Parent practices of co-play in a community playgroup

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

Signed: 

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

Playgroups are a universal form of early childhood provision that offer opportunities for families to learn and develop through informal play activities and social interaction. Parents are supported in their role by trained playgroup coordinators at supported playgroups who also organise play activities for children's learning. Community playgroups are self-managed and run by the attending parents. Families voluntarily attend community playgroups, and parents remain on-site with their children throughout the session each week. Despite the parents' key involvement, little is known about parents' practices of co-play in community playgroups. This thesis is a study of parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup. The aim of the study is to identify what parents' co-play practices are, and the factors that enabled and constrained their practices. Using an ethnographic methodology, field observations and informal interviews were conducted with six parents in one community playgroup located in metropolitan Melbourne, in relation to their co-play practices. Framed by the practice architectures theory (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008), this study investigated the parents' sayings, doings and relatings to uncover the co-play practices, and the enablers and constraints on those practices. The findings identified the parents' guiding and participating co-play practices, and that those practices were enabled and constrained by the practice architectures of cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements such as the parents' knowledge about their child's likes or dislikes, the toys provided at the community playgroup, and the parents' beliefs about their role. The study's findings theorised that the parents' sayings, doings and relatings enacted different combinations of co-play practices that described the parents' involvement with their children's play in the community playgroup. This study thus contributes knowledge towards how parents are involved with their child's play in community playgroups, which may be used as suggestions to increase parents' involvement with children's play.

Chapter 1: Thesis Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter, comprising of four main sections, introduces the study. Section one shares a personal account of my experience in a community playgroup, which sets the background to this research. Section two discusses the rationale for this research and defines the research focus. Section three briefly explains how the study was conducted by introducing the theoretical framework used in this study for addressing the research questions. The last section presents the thesis structure by outlining the contents of each subsequent chapter.

1.2 Personal background

Three years ago I began attending a community playgroup with my then 20-month-old toddler so that she could have opportunities to meet and play with other children. In our first playgroup session, my daughter held on to my hand and guided me along as she explored the different play objects and activities, insisting that I remained by her side. This meant that I became her play partner at the playgroup, participating in the play activities of her choice such as kicking a ball and role-playing in the home corner. This experience piqued my early interest of how parents are generally involved with their child's play in community playgroups.

As I participated in my child's play in the subsequent weeks at the community playgroup, I began to notice that there were many opportunities in the play activities for children's learning and development. For example, being in a community playgroup with new play objects and activities that were different to those at home, as well as sharing a communal play space with other children and adults offered lots of learning opportunities to a child such as the need to be respectful and considerate of others at the playgroup.

Importantly, my active involvement with the play meant that I could identify the learning opportunities and was able to use some of them to support my child's learning. For instance, I could promote the value of sharing and building of friendships with my toddler when I noticed another child watching us play in the home corner, by encouraging her to share the play objects with others. For this reason, my interest into a parent's role within their child's play in a community playgroup setting began to grow. I was particularly interested in what are the parents' practices when they were involved with their children's play at the community playgroup.

Hence, my personal experience as a mother in a community playgroup motivated this journey of researching about parents' practices during co-play, which referred to the encounter between a parent, child and play objects in the community playgroup. Through this research, I aimed to develop understanding of what are parents' co-play practices with their children in a community playgroup, as well as to bring to light some of the factors that enabled and constrained their co-play practices. It seemed that this was a research area that is presently under-explored, with a lack of resources to support parents' involvement with their children's play in community playgroups. Therefore, the insights from this research aim to contribute knowledge for understanding about parents' co-play practices, which is helpful for supporting parents' involvement with their children's play in community playgroups.

1.3 Rationale for this research

The focus of this research is on parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup. For the purpose of this research, "co-play" refers to an encounter between a parent, child and play objects in a community playgroup. In addition, the term "parent" in this research includes parents, carers and kinship members.

As previously outlined in section 1.2, this research was motivated by my personal experience as a mother in a community playgroup, which started my interest in parents' involvement with their children's play in community playgroups. This section draws on some previous literature from the fields of early childhood and playgroup research to discuss the need for researching about parents' co-play practices in community playgroups.

1.3.1 Play and early childhood services in Australia

Early childhood education recognises the importance of play in the early years of a child's life. Play is highly valued in early childhood settings because of the belief that it comes naturally to a child (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010), thereby viewed as a non-imposing and unstructured way of preparing a young child for learning. Furthermore, some theorists also believed in the value of having adults involved in the play because of its potential benefits on the children's learning and development. One of the benefits is in the support provided by an adult during play, for instance, through social interaction, which has the potential to build on a child's existing understandings (Vygotsky, 1978).

In Australia, early childhood education and care is offered to children through a range of services such as childcare centres, family day care, pre-schools, kindergartens and playgroups. Children from birth to five years of age can attend childcare centres, family day care, and playgroups, whereas pre-schools and kindergartens generally cater for children from three to five years of age. Most of these early childhood education and care services provide a play-based learning program that is delivered by a qualified educator (SCRGSP, 2019), or in the context of supported playgroups, a professionally-trained playgroup facilitator. Qualified early childhood educators and playgroup facilitators are trained to be able to give children the opportunities to learn from a range of play experiences (ACECQA, 2014). Hence, they play a

vital role in supporting children and their families through the early learning and development journey in their respective settings.

Of these early learning settings, playgroups are an interesting form of an early childhood service provision. Families generally attend playgroups for the purposes of play and socialisation (Playgroup Australia, 2013). Unlike other early childhood services where parents leave their children in the care of trained professionals, parents who attend playgroups remain with their children for the duration of the playgroup session. Particularly in supported playgroups, parents participate with their children in a range of play experiences organised by a playgroup facilitator, which has been associated with positive outcomes such as increased in parental skills and confidence, and being emotionally supported (Jackson, 2013).

1.3.2 Parent involvement with children's play in community playgroups

In Australia, not all playgroups are facilitated by trained staff. Community playgroups are a type of playgroup that is managed and run by parent volunteers, who are usually attendees of the playgroup (Playgroup Australia, 2021). Unlike professional playgroup facilitators, parent volunteers are not paid and trained for the role, rather they actively involve with the playgroup out of their own free will. Therefore, community playgroups are typically characterised by an informal play setting that offers parents and their children opportunities to meet, socialise and play together with other families.

Through community playgroup participation, parents develop relationships with other parents at the playgroup, which has been shown to have helped in reducing social isolation through parental support and friendship (McLean et al., 2020). For example, McLean et al. (2017a) had found that parents used social media to communicate with each other even on non-playgroup days, and that they often shared strategies for supporting their children's play at home. This finding was important as it suggests that participation in community playgroups

can lead to building parents' capabilities for involvement with their children's play in the home. The sharing of knowledge about play between parents through the community playgroup social media enhanced parents' knowledge and their ability to provide meaningful play experiences for their children at home. This suggests that community playgroup participation has the potential to support parents in their role as "the first educators of their children" (Evangelou & Wild, 2014, p. 384) through use of the community playgroup social media for sharing knowledge about play between parents from the same playgroup. The study provided an insight into parental learning about play through participation in the community playgroup social media, but what happens in the community playgroups between parents and their children, particularly how parents are actually involved with their children's play had not yet been examined prior to this study, to the best of my knowledge.

At community playgroups, the presence of the parents with their children presents many opportunities for parents to be involved with their children's play. Previous research has highlighted the benefits of co-playing between children and non-related adults in an experimental research setting (Qu, 2011) and between children and an educator in a classroom (Ward, 1996), but none on co-playing between the parent and their child.

Furthermore, research into the home learning environment has emphasised the benefits of parents' active involvement with young children's play for supporting the child's cognitive development (Melhuish, 2010). More recently, it was also raised that community playgroups have the potential to serve as sites for parental education that support parents' engagement with their children's learning and development through play (McLean et al., 2017b). The research indicates that there are benefits for children of co-playing with an adult, as well as the potential for community playgroups to support parents' active involvement with their child's early learning through play.

Despite this knowledge, there does not appear to be any published research that has sought to understand how co-playing actually unfolds in a community playgroup between a parent and their child. Understanding in this area is important especially within the context of community playgroups because, there is not a professionally-trained facilitator to organise play activities at the playgroup, as is the case in supported playgroups, so parents in community playgroups assume a more active role with their children's play. Parents, however, can be better supported to engage with their children's play in community playgroups if knowledge about their co-play practices is available.

Hence, this study theorises parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup. It sought to understand what parents' practices of co-play are like in a community playgroup. There is an increasing number of studies focused on the practices of individuals as a way of understanding specific human actions (see Wilkinson et al., 2019; Ronnerman & Kemmis, 2016; Salamon et al., 2016). For example, Salamon et al. (2016) examined the practices of early childhood educators to uncover the naïve beliefs and implicit theories that influence early childhood educators' practice. These studies have been able to explain how individuals relate with one another through the various levels of interaction (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). This present study focused on parents' practices, during co-play interactions with their child, in order to understand how the parents were involved with their children's play in the community playgroup.

1.4 Theoretical framework

A practice theory perspective provides the theoretical basis for the research undertaken in this study. Practice theory focuses on people's practices because it is based on the idea that human life can be understood through their activities (Grootenboer et al., 2017; Kemmis et al., 2014; Schatzki, 2012). In their work, Kemmis et al. (2014) were interested in understanding

people's activities through what they say and how they relate with one another, known as the "practice architectures" that hold practices in place. The concept of practice architectures refers to the "combinations of cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that enable and constrain how a practice can unfold" (Kemmis, 2019, p. 13).

According to Kemmis et al. (2014), practice architectures exist in sites of practice, prefiguring a practice by way of enabling and constraining particular kinds of *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings*. For example, community playgroups are a type of non-facilitated playgroup where parents stay in the playgroup with their child. A range of toys are provided at community playgroups by way of encouraging children to engage in play. Hence, certain conditions are in place at community playgroups, serving as the practice architectures that predict particular practices such as the parents remaining at the playgroup with their children, and the children engaged in play using the provided toys.

The practice architectures theory was used in this study because it proposed two streams of thinking that informed this thesis. The first is that the parents' sayings, doings and relatings, are the aspects that make up their co-play practices, and secondly, how the combinations of sayings, doings and relatings are enabled and constrained by practice architectures. In other words, what parents say, do and how they relate with their children when playing together are enabled and constrained by the practice architectures. For example, parents interact with their children during play through speech (sayings), physical actions (doings), and relationships (relatings). What a parent say, do, and how they relate with their child differs in each play activity, which is likely a result of the practice architectures enabling and constraining the practices. This study thus views the practice architectures that enable and constrain the unfolding of practices as important for understanding parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup.

The specific purpose of this research is to contribute to knowledge about parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup by exploring these two research questions:

1. What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?
2. What do parents say about enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?

The aim is to identify the parents' practices of co-play with their child, and the factors, or practice architectures that are enabling and constraining those co-play practices. This was investigated by examining parents' sayings, doings and relatings to identify the co-play practices, followed by interviews with the parents in relation to the observed co-play practices to understand what were the practice architectures that shaped those practices. In short, this study assumed a practice theory perspective towards the theorising of parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

There are seven chapters in this thesis. *Chapter One* introduces the research study and discusses the rationale for this study. The practice architectures theory is briefly outlined as providing the theoretical lens for this study that aims to theorise parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup.

Chapter Two reviews relevant literature to provide a summary of the main issues related to this research. The chapter is structured into three key sections: 1) the key period of early childhood; 2) the provision of playgroups; and 3) the influence of play on children's learning and development. Community playgroups are a unique type of early childhood service provision because, unlike other services where professional staff are present to deliver early childhood education and care to the children in their settings, parents attend and remain at

community playgroups with their children. Highlighted in the literature was the importance of the parent's role in supporting their children's learning and development while engaging in play. In community playgroups, parents are largely responsible for the provision of meaningful play experiences for their children. It was concluded from the review of available literature that further exploration of the parents' co-play practices is needed to better understand how parents are involved with their children's play in community playgroups.

Chapter Three describes the theoretical framework used in this study. A practice theory perspective informed the idea that human life can be understood through their practices of sayings, doings and relatings. The concept of practice architectures, discussed in detail in the chapter, is important for understanding how the parents' co-play practices were shaped and influenced by social conditions.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology of this study. This research adopted a qualitative research approach informed by a social constructivism paradigm so that understanding of parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup are co-constructed with the research participants. An ethnographic methodology was thus used to carry out this research because being in the naturalistic setting of the community playgroup was deemed most suitable for observing and gaining a deeper understanding of the parents' co-play practices. Methods of data collection are detailed in the chapter, together with the phases undertaken for an inductive thematic analysis of the data.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the research. Two sets of findings were identified, which were:

1) Parent practices of co-play in the community playgroup
2) Parent expressions about the enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play

The first set of findings describes the parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup, which were presented as two main themes and six sub-themes. The second set of findings describes the parents' expressions about the enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play, which were presented as three main themes and seven sub-themes.

Chapter Six discusses the two sets of findings in more detail. The findings of this study were generated through application of the practice architectures theory. This chapter considers how the practice architectures theory was used for generating the findings that contributed to the theorising of parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup. The final section discusses how the two sets of findings helped us understand that the parents' co-play practices were formed through combinations of their sayings, doings and relatings, hence, theorising parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup.

Chapter Seven concludes the study by summarising how the aim and research questions have been addressed, as well as implications of the findings. The significance of this research is argued as making two important contributions to knowledge: 1) new understandings that theorise parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup; 2) new theoretical approach to studying parents' co-play practices in community playgroups. Finally, the chapter outlines limitations to this research and provides suggestions for future research.

1.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the research study. The researcher's personal and professional interests have been described, followed by the research focus. The practice theory perspective used to frame the research has been introduced. In particular, the practice architectures theory has been discussed for its use in exploring the research questions of this study. The chapter concluded with an outline of the contents in each of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This study theorises parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup. It seeks to provide an understanding of what parents' practices of co-play are like in a community playgroup and parents' perspectives on some of the enablers and constraints to those practices. This chapter provides a review of research literature that is presented in three main sections: 1) the key period of early childhood; 2) the provision of playgroups; and 3) the influence of play on children's learning and development. Together, the review highlights the value of community playgroups as sites for parents' participation in their children's play.

The search on literature for inclusion in this review was conducted using four databases, which included Academic Search Complete, Education Source, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Google Scholar. Key search terms included "playgroup", "parent involvement", "children's play", and "co-play". A series of terms synonymous with the key search terms were also applied such as "caregivers", "families", "play", "children", "engagement", "interaction", and "play practices". Searches were refined based on the exclusion criteria of contemporary date ranged between 2010 to 2021, publications in English, and using Boolean search words.

2.2 The key period of early childhood

Early childhood is typically defined as the period of children's lives between birth to eight years of age. Children grow and develop most rapidly at this time of their lives. It is recognised in Australia and internationally that early childhood education and care (ECEC) has a pivotal role in influencing children's development and life chances. For example, the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments in Australia share the vision that by 2020

"all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation" (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). This has led to significant efforts in the country in the past decade to invest in early childhood development, to ensure that all children experience a positive early childhood, from the antenatal period through to eight years old.

As part of the National Quality Agenda (NQA) in Australia, the introduction of the National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2012 aims to set national quality benchmarks across ECEC services such as day care centres, preschools/kindergartens and outside school hours care. The NQF sets standards for multiple quality areas, which helps to ensure that children attending these services receive quality care and are better supported in their learning and development (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2020). For example, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) guides early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programs, including transition to school, through descriptions of principles and outcomes required to support children's learning from birth to five years old (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009).

Similarly, many countries around the world have demonstrated increasing awareness of the importance of early childhood education. In recent years, for example, enrolment in ECEC services has increased in The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (27 European nations, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Japan, Israel, Korea, Mexico, and Colombia). On average, 78% of three-year-olds, 87% of four-year-olds and more than 90% of five-year-olds were enrolled in early childhood education and primary education in 2016 (OECD, 2018). This suggests that there is now greater awareness among families globally about the importance of an early childhood education. However, the OECD data showed that the enrolment rate for children under the age of three was at only 35% (OECD, 2018).

Many families may choose to provide care for their children at home in the early years, which likely explains the lower enrolment rate into ECEC services for children under three years. There is strong scientific evidence that confirms the first three years as a time during which the brain is especially adaptable and responsive to experiences, supporting "rapid acquisition of language, cognitive skills, and socio-emotional competencies" (Britto et al., 2017). Furthermore, there is growing evidence suggesting that children's development from conception to three years of age has lifelong outcomes, linking to health, wellbeing, education and overall opportunities as adults (Strong Foundations Collaboration, 2019; Britto et al., 2017).

Consequently, efforts are increasingly directed towards providing children with access to high-quality ECEC services because it is believed that the quality of early education and care received by children can strongly impact on their development (Melhuish et al., 2015). The focus in Australia on high-quality ECEC services is reflected in the NQF, as discussed earlier (page 12). However, the NQF quality standard is not applied to playgroups even though playgroups have been recognised as an informal early childhood service. This is likely because parents attend playgroups with their children and are thus their primary carers at the playgroup. This means that the benefits associated with use of the NQF for ECEC services, such as regulation and quality improvement, are not extended to playgroup settings.

It is, therefore, important to consider parents' provision of care and providing developmentally-stimulating opportunities for their children at playgroups. Playgroups offer the opportunity to share knowledge with parents and promote beneficial parent-child interaction. Research has suggested that not all parents have the skills to provide meaningful play experiences for stimulating their children's learning (Goff et al., 2012), highlighting the value of parental support at playgroups. Furthermore, positive experiences gained at playgroups can increase parental knowledge and skills about play that may be extended to play

experiences in the home (McLean et al., 2016), thereby leading to outcomes beyond the playgroup context. This suggests the importance of playgroups as an early learning environment for even the youngest children, especially those not attending any formal ECEC services. Additionally, knowledge about play gained in playgroups may enhance parents' provision of early learning and care for their children at the playgroup, and beyond playgroups such as in the home, suggesting the value of considering parents' practices at playgroups.

2.2.1 Quality in early childhood education and care

Research suggests that the quality of ECEC impacts on learning and development outcomes. High-quality ECEC strengthens early development, which benefits children's subsequent school performance and future learning, health and well-being, and outcomes later in life (Schleicher, 2019). More specifically, Melhuish et al. (2015) conducted a review of research on the impact of ECEC upon child development where it was reported that all children in the first three years of their lives, disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged, stand to gain from attending high-quality ECEC services because participation in these services benefit children's cognitive, language and social development.

Conversely, it has been found that low-quality ECEC services can bring detrimental effects to children, more so for disadvantaged children, in forms such as "deficits in language or cognitive development" and development of "antisocial behaviour" (Melhuish et al., 2015, p. 5). Given the impact of quality in ECEC services on children's development, it is important to give attention to quality characteristics that support children's learning and development.

Slot's (2018) review of quality in centre and family day care provisions rightly pointed out that there is a lack of studies about the quality of provisions for children aged three and under. The majority of studies have focused on centre-based provisions such as childcares,

kindergartens, nurseries or preschools where children, mostly over the age of three, are left under the care of qualified carers and educators.

Given that playgroups are attended by young children alongside their parents, they are not typically considered as a centre-based care provision. Although considerations of quality in ECEC services are therefore not typically extended to the context of playgroups, previous studies (e.g. Slot, 2018; Melhuish et al., 2015) have highlighted some of the quality areas for ECEC services that may enhance children's play experiences at playgroups, making it necessary to draw on these discussions for reflection of the children's experiences in playgroups.

Most of the literature considered quality in ECEC services in terms of structural and the process quality. Structural quality refers to aspects of infrastructure such as the organisation or the physical setting, whereas process quality concerns children's everyday experiences, including staff-child and peer interactions (Slot, 2018). Furthermore, some studies discussed "active ingredients" or the features of high-quality early childhood provisions that benefited children's development. For example, Melhuish et al. (2015, p. 5) summarised the quality characteristics of early years provision as:

1. Adult-child interaction that is responsive, affectionate and readily available
2. Well-trained staff who are committed to their work and children
3. A developmentally appropriate curriculum with educational content
4. Ratios and group sizes that allow staff to interact appropriately with children
5. Supervision that maintains consistency in the quality of care
6. Staff development that ensures continuity, stability and improving quality
7. Facilities that are safe and sanitary and accessible to parents

Of these, the quality characteristic of "adult-child interaction that is responsive, affectionate and readily available" is of particular interest to this present study. The presence of the parent with their child at playgroups means that there is potential for the child to gain responsive and personal attention from an adult, which is their parent, through parent-child interaction.

Adult-child interaction is recognised as one of the most important characteristics of ECEC service quality. This is because research indicates that in order to reach their full developmental potential, children need an early learning environment that provides "opportunities to engage in developmentally appropriate, stimulating and language-rich activities, and social interactions" (Schleicher, 2019, p. 12). It is through adult-child interactions "while involved in play, more structured activities or routines" and in "interactions with the space and materials available" (Schleicher, 2019, p. 22) that children are supported in maximising benefits from an early learning environment. Furthermore, Blewitt et al.'s (2020) study on educator-child interactions in ECEC settings points to the importance of adult-child interactions for encouraging children's social-emotional development, which relates to their "self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationships, and responsible decision-making" (p. 992).

Playgroups have potential to promote children's learning through quality adult-child interaction due to the one-to-one attention afforded by presence of the parent with their child at the playgroup, differentiating it from other early years programs. However, to date, there has not been any research that explored parent-child interactions while engaged in play at playgroups, particularly in a community playgroup setting. This means that little is known about the influence that parent-child interactions at playgroup have on children's learning and development.

This study thus explores parents' practices, including interactions, with their child during play at a community playgroup. It is anticipated that this research will provide a better

understanding of parents' practices at the playgroup, and the positive practices could be promoted at community playgroups. This could be a way of enhancing the quality of parent-child interactions at community playgroups and beyond, a key characteristic of a positive early learning environment.

2.2.2 Summary of section 2.2

This section has focused on understanding the importance of the early years of children's lives. Early childhood, which is the time from birth to eight years of age, is a critical period of a child's life because it is not only important for young children's development but it also has effects that may impact on school performance and life outcomes (Strong Foundations Collaboration, 2019). Playgroups have the potential to offer positive early learning experiences for young children through play. In addition, research has shown the benefits of adult-child interaction on children's learning, including social-emotional development (Melhuish et al., 2015), which can be achieved at playgroups through parent-child interactions. Despite its importance, little research has focused on parents' involvement with their children's play in playgroups, and much could be learnt from examining parent-child interactions within the context of playgroups. This study focuses on parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup to better understand how parents interact with their children during play at playgroup.

2.3 The provision of playgroups

This section focuses on playgroups, and how this unique early childhood experience plays an important role in promoting children's early learning and development. Many countries implement an early years policy that recognises the importance of children's access to early childhood education services. In Denmark, for instance, the early years curriculum

known as the Pedagogical Learning Plan includes the overall statutory aims and learning themes that are incorporated into learning plans for children aged between six months to school age in early years settings (Clausen, 2015). In Singapore, the government commits efforts to improve the overall quality of preschool education and to make preschool education affordable and accessible to all children, especially those from less-advantaged homes (Tan, 2017). Similarly in Australia, children and families are encouraged to attend early childhood services. For example, the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) identified playgroups, early childhood education and care, outside school hours care, kindergarten programs, sporting, as well as community and cultural organisations including libraries, museums, botanic gardens, galleries and zoos as the range of universal services for enhancing children's learning and development (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 6).

Playgroups are internationally regarded as a popular option for parents and children, from birth to five years of age, to come together to socialise and engage in play. In England, playgroups were used from as early as the 1960s as "a self-help response by mothers due to a lack of nursery education" (Statham & Brophy, 1991, p. 40), and has continued to grow and develop over the decades until the 1980s when playgroups became a valid alternative for nursery (Statham & Brophy, 1991). Similarly in New Zealand, playcentres started as a support service for mothers in 1941 and, through the years, has grown to become the largest parent-led provider of early childhood education in Aotearoa (Playcentre, 2021). In Australia, playgroups began in the 1970s in response to grassroots demand from mothers wanting to provide play experiences for their children (Townley, 2018). This resulted in the use of playgroups in Australia up to today, where families meet regularly at a community-based venue to socialise and engage in play with other children and families (Playgroup Australia, 2013). Presently,

playgroups are recognised in Australia, and internationally, as “an accessible and universal form of early childhood service provision” (Playgroup Australia, 2019a, p. 9).

2.3.1 Types of playgroups

Playgroups in Australia are supported by State and Territory playgroup organisations, and the national representative body known as Playgroup Australia (Playgroup Australia, 2021). Playgroup organisations help connect families to playgroups. For example in Victoria, Playgroup Victoria supports local communities and families in starting and running a playgroup (Playgroup Victoria, 2021). Many types of playgroups exist catering to the different needs of families such as groups consisting of families living within a geographical area, families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, families of children who have unique developmental needs, LGBTQ families, fathers’ only groups, service-led groups, and intergenerational groups. Therefore, State and Territory playgroup organisations provide valuable support to families and playgroups through assistance with venues, insurance and play ideas (Playgroup Australia, 2021).

The two main types of playgroups in Australia are supported playgroups and community playgroups. Supported playgroups are typically facilitated by qualified, paid professionals (Commerford & Robinson, 2016), who are trained to support “hard-to-reach” (Evangelou et al., 2013) families. Examples of these are the PlayConnect Playgroups or intensive supported playgroups such as those in the “It Takes a Village Multicultural Early Learning Program” in Western Australia. Families who attend these playgroups have shared needs or vulnerabilities. For instance, the PlayConnect Playgroups are designed for families of children aged 0-6 years with needs associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or autism-like characteristics in communication, behaviour or social skills (Playgroup Australia, 2019b). Intensive supported playgroups, like those in “It Takes a Village Multicultural Early

Learning Program", target migrant and humanitarian families and their children (Targowska et al., 2011).

One of the underlying reasons that supported playgroups are effective is due to the presence of playgroup facilitators. Jackson (2013), in her study of three supported playgroups in Western Sydney, suggested increased experiences of emotional support and confidence in parenting, and decreased feelings of isolation and inequality for parents. This was attributed to the role of the playgroup facilitators who, for example, would prepare a wide range of learning environments or activities that encouraged parents to engage in natural conversations with their children and with other parents (Jackson, 2013).

Furthermore, two scoping and systematic reviews on supported playgroups, including therapeutic playgroups and intensive support playgroups, reported that playgroup facilitators not only supported families in forming social connections and friendships with other families at those playgroups, but importantly, they contributed information that provided the families with access to agencies and other services (Armstrong et al., 2019; Lakhani & Macfarlane, 2015). Vulnerable children and families, in particular, need and gain greatest benefit from effective interventions including in health, education, and social and child protection (Richter et al., 2016), thereby playgroup facilitators were able to fulfil this vital role of directing playgroup families to relevant agencies and services.

Unlike in supported playgroups, community playgroups are not run by paid facilitators. Community playgroups do not target specific types of families, but rather aim to include all families to meet for opportunities to socialise and for children to engage in play activities. Parents who attend with their children usually manage and lead these playgroups, which are typically held on a weekly basis. In addition to managing and facilitating their children's play at the community playgroups, parents' roles may also include organising and setting up a range of play activities each week (FaHCSIA, 2011). These are important responsibilities for

ensuring the continuity of the playgroup because community playgroups largely depend on voluntary contributions from parents who attend them.

Community playgroups do not have the support from an onsite and paid playgroup facilitator, who is usually a qualified early childhood professional (Dadich & Spooner, 2008). Professional playgroup facilitators usually organise play experiences and foster positive social interactions at playgroups (Berthelsen et al., 2012; McArthur et al., 2010). The absence of a facilitator could be a contributing factor to why most playgroup research has been undertaken in supported rather than community playgroups, as there is not a professional to facilitate the relationship between the families and researchers. Due to a lack of research into community playgroups presently, not as much is known about how parents facilitate children's play at these playgroups. Existing playgroup research has tended to focus on supported playgroups (McLean et al., 2020).

Some studies have indicated that there is great potential for community playgroups to benefit children's learning and development, primarily because of their parents' active involvement with their children's play at these playgroups. For example, McLean et al. (2017a) found that parents were generally knowledgeable about play-types, and they also had a sound understanding of their children's interests and needs. This parents' knowledge suggests that they are capable of providing meaningful play experiences for their children at community playgroups and may benefit from brief messaging on beneficial aspects of parents' co-play practices in community playgroups. Furthermore, the parents' actual presence and involvement with their children's play have far-reaching impacts beyond playgroups. For instance, parents' provision of play experiences for children at the community playgroup is likely to be repeated and extended through play in the home (McLean et al., 2016), which means that families' participation in community playgroups has the potential to positively influence children's home learning environment.

2.3.2 Benefits of participation in community playgroups

There is a growing body of research evidence indicating the benefits, in the social dimension, for families participating in community playgroups. McLean et al. (2020), through a systematic review of studies on community playgroups, identified that benefits were recorded for three groups: caregivers, families, and the community. For example, caregivers formed social networks with other caregivers at playgroups. This not only helps in reducing social isolation, but brings further benefits for families through support, friendship and resources received through playgroup participation. However, McLean et al. (2020) point to the lack of studies that have reported on the benefits of playgroup participation for children. Although there have been studies suggesting that participation in playgroups raises caregivers' awareness of early childhood education (Nyland et al., 2011), and contributes to social and learning outcomes for children (Gregory et al., 2017; French, 2005), these studies talked about participation in playgroups in general, rather than for specific playgroup types. This means that, to date, it has not been made clear how families' participation in community playgroups may benefit children's learning and development. This section discusses some typical characteristics of community playgroups to draw on implications of benefits for children's learning and development.

Foremostly, parents' presence in a community playgroup brings many benefits to their children. From the child's perspective, having their parent near is reassuring and makes them feel safe, especially if the parent has been their primary carer from birth (Winnicott, 1999). Research on attachment indicates that children use their parents' physical presence as a secure base for exploration (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1971). Thus, community playgroups offer children a positive environment to explore and to develop independence within the safe comfort of their parents' company.

In more recent years, playgroup research has begun to focus on playgroups as sites for promoting parental knowledge about children's play. According to McLean et al. (2017b), playgroups support parents' active engagement in children's learning and development through play. This is most likely due to the parents' attendance at the playgroup with their children, and their active involvement in play activities with their children. Williams et al. (2020) describe parents' active participation in playgroups as having a clear role in play activities and specific tasks to do such as singing along or rocking their child to music, rolling a ball back and forth, scribbling together, and assisting their child in gluing items. This likely explains why parental involvement has been found to be higher in playgroups than at any other pre-school provision (Sylva et al., 1980) because, unlike at childcare services for example where children are left under the care of carers and educators, parents at playgroups are present and often involved with their children's play. Through involvement with their children's play, community playgroups have the potential to "influence parenting practices and children's play experiences" (McLean et al., 2017b, p. 234), so that these practices and skills may extend beyond the community playgroup to other experiences of play, for example, when parents play with their children in the home.

Essentially, play is the central component of community playgroups, and it is through participation in play activities that children learn and develop. Section 2.4 explores in more detail the role of play in children's learning and development, but the critical point here is that community playgroups offer opportunities for children and their parents to share quality time together, play and socialise (Njegac et al., 2016). These play interactions between the child and their parent are important for many reasons. In short, it forms the foundations for neural and social development, with the quality of such early attachment experiences shaping the child's early development (Moore, 2007).

Roberts (2011) also stresses on the significance of learning together, through her definition of companionable learning, in which she argues that children learn how to think, understand, communicate, behave, show emotions, and develop social skills from engaging in shared pre-occupation with a companion. A child engaging in a play activity with their parent at a community playgroup can be seen as an example of precious opportunities for parent-child companionable learning.

Furthermore, parent-child play interactions are a highly valued practice in community playgroups. This is evident in Playgroup Victoria's resources, "Parents as First Educators at Playgroup" for example, which provides ideas for parents to be involved in their children's play by making use of props provided at playgroups such as the dress up box, blankets, parachute play and balls. The resources also offer play ideas for parent engagement with their children without the use of props. Some of these suggestions include "sit facing each other with knees bent. Hold hands and rock back and forth as you sing *row, row, row your boat*" or "crouch on all fours and encourage your child to crawl under you" (Playgroup Victoria, 2015). These suggestions for play encourage parents to be actively involved with their children's play at playgroup.

2.3.3 Summary of section 2.3

This section has described the importance of playgroups internationally, with a focus on the provision of playgroups in Australia. There are two main types of playgroups: supported playgroups and community playgroups. Research has established playgroups as sites where parents are actively involved with their children's play, bringing positive benefits such as increasing parental knowledge about children's play and improving on the home learning environment (McLean et al., 2017b). However, many of these studies have focused on supported playgroups where parents were supported by trained playgroup facilitators, who

played a vital role in encouraging parental involvement in supported playgroups. There is a lack of understanding, therefore, about community playgroups and, especially, of how the parents are involved with their children's play in a community playgroup.

In community playgroups, parents are responsible for facilitating their own children's play. In addition, parents attend community playgroups with their children of their own will, not out of satisfying requirements of agencies or services, which further suggests the parents' belief and commitment to enhancing their child's play experiences through attending a community playgroup. Therefore, this study focuses on the parents' practices of co-play to better understand parents' involvement with their children's play in a community playgroup.

2.4 The influence of play on children's learning and development

This section explores the influence of play on children's learning and development to gain understanding about the value of parental involvement with their children's play. Central to community playgroups is children's engagement with play. Whilst children are occupied with play activities, parents may participate in their child's play or they may spend time socialising with other parents at the playgroup (Berthelsen et al., 2012), thus offering opportunities for their children to self-explore the toys provided or to engage in play with other children at the community playgroup. This section aims to understand play and its benefits in the early years of a child's life due to the importance of play in community playgroups.

