance of recognising the possibilities of encountering 'situated ethics' along the different stages of research (Simons and Usher, 2000, p.2). Simons and Usher (2000) define 'situated ethics' as 'immune to universalisation' and 'local and specific to particular practices' and circumstances (p.2). As the project involved conducting

research with vulnerable members of society, i.e. young children in complex environments and in relationships that developed with time, the 'ethical dilemmas encountered' were wide ranging and were dealt with through constant reflexive practice (Flewitt, 2003, p.138-139). They 'were resolved as they emerged in the field, in their local and specific contexts, on a minute-by minute-basis depending on my (researcher's) perceptions and interpretations of the dynamics of the participants' interactions, intentions and anxieties' (Flewitt, 2003, p.138-139). My responses were developed through ongoing consultation with the children, practitioners, parents and my research supervisor. My withdrawal from Aleksy (see Boxes 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8) in the initial sessions in response to his non-verbal cues of dissent, and Ms. Nowak's role in assisting communication between us at a later stage of the project that led to development of our researcher-child relationship, is an example of how I responded to situated ethics. Ms. Nowak's involvement was informed by keeping in mind the following factors: Aleksy's age as he was younger than most of his peers in the nursery; his English language skills that were at the initial stages of development; and the widespread culture in the nursery of children conforming to adults' instructions without resistance, due to the prevalent power differential between them. Therefore, while Ms. Nowak assisted, in overcoming the language barrier that Aleksy and I experienced; and in explaining to Aleksy the concept of the study (given that such complex concepts can be challenging to comprehend for children of such young age), Aleksy was repeatedly made aware of his right to decline or withdraw from the study at any time.

3.13.2. Ethics of doing research with children

The provision of multiple participatory tools to avoid essentialising specific skills in children; process of informed consent; and maintenance of anonymity of participants, are ethical considerations involved in research with children, that several authors (such as Morrow and Richards, 1996; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; and Flewitt, 2005) focus on. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) suggest participatory research methods as appropriate for addressing ethical dilemmas arising in research involving children, as access to multiple modes of communication enable children's agency by allowing them to direct research and express their own interpretations of

the data generated. Morrow (2008) argues that the use of single method such as oral interviews only, essentialise verbal communication skills in children. The discussion of the literature highlighted possibilities of marginalisation of children that could result from my project, and informed the development of my methodology that was ethically sound because it did not prioritise specific skills in children (see Section 3.10). The decision to choose the multiple participatory tools approach was driven by my aim to enable children to choose their preferred methods while taking part in the research. This helped ensure that the participants were not selected based on their competencies. Amy's use of photographs from her 'special book' to communicate to me that she liked dressing up as Elsa when she played at home, is an illustrative example of how visual material was selected by Amy as a mode of non-verbal communication (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1: During her first child-conference in February, Amy used non-verbal visual tools to communicate with me regarding her play at home.

As I repeated my questions to her Amy (whose verbal skills were still developing) noticed my struggle to understand her two word replies to my questions regarding what she liked to do during play time at home. Amy paused and fetched her 'special book' compiled by the practitioners that consisted of her photographs, drawings and some written work, done at home and in the nursery. Amy flipped through the pages and pointed to a photograph of herself in a dress with Elsa's image printed on it. I asked if she liked playing Elsa at home. Amy nodded and smiled and said 'yeah'.



Amy's reference to her photograph to communicate what she liked playing at home, is an example of how the availability of multiple participatory tools enabled me to avoid essentialising specific skills in children. In this instance, Amy's use of visual material enabled us to avoid relying solely on verbal communication. The role of the discussion of the literature in informing my approach to seeking children's informed consent is focused on in the following subsection.

The process of informed consent requires constant vigilance on the part of the researcher, and should be conducted in an ongoing manner. This is also known as provisional consent (Flewitt, 2005). My method of provisional consent respected children's decisions to accept and decline invitations to take part in the research and withdraw their participation at any time. These aspects of my research align with Article 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 13 states a 'child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice' (p.5). The ongoing nature of the process of consent allows children opportunities to ask questions throughout the course of the research; re-evaluate their decisions regarding taking part; and join in and withdraw participation at any point in time. Provisional consent is encouraged by Mayne et al. (2016) who refer to Lundy's work to caution researchers to avoid becoming complacent 'where initial good intentions soon evaporate once practical implementation becomes inconvenient' (p.675). These concerns were addressed in my approach by practising ongoing reflexivity. In addition to verbal signs, I looked for non-verbal gestures that indicated children's consent or dissent. My first unsuccessful encounter with Andrew in January is an example of how I interpreted his reluctance to make eye contact with me and engage in conversation; and his rushed exit as he followed his friend, as signs of his dissent (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2: My first unsuccessful attempt at obtaining informed consent from Andrew for a mosaic session.

I approached Andrew who held a telephone to his ear in the home corner and tried to get Ameel's attention as he sputtered and spoke to Ameel in an uncontrollable state of excitement.

Andrew: Ameel! Come! It's your father. Come! Your father is on the phone!

Ameel left the home corner and started walking towards the hallway. I approached Andrew with the intention of explaining my study and his potential involvement in it, hoping to obtain his informed consent. As I asked Andrew if he had a minute to speak to me, I noticed that Andrew was breathing rapidly with short gasps as he avoided making eye contact with me and tried to look around my left and my right, trying to see if Ameel was behind me. His eyes wandered all over the two carpets on that side of the nursery.

Andrew: But I want to play with Ameel. He's my friend. I have to find him.

Andrew sprinted off around me and down the hallway. I heard his voice fading as he ran further away from me, calling out to Ameel. I walked around the corner in the direction that I had seen Andrew go, to find the two children near the dress up area in the hallway where Andrew appeared to be trying to convince Ameel to do something. I was not close enough to hear all of what was said.

Andrew: Ameel let's.... Come on. Let's..

I observed the children for another minute or two. Andrew appeared engrossed in conversation with Ameel, as he touched Ameel's shoulder and tried to cajole him. I decided not to interrupt the development of their interaction; and moved on to Eric, another participant for the morning session.

Andrew's actions were interpreted as indirect indicators of his dissent. Although Andrew did not verbally decline to take part in the study, his reluctance was evident in his impatience to get away from me and run after his friend. Such interpretations of inexplicit gestures and appropriate responses were part of my ethical practice, as I tried to remain aware of signs of consent and dissent among participants.

Negotiating informed consent

Methods were designed to enable children to share information as 'active agents' and as experts of their own lives (James and Prout, 1995). Aligning

the research agenda with the paradigm of the 'new sociology of childhood' meant that consent regarding children's participation, from gatekeepers (i.e. school, practitioners and parents) would not suffice. Children's right to participate and decline needed to be respected and informed consent from children was required. Alderson and Morrow (2011) call upon researchers to make clear to children that they can choose to decline the request to participate, or drop out at any point. Details of how I intended to communicate this in a child-friendly manner appropriate for young children of ages three to five, was specified in my ethics application. The application further stated that in the event that children were to decline to participate or drop out, I would ensure that they were not referred to in in-depth interviews with practitioners. In the eventuality that a child wanted to discontinue with a research method, the interview or data collection activity would be stopped immediately, or the activity would be continued with other participants and the drop out participant's data from the session would not be used in the thesis. I intended to find specific guidelines on how to offer the process of informed consent as a meaningful experience to the children, that was also ethically airtight. I expected to read about best practice methods that could be universally applicable to this particular age group; only to find that the notion of informed consent is heavily contested. The ethically sound approach to obtaining consent is through an iterative process of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, where the researcher critically reflects and acknowledges the limitations of their own approach used to obtain consent (Flewitt, 2005).

Recent attention focuses on problematising the notion of informed consent (Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Powell et al., 2012; and Mayne et al., 2016). Drawing on the concept of informed consent, Mayne et al. (2016) identify 'informing' and 'consenting' as two separate but connected and essential activities that form the process of informed consent (p.674). They suggest that 'it is only when potential participants understand their role and the purpose of the research project, and signify that consent, that the two aspects are combined to become 'informed consent'' (p.674). I aimed to introduce myself prior to each mosaic session to the child concerned and inform them of the purpose of the study and the nature of their potential involvement (see Box 3.3) before I invited them to take part.

Box 3.3: The steps I took to inform the children

- I introduced myself to the children as a learner who was there to learn how children play in the nursery and at home. I wanted to learn about children's play as part of my study, for which I attended a school for grownups.
- I informed the children that the study required me to watch the children during playtime. I made them aware of the camera as an additional resource available for them to use.
- I informed the children that eight of their peers from the nursery were also taking part in the study; and that they were only included upon receipt of their parents' permission.
- Children were made aware that they would do the study only if they wanted to and decide how they wanted to take part; they were able to withdraw participation and ask me questions at any time.

This subsection provided insight into how the exploration of the literature informed my process of negotiating informed consent with the children; and consideration of the complexities involved in conducting ethically sound research with children. The following section focuses on steps taken to maintain participants' anonymity.

Steps taken to maintain anonymity

This section focuses on the steps I took to maintain anonymity of participants. Flick (2014) argues that 'researchers need to guarantee participants' confidentiality, which means that the information about them is only used in a way which makes it impossible for other persons to identify the participants ...' (p.40). In the context of this project 'the concept of confidentiality (is) was closely connected with anonymity in that anonymity (is) was one way in which confidentiality (is) was operationalised' (Wiles, et al., 2008, p.419). Pseudonyms assigned to schools, practitioners, parents, other school staff and child participants were recorded in an electronic document. In the thesis, participants are assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The commitment to maintain participants' anonymity extended

to visual data as well. In photographs, participants' faces and children's names printed on their drawings (a common practice in both Nurseries), were smudged with the use of computer software to ensure anonymity (Flewitt, 2005).

My encounter with Andrew (see Box 3.2) is illustrative of the hurried nature of the process of informed consent that I experienced on most days. Despite my intentions of informing all children of my plans for maintaining their anonymity, opportunities to do so were rare, as the children would tend to become impatient by the time I informed them regarding the availability of the camera. Some were not concerned with anonymity and explicitly instructed me to return to my supervisor and deliver their messages. For example, Naomi insisted that I take the rocket that I helped her build and show to my supervisor. Others asked questions at various points in time during the study regarding who was going to see my notes from the mosaic sessions; and at times requested confidentiality by omitting certain information from my notes, as they did not wish for my supervisor to see them (see Box 3.4).

Box 3.4: Irene instructed me to omit a part of our interaction during a mosaic session from my field notes.

In April, we conducted Irene's mosaic session in the Reception play ground. We were under the shed as it was raining outside. As I recorded my observations in my notebook, Irene suggested that we step out in the rain and pretend to go shopping. I was hesitant and I told her that I was concerned that my notebook would get wet in the rain.

Irene: Let's go out shopping?

Researcher: I have to stay in because I can't get my notebook wet in the rain.

Irene: Why??

Researcher: Because I need to show this to my teacher.

Irene: Oh yeah what's his name again?

R: Phil.

Irene: [REDACTED] What Irene said next is redacted as per her instructions.

Irene's insistence that I refrain from sharing certain details from her session with my supervisor, indicates that she was aware of her right to choose what she wanted to include and exclude from the research. However it was impossible to ascertain that all children had the same understanding of the concept of anonymity as Irene. The following section focuses on the steps taken to analyse the data.

3.14. Approach to data analysis, case study analysis and data presentation, and summary of researching findings

This section focuses on how I constructed case studies, and presented and analysed different themes and perspectives within the case study approach. It provides insight into how my rationale for the approach to the identification and analysis of themes in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven, and summarisation of research findings in Chapter Eight, is influenced by the particular concepts and practices discussed in the literature on case studies. In my research, I used both single and multiple case study approaches. While the research questions are answered through multiple case studies in the thesis, within my particular use of case studies in the different chapters, I drew on the various differentiations that authors such as Yin (2003) and Seawright and Gerring (2008) make between single and multiple case studies. As specified in the sampling technique section (see Section 3.7), the selection of case studies was purposive and was determined by what I considered to be of importance concerning the understanding of how my conceptual framework is used to answer the research questions. The following discussion provides further insight into my approach to this selection.

Selection of case studies, data presentation, and analysis

The exploration of Creswell (2007) and Yin (2003) informed my choice of selection of case studies; and the amount of data that is appropriate for answering research questions. Creswell (2007) suggest that case studies involve data generated from 'multiple sources of information' and aim to identify 'case-based themes' (p.245). Case studies in this thesis analyse

data representing multiple child and adult (parents, practitioners, researcher) perspectives. Children generated data through their engagement in free play as a participatory tool, and data was generated with adults through in-depth interviews and informal conversations recorded with the participants' consent. The authors highlight the importance of 'intent of the case analysis' and differentiate between 'single instrumental case study' and 'collective or multiple-case study' (p.246). In the former the researcher identifies the 'issue' of 'concern and then selects' a single case study to 'illustrate this issue' (p.246). In the latter, 'multiple case studies' are selected 'to illustrate the issue' (p.246). Creswell (2007) suggest that researchers may intentionally choose more than one case study in order to illustrate differing perspectives on the topic of concern. Yin (2003) suggests that the 'multiple-case design uses the logic of replication where the procedures are replicated for each case' (p.246). Seawright and Gerring (2008) provide a more nuanced rationale and suggest 'seven case selection procedures' that 'focus on typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, most similar, and most different case' and argue that each 'facilitates a different strategy' for analysis (p.294). In this research, both single and multiple case study approaches were adopted for particular reasons. While the research questions are answered through multiple case studies, within my particular use of case studies in the different chapters, I drew on the various differentiations these authors highlight. In Chapter Five Dave's single case study illustrates developments over time in the complex relationship between his free play at home and in the nursery, perceived and responded to from multiple perspectives. Whereas, in Chapter Six, the selection of findings from both Naomi and Sophia's play journeys generated at three specific stages of research; and the dialogue between their parents' perceptions of their children's play, parallel Yin's (2003) suggestion, in the way they represent diversity among participants. This diversity relates to the ways in which Naomi and Sophia showed agency in free play during their research journeys. Similarly, in Chapter Seven, the selection of Amy and Rachel's case studies that focused on their interactions with practitioners' during free play were selected to illustrate diversity in practitioner-child play interactions. The case studies for Chapters Five, Six and Seven were selected to develop an in-depth understanding from multiple perspectives, of each child's play journey over the course of the six months of research. Given the space available in the thesis, a larger number of case studies

would have limited the scope for detailed development of understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship over time between children's play at home and in the nursery (Creswell, 2007). How I handled the data analysis and presentation in each analysis chapter is discussed below.

This discussion provides insight into the approach to analysis in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven. As the researcher-child relationship is the key theme of Chapter Four, it is divided up in a manner that highlights sub-themes that I consider to be of importance to the understanding of the key theme. These sub-themes include the unfolding of the experience of establishing and developing the researcher-child relationship; the children's ownership over the research process; and the impact of the researcher-participant relationships on the meaning-making process. The discussions of these themes are supported with illustrative examples. The selection of these examples was determined by my judgement of information-rich cases that supported my discussion. Unlike the rest of the chapters, Chapter Four does not focus on a single case study to depict a child's play journey over the six months. However, a sense of time is provided by specifying the stage along a child's research journey during which the single play related research encounter being presented as an illustrative example, occurred.

Chapter Five aims to provide insight into the complex and dynamic relationship over time between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery, by exploring in details the theme of friendship in relationship to free play in the research journey of a child named Dave. Dave's journey was selected as an information-rich case. In response to the research questions, a multi-perspective and chronological approach is taken to Dave's case study analysis in order to capture the complex and dynamic contextual, relational and temporal dimensions of his home-nursery free play.

As the study contributes to knowledge through the position it takes on children's complex and dynamic agency, children's agency is explored as the key topic in Chapter Six. The chapter presents the case studies of two children who exercised agency in diverse ways during their free play journeys. These two case studies were selected as one illustrates conventional while the other illustrates unconventional expressions of

agency. This approach supports the study's claim that children show agency in various ways, and that it is important to recognise children's expressions of agency that differ from widely accepted forms of agency. The chapter takes a chronological approach to presenting data from the different stages of each child's research journey, and draws parallels and relationships between them. This approach supports the study's claim that children's expressions of agency can change due to complex combinations of factors such as contexts, relationships, and time. The chapter discusses how parents perceive and make meaning of developments and consistencies in their children's play over time in the nursery and at home. This approach supports the study's claim that children's agency is assigned complex and multiple meanings from various perspectives, and these meanings can change over time due to contexts within which children's free play is experienced.

Chapter Seven explores the key theme of practitioner-child relationships in free play-related research encounters and how practitioners perceive, make-meaning of, and respond to children's home-nursery free play. The chapter presents two case studies that illustrate the varying nature of practitioner-child free play-related interactions. In the discussion of the analysis, a chronological approach is taken to provide a sense of how at the various stages of the research, the children interacted differently with the researcher and the practitioners. The following discussion focuses on my approach to summarising the research findings.

Approach to summary of the research findings

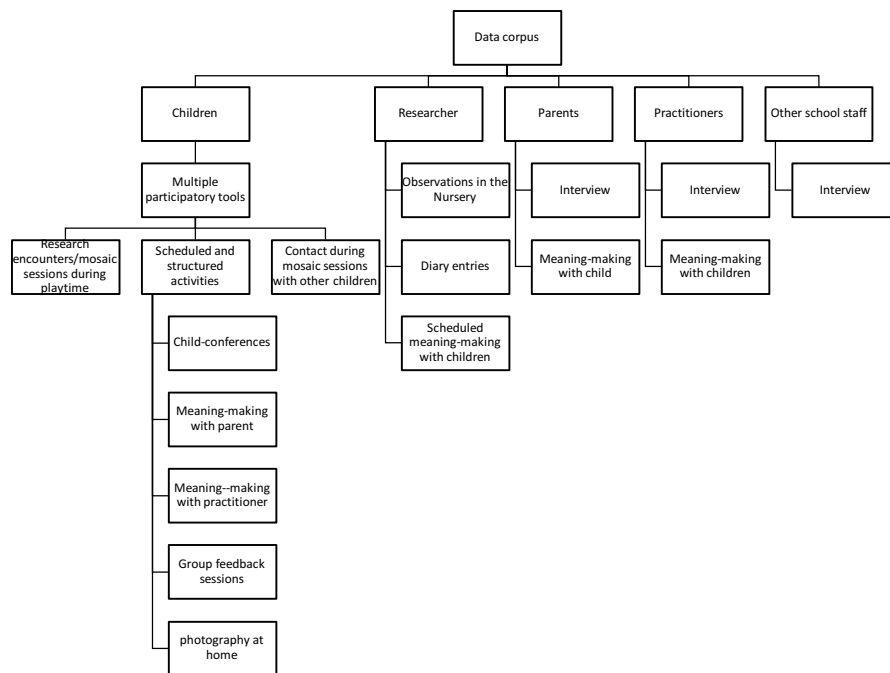
The following exploration of the literature informed my approach to presenting a summary of the research findings in Chapter Eight. Creswell (2007) and Yin (2003) discuss generalisability of case study findings. While Creswell (2007) claim that 'as a general rule, qualitative researchers' tend to avoid 'generaliz(ing) from one case to another because the contexts of cases differ' (p.246-247), Yin (2003) suggests 'identify(ing) issues within each case and then' generating 'common themes that' extend beyond those individual cases (p.248). Hancock and Algozzine (2016) discuss how to report findings from case study analysis. They suggest closing case studies 'with a broad interpretation of what (we) has been learnt' (p.248)

through 'repetitive, ongoing review of accumulated information, in order to identify recurrent patterns, themes, or categories' (p.61). They suggest organising findings into themes that 'represent tentative and then final outcomes for the research. Identifying themes involves a series of steps that end in a collection of parallel findings representing the results of the investigation' (p.62). In Chapter Eight, the findings from the thesis are examined by drawing commonalities across case studies and nuanced differences are illustrated with examples from the analysis chapters. This approach answers the research questions by revealing aspects of the relationship between free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery that the children had in common. It also provides insight into the nuanced ways in which each child's free play journey varied over time and was perceived in different ways from multiple perspectives at various points in time. The collection of parallel findings that represent the results of this research are organised within categories and themes that are relevant to the concepts specified in the research questions. These themes and categories are related to, the ways in which children communicated having experienced and adults perceived children's experiences in terms of spaces, resources, and relationships at home and in the nursery; the traffic between the imaginary worlds that children inhabit in the two settings; the parallels and differences in the ways play was structured and/or unstructured in particular ways through children's dialogue with adults (parents and practitioners); and the ways in which children's play relationships were affected by the patterns that they developed at home, and the way the children tried to transfer aspects of play in relationship to what they experienced in the nursery. While parallels relate to whether children were passive or active in communicating the above, a more detailed description of the findings shows how such findings were expressed in nuanced ways in the case studies. Drawing such commonalities across case studies provides a broad framework for presenting parallels in findings, and shows the rich differences within those commonalities by providing illustrations of diversity from the case studies. Hancock and Algozzine (2016) suggest that case study findings can also be synthesised and presented based on the sources that provide the information' (p.63). In this thesis, the findings are presented in a manner that shows nuanced variations between different perspectives. The next section focuses on how I thematically analysed the case studies.

Thematic analysis of the case studies

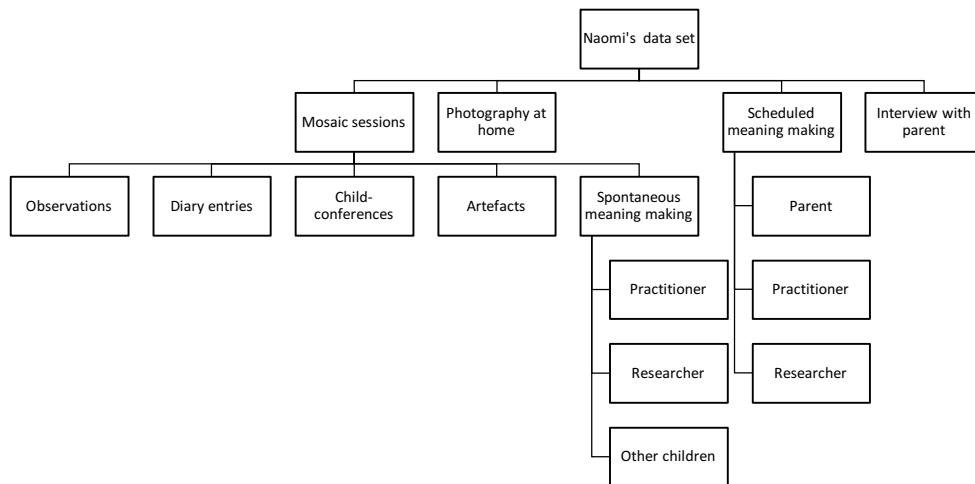
My approach to thematic analysis was informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) 'step by step' guide to thematic analysis. Children's mosaic data, and interviews with the parents, practitioners, and other school staff were digitised and these formed the data corpus (see Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5 Data corpus



The process of documenting the data corpus formed part of my engagement with the data and my analytical process (Bird, 2005). The 'data set' encompassed all data from the corpus that was (being) used for a particular analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). For instance, Naomi's data set (see Figure 3.6) included data pertaining to Naomi generated by her, her peers and adults (her parent, practitioners and the researcher) through the use of all research methods in the nursery and at home.

Figure 3.6 Naomi's data set



The decision to use a thematic analysis approach was influenced by Clark and Moss' (2011) analysis of themes that emerged from data generated by children through the use of multiple participatory tools, that represented how children felt about changes to an outdoor play area. This approach was adopted due to its suitability for identifying themes within what the children communicated, instead of searching for themes in the data that were predefined solely in relationship to the literature review and the research questions, prior to data collection. In my research, the themes that children communicated as significant to their free play, through their choices in the research were identified as the key themes and are explored in the analysis chapters that focus on case studies. My process of data management that formed part of my approach to analysis is discussed below.

I. Data management

Data management is an essential initial stages in the process of data analysis. All mosaic pieces generated by each child over the six months of research, were compiled chronologically into a single digital document. This included six mosaic sessions, three child-conferences, two group feedback sessions, meaning-makings with researcher, practitioner, and parent, and the researcher's interview with the parent. The oral interviews were transcribed. All data from the mosaic sessions, including my observation

notes of the children's play and artefacts were digitised to form individual mosaics for each child.

II. Transcription

The process of transcribing interviews, digitising observation notes and data generated through mosaic activities, familiarised me with the data and raised my awareness regarding decisions that I made during the interviews and mosaic sessions. Green et al.'s (1997) conceptualisation that 'a transcript is a text that "re-presents" an event; it is not an event itself' (p.172), can be interpreted as, transcriptions can vary from actual events in nuanced ways as they are influenced by how the transcriber interprets audio files. Green et al.'s (1997) argument holds true in relation to my digitisation of the data generated during mosaic sessions. While it was impossible to document all details regarding the contexts within which events occurred, I recorded details that I felt were the most relevant to my research questions. While my understanding, recording and interpretations of nuances such as pauses and laughter in interviews were subjective, so were my documentation and interpretation of the data generated during the mosaic sessions.

III. Coding

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps to thematic analysis, I familiarised myself with the data as I digitised it, and as I re-read it to identify interesting patterns across the mosaics. While combing through the data, I referred to Tuckett's (2005) questions that were influenced by Charmaz's (1990) social constructionist perspective, such as 'why do (participants) think and feel and act the way they do? Under what conditions do they think and feel and act the way they do? And what are the consequences of their beliefs, feelings and actions?' (p.1165). This process began during the data collection phase. Patterns became codes for tagging 'common threads' across the data that appeared to be of significance in relation to the research questions (DeSantis and Noel Ugarriza, 2000, p.352). Coding was done using MAXQDA, a software that I used to organise and code data. A coding memo is stored on MAXQDA that consists of descriptions of all codes and themes that were developed over

the different stages of the analysis. See below (see Box 3.5) an example of a coded excerpt from Naomi's mosaic session conducted in February 2016.

Box 3.5 Coded excerpt from Naomi's mosaic session conducted in February 2016

57 R: I don't know how to. Why don't you make it and then I'll try once I've seen you do it? I'll watch you.

58 Naomi took the pen from me and started drawing.

59 Naomi: then we have to colour it with colouring pencil. I'm going to be using every single colour. Now we need some scissors to cut it up.

60 Naomi accidentally cut it in half and gasped.

61 Naomi: This bit. The other bit.

62 She brought another paper and said to me "there, now you try to do the colouring".

63 Before I could start colouring Naomi took the colour pencil from me and began colouring it.

64 Naomi: Now can you cut it out? Please?

65 As I began to cut it, she took the scissors from me and decided to cut it herself.

66 Naomi went back to Ms. Patmore.

67 Ms. Patmore: You ok?

68 Naomi: Look what I made.

69 Ms. Patmore: What is it?

70 Naomi pointed at it.

71 Naomi: It's a handbook. The name was a bit wrong. My mum did my name wrong.

72 Ms. Patmore: Your mum said the letters but you need to say the sounds.

73 Naomi was off to the home corner. She went through the door into the kitchen, opened the fridge. She fetched a bag and opened the fridge again. She explored all the bins in the kitchen.

74 Amy pointed at a doll and said "baby. I am teacher".

75 Naomi put a paper into Ms. Patmore's home box.

76 Naomi: I want to go outside.

77 R: We cannot go outside now because there aren't enough teachers.

78 Naomi: I am going to be Ms. Patmore.

79 Diary: Naomi had found a bracelet in one of the drawers in the kitchen earlier and asked me to wear it.

80 R: Did you want the bracelet back?

81 Naomi paced back and forth. She looked out the window from time to time. She seemed eager to go outside.

82 Naomi: I want a bag, pram, baby.

83 We went back to the home corner.

5/8

Braun and Clark (2006) suggest that perspectives differ on whether consulting literature during coding and analysis is beneficial. While some suggest that reviewing literature can limit 'analytic field of vision', the authors draw on Tuckett's (2005) work who argues that literature can 'sensitise one to nuances' within findings (p.86). My engagement with literature was an ongoing part of my analytic process. The following is an excerpt from a memo written on Dave's case study by consulting literature that sensitised me to the theme of friendship in his play journey (see Box 3.6).

Box 3.6 Excerpt from a memo written on Dave's case study.

Theme: Dave's developing relationship with Henry

Henry's attitude towards his friendship with Dave that transpired during the later stages of the research resonate Rizzo's (1989) findings that Corsaro (2014) draws upon, regarding 'best friends often tr(ick)ying to protect their friendships from the possible intrusions from others, while at the same time, trying to expand their friendship groups...' (p.719). When Henry expressed his desire to expand his network of friends, to Dave, Dave designed a strategy of time-share, that would allow Henry to play with other children in the nursery.

The excerpt above shows how consulting literature such as Corsaro (2014) sensitised me to the theme of friendship in Dave's data.

Thematic analysis was also conducted across all practitioner and other staff interviews. However, only the themes that were of relevance to the ones that children communicated through the research as important to their free play, were analysed. These themes were explored in adults' interviews to gain insight into the layers of meanings that were attached to children's free play cultures and practices from the various perspectives. The following section discusses the overarching themes and sub-themes presented and discussed in the thesis.

3.15. Overarching themes and Sub-themes

Each child's relationship to the themes had complexities and commonalities across them. I have not attempted to identify one distinguishing factor about each child's play journey as these journeys were multi-faceted. This section introduces the overarching themes and sub-themes that are discussed in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven due to their relevance to the research questions, and as they enable me to demonstrate how the conceptual framework is used to make meaning of children's free play-related research encounters. While doing so, the study recognises that there were commonalities among children's play and also that each child had highly individualised relationships to some themes and not to others.

In Chapter Four, the overarching theme is the researcher-child relationship. The concepts of 'agency', 'power', 'meaning-making', and 'co-reflexivity' run through the chapter. The chapter is organised under further themes of 'the unfolding of the experience of establishing and developing the researcher-child relationship'; 'ownership over the research process'; and 'the impact of the researcher-participant relationships on the meaning-making process'. Further sub-themes explored within these sections include, school culture, researcher identity, new playful research practices developed through co-reflexivity during researcher-child interactions, boundaries tested by the children, the role of verbal and non-verbal communication, pretend play, sand play, games, hand printing, identification of shapes and colours during

the generation of artefacts at playtime, the recollection of past play experiences, and the web of relationships that impact children's meaning-making of play.

In Chapter Five, the overarching theme is friendship and its relationship to free play journey over time. The chapter is organised under the themes of, key aspects of friendship and its impact on play choices, reasons for longstanding friendship at playtime in the nursery, the relationship between researcher-child interactions and the children's friendship. Further sub-themes that are explored form multiple adult and child perspectives in the chapter are, best friends and pretend friends, school friends and family friends, excursions as play activities, play pattern, peer interactions, conversations, computer games, pretend play, playing shop, poisons, secrets, bikes, bubbles, dinosaurs, life and death, hiding places, verbal and non-verbal communication, practitioners' reflections on their play practices, home environment, bullying, the involvement of parents in play, and school culture.

In Chapter Six, the overarching theme is children's agency in their research journeys. The chapter is divided into sections that examine data from various points in time. The themes that are explored in the chapter include, children's agenda for research and play, diverse expressions of agency, co-reflexivity, children's positioning of self, peers and the researcher, pretend play, photography, costumes, water play, drawing, nursery play spaces such as the home corner, testing of boundaries, bodily gestures, exclusion of peers, school culture, parallels between home-school play, access to practitioners' resources during play, observation as choice of play activity, researcher-child relationship, play as space to explore and make sense of experiences at home, overt references to the study, developing friendships, negotiations with peers, parents perspectives, play spaces and relationships beyond home and nursery, differing adults' interpretations of children's agency, play objects, emotions, relationships, and parents' reflections on their own play practices

In Chapter Seven, the overarching theme that is explored is practitioner-child interactions in free play-related research encounters. The chapter is divided under the themes of 'practitioner-child interactions' and 'practitioners'

perspectives and reflections on their play practices'. The sub-themes that are explored in the chapter include, pretend play with pram and Elsa, family, play spaces in the nursery, mobility between play spaces, verbal and non-verbal communication, researcher-child interactions, school culture, identification of shapes and colours in artefacts generated through play, home-school relationship, structural barriers experienced by the practitioners, practitioner-child dialogue, practitioner-parent dialogue, social and physical play environment at home, practitioners' perspectives on parents' attitudes towards children's play, practitioners reflections on the impact of their positions along the organisational hierarchy and accountability tools on their responses to children's play. The following section focuses on the study's methodological contributions.

3.16. Methodological contribution

This study makes methodological contributions to the field of conducting research with children in the following ways. The study offers free play as a participatory tool for children to engage in experiential research to share aspects of their free play at home and in the nursery. The study contributes to participatory research with children, by showing value in its approach to the introduction of the researcher to the children, as a learner who studied how the children played at home and in the nursery; and attended a school for adults. The study also contributes by extending the use of participatory research that currently focus on data generated by children in the form of artefacts and narratives, and showing value in also examining children's experiences of engaging in the research process.

3.17. Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the interactive process of developing the research questions in response to participants engagement with the research over time. It showed how the discussions of critical perspectives in literature relating to the 'new sociology of childhood', informed the development of my philosophical knowledge base within my methodological framework. The chapter discussed the resultant aim of my methodological framework to foreground children's perspectives in research, and to take into account

relational, contextual and temporal dimensions of children's free play. This led to the incorporation of participatory research with children; the case study approach to qualitative research; and the thematic analysis approach, into my methodological framework. The chapter discussed the research methods I selected and how I utilised them to conduct participatory research with children. It showed how the discussion of the literature informed the way I generated data with the participants, and my ethical considerations. The chapter discussed how I conducted thematic analysis of the multiple adult and child perspectives in the case studies, and foregrounded the children's perspectives by analysing themes that the children highlighted in their research through engagement in free play. A discussion of how I presented the findings in the thesis by consulting literature was followed by a discussion of the studies methodological contributions to the field of research with children. The following chapter focuses on the development of the researcher-child relationship over the course of the study.

4. Chapter Four: Researcher-child relationship.

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the development of my methodological framework and research methods. By focusing on the developments over time in the key theme of the researcher-child relationship that became meaningful findings in individual children's research journeys, this chapter aims to answer the research question of: how did the research experience impact children's free play in the nursery? Agency, power, meaning-making and co-reflexivity are concepts that run through the chapter as they are at the core of the researcher-child relationship. Examining the researcher-child relationship is important as it formed part of the context within which free play was experienced, and impacted children's agency. Under the key theme of the researcher-child relationship, the sub-themes explored in this chapter are: 'the unfolding of the experience of establishing and developing the researcher-child relationship'; 'ownership over the research process'; and 'the impact of the researcher-participant relationships on the meaning-making process'. The discussions of these themes are supported with illustrative examples. The selection of the examples was determined by my judgement of information-rich cases that support the discussion in response to the research questions. A sense of time is provided by specifying the stage along a child's research journey during which the single play related research encounter presented as an illustrative example, occurred.

4.2. The unfolding of the experience of establishing and developing the researcher-child relationship

This section focuses on the experience over time of establishing and developing my intended researcher role. Unique developments over time in individual researcher-child relationships impacted the children's assimilation of the research task, their decisions regarding what they communicated about their play at home and in the nursery; and consequently their free play in the nursery. This section also examines my encounters with and responses to, the school culture communicated to me by the practitioners, that in turn impacted the development of the researcher role, my interactions

with the children, and consequently overall findings. An examination of the measures taken to establish my role provides an understanding of my agenda. The agenda included communicating to children that I intended for them to make meaning of my role, the purpose of the study, and their own role in sharing aspects of their free play. It also included establishing that I differed from the children and the practitioners in terms of my position of power in the nursery. The examination of illustrative examples answer the research question by showing how the unfolding of my experience of establishing and developing this relationship impacted children's free play in the nursery.

The following are the key aspects of my intended agenda for communicating my researcher identity. They are discussed to show how they were developed in response to my encounters with the children and the practitioners:

- a. Communicate researcher-practitioner power differential by assuming a non-practitioner identity.

Varying responses among children and practitioners in nursery A and B, to my intention of being addressed by my first name only as a non-practitioner, impacted children's engagements with me during free play in nursery A. In contrast to 'Ms.' and my last name, being addressed as Yaspia was aimed at communicating to the children that the power differential in our researcher-child relationship was different from the predominant practitioner-child relationships. In my agenda for my introduction with the children, the practitioners were assigned a supportive role for establishing and maintaining my non-practitioner identity in my researcher role (see Section 3.11). Ms. Nowak in nursery A introduced me as intended. Ongoing dialogue with the children regarding this practice served as a constant reminder of the ways in which I differed from the practitioners in terms of power. I attributed some children's tendency of occasionally addressing me as 'Ms.', to the predominant practice of addressing practitioners as Ms., that formed part of the nursery culture and children's 'durable habitus'. However, these mistakes were followed by immediate realisations and corrective actions either by the children themselves, or by their peers and me. By some children such as Clare, such "mistakes" were intentional and came to be

treated as a running joke attached with humour and developed into a game (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1: Four months into the research in April, Clare's practice of playfully and deliberately misaddressing me as a practitioner became a running joke.

I accompanied Dave during his mosaic session, to a shed where Henry and Clare were playing with hammer and nail sets.

Henry: Yaspia, do you know that I'm making a roundabout?

Clare (smiled appearing proud with her lips pursed): Miss, I need one of these (she pointed at the hammer that Henry was working with).

Dave grinned and said "she's not miss"!

Henry: She's Yaspia.

Such instances were valuable reminders for the participants and others in their surroundings of my non-practitioner identity. They differentiated my researcher-child relationships from the prevalent practitioner-child relationships in the nursery. Clare's act of testing me by misaddressing me illustrates how through reflexivity she made meaning of my responses to her, and over time by playfully and intentionally repeating this 'mistake', she developed a research practice that was unique to our researcher-child relationship. This shows how Clare's engagement in the research and our unique researcher-child relationship impacted her free play in the nursery.

Variations in my encounters with the two nursery cultures were experienced for the first time when Ms. Smith in nursery B rejected my plan to be introduced as Yaspia (see Box 4.2).

Box 4.2: My experience of Nursery B's culture at the early stages of the research in January.

Ms. Smith rejected my request to be introduced to the children by my first name, as she considered this practice to contradict the school's culture that required all adults to assume the same level of power in relation to children; and to be addressed as Ms./Mr. following by surnames. Ms. Smith expressed concern that implementing my plans could instigate some

children to question the authority of any new staff. Following this discussion, I introduced myself to the participants in nursery B as someone who was there to conduct a study, without an explicit introduction as a non-practitioner and without specific requests regarding how I was to be addressed.

I attributed such differences in my encounters with the two nursery cultures to Ms. Smith's intention of maintaining prevalent 'doxas' that ensured that adults' authority in the nursery was not questioned by the children. Although children in nursery B addressed me as Ms., through experiences of my responses over time, the participants learnt how I differed from the practitioners. My interactions with Naomi (in Box 4.3) show how she learnt about my non-practitioner identity through her observations of my interactions with other participants during the research and through our co-reflexivity.

Box 4.3: In her second mosaic session in February, Naomi tested boundaries to gauge the balance of power in our researcher-child relationship.

I approached Naomi and invited her to take part in the study, she wrote something in the yes column. She grinned and put her hand on my notebook and said "let's do this backwards!" We flipped to the previous page.

Moments later, as Naomi played with the tool box, she said to me 'I'm too busy. Why don't you watch someone else play?'

R: Ok.

As I began to walk away, Naomi chuckled.

Naomi: No stay. You can sit there and watch me play tool box (she pointed to a spot on the carpet a few feet away).

Based on her observations of my child-centric interactions with other participants prior to her first mosaic session during which I followed children's agenda, Naomi differentiated me from the practitioners. I interpreted Naomi's playful directions to 'do it backwards' and 'sit there and watch me play', as her way of being reflexive to gauge the threshold that had to be exceeded for me to react with authority and direct her according to my

adult agenda, as would be expected of practitioners. I interpreted her instructions as exploration of her own power in our researcher-child relationship; and communication of her understanding to me through her 'bodily hexis' as she put her hand on my notebook, grinned and pointed her finger to physically position me. One of several possible interpretations is that Naomi realised that she possessed valuable knowledge relating to her play that I was interested in, and translated this know-how into cultural capital that she used to negotiate her position in our researcher-child interactions. Through careful consideration in my responses to Naomi, I attempted to create an agency thickening experience for her, and communicate to her that in this child-centric engagement she could determine how we conducted research. Naomi's engagement with me shows how her understanding of my presence impacted her decisions and behaviour during her free play. The developments in children's awareness of my non-practitioner identity varied and were not all communicated in the same overt manner as Naomi. Amy's non-verbal cues indicating consent and communicating directions as she led me to various play spaces (see Section 7.2), show how Amy's co-reflexive interactions with me in research differed from Naomi's. With children such as Amy who were not overtly verbal about their intentions like Naomi, ambiguities in their play were acknowledged by presenting multiple possible interpretations from my perspective, and by collating the perspectives of others who contributed to their mosaics.

These illustrative examples show how my intentions of being addressed as a non-practitioner in order to communicate the power differentials in researcher-child and researcher-practitioner relationships, received varied responses from the children and practitioners in the two Nurseries. This in turn led to the development of unique researcher-child relationships that had diverse impacts on children's free play experienced in my presence.

- b. Communicate the researcher-practitioner and researcher-child power differentials by refraining from implementing practitioners' cultures and practices.

To communicate the power differentials in researcher-child and researcher-practitioner relationships, I intended to refrain from implementing practitioners' cultures and practices. This impacted the children's free play behaviour in my presence, and received varying responses in the two Nurseries that led to subsequent adjustments in my approach. I communicated to the practitioners my intentions to limit my involvement at play time to assisting and implementing practitioners' cultures and practices only in emergencies and in the rare absence of practitioners. The probability of such instances were to be reduced by ensuring that the mosaic sessions at play time were conducted in the constant presence of at least one practitioner. Assuming this aspect of the non-practitioner role enabled me to observe practitioners' responses to children's free play. However, in such instances, I remained cognizant that practitioners and children exhibited during free play, what they considered to be valuable cultural capital according to their perceived understanding of my research agenda. In nursery A, Ms. Nowak's response to a conflict between Irene and Clare in my presence, is a case in point (see Box 4.4).

Box 4.4: Ms. A couple of months into the research in February, Nowak intervened to settle a disagreement between Irene and Clare during a child-conference.

Researcher: What do you like about playtime in the nursery?

Irene: I like to play duck duck goose and tag.

Clare: I like duck duck goose too.

Irene: She's copying me!

Irene and Clare both lowered their heads and brought them close together. They hissed at each other. I looked around to locate Ms. Nowak who appeared busy looking down at something on her desk. As Clare saw me search for Ms. Nowak she stood up and scurried away from the table. She leaned over from behind a shelf, peeking at Ms. Nowak and whispered to me as she shook her head with her index finger on her lip, 'shshshsh don't tell her!'

As Ms. Nowak looked up and scanned the room, she noticed that Irene looked upset. She came over and had Irene and Clare talk things out while I observed.

Ms. Nowak's intervention enabled me to maintain my intended power differential in the researcher-child relationship by avoiding stepping in as a practitioner to settle the disagreements, and observe her response to a situation arising out of children's free play. In my interpretation, I remained cognizant that Ms. Nowak's response was influenced by her awareness of my intentions to observe her reaction to children's play as a practitioner, and that in her response she may have intended to display what she considered as good practice. As Clare noticed me search for a practitioner, she did not show concern regarding being reprimanded by me, as would be expected from a practitioner. Instead, Clare physically and verbally embodied her concern regarding being found out by Ms. Nowak by scurrying to hide behind the shelf, leaning over with caution to peek, shaking her head and pressing her finger on her lip followed by a verbal 'shshshsh don't tell her!' as she instructed me to maintain secrecy. Clare's assumption that she could request me to refrain from "telling on her", reveals that she differentiated me from the practitioners in terms of the nature and degree of agency that she could exercise in my presence by testing boundaries. Instances such as these prompted me to reflect on the implications of my researcher role on the nature of children's agency, and highlighted the importance of remaining vigilant to avoid condoning actions that marginalised others in the nursery. This example illustrates that my decision to refrain from implementing the nursery cultures and practices to communicate to the children the researcher-practitioner and researcher-child power differentials, had complex impacts on both the children and the practitioners' engagement during free play.

My intention to communicate the researcher-practitioner power differential by refraining from implementing nursery cultures and practices was responded to in the two Nurseries in varying ways (see Box 4.5).

Box 4.5: In January, in contrast to Ms. Nowak's cooperation in enabling me to refrain from implementing the predominant cultures and practices, Ms. Smith rejected my agenda as she perceived it to contradict the school culture.

Ms. Smith's rejection of my plan to avoid implementing the practitioners' practices in her initial response echoed her reactions to my agenda regarding being addressed as a non-practitioner (see Box 4.2), where she anticipated that such practice would contradict the existing power dynamics in the adult-child relationships prevalent in the school's culture. However, once I related the importance of my uninterrupted observations, to practitioners' uninterrupted long and medium observations of children's activities during which they were relieved of all practitioners' duties, Ms. Smith agreed that withdrawing from practitioners' responsibilities was indeed essential while conducting observations.

Framing my negotiation using terms that Ms. Smith was familiar with as part of the school culture, enabled me to communicate to her my rationale for the nature of my intended researcher role. This instance illustrates how I adapted to the school culture and used the language specific to it, to mitigate the dissonance between my research intentions and practitioners' expectations of me. The contrasting examples from nursery A and B are indicative of the relationship between my research experience and underlying factors such as the school cultures, and how I adapted to them. These experiences in turn influenced the development of my researcher role and consequently impacted the children's free play.

- c. Enable children to determine the nature and level of my involvement in their free play through ongoing researcher-child co-reflexivity.

Initially I assumed the role of an observer uninvolved in the children's play. With time my level of involvement in each child's free play varied, as through co-reflexivity the children assimilated and understood the nature of my researcher- role and directed my level of involvement in their play. During free play, practitioners either remained uninvolved in children's play as they were engrossed in activities related to documenting evidence of learning, or they engaged in scaffolding to extend children's learning in play. In contrast, I refrained from assuming a pedagogic role, with the exception of demonstrating the use of the camera at the early stages of the research. I took part in children's play only if and when they invited me, and followed their directions. This practice of following children's instructions was

important for communicating that I did not want to be perceived as a practitioner who scaffolded, imparted knowledge and assessed children's learning by asking questions. I intended to engage with the children in a process of co-reflexivity, within which they assimilated the nature of my role by interpreting my ways of being in my responses to them. My response to Naomi's (see Box 4.3) suggestion is an illustrative example of how I communicated to her, the child-centric nature of our interactions by following her instructions and recording the observations backwards in my notebook. I wanted the children to make meaning of the way I embodied the role and communicated its attributes through my ways of being with and around them. As the children engaged in the co-reflexive space of research with me and thought about the implications of their own decisions, they improvised and explored various ways of engaging in research and free play. For example Naomi and Sophia's engagement with me in research varied at the different stages of the research (see Chapter Six). If and when the children integrated me in their play, it was driven by them through gradual developments over time. Dave and Henry's exclusion of me from their private conversations in February (see Box 5.19), in contrast to their inclusion of me in their play of the 'poison shop' in May (see Box 5.22) illustrates the child-directed developments in the nature of my involvement in their free play experiences over time.

- d. Conduct observations of play initiated and governed by the children; and enable children to select materials to be communicated in observation notes based on their understanding of the purpose of the research.

