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PhD Thesis

**Play and community playgroups : Caregiver motives and early
childhood societal values**

Thomas, Melanie Joy

Thomas, M. J. (2021). Play and community playgroups : Caregiver motives and early
childhood societal values [PhD Thesis]. Australian Catholic University
Institute. <https://doi.org/10.26199/acu.8xyy8>

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Play and Community Playgroups: Caregiver Motives and Early Childhood Societal Values

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A Thesis Submitted in the Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education
Australian Catholic University

Melbourne, Australia

November 2021

Abstract

This thesis investigates how the institution of playgroup is co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup. Playgroups provide an informal place for children and their caregivers to come together and engage in a range of play activities. Participation in playgroup has been identified as one way of increasing children's access to play-based learning experiences in early childhood as play is the primary activity provided to children at playgroup and caregivers attend with their children. Despite an increase in interest in both early childhood and play, little is known about caregivers' experiences of community playgroup.

The qualitative research of this thesis is situated within cultural-historical theory, specifically drawing on the work of Hedegaard (2009) to understand caregivers' perspectives of their motives for and societal values about play and the institution of playgroup. Hedegaard (2009) contends that both the values from society and an individual's motives influence a person's participation within the institutions that they engage in. Caregiver motives and societal values are investigated in the research in relation to a caregiver's participation within the institutions of home and playgroup.

A mosaic approach (Clark, 2010a) was used in this research to gain insight into the institution of playgroup with the participating caregivers. A mosaic approach involves multiple methods of data collection, is participatory research and engages the participant and the researcher in reflection on meanings. The multiple data collection methods undertaken in this research included caregiver photographic documentation, researcher autoethnography, semi-structured interviews, a co-constructed play map, play map interviews and a researcher reflective journal. The research involved seven participants from two community playgroups in Melbourne, Australia.

The findings of the research showed that the institution of playgroup is co-constituted by societal values and caregiver motives. The research found that while the core of community playgroup from an institutional perspective recognises outdoors, socialisation and inclusivity, community playgroups are also idiosyncratic and adaptable. This finding reflects both the shared societal values for early childhood as well as the unique individual motives of the caregivers that attend playgroup. These findings provide new insights into understandings of community playgroup and offer opportunity to further explore the provision of community playgroup to caregivers and their children.

Keywords: Community playgroup, Mosaic approach, early childhood, play, children, caregivers, cultural-historical theory.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Figures.....	viii
List of Tables.....	xi
List of Abbreviations.....	xi
Statement of original authorship.....	xii
Publications Produced During Candidature	xiii
Acknowledgements.....	xiv
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Context of the Study.....	1
Play	1
Playgroup	2
Research Question and Scope	3
Significance of the study.....	3
Personal Orientation to the Research	4
Outline of the Thesis	5
Chapter 2. Literature Review.....	8
The Literature Search Process	8
Play Literature	9
Theories of Play and Learning	9
Piaget's Theory of Play	12
Vygotsky's Theory of Play.....	13
The Influence of Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Play	14
Defining Play.....	15
Play in a Cultural Context	17
Summary	23
Playgroup	23
What is Playgroup?	24
International Playgroup Literature.....	25
Benefits to Children Through Playgroup Participation	26
<i>Enhanced Development Across All Developmental Domains.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Social Engagement With Others.....</i>	<i>28</i>
Benefits to Caregivers Through Playgroup Participation	29
<i>Friendships.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Support</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Sense of Community</i>	<i>33</i>

Benefits to the Community of Playgroup Participation	34
Caregivers Learning About Play Through Playgroup	35
Playgroup and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families	36
Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in playgroup	38
Summary	40
Caregivers' Perspectives of Play Literature.....	41
The Value (or not) of Play.....	41
Structured, Academic Learning and Unstructured, Play-Based Learning	42
Cultural Perspectives of Play	44
Caregivers Perspectives of What Constitutes Play.....	46
Summary	47
Conclusion.....	47
Chapter 3. Theory	49
An Overview of Vygotsky's Theoretical Framework	49
Mediation	50
Social Situation	51
Crisis	52
Vygotsky's Influence on Theoretical Perspectives	53
Hedegaard's Cultural-Historical Theory.....	54
Social Situations	56
Society, Institution, and Individual Perspectives	58
<i>Societal Perspective</i>	61
<i>Institutional Perspective</i>	62
<i>Individual Perspective</i>	65
Using Hedegaard's Model in This Research	65
Activity Settings.....	66
Everyday Practices.....	68
Motives.....	68
Values	70
Conclusion.....	70
Chapter 4. Methodology	71
Qualitative Research	71
Social Constructivist Paradigm	72
Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology and Methodology.....	73
<i>Relativist Ontology</i>	75
<i>Subjectivist Epistemology</i>	75
Axiology	76
<i>Naturalistic Methodology</i>	76

Paradigm Summary	77
Case Study Research Design.....	78
Sampling and Participants.....	79
Purposive Sampling	80
Sample Size.....	82
Data Generation	83
Data Methods.....	86
A Mosaic Approach	86
Phase 1A – Caregiver Photographic Documentation	88
Phase 1B – Autoethnography.....	90
Phase 2 – Semi-Structured Interview.....	92
Phase 3 – Co-Constructed Play Map	94
Researcher Reflective Journal	97
Data Analysis	99
Inductive Coding.....	99
Deductive Coding	103
Combined Inductive and Deductive Analysis	103
Ethical Considerations	105
Ethical Issues in Participatory Photography.....	106
Researcher Risk Assessment	107
Limitations.....	107
Conclusion.....	108
Chapter 5. Findings	110
The Conceptualisation of Motives and Values in This Research	110
An Overview of Tenby Playgroup.....	112
An Overview of Warrington Playgroup.....	114
Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and/or at Playgroup	116
Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and Motives at Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup	116
<i>Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home Held in Common by Each Playgroup.....</i>	116
<i>Caregiver Motives at Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup.....</i>	125
<i>Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and/or Motives at Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup.....</i>	128
Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and Caregiver Motives at Playgroup That Were Different Between Each Playgroup	137
<i>Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and Motives at Playgroup That Were Different for Each Playgroup.....</i>	138
<i>Caregiver Motives at Playgroup That Were Different for Each Playgroup</i>	150
Educator Societal Early Childhood Values for Playgroup	152

Play-Based Learning	153
Open-Ended Activities	158
Agency and Self-Help	163
Inclusive of Children With Additional Needs	166
Inclusive of Indigenous Culture	167
Music	168
Shared Caregiver Motives and Educator Societal Values for Activities at Home and/or at Playgroup	
169	
Shared Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home, Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Educator Societal Values for Playgroup That Were Different Between Each Playgroup	170
<i>Reading Books</i>	170
Shared Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Educator Societal Values for Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup	178
<i>Socialisation</i>	179
Cultural Inclusivity	184
Shared Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home, Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Educator Societal Values for Playgroup	187
<i>Outdoors</i>	188
Conclusion	204
Chapter 6. Discussion	206
What Co-Constitutes the Institution of Playgroup?	207
How Else is the Institution of Community Playgroup Constituted?	213
Socialisation	213
Cultural Inclusivity	218
Reading Books	220
Summary	223
Motives and Values That are not Co-Constituted in the Institution of Playgroup	224
Digital Media	224
Volunteering	225
Grandparents	226
Agency and Self-Help	226
Music	227
Play and Learning	228
Summary	232
Understanding Community Playgroups	234
Conclusion	237
Chapter 7. Conclusion	239
Aims and Rationale of the Thesis	239
How the Investigation was Carried out	241

Overview of the Findings	243
Significance of the Research	244
Contribution to Knowledge: Methodological Approach	244
Contribution to Knowledge: New Understandings of Community Playgroup	246
Limitations of the Study.....	248
Further Questions Arising From the Study	249
A Personal Perspective	250
Conclusion.....	252
References	254
Appendices	278
Appendix 1. Ethics Approval.....	278
Appendix 2. Explanatory Information Letter	279
Appendix 3. Modified Explanatory Letter for Participants With Limited English Literacy Skills	282
Appendix 4. Consent Form	284
Appendix 5. Child Assent Form	286
Appendix 6. Image Taking Guidelines	287
Appendix 7. Instructions for Using Edmodo™.....	288
Appendix 8. Co-constructed Play Maps	297
Appendix 9. Letter of Agreement to Participate - Tenby Playgroup.....	304
Appendix 10. Letter of Agreement to Participate - Warrington Playgroup	304
Appendix 11. Semi-Structured Interview Questions.....	305

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Vygotsky’s tool-mediated triangle.....	51
<i>Figure 2.</i> Hedegaard’s “model of children’s activity settings in different institutions”	59
<i>Figure 3.</i> Hedegaard’s model for the purposes of this research.....	61
<i>Figure 4.</i> Participants of the research from each playgroup.....	83
<i>Figure 5.</i> Phases of the data generation.....	85
<i>Figure 6.</i> Examples of text and corresponding images derived from the autoethnography.....	92
<i>Figure 7.</i> Co-created play map.....	96
<i>Figure 8.</i> Initial inductively derived themes identified within the data.....	101
<i>Figure 9.</i> NVivo codes for the caregiver data.....	102
<i>Figure 10.</i> NVivo codes for researcher data.....	103
<i>Figure 11.</i> Participant folders set up in NVivo.....	104
<i>Figure 12.</i> The interrelationship between findings.....	112
<i>Figure 13.</i> Caregiver motives held in common for activities at home.....	117
<i>Figure 14.</i> Farsana. Tenby playgroup. Using the iPad at home.....	119
<i>Figure 15.</i> Jess. Tenby playgroup. Watching the television at home.....	120
<i>Figure 16.</i> Jess. Tenby playgroup. Playing on the phone at home.....	120
<i>Figure 17.</i> Kiby. Tenby playgroup. Using the tablet at home.....	121
<i>Figure 18.</i> Super Nan. Warrington playgroup. Watching Television at Super Nan’s house.....	122
<i>Figure 19.</i> Madison. Warrington playgroup. Watching Television at home.....	124
<i>Figure 20.</i> Madison. Warrington playgroup. Using the toy laptop at home.....	124
<i>Figure 21.</i> Caregiver motives at playgroup held in common by each playgroup.	126
<i>Figure 22.</i> Caregiver motives for activities at home and/or motives at playgroup held in common by each playgroup.	129
<i>Figure 23.</i> Kiby. Tenby playgroup. Carrying the Bible book at home.....	131
<i>Figure 24.</i> Wanda. Tenby playgroup. Colouring in at home.....	134
<i>Figure 25.</i> Wanda. Tenby playgroup. Colouring in at playgroup.....	135
<i>Figure 26.</i> Jess. Tenby playgroup. Painting-by-numbers at home.....	135
<i>Figure 27.</i> Madison. Warrington playgroup. Drawing at playgroup.....	137
<i>Figure 28.</i> Caregiver motives for activities at home and motives at playgroup that were different for each playgroup.	138
<i>Figure 29.</i> Farsana. Tenby playgroup. Sitting at the table with magnetic blocks at home.....	141

Figure 30. Kiby. Tenby playgroup. At the library.....	142
Figure 31. Wanda. Tenby playgroup. Rolling playdough at playgroup.....	144
Figure 32. Kiby. Tenby playgroup. Playing with cars on the track at home.....	144
Figure 33. Farsana. Tenby playgroup. Sitting on the floor playing with Duplo at home.....	145
Figure 34. Kiby. Tenby playgroup. Completing a worksheet matching shapes at playgroup.....	148
Figure 35. Farsana. Tenby playgroup. Sitting at the table completing worksheets at home.....	148
Figure 36. Farsana. Tenby playgroup. Sitting at the table completing worksheets at home.....	148
Figure 37. Motives at playgroup that were different for each playgroup.	151
Figure 38. Educator societal early childhood values for playgroup	153
Figure 39. Farsana. Tenby playgroup. Playing with the Transformer™ at home.....	157
Figure 40. Wanda. Tenby playgroup. Building a block tower at home.....	158
Figure 41. Sarah. Warrington playgroup. Sand in a tub at home.....	161
Figure 42. Sarah. Warrington playgroup. Kinetic sand at home.....	162
Figure 43. Madison. Warrington playgroup. Toy cars at home.....	162
Figure 44. Wanda. Tenby playgroup. Putting away the shopping at home.....	164
Figure 45. Wanda. Tenby playgroup. Stirring the cooking pot at home.....	165
Figure 46. Shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup that were different between each playgroup.....	170
Figure 47. Wanda. Tenby playgroup. Reading books at home.....	173
Figure 48. Farsana. Tenby playgroup. Reading books at home.....	174
Figure 49. Jess. Tenby playgroup. Reading books at home.....	175
Figure 50. Jess. Tenby playgroup. Reading books at home.....	175
Figure 51. Sarah. Warrington playgroup. Reading books at home.....	176
Figure 52. Shared caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup held in common between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup.	178
Figure 53. Shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup held in common between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup.....	188
Figure 54. Kiby. Tenby playgroup. On the slide at the park.....	191
Figure 55. Kiby. Tenby playgroup. Riding the trike outdoors at home.....	192
Figure 56. Super Nan. Warrington playgroup. On the swing in the backyard at home.....	194
Figure 57. Super Nan. Warrington playgroup. Having a picnic in the backyard at home.....	195
Figure 58. Super Nan. Warrington playgroup. Playing hide and seek in the backyard at home.....	195

<i>Figure 59.</i> Super Nan. Warrington playgroup. Building with blocks outside at home.....	196
<i>Figure 60.</i> Madison. Warrington playgroup. Climbing the stairs on the fort at the park.....	197
<i>Figure 61.</i> Madison. Warrington playgroup. Through the tunnel at the park.....	198
<i>Figure 62.</i> Sarah. Warrington playgroup. Using puppets in the cubby in the backyard at home.....	199
<i>Figure 63.</i> Sarah. Warrington playgroup. On the swings in the backyard at home.....	200
<i>Figure 64.</i> Sarah. Warrington playgroup. On the slide in the backyard at home.....	200
<i>Figure 65.</i> Sarah. Warrington playgroup. On the trampoline in the backyard at home.....	201
<i>Figure 66.</i> Super Nan. Warrington playgroup. Riding bikes outdoors at playgroup.....	203
<i>Figure 67.</i> Super Nan. Warrington playgroup. Pushing a doll in a pram outdoors at playgroup.....	204
<i>Figure 68.</i> The interrelationship between the caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and early childhood values for playgroup between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup.....	205
<i>Figure 69.</i> The co-construction of community playgroup is characterised by outdoors, socialisation and cultural inclusivity.....	207
<i>Figure 70.</i> The interrelationship between the caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and early childhood values for playgroup between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup.....	244

List of Tables

Table 1. Theoretical perspectives of constructionism related to my research.....	74
Table 2. Caregiver and researcher codes deductively applied to data in NVIVO.....	102
Table 3. Typical session routine for Tenby playgroup.....	113-114
Table 4. Typical session routine for Warrington playgroup.....	115

List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACECQA	Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CLO	Cultural Liaison Officer
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
ECA	Early Childhood Australia
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
HIPPY	Home Instruction for Parents and Preschool Youngsters
HREC	Human Rights Ethics Committee
LSAC	Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children
NQF	National Quality Framework
PEEP	Peers Early Education Partnership
TAFE	Technical and Further Education College
VEYLDF	Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Statement of original authorship

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award for 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 committee.

Signed:

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the author's signature.

Date: 20.11.2021

Publications Produced During Candidature

Conferences:

Thomas, M. (2019, December). Using a Mosaic approach to explore caregiver's perspectives of play and playgroup. Presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Brisbane, Australia: AARE.

Thomas, M. (2021, November). Using researcher autoethnography and a Mosaic approach to co-construct perspectives of play at community playgroup. Presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Online Conference: AARE.

Thomas, M. (2022, February). Caregivers' motives for play and learning at community playgroup. Presented at the Australasian Journal of Early Childhood Research Symposium, Online Conference: AJEC.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks and gratitude to my supervision team. To my principal supervisor Dr Karen McLean, thank you for your guidance, support, patience and belief in my work. Thank you for the meetings and countless hours of reading through and providing feedback of the many drafts of my work. In the challenging final 18 months of my candidature thank you for your support and guidance which took place mostly over Zoom.

To my co-supervisor Professor Susan Edwards, thank you for offering me the opportunity and believing in me. Who would have thought that those years ago when we met in the little office of my kindergarten, this is where I would be years later? It was you. Without your encouragement I would not be where I am today and for that I will be forever grateful.

My thanks to Dr Renata Cinelli, my associate supervisor who provided much support, feedback and encouragement throughout my journey. Thanks also to Dr Victoria Minson who joined my supervision team in my third year and provided feedback on many drafts. Thanks to Dr Joanne Tarasuik of Playgroup Victoria for your expertise and feedback.

To the participants in the study, I wish to give my thanks. To the two playgroups, the caregivers and their children, thank you for sharing your time and your experiences of community playgroup.

This research was supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. The funding I received through this scholarship provided me with the opportunity to undertake this research and I am grateful for this opportunity.

I began this PhD journey in 2018. In 2020 the COVID-19 global pandemic hit. The majority of my meetings and supervision moved to online meetings through Zoom in the remaining 18 months of my PhD. While grateful that I had completed my data collection at the playgroups it brought new challenges, however, with the assistance of an amazing and dedicated supervision team I was able to continue my work.

To my three children, Emily, Joshua and Matthew, my cheer squad. Thank you for your acceptance of a mum who was often working at her computer. It is my hope that I have instilled in you respect for and a love of lifelong learning, as well as hard work and determination. My little dog, Shelby, who kept me company and listened to my trials and successes along the way. My mum and dad, George and Andrea Thomas, who always taught me to reach for the stars, that education was important, and that I could do anything I set my mind to.

I dedicate this thesis to my beautiful mum, Andrea Thomas, who in May 2020 was diagnosed with stage 4 brain cancer. Mum, you were the leader of my cheer squad and my main supporter, nothing was too much for you and you always came to help me with my children when I needed it so that I could continue my work. I have watched you fight your illness over the last 18 months with strength. You inspire me every day. I am so pleased that you have seen me finish.



In loving memory of Andrea Thomas 17/10/1947 – 1/1/2022.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis is an investigation into the institution of playgroup. It considers the influence of the societal values and caregiver motives on families' participation in community playgroup in Melbourne, Australia. This chapter introduces the focus of the research and provides a contextual background to the study. A brief outline of each chapter is also included.

Context of the Study

Play

The role of play in children's growth, learning and development has been studied in detail from as early as the eighteenth century (Bergen, 2014; Hedges, 2014; Saracho & Evans, 2021b). Play is seen as a right for a child with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1990) recognizing children's rights to play. Similarly, the national curriculum document, the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009), identifies play as an important component of the Australian early childhood curriculum, describing play-based learning as "a context for learning through which children organize and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 6). The value of play-based learning has been well researched and documented within Western-European cultures (Gaskins, 2014; Nolan & Paatsch, 2018; Rogers, 2015a), including Australia, with parents from these cultures more likely to embrace play as an important component of children's development (Roopnarine, 2011). In Western-European cultures play has long been seen as an inherent part of early childhood, however this may not be true for all families (Brooker, 2018).

The cultural context of caregivers and their children, such as shared understandings, values and beliefs that shape a person's understanding of the world (Reid et al., 2019), may provide variations in understandings of play held by caregivers attending community playgroup. In this research the term 'caregivers' is used to describe the adults that attend playgroup with their children. This may include parents, carers, kinship members and other adults in children's lives. Rentzou et al. (2019) suggests that conceptualisations of play may be linked to values about childhood and the status of play, held by caregivers which may vary across cultures. These variations in the conceptualisations of play may inform the provision of play by caregivers in settings such as at home and when participating in community playgroup. The Western-European position of play as a context for learning is often accepted as a universal norm, however this view

may be in contrast with the diverse cultural practices and beliefs held by some cultures (Roopnarine, 2011).

Research shows that in some cultures children have less opportunities to play (Brooker, 2018; Gaskins, 2014). Children may participate in adult work, assisting in some of the tasks that need to be undertaken within the home. In these cultures children may learn through participating in the daily family tasks while play is given less emphasis (Brooker, 2005; Brooker, 2018; Gaskins, 2014; Ng'asike, 2014; Roopnarine, 2011). In many Western-European cultures caregiver participation in children's play is encouraged and valued, while in other cultures play is considered to be an activity specifically for children (Brooker, 2005; Gaskins, 2014; Roopnarine, 2011). For example, research undertaken by Brooker (2005) found that children from Bangladeshi families often spent their time at home observing and helping in the family daily routines. When the Bangladeshi mothers were asked about their 4-year-olds' favourite toys and pastimes they did not see the relevance in the question. Mothers in the European families in this study "cherished their children's very 'childishness': their children had a time, a space and a life-style of their own, and were expected to behave in child-specific ways" (Brooker, 2005, p. 121). This research suggests that value placed on play may be culturally situated.

Playgroup

Playgroups began in Australia in the 1970s as an option for caregivers interested in extending their social supports and providing opportunities for play for their children (Townley, 2018). Research has suggested many benefits of playgroup participation including benefits to children (Needham & Jackson, 2012; Williams et al., 2016), caregivers (Deadman & McKenzie, 2020; Jackson, 2011; New et al., 2015) and the community (Gibson et al., 2015; Keam et al., 2018). Playgroup provision in Australia has two primary models; community and supported.

Supported playgroups focus on supporting the development and wellbeing of both caregivers and children (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Jackson, 2013) and are usually run by a trained, paid facilitator. Supported playgroups focus on families with particular needs or vulnerabilities and often aim to improve outcomes for children and families (McLean et al., 2020). Community playgroups are run by volunteer caregivers and provide an informal place for children and their caregivers to engage in a range of activities together (McLean et al., 2014). Community playgroups operate in over 78 percent of all Australian postcodes, including metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas (Playgroup Australia, 2019) and have more than 170,000 participants across Australia (Playgroup Australia, 2019). Their wide reach attracts caregivers from a range of socio-economic backgrounds (Gregory et al., 2017), however, children from Indigenous and culturally

and linguistically diverse (CALD) families are less likely to attend (Gregory et al., 2017). Community playgroups aim to provide social opportunities and support for children and caregivers through self-management by the participants (Department of Education and Training Victoria, 2022).

In Australia playgroups have been highlighted as important early childhood services and are represented in government policy and curriculum documents such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) (Department of Education and Training Victoria [DET], 2016). The Victorian government's commitment to playgroups as universal early childhood services can be found in the Early Childhood Reform Plan (Department of Education and Training Victoria, 2017) which places emphasis on playgroup participation through an increased interest in the provision of early childhood services and providing support for caregivers. Despite this recognition at policy level, little is known about community playgroup as an institution comprising both the values of early childhood education and the motives for participation by caregivers, especially in culturally diverse communities.

Research Question and Scope

Western-European conceptualisations of play guide both Victorian state and Australian national guidelines, policy and curriculum documents whereby play is recognised as a context for learning. The provision of playgroup as a universal early childhood service that provides support for caregivers and young children means that the values of early childhood education within Australia are reflected within the provision of playgroups. Community playgroups are run by caregiver volunteers from varied cultural backgrounds across many communities within Australia with little known about the caregivers' conceptualisations of play and motives for participation.

As such this thesis poses the following research question to frame the investigation:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

Significance of the study

The research undertaken in this study as a result of the posed research question provides vital information and new understandings about community playgroup provision in Australia. As a recognized provider of early childhood education within Australia, limited research has been undertaken into community playgroups (McLean et al., 2020). Derived from the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1997, 1998, 2016), Hedegaard's cultural-historical theory and model of learning and development through participation in institutional practice (Hedegaard, 2009, 2012a) was

conceptualized for this research. Hedegaard's theory was used to provide an understanding of caregiver motives and societal values for play and the institution of playgroup.

A Mosaic methodological approach (Clark, 2010b) was used to gain insight into the varying perspectives of the caregivers. This approach used a range of data collection methods, was participatory and brought both verbal and visual research methods together (Clark, 2010b). The use of a Mosaic approach in this research enabled myself and the caregiver participants to co-construct knowledge to address the research question. This methodological approach culminated in the co-construction of a play map between myself and the playgroup caregivers. The play map was developed specifically for this research and represented the co-constitution of caregiver motives and early childhood societal values for play and playgroup.

Personal Orientation to the Research

As an experienced early childhood professional my interest in play and the value of play in children's learning has derived from many years of work within early childhood education. I have implemented play-based programs for children, taught pre-service educators about the value of play-based learning and guided educators in their pedagogy within early childhood services. This belief in the role of play and play-based learning led me to wonder about playgroup, as play is the primary activity that children engage in while attending with their caregivers. I wondered if caregivers were attending playgroup with their children, what were their thoughts on the play component of *playgroup*. Do caregivers think about play in the same way as I do as an experienced member and participant in the early childhood education community? Do caregivers see the same value in play I see? And what connections do caregivers see between children's play and learning? If caregivers are encouraged to attend playgroup, does the word play promote attendance or does it hinder their participation? Through this research I seek to contribute and build upon existing literature to gain a greater understanding of the role of play within playgroup. This is significant because playgroups have been identified as important providers of play-based early childhood education programs for children. A caregiver may be more likely to participate in playgroup if they see play as an important way for children to learn. However, if a caregiver holds a culturally-situated view of play as something children do when there are no other tasks to be done, they may not see any benefit in participating.

This research was conducted following a constructivist paradigm which argues that multiple realities are experienced by individuals in their own lives. A subjectivist epistemology guided the research whereby the researcher and participant co-create understandings. In this research the co-creation of knowledge guided some of the methodological decisions that are

outlined in Chapter Four. The co-creation of knowledge between myself and the caregiver participants in this research influenced the use of the Mosaic approach which uses multiple data collection methods and participatory research to create a visual representation of the issues under investigation.

Hedegaard's (2009) cultural-historical theory guided this study and is outlined in Chapter Three. Hedegaard uses the concepts of motives and values to explain the influence both society and an individual have on the institutions in which they participate. Motives come from the individual and are what drives a person, or their goals for what they wish to achieve. Values come from society and are what a society sees as important. Societal practices represent a set of cultural values and norms that have been developed over time. In this research early childhood education, including that of playgroups is conceptualized as a societal practice because it can be seen as an institution within society that an individual (caregiver or child) can participate in. The values and traditions of early childhood education (e.g., play-based learning) are seen as the societal values while the motives of the caregivers, that is what drives a caregiver regarding play are seen as individual values. This study simultaneously considers the societal values and caregiver motives for play within community playgroup. While the caregiver participants identified their motives for play, the societal values were considered representative of my own professional experience within early childhood education. These values were based on my many years of experience working as an early childhood professional, including my initial teacher education, professional development and knowledge of early childhood curriculum, standards, guidelines, policies, and laws.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter Two, the literature review, is structured into three main sections: 1) play; 2) playgroup; and 3) caregivers' perspectives of play. Chapter Two explores the theoretical history of play with a particular focus of the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky. It follows with a discussion of the influence of socio-cultural perspectives on play and literature that investigates play in a cultural context. The review of playgroup literature includes an investigation of international literature and discusses the identified benefits to children, caregivers, and the community through participation in playgroup. Literature investigating caregiver learning about play through playgroup participation and playgroup and both CALD families as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are also identified. Finally, literature that investigates caregivers' perspectives of play both internationally and within Australia is discussed. This chapter identifies play as a contested concept relative to learning in early childhood education, and a gap

in the research literature indicating that more needs to be known about caregiver perspectives of play and playgroup, particularly in relation to community playgroup.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical framework used in this study. The chapter begins with an exploration of the works of Vygotsky (1978, 1997, 1998, 2016), the concepts of mediation, social situation and crisis and his influence on contemporary cultural-historical thinking. The use of Hedegaard's (2009) cultural-historical theory within this study is then discussed with identification of the key concepts within this theory and the conceptualisation of these as used within this study are explored. Emphasis is placed on the societal, institutional, and individual perspectives as well as the concepts of values and motives.

Chapter Four focuses on the methodological design of the study used to explore the research question. It provides an overview of the qualitative case study research design and focuses on a constructivist paradigm guiding research. The data collection process is outlined, including participant selection, the use of the Mosaic approach and data collection methods. The data analysis of the research is discussed along with the ethical considerations and limitations of the research.

The findings from the research are outlined in Chapter Five. The chapter identifies three main categories of findings: 1) caregiver motives for activities at home and/or for playgroup; 2) educator societal values for playgroup; and 3) shared caregiver motives and educator societal values for activities at home and/or at playgroup. Each category is discussed in turn, illustrating the overlap between caregiver motives and societal values from the two participating community playgroups.

Chapter Six provides a discussion of the findings from the two participating community playgroups, Tenby playgroup and Warrington playgroup, in relation to the research question, reviewed literature, and theoretical framework. The chapter identifies that the institution of community playgroup is characterised by outdoors, socialisation and cultural inclusivity. The chapter explains that while the research identifies the three shared values and motives, it is also shown in this research that between the Tenby and Warrington playgroup there were motives and values that were not shared including: reading books, digital media, volunteering, grandparents, agency and self-help, music and play and learning. These variances within the two playgroups illustrates that community playgroup is adaptable to the motives for attendance indicated by caregivers.

In the final chapter, Chapter Seven, I outline the contribution this research has made to methodological approaches for studying community playgroups through the use of the Mosaic approach for data collection, and furthermore to generating new understandings of community playgroup and what the institution of community playgroup looks like to participants from culturally diverse communities. The findings illustrate that playgroup is co-constituted by the outdoors. This is supported by socialisation and cultural inclusivity. The idiosyncratic nature of community playgroup which reflect both the shared societal values and the unique individual motives of the caregivers that attend is also identified. The idiosyncrasies provide the opportunity to reflect that each community playgroup will differ while still providing caregivers and children from diverse cultural backgrounds social opportunities to come together. This chapter recognises limitations to the study and areas for further research are outlined. The next chapter of this thesis will outline a review of the literature relevant to this study.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The literature in this chapter is presented in three main sections. These are: a) play; b) playgroup; and c) caregivers' perspectives of play. These three topics encompass the themes indicated in the research question:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

The chapter begins with an explanation of the literature search process. It then considers the history of play and play theory, the role of play within the lives of young children and the progression through to contemporary play pedagogy. This is followed by an exploration of current literature surrounding playgroup and both children and caregivers' participation in playgroup. The final section of this chapter considers caregiver's perspectives of play and how these are indicated in their motives for playgroup participation and confirms the research question.

In this research the term 'caregivers' is used to describe the adults that attend playgroup with their children. This may include parents, carers, kinship members and other adults in children's lives. In this chapter when referring to the literature the terms used by the authors (i.e., parent, caregiver, mothers, fathers) are used to ensure consistency in reported findings.

The Literature Search Process

This section describes the search process for the identification of literature included in this chapter. This involved a series of literature searches focusing on theoretical perspectives of play, playgroup, and parent perspectives of play. This review was updated regularly between 2018 and 2021 as the thesis progressed. Literature included peer reviewed journal articles, books, and grey literature. All search terms were processed through a number of data bases including ProQuest, Informit, EBSCO, Sage and Google Scholar.

Theoretical literature about young children's play was sought to gain an understanding of the history and theories of play which have developed over time. Key search terms included 'early childhood theorists', 'play', 'early childhood' and 'children'. More specific theorist names were then searched including 'Comenius', 'Rousseau', 'Locke', 'Pestalozzi', 'Froebel', 'Hall', 'Dewey', 'Montessori', 'Freud', 'Piaget' and 'Vygotsky'. The search terms 'socio-cultural' and 'cultural-historical' were included.

Contemporary literature about playgroup was identified using key search terms including 'playgroup', 'parent group', 'infant toddler group' and 'mothers' group'. This search for literature

was conducted from 2000 to 2021. Literature included research in supported and community playgroup and playgroup generally. While most of the literature was from the Australian context, literature from countries outside Australia was also considered.

Literature regarding parent and caregiver perspectives of play was identified using the search terms: 'parent perspectives', 'parent beliefs', 'parent perspectives of play', 'perceptions of play', 'play beliefs', 'play', and 'parents'. This search was conducted to identify literature published between 2000 to 2021.

Literature referred to in this chapter was also identified through citation searching. This process involved searching the reference lists of included papers for other papers relevant to the research topic. These articles were then screened for relevance to this thesis at the title and abstract with the full text of related articles then reviewed (Briscoe et al., 2020).

Play Literature

Theories of Play and Learning

Throughout history there have been many theories of learning and play that have contributed to understandings of children's play and development (Bergen, 2014; Brooker, 2010; Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2014; Saracho & Evans, 2021b; Wood & Attfield, 2013). Early theorists such as Comenius, Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel set the stage for discourse and theories on how best to raise and educate young children. Prior to the time of these theorists little thought was given to the development and education of young children (Platz & Arellano, 2011).

Comenius (1592-1670) was one of the founders of early childhood education and is credited with developing the concept of early education (Bergen, 2014; Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2014). Comenius differentiated learning into four stages from early childhood to adulthood and felt that a child had to be ready to learn (Peltzman, 1998). He believed that children learned through nature and that knowledge was attained through real life experiences (Valkanova, 2015). Comenius "felt that children should make connections between what they are learning and their real life encounters" (Platz & Arellano, 2011, p. 57). Teaching children involved supervising the child and their development based on an understanding of the child's intellectual level and needs (Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2014). Comenius introduced the concept of children learning through play to early childhood education (Platz & Arellano, 2011).

Both Locke and Rousseau advocated for the education of young children through play, though they offered different views as to how this was to occur in their writing. Locke (1632-1704) believed that a person was born a blank slate (tabula rasa) at birth (Bergen, 2014; Giardiello, 2015).

Locke maintained that each child was an individual whose future was shaped by their early experiences as a result of the training and experiences they encountered after they were born (Giardiello, 2015; Platz & Arellano, 2011). Locke contended that children should be taught through play experiences (Bergen, 2014; Platz & Arellano, 2011). In contrast, Rousseau (1712-1778), like Comenius, felt that a child must be ready to learn and claimed that each child is born with their own predetermined fate which would develop in a specific order (Peltzman, 1998). Rousseau believed childhood held an innocence that required children to be shielded from the outside world through the creation of a protective environment (Rogers, 2015a, 2015b). Rousseau stated that the role of education was to let the children's natural abilities develop without adult assistance (Hedges, 2014) and should be based around children's interests (Platz & Arellano, 2011). Play was appreciated and promoted as a "natural form of children's healthy development" (Hedges, 2014, p.193). Rousseau's theories were the beginning of what has been a long-held belief that play should be child centred and spontaneous (Hedges, 2014; Moore et al., 2014; Rogers, 2015a).

Pestalozzi (1746-1827) followed Rousseau's promotion of play and was greatly influenced by his work (Sellars & Imig, 2021). He believed that education was for everyone and should be aligned with children's natural development (Platz & Arellano, 2011; Valkanova, 2015). Like Locke, Pestalozzi believed that children were individuals. He encouraged children to explore the environment and find answers for themselves rather than being given predetermined answers (Andrews, 2012; Bergen, 2014; Saracho & Evans, 2021a). A student of Pestalozzi, Froebel (1782-1852), set up the first kindergarten or 'child's garden' (Bergen, 2014; Saracho & Evans, 2021a) and was a pioneer in the development of early childhood education (Saracho & Evans, 2021a). Froebel developed a child centred curriculum where play was seen as natural and essential and a way for children to learn (Bergen, 2014; Reifel, 2014; Smedley & Hoskins, 2020). Froebel used play as a teaching strategy, developing manipulative play materials known as gifts, and tasks or activities, known as occupations, for the children to engage in (Bergen, 2014; Smedley & Hoskins, 2020). He placed emphasis on the child self-selecting their activities and participating in them with the adult or teacher being nearby and ready to assist if and when the child needed help.

Hall and Dewey were American psychological theorists whose work influenced how play was viewed in early childhood education (Bergen, 2014). A founder in the field of child development, Hall (1844-1924) "believed children went through stages in their play that demonstrated the stages of human evolution" (Bergen, 2014, p. 11). Hall contributed to the idea that early development was enhanced through children's participation in play (Bergen, 2014). Hall is credited with reshaping the Western-European kindergarten movement and creating the child study movement through the observation of children (Peltzman, 1998). Dewey (1859-1952)

transformed and influenced the role of the Western-European kindergarten and the field of early childhood education at the turn of the twentieth century. Like many before him, Dewey advocated for the role of play in education, providing children with many learning experiences. Dewey felt that it was important for children to learn through doing (Berding, 2015) and that children developed when they were involved in activities that had a purpose and a problem to solve (Bergen, 2014). He saw children as active participants in developing their experiences and learning environments where the children co-constructed their learning with the teacher acting as a guide for the children and their learning (Wood & Attfield, 2013).

In a similar time to Dewey, Montessori (1870-1952) believed that “the first years of life were the most critical in terms of learning and education” (Platz & Arellano, 2011, p. 58). Montessori developed a program in Rome which had a child-centred approach. Like Froebel, she believed that children should be active participants in their learning. Montessori believed that each child developed from within as an individual and that the teacher was an observer who facilitated the child’s play and learning (Andrews, 2012; Giardiello, 2015), rather than someone who shaped children’s behaviour (Peltzman, 1998). Montessori (2012) used child sized materials that were designed for children to master a specific skill, for example, stacking blocks and cylinders of varying sizes that encouraged children to develop skills in numeracy and geometry (Wager & Parks, 2014). The materials were self-correcting in that there was only one correct way to use them and they provided an ordered sequence to complete the activity (Carr, 2014). The children selected the materials they wished to use from a shelf and engaged in the activities with limited adult help (Bergen, 2014; Giardiello, 2015).

Freud (1856-1939) emphasised the importance of a person’s early experiences. Like Piaget, Freud believed development took place in stages, however, the focus of his theory was the role of a person’s unconscious and its role in the development of their personality. Freud developed a theory of psychosexual development which “discussed aspects of children’s play and adult playful thought” (Bergen, 2014, p. 14). Freud believed play and dreams were “windows to the subconscious” (Andrews, 2012, p. 178). He saw early childhood play as a place where a child can create their own world that they can control (Bergen, 2014). Freud’s work gave early childhood education an understanding of play as a vehicle for children to act out their feelings and manage their emotions (Meyers & Berk, 2014).

These early theorists emphasised the important role of play in children’s development and education which led to future, more explicit, theoretical views about play and learning (Bergen, 2014; Hedges, 2014) which will be explored in the following sections of this chapter. The early

theories of childhood and play are relevant to their particular time in history. The theories that currently guide Western-European early childhood practices and pedagogy can be traced back to these early thinkers (Moore et al., 2014; Rogers, 2015b; Saracho & Evans, 2021a). While globalisation has influenced the application of Western-European interpretations of children's development and play in non-Western-European countries these may not reflect the values and beliefs of early childhood education and care in these non-Western-European countries (Edwards, 2021; Gupta, 2020). This may also be true for Indigenous cultures such as Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples where the application of Western-European interpretations of children's development and play may not adequately represent the varying values, beliefs and experiences of early childhood education and care for Indigenous families (Fleer & Hammer, 2014; Kitson & Bowes, 2010; Martin, 2016). Incorporating Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing, including language, culture and relationships, may be more reflective of Indigenous culture (Kitson & Bowes, 2010; Windisch et al., 2003). Given my personal experience in early childhood education as an educator in the Western-European tradition, this chapter continues to feature theorists in this vein, including Piaget and Vygotsky.

Piaget's Theory of Play

Credited with creating Developmental Theory, Piaget (1896-1980) focused on children's intellectual development and believed that children constructed knowledge through their engagement in their world (Saracho & Evans, 2021b). Piaget argued that children's knowledge was acquired through the process of assimilation and accommodation of information that stemmed from children's acquisition and processing of new information which resulted in children's progression through a series of stages in their knowledge acquisition (Piaget, 1951). Piaget (1951) believed that through birth to adulthood a person progressed through four stages, including the sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, the stage of concrete operations, and the stage of formal operations. A child had to be at a particular stage of development to be able to learn new concepts, with each concept getting more complex as a child progressed through the stages (Piaget, 1951).

Piaget (1951) theorised that children learned best through their play as it was through play that thought was arguably generated. Play provided children with the stimulus to "explore and understand the world, organise their thoughts and adapt" (Andrews, 2012, p. 54), placing emphasis on both the relationship between the individual and their environment and on the role of the child's activity in the development of thought (Ginsburg & Oppen, 1969). An educator following a Piagetian viewpoint will use observation of the child to assist them in assessing a child's current level of development. Through observation, the educator can then design the educational experience to the child's current needs using concrete activities. The educator's role is to provide a variety of

experiences and materials for the child to explore based on their observations of the child. The educator will encourage and support the child's learning through the child engaging in the experiences provided that are of interest.

Piaget's theory led to the implementation of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Bredekamp et al., 1997) in the provision of early childhood education during the late 1990s and early 2000s in many Western-European countries, including Australia (Edwards, 2007; Saracho & Evans, 2021b). DAP highlighted the value of play in children's learning and emphasised the importance of children guiding their own learning through their exploration of, and interaction with, their environment and the experiences provided for them by educators (Sumsion & Harrison, 2014). Many of the Piagetian ideas about early learning and development have become firmly embedded in current pedagogy and understandings about early childhood education (Arthur et al., 2017), including most notably that of active, hands-on play-based learning.

Vygotsky's Theory of Play

Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Russian psychologist, whose works were not translated to English until the 1960s. Vygotsky saw both children's play and the supporting adult's role in play as important for learning, and introduced the cultural and socially constructed nature of development (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). He stressed the importance of families, communities, and other children in learning, believing that social and cognitive development are dialectically related. The role of the adult or educator within Vygotskian thinking is more involved than that indicated by DAP according to Piagetian thinking (Arthur et al., 2017). Rather than the adult standing by observing the child with the child guiding their own learning, as in DAP, within Vygotsky's (1978) theory the adult takes a more active role via social interactions on an interpersonal level "to support children's conceptual learning and the acquisition of content knowledge" (Moore et al., 2014, p. 18).

Vygotsky (2016) saw play as a "purposeful activity for a child" (p. 19) that could be "termed a leading activity that determines the child's development" (Vygotsky, 2016, p. 18). Socio-dramatic play was seen as a major source of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Through the child's socio-dramatic play, the child would re-enact something that had happened in their real life. The child would create an imaginary situation from their experience. For example, a child may visit the doctor with their caregiver and then create an imaginary play situation where they are the patient at the surgery (Vygotsky, 2016). In this play "what passes unnoticed by the child in real life becomes a rule of behaviour in play" (Vygotsky, 2016, p. 10). Through their play the child enacts the cultural rules,

languages and concepts of their culture without being aware of them (Bergen, 2014; Drewes, 2019; Fler, 2010a).

Vygotsky (1998) described the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of the child in which play is the creator. The ZPD represents the area of potential growth just beyond, and within reach, of where the child's capabilities currently lie. Vygotsky (1998) maintained that through scaffolding, interactions and experiences with other children and adults in play, a child could develop within their ZPD and work beyond the level they would normally be working at. This is a change in perspective from the developmental thinking of Piaget because up until this point under DAP the child would guide their own learning with the educator taking the cue of the child. Then in DAP, through considered observation of the child's current level of development, experiences and play-based learning opportunities would be designed around the child's needs and interests. Conversely, using a Vygotskian or socio-cultural pedagogy to consider a child's learning, the child would gain understandings and competencies that would otherwise be out of reach without support given by adults, an older peer, or within their socio-dramatic play, to support and guide learning (Meyers & Berk, 2014).

The Influence of Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Play

Traditionally, the focus of Western-European early childhood education has been to extend children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive and language development. This has predominantly stemmed from Piagetian and DAP, as well as through the work of early theorists of play and child development (e.g., Rousseau, Dewey, Froebel) (Ang, 2016; Walsh et al., 2019). However, the pedagogical landscape of early childhood education indicates a marked change in theoretical orientation, moving from a focus on individual children and their developmental domains to a consideration of the social and cultural foundation of learning. This shift from developmentalist to sociocultural thinking was in part motivated by criticism of developmental thinking and its manifestation in pedagogical approaches such as DAP; this being that developmental theory came to represent a universal truth whereby all children were viewed as following a linear path progressing through the stages of development in a particular order (Nolan & Kilderry, 2010; Walsh et al., 2019). This view does not take into consideration socio-cultural constructs such as the impact of "gender, peer relationships, cultural experience and socioeconomic opportunities" (Moore et al., 2014, p. 20) on a child's development.

Stemming from Vygotsky's work, socio-cultural theory provided the early childhood education and care sector with new insights into children's learning. According to this theoretical perspective social and cultural interactions with knowledgeable peers and adults help children to

“experience, explore and construct new understandings, knowledge and skills in a dialectic rather than linear process of development” (Hedges, 2010, p. 28). Rather than following set stages of children’s learning and development, learning from a sociocultural perspective is considered to occur through children’s interactions with peers and adults. These interactions may involve discussions and investigation done together. Universal concepts about learning, development and play occurring through set stages of development, and their place in institutional practices are contested by socio-cultural theorists and attention given instead to culture, social situations and contexts (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Fler, 2021; Wood, 2010). A socio-cultural theoretical perspective considers how cultural practices relate to development and the “cultural nature of everyday life” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 10) and reflects an understanding of the “culturally and socially constructed nature of learning” (Jordan, 2010, p. 96).

A socio-cultural approach to children’s development considers the varying expectations communities have on children to engage in activities at different ages. For example, in some cultures and communities it will be deemed appropriate at different ages to be able to take care of another child or infant (Rogoff, 2003). Children participate in experiences and activities in their home or social culture and through their continued participation they move from that of learner to expert as a result of being guided by more experienced children or adults. The child learns through the experience of watching, helping, or doing the activity. Development then occurs in the course of “children’s everyday involvement in social life” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 18). For most children in a Western-European culture the activities the children engage in may include play, but for many cultures these activities may also include those that might be described as work (Brooker, 2018; Gaskins, 2014; Gaskins et al., 2007; Göncü et al., 2006; Ng’asike, 2014; Rogoff, 2003).

Defining Play

It is difficult to define play due to its contested nature. Wood and Attfield (2013) suggests that:

early childhood education is underpinned by an ideological and theoretical tradition which regards play as essential to learning and development. The eclectic mix of ideas from this tradition ranges from the rhapsodic to the pragmatic, regarding the value of play, the nature of childhood, the purposes of education, the rights of the child and adult’s roles and responsibilities. (p. 1).

Within this theoretical tradition are the theories of Comenius, Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Hall, Dewey, Montessori, Freud, Piaget, and Vygotsky. Each theorist generated new ideas about

childhood and play, often building on the work of the theorists that came before them and each contributed to current thinking about play. These include Rousseau's ideas about the innocence and protection of childhood (Rogers, 2015b); Froebel's view of children playing in the garden and play being children's work (Bergen, 2014); Dewey's belief of children learning through doing while engaged in real life problems (Bergen, 2014; Platz & Arellano, 2011); Piaget's notion on the construction of knowledge through exploration during play (Piaget, 1951); and Vygotsky's focus on the social and cultural context for learning and play as a mediation of knowledge and learning and as a framework for adult interaction (Vygotsky, 2016). Many of these ideas have come to represent taken for granted understandings of play (Farquhar & White, 2014; Fler, 2021; Fler et al., 2018; Rogers, 2015b; Walsh et al., 2019).

Play is strongly established in early childhood curriculum frameworks across many Western-European countries such as Australia, New Zealand and England (Ang, 2016; Wood & Hedges, 2016) with a belief that children's early educational experiences should be based on active play-based learning (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018; Rogers, 2015b). These Western-European ideals understand play as a

natural, voluntary and intrinsically motivated activity, free from externally imposed goals or rules...[where] play is viewed in opposition to work or formal approaches to teaching and learning as process, rather than product-oriented, and as the context for, rather than the context of, learning (Rogers, 2015b, p. 591).

However, socio-cultural theories challenge these "taken for granted understandings of play in early childhood education" (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010, p. 1).

Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) argue that some of the highly valued beliefs about play, such as "the ideas that play is: natural, about development and learning, normal, fun, innocent, and a universal right for children" (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010, p. 2), are not universal for all children. These ideas are very Western-European-centric and do not reflect the diversity of children's lives, cultural values and social norms that may exist beyond the Western-European definitions of play (Ang, 2016; Edwards, 2021). The way in which children and childhood are situated within a culture or society will provide variances in how play is valued and viewed (Göncü & Gaskins, 2007; Gupta, 2020; Rentzou et al., 2019). Gaskins et al. (2007) report on a study of play in three varying cultural contexts and found that there were contrasting ways in which children's play was represented within cultures. These variances were a result of varying child-rearing beliefs, types of social interactions, values and resources that were available to the children in their play.

The extent to which other activities such as work, caring duties, worship or service to family members took priority influenced the children's engagement in play activities (Gaskins et al., 2007). There is a need to move beyond a universal view of play to take into consideration the social and cultural variances of play for children.

Play in a Cultural Context

The cultural context has a significant influence on conceptualisations of play held by caregivers, teachers, and significant adults in young children's lives (Gupta, 2015; Rentzou et al., 2019). Moreover, the social setting within cultural contexts mediates adults' expectations for children's play and play-based learning (Fung & Cheng, 2012; Gupta, 2015). In this section I consider the literature regarding cultural contexts for play and insights from this work about how the social setting mediates adults' expectations and subsequent provision of play. From this research I contend that more needs to be known about how the social setting mediates caregivers' expectations and subsequent provision of play and the potential of playgroup as a unique context for blending universal and culturally specific aspects of play.

In a cross-cultural study which investigated preschool teachers' conceptualisations of play in eight countries including; Denmark, Turkey, Cyprus, Italy, Estonia, Spain, Greece and the United States of America, Rentzou et al. (2019) discuss variations in play and play-based learning in early childhood across the countries. Through questionnaires undertaken with 212 early childhood educators the researchers asked questions about how the participants defined play and how much time play was used for different purposes including academic purposes and to develop children's social skills. Rentzou et al. (2019) found that early childhood educators' conceptualisations of play are culture-specific and are related to the status of play in each of the countries. They found that "although play is a universal activity it is also a culturally specific activity and has a cultural basis" (Rentzou et al., 2019, p. 3).

Rentzou et al. (2019) found that while there may be many aspects of play that are similar across cultures, there are also variations in conceptualisations, values and beliefs about play across cultures which were seen to affect the way play was provided for children in early childhood settings within the research. In Denmark the primary emphasis was placed on the development of social skills through play; in Turkey the focus was on play that was entertaining and fun; in Cyprus it was the creative aspect of play as well as providing a relaxing quality for children; in Italy it was the social and educational aspects of play; in Estonia play is seen as children's work with academic learning and social and emotional skills highlighted, in Spain children's learning and fun was emphasised, in the USA children's exploration of their world and fun, and in Greece emphasis was

placed on entertainment, creativity and learning (Rentzou et al., 2019). The study found that there were both similarities and variations in the way play was conceptualized across the participating cultures. Similarities or universal characteristics of play included: “play supports social/emotional development, play as learning, play as fun, play as creativity, play as an opportunity to explore the world, and voluntary” (Rentzou et al., 2019, p. 10). Variations, or non-universal characteristics of play in the participating countries included: “no external goals, play as a physical activity, rules, fundamental, play as children’s work, play as a recreational activity and overall development” (Rentzou et al., 2019, p. 10).

Rentzou et al. (2019) argue that the cultural context within each country influences the status of play and how teachers think about play. For example, in Denmark, where there is strong support for children’s rights, free play is more evident than in the USA where there is a stronger connection to learning and development through play (Rentzou et al., 2019). Rentzou et al. (2019) suggest that the status of play in each of the countries influence the culture-specific conceptualisations of play. These variances indicate that in “some countries an ‘ethos of play’ is prevalent” (Rentzou et al., 2019, p. 13), such as in Denmark and Estonia where play is conceptualized as supporting children’s development and children can play whenever they want with little restriction placed on their play. In other countries, such as Cyprus and Turkey “schoolification prevails” (Rentzou et al., 2019, p. 13) where play is used for more academic purposes and play is provided in a fixed daily routine. This variation results in conflicting attitudes towards play and in early childhood educators’ tussle to “achieve an appropriate role for play within diverse early childhood contexts” (Rentzou et al., 2019, p. 13). This research identified the varying conceptualisations of play for early childhood educators across eight countries. It highlighted the universal and non-universal characteristics of play shared between the participating countries. The authors suggest that how educators conceptualize play is linked to the status of play in their country, and using the findings provide a cultural definition for play in each country. Although parental conceptualisations of play were not the focus of this research it may be that these also inform the provision of play in early childhood by significant adults.

Gupta (2015, 2020) reports on a series of qualitative naturalistic inquiries conducted in India with early childhood teachers (n=45) and school directors (n=15) across 15 schools to understand the relationship between educational philosophy and pedagogy of early childhood teacher education programs and the practice of the teachers in their early childhood classrooms. This research described three interconnected elements in the educators’ pedagogy. These include:

a highly structured academic curriculum mandated by the government and historically rooted in the educational policies of the British colonial administration; the ongoing values-based curriculum rooted in Ancient Indian beliefs and the practical and tacit knowledge of teachers; and some curricular ideas central to Euro-American progressive education (Gupta, 2015, p. 261).