2.4.1 Conceptualisations of play

From as far back as the seventeenth century, there have been discussions of play as being central to children's learning. Comenius (1592-1670) talked about the importance of an environment that "encourages playful activity" for young children's learning (Fein, 1999, p.

194). Following Comenius, Pestalozzi (1746-1827) introduced "objects that could be manipulated and used a sensory approach to curriculum" (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010, p. 4). Rousseau (1712-1778), whose ideas have influenced understandings of play in early childhood education, viewed play slightly differently from others. According to him, children are naturally good, play is a natural thing for children, and children should have freedom to play, preferably without adult intervention so that they can practise their innate forces to make wise decisions (Weber, 1984; Cleverley & Phillips, 1987; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). This notion of "the unfolding of innate ideas" was also shared by Froebel (1782-1852), who saw play as "the perfect medium for self-activity – for the release of the child's inner powers" (Weber, 1984, p. 37).

Early childhood education is greatly influenced by two psychologists', Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), theories about how children learn. While both theories involved how children constructed knowledge, the ways in which they viewed the process of knowledge-construction differed between the two theorists. Piaget (2003/1964, p. S9) believed that children actively construct understandings of their world by going through four stages of development:

1) sensory-motor/pre-verbal stage (from birth to 18 months);
2) pre-operational representation – beginning of language stage;
3) concrete operations stage;
4) formal/hypothetic-deductive operations stage.

For Piaget (2003), these four stages of development describe the process of "assimilation" that is fundamental in a child's learning, defined as "the integration of any sort of reality into a structure" (p. S17). Therefore, Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggested that children construct knowledge through exploration of the world around them. This theory has

given rise to different types of play, known as "practice games", "symbolic games" and "games with rules" (Piaget, 2013/1951, p. 110). Different types of play are aimed at supporting a child's knowledge-construction through the stages of cognitive development. For example, infants engage in practice games involving repetitive actions as they learn control of their bodies and objects such as shaking a rattle (Frost, 1992). Toddlers begin to engage in symbolic play where they use objects to represent things in real-life such as use of play food items as real food. As their cognitive ability matures, children make and remember rules for their play. Piaget's idea of play is one where each type of play emerges and changes at different ages and stages of cognitive development (Johnson et al., 2005).

Similarly, Vygotsky (1933/2004, p. 65) writes that play "involves the development and exercise of all the child's powers and latent strengths". Unlike Piaget, however, Vygotsky did not view play as "natural" or as a "self-activity", but as a social activity and that is largely dependent on mediation from others (Karpov, 2005). For Vygotsky (1981), all learning begins externally in the social sphere before these processes are internalised, and gradually transform elementary functions,

> "*Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category…Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher relations and their relationships*"
>
> (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 163)

This suggests that interaction with others, such as an adult, during play is important because it is through such mediation that helps build on children's existing understandings, which would enable them to gradually gain control of their environment.

The benefits of adult mediation in children's play can be seen further in Vygotsky's approach to play, particularly in his definition of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD):

> "*The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*"
>
> (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

During play, the role of the adult or more capable others is to support and guide children to perform what they are not able to do on their own, hence, guidance within the ZPD. This can be in the form of guiding or modelling behaviours so that the child eventually gains control of the new ways of thinking and behaving independently. This also means that from Vygotsky's perspective, parent and child co-play provides positive opportunities for children's learning because of guidance provided by the parent within the ZPD.

Vygotsky (1967) further argues that play is "the leading source of development in the preschool years" (p. 6), and that "the child moves forward essentially through play activity" (p. 16). According to Vygotsky (1967), as young children "advance from one age stage to another" they tend to experience change in their "motives and incentives to act" (p. 7). For example, at around the age of three years, they develop motivations to act like an adult (Leont'ev, 1981). This can be observed when a child tries to cook a meal in the play kitchen, pretends to be a doctor through the use of a doctor play set, or holds a baby doll and pats it to sleep. Play is used by the child to create "an imaginary, illusory world in which the unrealizable desires can be realized" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 93). The "unrealizable desires" at this age stage is to imitate the acts of adults, i.e., a mother cooking in the kitchen, a doctor and patient, a mother carrying her baby.

Based on Vygotsky's ideas, play leads development in the preschool years in two main ways:

> "*First, play with substitute objects constitutes an important step in the development of semiotic mediation…Second, sociodramatic play involves the active appropriation of sociocultural rules of activity, having a profound influence on cognitive and personality development*" (Vygotsky, as cited in Duncan & Tarulli, 2003, p. 273)

Fundamentally, engaging in such play is vital for children's development. Vygotsky (1967, 1978) believed that playing with objects in imaginary situations helps develop symbolism, which precedes development of more advanced motivational and cognitive processes. In playing with a toy kitchen, for instance, the child learns to substitute the cooking pans and toy foods with the real items used by his/her parent in the kitchen. The child would even pretend to eat those foods by bringing them near to his/her mouth, but knowing not to eat as they would do with real foods. The use of objects in this way, and the appropriation of rules and behaviour during such play activities are significant as "the child learns to act in a cognitive, rather than externally visible realm, relying on internal tendencies and motives, and not on incentives supplied by external things" (Vygotsky, 1967, p. 11). In this way, the child's thinking which "is separated from objects and action arises from ideas rather than from things" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 97). According to Vygotsky (1978), this is valuable for the development of more mature cognitive processes in children, such as abstract thinking.

Despite the vast existing literature there is about play, it is still difficult to point to a single definition of play. To date, there is still a lack of consensus around which type of play most benefits children's learning and development. According to Bodrova (2008), "traditional play" is important for children's learning and development. Specifically, "make-believe play", involving pretend and role play, has great potential to be a source of children's development.

Drawing on Vygotsky's components of "real play", Bodrova (2008) argues that children engaging in "make-believe play" are more likely to develop new forms of thinking, self-regulation, imagination, literacy and oral language, as well as metalinguistic awareness. "Real play", according to Vygotsky (1967), has three components (as cited in Bodrova, 2008, p. 359):

- children create an imaginary situation;
- take on and act out roles;
- follow a set of rules determined by specific roles.

For example, in role-play, children manage the roles they are playing, together with the rules that they need to follow when playing those roles. Bodrova (2008, p. 361) explains that this "requires children to practice self-regulation" as they manoeuvre between their given roles and "other regulations", or rules issued by other players. Hence, engaging in this type of play is said to promote children's development. Bodrova (2008) adds that children's development through play can be further enhanced by "adult mediation" or "adult scaffolding" of make-believe play (p. 365). The term scaffolding was introduced by Wood et al. (1976) to indicate the nature of support and guidance in the context of teaching and learning. According to Bruner (1978), scaffolding refers to steps taken by an adult for helping a child acquire difficult skills. For example, they may divide a task into manageable parts or direct the child's attention to a particular element by way of supporting a child's progression through the task.

This section has provided a historical overview of play as conceptualised by different theorists. Vygotsky's (1967) account of play was especially useful because it helped explain how play promotes children's higher mental functionings, as well as its significance as "the leading source of development in the preschool years" (p. 6). Vygotsky's concept of play suggests the importance of parents' involvement because it was reasoned that a child's learning through play is mediated by the adults involved in the play.

2.4.2 The value of parent involvement with children's play in the home and at playgroups

This section explores research into the value of parent involvement with children's play, drawing on literature regarding the home learning environment and in playgroups.

2.4.2.1 Parent involvement with children's play in the home

Parental involvement is important in children's play because it is believed that parents can be powerful facilitators of their children's learning (Evangelou & Wild, 2014). Despite its importance, researchers are divided in their perceptions of play involvement, with some believing that 'the full potential of play can be unlocked by active teachers or parents' and others who recommend a more child-led approach, free of explicit adult direction (Whitebread et. al., 2012, p. 33). Similarly, involvement with children's play may be understood and manifested in many ways by different parents. For example, some parents may not be aware that children learn through play or they may not know how to be involved in their children's play. This suggests a need for exploring parents' involvement with children's play to better understand its benefits on children's learning.

From a "Home Learning Environment" (HLE) perspective, there is strong evidence to suggest that parents have a vital role in supporting their children's play. For example, a longitudinal study undertaken in England known as the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) indicates that the quality of a child's learning experiences in the family has more influence on future achievement than ability, material circumstances or the quality of preschool and school provision (Sylva et al., 2004a). The findings in Sylva et al.'s study were consistent with a later study conducted in Germany that examined the influence of home and preschool learning environment on the development of early numeracy skills. Anders et al. (2012) found that children from a high-quality HLE demonstrated stronger numeracy skills at preschool entry. In fact, the quality of the HLE influences children's learning at preschool. It

was found in their study that children with a medium- or high-quality HLE seem able to take advantage of a high-quality preschool, whereas children with a low-quality HLE do not seem able to benefit from two years of high-quality stimulation at preschool. This is possibly because the quality of the HLE has an important role in shaping children's cognitive development and receptiveness towards academic stimulation by the age of three, when children in Germany often experience centre-based education and care for the first time (Anders et al., 2012). This study confirmed the importance of a positive early learning environment in the key period from birth to three years. It highlights the importance of parents' involvement in the family or home context from early in a child's life in providing children with this experience because of the effects on how children will go on to perform and benefit from preschool education.

Improving parents' understanding may encourage parent involvement with children's play in the home. It was reported in another study that parents in a community at risk of educational underachievement participated in a family-focused intervention aimed at promoting literacy, numeracy and self-esteem, known as the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP). The study showed that the parents made significant improvement in their socio-economic status, such as taking up more basic skills courses, and showing greater awareness of and fostering their child's literacy development (Sylva et al., 2004b). This study suggested that parent involvement can be encouraged by improving parents' understanding of ways they can support their children's learning and development through play and interaction (Evangelou et al., 2007). Melhuish et al. (2008) extend on this study by proposing that "what parents do" with their children in a home environment is more important than "who parents are". This is because parents can involve their children in learning-related activities that are conducive to their learning. Examples of these activities include "reading, library visits, playing with letters and numbers, painting and drawing, teaching (through play) the letters of the alphabet, playing with numbers and shapes, teaching nursery rhymes and singing" (Desforges with Abouchaar,

2003, p. 23). In addition to these activities, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) drew attention to the concept of "at home good parenting" to emphasise on the benefits of a home environment that is "secure and stable, accompanied by intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, cultivation of values and high aspirations in relation to education and personal fulfilment" (p. 4). Parents' involvement, such as in these home-learning activities, is important for supporting their children's introduction to and learning from these activities. These studies suggest the importance of parents' involvement in promoting a positive home environment. Improving parents' understanding of ways to support their children's learning and development may increase parent-child engagement in supportive interactions and meaningful activities.

In further research, evidence from the Abecedarian Project emphasises the importance of a quality early educational experience for young children (Sparling, 2011). The project targeted children at risk of developmental delays or academic failure from families of low-income status, by providing an intensive early educational program that runs for full days, year-round within a quality childcare setting, starting within the first 6 months of life (Campbell et al., 2012). Findings of the project twenty-five years after the participants completed the program reinforce "the importance of the first five years of life as a key stage during which cognitive skills that provide a foundation for future success are acquired" (Campbell et al., 2012, p. 1041). Examples of the positive outcomes reported included educational benefits such as having acquired more years of education, and economic benefits such as having worked steadily over the past two years and were less likely to use public assistance to meet basic needs (Campbell et al., 2012; Campbell et al., 2002). These studies in relation to HLE demonstrate the importance of parents' active involvement in the early years of their children's lives, which begins at home. In fact, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY, 2016) argued that parents are the strongest influence in determining their child's life chances.

Despite the success of intervention programs, such as the PEEP and the Abecedarian, on improving children's early learning and development, it remains an ongoing challenge to engage "hard-to-reach" families. There is strong evidence indicating the benefits of the parents' participation in such intervention programs on their involvement with their children's play and interaction (e.g. Sylva el al., 2004b). However, these families have often been described as "hard-to-reach" due to their lack of willingness to participate in such programs. Evangelou et al. (2013), however, proposed that such intervention programs and services can be made more accessible to these families, such as being held at more strategic locations nearer to their homes or more easily accessible by public transport. This is to ensure that these programs and services can be reached and are accessible to "hard-to-reach" families.

2.4.2.2 Parent involvement with children's play at playgroups

In Australia, parents are encouraged to attend playgroups with their children from as early as birth. It is believed that playgroups offer opportunities for parents to learn about the importance of play, and especially, on ways to engage their children in play experiences at the playgroup that can then be extended to the home environment. Njegac et al. (2016), in associating the playgroup environment with the home, state that like home, "[playgroup] is a relaxed, informal place for parents and children to read together, play together", but that playgroups also offer opportunities for learning from other families (p. 15). This section explores some of these learning opportunities provided by playgroups, especially in relation to parents' involvement with children's play at playgroups.

Research has also shown that a learning environment that is defined by child-initiated activities is more conducive for children's learning than one that is scripted and highly-structured by adult instructions (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), thus further strengthening the benefits of attending a community playgroup. In addition, an Australian research project,

known as Linking Schools and Early Years project, suggested playgroups as a family engagement strategy (Eastman et al., 2012). Eastman et al. reported that playgroups, particularly school-based playgroups, provided the opportunity for schools to connect and engage with families prior to their child starting school, increasing the likelihood for a smooth transition to school. Playgroups can, therefore, act as the engagement strategy and also an opportunity for facilitators to model play, parents to share ideas with one another, or through observations of other parents playing with their children.

Playgroups are sites where parents are encouraged to participate in co-playing with their child. The concept of "co-play" will be discussed in more detail under section 2.4.3. However, one study conducted in the United States (Mize & Pettit, 2010) examined mothers' supervision of child-peer interactions at a playgroup, which provided some indications of the value of having the parents involved with their children during play at playgroups. The study concluded that the mothers' behaviour at the playgroup greatly impacted on their own child's interaction with other children. For example, the "mothers who were relatively more attentive to children rather than to other adults had children who engaged in more peer-oriented play", possibly because the mothers would initiate to bring their child into "closer proximity and interest them in similar activities" with other children (Mize & Pettit, 2010, p. 1281). The study was important because it suggested that the way parents engaged with their children influenced how the child socialised with other children at the playgroup. While playgroups are known to provide opportunities for children to socialise and play together with others, Mize and Pettit's (2010) study demonstrated that it was what the mothers did at the playgroup, their ways of interaction and supervision of their child at the playgroup as examples, that influenced their child's engagement with play or interaction with other children.

This parental role of being involved with their children's play is an important one at community playgroups as even from early days, Fields and Clearly-Gilbert (1983) had already

observed that parents spent the most time facilitating children's play and talking to other parents about their children's development at playgroups. This observation remains true in modern day community playgroups where parents actively involved with their children's play (McLean et al., 2017a). Parent's involvement with their children's play at playgroups presents an opportunity to research parents' co-play practices in community playgroups.

2.4.3 Parents' practices of co-play

This section explores the concept of co-play in more detail. Co-play generally refers to the practice of playing with another individual (Qu, 2011). Other concepts used similarly for describing the practice of playing together include "joint play" (Li et al., 2021; Waldman-Levi et al., 2019) and "guided play" (Weisberg & Zosh, 2018; Fisher et al., 2013). The latter concept is more often used to describe play that is characterised by structured interactions such as within a classroom context (Jay & Knaus, 2018). Despite its close reference to play, co-play literature involving children and adults is scarce, especially in early childhood research. This review found only one study published in the past decade. This study from Singapore focused on examining the effects of several co-play configurations, such as co-players as opponents or co-players in cooperation and used an experimental research design with young children (Qu, 2011). There was another older study on co-play in an early childhood context, where co-play was established as an effective play intervention strategy for enriching the quality of children's play (Ward, 1996). The present section reviews aspects of these two studies on co-play in more detail as a way of highlighting the benefits of parents co-playing with their children. Two other studies about parents' practices at playgroups will also be discussed, which will provide further indication that there is currently a gap for understanding parents' practices of co-play in community playgroups.

Ward (1996) defined co-play as an effective play strategy, in which "an adult joins in a child-directed play scenario and facilitates learning and development" (p. 20). In her study, she described how the educator used the co-play strategy with a group of kindergarteners. For example, the educator joined in the children's make-believe play and conversations in the home corner by responding and making comments about the children's actions, which contributed to the play context by ways of "asking for information (Can I see a menu?)", "adding new elements (broccoli)", and "responding to the children's initiatives (It looks delicious)" (Ward, 1996, p. 22). By identifying the educator's co-play practices, Ward (1996) found that the educator was able to "facilitate play-related language exchanges, ask higher level questions to extend the play, and include other children in the play" (p. 8). Thus, the study suggests value for identifying co-play practices. The findings provide understanding into how an educator supports play in ways that guided the children's learning and development.

Co-play as a play strategy is not unlike guided play, also a form of child-directed play with adult support. Both practices of co-play and guided play are similar in that the child controls the play direction. However, a learning goal is often the objective of guided play, with the role of the adult being to scaffold activities and provide guidance that will allow the child to reach the targeted learning (Weisberg & Zosh, 2018). Therefore, researchers have argued that guided play tended to promote children's learning in classrooms because of its effectiveness in targeting academic outcomes (Jay & Knaus, 2018; Weisberg et al., 2013). The lack of studies in more naturalistic settings means that the effectiveness of guiding play outside of the classroom context is not determined (Weisberg et al., 2016).

Though, as Ward (1996) and a few others studies have demonstrated, it is possible for adults to guide children's learning and development during co-play by sensitively responding to, and making suggestions and comments about the children's actions (Pursi & Lipponen, 2018; Kalliala, 2014; Bernier et al., 2010; Lobman, 2006). This form of guiding during co-play

is likely to be more effective in naturalistic settings. For example, community playgroups, unlike in a classroom setting, does not follow any curricula that has set learning outcomes, and can thus naturally follow the children's lead. The lack of studies on co-play practices in playgroups means that little is known about how parents guide children's learning at community playgroups.

On the other hand, Qu's (2011) study investigated the influence of co-play on three- and four-year-olds' executive function. Executive function refers to "the ability to execute appropriate actions and to inhibit inappropriate actions for the attainment of a specific goal" (Moriguchi, 2014, p. 1). Research has shown that the executive function develops most rapidly in the preschool years (Anderson, 2002), and that social interaction facilitates the development of this function in young children (Moriguchi, 2014). Qu's (2011) study identified that co-playing with a more experienced individual can influence children to become more efficient in executive control due to the facilitation effects of the co-player. For example, the presence of a co-player, who shares a common goal with the child, was able to influence the child's behavioural control such as improving his/her concentration on the task. This finding helped highlight the benefits of adults being involved in their children's play by showing the effects on children's behaviours and concentration.

The studies about co-play reviewed above point to the potential of co-playing in supporting children's learning and development. It was shown that co-playing with an adult has the potential to enrich the quality of children's play (Ward, 1996), as well as promoting children's efficiency in executive control (Qu, 2011). Whilst benefits of co-playing are suggested, none of these studies explored co-playing between a parent and their child or within the context of a community playgroup, such as the case in this study. Yet, community playgroups are sites that offer many opportunities for parents to co-play with their children by providing toys and other resources for children's play activities. Importantly, Moriguchi (2014)

suggested that parents are well-positioned to facilitate their children's development of executive function through parent-child interactions. This is likely because maternal sensitivity in reading and responding to the child's needs, together with appropriate verbal scaffolding are especially useful for developing children's executive function (Bernier et al., 2010).

Additionally, research in relation to parents' practices at playgroups have shown that there are potential benefits for encouraging parents' involvement with their child's play activities. For example, Fleer and Hammer (2014), who investigated Australian Indigenous caregivers' playgroup practices found that the caregivers in their study generally supported the repertoire of practices within activities set up at the site. Examples of these practices were the adults sitting down and working with the children to begin an activity or to undertake tasks, showing how to use equipment, such as a stapler or glue brush in a craft activity, or techniques to encourage the children to join in, as well as interacting with their children during tasks through a combination of talk and modelling actions (Fleer & Hammer, 2014). The study argued that these practices oriented the children to participate in activities with their caregivers, and that the caregivers' participation in the activities, for example a craft activity, created the social conditions for engaging in a valued form of learning for the children. As the study was focused on investigating the impact of the adults' repertoire of practices on children's learning, it did not provide analysis from the perspectives of the caregivers. Nonetheless, the analysis suggested that the children benefited from their caregivers' involvement with their play at the playgroup. Furthermore, the caregivers' practices observed in the study included talking or demonstrating play, by way of supporting and encouraging their children to join in the experiences (Fleer & Hammer, 2014). The caregivers in the study utilised talk as engagement in an activity, rather than as a substitute of involvement. In other words, the caregivers tended to use both talk and other physical acts by way of participation in the activities. The choice of those practices depended on their children's needs in the activities. For example, in their

attempts at encouraging their children's participation in the activities, the caregivers typically used talk and modelling strategies for demonstrating the use of equipment and materials (Fleer & Hammer, 2014). This indicates the caregivers' sensitivity in responding to their children's needs and behaviours, which Ward (1996) had previously indicated as an effective practice for guiding children's learning and development during co-play.

In another study, McLean et al. (2017a) gained insights into parents' practices in community playgroups, observing that parents used social media to share with other attending parents at the playgroup "adult-mediated strategies for supporting their children's engagement in play" (McLean et al., 2017a, p. 207). For example, the parents shared guiding and modelling strategies for learning such as their child "using the tongs to pick up fruit at snack time after watching the adults use them" (McLean et al., 2017a, p. 207). Due to the aims of their research which did not include investigating parents' play practices, this data about how the group of mothers had interacted with their children in supporting their play was not further pursued. Further examination into these, such as through interviews with the parents about their co-play practices, could bring to light some of the factors that influenced their co-play practices with their children at the playgroup, and contribute to an understanding of parents' co-play practices in community playgroups.

2.4.4 Summary of section 2.4

This section has reviewed research that provides evidence for the importance of play on children's learning and development, as well as the value of parents' involvement in their children's play in the home environment and at playgroups. Community playgroups provide children with opportunities for engagement with a wide range of play experiences, with the further advantage of having their parents present with them at the playgroup. Research has highlighted several benefits of families' attendance at community playgroups, for instance

increasing parents' knowledge about play (McLean et al., 2017b). Despite parents' motivation for attending and being responsible for their own children's play at a community playgroup, little is known about parents' practices of co-play in community playgroups. An investigation of parents' co-play practices in community playgroups, such as the research presented in this thesis, can contribute to understanding how parents are involved with their children's play. This new knowledge can then guide the development of resources to support parents' provision of rich play experiences for their children in a community playgroup.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

The review in this chapter identified a need for researching about parents' co-play practices in community playgroups due to several reasons. Firstly, playgroups serve as an "accessible and universal form of early childhood service" (Playgroup Australia, 2019, p. 9). Apart from providing children with a positive early learning environment, playgroup participation offers parents opportunities to bond with their children through play due to the presence of the parent with their child at the playgroup. Unlike other forms of early childhood service provision, community playgroups are not supported by professional educators or trained facilitators but are instead led by the attending parents. This is an interesting phenomenon because it raises the question of how parents in a community playgroup are involved with their children's play.

Secondly, this review found that playgroup research has so far focused on supported playgroups, and the role of professional facilitators in supported playgroups. Not as much is known about what goes on in community playgroups, in particular, how parents engage with their children's play.

Finally, reviewing studies of co-play and parental involvement suggested the potential benefits of co-playing between parents and their children. The lack of research into co-playing

between parent and child, and within the context of community playgroups highlighted the need to better understand how co-playing unfolds between a parent and their child in a community playgroup, which is the focus of this thesis. Hence, this study aims to theorise parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 established the need for this research, which is to theorise parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup. This chapter introduces the main theories and relevant concepts used in this study to develop understandings of parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup. The chapter begins by outlining a brief history of practice theory, where it explains how the shift from human mental processes to real practices was recognised. Next, two streams of thought offered by the practice theory perspective are drawn upon to reflect on parents' practices of co-play in community playgroups. Following on from this, the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) is outlined, where ideas and concepts relevant to this study are introduced and explained in detail. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how practice theory has been applied in educational research. In particular, two important studies demonstrating the use of the theory of practice architectures in early years research are reviewed as they highlight the potential use of this theory for this study.

3.2 Practice theory: A brief historical overview

Practice theory seeks to understand practices in a given context within the social world. An exploration of the history of practice theory traces back to when Marx (1818-1883) challenged centuries of Western rationalist and mentalist tradition, such as the works of Aristotle and Plato, to legitimise real activity, or what people actually do in their everyday life, as an object of consideration (Nicolini, 2012). As Marx (1845/1977) puts it,

> "*…we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. . .Where speculation ends—in real life—there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men*" (Marx, 1845, Ch. 1a).

The tension between mental processes and real practices as the way of understanding human actions is mapped out here, with Marx strongly arguing for consideration of "the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men", or simply put, the practices.

Furthermore, Marx puts forth the view that,

> "*…men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life*"
>
> (Marx, 1845, Ch. 1a).

This is an important proposition, particularly during that historical period where mental tradition dominates, because it offers an alternative view of knowledge acquisition. Rather than seeing one's practices as a representation of their knowledge or what they already acquired, the alternative view proposes that knowledge is acquired in the process of developing one's practices. This opens up possibilities for a shift from examining the human mind to a focus on actual practices.

In this regard, Heidegger (1889-1976) made a significant contribution by highlighting our tendency to take for granted the practices in our daily living. He questions the concept of "everydayness" or "the unity or relatively unproblematic nature of human existence in the

course of worldly activity", to effectively argue that "our being in the world is, in fact, meaningfully structured by a texture of social and material practices that remain unthought of as such" (Nicolini, 2012, p. 34).

Drawing on Heidegger's (1929) example of "hammering", Nicolini (2012) contemplates that a carpenter hammering a nail into a piece of wood is likely to be unthinkingly using the hammer just as he uses his arm to wield it. His or her capacity to act depends upon the familiarity with the act of hammering, not on his need to "think a hammer" in order to drive in a nail (Nicolini, 2012, p. 34). This suggests that people, in going about their everyday activities, tend to utilise and demonstrate their knowledge through practices, and at most times without active realisations of their intentions.

Dreyfus (1991), drawing on Heidegger, further explains that this is a result of people being socialised into everyday practices but these practices are not represented in their minds. As in the example of the carpenter going about his carpentry work, "there are only skills and practices" (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 22) that can be observed, rather than his "system of beliefs" (Nicolini, 2012, p. 34) or the knowledge that is in his mind. Thus, Heidegger's ideas highlight the importance of observing and recounting a person who is present in the whole range of his or her existing (Nicolini, 2012). This is because human knowledge resides not only in their minds but is also demonstrated through human practices.

Wittgenstein (1889-1951) adds further to the importance of observing practices in the social world. His contributions relate to the role of language as a fundamental resource, and in turn, the meaning-making process in everyday activities, as he wrote,

> "*The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction. Only from this can more complicated forms develop*" (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 31).

Of concern to Wittgenstein is the "intellectual representational interpretation and the capacity to grasp meaning" (Nicolini, 2012, p. 38) of language as a point of departure for the continuation of an activity. A person's use of language to convey meanings and how these meanings are interpreted by another person is highlighted as potentially problematic, if not given its due consideration.

According to Wittgenstein, "meaning (and mind) cannot be properly conceived of as properties of individual consciousness, and instead should be conceived relationally as the result of the practical activity of sensuous and engaged agents" (Nicolini, 2012, p. 40). In other words, it is not enough to make sense of language from trying to understand one's internal thinking alone, rather it needs to be considered in the practical context where it appears. This means that the practical context in which language is used can profoundly influence its meanings, hence, stressing on the importance of the context of use. This necessarily entails in a given circumstance all the other practices engaged by the person in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of their interactions.

The focus on human practices has evolved into many of today's theories of practice, or collectively known as practice theory. The plural term "practice theories" is also often used because of the need to draw upon a combination of theoretical approaches for understanding the "complexities, nuances and diversity" of the scope of practice (Nicolini, 2012, p. 1). However, the one commonality shared by theories of practice is the focus on practices for understanding the social world (Gram-Hanssen, 2009).

3.3 Reflecting on parents' practices of co-play in community playgroups from a practice theory perspective

Practice is a fundamental concept in practice theory. Nicolini (2012) posits that there is no single definition of practice because the scope of a practice is complex and diverse. For

example, research drawing on practice theory could focus on the context of practice (Schatzki, 2003), practice communities (Wenger, 1998) or on an individual as an apprentice gaining competency in a specific practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), all of which involve different forms of practice conceptualisations, resulting in a wide range of investigations about practices. Therefore, the lack of an unified way of defining practice makes it necessary for any research about practices, such as this present study, to describe its concept of practice that is most meaningful in accordance with its research aims and objectives.

The practice theory perspective suggested two streams of thinking that are useful for this study. The first is in its view on practice as a social activity, rather than solely a mental process. Relatedly, the second is in its argument about how the social world influences one's practice. The two propositions offered a way of understanding practice, for this study in particular, parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup.

3.3.1 The practice of co-play as a social activity

According to Kemmis (2019), practices can be viewed in several scales, at a general level down to the more granular-level type of practices. For example, the parent's co-play practice is at a very general level, zooming in to more particular practices that define a co-play activity such as stacking up blocks with the child, and further down to the granular level of practice where the parent asks questions or answers the child's queries.

Kemmis (2019) also proposed that "a practice is an encounter with the world and with people and things in it" (p. 20). For this study, this means that parents' co-play practices involve encounters such as they take place within a community playgroup (the world), with children (people), and a toy or other resources at the playgroup (things). This suggests that the social dimension has an important place in a practice of co-play due to its taking place within a social context, and involving other people and things.

Practice theory puts a focus on the role of the parent's external world, not just his or her own mental processes. It recognises that a parent's co-play practices are not solely dependent on one's personal intentions and actions but are shaped and conditioned by extra-individual conditions beyond the individual parent, such as social circumstances and arrangements (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). For example, when a parent participates in a co-play activity at the community playgroup, they enter into a relationship with the child. The child, as much as the parent, can control the direction and content of the co-play interaction. This can be seen, for instance, when a parent tries to invite the child to play with a doll. The child, who is not interested in the parent's suggestion of a doll, may instead point to the train set, indicating their preference for the train set. This may prompt the parent to take out the train set and begin rolling a train with the child.

The above example shows the influence of social conditions on a parent's co-play practices. There is value in understanding the social conditions of practices because, as seen in the example, the parent's co-play practices were not only a product of their own intentions and actions but were equally shaped and conditioned by other factors present in the co-play activity such as the child's preference for the train set over the parent's preference for a doll. By recognising those social conditions, it helped us to understand how the parent's co-play practices came to be enacted within the co-play activity.

3.3.2 The influence of social conditions on parents' practices of co-play

In the same way, social circumstances, arrangements and conditions play a role in influencing one's practice. According to Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008), "praxis", or actions aimed for the good of individuals and humankind, is not developed naturally in the practitioner alone, but is formed through his or her education, circumstances, experiences, and even as a product of other practices. The significant point is that we, as human beings, are "part of the

societies that frame us and within which we have our social relations…those others give us our selfhood – through our upbringing, our education, our experience" (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 38).

At playgroups, parents and children encounter each other. This means playgroups are a social site where there may be social conditions present that shape the parents' co-play practices. As an example, parents' practices at community playgroups can be influenced by the types of toy resources provided as well as how those resources are set up. For instance, a parent may be more likely to sit with their child and stack blocks together if the building blocks are readily available, such as being set up on a table with chairs provided for both the parent and the child. In contrast, the parent is likely to suggest other activities to the child if they realised that the building blocks are locked away in a storage room which required a key that parents have to ask for from the receptionist located on another level in the same building. Therefore, the availability and set up of toy resources at playgroups can act as a social condition that enables and constrains parents' co-play practices.

Perhaps the most influential condition on parents' practices of co-play in playgroups depends on which types of playgroups parents attend with their children. The two common types of playgroups in Australia are supported playgroups and community playgroups. In a supported playgroup, there is a paid and qualified playgroup facilitator whose role it is to support families in various ways which can include promoting children's learning and development through play-based activities. Therefore, what parents do with their children at supported playgroups may be influenced by the professional facilitator.

On the other hand, community playgroups are not facilitated by formally trained facilitators, but are dependent on the parents and/or volunteers themselves to facilitate their own children's play. These playgroups are typically equipped with toy resources and play equipment that provide families with opportunities for play and socialisation, and the parents

are responsible for facilitating their child's play in community playgroups. As mentioned in chapter 2, the present lack of research into community playgroups, especially in relation to parents' co-play practices, means that very little is known about how parents are involved with their children's play in community playgroups. Without the support of playgroup facilitators to organise play-based learning activities for children in community playgroups, the parents assume an active role in facilitating their child's play. This study seeks to identify what are the parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup, and the social conditions that influenced those practices using the practice architectures theory, introduced in the next section.

3.4 The theory of practice architectures

Practice theory has established practice as a social, rather than a mental process occurring within the individual. This is taken as a point of departure for the theory of practice architectures, which primarily concerns with "the ways in which the individual relates intersubjectively to any other" (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 37). With that, practice architectures theory invites consideration of the relationship between practices and their social conditions, for example, how parents' practices of co-play are shaped by conditions that are present or absent at the playgroup, of how parents' practices are adapted, changed and evolved in response to changing conditions, or even how parents come to develop those practices of co-play (Kemmis, 2019).

Kemmis et al.'s (2014) theory of practice and practice architectures, which offers a way for observing and analysing practices, is summarised schematically in Figure 3.1.