The observations in my researcher role were conducted in a child-centric manner by communicating to the children, my intentions to learn about their free play, and that they could set their own play agenda and select materials to represent their play in the research. The practitioners' approach to conducting observations of children's free play was adult-centric as they were not preceded by efforts to inform the children of their adult agenda. The children were not privy to materials that were documented as outcomes of the adults' observations of their play. In contrast, my invitations to children to take part in the research by sharing my agenda, and negotiations of consent, were aimed at creating a child-centric experience. These processes were designed

to thicken children's agency by positioning them in decision-making roles regarding whether they agreed to be observed, and regarding selecting materials to represent their play in my notes. With such power to make decisions, I intended for the children to differentiate between their relationship with me and the prevalent one they had with the practitioners. In contrast to practitioners observation notes that were not shared with the children, providing access to the notes pertaining to children's own play at any time during the session, was a step I took to establish a more transparent researcher-child relationship. Unlike practitioners who did not divulge their intentions for conducting observations, my research agenda that involved learning how the children played at home and in the nursery and reporting back to my teacher (research supervisor) at a school for grownups, was shared with the children prior to the start of each mosaic session. Some children showed agency by instructing me to refrain from printing and sharing through my study, particular details of their play. One such instance involved Irene's expression of her wish to omit a particular interaction between us during free play from my notes, in order to make the information inaccessible to Phil (see Box 3.4). Such examples show that the transparency regarding my agenda for observations, and steps taken to be child-centric in my approach to conducting the observations impacted the children's choices and actions during free play.

- e. In my approach to building rapport with individual children, I responded to specific contextual factors that impacted our researcher-child interactions.

Variations in children's perceptions of my identity as a researcher led to the development of unique child-researcher relationships. These perceptions were shaped by the contexts within which our interactions took place. In my researcher role I tried to respond to contextual factors in order to ensure that the children understood my intentions for the research and their right to consent and dissent to my invitation to take part in the study. Ms. Nowak's involvement in the developments over time in my relationship with Aleksy is an illustrative example of how I responded to the contextual factors that shaped our interactions over time (see Box 4.6).

Box 4.6: Aleksy 's relationship with me during the first two months of research.

Aleksy was the youngest child in his nursery. In January, as Aleksy's mother returned the signed consent form to me, she expressed concern regarding Aleksy's developing skills in communicating in English and informed that he only spoke Polish at home.

In the nursery, Aleksy sang along during carpet sessions and I had not seen him initiating verbal conversations with anyone. Aleksy regularly engaged in play with a couple of peers in the sandpit, that consisted of minimal verbal communication. Most of the interactions that I witnessed, included words and short phrases that were related to sharing of toys, such as "give me, yes, no, I want this, you have to share, and thank you".

The first time I attempted to invite Aleksy to take part in the study in January, was in the book corner with a couple of peers. Upon returning from lunch, they raced to land on the throw pillows, panting and laughing out loud. As I greeted Aleksy and sat near him, he stopped laughing. He stared at me with his eyes wide and his mouth open. Before I was able to complete a couple of sentences, Aleksy's chin quivered a little. He immediately shook his head and said "no". He squirmed with a look of discomfort on his face as he stood up. Aleksy rushed out of the book corner. Over the next two months, I approached Aleksy twice to invite him as part of my commitment to provisional consent that enabled children to rethink their decision to consent and dissent to taking part in an on-going manner. On both occasions, Aleksy shook his head, looked down and continued with the activity he was already engaged in.

Aleksy's young age in comparison to his peers, the lack of a common language between us, and his reluctance to engage with an unknown adult during play, are some of several possible interpretations of Aleksy's continued dissent.

Developments took place in my researcher-child relationship with Aleksy in March (see Box 4.7). Ms. Nowak's engagement in the group feedback session played a vital role in shifting the nature of our relationship.

Box 4.7: After a couple of months, in March Ms. Nowak aided as a translator.

When Ms. Nowak assisted me with the children's group feedback session, Aleksy remained silent as Ms. Nowak asked questions.

Ms. Nowak: Why does Yaspia come to the nursery?

Aleksy did not respond.

Ms. Nowak informed me that she could speak Polish and offered to translate. She explained to him again in Polish that we were discussing the study.

Aleksy replied to her in Polish: What study?

Ms. Nowak continued in Polish: What do you like about doing the study?

Aleksy: I like these stickers (the children were provided with smiley stickers. A happy smiley indicated that they liked doing the study, while a sad smiley indicated that they did not like doing the study). Aleksy used a sad smiley.

Ms. Nowak: Is there anything you do not like in the study?

Aleksy: I don't like this (Ms. Nowak interpreted it as his reference to the feedback activity).

As Aleksy was informed that he was free to withdraw from the activity if he wished to, he stood up and walked out of the book corner where we were located.

Once the potential of having Ms. Nowak as a link between us was realised, she became an intermediary who assisting me in inviting Aleksy to take part in the study in April (see Box 4.8).

Box 4.8: Ms. Nowak translated my invitation to Aleksy in April.

Ms. Nowak accompanied me and translated on my behalf as I invited Aleksy to take part in the study. Aleksy agreed to take part in the study. As Aleksy ran outside, he turned around to see if I was following him. Aleksy picked up a toy blue beetle from one of the flower pots and said to me "look, blue".

Ms. Nowak's assistance, familiarity with my presence from my frequent attendance in the nursery, and Aleksy's observations of my interactions with other children over time, were contextual factors that may have impacted the developments in our research-child relationship. Once the initial language barrier was overcome with the help of Ms. Nowak, and Aleksy was aware of my purpose of watching him play, we required little assistance from Ms. Nowak. In our remaining sessions, Aleksy took charge as he showed me toys and resources in the nursery that were of interest to him and drew in my notebook, albeit we maintained minimal verbal communication. In contrast, Naomi's research journey in Chapter Six shows how her researcher-child relationship with me developed in a different manner over time, as she consistently verbalised her choices and actions related to the study; and directed the way I conducted the research. Drawing comparisons between Naomi and Aleksy's interactions with me over time shows how contextual factors that impacted our interactions and my subsequent responses to them, influenced the development of individual researcher-child relationships and consequently children's engagement in free play in the nursery.

4.2.1 The discussion of the analysis with the literature

The discussion of the analysis with the literature (such as Corsaro, 1997; Mandell, 1998; and Swain, 2006) that focuses on the nature of researcher roles and ways to establish and develop them, informed my approach to positioning myself as the research. My approach paralleled Corsaro's (1997; 2005) reactive method in the way I conducted myself as a non-participant observer until I was directed by the children to assume a more active part in their play. It was important for the children to understand that in my role as a learner, I was unable to perform the practitioner's duties such as monitoring children and implementing their cultures and practices. However, unlike Mandell (1997) who redirected children to practitioners in her responses to requests such as 'hold(ing) them in (my) her lap' and 'tying shoes' that she identified as 'teacher like support', I limited my redirections only to tasks that warranted practitioners' intervention from their position of power. My approach to reflexivity parallels the work of Moore, et al. (2016); and Warin (2011) as this practice was not limited to me as the researcher, but also involved participants as they reflected on their own experiences and

assumptions. It differs from these studies in the way the children and I engaged in the co-reflexive space which in turn impacted their free play choices, actions and behaviour. In Warin's (2011) study, children shared their perceptions by reflecting on past experiences. In contrast, the embodied co-reflexivity practised during free play shared between the children and me, impacted how events unfolded in the research. Therefore, the impact of co-reflexivity was not limited to the analysis and the meaning-making of previously generated data at a later time, but also directly impacted the experience of free play and the research. Co-reflexivity between the researcher and participants is examined as live elements within the research experience itself, that had implications on the choices made by both participants and the researcher. These live elements pertain to what both child participants and the researcher communicated as they made meaning of and responded to one another's ways of being. For example (see Box 6.1), although Naomi did not intend to terminate the session, she temporarily dismissed me and in response to my reaction, retrieved her instruction. I interpreted Naomi's behaviour and actions as co-reflexivity to gauge her position of power in our researcher-child relationship.

This section focused on my approach to establishing my researcher role and my subsequent situated responses, that impacted developments in my unique researcher-child relationships with individual children and their free play experienced in my presence. The following section focuses on how the children took ownership over the research process.

4.3. Ownership over the research process

This section focuses on how the children made meaning of the researcher-child relationship through co-reflexivity, and its consequent impact on how they engaged in free play and the research process while they developed unique relationships with me over time.

With the aim of taking a child-centric approach in the research, I tried to enable the children to set their own agenda and self-govern their activities during free play within the parameters of the nursery provision, 'relatively free of 'adult intrusion' (Wood, 2014, p.4). I intended for the children's research encounters to be agency thickening experiences (Klocker, 2007),

and expected each child's choices and actions to be rooted in their interpretation of the purpose of the research; and their resultant intentions for it. I conceived of this process of interpretation to involve co-reflexivity between the children and me, as I carefully considered how I embodied and communicated my intended researcher role, and the children responded through reflexivity by thinking about the implications of their choices. Based on these interpretations, the children communicated aspects of their play repertoires at home and in the nursery that they considered as valuable cultural capital for the research task. The analysis of the following excerpt (see Box 4.9) shows how Irene explored and assimilated the process in a reflexive manner in her first mosaic session and exhibited certain cultural capital through her play. She interpreted the nature of my researcher role and the dynamics of our researcher-child relationship from the way I conducted myself as the events of the mosaic session unfolded.

Box 4.9: Irene engaged in pretend play as she made a telephone call to mummy, during child-conferencing in her first mosaic session in January.

Irene located us in the play kitchen and picked up the phone to pretend call her mum.

Irene: Calling Mum. Mummy, I don't think my hairband is right for school...
(in her conversation with mum, Irene mentioned the themes of baby, hairband, and being reprimanded by the police for good and bad behaviour).

Ok bye alligator. See ya later alligator.

Irene hung up the phone and turned to me.

Irene: How was that? Was that alright?

Researcher: Yes. That was lovely. Thank you.

Irene looked into my notebook as I documented my observations.

Irene: Do you want me to do that again? Slowly? So you can write?

In this research encounter, there were no explicit expectations from me and I deliberately did not provide Irene with any instructions. My aim for the session was to be child-centric in following that approach. While I was aware of my intention to make meaning with her of her agenda for the session, the events that unfolded were a consequence of our child-conference

interactions that took place moments earlier as I asked her questions regarding her play at home and in the nursery. By taking ownership of the research space, Irene chose to display individual aspects of her play and experiences that she wanted to highlight. This was possible because of the nature of our researcher-child relationship, where Irene felt empowered enough to direct our activities in the session. Irene's ownership over the research process was evident in the unguided choices she made. In the absence of direct adult instructions during free play and research, Irene's choices were led by her underlying consciousness, knowledge and interpretation of my expectations. Acknowledging that Irene's selections were made as a response to my research agenda, I interpreted her to be agentic in her use of the research space to choose and share her play repertoire with me by pretend calling her mum. Irene relocated us from the outdoor area to a space of her choice-the play kitchen. Using open-ended resources in the provision without any prompts from me, Irene developed a selected demonstration that included themes of mum, babies, hairbands, and being reprimanded for bad behaviour, from her play experiences at home and in the nursery in response to my child-conferencing questions. (These themes recurred in various pieces of Irene's mosaic generated over time. Details are not shared due to the limited space in this chapter). Irene's movement in and out of the pretend situation and reality, by picking up and hanging up the phone was important because she used it to confirm with me whether her delivery matched my research agenda. She did so by overtly attempting to co-reflect with me on how we conducted the research, and ensuring that I documented the play that she had just displayed. This illustrative example shows Irene's levels of awareness during the research. Irene's play repertoire revealed details pertaining to the themes in her play that she wanted to communicate in the research. Her stepping out of play to review her progress within the research process with me, reveals how her awareness of our researcher-child relationship impacted her choices in this particular free play experience.

Examining how Irene made meaning of the research space and my role in her free play, demonstrates that there was mutuality between us as we practiced co-reflexivity and communicated our intentions to one another in the way we conducted ourselves. I interpreted Irene's levels of consciousness to pertain to: the nature of her play that she exhibited, her

perception of what was expected of her in the research process, and her position in relation to mine in our researcher-child relationship as she made meaning of the research process and self-governed her play. She showed an understanding of the shift in power that made our researcher-child relationship different from the prevalent practitioner-child relationships in the nursery that were typically directed by the adults' agenda.

4.3.1 The discussion of the analysis with the literature

The discussion of the analysis with the literature (such as Cahill, 2004; Grover, 2004; and Burke, 2005) informed my approach to creating an agency thickening space for the children to assimilate the research process and the nature of my researcher role, and set their own research agenda. Contrary to Burke's (2005) adult-centric structured approach that limited children's opportunities to set their own agenda regarding their use of participatory tools, my research design enabled the children to explore all resources available for the research and assimilate the nature of my researcher role and my research agenda from the way I conducted myself. I intended for the children to determine the nature of their individual contributions to the project (Clark and Moss, 2001; Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). My interpretation of Irene's stepping in and out of pretence mode to engage in co-reflexivity with me was informed by the discussion of debates focusing on children's ability to distinguish between fantasy or pretend situations and reality (by Downs, 1990; Sparks, 1986; Wilson, Hoffner and Cantor, 1987). These authors have conducted studies to determine children's ability to tell reality apart from fantasy in relation to characters seen on television, claiming that children were unable to differentiate between the two, thus reinforcing Paiget's claim that children of such young age have unclear understanding and are unable to successfully differentiate between fantasy and reality. Conversely, others (such as Scarlett and Wolf, 1979; Wolf and Grollman, 1982; and Wolf and Hicks, 1989) conducted research with children in naturalistic settings and through observations, suggested that children are able to clearly distinguish between pretend situations and reality, thus challenging Paiget's notion. In more recent research (such as the one conducted by Sharon and Woolley, 2004) understanding regarding the issue has been further developed, bringing to attention the complexities involved in determining children's differentiations

of the two. Sharon and Woolley (2004) argue that as children's understandings of their surroundings are constantly evolving, in addition to 'fantasy' and 'reality', they need to be able to categorise what is ambiguous to them, to a separate category of 'uncertainty' (p.293). As children work out and develop their understandings gradually through their lived experiences, they can continue to relocate what they were previously unsure of, into the categories of 'reality' and 'fantasy' (p.293). Similarly, contemporary research such as the one by Pierucci, et al. (2013) support the argument that determining children's understanding of differences between fantasy and reality is a complex issue, as they claim that children show individual differences in their preferences to engage in play related to fantasy and reality. 'Some children are more reality-oriented while others are more fantasy-oriented' (p.62). The grappling over this issue is particularly relevant to my analysis as although Irene showed intentional orientation of the elements of imagination and reality in her play, in a sophisticated manner; and overtly related to her performance within the research process, not all children engaged in research in the same way. For instance, Sophia showed awareness of my presence as she informed me of her intentions (see Box 6.2), but did not step out of her play mode to reflect on their performance and experiences of conducting the research. Such variations in engagement among children shows that children's assimilation of the researcher-child relationship and the research space varied and led to children showing diverse levels of ownership within the research process.

This section revealed that the children's interpretation of my researcher role was shaped through ongoing co-reflexivity as we developed an understanding of each other's responses. The following section focuses on the impact of the complex web of researcher-participant relationships on the meaning-making process.

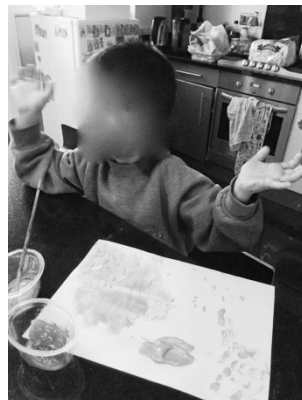
4.4. The impact of researcher-participant relationships on the meaning-making process

This section examines the impact of the researcher-participant relationship on children's meaning-making. It responds to Tisdall and Punch's (2012) call for taking into account 'context'; 'transitions'; 'change'; and 'relationships' while conducting research with children (p.10). By incorporating these

concepts into the process of inquiry, this section examines how both children and adults' awareness of my presence impacted their engagements in the process of meaning-making. The dynamics of the meaning-making dialogue that communicated how aspects of children's free play perceived from multiple perspectives, is conceptualised using the framework from Chapter Two (see Section 2.3).

The children's dynamic interactions with the practitioners and their parents in their collaborative meaning-making of data generated during free play, is conceptualised as Bourdieu's field. Rather than focusing only on the narratives generated through their collaborative discussions, the experience of creating the dialogue is also conceptualised as a dynamic field of negotiations. Despite my efforts to keep overt involvement in such interactions to a minimum, the impact of my presence on participants' engagement in the research process and the nature of the material they generated, was inevitable. My presence, the participants' perception of my role and my developing relationship with them, and how they assimilated and interpreted the purpose of the research and their role within the research process, were all factors impacting their engagement in the research and the findings. The vignette of Henry's meaning-making with his mother, Nora in my presence (see Box 4.10) reveals the dynamics of the relationships operating in this meaning-making encounter, and the impact of the participants' different levels of awareness on their selection of the aspects of play that they communicated.

Box 4.10: Two and a half months into the research, in March, Henry and his Mum took this photographs of Henry making handprints with paint at home the previous night. Henry chose this particular photograph to talk about during meaning-making with his mum in my presence.



Nora: Would you like to talk about the painting?

Henry: Yeah.

Nora: Or the fighting?

Henry: Painting.

Nora: Painting? Yeah let's see. Ok what did you enjoy most?

Henry: aa

Nora: When you were painting with your hands.

Henry: When my hands were red.

Nora: You like the red colour? That was orange wasn't it?

Henry: And when I, and when it was all over my hands.

Nora: Ok. So why do you think you like doing that Henry? Is it what you create or is it the feeling of the paint on your palm?

Henry: Feeling of the paint.

Nora: Do you like getting messy?

Henry: Yes.

Nora: Really? (Chuckled) Ok. Would you like to do it again soon?

Henry: Yeah.

Nora: Ok. Um. Is there anything else you wanted to do yesterday? If we had more time, is there anything you would like to do when we do it next time? What would that be Henry?

Henry: Painting in my hands and putting it on the paper.

Nora: We've done that. Or would you like to try more colours?

Henry: More colours.

Nora: Or different shapes? Or different body parts?

Henry: More colours and different body parts. Those two.

Nora: We could also try making like animals and different different shapes with your fingers. Or you remember we did some shapes from potatoes and we used them to print different flower shapes. Remember that?

Henry: Yeah. And even say a different body part. (Henry whispered in his Mum's ear).

Nora: Your feet you mean?

Henry: No, leg.

Nora: Your leg? You can't paint your whole leg.

Henry: Chuckled.

Nora: I mean you could paint it but it would be really hard to make a print from, with your whole leg. You know even just fitting your palm on the paper seemed very hard yesterday.

Henry: Or maybe my feet.

Nora: Do you remember?

Henry: a .. a.. I can do my feet as well.

Nora: Yes Dory (Henry's sister) did that. Do you remember? It was really messy afterwards when she walked to the bathroom (chuckled). But it was really hard to put all parts of your palm down yesterday, do you remember?

You spent quite a long time making sure that it's, it's reached the paper everywhere. Do you remember that? (Waiting for Henry's response). No?

We could also try mixing new colours. You like colours a lot.

Henry looked at me and said: I like, one day, I just, when I saw a muddy puddle, I jumped in it for a long time with my feet. They were so messy.

Nora: Oh yes. (chuckled). Yes. He wasn't wearing any shoes or wellingtons. We were on holiday in Hungary, it was really warm and yeah we just made puddles ourselves using water and he was jumping in them, making foot prints with mud.

Henry: Yeah.

Nora: It's quite the same. Just different colour and different material.

Henry: Yeah and it was too funny and I really liked it.

It is reasonable to suggest that, based on their knowledge of the research agenda, Henry and his mother Nora brought certain aspects of their relationship and his play at home into the meaning-making space; creating parallels in my presence. The activities of hand printing and play fighting that feature in this vignette, parallel the activities shared at home that were mentioned by Nora in her interview, conducted earlier in the day. Through reflexivity, I remained cognizant of the implications of my researcher agenda on Henry and his mother's intentions. As prioritising children's agenda underpins my research approach, I invited Henry to begin the process by choosing materials to discuss. The analysis of the interactions within the process provides impetus to ask questions regarding the impact that physical and social contextual factors can have on participants' agency and their levels of awareness during meaning-making. The interactions revealed

a complex mixture of questions from Nora that at times I interpreted as her attempts to steer Henry's thinking in a certain direction, and at other times, rather than playing a didactic role, I interpreted Nora's contributions as signs of remaining sensitive to Henry's responses. While there was a certain level of ambiguity in Nora's intentions in facilitating the collaborative meaning-making, her efforts to share control over the process of constructing meaning of the material with Henry was visible in their interactions. I interpreted Nora's act of presenting the photographs of play-fighting as an additional option to choose from for meaning-making despite Henry having expressed his decision to discuss the photograph of the hand-printing, as Nora's attempt to determine the direction of the conversation. Henry showed agency as he reasserted in his response his wish to continue with his initial choice of discussing the photograph of hand printing. I interpreted Nora's follow-up question regarding what he enjoyed the most about hand printing, as her way of communicating her acceptance of his decision and her continued interest in his choice. I interpreted Nora's correction of Henry's identification of the colour that he used during the activity as her intention to demonstrate to me, how she utilised their conversations as opportunities to support Henry's learning. As Henry focused on the experience of having paint on his hand instead of what was on the paper, Nora facilitated the process of meaning-making by asking questions to verify whether his interests lay in the process or the outcome of the activity. Although Nora described the experience as 'messy', her tone and accompanying chuckles and question to Henry regarding whether he liked being messy, communicated the positive associations she made with the activity. I interpreted her following questions as her attempts to extend and develop the conversation further by providing Henry with a range of options to choose from, such as making animals and shapes, and the use of different parts of the body. Henry was agentic in the way he expressed his wish to paint his leg in the future and later corrected Nora for misunderstanding his choice of 'leg' for 'feet'. The part of the interaction that followed revealed Nora and Henry's negotiations regarding the possibilities of future re-creation of the experience. These consisted of Nora drawing Henry's attention to the potential challenges that painting his leg would pose. In his response, Henry negotiated by suggesting a smaller body part- 'the feet' as an alternative. Nora drew references to a past event that involved Henry's sister Dory's challenges with foot printing, to strengthen her case against

Henry's suggestion. Through his response, Henry gained control of the dialogue and redirected the discussion in an agentic manner. One way of interpreting his act of introducing new material related to a previous holiday, generated through recollection of a past event, could be that he attempted to parallel Nora's reference to Dory's foot printing experience from the past. Henry's orientation of the photograph to recollect memories from a holiday experience that did not involve photographs or paint, are indicative of the opportunity he had to widen the lens of the photograph and reveal to both Nora and me, the thoughts and experiences that he associated with the activity in the photograph. One of several possible interpretations is that Nora's questions to Henry acted as prompts, which in turn were shaped by her awareness of my presence and her interpretation of my expectations from her. Similarly, based on my developing relationship with Henry, Henry's introduction of the new material can be interpreted as his response to his understanding of his own role in the research and his awareness of my interest in learning about his play experiences.

The analysis of this meaning-making encounter reveals that both Henry and Nora interpreted the research process, and that based on the awareness of their individual developing relationships with me, they decided to communicate certain aspects of their relationship and shared play experiences. The materials that they contributed, provided a view of their dispositions and cultures that formed their play habitus at home. It is important to remain cognizant that their selection of the materials for this research encounter was determined by their perception of what would be considered as valuable cultural capital within the research. Conceptualising the 'meaning-making' space as Bourdieu's 'field' develops an understanding of how Henry and Nora exerted agency and negotiated their individual positions in determining the course of dialogue, and how my presence was a contextual factor that impacted their engagement in the activity.

4.4.1 The exploration of the analysis with the literature

The critical role of adult attitude and the impact of the dynamics of adult-child relationships on children's meaning-making is focused on in the literature (by Clark and Moss, 2005; Cook and Hess, 2007; and Waller and Bitou, 2011). The exploration of such literature reveals parallels in the way the authors

encourage the use of meaning-making as an effective tool for conducting research with children. However, there are also subtle differences in their suggestions for and attitudes towards adults' role in meaning-making with children. Cook and Hess (2007) raise concern regarding the possible dangers of limiting the scope of children's thinking within the parameters of researchers' expectations in meaning-making spaces. Waller and Bitou (2011) draw on Cook and Hess' (2007) work and extend this argument by highlighting the necessity to 'give(s) children the opportunity to play a central role in revealing their own priorities for interpretation with adults' (Waller and Bitou, 2011, p.18). Similarly, Gooch (2008) suggests for adults to provide child-centric experiences, by 'facilitating children's 'assembly and construction of their own understanding' (Pollard, 2004, p.294). Henry's meaning-making with Nora revealed the interconnectedness of relationships involving Henry, Nora and me, operating in the particular meaning-making process. Similarly, collaborative meaning-making experiences shared between other children with their parents and the practitioners were all impacted by the web of relationships that involved the children, the adults (parents/ practitioners) and me. This research recognises that based on their knowledge of the research agenda, the children and the adults brought certain aspects of their relationship and their play at home and in the nursery into the meaning-making space; creating parallels in my presence. Cook and Hess (2007) position and interpret researchers' agenda framing children's intentions as a risk. In contrast, my research conceptualises this process to be more complex. By acknowledging that the participants' perceptions of the researchers' agenda was a factor that shaped their engagement in research, this study adds to this existing literature in the following way. It brings to attention, the need to examine the complex ways in which both children and adults interpret such research agenda, assimilate the research process, and in response select materials that they consider to be of relevance and communicate specific aspects of the children's play at home and in the nursery. Participants communicated aspects of play dispositions, culture and knowledge that they considered as good practice and as valuable cultural capital for the research. The analysis of these meaning-making interactions underpinned by the conceptual framework (see Section 2.3) revealed complex mixtures of attitudes among the parents and practitioners, as they assumed a variety of positions ranging from 'didactic' to 'reflective agent(s)' (Pollard, 2004, p.294). The latter involved, remaining 'sensitiv(ity)e' to

children's responses; facilitating a process that thickened children's agency as they 'assembl(y)ed and construct(ion)ed (of) their own understanding(s)' (Pollard, 2004, p.294). An examination of the dynamics within the meaning-making process revealed that not all interactions were similar to the one involving Henry and Nora. Contrary to Gooch's (2008) suggestion to 'recognise children as collaborators in building understandings about interaction where adult and child spaces meet', not all children were able to explore the meaning-making space in a child-centric manner in the presence of their parents and practitioners (p.100). Rather, the meaning-making experiences revealed complex dynamics within adult-child negotiations that shape children's everyday free play experiences in the nursery and at home.

This section showed how the complex web of relationships involving the researcher, the children and the adult participants impacted the free play related research encounters.

4.5. Chapter summary

This chapter analysed vignettes of illustrative examples to show how my researcher role was established, and developed over time through my responses to contextual factors and to children and practitioners' reactions to my presence and to my research agenda. The chapter examined the following areas related to the complex researcher-child relationship: establishing and development, ownership of the research process, and how meaning-making was affected by it. The concepts of agency, meaning-making, power and co-reflexivity ran through the chapter as they formed the core of the researcher-child relationship. The chapter answered the research question of, how did the research experience impact children's free play? The analysis showed that the research experience impacted children's free play in the nursery as the free play provision was utilised as a participatory tool by the children. This impact can be understood in the way it affected children's free play through its effect on their meaning-making of the research process, their responses to our developing unique researcher-child relationships, and their negotiations of power dynamics in play related interactions. The children's awareness of being part of the research impacted their free play choices through their selection of materials to be communicated in the study and the types of play they engaged in during the

research. The impact of the research can also be understood in relation to how the parents and practitioners made-meaning of the research process and interpreted the intended goals of the research, that consequently shaped how they conducted themselves in adult-child interactions related to free play. The following Chapter examines the case study of one child named Dave, to provide insight into how developments of a theme that he communicated to be significant in his free play journey, was perceived and responded to from multiple adult (practitioners, parents and researcher) and child perspectives.

5. Chapter Five: Multiple perspectives of the developments over time in Dave's free play.

5.1. Introduction

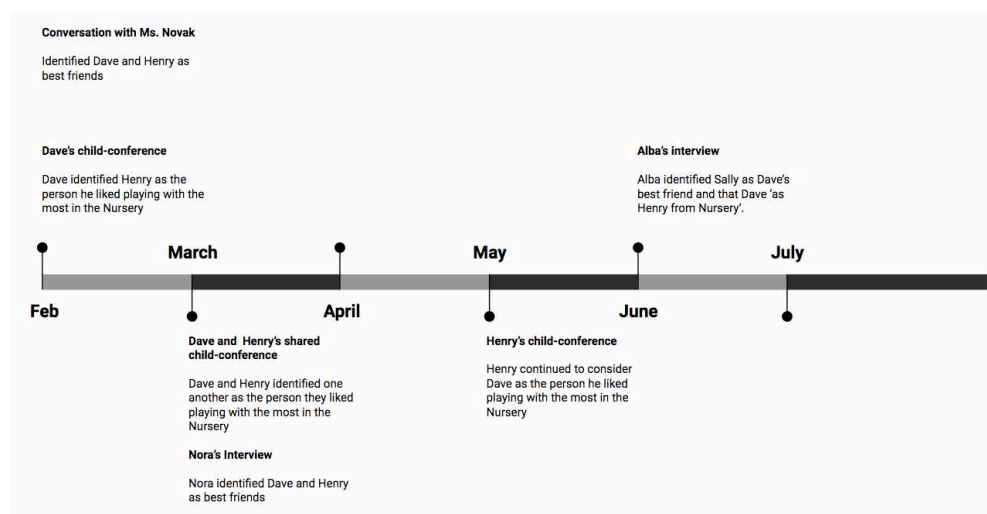
The previous chapter focused on the developments over time in the unique researcher-child relationships and how they impacted children's free play-related research experiences in the nursery. This chapter aims to provide insight into the complex and dynamic relationship over time between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery, by exploring in details the theme of friendship in relationship to free play in the research journey of a child named Dave (see Section 3.14 and 3.15 for further details on the selection of case studies and themes). Dave's journey was selected and analysed to answer the research questions as it is an information-rich case that illustrates the complex and dynamic contextual, relational, and temporal dimensions of key themes in children's free play at home and in the nursery (in Dave's case his friendship in play). The multi-perspective and chronological approach taken to the analysis of this case in this chapter makes it possible to illustrate the complex developments over time that contributed to the dynamic nature of the theme, and how these developments were made meaning of by various individuals (children and adults) at different points in the research journey from their unique positions in Dave's life.

5.2. Identifying Dave's friendship with Henry as an aspect of his free play

This section presents data generated from multiple perspectives such as Dave and his mother Alba, Henry and his mother Nora, Ms. Nowak, a practitioner and my observations (see Timeline 5.1). The data confirms the existence of Dave's friendship with Henry that developed at playtime in the nursery prior to the start of the project, and its continued role as a key factor among many that shaped Dave's free play experiences throughout the six months of research. The analysis of these perspectives answers the research questions by providing insight into the following aspects relating to Dave's free play at home and in the nursery: how the adults (parents and

practitioner) and the children perceived and contextualised the nature of Dave and Henry's free play; the reasons Dave, Henry, their parents and the practitioner ascribed their friendship and shared play experiences to; how the practitioners made meaning of and responded to Dave and Henry's shared play; how the parents perceived their own role in shaping their children's play experiences; and the parents' approaches to learning about developments in their children's play in the nursery.

Timeline 5.1: The events relevant to identifying Dave's friendship with Henry as an aspect of his free play



In his first individual child-conference in February, Dave identified Henry as his most liked person to play with in the nursery (see Box 5.1).

Box 5.1: Dave's answer in his first one-on-one child-conference in February.

Researcher: Who do you like playing with in the nursery?

Dave: Well I can't say. But I like playing with Henry. I play with him on the computer. I like lots of people.

Although Dave informed me that he liked 'lots of people', he particularly named Henry as the person he liked playing with in the nursery. By identifying 'play(ing) on the computer' as an activity he shared with Henry,

Dave contextualised his play experiences with Henry in relationship to specific resources in the nursery.

In an informal conversation with me in February, Ms. Nowak shared her perception of the nature of Dave's interactions with Henry that she had observed during playtime in the nursery (see Box 5.2).

Box 5.2: In an informal conversation in February, Ms. Nowak confirmed that she had witnessed Dave's friendship with Henry during playtime in the nursery.

Researcher's diary entry:

Ms. Nowak: Henry and Dave are best friends. They engage in many philosophical conversations. Every time we teachers have attempted to listen in on their conversations, the boys have either walked further away, or changed the topic of conversation, or stopped talking altogether. I wish there was some way for me to listen to them without interrupting.

Ms. Nowak provided insight into her perception of the nature of Dave's relationship with Henry, how she made meaning of their shared play activities, and her own approach to learning about their shared play and facilitating it. Ms. Nowak defined Henry and Dave's presence in each other's play in the nursery as friendship between best friends. Based on fleetingly heard partial conversations between the two during playtime, Ms. Nowak concluded that their conversations were 'philosophical' in nature. Ms. Nowak's expression of eagerness to gain access to such conversations showed that she considered Dave and Henry's ability to co-create such experiences during free play as valuable cultural capital. However, Ms. Nowak shared that she exercised caution to avoid disrupting the development of such conversations. This awareness to remain sensitive was developed through her previous experiences with Dave and Henry at play time. In these instances, Ms. Nowak perceived Dave and Henry to indicate by embodying non-verbal cues such as abrupt termination of their conversations, following by silence and through bodily gestures such as 'walking away', that others (including the practitioners) in the nursery were

not privy to their private conversations. Such considerations showed that Nowak recognised free play as agency thickening opportunities for children to self-govern their activities without adult involvement. Ms. Nowak showed that she was conscious of Dave and Henry's awareness of their right to privacy during free play, and that she recognised their agentic decisions to exercise those rights by denying her access to their free play activities.

As Dave and Henry chose to play together regularly, in order to avoid disrupting their free play, Dave, Henry and I agreed to conduct shared research activities during several mosaic sessions. For example, we conducted their first joint child-conference in March (see Box 5.3).

Box 5.3: In their first shared child-conference in March, both Dave and Henry identified one another as the person they liked playing with in the nursery.

Researcher: Who do you like playing with in the nursery?

Dave: I like playing with Henry.

Researcher: Can you tell me why?

Dave: Because he's always playing with me sometimes.

Henry: I like playing with Dave.

Researcher: Why do you like playing with Dave?

Henry: Because he always wants to play with me.

Without hesitation, Dave and Henry both named one another as the person they liked playing with in the nursery, and attributed their choice to the other's availability and willingness to play together.

In her interview in March, Nora shared her perception of Dave's connection to Henry's play experiences in the nursery (see Box 5.4).

Box 5.4: In Nora's interview two and a half months into the research in March, she discussed what she learnt from a practitioner regarding Henry's relationship with people he played with in the nursery.

Nora: He has a best friend now at school. They are quite similar. And they have very nice conversations.

Researcher: Who is his best friend?

Nora: Dave. I was told by the teacher that she's sometimes listening to their conversations and it's like very, sometimes very philosophical. It's really nice. He's he's quite attached to Dave and now Jesslyn as well, which is really nice to see... But yeah, I think he's making relationships now much easier, and he's more confident.

Nora shared her knowledge of Henry's emerging and developing relationships as part of his play experiences in the nursery. She named the practitioners as her source of learning about developments in Henry's play experiences in the nursery in terms of the people he played with and the types of activities he engaged in, such as conversations with his peers. Nora's interview shows her awareness of the practitioners' approach to gaining insight into children's activities during playtime in the nursery, such as 'listening to their conversations'. This indicated the role of her parent-practitioner relationship in maintaining interactions between Henry's play worlds at home and in the nursery. Nora identified Dave as Henry's best friend. She shared her positive outlook on the benefits that such emerging friendships with Henry's peers formed and developed through play in the nursery, had on his level of confidence in his own ability to form new relationships. Expressing her appreciation for the 'philosophical' nature of the conversations that Henry shared with Dave (according to the information she received from the practitioners), Nora attributed such experiences during play to similarities in Henry and Dave's dispositions.

Henry maintained his answer in his individual child-conference in May showing continuity in his preference for Dave as a play partner throughout the six months of his research journey (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.5: Henry's answer in his final one-on-one child-conference in May.

Henry: Dave and Jesslyn.

Researcher: Why do you like playing with them?

Henry: Because Dave plays with me.

Although Henry initially named both Jesslyn and Dave as people he liked playing with in the nursery, in his answer to my follow up question, Henry focused especially on Dave and elaborated. He stated Dave's willingness to play together and presence in his play as his reasons for choosing Dave as his preferred play partner. Henry's maintenance of Dave in his answers in his individual and shared child-conferences confirmed the continuity of their friendship; and that their answers in the shared conferences were not influenced solely by contextual factors such as feelings of obligations that they may have felt in each other's presence.

In her interview in June (which was conducted in Dave's home in his presence with the school's permission due to logistical reasons), Dave's mother Alba confirmed the existence of Dave and Henry's friendship, and provided insight into her perception of Dave's relationships and play experiences with other children (see Box 5.6).

Box 5.6: In her interview in June, Alba shared her perception of Dave's play experiences shared with other children.

Alba: Now he has his best friend, who is Sally, who we see. Then he has Henry from school that he, I know his mother. So Sally was from Dave's old nursery. And then I became friend to her mother. Oh we go to do good things! We go, we do, what do we do with Sally? We already been her house, couple of times, isn't it? (she asked Dave). We play with her toys. We play with the dolls' house. Dave liked to play with the doll's house, we played with the unicorn, wasn't it? Then we do good things, we go to Tower of London. What else we did with Sally Dave? (without waiting for Dave to respond. Dave appeared engrossed in his play with his grandmother). We went Church sometimes, not that Dave likes the Church too much. What did we do? We go to the theatre a few times, isn't it? You went to the library few times. So we do like activities.

Alba's interview reveals her perception of her own role as a parent in shaping Dave's play experiences. Although she briefly mentioned Henry as

someone that Dave ‘has in the nursery’, Alba identified Sally from Dave’s previous nursery as his current best friend. Alba spoke fondly of the activities that Dave and Sally continued to share despite Dave having left the previous nursery, and she contextualised these experiences in terms of the people involved, play resources, and places. She identified playing with Sally’s toys, such as a unicorn and a doll house as play experiences shared between Dave and Sally. Alba informed that their play experiences also included excursions such as visits to the church, theatre, library and the Tower of London, that involved both Dave and Sally’s mothers. Alba’s perception of her own role as valuable in Dave’s experiences is evident in the way she said ‘we’ to include herself in answers pertaining to Dave’s play. Her identification of their shared experiences as ‘good things’ repeatedly indicated her approval of and positive outlook on Dave play experiences with Sally. Alba’s interview provided a sense of what she valued in her approach towards Dave’s friendships and their relationship to his play experiences. I interpreted her recalls of socialising with Dave’s friends and their parents as illustrative examples that she used to familiarise me with her practice of remaining involved in his play by creating a complex web of relationships involving children and parents.

As Alba and I continued our interview, Dave who was playing with his grandmother next to us, decided to interject and share aspects of his play that differed from what Alba focused on (see Box 5.7).

Box 5.7: While Alba informed me of Dave’s shared activities with Sally and her familiarity with Nora, Dave interjected to speak about Henry.

Dave to the researcher: I’ve even been to Henry’s house.

Researcher: Have you? How many times have you been to Henry’s house?

Dave: Once

Researcher to Dave: And what did you do there?

Alba: What was it? Why we went there? Was Henry’s birthday, wasn’t it?

Researcher to Henry: So what did you do on Henry’s birthday?

Alba: We were playing the toy thing, wasn’t it? The pasta..

Dave: Pasta what? (Dave squinted his eyes and looked confused)

Alba: Pasta puzzle. And he had a cake there. Didn’t we?

Dave and Alba's engagement in the interaction reveals differences in their agenda regarding the aspects of play they wanted to share in the research. Dave showed agency in his interjection while Alba spoke about Sally. He brought to my attention his play experiences with Henry that extended beyond the nursery when Dave and Alba had attended Henry's birthday party. Dave's interest in sharing his experience of attending Henry's birthday party showed that his play world from the nursery interacted with his play world outside of it. While his intention to highlight his relationship with Henry was clear, there was ambiguity regarding what may have prompted this sudden interjection. The following two are discussed as the most likely causes based on my knowledge gathered through my experiences with Dave over the course of the project. Dave's decision to interject may have been motivated by his intent to compensate for the way Alba and I fleetingly touched upon the topic of his friendship with Henry as part of his play in the nursery. It could also be argued that Dave's decision to interject was a result of him trying to draw parallels between his experiences with Henry and his experiences with me. Meeting me in his home instead of the nursery where we usually met, may have prompted him to recollect his experience of seeing Henry in an unusual setting (Henry's birthday party at home) as well. As I redirected my focus from Alba to Dave to ask him further questions about his visit to Henry's house, Alba attempted to partake in the conversation and dominated the space by answering my questions to Dave, asking him follow up questions and answering them herself, marginalising his opportunities to answer. Conceptualising the interaction using Bourdieu's field reveals how Dave and Alba negotiated within the interactive space to direct the conversation as Dave tried to draw my attention to his experience of Henry's birthday party, while Alba continued to demonstrate her role in and her knowledge of that particular experience. It is important to remain cognizant that their engagement in the research process was shaped by their awareness of my presence and how they perceived the purpose of the research process. The differences between what Dave and Alba communicated regarding the play experiences shared with Henry, show that their agenda for the research differed. This focus in turn was shaped by their individual perception of what was relevant information for understanding Dave's free play at home and in the nursery.

5.2.1. The discussion of the analysis with the literature

Authors such as Haw (2017) and Howes (2009) debate aspects of children's relationships with their peers that contribute to the development of friendships. However, these authors differ in the way they draw attention to the use of child and adult perspectives to research the topic of children's friendships. Using interviews with children, five overarching factors were identified by Haw (2017) that affected 'preschoolers' nominations of best friends' (p.ii). These included, 'personal characteristics and psychological attributes', 'play and shared activities', 'geographical associations', 'similarity amongst preschoolers', and 'general fondness' (p.ii). Within these further subthemes were identified, and the ones that are of relevance to Dave's friendship with Henry and its relationship to his play are discussed. Haw (2017) suggests that children 'considered a higher frequency of play and activities experienced together, and prolonged periods of time spent in each other's company, as indicators of best friendships' (p.78). These are identified as signs of 'dedication' among preschoolers (p.78). Similarly, Dave and Henry referred to their experiences of regularly spending playtime together as their rationale for identifying one another as the person they preferred to play with in the nursery. In contrast to Haw's (2017) sole reliance on children's perspectives, my research provides a multi-dimensional insight into various adult and child perspectives that attach layers of meaning to Dave's friendships and his play. Based on her experience with Dave and Henry at playtime, Ms. Nowak suggested that exclusivity in their friendship was visible in the way Dave and Henry constantly protected their play space from the practitioners in the nursery. She identified such tendency in the children as an indicator of the level of their friendship that developed through their shared play experiences. Such selection of one playmate over other 'alternative peers' is considered as a sign of dedication by Haw (2017, p.77). Howes (2009) draws attention to the possibility of 'identifying friendships in accounts' provided by mothers, claiming that such a method can bring to attention friendships that are 'beyond the contexts being observed' (p.184). A discussion of Howes' (2009) work relates to my analysis of Alba's perspective in which she showed a preference for Dave's friendship with Sally outside of the nursery that in turn impacted his play experiences. Drawing parallels between Alba's perception and Howes (2009) brings to my attention a friendship that I was

unaware of due to its existence beyond the walls of the nursery where Dave and I usually met. Howes (2009) expresses concern regarding the drawbacks of relying on mothers to identify their children's friendships, as such an approach may 'lead to the identification of a best friend to the child with whom the mother feels most comfortable' (p.184). My interpretation of Alba's identification of Sally as Dave's best friend echoes Howes' (2009) claim regarding mothers' preferences. Alba's approval of Dave's play with Sally was evident in the way she fondly recollected activities she and Dave engaged in with Sally and her mother. However I would refute Howes' (2009) suggestion that mothers expressing their preference for certain children as their children's friends over others is a drawback of this approach. Alba's choice of Dave's friends to discuss in her interview reveals aspects of her perception and parental approach that impacted Dave's play experiences. They provide insight into her attitude towards Dave's relationships, shedding light on the issues that she considered to be significant in relation to Dave's play experiences. Rather than rejecting parents' perspectives as adult-centric agenda that overshadow children's preferences, my research emphasises the value of examining adult-child dynamics to gain insight into their complex negotiations to establish their own agenda, and to examine parents' perspectives in order to gain an understanding of their parental attitudes which in turn impact the children's free play experiences. The exploration of these multiple perspectives revealed Dave's friendships as an important aspect of his free play experiences. Within this theme, they also revealed more nuanced differences in the way this theme was understood and responded to from various standpoints. The following section explores in depth through the examination of multiple perspectives, the reasons why Dave and Henry played together.

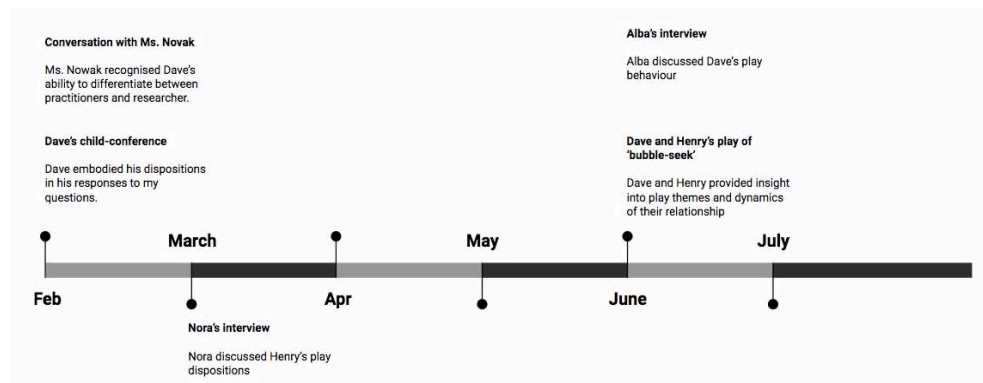
5.3. Examining the reasons why they played together

The previous section established that Dave's friendship with Henry was longstanding and that they both ascribed their friendship to reciprocity. This section examines the different perspectives from which their dispositions and play preferences were identified as the reasons that led Dave and Henry to share their play experiences with one another.

5.3.1. The role of Dave and Henry's dispositions in their play

The previous section indicates that Ms. Nowak and Nora perceived the similarities in Dave and Henry's dispositions to be one of the factors that brought them together at playtime and shaped their shared play experiences. In this section, multiple perspectives are examined to provide further insight into how their dispositions were perceived. Collating these with my observations of Dave and Henry's play and child-conferences, illustrates the parallels and subtle differences within the multiple perceptions. An examination of these parallels and differences provides a more detailed insight into the role of Dave's disposition in his play journey.

Timeline 5.2: The events relevant for understanding the reasons why Dave and Henry played together



In our first child-conference in February (see Box 5.8), Dave answered my questions pertaining to his free play in the nursery in a distinct manner.

Box 5.8: Dave's first child-conference in February.

1. What do you like about playtime in the nursery?

Dave: Well I can't really say one thing (curling the corner of his mouth). But I like playing.

Researcher: What do you like to play?

Dave: I like playing with (pause followed by sigh)...well I don't really know what I like the most. Can't think of one thing. But I like playing on the computer sometimes.

Researcher: What do you play on the computer?

Dave: Some kind of game (gently shrugged his shoulders).

Researcher: Can you name some games that you play.

Dave: I can't really say one name. I play (paused and looked away as he gazed steadily and intently) you know (paused and gently shook his head from side to side) different stuff.

Dave contextualised his play practice in the nursery in relation to resources such as the computer. From the beginning of the project, Dave interacted with a distinct affect during the mosaic sessions. In this instance, he embodied his dispositional repertoire through his tone, pauses and his bodily hexis such as his facial gestures. Dave's outward physical expressions of emotions were recorded in my notes in the form of his tone of voice, his facial and bodily gestures- such as curling the corner of his mouth and shrugging his shoulders. Dave paused briefly after each of my questions. Some of his answers were accompanied by sighs while he took time to contemplate. I interpreted the pauses that were followed by an eye gaze, as he looked away steadily and intently, and curled the corner of his mouth, and began every answer with "I can't really say one thing", as Dave's way of delivering answers with affect to communicate that he was taking time to consider my questions; and that these questions did not necessarily have single answers.