Gupta (2015) described this as a post-colonial curriculum or “third space of pedagogical hybridity” (p. 261) that blends Western-European early childhood play pedagogy with government prescribed curriculum and traditional Indian values, beliefs and culture. Gupta (2015) suggests that countries such as India perceive a ‘good’ school as providing an early childhood curriculum based on Western-European play pedagogy, however, these pedagogies are based on Western-European understandings of childhood, development and lifestyles as well as images of the child and images of the teacher that are not reciprocated in non-Western-European countries. She describes a ‘third space’ whereby the teachers within the research found a “balance between tradition and modernism, and...[a] balance between the Indian, colonial and postcolonial elements in their practice” (Gupta, 2015, p. 269). This involved blending the Western-European and government stipulated pedagogy with Indian tradition, values, beliefs and educational ideals. Gupta (2015, 2020) suggests that all cultures hold particular values about children which influence the way early childhood pedagogy is portrayed. This research shows how these images presented by the early childhood teachers and directors reflect the universal conceptualisations of play and early childhood. It may be that caregivers’ images of the child also contribute to this third space and although not the focus of this research may be worthy of investigation in other early childhood settings such as playgroups.

Fung and Cheng (2012) used naturalistic observation and interviews with 24 teachers, 20 principals and 98 parents in 20 Hong Kong early childhood services to investigate the participants’ perspectives of learning through play. The research also included focus groups of five parents from each school to “gather parents’ views on the implementation of the play-based curriculum” (Fung & Cheng, 2012, p. 22). Fung and Cheng (2012) found that play-based pedagogy is evident in early childhood curriculum in Hong Kong, however, many teachers find it difficult to implement. One of the main hurdles to the implementation of play-based pedagogy identified in this research was the expectations of parents who prefer to focus on academic achievements for their children. The parents in this research “endorsed the concept of learning through play and yet defined play in terms of the children’s learning performance – as a means for learning” (Fung & Cheng, 2012, p. 24). The parents wanted to see evidence of their child’s learning, which appeared to supersede their desire for their children to engage in playful learning experiences, even though they identified

that learning could take place through play. As most early childhood services in Hong Kong are private and rely on parental support to operate, the parental views on learning through play hold a strong influence as to whether play based learning is implemented in the early childhood programs. The teachers in this research highlighted parental expectations as well as facilities and resources, such as time, student numbers and heavy workloads as barriers to play-based pedagogy. This resulted in a unique, culturally-specific blend of play-based pedagogy that reflected the unique circumstances of the participating schools, teachers, principals, caregivers and communities which were a variation to the Western-European early childhood play pedagogy. This research indicated that there are variations in the perspectives of learning through play between early childhood teachers, principals and parents in Hong Kong. It further suggests that more needs to be known about caregivers' perspectives of play and play-based learning and the implications for the provision of community playgroup.

Wu et al. (2018) investigated Chinese and German teachers' and parents' conceptualisations and understandings of learning through play. The research was undertaken in two phases with a total of 28 teachers and 12 parents across Germany and Hong Kong. In phase 1, 12 kindergarten teachers were interviewed about their perspectives of play and then selected videos of exemplary play episodes that took place in their classrooms. In Phase 2, the videos were shared with 16 other teachers and 12 parents in focus groups from the two countries to identify the second group of teachers and parents' conceptions and understandings of play. The researchers found variations in conceptualisations of play between the teacher and parent participants from both Hong Kong and Germany as well as variations between the teachers and parents in each country. For example, the videos selected by the teachers in phase 1 showed variations in the activities and the play the children engaged in. The videos from Hong Kong included activities that involved the whole group of children which were "orientated to collective learning objectives" (Wu et al., 2018, p. 239) where the focus of the children's play in the group was on learning. The videos from Germany involved individual or small group activities which were "based on the children's aims and psychological needs" (Wu et al., 2018, p. 239) where the children guided their own participation in experiences. In phase 2 the participants from Hong Kong focused on the children's learning and the role of the teacher in guiding children's learning, while the German participants emphasized the children's participation and choices in their own play.

Wu et al. (2018) report that while there were differences, the majority of teachers and parents in both Hong Kong and Germany have a "similar conception of learning at play that emphasizes the importance of children's self-initiative" (Wu et al., 2018, p. 240) in their play. However, this similarity may vary in the practices between the two countries with the Chinese

teachers concerned about preparing the children for school, resulting in more teacher-directed learning. Wu et al. (2018) also contend that parents' views on play and learning and their support of play may influence the practices on the classrooms of the two countries. It may be that parental support of play may also influence the practices within the provision of community playgroup which has not yet been explored.

In research that investigated the perspectives of play among early childhood educators in Japan, the United States and Sweden, Izumi-Taylor et al. (2010) conducted questionnaires with 40 educators from each country (total N= 120). The educators were asked five questions: "1) Tell me, what is play?; 2) Tell me about play in your classroom; 3) Tell me, how do you think play affects students; 4) Tell me of your concept of adult play; and 5) Tell me what playfulness is to you" (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010, p. 4). The research found that there were both similarities and variations between the educators from each of the participating countries. Many teachers from all three countries identified play as a process for learning, however for Japanese educators' play was associated to social and emotional learning but was not linked to academic learning.

Educators from both Sweden and Japan saw play as a source of possibilities, where children can make choices and changes according to their wishes and interactions with others, however, this was not identified with the American educators. Play was seen as a source of empowerment for children in Japan, where children can gain the "powers to cope with everyday life" (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010, p. 5) however, this was not replicated with the Swedish or American educators. Educators from all three countries referred to the relationship of play to promote children's creativity and that play was related to fun activities, enjoyment and happiness for children. American and Swedish educators saw play as children's work, however, Japanese educators did not describe play in this way. Educators from both Japan and Sweden indicated that they provided children with unstructured play, where children can make their own choices, decisions, and initiate the play, while the American educators spoke about scheduled time for play. Izumi-Taylor et al. (2010) suggest that through understanding conceptualisations of play from the perspectives of educators from varying countries play may be understood as a cultural phenomenon that can provide understandings of cultural perspectives which can be valuable for multicultural communities. This could provide further information and understanding in approaching the provision of play at playgroup, particularly in communities with diverse populations (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010).

Ng'asike (2014) reports on the provision of early childhood programs in nomadic pastoralist communities in Kenya. He argues that the implementation of Western-European early childhood

pedagogical practices has produced an educational system in Kenya that “alienates...children from their cultural roots in the name of modernization” (Ng'asike, 2014, p. 43) whereby the programs are based heavily on Western-European ideologies and “African cultures including local Indigenous knowledge are largely disregarded” (Ng'asike, 2014, p. 45). Ng'asike (2014) contends that the use of local cultural contexts for classroom instruction ensures that children’s learning is culturally engaging and stimulating in early childhood classrooms. This can include the use of local cultural experiences to provide context for scientific concepts, using “cultural communication tools such as proverbs, myths, stories, songs and games” (Ng'asike, 2014, p. 54), and observation that would be used in learning cultural dances and rituals within communities. Ng'asike (2014) suggests that the variation between the early childhood pedagogy and the children’s lives contrasts to the social, cultural and historical constructions of early childhood development such as those of Rogoff (2003) and Vygotsky (1978) for example, which highlight the influence of a person’s activities in everyday life within cultural institutions. It may be that caregivers culturally specific perspectives of play influence the provision of play, particularly in settings such as community playgroups where families from many cultures can attend.

‘Culture’ can be described as a set of ‘shared understandings’ and ‘shared expectations’ (Reid et al., 2019). Cultural communities have “values, beliefs, goals, norms, activities, routines, traditions, and stories that shape how children understand the world and what is expected of them” (Reid et al., 2019, p. 978). However, this static conceptualisation of culture, where culture influences children’s development in predictable ways, has been challenged towards a view that provides variability where culture and development interact with each other. In this later construction, children use cultural artefacts or tools such as values, symbols, objects, and technologies which have been developed across generations by cultural communities (Bang, 2015; Rogoff, 2003) from “multiple contexts to make sense of experience, and modify the cultural artefacts they employ” (Reid et al., 2019, p. 976). Within a cultural-historical theoretical perspective, development is seen as a cultural process that can be understood through participation in daily practices where a person can make sense of their world and assign meaning to experiences with cultural artefacts (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). The literature suggests that the cultural context within varying countries influences the status of play and how both educators and caregivers think about play. These conceptualisations of play are often linked to the status of play within each country studied in the research, providing a cultural definition for play in each country. The literature identifies that in many cultures, the Western-European play pedagogy is reflected in early childhood curriculum, however this is in contrast to the status of play held by caregivers (Fung & Cheng, 2012; Gupta, 2015; Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010; Ng'asike, 2014; Rentzou et

al., 2019; Wu et al., 2018). This suggests that contemporary understandings of play need to consider a dynamic model of cultural diversity that takes into account the varying motives of caregivers both across and within cultures providing adaptive approaches to the provision of play pedagogies to respect the cultural context and the diversity within families (Reid et al., 2019) such as those attending community playgroup.

The literature indicates that early childhood teachers have been the focus of a number of recent studies regarding cultural contexts for play. Despite these studies providing important insights into how culture influences early childhood teachers' pedagogy it would seem that less is known about caregivers' expectations for play and how these mediate the provision of play in early childhood and in unique early childhood settings such as playgroups. There would seem to be a need to consider how Western-European early childhood societal values come together with caregiver motives for play which are influenced by caregiver cultural values (Gupta, 2015, 2020), to create a unique blend of universal and culturally specific play. This blend of both universal and culturally specific conceptualisations of play may provide in playgroups what Gupta (2015, 2020) describes as a "third space of pedagogical hybridity" (Gupta, 2015, p. 269) whereby Western-European pedagogy and the diverse cultural ideologies of caregivers can be combined.

Summary

Given current research highlighting the significance of cultural contexts play and the theoretical evolution of play in Western-European early childhood education from developmental to socio-cultural perspectives, the definition of play used in this research is based primarily on a socio-cultural perspective. Play is seen as a set of socially and culturally constructed "observable human practices jointly constructed between peers" (Nuttall et al., 2019, p. 3), and between adults and children. Play is also seen as a "cultural activity, cultural construction and a cultural interpretation of children's everyday lives, lives that are different in different cultural communities, and where the enculturation process is specific to that community" (Fleer & Veresov, 2018, pp. 54-55). The cultural practices of the society in which a child lives, the value placed on play within a child's cultural settings and a child's interactions with peers and adults within the play, their experiences of play and the world around them, will influence the play child is engaged in.

Playgroup

This section of the chapter begins with a description of playgroups in the Australian context, followed by a discussion about the outcomes and benefits of playgroup participation to children, caregivers, and the community. Research about caregivers learning about play through playgroup participation is also discussed. Finally, playgroup for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

(CALD) communities as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are considered in relation to the research topic.

What is Playgroup?

Different variations of playgroup occur throughout the world, for example, in Australia (Commerford & Robinson, 2016), the United States (Mize & Pettit, 2010), New Zealand (Ministry of Education New Zealand, 2021), the United Kingdom (Needham & Jackson, 2012), Canada (Mulcahy et al., 2010), China (Nyland et al., 2016) and Hong Kong (Williams et al., 2020). What these variations all have in common is that playgroups are groups of caregivers and children who come together to socialise and engage in play activities (Hancock et al., 2015; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, Skouteris, et al., 2017), and are characterised by caregiver involvement in the facilitation of children's play (Hancock et al., 2015; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, Skouteris, et al., 2017; Sincovich et al., 2020). Playgroups emerged in Australia in the 1970s as a "grassroots response by mothers wanting to access social support and provide quality play experiences for their children" (McLean et al., 2020, p. 156). From this grassroots history, Australian national and state government policy and curriculum documents now identify playgroup as key early childhood services. For example, in the national curriculum document, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), and the Victorian state curriculum document, the VEYLDF (DET, 2016), playgroup is identified as an early childhood service providing play, learning and socialisation opportunities for young children.

In Victoria, Australia, where this PhD study was conducted, playgroups are organised gatherings that caregivers can attend with their children which usually run once a week for approximately two hours per week. Playgroup provides a relaxed environment for caregivers and children to meet and socialise and for children to play and learn (Jackson, 2011). Playgroup provision in Australia has two primary models; community and supported. Community playgroups are run and set up by volunteer caregivers and provide an informal place for children and their caregivers to socialise and engage in a range of activities together (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Gibson et al., 2015; McLean et al., 2014; Sincovich et al., 2020). Community playgroups "operate in all sections of the community and attract caregivers and children from a range of socioeconomic levels" (McLean et al., 2020, p. 157). It is estimated that over 170,000 families participate in community playgroup each week (Playgroup Australia, 2019). Community playgroups aim to provide opportunities for: children to engage in play with other children; families to interact with other families from their community; and caregivers to talk about parenting and share experiences with others (Department of Education and Training Victoria, 2022). The focus of community playgroup is for caregivers to manage and lead play and social activities together as a group (Gibson et al., 2015).

Supported playgroups have a dual focus on supporting the development and wellbeing of both children and their parents (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Jackson, 2013). Supported playgroups are usually run by a paid facilitator, who is trained to coordinate the playgroup sessions, oversee the planning of the playgroup and the setup of activities (Commerford & Hunter, 2017; McLean et al., 2014; McLean et al., 2020; Sincovich et al., 2020). These playgroups usually focus on families with particular needs or vulnerabilities such as CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians or people living with a disability (Commerford & Robinson, 2016). Supported playgroups aim to: enhance children's development through providing quality early childhood experiences; increase parental knowledge about child development, early childhood learning and positive parenting; facilitate social networks; provide access to resources and information; and provide opportunities to refer families to support services (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Jackson, 2013). Supported playgroups focus on providing interventions to improve outcomes for children and families (McLean et al., 2020).

Of the existing research it would appear that less is known about community playgroup participation despite the prevalence (McLean, 2020). Current research that investigates community playgroup identifies social benefits for caregivers and children as well as economic benefits for communities (McLean et al., 2020). However, limited research has considered how the institution of playgroup is co-constructed from a social and cultural perspective, particularly noting the motives for playgroup attendance amongst culturally diverse families.

International Playgroup Literature

International playgroup research is limited, however it provides insight into playgroup provision in a number of countries. For example, Williams et al. (2020) investigated the effects of parental involvement in a seven week supported playgroup program on parenting stress and toddler social-communicative behaviour in Hong Kong. This study had two groups of participants: parent involved (n=31) or parent uninvolved (n=31) Supported playgroups were introduced to Hong Kong in the 2000s and Williams et al. (2020) report they have become popular with parents. The research found that toddlers from the group that had parental involvement had greater communicative behaviour than the toddlers that did not have parent involvement. The research also found that the children from the parent involved group showed greater improvements in their engagement in playgroup activities and interactions with peers and other adults. This research provides evidence of benefits to children's social-communicative behaviour and engagement in the playgroup experiences through parent involvement with children while they attend.

Nyland et al. (2016) report on the provision of playgroup for migrant children in Beijing, China. Using an organised parent volunteer system in conjunction with early childhood students from a local University the playgroup in this research provided parent education sessions for the parents and play based educational experiences for the children. The combination of both child and parental education through the provision of programs internationally such as the Head Start, HighScope Perry Preschool, Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) and HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents and Preschool Youngsters) projects is similar to the supported playgroup programs available to families in Australia. HighScope has been implemented across 20 different countries, while the HIPPY program has been implemented in Turkey, Mexico, Chile, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States (Evangelou & Wild, 2014). These programs such as HighScope, PEERS and HIPPY were designed to improve outcomes for caregivers and their children from low-income families where they could work in partnership with professionals through the use of play with the children and the encouragement of parents to be involved in their children's learning (Evangelou et al., 2007; Evangelou & Wild, 2014). While limited, international playgroup literature provides evidence of the implementation of programs similar to Australia's supported playgroup model whereby programs have been designed and implemented to improve outcomes for caregivers and their children through partnerships with trained professionals.

Benefits to Children Through Playgroup Participation

Research highlights benefits to children who attend playgroup. The reported benefits include: a) enhanced development across all developmental domains (Williams et al., 2016); and b) opportunities for social engagement with others (Needham & Jackson, 2012).

Enhanced Development Across All Developmental Domains

Positive developmental outcomes of playgroup participation for children across a range of developmental domains have been identified in the literature, including cognitive, social, emotional, language and physical development (Gregory et al., 2017; Sincovich et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2016). Playgroup research has also linked positive outcomes for children attending community playgroup across all areas of the Victorian state curriculum framework for early childhood teachers working with children birth to eight years, the VEYLDF (DET, 2016). These outcomes include: "children have a strong sense of identity, children are connected and contribute to their world, children have a strong sense of wellbeing, children are confident and involved learners and children are effective communicators" (DET, 2016, p. 19).

In research that investigated the role of playgroup development consultants within community playgroup in regional Victoria, McLean et al. (2016) outline the identified benefits for

children in attending playgroup by the children's caregivers. The role of the playgroup development consultant in this research was to promote the connection with community playgroups in regional communities with early childhood services and increase the promotion of, and participation in community playgroups with young families. Through interviews with the caregiver participants and caregiver social media posts the researchers mapped the identified benefits of playgroup participation across all areas of the Victorian state curriculum framework for children birth to eight years of age, the VEYLDF (DET, 2016). The research highlighted the children's engagement with each of the five learning outcomes in the VEYLDF (DET, 2016) and found that participation in community playgroup encouraged children's learning, supported children's development, developed children's communication skills, and developed children's confidence.

Positive outcomes for children are identified in a series of reports using Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data (Gregory et al., 2017; Sincovich et al., 2014; Sincovich et al., 2020; Sincovich et al., 2019). In a study examining AEDC 2015 data Sincovich et al. (2020) found that children who had attended playgroup had better outcomes across all developmental domains than children who did not attend playgroup. The developmental domains included physical, social, emotional, language, communication, and cognitive development. The studies identified a positive association between playgroup participation and children's development when starting school for children from a range of backgrounds, whereas children who did not attend playgroup prior to commencing school were more likely to be developmentally vulnerable. The research also found that children who had attended playgroup had less trouble transitioning to school than children who had not attended playgroup. This research provides evidence on the positive impacts that can be experienced by children through participation in playgroup, particularly regarding children's preparedness for starting school.

A further study investigated children's early learning and development in supported playgroup and evaluated supported playgroup provision in Queensland, Australia. Through interviews with 212 families Williams et al. (2016) identified a number of benefits for children. These included: social-emotional development, school readiness and learning, developmental and behavioural changes, and providing time for children to play one-on-one with their parents. This research also involved an analysis of data from Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) (N=1274). Williams et al. (2016) found that children who had participated regularly in playgroup had greater emotional and attentional regulation skills, a higher expressive vocabulary, and greater literacy and numeracy skills than children who had not attended playgroup, further indicating the positive outcomes for children's development through playgroup participation. Similar findings using LSAC data were also reported by Hancock et al. (2012).

Some intervention studies in playgroups have also reported similar outcomes of participation for children. Page et al. (2019) report on an Abecedarian approach intervention provided for Aboriginal children attending playgroups in two remote communities in the Northern Territory, Australia. The research found that the provision of this intervention supports children's learning and outcomes and can be effectively delivered in playgroups in remote communities. Similarly, Hackworth et al. (2017) found that the provision of the Small Talk group parenting intervention that focuses on the home learning environment for young children of disadvantaged families, provided positive outcomes for the children involved. These studies identify positive outcomes for children of participation in supported playgroup intervention programs.

The findings from the literature provides some evidence that children's development in all developmental areas is enhanced through playgroup participation. There is also evidence that positive outcomes for children can be linked to the learning outcomes from the VEYLDF (DET, 2016) (McLean et al., 2016). The research provides some evidence that, as an informal early childhood service in Australia that does not have a mandated curriculum, playgroup may be able to achieve similar outcomes for children to those in more formal early childhood education settings such as childcare and preschool. However, as much of the research was undertaken using broad data sets such as the AEDC and LSAC, which do not identify the type of playgroup children attended, it is difficult to determine whether there are differences in children's developmental outcomes between supported playgroups with trained facilitators and community playgroups that are parent-led.

Social Engagement With Others

Children's social skills are enhanced when they have the opportunity to participate in playgroup. Research shows that playgroup offers the children a safe place to play and interact with other children while their parents are nearby to provide security and support if and when it is needed (Hancock et al., 2012; Jackson, 2006; McEwin et al., 2015; McLean et al., 2014; New et al., 2015). Needham and Jackson (2012) compared caregivers experiences of supported playgroup between England and Australia which combined findings from two independent studies. The studies used interviews with parents and facilitators of three supported playgroups as well as observations. Needham and Jackson (2012) report that without exception Australian parents in the study stated that children's socialisation and the opportunity participation in playgroup provided for the children to mix with other children was the primary reason for their participation in playgroup. The English parents in this study cited the development of their children's independence and the opportunities for socialising with other parents as their primary reasons for attendance.

The social connections and friendship the children make at playgroup can often be carried into the school environment, particularly if the playgroup is located at the school (Jackson, 2006; McLean et al., 2014). In a case study consisting of semi-structured interviews, observations and a group interview, Jackson (2006) explored “playgroups as protective environments for refugee children at risk of trauma” (p. 1). For the refugee families in this research (N=5) having the supported playgroup on the site of the school assisted in transition to school, as the children were able to remain with their parents while slowly adjusting to a new environment as they attended playgroup. The children did not require further adjustment to a new environment when they commenced school, as they were familiar with the school environment through their attendance at the playgroup that was located at the school. The children also knew many children from the playgroup that were attending the school with them. Jackson (2006) further commented, however, that cooperation and communication between the playgroup, school and parents was essential to support children transitioning between the playgroup and the school.

Research has identified benefits to children’s overall development aligned with developmental domains and the VEYLDF (DET, 2016), as well as enhancing children’s social engagement with others through playgroup participation. However, much of the research is limited to the supported playgroup context (McLean et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2018). Further research needs to be undertaken within the community playgroup context. Current research has used data from national data sets including census information, such as AEDC (Gregory et al., 2017; Sincovich et al., 2020) and LSAC (Hancock et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2016) and interviews with caregivers and facilitators, however, there seems to be less research investigating children’s development or observations of children within the playgroup context. Research has yet to determine to what extent the benefits to children in attending playgroup act as a motive for caregiver’s participation in playgroup with their child.

Benefits to Caregivers Through Playgroup Participation

A range of benefits to caregivers through participation in playgroup are identified in the literature. The reported benefits include: a) providing caregivers a place to develop friendships (Gibson et al., 2015; Jackson, 2011; McShane et al., 2016; Strange et al., 2017); b) providing support for caregivers (Hancock et al., 2015; Jackson, 2013; New et al., 2015); and c) providing caregivers with a sense of community (Deadman & McKenzie, 2020; Keam et al., 2018; Strange et al., 2014).

In research that identified multiple areas of benefits to caregivers through participation in supported playgroup Jackson (2011) completed a qualitative multi-case study of three supported playgroups. Focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 13 parents, as well as semi-

structured interviews with two parents and a facilitator from each of the three groups. Jackson (2011) highlights several categories of caregiver benefits experienced through participation in supported playgroup, including: friendship and social network support; relational support; peer support; emotional support; support in their parenting role; support through information and resources gained; and 'circle of care' and multidisciplinary support through a wide support network of professionals. Jackson (2011) suggests that it is the relationships within the playgroup that provides the support for the families that attend. It was also found that the support provided to caregivers is dependent on the engagement and participation of the caregivers within the playgroup. The support that was provided for the caregivers through the participation in the playgroup included social opportunities, access to formal support services and increased caregiver confidence.

Similarly, research undertaken by Mulcahy et al. (2010) in Ontario, Canada reported on many benefits for caregivers attending mother's group (similar to playgroup in Australia) and organised the findings from this research into three categories of 'getting together', 'getting by' and 'getting ahead' to describe the social benefits to caregivers in attending playgroup. The groups allowed mothers to 'get by' by "providing a system of emotional support, and they also offer the possibility of 'getting ahead' by creating a network wherein resources might be accessed" (Mulcahy et al., 2010, p. 8). 'Getting together' provided mothers the opportunity for homophilous bonding as well as bringing together groups of women who might not have otherwise connected. However, Mulcahy et al. (2010) also found that some mothers 'get left out', 'get judged' and 'get gendered', explaining that some mothers may be left out of groups that hold positions of privilege and exclusion. The findings of this research also revealed mothers feared being judged by other mothers as well as the mother's groups "reinforcing gendered ideologies about both motherhood and fatherhood" (Mulcahy et al., 2010, p. 16). This suggests that while there are benefits for caregivers in attending playgroup, there may also be tensions experienced by some caregivers, which may also deter some caregivers attending or continuing to attend playgroup.

Friendships

Playgroup offers caregivers a place to make friends and build relationships with other caregivers where they can talk about their similarities, differences, struggles and achievements in parenting young children. Research identifies playgroup as an excellent place for socialisation and friendship for both caregivers and children (Gibson et al., 2015; Hancock et al., 2015; Strange et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2016), reducing feelings of social isolation for some caregivers (Gibson et al., 2015; McShane et al., 2016). Participation in playgroup also provides caregivers with the opportunity to interact with and develop friendships with a diverse range of caregivers from many

backgrounds that they may not have had interactions with without playgroup attendance (Williams et al., 2016).

The opportunity for socialisation and friendship is highlighted as one of the key reasons for attendance by Harman et al. (2014) in their research into why mothers attend playgroup. Harman et al. (2014) conducted their research, in metropolitan Perth, Australia. The researchers interviewed three groups of mothers in either individual interviews (n=11) or focus group interviews (n=10). This research found that developing a “sense of belonging” (Harman et al., 2014, p. 131), which the researchers use to describe the mothers building friendships, was the most commonly identified reason for attending playgroup. Similarly, in research that investigated the social and economic value of community playgroup McShane et al. (2016) found that the participants (N=33) identified that playgroup was very important to them as they had found support and friendships within their community.

Research has also shown that playgroup assists migrant families to build friendships with other families through their interactions at playgroup (Jackson, 2006; New et al., 2015). In research undertaken by Jackson (2006) in a supported playgroup for refugee families, a predominant finding was that playgroup had “become ‘a family’ for all participants and that their social isolation had been reduced through the close friendships they had developed through the group” (Jackson, 2006, p. 4). These friendships helped the participants feel a sense of belonging in their new community which reduced the levels of stress and anxiety within the refugee families.

The literature suggests that playgroup provides caregivers the opportunity to build friendships and social relations with others through their participation. This opportunity for socialisation provides caregivers with a sense of belonging in their community and may be a primary motive for many caregivers to start and continue to attend playgroup.

Support

Playgroup offers caregivers support in their caregiving role (Jackson, 2011; New et al., 2015; Strange et al., 2014). Support provided includes information about caregiving (McShane et al., 2016; Strange et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2016), child development and children’s behaviour, as well as referrals to specialist services when required (Berthelsen et al., 2012; Jackson, 2013; McLean et al., 2014; McShane et al., 2016; Needham & Jackson, 2012). Through playgroup participation caregivers can gain new knowledge that they can use in their caregiving and relationships with their children (Jackson, 2013). Research also shows that playgroup can offer caregivers a place to feel more comfortable in their caregiver role, through their interactions with other caregivers, watching other caregivers with their own children of the same age (Harman et al.,

2014; Macfarlane et al., 2017), and through talking with other caregivers about caregiving (Macfarlane et al., 2017; McShane et al., 2016).

Strange et al. (2014) conducted research in newly established residential communities in Perth, Australia, which used interviews and focus groups to investigate the way families were supported and community connectedness was fostered by supported playgroup and mothers' groups. In this research Strange et al. (2014) found that supported playgroup provides "an opportunity to informally share information and practices about parenting, as well as be among people in similar life-stage circumstances" (pp. 4-5). The research found that supported playgroup provides an accommodating place where parents are unreservedly accepted and respected which supported the parents' roles as the most important people in their children's lives. This then promoted a safe environment where the playgroup leader could model positive behaviours and guidance in relation to parenting and child development.

McEwin et al. (2015) interviewed 12 caregivers and two facilitators in a disadvantaged area of Melbourne and examined "the efficacy of co-locating a supported playgroup in a shopping centre" (McEwin et al., 2015, p. 69). McEwin et al. (2015) found the support offered to disadvantaged families through a paid playgroup leader was very important. Information given to caregivers by the facilitators such as "the location of the local doctors, other services offered in the area (e.g., nearby childcare and kindergartens) and what government support services carers are entitled to" (McEwin et al., 2015, p. 79) were particularly helpful to the families. Visits to the playgroup from health professionals such as a dentist, nutritionist, occupational therapist, or speech therapist all assisted the parents attending the playgroup. The links to local services and health professionals assisted the families to access information and resources within their community.

In research that used data from the LSAC Hancock et al. (2015) found that mothers who did not participate in playgroup or participated in playgroup for a short amount of time were more likely to report a lack of support as their children grew older. The research suggests that mothers who participate in playgroup feel less socially isolated and have developed stronger social support networks than those who did not attend playgroup.

The literature suggests that caregivers receive support through interactions with trained facilitators as well as support gained through interactions with other caregivers. This is important because it highlights not only the value supported playgroup has in providing support to caregivers through trained facilitators, but also the support caregivers can receive through each other within

community playgroup. What is not evident within the current research is the extent to which this support for caregivers acts as a motive for attendance.

Sense of Community

Through participation in playgroup caregivers develop a sense of belonging that provides a feeling of being “part of the community” (Kearney et al., 2018, p. 66). A sense of community is developed by caregivers through connections with others who have children of a similar age and who live locally. This sense of community can be built through the interactions the caregivers have with a wide range of community members that they might not necessarily have met without participating in the playgroup (Kearney et al., 2018). Caregivers may meet up socially with playgroup families outside the playgroup. They may also recognise other playgroup participants within other areas of the community, such as at the supermarket or when playing at the park (Deadman & McKenzie, 2020; Strange et al., 2014).

In research that investigated the role of community playgroup in building community capacity Kearney et al. (2018) interviewed thirty-three caregivers. This research found that caregiver’s sense of community and belonging was enhanced through participation as they were able to meet other caregivers that they would not have normally met, such as grandparents and caregivers who had English as an additional language, through their participation in the community playgroup. This research also found that the connections the caregivers made in the playgroup extended out into the wider community through participation in fundraising events, participation in committee and leadership roles and engaging with potential new playgroup members.

In another study Strange et al. (2014) proposes that when relationships are built with others in the playgroup and the local community, the participants in the study report a stronger connectedness to the community. This research is supported by that of Jackson (2006) who suggests with her work with migrant families that a sense of community and social inclusion is fostered in playgroup participation, which will give the families social and emotional benefits. Both Jackson (2006) and Strange et al. (2014) state that this sense of community was important for families that had relocated, either to a new country or a new suburb, as it provided the opportunity to assist families with reducing their feelings of isolation in a new country and community. Attendance at playgroup was able to provide families with a sense of community, particularly if they had recently moved to Australia from another country.

The sense of community and belonging through playgroup participation was identified in both community and supported playgroup literature. The evidence in the literature suggests that while a trained facilitator can assist caregivers in developing a sense of community and a sense of

belonging and connectedness to their community, it was the interactions caregivers had with each other within the playgroup that helped develop a sense of community within the playgroup participants regardless of playgroup type.

The identified benefits to caregivers of playgroup participation include providing friendships and social opportunities, providing support in their parenting role, and providing a sense of community to caregivers. Much of the research has been undertaken within the supported playgroup context, though there has been some research undertaken in the community playgroup. Although friendships, socialising with others and sense of community can be facilitated through a trained facilitator in supported playgroup, the literature also indicated that it is the interactions between the playgroup participants that contribute to a sense of belonging for the caregivers. There is also some evidence in the literature that for some caregivers, participation in playgroup can lead to feelings of being left out. This is important as feelings of exclusion may prevent some caregivers attending playgroup hindering their access to the benefits that can be received through participation. Caregiver motives for attending playgroup may be linked to these identified benefits to caregivers, however, there has been limited evidence and discussion of this in the literature.

Benefits to the Community of Playgroup Participation

Many benefits to the community have been identified in playgroup research most notably in terms of social capital. Gibson et al. (2015) describe social capital as “the depth and nature of relationships among individuals as well as their connections to their communities, services and institutions, which enable linkage and access to social and other resources” (p. 4). McLean, Edwards, Evangelou and Lambert (2017) further explores social capital theory in terms of bonding and bridging relationships whereby bonding relationships are with “like members of the playgroup” (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017, p. 6) and bridging relationships are established with wider members of the community.

Research has found that through participation in playgroup, links within the community are formed by the caregivers participating in the playgroup which enhances the feeling of connectedness to the local community by participants (Deadman & McKenzie, 2020; Gibson et al., 2015; Keam et al., 2018; McShane et al., 2016). These links can be within the playgroup (bonding relationships) in the form of support, friendship and social networks gained between the participating caregivers (Gibson et al., 2015; McShane et al., 2016). Links can also be external to the playgroup such as links to local services within the community through recommendations and referrals to services (bridging relationships), for example, Maternal Child Health services, schools (McShane et al., 2016), “library story sessions, book launches and sewing classes” (Deadman &

McKenzie, 2020, p. 79). Research has also highlighted the ability of playgroup participation to bring the community together through the diversity in their group such as nationalities, cultures, socio-economic status and generations (Deadman & McKenzie, 2020; Hernandez et al., 2020; Jackson, 2006; McShane et al., 2016).

In research that explored the role of community playgroup in building community capacity Keam et al. (2018) found that playgroup “act[s] as [a] key site...for building community capacity through developing community connections, skill building and creating leadership pathways” (p. 65). The research found that the community playgroup provided participants with opportunities to participate on playgroup committees which was often their first venture into community volunteering which “translated into future community leadership such as kindergarten committees of management and primary school councils” (Kearm et al., 2018, p. 65). This research showed that through their engagement with the playgroup, caregivers felt more connected to other community members as well as other organisations within the community.

The community benefits of community playgroup provision and participation have not yet been explored in terms of the societal values and the caregiver motives for playgroup. Limited evidence in the literature has explored the social capital gained through playgroup in both bonding and bridging relationships in terms of a motive for attendance for caregivers.

Caregivers Learning About Play Through Playgroup

Play is the primary activity that children and their caregivers are involved in when participating in playgroup. Consideration therefore needs to be given to the caregiver’s perspectives of, motives for, and knowledge about play as these may influence the provision of play experiences for children (McLean, 2020). This is particularly relevant in community playgroup where the organisation of the playgroup is led by the caregiver volunteers (McLean, Edwards, & Morris, 2017). The facilitator in a supported playgroup will implement the playgroup activities for the children and will share their knowledge of early childhood and play with the caregivers attending (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Jackson, 2013).

Parental learning about play within community playgroup through the use of social media is discussed in research by McLean, Edwards and Morris (2017). This research involved semi-structured, focus group and parent-child dyad interviews as well as social media posts with families from three rural and regional areas of Victoria, Australia. Using social media parents were able to identify outdoor and physical play, art and craft, fine motor, sensory and exploratory, construction and pretend play experiences their children were involved in at playgroup. The research found that “parents held content knowledge of children’s play that broadly aligns with established discourse

on children's play" (McLean, Edwards, & Morris, 2017, p. 206) and that the parents were able to articulate what they believed the children were learning through play rather than just a description of the children's play.

Research undertaken by The Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Centre for Community Child Health Royal Children's Hospital (2014) was undertaken in the supported playgroup context. This research evaluated the Berry Street Early Learning is Fun Play and Learn Groups which provide supported playgroup for the South Sudanese, Karen and Afghan communities across metropolitan Melbourne, Australia. The research found that caregivers from a South Sudanese supported playgroup demonstrated an awareness of the importance of play in early childhood. For example, caregivers in the research "reported that they observed the children learn new activities; new development/skills; and observed their children using their minds through play" (The Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Centre for Community Child Health Royal Children's Hospital, 2014, p. 46). The caregivers in the research identified that they had learned much about play and providing activities for their children and interacting with their children when they were playing from the facilitator at the playgroup.

The research of both McLean, Edwards and Morris (2017) and The Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Centre for Community Child Health Royal Children's Hospital (2014) provide some insight into the caregivers learning about play through their participation in playgroup. However, this remains an under researched area. It is an important area to consider as play is the activity that children are involved in while attending playgroup with their caregivers, while research also shows that participation in playgroup provides opportunities for children's enhanced development and learning (Gregory et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2016; Sincovich et al., 2020). This suggests that caregiver knowledge of play developed through playgroup participation may have benefits for children.

Playgroup and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families

Research has been undertaken to investigate supported playgroup participation in CALD communities. McDonald et al. (2014) define diverse communities as "communities comprising migrants from non-English speaking countries, asylum seekers and refugees and their children including children born in Australia" (p. 1). Research undertaken in CALD communities reports on the benefits for CALD children and caregivers through attendance at supported playgroup. This research has been undertaken in supported playgroups that have a focus on particular groups such as refugees (Jackson, 2006; New et al., 2015), Sudanese or Afghani backgrounds (Oke et al., 2007; The Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Centre for Community Child Health Royal

Children's Hospital, 2014), or families specifically from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Warr et al., 2013). Little research has been undertaken concerning community playgroup in culturally diverse communities.

The benefits for CALD caregivers of playgroup participation include meeting other caregivers and reducing social isolation (Jackson, 2006; New et al., 2015; Oke et al., 2007; Warr et al., 2013), learning skills such as speaking and listening in English (Oke et al., 2007), providing emotional support to the caregivers (New et al., 2015), improving interactions and connections between caregivers and their children (Jackson, 2006; Oke et al., 2007), enhancing caregivers connections with their community (New et al., 2015) and caregivers being more able to support their children's development (Jackson, 2006; The Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Centre for Community Child Health Royal Children's Hospital, 2014). A trained facilitator in the supported playgroup model also provides CALD families with many additional supports such as links to services, activities for the children and support to caregivers (Oke et al., 2007).

Benefits to CALD children in attending playgroup includes children getting used to routines, sharing (Oke et al., 2007), socialisation with other children (Jackson, 2006; Oke et al., 2007), and confidence (Jackson, 2006). Children's communication and language development in both their first language and English are also enhanced through participation in playgroup (The Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Centre for Community Child Health Royal Children's Hospital, 2014). Research has found that participation in supported playgroup assisted refugee children's transition to primary school, particularly if the playgroup was located within the school grounds, which was shown to reduce both caregiver and children's anxiety within that transition (Jackson, 2006; New et al., 2015; The Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Centre for Community Child Health Royal Children's Hospital, 2014).

In research involving caregivers from two supported playgroups in Melbourne that focused on CALD caregivers, Deadman and McKenzie (2020) investigated the impact of playgroup participation on CALD caregivers' degree of social support, connectedness and self-efficacy. Through interviews, questionnaires and surveys, undertaken with 11 participants, Deadman and McKenzie (2020) found that the caregivers felt more supported and connected as a result of attending playgroup, with many caregivers feeling isolated prior to attending the playgroup due to moving to a new country. The caregivers extended their social connectedness through attending the playgroup, developing relationships with other playgroup participants. The caregivers in the research also identified that by attending the playgroup they were more connected to the

community, providing links to other community events. They also gained informational support through conversations and gaining parenting advice with other caregivers and trained facilitators.

Research has shown that barriers to playgroup attendance for CALD families include the language in which the playgroup was conducted and suggest that English speaking playgroups may benefit from having interpreters (Oke et al., 2007). Lack of transport was a considerable barrier to many caregivers, with many identifying that they were only able to attend if the playgroup was close to home or accessible by public transport (Oke et al., 2007; Warr et al., 2013). Another barrier was that caregivers had little knowledge of playgroup (Oke et al., 2007; Warr et al., 2013). In research that investigated supported playgroup for families from non-English speaking backgrounds Warr et al. (2013) found that in some cultures the male partner needed to approve the female caregiver attending the playgroup which required partners to “understand the benefits of playgroups for both children and mothers” (Warr et al., 2013, p. 44). Where this is not possible, cultural perspectives on female participation in community activities must be better understood.

Little research has been undertaken within community playgroup with CALD caregivers. While benefits and barriers have been explored for CALD families, research has not identified cultural variation in participation and how this mediates caregiver interpretations and motives for attending community playgroup.

Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in playgroup

Research has been undertaken to investigate Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families’ participation in supported playgroup. This body of research reports on the benefits for both caregivers and children through attendance at supported playgroup. Williams et al. (2017) report on the data collected from The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, a national longitudinal study of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This research found that the provision of supported playgroup can enhance the participation and engagement of families in isolated areas which can enrich both the home learning environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and improve outcomes for caregivers, children and their communities. Williams et al. (2017) also found that playgroups that are facilitated by local community members are able to meet the cultural needs of the local families that attend them.

Barblett et al. (2020) report on research undertaken in Western Australia that evaluated a supported playgroup program provided in public schools for Aboriginal children and their caregivers. The KindiLink program aims to include the “cultivation of Aboriginal families’ and children’s developing sense of belonging and engagement at their local primary school” (Barblett et al., 2020, p. 309). Through a mixed methods qualitative approach to four case study playgroups,

the researchers used interviews with families, community members, principals, teachers and playgroup staff. The research found that the KindiLink program enhanced the connection between schools, the community and Aboriginal children and families in a culturally safe space. The program also enhanced the confidence and capacity of parents as their children's first teachers. Like the research of Williams et al. (2017) previously mentioned, Barblett et al. (2020) found that the home learning environment of the children was enriched through the playgroup participation. For the Aboriginal families attending the playgroup, the inclusion of Aboriginal staff "was essential in building trust and sustainable engagement from families" (Barblett et al., 2020, p. 319). The Aboriginal staff provided cultural knowledge and supported children's growing cultural awareness which enhanced family engagement (Barblett et al., 2020).

Page et al. (2019); (Page, Murray, Cock, et al., 2021; Page, Murray, Niklas, et al., 2021) and Gapany et al. (2022) report through a series of papers on the Galiwin'ku Families as First Teachers supported playgroup in a remote community in the Northern Territory, Australia. Galiwin'ku. The people of Galiwin'ku are the Yolnu people and speak Yolngu Matha – a group of languages. Gapany et al. (2022) share the way the playgroup has "explored and upheld the strengths of Yolnu identity, cultural knowledge and language" (p. 20) through providing the mothers who attend the playgroup the opportunity to embed "gesture, sign language, Yolngu Matha language conventions, Yolnu kinship, clan concepts and dance into their daily interactions with their children" (Gapany et al., 2022, p. 20) at the playgroup. Gapany et al. (2022) reflect that this has empowered the mother's attending the playgroup to "feel agentic in their children's learning" (p. 20), empowered the mother's as the children's first teachers, and allowed the participants to build strong Yolnu identities in the children attending.

Page et al. (2019); (Page, Murray, Cock, et al., 2021; Page, Murray, Niklas, et al., 2021) report further on research undertaken within the Galiwin'ku Families as First Teachers supported playgroup. This research highlights additional benefits identified for families participating in the Galiwin'ku supported playgroup. For example, Page et al. (2019) report on the implementation of the Abecedarian Approach Australia within the playgroup. Using the Brigance Early Childhood Screen as a measurement of 128 children across two playgroup sites, the implementation of Conversational Reading and Learning Games was assessed. Providing cultural adaptations, such as embedding culture and local language to the Abecedarian approach in the implementation of the playgroup was reported to boost the language and learning skills as well as the educational outcomes of the Aboriginal children attending. In addition, Page, Murray, Niklas, et al. (2021) report that in the same study, through the Galiwin'ku Families as First Teachers supported playgroup, parents of children attending were provided with coaching in the use of Conversational Reading by

trained Families as First Teachers staff. The Conversational Reading program is an “evidence-based shared reading strategy in first language” (Page, Murray, Niklas, et al., 2021, p. 246). The research found that there were higher levels of parent and child participation at the playgroup and the success of parents to implement the taught strategies provided evidence of positive outcomes of children’s language and learning. Page, Murray, Niklas, et al. (2021) suggest that their research provides evidence that the “provision of coaching at playgroup is an effective way to build parent capacity in the implementation of evidence-based early learning strategies, and that supporting parent mastery of teaching strategies has the potential to improve the learning outcomes of young children in remote Aboriginal communities” (p. 246).

These studies provide evidence that the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in “evidence-based early learning programs by building parents’ capacity to implement teaching and learning strategies with their children can have positive impacts on parents’ skills as well as on children’s early learning outcomes” (Page, Murray, Niklas, et al., 2021, p. 247). However, little research has been undertaken within community playgroup with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caregivers.

Summary

There is limited Australian based research on playgroup in general, with the focus of much of the current research on supported rather than community playgroup. Research shows that the benefits provided to children through participation in playgroup include traditional developmental areas (such as cognitive, physical, language, social and emotional development), with particular emphasis on socializing with other children and language and communication development. Much of the literature focuses on the benefits of playgroup attendance for caregivers. These benefits include friendships and social support, while many supported playgroups offer caregivers parenting support and act as an information resource that provides links to other services and a sense of community. There is also some evidence that caregivers are able to identify the play children are engaged in when participating in playgroup. Research investigating the provision of playgroup in CALD communities shows many benefits for both caregivers and children in attending supported playgroup, with minimal research undertaken with CALD families in community playgroup. Finally, research shows benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and caregivers attending supported playgroup within their community. There is little evidence of societal values and caregiver motives for play within families attending a community playgroup within the current playgroup literature.

Caregivers' Perspectives of Play Literature

Consideration needs to be given to caregiver perspectives of play as their beliefs about play influence how they organize their children's "everyday living contexts, from the objects found in the home environment (e.g., toys), to their daily routines and social interactions" (Fisher et al., 2008, p. 307). Caregivers' perspectives of play will influence caregiver motives for play, the opportunities children have to play and the types of play their child might engage in. In this section of the chapter the value caregivers place on play within the literature is examined, followed by a consideration of caregiver perspectives of both structured and unstructured learning. Research about perspectives of play from caregivers of CALD backgrounds is considered as well as how caregivers from these communities describe children's play.

The Value (or not) of Play

There is a range of perspectives about play from caregivers. Research shows that some caregivers value play in children's learning and development, draw a correlation between play, learning and enjoyment, and express value in play based learning as a way children can learn in an enjoyable way (Fisher et al., 2008; Fogle & Mendez, 2006; Fung & Cheng, 2012; Ihmeideh, 2019; Kane, 2016; Pirpir et al., 2009). However, research also shows that caregivers may feel that play is something to be done after the school 'work' or learning is done (Fung & Cheng, 2012; Kane, 2016; O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012).

Research by Breathnach et al. (2016) reports on the findings of two studies in Queensland which used interviews with 14 participants to investigate parents' perspectives of play and its role in children's development in the Preparatory year of schooling (5-6 years of age) in Queensland, Australia. The parents in this research identified many varying perspectives of play. Some parents articulated a connection between play and learning, however, these same parents also commented that "too much play can be detrimental to learning" (Breathnach et al., 2016, p. 80). Other parents in this research felt that the teacher was required to direct the play as free play, i.e., child directed play, which was seen as purposeless. On the other hand, other parents in this research saw the children's play as valuable and commented on the learning taking place through the play.

In research that investigated African American mothers' perspectives of play in the United States, Fogle and Mendez (2006) found varying responses from parents. In completing a rating scale about play with participants (N=259), Fogle and Mendez (2006) found parents either indicated that they "enjoy play, view play as a priority, and see play as a teaching opportunity" (p. 515) or they preferred an academic focus for their children. Within the academic focus parents identified "items which reflect an emphasis on academic skills, such as learning numbers or letters, and a belief that

play does not have a central role in facilitating the development of these skills” (Fogle & Mendez, 2006, p. 515). Fogle and Mendez (2006) found that some parents held positive attitudes towards play but believed that play did not encourage the development of academic skills such as reading or learning letters of the alphabet.

Lin and Li (2019) and Lin et al. (2020) investigated the intra-cultural perspectives of play with 163 parents in China. The research found that there were variations in the perspectives of Chinese parents. The parents in their research either valued academic learning and activities for their children, or placed a higher value on play and a lower value on academic activities. Lin and Li (2019) also found that some parents valued both academic activities and play. In further research that investigated six Chinese families’ perspectives of play Lin et al. (2019) found that the families had developed a “compromise between Western notions of child-centred play and the Chinese tradition of adult-directed academic training” (Lin et al., 2019, p. 82) that they labelled ‘eduplay’. Eduplay was seen as a Chinese version of play-based learning and a blend of the two variants of the parent’s perspectives, including child-centred play and adult-directed training.

Within the research about caregiver’s perspectives of play, many of the researchers found conflicting perspectives from the participating caregivers. Some caregivers valued play (Breathnach et al., 2016; Fogle & Mendez, 2006), however, some caregivers did not (Fogle & Mendez, 2006; Lin & Li, 2019; Lin et al., 2020). Other caregivers felt that although children learned through play, they also wanted more specific, visible learning to take place, rather than what they perceived to be child-led, free-play learning (Fisher et al., 2008; Fogle & Mendez, 2006; Kane, 2016; Parmar et al., 2004). The varying perspectives of play may have an impact on caregiver’s participation in, and expectations of playgroup, as play is the primary activity provided to children when they attend. However, despite research investigating caregiver perspectives on play, there is little research considering how such perspectives may influence caregivers’ motives for participation in community *playgroups*.

Structured, Academic Learning and Unstructured, Play-Based Learning

Research has indicated that some caregivers value a structured academic environment for children over an unstructured play-based environment (Breathnach et al., 2016; Knoop & Jensen, 2003; LaForett & Mendez, 2017; Lin & Li, 2019; Lin et al., 2019, 2020; O’Gorman & Ailwood, 2012). Structured learning refers to learning that traditionally takes place within a more conventional school environment where children are given a specific task to complete to learn a specific skill or knowledge set. For example, structured learning might involve all the children in the classroom sitting listening to the teacher as they explain concepts of floating and sinking. Unstructured

learning refers to a play-based learning environment where the children learn through the exploration of and participation in the environment with the support and guidance of an adult or teacher. In an unstructured learning environment, using the floating and sinking example, children are given the opportunity to choose to place objects into the water and experiment with whether the objects float or sink. Often, academic style learning of literacy and numeracy is associated with a structured environment where the number concepts or phonological knowledge is taught to all children at the same time through instruction and a set task. Many caregivers feel that a focus on specific literacy and numeracy learning is important (Kane, 2016; Knoop & Jensen, 2003; LaForett & Mendez, 2017; Lin & Li, 2019; Lin et al., 2020; O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012; Parmar et al., 2004), as it will help with their child's cognitive development (Parmar et al., 2004). Some caregivers believe that play does not assist in preschool children's development (Parmar et al., 2004), however, some research indicates that caregivers value an unstructured, play-based environment for children's learning (Ihmeideh, 2019; Lin & Li, 2019; Lin et al., 2020; Warash et al., 2017). These caregivers report that an unstructured play-based environment has a positive influence on children's development (Ihmeideh, 2019; Lin et al., 2019).

Research in a non-government Queensland school used interviews to investigate parent's perspectives of play in the first year of school. In this research O'Gorman and Ailwood (2012) found varied perspectives between the 26 participants. Many parents in this research described a play-based program as one where the children were learning without realising that they were learning, and that learning through play involved more hands-on engagement, rather than "sitting down with a text book" (O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012, p. 270). The parents in the research described play as being "valued as long as it also explicitly focused on worthwhile school-based learning, especially literacy and numeracy" (O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012, p. 270). Other parents in the research made "distinctions between play and 'doing things' which included 'work' and getting ready for the following year of school" (O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012, p. 271). While yet other parents felt that the Preparatory year was important for the children to move away from play into more structured learning where there was a strong focus on literacy and numeracy learning that they felt could not be achieved through a play-based curriculum.

As described earlier in this chapter (p. 19) Fung and Cheng (2012) interviewed 20 educators and families from early childhood settings, consisting of teachers, principals, and parents in Hong Kong about their perspectives of the role of play in learning. This research reported that most of the parents in the study liked the idea of adding play to the curriculum and felt that it would be an effective way to teach the content of the curriculum (Fung & Cheng, 2012). However, the parents "could not identify the educational results that can be achieved through play" (Fung & Cheng, 2012,

p. 26). For the parents, play was separate from learning, and they would rather have a more traditional method of “directed teaching and rote learning for the children” (Fung & Cheng, 2012, p. 27). The researchers felt that the parent participants valued a structured learning environment over an unstructured one. The parents in this research could not see learning associated with play, and preferred a program that emphasised “academic skills – especially counting, reading and writing” (Fung & Cheng, 2012, p. 27), considering that such skills would better prepare their children for the world ahead of them.

Conversely, research by Warash et al. (2017) found that parents in their research highly valued an unstructured play-based learning environment. This research used a rating scale to consider differences between mothers (n=38) and fathers (n=38) of pre-school aged children’s perceptions of play in West Virginia, U.S.A. They found that mothers placed a higher value on play than fathers and the fathers placed a higher value on academic focus than the mothers. The fathers did value play, just not as much as the mothers. The researchers speculated that this may be because mothers were more well informed on the value of play as they may often be the parent who selects the child’s educational facility and may have undertaken research into play-based learning through this selection process. The researchers found that as the children got closer to school age though, the parents support of play lessened, which may be attributed to the decrease in play opportunities for children as they begin formal schooling.