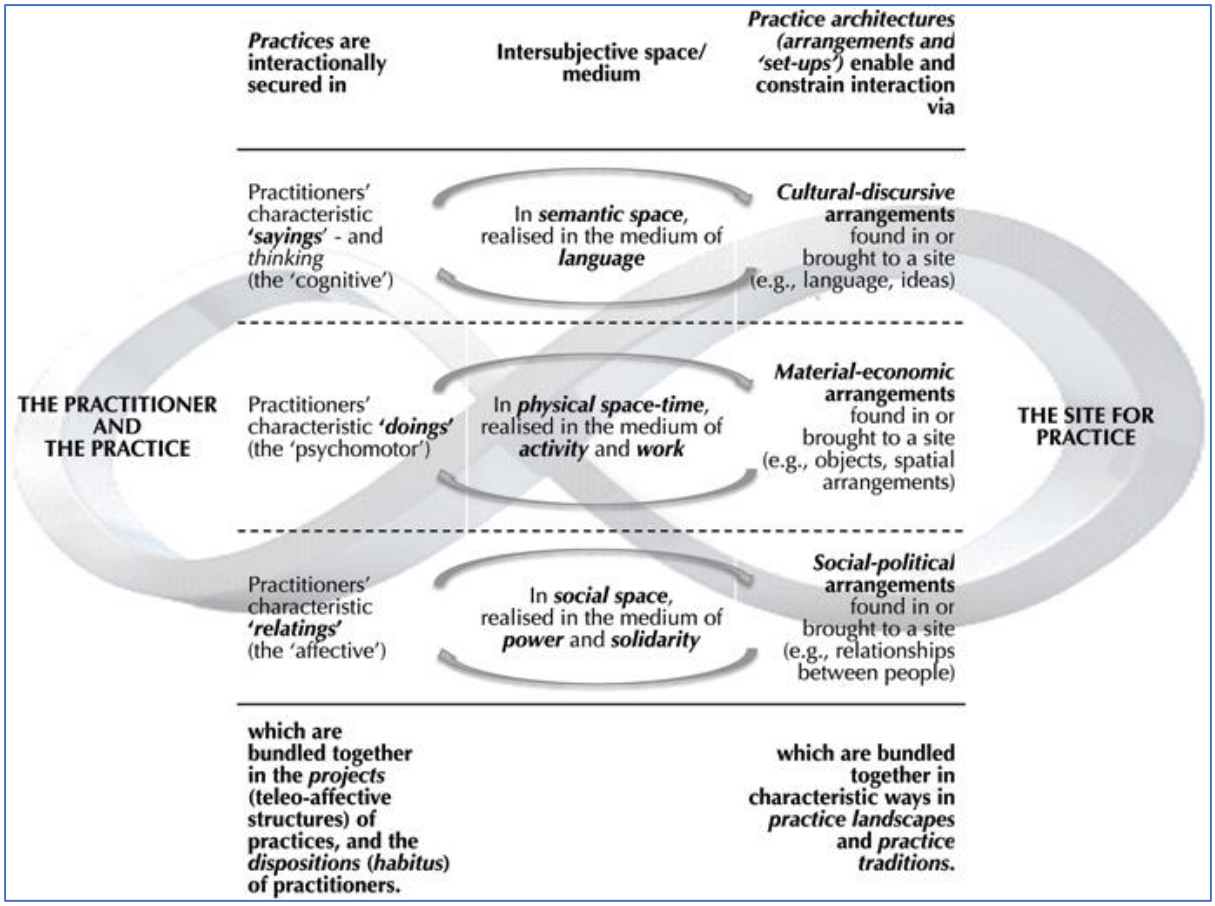

Figure 3.1: The theory of practice and practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 38)

According to Kemmis et al. (2014), practice architectures are existent in sites of practice and they prefigure practices, enabling and constraining particular kinds of sayings, doings and relatings among people. What is significant about this theory is the potential for understanding how particular kinds of sayings, doings and relatings in practices are shaped and conditioned by its practice architectures in the semantic, physical and social spaces. As shown in Figure 3.1, a person's sayings may be shaped by the cultural-discursive arrangements such as language and ideas in the semantic space, just as how the person's doings and relatings may also be shaped by the material-economic arrangements (e.g. objects and spatial arrangements) and social-political arrangements (e.g. relationships between people) in the physical and social spaces, respectively.

Two aspects of the practice architectures theory are highly relevant to this study, which are: 1) how practice is conceptualised, and 2) how practice is shaped and conditioned by practice architectures. These are discussed in detail in the following sections. Primarily, these ideas are important to this study because they support an exploration of what constitutes parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup, as well as of the enablers and constraints to those practices of co-play. For this reason, practice architectures theory was utilised in this study for understanding parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup.

Specifically, for this study, the theory of practice architectures was used to address these research questions:

1. What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?
2. What do parents say about enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in a community playgroup?

3.4.1 Conceptualising parents' co-play practices

Foremostly, this study drew on the theory of practice architectures for addressing the first research question, which was to identify the parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup.

Kemmis (2018) defines a practice as:

> "*a form of human action in history, in which particular activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of particular ideas and talk (sayings), and when the people involved are distributed in particular kinds of relationships (relatings), and when this combination of sayings, doings and relating 'hang together' in the project of the practice (the ends and purposes that motivate the practice).*"
>
> (Kemmis, 2018, p. 2-3)

For Kemmis (2018), a practice is composed of sayings, doings and relatings, and that these three usually occur as bundles of practice. This view of practice suggests that parents' co-play practices are composed of bundles of sayings, doings and relatings. For example, in a building blocks activity, a saying may be the parent asking or answering a question, just as a doing may involve the parent sitting down and helping the child to stack up blocks. And relating focuses on the parent's relationship with the child during the activity, which may be that the parent is acting as a co-player or a non-participant watching from the side.

Based on Kemmis' (2018) definition of practice, it is possible to identify and to describe characteristics of parents' co-play practices in community playgroups. This is because a practice is characterised by its sayings, doings and relatings, giving each practice its distinctive qualities through "the contents of sayings, doings and relatings", and "the way sayings, doings and relatings are bundled together" (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 51).

For instance, the practices found in a building blocks activity is most likely to differ in many aspects from practices found in a ball activity. Firstly, a parent saying "Can you throw or kick it to me" can be easily recognised as belonging to the ball activity, not to building blocks, because we know that it is not likely for the parent to instruct the child to throw or kick the block pieces. The actions (doings) in both practices would also be different as the ball activity is likely to involve more physical movements of the body such as running or jumping. How the parent relates with the child in both activities would also be different as the parent in the block activity may choose to watch the child and provide some support from time to time, whereas the parent in the ball activity may actively assume his or her turn in throwing and receiving the ball with the child in order to maintain continuity of the game.

In addition, the practices of co-play are likely to differ from one parent to another because of the social conditions at play, such as social circumstance and personal experience. How individual parents practice co-playing at community playgroups can also be influenced

by their past experiences, circumstances or encounters (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). For example, their main motivation for attending a playgroup can be a strong condition that shapes parents' practices at the playgroup. If the parent's primary goal is to be able to meet and interact with other parents while his or her child can be kept entertained by new toys and other children, then the parent would likely not be actively co-playing with his or her child through the playgroup session. He or she would instead be spending their time talking with other parents at the playgroup.

Therefore, the theory of practice architectures has helped to conceptualise parents' co-play practices in the way that drew this study's focus onto the parents' sayings, doings and relatings within the co-play activities. Of interest to this study is what were the contents of the parents' sayings, doings and relatings, and how these bundled to form the co-play practices.

3.4.2 Enablers and constraints on parents' practices of co-play

Another key aspect of the practice architectures theory is that practices are enabled and constrained by the preconditions of cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2014), or collectively, known as practice architectures. It is believed that these conditions influence parents' "dispositions and forms of actions" (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 39), thereby shaping their practices of co-play in playgroups. In the context of community playgroups where parents' practices are not influenced by the professional facilitators, much of their practices are likely to be personal choices and decisions shaped and conditioned by the pre-conditions.

Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 32) described the preconditions as:

- *cultural-discursive arrangements* that are the resources that make possible the language and discourses used in and about this practice;

- *material-economic arrangements* that are the resources that make possible the activities undertaken in the course of the practice;
- *social-political arrangements* that are the resources that make possible the relationships between people and non-human objects that occur in the practice.

This study is interested in identifying what were the factors or the arrangements that enabled and constrained parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup.

3.4.2.1 Cultural-discursive arrangements

Co-playing most often involves verbal and non-verbal communication between parents and their children. Verbal communication results in the production of speech or sayings such as asking questions and making comments. With children, especially infants and toddlers, who have not yet developed their speaking ability, they may use other means to exhibit agency (Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2008). For instance, a young child may turn away from his mother's offer of a toy train, instead he picks up a piece of the train track to play with. The child is using his body language (e.g. turns away from his mother, picks up and plays with a train track) to exhibit his preference towards the train track over the toy train.

As this study's focus is on the parents' co-play practices, the cultural-discursive arrangements referred to the conditions or resources that made possible the parents' sayings. This includes not only the use of "specialised language" during co-play, but also the kinds of knowledge that may shape parents' understanding of situations and that may guide their communication with their children (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 47). For example, in this study, a parent's knowledge about the child's interest in stacking up blocks may prompt the parent to engage in sayings such as "Do you want to stack up some blocks?" (suggesting a block-stacking activity) or "Are you going to build a tall tower with those blocks like you always do?" (predicting actions). The parents' sayings in this example may have been

motivated by their knowledge of the child's interest in playing with blocks or by previous play experiences where the child had used the blocks to build a tall tower.

Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) highlight the difficulty of identifying which of the cultural-discursive arrangements are influencing practices at any time or in a situation. This is because which practice the individual adopts is partly determined by "experience and judgement", by "the kind of situation it is", and "by traditions and conventions of thinking about and understanding situations" (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 43). This suggests that in order to understand some of the cultural-discursive influences on practices, there should be opportunities for the practitioner to reflect and talk about the experience, their judgements or to share their general thinking about the situation because parents' perspectives are believed to be important in having shaped their co-play practices.

In this study, cultural-discursive arrangements are discussed in relation to the kinds of knowledge that influenced parents' sayings in a co-play activity. The interest is on understanding the kind of knowledge, from the parents' perspective, that enabled and constrained what parents say to their children during co-play at the community playgroup.

3.4.2.2 Material-economic arrangements

Co-playing not only involves communication, but also physical activity such as the parent throwing a ball or stacking up blocks with the child. For that reason, the material-economic arrangements are relevant to parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup because this dimension accounts for the objects and things that enable or constrain what people do (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Material-economic arrangements can play a significant role in shaping parents' practices of co-play in community playgroups. As discussed previously in section 3.3.2, an important social condition that greatly influenced how parents act in supported playgroups is

the presence of a professional facilitator. Jackson (2013), for example, reported that the professional facilitators played a crucial role in engaging parents in meaningful play-based activities with their children at supported playgroups, also enabling parents to gain confidence and emotional support. In supported playgroups, therefore, the professional facilitator serves as an important material arrangement that shapes the parents' co-play practices.

In community playgroups such as is the focus of the presented study, there are usually no professional facilitators present in the playgroup. Hence, the material-economic arrangements that may influence co-play practices may be in the toy resources provided at the community playgroup. Previous research has indicated that playing with different toys can promote children's cognitive, social, and motor skills (Dauch et al., 2018; Kavousipor et al., 2016; Knox, 2008; Tomopoulos et al., 2006). Therefore, the toys and other play equipment provided in a community playgroup may influence what parents decide to do at the playgroup.

For instance, a parent is able to play throwing and catching a ball with the child at the playgroup because of the availability of the ball (material), as well other arrangements like an outdoor space (physical) that is conducive for such physical activities. Conversely, this activity cannot take place at the playgroup if these material and physical arrangements are not made available, or if it does, it would be with much difficulty.

Hence, material-economic arrangements can influence parents' co-play practices in community playgroups. This study is particularly interested in identifying the material-economic factors that enabled and constrained what parents do with their children at the community playgroup.

3.4.2.3 Social-political arrangements

Parents' co-play practices are also influenced by the social-political arrangements. According to practice architectures theory, this happens because people are shaped by social

circumstances that have happened in the past as well as at present (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). As people grow and encounter other people and situations, they learn how to act in and understand different contexts. They also continue to encounter new situations where they adapt previously learned practices and learn new ones. Therefore, practices embed people's understandings and beliefs formed over time from their experiences of the world and from social encounters with others.

The social-political arrangements relevant to this study are the beliefs and understandings that influenced how parents relate with their children at the community playgroup. Co-playing in community playgroups involves at least two individuals such as parent and child or between children, which means that it is "conducted in and through relationship with others" (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008, p. 48). This study focused on the relationship between parents and their children in co-play activities at the community playgroup, and of the kind of beliefs and understandings that influenced the parents' co-play practices.

For example, it can be assumed that parents who strongly believe in the value of playing with the child as the way of promoting children's learning and development were more likely to actively engage in co-playing. Other factors, such as parents' reasons for joining a playgroup, may also influence their practices at the playgroup because it is believed that people's actions or social practices are, to some extent, socially pre-figured by some kinds of history that shape their beliefs and understandings of situations. Thus, this study seeks to understand some of the parents' beliefs and understandings that enabled and constrained their practices of co-play in the community playgroup.

3.5 Application of practice theory and practice architectures in educational research

This section discusses the use of the practice theory, particularly the practice architectures theory, in previous studies to demonstrate how these contribute to the use of the practice architectures theory in this present thesis.

Practice theory focuses on the actual experiences of practices in the real world (Nicolini, 2012). One of the reasons that a practice-based approach appeals to research is that it accounts for 'the layers, levels and intricacies, and situatedness of' practices (Grootenboer et al., 2017, p. 3). This means that practice theory is widely used to "examine and [is] sensitive to practices, the enactment of practices, the composition and the development of practices and the practitioners of practices" (p. 2). A practice-based approach focuses on practices, not just solely on the practitioners, because it recognises the range of interconnected practices unfolding alongside the practitioners of practices within a practice site (Grootenboer et al., 2017).

Educational research has utilised practice theory for understanding teaching and learning practices across a range of education contexts (e.g. Blue & Grootenboer, 2017; Edwards-Groves 2017; Salamon et al., 2016). In these studies, the focus of inquiry is on practices, as in the practices of financial literacy education in a Canadian Aboriginal community (Blue & Grootenboer, 2017), the reading practices in an Australian Year One classroom (Edwards-Groves, 2017), and the practices of early childhood educators (Salamon et al., 2016). Of these, Salamon et al.'s (2016) study represents one of the very few studies in early childhood research that have drawn on practice theory, and practice architectures theory in particular. The following section reviews aspects of two studies that have used the theory of practice architectures in early years research, as a way of highlighting its potential usefulness for research into parents' practices of co-play in community playgroups.

Salamon et al. (2016) used the practice architectures theory to understand the practices of early childhood educators by examining their beliefs and the implicit theories influencing their practices. By drawing on the concepts of the theory of practice architectures as a stimulus to help elicit early childhood educators' thinking, Salamon et al. (2016) found that the practices of those educators were greatly influenced, and shaped, by the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements of the early childhood education sector. In the particular service in which her study was conducted, the educators had to apply for formal approval to justify the use of certain resources, such as rocks, before introducing such resources to children (Salamon et al., 2016, p. 438). This meant that the educators had to prepare a large amount of paperwork just to use rocks with children, which often resulted in their choosing other resources that required none or a less complicated procedure. As a result of using the concepts of practice architectures theory as a stimulus in conversations with early childhood educators, Salamon et al.'s (2016) research was able to demonstrate how the early childhood educators' practices were restricted by practices in the particular service, hindering their ability to focus on providing experiences that were of real benefits to the children's learning.

The second study was the use of the practice architectures theory on bedtime reading practices. In the study of a 20-month-old baby's participation in the practice of bedtime reading with his parents, Kemmis (2019) used the theory of practice architectures to unpack the practice of bedtime reading and its practice architectures. Baby Miles' participation in the practice of bedtime reading was characterised by the practices of "asking for a story (saying)", "going to the bookshelf and taking down books (doings)", and "entering a special relationship with his parents (relating)" (Kemmis, 2019, p. 14).

Additionally, the concept of practice architectures was used in the study to refer to the arrangements that made possible those sayings, doings and relatings. Baby Miles' practices were made possible by his "approximation or use of words recognisable to his parents (among

the local cultural-discursive arrangement)", by "the bookshelf, the books, and the time taken for the activity (among the local material-economic arrangements)", and by a special relationship "charged by the reassurance of solidarity (social-political arrangement)" (Kemmis, 2019, p. 14-15). By unpacking these elements, Kemmis (2019) showed that the practice of bedtime reading is "a precious time in family building, and a powerful force for family building", supported by important practice architectures in households such as the availability and use of books, and time set aside each evening for this activity.

Both of Salamon et al.'s (2016) and Kemmis' (2019) works highlighted the potential of the practice architectures theory for this present study, which seeks to understand parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup. The two studies have used the theory differently, to some extent, from each other, in accordance with their research purposes. The theory of practice architectures sets the theoretical backdrop in Kemmis' (2019) study, of which was used for analysing data about the practice of bedtime reading. While the theory was also strongly grounded in Salamon et al.'s (2016) research, the use of the theory extended to achieve the purpose of stimulating discussions with groups of early childhood educators. By drawing on the concepts of the theory of practice architectures as a stimulus for discussion, implicit theories and taken-for-granted beliefs that influenced the practices of early childhood educators were brought to light (Salamon et al., 2016). Both of these studies suggested practical and collaborative ways for conducting research using the practice architectures theory, which were adopted and adapted to the present study.

Like both studies which identified practices and the practice architectures enabling and constricting those practices in their respective sites, this study sought to identify parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup and the practice architectures that prefigured parents' practices. The theory of practice architectures was used in this study both for analysing data about parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup, and to some extent, in

conversations with parents about their co-play practices and activities at the playgroup. For the purpose of data analysis, this study seeks to identify the parents' practices of co-play by unpacking their sayings, doings and relatings that occurred in co-play activities, similar to how the practice of bedtime reading was unpacked in Kemmis' (2019) study.

In addition, this study also sought to identify the practice architectures that shaped parents' practices of co-play at the community playgroup, but from the parents' perspective. This means that similar to Salamon et al.'s (2016) study, discussions were conducted to seek the parents' perspectives about what may have enabled and constrained their co-play practices. Through conversations with the parents, the practice architectures that shaped their practices of co-play at the community playgroup were brought to light. However, unlike Salamon et al.'s (2016) study, these discussions were less formally structured, in that the concepts of practice architectures theory were not used as stimulus, but rather the discussions were kept open and orientated towards opportunities for parents to reflect on co-play activities and to share information related to particular practices. This was to minimise, as much as possible, potential pressures that may be placed on parents, such as feeling like they have to conform to specific ways of behaving at the community playgroup during the research process. The methodology applied to the conduct of this present research will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

3.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has introduced practice theory, firstly, by providing an historical overview of the important practice theorists and their contributions to the rise of the theory. Practice theory deviates from many theories in its time because of its focus on real human practices, rather than on human mental processes. This provided a suitable theoretical lens for this research study, which aimed to theorise parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup.

With that, the chapter proceeded to a description of the theory of practice architectures. The two important aspects of the theory that were highly relevant to this study were: 1) how practice is conceptualised, and 2) how practice is shaped and conditioned by practice architectures. These ideas supported an exploration of what constitutes parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup, as well as of the enablers and constraints of those practices.

The chapter concluded with a focus on how practice theory, in particular the theory of practice architectures, had been utilised in past research in education. It specifically focused on reviewing two studies, Salamon et al.'s (2016) and Kemmis' (2019), because these provided useful directions in relation to the use of the practice architectures theory for this present study. The practice architectures theory is used in this study to identify what are the parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup, and what are the enablers and constraints expressed by parents in discussions about their co-play practices.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 introduced the practice architectures theory used in this study to theorise parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup. It was established that parents' co-play practices are socially-situated relative to mental activity, which influenced the consideration of a research approach that is outlined in this present chapter. This chapter describes the research process of this study, which was designed to investigate the research questions: *1) What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?*, and 2) *What do parents say about enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in a community playgroup?*. The chapter begins by revisiting the claim about practices as socially-situated to consider why a qualitative research approach was chosen for this study, and how it influenced the ontological and epistemological positions. Following on, it introduces the ethnographic research methodology, and explains why this was suitable for conducting the research proposed in this study. This is followed by a discussion of the research methods used for collecting data, which consisted of field observations, informal interviews and photographic data. Finally, the chapter concludes with outlining the steps undertaken for the analysis of the data in order to generate the findings relevant to the research focus of this study.

4.2 Research approach

There are many methods that researchers can choose from for collecting and analysing data. Social science researchers apply qualitative and quantitative research methods "to build explanatory theory about people and their behaviour" (Punch, 2014, p. 9). Generally, qualitative research utilises methods that produces non-numerical data, whilst quantitative research works with numerical data. This study used a qualitative research approach, which

involved observations, interviews, and an inductive data analysis process, for collecting data and gaining insights into parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup.

Researchers make decisions on their approach to research based on a number of factors. Most often, they consider what the research inquiry is, and the methods of data collection and analysis that will help to achieve the aims of the research. However, it has also become increasingly important to make clear one's "way of thinking about the social reality" (Punch, 2014, p. 3). This is because beliefs about "the nature of being or reality" (ontology) and "the nature and scope of knowledge" (epistemology) (Twining et al., 2016, p. A2) can influence the choice of methods for collecting and analysing data. Hence, this section discusses the philosophical assumptions made in this study, and how they contributed to developing understanding of the research inquiry. The first person "I" is used in this chapter to describe this study's research process because, as the researcher entering the playgroup setting, it was not possible to be removed from the research arrangements.

4.2.1 Qualitative research

The Theoretical Framework chapter (see Chapter 2, section 3.3) explained that parents' co-play practices are socially-situated. This meant that the co-play practices are shaped by social factors brought into or already present at the community playgroup, such as the children and parents (people), and toys or other resources (things). In particular, this study sought to identify the parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup, and the enablers and constraints on the co-play practices. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was most suited to this inquiry because of its affordance for interpreting the social context of a co-play practice.

Furthermore, qualitative research is a non-numerical approach to data that is associated with naturalistic and interpretive methodologies. It is most suited for research that asks the "what" and "how" questions (Silverman, 2014), as opposed to the "how many" and "how

often" questions in quantitative research. Thus, a qualitative research approach was deemed most appropriate for addressing the research questions of this study:

1. What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?
2. What do parents say about enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in a community playgroup?

Yin (2016, p. 9) describes qualitative research as:

- Studying the meaning of people's lives, in their real-world roles;
- Representing the views and perspectives of the people in a study;
- Explicitly attending to and accounting for real-world contextual conditions;
- Contributing insights from existing or new concepts that may help to explain social behaviour and thinking;
- Acknowledging the potential relevance of multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.

Essentially, qualitative research is interested in the real world and people's experiences of it, rather than an experimental setting that is created for the purpose of a research inquiry. It is believed that the "naturalistic" methodological approach enables researchers to uncover how people experience the world, and to "interpret" the meaning that they may attribute to their experiences (Lapan et al., 2012).

In this study, I visited a community playgroup once weekly for seven weeks, in which I observed parents co-playing with the children. In accordance with the aim of this study, a naturalistic observation approach was best suited as it allowed me to develop understandings of parents' co-play practices in, as much as possible, the naturally occurring setting of a community playgroup. Moreover, the techniques of observing, interviewing, and interpreting

are central to qualitative research for gathering people's experiences and views (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These techniques were employed in this study for identifying parents' practices of co-play in the playgroup, and for gaining insights into the resources that helped shape those co-play practices.

4.2.2 Ontology and epistemology

Qualitative research is most often located in the constructivism paradigm (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A constructivism paradigm endeavours to construct understandings based on people's experiences of the world (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). For constructivist researchers, this means trying to "get into the head" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 33) of the research participants in order to understand their thinking and their interpretations of the world around them. This study perceived parents' co-play practices as socially-situated, shaped by social factors brought into or present in the community playgroup. A constructivism paradigm allowed me to gain knowledge of the co-play practices through collaboration with the parents to understand their co-play practices at the playgroup. In this study, my efforts were focused on co-constructing knowledge about parents' practices of co-play, through interactions with the parent participants on their experiences of co-playing with their children at the playgroup. This included observations of their practices, and interviews with the parents to gather their views about their co-play practices.

Any research paradigm entails what one believes about the nature of reality ("ontology"), and the nature of knowledge ("epistemology"). Epistemologically, the social constructivism paradigm emphasises the importance of the social and cultural context for gaining knowledge of the world. According to Lincoln and Guba (2013), knowledge is always context-bound, which means knowledge changes when the context is changed (p. 55). What can be known about the world, therefore, is knowledge that is constructed based on people's

experiences or sense made of their experiences of the world (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). This epistemological position aligned with this study's theorical construction of the parents' co-play practices, which also highlighted the importance of the social dimension in influencing the parents' practices at the playgroup.

Further, ontology concerns the assumptions made about the nature of reality, which influence how we make sense of data. Social constructivists, who believe that knowledge about the real world is socially constructed from people's experiences, see the purpose of research as to understand multiple constructions of what is considered to be real (Lapan et al., 2012). To them, there is not one objective reality. Rather, they perceive that there are multiple realities, of which researchers can explore and make meaning of these realities through interactions with research participants. The outcome of the exploration is an understanding of reality that is co-constructed and agreed by the researchers and research participants. What these propositions meant for this study was that there are multiple realities in how parents co-play with their children, and their justifications for doing so. Hence, the aim of this study was to understand how a group of parents co-played with their children at a community playgroup, through an investigation of their practices of co-play. The data collection allowed me to understand parents' co-play practices through my "own thinking and cognitive processing of data informed by [my] interactions with participants" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 33). The knowledge of the parents' co-play practices was socially constructed from my personal experience of reality within the natural setting of the community playgroup, where I observed the parents' co-play practices and asked questions about their practices in order to explore and make sense of their experiences of co-playing with their children at the playgroup.

4.2.3 Axiology

Axiology concerns the values held by a researcher, and their ethical behaviour when working with research participants. It is important to consider axiology in research because a researcher's values influence the research methodology, including data collection and analysis methods (Klenke et al., 2016). Use of the practice architectures theory in this study meant that the focus was on the social context, including factors that shaped the parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup. Therefore, the methods employed in this study involved face-to-face interactions with research participants to observe and talk about their practices of co-play, which highlights the importance of my professional relationship with families at the community playgroup.

I referred to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007 (updated 2018)* for guidance in shaping my ethical conduct when working with parents and young children at the playgroup. Particularly, the guidelines helped in establishing:

- the protocol for gaining consent from research participants
- the conduct of research involving young children

Ethical clearance for this study had also been sought and approved by the *Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee* on 21st October 2019 (see appendix A). It was important for me that the parents and children were willing to participate in this research, and were comfortable to be observed and to talk with me about their co-play practices as part of the data generation process. In order to build and maintain a positive relationship with the families, I informed them about this research on my first visit at the community playgroup, and was respectful in my interactions with the parents and children at the playgroup each week.

The National Statement promotes the values of "respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice, and beneficence" (p. 9). These values served me in building a

trusting and mutually responsible relationship with the parent participants. For example, the recognition that "each human being has value in himself or herself…the capacity to determine one's own life and one's own decisions" (National Statement, 2007, p. 9) influenced the way I approached and interacted with the participants. Before I began collecting any data from the families, I was careful to inform and explain to them this research project, and should they agree to participate, their involvement in the project. Also, when interviewing the parents about their co-play practices, I focused on understanding what each parent said about playing with their own children, rather than searching for an objective reality.

Parents' co-play practices and what they said about their practices were this study's focus of inquiry. Although children were not the primary participants in that their perspectives were not sought through interviews, it was still important to acknowledge that the children, as much as their parents, may experience some discomfort resulting from the conduct of this research. An example of such discomfort could be caused by my presence at the playgroup to observe their parents' practices and ask questions to the parents to seek their perspectives. For this reason, children aged three and above completed child-friendly assent forms with help from myself and their parents, while parents gave consent on behalf of their children aged below three years. This decision was made based on the recognition that infants, who made up the majority of the young children group at this playgroup, were "unable to take part in discussion about the research and its effects" (National Statement, 2007, p. 65).

4.3 Methodology: Ethnographic research

Methodology explains how the research is conducted based on beliefs on how knowledge is gained. An ethnographic research methodology was chosen for this study as it provided the means for exploration of the research questions. This study adopted an ethnographic research methodology because it was deemed suitable for bringing attention to

parents' practices of co-play, and for understanding these practices in the naturalistic setting of a playgroup.

Ethnographic research is a type of qualitative methodology undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of a social or cultural group. It does so by gathering data from a range of ways, but primarily through "direct observation" in the field and "informal conversations" with research participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). These methods enable ethnographic researchers to gain a better understanding of participants' actions and behaviours, the meanings of their actions and behaviours, and their points of view (Gobo & Marciniak, 2011, p. 113).

The most important decision in ethnographic research is deciding on the social or cultural group to study because it can be difficult to determine the boundaries of the ethnographic field (Kramer & Adams, 2018). The purpose of this study was to understand how parents co-played with their children at playgroup. It became apparent that there are typically two types of playgroups in Australia. These are supported playgroups and community playgroups. This study chose to focus on one community playgroup because, unlike at supported playgroups where there are qualified staff to facilitate the children's play, parents at community playgroups typically manage and are responsible for their children's play. Hence, community playgroups were most suited for this study because of the aim to understand how parents co-played with their children at playgroups and how they made decisions about their co-play practices were less likely to be influenced by the actions and interactions of a playgroup facilitator.

Ethnographic researchers also need to decide on whether to focus on a particular aspect of the group's life or to allow for interesting observations to emerge during fieldwork (Kramer & Adams, 2018). In this study, the research focus was on the parents' practices when they played with their children at a community playgroup. It emerged during my fieldwork that not all the parents engaged equally in co-playing at the playgroup, rather some parents spent very

little time playing with their children. This observation, although not initially preconceived, formed an important focus in my later interviews with those parents as I sought their sayings on their co-play practices at playgroup.

According to Gobo and Marciniak (2011), there are two types of observation strategies in ethnographic research: "non-participant" observation, and "participant" observation. This study used the participant observation strategy to address the first research question: *What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?* Informal conversations and interviews with the parent participants provided insights into the meanings of their co-play practices, which helped to address the second research question: *What do parents say about enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in a community playgroup?*

Participant observation is a key method in ethnographic research where researchers not only observe the social group, but also actively participate in the group life, as if they belonged to the group. This was the case in this study, where I was not only observing the parent participants as a researcher at the playgroup, but I was also interacting with them as a parent and sharing my own experiences about my child. This "immersion" (Reeves et al., 2013, p. e1365) in the social setting allowed me to gain insights into the group's social practices as the parents were more willing to share their experiences of playing with their children both at the playgroup and at home due to our common circumstance of parenting young children.

Furthermore, ethnographic research often uses interviews to complement participant observation (Reeves et al., 2013). While observations provide insights into the group's life, researchers conduct interviews with participants to elicit their views that help explain their actions and practices. In this study, informal interviews were conducted with the parent participants to gain insights into the meanings of their specific co-play practices observed at the playgroup. This would further inform understandings of parents' co-play practices, such as why the parent adopted a particular practice when playing with their child.

Therefore, ethnographic research was a useful methodology for conducting this present research because it offered a way to capture and interpret parents' co-play practices through "observation of actual behaviour" (Gobo & Marciniak, 2011, p. 113) and interviews about their co-play practices at the community playgroup. This contributed knowledge for developing understandings of how parents co-played with their children at community playgroups and the meanings of their practices.

4.3.1 Research context

The research context is centrally important in ethnographic studies because it is where researchers conduct observations and interact with research participants in order to gain insights into their group's social practices. In "actioning" or "doing" ethnographic research such as in this study, there are two important processes: the sampling method, and inviting participation from families (Reeves et al., 2013, p. e1368).

4.3.1.1 Sampling method

Sampling is the process whereby researchers actively select the context and participants for their research. It is an important aspect of ethnographic research because researchers gather "rich data of the phenomenon of interest" from the research context and participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018, p. 10). A single study site, but with multiple individuals is preferred in ethnographic studies in order to generate "insightful accounts" (Reeves et al., 2013, p. e1369) of the studied phenomenon.

There are many sampling methods that are used in qualitative research. "Convenience sampling" was the method used for selecting one community playgroup in this study because it was most important that the parents in the selected playgroup were available and willing to participate in the research (Salkind, 2012). It was equally important that the selected

community playgroup was located in Melbourne so that it was possible for me to access for data collection.

In this study, the selected playgroup was identified using the "Find a playgroup" search function on the Playgroup Victoria website. Using the search criterion to locate playgroups within three kilometres from postcode 3000, Melbourne, Victoria, I found six playgroups that matched the criterion. To further narrow down my search, I read the descriptions of each playgroup and removed those that were not suitable for this study because these were led by trained and qualified staff.

4.3.1.2 Recruitment

In order to protect potential research participants, ethnographic researchers should gain permission from key group members and relevant research review committees (Kramer & Adams, 2018). In this study, the key group member was a parent who facilitated the community playgroup located in North Fitzroy. Ethical clearance for this study was sought and approved by the *Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee* before any contact was made with the playgroup.