Some of Dave's verbal responses delivered with specific affect led me to be reflexive and reconsider the spontaneous follow up questions I asked him regarding his play (see Box 5.9).

Box 5.9: Dave's reaction in our first child-conference in February led me to modify my question.

6. What do you like about playtime at home?

Dave: Playing with my toys.

Researcher: Can you name some of them?

Dave (laughed out loud. He then smirked as he shook his head gently and said): None of my toys have names.

Researcher (I felt embarrassed. I chuckled): ok let me ask you another question. What toys do you have?

Dave: I have lots of toys (chuckles).

Dave contextualised his play at home in terms of resources such as toys and their quantity. His laughter and facial reaction indicated that he interpreted my question as immature and as one that he expected to be aimed at a younger child. It provided insight into how he made meaning of my identity as an adult in the nursery from the way I framed my questions regarding his play. His response had an immediate impact on my reflexivity as I retracted my question and reframed it. Dave's embodiment of his emotions and understanding expressed through his demeanour not only affected our interactions, but also impacted his play as he reacted to other children. For instance, in June, before Dave and Henry trapped a lion in a cage (see Box 5.18), Manuel snatched the lion from Dave. In response, Dave furrowed his eye brows, flared his nostrils and asked "How can you snatch it from my hand?!". Manuel rode away on the lion (which was a bike) without answering Dave's question. Dave embodied his reaction through his physical gestures by throwing his hands up, shaking his head and rolling his eyes with a look of disdain. Dave patiently waited to have his turn with the bike while he kept an eye on Manuel. Dave's response provided insight into how his dispositions shaped his response to situations of disagreements and tensions arising out of free play. He refrained from retaliating or reporting the snatching incident to a practitioner. Instead, Dave adhered to the culture of turn-taking that was enforced in the nursery by the practitioners, as he waited for Manuel to finish playing with the bike. This instance is an example of how Dave embodied his dispositions through his physical gestures and his tone of voice in a disagreement with Manuel that emerged during free play.

As highlighted in the previous section, Ms. Nowak suggested that the similarities in their dispositions led Dave and Henry to play with one another. She assigned the characteristic of being 'mature' to both Dave and Henry, as she made meaning of Dave's decision to decline my invitation to take part in a mosaic session and suggest playtime later in the afternoon as an alternative (Box 5.10).

Box 5.10: Researcher's diary entry-informal conversation with Ms. Nowak in February.

I approached Dave at playtime in the morning and invited him to take part in the mosaic session. Dave, who was on his way to the playground, nodded and said 'yes, but I'm a bit busy now. Let's do it later in the afternoon'.

When I met Ms. Nowak at lunch, she inquired about how the mosaic session with Dave went in the morning. Upon learning that Dave postponed the mosaic session, Ms. Nowak remarked:

Dave and Henry are both very mature. I can't believe he said that to you! You know he is so mature and sometimes the other children say no to us if they are busy playing. But Dave would never do that. He would just do the activity. It's so interesting how they think they can do that with you.

Ms. Nowak provided insight into her understanding of Dave's dispositions such as his level of 'maturity' that he shared with Henry, and that shaped his responses to the practitioners in the nursery, leading him to comply during adult-directed structured activities even at free play time. She discussed how Dave's dispositions set him apart from his peers in the nursery. Ms. Nowak identified Dave's ability to interpret that I was different from the practitioners in the nursery as compelling evidence of his ability to differentiate between adults who assume complex roles. She differentiated him from the other children in terms of how they reacted to the practitioners' structured activities that were conducted during time allocated for free play. Ms. Nowak's differentiation showed that within her approach, even in free play time when children were expected to self-govern their activities, compliance in structured activities introduced by the practitioners was desired. Dave's compliance with the practitioners in such circumstances was interpreted as 'maturity' and his dispositions that led him to react in this manner were valued. Ms. Nowak's statements suggest that children's persistence to continue with their self-initiated play by resisting adult suggested structured tasks were not interpreted and appreciated as signs of 'good agency' in the nursery (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin's, 2007). She viewed Dave's contrasting decision to show agency by declining my invitation and

suggesting a later time, to be indicative of his ability to comprehend the researcher-practitioner power differential. Ms. Nowak's meaning-making of Dave's reaction to my invitation demonstrates the role of 'ambiguous agency' (see Section 2.6.3) where the same expression of agency is interpreted differently when it is shown in different contexts and in relationship to different people.

Henry's mother Nora shared her perspective on the developments in Henry's play behaviour. As a part of these developments, Nora mentioned Henry's relationship with Dave that she believed to be a result of the similarities in their dispositions, and that led them to have 'very nice conversations' at play time in the nursery (see Box 5.11) .

Box 5.11: Nora described Henry's play disposition in her interview in response to being asked to describe Henry's social play environment at home.

Nora: He's quite an introverted child, I think, in my opinion. So he, from the start he liked to play on his own. He had his siblings and he was playing with them but he also liked just to play by himself. I think he, he is, he gets relaxed by playing on his own, he likes the quiet, not being disturbed, no one taking his toys away. He likes his peace and quiet. And he creates nice things. He has improved a lot in playing with other children and making friends. He has a best friend now at school. They are quite similar. And they have very nice conversations (Nora informed that she learnt about Henry's friendship with Dave from Ms. Nowak).

Nora provided insight into the developments in Henry's play dispositions at home and in the nursery from her perspective. She perceived Henry's tendencies in play to be consistent over time. Nora described him as 'introverted' from the beginning and contextualised his play practise at home as she discussed his preference for solitary play activities in quiet environments; and for creating things. Nora expressed that although Henry's play experiences at home consisted of a mixture of play with his siblings and solitary play, he showed greater preference for solitary play. She associated

positive impacts with Henry's solitary play as she shared her views that such play had a calming effect on him by enabling him to avoid sharing his toys and disrupting his play. Nora identified her parent-practitioner relationship with Ms. Nowak as her source for remaining informed regarding Henry's developing relationships and play experiences in the nursery. She concluded that during his time in this nursery Henry developed in terms of engaging in play with other children and in terms of building new relationships. Henry's relationship with Dave emerged in Nora's interview as the most significant of these relationships as she identified it as a friendship between 'best friend(s)'. She attributed this relationship to Henry and Dave possessing similar characteristics that enabled them to engage in 'very nice conversations' at playtime in the nursery.

In addition to the similarities in dispositions as a reason for their shared play experiences perceived and highlighted by Nora and Ms. Nowak, Dave and Henry's interactions in play provided further insight into the dynamics of their relationship; and the nature of play that they engaged in (see Box 5.12).

Box 5.12: Dave's response to Henry's suggestion to play 'bubble seek'.

Henry and Dave collected fruits and insects that were hidden in the plants by the practitioners. The practitioners were assessing children's ability to identify insects and fruits by ticking off children's answers in an evaluation sheet.

Henry began to blow bubbles at Dave. Dave stood in a hands-on-hips pose and said "that's not a game!"

Henry: It is! It is! We can call it 'bubble seek'. So..so.. one person makes the bubbles and hides the bubbles and the other person has to find it.

Dave and Henry both chuckled.

Dave: No bubbles and no dinosaurs! ok?

Dave and Henry's interaction reveals aspects of the dynamics of their relationship and the nature of play that they engaged in. Their play with the resources in the nursery that were designed by practitioners for assessment purposes, shows parallel links between the themes (of insects and fruits) in

their play and in the practitioners' work related to collecting evidence of learning. It also reveals that by collecting the fruits and insects, Dave and Henry exerted agency and extended the use of the set up beyond their intended purpose according to the practitioners' agenda of having the children identify them. With no verbal warning, Henry blew bubbles at Dave. Whether he intended to add the element of bubbles to their ongoing play with insects and fruits; or to transition to a different play that only involved bubbles, is ambiguous. In response Dave refused to recognise Henry's unannounced and arbitrary interjection of the new element in their play with the act of blowing bubbles, as a game. Through his bodily gestures such as placing his hands on his hips that accompanied his rejection, Dave communicated a sense of superiority in power that he assumed in that instance within their relationship. Henry's acceptance of such positioning by Dave was visible in his way of repeatedly reassuring Dave that it is indeed a game, giving it the name of 'bubble seek', and assigning roles and creating rules of the game that resembled the name to legitimise it. The shared chuckles show the amicable nature of the negotiation and was followed by Dave seeking clarification that Henry would not suggest engaging in further play involving bubbles and dinosaurs. The findings in this vignette reveal how Dave physically embodied the power dynamics in his interaction and how Henry responded to them. They provide insight into the nature of the shared play that they engaged in during playtime in the nursery.

In response to my questions relating to Dave's behaviour during play, Alba (Dave's mother) shared her perception of Dave's temperament; and discussed her approach to making provision for his play at home (see Box 5.13).

Box 5.13: Alba's perception of Dave's dispositions and their impact on his play.

Alba: He has a high perception for his age. I'm not saying he's high intelligence, but he has a high perception of feelings and expression. Because we do these at home all the time, because we're very close.

A part of Alba's response to my question pertaining to who initiates play at home:

Alba: I don't put normal tv on. It's Cbeebies only. And it's painful, for parents to have that. But I don't want the influence of information that would confuse his head. If he goes through tv channels, and he understands that people can hurt each other, he understand about guns, he understand about bombs, he understand things like that and because he's so perceptive, I don't like to expose him and actually worry about him, he shouldn't be worried about it in his age.

Alba's interview reveals her perception of Dave's dispositions and of her own role in shaping his play practices at home. She identified Dave's temperament as a factor that impacted her provision for his play at home. Alba perceived Dave's temperament to be unusual for his age and described Dave to have a high level of perception and ability to grasp complex concepts. She considered such characteristics to be a result of their close relationship and regular communicative practices at home, and to be valuable attributes in Dave that made him sensitive and set him apart from his peers. However, Alba also expressed concern that such attributes made Dave vulnerable and shared that as part of her approach to protecting his emotional wellbeing, in her provision for his play at home she restricted Dave's exposure to sensitive content by limiting access only to Cbeebies on the television. The excerpt from Alba's interview reveals that she perceived an important role for herself in shaping Dave's habitus through his play experiences at home.

In contrast to his behaviour at playtime in the nursery, Dave appeared unusually talkative while playing with his grandmother near us as Alba and I conducted the interview. In response to my casual remark regarding the difference I noticed in his behaviour, Alba shared her theory regarding Dave's contrasting behaviour at home and in the nursery (Box 5.14).

Box 5.14: Alba shared her perception of changes in Dave's play behaviour over time.

Researcher: I haven't seen him this chatty in school.

Alba: He was chatty before. But he changed his behaviour in school.

Researcher: Why do you think that?

Alba: Because the kids started discriminating against him because he was getting too much attention from the teachers.

Researcher: When he was chatty?

Alba: Mm hmm. So he changed his behaviour.

Researcher: Is that what he said?

Alba: I noticed a behaviour you know, that, it changed. It's just, it's part of his, learning curve as well. He's very, he has a very high comprehension about feelings and it's very difficult for other kids to understand and relate to that. I discussed that with his teacher when I went there and I said ok I understand that it's difficult for other kids to match the feelings. So yeah he did change. And again, it's about him learning to interact with other kids. But at his nursery, he was much chatty. He's been at nursery since seven months old. So I know, I could see my child at the nursery environment, how chatty he was and how expressive he was. Then he went to this nursery and he was fine at the beginning. Then he realised that he wasn't as popular as at his nursery and people didn't praise him in the same level because he had a much more, interaction with the adults at the nursery before this school. That's why he's changed. And he's still very demanding, very chatty in here (home), but there (nursery) he's just learning to adapt and not to get so much attention. So the kids would accept him better.

Alba drew parallels between Dave's play behaviour at home and in his previous nursery, and highlighted a shift in his play dispositions in the present nursery that she observed over time. Alba claimed that Dave intentionally curtailed his enthusiasm in the nursery in an effort to be accepted by his peers. She attributed this shift to adverse reactions from his peers who were jealous of Dave's growing relationship with practitioners. Alba perceived that Dave recognised that his enthusiastic play dispositions which were considered as valuable cultural capital by practitioners in the previous nursery, were not assigned the same value by the practitioners in his current nursery. She attributed such differences to the play cultures in the present nursery that resulted in relatively less frequent interactions during play between practitioners and the children. Alba made additional

claims based on her perception that Dave came to realise that although this cultural capital was appreciated in his relationships with the practitioners in the current nursery, his dispositions did not earn him the same benefits in his relationships in play with his peers in the same field of the nursery. Alba was cognizant that this change may have been part of his development and learning. Conceptualising Alba's perception using Bourdieu's (1990) habitus, shows her awareness of the transposability of Dave's habitus, and that through new experiences over time Dave's set of dispositions evolved. However, in contrast to Bourdieu's (1990) suggestion that such changes are unconscious, Alba claimed that Dave consciously changed his behaviour in the nursery in order to respond to the developments in the behaviour of others (such as the practitioners and his peers) towards him. Alba perceived the contrasts between Dave's behaviour during play at home and in the nursery, and suggested that the changes were limited to playtime in the nursery only as his behaviour during play at home remained unchanged. Her interview provides insight into her attitude towards Dave's play experiences in the nursery. Although she acknowledged the necessity for Dave to interact with his peers, in her approach to discussing Dave's dispositions with the practitioners, Alba communicated that such dispositions were valuable cultural capital that Dave possessed and other children lacked. This excerpt from Alba's interview provided insight into how she made meaning of the developments over time that she perceived in Dave's play dispositions at home and in the nursery.

5.3.1.1. The discussion of the analysis with the literature

A number of authors (such as Dunn, 2006; Hartup and Stevens, 1997; Papadopoulou, 2016; and Rubin et al. 2005) focus on children's reasons for selecting best friends among peers. Dunn (2006); Hartup and Stevens (1997); and Rubin et al. (2005) argue that from an early age children tend to develop relationships with individuals who share similar attributes and dispositions. Similarly, Nora and Ms. Nowak suggested that parallels in their dispositions brought Dave and Henry together as friends during their play experiences in the nursery. Based on their findings, Papadopoulou (2016) suggests that through 'niche picking', 'children's selection of best friend(s) among peers is determined according to 'criteria' such as 'spending time with (this) friend(s)'; 'being able to pursue (his/her) their interests; and share

them with (a) similar-minded other(s)' (p.1555). Concurrently, selecting each other as their best friend in the nursery enabled Dave and Henry who according to Nora and Ms. Nowak shared similarities in their dispositions, to engage in conversations and play that they were both interested in. Papadopoulou (2016) parallels Morris et al.'s (2007) focus on 'niche picking' in relation to children's experiences. However a key difference relates to the way Papadopoulou (2016) focuses on 'niche picking' in children in their approach to selecting friends, while Morris et al. (2007) use the concept of 'niche picking' to describe parents' approach towards aspects relating to their children's experiences. Morris et al. (2007) describe 'niche picking' as 'parenting practice that involves parents selectively choosing or avoiding opportunities for their children to experience emotional stimuli' (p.369). Alba's perception examined in this section, echoes Morris et al.'s (2007) claim as it reveals her practice of 'niche picking' as she intentionally shaped Dave's access to resources for play at home in order to protect his emotional wellbeing. In the previous section, Ms. Nowak's interview revealed practitioners' approaches to creating 'environment(s) that allow(ed) space' for the children's niche picking that enabled Dave and Henry to nurture their relationship during their self-governed activities at playtime (p.1544). This research adds to this body of literature by examining multiple adult and child perspectives to gain deeper insight, instead of focusing solely on either children's or adults' use of niche picking in their approaches to developing relationships and facilitating play experiences.

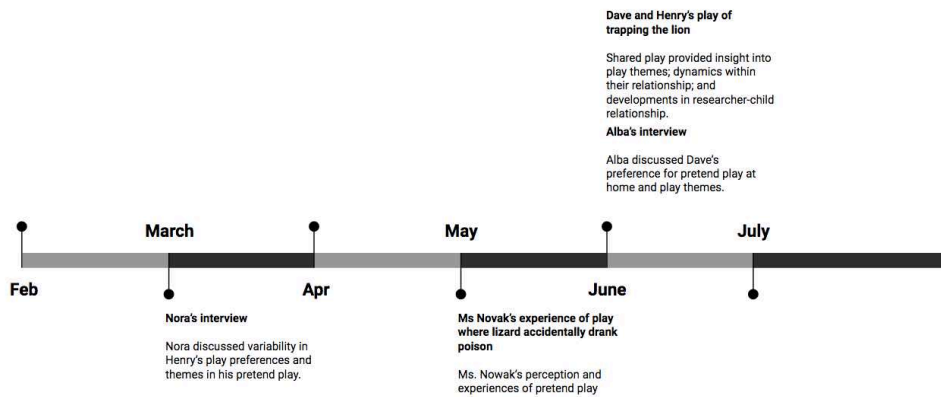
This section revealed that the theme of play dispositions bridged Dave's home free play cultures and practices to those in the nursery. It provided insight into how this relationship was perceived from the various adult (parents and practitioner) perspectives.

5.3.2. Dave and Henry's preference for pretend play

This section examines the data generated in the mosaic sessions where Dave and Henry showed similarities in their preference for pretend play compared to other types of play. These play experiences consist of complex themes and were continued for extended periods of time. The practitioners' and parents' perspectives provide insight into how they made meaning of Dave and Henry's play behaviour at home. Drawing together these multiple

perspectives provides a multi-dimensional insight into Dave's play preferences at home and in the nursery.

Timeline 5.3: The events relevant for examining Dave and Henry's preference for pretend play.



According to Henry's mother Nora, Henry frequently engaged in pretend play at home and at the time of her interview it was his favourite type of play (see Box 5.15).

Box 5.15: Nora's interview reveals Henry's current play preferences.

Nora: He likes pretend play and now making up stories. He doesn't have like a very best favourite, he keeps switching, between different things. Yeah it's pretend play, number one at the moment.

Researcher: What kind of play do you do with him?

Nora: Well mostly, nowadays it's just being superhero or a knight. So they (Henry and his siblings) have their swords and shields and armour and things like that. We used to play, he used to play the cook in a kitchen, play doctors and shops. Yes, I think these are the main things.

Nora provided insight into the prevalent themes in Henry's play at the time that included superheroes and knights, kitchen, doctors and shops, and making up stories. She contextualised his play by discussing resources such as swords, shields and armours that Henry had access to at home. Although at the time Henry was interested in pretend play, Nora communicated

variability in his preference over time. Parallels can be drawn between Henry's preference for pretend play at home and his play encounters with Dave in the nursery in my presence that consisted of imaginative elements. His theme of 'shop' from Nora's interview recurred later in his play journey in a play experience shared with Dave and me (see Box 5.22).

Ms. Nowak provided insight into her approach to Dave and Henry's play (see Box 5.16).

Box 5.16: Ms. Nowak's reaction to Dave's imaginary play.

The same week that Dave and Henry engaged in pretend play with me and sold me poison from their shop (see Box 5.22), Dave mentioned spotting imaginary lizards drinking poison as he crossed a wooden plank that Ms. Nowak had set up as a bridge, balanced over two green bins in the outdoor play area. Ms. Nowak played with the children outside while I stayed inside conducting a mosaic session with another participant. In a later conversation, Ms. Nowak recalled the events from earlier in the day and expressed her 'fascinati(ng)on' upon hearing Dave's narration of how the imaginary lizards accidentally drank some poison.

Ms. Nowak showed appreciation for the themes in Dave's play, as she shared her perception. Dave utilised the bridge set up by the practitioners as part of the provision for play; added imaginary lizards, and assigned them actions such as accidentally drinking poison. Parallels can be drawn between this play instance and Dave and Henry's play at the poison shop in my presence (see Box 5.22), as they both consist of the theme of drinking poison. This instance reveals Ms. Nowak's approach to the children's play during playtime and provides insight into how she perceived and appreciated Dave's play specifically. Furthermore Ms. Lindt's approach of terminating all play with the exception of allowing Dave and Henry's play with the lion to continue, reveals that in her approach, she valued the type of play that Dave and Henry engaged in (see Box 5.18). The practitioners' reactions to Dave and Henry's pretend play provide insight into their experience and perceptions. Their facilitation of opportunities within their practice in order to enable Dave and Henry to extend and develop their pretend play, shows that

practitioners considered such play to be valuable experiences for the children.

In her interview, Alba shared her perception of the kind of play that Dave engaged in at home (see Box 5.17).

Box 5.17: In her interview, Alba shared her perception of Dave's preference for pretend play.

Researcher: Does Dave play on his own?

Alba: Tsk. He does. It's not his preferred thing to be very sincere. But he would play. He in there, by himself. But if he could, he would play with us. One of his role play, that he likes to make someone, that he's the Daddy, and I am his child. And he'll take me to the museums or doing things like that. So he does like the attention very much. I try to dedicate as much time as I can.

Although Alba observed Dave engage in solitary play at home, she perceived him to prefer having play partners. Such preferences were also communicated by Dave in his child-conference, where he mentioned that he does not liking playing on his own (see Box 5.20). According to Alba, Dave directed play at home; assumed an active role within the play, such as that of a Daddy who took his child to the museum; and assigned passive roles to his play partners who had actions done to them by Dave. Alba reflected on her own approach to Dave's play at home in terms of the amount of time she was able to assign for engaging in play with him. The parallels in Dave's engagement in pretend play in the nursery; and Alba's perception of his preference for assuming a directive role, show the similarities between his play at home (as described by Alba) and his play involving the lion (see Box 5.18) and bubble seek (see Box 5.12) with Henry in the nursery. However, a further examination of the dynamics of his play interactions with Henry (see Box 5.12 and 5.18) show the differences between Dave's pretend play in the two environments.

Dave and Henry's play of trapping a lion in a cage and taking care of it is an example of their complex pretend play (see Box 5.18).

Box 5.18: Dave and Henry trapped a lion in a cage during their shared mosaic session.

The lion was a balancing bike in the nursery that had a lion's face in the front. The garden of good manners built by the practitioners out of a wooden crate turned upside down with pictures of butterflies, flowers, and leaves pinned to the wooden planks, was imagined to be the cage by Dave and Henry.

Henry held up a toy boiled egg, showing it off to the lion.

Henry: Lion! Come and get your egg before I eat it!

Dave took the egg from Henry's hand, removed a piece of foam that he used to barricade the entrance to the cage and crawled in. He then gently placed the egg next to the lion.

Dave: Let's go out before the egg opens (he whispered to Henry).

Dave then whispered to me: Because that's a lion's egg.

Henry said to me: It's the lion's cage. He's looking after his baby.

Dave: He's only got one lion egg. The baby will be hatched.

They put the barricade back up and Dave said to me, "don't forget I have to put the key lock". He turned an imaginary key, "click click click".

Dave leaned against the foam to hold it upright.

Dave said to Henry: He's a nice lion. We're not strangers to him. He might bite strangers.

Henry: Yeah we're not strangers. He even knows our names.

Dave said to me: We're looking after him because he is not in the zoo.

Henry: He needs to look after his babies.

Dave and Henry walked around the cage cautiously slightly bending their knees to crouch as they peeked in through the gaps between the bars of the cage, while they guarded the lion.

Dave: He's gonna eat chicken for lunch (as he slipped a leaf into the cage through the wooden planks).

Dave removed the barricade and put his hand in to gently feed the lion.

Dave's eyes widened as he said to me: You don't want to put your fingers in.

Researcher: Oh! Why not?

Dave squinted and raised a corner of his mouth up and said : What?! They eat meat!

Henry: Yes, he loves meat. The baby lion needs a lot of meat. And humans have a lot of meat (he touched his own ribs).

Dave to Henry: We're not even sure who's gonna eat it. The baby or the adult. (he whispered) Stop putting in the meat.

Dave pulled out small coloured cubes from his pocket and showed them to me.

Dave: I took out these flower petals because these can be very dangerous for the little ones. Because they don't know what to eat. Can you keep the flowers please? You can put them on the floor.

I took the cubes from his hand and placed them on the ground.

In the middle of their play Manuel had appeared again and tried to force his hand into the cage and drag the lion out. Henry and Dave seemed upset with Manuel at first. They both furrowed their brows and turned the corners of their mouths down.

Henry and Dave said to Manuel: We will tell him not to bite you if you don't go in.

Manuel agreed and he let the lion remain inside while he stood outside the cage.

At the end of playtime, Ms. Lindnt instructed all the children in the outdoor area to wrap up their play. However, she allowed Dave and Henry's play to progress for a few more minutes while others tidied up the resources.

Dave and Henry's play with the lion (see Box 5.18) shows how they synthesised their knowledge, their experience of playing with one another, and their imaginative skills to co-create and develop their shared play. They experimented with the lion's role by introducing new dimensions to it's nature from time to time. This was evident in the different stages of their development of the lion, that included: their initial depiction of the lion as an animal that needed to be caged; to a lion that needed encouragement and enthusing to receive an egg which was possibly offered as food; to a lion

that needed to be taken care of so that it in turn could care for the baby that was to hatch out of the egg. The complex nature of the lion continued to intensify as Dave and Henry assigned it both good and bad characteristics- implying that the lion was a danger to strangers, but would not harm Dave and Henry because it knew them.

My involvement that was directed by Dave progressed simultaneously with the developments in the play. Dave took the initial step to acknowledge my presence by informing me of his rationale for suggesting to Henry that they should leave the cage 'before the egg opens'. By whispering to me in a manner similar to his whispers to Henry, Dave avoided stepping out of his play mode to interact with me. Henry followed suit, making me aware of their symbolic play by informing me that the garden of manners represented the lion's cage, and that the lion was 'looking after his baby'. For the rest of the play encounter, Dave's practice of keeping me informed of developments continued and was followed by further details from Henry. As the play progressed, Dave transitioned from merely keeping me informed, to speaking to me as if I was a part of their play. This transition was subtle as he shifted from informing to instructing me. While instructions such as 'don't forget' and warnings such as 'you don't want to put the finger in' required me to maintain a level of awareness, by handing me the cubes that represented petals Dave assigned me the physical responsibility of keeping them out of the baby's reach. His physical embodiment of the play mode was visible in the way he indicated caution in his bodily movements by bending his knees, slowly inserting food into the cage, and peeking into the cage. He embodied fear and concern in his eyes by widening them; and his disbelief in my lack of knowledge of that lions eat meat through his facial expressions. Such physical gestures and the resultant shift in my level of involvement devised by Dave indicated that he imagined me to be a part of the pretend realm.

Dave and Henry's play reveals the dynamics of their relationship. Henry's acceptance of the changes and the introduction of new aspects in their play suggested by Dave shows the nature of the dynamics in their relationship. Dave's decision to include the interactions with me as part of the play, changing the egg's purpose of representing food to representing the lion's baby, the suggestion that the lion was only a danger to strangers and not to familiar children, were accepted by Henry without question. As Henry

provided me further information on the symbolic meaning that was attached to objects such as the wooden crate; and used bodily gestures by touching his own ribs to support Dave's claim that humans were in danger of being eaten by the lion, he indicated that he accepted Dave's leading role in developing their play. He expanded on Dave's theme of the lion needing to be taken care because it was not in a zoo by adding that the lion was also responsible for taking care of its babies. In this manner Henry built on Dave's contributions to their play. In addition to accepting the changes and the introduction of new elements, Henry accepted Dave's direct instructions by following him out of the cage 'before the egg open(s)ed', and by stopping inserting meat into the cage as they 'didn't even know who's going to eat it. The baby or the adult'. Instead of exiting the pretend mode to discuss their intentions for the play's development, Dave and Henry stayed within the play mode and made their contributions in the form of whispers to the lion, to me, and to each other, pretending as though they did not want to disturb the lion. By developing the play in their pretence mode, Dave and Henry contributed to the complexities in the play without disrupting it to discuss how they each wanted the play to progress.

This play activity showed Dave and Henry's thinking strategy, communication, and ability to negotiate with Manuel, using their familiarity with the lion and their ability to convince the lion to do things as leverage. Rather than drawing attention from one of the practitioners, Dave and Henry combined efforts and succeeded at arriving at an agreement with Manuel. Dave and Henry convinced Manuel to cooperate without having to step out of the pretend mode. By doing so, they included Manuel in their play which enabled them to prevent Manuel from disrupting their play completely.

5.3.2.1. The discussion of the analysis with the literature

A discussion of the work of authors such as Papadopoulou (2016); and Hoyte et al. (2014) who focus on various aspects of children's peer play, informed my approach to making meaning of peer dynamics in the children's shared free play experiences. While Papadopoulou (2016) focuses on the role of similar interests in shaping children's choices of play partners, Hoyte et al. (2014) draw on a range of other authors to argue that examining peer interactions provides an understanding of the complex negotiations of power

dynamics in play interactions. Papadopoulou (2016) suggests that 'the most harmonious friendships' 'seemed to involve children who had similar, or rather complementary, interests and traits' (p.1555). Similarly, Dave and Henry showed similar interests in their preference for pretend play. The dynamics of their interactions in play revealed how they played complementary roles by accepting each other's suggestions of changing play and adding new elements, and by building on each other's contributions in play. Papadopoulou (2016) refers to Dunn's (2006) study, where four-year-olds showed similarities with friends in their 'understanding of others' minds, in general intelligence and verbal ability' (p.1549). In contrast, my research shows that Dave and Henry showed similarities in the ways they imagined developments in their play and were able to communicate to each other their plans for the play by staying within play mode, instead of stepping out of play to negotiate and ensure that their individual ideas were incorporated. Hoyte et al. (2014) suggest that 'play conversations' provide insight into children's negotiations within their 'relationships with peers' (p.20). Similarly, Dave's interactions with Henry in their play involving the lion, reveal the power dynamics within their peer relationship. Drawing on the work of authors such as Goodwin, (2002); Goodwin and Kyratzis (2007); Kyratzis (2004); and Kyratzis (2007), Hoyte et al. (2014) suggest that 'young children appropriate power and resist control through talk in their peer relationships' (p.20-21). The authors underscore the need to study how children's 'talks' in play 'contexts' are utilised to 'nurture' 'friendships' (p.20-21). Dave and Henry's play involving the lion shows that while they nurtured their already existing relationship by accepting each other's ideas and building on each other's suggestions to develop their play, they also used 'talk' to remain in their play mode and sustain their play by keeping other children from disrupting it. Dunne (2004) argues that 'nurturing takes place' as children 'co-create their imaginative worlds', by 'shar(e)ing their ideas' and showing within their play, the 'coordination of their ideas and imaginations' (p.1). Similarly, Henry's acceptance of Dave's decision to appropriate power in our researcher-child relationship was visible in the way he made remarks that echoed and complemented Dave's suggestions. In order for children to co-construct play, Hoyte et al (2014) suggest the importance of having 'previously shared play experiences that can provide a basis of trust in and respect or liking for each other' (p.31). The authors claim that these aspects can lead children to 'accept and build on each

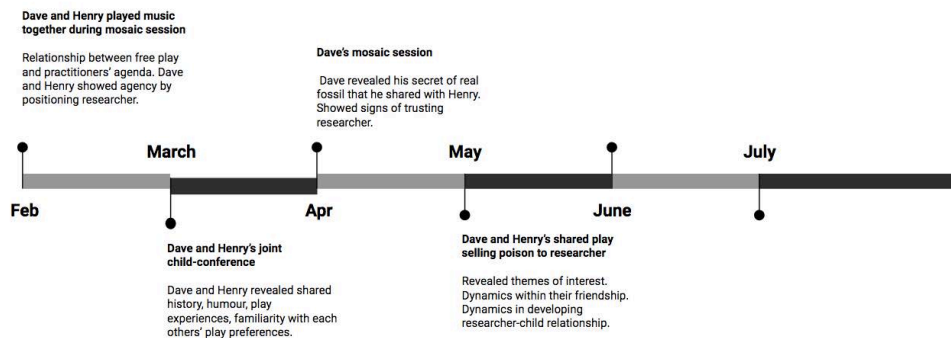
other's play moves' (Hoyte et al. 2014, p.31). Preece (1987) found that 'narratives created in collaboration were more complex in nature than the ones produced by children's solo effort'. Based on this, Hoyte et al. (2014) calls for further investigation of whether friendships are necessary for complex narratives. This research responds to Hoyte et al.'s (2014) call for the examination of children's dynamic play interactions, as it makes meaning of children's play encounters as live networks of negotiations for power. Furthermore, by collating the multiple perspectives from the individuals involved in the facilitation of play at home and in the nursery, the study shows that the same themes in children's play were developed differently at home and in the nursery, due to differing contextual factors such as resources, rules and children's relationships with their play partners (such as adults and children) developed through experiences over time.

This section showed the parallels between Dave's play at home and in the nursery by highlighting his preference for pretend play in both environments. Collating my observations of Dave and Henry's shared play encounters in the nursery, and their practitioners' and parents' perceptions of their play at home, showed that while there were commonalities in terms of recurring themes of pretend play consisting of imaginative elements between home and nursery, the development of these themes in their play in the two settings varied due to contextual factors such as resources and relationships with play partners.

5.4. The researcher-child relationship developed through play experiences over time

Dave and Henry's relationship with me in my researcher role is an aspect of their play that is examined in this section because their research encounters with me constituted a significant part of their shared play experiences. Examining the turning points in our researcher-child relationship illustrates the complex nature of the web of relationships that I became a part of over the six months of research.

Timeline 5.4 The events relevant for understanding how the researcher-child relationship developed through play experiences over time.



Research contact during free play time at the early stages of the project show Dave and Henry's approach towards me as someone new in the nursery (see Box 5.19).

Box 5.19: Dave and Henry lowered their voices to have a private conversation during their joint mosaic session in February.

Dave and Henry explored the musical instruments that the practitioners put out on the table outside, that was next to the ramp that led to the nursery. Ms. Nowak also used musical instruments during carpet session that week. I stood on the ramp and observed Henry and Dave over the short wall that stood between the ramp and the table. As Henry clapped the cymbal looking at Dave, Henry nodded his head, stuck his bottom out a little and swayed it gently to the rhythm. He bent over, got closer to Dave and said "look how I do it". While they played music, Henry and Dave glanced at me intermittently. After a while, Henry and Dave started to have a conversation between themselves. They lowered their voices, as they brought their heads closer together. I was unable to hear most of the conversation from where I stood. As I interpreted their actions of lowering their voices and bringing their heads together as their embodiment of signs of their dissent, and their intention to exclude me from their conversation, I did not attempt to move closer to them.

Dave: A long time ago...

Henry: I know that....

Dave:

Henry: Because they like to... (to something Dave had said)

Dave: Ok ok ok.

Making music and dancing are the themes that were identified in this instance of Dave's play with Henry. Contextualising this particular play in relation to the outdoor space and the resources utilised, shows the parallels between Dave and Henry's choice of playing music and practitioners' agenda for structured activities. One of the several possible ways of interpreting this play instance is that Dave and Henry's self-governed play was influenced by their previous experience of a structured activity involving musical instruments that was directed by the practitioners, and the provision of the resources for free play designed by the practitioners that mirrored their agenda for structured time and therefore served their adult agenda for the children's play. Henry embodied the themes of music and dancing through his bodily movements as he demonstrated his dance to Dave. Although Dave and Henry expressed their consent to taking part in this session, their decision to keep certain parts of their interactions private from me was visible in their attitude. Moving closer together, maintaining the lowest possible volume while they engaged in a conversation with one another, and glancing at me from time to time to assess the physical distance between us, were Dave and Henry's ways of communicating to me that I was not privy to everything they discussed. I interpreted Dave and Henry's efforts to protect a part of their conversation from me as indications of their ability to recognise free play time and the research process as agency thickening spaces for the children. Through their bodily gestures and lowering of their voices, they embodied an attitude towards me that communicated that they considered me as an outsider who had limited access to certain components of their play time activities. I attributed this attitude to their lack of familiarity with my researcher role and uncertainties associated with my identity. Similar to Ms. Nowak's concerns that her efforts to listen in would lead to the termination of Dave and Henry's conversations at playtime (see Box 5.2), I too was cautious to not intrude in their private play space.

Our joint child-conference in March, reveals further strategies utilised by Dave and Henry to position me as an outsider as I asked them questions relating to their play experiences at home (see Box 5.20).

Box 5.20 : In the child-conference in March, Dave and Henry engaged in the activity playfully. Henry tried to confuse me with his ambiguous answers that seemed to be part of his inside jokes that he shared with Dave.

Researcher: What do you not like about playtime at home?

Henry: Eyes (Dave and Henry both laughed out loud).

Researcher: Eyes? (I pointed at my own eyes and they both laughed again).
Why not?

Dave: (still laughing). He doesn't like eyes because he likes not being seen.

Researcher: Why does he not like being seen? (I looked at both Dave and Henry).

Dave: (Nodded) He does love to hide. I don't like playing on my own.

Dave shared that he did not like to play on his own at home. His answer parallels Alba's perception regarding Dave's preference for play partners at home, expressed in her interview (see Box 5.17). Dave and Henry provided insight into Henry's preferences regarding his play at home. Dave's initial answer that Henry 'likes not being seen' led me to contemplate whether they tried to communicate to me that they wanted me to stop observing them. However, Dave's following answer clarified that Henry 'likes not being seen' because he 'does love to hide'. This led me to interpret Henry's answer as a possible indication that he preferred to hide during his play at home. This vignette shows how at the initial stages of the research, Dave and Henry's shared history and sense of humour surfaced in their interactions with me as we discussed aspects of their play. For instance, they shared jokes and chuckles between themselves while answering my questions, making it apparent that they were the only two people who were able to understand and appreciate them. As Henry tried to confuse me with his ambiguous answer regarding what he did not like about playtime at home, Dave indicated that he was familiar with Henry's jokes and his likes related to play, as they shared past play experiences together in the nursery. In addition to

their individual behaviour towards me, their collaborative reactions to my presence made me aware of an established practice of friendship between them. Their familiarity with one another was visible in their shared smiles, their shared sense of humour, and their interpretations of each other's cryptic responses related to their play experiences at home and in the nursery.

In his mosaic session in April, Dave's interactions with me showed signs of the development of trust with our researcher-child relationship (see Box 5.21).

Box 5.21: Dave's Mosaic session in April: Henry was absent. Dave and I conducted his mosaic session at the table of sea creatures.

Dave: I came to Henry's house but his parents don't let him come even though I have a real fossil.

R: Oh wow. Tell me about the fossil.

Dave: It's a secret.

R: Oh!

Dave: I told Henry but he will never tell his family. Henry doesn't have a lot of dinosaurs.

By sharing a secret regarding his possession of a real fossil at home that previously only Henry was privy to, Dave showed that he trusted me. The theme of the fossil recurred during Dave's meaning-making with his mother in my presence at home. It was demonstrated as part of what Dave chose to communicate to me regarding his play at home.

Key developments in our researcher-child relationship emerged in May when Dave and Henry included me in their play (see Box 5.22).

Box 5.22: During the Mosaic session in May, I was included in Dave and Henry's play.

I was invited by Dave and Henry to sit in a chair in front of the desk under the shed in the Reception playground, where Henry and Dave had set up a shop. Henry stood behind the cash register and Dave stood next to him. Dave leaned over, rested his elbows on the corner of the table with his legs crossed and watched Henry be the shopkeeper with a few painting cups filled with sand.

Henry asked me: What would you like to buy?

Researcher: What are you selling?

Dave: Something not poison.

Henry eyes widened: Electric poison!

I was instructed by Henry to shut my eyes upon being declared 'dead' as I drank from the cup of electric poison that I bought from Henry, and to open my eyes when Henry and Dave chanted 'life' as Henry punched numbers into the register. After dying and being brought back to life several times, Dave handed me a toy pineapple and said "have the pineapple. That will never make you be dead".

I ate the pineapple. Henry made me have some more poison. But I did not shut my eyes when he said "dead".

Henry: Not working. How shall we make you dead? Butterfly poison!

Dave: It can only make dead, butterflies.

Henry: Cat poison! Henry gave me some cat poison.

Dave: It can only make dead, cats.

Henry punched some numbers into the register.

Dave shrugged his shoulders, pointed to me and said to Henry "see nothing. You cannot do anything now".

The themes that emerged from this play encounter are shop, different types of poison, life and death, and antidotes that counteract poisons. While the theme of 'shop' also emerged in Nora's interview as one of Henry's preferred play themes at home (see Box 5.15), the theme of 'poison' recurred later that week in Dave's play in the nursery in Ms. Nowak's presence (see Box 5.16). The reception playground as the physical location of play; and the resources such as the desk, the cash register, the cups and the toy pineapple, provide information regarding the spatial and physical contexts within which the play took place. In this play session, I was invited to play a

more active role in comparison to my usual role as an observer. Instead of telling me what I should ask for at the shop, Henry invited me to determine what he was selling. From the start, Dave and Henry embodied the roles they had assumed in play. While Dave's posture of leaning over on his elbow and resting his face on his hand showed that he was taking on the role of an observer, Henry took on a more active role as he stood behind the cash register and remained in charge of all transactions. I interpreted Dave's answer of 'something not poison' to my question as an indication that he anticipated Henry's interest in poison and that he wanted themes other than poison to be explored. His decision to not directly specify the item that was to be sold showed that he intended to let Henry decide what to sell to me as long as it was 'something not poison'. In contrast to being discouraged, Dave's suggestion seemed to serve as a reminder for Henry that led him to sell me 'electric poison'. Henry's realisation of the possibility of selling poison was visible in the way his eyes widened. After joining in Henry's chants of 'life' and death', Dave made a second attempt to change the theme of play from poison. He stayed within the play mode that consisted of life, death and poisons and introduced the new element of antidote to counteract Henry's poisons. Henry's poisons could only cause temporary death and he assumed the power to bring me back to life. Dave pre-emptively assigned the pineapple powers to make me immortal, as he anticipated that Henry would try to feed me more poison. Despite drinking more poison, I remained alive after having the pineapple. In the few seconds that I had, to decide whether to live or die, I practised reflexivity. I knew my reaction would have implications on the progress of the play. I decided to remain alive as it appeared to be the logical outcome given that I had had the pineapple that would 'never make (you)me be dead'. Instead of stepping out of play mode and instructing me to follow his directions instead of Dave's, Henry accepted that his poison was ineffective. In response, as Henry invented new types of poisons, Dave suggested that they were not poisonous enough to have an effect on me. This play encounter reveals how Dave and Henry negotiated their position in play without stepping out of play mode and interrupting their play. It reveals the complex manner in which by May, Henry and Dave assigned me a role in their play. The levels of involvement they assigned me varied across play experiences in a non-linear manner. Henry's meaning making session with his mother was a turning point in our relationship (see Box 4.10) as after watching me interact with his mother, Henry showed an

increased eagerness to share aspects of his play with me as he overtly expressed that he wanted to spend playtime with me. For instance, following the meaning-making session with his mother, Henry invited me to sit with him at playtime as he wrote a letter to his mother and drew a picture of flower monsters in order to narrate to me a story about them. Watching Henry's increased interactions with me may have been one of the several factors in addition to my frequent visits to the nursery and observations of my research interactions with his peers, that led Dave to accept my presence in their shared play. As our relationship developed over the course of the research, they narrated their play to me (see Box 5.18). At other times Dave and Henry encouraged me to assume more active roles in their play (for instance, they invited me to buy and drink poison from their shop; and keep flower petals out of the baby lion's reach).

5.4.1. The discussion of the analysis with the literature

An exploration of the various approaches (such as the ones suggested by Corsaro, 1997; Goldman-Segall, 1998; Mandell, 1998; Mayall, 2000; and Waller and Bitou, 2011) to communicating power differentials within the researcher-child relationship examined in Chapter Four, informed my approach to making meaning of Dave and Henry's researcher-child relationships with me, in relation to their shared play experiences. Similar to Corsaro (1997) I positioned myself during play in order to be directed by Dave and Henry. Mayall (2000) argues that it is important for researchers to address the power imbalance in the researcher-child dynamics. From the early stages of the study, I embodied my researcher role in my reactions to the children during play, to communicate the power differential in our relationship. By refraining from moving physically closer to listen in on their conversation, I communicated to Henry and Dave that I recognised their right to share some selected aspects of their play with me and limit my access to others. Waller and Bitou (2011) concur with Mayall's (2000) argument and extend it as they draw from Goldman-Segall's (1998) suggestion to 'establish rapport' (p.93). The authors highlight the importance of time that creates opportunities for gradual developments to take place in the researcher-child relationship. My research responds to the author's suggestion by examining developments in individual researcher-child relationships over time. Dave and Henry's awareness regarding my non-

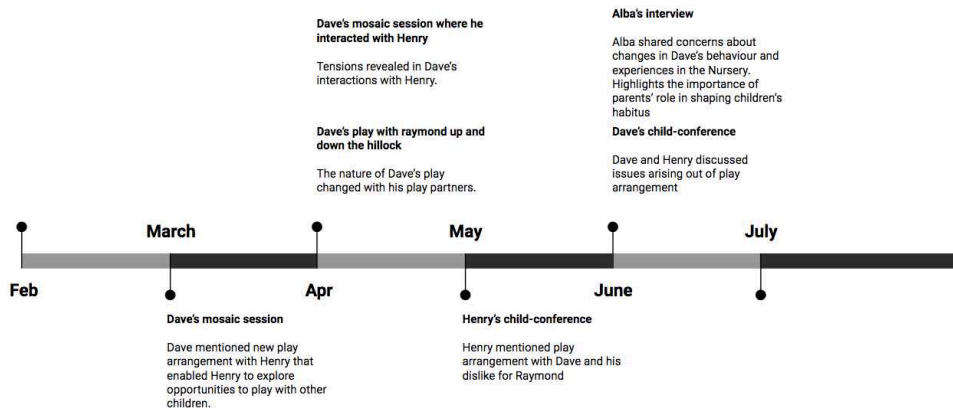
practitioner like attributes developed gradually over time as they reflected on my actions and responses, and dissociated ideas of evaluative and pedagogic responsibilities from my identity. Such awareness developed as I responded to them in a reflexive manner by following their directions during play, by drinking poison and dying and coming back to life, and by keeping the rose petals out of the baby lion's reach. While this section shows parallels between the literature and my research in the way power differentials were addressed in a reflexive manner over time within the developing researcher-child relationship, it also reveals that this relationship significantly impacted the developments in the children's play experienced in the nursery.

This section provided insight into Dave's play in the nursery, highlighting the themes that emerged from this play encounters such as music, dance, shops, poison, antidotes, and life and death. It revealed how these attributes continued to impact Dave and Henry's ongoing shared play encounters experienced throughout their research journeys, and their research engagements with me over time which in turn became meaningful research findings.

5.5. Examining the relationship between the complex developments in Dave and Henry's friendship and their free play

The individual and shared child-conferences, play encounters during research, and interviews with the adults provide insight into the various perspectives from which the developments in Dave's relationships in the nursery and their impact on his play at home and in the nursery were perceived.

Timeline 5.5: The events relevant for examining the relationship between the complex developments in Dave and Henry’s friendship and their free play.



On a Friday in March, Dave and I conducted his third mosaic session. As Dave located us at the table of sea creatures where he said he wanted to play, he informed me of the recent arrangements between Henry and him regarding their approach to spending playtime together in the nursery (see Box 5.23).

Box 5.23: Dave informed me of his new play arrangement with Henry.

Dave pointed at the table of sea creatures: Let's go there. I want to play there.

Researcher: Where's Henry? I haven't seen him today.

Dave: He's not here today. Well, I don't play with him these days anyways.

Researcher: Why not?

Dave: Because I play with him on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. I don't play with him on Friday.

Researcher: Why don't you play with him on Friday?

Dave: Because Henry said we always play together. He wanted to play with other friends. So I said we can play together on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and he can play with other friends on Friday.