The research indicates varying perspectives of caregivers regarding the provision of structured, academic learning and unstructured play-based learning for children. With play the primary activity provided for children at playgroup these perspectives influence caregiver motives for attending and participating in playgroup. They may also have an impact on the experiences provided for children to engage in at community playgroup and the motives of the caregivers attending the playgroup.

Cultural Perspectives of Play

Some of the literature considers caregiver perspectives of play within cultures. Tobin and Kurban (2010) investigated immigrant parent perspectives of play in England, France, Germany, Italy and the U.S.A. Tobin and Kurban (2010) found that parents from all cultural backgrounds wanted an academic, school-like curriculum with specific reference to literacy and numeracy. The researchers report that the immigrant parents of this research “see their children as starting out behind and they see it as the school’s responsibility to help close this gap” (Tobin & Kurban, 2010, p. 81). The parents felt that a more academic approach in the early childhood setting would help the children when they moved on to school.

Knoop and Jensen (2003) conducted a large research project of 3000 parents who participated in telephone survey interviews in five countries: France, Germany, Japan, U.K., and U.S.A. In a cross-cultural study of parental values and attitudes toward children's time for play, the research found that parents from Japan and Germany wanted to give their children more time for free play, while the other countries were less inclined to offer the children more time for free play. Knoop and Jensen (2003) found the parents from the countries in the research felt that they needed to create a balance between free play and scheduled activities. Although the parents in the research realised that time for free play was highly beneficial for children, they also expressed a need to be able to prepare their children for adult work life, which they felt would be enhanced through participation in scheduled activities. This research demonstrates the dichotomy of perspectives not only between participants but also within an individual person.

Muhonen et al. (2019) explored the perspectives of play of mothers in Muenster, Germany (n=34), Chennai, India (n=36) and New York City, U.S.A. (n=36). In an exploration of beliefs about their role and the goals they held for their children's play activities Muhonen et al. (2019) found that the mothers from the three countries saw a role for themselves in their children's play which suggested that they viewed play as important in their children's development. The researchers identified four roles for the parents: facilitator, teacher, play partner and observer. In Germany and the U.S.A., the role of facilitator was the most commonly identified. In this role the mothers "described their role during play activities as facilitating and supporting their child's interests and learning" (Muhonen et al., 2019, p. 227), encouraging the children to solve problems, make their own decisions and be creative. In India the role of teacher was the most commonly identified for the mothers. In this role the mothers provided their children with information by telling, modelling and explaining, providing their children with information to learn specific skills or behaviours. Educational goals were referred to by teacher-mothers, while play partner and observer mothers emphasised the role of play. Variations of the mother's roles in play were identified between countries as well as variations within each community.

Comparisons between Euro-American and Asian parents perspectives of play have been made by Parmar et al. (2004). This research used interviews, questionnaires and diary notes to gain an insight into Euro-American (n = 24) and Asian (n = 24) parents in northeast Connecticut in the U.S.A. Parmar et al. (2004) found that Euro-American parents valued play and play-based learning while in contrast Asian parents preferred a more academic focus for their children's learning as they felt that it would give their children a head-start at school. This research also found differences in the toys and time offered to preschool children to play between cultures. As the Euro-American parents valued play more, they provided their children with more toys to play with, more time to

play and often joined their children in play activities. The Asian parents, on the other hand, provided less toys and time. Parmar et al. (2004) found that the toys the Asian parents provided their children with were more typically educational type toys and when they joined their children in their activity they were more likely to take a teacher role (Parmar et al., 2004).

This finding was reinforced by research by Parmar et al. (2008) who investigated the participation of Asian and Euro-American parents in their preschool aged children's play and activities. This research found that "parents in both groups spent similar amounts of time in play activities with their children" (Parmar et al., 2008, p. 163) however, Asian parents spent more time in construction play and Euro-American parents in social play. They also found that Asian parents spent more time in academic-type activities such as literacy and numeracy and using a computer.

The research that investigates caregiver perspectives of play within various cultures further suggests interpretations of play are culturally based. International research shows that caregivers value play as a tool for learning, as well as expressing a need for preparing children for schooling and life through more direct learning instruction. Research has also highlighted variations when comparing caregivers' perspectives cross-culturally (Knoop & Jensen, 2003; Parmar et al., 2004; Parmar et al., 2008; Tobin & Kurban, 2010). Cultural understandings and motives of play from a caregiver perspective have not been a large focus of attention in research in Australia and have not previously been considered relative to caregiver participation in community playgroups.

Caregivers Perspectives of What Constitutes Play

Variations in caregivers' perspectives of what constitutes play can be found in research by Fisher et al. (2008) who undertook two studies that examined beliefs about the relationship between play and learning of 1130 mothers in the U.S.A. Fisher et al. (2008) found that there were variations in the mother's "conceptualisations of play, perceived learning value, and frequency of children's play behaviours" (Fisher et al., 2008, p. 305). The mothers either saw everything the children did as play, saw only some activities as play, while others could not decide what did and did not constitute play. The research also found that a wide array of activities was viewed as play by the mothers, including structured and unstructured activities. The structured activities were goal orientated and often consisted of a set sequence of events or actions. Unstructured activities were highly varied and involved imagination and creativity and included free play, fantasy or symbolic play and social play. Some parents placed academic value in both structured and unstructured learning activities while others placed more learning value in structured activities over unstructured activities. For mothers, "structured play represented activities with an inherent goal structure that included (a) electronic toys, television and computer use, and (b) life skills

preparatory activities such as shopping trips, museum and library visits, and use of flash cards” (Fisher et al., 2008, p. 311).

Research across five countries (France, Germany, Japan, U.K. and U.S.A.) by Knoop and Jensen (2003) illustrates that parents rate the following activities as play (in order of highest ranking to lowest); going to the playground, building toys, painting, drawing and making things, pretending with dolls/actions figures, reading, video games, watching television or videos, using the internet, shopping. It is noteworthy that a “large amount of parents in the five countries see children’s interactions with technological products as play” (Knoop & Jensen, 2003, p. 11) and many parents consider shopping to be a play activity, which is something that may not have traditionally been identified as play activities. The variations in parents’ perspectives of play may have influence on the variations in their perspective of whether or not children spending time engaged in play activities is of value to their learning. This may have implications for the experiences that are provided for children in community playgroup and the motives for play held by the caregivers attending the playgroup.

Summary

Within the research relating to caregiver perspectives of play many of the findings indicate that caregivers often have varying opinions; caregivers who value play in a more unstructured child-led environment; caregivers that prefer more structured and academic learning for their preschool children (Breathnach et al., 2016); and caregivers that express both positive and negative perspectives towards children’s play (Breathnach et al., 2016). This suggests that caregivers’ perspectives are divided on what constitutes play, with evidence of cultural variation in how play is understood. Cultural variation in perspectives of play may have implications for caregiver motives for participating in community playgroups.

Conclusion

This chapter reported on the literature in relation to theories of play, playgroup, and parent perspectives of play. The progression of play theories from the 1600s through to contemporary thinking were identified with particular reference made to the theories of Comenius, Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Piaget, and Vygotsky. Socio-cultural theory in relation to play was also discussed. Contemporary thinking concerning play highlights the contextualized nature of play in terms of children’s cultural experiences and caregiver perspectives. This challenges the idea of play as developmentally universal, including through approaches to early childhood education such as Developmentally Appropriate Practice.

The chapter then reviewed the playgroup literature, starting with an examination of playgroup provision in Victoria, Australia. The literature identified benefits to children through playgroup participation, including enhanced development across all areas (social, emotional, cognitive, language and motor skills) and social engagement with others. Benefits to caregivers were also identified in the literature. These included: friendships, support provided to caregivers and a sense of community for caregivers. Research identified benefits to the community through playgroup participation, particularly in terms of social capital. Caregivers learning about play through participation in playgroup was identified in some of the literature. The playgroup literature section concluded with a discussion of the provision of playgroup to CALD families and communities as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, which again, identified benefits to caregivers, children, and community.

Finally, the chapter reviewed the literature in relation to caregiver's perspectives of play. This literature identified variations held by caregivers in the value of play with some caregivers articulating the value of play in children's learning and development and others suggesting that play is something for children to do once schoolwork and formal learning is complete. Research also indicated that some caregivers value an unstructured, play-based environment for their children to learn in, while others value a structured academic environment. There was also consideration given in the research to cultural variation in caregivers perspectives of play.

The literature in this chapter suggests capacity for better understanding caregiver perspectives of play, and how these are indicated in their motives for playgroup participation, especially community playgroup. Limited research has been undertaken within community playgroup, even though they are amongst the most highly accessed form of playgroup in Australia, attended by caregivers and their children from culturally, linguistically and socially-economic diverse communities. Given sociocultural theory considers institutions such as playgroup as co-constituted by individual perspectives and motives, and societal values, the lack of research about community playgroup indicates value in researching, and therefore better understanding how the institution of community playgroup is constituted. The research question informing this study, therefore asks:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

The next chapter (Chapter 3, Theory) outlines and explains the theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter 3. Theory

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework underpinning this research. It begins by providing an overview of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, including key concepts within this work such as mediation, the social situation of development and the notion of crisis. The chapter then explores Hedegaard's (2009) cultural-historical thinking which is used as a lens from which to explore the research question:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

Hedegaard's (2009) cultural-historical theory considers the three perspectives of the state, the institution, and the individual as constitutive of development. These perspectives are discussed and examined in relation to this research. This chapter then discusses the concepts of activity settings, everyday practices, motives, and values as they relate to Hedegaard's (2009) thinking and their conceptualisation within the research reported in this thesis.

An Overview of Vygotsky's Theoretical Framework

The origins of cultural-historical theory can be traced to the work of Vygotsky (1896-1934), a Russian scholar who was interested in language and cognitive development and their relationship to learning. Initially censored by the Soviet government his works were not available in Western countries until they were translated to English in the 1960s (Mooney, 2013; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Based on Marxian theory, which was prevalent in Russia at that time, Vygotsky's thinking considered the development of the relationship between the individual and their social environment, while learning to engage and participate in shared activities (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Vygotsky's (1978) approach in psychology recognised that the relationship between an individual's mental processes and their interaction with cultural, historical, and institutional settings were dialectically related (Langford, 2005; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

The work of Vygotsky has had a significant influence on Western-European early childhood education. Vygotsky (1978) placed an emphasis on both personal and social experiences, believing that children's worlds are shaped by families, communities, education and culture (Mooney, 2013). Unlike developmental theories of development (such as the work of Piaget), Vygotsky did not see development progressing in a linear way. His theory "focused on a holistic model of development that included the dialectical relations between psychological, biological, and cultural dimensions as noted through motives, cognition, and the social situation of development" (Fleer, 2014, p. 17). For Vygotsky the central source of a child's development is in their relationship with their environment.

Three key concepts in Vygotsky's work include mediation, the social situation of development and crisis relative to the child and environment.

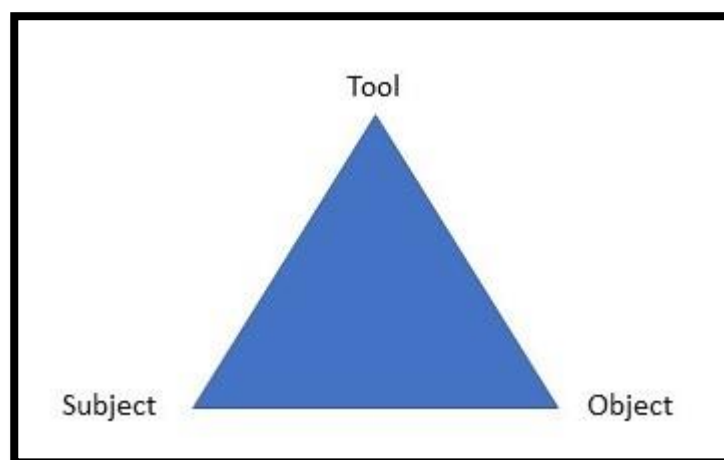
Mediation

The concept of mediation was central to Vygotsky's (1978) cultural-historical theory (Daniels, 2008). It was used to explain the "semiotic process that enables human consciousness development through interaction with artefacts, tools, and social others in an environment" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 16) which results in a person finding new meanings in their world. For Vygotsky, the relationships between people, objects or events in the environment are mediated by cultural means, tools, and signs. These relationships change over time and are not constant (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, an adult and child use language as a means of communication in their interactions, as a child gets older the use of language is also internalised by the child as a way of thinking (Smidt, 2009).

Mediated action occurs when the interactions people engage in allows opportunities that contribute to the social formation of their consciousness (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). A person makes meaning of their world through these interactions while at the same time modifying and creating activities that produce the transformation of artefacts, tools, and people in their environment (Daniels, 2008; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Mediated action involves an interaction between the individual (subject) and mediating tools (or artefacts) and objects (Figure 1). Vygotsky's (1997) now famous mediated triangle represents this relationship. An activity involves a subject and an object which is mediated by a cultural tool. The subject is the person engaged in the activity. The object is what gives the activity its direction and what the subject is interested in or exploring. The tool can include physical or symbolic artefacts, social others, and prior knowledge (Smidt, 2009). A cultural tool is something a person uses to help their thinking or problem solving. Tools are usually created by humans and have been developed through culturally-based social actions over time (Edwards, 2015). For example, the caregivers within the playgroup communicate with each other through a shared language. The caregivers are the subject, the language is the tool and the conversation that takes place is the object. The mediation takes place through the shared language of the caregivers as they interact with each other at playgroup.

Figure 1

Vygotsky's Tool-Mediated Triangle (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 79).



Social Situation

According to Vygotsky, each stage of development begins with a social situation of development which is influenced by a person's social relationships with others and their state of dependence or independence that changes as the person gets older (Vygotsky, 1998). The social situation refers to the interactions a person has with others through the period. For example, in infancy the social situation of development is produced because the infant depends on adults. In early childhood, a child gains partial independence from their social relationships as they learn to walk and talk. For a child of preschool age the social situation of development focuses on their relationship with their parents as they begin to develop more independence to complete things for themselves (Langford, 2005). For the adolescent the achievement of sexual maturity is part of the social situation of development as the adolescent loosens ties with their parents and forms bonds with their peers as they develop their independence (Langford, 2005). Vygotsky (1998) explains that the environment needs to be considered with the person, rather than separate to the person, in respect to their development. Vygotsky (1998) describes the importance of the social situation:

We must admit that at the beginning of each age period, there develops a completely original, exclusive, single and unique relation, specific to the given age, between the child and reality, mainly the social reality, that surrounds him. We call this relation the *social situation of development* at the given age. The social situation of development represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during the given period. It determines wholly and completely the forms and the path along which the child will acquire ever new personality characteristics, drawing them from the

social reality as from the basic source of development, the path along which the social becomes individual (p. 198).

As a person passes through the period and moves towards the end of an age they will reconstruct their consciousness “and in this way change the whole system of relations to external reality and to himself” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 199). Vygotsky (1998) suggests that at this time the person is now a different person than they were at the start of the stage as via the social situation of development they have moved on to the next stage and are facing further development.

Crisis

Within each period a person’s personality shifts through the social situation of development and forms “neoformations” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 194) which have a key role in development. Neoformations represent a person’s psychological function and their interaction with their social environment. “Each neoformation has its own path of development, each interacting with the others, and undergoing qualitative changes at different stages in the child’s development” (Blunden, 2011, p. 465). This development can lead to conflict, which Vygotsky refers to as a crisis, between the personality and the social situation because the two no longer match providing a critical period (Vygotsky, 1998). “Critical periods alternate with stable periods and are turning points in development, once again confirming that the development of the child is a dialectical process in which a transition from one stage to another is accomplished” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 193). The crisis provides a point where a new social situation is developed for a person. This crisis is resolved by the neoformation growing and producing a new way of thinking and functioning creating a new social situation of development where the person’s needs can be met. The conflict or crisis between one’s personality and social situation is resolved and the person moves to the new social situation of development for the next stage (Langford, 2005). For example, a caregiver attends playgroup and may learn about providing play experiences for their child. The process of learning about play through the caregiver’s engagement in the playgroup environment represents new neoformations which provide new understandings of play in children’s lives. This new knowledge interacts with their current knowledge to develop new understandings. This provides a crisis as old understandings are challenged, and new understandings or social situations are integrated through the participation in the playgroup. The crisis provides the opportunity for the new social situations which is attending playgroup, which then leads to a new neoformation producing a new way of thinking about play for young children.

Vygotsky's Influence on Theoretical Perspectives

Vygotsky's work has influenced many theoretical perspectives, including cultural-historical activity theory, socio-cultural theory, cultural-historical theory, and social constructivism. I will briefly outline each of these below before highlighting the chosen perspective for this thesis.

Furthering the work with Vygotsky, Leontiev, a colleague of Vygotsky, extended the investigation into social psychology and introduced the term activity theory (Ridgway, 2010; Wertsch, 1988; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). This was expanded by Engeström (2015) and became known as cultural-historical activity theory which includes the "wider embodiment of perceptions, historical development and personality in social practices" (Ridgway, 2010, p. 313) as expressed in human activity. This theory includes the interaction between "subject, object, motivation, action, goals, socio-historical context, and the consequences and activity" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 21).

Socio-cultural theory has also developed from the work of Vygotsky. This theory recognises that children's development is shaped by the interactions they have with others and where the interactions take place (Edwards, 2003). It takes into account the social, historical and cultural aspects of everyday activities (Fleer, Anning, et al., 2009), as well as the influences of other people and the tools of their environment (Carr, 2014). The relationship between social and individual processes in the development of knowledge are emphasised in socio-cultural approaches (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

Another perspective influenced by the work of Vygotsky is social constructivism. Social constructivism can be described as a "view about the social nature of knowledge and science" (Detel, 2015, p. 228). In this view the central idea is that some things are produced by social actions, that is, through actions carried out by interacting with other people (Detel, 2015) as well as cultural tools. Cultural tools can be conceptualised not only as "static objects, but as embodiments of certain cultural practices, crystalised templates of action, schematized representations of certain ways of doing things as discovered in the collaborative history of humanity" (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2006, p. 97). Social constructivist research is focused on the immediate social contexts (Fleer, Anning, et al., 2009) of the here and now, rather than considering the historical implications of the past (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2006).

Finally, cultural-historical theory stems from the work of Vygotsky. A cultural-historical approach acknowledges the historical context in which people develop, which Vygotsky contends is to "study it in the process of change" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 65). Vygotsky viewed the human aspect of development as the "culture that settles in...[a person's] consciousness, behaviour and development...[and] learn to deal with objects and other human beings that is crucial in the cultural

development of human activities” (van Oers, 2014, p. 56). Cultural-historical theory understands development to take into consideration the activities and interactions and the features of the people involved in those activities and interactions. It considers the development of the cultural setting over historical time, which provides meaning to the activities and interactions (Fleer, Hedegaard, et al., 2009). Cultural-historical theories are based on the concept that activities take place within cultural contexts and can be understood best when they are investigated in their historical circumstance (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). This theory places importance on both the social and individual in the construction of knowledge by integrating history and culture (Ridgway, 2010).

Hedegaard (2008) works within a cultural-historical perspective and her thinking guides the theoretical framework for this research. Hedegaard conceptualised a model of “learning and development through participation in institutional practices” (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 130). The model provides the opportunity to reflect on the complex relationships within societal, institutional and individual practices (Hedegaard, 2009). Hedegaard (2008) offers a conceptualisation where the relationships within institutional practices is considered in a person’s development. Hedegaard’s (2008) theoretical framework was chosen for this research as the institutional practices of families and playgroup, the societal practice of early childhood and the individual practice of the caregiver, as well as the interaction between the three, are likely to shed light on how community playgroups are culturally constituted, paying particular attention to caregiver motives for play.

Hedegaard’s Cultural-Historical Theory

This research uses Hedegaard’s cultural-historical theory to investigate how the institution of playgroup is co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup. Hedegaard’s (2009) cultural-historical theory conceptualises development through the inclusion of the perspectives of the individual, consideration of practices and their traditions within institutions, and the societal conditions for these practices.

Cultural-historical theory aims to understand how to create conditions that lead to an individual’s development and thus support the development of their capabilities that are part of the everyday practices in which they participate (Hedegaard, 2009). Within this theory development is described by Hedegaard as a consequence of “participation in historically-formed societal practices” (Chaiklin & Hedegaard, 2009, p. 184). Societal practices are the groups, clubs, or institutions in which individuals engage, for example, families, religious institutions, sports clubs, or playgroups. These societal practices represent a set of cultural values and norms that have been developed over time (Chaiklin & Hedegaard, 2009). In this research early childhood education,

including that of playgroups, is conceptualised as a societal practice because it can be seen as an institution within society that an individual (caregiver or child) can participate in. Further, the perspectives of the caregiver (as the individual) and their practices and traditions within institutions such as the family and playgroup will be considered, in this way giving insight into how playgroups as an institution are co-constituted at the societal and individual level.

Hedegaard (2008) theorises that the perspectives of society, institutions and an individual need to be thought about within a wholeness approach and will be considered across an individual's everyday life in activity settings within a variety of institutional settings. A wholeness approach considers all the individual aspects of an individual to develop a holistic view of that individual and their experiences. For example, the interdependent relationship between an individual's activities, institutional practices and societal conditions are viewed together to consider how the practice in one institution crosses over and influences participation in another (Fleer, Hedegaard, et al., 2009; Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013). In the context of this research a wholeness approach means that the caregiver's motives (e.g., what drives a person, what their goal is) when they participate in activity settings, which are located in the institutions of their own family practice and a community playgroup, will be driven by societal values (e.g., a social institution such as early childhood education), for example, play or play-based learning. These values are embodied in traditions such as family culture and are framed by societal conditions, such as the value placed on play in early childhood education (Hedegaard, 2012b). The various perspectives concerning an individual's social situation of development needs to be considered so that the diversity of conditions present for their development and everyday activities can be analysed according to how these interact with the values incumbent within any given societal institution.

Hedegaard's cultural-historical theory "seeks to capture and analyse the different institutional collectives in children's everyday life, such as home, school and kindergarten" (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010, p. 149). An institution is where an individual practices their everyday life, and they may participate in many institutions at the same time. Each institution (e.g., family, playgroup) has its own traditions (e.g., work before play, or play for learning) which influence any given situation. An individual's engagement and participation in the institution will influence their development. An individual's *motives* for participating in these institutions are related to both the practices within the institutions and the values held by the culture.

Within cultural-historical theory the practices that take place in the societal institutions and the activities of the individual within these institutions are important (Hedegaard, 2009). The activities that an individual is creating and participating in, influence the institutional practices

provided at a societal level, and therefore also influence changes in that society. An individual contributes to both the institutions in which they are engaged in, and therefore the perspective of the society in which they are part. In this way both the institution and an individual contribute to practice within cultural-historical theory (Hedegaard, 2009).

A cultural-historical approach takes into account the “specific social settings of [an] individual...and the cultural and historical aspects of their everyday living and...the diversity in...[an individual’s] actual development” (Hedegaard, 2009, pp. 68-69). In terms of this research the everyday living that takes place between the caregiver and the child can be considered in relation to their specific situation, taking into consideration their cultural and historical experiences. A cultural perspective considers an individual to be an “active participant in a collective community...embracing institutional and cultural values, beliefs and motives” (Fleer & Quinones, 2009, p. 90). The historical component considers how these develop over time (Fleer, Hedegaard, et al., 2009).

Values and motives guide an individual’s activities in different settings in institutional practices while the setting in which the individual participates (such as in the family and at playgroup) is influenced through their actions, consequently impacting the circumstances for their own development (Hedegaard, 2012a). In this research the values and traditions of early childhood education (e.g., play-based learning), which may have an impact on family practice and playgroup practice, will be considered. The research will also consider the motives of the caregivers, that is what drives a caregiver regarding play to participate in a community playgroup, and how these motives may in turn, influence both family and playgroup practices.

Social Situations

The inclusion of social situations in the work of Hedegaard stems from the work of Vygotsky (1998) and his notion of the social situation of development (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). The social situation of an individual is influenced by the societal and cultural context in which an individual is entrenched in. Particular social situations will be foregrounded in various cultural contexts, which will position an individual to “actively engage and take up particular participation structures” (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010, p. 151). From a cultural-historical perspective the environment is considered integral to the individual, rather than something outside, existing without reference to the individual (Vygotsky, 1998). In this view “it is not just the...[individual] that changes, nor is it the environment that changes, but it is the...[individual’s] *relations* to the environment that changes” (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010, p. 150 author's emphasis). For example, within a family institution each individual will have their own role within it (such as parent, child or sibling). If an individual’s role

is the parent, they will have influence on the family institution as well as in the relationships within the family which would be different if they were, say, the child or a sibling. These roles will then also have influence on other institutions such as their participation in playgroup.

Hedegaard (2009) considers the societal conditions of cultural practices in institutions. The societal conditions shape the activities for participation (Fleer, 2010b). For example, in a school setting there will be conditions that a teacher will have a particular number of children in the classroom and specific materials for the children to use. These will be the societal conditions expected for a school classroom, which will shape the classroom that the teacher is participating in (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010).

By understanding an individual's participation in different institutions greater insights are gained into an individual's changing *relations* with reality. Sociocultural pathways are created through practices in institutions in which an individual participates. Hedegaard (2009) extends Vygotsky's (1998) concept of the social situation in her "theorisation of institutional practices in relation to children's activity as they negotiate the practice transitions within and across institutions" (Fleer, 2010b, p. 190). Like Vygotsky (1998), Hedegaard (2009) contends that crises in an individual's life provide the conditions for development. Hedegaard (2009) suggests that through entering a new institutional context that is unfamiliar to an individual they can experience demands that can result in a crisis in their social situation (Fleer, 2010b). Theoretically, this argument holds for the participation of adult caregivers in community playgroups.

The social situation of development is understood by considering an individual's activity and practice within and across institutions. An individual's development is enhanced through crises they face in their lives. These crises in their new social situation occur when an individual enters a new institutional context where expectations and practices are unfamiliar and they form new competences and motives, and previous ones have to be surpassed in the course of development (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). For an individual, their social situation of development is achieved through their interaction with others. An individual may meet new demands in a new institutional practice while also putting new demands on their caregivers. Hedegaard (2012a) describes social situations:

In Vygotsky's (1932/1998) theory of a child's social situation of development a child's entering a new age period is indicated by crises, where new formation of competence and motives takes place and earlier ones have to be transcended in the process of development. A child's social situation of development is realised through the child's interaction with others. In

entering a new institutional practice, the child meets new demands both directly and indirectly but also put new demands on the caregivers; the child not only acquires understanding of and competences to perform activities but also influences and changes the settings in which he or she participates in the different practices (p. 128).

In this research social situations are identified as relevant for adult caregivers as well as children, occurring in institutional practices such as the family and playgroup, where the caregiver is thinking, talking and acting in interaction with others (e.g., other adults, caregivers and children). In this way the institutions provide a social situation, a place where the caregiver, the environment and the interactions that take place, helping to shape the individual, their motives, values, and the everyday activities that they participate in. The institutions of family and playgroup provide an opportunity for caregivers to acquire new understandings and competences, concerning their interactions with their children, and by consequence influencing change within these institutions.

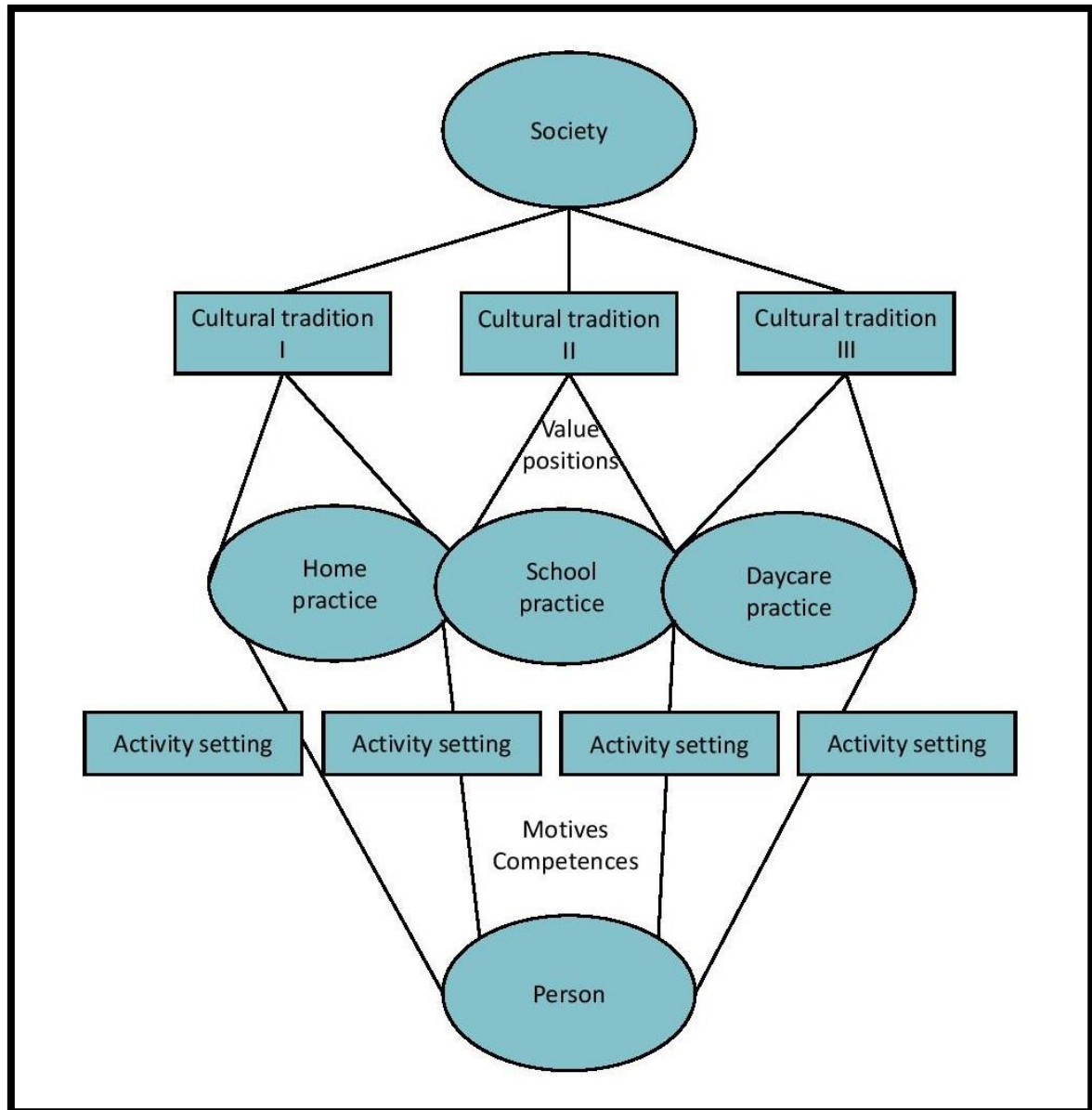
Society, Institution, and Individual Perspectives

This section provides an overview of three perspectives identified in Hedegaard's cultural-historical theory: 1) society, 2) the institution and 3) the individual. Each perspective is then discussed in turn and considered in relation to this research, concluding with an overview of the perspectives as they are seen within this research.

Hedegaard's (2009) model considers the societal, institutional and individual's perspective, whereby development can be viewed from all three perspectives. Through the use of Hedegaard's (2009) "model of children's learning and development through participation in institutional practice" (p. 130) (Figure 2) early childhood education and family culture are conceptualised as the culture or tradition through which play and playgroup are seen as the value positions. The institutions in this research are family and playgroup practice while the caregiver occupies the place as the individual.

Figure 2

Hedegaard's "Model of Children's Activity Settings in Different Institutions" (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 130)



Note. This figure demonstrates society at the societal level, home, school, and daycare practice are at the institutional level and person is at the individual level.

Hedegaard's model depicts society at the top of the table which represents the culture and tradition(s) of the society. Within this research society is represented by the community in which the caregivers lived, this being inner-suburban Melbourne, Australia. Culture and tradition (family culture, early childhood) hold values which impact the institution where the child or individual participates (family, playgroup). Hedegaard (2009) positions the individual (caregiver) as being at

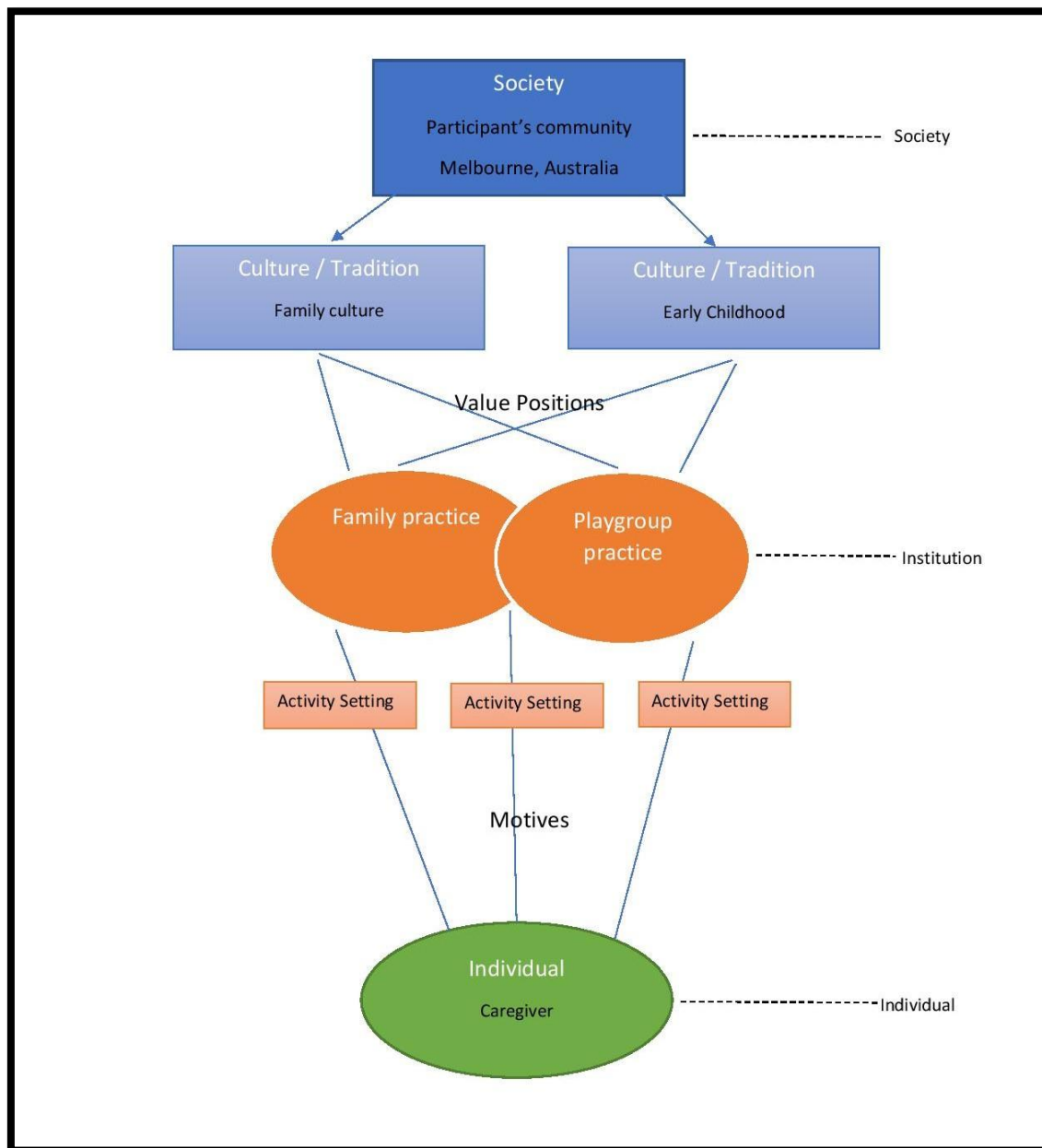
the bottom of the model (Figure 3). The individual's motives have an influence on the institution in which the individual participates, while that individual can participate in many institutions both at the same time and throughout time. Within these institutions are activity settings (practices and traditions within the institutions, such as playtime, meals, and work) in which the individual participates. A fluid motion occurs between society and the individual, both having an impact on the institutions. At the same time the institutions have influence on both the society and the individual in a two-way motion. The institutions are where the values of society and the motives of the person meet. Ideally these values and motives will not be in competition with each other and will work together for the individual participating in the institutions, but this might not necessarily always be the case.

In this research, institutions such as the family and playgroup interact together through activity settings, and with the motives of the everyday practices of the caregiver, who is in the position of the individual. For example, in an activity setting such as a mealtime that can occur in institutions of family practice *and* playgroup practice, the motive of the caregiver may be to have their child eat fruit for morning tea as it is a healthy choice. This research considers what the motives of the caregiver are that connect with the everyday practices from the two primary institutions in which they participate, these being the family and the playgroup. For example, the motive of the caregiver to provide their child a healthy morning tea when they are at home and when they are attending playgroup. These institutions hold value positions, especially in the playgroup where play is viewed as a means of learning from a Western-European point of view. An individual's motives, along with society's values may or may not work together to help shape a caregiver's perspective. For example, research shows that caregiver perspectives of play are culturally situated and may not always align with a Western-European value in which play is associated with learning (Fung & Cheng, 2012; Lin & Li, 2019; Lin et al., 2020). This research is interested in how the institution of playgroup is therefore co-constituted by the individual caregiver and the societal representations of early childhood education (Figure 3).

Variances of the conceptions of these motives and values arise depending on the different institutions, the practice traditions within the institutions and the individuals participating in the practice. When analysing an individual's social situation all three perspectives (societal, institutional, individual) are necessary. This is represented in the model as the individual's "relation via motives...to the different activity settings" (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 130) and how their values and motives shape their perspectives of play and playgroup and their participation within the institutions.

Figure 3

Hedegaard's (2012a) Model for the Purposes of this Research



Societal Perspective

The societal perspective contains historically developed cultural traditions that are located in and valued by particular communities which are “formalized into laws and regulations as conditions for the existence of an institution” (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 129). At this level society mediates an individual’s participation in activities through the institutions through laws, guidelines and practices (Hedegaard, 2012a). The societal perspective provides the conditions for the different practices such as the family practice and the playgroup practice. For example, the societal

perspective in this research is represented by the participants' communities in Melbourne, Australia, and the conditions and expectations for family and early childhood are outlined and provided at this level such as the national curriculum document for early childhood educators, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), and laws concerning children and families such as child safety or divorce.

Society provides traditions that often have written or implied "values, norms and discourses about child development" (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 65), best practices for optimum outcomes for children and so forth. These are combined with the cultural traditions and values. Within early childhood education in Australia there will be regulations, set by society and written into laws, regarding the number of educators working with a specific number of children and particular resources available for children to use (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). These are outlined in Australia by an independent national authority that assists state, territory and federal governments in administering Australia's National Quality Framework (NQF) (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2020) for children's education and care. This authority is the Australian Children's Education and Care Authority (ACECQA). Furthermore, the cultural tradition of play-based learning is evident in the national EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) which describes play as a "context for learning" (p. 6).

An example of unwritten expectations from within society are the values the society upholds about appropriate practices for children's learning activities (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010). These unwritten expectations frequently stem from the value attached to historical theories in early childhood education such as Piaget (1951). Research shows that these historical values persist, even as new ways of thinking emerge (Farquhar & White, 2014; Fleer et al., 2018; Rogers, 2015b; Walsh et al., 2019). These laws, regulations and expectations blend together with "a set of values about what is good practice for children's learning activity" (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010, p. 152) to form the value positions of the society which then influence the institutional practices in which the caregiver engages. In this study, my own participation in early childhood education as an educator, alongside written policy, such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) are taken as representative of the societal perspective on early childhood education within community playgroups.

Institutional Perspective

The central focus of cultural-historical theory is "the practice of everyday life in different institutions" (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 74). An individual will engage in various institutions, such as the family and playgroup, at the same time. The institutional perspective has a focus on the everyday practices within the institutions. The *everyday practices in institutions need to be seen as blending societal cultural traditions and values with personal motives*. The institutional practice is where the

values from the society and the motives from the individual meet. For example, the societal expectations of play-based learning as valuable for young children when children are participating in a playgroup must meet the motives of the caregiver. In this example, the motive for the caregiver may well be that children learn through play. Here, in the institution of playgroup, the societal values of play, which is that children meet for play because play is valued for learning, meet with the caregiver motives of play, that children learn through play. Thus, values and motives knot together in cohesion co-constituting the institution of playgroup. However, this cohesion may not be the case if the caregiver does not hold the same motives for their children's learning as is the value expressed in playgroups and believes that play is something that children do when there is nothing else to be done. In this situation, the caregiver may not attend playgroup with their child, or only attend when within the family practices all work is done and there is time for play.

The societal, institutional, and individual all work together to allow an understanding of the variations consequently available within an institutional practice. For example, where the caregiver motive for play and playgroup values are misaligned, caregiver and child attendance may be ad hoc; but where they are well aligned attendance may be regular. Regularity of attendance will influence the extent to which the social situation is available for mediation of the caregiver's development, and by extension of their child.

The "informal community traditions and discourses related to school and home" (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2009, p. 255) form the general institutional aspect, such as, children play when at playgroup, while the individual traditions that can be seen in shared activities of an individual within a specific institution form the individual aspect, such as, the particular way play is provided for in a particular playgroup (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2009). Hedegaard and Fleer (2009) refer to these as formal societal, general institutional and individual perspectives, and suggest that all three need to be present for an institutional practice to exist. The dominating activities in an individual's life and their participation in different institutional practices changes over time as they finish in some institutions and enter new ones. As an individual learns, grows, and develops they will move from and between institutions. For example, as a child grows, they move from the institution of kindergarten into the institution of school. As an adult an individual will move between institutions such as from workplace to workplace, or upon the birth of a child from workplace to playgroup, or from home to playgroup. This movement will see a shift in an individual's focus over time.

Playgroup as an Institutional Practice. Playgroup can be seen as an institutional practice. Each playgroup will have its own characteristics, reflecting the historical actions and decisions of the individuals, such as facilitators, families and children, who participate in that particular

playgroup (Hedegaard & Fler, 2009). The individual aspect of practice for each playgroup will have some features that are found in all playgroups, reflecting their interpretation of general practices of playgroups. This individual aspect might be that when the children first arrive at playgroup, they engage in play activities provided for them such as craft, playdough or trains, then they all sit together to have morning tea before finishing the session with a story and song together. For another playgroup the individual aspect might be that they spend the whole playgroup session exploring and playing in a local natural parkland. These individual aspects are mediated through caregiver motives for attendance.

The general aspect is developed through following guidelines for setting up playgroups and training for paid facilitators in supported playgroups. For example, there might be guidelines developed to assist in the set up and operation of a playgroup from bodies such as Playgroup Victoria that outline ways to ensure a smooth operation of the playgroup. For supported playgroups there will also be guidelines in relation to funding and policy.

Individual and general traditions of playgroup practice are developed in relation to the social aspect of playgroup practice. This social aspect will reflect societal interests, such as laws and regulations, policy papers, instructional guides and other official demands on playgroup practice and more broadly early childhood education (Hedegaard & Fler, 2009), for example, the national early childhood curriculum, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009). These three aspects, individual, general and societal, will be present in every institutional practice though the contribution and interaction between the aspects will differ for each specific, individual institutional practice (Hedegaard & Fler, 2009).

The Family as an Institutional Practice. Another example of an institution is a family, which is usually a child's first important institution. The practice within a family is usually unwritten and is often unspoken. Each family will have their own unique features which is the individual aspect of a family. This might be, for example, who is in the family, or what the family routine is at mealtimes. However, there will be other features which will be shared with other families in a community and this can then be characterised as general family practice. These features that can be found across families can be identified in "traditions that are common for several generations of family life in a specific society, which through a historical process have become traditions for how to live and act in families" (Hedegaard & Fler, 2009, p. 256). At the societal level, some traditions of family life such as inheritance, birthright, divorce, and educational requirements for children, have been formalised into laws and regulations about family life. For example, Australia has laws for

compulsory attendance at school in the Education and Training Reform Act (2006) and laws for marriage and divorce in the Family Law Act (1975).

There are differences in practices when looking at different institutions. For example, the dominant feature is individual aspects within the family institution, while there is little focus on societal practice, such as laws and regulations, for how families should care for their children. In school, however, there is a stronger focus on societal practice as the areas of subject matter, curriculum and/or school hours are followed from this level (Hedegaard & Fler, 2009).

Individual Perspective

An individual's perspective is reflected in their motives and personal values and in their activities in the different institutions (Fler, 2010b). Their actions and interactions with others within the institutions, such as the playgroup, is viewed as their perspective. An individual's perspective is an analytical concept, that considers their "intentional activity and motive orientation in a specific activity setting" (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 135). Each individual will have a different perspective in an activity setting (Hedegaard, 2012a) and bring with them their own "special needs, projects and motives in the everyday life" (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 73). In this research the individual perspective will be provided by the caregiver. Their perspective will influence their motives that then affect their participation in the different institutions. For example, if the caregiver's perspective guides the motive that play holds a valuable place in children's learning and development, that will influence their participation in playgroup, as they may be more likely to join a playgroup than a caregiver who does not believe play relates to learning.

Using Hedegaard's Model in This Research

In this research, society, early childhood education, and family culture are placed at the top of the model encompassed within the societal perspective while the caregiver is at the bottom of the model within the individual perspective position (Figure 3). While visually one is at the top and one at the bottom this is not representative of their influence or importance. Values from society along with motives from the individual feed from the top and the bottom of the figure to influence and have effect on the institutions, including family practice and playgroup practice, and their activities located in the middle of the figure. The values from the top and the motives from the bottom interact to form the caregiver's perspectives on play, that are seen in the institutions, such as family practice and playgroup practice. This interaction in the activity settings of the practices in the institutions are an integral component of the system. The institution and the individual both contribute to the practice or the activity within the practice. At the same time, an individual's participation within the institutions may have influence on the society and the individual. Play,

playgroup and early childhood education hold value positions that can have an impact on the caregiver's perspectives, as can their motives for participation in the practices. These motives may be reflected onto the caregivers and to the children in their care. To be able to investigate a caregiver's perspectives of playgroup, research must explore the caregiver's motives and societal values to be able to see how the institution of playgroup is co-constituted by the individual motives and societal values. In this manner, new insight may be generated into how community playgroups are comprised, and in doing so act as a lever supporting the continued development of these groups in the best interests of children and families within their local communities.

Activity Settings

Activity settings are reoccurring events in daily life that are located within institutions and are based on traditions (Hedegaard, 2012a). The practices are seen as routine-type activities happening within each of the institutions. For example, within the family institution there can be a number of activity settings. Hedegaard (2012a) gives examples of activity settings:

- Morning settings with waking up, getting dressed and having breakfast;
- Being brought to school;
- Participating in lessons;
- Having recess and lunch;
- Coming home from school with snack time;
- Doing homework;
- Having play time;
- Having dinner; and
- Going to bed (p. 131).

The activity level in Hedegaard's model signifies the shared activity settings of an individual in a specific institution such as home or playgroup and is conceptualised as "societal traditions realised within an institutional practice as concrete historical events" (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 132).

Both the individual and the traditions that impact institutional practice have influence over the structure of the activity setting (Hedegaard et al., 2012). Considered from the institution perspective, activity settings are reoccurring traditions for activities that take place in an institutional practice (Hedegaard et al., 2012). Practices such as eating breakfast is an example of a recurrent activity setting from an institutional perspective. An individual will create a recurrent social situation in an activity setting within an institution that includes other individuals and that meets their own needs.

Different societies will have different examples of an activity setting. For example, activity settings such as breakfast or homework will be framed by societal traditions of a particular society and they can be quite different within various societies. Within a family the activity setting is created by the family members together. An individual will also contribute to and be influenced by a family's activity setting (Hedegaard et al., 2012). Hedegaard et al. (2012) gives the example of children of various ages completing homework. In this example, each child participates in this activity setting from their own specific social situation of development according to their experience (Hedegaard et al., 2012). For a younger child, they participate in the homework activity setting by drawing on some paper, a child slightly older will be reading their reading book, while a child even older may be preparing a presentation for their class. The social situation of development is linked by personalising each individual's activity in the form of the individual's "emotional experience to the social demands in the activity setting" (Hedegaard et al., 2012, p. 21). An individual's motives in the activity setting are realised through their activities.

Researching across activity settings in the everyday life of an individual will provide a wholeness perspective and put into focus how and when an individual participates in their activities and how they experience and feel about their participation (Bang, 2009). For this research, including various activity settings for both the caregiver and the child provides a detailed perspective of their everyday life as a means of accessing their motives for playgroup participation.

Within these social situations the individual's motives are met when their activities reflect cultural traditions and values. For each individual, their experience of a social situation will be different within the same activity setting because each individual has a unique understanding of the setting and their own motives. Similarly, an individual can engage in a number of different activity settings within the different institutional practices in which they participate in (Hedegaard, 2012a).

The concept of activity setting is included as a smaller unit than the concept of practice to "analyse how children's activities at home can be influenced by school, and also how children can be active agents influencing practice" (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 131). This can be seen, for example, when activities the child has done at school influence and contribute to changes in the practices at home (Hedegaard, 2012a). For the context of this research, this would be illustrated when something from the playgroup influences practices (e.g., shared reading at playgroup translating into joint reading between a caregiver and child at bedtime) in the home or vice versa. Each institution will have a different tradition that influences the other. An activity setting and the interactions within a family practice will be different from an activity setting and its interactions

within a school practice. For example, within home and school a lunch setting will be different for the same child. This will also be the case for children within the same society (Hedegaard, 2012a). The interactions between an individual, an activity setting and interactions with other individuals is a fluid motion that goes both ways (Hedegaard, 2012a).

Everyday Practices

A key concept within cultural-historical theory is “children’s projects, their intentions, their everyday practices and their interaction with other...[individuals] in this everyday practice” (Hedegaard, 2009, pp. 71-72). Within this theory, individuals are seen as developing through their participation in everyday activities and practices in societal institutions. However, society and its institutions are not immobile, they are seen as changing over time in a “dynamic interaction between...[an individual’s] activities, institutional practice, societal traditions and discourse, and material conditions” (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 72). An individual’s life and development can be affected by several types of institutional practices within their social situation. These may be playgroup, family, or work. The individual initiating or entering activities within societal institutions will influence their development, their path through different institutional practices will depend on the person’s “biology, the material conditions, and the cultural traditions and norms of the society and its institutions” (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 72).

In everyday life an individual is usually connected to more than one institution. For example, during the early childhood period of a child’s life, grandparents and the extended family may have connections with a child. Health care institutions and, for some families, religious institutions may be connected to an individual’s everyday life and these will provide norms and values for the individual (Hedegaard, 2009). This will also provide an individual with cultural values, motives and ways of acting through participation, interaction, and communication within these everyday institutional practices. The society that surrounds institutions gives conditions for everyday life that take place within the institutions in which an individual participates. This is because the society, through culture and traditions, has influence on the institutions through the values passed on to them.

Motives

Motives are what drives an individual, they are why they are doing something or behaving in a particular way, and what their goal might be. They are a “concrete, but general, objective in a societal practice towards which...[an individual’s] actions are organised” (Chaiklin & Hedegaard, 2009, p. 190). Within cultural-historical theory an individual’s motives develop in institutional practice, they go beyond a specific situation and can represent the drive that characterises an

individual in different activities. An individual's motives influence their choice of activities and how they relate to others, which changes through time and as the individual develops. An individual will have several motives both over the course of time and at any given time. Some of the motives an individual has will be more important than others (Hedegaard, 2012a). An individual can acquire motives through instructional activities. Through this acquisition an individual will develop knowledge and skills that will support the realisation of their motives and will use this knowledge in relation to their motives (Chaiklin & Hedegaard, 2009) to ensure achievement of their motive themselves.

Motives help to guide an individual's life and their point of view across different situations. An individual may have several motives functioning at any given time, which will all be interrelated. The most meaningful motive will be the one that is dominating an individual at that time (Hedegaard, 2005). Through the developmental process an individual may have several consecutive motives:

the motive of the infant is contact with caregivers; the toddler's dominating motive is exploration of the surroundings; the dominating motive of the preschool child is play; during the first years of school the child has a learning motive which by and by is replaced by the motive to be accepted by friends and to become someone of consequence. (Bottcher, 2009, p. 113).

As an individual grows these motives may overlap with others. The specific motives of an individual are the result of their participation in practices, and their development of interests and ideas about what they would like to do in the future. Therefore personal motives develop and change as they grow, leading to new ways of participating in new institutional settings (Bottcher, 2009). Following an individual and their actions within an activity setting over time allows an observer to determine their most important motive within the specific activity setting (Hedegaard et al., 2012).