Using the contact details and link provided on Playgroup Victoria website, I contacted the key group member via Facebook messenger. In the introductory message, I introduced myself and the research project, and asked if the playgroup would be interested to participate in this study. When the playgroup facilitator expressed interest to participate, I then provided this person with the Participant Information Letter (see appendix B) that informed potential participants about what the research project was about and their involvement in the project. The facilitator also arranged for me to visit a playgroup session so that I could meet the other parents who attended the playgroup to explain the project to each parent and to seek their permission to participate in this research. A total of eight families regularly attended the

playgroup. Of these, six parents at the playgroup indicated their willingness to participate in the research study by signing the Consent Form (see appendix C) for themselves and on behalf of their infant children. Both parental consent and child assent was sought for children over three years of age. One child, aged three and a half, completed a Child Assent Form (see appendix D) with her father's help, indicating her willingness to be observed at the playgroup. Two families from the playgroup did not participate in this study. Sometimes when it is not possible to secure permission from all members of the group, the researcher must take care in disguising and representing those who are not participating in the research (Kramer & Adams, 2018). In this study, the non-participating families were not included in observations or in any parts of the research study.

4.3.1.3 Parent participants

Six parents and their children were involved in the data collection process. The parent participants were: three mothers and three fathers. The small sample size was considered to be appropriate for this study in gaining an "in-depth and detailed explanation" of parents' practices of co-play at the community playgroup (Plakhotnik, 2016, p. 6). However, the limitation in having a small sample size, like in this study, was that the findings from this playgroup may not accurately reflect how parents in other community playgroups co-played with their children or what they said about their co-play practices.

Table 4.1 summarises the six parent participants and their children. Pseudonyms are assigned for the parents and their children.

Parent Name	Relationship to Child	Child Name	Child Age (At the start of project)
Toby	Father	Felix	14 months
Joey	Mother	Miles	14 months
Laura	Mother	Hugo	12 months
Alex	Father	Mia	3.5 years
Fred	Father	Chloe	2.5 years
Noni	Mother	Zoe	2 years

Table 4.1: Summary of research participants

4.4 Data collection methods

Qualitative data collection methods enabled data about parents' co-play practices to be gathered from the community playgroup. The types of data collected for this study were field observation notes, photographs, and interviews with parents about their co-play practices.

4.4.1 Field observations

Field observation is the most suitable data collection technique when a phenomenon can be observed first-hand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is because the researcher is present at the research context for field observation, which means that they can notice things that are routine to the participants, but that may lead to understanding of the phenomenon of interest. This study used the field observation method to collect data about parents' co-play practices in one community playgroup.

Seven playgroup sessions were observed across nine weeks from the start of the school year. The first two of these sessions were spent getting to know the families and building rapport. After I had gained consent from the families at the playgroup, I carried out formal observations of five weekly sessions. At each session, I aimed to document parents' practices

in at least three co-play activities. In this study, "co-play" refers to the encounters between a parent, child and play objects in the community playgroup. Parents were involved in different ways with their children's play, for example, a parent followed behind the child as he/she walked about in the room holding a toy but did not interact with the child, or a parent who sat beside the child and participated in the role-play of toy food items.

The "participant observation" strategy was used in this study, which involved watching parents engaged in co-playing with their children, and then talking to those parents about their practices in situ. According to Guest et al. (2013), participant observation is particularly useful for capturing routine actions that "happen below the level of conscious thought", resulting in "a much more complete view" of a behaviour (p. 77). The practice architectures theory in this study, as discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter (see Chapter 3, section 3.4), invited consideration of the relationship between the parents' co-play practices and the social conditions that shaped the practices. For example, how their practices were shaped by conditions present or absent at the playgroup, or how the practices adapted, changed and evolved in response to changing conditions (Kemmis, 2019). The participant observation strategy used in this study afforded opportunities for capturing parents' routine practices of co-play at the community playgroup. Such co-play practices would most likely have been missed by other methods of data collection, such as interviewing the parents. For example, if parents were asked to describe their co-play practices in an interview, they may not think to mention some of the more routinised practices, such as giving instructions to their child during play, or perhaps they may consider it inappropriate to bring up such practices (Guest et al., 2013).

Therefore, the advantage of undertaking participant observation, where I observed parents co-playing with their children and talked with them in situ about their practices, was the opportunity for constructing understandings of parents' co-play practices together with the parents. For example, having observed a parent instructing her child to drive his push-along

car forwards and backwards, I learnt from her that learning to self-propel was, for this parent, the next step in promoting his development with the use of the toy car since he was now able to climb in and out of the car. The meaning of this parent's "instructing" practice was made clearer by informally interviewing her about how she was co-playing with her child shortly after the play had happened. Further, this observation strategy corresponded with the ontological and epistemological view of this study, which was that knowledge about parents' co-play practices was best co-constructed with the parent participants through mutual engagements and interactions.

The challenges of conducting participant observation in this study included: 1) difficulty recording field notes during play, and 2) how I was to present myself at the playgroup. Field notes were an important component of the field observations because they provided descriptions of parents' practices when co-playing with their children at the community playgroup (Patton, 2015). However, the note-taking activity was at times a disruption to the natural unfolding of play events at the playgroup, for example, in those physical activities where I joined the children and their parents in throwing and kicking a ball at the outdoor space. Hence, I relied on "head notes" and "scratch notes" in those moments of play where it was not convenient for me to take written notes. These were mental records or quick jotting down of words, phrases, or other brief observations, which I then used after the play for expanding the field observation notes (Kramer & Adams, 2018).

Active participation in the families' play experiences at the playgroup meant that I could build a trusting relationship with the parents and their children, which resulted in the families' willingness to share information with me. At the same time, I had to ensure that I was not imposing my influence onto the parents' norms at the playgroup because my interest to understand parents' co-play practices could put pressure on the parents to engage in co-playing with their children, which may not be their norm (Zhao & Ji, 2014). Furr (2010) cautioned

against using pre-adopted concepts which could result in influencing participants to give responses that they believed to be ideal for the study in order to achieve "social desirability" (p. 1396). In order to minimise my influence on the parent participants, I avoided using the word "co-play" in my interviews with them, rather I kept our discussions about their practices open.

4.4.2 Informal interviews

Interviews were informally conducted with individual parents at the conclusion of each play activity, when it was convenient to do so. The interviews were audio-recorded using a recording device and later transcribed for data analysis. The following is a list of example questions that were used in the interviews with each parent (Guest et al., 2013, p. 17):

1) Let's talk about the play activity that you were just doing with your child.

   Is this kind of play something you do often with your child?

   [*e.g. pretend kitchen, playing a ball, playing with trains*]

2) Do you normally play this way with your child?

   [*e.g. sitting down, building the blocks, telling him what to do*]

3) Do you have anything else you would like to share about this activity?

   Or about playing with your child?

By keeping the interviews open and not specifically aimed at the topic of co-play, I tried to minimise my influence on the participants so that they were more likely to share their real perspectives rather than what they believed to be ideal for this study.

Furthermore, this method of interviewing in situ produced "context-specific" data, which allowed me to better understand why parents adopted specific co-play practices in the play activities (Dube et al., 2014). For example, the following excerpt from my field observation notes showed the importance of interviewing a parent in situ:

Miles does not play with the trains on the tracks with his mother. In talking with Joey later, she says that Miles is still figuring out train sets…, and of the toys that are kind of appropriate for his age range at playgroup, the train set is one she finds the most fun.

(Fieldnotes1_31.1.20)

The parent's perspective from the informal interview, conducted shortly after the play, helped to explain her practice of continuing to build the train tracks despite her child's lack of interest in the tracks, thereby contextualising her co-play practice.

4.4.3 Photographs

Photographs were included in this study to document observations that were more difficult to capture with written text. In qualitative research, photographs are increasingly used because they can bring another dimension to the data that existing methods cannot achieve (Balmer et al., 2015). In this study, photographs were used to capture visual images of parents co-playing with their children. These photographs were able to "add valuable insights" (Barbour, 2014) into observations of the parents' practices, particularly in relation to the parents' positioning of themselves in the spatial context of co-play. The photographs captured various physical positionings of the parents during co-play, for example, how they were seated or standing, and together with the other types of data, provided a richer description of the parents' co-play practices.

One of the challenges of using photographs in research is the issue of selectivity that can lead to the problem of bias. Photographs capture a selective focus that is normally determined by the researcher's research agenda or interests, thereby, likely resulting in the telling of a selective story (Cohen et al., 2018). For this study, photographic data was only one of the range of data collected for this study, which also included field observation notes and informal interviews with parents. This meant that details that the photographs represented were

not treated as the “singular objective reality”, rather they contributed to a part of a “story” or “telling the story”, that in this project was about how parents’ co-played with their children in the community playgroup (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 629).

4.5 Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to establish sound interpretations and inferences of the data (Twining et al., 2016). In this study, data was inductively analysed to generate understandings for the research questions. Due to a lack of documented evidence regarding parents’ co-play practices in community playgroups prior to this study, there was no established framework on parents’ practices of co-play that could be used for deductive analysis of the raw data. Hence, an inductive thematic analysis was applied on the field observation notes and interview transcripts in order to establish new theoretical understandings about parents’ practices of co-play in community playgroups.

In this inductive analysis process, the raw data was organised and assigned codes based on what was found to be “empirically grounded and theoretically interesting” about parents’ co-play practices (Schussler et al., 2014, p. 147). Six phases were undertaken for the inductive thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013):

- Phase one – Familiarisation with the data
- Phase two – Coding
- Phase three – Searching for themes
- Phase four – Reviewing themes
- Phase five – Defining and naming themes
- Phase six – Writing-up

The last phase, which involved the writing-up of the analysis and findings, will be presented in chapter five. Photographic evidence is also included to support the findings reported in the chapter.

4.5.1 Phases of thematic analysis

Phase one – Familiarisation with the raw data

I started the analysis by reading all the field observation notes and interview transcripts. The raw dataset was read and re-read to familiarise myself with the content.

Phase two – Coding

The field observation notes and interview transcripts were read again to identify important content in relation to parents' practices of co-play. These were highlighted and assigned initial codes. The following shows an example of codes applied to a short segment of the data:

Data extract	**Coded for**
Mia holds her father's hand and asks him to play with her. Alex asks Mia what she would like to play. Mia looks around the room but does not respond. Alex says it is quite hot outside so they will stay indoors. He walks her to the soft blocks.	1. Sayings & Doings 2. Responds to child's cues 3. Provides play suggestion

Table 4.2: Data extract, with codes applied

Phase three – Searching for themes

The data extracts and initially assigned codes were re-read for the purpose of constructing potential themes. All the coded data were collated into each potential theme. At the end of this phase, thirty-five potential themes were generated from the data set that were relevant to the research questions, presented in Table 4.3:

Research questions	Potential themes
RQ1: What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?	1. Making toys available 2. Body positioning 3. Modelling play 4. Observing play 5. Talking with other parent 6. Responding to child's request to play 7. Providing suggestion for play 8. Giving positive encouragement 9. Showing enjoyment 10. Setting up play activity/equipment 11. Modelling social skills 12. Extending play 13. Giving instructions 14. Teaching concepts 15. Providing guidance for play 16. Responding to child's request for play items 17. Responding to child's play 18. Responding to child's behaviour 19. Deflecting child's behaviour
RQ2: What do parents say about enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?	1. Comment on developmental stage 2. Making connection to home play 3. Observation about play at home 4. Responding to child's development 5. Fun for the parent 6. Observation about play 7. Comment about co-play at home 8. Responding to child's interest 9. Fun for child 10. Comment about how parent co-plays 11. Comment about parent's role 12. Making connection to previous play at playgroup 13. Comment about child's interest/likes 14. Making connection to previous play 15. Comment about toys 16. Fun for child and parent

Table 4.3: Identified themes in response to research questions

Phase four – Reviewing themes

The collated extracts for each theme were read to check if they captured the meanings in the coded data. Some of the initial themes were found to convey the same meanings so they were collapsed into other themes. The outcome of this theme-reviewing process was a thematic map constructed for each of the research questions:

RQ1: What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?

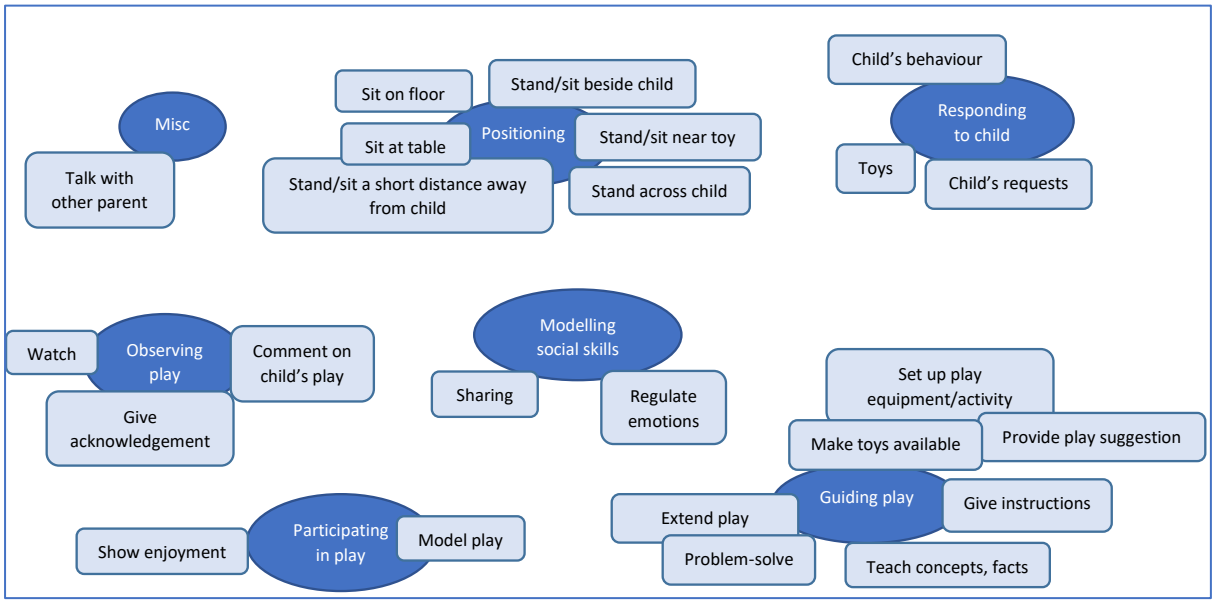

Figure 4.1: Initial thematic map for RQ1, showing six main themes

RQ2: What do parents say about enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?

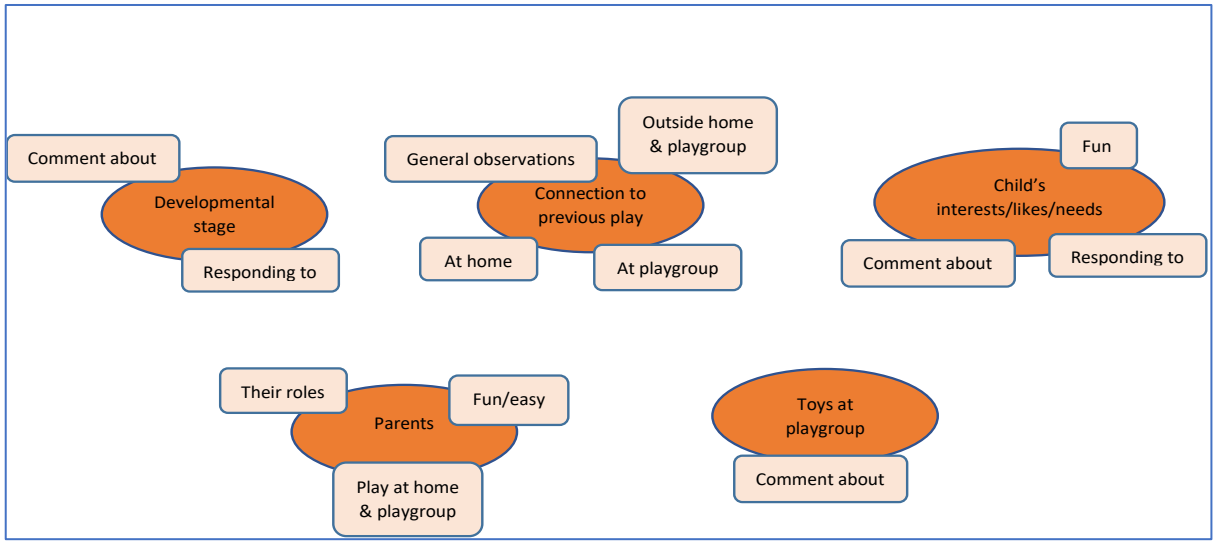

Figure 4.2: Initial thematic map for RQ2, showing five main themes

Phase five – Defining and naming themes

The themes were further refined by referring back to the coded extracts for each theme and identifying what meanings they actually conveyed about parents' co-play practices, so that each theme could be clearly named and defined. Through this refinement process, two overarching themes were identified in parents' co-play practices: "guiding" and "participating".

Braun and Clarke (2012) suggest that a combination of inductive and deductive approaches can be used in coding and analysing data because it is important to be able to "give voice to experiences and meanings" (p. 59) reported in the data. In order to capture the "essence" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92) of parents' practices in the sub-themes, I referred to literature on "guided play" (e.g. Weisberg & Zosh, 2018; Jay & Knaus, 2018; Weisberg et al., 2016), and "active participation in play" (e.g. Pursi & Lipponen, 2018; Kalliala, 2014; Bernier et al., 2010; Lobman, 2006) to understand how those concepts were described in the wider

literature. The outcome of this phase in relation to *RQ1: What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?* was two main themes and six sub-themes that adequately described parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup.

In relation to *RQ2: What do parents say about enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in a community playgroup?* the generated themes were further analysed to understand how they served as the practice architectures that influenced the parents' co-play practices at playgroup. The following is an example of the practice architectures code used with a segment of the data (see also appendix E for full set of data analysis):

Characteristics of Practices	**Data Extracts, Themes & Subthemes (from parent interview transcripts)**	**Practice Architectures (What is relevant to parents' practices from the interviews?)**
Sayings Watching Miles in the car, Joey gives instructions "Go backwards, go forwards"	*Comment on child's development* This is all new.	*Cultural-discursive arrangement* Joey's instructions followed from her observation of Miles' new ability to climb in and out of the car unaided.
	Comment on child's further development That [*the propelling*] he needs help. It's better for him to learn this so he can propel himself which the red car is quite hard even for the older children it's difficult to push themselves along.	Following on, she gave instructions based on the idea that he should now learn to self-propel and that the red car was particularly difficult to self-propel himself in.
Doings Joey facilitates this activity by observing Miles climb into the car by himself, without aiding him.	*Knowledge of child's likes* He loves wheels, of any descriptions. He likes being pushed around in those vehicles.	*Material-economic arrangement* The activity was largely enabled by the red car at the playgroup. Joey talks about it as a toy that Miles likes.
Relatings This relationship is one where Joey does not provide physical support to Felix. She relied on observation and giving verbal instructions as ways of guiding his play.	*Comment about parent's role* It's hard to find the balance between us doing everything for them and giving them the chance to play on their own.	*Social-political arrangement* Joey's belief about finding "the balance" explained why she stood back to allow Miles to "play on their own".

Figure 4.3: Data extract, with practice architecture codes used

The outcome of this process was understanding of the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that parents expressed to have enabled and constrained their practices of co-play in the community playgroup.

4.6 Credibility and trustworthiness

A range of qualitative methods were employed in this study to collect data for understanding parents' co-play practices at a community playgroup, resulting in a collection of evidence. How I then manage and use the collected data influence its credibility and trustworthiness, which is an important criterion for developing a good account of the research. This study made use of the following processes in order to strengthen the credibility of this project (Twining et al., 2016, p. A7):

- Data triangulation – using data from different participants
- Method triangulation – using multiple methods to collect data

Data for this study was collected from six parents in one community playgroup. The smaller sample size enabled me to focus on each parent's experiences in the play activities, which provided valuable insights into their co-play practices, as opposed to a larger sample size. A smaller sample size also meant that it was possible to identify patterns in some of the parents' co-play practices because of the opportunities afforded for more frequent and intimate observations of the same parents combined with follow-up interviews. For example, the following excerpt from my field observation notes showed that I was beginning to take note of one parent's tendency to co-play with his child at the playgroup:

> *Alex and Mia are often playing together. Alex tends to play with Mia a lot. Mia rarely joins the other children to play (e.g. water table)...She seems happy playing with her father. In my next visit, I would like to observe Alex and Mia more closely as they play together.* (Fieldnotes1_31.1.20)

Furthermore, multiple methods were used in this study for collecting data, which were conducting field observations, taking field notes and photographs, and interviewing individual

parents informally about their co-play practices. Undertaking different methods of data collection resulted in a trail of evidence from the different sources of data that were used for reflecting on and for supporting development of my understanding of the parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup.

In addition to the triangulation processes, I also wrote "reflexive field notes" to make explicit my ongoing reflections of the data because it was believed that a researcher inevitably influences the research process and outcome (Finlay, 2012, p. 319). These influences may be caused by the researcher's biases, assumptions, values or interests, and that they cannot be completely eradicated (O'Brien et al., 2014). Writing reflexive field notes allowed me to reflect on and recognise my own influences in the research process, such as in this excerpt:

> *This playgroup is quite different to ones I attended as a parent previously. At this playgroup, the toys that are available are located at three areas…where they are not readily visible because they are kept in storage cubes or arranged into the shelves... there is a mix of parents who play with their children…and parents who mostly chat with other parents, leaving their children to play.* (Fieldnotes1_31.1.20)

Most of all, the use of reflexive field notes helped in keeping this study focused and manageable in accordance with its research interest, thus, minimising problems such as "lack of criticality within the analysis" and "failure to provide sufficient examples from the data" (Twining et al., 2016, p. A7). These problems are common in research when the researcher has collected "too much data and not having the capacity to analyse it all adequately" (Twining et al., 2016, p. A6).

4.7 Data management

It is important that data collected about families are appropriately managed to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of research participants are protected. In this study, field observation notes, photographs, and recordings of parent interviews may contain private or sensitive information. Hence, electronic data is stored using the ACU data storage. Electronic data is stored with the data type, participant's name, and date of data collection. For example, Fieldnotes1_18.12.19 and Interview_Celine_18.12.19. Each participant has a file in their pseudonym name where all electronic data related to that participant is stored. Any written documents, such as handwritten fieldnotes, were also kept in a labelled file for this project in a locked cabinet of the researcher.

4.8 Chapter conclusion

In summary, this is a qualitative, ethnographic research study of parents' co-play practices at a community playgroup. The study was guided by a social constructivism research paradigm, where understanding of parents' practices was co-constructed with the research participants. The chapter described how an ethnographic research methodology was adopted to investigate the research questions: 1) *What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?* and 2) *What do parents say about enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in a community playgroup?* The methods used for collecting data were outlined, and they included field observations, photographs and informal interviews with the parents. Consideration for the credibility and trustworthiness of this study was also discussed. Finally, the chapter outlined the phases undertaken for an inductive thematic analysis of the field observation data and parents' interview transcripts. The analysis of data resulted in two main themes and six sub-themes generated for research question one, and for research question two, insights into the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that

parents expressed to have enabled and/or constrained their practices of co-play in the community playgroup. These findings will be presented in detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the community playgroup environment, followed by a description of the two sets of findings that were generated from the analysis of the data. Each set of findings consisted of the main themes and the sub-themes, and these informed understanding about parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup. Each theme is discussed in detail in this chapter.

5.2 Overview of the community playgroup environment and this study's findings

The playgroup observed in this study was a community playgroup located in metropolitan Melbourne. Six families usually attended this community playgroup, which started two months prior to the first data generation visit. They consisted of three mothers, three fathers and six children, aged between 12 months to 3.5 years. The families had only been attending this community playgroup for two months or less, so they were not very familiar with each other. The format was similar in each of the weekly sessions, with families entering the room at different times throughout the session and talking with other parents and/or staying near their children as they played with the toys provided at the playgroup. A range of toys was available in the indoor and outdoor spaces of this community playgroup venue, and some of these toys required the parents to bring them out from boxes and shelves. At the end of each session, parents packed away the toys and tidied the spaces before they left.

The aim of this study was to generate understandings in order to theorise parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup. As previously defined, co-play in this study referred to an encounter between a parent, child and the play objects in the community playgroup. The practice architectures theory was thus used in the analysis of the data, which

generated two sets of findings that addressed the research questions. The two sets of findings were:

1. parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup; and
2. parents' expressions about the enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play.

Table 5.1 presents a summary of the main themes and the sub-themes in the two sets of findings.

Finding set	Main themes	Sub-themes
One	Guiding practices of co-play	Provide play opportunities for their children
		Extend on their children's play experience
		Highlight concepts or positive behaviours
	Participating practices of co-play	Signal participation
		Create a play connection
		Demonstrate ongoing co-participation
Two	Cultural-discursive arrangements	Knowledge about child's likes and dislikes
		Knowledge about what the child was able or unable to do
	Material-economic arrangements	Toys at the community playgroup
		Toys at home
		Toys and activities children liked
	Social-political arrangements	Beliefs about their role
		Understandings of their children's dispositions

Table 5.1: Main themes and sub-themes regarding parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup

Finding one describes the parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup, which were presented as two main themes and six sub-themes. This set of findings addressed research question one: *What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?* Finding two describes the parents' expressions about the enablers and constraints on their

practices of co-play at the community playgroup. These were presented as three main themes and seven sub-themes. This set of findings addressed research question two: *What do parents say about enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?* Each set of findings is now discussed in more detail.

5.3 Finding one: Parent practices of co-play in a community playgroup

As previously discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.4.1), practices are enacted in people's sayings, doings and relatings (Kemmis, 2018). This suggested that parents' co-play practices can be understood from the parents' sayings, doings and relatings. Parents' sayings referred to their spoken interactions during co-playing. Parents' doings referred to their physical actions. Parents' relatings referred to the particular kinds of relationships established between the parent, their child and the play objects during co-playing. Therefore, the analysis of the data focused on parents' sayings, doings and relatings during co-playing in order to identify and understand parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup.

Findings from the data indicated that during co-play parents engaged in practices that mainly guided their child's play or that enabled the parent's participation in the play activities. These practices were grouped under: 1) guiding practices of co-play; and 2) participating practices of co-play. Guiding practices of co-play were observed to occur when parents facilitated the child's engagement with play activities, but the parents did not join in the play. These practices allowed parents to provide play opportunities for their child, to extend on their child's play experience, and to highlight specific concepts or positive behaviours. Participating practices of co-play were observed to occur when parents facilitated the child's engagement with play activities by joining in as co-players in the play activities. These practices allowed

parents to signal participation, to create a play connection with the child, and to demonstrate on-going co-participation in the play activities.

5.3.1 Main theme 1: Parents' guiding practices of co-play

Guiding practices of co-play were observed to occur when parents facilitated the child's engagement with play activities but did not join in the play. These practices allowed parents to provide play opportunities for their child, to extend on the child's play experience, and to highlight specific concepts or positive behaviours. The next sections present the findings on these guiding practices of co-play.

5.3.1.1 Provide play opportunities for their children

Providing play opportunities for their children was often observed to occur at the beginning of a co-play, and this was initiated largely through parents' doings. For example, when parents took out toys from the boxes and shelves or when parents set up a play equipment. Figure 5.1 shows a child participant at the indoor space surrounded with small toy vehicles and play food items, which his father had selected from a box of playgroup toys for play.

Figure 5.1: A child surrounded by the toys his father had selected for him

The parent was not seen in the picture because he was in the community playgroup's outdoor space talking with another parent. The father did not remain present in the room with the child and the play objects, and the child was left to explore on his own the selected toys, thereby they were no longer engaged in co-playing. The father's non-presence with his child after having selected a box of toys for the child indicated that the co-play did not extend beyond the practice of providing play opportunities for the child.

The following field observation notes are further examples of parents' providing play opportunities for their children at the beginning of a co-play. The first example recorded the parent taking out a train set from a box (doing), making it available for the child's play:

She [parent] *pulls out the storage box marked "Trains".* (Fieldnotes1_31.1.20)

The second example describes two parents setting up a water table for water play (doing) and then watching on as their children played in the water at the water table (doing, relating):

Toby and Joey [parents] *start to bring cups of water out to fill up the water table. They stand a short distance from their children and watch them play.* (Fieldnotes1_31.1.20)

The parents' actions of standing a distance away from their children but keeping watch (doings) indicated non-active participation in the play activity. At the same time, it also suggested a relationship established whereby the parents were there for the children, if needed, but they were not actively joining in their children's water play (relating).

The above examples showed parents providing play opportunities for their children by providing access to play objects and play equipment, but that the parents did not join in the play beyond making the play objects available. Hence, parents' practices in these co-play examples were limited to the purpose of guiding their child's participation in play activities, and this was achieved by making available play objects and play equipment to encourage the child's play.

5.3.1.2 Extend on their children's play experience

There were times where the parents initiated co-playing by stepping into their child's play activity. It was observed that parents would initiate sayings during the child's play that extended on the child's play experience. As an example, the following observation showed how Mia [child] was pushing a toy shopping trolley around the room when her father approached her, thereby starting a co-play interaction:

Mia pushes the shopping trolley around the room. Alex [parent] stands near the toy storage cubes. He says "Are you shopping?" and looks into the storage cubes, "What is in here? Dinosaur? Ball?". Mia pushes the trolley towards her father and looks into the boxes. Mia says "Let's buy something else." Looking into the boxes, she says "We can buy this that". Alex says "Ok, put it into your shopping trolley" (Fieldnotes2_7.2.20)

In this example, Alex [parent] entered into the child's play activity by initiating particular sayings, doings and relatings. The doings and sayings that marked the parent's entry into the child's play were the physical positioning of himself near the toy storage cubes (doing) and then asking the child if she was shopping (saying). Through these initiations, Alex established a particular kind of relationship with Mia, indicated by his noticing her shopping play (relating). Alex's subsequent practices of looking into the storage cubes (doing), and at the same time, asking *"What is in here? Dinosaur? Ball?* (saying) managed to gain and direct the child's attention to the play objects in the storage cubes (relating), suggesting the play idea of using those play objects as items she could purchase in her shopping play. Therefore, Alex's initiations of sayings, doings and relatings extended on the child's shopping play experience, thereby guiding the child's participation in the play.

In another example, Joey [parent] was standing near Miles [child] as she watched him climbed into the ride-on toy car. She stepped into her child's play by initiating instructions after the child had settled in the ride-on car.

> *When Miles is in the car and turning the driving wheels around, Joey says "Go backwards, go forwards". Miles tries to move the car with his feet. The car only moves a little forwards and backwards.* (Fieldnotes4_6.3.20)

When talking about this co-play activity in the interview, Joey shared she knew Miles was able to climb into the ride-on car without help, but that he could not move it on his own.

> "*I think it's better for him to learn this so he can propel himself which the red car is quite hard even for the older children it's difficult to push themselves along…He can climb into it himself, that yup. That* [the propelling] *he needs help.* (Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

Joey's comments demonstrated her awareness of what Miles could and could not do on his own with the ride-on toy car. This further supported an understanding of her practices during the co-play, where she had stood watching the child (doing) because she had known that the child was able to climb into the ride-on car on his own. However, she then stepped in and offered her instructions *"Go backwards, go forwards"* (saying) where she had known her child needed the guidance so that she could extend on his play experience with the ride-on car.

5.3.1.3 Highlight concepts or positive behaviours

It was observed that parents also stepped into their child's play activities and initiated sayings and doings when the parents noticed opportunities to highlight particular concepts or positive behaviours. The following co-play example shows how Alex [parent] took the opportunity to highlight colour concepts:

> *He* [parent] *holds up a block to Mia* [child] *"What colour is this block?". Mia says "Red". Alex holds up another block. Mia says "Green".* (Fieldnotes2_7.2.20)

Through the parent's saying (*"What colour is this block?"*) and doing (*Alex holds up another block*), Alex established for Mia [child] ways of relating with her parent (responding to her father's questions) and the play objects (naming the block colours).

A little while later during the same play activity, Alex stepped in again and initiated sayings and doings in order to guide his child's behaviour. The parent had noticed that another child was trying to reach for the toys that were all scattered around Mia:

> *Alex moves some blocks towards Chloe, and says to Mia "Push the blocks here so Chloe can play together. Let's all play together." Mia pushes the blocks there and asks "Which is my block?". Alex says "None are yours. We all share the blocks."* (Fieldnotes2_7.2.20)

When Alex noticed that another child wanted to play with the toys, he moved some of the blocks towards the child (doing), and at the same time instructed Mia *"Push the blocks here so Chloe can play together"* (saying). Through the saying and doing, Alex established a relationship with his child whereby he modelled the positive behaviour of sharing the toys with others (relating), emphasised in his further sayings *"Let's all play together"* and *"We all share the blocks"*. Mia picked up her father's suggestion as she began pushing the blocks towards the other child, her action demonstrating association with the positive behaviour of sharing that her father had just modelled.

During the interviews with the parents, some parents spoke about their intentions in relation to their child's play at the community playgroup. These intentions helped to explain why the parents would step into their child's play at particular instances and guided the play in specific directions. For example, one parent commented that his intention was to make the play experience educational for his child:

> "*Some of the toys here are for younger children so to make it interesting for her I try to make it educational for her. I mean I don't go out on purpose to do that, I think that's just how it comes about.*" (Interview_Alex_6.3.20)

Alex's [parent] intention was for the play to be more 'educational' for the child because he felt that the toys at this community playgroup were targeted at much younger children. He shared his intention in guiding the play to make it more interesting for his child.

Another parent shared his intention in letting his child interact with other children at the community playgroup, as well as ensuring the child did not hurt others:

"*The idea is to let her interact with other kids. If I see she is by herself I will try to push her to other kids…I just have to make sure she doesn't hurt anyone because she is becoming quite big and a bit of a bully. She can be quite rough so I always keep an eye on her.*"

(Interview_Fred_13.3.20)

The interview data confirmed the field observation data regarding the tendency for parents to step in their children's play. It was found that the parents did so because of their intentions for their child's play at the community playgroup. In Alex's circumstance, it was for more educational play opportunities because he had felt that the toys at this community playgroup were not suitably aged for his child. Fred's intentions, which were to encourage his child to interact with other children at the community playgroup and to ensure that the child did not hurt others, meant that he would step in to intervene in his child's play if those conditions occurred.