Researcher: Why did you both choose Friday? Was there a reason?

Dave: I don't know.

Researcher: So whose idea was it to play with other friends on Friday?

Dave: I came up with Friday because Henry was thinking about it so I came up with it.

Researcher: So who do you play with on Fridays?

Dave: I played with Raymond.

Researcher: And why did you play with Raymond?

Dave: I played with him. But I don't like him. But he kind of likes me. So I pretend to like him.

Researcher: Why don't you like Raymond?

Dave: Because he says things like 'stupid' and things like that (he shook his head and rolled his eyes in disappointment).

Dave showed agency as he expressed his intention to play with the sea creatures, and spatially located us in the nursery. Dave provided insight into the recent developments in his play in the nursery. These developments were related to the changes in his play partners. Dave informed me that he designed a schedule to facilitate Henry's recent interest in exploring opportunities to play with the other children in the nursery. Dave expressed his disinterest in engaging in play with anyone other than Henry; making clear to me that he was satisfied with their previous routine of only playing with one another and suggested the new arrangement to accommodate Henry's wishes. The driving factor behind Dave's selection of Raymond to play with, who both Dave and Henry (see section 5.23) described to me on multiple occasions as someone in the nursery that they disliked, was unclear to me. Fearing that Dave would perceive me as too inquisitive which might in turn lead him to reconsider his decision to discuss these developments with me, I refrained from expressing excessive interest in Dave's decision of selecting Raymond despite disliking him. A following play experience between Dave and Raymond in the nursery on a Friday recorded in the research showed changes in Dave's play in the nursery. The nature of his play shifted from pretend play with Henry to exploring activities with Raymond that were more physical in nature. For example: (see Box 5.24) Dave's play with Raymond at the reception playground involved climbing up and down a hillock.

Box 5.24: Dave and Raymond's play at the hillock during the mosaic session in April.

Dave and Raymond held hands as they stood at the top of the hillock and watched two boys from reception play fight at the foot. As Raymond took the slide down with his hands up in the air, Dave stood behind him at the top. Once Raymond arrived at the foot of the hillock, Dave changed his mind about sliding down and climbed down instead. As he climbed down, he held on to a thick rope that was tied to a wooden pole at the top of the hillock, and he crouched from time to time exercising caution. Before Dave was able to arrive at the bottom, Raymond ran up the hillock and Dave tried to follow him by climbing back up. He still hung on to the rope. Dave fell as he lost his balance momentarily, and was back on his feet soon after. Raymond looked back at Dave.

Raymond: You can't. You just don't have the balance.

Dave furrowed his brows: I do have the balance!

Dave climbed up and down while Raymond used the slide a few more times. Raymond rolled down the hillock. Each time he rolled down he aimed to collide with Dave and Dave tried to move out of Raymond's way. Raymond eventually succeeded in running into him. Dave furrowed his brows and climbed down emitting a puff of breath in anger and stomped into the bugs research lab.

In comparison to Dave's play with Henry that involved imaginative elements, his play with Raymond involved physical challenges and had less opportunities for dialogue. Dave's caution by crouching and holding on to a rope for support, in contrast to the ease with which Raymond used the slide and rolled down the hillock, showed the differences in their play repertoires in relation to the exploration of physical challenges. Dave's reaction that he embodied by exiting the play and marching into the bugs research lab in a huff and a puff revealed the contrasts in the dynamics between his emerging relationship with Raymond and his established relationship with Henry. With Henry, Dave was able to negotiate through play. My interpretation suggests the possibility that Dave was saddened by the changes in his play routine with Henry, and to learn of Henry's recently developing interest in making changes to the way they spent playtime together that indicated that Henry

was no longer content with playing only with Dave. It is important to note that Dave did not explicitly mention experiencing feelings of sadness as he informed me of these changes to their play. My claim is rooted in the meaningful way that I was getting to know Dave as he played an active role in familiarising me with himself and aspects of his play experiences (for example: we recently conducted a meaning-making session together where Dave and I reflected on the photographs that he took at his mother's home and at his Dad's home. During this session, Dave familiarised me with his world at home as he used the photographs to introduce me to his family, show me his toys and his experience engaging in various play related activities at home). It is important to acknowledge that Dave communicated these changes to me towards the middle stages of the data collection period and our researcher-child relationship was still in the developing stages. I interpreted this particular instance of Dave sharing information regarding the developments in his play related to his friendship with Henry and his dislike for Raymond with me, as a significant moment in our relationship. It is undeniable that my own feelings impacted my judgement that Dave was experiencing feelings of sadness. Along with feeling intrigued by the complexities being explained to me, I also felt privileged knowing that Dave chose to share such sensitive information with me, that required a level of trust and required putting himself in a position of vulnerability as he revealed his private thoughts about disliking Raymond but pretending to like him while they played together on Fridays. I interpreted his decision to share such details with me, to be indicative of his growing trust in me and that he considered me capable of appreciating the complexities involved in understanding how his play experiences in the nursery were changing.

Although Dave spent the majority of playtime during the mosaic session in April with Raymond, he interacted with Henry briefly while they sat with a group of children (see Box 5.25).

Box 5.25: Tensions escalated between Dave and Henry at playtime in April.

I accompanied Dave and Raymond as they explored the resources in the reception playground by running from one area to another, touching the resources that were set up by the practitioners. They did not speak to one another or make physical gestures to communicate. Raymond ran and Dave

followed him. They arrived at the shed where they joined Henry and some other children who were playing with nail and hammer sets. Henry informed me that he was making a roundabout. Dave tried to touch Henry's board. Henry held Dave's wrist and stopped him.

Henry: No Dave! It's a roundabout. It's dangerous.

Dave: Clare must break her car before she goes so other people can have a turn. Henry. Henry. Henry? HENRY! (raising the volume of his voice)

Henry: I can hear you! (without looking up from his board, lips pursed and brows furrowed).

Dave: When you finish, you should take your bits off so other people can use, ok? Henry. Henry. Henry! (Henry continued with his roundabout without responding).

This vignette shows Dave's exploration of the reception playground at playtime as he followed Raymond. The two did not interact during their exploration. This example shows that Dave's selection of play partners continued to affect the nature of his play as it shifted from interactive and imaginative play to activities that required relatively more physical movements. In this instance, his decision to explore the playground with Raymond resulted in his brief interaction with Henry. Dave's attempt to touch Henry's roundabout is interpreted as an indication of his intention to join Henry's play without verbal permission or negotiation. Henry informed me that he built a roundabout, and assumed that Dave heard him. Henry continued in his play mode and denied Dave access to his play by cautioning him of the danger of touching the roundabout. Dave announced that Clare should dismantle her car at the end of her play in order for others to have their turns with the hammer and nail set. By doing so he utilised the 'doxas' practised as part of the nursery culture as a rationale for attempting to establish verbal interaction with Henry (Bourdieu, 1990). A lack of acknowledgement from Henry left Dave visibly frustrated and he called out Henry's name repeatedly, while increasing the volume of his voice to ensure that Henry responded. In his brief reply Henry embodied his annoyed reaction through his facial expressions and lack of interest in disrupting his play to make eye contact with Dave. He chose not to address Dave's concerns regarding Clare. This led Dave to take a more direct approach by telling Henry that he too would have to dismantle his roundabout at the end of his play. Henry's lack of response communicated that he remained

uninterested in what Dave had to say. I interpreted this encounter as an indication that spending playtime apart led to the escalation of tensions within Dave's relationship with Henry.

In May, as Henry and I conducted his mosaic session together at the water tray in the outdoor play area, Dave played with Raymond on the computer inside the nursery (see Box 5.26).

Box 5.26: Henry communicated his dislike for Raymond and the recent changes in his relationship with Dave.

Researcher: Who do you like playing with in the nursery?

Henry: Dave and Jesslyn.

Researcher: Why do you like playing with them?

Henry: Because Dave plays with me.

Researcher: And Jesslyn?

Henry: Jesslyn plays with me on Fridays.

Researcher: And Dave plays with you on Fridays as well?

Henry: Dave plays with me on Fridays if Jesslyn isn't here on Fridays.

Researcher: Why does Dave play with you on Fridays only when Jesslyn isn't here?

Henry: Because I play with Dave on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. So I play with Jesslyn on Friday.

Researcher: Is there anything that you do not like about playtime in the nursery?

Henry: Raymond.

Researcher: Why don't you like Raymond?

Henry: Because he is bad.

Researcher: Why do you think Raymond is bad?

Henry: He's bad always to my friends.

Researcher: Who is he bad to?

Henry: To Dave, he just, he just does bad things to Dave. But I don't know what those things are. Sometimes he does bad things to me too.

Researcher: Can you tell me about a bad thing that Raymond did to you?

Henry: Sometimes he will put water on my apron. It will then go down to my trousers and my mother will be angry. For those reasons, he is stupid.

As we were finishing up the child-conference, Henry found an insect in a sand tray under the outdoor shed. He ran inside in excitement and stopped at the door as he saw Dave's back turned to him while he sat next to Raymond in front of the computer. Henry walked back as he hung his head.

Henry: Yaspia, can you please tell Dave to come see the bug?

Researcher: Why don't you tell him?

Henry: Because he's with Raymond.

Researcher: I'm sure he would still love to see the bug.

Henry: I think you should tell him. Please? Please?

Researcher: Sure.

This was the first instance where in a one-on-one research activity, Henry spoke to me regarding the arrangements with Dave that resulted in the changes in their shared play experiences in the nursery. Henry informed me that his dislike for Raymond was not only rooted in a personal feud, but was his way of showing his loyalty to Dave as Raymond did 'bad things to him'. Henry's reluctance to interrupt Dave's play with Raymond to show him the bug shows that there were tensions between the two. This vignette also provides insight into the nature of Dave's play with Raymond in the nursery. In this instance, it involved playing on the computer.

Dave and Henry individually spoke to me about the changes and the tensions in their relationship in one-on-one research encounters. Although these tensions became increasingly visible in their play interactions on Fridays (see Box 5.25), I was yet to witness a discussion between the two regarding the issue. As Dave and I began his child-conference (we were nearing tidy up time and discussing continuing the next day) at the end of Dave and Henry's "trapping the lion in the cage" play, Henry remarked after Dave's answered my questions, as though he was correcting Dave's answers (see Box 5.27).

Box 5.27: Dave and Henry wrapped up their 'trapping the lion in the cage' play before returning to the nursery, and we completed part of Dave's child-conference.

Researcher: Who do you like playing with in the nursery?

Dave: Henry.

Henry intervened

Henry to Dave: And Raymond.

Dave: Not as much. Anyway. I only play with him on Fridays.

Dave looked at Henry and said: Everyday I play with you.

Henry: (turned the corners of his lips down) But remember, you play with him in the big playground (Henry referred to the instance when he observed Dave and Raymond play in the reception playground after lunch on the Tuesday of that week).

While the nature of Dave and Henry's play during the rest of the week remained similar to their play prior to the new arrangement for Fridays, Dave's play on Fridays changed as a result of playing with Raymond. For instance, Dave was observed engaging in climbing up and sliding down the hillock in the reception playground as he followed Raymond's directions and attempted to emulate his play (see Box 5.24). Although Henry hesitated to disrupt Dave's play with Raymond in May, he was agentic in the way he interjected into the child-conference to correct Dave's answers. Henry's tone and facial expression indicated that he intended to communicate to Dave that he was not pleased to watch Dave and Raymond play together on a Tuesday.

The impact of the changing relationships in Dave's everyday play experiences were not limited to the nursery, but were also perceived by Alba as a factor impacting his play behaviour at home (see Box 5.28).

Box 5.28: Alba shared her concerns regarding her perceived changes in Dave's play behaviour.

So the rest is pretty freely. So he can play with whatever toys he has. One time that he, he used an unacceptable word, I took away his computer, he

was very upset. Because I usually don't take things away from him because he's very mature. So I don't need to because he understands when he's misbehaved. But it was a child at school that was calling him, (she spelled) S T U P I D? Yup, and then when he come back to me, he, he, he used that to me when we were playing and then and then, then we discussed and then, but then afterwards it was fine.

Alba spoke of the measures she took in her provision for play at home such as monitoring Dave's access to television content, to emphasise the role of parents in shaping their children's play behaviour.

Alba: Same thing as, something with the parent about that thing of the other child kind of bullying him, because it's him and Henry, and then I said to her and I said, I said, I spoke with the teacher and now I asked them to act up on it because I don't know what's going on at home. It might be that he's being bullied himself by his parents. And I don't wanna get involved, but I don't understand why he has this behaviour. And then Nora said to me, Oh but then shouldn't they learn? Shouldn't they deal with things? And I thought to myself, no. He's too young to be exposed to have to deal with that type of subject. In few years time, yeah, I will say yeah. Let me sit down with him and explain, but now I cannot explain to him. Maybe he doesn't know what it is, or maybe he's going through something at home.

Towards the end of the interview, Alba informed me that Dave would be attending a different school from the following term.

In Alba's interview I did not introduce the recent developments involving Raymond as I did not intend to divulge information that the children shared with me in the mosaic sessions, keeping in mind my ethical considerations. Without any direct prompts from me, Alba expressed her concerns regarding Dave's recent encounters with a certain child in the nursery that she refrained from naming, and her assumptions regarding its impact on Dave's behaviour and play. In contrast to the concerns expressed by Dave and Henry regarding their relationship and play, Alba appeared to be unaware of the recent changes in Dave's play arrangement with Henry, and focused on Dave's relationship with the anonymous child and its resultant impact on

Dave's play behaviour with her at home. Dave and Alba's varying focus on Dave's relationships with Henry and Raymond in the nursery showed differences in their perspectives in terms of selecting particular aspects of Dave's play to highlight in the research (see Box 5.7). Alba's anxiety and preoccupation with the issue was evident in the way she diverted the interview from my questions to her concerns regarding Dave's exposure to unsuitable information and actions in the nursery. Alba expressed her apprehension regarding the school's approach towards the issue, and implied that 'anonymous' behaviour may have resulted from the parent-child relationships that shaped his habitus at home. The parallels drawn between anonymous' behaviour in the nursery and his relationship with his parents at home indicates the level of significance Alba attached to parents' role in shaping their children's habitus that influenced their play experiences in the nursery.

5.5.1. The discussion of the analysis with the literature

The exploration of the analysis with the literature (such as Broadhead and Chesworth, 2014; Corsaro, 2014; and Papadopoulou, 2016) that focuses on children's friendships informed my approach to making meaning of the developments over time in Dave play in the nursery due to his changing dynamics with his peers. Papadopoulou (2016) suggests that "being friends' with somebody implies having certain privileges, receiving support, ... and confiding 'secrets' that only friends may share' (p.1554). The data examined in the previous section shows that Dave and Henry shared secrets (such as Dave's secret fossil). Henry expressed his loyalty to Dave by disliking Raymond for 'doing bad things' to Dave. Based on what Dave shared in his child-conference in March, it can be argued that he perceived Henry to be his 'core friend' while Raymond was his 'contingency friend' to 'fall back on' on Fridays when Henry was unavailable for play (Broadhead and Chesworth, 2014, p.96). The tensions that resulted from Henry and Dave's dialogue regarding the developments in their play experiences resonate with Rizzo's (1989) findings that Corsaro (2014) draws upon. Corsaro (2014) suggests that 'best friends often tr(ied)ying to protect their friendships from the possible intrusions from others, while at the same time, trying to expand their friendship groups...' (p.719). When Henry expressed his desire to expand his network of friends to Dave, Dave designed an arrangement that

divided playtime, enabling Henry to play with the other children in the nursery. This required Henry and Dave to follow a scheduled arrangement, according to which Henry and Dave would play together during the week, with the exception of Fridays when they would both branch off to create new networks with other children. Similar to Corsaro's (2014) claims, Henry's intentions to protect his friendship with Dave were visible in his interactions with Dave during Dave's child-conference (see Box 5.27).

This section showed how the impact of Dave's friendships on his free play was perceived in the nursery (by Dave and Henry) and at home (by Alba). Although collating the various perspective revealed Dave's interactions with Raymond as a factor that led to the changes in his play experiences in the nursery, the analysis revealed nuanced differences between the children (Dave and Henry) and Alba's perceptions of the developments over time in Dave's relationships with his peers and their consequent impact on his free play behaviour and choices both at home and in the nursery.

5.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter used Dave's case study to examine the relationship between his free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. The chapter focused on the relationship between Dave's friendships and his free play, as a key theme in his play journey as Dave identified it in the research as a significant aspect of his free play at home and in the nursery. The analysis showed that the developments in this aspect of his play were perceived and responded to in differing ways from multiple adult (practitioners, parents and researcher) and child perspectives. The chapter answered the following research questions: What are the relationships between Dave's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery? How are these relationships perceived from multiple perspectives? How do these relationships, their perceptions, and subsequent responses impact Dave's free play experiences in the nursery? How did the research experience impact Dave's free play?

Collating the multiple perspectives into the developments in Dave's play themes, language, play behaviour and agency exercised during free play over time, showed the complex and dynamic nature of the two-way traffic of

cultures and practices between Dave's home and the nursery. The values that were assigned to such developments varied across Alba and Ms. Nowak's perspectives, and revealed the parallels and tensions between cultures and practices between Dave's home and the nursery. Dave's play in the nursery revealed that he exercised agency in various ways. While these aligned with the accepted forms of agency in the nursery culture, some of his expressions of agency were perceived by Alba to contradict the cultures and practices at home. Within the cultures and practices at home and in the nursery, Alba and Ms. Nowak reflected on their approaches to creating free play provision in terms of space, resources, and relationships that impacted their responses to Dave's free play. The chapter revealed that the awareness of being part of the research impacted Dave's free play choices through his selection of materials to be communicated in the study and the types of play that he engaged in during the research. The research also impacted the parents and the practitioners as they assimilated the research process and interpreted the intended goals of the research. These consequently shaped how they conducted themselves in adult-child interactions related to free play, and selected information that they shared in their discussions with me. The following chapter creates a discussion between two diverse case studies to show the parallels and relationships between the progression of two children's free play journeys over time. A discussion is also created between their parents' perceptions of how they perceived the developments over time in their free play to provide insight into the parallels and differences between the individual children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery.

6. Chapter Six: Naomi and Sophia's play journeys and their parents' perspectives

6.1. Introduction

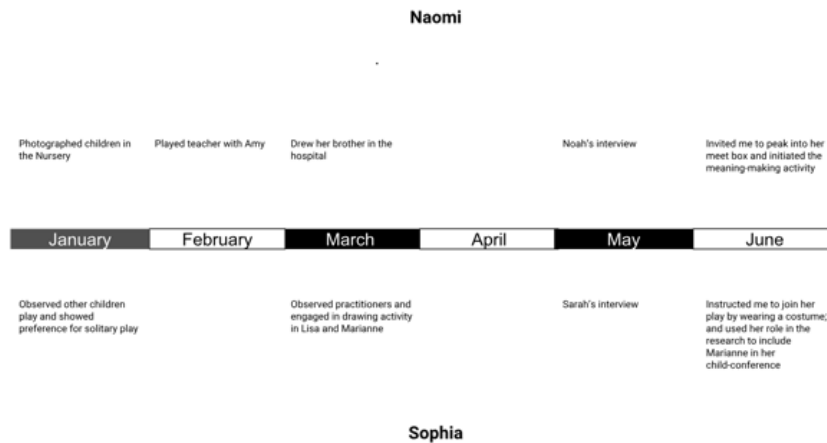
The previous chapter provided insight into the complex developments over time in children's free play journeys by focusing on Dave's case study. Children's agency is explored as the key theme in Chapter Six. This chapter presents the case studies of two children Naomi and Sophia, who exercised agency in diverse ways during their free play journeys (see Sections 3.14 and 3.15). While Naomi's expressions of agency were aligned with widely accepted forms, Sophia's agency exercised in her play deviated from them. This approach of selecting diverse case studies supports the study's claim that children show agency in various ways, and that it is important to recognise children's expressions of agency that differ from widely accepted forms of agency. The chapter takes a chronological approach to presenting the data from the different stages of each child's research journey, and draws parallels and relationships between them. This approach supports the study's claim that children's expressions of agency can change due to complex combinations of factors such as contexts, relationships, and time. The chapter discusses how the parents perceive and make meaning of developments and consistencies in their children's play over time in the nursery and at home. This approach supports the study's claim that children's agency is assigned complex and multiple meanings from various perspectives, and these meanings can change over time due to contexts within which children's free play is experienced (see Sections 3.14 and 3.15 for more details). By creating a discussion between Naomi and Sophia's play journeys, the chapter aims to answer all three research questions.

6.2. Mosaic sessions

This section answers the research questions by examining data from Naomi and Sophia's free play during the mosaic sessions conducted in the nursery in January, March and June. The data shows Naomi's overt references to the research and directions to me during free play, and Sophia's developing relationship with two of her peers (Marianne and Lisa). These were

communicated as key themes by the children through their free play in the mosaic sessions (see Sections 3.3, 3.14, and 3.15). The following is a timeline of the events examined in this section. Their chronological arrangement shows the simultaneous developments in each individual journey at three points in time.

Timeline 6.1: The simultaneous developments in Naomi and Sophia's individual journeys at three points in time.



A discussion between the analysis of excerpts show the developments over time of the play themes in their individual play journeys. The discussion also shows the relationship between Naomi and Sophia's play at the three stages of the research. It reveals the parallels and relationships between them, and shows the individually of their play journeys.

6.2.1. January

In Naomi's first mosaic session, she exerted agency in free play as she related to the research activities, communicated her agenda regarding the use of resources, positioned herself in her interactions with her peers and me, and responded to her perceived understanding of my research intentions (see Box 6.1).

Box 6.1: As Naomi took photographs of her peers' free play, she exerted agency in her interactions with her peers and me.

When Naomi observed me conducting the research with other child participants earlier that week, we spoke about her upcoming first mosaic session.

In her first mosaic session, Naomi was on Ms. Smith's carpet exploring a toy calculator. As I approached her to invite her to take part in the study, Naomi nodded and verbally consented by saying 'yes'. She instantaneously held the calculator up close to my face.

Naomi: Do you know what this is?

Before I could answer, Naomi said 'this is a calculator. Do you need me to take pictures?'

Without waiting for my response, Naomi grabbed the camera from my hand.

Naomi: Here, give it to me. I need to take pictures.

She ran fast between the different spaces within the nursery, photographing children. Naomi entered the play kitchen, took a seat at the table and photographed girls who were sipping tea. She declined children's requests to have a turn with the camera.

Naomi: No you can't have it.

She pointed at me and said, 'I am doing some work with her. Now you have to go in there and I have to take a picture of all of you. Everybody sit down. Everybody say cheese!'

Naomi held on to the camera with one hand and used the other to turn the girls' heads and lift their chins up and down.

Naomi: Smile! Yes much better!

She patted the girls on their shoulders.

Naomi: Nice one!

She turned her head to look at me and said 'come let's go' and walked towards the hallway.

As I followed Naomi, we passed the water station and Naomi turned around to look at me and said 'I love playing with water. But not at home. Only in the nursery'.

As we continued to walk she turned around again and stopped. She pulled my notebook down, looked into it and asked 'what are you writing?'

Researcher: I'm writing about watching you play.

Clara, a non-participant, was playing nearby and overheard this conversation.

Clara asked me, 'are you watching me?'

Naomi turned her head sideways to look at Clara. She shrugged her shoulders, squinted her eyes, pursed her lips for a moment and then waved her index finger back and forth and said in an assertive tone 'not you darling'.

Naomi's instantaneous consent in response to my invitation by nodding her head and verbally agreeing, her prompt decisions regarding her use of the camera, her overt expressions informing the other children of her 'work' with me, her directions to peers and me without waiting for or seeking instructions, and the setting of her own research agenda indicated that Naomi may have anticipated the research space. Naomi's observations of my child-centric responses to other children during the earlier mosaic sessions and her previous dialogue with me regarding her upcoming first mosaic session (see Box 6.1), may have been the factors that informed such choices and behaviour in her first mosaic session.

Naomi tested my knowledge of the play resources in the nursery. It is possible that based on her observations of my reflexive behaviour conducive to child-initiated and governed activities in the earlier mosaic sessions with the other children, Naomi may have construed that unlike practitioners, I was unfamiliar with the provision for free play in the nursery. Such assumptions may have led her to answer her own question and impart to me that the object she held was a calculator. I interpreted this instance as an indication that Naomi differentiated my position in our adult-child relationship from that of practitioners in the prevalent practitioner-child relationships in terms of familiarity with the play resources in the nursery. The assertiveness of her physical action of taking the camera from my hand; and her tone of voice as she said 'here, give it to me' instead of requesting a turn with the camera as 'doxas' in the nursery would have required on her part had she been interacting with a practitioner instead, showed how Naomi 'embodied' her directive role in our researcher-child relationship (Bourdieu, 1990). I interpreted Naomi's instruction to me to follow her as she said 'come on let's go' as indication of her intention to lead me as I followed and observed her free play. As Naomi physically pulled my notebook down and looked into it, she communicated a sense of entitlement over my notes. I interpreted such communication through her 'bodily hexis' as Naomi's differentiation of me

from the practitioners, as children accessing practitioners' observation notes was not common practice in the nursery culture. Her inquiry regarding what I was writing indicated that at the early stages of the study, the dynamics of our researcher-child relationship had a thickening impact on her agency as it enabled her to ask questions and assimilate the research process and my researcher role.

Naomi's commencement of photography without seeking permission or instructions, showed that she embodied a sense of entitlement over the camera due to her position in the research. Her declaration of her self-initiated agenda in relation to the camera showed that the research space thickened her agency. This claim is based on my observation that children's use of cameras during play time was not commonplace in the nursery culture, as access to cameras was limited to the practitioners only.

Naomi denied her peers' turns with the camera because she was 'doing some work' with me. A possible interpretation of her reference to taking photographs as 'work' is that she intended to justify her reluctance to share by establishing that her engagement in the research activities were important and could not be interrupted. Her refusal to share was not accompanied by negotiations or suggestions that could extend her time marginally with the camera, as these were steps to following the 'doxas' that were part of the nursery play culture established by the practitioners in relation to sharing of resources (Bourdieu, 1990). Naomi made no effort to discuss an arrangement whereby her peers could have their turns with the camera under a time-share scheme. One possible interpretation is that Naomi may have assumed that the practitioners' rules set up to be followed during free play, did not apply to her self-governed activities during the research. Such assumptions may have led Naomi to challenge the structure of social arrangements that were part of the nursery play culture. By refusing to share the camera, Naomi showed that she interpreted the research space to be an agency thickening context that enhanced her ability to exercise her free will in relation to utilising the research tools.

Naomi's direction during the photo-shoot included her use of language such as, 'smile' and 'say cheese!', her physical positioning such as moving chins up and down, to compose the visual elements of photographs; and her

delivery of positive feedback by saying 'nice one!' and 'much better' to her subjects and physically patting them on their shoulders. I interpreted these elements in her directions as indications of her previous experience of being photographed and/ or of having used a camera. It is reasonable to suggest that Naomi's representation of herself as a seasoned photographer may have resulted from her experiences outside the nursery. This suggestion is based on my observation that the practitioners took candid photographs of children engaging in activities for the purpose of documentation and the composition of such photographs did not require verbal directions. Furthermore, cameras were not part of the play provision in the two Nurseries. The behaviour that Naomi displayed is conceptualised as 'embodiment' of her 'cultural capital' that consisted of her knowledge of using the camera (Bourdieu, 1990). Naomi's agentic directions in the photo-shoot showed her ability to transfer and incorporate her cultural capital consisting of her knowhow of using the camera acquired through her experiences that took place in various contexts, into her play activities within the nursery with her peers. Her use of language specific to the activity to initiate and communicate her intentions to her peers, reveals the relationship between her play culture and practices within and beyond the nursery.

In addition to manifesting her 'cultural capital', the assertiveness of her verbal and physical instructions and expression of approval and praise with pats on her peers' shoulders and saying 'nice one' shows how Naomi embodied her directive role in her 'bodily hexis' (Bourdieu, 1990). It can be argued that Naomi interpreted the research space as an agency thickening context that enhanced her ability to take charge of her own free play activities, and direct my involvement and those of the other children. As she engaged in the research task, she incorporated the meaning she made of the experience into her ways of 'stand(ing), speak(ing), walk(ing), and thereby (of) feel(ing) and think(ing)' (Bourdieu, 1990, p.70). Her 'bodily hexis' in her directions to and approval of peers reveal that Naomi differentiated herself from the non-participants as she assumed a position in their peer relationships, within which she was able to determine the nature of their involvement in her research and assess their performance (Bourdieu, 1990). The evidence of Naomi's differentiation of herself from the non-participants extended beyond her instructions, and congratulatory gestures and remarks. In the same mosaic session, Naomi, through her 'bodily hexis', explicitly

communicated to Clara that she was excluded from my observations. Naomi embodied a sense of superiority in her response to Clara's question to me. Through her facial expressions of pursing her lips, squinting her eyes, bodily gestures such as waving her finger back and forth, and assertive tone of voice, Naomi informed Clara that her play did not feature in my observation notes. Naomi capitalised her position in the research in order to set herself apart from Clara who was engaged in parallel play. This instance of situated ethics led me to critically reflect on the consequences of the research. Naomi's behaviour of marginalising Clara, showed that she interpreted the research encounter as an agency thickening experience, while raising concerns for me that Naomi's research might be thinning the agency of the non-participant children. In this instance, I refrained from intervening as this interaction occurred in the presence of a practitioner, and I intended to observe the practitioners' responses to the children during free play. At the start of the project, I communicated to the practitioners that my presence should not impact their practices as along with the children's play I intended to observe practitioners' practices during play time. Consequently, throughout the research, the practitioners intervened in the children's play in my presence where they felt intervention was necessary (see Box 4.4). It is however impossible to ascertain that the practitioner remembered these guidelines in this particular instance. Forgetting the guidelines may have led them to avoid intervening during my research. Nonetheless, I refrained from drawing their attention to the situation as I intended to avoid influencing their reaction to Naomi. This instance is an illustrative example of the 'messiness' (Brannen, 2017) (see Section 3.3) of the research that required me to maintain a critical awareness of 'situated ethics' (Simons and Usher, 2000, p.2) (see section 3.13).

As Naomi agentically led me while she moved between the spaces in the nursery, her reference to the water station provided a sense that we were on a tour of her play spaces in the nursery, guided and controlled by Naomi. She highlighted water play as a theme in her play that she interpreted to be of relevance to the purpose of the study. Her differentiation in her experience of water play that varied depending on whether she was at home or in the nursery, reveals that she associated different types of play with diverse contexts. Her decision to combine aspects of her water play experiences in the two settings shows Naomi's understanding of my intentions to learn

about her play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. It also shows that such understanding shaped her research agenda, which in turn impacted her free play as she located us near the water tray to discuss the parallels in her experiences in the two settings.

During her first mosaic session Sophia showed agency in her free play choices by engaging in particular activities, locating herself in specific spaces, accessing the practitioners' resources, limiting other children's access to those resources, and communicating her intentions to me (see Box 6.2).

Box 6.2: Sophia showed agency by choosing to observe other children, locating herself on Ms. Smith's carpet, accessing Ms. Smith's teaching resources, and restricting other children from accessing them.

Sophia expressed her consent to take part in the mosaic session by drawing a smiley in the 'yes' column. After carpet time, Ms. Smith stored the sitting spots in a box. Sophia took one of the spots out of the box, placed it on Ms. Smith's carpet, sat on it, and she said to me 'I want to sit and rest'. I sat next to Sophia while she observed the other children in the surrounding spaces for nearly twenty minutes. Ms. Smith came out of the office and as she walked by, she asked me 'any luck? Were you able to do any activities with her or has she just been sitting there doing nothing?' I responded 'we're doing ok'.

Two children arrived at Ms. Smith's carpet. They sat close to Sophia and started playing with some number foam mats. I relocated to Ms. Smith's chair as I felt pins and needles in my legs and at the time, did not consider how sitting on the practitioner's chair might impact children's perceptions of my researcher role. Sophia came up to me and said, 'I want to sit on the chair'. I vacated the chair for Sophia who sat on it and continued to observe the children on the carpet playing with the number mats. Soon the two children abandoned the mats and climbed up Sophia's chair. Sophia stood up and relocated herself a few feet away as she continued to observe the children. She pointed at the flashcards that were visible inside Ms. Smith's transparent drawer and said to me 'I want Ms. Smith's picture'. I informed Sophia that I was unable to access Ms. Smith's drawer without her permission. Sophia opened the drawer and pulled out a flashcard with the

image of an attendance register. As soon as Sophia saw the other children approach her upon noticing the flashcard in her hand, Sophia quickly tucked it back into the drawer.

Sophia showed agency in our researcher-child relationship through her selection of space and resources during free play as she informed me of her intention to, 'sit and rest'; replace me on Ms. Smith's chair; and access the practitioners' resources such as Ms. Smith's flashcard, that I could not in my researcher role. However, as Sophia did not overtly verbalise how she related to the research or my researcher role as Naomi did in her first mosaic session, it is impossible to be certain that Sophia fully grasped the intended researcher-child relationship in this instance. I interpreted Sophia's expressions of her intention to sit on Ms. Smith's chair and access materials from her drawer, as implicit directions to me, as they required me to vacate Ms. Smith's chair to make it available for her and open Ms. Smith's drawer to obtain flashcards for her. Without overtly outlining goals for me, by implying that I vacate the chair and open Ms. Smith's drawer to fetch the flashcard, Sophia expressed her intentions in a manner that communicated to me that I needed to be reflexive in assimilating and executing my part in facilitating her sitting on the chair and accessing the flashcard. I interpreted Sophia's implicit directions as exploration. I interpreted her observations of my responses as testing through reflexivity and developing an awareness of her position of power in our researcher-child relationship. Upon being informed that I lacked the authority to access Ms. Smith's resources, Sophia reacted by opening the drawer herself. By challenging the nursery culture that required the children to seek permission from the practitioners in order to gain access to their teaching resources, Sophia communicated that her agency was thicker than mine in terms of being able to access restricted spaces and resources during play. A possible interpretation of Sophia's actions that challenged the established boundaries in the nursery culture, is that Sophia was testing to see if I would react as the practitioners would.

Sophia's agency in her peer interactions varied from her adult-child interaction with me in this play scenario. With me, Sophia verbally expressed her intentions to sit and rest, occupy Ms. Smith's chair, and access Ms. Smith's flashcard. She also showed agency by physically obtaining the

flashcard. In contrast, Sophia reacted non-verbally to her peers' unannounced intrusion while she sat on the chair, by physically relocating herself. One possible interpretation of Sophia's withdrawal is that she lost interest in the activity and showed agency by rejecting the other children's attempts to take part in her play, by physically exiting the activity without any verbal announcements. A second possible interpretation is that the interruption thinned her agency to confront and negotiate with them in order to maintain continuity in her solitary play. If the second interpretation were to hold true, by drawing on Robson et al.'s (2007) work relating to agency (see Section 2.6.3), it could be suggested that although her peers' intrusion may have thinned Sophia's agency, it was not completely absent in this instance. Sophia observed the children's approach towards her, sensed their interest in the flashcard, and anticipated their impending attempt to gain possession of it. In her response she exerted agency as she took a pre-emptive action by putting the flashcard back into the drawer. A lack of initiative from the other children to open the drawer as Sophia did showed that children accessing Ms. Smith's drawer was not part of the nursery play culture and practice. By taking Ms. Smith's flashcard, Sophia showed agency as she challenged the 'doxas' that restricted children's access to the practitioners' teaching resources at playtime (Bourdieu, 1990). By tucking the flashcard away in the drawer, Sophia showed that she considered the drawer to be a safe space protected from the other children by the doxas that she had challenged moments earlier. Although debates and negotiations were absent between Sophia and her peers, I interpreted her decision to quickly store the flashcard away to restrict her peers' access, as agentic. Sophia's peers' approach towards gaining access to her play space and resources, can be conceptualised as contextual factors that had 'thickening' and 'thinning' impacts on Sophia's agency (Klocker, 2007). In her play choices during her first research encounter, Sophia repeatedly challenged the nursery play culture and practices pertaining to accessing the practitioners' resources. I interpreted her withdrawal from her chosen activities upon receiving non-verbal signs of interest to join from her peers, as agentic expressions of her intention to continue her solitary play.

Ms. Smith's questions to me reveals the contrasts between how she and I made meaning of Sophia's agentic decision to sit on the carpet and rest while she observed the other children play. Ms. Smith's suggestion that

Sophia was 'doing nothing' indicates that her agency exercised in choosing to sit and rest and observe the other children's play as a playtime activities, was in conflict with Ms. Smith's interpretation of children's agency in play and what she considered to qualify as free play. I perceived Sophia to be agentic in communicating to me how she intended to spend playtime. Based on the examination of Bligh's (2011) work in Chapter Two, I interpreted Sophia's silent observation of the other children's play as her agentic selection of free play activity. The contrast between my interpretation and that of Ms. Smith shows how Sophia's choice that did not align with the conventional understanding of free play in the nursery, was assigned varying meanings when perceived from the differing socio-cultural perspectives of a researcher and a practitioner (Bligh, 2011). Ms. Smith's interaction with me provides insight into how she perceived Sophia's free play in the nursery.

6.2.1.1. A discussion between Naomi and Sophia's play

Examining Naomi and Sophia's free play choices made in their first research encounter in relation to the themes of spaces, resources and relationships, provides insight into their nursery play culture and practices. While Naomi was declarative regarding her actions related to the research task, such indications of being part of the study were not present in Sophia's play choices as she continued with her chosen activities without mentioning the research. Naomi's questions to me regarding what I was writing and testing my knowledge to see if I knew that she was holding a calculator indicate that she was curious about my researcher role and was making meaning of it from my behaviour and responses. In comparison, Sophia showed agency in our researcher-child interactions relatively less overtly by expressing her intentions to me that had implied consequences for my actions. For instance, her intention to sit on Ms. Smith's chair required me to vacate it. Sophia and Naomi's agency in relationship to space differed. Naomi familiarised me with her play practices through her swift mobility between the spaces in the nursery. On the other hand, Sophia showed agency by locating herself on Ms. Smith's carpet for a prolonged period of time. Both Naomi and Sophia were agentic in their use of resources. Naomi communicated verbally and through her bodily gestures, her position of power that she assumed in relation to me and her peers in terms of making decisions regarding how to use the camera as a research tool. Naomi's degree of agency in her

researcher-child interactions with me paralleled her degree of agency in her interactions with her peers as she assumed a directive role and instructed us. In contrast, Sophia's agency in relationship to resources varied between her peer and our researcher-child interactions. Sophia verbalised her intention to replace me on Ms. Smith's chair. However, she refrained from verbally negotiating with peers to maintain possession of resources when they interrupted her play activities. Instead, she showed agency non-verbally by limiting their access to Ms. Smith's flashcard. Parallels exist in the way both Sophia and Naomi communicated their awareness of their position of power in relationship to me. Within such parallels, nuanced differences show that Naomi and Sophia directed me in their unique implicit and explicit ways. Through her verbally assertive instructions such as 'give me the camera' and 'come, let's go', Naomi explicitly directed me and guided me through her play environment. In contrast, Sophia's verbal expressions of intentions for her own actions that did not directly instruct me, had implied consequences for me as they required me to assimilate my role in facilitating her play agenda. For instance, Sophia's verbal expression of her intention to sit on Ms. Smith's chair implied that I was required to vacate the chair. In her first mosaic session, Naomi provided insight into her play at home and in the nursery as she connected her practice of water play in the nursery to the absence of such play at home during this session. I interpreted Naomi's photography during play as manifestation of her cultural capital consisting of her knowledge related to the camera, that she acquired beyond the nursery. While Sophia's first play session provided insight into her play culture and practice in the nursery, little insight was gained into her play at home. A possible interpretation of Sophia's engagement is that she was exploring the research space and our researcher-child relationship that appeared unusual from the prevalent practitioner-child relationships.

6.2.2. March

In her third mosaic session, Naomi overtly announced to Ms. Khan that her selection of the activity during playtime was related to her work pertaining to the research. She asked the questions regarding my work related to the research as she continued to make meaning of my role. Naomi chose drawing as a free play activity for conducting the research in order to

communicate regarding the recent developments that took place at home (see Box 6.3).

Box 6.3: Naomi informed Ms. Khan of her intentions to do the study; and made a drawing of her brother in the hospital.

Naomi walked over to Ms. Khan's carpet where Ms. Khan was wrapping up her work on assessments. Naomi replaced Ms. Khan on her chair. She looked at Ms. Khan and said 'I'm going to do the study'. Ms. Khan said 'I see' and left. Naomi flipped through my notebook and asked for my pen as we both sat at the desk.

As she scribbled, Naomi chuckled and said 'looks like I'm doing the study too'.

Naomi: Have you went to this place?

Researcher: What do you mean?

Naomi: I mean have you went to this place everyday? Why do you come here?

Researcher: I come here to do the study, to learn how children play.

Naomi made the following drawing. She narrated to me that she was drawing a bed; a pillow; and her brother.



Naomi: That's his broken arm. This is him in the hospital.

Researcher: I'm sorry to here that. Is he in the hospital now?

Naomi: He's at home. He didn't go to school. He's getting better. Why are you writing?

Researcher: So I don't forget what you've said to me.

Naomi: I told Ms. Patmore too. She said it's ok if we look after him. Oh I forgot to draw his hair! His hair looks like pizza. I'm doing my study too. This is a get well soon picture for him.

Naomi told me her brother's name and asked 'can you draw my brother's name'?

Researcher: Sure.

Naomi: How will you draw it?

Researcher: I said the letter sounds as I wrote Naomi's brother's name on the drawing.

Naomi: What are you writing?

Researcher: I'm writing about your drawing and what you've said.

Naomi: Oh about my picture?

Naomi laughed uncontrollably covering her mouth with her palms and said 'he does something funny. He farts on my belly with his mouth'.

We both chuckled.

Naomi vocalised how she associated the act of writing in my notebook as 'doing the study'. I interpreted her decision to inform Ms. Khan of her intention in a declarative manner as agentic in drawing attention from an adult and displaying her engagement related to the research. Naomi continued to make meaning of my researcher role as she asked me questions regarding the nature of my engagement in the research that related to the frequency of my visits to the nursery, and she enquired about the content of my writing. Another possible interpretation of Naomi's question 'why do you come here?' is that Naomi may have forgotten the details that I had shared with her regarding the purpose of the study at the beginning of her previous mosaic sessions. Naomi used my notebook and pen to emulate my actions of documenting observation notes as she created a parallel experience for herself. A possible interpretation of Naomi's accompanying talk with her drawing without questions or prompts from me, is that she was aware of her role in the research and based on her perceived understanding of my intentions, she chose to inform me of the recent developments that had taken place at home. Playing with Naomi's brother emerged as a theme in her play culture and practice in her home; and it is possible that Naomi considered events that impacted her play with her brother at home to be relevant to the research. While making meaning of Naomi's accompanying talk, I considered the possible influence of adult agenda as a contextual factor on Naomi's drawings and meaning-making (Einarsdottir et al. 2009; and Coates, 2002). I interpreted Naomi's drawing

and accompanying narrative as her response to my intentions of learning about her free play at home. The effects of her brother's accident extended beyond her play experiences at home and spilled over to her play experiences in the nursery as it repeatedly featured in her free play (see Box 6.3 and 6.5). Naomi verbally narrated the developments she made in her drawing by describing the hair she was illustrating as 'pizza'. In her narration, Naomi gradually shifted the purpose of the drawing from work related to the study to a get well soon picture for her brother. Naomi attached further meaning to the drawing by using it as prompt to recall playful interactions she shared with her brother at home that involved her brother farting on her belly with his mouth. Naomi's enquiry regarding whether I knew how to write her brother's name shows that she perceived me to differ from the practitioners in terms of my ability to spell.

In her mosaic session in March, Sophia located herself near Ms. Main at playtime as she observed her and listened to her conversation with another practitioner. Sophia's relationship with two girls-Lisa and Marianne in the nursery emerged as a developing theme in her free play during the mosaic sessions. In this particular session, Sophia utilised the resources that Ms. Main provided her for free play, to build rapport with Lisa and Marianne (see Box 6.4).

Box 6.4: Sophia utilised the drawing resources she obtained from Ms. Main's to build rapport with Lisa and Marianne.

Sophia stood in the hallway, observing and listening to Ms. Main who held the kitchen door open and engaged in conversation with another practitioner who was in the kitchen. Ms. Main looked at Sophia and asked 'want to do some drawing on the board'?

Sophia smiled and nodded to indicate that she agreed.

Ms. Main and Sophia walked over to Ms. Khan's carpet.

Ms. Main tore some flip chart paper from the board and placed them on the carpet for Sophia to draw on. While Sophia drew a rainbow, Marianne and Lisa joined in and sat around the paper. Ms. Main gave marker pens to Sophia, Lisa and Marianne. Sophia watched Marianne and Lisa draw. Sophia said to Lisa 'I'm using all of them now'.

Sophia handed one of her markers to Lisa. She tilted her head and said to Lisa 'I'm gonna keep the green one'. Sophia coloured and looked out the window from time to time. She rested her chin on her hand, leaning on the carpet with her elbow and said to Marianne, 'Marianne, I love drawing'.

I interpreted Sophia's act of locating herself near Ms. Main, observing her and listening to her conversation, as agentic choices made in relationship to space and activities. In this excerpt, Sophia's free play engagements show no direct references to the research. However, in addition to consenting at the start of the session, she showed awareness of my presence by looking at me from time to time.

The examination of Ms. Main's response to Sophia's observation provides insight into her approach as a practitioner to Sophia's free play choices. I interpreted Ms. Main's question to Sophia regarding whether she wanted to draw on the board as an adult intervention that disrupted Sophia's observation of the practitioners at playtime. One possible interpretation of Ms. Main's question is that she concluded that Sophia's observation needed to end as she did not perceive observation as a play activity; and suggested drawing as an appropriate alternative. Another possible interpretation is that Ms. Main assumed that Sophia was awaiting instructions or play suggestions from Ms. Main, and was silent as she did not want to interrupt the practitioners' conversation. The reasons behind Ms. Main's suggestion of drawing on the board, a resource that only practitioners accessed; and was not typically considered as a play resource for children, also remains unclear.

Marianne and Lisa joined Sophia's drawing activity without verbally seeking her permission or announcing their intentions to Sophia or Ms. Main. Sophia's acceptance of Marianne and Lisa in her drawing activity was visible in the way she offered the resources to them, and kept them informed of her intentions of keeping certain colours for herself while she shared the rest with them. In this instance, I interpreted Sophia's sharing of resources that she gained access to from Ms. Main, with Lisa and Marianne, as her way of capitalising her relationship with Ms. Main in an agentic manner to create

opportunities for interactions and developing her relationship with Marriane and Lisa. I interpreted her bodily gestures such as head tilt and smile, and resting her chin on her hand while leaning over her elbow on the carpet, as Sophia's ways of communicating to Marianne that she was being attentive towards her.