For this research considering an individual's motives from an individual perspective is an important component to be able to determine their motives for play and therefore participation in community playgroup. An individual's motives influence their participation in institutions, as will their participation in these institutions influence their motives. In this research the focus is caregiver's participation in activity settings and institutions in both the family practice and playgroup practice. For example, if a caregiver sees play as an important way for children to learn, then their participation in playgroup may be further heightened as they see the benefit in participating in a group where the children engage in play. On the other hand, if play is seen as something children do when there is nothing else for them to do, or something children do after

the work and learning of the day is completed, then their participation in playgroup has no specific motive, with little consequent benefit seen in playgroup participation.

Values

Values are “interwoven in different cultural traditions in the institutions where...[an individual’s] daily activities take place” (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 80). When an individual’s activities meet cultural traditions and values, the individual’s motives are realised (Hedegaard, 2012a). The dominating value positions of society hold the cultural traditions from within that society that have been developed historically over time. Values can be seen as moving in a downward direction (Figure 2; Figure 3) from the societal perspective to the institutional perspective. By the same token, values can move in an upwards direction from the institution to the society. For example, society may value play as a means for children to learn and that will be reflected in the social provision of playgroups for children and families within the local community. In the same way, the institution itself, may value being a particular type of playgroup, such as supported playgroup with a paid, trained facilitator, with this value influencing the social provision of government funding for the facilitator. For the purposes of this research, the society is considered to hold values about play-based learning in early childhood education. Society will provide the conditions for cultural practices in institutions through the values that it holds in conjunction with the laws that are provided at this level (e.g., ACECQA) and the values it holds regarding appropriate practice for children’s learning (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework used in this study. It has provided an introduction and overview of Vygotsky’s (1978, 1997, 1998) thinking and key concepts in his work, including mediation, the social situation of development and crisis relative to human development. The chapter has presented the link between Vygotsky’s (1978, 1997, 1998) theory and cultural-historical theory, in terms of the dialectical relationship between people and society, with specific reference to Hedegaard’s cultural-historical theory. According to Hedegaard (2009), society, institutions and individuals are considered as an interrelationship between all three perspectives. The individual is guided by their motives, just as society is guided by values while both motives and values are influenced by institutional practices. These values and motives intersect in the individual’s participation in everyday activities in activity settings in institutions. The next chapter will explain and discuss the methodological underpinnings of this study.

Chapter 4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological directions taken in this research to explore the research question:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

The chapter begins by describing the qualitative research approach undertaken in this study. It discusses the constructivist paradigm underpinning the research and how this paradigm guides the ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodological conduct of the research. A case study design is explored in this chapter, including the approach to inviting participant contributions to the research. This chapter also describes the data generation, including the Mosaic approach, used in this research. The data analysis process undertaken in the research is reported, including the use of inductive and deductive coding. In the latter sections of the chapter, the ethical considerations undertaken for the research and the limitations of the research are discussed.

Qualitative Research

Research can be undertaken using qualitative and/or quantitative methods. Quantitative research asks specific questions to gain measurable and observable data which then provides numeric data from an often-large number of people and presents a statistical analysis of the data. Conversely, qualitative research explores a problem and develops a comprehensive understanding of a central phenomenon, such as how the institution of playgroup is co-constituted from a cultural-historical perspective. Qualitative research provides a well conceptualised research question, with a specific purpose, and in response seeks to gather the participant views, often using spoken or written language amongst other visual representations (e.g., photographic images, drawings). Qualitative research generally has a smaller number of participants than quantitative research. The use of codes, categories and themes are used for analysis of qualitative data (Creswell, 2014a).

The research undertaken in this thesis is a qualitative study. Qualitative research is used when a researcher wishes to “collect, interpret and make judgements about data that cannot be measured – such as what people say and do, how they say it and why” (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013, p. 26). The intent in this research is to capture the perspectives of participants, and to investigate how the institution of playgroup is co-constituted by individual motives for play within families and societal values about play. Perspectives may be effectively captured from within a social constructivist paradigm.

Social Constructivist Paradigm

The philosophical underpinning guiding this research is social constructivism. Creswell (2014b) suggests that social constructivists follow the idea that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p. 8). This understanding is founded on a person’s historical and social perspectives which change with their experiences within the world. The meanings a person makes of their world will be varied and are often formed through their social actions and interactions with others according to the cultural and historical norms that operate in their lives (Creswell, 2014b; Detel, 2015). Social constructivist researchers focus on these social, cultural and historical contexts to interpret the meanings people have about the world (Fleer, Anning, et al., 2009).

Through the use of a social constructivist paradigm this research is guided by the belief that there are multiple perspectives held about the world by people, and that their experiences within the world cannot be categorised as a universal understanding. In this research, a social constructivist paradigm was chosen to enable an investigation into the individual motives for play by caregivers and the societal values for play co-constituting the institution of playgroup. In using a social constructivist paradigm, I recognise as a researcher that perspectives will differ for each participant in the research, and that my interpretation of these perspectives also shapes how they are represented in the research findings.

In this research I am interested in the perspectives, or from a cultural historical perspective, the motives of the participants. Methods that seek participant perspectives are detailed later in this chapter, and include photographic documentation, an autoethnography, semi-structured interviews and the co-construction of a play map between the caregiver participants and myself.

To understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants the research focuses on the specific contexts or settings of the participant’s lives (Creswell, 2014b). This provides a rich and detailed understanding of the participant’s reality by understanding their motives. The multiple data methods provide me with the opportunity to understand the context of the participants through gathering information personally with each participant (Creswell, 2014b).

As a constructivist researcher, I recognise that my own background affects my interpretation of the participants experiences and consequent data generated (Lincoln et al., 2018). In this research I have positioned my contribution to the data generation as representative of early childhood in society (Chapter 3, p.61.) and acknowledge that my representation will be reflective of my experience in early childhood education. I acknowledge that my representation stems from my personal, cultural, and historical understandings about young children, play, learning and

development, and the role of early childhood education in society. This is important because through a constructivist paradigm my personal values, beliefs and understandings influence my interpretation of the data generated in the research. A personal reflective journal was therefore kept throughout the data generation process ensuring that I reflected upon my representation of early childhood education throughout the data generation process. By acknowledging my own understandings, beliefs and values and how these may influence my perspective I am able to connect with the meanings the participants have about their world (Creswell, 2014b).

Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology and Methodology

The foundational assumptions that guide approaches to research are known as ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. A constructivist understanding of these concepts used in this research is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Theoretical Perspectives of Constructionism Related to my Research (adapted from Hatch, 2002).

Concepts	Constructivist Paradigm	Research Question: How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?
Ontology What is the nature of reality?	Multiple realities exist.	Each participant has their own ideas, thoughts and answers about the research question which are all valid, important, and respected as their own views.
Epistemology What can be known and what is the relationship of the researcher to the research?	Knowledge is a shared construction. The researcher and participant co-construct understandings.	The development of a shared understanding of the participants lived motives for play. This was obtained through the creation of a co-constructed play map with the participants. Together the participants and I co-constructed knowledge and an understanding of my values as representative of early childhood education and their motives for play with these co-constructions giving insight into the co-constitution of playgroups as an institution.
Axiology What is the role of values?	Recognition that the researcher holds values.	The values and biases of the researcher as well as the information gained in the research is reported.
Methodology How is the knowledge gained?	Naturalistic qualitative methods.	Time is spent interviewing the participants and working with the participants to co-create a play map. Photographs show the caregivers and their children in their usual social contexts.

Relativist Ontology

Ontology is “the study of the nature of reality” (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 82) and its characteristics. Lincoln et al. (2018) describe ontology as the “world views and assumptions in which researchers operate in their search for new knowledge” (p. 114). As a qualitative researcher I embrace the notion of multiple realities, and report on the multiple realities that are held by the participants of my research (Creswell, 2013).

A constructivist ontological perspective assumes that we are unable to know universal, absolute realities, instead believing that there are many individual perspectives or constructions of reality (Hatch, 2002). This is referred to as a relativist ontology within a constructivist perspective. A constructivist ontological perspective argues that “multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). This means that through our lived experiences and social interactions with others we construct our own knowledge. A relativist perspective is reflected in case study research such as this research, as it acknowledges that there are multiple realities with multiple meanings (Yin, 2014). Within this research the different perspectives of the participants provide the opportunity to explore what the motives for play are for families attending community playgroup. As a researcher I participated in the research process with the participants through the co-creation of a play map bringing to this play map values representative of early childhood education based on my experience as an early childhood professional.

Subjectivist Epistemology

The epistemological question asks: “what is the relationship between the knower and the known?” (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 19) or the researcher and what is being researched. Lincoln et al. (2018) describe epistemology as “the process of thinking. The relationship between what we know and what we see. The truths we seek and believe as researchers” (p. 115). Epistemology is what is included as knowledge and how knowledge claims are validated (Creswell, 2013).

A constructivist paradigm follows a subjectivist epistemology where the knower and the respondent co-create understandings (Lincoln et al., 2018). Researchers and participants engage together to “construct the subjective reality that is under investigation” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). In this research co-constructed understandings are sought through the data collection methods including semi-structured interviews and co-constructed play maps in the co-construction of an understanding of how playgroup is co-constituted as an institution.

Consideration into how the caregivers construct their motives is important. The findings of this research are the result of interactions between myself, as the researcher, and the caregivers, as the researched. A subjectivist epistemology, followed under a constructivist paradigm,

assumes that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know. The investigator and the object of investigation are linked such that who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others and the world. This means we are shaped by our lived experiences, and these will always come out in the knowledge we generate as researchers and in the data generated by our subjects (Lincoln et al., 2018, pp. 116-117).

These understandings of the world, ourselves and others, for myself as the researcher, and the caregivers as the participants, are evident in the data generated by this research and reported in this thesis.

Axiology

Axiology considers the role of values in a research study. In qualitative research it is important that a researcher makes their values known. In a constructivist qualitative study the researcher positions themselves in a study (Creswell, 2013) and acknowledges the value-laden nature of the study. The researcher reports their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of the information gathered from the data (Creswell, 2013). Throughout this research thesis I discuss the values that are involved within the research and include my own interpretation as well as the interpretations of the participants (Creswell, 2013). For example, in the semi-structured interviews one of the caregiver participants, Madison (Warrington playgroup) commented that she attached importance to play for her son Jordan as she has fond memories of playing as a child (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p.6). This may mean that she has a motive for play as it is something her child gains enjoyment from. Madison remembers a feeling of happiness as she reflected on her own experiences. I am able to relate to those feelings in terms of my personal values as I have similar memories of playing as a child and I was able to take these memories into account in the interpretation of the data from the interviews.

Naturalistic Methodology

The methodology of research considers how we know the world or gain knowledge of it, the process taken in the research, and how we seek out new knowledge (Lincoln et al., 2018). A constructivist paradigm takes a naturalistic approach to methodology. In a naturalistic approach the researcher spends time with the participants observing and interviewing them in their natural

contexts in an effort to “reconstruct the constructions participants use to make sense of their worlds” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15).

A naturalistic approach to this research included a semi-structured interview session and a co-created mapping session with each participant. This means that I was able to interview the caregivers in their usual settings of either their home or playgroup, which gave me the opportunity to understand the constructions they used to make sense of their world (Lincoln et al., 2018). I was also able to use the photographs the participants took of their children in their day-to-day pastimes and activities to further understand the caregiver’s constructions of their world. Through these data collection methods, such as the interviews, photographs and the co-constructed play map, I was able to participate in a dialog between myself as the researcher and the caregivers to work collaboratively in the construction of our shared values and motives (Lincoln et al., 2018). By structuring my interactions with the caregivers in a collaborative way, I was able to give the caregivers the time and space to be able to share their constructions of their motives for play. This was also achieved using a semi-structured interview and a session where the participants and I co-created a play map, both of which allowed me to ask further questions of a participant to clarify my understanding of what they were discussing in terms of their motives for play.

Paradigm Summary

The constructivist paradigm “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings) and a naturalistic (in the...usual setting) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a, p. 20). In the context of my research a relativist ontology is evident in the understanding that each participant has their own perspective about the research question which is:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

These perspectives from the participants are considered valid, important and valued, as their views. Through a subjectivist epistemology I, as the researcher, together with the participants of the research, created an understanding of the research question from the participants responses by considering both the participant response and my own values that we bring to the research. A naturalistic methodology included semi-structured interviews that took place in the participants homes or at their playgroup, in a typical setting for them, as well as a co-created play mapping session where together we shared our values and motives about play for understanding the institution of playgroup.

The basic assumptions guiding this research are that “knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Mertens, 2015, p. 16).

Case Study Research Design

Case study research examines a phenomenon known as the ‘case’ in detail and within its real-world setting. Case study research is undertaken when the researcher wishes to gain insight into a real world case and believes that in order to do this an understanding of contextual conditions in which the case is generated is necessary (Yin, 2014).

A case study research design was chosen for this investigation as case study research arises out of the desire to investigate and understand a complex social phenomena in its real world context (Yin, 2014). This research considers the motives of caregivers and the values of early childhood education in the co-constitution of the institution of playgroup – which cannot be answered through a survey, experiment or archival data methods. The study is instead suited to an exploratory case study which allows an in-depth understanding to develop of the phenomenon (e.g., motives and values) being studied (Yin, 2014).

Within a case study the researcher develops an in-depth exploration and analysis of a bounded system which means that the case is chosen for the research in terms of “time, place, or some physical boundaries” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021, p. 523). The boundary helps determine the case. In this research, the bounded system is caregivers attending a community playgroup in metropolitan Melbourne, Australia. Extensive data collection is also a key feature of a case study. In this research the caregiver’s motives, and my values constituting the institution of playgroup is investigated as the phenomenon within the context of the bounded system (e.g., the community playgroup of the participants). The detailed process of data collection, through the collection of photographs, semi-structured interviews, my own autoethnography and the co-creation of play maps means multiple sources of data were engaged to create a rich and full understanding of the phenomenon being explored.

The unit of analysis has an impact on the research, including the participants and sample size. The unit of analysis defines what the ‘case’ to be studied is for the research and “what you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study” (Patton, 2015, p. 263). In this research the unit of analysis were the individual caregiver motives for play combined with my representation of societal values for play in early childhood education.

In order to develop and provide an in-depth understanding of how the institution of playgroup is co-constituted by individual motives and societal values within families attending a community playgroup, the number of participants that contributed was small. Having a larger number of participants would mean for each additional caregiver involved I would then have “less time to devote to exploring the depths” (Creswell, 2014a, p. 493) and this would not achieve the desired outcome for a case study within a constructivist paradigm. For this research, there were seven caregiver participants. Having seven participants assisted in being able to provide an insight into caregiver motives and societal values for play, while still remaining a small enough number to explore in-depth the motives for play of each caregiver.

Sampling and Participants

A culturally diverse community in metropolitan Melbourne was selected for this research to obtain a rich representation of caregiver motives and societal values for play. In this research culturally and linguistically diverse refers to diversity in culture, heritage, background, tradition and language of the participants (DEEWR, 2009). Culture is created by individuals and groups and can be passed on in the form of language and practices from generation to generation. Variances in culture can occur from group to group and person to person, based on values, beliefs, attitudes, and social structures.

The community involved in this research was chosen through data obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). 2016 Australian Census Data, available on the ABS website, identifies for each suburb in Australia the countries of birth of the residents of the suburb and the percentages of residents within the suburb born in each of the listed countries (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This data was used to identify suburbs within metropolitan Melbourne that have lower percentages of residents born in Australia compared to other suburbs. Communities with a lower percentage of residents born in Australia compared to other communities in Melbourne were considered culturally diverse communities for the purposes of this research. It may be that many of the residents were born in the same country outside Australia, or that the residents are from a range of countries outside Australia. For example, in Carlton, an inner-city suburb of Melbourne 27.4% of residents were born in Australia, 22.6% were born in China, 6.4% Malaysia, 3.1% Indonesia, 2.6% India and 2.3% Singapore (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Conversely, in Lilydale, an outer Eastern suburb of Melbourne 79% of residents were born in Australia, 5.3% in England, 1.3% Italy, 1.1% New Zealand, 0.9% Netherlands and 0.8% India (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). In this instance, for the purposes of this research, when comparing the two suburbs, Carlton has a lower percentage of residents born in Australia and

would be more suited to the research. This is due to the idea that play itself is culturally defined, as identified in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Researching with caregiver participants living in culturally diverse communities was intended to help shed light on motives for play that may not necessarily have aligned with Western-European accepted values about play in early childhood education. In this manner, the co-constitution of playgroup amongst caregivers living in culturally diverse communities could generate insight into how playgroups, which are known to provide learning benefits for children (Gregory et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2016; Sincovich et al., 2020) and social benefits for families (Gibson et al., 2015; Hancock et al., 2015; Needham & Jackson, 2012), can be identified and provided for families from a range of cultural experiences.

The two community playgroups that participated in this research were located in the Western suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria. The local council area of the two playgroups that participated in the research was identified through the ABS data. According to the ABS data the two suburbs the playgroups were located in within this local council area, had a high proportion of their residents who were born overseas. In the local council area of the playgroups 52.8% of residents were born in Australia, 10.3% of residents were born in India, 3.6% in New Zealand, 2.6% in the Philippines, 2.5% in China and 2.3% in England. Information regarding existing playgroups operating within the chosen community was obtained through the Playgroup Victoria website (Playgroup Victoria, 2020a). This website contained reference to 45 playgroups in the community. From this list, playgroups were progressively contacted by email and telephone until two playgroups agreed to participate. Participants from the two community playgroups included seven caregivers (i.e., parents, kinships members, carers) of children, who attended a playgroup in 2019 when the data collection was undertaken. The participants of the research identified as Sri Lankan (Farsana), Afghan (Jess), Indian-Indonesian (Wanda), Italian (Madison), Ethiopian (Kiby) and two of the participants identified as European-Australian (Sarah and Super Nan).

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling involves “selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Determining which selection criteria will be used and then finding or locating a unit matching this list is important. This selection criteria reflected the purpose of the study and guided the identification of information-rich cases. Purposive sampling is based on the notion that the researcher wishes to discover, understand, and gain insight on a particular phenomenon and therefore will choose a sample from which they can learn the most (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this research I invited participation from caregivers who currently attended one of two community playgroups in a culturally diverse community to gain insight into their individual motives for play.

To invite participation of caregivers, I accessed a list of playgroups that operated in the identified community areas through the Playgroup Victoria website. The website provided emails and/or phone numbers of the facilitators of the playgroups listed. I sent an introductory email to all the listed community playgroups in two identified local council areas. A total of 74 emails were sent. I received 12 replies from playgroup facilitators that indicated the playgroups were not interested in participating in the research. The remaining 62 playgroups did not respond to my email. While waiting for a reply from my emails I called the playgroups that had listed a telephone contact with Playgroup Victoria. Through the telephone calls I made contact with the President of the Warrington (pseudonym) playgroup who agreed to participate. I sent her an explanatory letter via email (Appendix 2) and attended the Warrington playgroup the following week to introduce myself to the caregivers and invite their participation in the research.

At the same time, through Playgroup Victoria, I was introduced via email to a member of the Children and Family Team at a local council in Melbourne's Western suburbs, which was the same local council area as the Warrington playgroup, who then introduced me via email to the Cultural Liaison Officer (CLO) at the council. Through my interactions with the CLO I was able to make contact with the facilitator of the Tenby (pseudonym) playgroup who invited me to attend the playgroup. The CLO felt that it would be beneficial for me to attend the playgroup for several weeks to get to know the caregivers who attended the playgroup prior to asking the caregivers to participate in the research. The CLO explained that if I attended the playgroup and read a story to the children while I was there, it would help to build the trust with the caregivers about the research before asking them if they would like to participate in the research. After four weeks of familiarisation visits the playgroup caregivers were familiar and comfortable with me and I was able to ask caregivers if they would like to participate in the research.

At the Warrington playgroup, I spoke to the group of caregivers about the research and what participation would involve, while their children were sitting at the tables eating their morning tea. Two caregivers approached me individually and said that they would be interested in participating in the research. I gave them each an explanatory information letter, consent form, child assent form, image taking guidelines and instructions for using Edmodo™ (Appendix 2, 4, 5, 6 & 7). Edmodo™ is an educational website that offers a closed form of social media and was used in this research because it provided a safe and secure way for the caregivers to send me the photographs they had taken. I asked each caregiver to return the consent forms when they attended the playgroup the following week. At the conclusion of the playgroup session I spoke with the President of the playgroup who suggested I return later in the week when their second group of caregivers and children attended to see if I could recruit further participants. I returned for the

second group later that week, repeated the introduction process and recruited a third participant from the Warrington playgroup.

I attended the Tenby playgroup for four weeks prior to asking the caregivers if they would like to participate in the research. On the first week I attended the playgroup during morning teatime. The facilitator explained to the caregivers who I was and that in the future I would like some caregivers to participate in my research. I briefly explained the research to the caregivers as a group at that time. During the four weeks of familiarisation, I read stories and sang songs with the children and their caregivers at group time and participated in the playgroup session, talking with the caregivers and their children. On the fifth week of attending, I approached each caregiver at the playgroup individually and asked if they were interested in participating in the research. Initially six caregivers agreed to participate from the Tenby playgroup, however, two caregivers withdrew prior to returning their consent forms. Like the Warrington playgroup, I gave each caregiver an explanatory information letter, consent form, child assent form, image taking guidelines and instructions for using Edmodo™. I asked each caregiver to return the consent forms when I returned the following week, by which time I had four caregiver participants from the Tenby playgroup who had returned their consent forms.

Sample Size

There are no rules in the number of participants required in qualitative research. The sample size will depend on “what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources” (Patton, 2015, p. 311). This aligned with the notion of purposive sampling where the participants are invited relative to the focus of the research. Within qualitative research it is appropriate to engage with a sample size appropriate to gathering in-depth information (Patton, 2015). In this study, initially ten caregiver participants were identified as the target number (Davies & Harman, 2017; Harman et al., 2014) to allow me to get a deep understanding of each individual caregivers’ motives for play within one community. After the recruitment process, seven caregiver participants were recruited from two playgroups within one community. Three caregiver participants were recruited at the Warrington playgroup and four caregiver participants at the Tenby playgroup. The participants from each playgroup and their children are identified in Figure 4. Pseudonyms provided by the participants are used for each participant and their child(ren).

Figure 4

Participants of the Research From Each Playgroup



Data Generation

This research was conducted in three phases (Figure 5). These were: Phase 1A - Caregiver photograph documentation; Phase 1B – Researcher autoethnography; Phase 2A – Semi-structured interview; Phase 2B – Review and highlighting of interview transcript; and Phase 3 – Co-constructed play map. A researcher reflective journal was also kept throughout each phase to provide an opportunity for researcher reflection. Each phase is briefly described below and elaborated on further in the data methods section that follows.

In Phase 1A caregivers were asked to document a minimum of ten photographic examples of their child's participation in pastimes and activities that occur during a typical day for a one-week period (Wong & Fler, 2012). Photographic documentation provided the participants an opportunity to take an active role in the research (Holm, 2014), share their motives about play through the pastimes and activities their children engaged in throughout a one-week period and share what they deemed to be important and meaningful (Cohen et al., 2018; Wong & Fler, 2012). Photographic documentation is useful when used to stimulate discussion by promoting recall for the caregivers about their child's pastimes and activities (Jackson & Needham, 2014) through being able to tell a story about what is happening at a particular time (Cohen et al., 2018). Caregivers were asked to share their photographs with me through Edmodo™, an educational website that offers a closed form of social media. Sharing the photographs with me via Edmodo™ enabled me to gain insights into the caregiver's motives about play, in terms of the pastimes and activities that

make up a typical day for the caregivers and their child(ren) and informed preparation for the Phase 2A interviews.

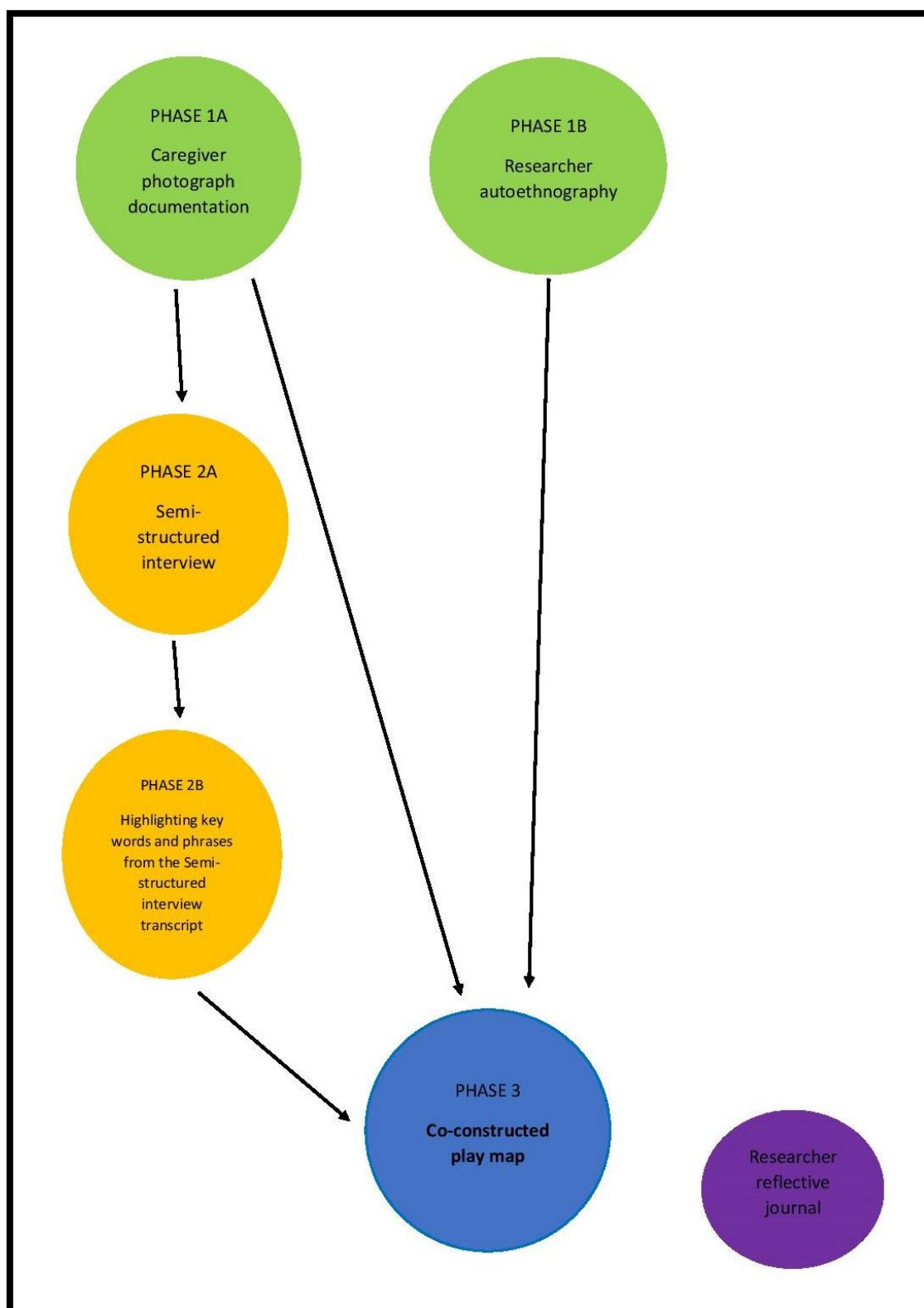
Phase 1B was undertaken alongside Phase 1A. In this phase I compiled an autoethnography of my experience in early childhood over the last thirty years. An autoethnography involves the researcher gathering insights into their own culture through their experiences (Patton, 2015), providing a researcher the opportunity to “express their lived experiences” (Henderson, 2018, p. 2). It seeks to describe and analyse the researcher’s personal experience to understand the culture in which they live (Ellis et al., 2011). In the autoethnography I wrote about my experience in early childhood, and I identified key words and phrases that represented my values about early childhood education. I sourced professional images from early childhood education journals and magazines (e.g., *Every Child Magazine*, produced by Early Childhood Australia) to represent some of these phrases.

In Phase 2A the caregiver and I were involved in a semi-structured interview (Patton, 2015) which used the photographs from Phase 1A as a stimulus to guide the discussion (Holm, 2014) about the caregiver’s motives about their child’s pastimes, activities and play. Interview questions were developed around the themes of play, values and motives and playgroup (Appendix 11). The interview questions were confirmed in consultation with the supervision team and were trialled with a caregiver not participating in the study (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In Phase 2B the caregivers were provided with a transcribed copy of the interview. They were invited to highlight text in the transcript about play that they considered important. Having the caregivers highlight text in the interview transcript provided an opportunity to gain an understanding of caregiver motives for play. While participatory research usually involves action research where the participants instigate and guide the research (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) this form of visual participatory research where the participants use their own data is less common, particularly in its use with adults (Clark, 2010a). Having the caregiver participants as active creators of data through taking photographs provides the participants with the opportunity to become engaged and reflective within the research process (Clark, 2010a).

Phase 3 involved the caregiver and I meeting again, where together we co-created a play map of their motives for play and my representational values about early childhood education. Their motives were indicated by the highlighted words from their transcripts, and my values from highlighted words from the autoethnography. Caregivers also used the photographic documentation from Phase 1A in the construction of the play maps.

Figure 5

Phases of the Data Generation



Data Methods

This section of the chapter describes the methods that were used within the research beginning with a discussion of the use of a Mosaic approach to data collection. It explains the rationale for the selected methods including the caregiver photographic documentation, researcher autoethnography, semi-structured interviews, co-constructed play map and researcher reflective journal.

A Mosaic Approach

A mosaic approach to qualitative data generation was taken in this research, using multiple methods of data collection. This approach constructs an image of the research and participant responses using a variety of research pieces or data (Clark, 2010a). The collection methods used in this research were photographs, a semi-structured interview, personal autoethnography, co-created play map, and reflective journal. By using many tools in data collection a “composite picture or ‘mosaic’” (Clark, 2010b, p. 117) was constructed of the caregiver’s motives for play and societal values for early childhood education through my own perspective as an early childhood professional. Through a mosaic approach the participants and myself were able to have an active role in the building of our shared understanding of motives and values for and about play and early childhood education (Clark, 2010b).

The Mosaic approach was developed to understand young children’s perspectives of their early childhood environments (Clark, 2011b). A Mosaic approach uses multiple sources of data collection (Greenfield, 2011) which are then arranged together to develop a complete picture of the phenomena under investigation (Botsoglou et al., 2019). The Mosaic approach brings together both verbal and visual research methods (Clark, 2010b). Clark (2011b) uses the term ‘mosaic’ to “suggest the assembly of material using several individual pieces or tiles, which together make more of a whole” (Clark, 2011b, p. 313). Thus, ‘Mosaic’ represents the building of an image using a range of research tools pieced together (Clark, 2010a).

Clark (2011b) notes that Mosaic approach research investigates “multiple perspectives which informs ‘co-constructed’ meaning. This bringing together of multiple perspectives using different modes of expression and the co-construction rather than extraction of meanings are key features of this approach” (p. 313). The co-construction of knowledge between the participant and the researcher aligns with a constructivist paradigm used in this research, where knowledge is created or generated between the participants and the researcher, rather than gathered or extracted from the participant by the researcher (Veale, 2005). It also aligns with the theoretical framework of this work where the institution of playgroup is considered as co-constituted by

motives and values. In this research motives for play were considered in terms of caregiver perspectives and values of early childhood education were considered from my own perspective as an experienced early childhood professional.

The Mosaic approach has a participatory nature for the participants. It emphasises the participant's agency in the research process (Clark, 2011b), drawing on each individual's strengths and facilitates thinking about experience through the use of expressive language to communicate these ideas with others (Clark, 2010a). Participants are viewed as experts in their own lives, skilful communicators, right holders and meaning makers (Clark, 2011a) which places the Mosaic approach as a "participant-centred or person-centred methodology where the emphasis rests on the experiences of the participant and their active role in the generation of knowledge" (Clark, 2011a, p. 328).

Researching using the Mosaic approach is participatory, reflexive, adaptable and focused on the participant's lived experience. It occurs in the participant's natural setting, is embedded in practice, and provides a framework for listening to participants. Greenfield (2011) outlines three stages in research using the Mosaic approach:

Stage one is the gathering of the data using multiple research tools; the second stage is the piecing together of the information for discussion, interpretation and reflection with participants; and the third stage is where findings are used for decision making and action (p. 110).

These three stages are reflected in this research. The first stage involved gathering data through Phases 1A (caregiver photographic documentation) and 1B (researcher autoethnography). The second stage through Phases 2A (semi-structured interview) and 2B (review and highlight of interviews and autoethnography). The third stage through Phase 3 (co-construction of the play map).

In a mosaic picture when you stand close to the picture you see the number of individual pieces which makes up the image. When you stand back from the mosaic you can see the whole picture that is made up of the smaller pictures. In this way this research follows the Mosaic approach, where a number of smaller pieces are put together to inform the larger picture. There is value in examining one piece, such as one caregiver interview, one photograph to understand caregiver motives for play, however, a more detailed image is gained from drawing on a number of these (Clark, 2010a). "The aim is that each research method or tool in the Mosaic approach contributes to increasing understandings of the participant's ways of seeing" (Clark, 2010a, p. 32).

The same applies to the use of the Mosaic approach in this research. Each phase of data collection is used to piece together a co-constructed understanding of individual motives and societal values for play and early childhood education for understanding the institution of playgroup.

Phase 1A – Caregiver Photographic Documentation

In Phase 1A of the research, the caregivers were asked to document, through photographs, examples of their children's participation in pastimes and activities that occur during a typical day at home, or playgroup for a one-week period. Photographic documentation as a research method is discussed in this section of the chapter, along with the implementation of this phase in the research.

Nowadays a majority of the population has access to devices that allow them to take still and moving images on their smart phones. Cameras can provide an "immediate, comprehensive and holistic image of situations, objects, people, events, lifestyles, contexts, conditions and so on" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 629). Through the use of photographs, the photographer is able to tell the story of what they thought was important (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Cultural values can also be conveyed through the particular photograph that has been taken, the composition of the photograph, and then the photograph that has been chosen to use (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The digital images in modern cameras are easy to transport or send to another person through the use of various online services such as email, social media and messenger applications, and allow the researcher to review them frequently once they have been sent to them (Cohen et al., 2018).

In this research the participants were asked to take photographs and document a minimum of ten photographic examples during a one week period of a range of pastimes and activities through various times of the day that the child was engaged in, and that the caregiver deemed to be important and meaningful (Cohen et al., 2018; Wong & Fleer, 2012). Caregivers were asked to use Edmodo™, a closed social media educational website, to send their photographs to the researcher, to allow the researcher to view and analyse the photographs prior to Phase 2A. In Phase 2A, the semi-structured interview, the photographs were used as a stimulus for a discussion about the caregiver's motives about their child's pastimes, activities, and play. Edmodo™ was used for ease and simplicity for the caregivers to ensure that the photographs were given to the researcher in a 'user friendly' and timely method when it was convenient for the caregivers (Hinchcliffe & Gavin, 2009). The use of Edmodo™ also ensured that the photographs could be stored and accessed easily for the duration of the data collection period, while the Application is free to download and use. The photographs were also used in Phase 3, the co-creation of a play map.

Caregivers were asked to photograph their children engaged in pastimes and activities during this phase to encompass experiences children may be engaged in, rather than only play. It may be that play, as it is understood by Western-European perspective may not be a valued activity within all families. The use of the terms 'pastimes and activities' were intended to be more inclusive of activities children may be seen engaging in, such as helping with domestic tasks, completing worksheets, using electronic devices, sewing, cooking, building with blocks, and so forth.

The caregivers were asked to share the photographs with me via Edmodo™, with further interactions between myself and the caregiver restricted to the semi-structured interview in Phase 2A. The purpose of the photo documentation was to stimulate discussion about the caregiver's motives about their child's pastimes, activities and play and promote recall for the caregivers about their child's pastimes and activities during the interview (Jackson & Needham, 2014). Using Edmodo™ posts as a data collection method offered an "alternative for hard-to-reach groups (due to practical constraints, disability or language communication barriers) who may be marginalised from qualitative research" (Creswell, 2013, pp. 159-161). It also provided an easy and convenient method for most caregivers to send their photographs to me. I assisted the caregivers to access Edmodo™ when it was required and provided the caregivers with clear written instructions on how to access and use Edmodo™ (Appendix 7).

Photographs become a moment in time. They tell a story or discourse about what is happening at the time, rather than simply being a singular reality (Cohen et al., 2018). In this research the photographs were used to tell a story about what was happening in the everyday lives of the children of the caregivers of this research. The photographs, when combined with the semi-structured interview, helped to gain an understanding of the motives for play that were held by the caregiver. It is the use of multiple photographs in this research that gives greater insight. Rather than being one moment in time, the photographs are a collection of several pastimes and activities the child was engaged in over the course of one week. Caregivers were provided with guidelines about taking the photographs at various times throughout the day and of different pastimes and activities. For example, taking photographs in the morning, at midday, in the afternoon and in the evening (Appendix 6).

Having the caregiver participants take the photographs is an important component of the research project. When the researcher takes the photographs, they make decisions as to what is important to photograph and therefore what is important for the participants. In contrast, having the participants take the photographs for the purpose of the semi-structured interviews "encourage[d] the participants to take a more active role in the research by indicating what is

meaningful for them to discuss in the interview” (Holm, 2014, p. 385) as they made decisions about the photographs they had taken and sent to me that then informed the questions in the interviews.

As a researcher I was careful with the instructions and examples I gave to the caregivers about taking the photographs as I did not want to influence the data generated. For example, had I requested a certain photograph be taken, I “may impose...[my] meaning of the phenomenon on participants, rather than obtaining the participants’ views” (Creswell, 2014a, p. 246). This problem was alleviated by ensuring that clear instructions were given. Examples given to the caregiver were broad and my expectations of what I thought I might see was kept out of the photograph instruction process. I asked the caregivers to take photographs of pastimes and activities that they engage in with their children and written guidelines were provided to the caregivers with regards to what to photograph as well as how to photograph their child to capture only what was needed for the research (Appendix 6).

Phase 1B – Autoethnography

In Phase 1B of the research I, as the researcher, compiled an autoethnography of my experience in early childhood over the last thirty years. This was undertaken in conjunction with Phase 1A. Autoethnography as a research method is discussed in this section as well as the implementation of this phase in the research.

As an approach to qualitative enquiry autoethnography involves “studying one’s own culture and oneself as part of that culture” (Patton, 2015, p. 102) as well as personal experiences within a culture (Henderson, 2018; Lapadat, 2017) and is often intended for academic and public audiences (Gullion, 2016). Through autoethnography a researcher uses their own experiences to gather insights into the culture of which they belong (Patton, 2015). Autoethnography can be described as an “approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273).

An autoethnography is written by the researcher about their personal experiences of events, circumstances, and interactions. It connects the autobiographical story of the researcher to the cultural, social and political and analyses their experiences in a first-person account (Ellis et al., 2011; Grant et al., 2013; Henderson, 2018). Through autoethnography the researcher uses their own experiences to show aspects of cultural experiences (Ellis et al., 2011; Henderson, 2018). This is often accomplished by considering personal experience with existing research, interviewing members of the cultural community and/or looking at cultural artifacts (Ellis et al., 2011).

In this research as the researcher, I compiled an autoethnography of the 30 years I have spent involved in the early childhood education sector. This was undertaken during Phase 1A while the caregivers were taking photographs of their children engaged in pastimes and activities. The autoethnography is a narrative of the time I have spent as a teacher and educator outlining the pedagogical and curriculum changes I have experienced in early childhood during this time and for the purpose of this research was taken as representative of the societal culture and tradition of early childhood. For example, the autoethnography highlights the changes that took place within early childhood education in Australia with the introduction and implementation of the first national curriculum, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), for children aged birth to eight years.

The autoethnography outlines my journey as an early childhood teacher in the early childhood sector in Melbourne, Australia. The journey of a young University student and pre-service teacher, in early employment as a qualified early childhood teacher working in child care, moving into the role of child care centre director, teaching adult learners the Diploma and Certificate III of early childhood education at a Melbourne Technical and Further Education college (TAFE), lecturing in the Early Childhood Degree program at the TAFE, working as a family day care coordinator in inner Metropolitan Melbourne, then as early childhood teacher in sessional kindergarten and finally as a PhD student. This journey has seen many changes in the early childhood sector and my autoethnography outlines these changes over this time.

Through the process of writing the autoethnography I was able to identify key words and phrases that represented my values as an experienced early childhood professional within the social construction of early childhood education. To help make these values accessible to the caregiver participants during our shared map making, images were sought to represent these words and phrases of value. To do this, the 'Every Child Magazine', a quarterly publication produced by Early Childhood Australia (ECA), was used to source the images that represented the values I identified as important for sharing with the caregivers. As a professional magazine, these images were further representations of the societal values for early childhood education. Examples of words, phrases and corresponding images are provided in Figure 7.

Words, phrases, and images from the autoethnography that represented my societal representation of the values of early childhood were used in Phase 3 when the caregivers and I met to create a 'play map' (page. 94). Creating a play map is a method innovated for this project for the purpose of understanding the co-constitution of caregiver motives and societal values of play and early childhood education in the institution of playgroup. For example, I included the term "outdoors" from my autoethnography to indicate that one of my societal represented values for

early childhood education was for children to have the opportunity to spend time in outdoor play. I also had an image of children playing outdoors (Figure 6). The use of words, phrases, and images from the autoethnography combined with the caregivers’ highlighted text and photographs provided an opportunity for the co-construction of a play map, where our shared values and motives could be established.

Figure 6

Examples of Text and Corresponding Images Derived from the Autoethnography

Text	Socialisation	Outdoors	Open-ended art and craft	Pretend play
Corresponding image				
Source	Every Child Magazine, Vol 25 No 2, 2019, p.31.	Every Child Magazine, Vol 25 No 2, 2019, p.28.	Every Child Magazine, Vol 25 No 1, 2019, p.30	Every Child Magazine, Vol 25 No 1, 2019, p.13.

Phase 2 – Semi-Structured Interview

In Phase 2A of the research the caregiver participants took part in a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview provides an opportunity for the researcher to ask pre-determined questions to the participants. This means that the interviewer is able to ensure that the same questions are asked of each participant. However, the questions asked of the participants are open-ended and the wording and the order of the questions may be adapted to each individual interviewee (Cohen et al., 2018) while the interviewer may ask follow-up questions and give prompts to the interviewee (Cohen et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews provide the interviewer with the opportunity to move the conversation in the direction that the interviewee takes it and the interviewer is able to ask additional questions based on the responses the interviewee gives (Hatch, 2002). The ability in a semi-structured interview for interaction between the researcher and the participant provides the opportunity for the interview to become co-constructed between them (Brinkmann, 2014).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2008) contend that semi-structured interviews are “defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order

to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 3). For this research the purpose of the semi-structured interview was to gain knowledge about the caregiver’s motives for their child’s pastimes and activities in the home and at playgroup. Through the use of ‘how, ‘why’ and ‘what’ questions the semi-structured interviews allowed for the caregivers of the research to provide descriptions of how they “experience the world, it’s episodes and events” (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 287). For example, in this research caregivers were asked ‘What is happening in this photo?’. This provided an opportunity for the caregiver to describe the pastimes and activities in which their children were engaged in the photographs they had taken. These descriptions provided insight into the caregivers’ lived experiences (or life world) of their own home lives as well as their participation in playgroup. The findings and discussion chapters of this thesis provide an interpretation of the meaning of the caregivers’ experiences as they described in the interviews (Brinkmann, 2014).

The semi-structured interviews in this research were undertaken between myself and each caregiver after I had completed Phase 1B, the autoethnography, and the caregiver had undertaken Phase 1A, the photo documentation. The interviews were orientated toward discussing the photographs including the caregiver’s perspectives regarding play, similarities and differences in activities and pastimes, aspects of play represented in the photographs and the caregiver’s motives for play. I also asked the caregiver about their own memories from their childhood and their experience of playgroup as an adult caregiver (Appendix 11). Through the course of the interview the caregiver and I looked at the photographs the caregiver had taken of their child’s pastimes and activities and talked about the photographs and whether they involved children’s play. For example, I commented that one of the caregivers had taken a photograph of their child using the iPad. I asked the caregiver to tell me about that photograph, what the caregiver’s role was when their child was using the iPad and whether it is something their child does often.

The semi-structured interviews with the caregivers were recorded and, upon completion, I transcribed. In Phase 2B the caregivers were given the transcriptions of their interviews and a highlighter and invited to return the transcript with highlighted sections when we next met to complete the play map in Phase 3. The caregivers were asked to highlight sections in the interview transcript that they thought were important and that represented their motives in relation to their child’s participation in pastimes and activities as well as playgroup. I explained to the caregivers that the highlighted words were then to be used in Phase 3, when we would meet to jointly create the play map.

Phase 3 – Co-Constructed Play Map

In Phase 3 of the research the caregiver participants and I co-created a play map of their individual motives and my societal values to establish shared perspectives about play and playgroup (see Appendix 8 for completed play maps).

Map making has been used by Clark (2011b) as one of the methods in the Mosaic approach to research which considered the design and review of learning environments for children. In Clark's (2011b) research the map making was designed as an activity for a group of children that worked together to build a map of their environment using photographs that they had taken. Clark (2011b) explains that the

term 'map making' emphasizes the active process of meaning-making which can occur as children assemble the maps rather than placing importance solely on the product, the map. The maps are...designed...to be a way of documenting place feelings and associations (p. 315).

Clark (2011b) views the maps in her research as data in their own right, rather than as a tool for other data-gathering. The map-making in Clark's (2011b) research combined visual methods of data gathering such as drawings and photographs with informal interviews which provided the children in the research with a variety of ways to explore their ideas about their environment (Clark, 2011a).

Within the Mosaic approach map making is an important piece of the process, providing the participants in this type of research with the "opportunity to provide a visual narrative" (Clark, 2010a, p. 39) of their perspectives using their own photographs, drawings and words. Clark (2010a) explains that when working with children to make their maps, an important part of the map making process was to talk with the children about their photographs and map. The discussions of the photographs the children had taken of their environment became the co-construction of meanings, while it was also important to ensure that the children's voices were heard and the researchers own interpretation of the images did not overrule the meanings offered by the children (Clark, 2010a).

Clark (2011a) suggests that visual participatory methods can be used with adults as well as children. In further research that investigated early childhood educators thoughts and experiences of the physical environment provided for children in their service Clark (2011a) explains the use of map making with the educators. The map making in this research was based on photographs the educators took of the environment and was used in conjunction with interviews with the educators. In this research Clark (2011a) places emphasis on interviews undertaken with adults after they have

taken their own photographs. The adults were able to explain their choice and selection of images to be used in their map making from the photographs they had taken. Clark (2011a) found that the maps the early childhood educators made in this research helped the “views and experiences of the different participants” (p. 325) become visible to others. Clark (2011a) highlights that cooperation between the researcher and the participants was an important part of the map-making. The focus for the conversation in the interview component of the research came from the selection of the visual images the participants made, while the use of the visual images appeared to give the participants confidence to express their opinions.

In these research examples the maps can be “seen to be acting as ‘mirrors’ to reflect experiences about being in the school back to other members of the community” (Clark, 2011b, p. 323). A similar process through documentation in the preschools of Reggio Emilia is discussed by Rinaldi (2006):

They become real mirrors of our knowledge, in which we see our own ideas and images reflected, but in which we also find other and different images with which to engage in dialogue (p. 323).

The map-making provides the participants the opportunity to “step back and to construct a narrative about their own experiences” (Clark, 2011b, p. 327) where the researchers such as myself can use these experiences as a stimulus for discussion between themselves and the participants to develop knowledge (Clark, 2011b).

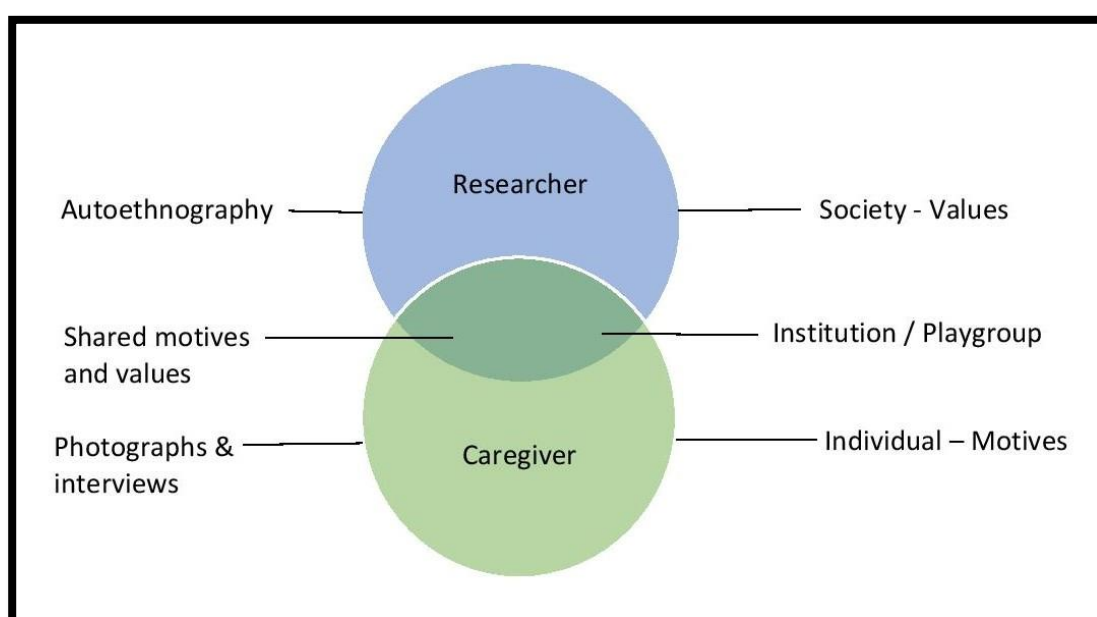
Phase 3 of this research involved the caregiver and I meeting a second time. This second meeting took place after I had transcribed the semi-structured interviews for each caregiver from Phase 2A and the caregivers had highlighted important words and phrases in the transcript in Phase 2B. When we met for the co-creation of the play map, I cut out the sections of the interview transcript that the caregivers had highlighted. Together the caregiver and I mapped our individual and shared perspectives about play and playgroup. The map consisted of a Venn diagram with a circle on the top representing societal values about early childhood education and the caregiver circle at the bottom representing their motives for play. This placing of the circles aligns with Hedegaard’s theorisation concerning the dialectical relationship between society and the individual in the co-constitution of institutions. Where the two circles meet is where the caregiver and the I share common motives for and values about play and early childhood education, consequently providing insight into how the institution of playgroup is co-constituted from a societal and personal perspective (Figure 7).

The caregiver and I used the caregiver photographs of their child engaged in pastimes and activities, transcript sections from the semi-structured interview, text and images from the autoethnography alongside any additional commentary identified and added by the caregiver during the creation of the map. Pens were available if the caregiver or I wished to add any new representations and text to the play map.

Initially it was my intention that the caregiver and I would take turns to select one item (e.g., image, photograph, text) at a time to place into the play map, to represent our motives for and values about play. However, through piloting of the play map interview with a caregiver not involved in the study, it became apparent that this process may create a position of power for myself, where my response to the caregiver's selected text or photographs, and the inclusion of my own text and images may influence the selections made by the caregivers. I therefore encouraged the caregiver to place all of their text and photographs first, and then moved on to my text and images. In this way the caregiver could freely share their perspectives without being influenced by what I added to the play map. From this point we were able to discuss any text and images that we each believed belonged in either the top or bottom circle, or in the overlapping circles of the Venn diagram. Thus, together each caregiver and I were co-creating the play map. As seen in Figure 7 the items created a representation of society, institution, or individual perspectives, which align with the three perspectives of Hedegaard's cultural-historical theory (Chapter 3 and Figure 2 & 3). Each of the play map interviews with the caregivers were recorded and I then transcribed them.

Figure 7

Co-created Play Map



Researcher Reflective Journal

A reflective journal kept through the research process is seen as important in qualitative participatory research (Greenfield, 2011). A reflective journal kept during research records the researcher's observations of the methods undertaken during the data generation process as well as recording the researcher's thoughts and ideas about the study in that particular moment (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013). The journal provided me with an opportunity for self-reflection on the research during the data generation process. For example, when I was completing the play map interview with Farsana I added my text and images when she raised the topic, rather than adding all of my text and images at the end of the process.

I started with Farsana's photos, then we matched and sorted through her words, and then we went through my images and words. A couple of times in Farsana's play map interview I added mine that we agreed on after she had added hers, for example, when she spoke about reading books and playing with the Transformer™. While I hadn't done that in the previous play map interview with Kiby, I chose to do it this time with Farsana to enhance the conversation and the process with Farsana. Until this point it had become quite stagnant as Farsana selected her photographs and then read through her highlighted text to see if she had text associated with the photograph (Researcher Journal, 2019).