5.3.2 Main theme 2: Parents' participating practices of co-play

Parents' participation in play with their children was the second main theme in relation to parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup that emerged from the analysis of the data. Unlike the co-play practice of guiding where parents guided their children's play but did not join in the play, parents in these upcoming co-play instances facilitated their child's play by participating as co-players in their children's play.

Firstly, figures 5.2 to 5.4 show parents' physical positionings in terms of how they related with their children and the play objects. The photographic data demonstrates that the parents were near the children and participating in their play activities (e.g., receiving food from the child, catching a ball from the child), which suggested the parents' active participation as co-players in their children's play.

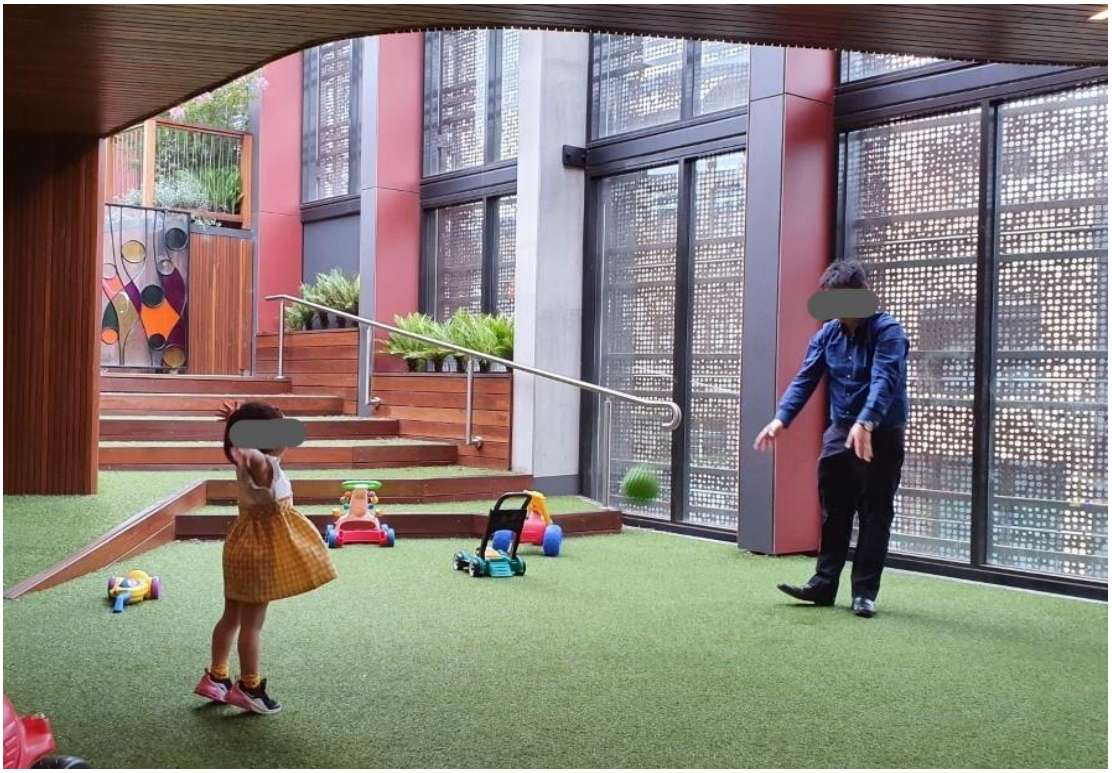

Figure 5.2: A parent standing across and catching a ball from the child

Figure 5.3: A parent receiving food and drinks prepared by the child

Figure 5.4: Parents receiving food from the children in a picnic play activity

Further aspects of parents' participation in their children's play were found in the following practices emerged from the analysis of the field observation data: 1) signal participation; 2) create a play connection; and 3) demonstrate ongoing co-participation. The next sections describe each of these in more detail, with a focus on how parents' sayings, doings and relatings formed the parents' participation in their children's play.

5.3.2.1 Signal participation

The findings suggested that parents signalled their participation in the children's play either by accepting a child's invitation to play or by actively initiating a play activity. The following example shows how Alex [parent] accepted Mia's [child] request to play:

Mia holds her father's hand and asks him to play with her. Alex asks Mia what she would like to play. Mia looks around the room but does not respond. Alex says it is quite hot outside so they will stay indoors. He walks her to the soft blocks.

(Fieldnotes1_31.1.20)

Mia had asked her father to play with her, to which Alex accepted the invitation by asking her what she wanted to play with (saying). When Mia could not decide, he then suggested a play activity by walking them towards the soft blocks (doing), where they sat down to play together (doing). Through his sayings and doings, Alex accepted Mia's invitation for co-playing by offering the child control over what she wanted them to play with together (relating). When this was met with a non-response from the child's side, the parent assumed the decision-making role (relating) by suggesting the soft block activity so that they could remain indoors and away from the warm weather outdoors.

Parents also signalled participation by actively initiating co-play activities with their children, as shown in this next example:

Toby and Jo [parents] *are sitting on the floor with Felix* [child]. *Toby has brought down the storage cube labelled 'Dress ups'. Jo takes a big black cloth and puts it over her head. Toby says to Felix "Where is mummy?".* (Fieldnotes4_6.3.20)

The initiation of the hide-and-seek activity happened when Jo [parent] picked up the black cloth and put it over her head (doing), which was a signal to Felix [child] that she was starting a play activity with him by using a piece of cloth that she had put on her head (relating). This was further confirmed by Toby's [parent] cue *"Where is mummy?"* (saying), which prompted Felix to join in to look for his mother.

The parents' practices of sayings, doings and relatings were observed to have been significant for establishing their children's participation in the play. This was further supported

by the parents' expressions during the interviews. In the interview with Toby, for example, he shared that:

> "*We do that a lot actually, hide and seek, peekaboo and all those kinds of things. They work really well because he* [child] *is still at that age where he doesn't understand where things go when he can't see them. So there's the sense of surprise so we do a lot of that.*" (Interview_Toby_13.3.20)

Both Toby and Jo [parents] signalled their participation by taking initiative, through sayings, doings and relatings, to set up and invite their child to the hide-and-seek activity. The signalling cues were important in serving to invite the child to participate in the hide-and-seek activity with his parents because, as Felix's father expressed, Felix was "*still at that age where he doesn't understand where things go when he can't see them*". This highlighted the importance of the parents' practices of supporting the child through the initial stage to make sense of and participate in the hide-and-seek game, which the child was not able to understand without his parents' guidance. The child, after having picked up on his parents' initiations, joined in the activity, observed when he began to assume the role of the seeker in the game looking for his mother, signifying his participation in the play.

5.3.2.2 Create a play connection

Having signalled their participation, parents often progressed to creating a play connection with their child. Findings from the data indicated that parents asked questions, gave instructions or engaged the child to build shared connections so that they could participate in their children's play activities. The next example demonstrates how a parent created a play connection with his child by engaging her in pretend play:

Alex is following her "Alright, let's mow the lawn. This is how you operate this". Mia is asking "What is this?". Alex replies "For pouring in the petrol". Mia continues to ask about another part "What is this for?". Alex replies "To adjust for high or low". Mia pushes the mower around and seems to be enjoying herself. Alex makes the sound of the engine "Vroom vroom" and comments to Mia "Well done". (Fieldnotes4_6.3.20)

Alex [parent] suggested a pretend play activity using the lawn mower toy, as indicated in his saying *"Alright, let's mow the lawn"*. Mia [child], who was unfamiliar with a lawn mower, began to ask her father what the different parts of the lawn mower were. The parent engaged in more sayings, *"For pouring in the petrol"*, *"To adjust for high or low"*, to explain the different parts of the mower. Mia then happily pushed the lawn mower as her father made sounds that imitated a real lawn mower (saying, doing). Through this shared understanding created by the parent of using the lawn mower toy to mow the lawn, the parent and the child were both able to participate and to contribute to the play as co-players (relating) – Mia pushed the lawn mower to mow the lawn, and Alex made lawn mower engine sounds "*vroom vroom*".

Sometimes, however, a play connection created by the parent was not reciprocated by the child. The next two co-play examples show the parents' attempts to create play connections with their children that were unsuccessful due to their children's refusal to cooperate and participate in the play connections.

Noni [Parent]picks up the doll that is on the table and gives it to Zoe [Child]. Zoe starts fussing, she seems to be asking Noni to breastfeed her. Noni refuses and says to the doll "No baby no milk". She holds up the doll to Zoe saying "Give the doll a kiss". Zoe is still fussing. Noni now holds up the doll and says "Show me where the baby's nose is". Noni and Zoe both touch the doll's nose. Noni continues "Where is the baby's mouth?". Zoe touches the doll's mouth. (Fieldnotes5_13.3.20)

Noni [parent] was unable to create a meaningful play connection with her child as Zoe [child] appeared to be distracted by her want to be breastfed. Noni used the doll to shift Zoe's attention (doing), indicated also in her statement *"No baby no milk"* (saying). Noni tried again to deflect Zoe's attention by holding up the doll (doing) and instructing the child to kiss the doll (saying). Through these doings and sayings, the parent tried to create a play connection between the child and the doll to encourage the child's play with the doll (relating), and one where the parent was seeking the child's compliance with her instructions (no breastfeeding at that moment). When Zoe refused to cooperate, Noni tried again to establish a new play connection using the same doll by directing Zoe's attention to its body parts through her sayings of *"Show me where the baby's nose is"* and *"Where is the baby's mouth?"*. Although Zoe demonstrated some interest in the doll this time, the connection ceased shortly after. Both Noni and Zoe left the playgroup session not long after as Zoe continued to be uncooperative with her mother.

Noni's example mirrored Joey's [parent] experience of creating a play connection with Miles [child]:

> *He* [child] *is rolling a small truck. Joey sits down on a chair next to Miles. She says "You can fix them together" and connects two vehicles together. Miles takes them apart and rolls the truck on the table. Joey says "Oh every time". Miles picks up a smaller red vehicle and rolls it on the table. Joey watches Miles plays with his vehicles.*
>
> (Fieldnotes3_14.2.20)

Joey tried to show her child how to connect two vehicles together, through demonstration (doing) as well as informing him that *"You can fix them together"* (saying), but she was unsuccessful because Miles preferred to roll each individual vehicle. His refusal to cooperate with his mother's intention of engaging him in constructing the vehicles (relating) left Joey no choice but to watch Miles play by himself with the vehicles, instead of being able to join in the

play together. Therefore, the two examples above demonstrated that during co-play activities, it was not always possible for parents to create meaningful play connections with children because besides managing the children's play, parents also had to accommodate the children's other needs and to respect the growing independence and preferences of the children.

5.3.2.3 Demonstrate ongoing co-participation

Having established a play connection with their children, parents participated in their children's play by demonstrating shared understandings of the play. For instance, the following parent had earlier established a play connection with his child, having suggested that she could pretend to cook the food pieces before serving it to him. Both the child and the parent were now demonstrating ongoing co-participation in the play activity:

> *Mia* [child] *makes some sizzling sound "Ssshhhhh" and hands the capsicum back to Alex* [parent]. *Alex pretends to eat it "Thanks, yum yum". Mia asks "Do you want milk?". Alex takes it and says "Thanks".* (Fieldnotes4_6.3.20)

Both Mia and Alex assumed the roles of co-players in the activity (relating), with Mia as the one who cooked and served the food (doings), while making sizzling sound *"Ssshhhhh"* (saying). Alex was equally engaged in the play, receiving and demonstrating actions of consuming the food (doings), at the same time acknowledging Mia's offers of food *"Thanks, yum yum"* (saying). This understanding of their roles (server-consumer) and actions in the co-play was clearly shared, demonstrated, and even somewhat expected between the parent and the child in order for the co-playing to continue. In fact, Alex shared in the interview that playing with toy food items was a play activity that his child enjoyed and one which he encouraged:

> "*This* [playing with food items] *is something she likes to do at home. She has a little kitchen at home and lots of little toy foods. And she loves preparing food and feeding it. So I like to encourage that, let her do some cooking and serve food…I think it's quite a caring behaviour, constructive I suppose. It's easy for me because I just sit there and get given food.*" (Interview_Alex_6.3.20)

Alex encouraged Mia's play with the toy food items by participating in the play as a co-player - the consumer of the foods served by Mia. The interview data revealed that he participated in the play not only because Mia enjoyed playing with the toy food items, but to encourage her practice of "*a caring behaviour*" through cooking and serving food to others. He also described his participatory role in the co-playing, "*sitting there and get given food*", as a practice that was "*easy*" or that can be easily managed by him.

Overtime it was observed across several weekly sessions that as both Alex and Mia became more familiar with the toys provided at this community playgroup, co-playing began to happen naturally for them at the sessions, as in this next example:

> *They stand a short distance across each other. Alex* [Parent] *throws a red ball towards Mia [child]. Mia runs after the ball and catches it. She throws it towards Alex. They repeat this several times. Alex and Mia are laughing and appear to enjoy the game together.*
>
> (Fieldnotes2_7.2.20)

This co-play activity occurred shortly after Alex and Mia had arrived at the playgroup session in week four of my field visits. Both the parent and the child very quickly and naturally assumed their positions in the outdoor space as co-players because they had engaged in this play activity of throwing and catching the ball together in previous playgroup sessions. It was observed in previous sessions that the child enjoyed this activity and would ask her father to join her in this

play. This observation suggested that meaningful shared understandings established in previous playgroup sessions were re-introduced again in subsequent sessions.

To summarise, Table 5.2 provides the definitions and examples from the data findings to illustrate each of the co-play practice presented in this section.

Table 5.2: Explanation of the co-play practices

Co-play practice	Definition	Example
Guiding	Parent facilitates the child's play activities, but does not participate in the play. Parent may focus on particular goals or outcomes.	Alex says to Felix "Do you want to play with us?" and passes the ball to him. Toby, who is seated away from the parents and children playing ball, calls out to Felix "What do you do with the ball? You need to throw it. Throw the ball or give it to someone". Toby says, "Sorry guys".
• *Providing play opportunities*	Parent provides play opportunities by providing access to toys or setting up play activities.	Toby and Joey start to bring cups of water out to fill up the water table. Toby and Joey are standing a short distance from their children and watching them.
• *Extending play*	Parent watches child's play and makes comments, asks questions, or extends the play based on child's interests.	Mia pushes the shopping trolley around the room. Alex stands near the storage cubes. He says, "Are you shopping?" and looks into the storage cubes, "What is in here? Dinosaur? Ball?". Alex says "Ok, put into your shopping trolley".
• *Highlighting concepts or positive behaviours*	Parent asks questions or gives instructions to highlight concepts (e.g. colours, body parts) or positive behaviour (e.g. sharing, social skills).	Alex moves some blocks towards Chloe and says to Mia "Push the blocks here so Chloe can play together. Let's all play together." Mia pushes the blocks there and asks, "Which is my block?" Alex says "None is yours. We all share the blocks."
Participating	Parent joins in child's play by accepting child's request to play or initiating play activity.	Alex brings down the cube labelled 'Toy food'. Alex says "Can you cook this capsicum please. I don't like my food raw" Alex says, "You can pretend there is." Alex pretends to eat it "Thanks, yum yum". Mia asks, "Do you want milk?". Alex takes it and says "Thanks"
• *Signalling of participation*	Parent accepts child's invitation to play or initiates a play activity by providing access to toys. Parent takes on physical positionings that signal their participation in the play.	Mia holds her father's hand and asks him to play with her. Alex asks Mia what she would like to play. Mia looks around the room but does not respond. Alex says it is quite hot outside so they will stay indoors. He walks her to the soft blocks.
• *Creating a play connection*	Parent builds a shared understanding with the child so that their play actions can be aligned. This includes asking questions, giving instructions, or even creating imaginary scenarios of play (e.g., pretend play), where parent and child participate in the imaginary play. Parent and/or child may also share emotional stances (e.g., showing enjoyment).	Alex is following her "Alright, let's mow the lawn. This is how you operate this". Mia is asking "What is this?" (pointing to a part). Alex replies "For pouring in the petrol". Mia continues to ask about another part "What is this for?". Alex replies "To adjust for high or low". Mia pushes the mower around and seems to be enjoying herself. Alex makes the sound of the engine "Vroom vroom" and comments to Mia "Well done".
• *Demonstrating ongoing co-participation*	Parent continues to co-participate in the child's play by demonstrating shared understandings of the play actions.	Alex pretends to eat it "Thanks, yum yum". Mia asks "Do you want milk?". Alex takes it and says "Thanks".

5.3.3 Summary of finding one

The set of findings outlined in this section were aimed at addressing this research question: *What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?* The analysis focused on identifying parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup through exploring and bringing to light the parents' sayings, doings and relatings in the co-play activities. Findings from the analysis of the field observation data indicated that parents typically engaged in guiding and participating practices of co-play. For the guiding co-play practices, parents were observed to be guiding when they facilitated their children's play, but did not join in the actual play. Parents guided their children's play in order to provide their children with opportunities for play, to extend on their children's play experience, and to highlight concepts or positive behaviours.

Participating practices of co-play allowed parents to join in their children's play as co-players. Findings showed that parents' participation in the co-play activities were characterised by the practices of signalling participation, creating a play connection, and demonstrating ongoing co-participation. The analysis of parents' participation practices of co-play indicated that it was not always possible for parents to create meaningful play connections with their children that progressed to on-going participation at the community playgroup, as alongside managing the children's play parents also had to accommodate the children's other needs and to respect the growing independence of their children.

5.4 Finding two: Parent expressions about enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play

This section presents findings from the analysis of the parent interview transcripts and the field observation data that inform understanding about the arrangements that enabled and constrained parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup. According to the practice

architectures theory, parents' sayings, doings and relatings are shaped by arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 32), known as:

- *cultural-discursive arrangements* that are the resources that make possible the language and discourses used in and about this practice;
- *material-economic arrangements* that are the resources that make possible the activities undertaken in the course of the practice; and
- *social-political arrangements* that are the resources that make possible the relationships between people and non-human objects that occur in the practice.

The next sections present the findings on parents' expressions about the enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup. These are discussed under the headings of cultural-discursive arrangements, material-economic arrangements, and social-political arrangements.

5.4.1 Cultural-discursive arrangements

It was observed in the community playgroup that co-playing usually involved spoken interactions between the parents and their children, resulting in the production of speech or sayings. The cultural-discursive arrangements referred to the conditions that made possible these sayings. In Chapter 3 section 3.4.2.1, it was established that language is a significant arrangement enabling spoken interactions (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). The analysis of the parent interview transcripts in relation to the cultural-discursive arrangements indicated that not only language, but parents' sayings during co-play were enabled by knowledge about their children. The findings suggested that parents expressed knowledge about: 1) child's likes and dislikes; and 2) what their child was able or unable to do. This knowledge enabled the content of parents' sayings or what the parents said to their children during co-play.

5.4.1.1 Knowledge about child's likes and dislikes

Parents shared that they drew on knowledge about their children's likes and dislikes, which influenced what they said to their children during co-play. For example, Joey [parent] expressed:

"We like playing with the train set" (Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

Joey shared that the train set was something they both enjoyed, which helped explain why she chose to take out the train set for Miles [child] at the community playgroup, as well as her non-surprised comment, *"Looking for trains"* (Fieldnotes1_31.1.20) when he had reached for the trains in the box on his own. Joey further expressed her child's likes (take everything apart) and dislikes (construct things):

"He likes to take everything apart, rather than construct things" (Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

In a co-play activity, Joey had instructed Miles to inform him that he could connect the vehicles together, as in *"You can fix them together"* (Fieldnotes3_14.2.20). The parent's knowledge of how the child tended to play with the toy trains or vehicles in a particular way (*take everything apart, rather than construct things*) had enabled the parent to target her instructions on encouraging the child to try connecting the vehicles together. However, the child rejected his mother's demonstration by pulling the vehicles apart and insisted on keeping them apart, resulting in Joey's comment *"Oh every time"* (Fieldnotes3_14.2.20).

5.4.1.2 Knowledge about what their child was able or unable to do

Parents often spoke about what their child was able or unable to do when talking about what they said to their children during play. This knowledge about their child enabled what they said to the children during co-play. As Alex [parent] explained:

"Like say the building blocks because otherwise if you just give it to her she may not necessarily know what to do. Whereas if we put it around her and say we're building something, 'We ask her, what will we try to build?' and then it becomes a bit more fun for her." (Interview_Alex_6.3.20)

Alex's explanation demonstrated his knowledge of what the child was not able to do (*if you just give it to her she may not necessarily know what to do*) and what the child was able to do with his support (*if we put it around her and say we're building something, we ask her what will we try to build and then it becomes a bit more fun for her*). The parent's expression suggested that parents' sayings during co-play had great potential for contributing to more meaningful play experiences for their children at the community playgroup. This was because, as demonstrated in the above excerpt, parents' sayings were enabled and informed by the knowledge of what the child was able and unable to do.

Similarly, another parent also expressed knowledge about what her child was not able to do with the ride-on toy car without her support:

"That he needs help. It's better for him to learn this so he can propel himself which the red car is quite hard even for the older children it's difficult to push themselves along."

(Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

Joey's [parent] instructions to Miles [child] during the play activity were enabled by her observations of his play that he was ready to learn to 'propel himself'. She verbally instructed him during play, as in her words *"Go backwards go forwards"* (Fieldnotes4_6.3.20), as a way of guiding him to try propelling the ride-on car on his own.

Joey's expression mirrored Noni's [parent], who shared that:

"Because she [child] *has only just learned about body parts so I just keep telling that to her. She gets them wrong, like she knows the words but she's like mouth is the hair."*

(Interview_Noni_13.3.20)

Like Joey, Noni's interaction with her child during the play activity was targeting a learning goal, which was naming body parts. Noni's knowledge of what her child was learning at home enabled her to reinforce Zoe's [child] learning to name body parts at the community playgroup, by using the doll and instructing Zoe to *"Show me where the baby's nose is. Where is the baby's mouth?"* (Fieldnotes5_13.3.20).

5.4.2 Material-economic arrangements

According to Kemmis et al. (2014), material-economic arrangements referred to the conditions that made possible the activities undertaken in the course of a practice, and these were important because they accounted for the objects and things that enabled or constrained what people did. In this study, parents were observed to engage in physical actions during co-play at the community playgroup. The findings indicated that the material-economic arrangements enabling and constraining parents' doings were primarily related to the toys provided as play objects in this community playgroup. Data findings revealed parent expressions that related to the material-economic arrangements informed understanding about what parents did with their children during co-play at the playgroup. Parents spoke about: 1) toys at the community playgroup; 2) toys at home; and 3) toys and activities children liked. Those toys and activities enabled and constrained what parents did with their children during co-play at the community playgroup.

5.4.2.1 Toys at the community playgroup

Findings indicated that the toys provided at this community playgroup enabled the children's play for some parents, but not for all. There were parents who expressed that the toys were more suitable for younger-aged children, as shown in the following comments:

> *"Also, because some of the toys here are for younger children so to make it interesting for her I try to make it educational for her."* (Interview_Alex_6.3.20)

> *"Of the toys that are kind of appropriate for his age range at playgroup, the train set is one I find the most fun."* (Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

The parents indicated that some of the toys provided at this community playgroup were more suited for much younger children, hence, constraining their children's play. One of those parents shared that he managed the problem by adapting the use of the toys to *make it interesting* for his child (aged three-and-a-half years), who was one of the oldest children at the playgroup.

Another parent also expressed how the toys provided at this community playgroup were not to their child's liking:

> *"She* [child] *really likes small toys. So, I find at playgroups they don't have small things because it's not safe."* (Interview_Noni_13.3.20)

Although this parent acknowledged safety issue associated with the use of small objects with young children, she felt that her child's play was constrained by the lack of smaller objects at the community playgroup.

Conversely, some parents did express how the toys provided at this community playgroup enabled meaningful play experiences for their children. As Toby [parent] described the water play experience:

> *"The first time we did it was just because it was out and everything was there. We thought it would be fun. Then we played with it quite regularly for a while at the beginning of summer."* (Interview_Toby_13.3.20)

The availability of the water play table at the community playgroup enabled the parents to set it up for their children to experience playing with water (observed in Fieldnotes1_31.1.20). Similarly, Alex [parent] also described how the padded blocks at the community playgroup enriched the child's play with building blocks:

> *"We have some small wooden building blocks at home but not these big padded ones. So that's what makes it different here… She likes to just stack up blocks to make it tall which is why I thought this padded blocks is more fun for her because when they stack up they are much taller than she is."* (Interview_Alex_6.3.20)

Alex felt that the padded blocks provided at this community playgroup provided enjoyment for his child because she enjoyed building the blocks up high. Compared with the wooden blocks they had at home, the padded blocks at the community playgroup enabled Mia [child] to build them up to be taller than her, which was an activity that they could not achieve with the wooden blocks at home.

5.4.2.2 Toys at home

Parents often associated their co-play experiences at home to the co-play experiences at the community playgroup, and it was found that those experiences at home largely enabled

what they did with their children at the community playgroup. For example, parents tried to reproduce play at the community playgroup in ways that were similar to their play experiences at home, such as expressed in the following interview data:

> *"We do that a lot at home actually, hide and seek, peekaboo and all those kinds of things."* (Interview_Toby_13.3.20)

> *"This is something she likes to do at home. She has a little kitchen at home and lots of little toy foods. And she loves preparing food and feeding it."* (Interview_Alex_6.3.20)

> *"It's fun because she likes to knock down the buildings afterwards. We have the small wooden ones at home where we try to build models of things. So, there's not as much knocking it down. We just build things together. Maybe I do end up doing most of the building but she likes to just stack up blocks to make it tall."* (Interview_Alex_6.3.20)

These parents were motivated by what their children had enjoyed from co-playing at home, which they now tried to reproduce with the toys provided at the community playgroup. However, this was not always possible because they were constrained by the range of toys provided at this community playgroup, as suggested in this interview extract:

> *"Like at home we have buttons, we have lots of small little buttons. I mean it's not safe but she's not interested in eating them. She's interested in looking at them, taking them out of the box, putting them in a bowl. That's the things she likes. She'll play with my bobby pins, my rubber bands."* (Interview_Noni_13.3.20)

This parent expressed that her child, who liked exploring small objects at home, was not able to enjoy playing at the community playgroup as much as when at home because small objects were generally considered unsafe at playgroups.

Furthermore, it was found that the connections parents made to their children's play experiences at home enabled them to provide continuity to their children's development in the community playgroup. In the following example, Laura [parent] spoke about how she encouraged her child, who was learning to walk, at home:

> *"I'm currently encouraging Hugo to walk. At home, he cruises between pieces of furniture. I would usually put blueberries around the low coffee table and he will hold on to cruise around the coffee table and picks each blueberry to eat"* (Fieldnotes3_14.2.20)

Hugo's [child] experience of eating blueberries at home was replicated for him in the community playgroup. This was enabled by Laura's use of a medium-height stool at the community playgroup, as substitute for the *low coffee table* when at home, to replicate what she did at home to encourage Hugo to walk.

Likewise, Joey [parent] also drew on her experiences of playing with Miles [child] at home:

> *"He* [child] *is still figuring out train sets. We've got one at home now and mostly he likes to break the tracks apart. Sometimes he'll watch the trains go round. Sometimes he'll push the trains around. But he's more disruptive than constructive at the moment."* (Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

It was observed that Joey would often construct the train tracks on her own, leaving Miles to roll the trains about by himself at the community playgroup (observed in Fieldnotes1_31.1.20). The parent's doings were informed by the parent's interview data explaining that Miles liked

to take apart the trains at home and disliked constructing them together. Therefore, the parent's physical actions at the community playgroup (constructing the train tracks on her own and leaving the child to roll the trains) were enabled and informed by her co-play experiences at home (…*he likes to break the tracks apart. Sometimes he'll watch the trains go round. Sometimes he'll push the trains around*).

Some parents, though, felt that their co-play experience at home was less than ideal and wanted it to be different at the community playgroup. As Fred [parent] explained in relation to play at home:

> *"She* [child] *has got her toys in an area. But frankly she doesn't play that much actually, she relies on me a lot. Like I am trying to help her draw but I end up doing it. I get her some playdough but I end up having to do the pieces. Yeah most of the time she isn't interested. She relies on me for entertainment."* (Interview_Fred_13.3.20)

Fred expressed that his child mostly relied on him when playing at home, suggesting that he would like for his child to play more independently without relying on him or to play with other children when they were at the community playgroup. The parent saw the community playgroup as enabling a different type of co-play to home, that is one that encouraged his child to interact with other children.

5.4.2.3 Toys and activities that children liked

When parents spoke about specific toys and co-play activities at the community playgroup, most expressed that the toys and activities enabled their children to enjoy play at the community playgroup. For example, Toby [parent] felt that the hide-and-seek game and the water play were fun for his child, which led him to initiate those activities with Felix [child] at the community playgroup:

"He is still at that age where he doesn't understand where things go when he can't see them. There's the sense of surprise so we do a lot of that especially when he needs calming down." (Interview_Toby_13.3.20)

"I think it is lots of fun to splash around at any age. It is good to build more confidence around water before Felix is big enough to swim." (Interview_Toby_13.3.20)

Likewise, Noni [parent] shared that the doll provided at the community playgroup enabled her to use it like a baby with her child during co-play (observed in Fieldnotes5_13.3.20) because Zoe [child] had generally been showing interest in babies:

"She [child] *is very interested in babies so she would look at a small child and say baby baby."* (Interview_Noni_13.3.20)

The same was expressed by Joey [parent], who was often observed to be pushing Miles [child] around in the ride-on toy car during play at the community playgroup:

"He [child] *loves wheels, of any descriptions. He likes being pushed around in those vehicles."* (Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

The ride-on toy car provided at the community playgroup had enabled Joey to use it in co-playing with Miles because he liked playing with and riding in vehicles.

5.4.3 Social-political arrangements

Social-political arrangements referred to the conditions that made possible the relationships between people and non-human objects that occur in a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). In this study, co-playing in the community playgroup involved a parent, a child and the play objects. This meant that co-playing was "conducted in and through relationships" (p. 48),

and that the parents' co-play practices were shaped by past and present social conditions (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). The social-political arrangements found in this study were the parents' expressions about their beliefs and understandings formed over time from their experiences of the world. Parents spoke about: 1) beliefs about their role; and 2) understandings of their children's dispositions. These beliefs and understandings enabled and constrained the ways that parents related with their children during co-play at the community playgroup.

5.4.3.1 Beliefs about their role

Parents expressed different beliefs regarding their role in co-play, which were found to influence their co-play practices at the community playgroup. Most parents shared that they wanted to give their children the opportunity to interact with other children when at the community playgroup:

> *"At playgroup I just let her do her things. The idea is to let her interact with other kids. If I see she is by herself, I will try to push her to other kids."* (Interview_Fred_13.3.20)

> *"When I bring him to playgroup, I tend to be a little less hands-on unless he really wants to play with me. Because one of the reasons for me to bring him to playgroup is to let him play with other kids. So that's where I try to stand back and see what he wants to do…It's only in playgroups, this one time where he's around other kids."*
>
> (Interview_Toby_13.3.20)

> *"But one of the important things about being at playgroup for me is to give Miles* [child] *a chance to engage with other children and to give me a chance to talk with the other parents."* (Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

It was observed that these parents generally engaged lesser in co-playing with their children at the community playgroup and would spend more time talking with other parents or encouraging their child to play with the other children. These parents' practices were enabled by their beliefs of wanting to provide opportunities for their child to interact with other children when at the community playgroup.

One parent, however, made comments on the importance of co-playing with his child (Interview_Alex_6.3.20):

"I try to be as interactive as I can because that's just part of playing"

"I don't go out on purpose to do that; I think that's just how it comes about. Otherwise she'll just push the mower for a minute and that's it."

"It's easy for me because I just sit there and get given food"

Alex [parent] felt that co-playing with Mia [child] not only helped her to stay focused for longer on an activity when at the community playgroup, but it was also quite natural and enjoyable for him. Another parent, Noni, was equally happy to engage in co-play with her child at the community playgroup:

"She also goes to childcare two days a week. She has been going to childcare since she was 8 months old. So, I don't think she needs further encouragement to make social interaction. I don't think playgroup is the only thing that she does. So, I don't really worry about it." (Interview_Noni_13.3.20)

For Noni [parent], she did not feel that she needed to encourage Zoe [child] to interact with other children at the community playgroup because Zoe had opportunities for social interaction

at childcare. Therefore, both Alex and Noni [parents] usually spent their time at the community playgroup engaged in play with their children Mia and Zoe [children], and this co-play tendency was found to be enabled by their beliefs about co-playing.

Some parents expressed that their co-play practices in the community playgroup were constrained by a concern about providing adequate support, but not to the extent of interfering in their children's natural development:

> *"It's hard to find the balance between us doing everything for them and giving them the chance to play on their own"* (Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

> *"But it's up to her, it's not like I want to know she has to reach some developmental stage. But also, if I can make her learn something then that's what I want."* (Interview_Fred_13.3.20)

From these interview extracts, these parents valued their children's natural development at their own pace. However, their expressions indicated that their co-play practices at the community playgroup were constrained by their concern about not wanting to be too involved in their children's play that they may unknowingly intrude upon their children's natural development.

5.4.3.2 Understandings of their children's dispositions

Findings indicated that how parents related with their children in co-play at the community playgroup was enabled by understandings of their children's dispositions. Examples of a child's disposition at the community playgroup were if the child preferred to play on his/her own or if the child felt more comfortable and able to enjoy play when the parent was near (see Chapter 3, section 3.4.2.3). Parents expressed understandings of their children's dispositions in the upcoming co-play examples.