6.2.2.1. Developments in Naomi and Sophia's play over time and a discussion between them

Parallels can be drawn between Sophia's free play in January and in March in the way she accessed the practitioners' resources. In January, Sophia challenged the predominant free play culture and practices in the nursery that restricted children's access to practitioners' teaching resources. She was agentic in taking Ms. Smith's flashcard from her drawer, whereas in March the idea of accessing the board emanated from Ms. Main in response to Sophia's decision to engage in observation. Naomi's engagement in research in her first mosaic session paralleled her engagement in her third mosaic session in March, as she continued to verbally declare that she was doing the study and as she continued to ask questions relating to my work pertaining to the research, to make meaning of my researcher role. Naomi and Sophia's agency in relation to spaces in their play in March differed from their play in January. In contrast to her swift mobility between the various spaces within the nursery in January, Naomi showed agency in March by locating us on Ms. Khan's carpet. Naomi remained on Ms. Khan's carpet for the rest of the session as she immersed herself in drawing. In contrast, Sophia chose to sit on Ms. Smith's carpet in her first mosaic session and in March she stood in the hallway. The latter was not designated for play purposes but was accessed only as a temporary pathway between the two sides of the nursery. In both their play sessions in March, Sophia and Naomi sought adult attention in different ways. While Naomi informed Ms. Khan of her intentions to engage in the research task, Sophia silently observed the practitioners and later engaged in a drawing activity that was suggested by Ms. Main. Naomi directed me in January and March. Unlike in the excerpt from her first session where Sophia informed me of her intentions, in the play instance in March, Sophia did not engage in verbal communication with me as her interactions were limited to Lisa and Marianne during the drawing activity. Naomi's data from January and March show the developments in

the nature of her peer and adult-child interactions. In January, her work involved directing me along with other children in the nursery. Naomi's drawing in March involved a more prolonged engagement with me as she narrated to me, the meaning she attached to the image she created of her brother. The excerpt of Sophia's play from January shows that her verbal communication was limited to informing me of her intentions while she refrained from interacting with the children who attempted to join her play. In March, developments emerged in Sophia's play as she shared her play resources with Marianne and Lisa who joined her without seeking permission to enter her play. Sophia's behaviour with Marianne and Lisa contrasted with her reaction to the children's unannounced intrusion in her play in the first mosaic session, where Sophia retreated from activities to avoid confronting her peers to sustain her solitary play; or engage in interactions to change her play from solitary to parallel or collaborative play with the new children on the carpet. Parallels can be drawn between Sophia and Naomi's choices to engage in drawing activities in March. Differences relate to the way Sophia's drawing was suggested and facilitated by a practitioner, whereas Naomi initiated her drawing activity as she paralleled my work related to the study using my pen and notebook. The accompanying talk documented with both Naomi and Sophia's drawings differed, as Sophia announced her intentions relating to the resources to build rapport with Lisa and Marianne, whereas Naomi narrated to me the meanings she attached to her drawing in order to provide insight into her play experiences at home involving her brother. Both Sophia and Naomi narrated their actions while drawing. While Sophia focused on the colours she used, Naomi described the hair she drew on her brother's head. While Naomi extended the drawing activity by using it as prompt to provide me with insight into her past playful experiences that she shared with her brother, Sophia communicated her love for drawing to Marianne.

6.2.3. June

In June, Naomi used her meet box that she brought to the nursery for show and tell, to provide insight into her free play at home. Earlier in the day, she engaged in the meaning-making task involving her photos relating to her play at home and in the nursery with Ms. Smith. By initiating revisitation of the activity with me at playtime, Naomi was agentic in maintaining continuity

in the meaning-making task. In her talk accompanying the selection of the photos, Naomi contextualised the events that her photographs represented in terms of people, resources, places, feeling, activities, and intentions. While meaning-making, Naomi simultaneously stepped in and out of pretend play mode (see Box 6.5).

Box 6.5: Naomi allowed me to take a peek into her meet box and initiated the meaning-making activity.

Naomi: Come, let's show you my meet box. I'll let you take a peek.

We walked over to the home box and Naomi pulled out a small cardboard box. She partially lifted one side of the lid and pulled out an orange tambourine.

Naomi: This is a tambourine of mine.

As I stretched my arm out to reach the tambourine, Naomi stopped me by touching my hand.

Naomi: No! you can't touch it now. You can stand next to Ms. Patmore at home time and watch.

Naomi conducted a meaning-making session with Ms. Smith earlier in the day. They discussed the photographs and drawings that Naomi collected during her research journey.

Naomi said to me: I want to talk about my photos.

We sat in front of the computer in the nursery and accessed her folder.

Naomi used the cursor to select the photos.



Naomi: That's me and Amy playing teacher. Next!



These are my cousins. Guess why I was so happy!

Researcher: Because someone was tickling you?

Naomi (shook her head): Cuz someone said something funny. Guess!

Researcher: I give up.

Naomi shook her head, pursed her lips and without looking away from the screen to face me, gently waved her hand at me.

Naomi: You'll never get it. It's so hard. Knock knock jokes with cousins.

Naomi gasped: Can you do the next one? Cuz I'm properly busy.

Naomi pulled a mobile phone out of her purse.

Naomi: Oh no! zero percent charge on my phone!

Without waiting for me to click, Naomi selected the next photo.



Naomi: That's my brother. He annoys me so much.

Two non-participants, Breagh and Angelina came over to look at the screen.

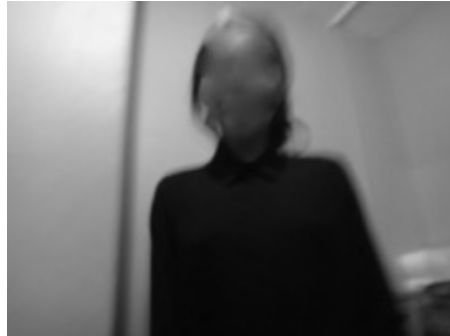


Naomi said to them: That's my daddy playing ball (chuckles). Would you like to touch my passport? (she opened her purse and pulled out her passport for them to touch while she held on to it). We made it to go on holiday.

Naomi: That's my brother in the hospital. He looks like a pizza (chuckles).

Another non-participant Gabrielle also joined us. She asked Naomi if she made the drawing at home or in the nursery.

Naomi: In school. When I was doing the study with Yaspia.



Naomi (in a strict tone): That's Tina, I was going to catch her for taking my picture! (she wagged her index finger up and down and up).

As Naomi invited me to peek into her meet box, she contextualised her play at home in terms of resources by showing me her tambourine. By stopping me from touching her tambourine verbally and with her hand movement, Naomi embodied her sense of control over my ability to access the contents of her meet box . She communicated to me that she was in a position to decide when I would be able to see her meet box and where I would be physically positioned at the time. Naomi's act of denying me access and agreeing to let me watch at a later time showed that she differentiated me from the practitioners who did not require the children's permission to access materials stored in the home boxes. The nursery 'doxas' related to accessing the home box required the children to seek the practitioners' permission, and to wait for items to be returned to the children at home time. It is possible that Naomi created parallels between the dynamics in the prevalent practitioner-child relationships and her relationship with me. She may have emulated the practitioners by assuming the superior position in our researcher-child relationship, as she controlled my access to the meet box .

In my interpretation of Naomi's choice to engage in meaning-making of her photographs as free play activity, I considered the impact of contextual factors such as adults' agenda; her previous experiences; and the physical

and social environment within which the meaning-making took place. A possible interpretation of Naomi's decision to initiate talk regarding her photos with me during play time is that she intended to parallel her meaning-making experience with Ms. Smith from earlier in the day. Naomi was agentic in using the research space to maintain continuity in her engagement in the meaning-making activity as she revisited it with me. As Naomi browsed through her photos, she showed agency in her selection of materials to comment on. Her approach of swiftly clicking through photos, announcing what they represented or what was happening at the time the photographs were taken without pause and declaring that she was moving on to the next photo of her choice, communicated that she assumed control of the task and our researcher-child interaction. As part of my reflexive practice, I refrained from interrupting Naomi with questions and only responded when she instructed me to 'guess' what specific photos represented. Reflecting within moments of delivering my response that Naomi appeared happy in the photo because someone was tickling her, I took into account the implications that sharing my adult interpretation could have on what Naomi would say next. I considered the possibility that Naomi may have instructed me to guess because she wanted me to ask 'what', so that she could share with me information regarding the photograph, that she was eager to reveal. I adjusted to my response to her next instruction for me to make a guess. I was cognizant of Naomi's intention to include me by assigning me a task in the meaning-making activity and did not want to reject her invitation by informing her that I would not guess the answer as my aim was to gain insight into her interpretation. By saying 'I give up' I intended to maintain the open-endedness of the photograph instead of attaching my own interpretation to it, and at the same time communicate to her that I was actively taking part in the task as she instructed. Naomi accepted that I failed to form an opinion. I interpreted her facial expression of pursing her lips, shaking of her head, and gesturing with her hand that accompanied her acknowledgement of the challenging nature of the task of estimating the correct answer, as her way of embodying a particular attitude towards me. Rather than a consolatory purpose, I interpreted her response as emphatically drawing my attention to her conclusion that I was incapable of guessing the answer.

While meaning-making, Naomi simultaneously shifted to pretend play mode as she delegated the task of 'doing the next one' to me because she was 'properly busy' checking the battery on her phone. As she invited the other children to touch her passport in her purse, Naomi allowed them access to her symbolic play of using a shiny red square pot holder to represent her passport that she intended to use to go on holiday. Although Naomi transitioned into pretend mode from time to time, meanings she attached to the photographs and her instructions to me to 'do the next one' showed that she continued to relate to the research task.

The meanings Naomi attached to the photographs provided insight into how she recalled her play experiences. The image that Naomi described as 'playing teacher with Amy' was taken in February when Naomi instructed me to photograph their play. After completing a writing task with Ms. Patmore, Naomi walked over to Amy who sat at the art table. As Amy turned the pages of a book, Naomi pointed at the images in the book and asked questions with an air of authority, assessing Amy's knowledge of colours and numbers (see Box 6.6).

Box 6.6: Naomi 'played teacher' with Amy.

Naomi: Amy, what colour is this?

Amy's answer was correct. Amy began reading the numbers that were in the book aloud.

Naomi: No.1,2,3.

She pointed with her finger and asked 'what is this one?' (Naomi raised her voice as she pointed at the picture in the book and sounded assertive).

Amy remained quiet, as she slightly lowered her head. With a subtle smirk, Amy placed the tip of her index finger into one corner of her mouth to indicate that she was embarrassed.

Naomi: What colour is this?

Amy: Purple.

Naomi: Good!

Naomi ran her index finger along the drawings as she said 'curly whirly twisty swirly upside down round and round'.

Amy followed with her finger.

Naomi: You did the “z” wrong. Let me show you how it’s done. Let me show you inside it. Just look (Naomi air wrote ‘z’ with her finger over the letter ‘z’ that was already printed in the book).

Amy was flipping through the pages of a book at the table. Naomi joined Amy without seeking her permission or making a verbal announcement. Naomi instantaneously used an assertive tone and her bodily gestures of pointing to the pages in the book, to initiate play. Amy’s acceptance of Naomi’s directive role was visible in the way she played along, as she complied with Naomi’s instructions. Their play revealed that Naomi assumed a superior position of power in their relationship and communicated it through her embodiment of the role of a practitioner. I interpreted their play to have a representational purpose and aspect to it. Through her behaviour with Amy, Naomi may have attempted to recreate a parallel experience in her free play that resembled the structured writing task that she completed with Ms. Patmore moments earlier. Therefore, Naomi’s activity with Ms. Patmore may have been one of the several contextual factors that affected Naomi’s play choices in this instance. Amy, who was familiar with the language used by the practitioners, showed in her conduct to have perceived Naomi’s intentions of assuming the role of a practitioner and reciprocated by assuming the role of a student. There was no clear demarcation between reality and pretence in this scenario, due to the resources that were being used (such as a book and the table where assessments were usually conducted); and as no roles were announced. I deduced this based on my observation of the power dynamics in their interactions where Naomi led and Amy responded to the aspects that Naomi added to the play through her directions. The subtle exaggeration in their gestures indicated that they had entered into play mode. For instance, Amy’s guilty facial expressions and Naomi’s varying pitch of voice while she pretended to be a practitioner, were indicators that play was underway. It was difficult to interpret whether Amy’s mistakes were intentional. Her subtle smirks indicated that Amy was not truly frightened of Naomi or embarrassed of her mistakes. Through their responses to one another, Naomi and Amy showed that they comprehended each other’s actions. Amy showed an understanding of the language that Naomi used to reaffirm her, as it was similar to the language that was used by the practitioners. Amy played child

in the nursery, but it was unclear if she played herself. This instance provides insight into Naomi's play culture and practice that was impacted by my presence in her free play.

During her meaning-making earlier in the day with Ms. Smith, Naomi informed that she photographed her cousins and her father during her visit to her cousin's house. In her talk accompanying the browsing of the photos, at playtime later in the day, Naomi provided a picture of the experience she shared with other people during the visit. This experience included her observations of her father playing football on a video game console, and her conversation with her cousins that involved knock knock jokes. Through her tone and finger wagging, when referring to catching Tina for photographing her, Naomi communicated through her 'bodily hexis' her intention to reprimand Tina. Naomi provided insight into the experience of using the camera by describing the dynamics of her interactions with her cousins. I interpreted Naomi's brother's visit to the hospital as a significant event that impacted her play experiences at home and in the nursery as it recurred as a theme at the various stages of her research journey.

In June, Sophia directed me to take part in her play, and used her position within the research to include Marianne in her pretend child-conference (see Box 6.7).

Box 6.7: Sophia showed agency in the way she ensured that Marianne was included in her pretend child-conference.

When Sophia consented to taking part in the mosaic session by drawing a smiley in the yes column, she agreed to inform me when she wanted to answer the child-conference questions.

Sophia said to me: We're going to the house.

Marianne (who was already with Sophia before I approach her to take part in the session) and I followed her to the home corner. Instead of walking in through the larger opening between the kitchen walls, Sophia opened the kitchen door to enter while we followed her. As soon as we arrived, Marianne suggested heading over to Ms. Khan's carpet to checkout the costumes.

Sophia shook her head to indicate that she agreed and followed Marianne.

I followed them to Ms. Khan's carpet, where Sophia and Marianne looked through the costumes.

Sophia said to me: You can wear one.

We held up one of the costumes against me.

Researcher: I don't think this will fit.

Sophia: Ms. Smith can help you.

Researcher: I think all the costumes are too small for me. Why don't you pick one?

Sophia tried to wear the Elsa costume which did not fit her.

Sophia said to me: You pick for me.

I chose Belle's costume. Sophia dressed as Belle, smiled at me tilting her head as she gently twirled; and Marianne chose to dress as Snow-white.

Sophia walked back towards the kitchen in the costume and Marianne and I followed. They returned to the kitchen through the door and we sat at the table.

Sophia looked around and said: mmm. We can do questions!

Researcher: What do you like about playtime in the nursery?

Sophia: Cars.

Marianne fetched a vegetable puzzle from the kitchen counter and brought it back to the table.

Researcher: What do you not like about playtime in the nursery?

Sophia: I like everything.

Sophia pretended to take bites from pieces of the puzzle set, looked at me and said 'I'm eating a cake', 'I'm eating a pancake', 'I'm eating a cookie'.

Marianne repeated after her. Sophia wrinkled her nose and said 'we're eating yucky food'. Marianne copied Sophia's facial expression.

Researcher: Who do you like playing with in the nursery?

Sophia: Marianne and Lisa.

Research: Why do you like playing with them?

Sophia: Because I like them.

Researcher: What do grownups in the nursery do at playtime?

Sophia: They write about kids.

She pointed at Marianne and said, 'it's Marianne's turn to talk to you'.

I reminded Sophia that we could stop at any time and that I would be happy to leave her to play with Marianne. Sophia replied 'no stay'.

She then pointed at Marianne and said 'ask Marianne'. I followed her direction and after consenting verbally, Marianne in a playful spirit entered the pretend research and answered some child-conference questions. Sophia answered the questions after Marianne. The influence of Marianne's answers on Sophia's following replies to my questions is visible in the way Sophia repeated aspects of Marianne's answers and at times said 'me too'. For ethical reasons, only Sophia's answers are presented below.

I asked Marianne: What do you like about playtime at home?

Marianne:

Sophia: I like my mummy and daddy.

Marianne:

Sophia: My daddy hugs me too!

Sophia then asked Marianne: But what does your daddy play? My daddy plays badminton with his friends and football with his friends. He plays badminton with me! And let me tell you about my mummy too. Mummy takes care of kids and plays badminton with friends. She plays badminton with me. Yeah yesterday I played with my daddy at his work.

Marianne:

Sophia: And then my daddy says breakfast time!

The findings in this vignette contextualise Sophia's play in the nursery in terms of activities such as pretend eating and dressing up, play resources such as cars, food puzzles and costumes, people such as Lisa and Marianne that Sophia identified as the children she liked to play with in the nursery, and spaces within the nursery such as the home corner and Ms. Khan's carpet where the costumes were displayed. In relation to her play at home, Sophia discussed experiences such as having played badminton with her parents; and playing with her father when she visited his workplace.

Sophia was agentic in the way she relocated between the spaces in the nursery and announced her intentions to me as she said 'we're going to the house'. I interpreted Sophia's reference to the home corner with the kitchen setup as house, as an indication that she entered into pretend play mode. This interpretation was reinforced when Sophia appeared to stay within the pretend mode by choosing to walk around and enter the 'house' through the

doorway into the kitchen, instead of the larger gap between the walls of the home corner that was on our way.

Sophia and Marianne's play provided insight into the dynamics of their peer relationship. Their play is conceptualised using Bourdieu's 'field', to examine the dynamics of their interactions. The decisions regarding their shared play experience were not arrived at through negotiations as Sophia and Marianne did not express divergent positions regarding their play agenda. Sophia's leading role in her relationship with Marianne was visible in the way Marianne followed her into the kitchen without questioning her decision. Upon their arrival, Sophia's instantaneous acceptance of Marianne's suggested shifts in play by relocating to Ms. Khan's carpet, and changing the nature of their play from being in the house to exploring costumes, showed Sophia's willingness to incorporate Marianne's contributions into their shared play. Through her walk towards the home corner with no verbal announcements and her return to the kitchen using the door, Sophia was agentic in communicating her intentions to reclaim the role of directing play and returning to her previous play in the house. While she continued with the child-conference activity that she initiated with me, Sophia showed her acceptance of the new elements that were introduced in the play by Marianne, who non-verbally inserted vegetable puzzle pieces by bringing them to the table where Sophia was seated. Sophia extended Marianne's contribution to the play by eating the puzzle pieces, using them to represent different foods such as pancakes and cookies, and adding descriptions such as 'yucky' to their taste. With a shift from 'I am' to 'we're' in her simultaneous narration, Sophia showed that she accepted Marianne's wish to emulate her act of eating pancakes and cookies, and communicated that she included Marianne in her experience of 'eating yucky food'. I interpreted Sophia's instruction to me to ask Marianne the child-conferencing questions, as her conversion of her position in the research into her cultural capital to include Marianne in the research activity. In my analysis, I considered Marianne's presence and answers as contextual factor that impacted Sophia's references to experiences with her daddy such as hugs and daddy saying 'breakfast time'. The parallels in their answers highlight the complexities that demanded consideration when making meaning of Sophia's references to the play experiences shared with daddy, during her child-conference in Marianne's presence (Einarsdottir et al., 2009; and Coates, 2002). A

possible interpretation of Sophia's question to Marianne about what her daddy plays, is that she may have intended to emulate me and create parallels between our researcher-child interactions and her interaction with Marianne within the pretend child-conference. Sophia asked Marianne questions that were similar to the ones I asked her relating to her play experiences with her daddy at home.

Sophia interacted with me from time to time, to keep me informed of her play intentions in relation to space, resources and activities. I interpreted Sophia's announcement that she was going to the house; eating pancakes, cookies and yucky food; and intention to engage in the child-conference, as her awareness of my presence in her play experience and of her understanding of my intentions to learn about her play. By inviting me to wear one of the costumes, Sophia showed agency in including me in her play with Marianne. I interpreted her invitation and her suggestion that Ms. Smith might be able to help me fit into one of the costumes, as an indication that Sophia perceived my researcher role to differ from those of the practitioners in terms of nature of my adult involvement in children's free play. This suggestion is based on my knowledge that the practitioners' role was limited to facilitating children's play by providing resources such as costumes within the provision and assisting children in utilising those resources in play; and that practitioners engaging in play by wearing costumes was not part of the nursery culture and practice. Sophia's bodily gestures such as a head tilt, smile and twirl communicated that she was satisfied with my selection of the costume for her. I considered the possibility that Sophia wished to terminate the session by redirecting my attention to Marianne, when she stated that it was Marianne's turn to talk to me. As part of my ethical commitments, I maintained awareness of signs of dissent during the mosaic sessions. In my response, I reminded her that we could stop the child-conference and resume at a later day and time of her choice. Sophia's instruction to me to stay was reassurance that she wanted to continue with the mosaic activity. As Sophia directed me to ask the conference questions to Marianne, her intentions of including Marianne in pretend research became clear to me. I interpreted this instance as Sophia's awareness of the affordances available to her within the research process. Instead of requesting that Marianne be included in the activity as would have been required with a practitioner in the nursery, Sophia instructed me to ask Marianne the child-conference

questions. The assertive nature of her direction to me reveals Sophia's awareness of her right to determine the agenda for the mosaic activities, and that she was in a position of power in our researcher-child relationship that enabled her to make such decisions without seeking my permission.

Sophia's inclusion of Marianne was an ethically complex moment. In my analysis, Sophia's interactions with Marianne were focused on as meaningful data instead of focusing on my interactions with Marianne. With a child-centred research focus, I followed Sophia's intention to playfully engage Marianne in research, where Marianne replied in a playful spirit. Sophia's questions to Marianne about daddy showed that she was playing with the idea of the research space; a space that Marianne joined in response to Sophia's intentions without an invitation from me. This was an illustrative example of the situated ethics encountered in the child-centric research, where the presence and interactions of non-participants (recorded with their consent) was considered as a contextual factors that impacted participants' engagement in play and the research, without directly analysing their engagement as part of the research data.

To be child-centric in my approach. I followed Sophia's instruction and chose a dress for her. However, reflexive practice during the analysis led to the realisation that redirecting the task of choosing back to her would have been a more child-centric response. By choosing the dress, I influenced Sophia's subsequent play. A possible interpretation is that my selection constricted her agency as it reduced the scope of what she could have communicated through her choice of the costume. This instance reveals the complex nature of the experience of practising ongoing reflexivity, and its interactional nature that required me to respond to the children's actions, choices and directions within moments. Reflexivity during the analysis and the write-up revealed that not all my responses were perfect and consistent, and there were moments such as this where I now feel I should have responded differently. Even within the six months of data collection, reflecting on my responses in recent encounters were learning experiences that led to developments in my position in the research.

6.2.3.1. Developments in Naomi and Sophia's play over time and a discussion between them

A discussion between Naomi and Sophia's free play in the final stages of their research reveals the consistencies and developments over time in their individual agency in relation to space, resources and relationships; and reveals the parallels and relationships between the developments in their two research journeys. In the final stages of the research, Naomi continued to overtly relate to the research task, and showed agency in our research-child relationship by directing me and initiating the meaning-making task to reflect on the materials that she generated over the course of the project both within and outside the nursery. Naomi's engagement in the research was the dominant form of free play activity that she engaged in, in my presence. In comparison to the findings relating to Sophia's play from January and March during which she did not make overt references to the research, in June Sophia expressed her intention to complete the child-conference questions and showed an increased awareness of my presence as she kept me informed of her intentions and the developments in her play. The developments in our researcher-child relationship were visible in Sophia's inclusion of me in her play by suggesting that I try on one of the costumes. Both Naomi and Sophia provided insight into their play culture and practice in the nursery and at home. The nature and level of their sharing and being involved in the research emerged as a theme in this chapter. Naomi used photographs and drawings to reflect on her play experiences shared with people such as her brother, father and cousins in various places such as a hospital and her cousin's house. Sophia provided insight into her play culture and practices by displaying her play in the nursery play-kitchen and by answering the child-conference questions. An examination of their play from the three stages of the research reveals that, the amount of time Naomi spent engaging in play with other children diminished with time as she immersed in research related activities with me. While Sophia's play in January and March reveals the development in her play preference from solitary play to shared experiences with peers, in June Sophia's play shows the nature of the developments in her relationship with Marianne. Sophia and Marianne engaged in bi-directional verbal communication during the pretend child-conference. In contrast to using the resources obtained from Ms. Main in March, Sophia capitalised her role in

the research when she directed me to include Marianne in pretend research in June. Both Naomi and Sophia provided insight into their play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery in June in terms of people, play activities, resources, and places.

6.2.4. The discussion of the analysis with the literature

The discussion of the analysis with the literature (such as Chesworth, 2016; Hedges et al., 2011; Hedges, 2015; and Wood, 2014) informed my approach to making-meaning of the children's choices and what they communicated through their free play during the mosaic sessions. Wood (2014) calls for the need to recognise children's diverse ways of exercising agency in free play, while Chesworth (2016); Hedges et al. (2011); and Hedges (2015) emphasise the need to recognise how children's interests that shape their play choices, emanate out of their everyday experiences. Sophia paralleled Wood's (2014) argument that children's agency is expressed as they 'invent ways of challenging rules' (p.10), as she tested the established boundaries in the nursery by accessing materials beyond the play provision, such as the practitioners' resources allocated for structured time. Similarly, Naomi capitalised her role in the research to challenge rules relating to the sharing of play resources as she monopolised the camera. Wood (2014) argues that the children in her study fulfilled their intentions of 'boundary maintenance' 'specifically using subterfuge' as they 'challenge(d) the adults' boundaries' and devised their own rules (p.11). In her first mosaic session, Sophia related to the rules in the nursery culture in a complex manner. Although initially she challenged boundaries by accessing Ms. Smith's resources that were not intended for play purposes, Sophia's maintenance of boundaries set by the rules in the nursery culture was visible in the way she later restricted other the children from accessing Ms. Smith's flashcard by putting it back in the drawer. In contrast to challenging adults, in this instance Sophia challenged her peers as she anticipated their interest in joining her exploration of the flashcard. In providing partial access to her meet box consisting of materials that represented her play at home, Naomi paralleled Wood's (2014) observation of children 'allow(ed)ing' peers 'partial involvement' in play (p.12). However, in contrast to such attitudes in children's towards their peers revealed in Wood's (2014) research, Naomi intended for such rules regarding partial access to be applied to me. The

children in Wood's (2014) study 'chose to sometimes exclude themselves from play' by 'not look(ing) at' children who invited them to play, and by 'remain(ed)ing silent'. In a similar manner, Sophia communicated to her peers non-verbally through her body language by removing herself from Ms. Smith's chair, that she wanted to continue her solitary engagement in her chosen activities. Wood's (2014) interpretation that 'free choice' was 'exercised' by children who withdrew from or declined invitations to join shared play with peers, informed my approach to interpreting Sophia's silent observation of her peers' play and listening to the practitioners' conversation, as her agency exercised in relation to space, activities, and relationship with peers, practitioners and the researcher (p.14). Chesworth (2016) draws on Hedges et al. (2011); and Hedges (2015) work bring to attention the limitations of 'pedagogical practices' being solely 'informed by developmental psychology' and calls for consideration of how children's 'interests are situated within the sociocultural practices of the home, classroom and community' (p.295). Parallels can be drawn between Chesworth's (2016) location of their study 'within sociocultural theory' and its recognition that children's interests emerge from their everyday practices at home and in the nursery and the findings in my research. My analysis of Naomi's play with Amy (see Box 6.6) considers Naomi's engagement in a structured task with Ms. Patmore experienced moments earlier, as a possible contextual factor that may have shaped her initiation and execution of 'playing teacher' with Amy. Similar to children's 'marginalisation and exclusion'; and 'sophisticated strategies for inclusion' observed in Chesworth's (2016) study, Naomi and Sophia were agentic in utilising strategies to include and exclude children in their activities during free play (p.305). Naomi's exclusion of Clara (Box 6.1) from the research led me to critically reflect on the nature of agency that the research promoted in Naomi; and the consequent impact of her research on Clara's agency during free play. In June, as Sophia showed an increased awareness of my presence and related to the research activities more overtly than in excerpts from January and March, she used her role in the research strategically to include Marianne in pretend research.

This section examined Naomi and Sophia's mosaic pieces generated during free play in January, March and June to show parallels in each child's play across the sessions; and the developments in relationships and play themes

over time. A discussion between the analysis of Naomi and Sophia's mosaic pieces showed the individuality of each child's play journey; and the relationships between them.

6.3. Parent's perspectives of their children's play

In this section an examination of the data from Noah (Naomi's father) and Sarah's (Sophia's mother) interviews, reveals how Noah and Sarah perceived their children's free play in relation to contextual factors such as physical and social play environments at home. The analysis also reveals how they made meaning of the relationship between the developments they observed over time in their children's play and their perception of play experiences in the nursery. A discussion is created between the parents' perceptions and the mosaic pieces generated by their children through free play in the nursery, to reveal the layers of meanings of play that represent the multiple standpoints. A discussion is also created to show the parallels and differences between parents' interpretation of Naomi and Sophia's free play, to provide an understanding of the parents' individual approaches to making meaning of and responding to their children's play.

Noah discussed the impact of changes over time in the contextual factors such as Naomi's social play environment on her agency in associating with play resources (see Box 6.8).

Box 6.8: Noah provided insight into his perception of Naomi's physical and social play environment at home.

Noah: well um her brother is eleven years old and whatever he does, she wants to do. He's watching ipad. She won't say, ok whatever you're watching. I'll watch. So she's her first choice. She likes being picky on anything. Basically it's a, the decision, my daughter and my son, they make the decision. But when the (childminding) kids are around, so my wife says, ok you're only allowed to play in this room now or you're only allowed to play certain amount of toys, so don't take all the toys out. My wife is busy because she's the main childminder. So she initiates in a way, you have to do this and that. She's, in the past she used to be jealous sometimes I admit. She would hesitate to share with other kids. Now she's ok. Very good.

Especially with some kids she's very friendly, very like open to any toys. She thinks every toy in our house is hers, but it's not actually. Now it's changing. So she is learning to share.

Researcher: What do you think is changing?

Noah: Her, I think because she is getting used to. Now, last two years, she's had about ten different childminding mates, friends similar age, whereas when we started there was none. Was only she and her older brother. She wasn't used to sharing I guess. Now she's used to sharing at home.

Noah differentiated Naomi's playtime experiences at home into two categories: one that involved sharing her play space and resources with her sibling; while the other included additional children that their parents were childminders to. Noah perceived the nature of the former to be determined by Naomi and her brother; while the latter was shaped by directions from Naomi's mother in terms of the spaces and the nature and amount of play resources that Naomi and her childminding play companions had access to. He communicated that during these play experiences, Naomi's mother's was in a higher position of power in her adult-child relationship with Naomi, and that Naomi was required to follow the 'doxas' that her mother established in her role as a childminder (Bourdieu, 1990). Noah's perception reveals that within the 'field' of Naomi's play at home, how 'doxas' 'thickened' and 'thinned' her agency to access spaces and resources during play, varied with the presence and absence of the children that her parents were childminders to (Bourdieu, 1990; and Klocker, 2007). Although Noah perceived Naomi to parallel her brother's choices by imitating his use of the ipad during their shared play experiences, he recognised Naomi's agency within those parallels as she determined the nature of material they watched on the ipad instead of accepting her brother's choices. Noah contextualised Naomi's play culture and practices at home in terms of the adults' changing roles, that resulted in the presence and absence of other children at various times in Naomi's home play environment. Such changes consequently impacted Naomi's play experiences.

Noah differentiated Naomi's current play dispositions from the behaviour she displayed in her play two years ago. Based on his observations, Noah perceived Naomi to have been agentic in claiming ownership of all the toys available at home in the past. However he indicated that he did not regard

such agency to be desirable as they were based on inaccurate assumptions. Noah elucidated this stance as he revealed the complex nature of the circumstances within which Naomi played at home. Noah considered the role of toys in Naomi's home to extend beyond shaping Naomi's play, and serve the purpose of constituting the provision suitable for the children that Noah and Naomi's mother were childminders to. He expected Naomi to discern between access and ownership, and show in her play behaviour an awareness that she had opportunities for shared use without having the license to limit other children's access to play resources by claiming exclusive rights to them. Noah shared his observation of a shift in Naomi's attitude from her behaviour two years ago, as he perceived her to have become more well disposed towards the concept of sharing play resources. He noted Naomi's tendency to share to vary in relation to the individual children she engaged in play with. Conceptualising Noah's interpretation of the developments in Naomi's play behaviour using Bourdieu's (1990) 'habitus', provides a way to make meaning of his understanding of the 'transposable dispositions' within Naomi's individual play habitus that he perceived to have shifted as a result of the changing social context at home (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53). According to Noah, such changes in social contexts occurred as with time, in addition to play experiences involving her older sibling, Naomi engaged in play more frequently with other children of similar age that her parents shared a professional relationship with. Noah's perception reveals that in his approach to making provision for free play at home, he intended to enculturate Naomi into practising sharing.

Naomi's play with her brother and the concept of sharing emerged as common themes across Noah's perception and Naomi's mosaic piece from January when she refused to share her camera with her peers, and from March and June when she referred to her brother in her drawing and meaning-making activity. While Naomi in her drawing and meaning-making informed me of her brother's recent accident and playful experiences she shared with him that involved him farting on her stomach with his mouth, Noah described watching on the ipad as a playtime activity that Naomi shared with her brother at home. Noah shared his views on the dynamics between the siblings, and how he interpreted Naomi's agency in her attempts to determine the nature of play activities she shared with her brother. Noah's interpretation of Naomi's reluctance to share play resources

at home in the past, paralleled my observation of Naomi's attitude in January when she refused to share the camera and communicated to Clara that her play was excluded from my observation notes.

Sarah contextualised Sophia's play at home in terms of space and resources. She provided insight into her role within Sophia's play culture and practice at home, and how she interpreted Sophia's agency in play (see Box 6.9).

Box 6.9: Sarah provided insight into her perception of Sophia's physical and social play environment at home.

Sarah: So she has a bedroom, where she's got most of her toys and then we've got the dining room where she's got her kitchen. So she's got quite a big kitchen set up; and then she's got little bits and pieces of toys in the living room. So she'll transfer some of the toys from the dining room into the living room. We've got an adjacent door. But mainly it's in the bedroom. Um yeah. So she does her research. She watches a lot of youtube videos. She'll watch a lot of adverts; and then she will tell us the ins and outs of that toy; and we'll go to the shop and she will pick it out. She'll tell us how it's used. How you play it. What you play it with. Um and then we buy it. So if I'm, if it's just me and her, then I tend to try and play with her as I'm doing house chores. So I will, she loves playdough. So I'll set her up with playdough. Then I'll go off and do a little bit of housework and then I'll come back and she will be, she'll show me what she's made; and then we make something together and then we go off. She... very rarely plays by herself. She's got this, I don't wanna call it fear. But right now she's going through this phase where if I'm not in the same room as her, she'll follow me around. So if I'm in the kitchen, then she'll bring all her toys and she'll sit near the passage, near the kitchen and she'll sit and play and watch me. She dislikes people in her space. She will decide when and where and how she likes to play. If you've put something a certain way or you've picked up a toy a certain way then she could get angry and lose interest in that game very quickly and leave. She likes to line up her toys, and they've gotta be done in a Sophia order and if you take something out, that's meant to be in a certain order by Sophia, then she'll, she doesn't.. doesn't express herself.

Sarah contextualised Sophia's play at home in relation to resources such as her play kitchen set, ipad and playdough; and spaces such as her bedroom, the living room, kitchen and passageway; and her own role in Sophia's play. Sarah's perception reveals that she conceptualised Sophia's agency in relationship to space, emotions, objects and relationships. Sarah's perception reveals that she considered the aspect of mobility in her provision for Sophia's play at home, to thicken Sophia's agency as it enabled Sophia to maintain continuity in her play by physically relocating resources without terminating and/or changing the nature of her play. As Sarah provided insight into the cultures and practices of acquiring new play resources at home, she presented Sophia's agency in terms of being able to act independently on knowledge and in taking initiative in demonstrating that knowledge while creating play related relationships with her parents.

Sarah shared that in her agenda for play culture and practices at home, she responded to contextual factors such as Sophia's current play interests (for example: Sophia's love for playdough); and play behaviour Sophia displayed at the time (for example: Sarah referred to Sophia 'going through a phase'). Sarah's perception reveals that she positioned herself in an important role in facilitating Sophia's play. She described her involvement in the form of her presence and absence in Sophia's play, how she related to the objects that Sophia played with, and how her involvement shifted between that of an onlooker and a play partner in their cooperative constructive play as they made things together.

Sarah ruminated on her understanding of the shifts in Sophia's behaviour through a framework that focused on Sophia's emotions, and provided insight into the patterns of Sarah's own observations. Sarah did not consider Sophia's emotions expressed in response to the interruptions to her play, to simply be impulsive reactions to changing contexts. She claimed that such expressions of emotions were habitual responses displayed over time and constituted a larger framework for her behaviour that demotivated her and led her to withdraw from her play. She categorised such patterns in Sophia's responses to particular stimuli such as 'you've put something a certain way or you've picked up a toy a certain way'. Sarah perceived Sophia's play dispositions that constituted her habitus to have changed over time as at the

time of the interview she reported that Sophia was 'going through a phase' of needing Sarah's presence during play at home. Sarah expressed cognizance of the ambiguity in her own understanding of the driving factor behind Sophia's tendency to seek adult attention. I interpreted Sarah's statement 'I don't wanna call it fear', as her hesitation to accept her realisation that Sophia's play behaviour might be impacted by fear. Rather than considering Sophia's physical relocation of play to seek adult company as her agency expressed in relation to space and resources, Sarah interpreted fear to be the contextual factor that thinned Sophia's agency and limited her ability to engage in solitary play without requiring Sarah's presence. Sarah's identification of Sophia's withdrawal from play in response to intrusions as Sophia's inability or reluctance to 'express herself' reveals that Sarah perceived Sophia to lack agency in instances when Sophia's responses did not align with Sarah's perception of agency.

Parallels can be drawn between Sarah's perception that Sophia withdrew from play upon being interrupted and my observations of Sophia's exit from activities when her peers attempted to join her during free play in the nursery at the initial stages of the research (see Box 6.2). However, our interpretation of Sophia's agency in withdrawal varies as I interpreted Sophia's exit from the play as agentic non-verbal expression of agency, while Sarah interpreted such behaviour as a lack of Sophia's ability to 'express herself'. Furthermore, although Sophia showed a preference for solitary play in her first mosaic session, over time, she showed an increased willingness to incorporate input from others in her play. For instance, in March, she accepted Ms. Main's suggestion to engage in a drawing activity; and welcomed Marianne and Lisa's unannounced entrance into her ongoing activity. In June, when Marianne interjected Sophia's play in the kitchen by suggesting they relocate to Ms. Khan's carpet to explore the costumes, Sophia complied by following Marianne. In the same session, Sophia extended Marianne's play by pretending to eat the puzzle pieces that Marianne inserted into their play without verbal announcements. The parallels between Sarah's perception and the mosaic sessions generated during free play in the nursery relate to Sophia's observations of others (such as Ms. Main and her peers) in the nursery, and (her mum) at home as an onlooker.

Noah provided insight into how he perceived the play culture and practices in the nursery to impact Naomi's habitus that shaped her play behaviour at home (see Box 6.10).

Box 6.10: Noah provided insight into his perception of the developments in Naomi's play behaviour since she started coming to the nursery.

Noah: She's sh' very much I think she's learnt sharing because of the nursery. Yes definitely. Otherwise she was not very good at sharing. That's my main thing I would say that they've improved sharing. She didn't, she's more sharing now. And she's using the words, 'sharing is caring'. It's all from school, yeah I think so.

The data examined earlier (see Box 6.8) shows that Noah attributed the changes in Naomi's play dispositions such as openness to sharing her toys during play at home, to the changing social contexts at home that required her to grow accustomed to sharing her play space and resources with the children that her parents were childminders to. Upon further reflection, Noah communicated that he connected Naomi's experiences in the nursery to the developments in her play dispositions, as he attributed her increased willingness to share to the play culture and practices in the nursery. I interpreted Noah's use of "they" as reference to practitioners. He identified Naomi's use of language such as 'sharing is caring' as an aspect of Naomi's play at home that resembled the 'doxas' within the nursery culture that enforced rules of sharing. Noah interpreted such parallels as evidence of learnings that reflected how Naomi embodied aspects of her nursery play culture and incorporated them into her play at home. Noah's use of the word 'definitely' instead of a possible reason, indicated the level of certainty with which he accredited Naomi's nursery play experiences for the development in her dispositions that were manifested in her play at home.

Naomi's behaviour in the research (see Box 6.1) differed from Noah's perception that in her play at home Naomi showed developments in her play dispositions in terms of her increased willingness to share her play resources and spaces with other children. In January (Box 6.1) Naomi refused to share the camera and the space that her play occupied in my

observation notes, with the other children. Naomi verbally and through her physical gestures embodied the associations she made with the camera and my notebook as resources allocated for the research. A possible interpretation of her reluctance to share the camera and the space her play occupied in my notes is that, her reluctance to share may have been limited to her research engagement; and that Naomi may have shown openness to sharing during non-research related free play activities. However, the practitioners who were present in these instances did not indicate that Naomi's behaviour was considered to be disconcerting and calling for adult intervention. A lack of adult any intervention led me to interpret her reluctance to share as a common occurrence in Naomi's play in the nursery. As at others times practitioners did not appear reluctant to intervene in my presence, the notion that practitioners refrained from intervening in order to avoid interrupting our research, is an unlikely interpretation.

Sarah expressed her understanding of how Sophia's play experiences in the nursery shaped her dispositions that impacted her play at home (see Box 6.11).

Box 6.11: Sarah provided insight into her perception of the developments in Sophia's play behaviour since she started coming to the nursery.

Sarah: (Chuckled) Aside from the, aside from the fact that some of the words that she would use, I would class as ghetto. She would say, she would say like "blah" and I'd say "what does that mean"? She says "oh" that "kids say it". She would say sometimes "girlfriend" and I'd be like, "what does that mean"? She'll be like, "init girlfriend". (Chuckles) So those are the kinda, kinda things that I, it's funny, but sometimes I think it's a bit... and it's stuff that she's picked up from school, because it's stuff that she started saying when she started school. She, she can be a bit aggressive at times. I find that, I say that, but then when she's with kids her own age, she, they take a toy off her, she won't challenge them. Even if she's playing with it, she will just let it be. She will walk away from the situation rather than ask for it back. But if it's me and her father that's playing, she will snatch it back from us, or she will ask for it back. So that's something she picked up when she started school.

Sarah shared her perception of the developments in Sophia's play behaviour with emotional affect such as with chuckles and statements such as 'it's funny, but sometimes I think it's a bit...' to communicate her disapproval of them. Sarah expressed dissatisfaction with how she perceived Sophia's play dispositions to have evolved as she came into contact with the other children in the nursery. The changes in Sophia's language and play behaviour that Sarah articulated, indicated that she positioned Sophia in the system of social class in relation to her peers in the nursery; and perceived Sophia's individual play habitus to have internalised aspects of the habitus of the other children through their shared play encounters in the nursery. I interpreted Sarah's categorisation of these aspects that she perceived Sophia to embody in her language and play behaviour, as new attributes forming her 'transposable' habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, p.53). Sarah indicated that these new attributes were characteristic of habitus belonging to a social class that Sarah perceived to be beneath the one that was reflected in Sophia's cultures and practices acquired through her experiences at home before she joined the nursery. Sarah drew attention to how she made meaning of the developments in Sophia's emotional behaviour in her adult-child play interactions with her parents in which Sophia reacted to adults taking possession of her toys by either 'snatching' them back and/or 'asking' to have them back. Her identification of such behaviour as aggression shows that Sarah considered the nature of agency Sophia showed in adult-child play interactions at home to be problematic. Similar to how Sarah made meaning of Sophia's embodiment of newly internalised aspects of the play cultures that she encountered in the nursery that were manifested in her play language at home, she also presumed Sophia's changed behaviour with her parents during play to be a result of her play experiences in the nursery. According to Sarah, during these experiences, Sophia's play habitus encountered those of the other children and internalised aspects of those habitus; a process Bourdieu defines as 'unique integration' (Bourdieu, 1990). In contrast, in peer play interactions with other children arising out of similar play situations that involved maintaining possession of her toys, Sarah perceived Sophia to lack agency as she yielded without challenging the interruptions in her play and reacted in a manner that contradicted Sarah's agenda for Sophia. As Sarah reflected on her understanding, she indicated that she was cognizant of the contradictions in her answer, as she said 'I say

that, but then...' showing awareness that she differentiated between Sophia's agency in her reactions during adult-child and peer play interactions. Sarah communicated that she valued and sought different agentic reaction from Sophia in parent-child and peer play interactions. This reveals that Sarah's perception of Sophia's agency in play was complex. She provided insight into how she made meaning of Sophia's agency in relation to toys and spaces during play. Sarah shared how she perceived Sophia's agency to be thickened and thinned by contextual factors such as the presence and the actions of adults and other children.

A discussion between Sophia's mosaic sessions and Sarah's interview shows the parallels in Sophia's observation of Ms. Main during playtime in March and Sarah's perception that Sophia sought adult attention and observed Sarah during play at home. Similar to Sarah's claim that Sophia withdrew from play when interrupted by other children, in January Sophia moved away from Ms. Smith's chair when the other children approached it to join her. However, Sophia's interactions with peers during play changed over time. In March Sophia's act of offering her highlighters to Lisa and expressing to Marianne her love for drawing showed that she welcomed their unannounced entry into her drawing activity.

6.3.1. A discussion between Noah and Sarah's perspectives

A discussion between Noah and Sarah's perceptions reveals the parallels and differences in their approaches to making meaning of and responding to the developments over time in their children's free play. Noah perceived Naomi's use of language specific to the culture of sharing in the nursery as evidence of the positive developments in Naomi's disposition displayed during play at home. He considered such developments to be the results of Naomi's play experiences in the nursery. In contrast, Sarah expressed her dissatisfaction with her perception of Sophia's behaviour during play at home. She considered Sophia's dispositions to have deteriorated and she concluded that such changes resulted from Sophia's play interactions in the nursery. While Noah evaluated changes in Naomi's behaviour only in relationship to her play interactions with children, Sarah showed that she paid attention to Sophia's behaviour with adults and children during play. Noah showed that he valued Naomi's increased willingness to share during

play. In contrast, Sarah showed that she had complicated expectations of agency from Sophia in her play interactions with her peers and adults. She expressed her dissatisfaction with Sophia's tendency to ask for or snatch, her toys back from her parents to regain possession. However, in response to the other children taking possession of her toys, Sarah perceived Sophia to lack agency because she withdrew from play and made no effort to maintain possession. Both Noah and Sarah's perceptions showed that they considered experiences to be determinants that shaped their children's behaviour in play over time. Noah contextualised Naomi's play at home in terms of how spatial mobility and access to resources varied with changing contexts in terms of the presence and absence of the children Naomi shared her play experiences with. He considered such contextual factors to have thickening and thinning impacts on Naomi's ability to make decisions regarding her play at home. In contrast, Sarah communicated that Sophia play environment at home was agency thickening in terms of her ability to access spaces and be able to relocate her play to maintain continuity while she sought Sarah's adult presence. They both referred to the language used in play by Naomi and Sophia as an indicator of the developments in their play behaviour that resulted from their play experienced in the nursery.

6.3.2. The discussion of the analysis with the literature:

Authors such as Brooker (2002); Brooker (2011); and Gorman and Ailwood (2012) highlight the importance of examining parents' attitudes towards and perception of play, as they argue that an understanding of children's home play environment is important for gaining insight into their play in formal settings as they are interconnected. Gorman and Ailwood (2012) report that parents hold 'varying definitions of what constitutes play' (p.266). The benefits of play are 'linked to learning without knowing it, engaging in hands-on activities, and preparing for Year One through a strong focus on academic progress' (p.266). In contrast, White et al. (2009) discuss the concept of play as a means of transmitting culture and language by incorporating cultural cues within provisions. In contrast to considering play as a tool for focusing on academic progress, Noah and Sarah's perceptions examined in this section resonate with White et al.'s (2009) concept of play as a tool for enculturation as they both evaluated the developments in their children's play in terms of the language used in play and play behaviour.