The reflective journal was a place to record thoughts, new ideas, questions to ask and things that needed to be done (Greenfield, 2011). For example, very early in the data generation process I wrote a list of the steps involved with each caregiver participant so that I could keep track of what I was up to with each participant. This was because the time taken to complete each step in the process varied between participants. The list of the steps involved in the data generation process were:

- Take photographs
- Post photographs on Edmodo™
- Analyse photographs
- Conduct semi-structured interview
- Transcribe interview
- Provide caregiver with copy of transcription for highlighting
- Get highlighted transcription
- Conduct play map interview (Researcher Journal, 2019).

After completing the first semi-structured interview in the research with Madison I recorded the following thoughts in my reflective journal:

The questions went well. A lot of the play questions were answered in her discussion of the photographs. I am hoping that I asked enough about playgroup. I am wondering also if some playgroup questions could have been added in the photo and play questions, rather than having them separate at the end of the interview. Then I wonder, though if this would blur the topics or take the focus too much in the other way (Researcher journal, 2019).

During the writing up stage of the research I was able to refer back to the reflective journal to help clarify what a participant was doing, consider how any environmental factors may have affected the participant at the time or consider how my “presence may have influenced study participant behaviour” (O’Connell & Dymont, 2013, p. 16) during the data collection process. The journal also reminded me of practices that worked and those that were less successful such as the first play map interview I undertook with Sarah. I reflected afterwards that I hadn’t used all the text and images in constructing the play map with Sarah and that I needed to reduce the number of my text and images to use in future play maps so that these were more streamlined to the topics I wished to discuss, instead of having numerous words and phrases about the same topic. I also reflected that at the end of the play map interview I sat with Sarah and glued into place all the pieces of paper that held the photographs, images and text. In future interviews I used blue tac to stick the pieces in place as that also allowed the caregiver and I to move pieces if necessary, during the creation process. The reflective journal provided me with a place to consider theory and practice and the connection between the two. For example, I reflected on the process of the co-constructed play map I had undertaken with Farsana:

At the end of the play map interview and co-construction I explained to Farsana the theory that was behind the circles in the play map. We could clearly see that the top circle had my text and images which represented the societal views of early childhood, and the bottom circle that represented her experience of playgroup and early childhood and the middle section where we had shared text, photographs and images that represented how she with her motives, and I, representing societal values, co-construct the institution of playgroup (Researcher journal, 2019).

The reflective journal was a place where I could reflect on both my personal and professional attitudes, assumptions, biases, beliefs and values (O’Connell & Dymont, 2013). For example, before

completing the play map interview with Farsana I reflected upon the similarities and variances in our motives and values that I had observed through my interactions with her at the playgroup:

I am keen to do this one [play map interview] as I felt that there would be more differences between Farsana and I in our thoughts about play and playgroup. I am not sure that this was reflected in the play map. We seem to have different ideas about play and structured activities for children from my observations of the provision of the activities and the routine of the playgroup (Researcher journal, 2019).

The reflective journal provided me with a place to record my observations, thought and reflections throughout the data collection process undertaken in the research.

Data Analysis

Data in this research was analysed using both inductive and deductive analysis (Pope et al., 2000). Each method of analysis will be discussed in the following sections.

Inductive Coding

Inductive analysis is used when the researcher wishes to identify “analytical categories as they emerge from the data” (Pope et al., 2000, p. 114) and to develop hypotheses without any preconceived categories (Patton, 2015; Pope et al., 2000). Inductive analysis involves the generation of general patterns and identifying common themes throughout the data (Patton, 2015). Using inductive analysis concepts, hypotheses or theories are developed through the careful analysis of all the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this research inductive analysis was used to draw out the themes and categories that emerged from phases 1A, caregiver photograph documentation, phase 1B, researcher autoethnography words and images, phase 2A, semi-structured interview, phase 2B caregiver highlighting of interview transcripts and phase 3, the co-constructed play map and interview.

Inductive data analysis involves “comparing one unit of information with the next, looking for recurring regularities in the data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 203) to develop themes or codes for the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The categories and themes for this research were developed using coding techniques. Initially, informal notes that took the form of coding memos were written to identify emerging themes that stemmed from initial analysis of the research data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These emerging themes were identified through reading and viewing the data numerous times. As this process took place numerous themes were developed and the data was compared with the rest of the data throughout this process (Pope et al., 2000). As the themes were

put together each theme was refined with clear definitions and names for the themes determined (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When the themes were refined the qualitative data analysis software program NVivo 12 was used for further data analysis.

The initial themes that were identified for the data of the research are outlined in Figure 8. These themes were then refined to develop the codes, that were used with the data when it was imported to NVivo 12. The refined codes consequently used for coding were divided into those for the caregiver data (motives) and those for the data from myself (societal values). These themes are identified in Table 2. and in Figure 9 and 10. The data from Phase 1A, caregiver photograph documentation, Phase 2A and 2B, semi-structured interviews and highlighting and Phase 3, the co-constructed play map, alongside the play map interview, were coded to the caregiver themes in NVivo. Data from phase 1B, the researcher autoethnography and Phase 3 play map and interview, were coded to the researcher themes in NVivo.

Figure 8

Initial Inductively Derived Themes Identified Within the Data

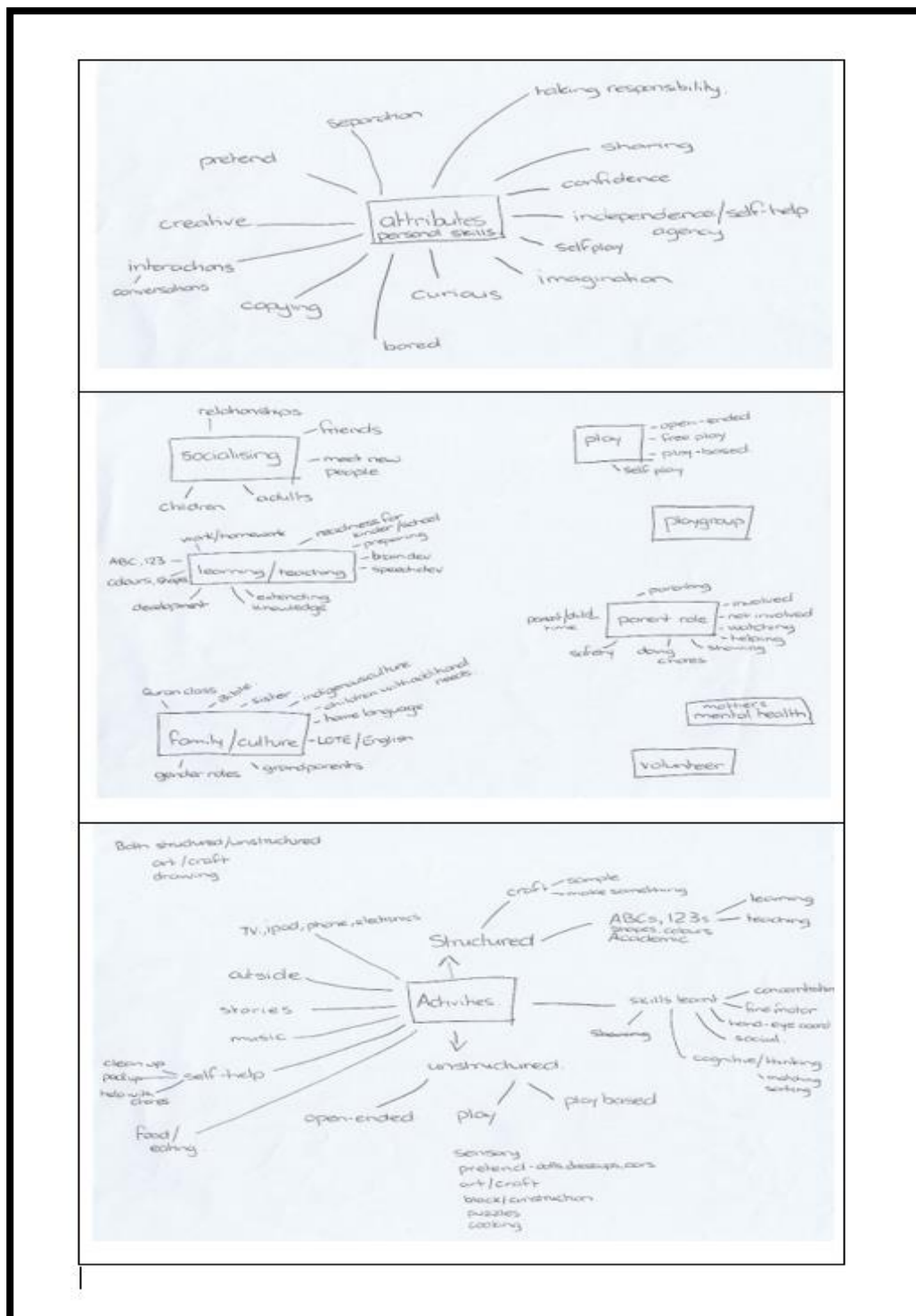


Table 2*Caregiver and Researcher Codes Deductively Applied to Data in NVIVO*

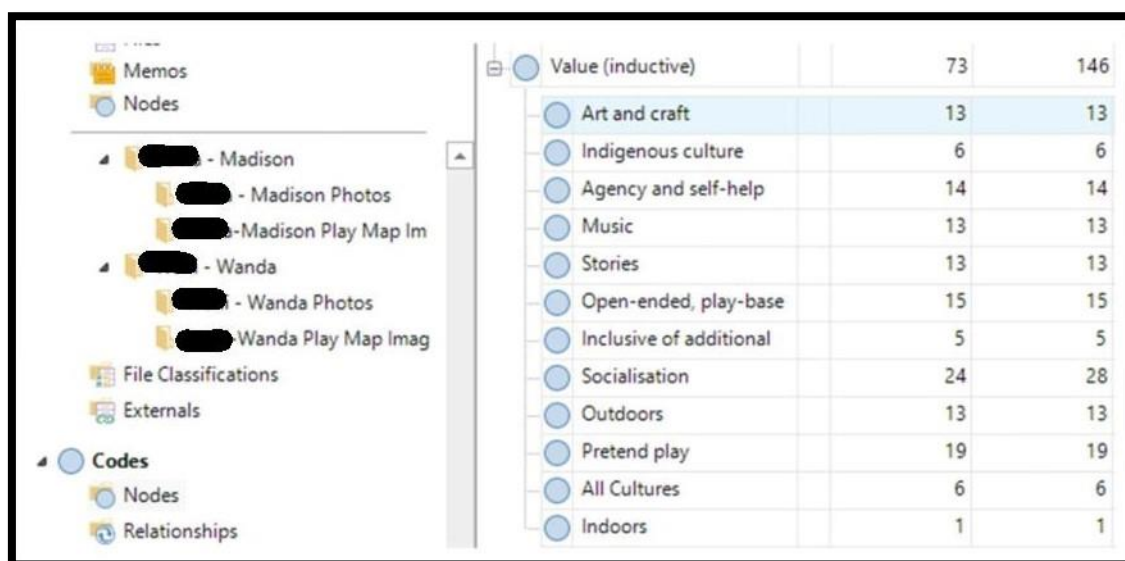
Caregiver coded themes (Motives)	Researcher coded themes (Values)
Activities	Agency and self-help
Art and craft	Inclusive of all cultures
Attributes-personal skills	Art and craft
Eating	Inclusive of children with additional needs
Family culture	Inclusive of Indigenous culture
Learning and teaching	Indoors
Mental health	Music
Outdoors	Open-ended and play-based
Parent role	Outdoors
Play	Pretend play
Playgroup	Socialisation
Pretend play	Stories
Socialisation	
Stories	
Volunteering	

Figure 9*NVivo Codes for the Caregiver Data*

Motive (inductive)	67	213
Activities	21	25
Art and Craft	14	19
Attributes-Personal skill	13	22
Eating	3	3
Family culture	9	12
Learning and teaching	13	26
Mental health	2	2
Outdoors	14	20
Parent role	7	13
Play	10	14
Playgroup	3	5
Pretend play	18	22
Socialisation	10	15
Stories	9	14
Volunteering	1	1

Figure 10

NVivo Codes for Researcher Data



The screenshot shows the NVivo interface. On the left, a tree view displays the code hierarchy: Memos, Nodes, and Codes. Under Codes, there are sub-nodes for 'Nodes' and 'Relationships'. The main area on the right shows a table of code frequencies. The table has three columns: the code name, and two frequency counts. The codes are listed in descending order of frequency.

Code	Frequency 1	Frequency 2
Value (inductive)	73	146
Art and craft	13	13
Indigenous culture	6	6
Agency and self-help	14	14
Music	13	13
Stories	13	13
Open-ended, play-base	15	15
Inclusive of additional	5	5
Socialisation	24	28
Outdoors	13	13
Pretend play	19	19
All Cultures	6	6
Indoors	1	1

Deductive Coding

Deductive coding was undertaken of data obtained through Phases 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B and 3. Data obtained through the caregiver photographs, the researcher autoethnography, the semi-structured interviews and the co-constructed play maps and interview were deductively coded according to Hedegaard's three perspectives; the society, institution and individual. Following categorisation according to each perspective, data were also deductively analysed according to the inductively identified caregiver motives and researcher values. For example, during Phase 3 a caregiver selected a photograph of their child completing a worksheet that required the child to match lower- and upper-case letters. The caregiver discussed that they were teaching their preschool age child letters because they thought that children should recognise letters before they go to school. This was then coded to an individual perspective as well as a motive because their motive to teach their child letters has come from their individual perspective. Conversely, my use of the phrase 'inclusive of additional needs' was coded to a value from a societal perspective as it was a value I held for children's learning in terms of early childhood education.

Combined Inductive and Deductive Analysis

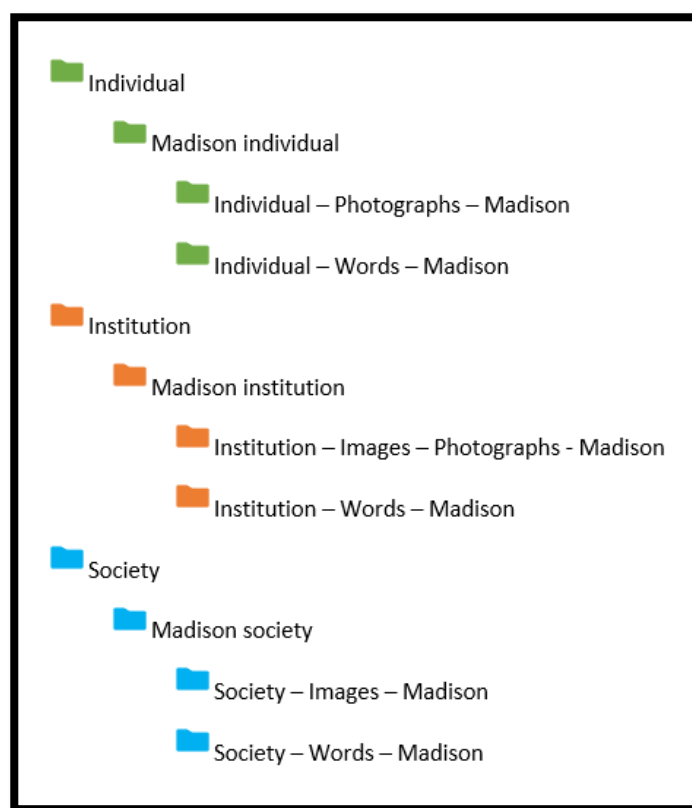
A combination of both inductive and deductive analysis was undertaken with the data from Phases 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B and 3 of the research. The inductive themes of the caregivers were identified as individual motives and the inductive themes of the researcher were identified as early childhood values. The data from Phase 3 was also analysed within Hedegaard's three perspectives of society, institution and individual for the completed co-constituted play maps. Each section of the play map

was then coded for the identified themes (motives or values,) from either the caregiver or the researcher (see Figure 9 & 10). Hedegaard (2012a) explains that motives derive from the individual while values come from society, while they both influence what takes place within the institutions in which a person participates.

A number of folders were set up for each caregiver in NVivo for use when coding their play maps. An example of these for Madison are displayed in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Participant Folders set up in NVivo



The text and images that were placed in the top, 'society' circle of the play map were identified and placed together in the society file for each caregiver. The text, images- and photographs that were placed in the middle circle, the 'institution' section of the play map were identified and placed in the institution file for each caregiver. The text and photographs that were placed in the bottom circle, or 'individual' section of the play map were identified and placed in the individual file for each caregiver. The text, images and photographs in the institution section were coded into values themes, if they were words or images from the researcher, or motives themes if they were text or photographs from the caregiver. In this way, any text, images or photographs

jointly placed and agreed upon between myself and each caregiver in the institutional section of the play map were considered indicative elements of the institution of playgroup.

Ethical Considerations

The ethics of this project is guided by the ethics approval received from the Australian Catholic University Human Rights Ethics Committee (HREC) (Appendix 1). Every effort was made to anticipate all ethical issues that may have arisen during the research (Creswell, 2014b). Creswell (2014a) identifies a number of areas that need to be considered when discussing ethical practices such as “informing participants of the purpose of the study, refraining from deceptive practices, sharing information with participants (including your role as a researcher), being respectful of the research site, reciprocity, using ethical interview practices, maintaining confidentiality, and collaborating with participants” (p. 252). This research: sought to establish a relationship with participants before seeking their participation; gained informed consent from all caregiver participants and assent for children over the age of three years; ensured anonymity and confidentiality of all participants through the use of pseudonyms for all participants, and removing any identifying features from the research; assessed and minimised the risks for both participants and the researcher; and, ensured data was stored in safe and secure locations, complying with all requirements of the HREC (Creswell, 2014a).

The participants in this research were provided with an information letter about their involvement in the research, including a modified version for use with participants with English as an additional language (Appendix 2 & 3). The information outlined in the information letter was also explained verbally to all participants when recruiting. This explanation included information relating to participating in the study, the purpose of the study and what their commitment level would be (e.g., taking and sending 10 photographs to the researcher, an interview, and a map-making session). As a translator was not available for this research and I was not able to speak the first language of the participants, English was the language used for the interviews and play map sessions.

It was explained to the participants that they could withdraw from the research at any time. When the potential participants were able to explain the requirements for their participation back to me to indicate their understanding of the research, their consent was sought and confirmed through the appropriate consent documentation (Appendix 4). Assent was sought for children of the caregivers the children were given the opportunity to complete an assent form (Edwards, 2015) (Appendix 5). Children are invited to provide assent rather than consent because consent is understood to be provided by participants over the age of 18. Ongoing assent of the children was

sought each time I visited the caregiver and child. This was done by showing the assent form to the child on each visit and ensuring that the child was still happy to participate by the child pointing to the thumbs up sign on the form. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity participants of the research were asked to select a pseudonym for themselves (caregivers and children) to use in the research.

It is recognised here, that while every effort has been made to ensure biases are not evident, due to the nature of qualitative case study research I have made decisions about the research. These decisions include which data is selected to report on and how the data has been analysed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Decisions and biases were managed by having the inductive and deductive coding regularly checked with a member of the supervision team for this project (Creswell, 2014a).

Ethical Issues in Participatory Photography

Having the participant as the photographer raises some ethical issues. The first issue is around permission. If a photograph is taken and another person's face is in the photo, other than the participant, this raises permission issues. As the researcher I would have to exclude some photographs from being included if other non-participants are captured in the photograph or blur out the faces of those not participating if they are captured in a photograph (Holm, 2014). Fortunately, all photographs sent to me were of the participating children only. Consent was required from caregivers to use images of children. Caregivers' determination of children's capacity to provide assent for each child's participation (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011) and use of images of the children was sought. Permission and use was also considered in the consent and assent forms for use of the photographs beyond this thesis (Cohen et al., 2018).

For the purposes of this research I ensured that all the participating caregivers fully understood what they were giving consent to, and also ensured assent was given by the children in the use of photographs (Holm, 2014). Consideration was given if other adults and children were involved in the everyday activities with the caregivers and the children. I ensured that the caregivers understood that they needed to try to take photographs that included only themselves and their child/ren. Identifiable images such as playgroup logos were not included in any of the photographs.

Care was taken to fully explain to the caregivers what they were to take photographs of, and examples given. This was done both verbally and visually through a 'Guidelines for taking photographs' instruction sheet (Appendix 6). The guidelines included taking photographs at different times of the day, while their child was engaged in different activities, and ensuring that

the child was asked for permission to take their photograph. It also included information and photographic examples of taking photographs of their child and other people that do not include images of people's faces. Photographs that were taken and sent to me that included the children's faces were blurred so the child could not be identified. I also explained that I did not want the caregivers to change, modify or alter the photographs in any way. The caregivers were given written information, including example images, of how to send the photographs to me via Edmodo™ (Holm, 2014) (Appendix 7).

Researcher Risk Assessment

Researcher safety was identified in the ethics application and given consideration throughout the data collection process. Interviews and interactions between the caregivers and myself took place within the playgroup that the caregivers attended or in the caregiver's home. I contacted the supervision team prior to attending a participant's home, and informed the team of the chosen location, time, and date of the meeting. On the day of the meeting, I notified the supervision team of my attendance at the home or agreed location, and again when I had left the home or agreed location through a text message. In this way, my location was known, and my safety was maintained throughout the data collection process.

Limitations

Validity and reliability provide credibility to the research and ensure that the research is plausible, has resonance with other similar research, and, whilst difficult for qualitative research, has some transferability, that the findings can be generalised into other contexts (Cohen et al., 2018; O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Research can be deemed reliable if it is reported accurately and precisely (Booth et al., 2016) and that we can trust the information we have been given (O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Validating the findings of the research means that the researcher is able to determine that the reporting of the research is accurate and credible which can be done through triangulation or member checking (Creswell, 2014a). Triangulation involves using evidence from different sources to ensure they all corroborate the same outcome or claim (Creswell, 2014a; Yin, 2014). Member checking involves asking participants in the study to check the accuracy of data or final report (Creswell, 2014a). Validity can be achieved if the researcher's theoretical conceptions of the theme are kept in the foreground when interpreting their results (Cohen et al., 2018; Hedegaard & Fler, 2008). Cohen et al. (2018) suggests that in qualitative research "validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, authenticity, richness, trustworthiness, dependability, credibility and scope of data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher" (p. 246).

Validity, reliability, and trustworthiness is maintained throughout this research. Throughout the findings of this research examples of the text and images provided by the participants and myself are used to evidence the claims made throughout the research. During the interviews and the co-construction of the play map, I ensured that any biases to my own views, values and motives were clearly identified and referred to in discussions with the caregiver only when the caregiver participant had the opportunity to share their motives in the first instance. I am also aware that there were occasions where the caregiver and I did not agree on shared values and motives, particularly when sharing ideas about playgroup in the co-construction of the play map. For example, a caregiver stated that they felt it is not their role to engage in play with their child, while I think adults should engage in play with children. In this situation I stated that I understood their perspective and suggested that, as an early childhood professional I enjoyed engaging in play with children.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed overview of the methodological approach used to conduct this research. The methodological decisions made for the research aimed to answer the research question:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

The chapter began by discussing the qualitative approach to the study which was informed by the social constructivist paradigm. Within the social constructivist paradigm the ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology for the research were established. These included a vision of the research whereby multiple realities exist and knowledge is socially constructed by both the participants and the researcher to co-create understandings. A case study research design was outlined for the study that involved an in-depth exploration and analysis of an identified phenomena, this being the co-construction of the institution of playgroup in a culturally diverse community in the Western suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. Seven caregivers of children attending a community playgroup from two community playgroups within the selected locality participated in the research. Using a Mosaic approach data was collected across phases 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B and 3 of the research, including: caregiver photographic documentation, an autoethnography, semi-structured interviews, caregiver highlighting of interview transcripts, co-constructed play map and a reflective journal. The chapter then detailed the data analysis process which involved inductive and deductive coding. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the ethical considerations

undertaken in the research, including ethical issues in participatory photography, and the limitations of the research. The following chapter presents a detailed report of the key findings.

Chapter 5. Findings

This chapter presents findings in response to the research question:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending community playgroups?

This research used Hedegaard's cultural-historical theory and "model of children's learning and development through participation in institutionalised practice" (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 73) to understand the shared caregiver motives and societal values of play and early childhood education within the institution of playgroup. The chapter reports on the motives of caregivers for activities within their home and playgroup. It also reports on the early childhood societal values about early childhood education, represented by me as the researcher and experienced early childhood professional. The chapter begins with a description of the concepts of motives and values as they have been conceptualised for this research. This is followed by an overview of the Tenby and Warrington playgroups. The chapter then presents the findings in relation to caregiver motives for activities at home and the caregiver motives at playgroup and where they were shared and different between the two playgroups. Next, the chapter presents the educator societal early childhood values for playgroup. Caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup that were different between each playgroup are then outlined. The chapter concludes with a description of the shared caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup held in common by each playgroup followed by the shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup.

The Conceptualisation of Motives and Values in This Research

This research uses Hedegaard's (2009) cultural historical interpretation of learning and development to conceptualise early childhood education as the societal tradition through which value positions of individuals dialectically shape institutions of practice. Societal values represent the cultural traditions from a society that have been developed over time (Hedegaard, 2009). The values of a society have an impact on an individual's participation in institutional practices such as playgroup. In this research societal values were identified through the researcher autoethnography in Phase 1B of the data collection. These societal values that I identified as an experienced early childhood professional and educator represented the early childhood educator societal values in the findings.

Hedegaard (2009) explains that an individual's motives are what drives a person and influences their choices of activities. Like the values of a society, the motives of an individual influence an individual's participation in institutions such as playgroup. In this research individual motives for activities at home and at playgroup were identified using a Mosaic approach to data collection. Data collection methods which aimed to capture individual caregiver motives for play at home and at playgroup included photographs of children's pastimes and activities, semi-structured interviews, highlighted transcripts and co-constructed play maps. The data collected from participating caregivers and their children at both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup were both inductively and deductively analysed using NVivo 12 to identify reoccurring themes and three categories of findings (Chapter 4, p. 97).

There were three main categories of findings. These were 1) caregiver motives for activities at home and/or for playgroup; 2) educator societal values for playgroup; and 3) shared caregiver motives and educator societal values for activities at home and/or at playgroup.

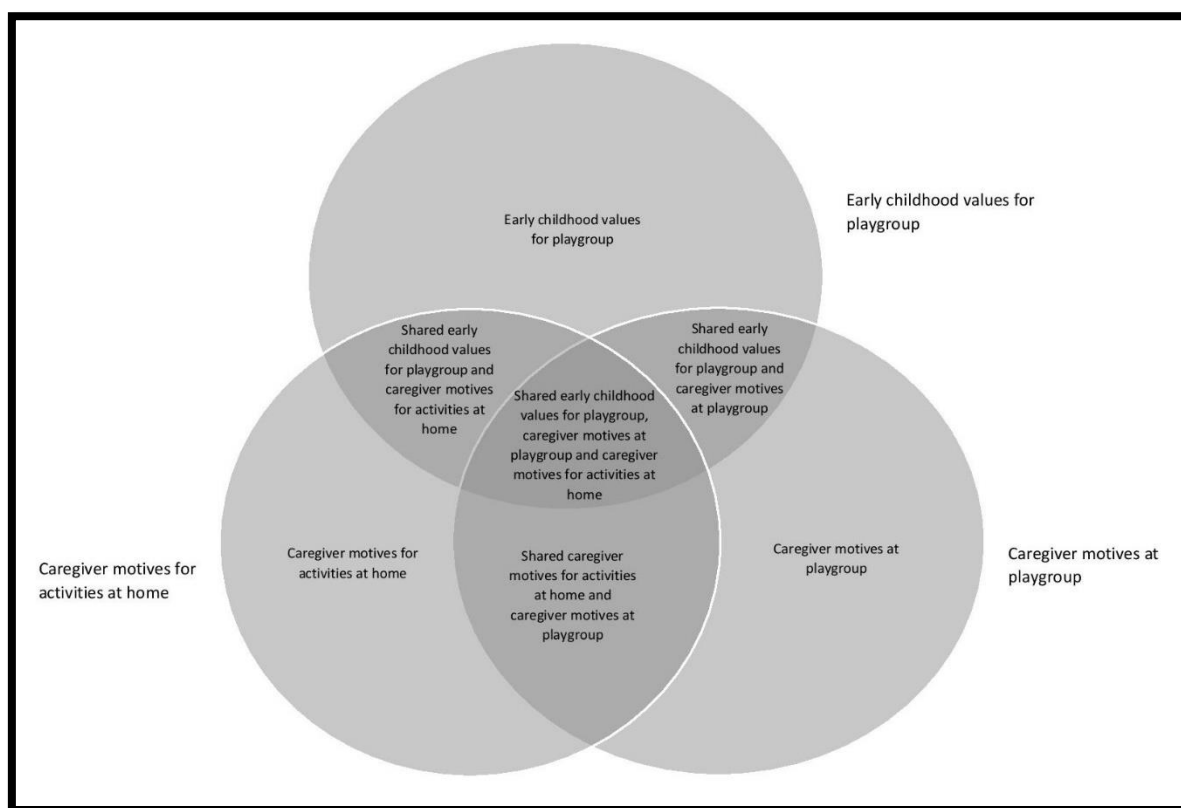
Two categories had several sub-categories. These were caregiver motives for activities at home and/or playgroup, and shared caregiver motives and educator societal values for activities at home and/or playgroup. Educator societal values for playgroup did not have any sub-categories. For caregiver motives for activities at home and/or playgroup there were five sub-categories. These were: 1) caregiver motives held in common for activities at home, 2) caregiver motives held in common at playgroup, 3) caregiver motives held in common at home and/or at playgroup, 4) caregiver motives that were different for each playgroup for activities at home and at playgroup, 5) caregiver motives that were different for each playgroup at playgroup.

For shared caregiver motives and educator societal values for activities at home and/or at playgroup there were three sub-categories. These were: 1) shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup that were different between each playgroup; 2) shared caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup held in common by each playgroup; and 3) shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup.

The interrelationship between findings is indicated by overlaps between caregiver motives for activities at home and play and playgroup, and caregiver and educator societal values for play and early childhood education (Figure 12). Each finding is discussed in turn, illustrating the overlap between values and motives as these are consecutively presented. First, however, an overview of the Tenby playgroup and an overview of the Warrington playgroup is provided.

Figure 12

The Interrelationship Between Findings



Note. This figure demonstrates the interrelationship between findings indicated by overlaps between caregiver motives for activities at home and play and playgroup, and caregiver and society values for play and early childhood education.

An Overview of Tenby Playgroup

The Tenby playgroup was held at a community centre in a metropolitan community of Melbourne. The community centre was built in 2013 and had a maternal and child health centre, a community kitchen, and a kindergarten/preschool on the premises. The room the playgroup used had a kitchenette and an adult bathroom. The room had floor to ceiling windows across two sides. There was a door to a small fenced-in outdoor area that the playgroup used. The outdoor area had a concrete path, a sand pit and a tan bark area. The playgroup had access to a shared storeroom to store the playgroup toys and equipment. The Tenby playgroup was facilitated by Farsana who ran the playgroup on Tuesdays from 11am – 1pm. Farsana was also a playgroup parent who attended the playgroup each week with her 5-year-old child, Sonic. Jess, Wanda and Kiby also attended the playgroup with their children.

Each week Farsana set up the room with activities including a plastic tunnel to climb through and a toy kitchen with toy pots, plates and food, and toys such as a train set, plastic blocks, and cars. Resources provided in the room included three child sized tables and chairs, activities such as colouring-in sheets and pencils and playdough were set up on these tables each week for caregivers and their children to use as self-directed play. There were also activities each week that were led by Farsana. For example, one week that I attended the children were making a butterfly painting. Under the direction of Farsana the children put large droplets of paint on one side of a piece of paper, then the paper was folded in half, so the paint went on both sides and a 'butterfly' print was made. The sessions followed a typical session routine each week which is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

Typical Session Routine for Tenby Playgroup

Tenby playgroup session routine	
Time	Activity
11.00	<p>Arrival</p> <p>Self-guided activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indoor and outdoor activities were set up for children and caregivers to self-select activities. Activities include blocks, books, kitchen, trains, cars, sand pit, bikes, playdough, colouring-in, puzzles. - During this time a painting activity is set up. The children participate one at a time with the assistance of Farsana and the child's caregiver.
11.50	<p>Pack up time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caregivers and children assist in packing up all the activities both indoors and outdoors.
12.00	<p>Snack time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caregivers and children sit together to eat a snack that they have brought from home.
12.15	<p>Craft time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All children and caregivers sit at the tables together and make something out of craft materials (e.g., craft sticks, patty pans, paper, cardboard). - A sample of what was to be made is displayed on the wall for everyone to see what the finished product looks like. For example, the craft activity might be to make a flower where there would be a flowerpot shape, a strip

	of paper for the stem, a circle for the head of the flower and pieces for the petals to stick onto a piece of paper.
12.40	Story and rhyme time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The children and caregivers take some chairs to an open area of the room and sit together. Farsana reads a story and sings some songs and finger plays with the children and their caregivers.
1.00	Home time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caregivers and children leave. - Facilitator and a parent helper finish cleaning up.

An Overview of Warrington Playgroup

Like the Tenby playgroup, the Warrington playgroup was held at a community centre in a metropolitan community of Melbourne. The community centre opened in 2011 and had a community kitchen, maternal and child health centre, library, and kindergarten/preschool at the premises. The room the playgroup used had a kitchenette and an adult bathroom. The Warrington playgroup ran on both a Monday and Thursday morning from 9.30am to 11.30am. Sarah and Madison attended the Thursday playgroup with their children and Super Nan attended the Monday playgroup with her grandchildren. Caregivers were able to choose to bring their children on one or both days that the playgroup operated. The caregivers that participated in the research each attended one day per week.

The playgroup was run by a parent volunteer committee consisting of a President, Vice President, Treasurer, Fund Raising Coordinator and General Committee Member. Two caregivers from the group would arrive early and set up the playroom and outdoor area for the families with a range of experiences and activities. These included activities such as cars, blocks, playdough, and dolls. Some adult sized chairs were set up along one wall of the room. The room had a large storeroom that the playgroup shared with other groups, where they stored all their toys and equipment. The room had some floor to ceiling windows which had a door that led to a small fenced-in outdoor area. The outdoor area had a concrete path, a cubby, a sand pit, and a small movable slide. There was a tan bark area and a chalk board attached to the outdoor wall.

The caregivers and their children could choose to play either indoors or outdoors and were able to move between the two spaces for the duration of the playgroup session. Throughout the session the storeroom doors were open, with a door leading to the indoor playroom and another door leading to the outdoor area, so that caregivers and/or children could access the toys and equipment that they wanted that was not already set out for the children. The caregivers set up

three low, child height tables placed together in one part of the room where they set up playdough, drawing and an art/craft activity for the session. In the rest of the room activities such as cars, blocks, musical instruments, toy kitchen and dolls were available as well as bikes and sand pit toys outside. The sessions followed a typical session routine each week which is outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

Typical Session Routine for Warrington Playgroup

Warrington playgroup session routine	
Time	Activity
9.15	Set Up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Playgroup group leader and another caregiver arrive to set up the indoor and outdoor activities for the session.
9.30	Arrival <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caregivers and children arrive. Self-guided activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children and caregivers self-select the activities they wish to participate in. - Activities include playdough, drawing, craft, blocks, toy kitchen, shape sorters, dolls, cars, balls, bikes, slide.
10.30	Morning tea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The tables are cleared and cleaned. - Children sit at the tables together and eat a snack together. - Caregivers bring a piece of fruit or crackers for everyone to share at morning teatime.
10.45	Self-guided activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When the children have finished their morning tea, they return to self-selected activities that remain set up from earlier in the session.
11.15	Pack up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caregivers and children pack up all the activities and toys and clean the tables and floor.
11.30	Home time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caregivers and children leave.

Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and/or at Playgroup

There were caregiver motives for activities at home and motives at playgroup that were held in common by each playgroup. There were also motives for activities at home and motives at playgroup that were different for each playgroup. Each of these will be discussed in the following sections.

Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and Motives at Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup

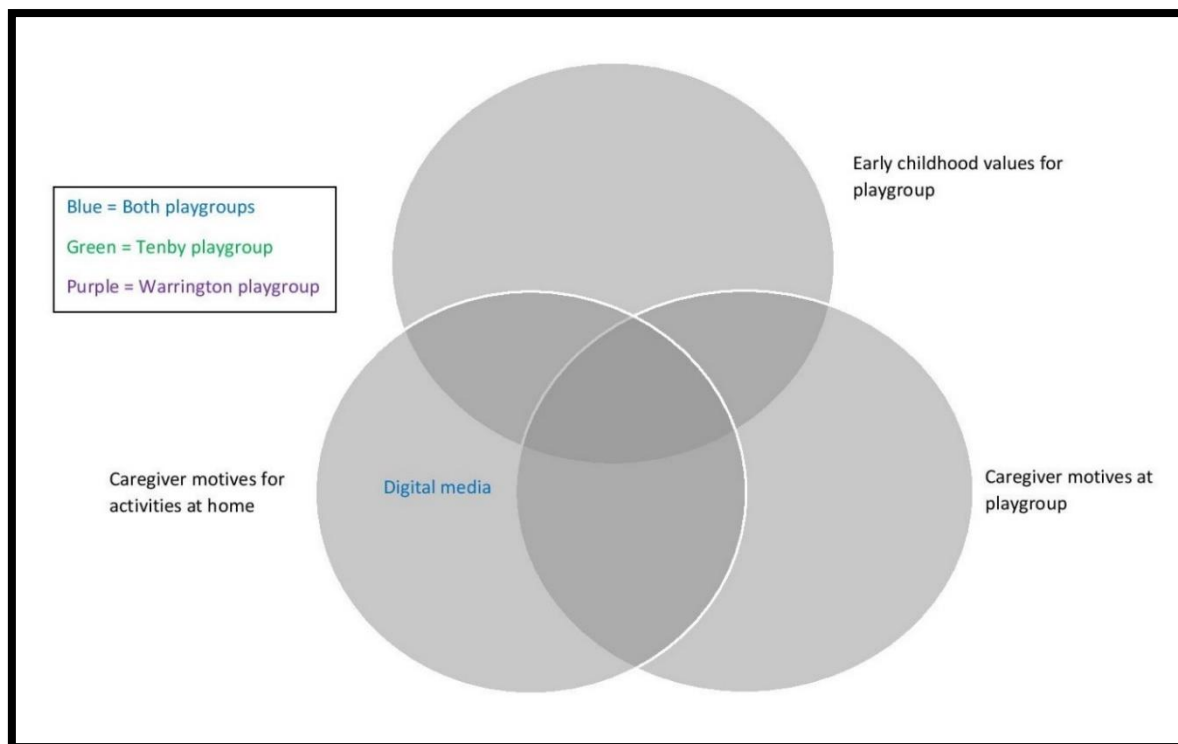
There were four caregiver motives for activities at home and motives at playgroup held in common for both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. These were: digital media, volunteering, outcomes-based art and craft and grandparents. Digital media at home was held in common for both playgroups. Volunteering at playgroup was held in common for both playgroups. Grandparents was a motive held in common by both playgroups but for the Tenby playgroup this was at home and for the Warrington playgroup it was both at home and at playgroup. Outcomes-based art and craft was also a motive held in common for both playgroups but for the Tenby playgroup this was at home and at playgroup and for the Warrington playgroup it was at playgroup.

Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home Held in Common by Each Playgroup

There was one motive for activities at home that was held in common for both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. This motive was digital media. This theme is identified in Figure 13 and will be discussed in the following section.

Figure 13

Caregiver Motives Held in Common for Activities at Home



Note . Digital media was the caregiver motive held in common for activities at home between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup.

Digital Media. The use of digital media such as iPads, tablets, phones, and television featured in the caregiver's discussions in the initial interviews about activities that take place at home. Three of the four caregivers from Tenby playgroup and two of the three caregivers from Warrington playgroup referred to their children watching television and using electronic media for pastimes and activities at home. In their caregiver photographic documentation from Phase 1A of the data collection process Farsana, Jess and Kiby from Tenby playgroup and Super Nan and Madison from Warrington playgroup, included photographs of their children using devices such as phones and tablets, watching television or using an electronic toy laptop to represent pastimes and activities that their children engaged in during a typical day. For example, Kiby included a photograph of Mia watching a program on the tablet before going to bed (Figure 17), Jess had a photograph of Fresh watching 'Daniel Tiger's Neighbourhood' through YouTube on the television (Figure 15), Farsana had a photograph of Sonic using Reading Eggs™ on the iPad (Figure 14), Super Nan included a photograph of Buzz and Sophia watching television (Figure 18) and Madsion included a photograph of Jordan watching 'Giggle and Hoot' on the television (Figure 19) as well as a photograph of Jordan using a toy laptop (Figure 20). The caregivers indicated in their initial

interviews that their children used the digital media daily. For example, Farsana noted, “all the time he [Sonic] want[s] to play games [on the tablet]” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.6) and Jess commented, “whenever she’s really screaming to...[have] it, I just turn...on...YouTube on the TV [for her]” (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial Interview, p. 6).

As a daily pastime or activity, caregivers’ motives for the use of digital media were described in terms of preparing the child for attending school (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6-7), distracting the child (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6), a quiet activity for the child (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7) and enhancing the child’s learning (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4-5). In the initial interview Farsana talked about her child’s (Sonic) use of Reading Eggs™, to support his preparation for school:

I downloaded the Reading Eggs™ [app],...all the time he want[s] to play games...[while] his brother [is] doing the iPad [for] his [home]work, and if he [Sonic] want[s] [the] iPad I'm not giving [it to him]. All the time...he'll ask me, “Mama I want iPad, I want iPad...I want to do homework”. [He] is asking something like that because his brother is doing homework...[on his] iPad. I said “Ok then you do...the education work”...he’s doing [it for] five minutes after that he’s changing [to a different app]...and he's starting to do the Minecraft...but he loves to play Minecraft™ (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6-7).

Farsana explained that she downloaded the Reading Eggs™ app for Sonic to use on the iPad (Figure 14). Reading Eggs™ is an education application that assists children to develop and extend their reading skills. Farsana explained that Sonic asks her to use the iPad and tells her that he would like to do ‘homework’ like his older teenage brother is doing. Farsana agreed to allow him to use it as she felt that Sonic would learn reading skills by using the app. However, when his mother is not looking Sonic closes the Reading Eggs™ app and opens the Minecraft™ app (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6-7). Minecraft™ is a video game where players build structures, acquire resources, and compete against others.

Figure 14

Farsana. Tenby Playgroup. Using the iPad at Home



Jess described her motives for the use of digital technologies as a pastime or activity in the home in terms of providing a distraction. For example, Jess explained in the initial interview that she feeds Fresh “when she’s [busy] on the phone...I give her everything. She’s eating because she’s busy with the phone” (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.6). Jess indicated that she used the devices such as the iPhone and television as a distraction tool while her daughter was eating meals. Jess further explained that her daughter likes to watch YouTube and children’s television shows on the iPhone and the television (Figure 15 & 16). Farsana also commented in her initial interview that she gave Sonic a device as a distraction while he was eating meals to try to encourage him to eat his food (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10).

Figure 15

Jess. Tenby Playgroup. Watching the Television at Home



Figure 16

Jess. Tenby Playgroup. Playing on the Phone at Home



Kiby explained in her initial interview that her motive for the use of digital technologies as a pastime or activity in the home was as a reward for Mia. For example, Kiby commented that Mia was given his tablet to use “when he listens” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3). Kiby further explained that in the photograph Mia’s father had given him the tablet before bed and it was something that Mia did sometimes when he had been “extra good” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3) (Figure 17).

Figure 17

Kiby. Tenby Playgroup. Using the Tablet at Home



Super Nan’s motive for the use of the television as a pastime or activity at home was described in terms of a quiet activity for her grandchildren. She had included a photograph of Buzz and Sophia sitting on the couch watching the television (Figure 18). In her initial interview Super Nan explained that sometimes the children had some quiet rest time while the television was on (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7).

Figure 18

Super Nan. Warrington Playgroup. Watching Television at Super Nan's House



Madison included a photograph of Jordan watching television (Figure 19) and another photograph of Jordan using a toy laptop (Figure 20). In the initial interview Madison emphasised the role of television in her child's life:

I know a lot of parents out there do not agree with TV. I do. I think it's really important. I know that people just go '*...why would you get your kids to watch tv*', but we just put it on ABC Kids. He [Jordan] learns so much. I honestly believe that his [Jordan's] speech was better because of it. And also, because I don't have family and friends [nearby]..., I'm not going to let him [Jordan] sit in...a quiet house...The best thing about it, he's [Jordan's] been watching TV since he was a newborn. I see some kids who aren't allowed to watch TV and when [the] TV comes on they are so glued to it that they do not focus on anything else...It's background noise for him [Jordan] and every now and then something will interest him like this [show did in this photograph], and he'll sit there and actually watch it...I am not ashamed to say that I put the TV on for him [Jordan] (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, pp. 4-5).

Madison explained that the television was often on in the background as it broke up the quietness of the house and it played a significant role in Jordan's home life. Madison's motive for the use of the television as a pastime or activity at home was the learning that she believed Jordan was undertaking through watching the television. She commented that through watching the children's programs on the television Jordan was improving his speech development through being immersed in language through the television shows that were on. Madison commented that as the television

was often on in the background while Jordan was playing with his toys, when something came on that interested Jordan he stopped to watch that part of the program, before going back to his play when his interest faded (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4-5).

Madison also included a photograph of Jordan using a toy laptop. Madison's motive for the use of the toy laptop as a pastime or activity at home was as a distraction as well as a tool for learning. For example, in her initial interview Madison explained that she worked from home and when Jordan was younger he would be interested in her laptop while she was trying to work, so she bought the toy laptop for Jordan to use while she was working on her laptop. Madison also commented that when Jordan's father was using his laptop, Jordan would get his toy laptop to use as Jordan enjoyed copying things his father was doing, explaining that Jordan "idolises his dad, so whatever his dad's doing, he does...he [Jordan] feels like he's kind of included" (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11). Madison commented further that the toy laptop had many functions that Jordan could use to learn the alphabet:

It's got the A to Z on it and he presses the button and there's four little categories up the top, so there's music, there's learning, there's animals and there's a games category so every button you push...he loves it and sits there, listens to...A for Apple, and then they'd be crunching an apple, or E for Elephant and there'd be an elephant sound (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p.11).

In the initial interview Madison explained the learning that she thought was taking place for Jordan when he was using his toy laptop. She commented that through using the toy laptop Jordan was learning about letters and the sounds letters made, as well as words that began with the letters. Madison further commented that Jordan enjoyed pressing the button on the toy laptop that sang the alphabet the most when he used the toy laptop.

Figure 19

Madison. Warrington Playgroup. Watching Television at Home



Figure 20

Madison. Warrington Playgroup. Using the Toy Laptop at Home



Although described as a regular pastime or activity, caregivers noted that they tried to limit the amount of time their children spent using digital technologies at home. Farsana explained in the initial interview that Sonic would not play on the iPad every day and that she tried to limit the amount of time he spent on it:

Yes, limit [time on iPad],...he would play one or two hours, but not every day...only Saturday and Sunday I'm giving, because most of the time Saturday is when his brother is playing...not every day, usually he is taking [the iPad] everyday but...not now I'm not giving, because he need to learn more things you know next year he's prep so I preparing for prep you know (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6-7).

In another example, Kiby commented that her son, Mia was using his own tablet which meant that he did not have to share either of his parent's devices (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3).

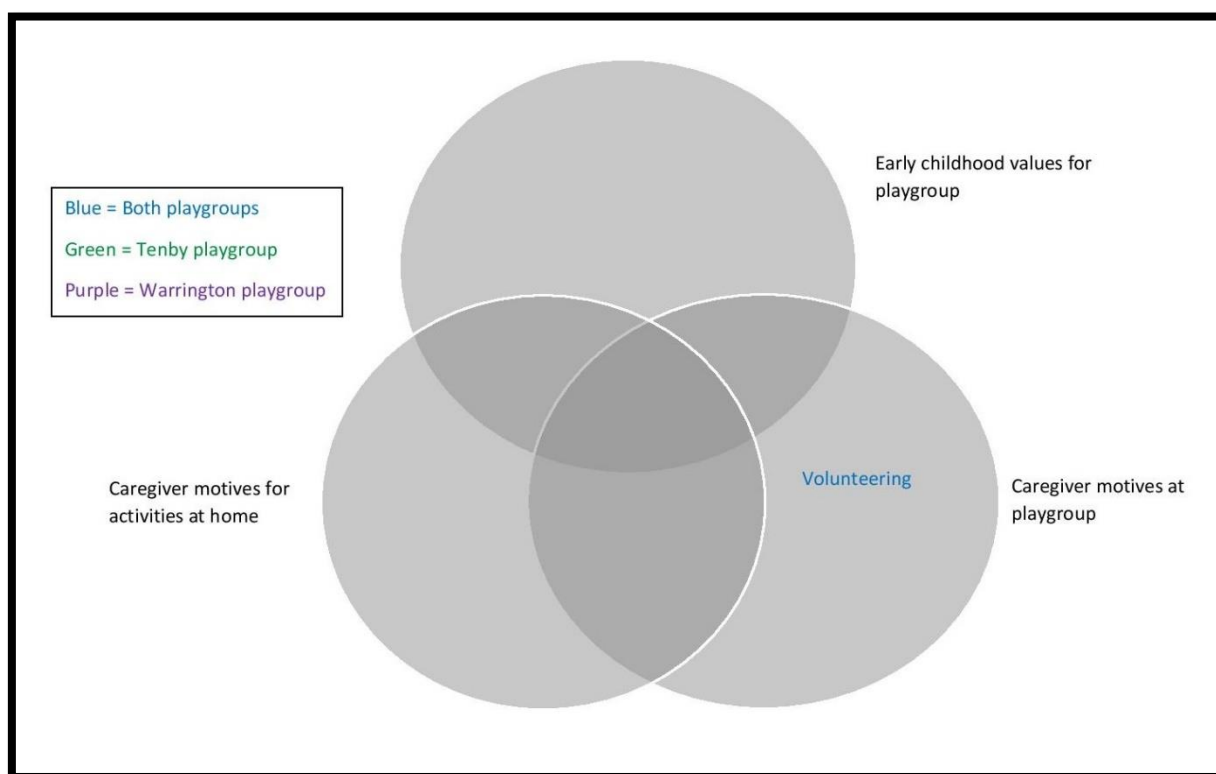
Through the play map interviews with Farsana, Jess and Kiby from Tenby playgroup and Super Nan and Madison from Warrington playgroup the caregivers all commented that the photographs of their children using digital media did not represent their experience of playgroup. For example, in the play map interview Madison commented that the photograph of Jordan watching the television and using the toy laptop were "more what I would associate with home" (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 6). Jess also commented in the play map interview that "there's no phone at playgroup" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 3) indicating that the photograph that she took of Fresh on the phone did not represent her experience of playgroup.

Caregiver Motives at Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup

There was one caregiver motive at playgroup that was held in common for both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. This motive was volunteering. This theme is identified in Figure 21 and will be discussed in the following section.

Figure 21

Caregiver Motives at Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup



Note. Volunteering was the motive at playgroup held in common between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup.

Volunteering. Volunteering was identified as a motive at playgroup by Farsana and Jess from the Tenby playgroup and Madison from the Warrington playgroup. Community playgroups such as the Tenby playgroup and Warrington playgroup are run by parent volunteers. In her initial interview Farsana identified volunteering as a way for her to participate in a new country, learn and gain confidence in speaking English and engage with families from her community. Farsana commented in her initial interview that she was not confident in speaking English and stayed at home a lot. She began to attend playgroup where she met the Cultural Liaison Officer (CLO) from the local council. The CLO asked Farsana to volunteer and run a Sri Lankan playgroup, when Farsana declined “because my English is very poor...so I can’t understand sometimes the words when anyone speaks” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14) the CLO asked Farsana what she thought she could do. Farsana enjoyed craft activities and suggested this to the CLO. Farsana began running craft classes for children in a volunteer capacity, which then led to her volunteering and running the Tenby playgroup. In her initial interview Farsana explained that through volunteering at the playgroup she was able to “meet parents, families and the children” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 17).

Jess felt that volunteering at the Tenby playgroup was a good opportunity for her. In her initial interview Jess said that a motive for her in attending the playgroup was that she had the opportunity to:

meet other families and it's experience for me and I can get lots of experience of learning everything...how the playgroup is run and if you are the supervisor how you should...[run the] playgroup. Slowly I am learning that [how to run a playgroup] (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14).