In this first co-play example, Joey [parent] was often observed to respect Miles' [child] preference to be left alone to explore the toys at the community playgroup because she recognised his independent nature:

> *"He is a pretty independent child, so he just tends to go find something to play with. If it's something that I can join in then brilliant."* (Interview_Joey_31.1.20)

A similar understanding was expressed by Fred [parent], who also tended to leave Chloe [child] to play with other children at the community playgroup. However, he added that:

> *"I just have to make sure she doesn't hurt anyone because she is becoming quite big and a bit of a bully. She can be quite rough, so I always keep an eye on her."*
>
> (Interview_Fred_13.3.20)

Fred was aware that Chloe could hurt other children during play, which prompted him to watch her closely at the community playgroup so that he could step in before she unintentionally hurt others.

For some parents, though, understandings of their children's dispositions enabled them to more readily assume the role of co-players in their children's play. As Noni [parent] explained:

> *"She* [child] *is very clingy. Because we don't go to playgroups regularly so usually when we go to playgroup, she is quite clingy. So, I find that she is around me anyway, like as in physically around me. She wants to be near me. So, she usually plays with me, like not doing any independent play with other kids."* (Interview_Noni_13.3.20)

Noni's expression demonstrated her awareness of Zoe's [child] discomfort at the community playgroup, which led to the behaviour of clinging on to Noni. Thus, Noni was often observed

to be engaged in co-playing with Zoe at the community playgroup enabled by her understanding of Zoe's insecurities. Not unlike Noni, Alex [parent] also expressed how Mia [child] generally felt when at the community playgroup:

> *"I think because there's a lot of people here at playgroup so she gets a bit shy so she wants me there…If she's by herself then she sort of has free reign to move around so she doesn't need me to hold her hand."* (Interview_Alex_6.3.20)

Alex was also aware of Mia's insecurity at the community playgroup due to the presence of more people than she was comfortable with. This resulted in her wanting to be near her father most of her time at the community playgroup, which Alex was happy to oblige enabled by the understanding of her disposition.

5.4.4 Summary of finding two

This section outlined the set of findings that were aimed at addressing research question two, which was: *What do parents say about enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?* The analysis was based on the theorisation that parents' ways of saying, doing and relating in co-play practices were shaped by cultural-discursive arrangements (the resources that make possible the language and discourses), material-economic arrangements (the resources that make possible the activities undertaken), and social-political arrangements (the resources that make possible the relationships between people and non-human objects). This section presented what these arrangements were that enabled and constrained parents' practices of co-play at the community playgroup, through an analysis of the parent interview data and the field observation data.

The cultural-discursive arrangements that enabled parents' sayings at the community playgroup were found to be from knowledge about their children. In the parent interview data,

parents expressed knowledge about the child's likes and dislikes, as well as knowledge about what their child was able or unable to do. These knowledge about their child enabled the contents of parents' sayings during co-play at the community playgroup. For example, specific instructions were targeted at promoting what the parent knew the child was not able to do without the parent's support.

The data revealed the material-economic arrangements that enabled and constrained what parents did at the community playgroup. Parents commented on the toys that were provided at the community playgroup, at their homes, and those that the children liked. The analysis suggested that the toys provided at the community playgroup enabled and constrained parents' co-play practices at the playgroup. For instance, parents expressed how the toys provided at the community playgroup enabled the parents to offer new play experiences for the children. Conversely, parents expressed how the lack of a wider variety of toys that suited their children's ages constrained their co-play at the community playgroup, resulting in the parents having to adapt the use of the toys to make it more enjoyable for their children.

Furthermore, parents shared beliefs and understandings to do with their role in co-playing and of their children's dispositions at the community playgroup. These formed the social-political arrangements that enabled and constrained the parents' ways of relating with their children during co-play at the community playgroup. For example, the parents who expressed their beliefs about wanting their child to interact with other children at the community playgroup were likely to reduce the frequency of co-playing at the playgroup and would instead encourage their child to play with the others. In summary, the findings presented in this section informed understanding about the enablers and constraints of parents' practices of co-play at the community playgroup, reported as the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements.

5.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings to address the research questions:

1. What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?
2. What do parents say about enablers or constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?

The chapter was divided into three main sections. The first section provided an overview of the community playgroup environment and this study's findings. The second and third sections presented the findings, with each focused on describing the findings for each of the research questions. Finding one, which was reported in section 5.3, informed understanding about what were the parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup. Finding two, which was reported in section 5.4, informed understanding about the enablers and constraints of parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup. The next chapter will continue with a discussion of these findings in relation to the use of the practice architectures theory.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is discussing the findings through the lens of practice architectures theory. Prior to this study, the practice architectures theory was not used in playgroup research. This study had utilised the practice architectures theory to develop understanding of parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup. The use of the theory has contributed new knowledge and consolidated knowledge from prior research.

There are four main sections in this chapter. The first section provides an overview of the practice architectures theory in relation to how it was utilised in this study for the analysis of the data. The second section discusses the use of the practice architectures theory for identifying what were the parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup. The third section discusses the use of the practice architectures theory for identifying what parents expressed that had enabled and constrained their practices of co-play in the community playgroup. The final section brings together this study's findings to discuss the overall contribution from utilising the practice architectures theory for understanding parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup.

6.2 Overview of this study's use of the practice architectures theory

In the Theoretical Framework chapter of this thesis (see Chapter 3, section 3.4), it was established that there are two main features of the practice architectures theory that were important in this study for understanding parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup (see Figure 6.1). These are in relation to: 1) the practitioner and the practice (left side of the figure); and 2) the site for practice or the practice architectures (right side of the figure). The intersubjective space/medium refers to the semantic space, the physical space-time

and the social space where participants encounter each other in social situations (Kemmis, 2018). The significance of this intersubjective space for understanding parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup will be discussed in detail in the later part of this chapter.

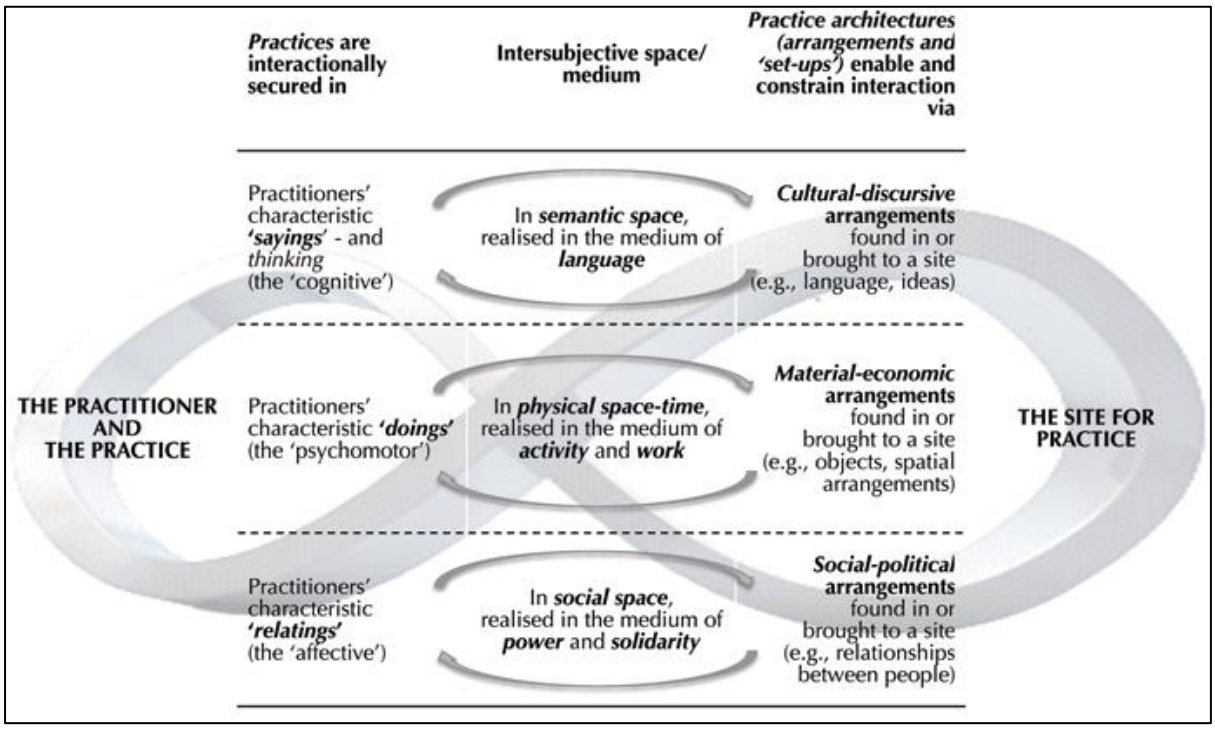

Figure 6.1: Practice architectures theory (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 38)

The practice architectures theory provides a framework for considering the relationship between people's practices and the social conditions giving rise to a practice (Kemmis, 2019). The theory was used in this present study for understanding parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup. The term co-play in this study referred to the encounters between a parent, child and play objects at the community playgroup (see Chapter 3, section 3.3.1). These encounters encompassed the unfolding of practices that involved the parent, the child and the play objects.

Thus, 'the practitioner and the practice' feature of the theory (left side of Figure 6.1) was relevant to this study as it highlighted the aspects of parents' practices, also known as parents' sayings, doings and relatings. By focusing on parents' sayings, doings and relatings,

this study identified the parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup, which addressed the first research question: *What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?*

'The site for practice or the practice architectures' (right side of Figure 6.1) was important for this study as it focused on the arrangements enabling and constraining parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup. The cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements identified from the analysis of data addressed the second research question: *What do parents say about enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?* The following sections discuss in detail the use of the practice architectures theory in this study for generating understandings about the parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup.

6.3 Practice architectures theory and parent practices of co-play

This study found that parents' practices of co-play at the community playgroup comprised sayings, doings and relatings, which aligned with Kemmis' (2018) proposition that a practice is composed of sayings, doings and relatings. Sayings were the spoken interactions such as a parent asking "*What is in here? Dinosaur? Ball?*". Doings were the physical actions such as a parent laying out a box of toys. Relatings were the particular kinds of relationships established with the child and/or the play objects such as a parent assuming the role of a co-player in a play activity as he/she stood across the child waiting to catch the ball.

According to Kemmis & Grootenboer (2008), sayings, doings and relatings bundle together in practices, and that these bundles characterise and give practices their distinctive qualities. This study's findings supported this view, specifically, by demonstrating how parents' co-play practices comprised bundles of sayings, doings and relatings. For example,

Alex's [parent] practices in this instance of a co-play comprised a bundle of sayings, doings and relatings:

Alex stands near the toy storage cubes.	**[doing, relating]**
He says "Are you shopping?"	**[saying]**
and looks into the storage cubes,	**[doing, relating]**
"What is in here? Dinosaur? Ball?".	**[saying, relating]**

Together this bundle of the parent's sayings, doings and relatings performed the function of extending on the child's play experience (detailed in Chapter 5, section 5.3.1.2).

Hence, through an inductive thematic analysis of parents' sayings, doings and relatings, this study revealed two main parents' practices observed from co-play activities at the community playgroup: parents guiding the play and parents participating in the play (see Figure 6.2). Guiding practices of co-play were practices that facilitated the child's engagement with play activities, but parents did not join in the play. Whereas participating practices of co-play were practices where parents joined in as co-players in the play activities by way of facilitating their child's engagement with play in the community playgroup.

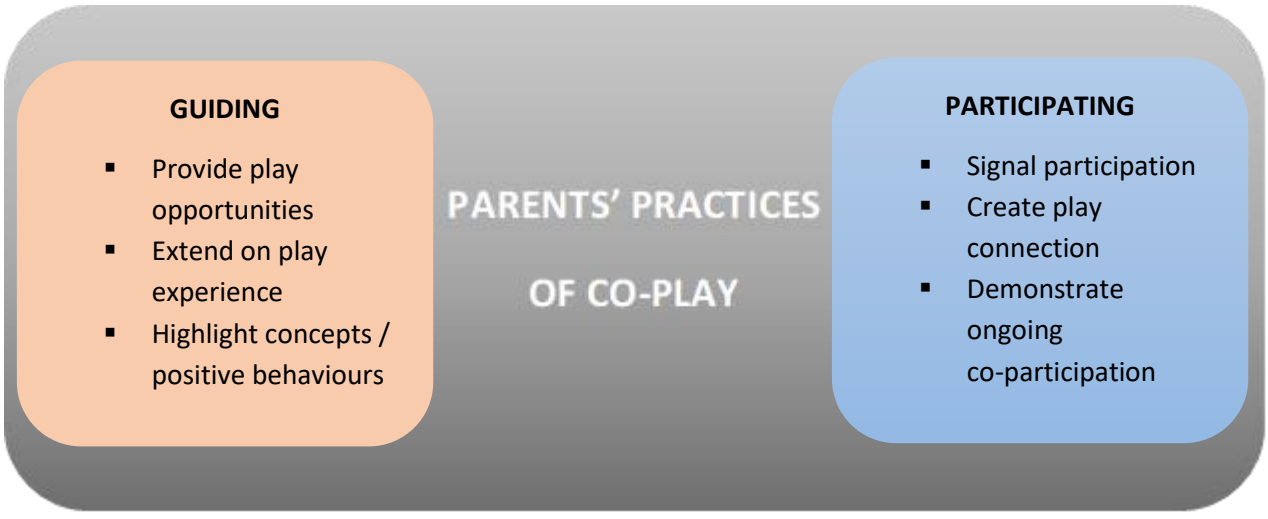

Figure 6.2: Parents' guiding and participating practices of co-play comprised of bundles of sayings, doings and relatings

Guiding practices of co-play (orange highlighted in Figure 6.2) were characterised by bundles of sayings, doings and relatings that allowed parents to provide play opportunities for their child, to extend on their child's play experience, and to highlight specific concepts or positive behaviours. Participating practices of co-play (blue highlighted in Figure 6.2) were characterised by bundles of sayings, doings and relatings that allowed parents to signal participation, to create a play connection, and to demonstrate ongoing co-participation.

Table 6.1 provides examples from the data findings showing the bundling of parents' sayings, doings and relatings in performing each of these specific functions of co-play practices. The rows highlighted in orange represent the guiding practices of co-play, while those highlighted in blue represent the participating practices of co-play. Some of the examples in Table 6.1 will be referred to and discussed in section 6.3.1.

Table 6.1: Bundles of sayings, doings and relatings performed specific functions of parents' co-play practices, with examples from data

	Example	Parent's Saying / Doing / Relating		Co-play practice
1	*Toby and Joey start to bring cups of water out to fill up the water table.* *They stand a short distance from their children and watch them.* (Fieldnotes1_31.1.20)	Doing Doing, Relating		Provide play opportunities
2	*Alex stands near the toy storage cubes.* *He says "Are you shopping?" and looks into the storage cubes, "What is in here? Dinosaur? Ball?".* (Fieldnotes2_7.2.20)	Doing Saying, Doing	Relating	Extend on play experience
3	*He* [parent] *holds up a block to Mia* [child] *"What colour is this block?". Mia says "Red".* *Alex holds up another block. Mia says "Green".* (Fieldnotes2_7.2.20)	Doing, Saying Doing	Relating	Highlight concepts
4	*Alex moves some blocks towards Chloe* [child], *and says to Mia* [child] *"Push the blocks here so Chloe can play together. Let's all play together."* (Fieldnotes2_7.2.20)	Doing, Saying	Relating	Highlight positive behaviours
5	*Toby and Jo are sitting on the floor with Felix* [child]. *Toby has brought down the storage cube labelled 'Dress ups'.* *Jo takes a big black cloth and puts it over her head.* *Toby says to Felix "Where is mummy?".* (Fieldnotes4_6.3.20)	Doing, Relating Doing Saying	Relating	Signal participation
6	*Alex is following her "Alright, let's mow the lawn. This is how you operate this".* *Mia* [child] *is asking "What is this?". Alex replies "For pouring in the petrol"…* *Alex makes the sound of the engine "Vroom vroom"…* (Fieldnotes4_6.3.20)	Saying Saying Saying, Doing	Relating	Create a play connection
7	*Mia* [child] *makes some sizzling sound "Sssshhhhh" and hands the capsicum back to Alex* [parent]. *Alex pretends to eat it "Thanks, yum yum".* (Fieldnotes4_6.3.20)	Doing, Saying	Relating	Demonstrate ongoing co-participation

6.3.1 The concept of relatings for understanding parent involvement in play

Kemmis (2018, p. 2-3) described relatings in practices as when the people and objects involved are "distributed in particular kinds of relationships". Using the example of a 20-month-old baby's participation in bedtime reading, Kemmis showed how the relating aspect of the practice was marked by:

> "*Miles and his parents now enter the special relationship of the bedtime reading space, one which is especially charged by the reassurance of solidarity (which may be replaced, should things go awry, with an exercise of parental power) that is the precursor to Miles' being put into bed*" (Kemmis, 2019, p. 15)

The 'relationship' that Kemmis spoke of in the excerpt was one of *solidarity* (Miles and his parents reading together before bed), but was equally one of *parental power* ("*may be replaced, should things go awry*"). It highlighted not just the parent's and the child's practices, but importantly it suggested the parents' role of maintaining order established for the practice of bedtime reading in their household.

In this study, the concept of relatings as depicted by Kemmis (2018) was important because it drew attention to the particular kinds of relationships established between the parent and the child, and/or the play objects during co-play in the community playgroup. This understanding about the relationships established between the parent, the child and the play objects during co-play showed how parents were involved with their children's play at the community playgroup.

As noted in the literature review (Chapter 2), parent involvement in community playgroups had been largely unexamined. Yet community playgroups are important sites for considering parental involvement with children's play because there is not a professional playgroup facilitator (Dadich & Spooner, 2008), rather, they are led by volunteers and parents

who attend these community playgroups with their children. The lack of studies conducted in community playgroups (McLean et al., 2020) meant that little was known about how parents were involved with their children's play in community playgroups.

In the literature review (see Chapter 2, section 2.4.2), it was established that parents' involvement, by promoting a positive home learning environment, benefits children's early learning and development (Anders et al., 2012; Melhuish et al, 2008; Sylva et al., 2004a). According to Evangelou and Wild (2014), parents are capable of being "powerful facilitators of their children's learning" (p. 383). This meant that parents have the capacity to provide their children with quality learning experiences in the family (Sylva et al., 2004b). Some examples of positive involvement with their children's early experiences in the home environment included reading together, teaching nursery rhymes and singing, and discussions together (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Examples of positive involvement in a supported playgroup were parents staying close to the child and encouraging their participation in the planned activities (Mize & Pettit, 2010). Therefore, the general consensus in parent involvement research was that parents' active involvement in their children's play is crucial for enhancing the child's learning and development. It is important to highlight these parent involvement practices here again because they provided a sense that the parents took active roles to be involved with their children's early experiences.

Although descriptions of 'active' involvement varied across previous studies (Williams et al., 2020; Pursi & Lipponen, 2018; Goff et al., 2012), the central idea was that the adults assumed roles that characterised their involvement in the play. For example, Pursi and Lipponen's (2018) study reported on a group care setting in a day-care centre where the adults' (consisting of a kindergarten teacher, nursery nurses and a personal assistant) active roles included initiating signals for joining in the children's play, creating opportunity spaces for joint play with sensitivity and respect for the child, and creating interactional resources for

sustained co-participation in play. Williams et al. (2020), in their study of parent involvement in supported playgroups, described the parents' active participation in the play activities as having a clear role to play and specific tasks to do such as singing along or rocking their child to music, rolling a ball back and forth, scribbling together, and assisting their child in gluing items. Goff et al. (2012) also considered the parents' active role as in providing cognitively challenging experiences that stimulated their child's learning. These studies demonstrated a range of adult' roles of being actively involved with their children's play across several early years settings, but there did not appear to be any studies that specifically explored parent involvement in community playgroups.

Therefore, this present study's focus was on parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup. It was found that the parents in this community playgroup were involved with their children's play through the guiding practices and participating practices of co-play, and that these practices largely comprised parents' active initiations of sayings, doings and relatings. Specifically, the concept of relatings from the practice architectures theory was helpful for unpacking the particular kinds of relationships established between the parent and the child, and/or the play objects during co-playing.

The findings indicated that parents' relatings were identified through their physical positionings. For instance, in the following excerpt from Table 6.1 (see table 6.2 below), the physical positioning of Toby and Joey [parents] was one where they stood a short distance away from their children, watching them play at the water table.

Toby and Joey start to bring cups of water out to fill up the water table.	Doing	Provide play opportunities
They stand a short distance from their children and watch them. (Fieldnotes1_31.1.20)	Doing, Relating	

Table 6.2: Excerpt from table 6.1 (example 1)

This way of positioning themselves established a relationship whereby the parents were available to guide the play if needed, but they were not participating with their children in the play activity. This finding mirrored the roles of non-participating parents in Williams et al.'s (2020) study where the parents did not participate in the play activities, but stayed in the room observing their child's play and only responded if their child initiated interactions.

Conversely, in Table 6.1 example 5 (see table 6.3 below), the physical positionings of Toby and Jo [parents] were marked by the acts of sitting down on the floor with their child and bringing down the box of dress-up props.

Toby and Jo are sitting on the floor with Felix [child]. *Toby has brought down the storage cube labelled 'Dress ups'.* *Jo takes a big black cloth and puts it over her head.* *Toby says to Felix "Where is mummy?".* (Fieldnotes4_6.3.20)	Doing, Relating Doing Saying	Relating	Signal participation

Table 6.3: Excerpt from table 6.1 (example 5)

This way of positioning themselves established a relationship of participation as co-players in their child's play. This finding echoed the adults' roles in Pursi and Lipponen's (2018) study, where they "momentarily lead by following their own play ideas and simultaneously observe if children stay responsive and engaged" (p. 34), highlighting the importance of the adults' role in actively producing play invitations to co-play because such initiations were beyond the capabilities of very young children.

Moreover, this study found that relatings were also established through combinations of parents' sayings and doings. In Table 6.1 example 3 (see table 6.4 below) for instance, the parent engaged his child through physically holding up a coloured block (*holds up a block*) and asking a question (*"What colour is this block?"*).

He [parent] *holds up a block to Mia* [child] *"What colour is this block?". Mia says "Red".* *Alex holds up another block. Mia says "Green".* (Fieldnotes2_7.2.20)	Doing, Saying Doing	Relating	Highlight concepts

Table 6.4: Excerpt from table 6.1 (example 3)

Through his doing and saying, the parent prompted a response from the child by way of naming the block colour, thereby establishing a particular way of relating with each other that was characterised by the pattern of questioning and answering. Furthermore, by focusing the analysis on the relationship established between the parent, the child and the blocks through the parent's saying and doing, enabled by practice architectures theory, it highlighted the parent's role of using the blocks for teaching colours. Thus, demonstrating the parent's involvement with the child's play by adopting practices that guided the child's play towards the concept of colours using the blocks.

Schatzki (2002) had proposed that a doing and a saying in practices, in itself, already implied relationships between people and things. For example, a parent speaking (saying) would bring the child into a relationship because the spoken interaction was typically directed at the child. In the same way, a parent engaged in co-play activities (doing) would bring the child and the play objects into a relationship through physical actions.

However, Kemmis et al. (2014) argued for the significance of explicating the relatings aspect of practices because doing so brings attention to "the medium of power and solidarity" embedded in practices. This study concurred with Kemmis et al.'s (2014) suggestion to explicate the relatings aspect of practices. This is because the data findings indicated that by focusing on the aspect of relatings, the analysis highlighted the parent's roles in the co-play activities, inadvertently demonstrating how parents were involved with their child's play in the community playgroup (illustrated in figure 6.3).

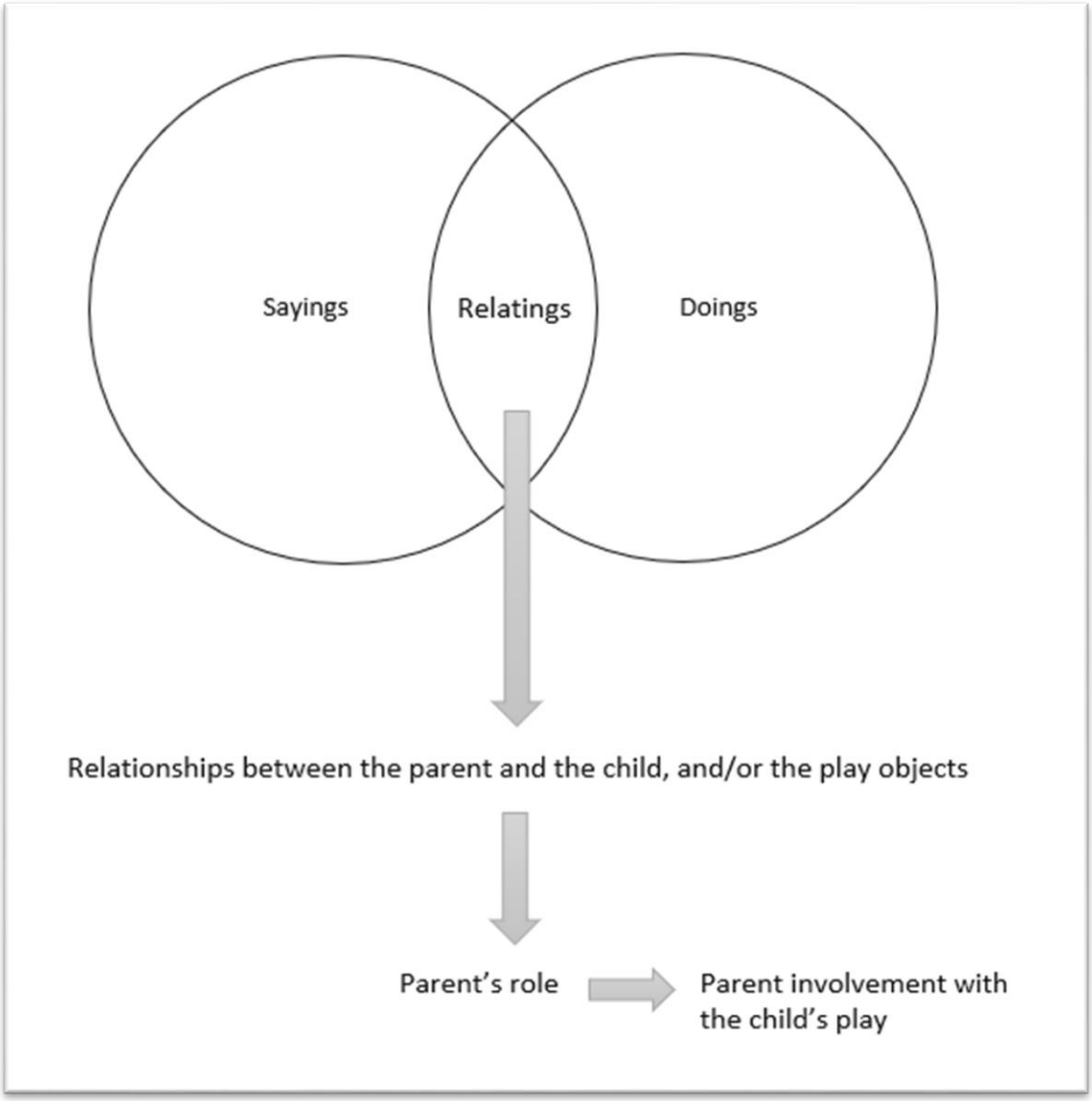

Figure 6.3: Relatings identified in combinations of sayings and doings as relationships between the parent, the child and/or play objects, highlighting the parent's role when involved with the child's play

The findings in this study in relation to parents' relatings suggested that it was the parents, rather than the children, that exercised power and built solidarity in the co-play activities. For example, parents exercised power by adopting practices that guided the play such as when parents chose specific play objects and play ideas that provided the children with play opportunities, extended on their play experiences, and highlighted particular concepts or positive behaviours. This was likely due to the ages of the children who attended this

community playgroup, with the majority (4 out of 6 children) not older than two years of age and not yet speaking fluently. Similarly, Pursi and Lipponen (2018) had reported that the adults in their study actively initiated play actions with the toddler children because those children were too young "to initiate social play and contribute to each other's play actions" (p. 34).

The findings also indicated that parents actively initiated practices for joining in their children's play. Parents' practices of signalling participation, creating play connections and demonstrating ongoing co-participation allowed the parents to build solidarity with their children around the play that led to the parents' active participation in the co-play activities. Parents' active participation in children's play was also beneficial for maintaining the child's interest in an activity ("*Otherwise she'll just push the mower for a minute and that's it*" [Interview_Alex_6.3.20]).

Prior research had reported on the benefits of parents' active involvement in children's play, for example, enabling them to recognise children's needs and competencies that allowed parents to respond with sensitivity to those needs (Kalliala, 2014; Fleer & Hammer, 2014; Bernier et al., 2010; Ward, 1996). This present study consolidated this knowledge with findings that supported the importance of parental involvement in play at a community playgroup context, in terms of enabling parents to guide the child's play and for parents to participate as co-players in the play activities.

More importantly, this study suggests that parent involvement entails parents' active initiations of sayings, doings or relatings, by showing that the majority of co-playing at the community playgroup as well as the direction of a co-play, whether it ceased because the parent moved away from the child or it continued due to the parent's participation as a co-player, were dependent on the parents. It was demonstrated that parents' active initiations of sayings, doings and relatings most often led to more enriched play experiences for their children at the community playgroup.

6.4 Practice architectures theory and parent expressions about enablers and constraints

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the theory of practice architectures, predominantly, concerned the relationships between practices and their social conditions (Kemmis, 2019). This meant that this theory could be used for research into community playgroups to understand the social conditions that influenced parents' practices of co-play. Kemmis et al. (2014) spoke about the conditions enabling and constraining people's practices as the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social political arrangements (see Chapter 3 section 3.5). In his example of the bedtime reading event, Kemmis (2019, p. 14-15) identified the arrangements that made possible the baby's sayings, doings and relatings as the "approximation or use of words recognisable to his parents" (a cultural-discursive arrangement example), "the bookshelf, the books, and the time taken for the activity" (material-economic arrangement examples), and a special relationship "charged by the reassurance of solidarity (a social-political arrangement example).

This study used the practice architectures theory to identify what parents said about the enablers and constraints on their co-play practices at the community playgroup. Salamon et al. (2016) had used the theory also in an early childhood context for examining early childhood educators' beliefs and implicit theories that influenced their practices (see Chapter 3, section 3.5). However, unlike Salamon et al. (2016) who had used the concepts within the theory of practice architectures as a framework to stimulate discussions with early childhood educators, this study used the concepts of cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements for the analysis of parent interview transcripts to identify the enablers and constraints of parents' practices of co-play. This was because it was more important for the interviews with the parents to be kept as open as possible so that they shared expressions of their co-play practices. By pre-adopting concepts in the interviews with parents, it may result

in influencing what the parents chose to share so that they could achieve "social desirability" by giving responses that they believed to be ideal for this study, hence, likely resulting in "response bias" (Furr, 2010, p. 1396). For example, by asking parents if they often co-played with their children and the reasonings behind their practices may have put pressure on the parents to provide responses that would see them as an involved parent.

The findings from the analysis of the parent interview data brought to light the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements embedded in parents' expressions about their co-play practices at the community playgroup (see Figure 6.4). Parents spoke about their child's likes or dislikes as well as what they were able or unable to do, which formed the cultural-discursive arrangements that enabled and constrained what parents said to their children during co-play. Parents commented about the toys at the community playgroup and at home as well as those toys or activities that their children liked, which formed the material-economic arrangements that enabled and constrained what parents did with their children at the community playgroup. Parents also talked about their personal beliefs and demonstrated understandings of their children's dispositions, which formed the social-political arrangements that enabled and constrained how parents related with their children in the co-play activities.