Brooker (2011) draws attention to the need to examine cultural dimensions of play by taking into consideration how play and learning are perceived in children's home environments, as these shape children's dispositions and habitus through their play experiences at home. This section responds to this particular area of attention highlighted by Brooker (2011) by providing insight into the parents' approaches to making meaning of and responding to their children's play. Within this response, my research provides further nuanced understanding of how the parents perceived their children's encounters with the school culture that reflected the practitioners' agenda; and the habitus of peers in the nursery, as factors that impacted their children's play dispositions. The section provides insight into the parents' complex understandings and expectations of their children's agency that they conceptualised in relation to spaces, resources, and adult and child relationships.

This section focused on Noah and Sarah's perception of Naomi and Sophia's play. A discussion created between Noah and Sarah's perceptions showed the relationships between them, and their unique role in providing insight into how Naomi and Sophia's individual play journeys were understood from their parents' perspectives.

6.4. Chapter Summary

By creating a discussion between Naomi and Sophia's play journeys, this chapter showed the parallels and relationships between them, and revealed individuality in their experiences as they accessed the same provision for play in the nursery. The developments over time in their play themes, language, play behaviour, and agency exercised during free play, perceived from child, parent, and the researcher's perspectives provided a multi-dimensional understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of the two way traffic of cultures and practices between home and the nursery. Naomi and Sophia's play practices in the nursery revealed that they exercised agency in various ways. While some were aligned with the accepted forms of agency in the nursery culture, others contradicted them. Collating multiple child and adult (parents, practitioners and the researcher) perspectives revealed that Naomi and Sophia's agency varied in terms of nature and degree as they experienced free play across varying contexts that had

thickening and thinning impacts on their agency. These contexts related to factors such as space, resources, and various adult-child and peer interactions and relationships. The perceptions of and responses to Naomi and Sophia's diverse expressions of agency during free play by their parents at home and by the practitioners during free play in the nursery, were shaped by the cultures and practises in those respective settings. The chapter showed that the research experience impacted Naomi and Sophia's free play in the nursery as they assimilated the research task, made meaning of and responded to our developing unique researcher-child relationships, and negotiated power dynamics in play related interactions. An awareness of being part of the research impacted their free play choices through their selection of materials to be communicated in the study and the types of play they engaged in during the research.

The following chapter identifies the factors that impacted practitioners' responses to the children through the analysis of two instances of practitioner-child interactions related to free play. These factors are then examined through a thematic analysis of the practitioners' interviews to provide insight into their perceptions of the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery, and their responses to children's free play in the nursery.

7. Chapter Seven: Practitioner-child play interactions and practitioners' perspectives

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the key theme of agency and discussed the parallels and relationships between two case studies. This chapter explores the key theme of practitioner-child relationships in free play related research encounters and how practitioners perceive, make-meaning of, and respond to children's home-nursery free play. The chapter presents two case studies that were selected as they illustrate diversity in practitioner-child free play-related interactions. Amy's interactions with Ms. Smith followed by Ms. Smith's reflections on her own practice provide insight into Ms. Smith's concerns regarding the potential negative impacts of adults' agenda on child-initiated play. In contrast, Rachel's interactions with Ms. Khan followed by Ms. Khan's reflections on her practice reveal Ms. Khan's adult-centric views regarding her own role in child-initiated play. In the discussion of the analysis, a chronological approach is taken to provide a sense of how at the various stages of the research, the children interacted differently with the researcher and the practitioners. The analysis of the adult-child interactions is supported using the conceptual framework from Chapter Two. The examination reveals the factors that impacted the practitioners' responses to the children's free play. These factors include the 'home-nursery relationship'; 'hierarchy'; 'practitioners' understandings of their own role in children's free play'; and 'accountability tools'. By focusing on these factors, the thematic analysis of all practitioners' interviews provides insight into how they perceived their own approach and experience of making meaning of and responding to the children's play. The chapter answers the following research questions:

1. What are the relationships between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery? How are these relationships perceived and responded to from multiple perspectives?

2. How do these relationships, perceptions, and responses develop over time and impact children's free play experiences in the nursery?
3. How did the research experience impact children's free play?

7.2. Amy and Rachel's mosaic pieces

This section examines practitioner-child interactions within Amy and Rachel's mosaic pieces. The analysis provides insight into Amy and Rachel's play and their interactions with practitioners' during play, and identifies the themes that emerged as factors impacting the practitioners' responses to Amy and Rachel.

7.2.1. Amy's play with doll and pram

Amy's play with a baby doll in a pram was a significant theme in her free play journey in the nursery that recurred over the course of the six months of research. The following vignette presents an excerpt from my observation notes of Amy's play with the pram from her first mosaic session (see Box 7.1).

Box 7.1: Ms. Smith's response to Amy's play in the nursery.

I observed Amy's play with a doll in the home corner. As more children poured into the pretend play area, Amy put the doll in the pram and buckled her up. She put some cups in the basket underneath. Amy pushed the pram through the hallway towards Ms. Patmore's carpet. As she walked she slowed down, turned around to look at me and waited until I caught up with her. Then she walked forward again. Amy sat down next to Ms. Smith on the carpet. Ms. Smith was conducting assessments with individual children. Amy gently moved the pram back and forth.

Ms. Smith, who had just completed an assessment and was about to start the next, asked 'Amy, Do you want baby to sleep?'

Amy nodded to show that she agreed.

Ms. Smith: Shall I fix the hood so she can lean back?

Amy nodded again to express that she agreed.

Amy watched Ms. Smith gently reattach the hood of the pram that had partially come off; and make the doll lean back.

Ms. Smith: There! See? I like the baby's jumper. She looks nice and warm. (Ms. Smith gasped as her eyes widened). Oh no no Amy! She's crying! She's hungry! Where's her milk?

Amy's eyes widened as she silently looked at Ms. Smith.

Ms. Smith: Maybe it's in the house?

Amy nodded to indicate that she agreed.

Ms. Smith: Go take her and find it. Quick!

Amy ran down the hallway taking long strides. She paused immediately upon encountering Ms. Cook, who appeared from the kitchen. Amy restarted with shorter quick strides as she scurried pushing the pram towards the home corner.

This excerpt provides insight into the physical and social context of Amy's play in the nursery and how she exercised agency in relationship to space, resources and people. Amy initiated her play in the home corner, using resources such as the baby doll and the pram. Amy's exit from the home corner upon other children's arrival showed that she was uninterested in sharing her play space with her peers. While physically relocating between spaces, Amy maintained continuity in her play by staying in pretend mode and her assumed role in it. This was visible in the way she placed the doll in the pram, packed some food in the basket of the pram in case the baby felt hungry, and adhered to the rules of securing babies in prams by fastening the buckle.

I interpreted Amy's slowing down, turning around and waiting for me to catch up to her, as non-verbal signs through which Amy using her bodily movements embodied her consent to continue to be observed by me while she played.

Amy rocked the pram back and forth, engaging in parallel play sitting next to Ms. Smith who appeared immersed in her own work. Out of several possible interpretations of Amy's decision to locate her play near Ms. Smith, the following two are the most likely based on the insight gained from Amy's mosaic pieces generated during the six months of research. Amy may have

sought Ms. Smith's attention in order to exhibit her play to an adult, or she may have assumed that as Ms. Smith appeared occupied with her own work, she would not intervene in her play; and that Ms. Smith's adult presence would additionally protect Amy's play from interruptions by the other children.

Without any verbal communication or eye contact from Amy, Ms. Smith interjected with her question regarding whether Amy wanted baby to sleep. Ms. Smith's interjection reveals that based on her observation of Amy rocking the pram, she interpreted that Amy assigned the doll the identity of a baby. In her question, Ms. Smith accepted and sustained the role of the doll that she assumed was assigned by Amy, by referring to it as baby. Her question 'do you want baby to sleep?' showed that she interpreted the rocking of the pram, as Amy's physical action that indicated her intention to put the baby to sleep. Upon receiving non-verbal reassurance through Amy's nod that her interpretation was correct, Ms. Smith sought Amy's permission before physically fixing the detached hood of the pram and making the baby lean back. In these interactions, Ms. Smith verified that she interpreted Amy's intentions accurately; sought Amy's permission before physically assisting her in play; and used her own actions as opportunities to model to Amy how to reattach the hood of the pram and help the baby lean back. Her intention in the latter was apparent as Ms. Smith remarked 'there!' to draw Amy's attention; and then verified whether Amy had observed her reattach the hood by asking, 'see?'

Amy's play was further encouraged and deepened as Ms. Smith elaborated the theme by suggesting sensations that were felt by the baby, such as hunger; and warmth from the jumper. Ms. Smith's gasp; facial expression through the widening of her eyes; and yelp as she suggested that the baby might be crying because he's hungry, were indications of her emotional involvement in the play. Another possible interpretation of Ms. Smith's reaction and suggestion is that it may have represented a form of witnessing that involved action that indicated a co-belief in Amy's play; and feedback by suggesting new dimensions through actions and Ms. Smith's use of her own empathy, imagination, and knowledge of the play process and facilitation. I interpreted this dramatisation to cause a momentary shift in Ms. Smith's position from being on the outside as a facilitator assisting Amy in her play,

to perhaps assuming a role inside Amy's play as a co-constructor who was not merely narrating but also physically relating to the sensations she announced and described. Ms. Smith's question regarding where the baby's milk was; suggestion that it might be in the house; and instruction to Amy to fetch it, show that rather than limiting herself to responding to Amy's ideas as an outside facilitator and assisting her play according to Amy's agenda, she joined in as a co-constructor to extend the play. Ms. Smith's suggestions and instructions could also be interpreted as her intention to communicate her belief in Amy's play through her elaborate responses. Ms. Smith no longer limited her own involvement to responding to Amy's ideas by asking questions to verify whether she interpreted Amy's intentions accurately. Instead, she may have been using other means to achieve a similar outcome. Such means included actively joining in the imaginary situation and adding elements to develop the theme. Ms. Smith may have looked for signs of acceptance of her ideas in Amy's responses. Ms. Smith extended the play both in relation to time by prolonging it; and in relation to the spaces in the nursery, by suggesting that Amy return to the house to find milk for the baby. Amy's non-verbal nods and return to the home corner indicated that she accepted the shift in their practitioner-child dynamic, where Ms. Smith assumed a more active role in shaping her play.

Amy mirrored Ms. Smith's concern and urgency in the way she emulated Ms. Smith's facial expression by widening her eyes and in her physical movements by rushing back to the house with the pram. I interpreted her pause upon encountering Ms. Cook and the subsequent shift from running to scurrying, as Amy's adherence to the 'doxas' within the nursery culture that restrict the children from running indoors, while still embodying urgency through her hasty movements in order to maintain continuity in her play (Bourdieu, 1990).

Once Amy's mosaic session was concluded, Ms. Smith shared with me her reflections on her interactions with Amy that I witnessed earlier in the session. With her permission, what she communicated was recorded as the researcher's diary entry and entered as a piece of Amy's mosaic that provided insight into Ms. Smith's perception of how she made meaning of and responded to Amy's play (see Box 7.2).

Box 7.2: Diary entry- Ms. Smith's reflection on her interactions with Amy at playtime.

Ms. Smith: I thought it was so interesting...almost as if she was playing it out for you. She knew you were watching her.

Researcher: What makes you say that?

Ms. Smith: Oh I don't know. Maybe because this is very unusual of Amy. She usually likes to play by herself. Does not interact with the other children while playing and does not seek out adult attention like Julia does.

Researcher: Why do you think she sat next to an adult?

Ms. Smith: I guess... maybe because she knows that when she engages with adults, she might get praised. Maybe she remembered what I did a few days ago. When she fed the doll, I took a photo of her and put it up on twitter and showed it to her. She was happy.

The baby, I think that might be from home. She has a little brother named Alen. He's about eighteen months old I think. If I wasn't doing writing with the children, I would have gone to the pretend play corner and gotten some other children involved... maybe put baby to sleep.

Researcher: Why would you get other children involved?

Ms. Smith: Because Amy is very quiet. When she first came here she was very quiet. She wouldn't say much. We put her on Ms. Patmore's carpet and her target has been two words.

We've been working to her... trying to help her build confidence.

Researcher: Why do you think she came and sat next to you?

Ms. Smith: Familiarity I guess. After Ms. Patmore, she sees me the most because I am on their carpet two afternoons a week. That's why.

Ms. Smith made meaning of Amy's decision to relocate her play near her. She interpreted Amy's play to be exhibitory and a response to her awareness of being observed by me. Ms. Smith suggested that my presence was a contextual factor that impacted Amy's play choices. To support her claim, she referred to her knowledge of Amy's predominant tendency to prefer solitary play and deduced that in this instance Amy displayed behaviour such as seeking adult attention that was unusual in her free play in order to exhibit certain aspects of her play to me. Ms. Smith drew parallels between Amy physically locating her play in her proximity, and a recent free

play experience that she shared with Amy, to communicate how she made meaning of Amy's decision to seek adult attention. She perceived Amy to have recollected being photographed by Ms. Smith a few days earlier while she fed the doll; and feeling pleased upon learning that Ms. Smith posted the photo on twitter. Ms. Smith concluded that such recollections may have prompted Amy to recreate aspects of her previous experience with Ms. Smith in a parallel play experience in my presence. In my analysis, I considered my presence and Ms. Smith's interpretation of my research intentions as contextual factors that impacted her engagement in Amy's free play (see Box 7.1) and her reflection on the engagement in this instance (see Box 7.2).

Ms. Smith's approach to making meaning of Amy's free play with the doll in the pram in her adult presence was not limited to the events in this particular play experience. In her interpretation, Ms. Smith referred to her previous experiences shared with Amy; and her consequent understanding of Amy's play habitus developed through their practitioner-child engagement during those shared experiences. Drawing connections to such references showed that rather than focusing on this single play instance, Ms. Smith took into consideration the contextual insight that she developed through an ongoing process of observing Amy's play and engaging with her during play. Ms. Smith showed that by drawing parallels and differences across Amy's free play witnessed over time, she was creating an understanding of the developments in Amy's play in a more continuous fashion by identifying recurring and emerging themes.

Ms. Smith considered structural barriers as a hindrance to her ability to adapt her approach to Amy's needs that were identified in her free play tendencies over time in the nursery. Ms. Smith communicated that she considered involving other children as a better course of action to address Amy's practice of solitary play in the nursery that involved limited verbal interactions. Ms. Smith's strategy to support Amy's play was informed by her knowledge of Amy's play culture and practices; and the agenda that had already been adopted by the practitioners in the nursery aimed towards developing Amy's confidence. She discussed her collaborative agenda designed with the other practitioners that aimed to address the areas of development identified for Amy, such as her verbal communication skills.

She provided insight into their process of setting up personalised goals and strategies that they considered to be appropriate for Amy. Ms. Smith communicated that these strategies were tailored in an ongoing manner and the practitioners iteratively revised them by assigning new goals, such as number of words and lengths of phrases, in order to ensure that their approach was aligned with how Amy's skills and play tendencies developed.

Ms. Smith made meaning of Amy's choice of the baby as a theme in her play. In the parallels that Ms. Smith drew between Amy's two experiences of feeding the doll during free play, 'seeking adult attention' and 'feeding the baby' emerged as the recurring themes in Amy's play in the nursery. The presence of the former was considered to be a rare occurrence from Ms. Smith's perspective. In her approach to making meaning of Amy's play themes, Ms. Smith's focus extended beyond Amy's free play in the nursery to her experiences at home, as she drew connections between the emergence of the theme of 'baby' and the presence of Amy's baby brother at home. Ms. Smith utilised her knowledge of Amy's brother as a part of her home play context in making meaning of Amy's play in the nursery, to show her understanding of the relationship between Amy's free play at home and in the nursery.

I interpreted Ms. Smith's task related to assessments as a structural barrier as she communicated it to be a contextual factor that impacted the nature of her engagement in Amy's play. She communicated that it constricted her agency in relation to space, as she was unable to leave the task and relocate to the home corner; involve other children; and put the baby to sleep. Instead, while remaining stationary in her position, Ms. Smith directed Amy to take the baby back to the house and feed her milk. Although the structural barrier impacted Amy's play experience by curtailing Ms. Smith's agency, I interpreted it to have a 'thickening' effect on Amy's ability to make choices regarding her ongoing play as she was able to continue her play in a different space within the nursery without the constant presence of Ms. Smith (Klocker, 2007).

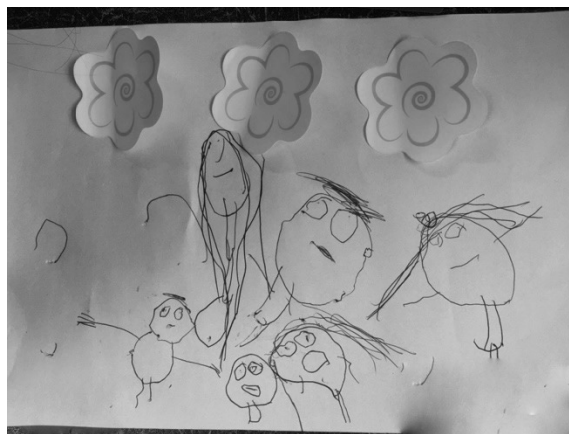
Ms. Smith attributed Amy's decision to choose her over the other practitioners available during free play, to familiarity. She perceived such awareness in Amy to have resulted from the frequency of their practitioner-

child contact and the amount of time they spent together. She considered these factors to be the determinants that placed her higher up in the hierarchy in relation to all the practitioners other than Ms. Patmore who was Amy's carpet practitioner. Ms. Smith communicated that her position in the hierarchy may have been a possible factor that increased her likelihood of being approached by Amy during free play. Amy may have also selected Ms. Smith because she expected Ms. Smith to be familiar with her play process due to their frequent contacts.

7.2.2. Rachel's drawing of her family

In June, Rachel selected the following drawing to discuss with Ms. Khan during their meaning-making session. Rachel created this drawing in my presence during an earlier mosaic session in January (see Box 7.3).

Box 7.3: Rachel's meaning-making with Ms. Khan.



Rachel pointed at the figure at the bottom left: That is Rapunzel's baby.

Ms. Khan pointed at two other figures and asked: And who is this?

Rachel: Mum. That's me and Mum. That's Mum. That's Daddy and my family.

Ms. Khan: Lovely.

Ms. Khan: What shape did you use?

Rachel did not respond.

Ms. Khan: How many? Counting?

Rachel did not respond.

Ms. Khan: So there are six circles for the faces. Why did you draw Rapunzel?
Rachel: Cuz I like it
Ms. Khan: Like it?
Rachel: Like it a lot
Ms. Khan: What makes her look really nice?
Rachel: Long hair
Ms. Khan: Long hair. Is that why you wear long hair?
Rachel: No I wear Elsa's hair.

Rachel selected her drawing of her family, Rapunzel and her baby, to talk about with Ms. Khan. Rachel's 'family' and 'long hair' were recurrent themes in her free play during the mosaic sessions.

Rachel and Ms. Khan's meaning-making revealed the dynamic nature of their practitioner-child interactions and the tensions between their child and adult agendas. Upon being informed that the figures in the drawing were Rachel's family, Rapunzel and her baby, Ms. Khan's question in her response regarding what shapes Rachel used in her drawing, revealed her academic agenda as well as the dynamics of their practitioner-child interaction. Ms. Khan's remark 'lovely' was not followed by questions aimed at gaining insight into the imagined themes of her family and Rapunzel introduced by Rachel. Instead Ms. Khan attempted to redirect the focus on Rachel's process of creating the drawing; and shift the purpose of the drawing from talking about her family and Rapunzel to identifying shapes and counting and encouraging Rachel to associate concepts from the learning agenda in the curriculum with her drawing. The lack of a response from Rachel could be interpreted in a number of ways and the following are the most likely in light of the insight gained from all her mosaic pieces. It is possible that Rachel may not have understood Ms. Khan's references to the shapes or by remaining silent, Rachel was communicating her lack of interest in following Ms. Khan's intentions of using the drawing as a space to discuss shapes and to count. Rachel's silence may have been an indication of her agency in refusing to comply with Ms. Khan's agenda. Ms. Khan's repeated attempts to redirect the focus of the activity to the curriculum

learning goals could be interpreted as her unwillingness to accept Rachel's dissent to comply or her perception that Rachel did not understand her intentions to associate shapes and counting with the drawing; and responded to the latter by modelling counting for Rachel as she said 'there are six circles for the face'. Unable to redirect the focus to her own agenda, Ms. Khan reverted to Rachel's interest that she expressed at the initial stage of the meaning-making task by revisiting the theme of Rapunzel. In her response, Rachel expressed her degree of preference for Rapunzel as she said 'like it a lot'. Ms. Khan asked questions related to Rapunzel's appearance to encourage Rachel to elaborate and verbalise her thinking. She connected Rachel's description of Rapunzel's long hair with the patterns in Rachel's play that she observed in the nursery. Ms. Khan's observations were aligned with my observations during the mosaic sessions of Rachel's play with the long hair tassel that was part of Elsa's costume in the nursery.

There were parallels and differences in Rachel's interactions with me and with Ms. Khan in relation to this particular drawing. When Rachel made the drawing in my presence in January, her engagement in the activity was accompanied by her narrative (see Box 7.4).

Box 7.4: Rachel created this drawing during her child-conference in January.

Rachel located us at the writing table. As she responded to my child-conference questions related to her free play at home, Rachel drew.

Rachel: My baby is sleeping. She has small teeth. She will grow bigger when she gets bigger. She's at home with Mummy and Daddy. I have a baby. Her name called Cindy. All the time she sleep and cry and play with me. I'm going to draw my Mummy and Daddy. She's awake. She has a middle size face. Let me draw another Mummy. I couldn't draw that one. My baby has a little hair. A little golden. Mummy has lots of hair. I'm drawing the body now. Daddy has no hair. Drawing Daddy now. That's me. I'm growing my hair now.



Rachel showed agency in relation to space; resources; and choice of activity in our researcher child relationship as she located us at the writing table and utilised the resources that were available within the nursery provision to create a drawing, while she responded to my question regarding what she liked about playtime at home. Rachel showed different levels of awareness while she narrated her decisions and process of drawing; described appearances such as the thickness and colour of hair and size and shape of face and teeth; assigned actions to her subjects such as sleeping and waking up; and evaluated her own performance within the drawing activity when she said 'I couldn't draw that one' as she drew mummy. Rachel narrated the events that she depicted in her drawing; as well as the patterns in the behaviour and attributes in the characters in her drawing that she observed during the experiences that occurred beyond the moment that the drawing represented. For instance, Rachel discussed the baby's tendency to sleep, cry and play with her. Rachel's drawing was not stagnant. Her depiction of change was revealed in the way she imagined and narrated the baby to be sleeping at first and then announced that the baby was awake. Her discussion extended beyond what the baby was doing in that moment that was depicted in her drawing and the baby's usual tendency to cry and sleep, to what she envisioned as a future possibility for the baby, such as 'she will grow bigger'. An examination of the various ways in which Rachel utilised the drawing as a prompt to discuss her past experiences and imagine future events reveals the multi-functionality of the drawing material that she generated during her free play in the nursery; and shows how aspects of her play experiences at home such as her family featured in her free play in the nursery.

An examination of Rachel's meaning making of her drawing with Ms. Khan and with me shows how the varying adult-child interactions led to a diversity in the development of dialogue and consequent insight that was gained from the two meaning-making encounters. It shows the significance of the role of Ms. Khan's practitioner agenda and my researcher agenda that influenced the manner in which we conducted ourselves during the interactions with Rachel. These differing adult agendas had 'thickening' and 'thinning' consequences on Rachel's agency (Klocker, 2007). Our researcher-child interactions during the activity were child-centric as I tried to follow Rachel's agenda; and play-focused as the drawing was created during playtime while we discussed Rachel's play at home. In contrast, Ms. Khan took a more adult-centric approach to redirect the activity towards the curriculum goals.

Through the examination of Amy and Rachel's free play in the nursery and their interactions with practitioners, this section highlighted the home-nursery relationship; hierarchy; the practitioners understanding of their own role in children's play; and accountability tool, as the factors that impacted practitioners' responses to children's free play. These themes are examined across all practitioner participants' interviews in the following section.

7.3. Practitioners' interviews

This section examines the factors highlighted in the previous section, across the interviews conducted with the practitioners in both the Nurseries. It provides insight into the practitioners' perspectives regarding the role of these factors in their approach to making meaning of and responding to children's free play.

7.3.1. Home-nursery relationship

The practitioners' understandings of children's free play at home was reflected in their perception of children's physical and social play contexts at home; and their perception of parents' attitudes towards free play. Their perceptions on the physical and social play contexts were based on the practitioners' visits to children's homes prior to the start of the academic year; and their dialogue with children regarding the play that children

experienced and the materials they generated outside the nursery. Practitioners' perceptions of parents' attitudes towards their children's play in the nursery were developed through their contact with the parents during parents' evenings, workshops and appointments scheduled to discuss their children's achievements and areas of development. In the interviews, the practitioners reflected on their approaches to making meaning of the relationship between children's free play at home and in the nursery and identified the aforementioned as their means of gaining insight.

Practitioners communicated that their knowledge concerning the cultures, practices and physical and social aspects of children's free play at home were predominantly gained through their observations during the home visits and through their dialogue with children in the nursery.

7.3.1.1. Home visits and practitioner-child dialogue

The following excerpt from Ms. Smith's interview shows the role of her observations during home visits and her dialogue with children in forming her understanding regarding children's play environments and practices at home (see Box 7.5).

Box 7.5: Ms. Smith gained insight into children's physical play environments and play cultures and practices at home through multiple avenues.

Ms. Smith: It's going on home visits and seeing the kind of toys and the resources that they have at home. There are a good handful of children who do have access to toys and to books and to different things. But there are also a bigger percentage who, when you talk to them after the weekend, what did you do? I sat at home and watched the tv. I watched Peppa Pig. And sometimes they may bring in a picture that they've made and it's of the back of a letter that Mum and Dad have received, because they just don't have, either financially, or they just haven't got it.

Ms. Smith's revealed that practitioner-child dialogue in the nursery played a critical role in providing the practitioners access to children's perceptions of how they experienced play cultures and practices at home. By examining the materials that children generated during playtime at home and brought to the

nursery, Ms. Smith drew conclusions regarding the nature of resources that children had access to for free play at home. Based on the knowledge gained from these multiple sources such as dialogue with children, observations during home visits and the material generated and brought to the nursery by the children, Ms. Smith deduced that children's play environments and practices at home were diverse. While she reported that some children had access to a variety of resources such as toys and books, she said that others 'just don't have, either financially, or they just haven't got it'.

Observations were identified as a source of information by Ms. Lindnt as she described her understanding of the aims for conducting home visits (see Box 7.6).

Box 7.6: Ms. Lindnt described her understanding of the aims for conducting observation during home visits.

Ms. Lindnt: Just just just, you know, just just nothing too heavy. Just a little bit, their needs and I mean, our role is just to get an insight into where the child's at their development... things like speech. But that's kind of like secondary, really, because it's mainly to just observe the children in their own setting... The ones I saw had a good range of learning resources.

I interpreted Ms. Lindnt's response to my question regarding the purpose of home visits, as her attempt to minimise the importance of the practice and imply that the information gained was not of considerable importance, through her use of language such as 'just just nothing too heavy' and repeated use of the word 'just'. Although she identified gaining insight into children's individual requirements and locating them along the stages of development as goals, she reduced their significance among the priorities of the visits by ranking them as 'secondary' to 'observ(e)ing them in their own setting', the aims of which she did not clarify. Based on her observations during home visits, Ms. Lindnt concluded that children had access to ample resources that she considered to be appropriate for learning.

Similar to Ms. Lindnt and Ms. Smith, Ms. Main referred to her observations during home visits and provided insight into her knowledge of children's play at home (see Box 7.7).

Box 7.7 Ms. Main's insight gained through her observations during home visits.

Ms. Main: Some, some when you visit them when there are home visits, they literally have like nothing. All of their backgrounds are quite different. So not even like pens, papers, toys, and then others when you go to their houses, some they've got everything like skytv. So it's quite like, I do think it's quite like one extreme or the other. They either have nothing or they have everything.

In contrast to Ms. Lindnt's observation that all the children she visited had access to a 'good range of learning resources', Ms. Main's observations paralleled Ms. Smith's perception of diversity in terms of access to resources at home. Ms. Main's description of the mixture of backgrounds as 'quite different' shows that she considered contrasts between children's environments at home to be stark, as she said 'they either have nothing or they have everything'. Unlike Ms. Lindnt who listed identifying children's developmental needs as an aim for conducting observations during home visits, Ms. Main focused only on the availability of physical resources.

7.3.1.2. An understanding of parents' views and practices towards their children's play

The practitioners' understanding of parents' views and practices towards their children's play emerged as a complex topic. They reported diversity in parents' attitudes, and the examination of the practitioners' interviews also revealed variations in their approaches to making meaning of such parental attitudes. The theme of diversity in parents' attitudes was identified in Ms. Smith's statement "we get a real mix" (see Box 7.13) as she expressed her awareness that parents took differing positions in relation to their children's play. Within this mix, Ms. Kent described the varying nature of parents' practices at home and attitudes towards play in the nursery (see Box 7.8).

Box 7.8: Ms. Kent discussed the range of parents' attitudes towards children's play.

Some parents, they have quite high expectations of their children. They want them to read, they want them to write their name, they want to, they're encouraged, they work with them at home. There are some parents definitely on my carpet who I see, they're really encouraged by hearing that their child can write their name, knows their numbers, is able to say sounds, identify sounds, and yes. Starting to be able to read. And then there are some that, just, don't worry about it at all and are happy for their children to just play.

In her reflection on her understanding of parents' attitudes towards children's play, Ms. Kent focused on parents' views regarding their children's academic progress in the nursery. Based on her contact with the parents of the children on her carpet, Ms. Kent identified the parents who overtly showed concern regarding their children's academic achievements as ones who had 'high expectations of their children' and differentiated them from parents who did not express concerns regarding their children's achievements of learning goals. A possible interpretation of Ms. Kent's categorisation of the latter as parents who do not 'worry about it at all' is that she may have considered them to be nonchalant and lacking concern. Her statement that they 'are happy for their children to just play' instead of mentioning her perception of whether and why these parents might value play, could be interpreted as Ms. Kent's understanding that children's engagement in play resulted from their parents' lack of motivation to focus on academic goals. Ms. Kent showed an awareness of parents' practices of 'working with (them) children at home' to supporting their reading and writing skills. The gaps identified in Ms. Kent's perceptions relate to her lack of references to parents' practices and attitudes towards their children's play at home. Based on this analysis, it can be argued that Ms. Kent took an academics-focused approach rather than a play-focused approach to understanding the role of parents' cultures, practices and attitudes in their children's home-nursery relationship.

In contrast to Ms. Kent who observed differing attitudes among parents and Ms. Smith who reporting 'get(ting) a real mix', Ms. Cook, provided a

condensed view of parents' views and classified them into a single category (see Box 7.9):

Box 7.9: Ms. Cook shared her perception of parents' attitudes towards their children's play.

Ms. Cook: I never heard anything about they don't like you to play with the children or please give him, them more teaching than playing.

Similar to Ms. Kent, Ms. Cook also focused on her understanding of parents' reactions to practices in the nursery instead of parents' practices and cultures towards making provision of and supporting their children's play at home. However, in contrast to Ms. Kent and Ms. Smith who spoke of the differing opinions among parents, Ms. Cook suggested that parents were undivided in their opinions regarding the practitioners' approaches towards their children's play and learning in the nursery. Examining these varying perceptions across the practitioners revealed that a possible explanation for such differences in their approaches to making-meaning of parents' positions regarding their children's play, was that the practitioners had different levels of contact with the parents. Frequencies and the nature of parent-practitioner contact depended on practitioners' hierarchy. Within this hierarchy, lead practitioners and class teachers such as Ms. Smith and Ms. Kent were designated point persons for particular groups of children who maintained contact with the respective parents. Practitioners such as Ms. Cook and Ms. Palmer (see Box 7.10) who were not assigned responsibility for specific children, floated between spaces and activities playing supportive roles assisting lead and class teachers; and deferred to them for communicating with parents (See Box 7.10).

Box 7.10: Ms. Palmer's understanding of parents' attitudes was based on information she gained through the other practitioners' contact with parents.

I haven't had any direct conversations with them about it. But I've kind of heard a couple of things said by other teachers who've said you know, parents think all they do all day is play. That they're not there learning. And I think that might kind of sum it up.

In contrast to Ms. Kent and Ms. Smith's understanding of the diversity in parents' attitudes, from their roles of class and lead practitioners, Ms. Palmer communicated that in her supporting role, she was not required to communicate with the parents. Based on the understanding of the other practitioners, Ms. Palmer perceived parents to be unanimous in lacking an understanding of the relationship between their children's play experiences in the nursery and their learning. Parallels can be drawn between her limited contact with that of Ms. Cook as they were both assisting lead practitioners. However, Ms. Cook's perception of the parents' understandings and attitudes towards their children's play experiences in the nursery differs from that of Ms. Palmer, as Ms. Cook perceived the parents to be satisfied with the amount of attention the nursery allocated for play and the achievement of academic goals. In contrast Ms. Palmer considered parents to be of the opinion that in the nursery 'all (they)children do all day is play' and 'they're not there learning'.

7.3.1.3. Reflections on parent-practitioner relationships

The practitioners' reflections on their parent-practitioner relationships reveal that they were based on interactions that involved one-way dialogue. Ms. Lindt's statement 'the parents are constantly fed positive information as to what's going on in early year', shows that parent-practitioner interactions only entailed keeping parents informed of the developments in the nursery and did not involve practitioners learning about children's cultures and practices at home (see Box 7.11).

Box 7.11: Ms. Lindt provided insight into parent-practitioner interactions.

Ms. Lindt: I think it's an important role because and I think you know, where they (parents), some of them might not have seen it (play) as positive before in the learning sense, when they come here at the end of summer, they see the children learning, obviously they get a chance to speak to us and we would say well ' she's not just playing, she's learning her numbers and colours and da da da da da. The parents are constantly fed positive information as to what's going on in early year.

Ms. Lindt considered practitioners to have an important role in convincing parents of the value of play as a tool for learning numbers and colours. She perceived some parents to lack an understanding of play as 'positive' 'in the learning sense'. Ms. Lindt provided insight into the nature of parents' visits to the nursery prior to the start of the academic year; and how the interactions entailed practitioners providing expert knowledge on how play can be educational and provide reassurance that what happens in the nursery is 'not just play' and that the children were 'learning' 'numbers and colours'. Ms. Lindt's statement, "parents are constantly fed positive information" shows that it was a one-way communication where the practitioners assumed the role of experts in the parent-practitioner interactions.

Ms. Nowak's approach to parent-practitioner interactions echoed Ms. Lindt's description of the one-way traffic of information (see Box 7.12).

Box 7.12: Ms. Nowak shared her approach to parent-practitioner interactions.

Ms. Nowak: So I had loads of conversations with different parents and some parents are very pro free play. They understand that this is part of child's development ... But then I have parents who, who are unhappy about children constantly playing. (Ms. Main shared her response to one such parent). I explained that free play is something that is very natural for his child at this age and this is the best way of actually teaching your child...I suggested to him to do at home, it should be something that follows his child's interest and maybe he could count the cars with him or just go with your child's interest and try to include those parts of knowledge that he thinks his child is missing, based on what his child likes doing.

Similar to Ms. Kent and Ms. Smith, Ms. Nowak perceived the parents' attitudes towards play to vary. She expressed her appreciation of parents' knowledge of the developmental benefits of play. As she reflected on her interactions with the parents, Ms. Nowak provided insight into her practice of sharing her expertise to help the parents realise the value of play as a tool for learning skills such as counting; and utilise it in a child-centric manner in their practices with their children at home by following their children's

interests expressed through their play choices. In contrast to Ms. Kent and Ms. Lindt's focus on the nursery practices, Ms. Nowak focused on her responses to parents' attitudes and practices at home.

Ms. Nowak's position in parent-practitioner relationships as an expert was similar to the ones assumed by Ms. Smith (7.13).

Box 7.13: Ms. Smith's reflection on her approach to parent-practitioner interactions.

Ms. Smith: I think we do 'get a real mix'. A lot of parents in the beginning of the year when you invite them to workshops about what we're learning, you do get a lot of parents who just say, what learning are you talking about? They just play. And you do have to kind of break down those barriers of, that play is... that learning is through play in the early years and that that's how the children do learn; and they do acquire; and they do strengthen on different skills. But that can be, I think that can be hard with the parents. Some of them are happy and they like them just playing. But then you will get some children who are more academic, for example Eric. And I'm pretty sure that his dad would prefer that he was doing something a bit more, book based, for example. Because Eric doesn't tend to play and engage in play like some of the other children. He can be quite passive. So it can be, I think it's just explaining to them, to the children, sorry to the parents; and explaining to them that this is how the children learn. And it's not just.. we've put play dough out for them to play with the play dough. It's for them to manipulate and to strengthen their fingers and things like that.

Ms. Smith provided insight into her perception of parents' attitudes towards their children's play. In her overview of the varying nature of attitudes in the 'mix', Ms. Smith provided the sense that she experienced challenges while attempting to build rapport with the parents. As she spoke of her ongoing work in raising awareness regarding the benefits of play among parents by 'breaking down barriers', she communicated that she perceived the parents' opinions to differ from those of the practitioners. Ms. Smith also spoke of parents who were 'happy and just liked them playing'. It was unclear as to whether these parents were appreciative of the role of play in strengthening

the skills that Ms. Smith considered play to be essential for, or if they were relatively less difficult to deal with for the practitioners in terms of challenging and remaining sceptical of the purpose of play for their children. One of several possible interpretations of Ms. Smith's brief description of such parents could be that Ms. Smith interpreted their reactions as a lack of interest.

Ms. Smith perceived parents to be unaware of the practitioners' agenda; and considered workshops to be a space for breaking attitudinal 'barriers' with the parents by explaining the practitioners' approaches to the children's learning through play. In her emphasis on 'do' in communicating to parents that 'children do learn' and 'they do acquire', Ms. Smith communicated that these explanations were aimed at convincing parents of the functionality of play as a means for 'learning', 'acquiring' and strengthen(ing)' various skills. As an example, she explained how the intentions behind including play dough within the provision extended beyond play to developing motor skills, as she said 'it's not just..we've put play dough out for them to play with the play dough. It's for them to manipulate and to strengthen their fingers...'

One of several possible interpretations of the following error in her speech- 'to the children, sorry to the parents', is that it was an indication of interference of an unconscious thought that may have emerged from the possible parallels she drew between her relationship with the children and with the parents. Her description showed that she took a pedagogic approach to explaining to the parents during which she perceived her professional knowledge to subordinate the parents' diverse knowledge, specific to their own culture, practices, and experiences.

Ms. Smith referred to her perception of Eric's play as an illustrative example of the challenging nature of the task of explaining practitioners' approach to play and learning, to the parents. Ms. Smith described Eric as 'academic' and perceived this attribute to be a factor responsible for the divergence of Eric's play from that of some of the other children in the nursery. She considered such difference in Eric's play to be a result of his father's attitude; and by describing Eric's play as passive, she communicated that she interpreted this difference as a deficit. The level of certainty she assigned by saying 'I'm pretty sure', to her opinion that 'his dad would prefer that he was

doing something a bit more book based' was not fully supported with sufficient evidence collected through Ms. Smith's direct contact with Eric's father. Ms. Smith's ascription of Eric's academic engagement to his father's attitude can be conceptualised using Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Her interview reveals that she perceived Eric's dispositions that led him to choose academic activities during free play to be a constituent of his habitus that he acquired through his experiences at home. She perceived these experiences to in turn be shaped by his father's habitus that consisted of beliefs that valued academics.

Although Ms. Smith assumed a similar position as Ms. Nowak in parent-practitioner relationships, she focused only on convincing parents of the values of play in the nursery, while Ms. Nowak also reflected on her practice of supporting parents' play practices at home.

The variations in the practitioners' approaches to making meaning of and responding to parents was visible in the contrasts between Ms. Smith and Ms. Khan's interviews (see Box 7.14)

Box 7.14: Ms. Khan provided insight into her approach to parent-practitioner interactions.

When parents are playing, I think a lot of parents just don't know how to play. Some parents think, oh we have to take them outside just to play. But they don't realise, you can play from, I don't know, you can walk, and count with them, or you can see how many cars there are. Let's count what colours they are. Different ways of encouraging them, they're all part of play. And a lot of parents just don't realise that. So when we do home visits, from the start when the child comes into nursery, we tell them these are the different things you can do to encourage your child. Like parents' evening to inform them. Like different ways of encouraging them and we have obviously meetings as well within the school year if there is some sort of lack in something where parent involvement can be added to. And obviously like, if a child has done something really well or hasn't, obviously informing the parent, how they can help, what they can do.

Ms. Khan's perception of parents' understandings and attitudes towards children's play indicates that her approach to the parent-practitioner relationships was academic goals oriented and her strategies to form partnerships with the parents were driven by her own assumptions of the parents' perspectives. Her lack of confidence in the parents' ability to provide rich and meaningful play experiences for their children was evident in her tone of superiority as she claimed 'parents just don't know how to play'.

The analysis reveals that Ms. Khan valued play as a means for practising skills such as counting and identifying colours and shapes. She presented an everyday activity such as walking and resources that were already present in people's environments such as cars that they walked by, as opportunities for parents to involve their children in counting and identifying shapes and colours. She considered such adult-child engagements where adults played a directive role in initiating activities, as 'all part of play'.

Ms. Khan communicated that she valued parental involvement in children's play. However, her description of her approach to maintaining parent-practitioner relationships for the benefit of the children's play shows that she viewed parent-practitioner interactions as one-way channels of communication. Ms. Khan provided insight into the nature and frequency of such interactions. The Interactions took place in person; began during home visits prior to the commencement of the school year; and continued during the parents' evenings and scheduled appointments when the parents were informed of their children's achievements and areas of development that required attention. In her description of these parent-practitioner interactions relating to the children's play, Ms. Khan indicated that she assumed the role of an expert in charge of informing and educating the parents; and considered the differences in the parents' perception of their children's play from those of the practitioners, as deficits. The purpose of Ms. Khan's strategies was to facilitate the parents' involvement in supporting the practitioners' academic agenda rather than to learn from parents about their children's play cultures and practices at home. The nature of what Ms. Khan communicated to the parents was school centric and did not consider the parents' perceptions. In contrast to Ms. Smith's who focused on convincing the parents' of the soundness of the nursery's approach to their children's

play, Ms. Khan paralleled Ms. Nowak's approach by reflecting on how she supported the parents' play practices with their children at home.

7.3.2. Hierarchy

In addition to impacting practitioners' exposure to parents (see Box 7.10), hierarchy was a factor that determined the frequency and duration of practitioner-child interactions; practitioners' knowledge of the curriculum; and their level of involvement in planning the play provision in the nursery.

In the previous sub-section, an examination of Ms. Palmer and Ms. Kent's interviews revealed how their positions in the hierarchy of practitioners according to seniority, led to them having varied amount of contact with the parents. In section 7.2, Ms. Smith drew attention to positioning within the hierarchy as a factor that influenced the practitioners' varying levels of contact with the children, that consequently affected the practitioners' opportunities to gain insight into children's free play experiences at home and in the nursery (see Box 7.2). An examination of the theme of hierarchy across the practitioners' interviews further reveals the relationships between the practitioners' position along the hierarchy and their familiarity with the curriculum and involvement in planning the play provision (see Box 7.15).

Box 7.15: Ms. Khanom, who was a teaching assistant, was unfamiliar with the curriculum document.

Ms. Khanom: I'm not really sure. I haven't seen it to be honest. But I think the curriculum says both child-initiated and adult-directed are important. Yeah because here they do both. I think both are important.

Ms. Khanom who was a teaching assistant was unable to explicitly refer to the formal framework that the practitioners followed in planning their play provision. However, she drew on her knowledge that was tacit and was gained from her observations and practices in the nursery, to suggest that both child-initiated play and adult-directed activities were included and valued within the culture and practices in the nursery.

In contrast, Ms. Kent, who due to her seniority along the hierarchy compared to Ms. Khanom had more responsibility of designing the play provision and lessons, provided insight into the role of 'Development Matters' as a reference tool in her approach to planning for play (see Box 7.16).

Box 7.16: Ms. Kent explained her process of utilising the curriculum as a reference tool.

Ms. Kent: We observe the children periodically. We do long observations, medium obs. From their long obs, we look at what their development next steps could be and plan an activity, according to how we can move them on. We use 'Development Matters' as a document to guide us. So, through those discussions that we have, during planning every Wednesday, we plan our activities, to figure out what we're going to put out for play.

Ms. Kent explained the role of observations in tracking progress and highlighting the areas of development by measuring them against the goals stated in 'Development Matters'. She provided insight into how observations informed the practitioners' choices of resources for facilitating appropriate play activities. In comparison to Ms. Khanom, Ms. Kent was able to better articulate and justify the different stages within her planning process. She communicated that her decisions were empirically grounded in her observations and guided by the curriculum.

The interviews revealed that the assistant practitioners who were unfamiliar with the 'Development Matters' document, were uninvolved in planning the play provision (see Box 7.17).

Box 7.17: Ms. Lindt who was unfamiliar with the curriculum was not involved in planning the play provision.

Ms. Lindt: All the resources are all written down here, what we need. So, to tell you the truth, I mean, I don't have too much input on the planning. It's all here for me. We'll go through it and then it's presented, honestly. So, I don't really plan the planning as such. The planning itself is done by the teacher (Ms. Nowak).

In contrast to Ms. Kent, who seemed to take ownership of the planning, Ms. Lindt communicated a more hands-off approach. She followed directions and deferred to the class teacher to make decisions regarding the planning of the provision.

7.3.3. The practitioners' understanding of their own role in children's play

Practitioners were eclectic in their approach to children's free play in the nursery. In the interviews, they highlighted the significance of the various aspects of their role in children's play. While some practitioners drew attention to their intended goals behind their involvement in children's play, others expressed concerns that their adult intervention marginalised child-initiated play.

Ms. Kent provided an example of a recent experience to show how she supported a child utilise the resources available in the nursery during free play (see Box 7.18).

Box 7.18: Ms. Kent discussed the role of modelling in her approach to supporting children during free play.

Ms. Kent: The other day, this week, there was a child who picked up the stethoscope. Didn't really know what to do with it and how it worked and how it even sits on their, sort of body. So, they were just sort of swinging it around actually. And then I could see that they were doing that and then I just showed them right it goes around your neck and this is what you do with the end piece and we pretended to then, one pa', I pretended to be the patient, and I said right you need to check my heartbeat, now I'm gonna check yours. So, I showed them how to use resources.

Ms. Kent indicated that her approach was catered towards introducing, reinforcing and or extending learning, depending on the individual children's needs. These needs were identified in the practitioners' interpretations of children's play that were informed by their observations. Ms. Kent perceived that her approach encouraged and facilitated active and exploratory

engagement with the resources available in the nursery. She discussed how she ensured that children's engagement with the resources matched the intended purposes assigned by the practitioners during the planning of the play provision. In her approach to modelling, Ms. Kent engaged in pretend play as she initially assumed the role of a patient by breathing while she instructed the child to use the stethoscope, and in turn taking as she later switched to the role of a doctor to check the child's heartbeat.

Ms. Smith focused on co-playing as a part of the school culture (see Box 7.19).

Box 7.19: Ms. Smith highlighted the school's culture as a factor that impacted her role in children's play.

Ms. Smith: We have a big push on co-playing. So the school, the early years focus for us as staff is to make sure that we're co-playing with the children, which can be hard and staff do find it challenging because if a child is busy engaged in an activity, and you go over and try to engage in co-playing, the idea is that you play alongside them and you build up on what they may need, knowing the curriculum and knowing their next steps, without even interacting that with the child necessarily, so for example, Lisa today, she was trying to make a tent and she was clipping the pegs on, but I could see that she needs something a bit higher. So, I just moved the trolley over and clipped it on but sometimes there is the risk that if an adult intervenes, sometimes it can just shatter the play and the children then will just go off and do something completely different. Because in their head, in my head I'm thinking ok if she had something higher, that would make her tent a bit more stable. But actually, in her head, she may be thinking, I want a low tent that I can snuggle under with my friends. So, it is, it's about watching and we are doing a lot of work on co-playing and kind of observing and knowing when to step in, but it is hard.