For Jess, volunteering gave her an opportunity to gain experience in her new country. She had moved to Australia from Afghanistan seven years prior, and shortly after her move she had fallen pregnant and had her first daughter (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 1). Not having worked in Australia, volunteering at the playgroup allowed her to learn about playgroups and provide both social and employment connections within the community. The nature of community playgroups being run by volunteers gives the caregivers that attend an opportunity to meet other caregivers through their involvement in the playgroup. It also provides caregivers such as Jess an opportunity to develop skills and gain experience in working with children. Jess commented that through her volunteer role in the playgroup she had to apply for her Working with Children card, which she felt was positive for her (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.14). Jess was interested in volunteering at her older daughter's school and hoped that the experience she gained through the playgroup would assist her in being able to do some volunteer work in the school (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14). Jess also hoped that both volunteering opportunities would lead to some paid work in the future (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.14).

Madison expressed another motive for volunteering at the playgroup. In the play map interview Madison explained that she volunteered to be on the committee of the Warrington playgroup to assist her in qualifying for government benefits (Child Care Subsidy) to reduce the cost of her childcare fees for her son, Jordan, to attend childcare two days a week. Madison explained in her play map interview:

[It] is important for me...[to be]...on the committee because I need day care, [and] the childcare subsidy [for day care] and I can't get that [the childcare subsidy] if I'm not on the committee...So you can get...[a] minimum of 8 hours a fortnight, [and a] maximum [of] 36 hours subsidised. So that's 2 days a week...and those 2 days [that Jordan attends childcare] give me time with him [her baby], it also gives me a break and the subsidy's great, so I had to go on the committee (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 11).

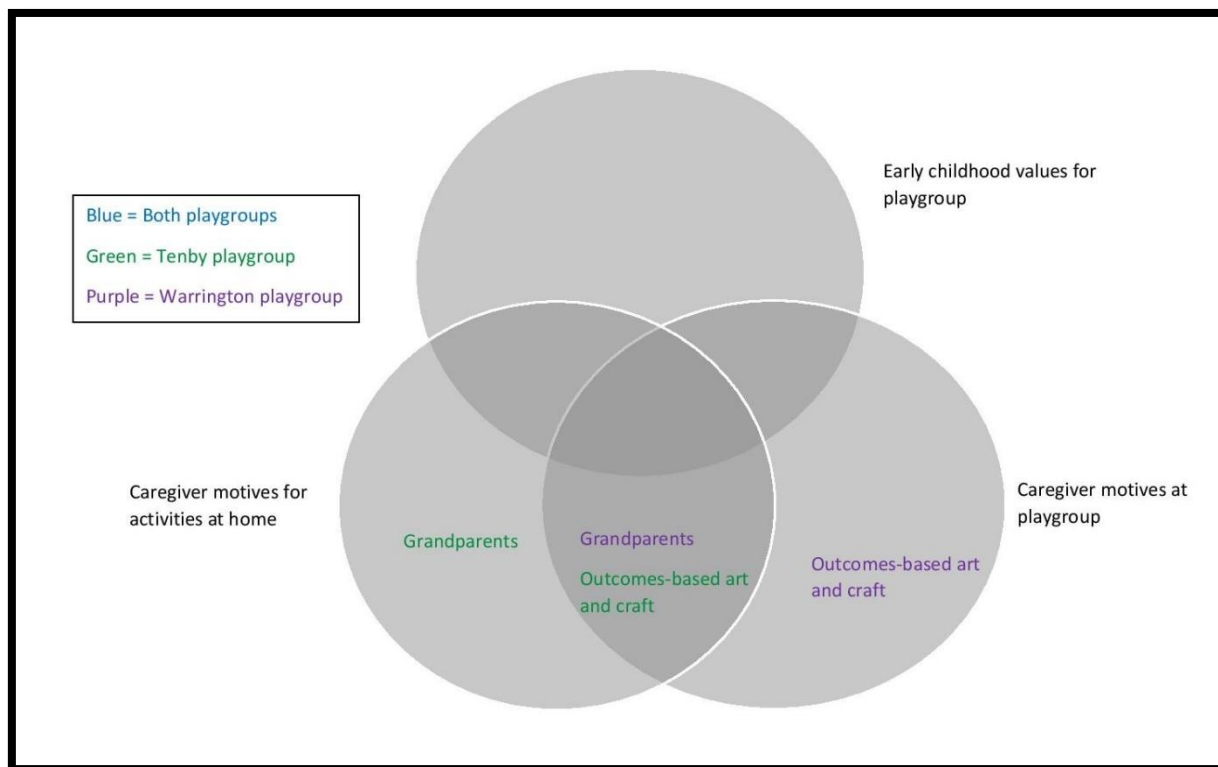
Madison explained that as a volunteer on the playgroup committee she qualified to receive Child Care Subsidy that reduced the cost of the fees for Jordan to attend childcare. She commented that having Jordan in childcare two days a week allowed her to spend those two days with her younger child and it gave her a “break” (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p.11). Madison also identified that attending playgroup assisted her mental health in both her initial interview and her play map interview with the time she spent at the playgroup assisting with the feelings of isolation Madison had at home with her children. The ability to qualify to receive reduced childcare fees so that Jordan could attend childcare was Madison’s motivator to volunteer as a member of the committee of the playgroup. Madison commented in both her initial interview and her play map interview that having Jordan attending child care was important for her as she felt he learned many skills: “he can count to 14, he can do his ABCs, he is stringing little sentences together now, he’s learning all these new things, he can tell me what the weather is” (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9).

Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and/or Motives at Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup

There were two motives for activities at home and/or motives at playgroup that were common for both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. These were grandparents and outcomes-based art and craft. For the Tenby playgroup grandparents were identified as a motive for activities at home and for the Warrington playgroup grandparents were identified as a motive for activities at home and a motive at playgroup. Outcome-based art and craft was identified as a motive for activities at home and motive at playgroup for the Tenby playgroup and as a motive at playgroup for the Warrington playgroup. These themes are identified in Figure 22 and will be discussed in the following section.

Figure 22

Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and/or Motives at Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup



Note. Grandparents and outcomes-based art and craft were the caregiver motives held in common for activities at home and/or caregiver motive at playgroup between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup.

Grandparents. The children's grandparents played a large role in their lives for three of the participating families. From the Tenby playgroup Jess' father-in-law lived in her household (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview), while Kiby's parents also lived with her and her family (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview). For the families of Jess and Kiby grandparents were a motive for activities at home. Jess and Kiby discussed the significant role the children's grandparents had in their lives in both their initial interviews and play map interviews. Jess and Kiby's motives for the role of the children's grandparents were providing care when Jess or Kiby were out of the house (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10; Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5) and engaging in activities with their grandchildren Fresh and Mia (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5; Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5-6). Super Nan was the grandparent of twins Buzz and Sophia and attended the Warrington playgroup with them (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 1). For Super Nan grandparents was a motive for activities both at

home and at playgroup. Super Nan's motives for both activities at home and at playgroup were spending time with her grandchildren, providing care for Buzz and Sophia to give their mother a break and engaging in pastimes and activities with Buzz and Sophia (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview & Play map interview).

Jess explained in her initial interview that her father-in-law was very involved in the pastimes and activities Fresh participated in. When I asked Jess in her initial interview what her daughter, Fresh's favourite thing to do was she replied that it was "playing with my father-in-law" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9). Jess commented that when Fresh was playing with her grandfather she liked to pretend that she was a "little doctor or little chef" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.10) and included the words "little doctor or little chef" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Play map) on her play map. Jess also explained that sometimes when she goes to collect her older daughter from school she leaves Jess with her father-in-law as "they're really busy" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.10) playing together and Fresh "doesn't want to go" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.10) with her. Jess explained that she and Fresh have a special relationship with her 92-year-old father-in-law, with Fresh often choosing to stay and play with him when Jess goes out. Fresh often played pretend games with her grandfather, feeding him goodies that she had made in the toy kitchen, or pretending to be his Doctor (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial Interview, p.10).

The role of the children's grandparents in the children's pastimes and activities was also highlighted as a motive with the play of Kiby's son, Mia. Many of Mia's activities were linked to the influence of his grandfather in his life. For example, in the initial interview Kiby explained Mia's play:

This is actually...[an] Oxford dictionary for [a] nurse, but he [Mia] thinks it's a bible, he's quite religious for his age. He likes going to church...and trying to read...the bible and stuff like that and he's gotten all of that from my dad cause my dad does morning prayers every morning...[My mum and dad] go to church every Sunday and every other day of the week... and he [Mia] thinks this is a bible similar to my dad's...[Mia is] usually holding on to it and...trying to read it and doing the cross sign (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.6).

Kiby explained that her parents were very religious, her father went to church every day and carried his bible with him. Mia had found a thick book of his mother's that was a similar size to the bible and Mia carried this book around to be like his grandfather (Figure 23). Kiby commented in her initial interview that this was Mia's favourite thing to do, along with acting out various parts of the

church service. Mia took the garden hose and sang into it like the microphone at his grandparent's church (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6). Mia also hit the ottoman at home like the drum in the church (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6). Kiby also remarked that Mia would often wear a hat, as his grandfather always wore a hat, and his grandfather had a walking stick, so Mia regularly found something such as a stick or a broom, that he would walk around carrying and leaning on (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.11).

Figure 23

Kiby. Tenby Playgroup. Carrying the Bible Book at Home



As the grandmother of twins, Buzz and Sophia, playgroup provided Super Nan with a set time once a week for her to spend time with her grandchildren. Super Nan commented in both the initial interview and the play map interview about how she enjoyed spending time with her grandchildren: "I love it when I am just listening to them, I...[think] it's the most beautiful sound in the world...listening to kids playing" (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). Super Nan's motive of spending time with her grandchildren was met through the time she spent with Buzz and Sophia both at her home and at playgroup. Super Nan described the joy she had when she was spending time with Sophia and Buzz, explaining that listening to the children play was the "most beautiful sound in the world" (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). Throughout Super Nan's initial interview and play map interview she frequently discussed the time Buzz and Sophia spent at her house and the types of activities they did together. For example, one of their favourite things to do together was to bake cakes and to sit on a blanket

together in the back yard looking at the clouds and eating their freshly baked treats (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5).

The influence of grandparents in the activities at home for the caregivers and their children was identified throughout the initial interviews as well as the play map interviews of Kiby, Jess and Super Nan. The grandparents assisted with caregiving of the children and were involved in the children's activities and pastimes including pretend play such as Jess' father-in-law playing pretend Doctor with Fresh (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.10) and Kiby's parents involving Mia in their church attendance (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.6). This was also evident through Super Nan's participation in playgroup with her grandchildren Buzz and Sophia, and the time Super Nan spent with Buzz and Sophia in her home.

Outcomes-Based Art and Craft. Outcomes-based art and craft was identified as a motive for activities at home and at playgroup for the Tenby playgroup and a motive at playgroup for the Warrington playgroup. In these findings, outcome-based art and craft refers to art and craft activities that were provided for the children where the focus of the activity was on what the artwork looked like once it was finished.

An outcomes-based art and craft time played a significant role in the routine of the Tenby playgroup. During the structured art and craft period the children and their caregivers created a piece of art or craft that looked like the sample that was displayed on the wall. In this way the art and craft activities were outcome-based where the focus was on what the artwork looked like once made. The caregiver's motive was for the children to make a recognisable piece of craft – this being the outcome of the activity. The caregivers' motive was also to teach the children new skills and for the children to learn new skills while completing the art and craft activity.

At craft time at the Tenby playgroup the activities of the playgroup were packed away and all the caregivers sat at the tables with their children (Researcher journal, 2019). Together with their caregivers, the children would then participate in the same art and craft activity. A sample would be displayed on the cupboard door so the caregivers and children could see what it was that they were to make and how to make it. The pieces that were needed were already cut into the required shapes so that the children and caregivers could stick the pieces together to make the object they were making for the day. Each piece that was required to make the craft was given one at a time. For example, the children might be making a snowman. They would be given a wooden craft stick, three white circles, a hat shape, two squares for eyes, an orange triangle for the nose, a scarf shape and three circles for the buttons. The sample would be displayed on the cupboard, and the caregivers would look at the sample and assist the children to make a snowman that looked

like the sample. A glue stick would be given to stick the pieces in place. Once completed each child would have their photograph taken by Farsana of the child holding their finished product (Researcher journal, 2019). The children could take the finished craft home with them, or they could choose for Farsana to keep it to put in their art and craft portfolio which they then received at the end of each term. My observations of this craft time were that the caregivers completed much of the craft for the children. For example, if a child placed an art material in a different place to what the sample showed, the caregiver would often move the piece so that it was in the same place as the sample provided (Researcher journal, 2019). While the caregivers were helping the children achieve the adult-directed desired outcome of the completed art and craft activity that looked like the displayed example, the children were not able to explore the materials provided to them in the way they wished, limiting the child's input and effort in the activity.

Kiby noted that during the craft activity Mia required her assistance to complete the craft:

We do craft [time] but I guess he's so young he's just everywhere [Mia's attention]...I have to [help Mia]. Most of the time I'm doing it [making the craft], but he does like it when we're towards the end of the...craft making, when he actually sees a picture of something [or the finished product] (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 8).

In the play map interview Kiby explained that Mia was quite young and had difficulty completing some of the art and craft projects they did at the playgroup. When this happened Kiby completed the craft, and Mia enjoyed the completed product. She explained that he would like to make it, but often found the steps required to make the craft quite difficult to complete (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play Map interview, p. 8). Kiby's motive was for Mia to complete the art and craft activity and make a piece of craft that looked the same as the sample.

In both the home of the Tenby caregivers and the Tenby playgroup, the children completed structured, outcome-based art and craft activities. The caregivers from Tenby playgroup included photographs of the children completing colouring in sheets (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, see Figure 24 & 25) or a paint-by-numbers activity at home (Jess, Tenby playgroup, see Figure 26), while I observed colouring-in sheets at playgroup each week (Researcher journal, 2019). In the initial interview Jess commented that she showed Fresh how to do the art and craft activities both at home and at playgroup. Jess' motive was to teach Fresh and for Fresh to learn how to do the activity correctly. Jess would hold Fresh's hand while she was colouring to teach her to stay within the lines of the colouring in sheet:

I'm there because she will do it messy, I will teach her, most of the time I'm there when she colour[s] cause... I'm trying to...[teach] her...how to colour and...[not to] draw out of the lines and sometimes I take her hand and sort of do the colouring (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4).

Jess explained that by doing this she could teach Fresh how to colour in between the lines and not make any mistakes by drawing outside the lines of the picture. In the paint-by-numbers activity in the photograph (Figure 26) Jess explained in the initial interview that "there are numbers and...number 1 she should colour the blue colour" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4) and that each number on the picture had a corresponding colour that told Fresh which colour to paint that section of the picture. Jess' motive was for Fresh to paint the picture in the correct colours, in the lines and for Fresh to produce the picture as it was supposed to look.

Figure 24

Wanda. Tenby Playgroup. Colouring in at Home



Figure 25

Wanda. Tenby Playgroup. Colouring in at Playgroup



Figure 26

Jess. Tenby Playgroup. Painting-By-Numbers at Home



Like the Tenby playgroup, the Warrington playgroup provided the children with outcome-based art and craft activities to complete where the focus of the activity was on the completed art and craft project. However, unlike the Tenby playgroup, the children at the Warrington playgroup could select whether they wanted to participate in the art and craft activity that was available for them (Researcher journal, 2019). The caregivers from the Warrington playgroup also identified different motives for the outcomes-based art and craft activities. Super Nan explained the motive for the craft activities was for the children to make a recognisable piece of art and craft that was often associated with events within the community. For example, Super Nan described a craft activity that was provided for the children around the time of the Melbourne Cup horse race:

[The craft is] a bit more [structured], they'll make something [at playgroup]...it might be Melbourne Cup Day [so] there'll be horses that have been printed out that you cut out, [and colour in and] stick [the horses] on a stick. (Super Nan, Warrington, Play map interview, p. 6).

Super Nan commented that the craft the children were offered at the playgroup was based around what was happening in the community at the time (e.g., the Melbourne Cup or Father's Day). The children were given a printed horse to colour in, cut out and then stick onto a craft stick. Super Nan further explained that the children were unable to cut out the picture of the horse as the playgroup only had adult scissors available, and that the adults did most of the activity for the children:

They didn't have [children's size scissors]...last time they [only] had the adults [size scissors], so I cut the things [horses] out [for Buzz and Sophia] so they're [the children] not really doing it [themselves],...all they're [the children] doing is sticking a bit of glue on the stick and sticking a horse on (Super Nan, Warrington, Play map interview, p. 7).

The caregivers from Warrington playgroup all explained that their children would often start with the art and craft activity when they first arrived before moving on to find other self-selected activities to do afterwards. Sarah's motive for completing the outcomes-based art and craft activity was for Sophie to settle in comfortably to the playgroup upon arrival and found that by completing the art and craft activity together when they first arrived was part of their routine of coming to playgroup (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9). Another motive Sarah identified was for Sophie to enjoy the activities on offer to Sophie at playgroup. Sarah commented in her initial about a typical arrival at playgroup: "When [Sophie] first started, the first thing she would do when coming to playgroup is go straight to the craft table, she absolutely loved that, so we'd always start off with a craft activity" (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9).

There were, however, also examples of process-based art and craft activities at the Warrington playgroup that were less focused on the final product at the end of the activity and more focused on the processes the children undertook while creating their art and craft. In this research process-based art and craft activities refers to art and craft activities provided for the children where the focus of the activity is for the children to explore with the materials and equipment provided for them to make whatever they would like to make. For example, at Warrington playgroup Madison had taken a photograph of Jordan drawing at playgroup (see Figure 27). In this photograph Jordan sat at the table with a plain white blank piece of paper on which he was able to explore making marks on the paper with the drawing materials provided for him, such as pencils and crayons. Madison's motive for this activity was for Jordan to engage in free play where he can engage in activities and use the materials provided as he wanted to (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p.10).

Figure 27

Madison. Warrington Playgroup. Drawing at Playgroup



Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and Caregiver Motives at Playgroup That Were Different Between Each Playgroup

There were four motives for activities at home and at playgroup that were different for both the Tenby and the Warrington playgroup. These were: teaching and learning new skills,

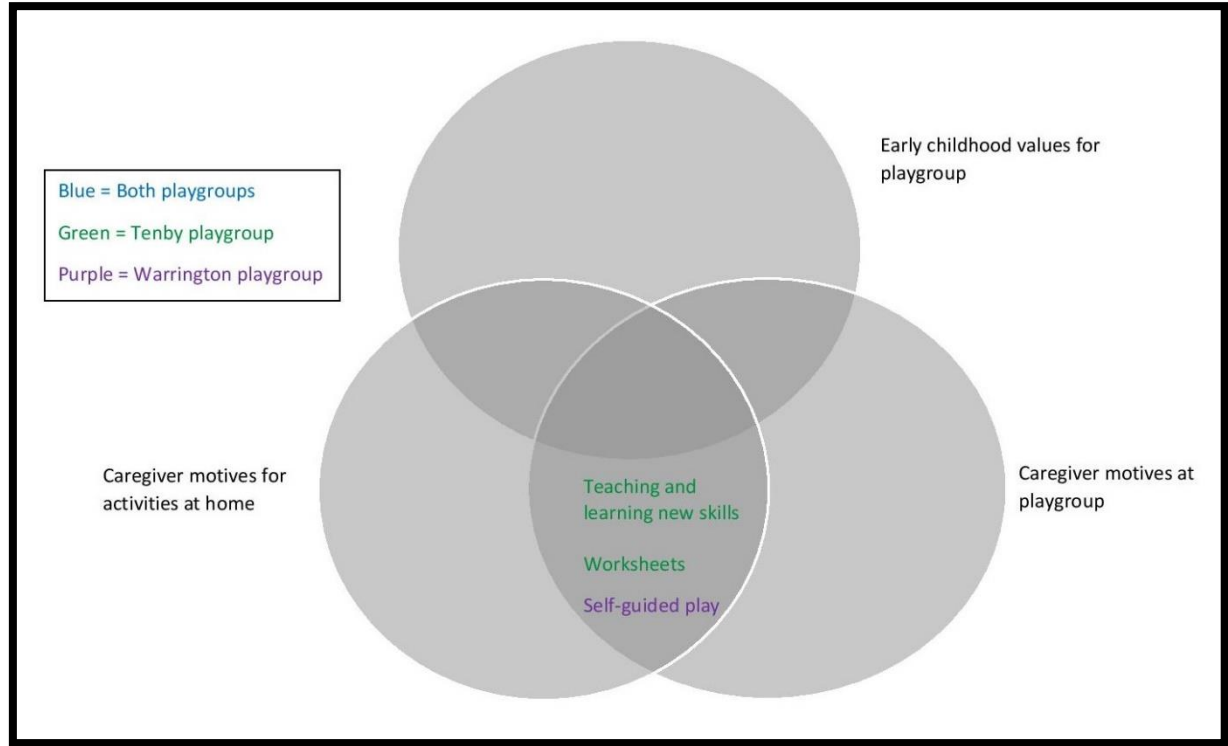
worksheets, self-guided play and spending time with children. Teaching and learning new skills and worksheets were motives for activities at home and motives at playgroup for the Tenby playgroup. Self-guided play was a motive for activities at home and motive at playgroup for the Warrington playgroup. Spending time with children was a motive at playgroup for the Warrington playgroup. There were no motives for activities at home only that were different for the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup.

Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and Motives at Playgroup That Were Different for Each Playgroup

There were three caregiver motives for activities at home and caregiver motives at playgroup that were different for both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. For the Tenby playgroup these were: teaching and learning new skills, and worksheets. For the Warrington playgroup this was self-guided play. These themes are identified in Figure 28 and will be discussed in the following sections.

Figure 28

Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home and Motives at Playgroup That Were Different for Each Playgroup



Note. Tenby playgroup motives for activities at home and motives at playgroup were teaching and learning new skills and worksheets. Warrington playgroup motives for activities at home and motives at playgroup was self-guided play.

Teaching and Learning New Skills. The caregivers from Tenby playgroup spoke considerably about teaching their children new skills as well as their children learning new skills across both the initial interviews and the play map interviews. In the initial interviews when I asked the caregivers about the photographs they had taken of their children involved in pastimes and activities in Phase 1 of the data collection, all four of the caregivers from Tenby playgroup spoke of both the children learning something in the activities, as well as their role in teaching the children something. For the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup the motive of children learning about letters, shapes, colours, and numbers was important. The motive of teaching and learning new skills was also evident when the caregivers and I spoke during the co-construction of the play maps.

Both Farsana and Jess from the Tenby playgroup saw play as something that the children participated in that was separate to learning. For these two caregivers from the Tenby playgroup play as a motive for their children's pastime and activity was not regarded as highly as the caregivers spending time teaching their child new skills. As the playgroup facilitator Farsana explained in both her initial interview and her play map interview that her motive was on the learning Sonic gained in the activities she provided at home and the learning the children gained in the activities she provided at the playgroup. Farsana did not feel that learning was linked to playing. In her initial interview Farsana commented that Sonic was "just playing all the time, his mind is totally... [engaged in] playing. That's why I'm trying to...do...some learning and all... but all the time [Sonic is] playing, playing" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). Farsana explained that she tried to encourage Sonic to participate in learning activities such as completing worksheets, writing his name, learning letters and numbers and using the Reading Eggs™ app on the iPad (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview & Play map interview).

Like Farsana, Jess explained that her motive for Fresh attending playgroup was to learn something, rather than spending all the time playing. Jess stated that "the [children have] toys... at home...kids can play with the toys at home... when... [you] take the kids to the playgroup they should learn something" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, initial interview, p. 13). When I asked Jess in her initial interview about her role in the activities Fresh was engaged in, she often commented on the skills she was trying to teach Fresh, rather than the play. For example, Jess explained that when Fresh had a new toy "The first time when she didn't know [how to use the toy] when I bought the toy...first I sit there and I teach...[Fresh] how to do it" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4). The caregivers from the Tenby playgroup felt that their children learning new skills was an important component of their participation in the playgroup as well as at home. Learning at home and learning at playgroup will each be discussed in the following sections.

Teaching and Learning new Skills at Home. The caregiver's motives of teaching children and children learning new skills was identified in the initial interviews of the Tenby caregivers when they each spoke of their child's pastimes and activities in the home. All four of the caregivers from Tenby playgroup identified that they thought it was important for their children to learn about letters, numbers, shapes, and colours. For example, in her initial interview Wanda stated that learning was important for Marvin in his engagement in pastimes and activities as she felt that "this is the age to learn" (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9) for Marvin. As a motive for teaching and learning new skills at home Wanda identified in her initial interview that she thought Marvin should be learning things every day, and that it was her responsibility, along with Marvin's father, to teach him new skills while they were engaged in pastimes and activities with him (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.4). Wanda also felt that Marvin learnt through watching what she and her husband did when she commented that Marvin was "going to see everything that we do, and learn and copy" (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.5).

Jess explained in her initial interview that her motive for her participation in Fresh's play was to teach Fresh how to participate in the pastime or activity she was engaged in. Jess explained that when she gave Fresh a new toy she had bought for her she sits with Fresh and "teach[es] [Fresh]...how to do it" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.4). Jess felt that it was important to show Fresh how to use her toys in what she saw as the correct way and would sit with Fresh to ensure activities were done correctly (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4). The caregiver motive of the children learning through the activities that they participated in at home was reiterated by each of the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup. For example, in the photograph of Sonic building with magnetic blocks (Figure 29) Farsana explained that Sonic "know[s] the shapes and he's telling the shapes to me" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 8). In this example Farsana commented on Sonic's ability to name the shapes of the blocks that he was using and focused on Sonic's learning of new skills and information.

Figure 29

Farsana. Tenby Playgroup. Sitting at the Table With Magnetic Blocks at Home



The caregivers from Tenby playgroup spoke of the learning taking place in the photographs of pastimes and activities they had sent to me in Phase 1A of the research. In the initial interviews with the caregivers when I asked the caregivers about their role in the activities that they had taken photographs of, they each spoke of teaching their children new skills and passing on information. For example, Kiby had taken a photograph of Mia during a visit to the local library (Figure 30). She described her process of choosing books that have:

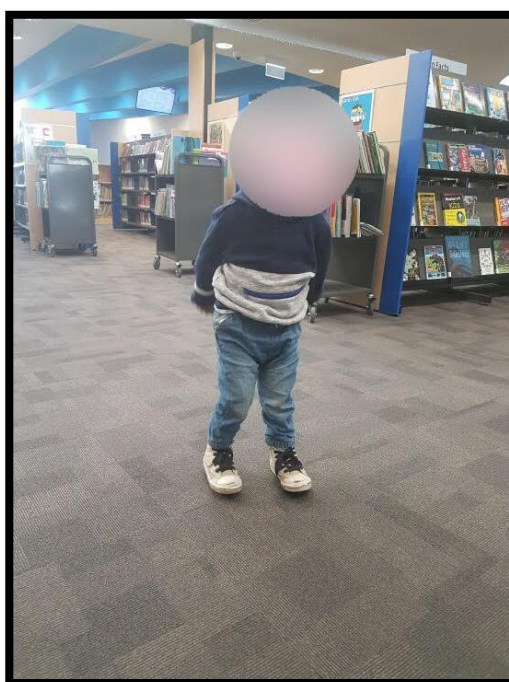
not too many words, more colours and more pictures and things like that and we'll take...[the books] home and compare it to things that are at home so he can kind of see there's a book here, and there's a book in real life...to make him learn...while he's going through the pages (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4).

Kiby explained her motive for teaching and learning in her initial interview. She commented that through the books they borrowed from the library she helped Mia learn about the objects in the book, the objects in real life, and connected the books to real life experiences for Mia. Kiby also linked the connection between real life, images, and toys in her play map interview when she spoke of taking Mia on a family outing to the zoo and connecting that outing to what happens at playgroup (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 2). Kiby's motive for teaching and learning was

evident when she explained that she hoped Mia would be able to connect the animals that they had seen at the zoo to the animals in books, puzzles and toy animals that they had at the playgroup (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p.2).

Figure 30

Kiby. Tenby Playgroup. At the Library



Learning the letters of the alphabet and numbers was also identified as a motive for all of the caregivers from Tenby. They each spoke about their children learning letters and numbers through books (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7), counting blocks in a tower (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4), naming the colours in the blocks and naming shapes they had made with magnetic blocks (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 8). For example, Wanda explained the role she and her husband had when Marvin was using the playdough was to talk to him about “the different colours, and...the shapes, making...the round shape, rectangle, triangle” (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4).

The caregivers’ motive for teaching and learning was further evidenced when they expressed the importance of learning these skills in both the initial interviews and the play map interviews. Skills such as colours, shapes, letters and numbers, were highlighted by the caregivers as important so that the children would be ‘ready’ for when they entered more formal schooling such as kindergarten and primary school. For example, Farsana explained that she thought she

needed to prepare her son to be ready to go to school: “I like to prepare for they are going for a next stage which is the...Prep” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14).

Teaching and Learning new Skills at Playgroup. The motive of teaching the children new skills and the children learning new skills was also highlighted when the caregivers from Tenby playgroup talked about their child’s participation in the playgroup. Some of the caregivers had included photographs of their children engaged in experiences at playgroup in Phase 1A. For example, Wanda had taken a photograph of Marvin using the playdough at playgroup (Figure 31). Wanda’s motive for Marvin to use the playdough was for her to teach Marvin and for Marvin to learn new skills. Wanda commented that Marvin learns about “the different colours. We’ll ask him what colour playdough” he wants as well as “teaching him shapes” (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, initial interview, p. 7). The caregivers also linked photographs of their child engaged in activities and pastimes at home to activities and pastimes that also occurred when they were at playgroup and they were then included in their play map. For example, Kiby had a photograph of Mia playing with his car track at home (Figure 32) and recognised that Mia also played with cars at playgroup. Farsana had a photograph of Sonic playing with Duplo at home (Figure 33) and recognised that Sonic also played with the Duplo at playgroup. One of the most common areas for discussion about learning and teaching came from the art and craft (including drawing) experiences provided for the children at playgroup. In these activities at playgroup the caregivers discussed their motive for the activity in terms of learning to colour in the lines (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4 & Play map interview, p. 5), making something that is recognisable and the same as the sample that is displayed to copy (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 8). Art and craft is discussed further on page 132.

Figure 31

Wanda. Tenby Playgroup. Rolling Playdough at Playgroup



Figure 32

Kiby. Tenby Playgroup. Playing with Cars on the Track at Home



Figure 33

Farsana. Tenby Playgroup. Sitting on the Floor Playing With Duplo at Home



As the facilitator of the Tenby playgroup, Farsana planned and arranged all the experiences the children were involved in at the playgroup. She was also responsible for planning the session routine at the playgroup (Researcher journal, 2019; Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 1). For Farsana, teaching the children new skills and the children learning skills was a primary motive for activities at playgroup and motive for home (Farsana, Initial interview & Play map interview). Farsana explained that she did not like the children playing “all the time” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11), instead she wanted “to prepare [the children] ... [to be ready to go to the] next stage” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11), either kindergarten or school. Farsana commented that at the playgroup she wanted the children to have “a routine, so [at] this time...we are playing and [at this time it is] craft...[and for] everyone [to] sit together...to learn [how] to sit...and...eat together” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11). Farsana noted that many of the caregivers in the playgroup often walked behind their children with food, putting the food into their child’s mouth as they walked around playing. She felt that at the playgroup the children should:

come and sit with me and eat that is the way I teach them...That’s why I want to do, this is the snack time or morning teatime come and sit everyone

together and then the kids learn something different (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11).

Farsana commented in both her initial interview and her play map interview on her motive at playgroup and what she thought was important in relation to the children learning at the playgroup as well as what she felt she should be teaching the children that attended the playgroup. She explained that the playgroup could prepare the children for the move into kindergarten or school and to do this the children should be doing something other than playing. Farsana also suggested that the caregivers could learn to interact with their children while they were engaged in the activities she provided at playgroup, rather than “just leaving the children to play” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11) or spending their time on their phone while the children were at playgroup (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11).

In both their initial interview and play map interview all of the Tenby playgroup caregivers identified the children learning about shapes, colours and letters at playgroup as a motive at playgroup. The caregivers spoke about teaching the children how to do the activities at playgroup, in particular the art and craft activities (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 8; Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). Jess suggested that the playgroup provided opportunities for the children to learn, unlike another playgroup she had attended where “the kids were playing, the mums were just sitting and chatting to each other” (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13). Jess shared that when the children engaged in self-guided play for the duration of the playgroup session the children would not have opportunities to learn (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13). Jess, and the other caregivers from Tenby playgroup, felt that the playgroup was a place for the children to learn new skills (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13; Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14; Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11; Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). Jess commented that through the craft activities the children learnt to use the scissors and stick things together (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.13). She also offered that the children learned to share with other children through the interactions they had with each other while attending playgroup (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.13). Jess said that she enjoyed sitting down with the children at the playgroup and showing them how to use the toys and equipment that was set out for them. For example, in her play map interview Jess explained that earlier that day she had shown a child how to roll up the playdough (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Play Map Interview, p. 11).

Worksheets. At Tenby playgroup structured worksheets were available each session for the children to complete, along with colouring in sheets (Researcher journal, 2019). The worksheets often involved activities such as matching a lowercase letter with an uppercase letter, matching a

picture of an object with the letter the object begins with or tracing around a shape (Figure 34). The worksheets were also evident in the photographs of children's pastimes and activities in Farsana's home (Figure 35 & 36). Kiby spoke about her motive for Mia completing a worksheet at playgroup in terms of Mia learning new skills by completing the worksheets:

So there's different shapes here...[I'm] just trying to get him to learn the different shapes and...put them together...[and join] the dots together...[I'm] trying to get him to learn to hold the pencil and...[learn] different shapes (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 1).

Kiby explained that when Mia was doing the worksheet activity, she was teaching him how to hold the pencil and he was learning about shapes. Similarly, Wanda had included two photographs of Marvin colouring in sheets in Phase 1A of the research (Figure 24 & 25), one at home and one at playgroup. In the initial interview Wanda explained that the previous day while Marvin was colouring she had taught him how to draw around an object to make a circle. Wanda's motive for completing the worksheets was to learn to control a pencil.

As the facilitator of the Tenby playgroup Farsana spoke of her motive for the worksheets in terms of learning. In Figure 36 Sonic is matching upper- and lower-case letters on his worksheet. Farsana explains in her initial interview:

[I'm teaching Sonic] the uppercase and lower-case letters and introducing the letters, then I'm telling [Sonic] which is the [letter], I'm showing this letter and I'm showing which is the one that's matching the lowercase, then he will show which one and he will join the letters, so I'm giving some more activities at home to learn (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3).

Farsana explained her motive for Sonic to learn about letters when completing worksheets at home (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3). Farsana further explained in her initial interview that she thought knowing letters and numbers was an important skill for Sonic to have prior to commencing school the following year (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3-4). Farsana shared this motive of learning letters and numbers through the completion of worksheets with the caregivers that attended Tenby playgroup where she was the facilitator. In her play map interview Farsana explained that the caregivers who attended the Tenby playgroup were "happy with...[the children] learning something and the letters" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 3).

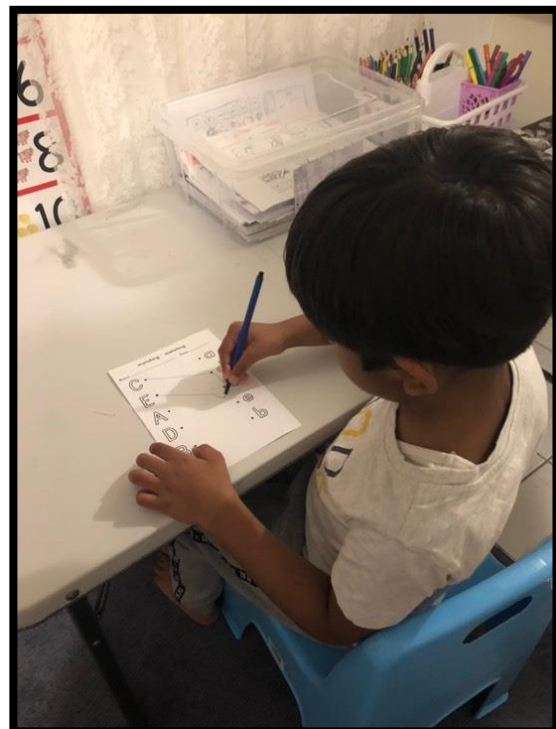
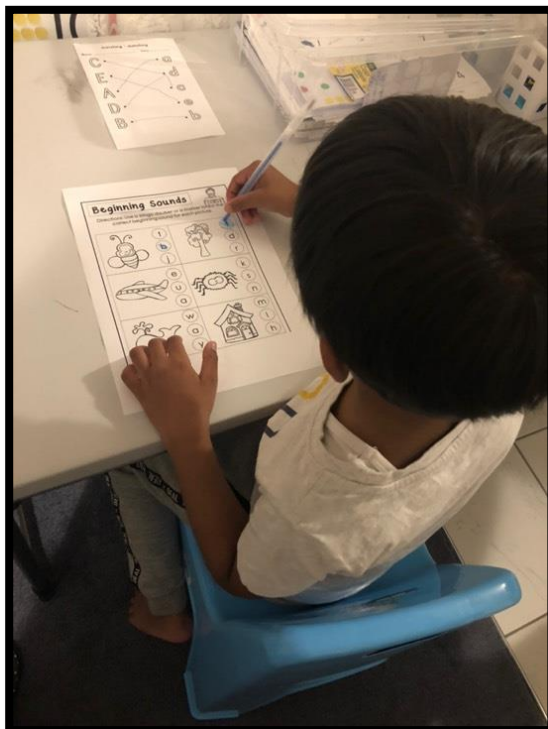
Figure 34

Kiby. Tenby Playgroup. Completing a Worksheet Matching Shapes at Playgroup



Figure 35 & 36

Farsana. Tenby Playgroup. Sitting at the Table Completing Worksheets at Home



Self-Guided Play. In this research self-guided play is used to describe play the children engage in without adult participation either alone or with other children as well as play children choose to participate in when provided with a range of activities to choose from both in the home and at playgroup. An identified motive of Madison and Sarah from Warrington playgroup was for

the children to be content to play by themselves, without adult participation in their play both at home and at playgroup. Madison and Sarah often happily joined Jordan and Sophie in their play both in the home and at playgroup, however, they also explained that it was important for their children to spend time playing on their own. Madison referred to this as “self-play” (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13):

I really think that self-play is good...sometimes he [Jordan] will come up to me and he'll... [say] “mum, play”, and I'll...[say] “mate I’m busy I can’t”, and he'll [Jordan] just accept it he won't even...[get upset] over it, he'll...[say] “ok”, [and] he'll go off and play...in his room or out here [in the family room] (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13).

Madison explained that often she was busy and was not able to join in the play with Jordan. Jordan happily accepted that she was too busy to play and played by himself. Madison expressed that it was important for Jordan to be able to play alone: “I really encourage self-play” (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13). Madison’s motive for self-guided play was for Jordan to be able to entertain himself and not require her to join in his play or entertain him all the time.

Sarah’s motive for Sophie to engage in self-guided play was for Sophie to be able to have some quiet time alone, away from Sarah and the rest of the family. Sarah commented that she thought that sometimes her daughter, Sophie “might just want to do something just quietly by herself” (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 8). Sarah explained that she thought that Sophie enjoyed being by herself and having time alone to play with her toys by herself.

The caregivers from Warrington playgroup also felt that the children’s involvement in self-guided play was representative of their playgroup experience. At the Warrington playgroup the caregivers’ children had the opportunity to either play by themselves, or with other children. Sarah’s motive for self-guided play at playgroup was for Sophie to become confident in navigating her own interactions with other children without Sarah’s assistance. Sarah explained in her initial interview that she often followed Sophie to where she was playing but only stepped in when she felt Sophie needed her assistance:

[Sophie would] just go and play wherever she wanted [when she was at playgroup] and it was really good for her because you could see the interactions between other kids develop.... she had been by herself for so long [before Sophie started attending the playgroup] she needed to learn how to play with other kids, and I suppose it was good [for Sarah] to watch and I

[Sarah] needed to facilitate that [play with other children] for quite a while and I still do so...Wherever she played I'd follow [at playgroup] and...as she was playing with someone [Sarah would] just jump in every now and then and say [to Sophie] "you need to ask them...if you can have a turn or ask if you can...play" (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, pp. 8-9).

Sarah explained that when she and Sophie attended playgroup Sophie was often involved in play by herself or with other children while Sarah was nearby to facilitate any social interactions when she needed to. Sarah commented in her initial interview that now they had been attending the playgroup for over a year she liked to "watch her [Sophie] and see how she's developing...and doing the things that she [Sophie] loves to do" (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). Sarah explained that she gave Sophie the space to interact with her peers at playgroup alone but was often nearby in case Sophie required Sarah's assistance.

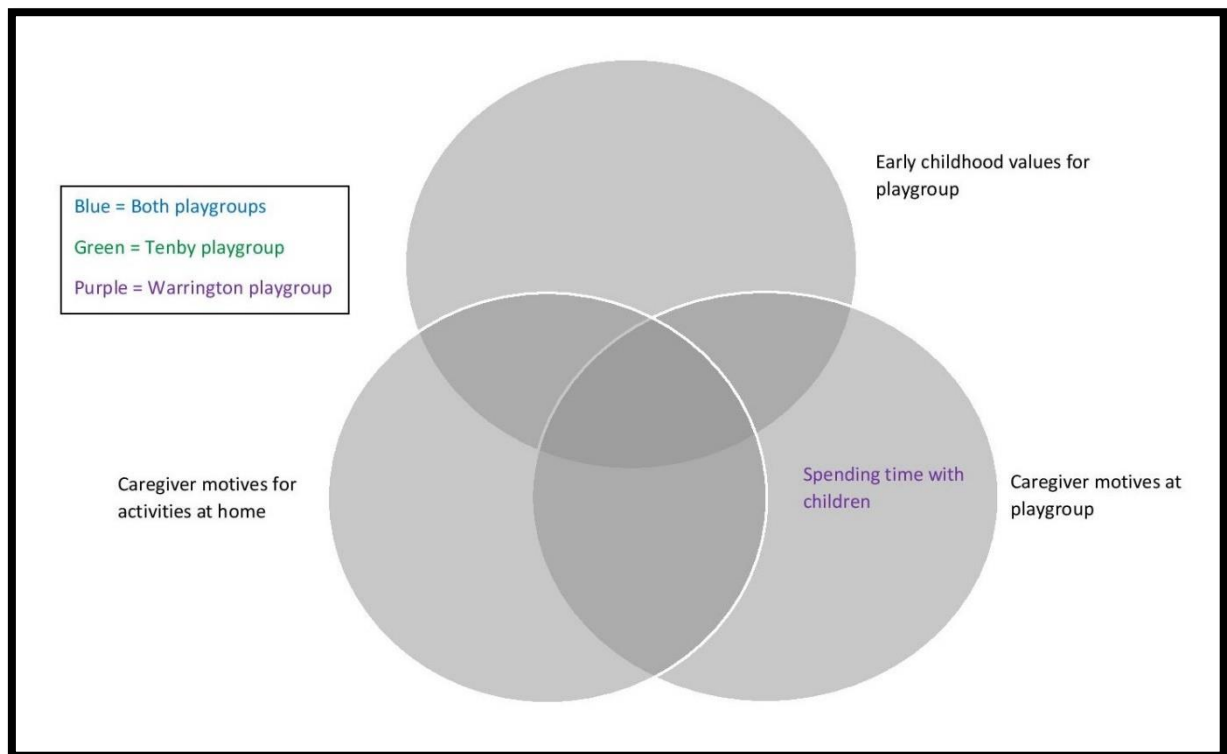
Super Nan explained that when she attended the playgroup with Buzz and Sophia, she would often sit with Buzz, who liked to have his grandmother's company at playgroup, however Sophia would usually "run off" (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13) and "find her friends" (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13) to play with. Super Nan's motive for self-guided play was to provide each of her grandchildren with the level of support that they were comfortable with. For Buzz, he liked to have his grandmother nearby. Super Nan commented that Buzz was very quiet and shy at playgroup and didn't interact with many people while he was there (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p.13). However, Super Nan explained that Sophia was very confident and had a group of friends that she looked out for when they attended playgroup. Super Nan explained that Sophia was happy to engage in self-guided play with her playgroup friends and Super Nan was happy to have less interaction with Sophia in her play at playgroup as she did not require Super Nan's attention while there (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13).

Caregiver Motives at Playgroup That Were Different for Each Playgroup

There was one motive at playgroup that was different for the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. This was spending time with children which was only identified as a motive at playgroup for the Warrington playgroup. This theme is identified in Figure 37 and will be discussed in the following section.

Figure 37

Motives at Playgroup That Were Different for Each Playgroup



Note. Warrington playgroup motive at playgroup was spending time with children.

Spending Time With Children. A motive that featured in the discussions about playgroup by the caregivers from Warrington playgroup was the opportunity playgroup offered for the caregivers to spend time with their children. Sarah, Madison, and Super Nan all commented in their initial interviews that attending playgroup provided them the opportunity to spend time with their child/ren for a set period of time throughout the week without the distractions of home life such as cleaning or cooking. Sarah commented on attending the playgroup:

We thought when she [Sophie]...[turned] two she needed to...get out, [and] start interacting with kids and playing, [be]cause she was, up until that point, an only child. So it was also an outlet for her [Sophie] [be]cause her brother had just come along and...[it was] time for her to spend...with myself [be]cause I didn't bring him [younger child] along when we first started. So, my parents looked after him [younger child] while we [Sarah and Sophie] came to playgroup for probably a good nine or ten months [before the younger child began attending as well]. So, she [Sophie] had that time to just come, socialise,

play, be with me and...she loved it (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, pp. 1-2).

In her initial interview Sarah explained that she started coming to the playgroup with her daughter, Sophie, not long after she had her second child. Initially Sarah's parents babysat her younger child while Sarah and Sophie attended the playgroup together. Sarah commented that it was something she and Sophie were able to do to spend time together (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 1). Sarah had attended the playgroup for a year and had begun to bring her younger child as well. Sarah's motive for attending the playgroup was to spend time with her children for a set amount of time once a week. Sarah commented that she liked "to be wherever she's [Sophie's] enjoying herself" (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10) and enjoyed watching Sophie playing and spending time with her (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10).

Super Nan attended the playgroup with her twin grandchildren Buzz and Sophia. Like Sarah, she also described her motive for attending the playgroup as something that she does to spend time with her grandchildren: "That's a special time with me, going to playgroup" (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14). Super Nan commented in her initial interview that she sees her grandchildren regularly and they spend some time at her house, however, attending the playgroup provided a set time each week for Super Nan to collect her grandchildren from their house and take them to playgroup with her.

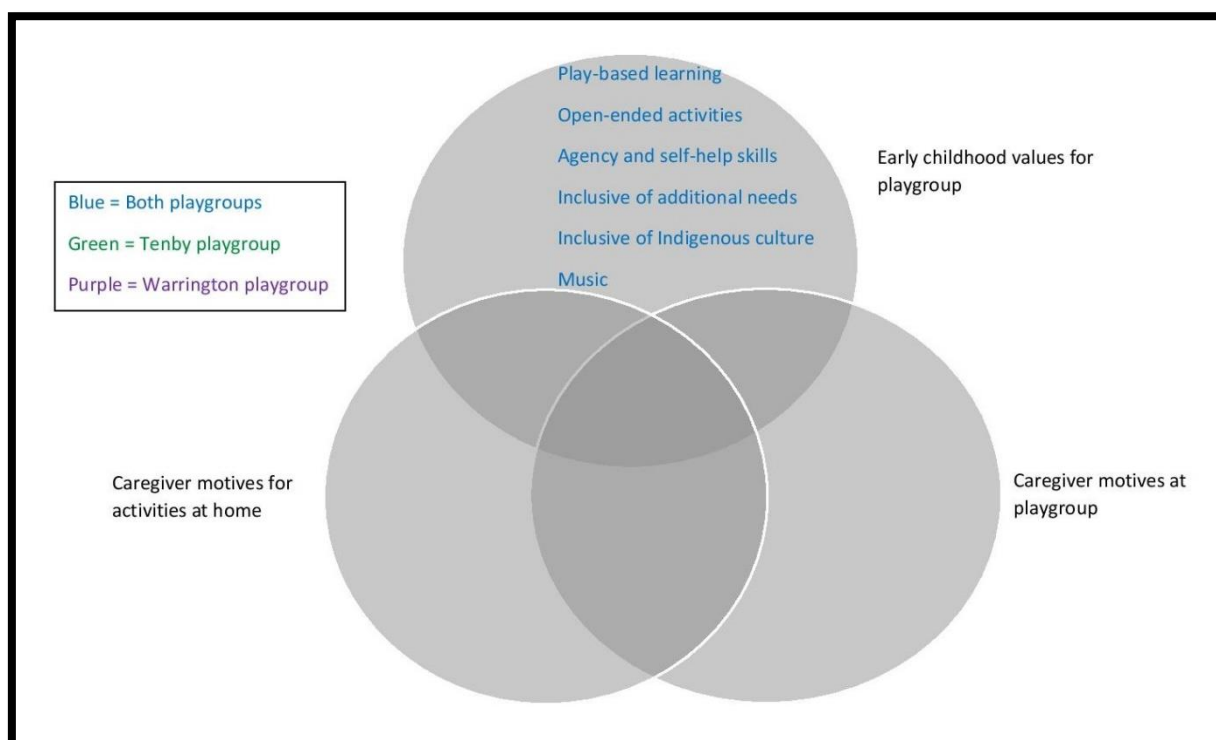
Madison commented in her initial interview that she had been feeling lonely at home with her child and saw an advertisement for the playgroup and decided to go along and see what it was like. Madison explained her motive for attending the playgroup as something that they could do together where they could meet and socialise with other caregivers and children (Madison, Warrington playgroup, initial interview, p. 18). Madison commented that "knowing Jordan is happy, knowing that he is socialising with his peers, but also for me...I've made some really good friends there" (Madison, Warrington playgroup, initial interview, p. 18) and that it was something that they could do together to get out of the house.

Educator Societal Early Childhood Values for Playgroup

There were six early childhood values for playgroup that were held by me as an early childhood professional that were not identified as a motive by the caregivers of either the Tenby playgroup or the Warrington playgroup. These were: play-based learning, open-ended activities, agency and self-help skills, inclusive of additional needs, inclusive of Indigenous culture and music. These themes are identified in Figure 38 and will be discussed in the following sections.

Figure 38

Educator Societal Early Childhood Values for Playgroup



Note. Early childhood values held by me as an early childhood professional that were not identified as motives by the caregivers of either the Tenby playgroup or the Warrington playgroup.

Play-Based Learning

As an early childhood professional, a value for early childhood that I hold is the value of play-based learning. The role of play is highlighted throughout the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) which identifies play-based learning as “a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of the social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations” (p. 6). Throughout my autoethnography undertaken in Phase 1B, I discussed the role of play-based learning in the early childhood programs I provided for children when working in early childhood services. These values stem from my early childhood training and professional development. I also identified pretend play in my autoethnography as an early childhood value that I held as an early childhood professional. I described the significance of play and pretend play: “through a child’s pretend play they can take on roles that they have seen others in, practice for real life situations, or imagine another world” (Researcher autoethnography, 2019, p. 6). Play provides children with “opportunities to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15). I used the phrases ‘*play-based learning*’ and ‘*pretend play*’ to represent my early childhood values

in the co-creation of the play maps in Phase 3. In the creation of the play maps with the caregivers I used an image from “Every Child” magazine, a quarterly publication produced by Early Childhood Australia, a peak early childhood advocacy organisation in Australia, of three children interacting with each other while playing with puppets and a child looking through a coloured block that another child was holding to represent my early childhood value of play-based learning and pretend play.

The play the children of the caregivers engaged in both at home and at playgroup was described differently between each of the caregivers and, more specifically across the two playgroups, Tenby playgroup and Warrington playgroup. The Warrington playgroup ran an open-ended, unstructured playgroup session where the children could choose the activities they wished to engage in both indoors and outdoors for the duration of the playgroup session (Chapter 5, p. 112). The first part of the Tenby playgroup session was open-ended, where the children and caregivers could choose the activities they wished to participate in (Chapter 5, p. 110) while in the second half of the Tenby playgroup the session was much more structured, where everyone sat together for snack time, craft time and music time. The caregivers from Warrington described the play their children were doing in the photographs of the children they had taken in Phase 1A, however they did not link the play to the learning that the children were engaged in through the play. Both Sarah and Super Nan spoke of the imaginative and pretend play the children did at home and at playgroup. Farsana and Jess from the Tenby playgroup spoke about the learning their children were doing which was identified as something that took place separately to the children’s play.

In the initial interviews I asked each caregiver to tell me about their experience of playgroup. The caregivers from Warrington playgroup expressed their preference for the children to be able to choose their experiences and have the freedom to explore the activities throughout the course of the playgroup session (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 17; Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13; Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p.10). The caregivers from the Warrington playgroup spoke about the play their children were involved in, including pretend play, at both home and at playgroup through both of their interviews. For example, in the play map interview Sarah was looking through her photographs that she had taken of Sophie engaged in pastimes and activities at home to see whether any of the photographs also represented things that happened at playgroup:

They make things at playgroup so therefore I’ve got the [photograph of Sophie] threading ...some imaginative play, lots of that [at playgroup] ...she plays with dolls at playgroup and has a play with them [the dolls]. Often we

have a book corner at playgroup and they have tent set up as well so that sometimes they can sit in the tent or just sit in the book corner... again [this one is] probably imaginative play with the puppets [happens at playgroup as well], they have done some sorting activities and tongs and fine motor stuff at playgroup [and] that probably fits in with the imaginative play (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 2).