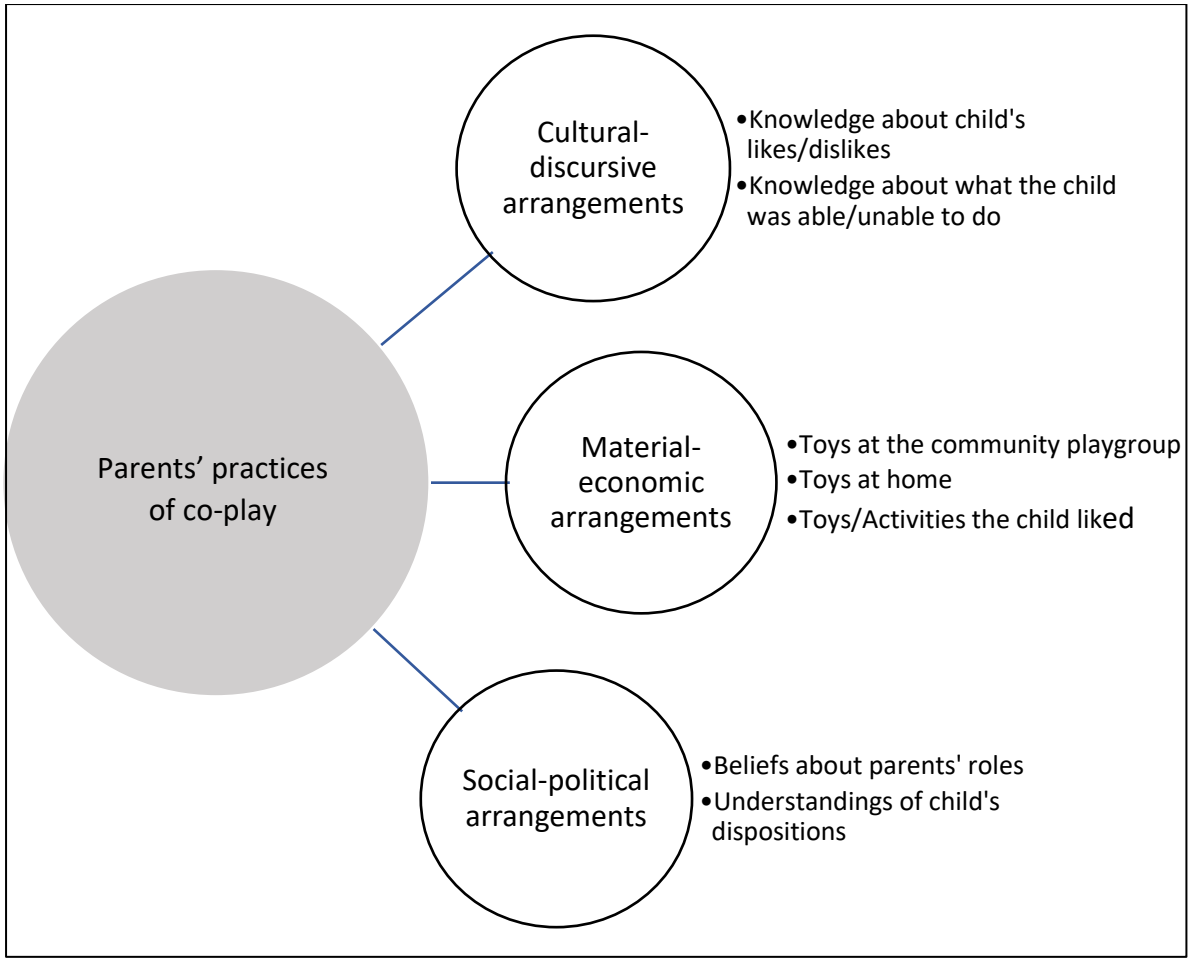

Figure 6.4: The practice architectures embedded in parent expressions about their practices of co-play in the community playgroup

Social-political arrangements appeared to have the most influence over parents' practices of co-play in terms of how parents generally related with their child at the community playgroup. It was noted across all interviews that parents spoke about their beliefs and understandings of their children's dispositions, which shaped the way they were involved with their children's play (see Chapter 5 section 5.3.3). The parents that were generally more involved with their child's play at the community playgroup made comments about the importance of joining in the play, e.g., *"I try to be as interactive as I can because that's just part of playing"* (Interview_Alex_6.3.20), and their expressions demonstrated understandings of the child's disposition (preference for the parent to be near), as in the following interview extract:

> *"She* [child] *is very clingy. Because we don't go to playgroups regularly so usually when we go to playgroup she is quite clingy. So I find that she is around me anyway, like as in physically around me. She wants to be near me. So she usually plays with me, like not doing any independent play with other kids."* (Interview_Noni_13.3.20).

Conversely, the parents who were less involved with their child's play at the community playgroup talked about giving opportunities for their children to socialise with other children and parents. For example, Fred, Toby, and Joey spoke about how they tended to encourage their children to interact with other children when at the community playgroup (e.g. *"…If I see she is by herself I will try to push her to other kids"* [Interview_Fred_13.3.20]; "*to give me a chance to talk with the other parents*" [Interview_Joey_31.1.20]; "*when I bring him to playgroup I tend to be a little less hands-on…Because one of the reasons for me to bring him to playgroup is to let him play with other kids.*" [Interview_Toby_13.3.20]). These findings mirrored Berthelsen et al.'s (2012) study, which had reported that parents attended playgroups mainly for addressing social isolation and for other child-related reasons.

Furthermore, the findings in this present study extended on Berthelsen et al.'s findings by suggesting an association between what parents believed was important about attending the playgroup and the adoption of particular co-play practices at the community playgroup. This knowledge of parents' beliefs about playgroup attendance and how these beliefs shaped the parents' co-play practices is particularly important for community playgroups because, as previously mentioned, these playgroups are not staffed by professional playgroup facilitators to lead parents' involvement with their children's play.

Therefore, the findings helped us to understand that parental beliefs are crucial for enabling and constraining parents' practices of co-play in this community playgroup. The parents' co-play practices at this community playgroup were enabled and constrained by what the parents valued about participation in the community playgroup. For example, parents who

valued co-playing tended to engage in co-play practices with their child in the community playgroup, whereas the parents who strongly valued social interactions engaged in practices that encouraged their own and their child's socialisation with other parents and children at the community playgroup.

Material-economic arrangements, which were about toys as play objects, were described by parents as important enablers and constraints to their practices of co-play at this community playgroup. The toys provided at the community playgroup enabled parents to engage their children in new play experiences such as when Toby spoke about the water play table experience (*"The first time we did it was just because it was out and everything was there. We thought it would be fun."*). The provided toys also enabled parents to replicate home play experiences using the different variety of toys at the community playgroup such as in this parent's expression:

> *"We have some small wooden building blocks at home but not these big padded ones. So that's what makes it different here… She likes to just stack up blocks to make it tall which is why I thought this padded blocks is more fun for her because when they stack up they are much taller than she is."* (Interview_Alex_6.3.20).

However, parents also described how their child's play at the community playgroup was constrained by the toys provided. This was largely due to the range of toys provided that parents felt were not appropriately aged for their child, thereby failing to capture the child's interests. Studies had found that children need access to different types of toys in order to promote cognitive, social, and fine and gross motor skills (Kavousipor et al., 2016; Tomopoulos et al., 2006). It had also been suggested in other studies that there were distinct phases in children's play (Knox, 2008), with younger toddlers preferring to use their mobility to engage in independent play, while older toddlers were more social and ready to engage in more advanced

use of play objects (Dauch et al., 2018). These studies signified the importance of making available a range of different toys at community playgroups not only to cater to children's interests, but also to help promote development.

The lack of a wider variety of toys that would meet the interests of the children at this community playgroup had led to parents having to adapt their practices to meet their child's needs. For example, Alex shared that he had adapted the use of the toys to a more educational way "*to make it interesting for her* [child]". Other parents also shared that the range of toys provided at the community playgroup did not meet their child's personal preferences such as when Noni commented on the lack of smaller play objects that would have captured her child's interest (*"She* [child] *really likes small toys. So, I find at playgroups they don't have small things because it's not safe."*). This finding was further supported by field observations of how Noni often tried to engage her child to play with the toys at the playgroup, but often without much success (see Chapter 5 section 5.2.2.2). These findings are important because it showed that parents often adapted their co-play practices in response to the experiences at the community playgroup so that they could continue to support their child's participation with play at the community playgroup.

Cultural-discursive arrangements, which were the knowledge parents drew upon for enabling their sayings, highlighted the parents' responsiveness and sensitivity towards their child's experiences of play at the community playgroup. Lobman (2006) said that responsive interactions in toddler classrooms involved the teacher actively leading, redirecting and listening as they built directly on what children were doing and saying in a joint activity. Based on Lobman's description, parents' sayings in this present community playgroup were responsive to their children's experiences, however, the findings from this study further indicated that it was the knowledge about their child that enabled parents to lead and respond sensitively to their play experiences. Moreover, this knowledge was not confined to happenings

in the immediate joint activity such as was captured in Lobman's (2006) study, but often incorporated prior co-play experiences from previous sessions or from home. This finding highlighted the benefit of having the parent involved in their child's play because parents were likely to be informed about their child's interests and developmental abilities, more so than a teacher for example, due to the longer time spent overall with the child and across different experiences. For example, Joey's expressions (Interview_Joey_31.1.20) embedded the knowledge she drew upon for the spoken interactions with her child:

> *"We like playing with the train set."*
>
> *"He* [child] *likes to take everything apart, rather than construct things."*
>
> *"That he* [child] *needs help. It's better for him to learn this so he can propel himself which the red car is quite hard even for the older children it's difficult to push themselves along."*

Knowledge about the child's likes or dislikes, and of what the child was not yet able to do by himself was demonstrated in this parent's expressions. By drawing on this knowledge for their practices of co-play in the community playgroup, it enabled parents to target specific instructions that responded to the child's areas of interest or development (e.g. *"You can fix them together"*; *"Go backwards, go forwards"*), thus, resulting in sayings that were responsive to the child's interests and needs.

6.5 Co-play as an intersubjective space for establishing relationships with the child and the play objects

Together these findings help us to understand the intersubjective space of co-play in the community playgroup (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5: The intersubjective space of co-play in a community playgroup, adapted from Kemmis et al.'s (2014) theory of practice and practice architectures

On the side of the individual: aspect of parents' practices	**Parents' *practices* are interactionally secured in**	**Parents' practices and practice architectures come together in the *intersubjective space* of co-play**	***Practice architectures* that enable and constrain action and interaction via**	On the side of the social: parents' experiences that shape what happens
For example, giving instructions to extend on the child's play experience	Parents' "***sayings***" and *thinking*	In ***semantic space***, realised in the medium of ***language*** (spoken interactions)	***Cultural-discursive* arrangements**	For example, parents' knowledge about what the child was able and unable to do on his own
For example, setting up the water table to provide the children with opportunities for water play	Parents' "***doings***"	In ***physical space-time***, realised in the medium of ***activity*** and ***work*** (physical actions)	***Material-economic* arrangements**	For example, the availability of the water play table at the playgroup motivated parents to set it up for their children to experience playing with water
For example, as co-player in a pretend play activity where the parent receives and consumes play food items served by the child by way of demonstrating ongoing co-participation with the child's play	Parents' "***relatings***"	In ***social space***, realised in the medium of ***power*** and ***solidarity*** (relationships)	***Social-political* arrangements**	For example, parents held beliefs about the importance of co-playing as a way of interacting with their children, for keeping the child's attention on the play activity, and as a natural process of play
	which are bundled together in practices.	**to form the co-play practices of guiding and participating.**	**which are bundled together in characteristic ways in practices.**	

Kemmis (2018) had proposed that in social situations participants encounter each other in intersubjective spaces, known as the semantic space, the physical space-time and the social space. The intersubjective space of co-play noted in this community playgroup consisted the dimensions of the spoken interactions (semantic space), the physical actions (physical space-

time) and the relationships (social space). Parents and their children encountered each other in these three dimensions of intersubjective space during co-play, where relationships were established between the parents with the children and the play objects, enabling parent involvement with their children's play in the community playgroup. This section discusses each of the intersubjective spaces of semantic space, physical space-time and social space in relation to the findings to show how these came together to form the parents' co-play practices of guiding and participating.

Figure 6.6 shows an example from the findings illustrating the unfolding of the semantic space (spoken interactions) during a co-play activity in this community playgroup (green highlighted).

On the side of the individual: aspect of parents' practices	**Parents' *practices* are interactionally secured in**	**Parents' practices and practice architectures come together in the *intersubjective space* of co-play**	***Practice architectures* that enable and constrain action and interaction via**	On the side of the social: parents' experiences that shape what happens
For example, giving instructions to extend on the child's play experience	Parents' "***sayings***" and *thinking*	In ***semantic space***, realised in the medium of ***language*** (spoken interactions)	***Cultural-discursive* arrangements**	For example, parents' knowledge about what the child was able and unable to do on his own
For example, setting up the water table to provide the children with opportunities for water play	Parents' "***doings***"	In ***physical space-time***, realised in the medium of ***activity*** and ***work*** (physical actions)	***Material-economic* arrangements**	For example, the availability of the water play table at the playgroup motivated parents to set it up for their children to experience playing with water
For example, as co-player in a pretend play activity where the parent receives and consumes play food items served by the child by way of demonstrating ongoing co-participation with the child's play	Parents' "***relatings***"	In ***social space***, realised in the medium of ***power*** and ***solidarity*** (relationships)	***Social-political* arrangements**	For example, parents held beliefs about the importance of co-playing as a way of interacting with their children, for keeping the child's attention on the play activity, and as a natural process of play
	which are bundled together in practices.	**to form the co-play practices of guiding and participating.**	**which are bundled together in characteristic ways in practices.**	

Figure 6.6: Example of parent practice and practice architectures in the semantic space

A parent had initiated sayings by instructing the child to try riding the toy car backwards and then forwards, thereby extending on the child's play experience with the ride-on toy car (guiding co-play practice). The particular sayings were enabled by the parent's knowledge about what the child was able and unable to do on his own with the toy car (cultural-discursive

arrangement), prompting the parent's instructions in guiding the child's play experience (detailed in Chapter 5, section 5.3.1.2).

An example of the findings from the unfolding of the physical space-time (physical actions) is presented in Figure 6.7 (green highlighted).

On the side of the individual: aspect of parents' practices	**Parents' *practices* are interactionally secured in**	**Parents' practices and practice architectures come together in the *intersubjective space* of co-play**	***Practice architectures* that enable and constrain action and interaction via**	On the side of the social: parents' experiences that shape what happens
For example, giving instructions to extend on the child's play experience	Parents' "***sayings***" and *thinking*	In ***semantic space***, realised in the medium of ***language*** (spoken interactions)	***Cultural-discursive* arrangements**	For example, parents' knowledge about what the child was able and unable to do on his own
For example, setting up the water table to provide the children with opportunities for water play	Parents' "***doings***"	In ***physical space-time***, realised in the medium of ***activity*** and ***work*** (physical actions)	***Material-economic* arrangements**	For example, the availability of the water play table at the playgroup motivated parents to set it up for their children to experience playing with water
For example, as co-player in a pretend play activity where the parent receives and consumes play food items served by the child by way of demonstrating ongoing co-participation with the child's play	Parents' "***relatings***"	In ***social space***, realised in the medium of ***power*** and ***solidarity*** (relationships)	***Social-political* arrangements**	For example, parents held beliefs about the importance of co-playing as a way of interacting with their children, for keeping the child's attention on the play activity, and as a natural process of play
	which are bundled together in practices.	**to form the co-play practices of guiding and participating.**	**which are bundled together in characteristic ways in practices.**	

Figure 6.7: Example of parent practice and practice architectures in the physical space-time

In this co-play example, the physical space-time unfolded with parents setting up the water table (doing) in order to provide the children with opportunities for water play (guiding co-play practice). The parents' doing was enabled by the availability of the water play table at the community playgroup (material-economic arrangement), which had motivated the parents to set it up for their children to experience playing with water (detailed in Chapter 5, section 5.4.2.1). Kemmis (2018) theorised that people's practices can change by building practice architectures that enable and constrain those practices. This example suggests the importance of providing a wide range of toys for promoting play activities at community playgroups

because, as the example indicated, the children's water play experience at the playgroup was enriched by the availability of the water table (practice architecture) that had enabled their parents to set it up (parent's doing) for their children's experience of playing with water.

An example of the findings from the unfolding of the social space (relationships) is presented in Figure 6.8 (green highlighted).

On the side of the individual: aspect of parents' practices	**Parents' *practices* are interactionally secured in**	**Parents' practices and practice architectures come together in the *intersubjective space* of co-play**	***Practice architectures* that enable and constrain action and interaction via**	On the side of the social: parents' experiences that shape what happens
For example, giving instructions to extend on the child's play experience	Parents' "***sayings***" and *thinking*	In ***semantic space***, realised in the medium of ***language*** (spoken interactions)	***Cultural-discursive* arrangements**	For example, parents' knowledge about what the child was able and unable to do on his own
For example, setting up the water table to provide the children with opportunities for water play	Parents' "***doings***"	In ***physical space-time***, realised in the medium of ***activity*** and ***work*** (physical actions)	***Material-economic* arrangements**	For example, the availability of the water play table at the playgroup motivated parents to set it up for their children to experience playing with water
For example, as co-player in a pretend play activity where the parent receives and consumes play food items served by the child by way of demonstrating ongoing co-participation with the child's play	Parents' "***relatings***"	In ***social space***, realised in the medium of ***power*** and ***solidarity*** (relationships)	***Social-political* arrangements**	For example, parents held beliefs about the importance of co-playing as a way of interacting with their children, for keeping the child's attention on the play activity, and as a natural process of play
	which are bundled together in practices.	**to form the co-play practices of guiding and participating.**	**which are bundled together in characteristic ways in practices.**	

Figure 6.8: Example of parent practice and practice architectures in the social space

The co-play example showed a parent relating as a co-player in their child's play. This was indicated from the parent's actions (doings) and spoken interactions (sayings) during the co-play, in which the parent had initiated for demonstrating his ongoing co-participation in the child's play by receiving and pretending to eat the play food items that the child served (participating co-play practice) (detailed in Chapter 5, section 5.3.2.3). The parent's way of

relating with the child's play in this example was enabled by the belief held by the parent about the importance of playing together with the child (social-political arrangement).

This example also highlights how the three dimensions of the intersubjective space usually occur simultaneously, demonstrated when the parent's doings (receiving and consuming food) and parent's sayings (requesting and rejecting food offer) integrated with each other to establish the parent's way of relating with the child (as co-player) (see section 6.3.1 for detailed discussion of parent relating). This means that as much as this study had explored the happening in each of the dimensions separately in order to understand the unfolding of parents' practices in each dimension, the reality is the three dimensions integrated with one another during co-play, forming the parents' guiding and participating practices of co-play in this community playgroup.

By demonstrating the happening of parents' practices and practice architectures in the three dimensions of the intersubjective co-play space, this study as a first, showed how these came together to form parents' guiding and participating co-play practices in the community playgroup. Parents co-play practices were enabled and constrained by practice architectures present at the playgroup (e.g. toys provided) or brought into the co-play (e.g. parents' knowledge of their child's likes or dislikes, parents' beliefs about co-play). This finding suggests potential for influencing parents' co-play practices through changes to the practice architectures. An example of a change may be to provide a range of toys and play activities that may encourage parents' involvement with their children's play. For example, a selection of books to promote parent and child reading or balls for throwing and kicking.

In addition, this study also identified the co-play practices of parents in this community playgroup as the guiding practices of co-play (including provide play opportunities, extend on play experience, highlight concepts/positive behaviours) and the participating practices of co-play (including signal participation, create play connection, demonstrate ongoing co-

participation). Through the findings, this study provides suggestions about how parents can be involved with their children's play. The guiding and participating co-play practices can be suggested to parents in community playgroups as ways for facilitating their children's play.

Finally, the co-play practices can be enacted in different combinations, as observed from this study. For example, it was observed that some parents participated in their children's play by signalling participation, followed by creating a play connection, and remained in the play activity by demonstrating ongoing co-participation. Somewhere along the co-play activity, a parent instructed their child to share the toys with other children at the playgroup, or the parent asked the child to identify the colour of the building blocks. Thus, the parent guided the co-play by way of highlighting a positive behaviour or the colour concept, whilst participating in the child's play (detailed in Chapter 5, section 5.3.1.3). In guiding the child to share toys with other children, the parent's role was crucial for supporting their child's interaction with other children at the playgroup. This aligns with the findings from Mize and Pettit's (2010) study where it was suggested that mothers' involvement with their children's play influenced how the child socialised with other children at playgroup. Hence, the guiding and participating co-play practices highlighted in this research can be communicated with playgroup families, for example via posters displayed at community playgroups, to support parents' involvement with children's play in community playgroups.

6.6 Chapter conclusion

Practice architectures theory offers a theoretical framework for learning about people's practices, but it had not been used for research into playgroups. This study used the practice architectures theory to understand parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup. This chapter discussed the use of the practice architectures theory for arriving at the two key findings in relation to the research questions. The findings were that: 1) parents' practices of co-play in

the community playgroup comprised sayings, doings and relatings, which bundled together to form the guiding and participating practices of co-play; and 2) parents' expressions revealed the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that enabled and constrained their co-play practices.

This study has contributed to an understanding of parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup. The parents' practices enabled and constrained by practice architectures occurred in the intersubjective space of co-play (spoken interactions, physical actions, relationships), forming parents' guiding and participating co-play practices. The guiding and participating co-play practices, and their six sub-themes, were enacted in different combinations during co-play. The chapter ended with the conclusion that the guiding and participating co-play practices offered in this study can be used as suggestions to support parents' involvement with their children's play in community playgroups.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by describing how the aim and research questions have been addressed in this study. In addition, the chapter presents the implications of the findings in relation to its contribution to new knowledge. The final section of the chapter outlines the limitations of this research and suggests areas for further research. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on this study.

7.2 Addressing the aim and research questions of this study

This section describes how this thesis has addressed the aim and research questions established in this study. The aim and the research questions are re-stated, followed by a brief explanation of how the investigation was carried out and how the findings address the research questions.

7.2.1 Restatement of the aim and research questions

In Australia, many families attend community playgroups for the purposes of play and social interaction from as early as the child's first year of life. Community playgroups were the focus of this thesis because it is a unique form of early childhood service, where parents attend with their children and facilitate their child's play activities using the play objects provided at these playgroups. It was thus recognised that a salient feature of community playgroups is the bringing together of young children and their parents for play and opportunities for social interaction with others (McLean et al., 2020).

Despite the central role that parents assume with their child's play in community playgroups, there has been a lack of research on the parents' co-play practices. Moreover, the

literature review of this study (see Chapter 2, section 2.4.2) highlighted the importance of a parent's role in relation to their child's play in the early years and a gap in the research concerning how this occurred in the context of community playgroups. Research in the home learning environment also showed that parents' involvement with children's play impacts on learning outcomes in the child's early years of their lives and beyond, which adds further importance to researching parents involvement with their child's play (Anders et al., 2012; Sylva et al., 2004a). This prompted the investigation in this study, which aimed to theorise parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup.

In order to theorise parents' practices of co-play, this research was informed by the practice architectures theory. The Theoretical Framework chapter (see Chapter 3, section 3.4) explained that the theory of practice architectures offered a systematic framework for understanding parents' co-play practices in this study, which had not previously been used in research into playgroups. By focusing on the parents' sayings, doings and relatings, and the social conditions enabling and constraining parents' co-play practices, the practice architectures theory allowed for understanding of the relationship between parents' co-play practices and the conditions that shaped those practices. Hence, the following research questions were posed and examined in this thesis:

1. What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?
2. What do parents say about enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?

7.2.2 How the investigation was carried out

In order to answer the above research questions, this thesis carried out an investigation into parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup using a range of data collection and analysis methods, which was discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Firstly, this study adopted an

ethnographic research methodology so that understandings about parents' co-play practices were gained from the naturalistic setting of a community playgroup. The research participants were six parents (3 mothers; 3 fathers) and six children (3 girls; 3 boys) aged between 12 months to 3.5 years from one community playgroup located in metropolitan Melbourne, selected using the convenience sampling method. This study utilised field observations, taking photographs, and informal interviews with the parent participants as the data collection methods. Finally, data was inductively analysed using a six-phase thematic analysis process (see Chapter 4, section 4.5.1), which generated two sets of findings that provided answers to the research questions.

7.2.3 Answers to the research questions

The first research question for this thesis related to identifying parents' practices of co-play in the community playgroup:

What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?

Findings of this research question indicated that parents' sayings, doings and relatings were bundled in combinations to perform specific functions in co-play. This revealed the parents' practices of co-play and showed how the parents were involved with their children's play in the community playgroup.

A detailed description of each of the identified co-play practices, together with examples from the data, were presented in Table 5.2 (see Chapter 5, section 5.3.2). In summary, two key themes were identified as the parents' main practices of co-play in the community playgroup:

1) *Guiding practices of co-play* consisted of the parents' practices that facilitated the child's participation with play activities, but the parent did not join in the play.

2) *Participating practices of co-play* consisted of the parents' practices where the parent joined in as a co-player in the play.

Six sub-themes were further identified, three each of parents' guiding, and participating co-play practices in the community playgroup:

1) *Provide play opportunities* was a *guiding* co-play practice where the parent provided access to toys or set up play activities for the child.

2) *Extend on play experience* was a *guiding* co-play practice where the parent watched the child's play, and made comments or asked questions that extended on the play.

3) *Highlight concepts or positive behaviours* was a *guiding* co-play practice involving the parent asking questions or giving instructions in order to talk about a specific concept (e.g. colours, body parts) or behaviour (e.g. sharing, taking turns).

4) *Signal participation* was a *participating* co-play practice where the parent either accepted the child's invitation to play or the parent initiated a play activity.

5) *Create play connection* was a *participating* co-play practice where the parent built shared understandings in play actions with the child.

6) *Demonstrate ongoing co-participation* was a *participating* co-play practice involving the parent continuing to participate in the child's play by demonstrating the shared understandings developed with the child around their play actions.

The second research question related to what parents said were the enablers and constraints on their co-play practices:

> *What do parents say about enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?*

Findings of this research question identified seven themes grouped under the respective arrangements of cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political, which were the

practice architectures found to have enabled and constrained the parents' co-play practices at the community playgroup:

1) The *cultural-discursive arrangements* that enabled and constrained what the parents said to their child:

- parents' knowledge about the child's likes or dislikes;
- knowledge about what the child was able or unable to do.

2) The *material-economic arrangements* that enabled and constrained what the parents did with their child:

- the toys that were provided at the community playgroup;
- the toys at home;
- the toys or activities that the child liked.

3) The *social-political arrangements* that enabled and constrained how parents related with their child:

- the parents' beliefs about their role;
- understandings about the child's dispositions.

7.3 Implications of the findings

The findings of this study contribute new understandings towards parental involvement with children's play in community playgroups through: 1) theorising parents' practices of co-play; and 2) the use of the practice architectures theory.

7.3.1 Theorising parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup

It was established in the Literature Review chapter (see Chapter 2, section 2.3) that there is a lack of researcher-informed knowledge about parents' involvement in their children's play in community playgroups, and limited resources have been provided to parents for

supporting their children's play in community playgroups. It was argued that researching parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup, as has been done in this study, can inform ways to support parents in facilitating their children's play, which may enhance the quality of the early learning opportunities in the community playgroup environment for children, which could be especially of value to those under three years of age and not attending a formal ECEC service.

The findings of this study informed understandings of the parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup. Firstly, it revealed how the parents actively involved themselves with their children's play by engaging in the co-play practices that guided the child's play and enabled the parents' participation as a co-player. The parents' co-play practices were identified as providing play opportunities, extending on play experience, highlighting concepts or positive behaviours, signalling participation, creating play connection, and demonstrating ongoing co-participation.

Secondly, the findings informed how the co-play practices were formed. When a parent co-played with their child, the parent's sayings, doings and relatings enabled and constrained by the practice architectures came together to form the guiding and participating co-play practices. The findings highlighted how the co-play practices were enacted by the parents in different combinations for the play activities. Together, the findings provided a theorising of the parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup, establishing new pathways that may be used for supporting parents' involvement with their children's play in community playgroups. The findings, for example, included observations of how the co-play practices were enacted by the parents in different combinations, enabling several functions to be achieved in a single play activity. This means that the findings documented the co-play practices in-action from the community playgroup, which can be used as practical suggestions for supporting parental involvement with children's play in other community playgroups. As an example, the

identified co-play practices can be suggested as ways to guide parents' involvement in their children's play. Using the co-play practice of *provide play opportunities*, for instance, a parent may select some play objects provided at the community playgroup by way of providing their child with play opportunities through access to a range of toys selected by the parent. After setting up some play objects, it may be that further suggestions can be given for supporting the parent's involvement. These could include using some of the other co-play practices such as *signal participation* and *create a play connection*. For example, the parent could say to the child "What shall we build with these blocks?" (signal participation) or "Why don't we build a tall tower like what we did yesterday? You had so much fun doing it" (create a play connection). Or the parent may choose just to sit and observe what their child does with the blocks before joining in later to *extend the child's play*.

Practical suggestions such as in these examples could be presented as an infographic, which is accessible in different formats including poster and digital formats, to support parents' involvement with their children's play in community playgroups. Appendix F presents a figure outlining the co-play practices that could be used to guide the creation of an infographic to support parents' involvement with their children's play in community playgroups. Therefore, the findings of this study can be used for building parents' knowledge of ways to be involved with their child's play through active participation in the community playgroup, which may have a further benefit of potential extension into the home. Previous research had indicated that the provision of play experiences in community playgroups is likely to be repeated and extended through play in the home (McLean et al., 2016), which suggests that the co-play practices identified in community playgroups are likely to be adopted into play experiences in the home. Thus, sharing the study's findings may contribute to increasing parental involvement in the home by offering practical suggestions, by way of the co-play practices, for parents to

get actively involved with their children's play in community playgroups that can also be enacted with play in the home.

Thirdly, the findings informed how the toys provided at the community playgroup influenced parents' co-play practices. Due to lack of a wider range of toys at the playgroup that would appeal to children of different ages and stimulate development, the parents adapted the use of the toys with their children to enhance play engagement. The findings suggest the importance of making available a range of different toys at community playgroups that cater to the ages and interests of children who attend the playgroup in order to promote children's development.

Finally, this study offers a deeper understanding of parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup that resulted in suggestions for enriching the quality of parent-child interaction through parents' sayings, doings and relatings. As discussed in the Literature Review chapter (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.1), adult-child interaction is recognised as an important characteristic of ECEC service quality (Melhuish et al., 2015) because children need responsive, stimulating and language-rich interactions in order to maximise their developmental potential in the early years, and the findings of this study can be used to improve the quality of parent-child interaction in community playgroups by informing parents of ways to engage more meaningfully with their child's play. For example, the co-play practice of *extending play* encourages the parent to be attentive towards the child's interest so that they can respond with ways of saying, doing and relating that build on the child's interests and needs. Similarly, the co-play practice of *highlighting concepts or positive behaviours* also prompts a parent to give attention to the child's needs in order to provide learning opportunities at appropriate co-play instances. Using this study's findings in this way can support the provision of community playgroups, by informing parents about ways to enhance their involvement in their child's play, for promoting young children's learning and development.

7.3.2 Use of the practice architectures theory

As the first study to have utilised the practice architectures theory on parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup, this study has offered a theoretical framework for future research in the playgroup field. By focusing on the individual parent's practice aspects (the ways of sayings, doings and relatings) and the social conditions enabling and constraining their co-play practices, this study has identified the guiding and participating co-play practices used by parents to be involved with their children's play.

The use of the practice architectures theory has allowed for the unique insight into how the co-play practices were formed, which was through combinations of parents' sayings, doings and relatings enabled and constrained by practice architectures. This has resulted in identification of a set of co-play practices, comprised of sayings, doings and relatings in which parents could adopt for increasing involvement with their children's play in community playgroups. This is important in the context of community playgroups because parents are responsible for their children's play, and there is not a professional playgroup facilitator. The findings generated using the practice architectures theory can be used to offer practical suggestions to parents to support the facilitation of their children's play in community playgroups.

7.4 Limitations of this study

Although this research provided insight into a previously unresearched area, and findings with translational value, it is necessary to acknowledge limitations of this study. The findings must be interpreted with consideration of these.

The first of these related to the carrying out of an ethnographic research, where I had specifically employed the participant observation strategy. As a participant-observer, I actively participated in the group life of the community playgroup, which enabled me to build

friendships and trust with the parents and children resulting in their willingness to share information with me. This included my frequent participation in play activities with the children and their parents, which at times posed a challenge to my data-recording. For example, my participation in playing ball with the research participants, which involved taking turns in throwing, receiving and kicking the ball, made it difficult for me to physically write down notes or to take photographs as I would usually do during the observations of co-play activities at the playgroup. A limitation in relation to this was that at times I missed out on recording some parts of the parents' speech or actions that unfolded in the play activity. To compensate, I relied on mental records or quick jotting down of key words, which I referred to for expanding the field observation notes after the play.

The second limitation of this study related to the means by which data was captured for this study. Despite recognising that video-recordings would have been ideal to capture aspects of the parents' practices, particularly the practice aspect of doings or the non-verbal acts, which would have afforded detailed consideration within the study, it was a conscious methodological decision not to use any video-recording device to minimise discomfort to the research participants in terms of influences on their natural behaviour. Instead, this study implemented the method triangulation process, utilising multiple methods for data collection, resulting in a trail of evidence from the different data sources that was used for reflecting on and for theorising the parents' co-play practices in the community playgroup.

The final limitation of this study related to the generalisability of findings, given that the research was undertaken with parents from the one community playgroup. The decision to collect data from the one group utilising an ethnographic research methodology was based on need to develop a trust with families before being able to observe their natural behaviour, which was a time-consuming aspect of the project. While this allowed for an in-depth and detailed examination of the parents' co-play practices in this community playgroup, the idiosyncratic

nature of community playgroups meant that the perspectives offered might have varied degrees of relevance across community playgroups due to differences in groups of parent and child participants, the structure and the environment of the playgroup or the availability of play objects and other resources.

7.5 Suggestions for further research

This study has contributed new knowledge, firstly, for understanding how parents' co-play practices in a community playgroup are enacted. Parents' co-play practices comprised of the parent's sayings, doings and relatings that were enabled and constrained by practice architectures. Secondly, this study contributed by identifying practical examples of parents' co-play practices, which suggested ways for parents to be involved with their children's play in community playgroups. Based on these contributions, there is potential for further research.

Picking up on the limitation related to generalising the findings to other community playgroups, additional studies into parents' co-play practices in other community playgroups are required to be able to establish whether the study's findings are replicated, or whether there are differences across groups. This would further extend our understanding about how parents are involved with their children's play and of the practice architectures enabling and constraining their co-play practices and determine if the practices in the community playgroups of focus are reflective of other community playgroups. In doing so, generalisations across a range of community playgroups could then be drawn to enrich and extend on the findings of parents' co-play practices from this research. A follow up study can also be conducted to explore parents' intentions in more depth in relation to co-play at community playgroups, and whether the intentions change over time.