Ms. Smith identified the school's attitude as a powerful factor that influenced her approach and expressed her perception of the school's culture of applying top down pressure on the practitioners to engage in 'co-play' with children. She perceived co-playing to be a standard approach that all

practitioners were required to uphold, rather than practitioners having the freedom to decide when to adapt their individual approach in relation to particular children's needs and developing play. Ms. Smith communicated that responding to such pressures while remaining committed to ensuring that children continued to govern their self-initiated play, posed challenges for the practitioners in the nursery.

Instead of waiting for children to seek adult assistance, the approach placed the onus on the practitioners to target particular children already engaged in play. Ms. Smith communicated that children during free play were seen in the observation but not heard through dialogue. She expressed concerns regarding the resultant dissonance between children and practitioners' agendas that led to disruptions in children's free play. Ms. Smith shared that the co-playing approach reflected the school's emphasis on achieving targets. As an example, Ms. Smith discussed the tensions between her adult intent and child interest that existed in the dynamic of her interaction with Lisa. Ms. Smith valued the importance of practitioners' skills and knowledge necessary for communicating with children and coordinating with them; and staying attuned to children's agenda. This was particularly highlighted in the example of Lisa's tent play where Ms. Smith spoke about the role of adults in free play. Her language had a striking effect when she used the word 'shatter' as she discussed the dangers of adult guidance originating from adult agenda, rather than focusing on the interactions between the adult and the child that could be a response to a child-initiated play. The tensions between her understanding and provision were evident as although she expressed an interest to watch how the play unfolded, her intentions were not actualised in practice due to the top-down pressure to co-play. Ms. Smith spoke from the experience of her practice and emphasised the importance of supporting children's play expressions rather than changing them. As she reflected upon her experience of intervening in play, she identified the social opportunities that may have been present in Lisa's free play with her friends which Ms. Smith may have hindered. As she examined the tensions between her agenda and that of Lisa, she recognised that while she was concerned with the stability of the tent, balance and its external appearance, Lisa may have had different goals. She considered the possibility that for Lisa the tent may have been something that facilitated snuggling with her friends. Ms. Smith indicated that the relationship between her agenda and

Lisa's intentions were ambiguous as her perception was based on her observations instead of her dialogue with Lisa. She problematised and reflected on her own practices and considered the unintended outcomes of stimulating change in play scenarios. Ms. Smith's response to Amy (in section 7.2, Box 7.2) showed that she considered the practitioner role to be an important one in enriching certain play experiences; and saw value in supporting language development and collaborative play with peers and modelling play skills. However, Ms. Smith showed an awareness of the inappropriateness of interventions that were not in tune with the children's intentions and involved redirecting the course of child-governed play.

Ms. Smith showed sensitivity in her perception of practitioner-child interactions in free play and expressed concern regarding the ways in which interruptions by the practitioners could have detrimental impacts on children's ownership over their own play. In contrast, Ms. Khan was less sensitive in her approach that prioritised her academic agenda (see Box 7.20).

Box 7.20: Ms. Khan provided insight into her approach to co-playing with children.

So, it's all different kinda things and you know when you see someone interested, you're better off like just butting in and just trying to get on with it with them, rather than oh I have to do a piece of paper. Let me just do that. That's not important. But sometimes you have to or else they just don't understand like you know, if you just leave them to it they just might not understand. Whereas if you're in there, you can explain to them, you can teach them while they're playing because it's something that they engaged in. So, I just interfere with them.

Ms. Khan communicated that she believed adult intervention was required in order for play to be developed to its full potential. As opposed to paper, she considered play to be appropriate and important for sustaining children's interests and motivation. In contrast to Ms. Smith, Ms. Khan in her language showed less sensitivity to adult-child interactions during free play in the way she said 'you're better off like just butting in' and in contrast to Ms. Smith,

she did not consider the possibility of the detrimental outcomes that her interruptions could have on children's on-going play. Ms. Khan held an understanding and commitment to play as a mechanism for her pedagogic practices. Game play emerged as a dominant element of Ms. Khan's strategy for achieving academic goals (also see Box 7.14).

Ms. Smith and Ms. Khan in their individual manner expressed that there was value to be found in play. Ms. Khan identified co-playing as adult's role in free play that entailed supporting them with language and providing encouragement. Ms. Khan's repeated focus on maths (also see Box 7.3) supports the telling argument that she did not trust play in its own right and that she considered play to be of benefit to the children only when used by the practitioners in association with the concepts of numeracy and literacy. Her use of language such as 'I just interfere with them' reveals the lack of sensitivity in her approach to children's play which was in stark contrast to Ms. Smith's approach of carefully considering the consequences of her presence and the slightest interjections in children's agenda. Ms. Khan asserted that if left in the absence of adults, children's play experiences were not meaningful.

7.3.4. Accountability tools

Two key components of accountability tools that emerged as factors impacting the practitioners' practices related to children's free play were the curriculum and structured tasks such as observations and assessments involved in the documentation of evidence of learning. The interviews reveal the complex ways in which these accountability tools were experienced as instrumental and as barriers to practice by the practitioners.

In section 7.2, Ms. Smith's reflection on her interaction with Amy highlights how she experienced structural barriers in the form of accountability measures such as structured tasks. The task of documenting evidence of learning impacted her ability to respond to Amy's free play by limiting her spatial mobility. Ms. Palmer indicated that she viewed the 'ticking off' feature as a shortcoming (see Box 7.21).

Box 7.21: Ms. Palmer drew attention to the limitations of following the curriculum during observations.

So, for instance, when I'm doing observations, I might think, Oh yeah, that's really interesting. That's, that's a, you know that's an interesting ability that they're showing. And then I'll go through the framework and try and find what they're doing and I realise, oh no, it's not. That's not a thing that's there to tick off. It's not one of the goals or the target. So maybe I see kind of value in certain things, that, that, you know the traditional kind of education system doesn't yet, or doesn't at this time put this stage in their development.

Ms. Palmer discussed a scenario to explain how she was confronted with dilemmas due to the closed-ended nature of the framework and expressed her resultant dissatisfaction. She identified gaps between the curriculum agenda and the children's play practices that made it challenging for her to integrate what she observed in the children's free play into the curriculum successfully. These gaps emerged as her observations did not match the skills in the categories within the framework. Suggesting that the children's abilities surpassed those assigned to their particular age groups in the curriculum, Ms. Palmer showed that her practice revealed areas for improvement. I interpreted Ms. Palmer's use of language such as 'traditional kind of education system doesn't yet', as indication that she considered the current framework to have deficits; and in need of revision in terms of specifying the skills that can be expected from children at various stages. She used the term 'traditional' to define the curriculum communicating that she possessed the ability to see value in the aspects of children's experiences that the curriculum missed.

Ms. Lindt communicated her interpretation that the sole purpose of structured tasks designed for achieving the curriculum goals, was to collect evidence to meet accountability measures (Box 7.22).

Box 7.22: Ms. Lindt communicated her role in planning the play provision.

We've got the areas of the curriculum that we have to cover, like the maths. Like if it was sponge painting, then we'd say, explain to them, look we need

you to do, put sponges, cover this mermaid's tail, da da da. And we would sort of tell them, rather than just have it all out and just leave them to do it themselves. But it's just really because we need to get evidence.

Ms. Lindt communicated that her work relating to meeting the curriculum objectives was instructional. She further communicated that the activities were structured to achieve the curriculum targets instead of enabling the children to have the necessary opportunities to explore ways to utilise the resources according to their own agenda. Ms. Lindt expressed that she perceived these structured activities to be a result of the accountability measures that required the practitioners to collect evidence of achievement of goals.

In contrast to Ms. Lindt's view, Ms. Nowak considered the curriculum to be flexible and beneficial for her planning of the provision for play (see Box 7.23).

Box 7.23: Ms. Nowak considered the curriculum to be flexible.

it's beneficial because it gives me as a teacher who knows the children in my class, more freedom on planning who I need to support at what area. So, I don't think curriculum specifies what should be teacher directed and what should be child's initiated play. I don't think there is any specification for that. I think is, as a teacher, knowing children in your class, you kind of, you made your own personal assessment on what a particular child might need support with and then based on the knowledge of knowing the child, you then provide, you know, those strategies and those opportunities for children to meet those targets. But I don't, curriculum specifically says about ok, so this part of curriculum should be adult directed and this should be child initiated.

Ms. Nowak considered the curriculum to be a framework that provided guidance rather than serve a prescriptive purpose. She perceived the curriculum to be enabling as its flexibility provided opportunities for practitioners' autonomy in customising their practice according to individual children's needs. In order to identify those needs, Ms. Nowak emphasised the importance of practitioner-child relationship. Familiarity resulting from

such relationships was essential for practitioners to be able to effectively create appropriate opportunities through which children could achieve the target outcomes outlined in the curriculum. Ms. Nowak exhibited confidence as she discussed the process of planning both unstructured and planned activities, communicating her agency in setting adult agenda. Ms. Nowak established in her interview that while she followed the curriculum for guidance, her decisions were based on her own understanding and assessment of individual children's needs. The confidence that she drew from her experience and knowledge echoed Ms. Smith's assertion that experience was essential in order for practitioners to be attuned to individual children's needs and provide dynamic scaffolding in play emerging from children's agenda.

Ms. Nowak considered the curriculum's focus on particular areas to have a marginalising impact on her ability to prioritise children's interests expressed through free play (see Box 7.24).

Box 7.24: Ms. Nowak drew attention to the limitations of the curriculum.

I think overall there is a big focus on literacy and maths and sometimes to the point that it makes me think and feel that maybe we neglect some of the other areas like creativity and art and design and/or maybe physical area even, the physical development, because we put so much, so much focus and so much, so much pressure on getting children to write or getting children to count. So yeah, I think those will be the limitations of that. We don't have that freedom or that flexibility maybe to, to just leave the literacy and maths and, not completely, but don't treat it as the priority comparing to the other areas.

Similar to Ms. Palmer who felt constricted due to the curriculum's failure to recognise the areas of learning and development that she considered to be of value to the children, Ms. Nowak expressed her unease regarding the curriculum's focus on literacy and numeracy. She considered such prioritisation to have a marginalising impact on children's opportunities to enhance other skills such as physical development and creativity through their play experiences.

7.4. The discussion of the analysis with the literature

The impact of accountability measures on practitioners' work is debated by several authors such as Roberts-Holmes (2015); Moss (2012); Ball (2003); Hedges (2014). Roberts-Holmes (2015) uses the term 'schoolification', to refer to the attention on numeracy and literacy in the early years to prepare children for school, and the consequent 'marginalisation of child-centred learning' (p.72). Moss (2012) argues that goals are set out in the 'school readiness discourse' that is 'language used to turn early years education' into a preliminary stage, that 'prepares children for compulsory school education' (p.4). Such a discourse opens up practitioners to stringent assessments within the framework of what Ball (2003) defines as 'performativity' (p.215). Ball (2003) argues that the 'discourse of quality' requires practitioners to let 'value replace (their) values' regarding what they believe is best for the development of children (Ball, 2003, p.217). Hedges (2014) draws attention to the challenges faced by practitioners when reconciling between developing ways to provide subject specific guidance in such play spaces; and ensuring that children's opportunities to self-govern the development of their chosen complex play themes are not marginalised. Fler (2015) draws on Hedges (2014) to argue that the 'smuggling in (of) content knowledge' (p.1811) by the practitioners in their study, marginalise their opportunities to observe and develop complex themes in children's 'self-governed' play. This chapter shows variations in the practitioners' perceptions of how accountability tools impacted their responses to children's play. Some practitioners paralleled Ball (2003) and Hedges' (2014) claims as they considered accountability measures in the form of documentation of evidence of learning; and structured activities within their practices for achieving curriculum goals, to pose challenges to their ability to facilitate children's free play. However, the chapter also reveals that there were others who viewed the curriculum to have a positive effect in the way it provides guidelines and flexibility, and emphasised the importance of familiarity with individual children's play patterns and needs in order to utilise it effectively in their play provision. The practitioners were divided in their opinions regarding what attributes of play they found valuable and these were reflected in their practices. While some (see Box 7.2) attempted to respond to the children's individual needs, others (see Box 7.3) paralleled

Fleer's (2015) claim and prioritised the curriculum agenda while responding to children's free play (Moss, 2012; and Roberts-Holmes, 2015). Among the former, were practitioners in positions such as those of lead practitioners who were in charge of overall nursery provision and took a more holistic approach in their responses to children's play. In contrast, the latter were practitioners who focused on particular subject areas and this was reflected in their subject-focus responses to children's play.

7.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter provided insight into the practitioners' provision of free play in their practices, and how they made meaning of children's free play at home and in the nursery. An examination of Amy and Rachel's mosaic pieces provided insight into their play in the nursery, and their interactions with the practitioners during free play. The themes of home-nursery relationship, hierarchy, the practitioners' understanding of their own role in children's play, and accountability tools were identified in the analysis of the practitioner-child interactions as factors that impacted Ms. Smith and Ms. Khan's interactions with Amy and Rachel. These themes were then examined across all practitioners' interviews to reveal the practitioners' perceptions of their own approaches to making meaning of and responding to children's free play.

This chapter answered the three research questions (in Section 7.1). Through an examination of the practitioner-child interactions during free play this chapter showed that children's agency in play was not static as free play was experienced across varying contexts (such as the presence of practitioners and their interactions with the children during play) that had thickening and thinning impacts on the children's agency. The practitioners' reflections revealed variations in their perceptions of their own role in supporting children's play and in their approaches to addressing and making meaning of parent-practitioner interactions. These varying perceptions impacted their responses to children's home-nursery relationships. The practitioners' perceptions of and responses to the children's free play were shaped by the nursery cultures and practices. Within these cultures and practices in the nursery, the practitioners reflected on the following as the factors that impacted their responses to

children during free play: the school's culture of co-playing; each practitioner's position along the organisational hierarchy; and accountability tools. The practitioners perceived children's play in the nursery to reflect the cultures and practices that they experienced at home. Through the examination of play encounters, the chapter showed that the practitioners and the children's experiences were impacted by the presence of the researcher, and the participants' perceptions of the researcher role and their interpretation of the purpose of the study.

The next chapter discusses the study's overall findings by drawing commonalities between case studies, and highlighting nuanced differences within those commonalities. It discusses how the findings answer the research questions.

8. Chapter Eight: Discussion and analysis

8.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided insight into the practitioners' provision of free play in their practice, and how they made meaning of children's free play at home and in the nursery. An examination of two children-Amy and Rachel's mosaic pieces provided insight into their play in the nursery, and their interactions with two practitioners during free play. This chapter presents the key discussion and analysis in response to the research questions (see Section 8.2) relating to the children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery.

8.2. The approach taken in presenting the discussion and analysis

This section presents the discussion and analysis under three overarching themes. It focuses on the discussion and the analysis from Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven to show how they answer the research questions. Hancock and Algozzine's (2016) suggestions regarding how to report findings from case study analysis (discussed in Sections 3.3 and 3.14) informed my approach to the discussion. The themes present commonalities across the case studies and also highlight rich differences within those parallels. Such rich differences are illustrated through dialogue and comparison between examples from the analysis chapters. Theme II also 'synthesise(d)s and present(ed)s based on the sources that provide the information' (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016, p.63) as they are categorised according to the different perspectives they represent.

The following discussion and analysis are organised under three overarching answers in response to the research questions:

1. What are the relationships between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery? How are these relationships perceived and responded to from multiple perspectives?

2. How do these relationships, perceptions, and responses develop over time and impact children's free play experiences in the nursery?

3. How did the research experience impact children's free play?

I. The analysis showed that whilst accessing the same nursery provision, individuality in the children's free play showed that there was a dialogic relationship between the free play cultures and practices encountered within the nursery and those encountered beyond the nursery. This theme answers the research question of, what are the relationships between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. By creating a discussion between Naomi and Sophia's differing engagement in free play in terms of their selection of resources, location of play in the various spaces, and interactions with their peers and adults (practitioners and the researcher), Chapter Six illustrates the unique progression of their individual research journeys. The study shows that whilst accessing the same resources and encountering cultures and practices established by the practitioners at play time, the children's engagement with the provision varied. These differences highlight the importance of examining the factors beyond the nursery that shaped children's play repertoires that comprised of their play dispositions. Such repertoires were developed as the children incorporated the aspects of cultures and practices that they encountered, internalised, and embodied across diverse contexts. In Chapter Six for example (see Box 6.1), Naomi represented herself as a seasoned photographer through her use of language such as, 'smile' and 'say cheese!'; physically positioned children by moving their chins up and down to compose the visual elements of the photograph; and delivered positive feedback by saying 'nice one!' and 'much better' to her subjects, and physically patted them on their shoulders. I interpreted such language and behaviour as indications of her previous experience of being photographed and/or of having used a camera. The claim that such know-how was acquired beyond the nursery and did not reflect the nursery cultures and practices was based on my observation of the practitioners. My observations showed that the practitioners took candid photographs of children engaging in activities for the purpose of documentation and the composition of such photographs did not require verbal directions. My observations also indicated that the

children were not allowed access to the cameras at playtime in both the Nurseries. Therefore, this study argues that Naomi embodied her knowledge of photography, and transferred and incorporated such know-how into her free play during research in the nursery. It argues that Naomi utilised specific cultural capital, i.e. knowledge of photography, acquired through her encounters with cultures and practices outside the nursery, to negotiate power dynamics in play interactions with her peers by directing them. This example supports the claim that individuality in each child's free play as they accessed the same nursery provision showed that there was a dialogic relationship between the children's varied experiences with free play cultures and practices in the nursery and those they encountered beyond the nursery.

- II. This answer provides further insight in response to the research question of 'what are the relationships between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery?' It also answers the questions of 'how are these relationships perceived and responded to from multiple perspectives? How do these relationships, perceptions, and responses develop over time and impact children's free play experiences in the nursery?' The examination of developments in the play themes of language, play behaviour and children's agency exercised during free play over time, showed the complex and dynamic nature of the two way traffic of cultures and practices between home and the nursery. An examination of multiple perspectives showed variations in the meanings that were assigned to these developments from various standpoints.

Play Themes

- a) The study found continuity in key themes that bridged children's play at home and in the nursery. It further revealed nuanced variations within those themes overtime resulting from the differing cultures and practices in the two settings. When examined through multiple perspectives, it revealed parallels and differences in the way the children, parents, and practitioners made meaning of and responded to those themes over time. The 'keyness' of these themes was determined by the frequency of their recurrence in mosaic pieces generated over time by the children and the significance they assigned to them during the research.

The recurrence of these themes in adults' (parents, practitioners and the researcher) perspectives provided insight into the additional layers of meanings assigned from various standpoints. The excerpts presented in the case studies in Chapters Five, Six and Seven pertain to key themes in Dave, Naomi, Sophia, Rachel and Amy's play journeys. The role of Dave's friendship in his free play experiences, Naomi's tendency to overtly verbalise her actions related to the study during play time and direct her peers and me; Sophia's developing relationship with peers; Amy's play with doll and pram; and Rachel's tendency to play Elsa wearing a tassel, were identified as the key themes in their respective case studies. Each of these themes bridged home and the nursery in particular ways. The following is an example that illuminates this finding by providing insight into the multiple perspectives from which Dave's theme of friendship in relationship to his free play was perceived over time.

Chapter Five presents a detailed examination of the development of the theme of Dave's friendships in relationship to his free play and shows its continuity over time as it bridged home and the nursery. The examination also reveals parallels and differences between the children's (Dave and Henry) and adults' (parents, practitioners and researcher) perceptions of this theme.

Alongside their developing relationships with other children in the nursery, Dave and Henry consistently referred to one another as the person they liked playing with the most in the nursery. They attributed this preference to each other's consistent availability and willingness to play together. By answering my follow-up child-conference questions to Henry regarding play at home and interpreting Henry's playful behaviour towards me, Dave communicated the following regarding their relationship. Shared humour due to familiarity through past shared experiences and knowledge of each other's home play cultures and practices, were communicated as aspects of their relationship. Dave and Henry's play over time during the mosaic sessions showed mutuality in their acceptance of each other's suggestions for developing their shared play in the form of changes and introduction of new elements in their play; as well as building on each other's ideas to add depth to and prolong their play (see Box 5.18). Both Dave and Henry practised reflexivity in interpreting each other's embodiment of play

intentions while staying in their assumed roles. This enabled them to avoid disrupting their on-going play to discuss progress and next steps. Dave and Henry showed common preferences for themes such as imaginative play that consisted of elements related to magic, poisons, and antidotes. Over the course of the project, both Henry and Dave in individual and shared mosaic experiences engaged in dialogue with me and with each other in my presence, regarding the developing tensions in their relationship. As they both communicated to me in the research, such developments resulted from their evolving friendships with other children in the nursery. These new relationships were also accompanied by changes in the nature of their play during mosaic sessions. Children's perspectives communicated to me in their accounts and reflections, varied from the adults' (parents, practitioners and researcher) perspectives. Such differences between children and adults' perspectives (highlighted in the following paragraph) revealed that while the adults were aware of the presence of the overarching key themes in the children's play, they were not privy to knowledge of all developments in those themes over the course of the research.

The theme of Dave's friendship recurred in the mosaic pieces generated by adults such as Dave's mother Alba and his practitioner Ms. Nowak. Collating the pieces showed parallels and differences in their perceptions. Alba and Ms. Nowak reflected on Dave's relationships with his best friend, and on their own roles in facilitating that friendship in Dave's play experiences. In her interview, Alba merely acknowledged that "he (Dave) has Henry in the nursery", and chose to discuss at length Dave's shared play with Sally who she identified as Dave's best friend. She emphasised her own role in Dave's past play experiences shared with both Henry and Sally beyond the nursery, and her familiarity with both Henry and Sally's mothers. I interpreted Alba's attention to such aspects of Dave's play, as a reflection of adult-centric play cultures and practices in Dave's home. In contrast to Alba who valued her own involvement in Dave's shared play with his friends, Ms. Nowak shared her perception of her own practice of caution to avoid disrupting Dave and Henry's 'philosophical conversations', and remaining sensitive to providing them privacy and space to develop their friendship. She described this friendship as one shared between 'best friends'. My observations provided insight into the practitioners' (see Box 5.18) practices of extending play time to enable continuity and development

of Dave and Henry's ongoing play, while their peers tidied up. The practitioners' interviews showed their appreciation of Dave and Henry's 'philosophical conversations' and imaginative play (see Box 5.2). Such insight revealed that Dave and Henry's shared play was valued and promoted within the culture and practices in the nursery.

By examining multiple perspectives, the study argues that commonalities show that there was continuity in key play themes between the children's play at home and in the nursery. Subtle meanings and expressions within and across these perspectives show that the nuanced differences between the cultures and practices at home and in the nursery were reflected in the adults' (parents and practitioners) perceptions, attitudes, provision and responses to the development of key themes that recurred in the children's play.

b) The findings showed that there was dialogue between varying contextual factors (such as space, relationships and resources) and developments in play themes, as the children actively maintained continuity in those themes and developed them in nuanced ways through their free play in the nursery and at home. For example, Chapter Five showed that there was dialogue between Henry's play theme of 'shop' and contextual factors at home and in the nursery within which he created, recreated and developed this particular play over time. Henry's mother Nora in her interview in March, identified Henry's preference for playing shop at home. The theme of shop recurred in May in Henry's free play in the nursery in a context that varied from that in his home. This context included factors such as space which was the reception playground, and physical resources such as the desk that was set up by the practitioners to appear as a shop with a toy cash register and cups. Relationships and interactions also formed part of the context. These included Dave's suggestions to explore a new theme that was 'something not poison'; and the shutting and opening of my eyes to indicate death and resurrection, in response to Dave and Henry's instructions as they chanted 'dead' and 'life' (see Box 5.22). The theme of death emerged in an earlier mosaic session when Henry drew my attention to a tray of dead fish in the reception playground. During the recurrence of play of the theme of shop in May, Henry created dialogue between his play theme and the context in the nursery, and developed it

further by incorporating the elements of poisons and antidotes and the ability to revive me from death. The dynamic relationship between Henry's play theme of 'shop' and the different contexts at home and in the nursery within which he experienced this particular play over time, is an illustrative example of how the themes were developed as they recurred and interacted with the different spatial, physical and social contexts in the nursery and at home.

Play behaviour and language

Children's play journeys over time revealed the developments in their play behaviour and language used during play. Developments were perceived by the parents and practitioners as indicators of the complex two-way traffic of free play cultures and practises from home and the nursery. The values that were assigned to such developments varied across the multiple perspectives, and revealed parallels and tensions between cultures and practices in the two settings. The developments in Dave's play behaviour such as his increased physical activity after he began to spend playtime with Raymond recorded in my observations, is an illustrative example of how children's play behaviour changed over time. Such developments were interpreted to be a result of the changes in his play partner as his play shifted from imaginative play on a regular basis with Henry, to more frequent physical play with Raymond that involved, running, climbing up and sliding down the hillock in the reception playground. As Naomi ran her index finger along the drawings and she said 'curly whirly twisty swirly upside down round and round' while she 'played teacher' with Amy (see Box 6.6), she incorporated into her play, instructional language used by the practitioners while teaching children how to write letters of the alphabet during structured time. These examples show that the children's play journeys over time revealed the developments in play behaviour and language that resulted from a multitude of contextual factors such as play experiences with other children and structured tasks with the practitioners in the nursery.

Parents perceived developments in language and play behaviour to be a result of their children encountering cultures and practises established by the practitioners, as well as home cultures and practices reflected by the

peers that their children encountered during free play in the nursery. By creating a discussion, Chapter Six highlighted commonalities and nuanced differences between Naomi's father Noah and Sophia's mother Sarah's cultures and perceptions of developments in their children's play behaviour and language over time. For instance, Noah expressed his satisfaction regarding Naomi's increased willingness to share her toys at home which he attributed to the culture in the nursery. He communicated that such developments were also reflected in the language that Naomi used during free play at home, such as 'sharing is caring'. However, not all parents expressed their satisfaction with the way their children internalised and reflected aspects of their free play experiences in the nursery by manifesting them in their free play at home. Dave's mother Alba (see Box 5.14) expressed her dissatisfaction with the changes she perceived in Dave's behaviour during free play in the nursery such as Dave being 'less chatty' over time. She attributed this shift in behaviour to the practitioners' lack of appreciation for such enthusiasm in their cultures and practices of responding to children's free play. Sarah (see Box 6.11) attributed changes in Sophia's play behaviour and language at home to the home cultures and practices of the peers that Sophia encountered during free play in the nursery. Sarah's dissatisfaction expressed regarding developments in language that Sophia used during play at home, that Sarah described as 'ghetto' revealed her concern that not all cultures and practices that Sophia encountered and internalised through her play in the nursery were approved of and valued by Sarah. Similarly, the practitioners interpreted the children's play behaviour to reflect cultures and practices at home. Ms. Smith's reference to how she understood Eric's play behaviour to be shaped by his father's attitude towards play and her assumption that 'his dad would prefer that he was doing something a bit more, book based...' because Eric doesn't tend to play and engage in play like some of the other children. He can be quite passive,' is an illustrative example of how practitioners' linked children's nursery play practises to cultures and practices at home (see Box 7.13). The practitioners' facilitation of the continuity and development of Dave and Henry's play (see Box 5.18) indicate that the play practices that were aligned with the nursery play agenda were more valued by the practitioners. These illustrative examples show that developments in children's language and play behaviour were perceived by the parents and the practitioners as indicators of the complex two-way traffic of free play

cultures and practises between home and the nursery. They provided insight into how the values assigned to such developments varied across multiple perspectives, and revealed the parallels and tensions between the cultures and practices in the two settings.

Agency

a) Children's play practices in the nursery revealed that they exercised agency in various ways. While some were aligned with the accepted forms of agency in the nursery culture, others contradicted them. Each child's agency varied in terms of its nature over time, as well as in degree as free play was experienced across varying contexts that had thickening and thinning impacts on the degree of agency. Children's agency in free play was assigned varying meanings from different perspectives. In Chapter Six, the discussion between excerpts from Sophia and Naomi's first mosaic sessions draws attention to the commonalities in the ways they both communicated agency. They embodied agency in terms of space as Sophia chose to locate herself on Ms. Smith's carpet while Naomi frequently shifted between the various spaces within the nursery; in terms of resources in the way Sophia limited her peers' access to Ms. Smith's flashcards and Naomi used the camera to take photographs of children in the nursery; in terms of expressing their intentions regarding the activities they chose to engage in, in the way Sophia informed me that she wished to rest on Ms. Smith's carpet and in the way Naomi suggested that we document the observation notes backwards. The discussion also draws out the differences in the ways these decisions were expressed. While Sophia silently sat and observed other children's play with minimal verbal interactions with me, Naomi verbalised her intentions and actively directed me through the different spaces within the nursery. Ms. Smith's question to me 'any luck? Were you able to do any activities with her or has she just been sitting there doing nothing?' is indicative that Sophia's agency in the particular instance was not aligned with the forms of agency that were widely recognised in the nursery and interpreted as agency. The discussion between the various stages of Sophia's play journey illustrates the variations in her agency during free play over time. For instance, in contrast to maintaining continuity in her solitary play in her first mosaic session, in the final stages Sophia utilised her role in the study to actively include her

peer in a research related activity during free play. This showed the evolution in the nature of Sophia's agency in relationship to developments in the nature of her free play practices in the nursery. Changes Amy made to the speed and nature of her strides upon encountering Ms. Cook who had emerged from the kitchen, while she ushered me to the homecorner as she maintained continuity in her play, showed how Amy responded to contextual changes (see Box 7.1) while she adhered to the nursery cultures and practices of no running indoors and sustained her ongoing play by continuing to push the pram. This example illustrates how the presence of the practitioners and the researcher had varying impacts on Amy's decisions regarding her play, and the fluid nature of her agency as it thickened and thinned in relation to changes in wide-ranging contexts. It illustrates that shifts in agency were non-linear, as while my presence was intended to enhance Amy's agency, a multitude of other contextual factors such as the emergence of Ms. Cook and the rules communicated to the children through the cultures and practices in the nursery, also thickened and thinned her agency.

b) The perceptions of and responses to children's diverse expressions of agency during free play by parents at home; and by practitioners during free play related child-practitioner interactions in the nursery were shaped by the cultures and practices in those respective settings.

- Within cultures and practices in the nursery, practitioners reflected on the following as the factors that impacted their responses to children during free play: practitioners' understandings of and approach to the home-school relationship; each practitioner's position along the organisational hierarchy; and accountability tools.

Among practitioners who reported having contact with parents due to their position along the hierarchy of seniority, their perceptions of their own approach to the home-school relationship revealed that they viewed themselves as experts in parent-practitioner relationships. They reflected on their practices, of supporting parents' engagement in play and learning activities with their children at home; and of educating parents regarding the nursery's practices. Practitioners expressed varying perceptions of parents' knowledge and attitude towards children's play. Some such as Ms.

Smith who had contact with parents, reported 'get(ting) a real mix' (see Box 7.13) in attitude, while others such as Ms. Palmer who did not have contact with parents and relied on the information she gained from other practitioners, perceived all parents' attitudes towards play to be uniform (see Box 7.10).

As a consequence of practitioners' positions in terms of seniority, varying levels of contact with parents and with children during structured time resulted in varying knowledge among the practitioners regarding children's play repertoires. Chapter Seven provides insight into how the practitioners' frequency and nature of contact with children during structured time and with their parents varied according to their positions along the hierarchy of seniority in the nursery. Within this hierarchy, lead practitioners and class teachers such as Ms. Smith and Ms. Kent led structured activities with the children, and were the designated point persons who maintained contact with the respective parents of particular groups of children they were assigned. Practitioners such as Ms. Cook and Ms. Palmer who were not assigned responsibility for specific children, floated between spaces and activities playing supportive roles assisting the lead and class teachers during structured tasks; and deferred to the class teachers for communicating with parents. These findings showed that due to the varying levels of contact with the children and their parents, the practitioners had varying levels of knowledge regarding children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery, that in turn shaped their responses to children's free play in the nursery.

While the designated class teachers' presence was consistent through all structured activities experienced by the children, children's contact with practitioners in supporting roles were more sporadic during structured time. This was perceived by the practitioners as a factor that influenced children's decisions to seek adult attention during free play. For instance, Ms. Smith (see Box 7.2) perceived Amy's frequent contact with her to be the reason behind Amy's decision to relocate her play near Ms. Smith. The study showed that in children's play practices, they were more likely to seek adult attention during play from practitioners that they were familiar with due to time spent together during structured activities in the nursery. Both the researcher's observations and the practitioners' perspectives revealed

that practitioners' positions in terms of seniority was a factor that determined their frequency and level of involvement in children's free play and contact with their parents. Such variations led practitioners to have different levels of knowledge regarding children's play repertoires.

As a consequence of practitioners' positions in terms of seniority, they had varying levels of responsibilities towards designing the play provision that required different levels of knowledge of the curriculum. The findings showed that the lead practitioners and class teachers were responsible for planning the provision in the nursery, while the practitioners playing supportive roles assisted the class teachers and lead practitioners by following their instructions. As a result, the practitioners in supportive roles who were uninvolved in planning the play provision, communicated in their interviews that their work did not require them to be familiar with the curriculum. The analysis of the practitioners interviews revealed that their varying levels of knowledge of the curriculum impacted their ability to link their understanding and interpretation of children's play to the curriculum. While Ms. Smith connected her intentions for engaging in Amy's play with the goals that she had identified for Amy's development with other practitioners, Ms. Lindt reported 'I don't have too much input on the planning. It's all here for me'. Contrasting examples of Ms. Smith and Ms. Khan's interactions with Amy and Rachel in Chapter Seven were illustrative of how the differences in their understanding of play and curriculum led to varied practitioner-child play interactions. This was evident in the different ways in which Ms. Smith and Ms. Khan reflected on their own role in children's play. Ms. Nowak and Ms. Smith who were both in lead practitioner positions expressed awareness of the disruptive impact untimely intervention by practitioners could have on the development of children's play. In contrast, Ms. Khan used language such as 'I just butt in' to communicate that she perceived her own role to be vital for children's play to be meaningful. These examples illustrate the relationship between the practitioners' positions in terms of seniority and their responses to the children's free play. The illustrative examples in this finding show the value of gaining multiple perspectives such as those of practitioners, as they deepen understanding of how the interaction between children's play at home and in the nursery is responded to in early years settings.

Two key components of accountability tools that emerged as factors impacting practitioners' practices related to children's free play were the curriculum, and structured tasks such as observations and assessments involved in the documentation of evidence. The practitioners' interviews revealed the complex ways in which the accountability tools were experienced as instrumental and as barriers to practice by practitioners. In section 7.2, Ms. Smith's reflection on her interaction with Amy highlighted how structural barriers in the form of accountability measures such as structured tasks for documenting evidence of learning, impacted her ability to respond to Amy's free play by limiting her spatial mobility. In her interview, Ms. Smith provided further insight into the role of the curriculum in her practice where she identified it as a positive guiding tool for setting out learning intentions for age appropriate bands, keeping track of goals, benchmarks and what to expect. She expressed appreciation for the flexibility and the resultant autonomy to the practitioners the curriculum provided by not being too prescriptive in nature while allowing her to be 'systematic' in her approach. Ms. Smith drew attention to the challenges she experienced in her practice, that resulted due to the school's rigid attitude while responding to children's developing interests in her planning of the play provision. Other practitioners were critical of this aspect of 'systematically' tracking according to 'the ticking sheet' and defined it as 'traditional' due to its gaps (see Box 7.21). These gaps pertained to its failure to encompass all the indicators of development that were observed during children's self-governed play. Other practitioners found that the curriculum drew attention to particular academic goals and marginalised other areas such as creativity. All practitioners reported that the documentation of evidence of learning impeded their ability to observe children's self-governed play, and respond to their free play in ways that they considered to be the most appropriate. Although Ms. Nowak appreciated the importance of opportunities for children to be agentic in the way she discussed her approach of retrieving from Dave and Henry during playtime in order to enable them to develop uninterrupted conversations, she also expressed appreciation for Dave's compliance in completing structured tasks related to accountability measures (see Box 5.10). Such appreciation of Dave's compliance despite being aware of his lack of interest in the activity, revealed ambiguity in Ms. Nowak's expectations of children's agency in play. This illustrative example shows that accountability

pressures created tensions between what practitioners valued and their practice. With these examples, the study illustrates how accountability tools were experienced by practitioners while they responded to children's free play.

- Within the cultures and practices at home, the parents reflected on their approach to creating free play provision in terms of space, resources and relationships that impacted their responses to their children. In Chapter Six, the examination of parents' perceptions of their children's agency in free play at home provided insight into the parents' intended goals for the cultures and practices they promoted at home. Both Noah and Sarah perceived their particular provision of space, resources and play interactions within play environments in their respective homes to be contextual factors that would shape certain kind of agency in their children. The discussion revealed nuanced differences between Noah and Sarah's perceptions; as well as insight into complexities in their individual perceptions. Noah perceived Naomi's agency in play to vary with the presence of other children that Noah and his partner were childminders to. He considered their presence to be a contextual factor that thinned Naomi's agency in terms of space, resources and activities as she was instructed in a structured manner according to adult (childminder's) agenda during playtime at home. While Noah expressed appreciation for Naomi's ability to make decisions in her brother's presence regarding her play time activities, he expressed that in the presence of other children, he intended for Naomi to follow adult (childminder's) agenda, and be less assertive in expressive ownership of her play resources at home by sharing with the other children. The chapter showed that Noah's expectations for Naomi's agency during playtime varied with changing contexts. Sarah considered involving Sophia in decisions regarding what play resources to purchase and where to locate play at home, as practices that thickened Sophia's agency. Sarah's concern regarding her observations that Sophia avoided confrontation when her play was interrupted by other children and passively retreated from the play instead, was interpreted as Sarah's perception that Sophia lacked agency in peer play interactions. In contrast, Sarah expressed dissatisfaction with Sophia's increased tendency over time to confront adults at home for interrupting her play or taking possession of her play resources without her consent. Such differences showed that Sarah's expectations for Sophia's

agency in play varied according to contextual factors such as the age of play partners. Noah and Sarah's perceptions provided insight into how Naomi and Sophia's cultures and practices in their respective homes varied; and impacted the development of their individual play over time. Such comparisons provide insight into Noah and Sarah's perceptions of their own approaches to creating free play provision in terms of space, resources, and relationships in their cultures and practices at home, that impacted their responses to their children's free play.

III. The study answered the question of 'how did the research experience impact children's free play?' It revealed that the research experience had significant impact on children's free play in the nursery as the free play provision was utilised as a participatory tool by the children. This impact can be understood in the following ways:

The research affected children's free play through their assimilation of the research task, their meaning-making of and responses to our developing unique researcher-child relationships, and negotiations of power dynamics in play related interactions. Chapter Four provides insights into how the developing researcher-child relationship impacted children's free play. It draws on Sophia and Naomi's case studies from Chapter Six to illustrate how the children made meaning of my role, and how I responded to them individually to help communicate through their varied experiences that I differed from the practitioners. The research reveals contrasting developments in their research journeys. Naomi used her role in the research to exclude her peers from her free play-related research activities from the early stages of the study. In contrast, Sophia, who initially did not overtly relate to the research space, over time began to utilise it to build rapport with one of her peers.

The awareness of being part of the research impacted the children's free play choices through their selection of materials to be communicated in the study, and the types of play they engaged in during the research. Children's understanding of the developing researcher-child relationship and of the purpose of the research impacted their selection of materials they communicated through their play. This was shown in the way Irene took ownership of the research task and communicated through her play with

teletubbies and the telephone, the themes of mum, good and bad behaviour, and babies. Irene's mosaic pieces generated over time through the play she exhibited and drawings she created in the nursery, visual materials she generated at home with the use of the camera, and her mother's interview, were collated over time. Their analysis revealed that the aforementioned were recurring key themes in Irene's play at home and in the nursery. Irene's play (see Box 4.9) repertoire through which she intentionally communicated the themes specific to her play at home and in the nursery, was impacted by the contextual factor of our researcher-child relationship and her awareness of what she interpreted to be my research intentions.

The impact of the research can also be understood in relation to how the parents and practitioners assimilated the research task and interpreted the intended goals of the research, that consequently shaped how they conducted themselves in the adult-child interactions related to free play. Children's researcher-child relationships with me were a part of a complex web of relationships, and the study found that our individual researcher-child relationships impacted children's interactions with their peers and meaning-making interactions with practitioners and parents. Naomi's bodily gestures of waving her index finger as she informed a non-participant peer that she was excluded from my observations and the study as she said 'not you darling' (See Box 6.1) shows that her awareness of our researcher-child relationship and her role in the research impacted how Naomi negotiated power dynamics with her peers. Henry's co-constructed dialogue during meaning-making with his mother provides an illustrative example of how he used the material that he generated during play at home, as a space to recollect play experiences that would be of relevance to both his mother and me.

Within this complex web of relationships, how adults (parents and practitioners) perceived my role, the goals of the research, and their own role in the study, impacted how they engaged with the children during free play and during adult-child collaborative meaning-making of the data generated by the children. Henry's meaning-making with his mother Nora is an illustrative example of how Nora and Henry communicated certain aspects of their shared free play experiences in my presence. In the analysis of the findings, the impact of Nora's awareness and interpretation

of my research intentions and expectations were taken into consideration as the factors that impacted her approach to the parent-child meaning-making interaction. The interaction revealed a complex mixture of questions from Nora that at times I interpreted as her attempts to steer Henry's thinking in a certain direction to perhaps serve what she interpreted to be the purpose of the research. At other times, rather than playing a didactic role, I interpreted Nora's contributions as signs of remaining sensitive to Henry's responses to show me that she was child-centric in her approach. I interpreted Nora's sharing of control over the process of constructing meaning of the material with Henry, to be influenced by my presence and her understanding of my research agenda.

Similarly, the analysis of Ms. Smith's reflection on her interactions with Amy during playtime that I witnessed, took into account the possibility that Ms. Smith's engagement with Amy may have been influenced by her awareness that I was observing her practice of responding to Amy's free play. Ms. Smith discussed her intentions of addressing Amy's specific needs in her response to her free play. These illustrative examples show that the research experience had significant impact on the children's free play in the nursery as it affected their assimilation of the research task, meaning-making of and responses to our developing unique researcher-child relationships, and negotiations of power dynamics in play related interactions. Findings such as those from Irene's play in my presence show that the awareness of being part of the research impacted the children's free play choices through their selection of material to be communicated in the study and the types of play they engaged in during the research. The impact of the research can also be understood in relation to how parents such as Nora and practitioners such as Ms. Smith assimilated the research task and interpreted the intended goals of the research, that consequently shaped how they conducted themselves in adult-child interactions related to free play.

8.3. Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the key discussion and analysis in response to the research questions relating to the children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. The following chapter discusses how the study

advances new knowledge and theoretical understandings of the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery, and informs the conceptual framework.

9. Chapter nine: Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented the key discussion and analysis in response to the research questions relating to the children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. This chapter discusses how the answers to the research questions presented in the previous chapter, advance new knowledge and theoretical understandings of the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery, and inform new dimensions to the conceptual framework. The chapter discusses the study's methodological contribution to the field of research with children, and how they address gaps in the literature. A discussion of the study's limitations highlights areas for development in future research. The concluding remarks discuss the benefits of the findings, and the conceptual and methodological contributions for researchers, practitioners and policy makers globally.

9.2. How the research advances new knowledge and theoretical understandings of the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery; and informs new dimensions to the conceptual framework

This section discusses how the research advances new knowledge and theoretical understandings of the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. My research agenda for studying the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery was largely inspired by Brooker (2002). Brooker (2002) conducted an ethnographic study into children's transitions between home and the reception, and utilised Bourdieu's concepts to make meaning of how home cultures and experiences shaped children's initial learning dispositions. The following is a discussion of the parallels and differences between Brooker's (2002) work and my research. It also includes the role of other key literature (such as Clark and Moss, 2011; Tisdall and Punch, 2012; and Wood, 2014) in informing my research approach that led to new insights into children's free play.

This research parallels Brooker's (2002) aim to study the relationship between children's home and school. Brooker (2002) primarily focused on the impact of this relationship on the overarching issue of children's learning dispositions that also encompassed children's play dispositions. In contrast, the primary focus of my research is on children's free play. Diversity in cultures and practices at home is considered as a factor that impacted children's experiences in the nursery in both the studies. My research parallels Brooker's (2002) use of Bourdieu's (1990) theoretical concepts of 'field', 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' to conceptualise the home-school relationship. However, there are particular areas that my research develops. While Brooker (2002) conceptualised home and the reception as two fields, my research adopted Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) approach to conceptualising children's everyday experiences as micro-fields (see Section 2.5.2b). In doing so, my research takes a granular approach to examining children's free play encounters by conceiving of them as live fields of dynamic interactions and experiences. The dynamic play encounters are examined to reveal negotiations for positions within the 'field' in adult-child (researcher-child, practitioner-child and parent-child) and peer interactions (Vuorisalo and Alanen, 2015). This is an innovative way in which my research builds on Brooker's (2002) work. While examining live 'fields', in addition to paralleling Brooker's (2002) use of 'habitus' by incorporating it into the conceptual framework, this study in its granular approach to analysis also examines 'embodiment' of developments over time in habitus and manifestation of such developments in the 'bodily hexis' of the participants (Bourdieu, 1990). The study also utilises Bourdieu's (1990) concept of 'unique integration' of habitus in conceiving of children's free play journeys as complex non-linear processes that are experienced across various contexts over time. During these processes children's individual habitus evolve by encountering the habitus of other individuals, as well as elements of the habitus of those that these other individuals have come into contact with in the past.

The analysis of free play encounters addresses Tisdall and Punch's (2012) criticism of the 'new sociology of childhood' by taking into account the wide-ranging physical and social contextual factors within which free play is experienced. By incorporating concepts such as 'thickening' and 'thinning' of

'agency' (Klocker, 2007; and Robson et al., 2007) the study shows how variations in agency within each play encounter, across children's play journeys, as well as at different stages within each child's individual play journey, can be understood. Brooker (2002) reported patterns in children's behaviour and take-up of the curriculum, based on her own observations. In contrast, my research takes a child-centric approach to the selection of materials for case studies by focusing on the key themes that the children communicated as important through their free play. This research parallels Brooker's (2002) decision to examine multiple adult (parents and practitioners) and child perspectives, to understand how developments in play themes and children's play behaviour over time were perceived and responded to. In my research, the examination of multiple perspectives showed that there was a complex and dynamic two-way traffic of free play between home and the nursery. This complex and dynamic relationship was impacted by the cultures and practices at home and in the nursery that shaped contexts within which the children experienced play. The study found that the dialogic relationship between the children's diverse free play cultures and practices at home and those encountered in the nursery, led to the individuality in each child's free play and research experiences whilst accessing the same nursery provision. The development of unique researcher-child relationships and their impact on children's free play experiences over time emerged as an important finding in the research. This finding addresses the following gap in Brooker's (2002) work. Although Brooker (2002) acknowledged her developing relationship with the parents over time, she did not explore the impact of her researcher-child relationship with the children as meaningful findings. There were significant differences in the researcher roles that were assumed in the two studies and this is explored further in the discussion of the literature in the section on the study's methodological contributions.