When sorting through the photographs Sarah commented numerous times about play, and about the imaginative play that her daughter Sophie was engaged in at home. Sarah used the phrase “imaginative play” to describe my early childhood value of “pretend play” and identified that the play took place both in the home and at playgroup.

Super Nan explained that she enjoyed engaging in Buzz and Sophia’s play when she was spending time with her grandchildren:

I'm usually dancing around pretending to be the costume that they're in whether it's a fairy or [laughs] whatever, I'm mad, I'm mad. [Buzz, Sophia, and Super Nan are] trying to use their imagination for different things you know. If...[Buzz]has got a cape on he thinks he can fly...[Sophia] always wants to be the princess and swirl around or [be a] ballerina...We talk, or engage in the play with them...and sometimes I pretend to be a witch or a bad fairy or whatever and they run away [laughs]. Especially in my backyard and I've... [got to] catch them. (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, pp. 4-5).

Super Nan commented that she enjoyed pretending with Buzz and Sophia when they were playing. She also explained that “it’s important, playtime” (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5) as the children have the opportunity to use their imagination (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 6).

Farsana from the Tenby playgroup saw play as something that the children engaged in that was separate to the children’s learning. For Farsana there was a time for learning and a time for play. For example, Farsana commented:

I think...I need to give...more [time to] learning to...[Sonic]... I [am] doing some games with him [Sonic] [like] the number game and letter game and all...But all the time he want[s] to play more and he’s playing more, that’s the [problem]. (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4).

Farsana explained that she gives Sonic learning activities to do such as letters and numbers, but Sonic would like to spend his time playing. Farsana saw that this was a problem as she would rather Sonic participate in learning experiences that she saw as happening separate to Sonic's play. In the photographs they had taken of their children engaged in pastimes and activities the caregivers from Tenby playgroup explained that their role was to teach their children something. Farsana, Jess and Wanda often spoke of teaching their children letters, numbers, shapes, and colours in their initial interviews. This was also evident when they spoke about the activities the children were engaged in while participating at playgroup.

The value of play-based learning that I hold as an early childhood professional contrasts with some of the motives described by caregivers. As discussed above, Farsana identified that the time the children spent "just playing" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10) was separate to the time children were learning: "all the time his [Sonic's] mind is...[spent] playing...I'm trying to...do some learning [with him instead], but all the time playing, playing" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10).

Farsana, Kiby and Wanda did not mention pretend play when discussing the pastimes and activities of their children. However, many of their photographs included their children engaged in pretend play. For example, Farsana had a photograph of her son Sonic playing with his Transformer™ toy (Figure 39). Farsana described Sonic's play with this toy when she spoke of him giving the toys voices:

He's [Sonic] talking with the...[Transformer™] ... [He is acting out] what's happening in the cartoon... [It is] the same thing he's doing with the toys...He's talking with...this toy and he's [making the toy say] "I'm not going to run, run away"... He's acting [out the cartoon in his play] so he's talking by himself (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 2).

Farsana described Sonic playing with his toy where he acted out what he had seen happening in the cartoon he had watched. Farsana explained that Sonic talked to himself while he was playing with the Transformer™, and Sonic said in his play "I'm not going to run, run away" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 2). In another example Kiby explained that Mia liked to carry around a nursing textbook of hers as he was copying what he saw his grandfather do (Figure 23) (pp. 125-126). Mia's grandfather frequently attended church and carried his bible to church with him. Mia carried the book imitating what he saw his grandfather doing and pretending to be his grandfather (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.6).

Farsana, Kiby and Wanda from the Tenby playgroup did not describe their child's play as pretending, often focusing only on the skills the children were learning while engaged in the pastimes and activities in their photographs. For example, Wanda had taken a photograph of Marvin building a tower with wooden blocks (Figure 40). When Wanda and I discussed this photograph, she described Marvin learning to name shapes and colours while she and Marvin's father were building with wooden blocks with him (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 2).

While the caregivers from both playgroups spoke of the play their children were engaged in, there was very little discussion about the role of play in their child's learning. The caregivers from the Warrington playgroup were more likely to describe the play their child was engaged in, while the caregivers from Tenby often saw the play as something that took place separate to their child's learning, or they spoke of the learning and teaching that was taking place through their interactions with their child in their play.

Figure 39

Farsana. Tenby Playgroup. Playing with the Transformer™ at Home



Figure 40

Wanda. Tenby Playgroup. Building a Block Tower at Home



Open-Ended Activities

An early childhood value I hold as an early childhood professional is to provide children with open-ended experiences to explore. This refers to experiences that have more than one way to use them and provide children with the opportunity to explore the materials in a variety of ways. A concept that I developed through my pre-service teacher training and through professional development, an open-ended environment encourages children's agency as they make choices about their play and learning. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) explains that early childhood environments "that support learning are vibrant and flexible spaces that are responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. They cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions" (p. 15). Providing children open-ended activities is similar to outcomes-based art and craft as discussed previously on page 132. As an early childhood professional, I identified open-ended activities as well as open-ended or process-based art and craft activities as a value for early childhood. In these findings process-based art and craft refers to art and craft activities provided for the children where the focus of the activity is for the children to explore with the materials and equipment provided for them to make whatever they would like to make. In my autoethnography I discussed open-ended art and craft activities:

art and craft experiences should be open-ended, with materials provided for the children to make whatever they want to make, without pre-conceived

ideas about what something should look like. I have never drawn things for children, even my own children, for I wish them to explore what something may look like and how it can be represented in a picture or a creation. Often, when children are young, they aren't actually thinking that they are making anything in particular, they are just exploring with the process and the materials they have to use. If I put this here, that will happen. If I want to stick this here, I need this to make it happen. If I use paint in this way it will make this mark, but if I use it in this way it will make this totally different mark. If I mix these colours, what colour will I make (Researcher autoethnography, 2019, p. 6).

With each of the caregivers I suggested the phrase '*open-ended art and craft*' as an early childhood value for playgroup in our play map interview discussion. I used an image from "Every Child" magazine of a child sitting at a craft table with a range of materials such as coloured pencils, coloured pens, glue, scissors, patty pans, paper etc to represent open-ended art and craft. I also had an image from "Every Child" magazine of children building with various shaped wooden blocks to represent open-ended activities. All the caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup reflected that this did not represent their experience of art and craft within the playgroup.

The Tenby playgroup provided a set art and craft time where all caregivers and children sat together and constructed a pre-determined craft activity where each child made the same thing (pp. 128-129). As I observed, the craft was often completed either fully or in part by the child's caregiver (Researcher journal, 2019). In a similar way to the image of play-based learning as discussed earlier (p. 149), this view of art and craft by caregivers conflicts with the early childhood value of open-ended experiences I hold as an early childhood professional. In the below excerpt from the play map interview with Farsana, I explain my value of art and craft as an early childhood professional:

As an early childhood teacher...when I am providing...an art and craft activity for the children...I'll give the children lots and lots of different materials and tools and everything else and maybe a blank piece of paper...and lots of different things and I will say to them, make whatever you want. So...all the activities...that we give the children are really open ended...there is no one way of doing the activity, they can do whatever they like and make whatever they like, so I would be...more inclined to have just a big table set up with lots

and lots of different materials. (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play Map Interview, p.12).

I discussed with Farsana that within an early childhood program that I would provide for children I would have an area set up for the children with lots of materials available for them to use, such as blank paper, recycled boxes, pieces of coloured paper, ribbon, foam, felt, patty pans, wooden sticks, glue, scissors, sticky tape, string, wool, etc. The children could then make whatever it was that they wanted to make. This would also happen if the children wanted to draw, they would have access to blank pieces of paper and materials to draw with and they could draw whatever it was that they wanted to draw. In this vision of open-ended art and craft the focus is on the learning that takes place through the making of the craft (process-based) rather than being focused on the end product that the child makes (product-based). The children would be able to choose whether this was an experience they would like to participate in throughout the course of the session, rather than everyone sitting down together and making the craft at the same time. The concept of open-ended experiences also applies to the experiences provided for the children. For example, wooden blocks of various shapes and sizes would allow the children to make what they wanted to make with the blocks. Farsana's response to the discussion about art and craft activities was to explain that she showed the children a "sample one... [that was] the one...[they] were going to do, then they [the children] look at...the thing they are making" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 12). Farsana agreed that she and I had differing expectations and experiences of the children's art and craft making activities (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p 12).

Caregivers from the Warrington playgroup included photographs of many open-ended experiences as examples of their children's pastimes and activities (see Figure 41, 42 & 43). The caregivers from Warrington playgroup all explained that their children had the opportunity to explore the many activities provided for them at playgroup as well as at home (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13; Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 17; Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9). In my observations of the playgroup while I visited, the children were able to choose the experiences they wanted to participate in and, aside from the art and craft activity, the experiences provided for the children at Warrington playgroup were open-ended, with more than one way to use the materials and toys (Researcher journal, 2019). Madison commented that the playgroup offered Jordan the opportunity to "run around and have a good play" (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 10). In this comment Madison was referring to way the playgroup routine was organised with the children able to choose the activities they wanted to participate in for most of the session, only being asked to sit down to have morning tea with everyone. While the Warrington playgroup provided open-ended

experiences and the caregivers had taken photographs of their children engaged in open-ended activities in Phase 1B, the caregivers from both the Warrington playgroup and the Tenby playgroup did not speak about providing open-ended activities for their children as a motive for play.

Figure 41

Sarah. Warrington Playgroup. Sand in a Tub at Home

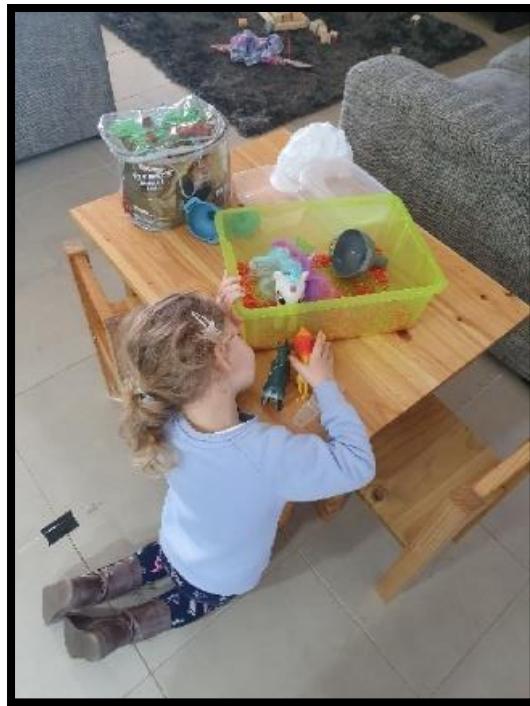


Figure 42

Sarah. Warrington Playgroup. Kinetic Sand at Home



Figure 54

Madison. Warrington Playgroup. Toy Cars at Home



Agency and Self-Help

Incorporating children's agency and self-help skills is an important component of early childhood education and care programs (Houen et al., 2016) and is reflected in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), defining children's agency as "being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world" (p. 45). In this research the phrase 'agency' is used to describe the opportunity given to children to make choices and decisions on events that involve them. I identified incorporating children's agency and self-help skills as an early childhood value and included an image from "Every Child" magazine of a child pouring themselves a drink in the co-construction of the play maps. This was accompanied by the phrase *'agency and self-help'*. When I asked the caregivers from Tenby playgroup about children having the opportunity to do things for themselves in the play map interviews they all felt that this represented both their experience of home and of playgroup. However, this was not something that the caregivers from either playgroup discussed until I raised it with them in the play map interview. The caregivers from the Warrington playgroup expressed in their play map interviews that the caregivers in their playgroup were more inclined to do things for the children and commented that there were limited opportunities for the children to do things for themselves.

Wanda had included two photographs of Marvin "helping" (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3 & 4) in Phase 1A. In the first photograph Marvin was helping "unload the groceries and putting the dog food in the dog food place, the basket" (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3) (Figure 44). In the second photograph Marvin was "helping...[Wanda] cooking. He got the stool out and he just jumped on board and he just wanted to go play stir it" (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4) (Figure 45). In both of these photographs Wanda discussed Marvin helping her with household tasks in the initial interview. When Wanda and I discussed these photographs in the play map interviews and I asked her about children's agency and self-help Wanda offered that it was not something that she saw happening at playgroup (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5).

Kiby, however, shared in her play map interview that she thought agency and self-help did reflect her experience of playgroup when I asked her about it. She commented that Mia helps get ready for mealtimes at home and it helps Mia "take...ownership and [develop] independence" (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 9). This sentiment was echoed through the play map interviews with Kiby, Jess and Farsana from the Tenby playgroup. These caregivers agreed that agency and self-help skills transferred into their experience of playgroup as well. Jess explained that at playgroup Fresh was doing things for herself:

It is a part of playgroup, because...she's... [playing with] the playdough...and she was making [it] by herself, she...[made] the fish and she showed me...'look mummy I made a fish'. She rolled it [the playdough] and she made a fish. (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 7).

As part of the familiarisation visits to the playgroup I led activities such as group stories and singing and assisted with playgroup organisation including set-up and pack up. During these visits I did not notice any examples of children being encouraged by caregivers to develop and express their agency and self-help skills. Caregivers tended to be very involved in doing things for their children including walking behind or beside their children and placing food in their mouths while the children continued playing and exploring their environment (Researcher journal, 2019).

Figure 44

Wanda. Tenby Playgroup. Putting Away the Shopping at Home



Figure 45

Wanda. Tenby Playgroup. Stirring the Cooking Pot at Home



The caregivers from the Warrington playgroup expressed that the caregivers in their playgroup were more inclined to do things for the children and commented that there were limited opportunities for the children to do things for themselves in their play map interviews. For example, Super Nan commented that the children at the playgroup did not help pack up at playgroup and the caregivers “seem to do it” (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 7). Madison explained in her play map interview that the children had limited opportunities to explore their agency and develop their self-help skills, particularly at morning teatime:

The mums still make their food for them [the children], the mum’s still pour their drinks for them, the mums still go and wash their [children’s] hands for them... the mum’s are still taking over [from the children], and I suppose that’s because...the basin’s too high [in the bathroom] so the kids need help...the table’s too high [that they have the food on] and we also don’t want to have them [the children] touching food...and the age bracket [of the children attending], you’ve got newborns right up to 4 [year-olds] (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 8).

Madison commented that at morning teatime there were limitations to allowing the children to serve themselves their food and pour their own drinks. She also explained that there were only adult sized toilets and sinks in the bathroom that was connected to the room the playgroup used, which limited the children's ability to be able to do things for themselves. The Warrington playgroup, however, did give the children the opportunity to self-select the experiences that they participated in while they attended (Researcher journal, 2019).

As an early childhood value children having the opportunity to develop their agency and self-help skills this theme was included in the play map interviews and play maps. However, while some of the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup agreed that this represented their experience of playgroup, it was raised only with Wanda when she spoke about Marvin assisting her with putting the groceries away and stirring the cooking pot on the stove. The caregivers from the Warrington playgroup did not indicate that agency and self-help skills was representative of their experience of playgroup.

Inclusive of Children With Additional Needs

Being inclusive of children with additional needs was an early childhood value that I identified for playgroup which was important to me as an early childhood professional. In my autoethnography I identified that this was an area that I developed my skills and knowledge in throughout my early childhood career. I reflected that it was only something I recently felt confident in my knowledge and abilities and was able to now advocate for (Researcher autoethnography, 2019). The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) defines inclusion as "taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes...ensur[ing] that all children have equitable access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and to value difference" (p. 45) Being inclusive of children with additional needs was not something that any of the caregivers raised in any of the play map interviews, so it was an area of discussion that was instigated by me for all of the caregivers.

Farsana, as the playgroup facilitator of the Tenby playgroup, felt that being inclusive of children with additional needs was something the playgroup could accommodate. The other caregivers from the Tenby playgroup required some explanation of what I was talking about when I spoke of being inclusive of children with additional needs. For example, when I described to Kiby (Tenby playgroup) that I valued the inclusion of children with additional needs in the playgroup it took several steps in the conversation before Kiby indicated that she understood what was meant

from this statement. I further clarified what I meant with Kiby by explaining that “maybe they had no vision” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). Kiby clarified my statement with a question “like some kind of disability or something?” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 10) at which point she understood the statement of “inclusive of additional needs” and determined that would not be reflected in her experience of playgroup.

The caregivers of Warrington all thought that their playgroup would be welcoming to all children and their families, however, including children with additional needs was not something that they currently experienced. Madison explained that there had previously been a child that attended that “had special needs” (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 14), however, they no longer attended, while Super Nan commented that they did not have any children with “extra need[s]” (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 13).

Inclusive of Indigenous Culture

The inclusion of Indigenous culture at playgroup was another early childhood value of mine that I shared with the caregivers in the co-construction of the play map in Phase 3. The recognition of the inclusion of Indigenous culture in early childhood is outlined in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and as an early childhood professional it was an area that I continually worked on to add to my knowledge and understanding. I had the phrase ‘Indigenous culture’ which was used on the play map with Super Nan and Madison (Warrington playgroup) and an image of Indigenous tools that were used in the play map with Super Nan, Farsana, Jess and Kiby. Similar to the theme of being inclusive of children with additional needs, being inclusive of Indigenous culture was not a theme that any of the caregivers raised in any of our interviews and discussions.

The caregivers of Tenby playgroup felt they could be inclusive, as they were with all cultures, but many did not specify anything they did at the playgroup to include Indigenous culture. When I asked Farsana if she thought incorporating Indigenous culture was something the represented her experience of playgroup Farsana replied that it was as they were “doing some Aboriginal art and also we did today the same you know for the decorating so that is all the Aboriginal dots decorating” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 16). Farsana discussed the inclusion of Aboriginal style art and craft activities to her inclusion of Indigenous culture within the playgroup. When discussing the inclusion of Indigenous culture with Kiby she expressed that it fitted into the previous discussion we had had on being culturally inclusive (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 11).

Similar to the caregivers from Tenby playgroup, the caregivers from Warrington did not raise the topic of including Indigenous culture in any of our interviews and discussions. When I

suggested to the Warrington caregivers that an early childhood value that I held was to be inclusive of Indigenous culture in the co-creation of the play map Madison commented that the playgroup had displayed “information about the local Indigenous” (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 14) culture on their noticeboard, however this was the only acknowledgement made. Super Nan commented that while her current experience of playgroup did not include Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, she hoped that all cultures felt welcomed to come to the playgroup in the future (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 14).

Music

In my autoethnography I included music as an early childhood value. In my initial pre-service teacher education we had studied music and movement for children at university. I reflected that music had played a large role within my personal and professional life. I have many fond memories of music and movement sessions with children in their early childhood service, often using music children listened to with their families as a link between a child’s home and early childhood centre. I suggested in my autoethnography that “seeing a child’s joy, moving to music, expressing themselves through music is wonderful. Music can also teach rhythm, coordination, a love of language and the arts. Children can express creativity and imagination through music” (Researcher autoethnography, 2019, p. 5). Music and singing are often an important component of an early childhood program offering children opportunities for “playful exploration, discovery, self-expression and communication” (Suthers, 2004, p. 45) and are represented in their inclusion in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009). Research has shown that music experiences in early childhood settings provide many benefits to young children (Bainger, 2010; Bond, 2015; Pérez-Moreno, 2018) including opportunities for “self-expression, individualised responses and sociable interactions as well as opportunities for the development of cognitive, physical, social, language and musical skills” (Suthers, 2004, p. 49). Music, however, was not raised by any of the caregivers in either their initial interview or their play map interview. With each caregiver I raised the inclusion of music in playgroup as an early childhood value. I included the word ‘*music*’ and an image of children dancing in the play map interviews.

At the Tenby playgroup music or ‘rhyme time’ (as Farsana called it) was incorporated into most playgroup sessions. When I visited the Tenby playgroup and conducted a story time each week during my initial visits, the children, caregivers, and I sang songs together after reading the story. I noted that this was something the playgroup families were familiar with as the caregivers would all sing the songs with me, suggest songs for me to sing that they knew, and sometimes taught me songs that I did not know (Researcher journal, 2019). Rhyme time continued within the playgroup once I had finished my familiarisation visits as I heard the singing while I was conducting

my interviews with the caregivers during the session. The caregivers from the Tenby playgroup all agreed that music was something that reflected their experience of playgroup when I raised it in our discussion in the play map interviews. However, the inclusion of music at playgroup was not initiated by the caregivers. Kiby commented that music time was Mia's favourite time at playgroup (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 9). Music was included in the shared section of the play map for Farsana, Jess, Kiby and Wanda.

The Warrington playgroup caregivers commented that the playgroup did not usually gather together at any point throughout the session for a group time and they did not usually include any music, singing or dancing into the playgroup. When I discussed the inclusion of music and singing into the playgroup in the play map interviews Madison and Super Nan both commented that they did not often sing songs (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 7; Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5). When I discussed the inclusion of music at playgroup with Sarah in our play map interview she commented:

I'm wondering whether or not it's to do with the range of ages that we have to try and engage the kids in a song, you've...got the older kids that want to run around and do...actions and stuff, [and] your younger kids that will either avoid this [music and singing], or are not interested. (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5).

Sarah commented that they did not often do any singing and dancing with the children (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, play map interview, p. 5). She explained that with the large range of ages of children attending the playgroup that it would be difficult to have everyone involved in a music time and the children might not want to join in.

Shared Caregiver Motives and Educator Societal Values for Activities at Home and/or at Playgroup

There were shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values that were different between each playgroup, shared caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup that were held in common for each playgroup, and shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup. Each of these will be discussed in the following sections.

Shared Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home, Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Educator Societal Values for Playgroup That Were Different Between Each Playgroup

There was one shared caregiver motive for activities at home, caregiver motive at playgroup and educator societal value for playgroup that was different between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. This was reading books. For the Tenby playgroup reading books was a shared motive for activity at home, motive at playgroup and educator societal value for playgroup. For the Warrington playgroup reading books was a shared motive for activity at home and educator societal value for playgroup. This theme is identified in Figure 46 and will be discussed in the following section.

Figure 46

Shared Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home, Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Educator Societal Values for Playgroup That Were Different Between Each Playgroup



Note. For the Tenby playgroup reading books was a shared motive for activity at home, motive at playgroup and educator societal value for playgroup. For the Warrington playgroup reading books was a shared motive for activity at home and educator societal value for playgroup.

Reading Books

Reading books was a theme that was identified by both myself as an early childhood professional in Phase 1B of the data collection as a value for playgroup and the caregivers from

both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup as a motive for activities at home. The Tenby playgroup also identified reading books as a motive at playgroup, while the Warrington playgroup did not identify reading stories as a motive at playgroup. As a motive for activity at home Wanda, Jess, Farsana and Sarah had included photographs of their children reading books in Phase 1A of the data collection. Wanda had a photograph of Marvin reading a book with a picture of a frog on the bed at home (Figure 58), Jess had two photographs of Fresh reading books on the floor at home (Figure 49 & 50), Farsana had a photograph of Sonic sitting at a table at home reading a book (Figure 48) and Sarah had a photograph of Sophie sitting on a cushion on the floor reading a book with two other books on the floor nearby (Figure 51). Also in this theme in Phase 1A Kiby included a photograph of Mia at the local library (Figure 30). Kiby explained in her initial interview that she and Mia visited the library every few weeks and borrowed some books from the library to take home for them to read together (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4).

The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) identifies reading and sharing books with children as an important part of the early years curriculum. In my pre-service teacher training we had studied reading books with children as a subject at university. As an early childhood value for playgroup that I identified in my autoethnography in Phase 1B of the research the image I used to represent the value of reading books in the co-construction of the play map was a photograph of an adult sitting on the floor reading a book to a small group of children. In my autoethnography I explain my early childhood value of reading books:

[children] learn language, they develop their imagination and creativity, they develop focus and attention, they give a child some quiet and restful time in what can often be very busy world, and they encourage pre-literacy skills, but most importantly they provide a child time to spend with an adult either in a large group, in a small group or one on one. (Researcher autoethnography, 2019, p.5).

In my autoethnography I discuss the early childhood value I have of reading books with children both in terms of the learning and development children gain through reading books such as enhancing children's language and literacy development and stimulating children's imagination and curiosity, as well as the opportunity reading books to children provides for educators to spend time with children. I further explain that reading books to children has provided me with some of my most favourite and treasured memories as an early childhood professional (Researcher journal, 2019, p. 5).

Reading Books at Home. As a daily pastime or activity at home the caregivers' motives for reading books were described in terms of learning from books (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5; Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4; Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6), something their child does on their own (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6; Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 8) and as a bedtime ritual (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10; Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5).

Wanda explained her motive for reading books as a pastime or activity in terms of learning and a daily bedtime ritual. For example, Wanda explained that Marvin

reads every night, before he goes to sleep, lots of books, he loves books. Reading and guessing everything through the book, pointing to them...Last night it was like eleven [books]. We've got the thousand books and you put the stickers on, so we're counting up...he learns a lot from books I guess, it's a good thing. (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5).

Wanda reflected that she read books with Marvin every night before bed (Figure 47). At the time of the initial interview one of the supermarket chains was promoting reading to children and had a thousand book chart that Wanda and Marvin could add stickers to each time they read a story. I asked Wanda in her initial interview how many books they would read each night and she replied that the previous evening they had read eleven books (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5). Wanda also commented that Marvin was "learn[ing] a lot from books" (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5). She explained that Marvin enjoyed pointing to the pictures and guessing the names of things that were in the pictures (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5). Throughout her initial interview Wanda commented that both she and her husband were encouraging Marvin to develop his speech and language and they would often give Marvin the names of objects in their play with him to help him develop his speech (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 2).

Figure 47

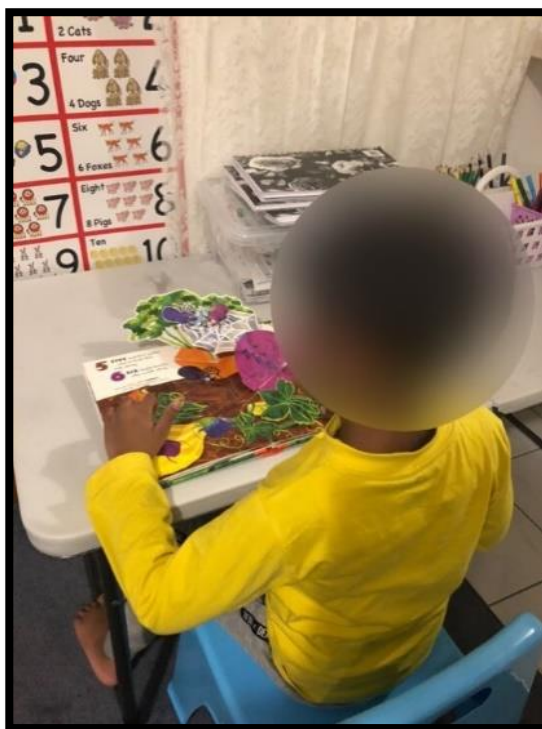
Wanda. Tenby Playgorup. Reading Books at Home



Farsana's motive for reading books was described in terms of something Sonic often does on his own. She explained in her initial interview that sometimes she doesn't have time to read Sonic a story so he "takes a story book and he see[s] the picture and he's making the stories" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6) on his own. Farsana commented in her initial interview that they did not read books all the time, as they were often very busy and did not have time, however, it was something that Sonic enjoyed doing regularly. Farsana also described her motive for books in terms of Sonic's learning. She reflected in her initial interview that sometimes she and her husband would read Sonic a book when he asked them to. When she read Sonic a book she would ask him questions about the book while he read the books (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6). This suggests that Farsana wanted Sonic to recall the story, be able to show his comprehension of the plot of the book and engage Sonic in a conversation about the book.

Figure 48

Farsana. Tenby Playgroup. Reading Books at Home



Jess described her motives for reading books at home in terms of learning from books. The books in the photographs that Jess took in Phase 1A are a “numbers book and...[a] letters book” (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6) (Figure 49 & 50). When I asked Jess about the photographs she had taken in the initial interview she commented that Fresh can “only...recognise the pictures, but she can’t read it still just some of the letters...because she’s three on her birthday, only she knows the number 3...and some of the letters she knows, like three or four letters she knows” (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6). Jess explained that Fresh could not yet read as she was only three years old, but that she did know the number three and some of the letters in the letters and numbers books that she was reading in the photographs. Jess indicated that knowing and recognising letters and numbers was an important skill for Fresh to have. Jess’ daughter Fresh enjoyed reading books and would often ask Jess or Fresh’s father or older sister to read her a story. If there was not a story to read Fresh would ask her family members to make up a story to tell her. Jess commented:

Me, my husband, my other daughter...everyone is reading a story...if there is no book she just [says] “tell me a story, tell me, what happened daddy” and we just sit...[and tell her] the story...she loves the story (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7).

Jess suggested that reading books was something that Fresh participated in daily at home.

Figure 49 & 50

Jess. Tenby Playgroup. Reading Books at Home



Kiby explained in her initial interview that she would take Mia to the local library on a regular basis, and had included a photograph of Mia at the library in Phase 1A of the research (Figure 50) to indicate a pastime and activity that they engaged in. Kiby explained that when they go to the library she tries to get books that have:

not too many words, more colours and more pictures and things like that and we'll take that home [the books] and compare it to things that are at home so he can kind of see there's a book here, and there's a book in real life and this is what it is, just to make him kind of understand what it is and...to make him learn also while he's going through the pages (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4).

Kiby's motive for reading books and going to the library to get books was described in terms of Mia learning through the books they borrowed. Kiby explained that through reading the books Mia was able to associate things that were in the books with things in real life.

Sarah's motive for reading books at home was explained in terms of reading books being an activity that Sophie did on her own in her play, as well as something that Sarah and Sophie

enjoyed doing together. Sarah commented on a photograph she took in Phase 1A of Sophie reading a story book at home (Figure 51):

She's [Sophie] got lots of books and just loves to read so she was just reading [when I took the photograph]. [She was] just quietly reading to herself playing. These books [like the one in Figure 51] here have got...scratchy, squishy things to play with in them. (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 8).

Sarah explained that they have a lot of books at home and Sophie enjoys reading them: "She loves stories...If I could sit and read her [Sophie] a book she'd be happy" (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 8). Super Nan also commented that reading her grandchildren stories was something they did frequently at her house: "I read a lot to them [Buzz and Sophia]...and they love having stories read to them...I've got a...[lot] of story books...I let them pick out the story" (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). Super Nan explained her motive for reading books to Buzz and Sophia in terms of something that they enjoy doing together and a bedtime ritual. Super Nan commented in her initial interview that she will read Buzz and Sophia stories on the couch during the day, as well as before they go to bed when they stay the night at her place (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10).

Figure 51

Sarah. Warrington Playgroup. Reading Books at Home



Reading Books at Playgroup. As a motive for playgroup, reading books was seen differently between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. In the Tenby playgroup a story time was incorporated into the playgroup routine while I attended. All the children and their caregivers came together to read some stories and sing some songs towards the end of the session. Farsana, the playgroup facilitator explained to me in her play map interview that this was less regular when I finished visiting the playgroup as she felt that the caregivers lacked confidence to read to a large group of children. Farsana commented that she thought that story time was important and she enjoyed reading books with the children (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5). Farsana also included the following highlighted words from her initial interview on her Play map:

Story, so sometimes he's telling "Mamma I want to read a story" and I'm reading story and I'm asking the questions and he read them. If I don't have time so he['s] taking a story book and he see[s] the picture and he's making the story (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.6).

As the playgroup facilitator the inclusion of the highlighted words from Farsana's initial interview by Farsana in the Play map suggests that her motive for reading books at playgroup was to provide caregivers with the opportunity to read books to their children as well as the children having the opportunity to read books to themselves while attending playgroup. Farsana was able to achieve these motives as she was responsible for providing the activities for the families attending the Tenby playgroup.

As well as a set time towards the end of the playgroup session each week to read books to the children the Tenby playgroup also had a bookshelf with books available for the children to look at or for caregivers to read to their children that was available each week. I observed some children looking through books and caregivers reading stories to their children during the playgroup session (Researcher journal, 2019).

The caregivers from the Warrington playgroup did not feel that reading books represented their experience of playgroup. While there was shelf with books on it in the Warrington playgroup, the caregivers commented that they rarely saw any of the children reading a book, or any caregivers reading books to their children (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5; Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 7). Unlike the Tenby playgroup, the Warrington playgroup did not have a structured group time during the session where all the caregivers and children came together, so there did not appear to be explicitly identified opportunities for the group of children attending to come together to have a story read to them

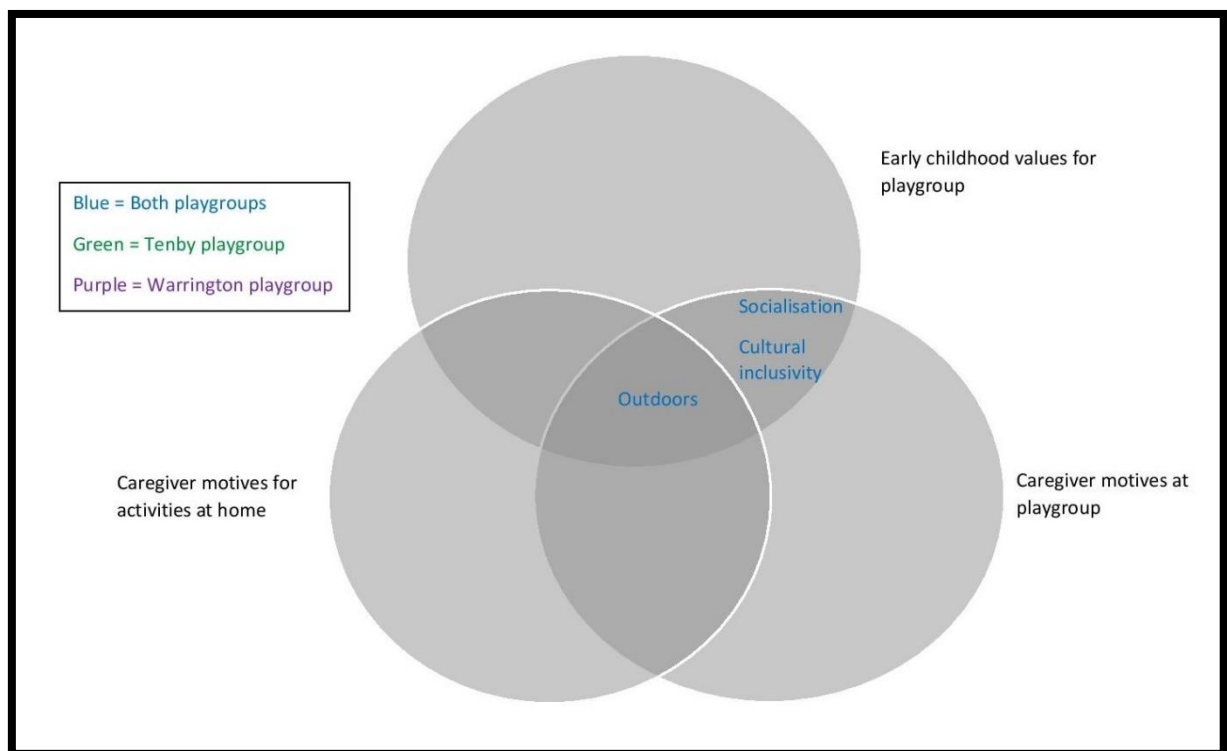
(Researcher journal, 2019). Super Nan commented that “we don’t read stories...at playgroup” (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 2) as the playgroup was too loud and the children were more interested in running around with their friends (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5).

Shared Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Educator Societal Values for Playgroup Held in Common by Each Playgroup

There were two shared caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup that were held in common for both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. These shared motives and values were socialisation and cultural inclusivity. These themes are identified in Figure 52 and will be discussed in the following sections.

Figure 52

Shared Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Educator Societal Values for Playgroup Held in Common Between the Tenby Playgroup and the Warrington Playgroup



Note. Shared caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup held in common between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup were socialisation and cultural inclusivity.

Socialisation

The opportunity for caregivers and children to socialise with other caregivers and children was identified by both myself as an early childhood professional in Phase 1B of the data collection as a value for playgroup and the caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup as a motive at playgroup. The caregivers identified socialisation in both their initial interviews and their play map interviews.

Many of the caregivers had also highlighted phrases about socialisation in Phase 2A of the research. For example, Madison had included from her initial interview the following text in her play map: "So playgroup is so good for him [Jordan], and it's good for me. So I've made, that's where I've made my friends, at playgroup, and he's made friends with their kids" (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10).

In Phase 1B, my researcher autoethnography I identified socialisation as an early childhood value for playgroup. The social connection children and families develop in early childhood settings is identified in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) with the "experiences of relationships and participation in communities contribut[ing] to children's belonging, being and becoming" (p. 25). The image I used to represent the value of socialisation in the co-construction of the play map was a photograph of three caregivers standing together each holding a child on their hip interacting together. I also included the phrase '*social interaction children have with both other children and other adults*' as well as the phrase '*the importance of relationships*', in the creation of the play maps with the caregivers in Phase 3. In my autoethnography I explain my value of socialisation within early childhood: "The most important part of any early childhood program is the social interaction children have with both other children and other adults" (Researcher autoethnography, 2019, p. 4). The opportunity children receive through early childhood programs to interact with adults other than their caregivers, and children other than their family members provides what is sometimes the first opportunity for many children to be involved with people, both adults and children, outside their extended family and provides children with the opportunity to extend their social experiences.

The caregivers described the opportunity playgroup provided for socialisation both in terms of adults interacting with other adults, and children interacting with other children. Some caregivers also spoke of the opportunities adults and children had to interact. The caregivers' motives for socialisation were described in terms of playgroup providing an opportunity for their children to interact with other children (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11), to make friends (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5; Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 4; Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14), to learn to share (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13) and to gain confidence in interactions with others

(Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4; Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5; Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14). Socialisation was also discussed in terms of the caregivers' motives for the caregivers to meet and interact with other caregivers (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 9, p. 17), make friends (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 4) and improve their mental health (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 4).

Jess described her motive for socialisation in her initial interview in terms of providing Fresh with opportunities to interact with other children, to make friends and to learn to share with others. Jess explained in her initial interview that through attending the playgroup Fresh was provided with opportunities to learn to share with children other than their siblings or family members. For example, in her initial interview Jess commented that the children were:

learning to shar[e] with the other kids that they don't know... [The other children are] not their cousins, they're not their sister or brother. The[y] [are] sharing with the other kids and that's...good, they're learning...[to] shar[e] the toys and...the activities [with other children] (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 13).

In her play map interview Jess continued to discuss the motive for attending the playgroup in terms of the social opportunities Fresh had in playing with other children. Jess commented in her play map interview that the children interacting with other children was more important than the interactions she and Fresh had with the other caregivers that attended the playgroup (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 6). Jess highlighted the importance she placed on the children having the opportunity to interact with other children outside their family.

Kiby reflected on Mia gaining confidence in his interactions with others through participation in the playgroup in both her initial interview and her play map interview. She described her motives for socialisation at playgroup in terms of the confidence Mia had gained through participation as well as the opportunity she had to make friends and talk with other caregivers. Kiby was very pleased with the opportunities the playgroup had provided for Mia to gain confidence in social situations. Kiby commented that the:

playgroup has helped so much, I can't believe how it's helped him [Mia] become more social and more confident and less scared of new people and strangers...It's really helped and I'm so happy. He [Mia] was never like this... At the beginning of the year he was always like errr [child moan], he sees

strangers, and...he'd never give a hi five because he was too scared and now... he's more open and, more free...It's really helped [playgroup]...He [Mia] goes everywhere and he doesn't get too scared [anymore]. (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.4).

Kiby explained that through Mia's participation in playgroup she has seen positive changes in Mia's self-confidence both at the playgroup and in social situations outside the playgroup, which she attributed to the playgroup participation. She reflected that the playgroup provided an opportunity for Mia to develop his social skills and to be confident in his interactions with other children and other adults. When I asked Kiby about how she benefitted from attending the playgroup in her initial interview she commented that

it's equally as important for mothers too to just engage with other mothers and exchange ideas, talk about each other, share different experiences. You learn too...for instance, if you're not able to cope with a certain thing you can get ideas about how to cope with them from other mothers so you're exchanging your experiences...and getting to know other people, getting to know your community more, because they are usually from the same community so it gives us a break and it's also fun getting to gather with other mothers who know the challenge of being a mother, sometimes...they can understand you (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11).

Kiby shared that the "social connections" (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5) that both she and Mia made through attending the Tenby playgroup were an important aspect of their attendance. She discussed the opportunity playgroup gave her to meet other caregivers and their children through attending playgroup, being able to share their parenting experiences and make connections within the community that they lived were important aspects of the playgroup.

Farsana's motives for socialisation at playgroup were discussed in terms of her son, Sonic, gaining confidence and friendship through attending as well as caregivers socialising with other caregivers at playgroup. Farsana suggested in her initial interview and her play map interview that through attending the playgroup Sonic had gained confidence in playing with other children. She commented that when they first began attending the playgroup Sonic was "very shy...[and] was not talking to anyone" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 16), however, through attending the playgroup Sonic watched the other children playing and started playing with them (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 16). Farsana continued by explaining that Sonic was very shy and does not talk to people when they leave the house, however, "with the friend his age

group he will, he's talking and he loves to play with them" (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 16).

As a motive for socialisation Farsana noted in our play map interview, that when the children started playing in the same space or together at playgroup it encouraged the caregivers to begin to talk to each other while their children were playing together (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 9). She commented that the caregivers followed their children while they were playing and when the caregivers were standing at the same activity with their children it initiated the conversations the caregivers had with each other. Farsana suggested that the opportunity playgroup provided for the caregivers to interact with each other and make friends was as important as the opportunity children had to make friends through their participation in the playgroup (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 8). As another motive for socialisation Farsana also highlighted in both her interviews that within the Tenby playgroup the caregivers who attended were encouraged to make friends with people who were outside their own cultural background. This was especially true if they did not have any family or friends either within their community or in Australia (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 16 & Play map interview, p. 9).

Sarah's motive for socialisation was described in terms of opportunities for her daughter Sophie to socialise with other children and adults, as well as the opportunity playgroup provided Sarah to meet other caregivers and make friends. Sarah discussed the friendships her daughter Sophie had made through playgroup and the relationships that had been built with other caregivers and children at the playgroup:

I notice it with Sophie and a couple of the other kids, they remember their [the other children's] names, they [the children] come in and they say hello, they [Sophie and the other children] play well together [be]cause they...know how each other works, and what their interests...are and even the parents, they [the children] know who the parents are now. She's [Sophie] happy to talk to them [other caregivers] and to go and ask them for something and if she needs something or just have a talk (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5).

Sarah commented that she started to take Sophie to playgroup as she felt that Sophie needed to start to interact with other children. She felt that playgroup offered Sophie this opportunity while Sarah was around to help facilitate these relationships for Sophie (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 1). Sarah commented that Sophie and the other children attending the

playgroup were getting to know each other and remembering each other from week to week. She had observed the children beginning to form a friendship, the children remembered what each other liked to do and what they did together previously at playgroup. Sarah explained that Sophie felt comfortable and confident around other caregivers at the playgroup (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5).

Madison identified that attending playgroup was good for her mental health in both her initial interview and her play map interview. Madison spoke extensively in both her initial interview and her play map interview about the importance of attending playgroup for her mental health. In particular, Madison commented that she was feeling isolated and alone when she first began attending the playgroup:

I've made some really good friends from there [the playgroup], and I think that the mental health of each mother is so important because if your mental health is not strong how do you keep your kids happy...it's a domino effect, you can't just focus on your kids and let go of you, it just doesn't work that way (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 18).

Madison commented that the playgroup had helped her mental health, and recognised that for her, to be able to parent and have happy children she also needed to feel happy. Madison explained that through attending the playgroup she had the opportunity to get out of the house and had made some very good friends who she could rely on and discuss parenting young children with, which all impacted her mental health in a positive way (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5). Madison's motives for socialisation were expressed in terms of making friends benefitting her mental health. She commented that through attending playgroup she had the opportunity to make social connections and make friends: "I was so lonely, before [I attended] playgroup...I know, personally for me, but I also know for the other mums there [at playgroup], playgroup has benefitted them emotionally, [and] mentally...it's such a lonely job being a mum" (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 4). Madison reflected that she had made some really good friends from playgroup and they caught up regularly outside of playgroup (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5). Madison explained that she grew up in a different part of the State to where she lives now and that she had felt very lonely prior to attending the playgroup (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 1-2). Madison explained that through attending the playgroup both she and Jordan had the opportunity to socialise with other children and caregivers (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 2).

Super Nan explained that her motive for socialisation with others through participation in playgroup was for Buzz and Sophia to interact with others. She explained that at playgroup Buzz and Sophia:

Interact...with other children, which is really good, also interacting with other people [such as parents], and it's good for them [Buzz and Sophia] because they're seeing other children, as I said with twins, they're [Buzz and Sophia] so close...they need that other company of other children. (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14).

Super Nan commented that attending playgroup provided Buzz and Sophia the opportunity to interact with both other children and other caregivers. Super Nan explained that as Buzz and Sophia were twins, they were used to playing with each other and attending playgroup offered them the opportunity to engage with other children. Super Nan further explained that attending the playgroup with her grandchildren was not a social opportunity for her, her priority was the social interactions and opportunities the playgroup provided for her grandchildren (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 15).

For the caregivers of both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup the opportunity for the caregivers to meet new people and make friends was secondary to the opportunities that the playgroup provided for their children to socialise with others. The caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup all spoke of the social benefits of attending playgroup for their children before they spoke about themselves meeting other caregivers. For example, Kiby explained that attending the playgroup “really helped him [Mia] engage with other kids, different people, strangers, and do things together with other kids” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11).

Cultural Inclusivity

Each caregiver from the Tenby playgroup and Super Nan and Madison from the Warrington playgroup identified that the playgroup was culturally inclusive. Both Kiby and Farsana discussed the cultural diversity of their playgroup in their initial interviews. Jess, Wanda, Madison and Super Nan all agreed that as a motive for playgroup being culturally inclusive was representative of their experience of playgroup during our play map interview. Both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup were culturally diverse. The caregivers that participated in this research from the Tenby playgroup identified themselves as Sri Lankan, Afghan, Ethiopian and Indonesian-Indian. Both Sarah and Super Nan identified as Australian while Madison explained that both her parents

were born in Italy and migrated to Australia when they were young (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 1).

A principle of the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), respect for diversity and cultural inclusivity was something I identified as an early childhood value for playgroup in Phase 1B, my researcher autoethnography. In my autoethnography I explain my early childhood value of cultural inclusivity within an early childhood program. I explain that it was not something that I remembered studying and learning about within my initial teacher education, however, throughout my early childhood teaching career it became something that I was very interested in learning more about and being able to implement respectful responsiveness to diversity within my programs (Researcher autoethnography, 2019, p. 6). With each caregiver (with the exception of Sarah) I raised the theme of the playgroup being culturally inclusive in the play map interviews. Both Farsana and Kiby had discussed the playgroup being culturally inclusive within their initial interviews.

Farsana's motive for cultural inclusivity was discussed in terms of caregivers learning about cultures other than their own and socialising with other caregivers. Farsana spoke about the cultural diversity within the playgroup:

We are not all from this country, we came from...different countries...When we come to the playgroup we can see that every culture [is represented at the playgroup], not only our culture...different culture[s] [as well]...We can share...ideas...like...any festival or something [that our culture has] or we can share how...[other cultures] celebrat[e]...We can make...friends and we can [get to] know each other. That is good for the parents as well. Most...of the parents...don't have any friends when they come [to] the playgroup. (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.16).

Farsana's comment highlighted the importance she placed on the opportunity that playgroup provided for the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup to meet with others in their community, as well as to meet with caregivers from cultures other than their own. Farsana also discussed the importance of learning about cultures other than their own and acceptance of people from cultures other than their own through the playgroup:

If [the caregivers] come to playgroup...we can see...how...the people [from other cultures] are very nice...[That] Indian people they look like this...we can hear about some different stories from others so we think if we saw the one person we don't always think they will like this or we have to talk to them,

then only we can understand how these people [are, but very lovely people...we have to talk to them, then only we can know, we know, 'oh she's like this' or something. Sometimes they don't know the language and they're a bit shy to talk (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 17).

Farsana reflected that through meeting caregivers with cultural backgrounds varying from their own at the playgroup the caregivers were provided with an opportunity to get to know someone from another cultural background and, rather than forming preconceived notions of what a person from another cultural background would be like, the caregivers were provided with the opportunity to get to know other caregivers. Farsana also suggested that this provided the caregivers with the opportunity to find out more about another culture through interacting with caregivers from that cultural background and learning through other members of the playgroup.

Kiby also discussed her motive for cultural inclusivity in terms of learning about cultures that varied from her own through their interactions with other families within the playgroup. For example, Kiby commented that through participating in the playgroup the children could be "expose[d]...to different kinds of food...[because] some kids are usually fed their own traditional meals and...exposure [to other foods] would help kids...come to a place where there's a variety of food" (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p.11). Kiby reflected on people within her community that shared her Ethiopian background in both her initial interview and her play map interview. Kiby suggested that "lots of Ethiopians don't like to get out of their comfort zone" (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 15) and may be too unsure of the unknown of playgroup and mixing with a culture that varied from their own. For Kiby, however, she enjoyed attending the playgroup and learning about other cultures within her community and meeting caregivers and children from varying cultural backgrounds through the playgroup (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14-15).

Like Farsana and Kiby, Jess' motive for cultural inclusivity was to learn about cultures other than her own and meet new people. Jess explained that the playgroup being "multicultural" (Jess, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 12) was important for her:

It's better to be here [where there are many cultures] than the same [culture]...because when they're together from the same country they speak the same language and the kids [are going to] ...learn nothing. They learn [and] see everything that they see at home...there's nothing different [if everyone is from the same country]...[It's] very important [for the playgroup] to be a multicultural one. (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 12).

Jess commented that the caregivers and their children had the opportunity to hear, learn and speak English through their participation in the playgroup, as English was the common language between all the participants.

Madison and Super Nan discussed their motives for cultural inclusivity in terms of providing an environment that was supportive for families with diverse cultural backgrounds. Super Nan explained that the playgroup was “very multicultural” (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 8) and that she enjoyed talking with the caregivers that attended that had English as a second language (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 13). Madison commented that “there’s a lot of cultures” (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p.14) that attended the playgroup. When I asked her about whether the playgroup was culturally inclusive Madison spoke about a family that attended the playgroup:

There’s one dad that comes now...[and] he’s the only dad that comes...We...try and make him feel...included...He comes to playgroup...and...[his child] really enjoys it...I think...he’s Iranian, and he has a very strong accent so we really...take that extra effort to...understand him...and make him feel included (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 14).

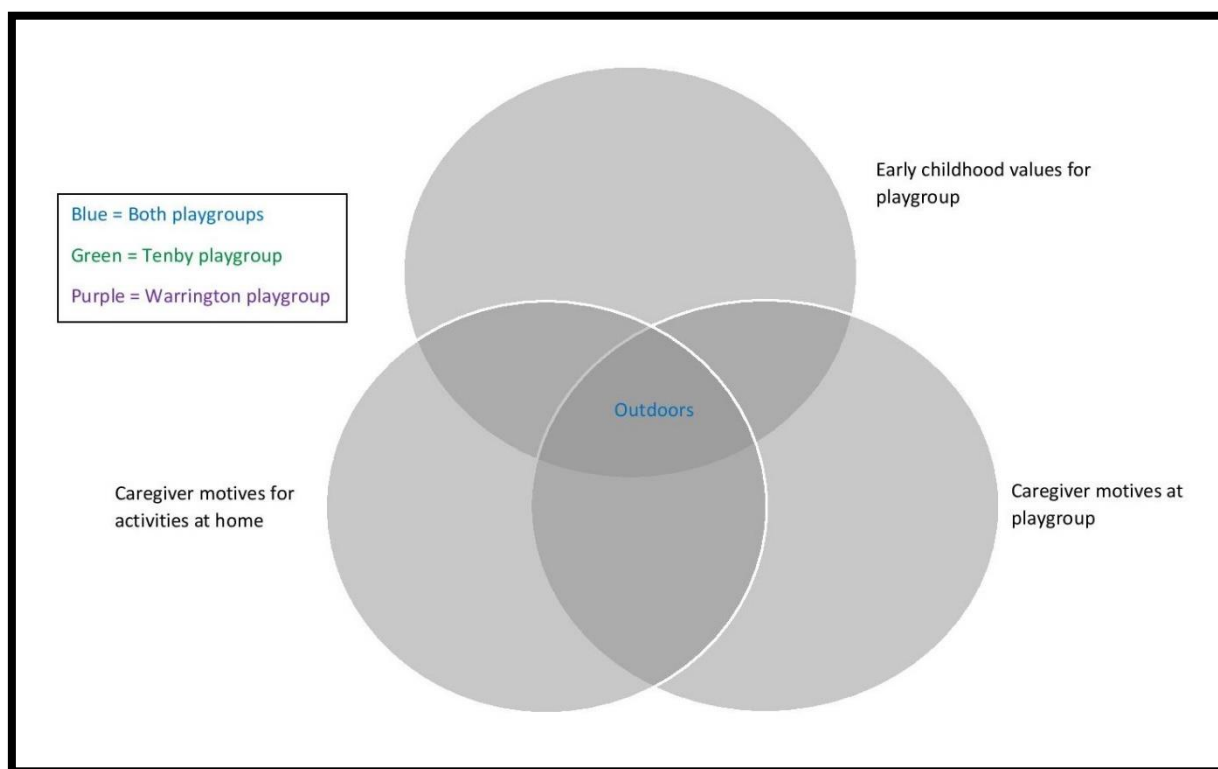
Madison reflected that the Warrington playgroup was inclusive of many different cultures, however, did not comment further on the ways that the playgroup ensured everyone felt included. Unlike the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup, the Warrington playgroup caregivers did not discuss the cultural diversity of the playgroup in their initial interviews.