Furthermore, the findings of this study were used to inform a resource in the form of a list of co-play practices for supporting parents' involvement with their children's play in

community playgroups, which is presented as Appendix F. An important next step is to establish how best to utilise this resource with parents in ways that can build parental knowledge of these co-play practices and enhance parental involvement in their children's play in community playgroups. One possible way of achieving this is, as suggested above in section 7.3.1, through the use of an infographic outlining the suggestions for parents' involvement with their children's play, which can be made available as a wall poster in community playgroups or distributed as a brochure to the attending parents. Therefore, research could examine the impact of such a resource on a community playgroup and its families, concerning how the parents are involved in the facilitation of their children's play at playgroup.

7.6 A final reflection

When I first attended a community playgroup in 2018, it was with my child who wanted me by her side throughout each session as she explored the play objects provided in the playgroup. This personal experience has since piqued my curiosity in relation to a parent's role within their child's play in community playgroups. As parents, we are often told the importance of being present for our children. In addition, with my background as a researcher in early childhood, I envisioned the potential value of co-play experiences as opportunities for enriching the child's learning and development.

Yet when I participated in my child's play, I felt that I had little practical knowledge of how to engage with my child and her play. Also having noticed that there was not many resources at the community playgroup for supporting parents' involvement with their child's play, it seemed that this was an area of research that needed attention.

Having conducted this research with a convenience sampling of one community playgroup, I have gained new insights in both my roles as a researcher and as a parent. As a researcher, an important aspect of carrying out a formal research study is in using a theory to

conceptualise the research problem. As a result of engaging with the practice architectures theory, this study has changed my understanding of parents' co-play practices. Rather than perceiving it as solely a set of skills, the practice architectures theory has prompted me to consider the underlying aspects of those practices – the components that make up a practice (e.g. what the parent say and do, and how they relate with the child), and the factors that bring about a practice (e.g. the enablers and constraints that shape parents' knowledge, beliefs or understandings).

As a result of this study, I have gained a deeper understanding of parents' co-play practices that has not only reinforced the belief about the importance of parental involvement with children's play, but it has enriched understanding of the ways that parents, including myself, can be involved with their children's play in community playgroups. Hence, the insights gained are presented in this thesis with the hope that it can benefit families in community playgroups.

7.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter consisted of five main sections that served to conclude the study. Section 7.2 re-stated this study's aim and the research questions and explained how these were addressed in this study. Implications of the findings, in particular, how the findings contributed new understandings towards parents' involvement with children's play in community playgroups were explained in section 7.3. Section 7.4 presented the limitations of this study, followed by suggestions for future research in section 7.5. The chapter concluded with a final reflection by the researcher on this research journey.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Ethics Approval Letter

From:	**Res Ethics** <Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au>
To:	**Karen Mclean** <Karen.McLean@acu.edu.au>; **pohyoke.chu@myacu.edu.au** <pohyoke.chu@myacu.edu.au>
CC:	**Res Ethics** <Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au>
Subject:	2019-155H Ethics application approved!
Date:	21.10.2019 04:07:26 (+0000)

Dear Applicant,

Chief Investigator: Karen Joy McLean

Student Researcher: Poh Yoke Celine Chu

Ethics Register Number: 2019-155H

Project Title: Parental engagement practices in children's play at a community playgroup

Date Approved: 21/10/2019

End Date: 31/10/2020

This is to certify that the above human ethics application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (ACU HREC). The application has been approved for the period given above.

Continued approval of this research project is contingent upon the submission of an annual progress report which is due on/before each anniversary of the project approval. A final report is due upon completion of the project. A report proforma can be downloaded from the ACU Research Ethics website.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that all conditions of approval are adhered to and that any modifications to the protocol, including changes to personnel, are approved prior to implementation. In addition, the ACU HREC must be notified of any reportable matters including, but not limited to, incidents, complaints and unexpected issues.

Researchers are also responsible for ensuring that they adhere to the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and the University's Research Code of Conduct.

Any queries relating to this application should be directed to the Ethics Secretariat (res.ethics@acu.edu.au). Please quote your ethics approval number in all communications with us.

We wish you every success with your research.

Kind regards,

Kylie Pashley

on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Assoc Prof. Michael Baker

Senior Research Ethics Officer | Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Australian Catholic University

T: +61 2 9739 2646 E: res.ethics@acu.edu.au

THIS IS AN AUTOMATICALLY GENERATED RESEARCHMASTER EMAIL

Appendix B

Participant Information Letter

PROJECT TITLE: Parent practices of co-play in a community playgroup
APPLICATION NUMBER: 2019-0923H
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Karen McLean
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Dr Celine PY Chu
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Master of Philosophy

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?
The research project investigates caregivers' practices of engagement with their children's play at a community playgroup. At community playgroups caregivers are responsible for facilitating their children's play. The aim of this project is to develop an understanding of how caregivers engage with their children's play at playgroup and how practices inform the provision of rich play experiences at playgroup.

Who is undertaking the project?
This project is being conducted by Dr Celine Chu and will form the basis for the degree of Master of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Dr Karen McLean.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?
If you experience any distress or embarrassment when being asked to reflect on your practices of engagement during the interviews, you will have the option not to provide this information.

What will I be asked to do?
Taking part in this project will involve:

- Allowing the researcher to observe the playgroup you attend over a four-week period (to be advised);
- Allowing the researcher to take photographs of you and your child playing together, which will only be used for discussions during the individual interviews with the researcher;
- Participating in a 10-minute individual interview with the researcher at the end of each playgroup session to share your views on how you have engaged with your child's play at the session;
- Allowing the researcher to audio-record the individual interview sessions

How much time will the project take?
The period of playgroup observation is for the two-hour duration of the playgroup for four-weeks only. Participation will also involve an interview with you at the end of each playgroup session, which will take approximately 10 minutes.

What are the benefits of the research project?
Caregivers will benefit from a raised awareness of their practices of engagement for enhancing caregiver-provided play activities for their children. Children will benefit from caregiver-provided play activities in the playgroup.

Can I withdraw from the study?
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences by contacting the Chief Investigator using the contact details provided below. If you withdraw from the study, all your data will be destroyed (i.e. audio recordings from the interviews will be deleted from all devices and any written documentation will be destroyed using confidential documents bins).

Will anyone else know the results of the project?
This research will be published in a thesis for the completion of a Master of Philosophy degree. It may also be published in journals and presented at conferences about early childhood education. Your confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms. This means that in publications arising from the research you will not be identifiable.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?
You can ask for a copy of all publications arising from the research. Please contact the Chief Investigator if you wish to receive these copies.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?
Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Dr Karen McLean via email at Karen.McLean@acu.edu.au or by phone at (03) 5336 5420

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?
The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number 2019-0923H). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au
Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?
If you wish to give consent to participate in this project, you should complete and sign both copies of the attached consent form and the attached child's assent form and return to Celine Chu or to your Playgroup Facilitator.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Karen McLean
Chief Investigator

Dr Celine PY Chu
Student Researcher

Appendix C

Consent Form

Copy for Researcher

TITLE OF PROJECT: Parent practices of co-play in a community playgroup

APPLICATION NUMBER: 2019-0923H

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR / SUPERVISOR: Dr Karen McLean

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Dr Celine PY Chu

I ..... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this research study which will involve:

- ☐ The researcher visiting and observing the playgroup each week for a four-week period;
- ☐ The researcher taking photographs of me and my child playing together, which will be used for discussions with me during the individual interviews;
- ☐ Participation in individual interviews with the researcher at the end of each playgroup session to share my views on how I have engaged with my child's play at the session;
- ☐ The researcher using an audio-recording device to record the interview sessions.

I understand that findings from this research will be published in a thesis for the completion of the Master of Philosophy degree and may be published in journals and presented at conferences about early childhood education.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

The pseudonym that I choose for myself to be used in this research is ……

The pseudonym that I choose for my child (under three years) to be used in this research is ……

If your child(ren) is three years of age or older, please use the child-friendly assent form for their assent to participate in this study.

I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences by contacting the Student Researcher, Dr Celine PY Chu, using the contact details provided on the information letter for this study or discussing my decision directly with the researcher. If I withdraw from the study all of my data will be destroyed (i.e. audio recordings from the interviews and photographs will be deleted from all devices and any written documentation will be destroyed using confidential document bins).

CHILD'S NAME: ……

YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHILD: ……..

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ……

SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:…… DATE: …….

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: …….. DATE:.....

Please return this form to Celine.Chu@acu.edu.au or to your Playgroup Facilitator.

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM
Copy for Participant to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT: Parent practices of co-play in a community playgroup

APPLICATION NUMBER: 2019-0923H

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS / SUPERVISORS: Dr Karen McLean

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Dr Celine PY Chu

I ..... (*the parent/guardian*) have read (*or, where appropriate*, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this research study which will involve:

- ☐ The researcher visiting and observing the playgroup each week for a four-week period;
- ☐ The researcher taking photographs of me and my child playing together, which will be used for discussions with me during the individual interviews;
- ☐ Participation in individual interviews with the researcher at the end of each playgroup session to share my views on how I have engaged with my child's play at the session;
- ☐ The researcher using an audio-recording device to record the interview sessions.

I understand that findings from this research will be published in a thesis for the completion of the Master of Philosophy degree and may be published in journals and presented at conferences about early childhood education.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

The pseudonym that I choose for myself to be used in this research is ……

The pseudonym that I choose for my child (under three years) to be used in this research is ……

If your child(ren) is three years of age or older, please use the child-friendly assent form for their assent to participate in this study.

I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences by contacting the Student Researcher, Dr Celine PY Chu, using the contact details provided on the information letter for this study or discussing my decision directly with the researcher. If I withdraw from the study all of my data will be destroyed (i.e. audio recordings from the interviews and photographs will be deleted from all devices and any written documentation will be destroyed using confidential document bins).

CHILD'S NAME: ……

YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHILD: ……..

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ……

SIGNATURE ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:……..DATE: ……..

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ……DATE:.....

Please return this form to Celine.Chu@acu.edu.au or to your Playgroup Facilitator.

Appendix D

Child Assent Form

Hi, name is Celine. I am a researcher, which means I like finding out about things. I would like you to help me do some research.

I would like to find out about what you and your family do when you come to playgroup.

Please answer “yes” or “no” by circling the “thumbs up” or the “thumbs down” under the statement.

Celine will visit my playgroup to watch my family, friends and me while we play at playgroup.

I will write about your playgroup in books and presentations. Which name would you like me to use when I write or talk about you? You can choose any name except your own.

……

YOUR FULL (REAL) NAME: ……

You can stop helping with the research at any time. Just tell an adult you want to stop.

Thank you

Appendix E

Data Analysis Table

RQ1: What are parents' practices of co-play in a community playgroup?
RQ2: What do parents say about enablers and constraints on their practices of co-play in the community playgroup?

Characteristics of Practices	**Data Extracts (from parent interview transcripts)**	**Practice Architectures**
Parent Guiding: Parent facilitates the child-directed play activities, but does not participate in the play.		
[OFN1 – Train tracks – Joey-Miles] <u>*Description of the play activity*</u> Joey provides access to the train set as a play opportunity. Then she engages in building the train tracks by herself. Miles walks around the room holding his trains, stopping at the table or kneeling on the floor to wheel his trains. *Sayings* When Miles approached the box and looks inside for trains, Joey comments "Looking for trains". She appears unsurprised by his act. *Doings* Joey facilitates this activity by engaging in a range of practices: *Providing play opportunity* - Provide access to toy trains.	 *Knowledge about child's interests* We like playing with the train set. *Toys at playgroup* & *Fun for parent* Of the toys that are kind of appropriate for his age range at playgroup, the train set is one I find the most fun.	<u>*Description of parent expression*</u> Joey spoke about the train set as a toy that they enjoy playing, that is age-appropriate for Miles, and fun for herself. She talked about how Miles played with his train set at home, as well as her understanding of her child's disposition as an independent child. *Cultural-discursive arrangement* Joey draws on her knowledge of Miles interest in toy trains when making the unsurprised comment to his action. This knowledge also served her as she chose to take out the train set, which she knew that Miles would enjoy. *Material-economic arrangement* Joey says that of the toys at playgroup, the train set is appropriate for Miles' age and is one that she enjoys.

Positioning herself - She sits on the floor next to the storage box of trains and contentedly builds the train tracks by herself *Observing play* - watching Miles as he walks about the room holding his trains, stopping at the table or kneeling on the floor to wheel his trains. *Relatings* Joey takes out the box of trains to provide Miles a play opportunity. Miles takes the trains and goes off to play with them, while Joey builds the train tracks.	*Connection to previous play at home* He is still figuring out train sets. We've got one at home now and mostly he likes to break the tracks apart. Sometimes he'll watch the trains go round. Sometimes he'll push the trains around. But he's more disruptive than constructive at the moment. *Connection to previous play (general observation)* He is a pretty independent child so he just tends to go find something to play with. If it's something that I can join in then brilliant.	It became more apparent - Joey's sitting down with the toys and building the train tracks on her own while watching Miles' play when she spoke about how he usually plays with his trains at home and how he is "more disruptive than constructive". *Social-political arrangement* This facilitative relationship of Joey "parallel playing" with Miles depended on her knowledge of Miles as "a pretty independent child", who "tends to go find something to play with".
[OFN3 – Small toy vehicles – Joey-Miles] *Description of the play activity* Joey guides play by giving instructions to extend Miles' play. Her attempt to show Miles how to connect two vehicles together is resisted by Miles, who immediately takes them apart. Joey leaves it and watches him play. *Sayings* Joey gives instructions "You can fix them together" and shows Miles that the two vehicles can connect together. She says "Oh everytime" when he immediately takes them apart and rolls the truck on the table. *Doings* Joey is trying to extend Miles' play with the small vehicles by showing him how he can connect two vehicles together. She lets him be	*Comment about child's likes* He likes to take everything apart, rather than construct things. *Connection to play at home* He does the same with the train tracks at home.	*Cultural-discursive arrangement* Joey's instructions were based on her understanding of how Miles tended to play with toy vehicles/trains "destructively -taking things apart" rather than "constructively", which is the way that she prefers and is trying to show Miles. *Material-economic arrangement* The activity is enabled by the availability of the small vehicles for play at the playgroup. Joey comments about how Miles plays with the

when he insists on taking the vehicles apart and rolling it on the table.		vehicles in the same way that he does with the trains at home (destructively).
[OFN4 – Ride on car – Joey-Miles] <u>*Description of the play activity*</u> Joey guides play by standing near Felix as he gets on the red Tikes car. She then gives instructions for him to move his car forwards and backwards. *Sayings* Watching Miles in the car, Joey gives instructions "Go backwards, go forwards" *Doings* Joey facilitates this activity by observing Miles climb into the car by himself, without aiding him. *Relatings* This relationship is one where Joey does not provide physical support to Felix. She relied on observation and giving verbal instructions as ways of guiding his play.	*Comment on child's development* This is all new. *Comment on child's further development* That [*the propelling*] he needs help. It's better for him to learn this so he can propel himself which the red car is quite hard even for the older children it's difficult to push themselves along. *Knowledge of child's likes* He loves wheels, of any descriptions. He likes being pushed around in those vehicles. *Comment about parent's role* It's hard to find the balance between us doing everything for them and giving them the chance to play on their own.	<u>*Description of parent's expression*</u> Joey talks about her observations of Miles' development with the ride-on-car. *Cultural-discursive arrangement* Joey's instructions followed from her observation of Miles' new ability to climb in and out of the car unaided. Following on, she gave instructions based on the idea that he should now learn to self-propel and that the red car was particularly difficult to self-propel himself in. *Material-economic arrangement* The activity was largely enabled by the red car at the playgroup. Joey talks about it as a toy that Miles likes. *Social-political arrangement* Joey's belief about finding "the balance" explained why she stood back to allow Miles to "play on their own".

[OFN1 – Water table – Toby-Felix, Joey-Miles] <u>*Description of the play activity*</u> Toby and Joey guide play by filling in water and setting up the water table as a play opportunity. They watch as Felix and Miles play at the water table, with Toby stepping in at times to squirt water to Felix's hand. *Doings* Toby and Joey set up the water table. They stand away and watch Felix and Miles playing at the water table. Toby would at times pick up the bath toy and squirt water to Felix's hand.	 *Toys at playgroup* & *Connection to previous play at playgroup* The first time we did it was just because it was out and everything was there. We thought it would be fun. Then we played with it quite regularly for a while at the beginning of summer. *Fun for child* & *Promotes child development* I think it is lots of fun to splash around at any age. It is good to build more confidence around water before Felix is big enough to swim.	 <u>*Description of parent's expression*</u> Toby talks about the water table and water play. *Material-economic arrangement* The availability of the water table at the playgroup was what prompted Toby to set it up for water play. They enjoyed it and played with it regularly. He thinks that water play is fun for the child and that it promotes confidence, which helps in learning to swim.
[OFN3 – Eating blueberries – Laura-Hugo] <u>*Description of the play activity*</u> Laura prepares for Hugo to eat the blueberries. She puts the container of blueberries on a medium-height stool so that Hugo has to pull himself up to a standing position to reach the blueberries. *Doings* Laura, who is sitting on the floor beside her child, takes out a container of berries and puts it on a stool (Hugo then pulls himself up and leans on the stool while eating the berries).	 *Making connection to home* I would usually put blueberries around the low coffee table and he will hold on to cruise around the coffee table and picks each blueberry to eat.	 <u>*Description of parent's expression*</u> Laura talks about how she is encouraging Hugo to walk at home. *Material-economic arrangement* The use of the stool at playgroup enables Laura to replicate what she does at home ("the low coffee table") to encourage Hugo to stand/walk.

Relatings Laura sets up the activity in a way that she feels helps to promote Hugo's development of walking.	*Knowledge about child's development* I'm currently encouraging Hugo to walk. At home, he cruises between pieces of furniture.	*Social-political arrangement* This was enabled by Laura's knowledge of her child's current stage of development.
[OFN5 – Picnic play – Fred-Chloe] *Description of the play activity* Fred communicates with Chloe in French so I could not understand what was mostly communicated between them. This activity begins with Mia picking up food pieces and bringing them to Alex. Chloe also begins to pick up food pieces and pretends to eat them. *Sayings* Giving instructions in French to guide child in finding the right shaped pieces. *Doings* Fred sits down on the ground, picks up toy food pieces and hands them to Chloe. He speaks to Chloe in French, it seems he is giving instructions to Chloe to find the shaped food items to fit into the toy shape-sorter picnic basket.	*Comment about child's ability* I tried the shapes and she doesn't actually get it like where to put the circle, the triangle. *Connection to play outside home and playgroup* We mostly do it when we go to the museum at the exhibition area where you can put the shapes. So very often I will do this when I go to the museum. *Connection to play and toys at home* Actually not really. Not really cooking because we don't have it at home. She has got her toys in an area. But frankly she doesn't play that much actually, she relies on me a lot. Like I am trying to help her draw but I end up doing it. I get her some play dough but I end up having to do the pieces. Yeah most of the time she isn't interested. She relies on me for entertainment.	*Cultural-discursive arrangement* Alex gave instructions to help Chloe to sort the food shapes because of his knowledge of Chloe's inability to identify shapes based on his observation of her previous play with shapes at the museum. *Material-economic arrangement* Fred and Chloe were engaged in the activity involving toy food pieces. He shares that the lack of such toy food at home meant that they didn't usually engage in pretend cooking play. He also spoke about how their play at home was somewhat constrained by her relying on him a lot, which meant that he ended up doing most of

		the activities. All these suggested that Chloe's play at home was constrained in some ways.
Relatings Fred guides Chloe in the shape-sorter activity. Overall he rarely engages in co-playing with Chloe at the playgroup.	*Parent's view on guiding child's development* But it's up to her, it's not like I want to know she has to reach some developmental stage. But also if I can make her learn something then that's what I want. *Parent's role at playgroup* At playgroup I just let her do her things. The idea is to let her interact with other kids. If I see she is by herself I will try to push her to other kids. I just have to make sure she doesn't hurt anyone because she is becoming quite big and a bit of a bully. She can be quite rough so I always keep an eye on her.	*Social-political arrangement* However, Fred spoke about how he preferred to leave Chloe to develop at her own pace but that he is happy to provide her support if needed. Furthermore, he specifically mentioned that he preferred to leave her to play on her own or with other kids at playgroup, with his role to ensure that she doesn't hurt other children. This helped explain why he was often observed not to be co-playing with Chloe at playgroup.
Parent Participating: Parent joins in child's play by accepting child's request to play or initiating play activity, by building a connection to the play or demonstrating ongoing co-participation in the play.		
[OFN1 – Padded blocks – Alex-Mia] <u>*Description of the play activity*</u> Alex actively participates in Mia's play with the padded building blocks. He initiates the activity, builds up a play connection, and maintains ongoing participation. *Sayings* Alex asks questions, gives instructions, and gives praise to Mia, all as a form of creating the play connection with Mia.	*Knowledge of child's ability* & *Parent role* Especially some of these things where it's a bit more guided, like say the building blocks because otherwise if you just give it to her she may not necessarily know what to do. Whereas if we put it around her and say we're building	*Cultural-discursive arrangement* Alex draws on the idea that Mia may not be able to play meaningfully with the padded blocks without his guidance. He sees his guidance as being able to make it more fun for child.

	something, we ask her what will we try to build and then it becomes a bit more fun for her.	
Doings Alex initiates the soft padded blocks activity. They take turns to stack up the blocks, repeating the actions several times, and laugh whenever the block tower falls down.	*Comment about toys* We have some small wooden building blocks at home but not these big padded ones. So that's what makes it different here… Which is why I thought this padded blocks is more fun for her because when they stack up they are much taller than she is. *Connection to play at home* & *Knowledge about child's likes* It's fun because she likes to knock down the buildings afterwards. We have the small wooden ones at home where we try to build models of things. So there's not as much knocking it down. We just build things together. Maybe I do end up doing most of the building but she likes to just stack up blocks to make it tall.	*Material-economic arrangement* Alex compares the padded blocks at playgroup to the wooden blocks at home. The padded blocks at playgroup enable Mia to build it up tall and to knock them down, both of which she likes to do.
Relatings Alex participates in Mia's play by responding to her request to play, initiating the padded block activity, creating a play connection, and maintaining the ongoing participation by taking turns to stack up the blocks. They seem to enjoy their play together.	*Comment about parent role* I try to be as interactive as I can because that's just part of playing. To give her a bit of experience I suppose. Especially some of these things where it's a bit more guided, like say the building blocks because otherwise if you just give it to her she may not necessarily know what to do. Whereas if we put it around her and say we're building something, we ask her what will we try to build and then it becomes a bit more fun for her.	*Social-political arrangement* This relationship is enabled by Alex's awareness of his role as an active participant of the play. He values his role in engaging Mia in more meaningful play (e.g. promote imaginary play – "if we put it around her and say we're building something"), which results in more fun for her and it being more meaningful ("to give her a bit of experience").

[OFN4 – Lawn mower toy – Alex-Mia] *Description of the play activity* Alex responds to Mia's request to play with the lawn mower push-along toy. He participates in the play by engaging Mia to imagine that they are using the toy to mow the lawn. He also talked about the parts of the lawn mower. Both Mia and Alex pretended that they were mowing the lawn. When another child is attracted to the same toy, Alex asks if Mia wanted to share it. *Sayings* Alex used speech to build a play connection with Mia by informing her that they are going to mow the lawn with the push-along toy. Mia begins to point to and asks about the parts of the mower, in which Alex responds by providing brief explanations "For pouring in the petrol", "To adjust for high or low". *Doings* Alex participates in this play by engaging in a range of practices: *Signalling participation* - Alex responds to Mia's request to play and signals his participation by following her as she pushes the lawn mower around. *Create play connection* – Alex engages Mia in imaginary play by announcing that they are going to mow the lawn as well as pretending to	*Providing play as an experience* Otherwise she'll never really get to experience it, like to teach her what the different parts of the lawn mower are and how it works and what it does like where you pour things. *Connection to previous play* It's [*Pretend play*] the main ways we play. *Comment on toys* The toys are just toys so we sort of have to use our imagination to make it something enjoyable for us. *Toys at playgroup* Also because some of the toys here are for younger children so to make it interesting for her I try to make it educational for her.	*Cultural-discursive arrangement* Alex used speech to create a pretend play scenario of using the lawn mower toy to mow the lawn. The practice was based on the idea of providing play as a way to experience real-life activity. With this, he also began to use some discourse associated with a lawn mower. Further, it was also based on the idea that they usually engaged in pretend play. *Material-economic arrangement* Alex spoke about the importance of applying imagination on toys to make it more enjoyable because toys are just toys. Alex commented that the toys at playgroup were for younger children so he values his role in making it more interesting for her.

turn on the machine. This raises Mia's curiosity of the other parts of the mower so she begins to ask about them. *Demonstrate ongoing participation* – Alex and Mia demonstrate a shared understanding of their play actions, with Mia happily pushing the mower and Alex makes the sound of mower "Vroom vroom". His praise for Mia further demonstrates his approval towards Mia that she shares his understanding of their play connection. *Relatings* Alex actively participates in Mia's play by signalling his participation, creating a play connection, and demonstrating ongoing participation.	*Parent's role* I don't go out on purpose to do that, I think that's just how it comes about. Otherwise she'll just push the mower for a minute and that's it.	*Social-political arrangement* As well as what was presented above under material-economic arrangement, his view on the importance of his role in using the toys more meaningfully with Mia helped explain his active participatory role in the play.
[OFN4 – Toy food – Alex-Mia] *Description of the play activity* Alex responds to Mia's request for the Toy Food box by bringing it down for her. When Mia begins to offer him food pieces from the box, he responds to her offer by requesting for it to be cooked using an imaginary kitchen. Mia obliges and continues to serve her father food, which Alex responds by receiving and pretending to eat. *Sayings* Alex used speech to request for Mia to cook his capsicum piece with an imaginary kitchen, and to continue participation in receiving and	*Comment on child's development* So I like to encourage that, let her do some cooking and serve food because it's quite a caring behaviour, constructive I suppose.	*Cultural-discursive arrangement* Alex's request and suggestion to Mia aimed to engage her in the act of pretending to cook and serving the food. The motivation behind his

eating the food as indicated in his acknowledgement of the food "Thanks, yum yum". *Doings* Alex participates in this play by engaging in a range of practices: *Signalling participation* – When Mia brings him food pieces, he signals participation by requesting her to cook the food. *Create play connection* – Alex suggests to Mia that she can pretend to cook the food pieces with an imaginary kitchen. This proposition is received by Mia, who then continues to offer him cooked food. *Demonstrate ongoing co-participation* – Mia continues to serve him cooked food, of which Alex receives and pretends to eat. *Relating* Alex participates in Mia's play by responding to her action of serving him food, creating a play connection, and they finally demonstrate ongoing participation by serving and receiving the food.	 *Connection to play and toys at home* This is something she likes to do at home. She has a little kitchen at home and lots of little toy foods. And she loves preparing food and feeding it. *Parent's role* It's easy for me because I just sit there and get given food.	practice was apparent when he spoke about how he saw those play practices as displays of "a caring behaviour" that he felt should be encouraged. *Material-economic arrangement* This activity was enabled by the toy food pieces available at the playgroup and the child's familiarity with the play actions of cooking and serving food. Alex shared that Mia was familiar with this because she has lots of toy food items at home and that she enjoys pretend cooking and serving food at home. *Social-political arrangement* On top of the child's familiarity with the play of cooking and serving food, this relationship was also encouraged by the father because he found it an easy role for him to perform - "I just sit there and get given food".
[OFN4 – Hide and seek – Toby-Jo-Felix] *Description of the play activity* Toby and Jo both participate in play with Felix. Jo hides under a black cloth and Felix seeks his mother.		

Sayings Toby provides guidance to Felix by prompting him with the question "Where is mummy?" *Doings* Toby and Jo both participate in the play by engaging in a range of practices: *Signalling of play* – Toby and Jo both sit down with Felix and the Dress Up box. Jo hides under a black cloth, signalling Felix to engage in seeking her. *Create play connection* – Toby guides Felix by prompting him to search for his mother, "Where is mummy?". *Demonstrate ongoing co-participation* – Felix pulls the cloth off Jo's head and appears very amused as he laughs and climbs over his mother, pinning her down on the floor. *Relatings* Both Toby and Jo took on different roles in the play. While Jo hides, Toby guides Felix so that he understands how to play.	*Knowledge of child's development* They work really well because he is still at that age where he doesn't understand where things go when he can't see them. *Connection to play at home* We do do that a lot at home actually, hide and seek, peekaboo and all those kinds of things. *Fun for child* There's the sense of surprise so we do a lot of that especially when he needs calming down. *Parent's role at playgroup* When I bring him to playgroup I tend to be a little less hands-on unless he really wants to play with me. Because one of the reasons for me to bring him to playgroup is to let him play with other kids. So that's where I try to stand back and see what he wants to do…It's only in playgroups, this one time where he's around other kids.	*Cultural-discursive arrangement* Toby guides Felix by asking him "Where is mummy?" because of his knowledge that Felix "doesn't understand where things go when he can't see them". *Material-economic arrangement* They engaged in a hide and seek activity, of which they also tended to play at home because Toby believes it is fun for Felix at his age. *Social-political arrangement* Toby spoke about how he co-plays quite differently at home and at playgroup. At playgroup he tries to stand back and values the opportunity for Felix to interact with other children at playgroup.

[OFN5 – Outdoor play – Noni-Zoe] <u>*Description of the play activity*</u> This play project consists of brief instances of Noni's participation in Zoe's play. They are kept brief due to Zoe's behaviours, which prompted Noni to have to respond to the issues. This also demonstrates the fluid nature of play at playgroup where many things can happen and parents often have to respond to their child's many needs, not just play. *Sayings* There are three instances of Noni's speech. Firstly, Noni responds positively to Zoe's initiation of play where she hid behind her mother and cuddled her. But before Noni can re-initiate the play, Zoe is distracted by a doll that another child is playing with. Noni responds by talking to Zoe about sharing. Finally, she asks if Zoe wants to play on the slide, which Zoe accepts the invitation. *Doings* Noni engages with Zoe through the practices of responding to her behaviours and highlighting positive behaviour. *Relatings* I argue that Noni tries to actively participate in Zoe's play because she would respond to Zoe's behaviours in each of the brief instances.	*Connection to other play context (childcare)* She also goes to childcare two days a week. She has been going to childcare since she was 8 months old. So I don't think she needs further encouragement to make social interaction. I don't think playgroup is the only think that she does. So I don't really worry about it. *Child's disposition at playgroup* She is very clingy. Because we don't go to playgroups regularly so usually when we go to playgroup she is quite clingy *Connection to previous play at playgroup* So I find that she is around me anyway, like as in physically around me. She wants to be near me. So she usually plays with me, like not doing any independent play with other kids.	<u>*Description of parent's expression*</u> Noni's whole talk is largely related to the social-political arrangement, which explains the co-play relationship between the mother and child. They can also be used to relate to Noni's sayings and doings. *Cultural-discursive arrangements* Noni shares that because Zoe also goes to childcare, hence, she wasn't concerned that she wasn't getting social interaction. This could explain why she doesn't actively encourage Zoe to engage with other kids, but instead actively plays with her. *Material-economic arrangement* Noni spoke about the playgroup, and how Zoe's infrequent visits to the playgroup caused her to be clingy towards her mother when at playgroup. *Social-political arrangement* Apart from the above, Noni acknowledged how Zoe wants to be near her and plays with her, which is the way their co-play relationship is at playgroup.

[OFN5 – Doll – Noni-Zoe] *Description of the play activity* Noni is actively trying to initiate play with Zoe, but Zoe does not show much interest in reciprocating the play. Shortly after this, Noni brought Zoe home.		
Sayings Noni's sayings are all aimed at establishing a play connection with Zoe. First, she uses the doll to respond to Zoe's request for breastfeeding, "No baby, no milk". Then she uses the doll again to model an appropriate behaviour, "Give the doll a kiss". Lastly, she used the doll to highlight the concepts of body. parts, "Show me where the baby's nose is", "Where is the baby's mouth?".	*Comment about child's development* Because she has only just learnt about body parts so I just keep telling that to her. She gets them wrong, like she knows the words but she's like mouth is the hair.	*Cultural-discursive arrangement* Noni mentioned the body parts of the doll in order to reinforce Zoe's learning about body parts.
Doings Noni uses the doll to initiate play with Zoe, to distract her from wanting to be breastfed, and to highlight the body parts concepts.	*Comment on using toys to highlight body parts* I was using the doll to reinforce body parts. *Comment about child's interest* Also because she is very interested in babies so she would look at a small child and say baby baby. *Comment on child's likes* p& *Toys at playgroup* She really likes small toys. So I find at playgroups they don't have small things because it's not safe.	*Material-economic arrangement* Noni used the doll at playgroup in the way that reinforced what Zoe was learning about body parts, and in response to Zoe's interest in babies. Hence, the doll enabled those practices. However, she spoke about how Zoe's play at playgroup was constrained by the lack of small toys that Zoe likes. She shared the things they play with at home such as buttons, bobby pins

	Connection to play at home Like at home we have buttons, we have lots of small little buttons. I mean it's not safe but she's not interested in eating them. She's interested in looking at them, taking them out of the box, putting them in a bowl. That's the things she likes. She'll play with my bobby pins, my rubber bands.	and rubber bands, all of which would not be deemed safe at playgroup.
Relatings Noni actively tries to initiate play with Zoe using the doll, but Zoe does not show much interest in reciprocating the play.	*Parent co-playing at home* We'll put them from one bowl to another, put them in boxes. We play hide and seek with them.	*Social-political arrangement* Noni shared how they would play with the small items together at home. Although these were not available at the playgroup, Noni was still actively trying to engage Zoe in playing with the doll by drawing on knowledge of Zoe's likes and interests.

Appendix F

List of Co-Play Practices Figure