This research contributes to knowledge by showing how its conceptual framework can be used to study children's dynamic free play in a new way. Authors such as Brooker (2002); Wragg (2013) and Vuorisalo and Alanen (2015) paved the path to conceptualising children's environments at home and school; their play and everyday interactions as Bourdieu's (1990) 'field' to capture the dynamic essence of their experiences. My research adopts Vuorisalo and Alanen's (2015) framework of using 'field' to analyse

children's everyday interactions and applies it to the micro-analysis of the children's individual free play encounters. My research builds on this framework and extends Vuorisalo and Alanen (2015) and Wragg's (2013) application of 'field' by calling into question the limitations in their approaches. These limitations relate to the ways in which the authors choose to ignore children's reactions to adults' responses in structured activities and free play respectively. My research claims that Wragg (2013) fails to conceptualise children's free play as dynamic and ongoing, and shows the value in rethinking free play by expanding the scope of 'field'. Instead of conceptualising adults' responses to children's play as the end of encounters that are made meaning of (as done by Wragg, 2013, see Section 2.5.2c), my research analyses the children's subsequent reactions to those adult responses. Sensitivity to context is particularly important in my framework as it takes into account the temporal, relational and contextual factors that set the boundaries within which children's free play develops and they exercise complex and dynamic agency (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). The role of 'agency' in my framework provides insight into my position on the concept. I conceive of agency to be complex and not static. I consider spatial, physical and social contextual factors within which children's experiences take place, to impact their agency. I conceptualise children's agency to be 'thickened' and 'thinned' by these contextual factors, and to be assigned different meanings from various perspectives. This study also shows how the meanings attached to children's agency were relationally and temporally dynamic. My framework builds on Bordonaro and Payne's (2012) 'ambiguous agency' and shows value in using it to conceptualise how children's complex agency in free play is interpreted differently in relation to contexts, relationships and time. My position on agency reflects Robson et al.'s (2007) understanding of 'agency along a continuum', as my conceptualisation of 'agency' refutes the oversimplified views of either presence or absence of agency. Instead, I conceive of agency to be on a continuum and even in the most constricting circumstances, I imagine children to exercise a certain degree of agency (Robson et al., 2007). Throughout the thesis, illustrative examples are examined using the concepts to show how my framework for conducting micro/granular analysis of children's individual play encounters and free play journeys over time can be used to deepen meaning-making and obtain fuller insights. These illustrative examples demonstrate the framework's value for future practice in

conducting research with children. This section focused on how this research contributes to the theoretical understandings of the relationship between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery. It also focused on how the study informs new dimensions to the conceptual framework by showing how concepts such as 'agency' and Bourdieu's 'field' can be used to develop ways to conduct micro-analysis of children's complex play encounters that are relationally, temporally, and contextually dynamic.

9.3. The study's methodological contributions and how it addresses gaps in the literature

The study adds to the existing body of literature by authors (such as Mandell, 1998; and Corsary, 1997) who assumed various researcher roles, and suggested addressing the power differentials in adult-child relationships with children in researchers' approaches to establishing and developing their roles. My study shows value in its approach (see Box 3.3 and Section 4.2) to introducing the researcher to the children in a way, that communicates to them my intentions of sharing control over the research agenda with them and maintains transparency regarding the purpose of the research. The project contributes to the field of research with children as it suggests a new way of addressing the power dynamics in researcher-child relationships. By adapting Clark and Moss' (2011) mosaic approach to fit the context of my research, this study responds to Tisdall and Punch's (2012) criticism of the new sociology of childhood for essentialising particular expressions of agency. This approach enables children to communicate regarding their free play through wide-ranging participatory tools that suit their individual preferences and skills. As part of ethical practice, seeking children's on-going consent and dissent enables them to accept and decline researcher invitations, and withdraw participation from research at any time. The study contributes to the mosaic approach in the following ways. Clark and Moss (2011) analysed material (such as drawings, photographs, roleplay, and maps) generated by children and narratives assigned to data, as research outcome that represented children's reflections on experiences and opinions on particular topics such as outdoor play spaces. My study presented the topic of research, i.e. free play, as a participatory tool to the children and enabled them to engage in experiential research as they researched free

play by 'doing free play'. I accompanied the children in my researcher role while they conducted the study through their engagement in free play. This enabled me to gain insight into the children's perspectives and observe them experiencing free play, instead of solely relying on their use of reflective tools such as interviews and child-conferences. Furthermore, Clark and Moss (2011) only considered materials (such as drawings, photographs, role play, maps) generated by children and meanings assigned to them, as research outcome. This research extends the use of participatory research to also examine children's experience of generating the data by utilising its conceptual framework to conceive of the research encounters as live network of negotiations. The framework developed by combining concepts from different theoretical frameworks makes it possible to conceive of these encounters as networks that are contextually, relationally and temporally dynamic.

9.4. The limitations of the study

This section discusses the limitations of the research and suggests areas of development for future research. The following were the limitations in the study's research methods:

- The absence of structured tasks for practitioners to reflect at a later time on their practitioner-child interactions during free play.
- The lack of opportunities for the children to reflect at a later time on their free play that was documented in my observation notes.
- The absence of observations of the children's free play at home.
- The subjectivity of the researcher and its impact on data interpretation.

The limitations are discussed in details below, followed by suggestions for development in future research.

- The absence of structured tasks for practitioners to reflect at a later time on their practitioner-child interactions during free play.

A gap in the research methods lies in the absence of opportunities for the practitioners to reflect on their responses to individual children during play as recorded in the researcher observations. The practitioners reflected on their overall practice in their interviews and from time to time drew references from illustrative examples. However there were no structured tasks that required them to reflect on specific interactions recorded in my observations. On the other hand, such tasks could have impacted practitioners' engagement with children in the nursery during play, leading them to be more attentive towards the participant children. As I wanted to examine how practitioners responded to children's free play in their practice, it was important to ensure that the research tasks did not entail additional engagement beyond the practitioners' usual practice.

- The lack of opportunities for children to reflect at a later time on their free play that was documented in my observation notes

Children were involved in the meaning-making of tangible findings that they generated such as visual data (drawings and photographs) and artefacts that they created. The observation notes of their free play included the dialogue that they engaged in and their meaning-making while they experienced play. However, these play instances were not reviewed with the children at a later time in a manner similar to how the children engaged in the meaning making of visual data and tangible materials, due to the volume of the findings and limited time. In future research, designing an approach that enables children to access and choose from such large volumes of documented observations, would enhance their ability to reflect on play experiences that they consider to be of importance and relevance.

- The absence of observations of the children's free play at home

The mosaic sessions with the children and the interviews with the parents were not conducted in children's homes as I adapted to the school culture that required me to conduct all research related activities within the nursery. I relied on the children to communicate through their free play in the nursery and through their use of resources such as the camera at home, the aspects of their free play at home that they considered to be of relevance to the study. In future research, conducting mosaic sessions in naturalistic home

settings would provide richer insight into their free play cultures and practices at home; and provide opportunities to observe if and how parents respond to children's play in their natural surroundings at home.

- The subjectivity of the researcher and its impact on data interpretation

The researcher's 'subjectivity is traditionally seen as a limitation that can impact the analysis, as the researcher's opinions, preferences, and feelings can shape' how they respond to participants in the field, as well as how the researcher makes meaning of the data (Sullivan, 2002, p.2). Hertz (1996) suggested that researchers must put aside all preconceived notions on the topic. Speziale et al. (2011) concur and suggest that the purpose of identifying biases is to be 'able to approach the topic more honestly and openly' (p.18). While I agree that acknowledging biases is important, it is however impossible to ensure that the meanings attached to the data by the researcher's is free of all preconceived judgement. In this thesis, by presenting multiple possible interpretations of free play related research encounters, I acknowledged that my researcher interpretation is subjective and influenced by my knowledge of the particular child participants that I developed over the course of the research. I would argue that there are advantages to such subjectivity. Throughout the thesis, I showed awareness of the implications of my subjectivity on the data collection and analysis through critical self-reflection (Dowling, 2005). This led to 'deep contextualisation of the data', providing more 'vivid descriptions' to the readers and 'clarity regarding the researcher's epistemological positioning' (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p.129). Jootun et al. (2009) draw on Dowell et al. (1994) to highlight a methodological concern that 'the role a researcher assumes in a research setting, his or her social identity and personality, affects the relationship with participants, which can influence the outcome of the research' (p.43). As this argument holds true in the case of this study, in addition to dedicating Chapter Four to the developing researcher-child relationships and their impacts on children's free play related research interactions, this thesis explores the researcher-participant relationships across all other analysis chapters. Throughout the thesis, my awareness of the subjectivity is also reflected in my acknowledgement of the contingency

and ambivalence of the meanings that I made as an adult, of children's as well as adult participants' communication (for example see Section 4.4).

9.5. Concluding remarks

This research provides in-depth insight into children's situated lived experiences of their free play journeys that are characterised by their nuanced meanings. Such insights are of value to education policy makers involved in devising initiatives that aim to bridge home-school gaps by addressing areas of skills and knowledge among children and their families that their research identifies as lacking. By illuminating such nuanced meanings, the research suggests prolonged studies such as this for gaining deeper insight into children's individual sets of dispositions that are shaped by cultures and practices at home, and how those dispositions interact with the cultures and practices encountered in early years settings. Instead of responding predetermined agendas, these learnings should be used as starting points for developing initiatives that respond to children's needs. The findings demonstrate the importance for practitioners to gain knowledge of children's individual play dispositions. The dialogic relationship between these dispositions and the cultures and practices in early years settings is essential, as, if practitioners solely focus on a goals driven approach to designing provision and practice, the full potential of children's unique free play will not be realised. Focusing on predetermined goals as starting points that guide their practice, will limit the meanings that practitioners attach to children's free play and lead to partial understanding of what children actually experience.

My conceptual framework is beneficial for researchers and practitioners involved in working with children. It provides new ways of conceiving of the complexity of children's free play experiences that are relationally, contextually and temporally dynamic and are assigned multiple meanings from various perspectives. A microanalyses of free play using my framework provides access to layers of meanings assigned from multiple perspectives over time. By extending ideas relating to agency, my framework builds on the work of scholars who address gaps in the literature and take a critical perspective on the paradigmatic shift of the 'new sociology of childhood'. The ideas related to agency developed in my research, are of value to future

studies concerned with the understanding of the relational, contextual and temporal dimensions of children's agency.

By offering free play provision as a participatory tool, this study shows practitioners and researchers who are interested in children's perspectives of their free play, that children need not be limited to reflective tools. Rather, researchers and practitioners can enable children to communicate regarding their own free play by engaging in and experiencing free play. This study's critical approach to examining the dynamic interactions involved in process of assigning meaning where children and adults engage in live networks of negotiations, is missing in contemporary participatory research with children. The study's inclusion of this examination using its conceptual framework is useful for both researchers and practitioners who seek to gain critical perspectives into the relational, contextual and temporal dimensions of children's experiences of constructing meanings of their own experiences. The study shows how data that reflects children's rather than adults' intentions for the research/inquiry can be generated, through its approach to the introduction of the researcher to the children. It shows value for researchers and practitioners aiming to understand children's experiences, to take a more direct and transparent approach to communicating their intentions to children. It shows value in sharing control over the inquiry agenda with the children, enabling them to determine what aspects of their experiences they want to communicate and how they want to communicate them.

I resolve to share my research findings relating to children's free play, as well as methodological and conceptual contributions beyond the remit of this thesis; and in the future, present case studies of each child's research journey. The privilege of sharing the research space with the children and being part of their play journey as a co-researcher has redefined my identity as an early years practitioner and researcher. I hope the research experience was as meaningful and enjoyable for them as it was for me.

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10. Appendices

A. Research questions developed over time

Research questions in upgrade document:

The relationship between free play at home and in nursery settings over time:

What are the dynamics between free play at home and free play in nursery settings?

How do they relate to one another over time?

What are the factors at home and in nursery that influence children's free play experiences?

How do parents, teachers and children perceive children's free play in the two spaces?

How do parents and teachers understand children's perception of their own free play?

How do children interpret and experience the activities that parents and teachers identify as free play?

Research questions during data collection and initial analysis:

a. What are the relationships between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in the nursery?

b. How do these relationships impact children's free play experiences in the nursery?

a. What are teachers' understandings of children's free play at home and in the nursery?

b. How do teachers respond to children's free play cultures in their practices in the nursery?

B. Child-conference

Child-conference

1. What do you like about playtime in nursery?
2. What do you not like about playtime in the nursery?
3. Who do you like playing with in the nursery?
4. What do grownups in the nursery do during playtime?
5. Can you tell me about your best day in the nursery?
6. What do you like about playtime at home?
7. What do you not like about playtime at home?
8. Who do you like playing with at home?
9. What do grownups at home do during playtime?
10. Can you tell me about your best day at home?
11. Would you like to share anything else?

C. Group feedback sessions

Questions for group feedback sessions

1. Why is Yaspia here?
2. How did you feel about doing the study with her? (indicated by sticking a thumbs up or thumbs down smiley)
3. What did you like about the study?
4. What did you not like about the study?
5. Can you tell Yaspia when you don't want to do the study?
6. Is there anything that you would like to do more to make the study more fun?

D. Information sheet for practitioners

Information sheet for practitioners

Title: A mixed method study of how the school approaches the transition of young children's free play cultures and practices between home and the nursery setting.

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Research questions:

1. How do school policies and practices presently relate to children's home free play cultures?
2. What are the relationships between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in nursery? How do these relationships impact children's free play experiences in the nursery?
3. What are practitioners' understandings of children's free play at home and in the nursery? How do practitioners respond to children's free play cultures in their practices in the nursery?

Please take part in the following. It will not take to long. You are encouraged to participate in all of them. It would be very helpful to have your views. Please indicate in the consent form if you would like to say yes to the following activities and return by 11th January 2016:

1. Questionnaire:

Completing a short structured questionnaire. This will include ticking your preferred answers and two image sorting tasks.

2. Interview

Being briefly interviewed individually on one occasion, at a time of your convenience in your place of work to talk about your experience in nursery.

3. Focus group discussions

Taking part in a group discussion, towards the final stages of the data collection period, with all participant nursery practitioners.

4. Creative research with children

I will be requesting children to take part in some art and photographing activities. I would like to request you to participate from time to time, in helping me reflect on some of the materials collected through children's use of creative methods.

5. *Observations*

Letting me know if you would give me permission to observe your interactions with the children during free play activities.

6. *Collecting additional material*

Letting me know if you would take a few photographs of children's work and collect other materials, such as children's drawing, that you consider to be significant to particular children's free play experiences. This will help me collect richer data. I will be providing you with a camera for this activity.

7. *Photographs*

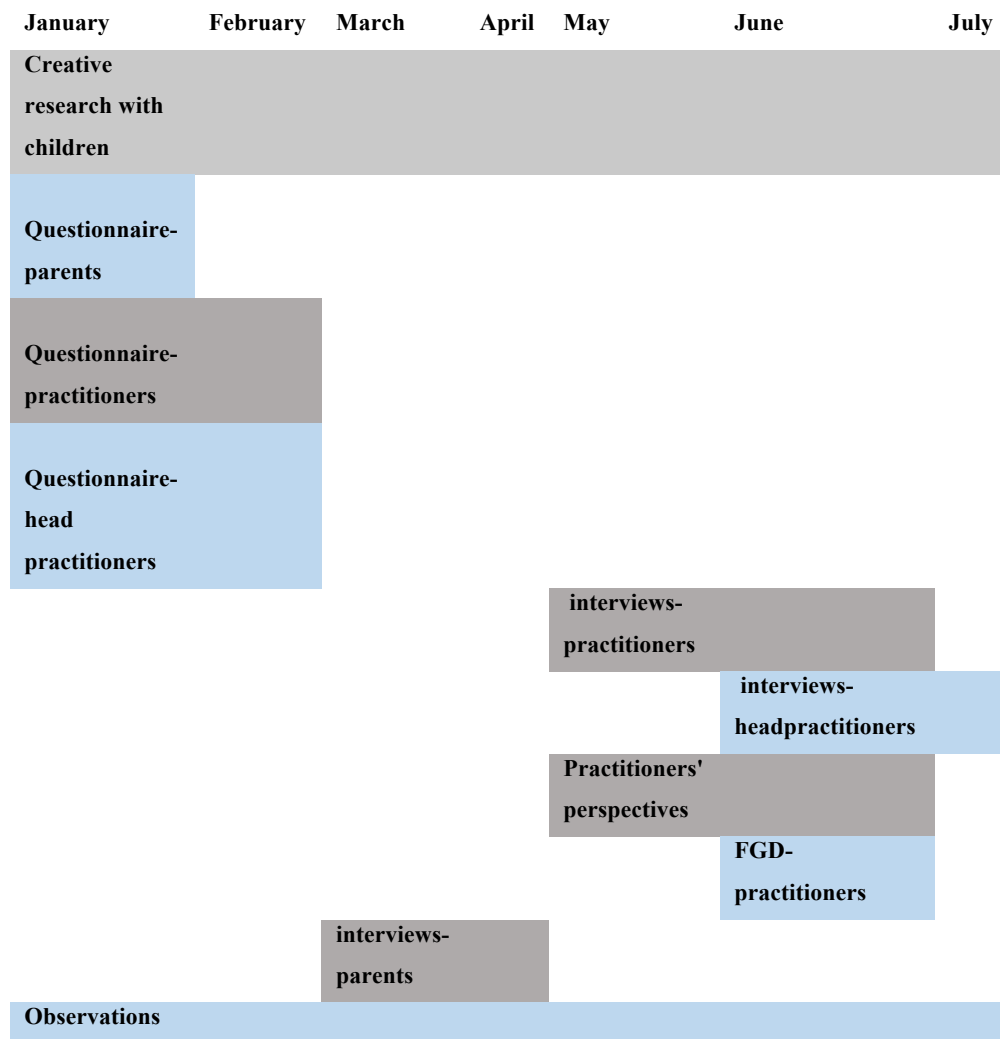
Letting me know if you would give permission to be photographed by the children during the creating research methods.

Ethics:

I have consulted BERA ethical guidelines and the guidelines provided by UCL, Institute of Education. The research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at UCL, Institute of Education. The interviews will be recorded, subject to your permission and recordings of interviews will be deleted upon write-up of the final report. The data will be stored in encrypted files in a computer that is password protected. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain anonymity of you, the children, the parents and your school. All faces in photographs taken by the children will be fuzzed using digital technology. If you do decide to take part, you can sign the consent form and return it to me. It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. You may also withdraw any data/information you have already provided up until it is written up in the final report, without giving a reason for doing so. A summary of the findings will be offered to you should you wish to read.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please use the following details to contact me: Yaspia Shakreen Salema, Email: yaspia@ucl.ac.uk. You can also contact my research supervisor at the University, Email: phil@ucl.ac.uk. UCL, Institute of Education, Department of Learning and Leadership, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL.

Data collection timeline:



Consent form for practitioners

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Title: A mixed method study of how the school approaches the transition of young children's free play cultures and practices between home and the nursery setting.

Adhering to ethical guidelines, this research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at UCL, Institute of Education.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please use the following details to contact me: Yaspia Shakreen Salema, Email: yaspia@ucl.ac.uk . You can also contact my research supervisor at the University, Email: phil@ucl.ac.uk. UCL, Institute of Education, Department of Learning and Leadership , 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL.

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Please
tick in the
Boxes

- I consent to participate in the following to take part in this research:

1. Interview

2. Focus group

3. Creative research with children

4. Observations

5. Collecting additional material

- I understand that the information I provide will be handled in accordance with the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998.

- I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any reports.

- I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this research, I can notify the researcher involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason.

Please print your name and sign below to acknowledge the following:

I, _____ agree to
take part in this research which has been explained to me.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The information sheet is for you to keep and refer to at any time. If you agree to participate, please detach the consent form and return it to me.

E. Information sheet and consent form for head-teachers

Information sheet for head teachers

Title: A mixed method study of how the school approaches the transition of young children's free play cultures and practices between home and the nursery setting.

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Research questions:

1. How do school policies and practices presently relate to children's home free play cultures?
2. What are the relationships between children's free play cultures and practices at home and in nursery? How do these relationships impact children's free play experiences in the nursery?
3. What are teachers' understandings of children's free play at home and in the nursery? How do teachers respond to children's free play cultures in their practices in the nursery?

Please take part in the following. It will not take to long. You are encouraged to participate in all of them. It would be very helpful to have your views. Please indicate in the consent form if you would like to say yes to participating in the following activities:

1. Questionnaire: Completing a short structured questionnaire. This will include ticking your preferred answers and two image sorting tasks.
2. Interview: Being briefly interviewed individually on one occasion at a time of your convenience, in your place of work to talk about the school's ethos, practices and experiences regarding children's play in the nursery setting.

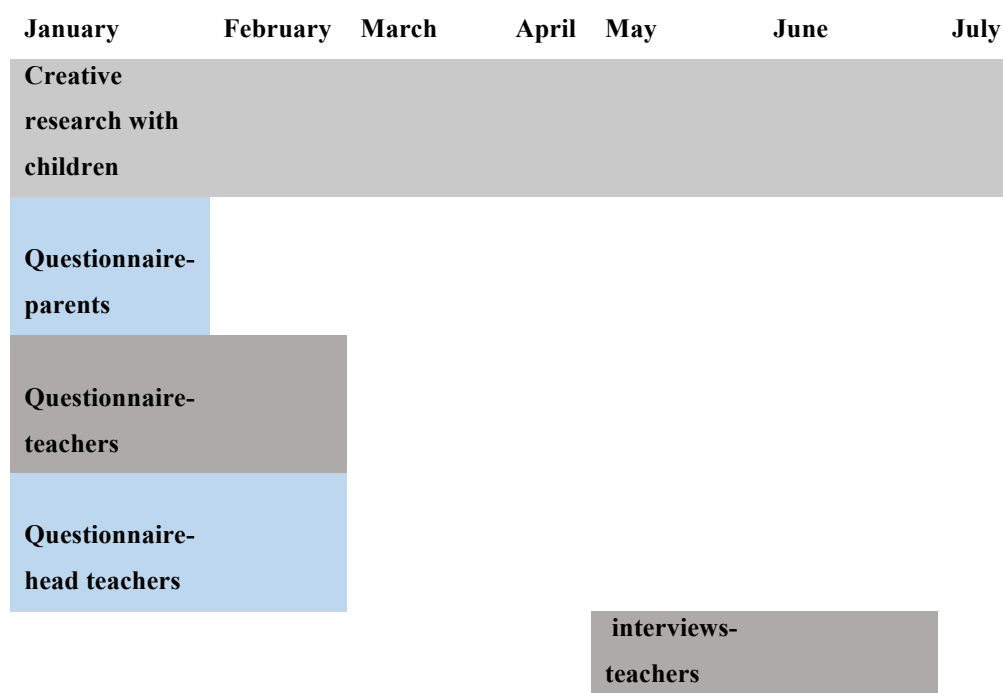
Ethics:

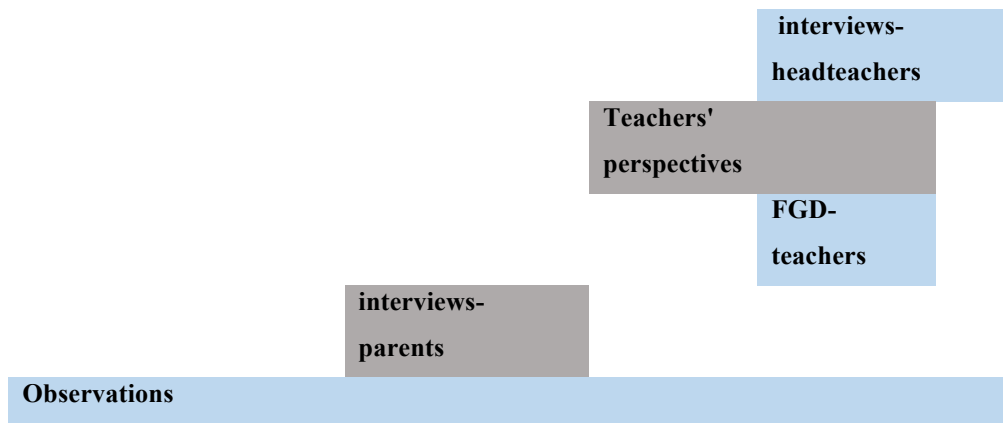
I have consulted BERA ethical guidelines and the guidelines provided by UCL, Institute of Education. The research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at UCL, Institute of Education. The interviews will be recorded, subject to your permission and

recordings of interviews will be deleted upon write-up of the final report. The data will be stored in encrypted files in a computer that is password protected. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain anonymity of you, the children, the parents, your school and all school staff. If you do decide to take part, you can sign the consent form and return it to me. It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. You may also withdraw any data/information you have already provided up until it is written up in the final report, without giving a reason for doing so. A summary of the findings will be offered to you should you wish to read it.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please use the following details to contact me: Yaspia Shakreen Salema, Email: yaspia@ucl.ac.uk . You can also contact my research supervisor at the University, Email: phil@ucl.ac.uk .UCL, Institute of Education, Department of Learning and Leadership , 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL.

Data collection timeline:





Consent form for head teachers

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Title: A mixed method study of how the school approaches the transition of young children's free play cultures and practices between home and the nursery setting.

Adhering to ethical guidelines, this research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at UCL, Institute of Education.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please use the following details to contact me: Yaspia Shakreen Salema, Email: yaspia@ucl.ac.uk . You can also contact my research supervisor at the University, Email: phil@ucl.ac.uk .UCL, Institute of Education, Department of Learning and Leadership , 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL.

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Please
tick in the
Boxes

- I consent to participate in the following to take part in this research:
 - 1. Questionnaire
 - 2. Interview

- I understand that the information I provide will be handled in accordance with the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998.

- I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any reports.

- I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this research, I can notify the researcher involved and withdraw from it
immediately without giving any reason.

Please print your name and sign below to acknowledge the following:

I, _____ agree to
take part in this research which has been explained to me.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. This copy of the information sheet is for you to keep and refer to at any time. If you agree to participate, please detach the consent form and return it to me.

F. Information sheet and consent form for parents

Information sheet for parents

Title: Insight into children's play at home and in the nursery.

I would like to invite you to take part in research that will aim to benefit your child. I am undertaking a research project as part of my study at University College London, Institute of Education. The aim of the study is to understand how the school approaches children's play at home and in the nursery. This will be done by getting the views of parents, children and the staff at the school.

Please take part in any or all of the following. They will not take too long. You are encouraged to participate in all of the activities. It would be very helpful to have your views. Please indicate on the consent form if you would like to say yes to participating in the following activities and return to the class teacher tomorrow or the next working day:

1. Interview: Please let me know if you are happy to be involved in a short interview with me to talk about your child's play. You do not need to be an expert!
2. Questionnaire: Please take ten minutes to complete a brief questionnaire that requires you to tick your preferred answers and give one word answers to a few questions. Once completed, you can return them to the class teacher. There are no right or wrong answers.
3. Your permission for creative research with children: Please let me know if you would give your child permission to take part in arts and play based activities in the nursery. These have been approved by the school.
4. Observation: Please let me know if you would give me permission to observe your child's play in the nursery.
5. Photographs:
 - a) Please let me know if you would give permission for your child to be photographed during the creative research methods in the nursery.
 - b) Please let me know if you are happy to be involved in a short creative research activity with your child at home. A camera will be sent home with

your child which you and your child can use together to take three to six photographs of your child's favourite items and people to play with; and favourite places to play in.

6. Learning diaries: Please let me know if you would give me permission to use the contents of your child's nursery learning diary during my interview with you and in interviews with your child's teachers.

I will maintain anonymity of you, your child, the school and the staff. Pseudonyms will be used and all faces in photographs will be fuzzed using digital technology. Choosing not to participate will not disadvantage you or your child in any way. I will be sharing the final report and my general conclusions with the school, hoping they will find it useful and it will help inform their approaches to children's experiences of play. I hope you take part.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please use the following details to contact me: Yaspia Shakreen Salema, Email: yaspia@ucl.ac.uk . You can also contact my research supervisor at the University, Email: phil@ucl.ac.uk .UCL, Institute of Education, Department of Learning and Leadership , 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL.

Please see the attached consent form and return it to the class teacher once completed.

Consent form for parents

Title: Insight into children's play at home and in the nursery.

Adhering to ethical guidelines, this research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee at UCL, Institute of Education.

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please use the following details to contact me: Yaspia Shakreen Salema, Email: yaspia@ucl.ac.uk . You can also contact my research supervisor at the University, Email: phil@ucl.ac.uk .UCL, Institute of Education, Department of Learning and Leadership , 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL.

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Please
tick in the
Boxes

- I consent to participate in the following to take part in this research:

1. Interview

2. Questionnaire

3. I consent to my child's participation in this research.

4. I consent to my child's play being observed.

5. Photographs:

a) I consent to my child's play being photographed during the creative research methods.

b) Creative research activity that involves taking photographs with my child at home.

6. I consent to my child's learning diary being used in interviews.

• I understand that the information my child and I provide will be handled in accordance with the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998.

• I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me; my child; the school and the staff, in any reports.

• I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this research; and/or I no longer wish for my child to participate in this

research, I can notify the researcher involved and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason.

Please print your name and sign below if you agree to participate; and give permission for your child to participate in this research.

Printed name of child: _____

Printed name of parent/ guardian: _____

Signature of parent/ guardian: _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

G. Interview with practitioners

In-depth semi-structured interview with nursery teachers

Information to be shared with participants prior to the start of each interview:

The aim of this mixed method research is to study how the school as an institution relates to the transition of diverse young children's home free play cultures and practices into the school's cultural norms.

Everything that is said in the interview will be confidential and as I write up my research I will ensure all responses will remain anonymous. It would be very helpful if I can tape-record the interview, unless there are any objections. If at any point you would like to terminate the interview please let me know. Thank you.

- 1. What is your role in this school?**
 - What role do you play in the nursery setting?
 - How long have you been teaching children in Early Years?

- 2. Can you tell me a bit about the class demographic?**
 - How many pupils are there in your class?
 - Can you tell me a bit about the ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds of the children in nursery?
 - How do you take these into consideration when you plan for free play?
 - How many teachers are there in your setting?
 - What is the student to teacher ratio?

- 3. How do you plan for play?**
 - What are the different areas in the room and what purposes are they used for?
 - How are children organized during activities, play and lessons?
 - How do you plan your classroom space to allow for play-based activities?
 - How do you allocate time for different activities?

- 4. How do you interpret the use of free play-based activities in the setting?**
 - What do you consider as free play in the setting?

- What free play-based activities do you use with your pupils?
 What target outcomes do you set for free play?
 What is the purpose of free play for your pupils?
- 5. How do you interpret the use of teacher-directed play-based activities in the setting?**
 What do you consider as teacher-directed play in the setting?
 What teacher-directed play-based activities do you use with your pupils?
 What target outcomes do you set for teacher-directed play?
 What is the purpose of teacher-directed play for your pupils?
- 6. What are the differences between teacher-directed play and free play?**
 What are the benefits of teacher-directed play?
 What are the limitations of teacher-directed play?
 What are the benefits of free play?
 What are the limitations of free play?
 Which one has proven to be more effective for you? Why?
- 7. What are the different forms of free play that you use in nursery?**
 How much time do you allocated for free play in your class?
 In your opinion, what are the features necessary in play for it to be called free play?
 What types of materials are children given access to for teacher-directed play?
 What types of instructions do the children receive during teacher-directed play?
 What target outcomes do you set for teacher-directed play?
 What role do you as a teacher play in teacher-directed play?
 How do teachers know when to intervene?
- 8. What are the different forms of teacher-directed play that you use in nursery?**
 How much time do you allocated for teacher-directed play in your class?
 In your opinion, what are the features necessary in play for it to be called teacher-directed play?
 What types of materials are children given access to for teacher-directed play?
 What types of instructions do the children receive during teacher-directed play?
 What target outcomes do you set for teacher-directed play?
 What role do you as a teacher play in teacher-directed play?
 How do teachers know when to intervene?
- 9. What is your understanding and interpretation of free play in the national curriculum?**
 How does this affect the way you plan your lessons?
 How does this affect your teaching in nursery?
 What forms of play do you think are the effective?
 What are the strengths and limitations of free play according to the national curriculum?

Can you please tell me about the types of free play opportunities that children have access to?

10. What is your understanding and interpretation of teacher-directed play in the national curriculum?

How does this affect the way you plan your lessons?

How does this affect your teaching in nursery?

What forms of play do you think are the effective?

What are the strengths and limitations of teacher-directed play according to the national curriculum?

Can you please tell me about the types of teacher-directed play opportunities that children have access to?

11. What is your school's attitude towards free play?

What does the school management consider as free play?

What do they think are the purposes of free play in early years?

12. What is your school's attitude towards teacher-directed play?

What does the school management consider as teacher-directed play?

What do they think are the purposes of teacher-directed play in early years?

13. What are the parental attitudes towards free play?

What activities do parents prefer?

How do parents view the use of free play?

How aware are parents of the benefits of free play?

14. What are the parental attitudes towards teacher-directed play?

What activities do parents prefer?

How do parents view the use of teacher-directed play?

How aware are parents of the benefits of teacher-directed play?

15. What challenges do you face while using the free play while using and teacher-directed play in the nursery setting?

Can you please tell me about the school's ethos and policies regarding play in the nursery setting?

What are the factors that influence the school's approach towards children's play?

Can you please tell me about what is included in the trainings that are provided to the nursery teachers?

16. Can you recall and tell me a bit about your own experiences of free play and directed play, when you were the same age as these children?

What were some of the free play activities that you used to engage in?

What are some of the teacher-directed activities that you remember engaging in?

What were your parents' attitudes towards free play and teacher-directed play?

17. Can you please choose something that reflects free play from a learning diary or one of the profiles based on the activities used for the mosaic approach, that interests you and tell me a bit it?

18. Is there anything else that you wish to add?

Thank you very much for your time and help.

H. Interview with other school staff

In-depth semi-structured interview with head teachers

Title: A mixed method study of how the school approaches the transition of young children's free play cultures and practices between home and the nursery setting.

Information to be shared with participants prior to the start of each interview:

The aim of this mixed method research is to study how the school as an institution supports the transition of diverse young children's home free play cultures into the school's cultural norms.

I intend to explore the perceptions that parents, teachers and children have of free play; the school's ethos; and the factors that affect teachers' provision of free play opportunities in nursery settings.

Everything that is said in the interview will be confidential and as I write up my research I will ensure all responses will remain anonymous. It would be very helpful if I can tape-record the interview, unless there are any objections. If at any point you would like to terminate the interview please let me know. Thank you.

1. What is your role in this school?

How long have you been in this role?

How long have you been with this school?

2. Can you please tell me a bit about the nursery setting demographic?

Can you tell me a bit about the ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds of the children in nursery?

How do teachers take these into consideration when they plan for free play?

3. How do the teachers plan children's daily activities in the setting?

What are the different areas in the room and what purposes are they used for?

How are children organized during activities, play and lessons?

How do the classroom spaces allow for play-based activities?

How do the teachers allocated time for different activities?

4. **How do you interpret the use of free play-based activities and teacher-directed play-based activities in the setting?**
 - What do you consider as free play and teacher-directed play in the setting?
 - What free play-based activities and teacher-directed play activities do teachers use with the children?
 - Can you please tell me about target outcomes for free play and teacher-directed play?
 - What is the purpose of free play and teacher-directed play for the children?

5. **What are the different forms of free play and teacher-directed play that you use in nursery?**
 - How much time is allocated for free play and teacher-directed play in the nursery setting?
 - In your opinion, what are the features necessary in play for it to be called free play and teacher-directed play?
 - What types of materials are children given access to for free play and teacher-directed play?
 - What types of instructions do the children receive during free play and teacher-directed play?
 - Can you please tell me about target outcomes for free play and teacher-directed play set by the school?
 - What role do teachers play in free play and teacher-directed play?
 - How do teachers know when to intervene?

6. **What are the differences between teacher-directed play and free play that take place in the nursery setting?**
 - What are the benefits of teacher-directed play?
 - What are the limitations of teacher-directed play?
 - What are the benefits of free play?
 - What are the limitations of free play?
 - Which one has proven to be more effective for the school? Why?

7. **What is your understanding and interpretation of free play and teacher-directed play in the national curriculum?**
 - How does they affect the way teachers plan their lessons?
 - How does they affect teaching in nursery?
 - What forms of play do you think are the effective?
 - What are the strengths and limitations of free play teacher-directed play according to the national curriculum?
 - Can you please tell me about the types of free play and teacher-directed play opportunities that children have access to?

8. **What is your school's attitude towards free play and teacher-directed play?**
 - What does the school management consider as free play and teacher-directed play?

What do they think are the purposes of free play and teacher-directed play in early years?

9. What are the parental attitudes towards free play and teacher-directed play?

What activities do parents prefer?

How do parents view the use of free play and teacher-directed play?

How aware are parents of the benefits of free play and teacher-directed play?

10. What challenges does the school face while using the free play and teacher-directed play in the nursery setting?

Can you please tell me about the school's ethos and policies regarding play in the nursery setting?

What are the factors that influence the school's approach towards children's play?

Can you please tell me about what is included in the trainings that are provided to the nursery teachers?

11. Can you please recall and tell me a bit about your own experiences of free play and directed play, when you were the same age as these children?

What were some of the free play activities that you used to engage in?

What are some of the teacher-directed activities that you remember engaging in?

What were your parents' attitudes towards free play and teacher-directed play?

12. Can you please choose something that reflects free play from a learning diary or one of the profiles based on the activities used for the mosaic approach, that interests you and tell me a bit it?

13. Is there anything else that you wish to add?

I. Interview with parents

Interview with parents

Title: Insight into children's play at home and in nursery.

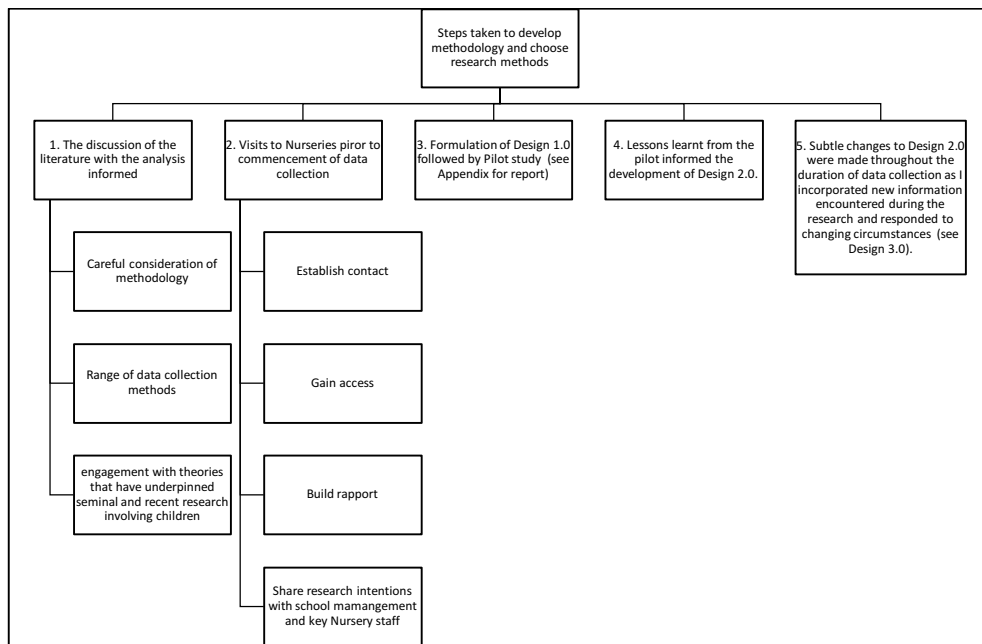
The aim of the study is to understand how the school relates to children's play at home and in nursery.

All data in the research report will be anonymous and no material will be used that identifies yourself, your child or the school. It would be very helpful if I can tape-record the interview, unless there are any objections. If at any point you would like to terminate the interview please let me know. Thank you.

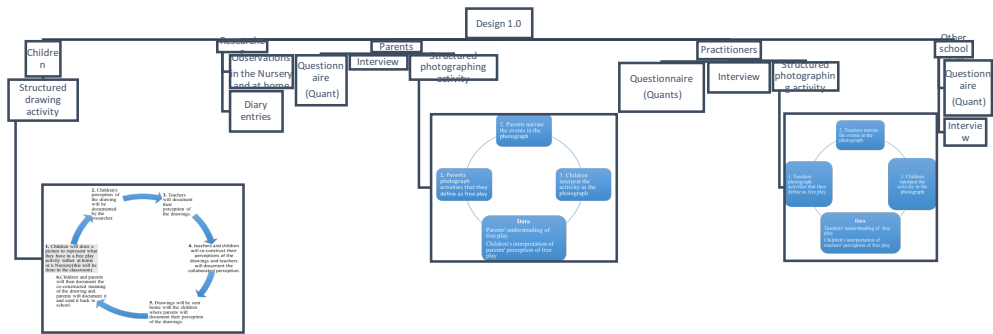
- 1) Can you please tell me about your child's physical and social play environment at home?
 - Where does your child spend of his/her time when at home?
 - Where does your child play?
 - What are your child's favourite toys?
 - Can you please tell me about your child's outdoor play when he/she is not in the nursery?
 - Can you please tell me about some of your child's likes and dislikes?
 - Does your child play alone? How often? For how long?
 - Does your child play with anyone else at home?
 - Do you play with your child? When and for how long?
 - Does your child play with other children after school? If yes, can you please tell me what happens? Where do they play? How often do they play?
 - Can you please tell me about any rules that your child has to follow when playing?
- 2) What are some of the activities that you and your child engage in together?
- 3) How do you feel about your child's favourite activity during play time?
- 4) What does your child do for the rest of the day after coming home from nursery?
- 5) Have you noticed any changes in your child's behaviour at home after he/she started going to nursery?
- 6) What changes, if any, have you seen in your child's play behaviour and choices since he/she started coming to the nursery?
- 7) How does your partner view the role of play in your child's daily life?
- 8) How valuable is play for your child?
 - What are the benefits and limitations of play for your child?

- What types of play do you encourage your child to engage in?
 - How do you priorities between your child's play and his/her learning to read and write?
- 9) What is the school's attitude towards play?
- 10) What are the teachers' attitude towards play?
- 11) What are your views on gender specific and gender neutral play for your child?
- Could you please tell me your reasons for sorting the images of toys into the three categories of boys' toys; girls' toys and toys for both boys and girls?
 - What are your thoughts on gender neutral and gender specific play for your child?
 - Can you tell me about your child's gender specific and/or gender neutral play at home and in the nursery?
- 12) How is your child being prepared for reception?
- What are some of the activities that your child is engaging in in the nursery setting to prepare for reception?
 - How is this impacting your child's opportunities and experiences of play in the nursery setting?
- 13) What kind of play does your child engage in at school?
- How does your child play when he/she is alone?
 - How does your child play with friends?
 - How does your child play with adults?
 - Who makes decisions about what to do during play?
 - How does your child respond to the teachers' directions while playing?
- 14) Can you please tell me about your own play experiences from when you were little?
- What were some of the play activities that you used to engage in on your own?
 - What are some of the adult-led activities that you remember engaging in?
 - What were your parents' attitudes towards your own play and adult-led play?

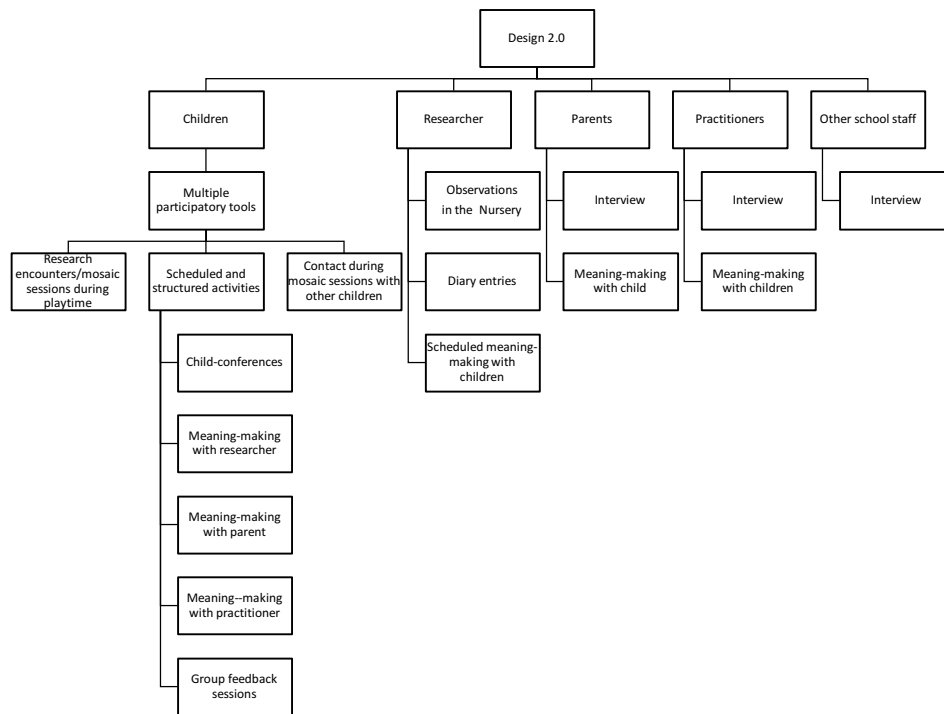
J. Steps taken to develop methodology and choose research methods



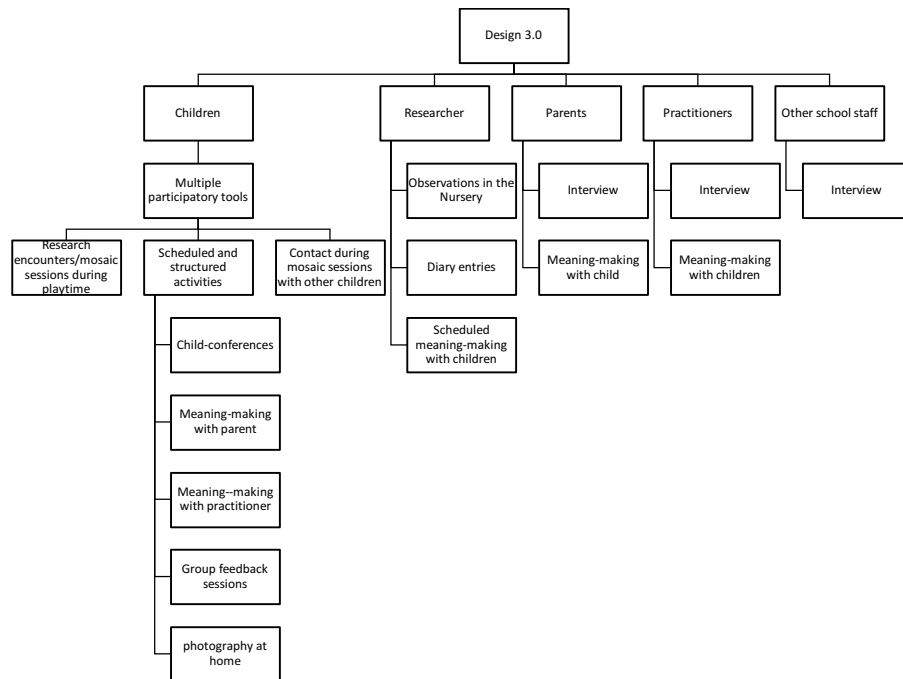
K. Design1.0



L. Design 2.0



M. Design3.0



N. Mosaic schedule

Child participants	January	February	March	April	May	June	July
Naomi	Consent + establishing	Session 1 1 hour during free play time Child-conference 1	Session 2 1 hour during free play time	Session 3 1 hour during free play time Child-conference 2 Group feedback session	Session 4 1 hour during free play time	Session 5 1 hour during free play time Child-conference 3	Session 6 1 hour during free play time Group feedback session
Took the camera home once for two days							
1 Scheduled meaning-making session with parent							
1 Scheduled meaning-making session with practitioner							