Shared Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home, Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Educator Societal Values for Playgroup

There was one shared caregiver motive for activities at home, caregiver motive for playgroup and educator societal value for playgroup that was held in common for both the Tenby and the Warrington playgroup. This shared motive and value was outdoors. This theme is identified in Figure 53 and will be discussed in the following section.

Figure 53

Shared Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home, Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Educator Societal Values for Playgroup Held in Common Between the Tenby Playgroup and the Warrington Playgroup.



Note. Shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup held in common between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup was outdoors.

Outdoors

Children spending time outdoors was a theme that was identified by both myself as an early childhood professional in Phase 1B of the data collection as a value for playgroup and the caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup as a motive for activities at home and a motive for playgroup. The caregivers identified the outdoors in both their discussions of activities at home as well as at playgroup in both their initial interviews and their play map interviews. Kiby, Sarah, Madison and Super Nan included photographs of their children engaged in pastimes and activities outdoors in Phase 1A of the data collection. Kiby had a photograph of Mia sliding down a slide at the park (Figure 54) and another photograph of Mia riding his trike on the path in the front of their home (Figure 55). Sarah had four photographs of Sophie engaged in pastimes and activities in their back yard, including with a puppet in the cubby house, on the

swings, on the slide and on the trampoline (Figure 62, 63, 64 & 65). Madison had two photographs of Jordan at a park, one climbing the stairs on the fort (Figure 60), and the other of Jordan in a tunnel (Figure 61). Super Nan had six photographs of Buzz and Sophia outdoors both in her backyard and at playgroup: on the swings in the backyard (Figure 56), having a picnic in the backyard (Figure 57), playing hide and seek in the backyard (Figure 58), building with blocks in the backyard (Figure 59), riding a bike outdoors at playgroup (Figure 66) and pushing a doll in a pram outdoors at playgroup (Figure 67).

As an early childhood value for playgroup that I identified in my autoethnography in Phase 1B the image I used to represent the value of outdoors in the co-construction of the play map was a collage of six photographs of children in bushland by a creek from “Every Child” magazine. The theme of children spending time outdoors was represented as a co-constituted societal value, caregiver motive for activities at home and caregiver motive for playgroup. The value of outdoor learning environments for children is outlined in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and discussed in the literature (see for example, James et al., 2017; Little & Wyver, 2008; Stone & Faulkner, 2014) with a range of benefits to children coming from their time spent outdoors including physical, emotional, social and intellectual (Olsen & Smith, 2017; Truelove et al., 2018). In my autoethnography I explained my early childhood value of the outdoors for playgroup: “spending time in the outdoors provides children with many opportunities they cannot get indoors. Children can experience different sights, smells, sounds and physicality. It gives them the space to take risks and figure things out for themselves” (Researcher autoethnography, 2019, p. 5). In my autoethnography I explained the value I hold as an early childhood professional of the opportunity for children to spend time outdoors daily and the benefits to children’s learning and development through this opportunity.

Both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup had access to an outdoor area which was directly off, and connected to, their indoor spaces. At the Tenby playgroup the outdoor area had a large sand pit, a concrete area and path and a tan bark area. The playgroup had access to equipment for the sand pit such as buckets and spades. They also had bikes, a tunnel, a water trough, and movable plastic stepping-stone tubs which the children used outdoors. For the first part of the session the children and caregivers could use both the indoor and outdoor areas, choosing where they would like to play and moving freely between both the indoor and outdoor spaces. The Warrington playgroup had a similar outdoor environment for the caregivers and their children. The outdoor area at the Warrington playgroup had a tan bark area, a concrete area and path, a small sand pit and a cubby house. The children had access to many outdoor materials such as bikes, sand pit toys including buckets and spades, wheelbarrows, and a movable slide. The

children and their caregivers could choose to play both indoors and outdoors, moving between both areas for the duration of the playgroup session.

As a daily pastime or activity both at home and at playgroup the caregivers motives for outdoors were described in terms of learning and having fun (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4-5 & p.7), keeping the child busy (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9) getting out of the house (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 11), doing things with their child (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7), engaging in activities (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 13), having a similar experience of childhood as the caregiver did (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6), getting fresh air and exploring (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6 & Play map interview, p.3), running around, playing and having fun (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6), spending time together playing outdoors (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3-4, p. 5 & p. 15) and spending time outdoors being healthy for children (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 4; Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6).

Outdoors at Home. Kiby, Wanda and Jess from the Tenby playgroup and Madison from the Warrington playgroup spoke of taking their children to the park to play in their initial interviews. As a motive for outdoors these caregivers all had parks and playgrounds that were within walking distance to their homes, providing easy access for the caregivers and their children (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, initial interview, p. 5; Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7; Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9; Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5). Playing outdoors at the park was something Kiby, Wanda, Jess and Madison did with their children throughout the week. Jess commented that on a typical day she would often take Fresh to the park or the playground (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9). Kiby included a photograph of Mia sliding down the slide at a park and commented that either herself or her parents “take him [Mia] down to the playground nearly every day” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5). Wanda explained that she and Marvin like to “go to the park...behind our house” (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7) together.

Kiby described her motive for outdoors as a pastime or activity in terms of learning and having fun. For example, Kiby explained that Mia “really likes going to the playground, he doesn’t want to go back home again” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5). In her initial interview Kiby commented that in the photograph of Mia sliding down the slide at the park (Figure 54) Mia had learnt to slide down the big slide and he wasn’t as scared of going down the slide as he used to be when they first started going to the playground (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.

5). Kiby went on to explain that “safety’s the most important thing, but also that he’s [Mia’s] having fun, he knows what to do and how to go up the slide for instance, he used to go up through here first [the wrong way] ...but now he knows to look at other ways [of climbing up the slide]” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5). Kiby described Mia learning the ‘correct’ way to climb up the slide, and that she had taught Mia to look for the ladder to use to get to the top of the slide. When I asked Kiby in the initial interview what her role was when they were at the park Kiby commented that she guided Mia around the park and showed “him what’s where, and how to get to certain areas of the playground” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 5). When discussing the photograph taken in Phase 1A of Mia on his trike at home (Figure 55) in the initial interview Kiby explained that Mia would ride his bike outdoors two or three times each day and it was one of Mia’s favourite things to do (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7-8). Kiby’s motive for outdoors was in terms of Mia’s learning: “He rides it perfectly. He knows when to stop...I’m usually at the back of him, guiding him, talking to him in my language, turn, left, turn right, go straight” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.8).

Figure 54

Kiby. Tenby Playgroup. On the Slide at the Park



Figure 55

Kiby. Tenby Playgroup. Riding the Trike Outdoors at Home



Wanda's motive for outdoors was explained in terms of doing things with her child. In her initial interview I asked Wanda what she and Marvin like to do together. Wanda commented that they "go to the park and he [Marvin] likes to go on the slide" (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7). Wanda also explained that sometimes she gets together with her friends that have children and they meet at the park together if it is a nice day (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 8). Going to the park together and with friends was something that Wanda did with Marvin each week as they had a park behind their house (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 7).

In the initial interview I asked Jess what a typical day for she and Fresh involved. Jess explained that she takes Fresh "to the shopping centre and the playgroup so she [Fresh] is busy" (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9). Jess' motive for outdoors was to keep Fresh busy, providing them with an activity to do during the day. Jess also commented in her play map interview that going to the park gets Jess and Fresh out of the house, providing them with a place to go during the day (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 9).

Super Nan and Sarah from the Warrington playgroup had taken photographs of their children outdoors in their backyards in Phase 1A of the data collection (see Figure 56, 57, 58, 59 & 62, 63, 64 & 65). Super Nan expressed the importance of outdoor play for her grandchildren in both her initial interview and her play map interview. Super Nan's motive for outdoors was expressed in terms of spending time playing outdoors with her grandchildren as well as spending time outdoors being healthy for the children. For example, Super Nan commented: "It's healthy for... [the children to go outside], you can still take things outside, painting, or...with the blanket [to have a picnic] or have lunch or whatever...they [the children] love it outside. It's good for...[them]" (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 4). Super Nan included several photographs of her grandchildren playing outside in her backyard in the photographs she took of the children's pastimes and activities. Super Nan spoke extensively throughout her initial interview and her play map interview about the time she spends playing with Buzz and Sophia, particularly outdoors. Aside from the motive of spending time outdoors being a healthy pastime and activity for children Super Nan's motive that she spoke about consistently was spending time engaged in pastimes and activities with her grandchildren outdoors. For example, Super Nan commented on some the photographs she had taken of the children outdoors at her house:

sometimes I pretend to be a witch or a bad fairy or whatever and they run away [laughs] Especially in my backyard and I've gotta catch them...[This photograph is] in my backyard...we always get out the cushions and the pillow if it's a cloudy day we try to look up in the sky and see what shapes of animals there is or if we can find, see butterflies or birds. And...I have a little radio which we put up in the tree and then we dance around the big [tree]...and they'll hide behind it and I've got to try and find them or they look for fairies...People think I'm crazy, so we always have a picnic on here, apples and cheese and whatever and this gives them a timeout having a cone with an ice cream in it or whatever...We love looking at the clouds trying to find different shapes and butterflies when they fly by...I think it's important, playtime, to me it's really important...This is where they hide behind the big tree and I've got to find them and you can't see them behind the tree cause the tree's so big...they'll go [and hide to the] side [of the tree] and then I'll just creep [to try to find them], and they'll run around and then they'll usually dart off, somewhere in the back yard and I've got to catch them, yeah, that's Finn trying to hide, saying peek-a-boo...This [photograph] is where they are on the swings...[This photograph is] on the grass, they love the grass, they love being

bare foot on the grass. I find children love to be barefoot on grass, I like being barefoot on grass (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial Interview, p. 5-6).

Super Nan explained in her initial interview that while playing outdoors with Buzz and Sophia she engaged in pretend play where she pretended to be the “bad fairy” and the children ran away from her. They also enjoyed playing hide and seek together in the backyard, hiding behind the big tree, and running away as she tried to find them. Later in her initial interview I asked Super Nan what the children’s most favourite thing to do with her was. Super Nan commented that the children enjoyed having picnics on a blanket outside (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). In Super Nan’s photographs Buzz and Sophia can be seen playing together on a swing (Figure 56), having a picnic (Figure 57), playing hide and seek (Figure 58), and building with blocks (Figure 59) outdoors at her house. Super Nan enjoyed playing with her grandchildren when she spent time with them, commenting later in the initial interview that as the children’s grandparent she has more time to spend with the children playing with them as she “can leave things, and do it when they’ve gone” home (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10).

Figure 56

Super Nan. Warrington Playgroup. On the Swing in the Backyard at Home



Figure 57

Super Nan. Warrington Playgroup. Having a Picnic in the Backyard at Home



Figure 58

Super Nan. Warrington Playgroup. Playing Hide and Seek in the Backyard at Home



Figure 59

Super Nan. Warrington Playgroup. Building with Blocks Outside at Home



Madison's motive of outdoors was for her children to have a similar experience to her own childhood (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6). Madison had fond memories of spending a lot of her childhood outdoors and commented that it was important for her children to spend time outdoors. Madison commented in her initial interview

I want them [her children] outside, I want them playing, I want them breathing the fresh air, I want them getting muddy, I want them playing through water, I want them doing all that sort of stuff, that's what I did growing up...I think it's really important to get out[side] (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6).

There was a park near Madison's house, and she often took Jordan for a walk to the playground at the park to play (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6). Madison had included two photographs of Jordan at the park in Phase 1A of the data collection, one of Jordan climbing the steps on the fort and the other of Jordan having climbed through a tunnel (Figure 60 & 61) Madison explained that playing at the park provided Jordan with the opportunity to "run around and have a good play" (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6) as well as spending time

outdoors as she had done as a child. She explained in her initial interview that Jordan loved being outside (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6).

Figure 60

Madison. Warrington Playgroup. Climbing the Stairs on the Fort at the Park



Figure 61

Madison. Warrington Playgroup. Through the Tunnel at the Park



Sarah had taken many photographs of Sophie playing outdoors in their backyard and included these in her photographs of Sophie's pastimes and activities in Phase 1A (Figure 62, 63, 64 & 65). Sarah's motive for outdoors was for Sophie to have the opportunity to run around, play and have fun. Sarah commented:

When she goes outside it's generally, in summer I put some structured things out there for her [Sophie] [be]cause we spend a lot of the time outside...[but] with the weather at the moment, when we go outside...[Sophie will] just run, go on the trampoline, go on the swings, cubby house, whatever...[Sophie would] like to do, so she's [Sophie] got some toys and stuff in the cubby house that she just pulls out when she goes in there and...just has a run around and absolutely loves it (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6).

Sarah explained that there were many activities for Sophie to enjoy when she went out into their backyard and they often went outside together engaging in the many activities available for Sophie outdoors. Sarah had included many of these activities in her photographs, for example, playing in the cubby, on the slide, swing, and trampoline. Sarah also spoke of her motive to spend time with Sophie in her activities outdoors in her initial interview. Sarah commented that she will talk with Sophie while she is playing, jump on the trampoline, and sit in the cubby house with

Sophie while they are outside together (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6). Sarah also commented that Sophie “likes to go outside and play” (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10) when she attends playgroup.

Figure 62

Sarah. Warrington Playgroup. Using Puppets in the Cubby in the Backyard at Home



Figure 63

Sarah. Warrington Playgroup. On the Swings in the Backyard at Home



Figure 64

Sarah. Warrington Playgroup. On the Slide in the Backyard at Home



Figure 65

Sarah. Warrington Playgroup. On the Trampoline in the Backyard at Home



Outdoors at Playgroup. The caregivers' motive for their child spending time outdoors was reiterated when the caregivers and I discussed whether the outdoors was representative of their experience of playgroup in their play map interviews. Kiby commented that many of the children spent the majority of the playgroup session outdoors before they had to pack up for snack/craft/rhyme times and that Mia enjoyed playing outdoors more than he did indoors (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 2). Kiby's motive for outdoors at playgroup was expressed in terms of limiting children's time on digital media. Kiby commented in her play map interview that being able to play outdoors was "so important" (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 7) and that outdoor play was happening a lot less "because of electronics and so much on TV that kids just want to be on iPads" (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 7). Kiby suggested that a benefit of having the outdoor area for the children to play in while at playgroup allowed the children the opportunity to spend time outdoors rather than potentially spending time on digital media when they are at home.

In the play map interview, I asked Farsana whether she thought that children having the opportunity to play outside at playgroup was important. In reply, Farsana explained that as a group they had been doing some planting and gardening with the children outdoors at playgroup and that she wished to do some more in the future (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 13, p.

18). Farsana's motive for outdoors at playgroup was described in terms of the activities provided for the children. As the facilitator at the Tenby playgroup, it was Farsana's responsibility to plan the experiences the caregivers and their children would engage in while attending the playgroup.

In our play map interview, I asked Wanda if she thought that outdoor play was a part of her experience of playgroup. She replied that it was and that Marvin "loves going outside" (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 6) at playgroup. In Phase 2A of the data collection process Wanda had highlighted the words '*going to the park and the slide*' and when discussing outdoors in the play map interview Wanda decided to place these highlighted words on her Play map to indicate something she thought represented her experience of playgroup. For Wanda, Marvin having the opportunity to play outdoors while he was at playgroup was her motive for outdoors. Having the opportunity at playgroup to go and play outside was an important part of their playgroup experience, as Marvin spent most of his playgroup time outdoors (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 6).

Madison identified that having an outdoor area at playgroup was an important part of her experience of playgroup. Madison commented:

Oh [sighs] it's so good [to have an outdoor area at playgroup], I mean imagine...it being summer, it's a beautiful day, in your mid 20s...degrees and you're stuck inside playing with toys inside. I think kids need to play outside...I think that's really important, the fresh air...also learning to be sun smart, put your hat on, put your sunscreen on (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 3).

Madison commented that the time the children can spend outdoors while attending playgroup is important. Madison's motive for outdoors at playgroup was similar to her motive for outdoors at home. In Phase 2A Madison had highlighted the words *I played outside a lot when I was a child* and chose to add these words to her play map to represent her experience of playgroup. Madison highlighted the fresh air, her experience of spending her childhood outdoors and in her play map interview also discussed Jordan learning to put on sunscreen before going outdoors (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 4).

Super Nan also highlighted that being able to spend time outdoors at playgroup was important. Super Nan explained in her play map interview that her grandchildren, in particular Buzz, spent a large amount of his time at playgroup playing outdoors (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 15). Super Nan expressed her motive for outdoors in terms of it being

healthy for the children: “It’s healthy for them...you can still take things outside, painting or...the blanket or have lunch...they love it outside, it’s good for them” (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p.4). Super Nan had taken a lot of photographs of her grandchildren outdoors both at home and at playgroup. At playgroup she had included photographs of Buzz riding a bike outdoors (Figure 66) and Sophia pushing a doll in a pram outdoors (Figure 67). In her initial interview Super Nan commented that Buzz “just loves riding the bikes” (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4) and that Buzz would “rather play outside at playgroup than be inside” (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4). Super Nan’s motive for outdoors at playgroup was also expressed in terms of what her grandchildren enjoyed doing. Super Nan explained that she would sit on the seat outside watching what Buzz and Sophia were doing.

Figure 66

Super Nan. Warrington Playgroup. Riding Bikes Outdoors at Playgroup



Figure 67

Super Nan. Warrington Playgroup. Pushing a Doll in a Pram Outdoors at Playgroup



Conclusion

This chapter has presented the caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup. It has identified where these motives were shared between the Tenby and Warrington playgroups and where the motives were different between each playgroup. Motives that were shared between caregivers at each playgroup included digital media, volunteering, grandparents and outcomes-based art and craft. Motives that were different between caregivers at each playgroup included teaching and learning new skills, worksheets, self-guided play and spending time with children. The chapter identified educator societal values that were not shared with the caregivers of either playgroup. These included play-based learning, open-ended activities, agency and self-help, inclusive of children with additional needs, inclusive of Indigenous culture and music.

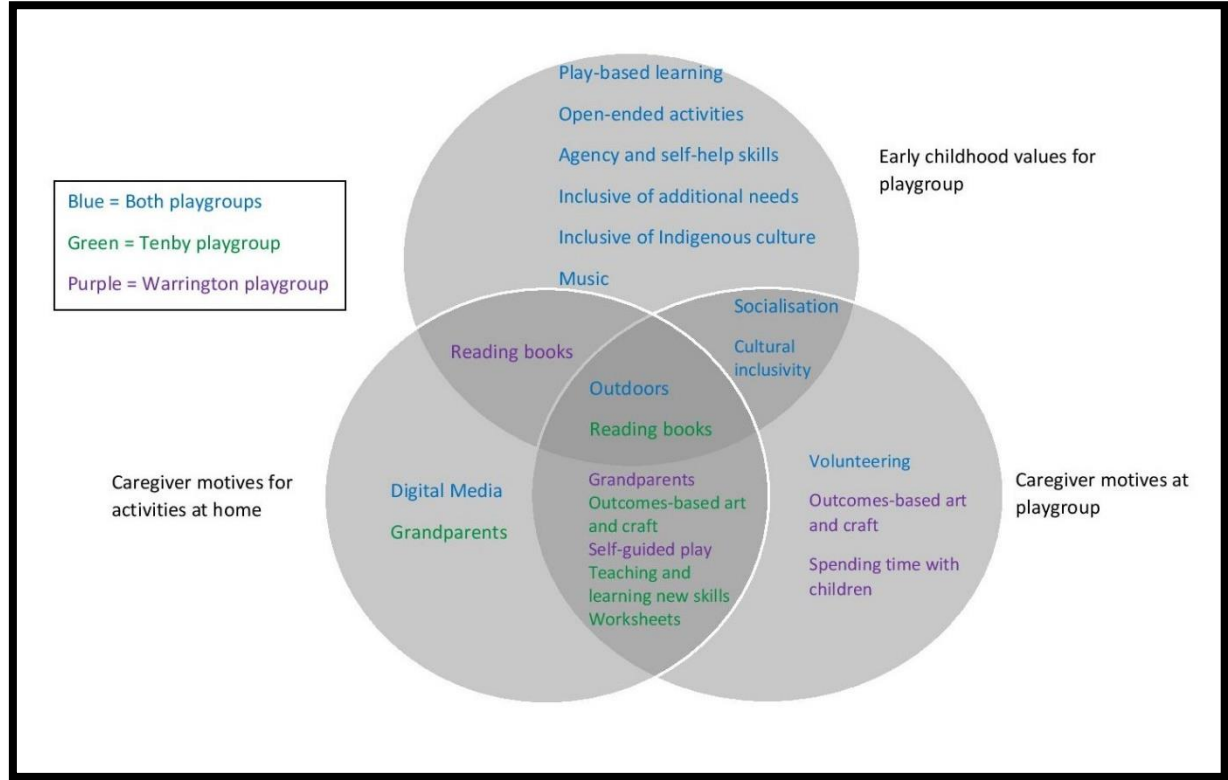
As identified in Figure 68 the interrelationship between the caregiver motives and educator societal values varied between each playgroup. Some caregiver motives and educator societal early childhood values were identified as shared, while others were not. The chapter identified where the caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup were different and where these were shared between caregivers from each

playgroup and educator societal values. Caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator early childhood values for playgroup that were different for each of the playgroups was reading books. The shared caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup between both playgroups included socialisation and cultural inclusivity. The shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator societal values for playgroup was outdoors.

The next chapter provides a discussion and interpretation of the findings that have been reported in this chapter, including reference to socio-cultural theory and the literature.

Figure 68

The Interrelationship Between the Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home, Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Early Childhood Values for Playgroup Between the Tenby Playgroup and the Warrington Playgroup



Chapter 6. Discussion

This chapter provides a discussion of the key findings from the research. The key findings are that the institution of community playgroup is co-constituted by the outdoors. This is complemented by socialisation and cultural inclusivity. Each finding is discussed according to the relevant literature. From this basis, the chapter also considers the contribution this research makes to the literature concerning community playgroups, particularly in terms of how these groups are co-constituted by societal values for early childhood education and caregiver motives for play.

Hedegaard's cultural-historical theory (2009) is used in this study to conceptualise the investigation undertaken to answer the research question:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

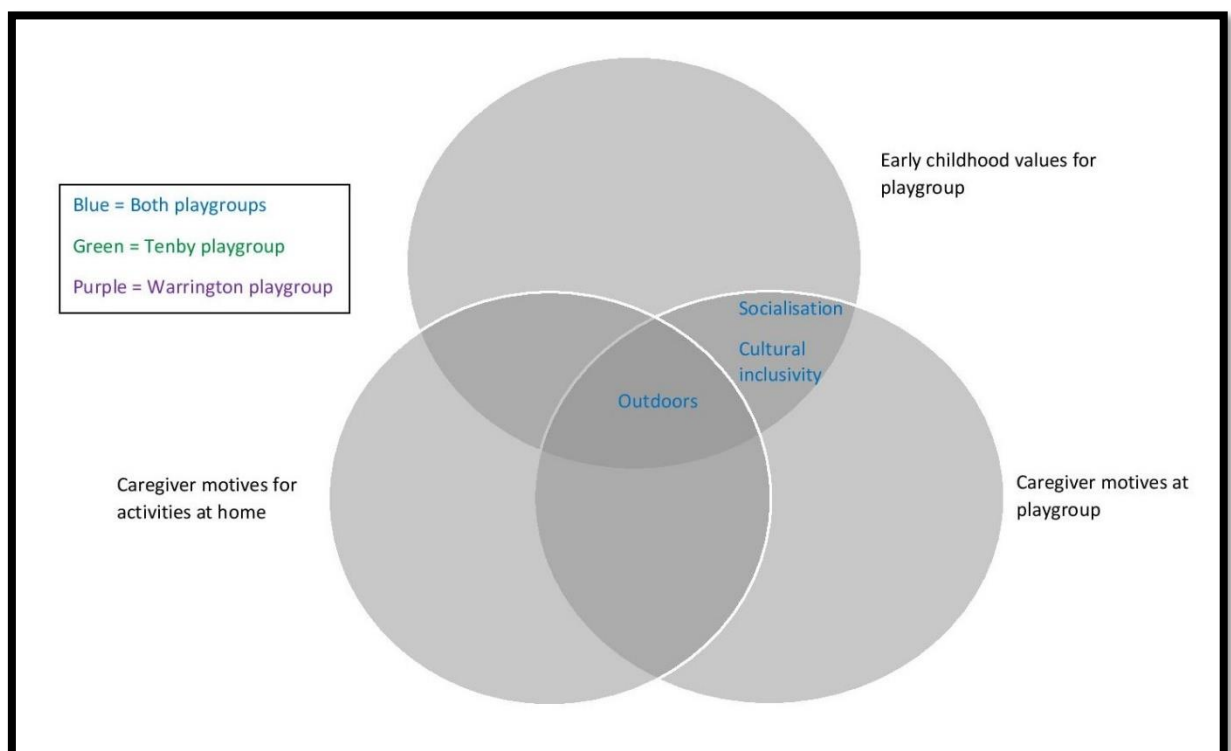
Hedegaard's theory contends that both societal values and an individual's motives impact an individual's participation in institutions such as family practice and playgroup practice. As described in Chapter 3 (p. 66) motives refer to caregiver goals for their participation in family practice and community playgroup practice. Fler and Hammer (2014) emphasise that participation in institutions culturally shapes an individual's motives. In this research, the institutions shaping caregiver motives are family practice and playgroup practice. Societal values are linked to the norms, values and cultural traditions of family culture and early childhood education that take place within the same institutions of family practice and playgroup practice (Hedegaard, 2008).

The interaction of societal values and an individual's motives takes place within the institutions in which they participate (Hedegaard, 2009). In this research, the caregivers participating in the research take the place of the individual. Playgroup practice and family practice represent the institutions in which an individual participates. I drew on my experience as an experienced early childhood professional to represent my expression of early childhood societal values in an autoethnography while the individual motives were identified through data collection undertaken with the playgroup caregivers. Through the co-creation of play maps, the caregivers and I determined our shared values and motives for play and community playgroup that met at the institution level. Using caregiver photographs, interview transcripts, my autoethnography and selected images that represented societal values, the caregivers and I were able to identify shared home and playgroup practices alongside values for early childhood education. Presented in Figure 52 in the previous chapter, and represented here as Figure 69, the finding addressing the research question suggest that the institution of community playgroup is co-constituted by motives and

values for outdoors. Outdoors is indicated as the only shared caregiver motive across home and playgroup for both Tenby playgroup and Warrington playgroup and societal value for early childhood education. Alongside outdoors sits the shared caregiver motives for playgroup between Tenby and Warrington playgroup, and my early childhood education values for playgroup of socialisation and cultural inclusivity. While these shared motives and values were evident, there were some primary differences between Tenby and Warrington, even where these differences connected with values in terms of an early childhood perspective.

Figure 69

The Co-construction of Community Playgroup is Characterised by Outdoors, Socialisation and Cultural Inclusivity



What Co-Constitutes the Institution of Playgroup?

The finding of children spending time outdoors was represented as a co-constituted societal value, caregiver motive for activities at home and caregiver motive at playgroup. The value of outdoor learning environments for children is outlined in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and discussed in the literature (see for example, James et al., 2017; Little & Wyver, 2008; Stone & Faulkner, 2014) with a range of benefits to children coming from their time spent outdoors including physical, emotional, social and intellectual (Olsen & Smith, 2017; Truelove et al., 2018). These benefits develop through the children's participation in free and unstructured time for play provided for

children outdoors. Outdoors is also indicated in the national EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), stating, for example, that

Outdoor learning spaces are a feature of Australian learning environments. They offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors. Play spaces in natural environments include plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water and other elements from nature. These spaces invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature. They foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education (pp. 15-16).

This research found that children spending time outdoors was the *only shared early childhood value and motive for activity at home and playgroup*.

The access to outdoor spaces for playgroup participation does not seem to have been widely reported in playgroup research. Some research suggests that outdoor experiences are available for children attending playgroup, however, this is not true for all playgroups. For example, research undertaken by Lloyd et al. (2017) that investigated playgroups as a site for health promotion stated that three of the four playgroups were able to utilise outdoor spaces. Moreover, research conducted by Wright et al. (2019) that investigated three variations of supported playgroups documented that one of the three playgroups provided time for the children to play outdoors, while the other playgroups in their research did not. Importantly, the findings from this research show that outdoor environments for play provided strong motives for families' participation suggesting that access to an outdoor environment at playgroup is significant for community playgroup participation.

Research does not indicate whether the outdoor environments used at playgroup are connected directly to the indoor spaces, such as those from the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup, or whether children and caregivers move between different spaces to be able to play outdoors. Both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup had access to an outdoor area that was directly connected to the indoor room that they used for the playgroup. This meant that both playgroups had direct and immediate access to an outdoor area and both groups were able to provide free-choice indoor and outdoor play simultaneously through the playgroup session. The opportunity for direct access to the outdoor space for the children to engage in may have been unique for the playgroups in this research. Although the caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup reflected that the opportunity for the children to spend

time outdoors while at playgroup was important for them this opportunity may not be available for caregivers attending playgroups elsewhere due to the location of the playgroup and the facilities available. This finding is of interest as it may have led to a unique motive for the Tenby and Warrington playgroup caregivers to attend playgroup due to the accessibility of outdoor spaces at the playgroup venues, situated within the densely populated metropolitan communities that these participating families lived. Having access to suitable venues for community playgroup has been highlighted in the literature with evidence that the availability of, and access to, community facilities and venues can be a barrier to the operation of playgroup (McShane, 2015). The finding suggests that the opportunity to have both an indoor and outdoor area that are directly connected may be an important consideration for new purpose-built facilities or when selecting venues for community playgroups.

There has been little playgroup research undertaken which examines the experiences children are engaged in while attending community playgroup. Historically, playgroups were formed for caregivers and their children to meet “for a couple of hours each week so that the children could learn through play” (Townley, 2018, p. 64). Of the existing playgroup research in general, play activities frequently identified include music (Knaus et al., 2016; Lloyd et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2014; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017), art and craft (Jackson, 2006; Lloyd et al., 2017; McEwin et al., 2015; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017), puzzles (McEwin et al., 2015; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017), stories (Knaus et al., 2016; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017), playdough (McEwin et al., 2015; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017), construction (Duplo, blocks) and pretend play (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017). In this research outdoors was the only shared motive for activities at home, motive for playgroup and early childhood societal value that was considered across both playgroups. This included sand play, bikes, water play, cubby house, slide, balance tubs, balls, a tunnel and trucks. McLean, Edwards, Evangelou and Lambert (2017) and McLean, Edwards and Morris (2017) identified sand play, bike riding, climbing, cubby houses, hoops and ball games as outdoor play activities provided to children at playgroup. The findings from this research add to the existing research literature by drawing attention to the emphasis placed on outdoor play in these community playgroups.

Through participation within activity settings, such as spending regular time outdoors at home or outdoor time at playgroup, an individual’s personal motives “are realised when his or her activities meet cultural traditions and values” (Hedegaard, 2012a, p. 130). These cultural traditions, particularly conceptualisations of play held by caregivers, can have influence on the activity settings in which caregivers provide for their children when they participate in playgroup (Gupta, 2015;

Rentzou et al., 2019). In this research the personal motives of the caregivers of having their children spend time outdoors both at home and at playgroup meets with the societal values of the importance of children spending time outdoors from the perspective of early childhood education. The societal values can be seen in early childhood documentation such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) as the curriculum framework guiding practice in Australian early childhood education. This meeting of motives and values within an activity setting provides the social situation for an individual which creates the opportunity for an individual's motives to be realised (Hedegaard, 2012a) – thus co-constituting the institution of community playgroup.

Societal traditions and values such as early childhood and family culture influence the institutions in which an individual participates such as family practice and playgroup practice. The societal practices of family culture represent cultural values and norms that have developed over time and can be reflected in the practices within the institutions (Chaiklin & Hedegaard, 2009). The societal values of outdoors stemming from family culture that were represented in family practice and playgroup practice and expressed by the caregivers as motives, may have contributed to the practices within the institutions (Hedegaard, 2009).

Each individual participating in the same activity setting may experience different social situations according to their experiences (Hedegaard, 2012a; Hedegaard et al., 2012). For example, each caregiver may have a different experience of spending time outdoors to their child. In this research Madison (Warrington playgroup) explained that spending time outdoors was important for her children because she had spent a lot of her childhood outside and the fresh air was good for children (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p.6) while she commented that when Jordan (Warrington playgroup) went outside he ran around “screaming and squealing” (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 19). Tannock (2014) contends that caregivers “tend to allow for louder voices and larger body movements” (p. 260) when children play outdoors while also “supporting less restricted behaviour and encouraging freedom of self-expression” (Tannock, 2014, pp. 260-261) that isn't available indoors. These examples show how the difference in social situations described by each caregiver, provides the opportunity for the varying motives of the caregivers to be realised (Hedegaard, 2012a).

The outdoors was identified as the only shared early childhood value and caregiver motive for activity at home and at playgroup. The motive of outdoors was expressed in varying ways by the caregivers. Their motives for outdoors were expressed in terms of keeping their child busy (Jess, Tenby playgroup), getting out of the house (Jess, Tenby playgroup), spending time with their child (Wanda, Tenby playgroup), learning and having fun (Kiby, Tenby playgroup; Sarah, Warrington

playgroup), spending time outdoors being healthy for the children (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup; Madison, Warrington playgroup) and having a similar experience of childhood as the caregiver (Madison, Warrington playgroup). As an activity setting within the institutions of family practice and playgroup practice the outdoors provides the opportunity for each caregiver's own specific social situation according to their experience (Hedegaard et al., 2012) and may provide understanding as to why the outdoors was the only shared early childhood value and caregiver motive for activity at home and at playgroup. The outdoors motive has the capacity to include varying ways of expression as a social situation and personalising each caregiver's activity (Hedegaard et al., 2012), while still maintaining its inclusion as a shared motive. This is because as a motive outdoors is able to personalise the varying caregiver expressions of the outdoors such as spending time with children, getting out of the house or being healthy.

The differences in an individual's experiences and beliefs will be reflected in their motives. These differences can include cultural differences which can also be evident within a society over a generation (Hedegaard, 2008). Rogoff (2003) suggests that "people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities – which also change" (pp. 3-4). What is interesting about this research was that similarities were evident between caregiver's motives of spending time outdoors for their children within both the Warrington playgroup and the Tenby playgroup. For example, Kiby (Tenby playgroup), Wanda (Tenby playgroup), Jess (Tenby playgroup) and Madison (Warrington playgroup) each commented that they regularly took their children to the park or playground, while Sarah (Warrington playgroup) and Super Nan (Warrington playgroup) both commented that their children enjoyed playing in their backyards. Similarly, Marvin (Wanda's son, Tenby playgroup), Mia (Kiby's son, Tenby playgroup), Jordan (Madison's son, Warrington playgroup), and Buzz (Super Nan's grandson, Warrington playgroup) each spent much of their playgroup time outdoors. The research found that there were similarities between the caregivers across both playgroups, as to the importance they placed on the children having the opportunity to spend time outdoors both in the home environment and at the playgroup. Hedegaard states that "assumptions about development as constructed in one community do not necessarily transfer to other communities" (Hedegaard, 2008, p. 12), however, this discordance was not evident in this research and further aligned with the value placed on the outdoors in terms of early childhood education.

Community playgroups are usually volunteer led by caregivers who may or may not have early childhood training. Community playgroups are often guided by the motives of their nominated facilitator or leader, such as Farsana at the Tenby playgroup, or the motives of the group

of caregivers that attend, such as the Warrington playgroup. These motives are developed through their participation in practices and institutions and influence their choices of activities and how they interact with others (Hedegaard et al., 2012). Motives for play and playgroup develop through the caregivers beliefs and values that are often culturally linked (Hedegaard, 2008) and may be shaped by societal values from family culture (Hedegaard, 2012a; Reid et al., 2019). Therefore, community playgroups, even though shaped from a societal value, such as the value of play as defined in early childhood education, may not have early childhood values evident within them.

While playgroup is recognised in early childhood curriculum documents such as the national EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) as an early childhood service, these documents prioritise play-based pedagogy. However, play based pedagogy was not identified in this research as co-constituting the institution of community playgroup as a shared caregiver motive and early childhood value for playgroup. Outdoors was the only shared caregiver motive at home and at playgroup and early childhood value. In terms of positioning playgroup in early childhood policy, this finding suggests that access to an outdoor area within the playgroup is important. At the two playgroups participating in this research, Tenby playgroup and Warrington playgroup, direct access between the indoor and outdoor play spaces for the children was available. The caregivers in this research recognised that this provided an opportunity for the children to freely move between the two spaces and commented on the importance of this opportunity. It may be beneficial to consider whether an indoor area is required at all. Some playgroups already operate in urban areas of Melbourne as outdoor playgroups. From the limited research available it is evident that some playgroup sessions are run in parklands or playgrounds in communities, providing children the opportunity to play outdoors for the whole playgroup session (McShane, 2015; Playgroup Victoria, 2020b). This corresponds with the increase in popularity of early years nature programs such as European and U.K. Forest Schools and 'bush kinder' sessions within Australian early childhood programs (Campbell & Speldewinde, 2019; Speldewinde et al., 2020). Finally, while the data collection of this research was undertaken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this finding is timely for the current COVID-19 pandemic in Melbourne, Australia in 2020/2021. As a shared motive for caregivers and early childhood value the outdoors provides opportunity for playgroup to continue to meet within social gathering and social distancing restrictions and requirements which hinder continued playgroup meeting indoors.

Hedegaard argues that the activities of one institutional practice will influence the institutional practice of another (Hedegaard, 2012a). Here, the activity setting of spending time outdoors within the family practice may influence the activity setting of spending time outdoors at playgroup. That is, the importance of spending time outdoors at home may be the reason why

outdoor time at playgroup is not only included in the playgroup routine but also identified by the caregivers in the research as important component of playgroup participation. This suggests that the caregiver motives for activities at home are important in the provision of community playgroup and that where caregiver motives for activities at home are recognised in the playgroup and aligned with this value for early childhood from a societal perspective richer opportunities for children's development are likely.

How Else is the Institution of Community Playgroup Constituted?

The finding of community playgroup providing the opportunity for socialisation and cultural inclusivity was represented as a co-constituted societal value and caregiver motive at playgroup. Socialisation and cultural inclusivity are co-constituents of the institution of community playgroup; however, these do not carry caregiver home motives as these are unique to being a part of a community playgroup outside the home. The finding of reading books was also a co-constituted caregiver motive for activities at home and at playgroup and early childhood value for playgroup for the Tenby playgroup, however, was only co-constituted between a caregiver motive for activities at home and early childhood value for the Warrington playgroup.

Socialisation

Playgroups developed from a need for mothers and carers to come together with their children to socialise and participate in play experiences with their children (McLean, Edwards, & Morris, 2017; Townley, 2018). Much of the playgroup literature investigates the social benefits to children and caregivers in attending playgroup. For example, research suggests that through participating in playgroup children gain confidence in speaking to others outside their own family (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, Skouteris, et al., 2017), children engage in conversations and play with other children (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, Skouteris, et al., 2017), caregivers engage in conversations with other caregivers about parenting (Jackson, 2011), caregivers receive parenting support through conversations with others (Jackson, 2011; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, Skouteris, et al., 2017; Needham & Jackson, 2012) and caregivers form friendships with other caregivers (Harman et al., 2014; McLean et al., 2014; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017; McShane et al., 2016; Needham & Jackson, 2012).

This research found that community playgroup provides the opportunity for socialisation with other caregivers and children and that this opportunity for socialisation was both a motive for the caregivers to attend playgroup and an early childhood value for playgroup. Common to both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup was the opportunity community playgroup provided for children to interact with other children and other caregivers, caregivers to share

experiences with each other and friendship for both caregivers and children. The opportunity for the children to interact with other children and caregivers and build friendships with other children was a priority motive for the caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. This concurs with findings in existing literature by Needham and Jackson (2012) that reports that caregivers attending supported playgroups highlighted their child's opportunities for socialisation as the reason for attending the playgroup. In this research, the primary focus for attending the playgroup of the caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup with their children was to provide the children with social opportunities. The opportunities the caregivers spoke about were for the children to interact with other children, to learn to share with other children, to interact with other adults and to gain self-confidence around other caregivers and children outside the family. For example, Kiby (Tenby playgroup) claimed that through attending playgroup her son, Mia, had "become more social and more confident and less scared of new people" (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 4).

Playgroup participation provides children with the opportunity to enhance their social development. Research has indicated that locating playgroups at schools provides children with the opportunity to make social connections that carry into the school environment (Jackson, 2006; Knaus et al., 2016; McLean et al., 2014). Further research has also found that supported playgroups provide children opportunities for socialisation and friendship including learning to share (Oke et al., 2007), interacting with other children (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017; Oke et al., 2007) and interacting with other caregivers (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017). This research adds to the literature in finding that not only do community playgroups provide children opportunities for socialising and friendship, but the playgroups in this research also provided children with opportunities to develop their confidence in interacting with other children and caregivers and separating from their caregivers.

Participating in playgroup provides caregivers with the opportunity to socialise and develop support networks and friendships (Gibson et al., 2015; Jackson, 2011; McShane et al., 2016; New et al., 2015; Strange et al., 2017). Research has also shown that caregivers develop a sense of belonging and community through participation in playgroup (Deadman & McKenzie, 2020; Keam et al., 2018; Strange et al., 2014). Similarly in this research, the caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup commented on the social benefits for themselves in attending the playgroups. The caregivers discussed being able to talk about parenting issues with other caregivers, making friends, interacting with other caregivers that were from another cultural background, having friends that they saw outside of the playgroup, and the importance of socialising with others for their mental health. For example, Kiby (Tenby playgroup) commented

that playgroup provided the caregivers with the opportunity to “engage with other mothers and exchange ideas, talk about each other, [and] share different experiences” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11). The caregivers reflected that they were able to talk with other caregivers about parenting, their children’s development and share experiences related to raising young children.

Research suggests that supported playgroups provide opportunities for caregivers to “increase their knowledge and parenting skills” (Jackson, 2011, p. 32) and share resources and information through their interactions with other caregivers (McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017). Within supported playgroups the interactions between caregivers are often facilitated by the playgroup coordinator whose role is to introduce families to each other as well as support networks within the community (Harman et al., 2014; Jackson, 2011; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017). This research showed that in these community playgroups the caregivers talked with other caregivers about parenting, their children’s development and shared experiences related to raising young children. For example, Kiby (Tenby playgroup) commented that she was able to talk to other caregivers and “share different experiences” (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 11) while Wanda (Tenby playgroup) shared that she spoke to other caregivers about the milestones her son, Marvin, had reached (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 10). The shared experience of caregiving described by caregivers at the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup in the opportunity to talk to other caregivers about parenting experiences and children’s development indicates that community playgroups like supported playgroup research findings (McEwin et al., 2015; Strange et al., 2014), also provide support networks for caregivers to increase parenting knowledge and skills.

Friendships formed at the playgroup was a significant component of playgroup participation for the caregivers. The caregivers spoke about having other caregivers to talk to at playgroup, seeing the friends they had made each week at playgroup, sharing their experience of playgroup with other caregivers, and getting together outside the playgroup for social occasions. Research suggests that being a caregiver to young children can be an isolating period of a caregiver’s life (McShane et al., 2016). This was supported in this research by Madison (Warrington playgroup) who reflected that “it’s such a lonely job being a mum” (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5) and that attending the playgroup had provided her with the opportunity to make friends and interact with other caregivers which benefitted her mental health. The research found that the caregivers from both the Tenby and the Warrington community playgroup initiated conversations and friendships with other caregivers. Farsana (Tenby playgroup) reflected that this would often occur when children were playing together in the same space as the

caregivers would begin to talk to each other while their children were playing together (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 9). Gibson et al. (2015) suggest that caregivers attending community playgroups may associate with other caregivers “who share...their current experiences” (p. 7) and find commonalities with other caregivers within the playgroup. In this research the common experience of being a caregiver to a young child for the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup helped build and maintain new friendships with other caregivers within the playgroup.

The caregivers from the Tenby playgroup spoke about the opportunities the playgroup provided them to interact and make friends with caregivers from cultural backgrounds other than their own and make connections within their community. Research by Strange et al. (2014) suggests that caregivers attending playgroup may find it “easier to connect with others who shared similar social, cultural and demographic backgrounds” (p. 5). This may be true for the caregivers attending the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup as they connected and built friendships with caregivers who share similar experiences of parenting young children. However, the caregivers attending both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup also came from varying cultural backgrounds, with many of the caregivers participating in the research having migrated to Australia. McDonald et al. (2014) assert that families from diverse communities are “learning how to parent in a new cultural context and [are] adapting to new cultural and societal values and beliefs” (p. 6) and may benefit from participation in a supported playgroup that provides a co-coordinator to assist with these challenges. This assistance provided by a facilitator in supported playgroup was not available to the caregivers from this research as the playgroups were community playgroups. This research found that interacting with caregivers from various cultural backgrounds was important for caregivers from the Tenby community playgroup as it provided them with connections into their wider community beyond their familiar cultural group.

The societal value of playgroup providing opportunity for socialisation for both caregivers and children is outlined in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) which highlights the social connections and relationships children and families develop in early childhood settings such as playgroup contribute to children’s belonging, being and becoming. The opportunities for socialisation provided by playgroup participation is also identified in playgroup literature (see for example, Gibson et al., 2015; Jackson, 2011; McShane et al., 2016; New et al., 2015; Strange et al., 2017), which has contributed to the societal value of socialisation at playgroup and the recognition of this value through playgroup organisations such as Playgroup Victoria who identify the building of friendships through playgroup in their vision statement (Playgroup Victoria, 2020b).

The ongoing contribution community playgroup makes in the social realm of caregivers and young children ensures its ongoing relevance in modern society. Hedegaard (2009) contends that an individual “contributes to his own institutional conditions and the perspective of his society; therefore, institution and...[individual] both have to be conceptualized as contributing to practice” (p. 65). In the context of this research, the societal value of playgroup providing the opportunity for caregivers and children to engage in social activity with other caregivers and children meets with the individual motive of caregivers and children to interact with others socially through their participation in playgroup. The interaction of values and motives within the institutional practice of playgroup also reflects the individual and society in a reciprocal movement of motives and values where an individual’s participation within institutional practice contributes to the conditions within the practice provided by society while also influencing changes in society (Hedegaard, 2009). This interaction creates a shared aspect of the institution of playgroup between the individual caregiver’s motives and the societal values. This shared value and motive of socialisation, however, was not seen in the family practice of motive or activity at home, as socialisation takes place with caregivers and children outside the home.

Traditionally playgroups in Australia were seen as places for mothers to come together to engage with each other and provide play experiences for their children (Townley, 2018). While some of the focus of the supported playgroup model has shifted to that of caregiver education (Commerford & Robinson, 2016; Jackson, 2013), research has found that the social aspect of playgroup has remained in both supported and community playgroup models (Gibson et al., 2015; Harman et al., 2014; Jackson, 2011; McShane et al., 2016; Needham & Jackson, 2012; Strange et al., 2017). Certainly, for the caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup the social aspect of playgroup for both the caregivers and their children remains a priority. The participation of the caregivers in the playgroup is influenced by their motive of socialisation for their children and themselves. The early childhood value, that I identified as an early childhood professional, of playgroups providing an opportunity to enhance the social relationships of caregivers and children also takes effect within the institution of playgroup whereby playgroups are provided for caregivers to attend with their children. The societal value of the social opportunities provided for the caregivers and their children is identified in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) which suggests that the relationships children develop with others are the foundations of a child’s construction of their identity. The societal perspective contains the “conditions the society provides for practices” (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 73) within the playgroup. These societal conditions include amongst others funding available for the operation of the playgroup and the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) that provides the curriculum guidelines for early childhood

services. This study adds to existing playgroup research by providing further evidence of the opportunities playgroup provides for socialisation for both caregivers and their children through participation in a community playgroup in a culturally diverse community. Significantly, this study indicated that the institution of community playgroup is not only driven by socialisation opportunities but would also seem to drive participation in diverse communities.

Cultural Inclusivity

In this research, the term 'culturally diverse community' is used to describe a community in a metropolitan city such as Melbourne which has families from a range of countries and cultures living within it. As discussed in Chapter 4, (pp. 77-78) a culturally diverse Metropolitan Melbourne community was chosen through the use of data obtained through the ABS Census data which identified communities where a higher percentage of the residents had been born outside of Australia in comparison to other communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Research has found that playgroups that are inclusive of many cultural backgrounds of the attendees as well as playgroups that are culturally specific, provide caregivers with opportunities for social interaction, support children's language development and encourage social connections (McDonald et al., 2014). The findings in this research suggest that the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup welcomed cultural diversity as it provided them with opportunities to interact with people from cultures other than their own, to learn about cultures and to make connections in their diverse communities. For example, Farsana (Tenby playgroup) commented that through participating in the playgroup she has met caregivers from various cultures, and they have shared their cultural celebrations with each other (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 16). Super Nan (Warrington playgroup) commented that the playgroup was "very multicultural" (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 8) and that she enjoyed talking with caregivers that attended that had English as an additional language (Super Nan, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 13).

Respect for diversity and cultural competency is identified in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009). It states, for example, that "respecting diversity means within the curriculum valuing and reflecting the practices, values and beliefs of families. Educators honour the histories, cultures, languages traditions, child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of families" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13). Inclusion is defined in the EYLF as "taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 45). The early childhood societal value of cultural inclusivity was also represented by the motives of the caregivers in the research. For example, Farsana (Tenby playgroup) commented about the cultural diversity in the playgroup and stated that the caregivers were "not all from this country, we came from...different countries...When we come to the playgroup we can

see that every culture [is represented at the playgroup], not only our culture...different cultures” (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 16). Similarly, Jess (Tenby playgroup) reflected on the importance of attending a culturally inclusive playgroup where she and her child could learn about cultures other than their own stating that it was “very important [for the playgroup] to be a multicultural one” (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 12).

Cultural inclusivity in playgroup research has tended to focus on supported playgroups. For example, research by New et al. (2015) and Jackson (2006) investigated the experiences of refugee families in supported playgroup. Playgroup research also reports on supported playgroups that aim to be accessible for caregivers from a particular cultural background, for example a playgroup for Muslim women (McDonald et al., 2014; McShane et al., 2016) or African refugees (New et al., 2015). The findings from this research indicate that cultural inclusivity can be a characteristic of community playgroups in culturally diverse communities. The caregivers in this research were representative of the cultural diversity in the communities which they lived, while the leaders of the playgroups were volunteers who represented the community and knew the families in the community because the playgroup was located where they lived.

Research has found that often migration to a new country can cause isolation leading to a lack of support for parents and caregivers (Davies & Harman, 2017; Strange et al., 2014). Research also suggests that playgroups can be homophilous, comprising of women who share “many background characteristics and life experiences” (Mulcahy et al., 2010, p. 10). This was not the experience of the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup. The caregivers all reflected that through attending the playgroup they had made friends with other caregivers from a range of cultural backgrounds while not necessarily sharing similar backgrounds and life experiences. This research adds to the playgroup literature as the caregivers in this research highlighted the support and friendship they had gained through their participation in a culturally diverse community playgroup in preference to attending a playgroup aimed at a particular cultural group.

The self-managed community playgroup model offers an economical alternative to the supported playgroup model in which playgroups are led by a paid facilitator (Playgroup Australia, 2013). The focus of many supported playgroups is on particular cultural groups, migrant or refugee families, or disadvantaged families (Commerford & Robinson, 2016). This community playgroup research supports community playgroup as an economically viable option for culturally diverse communities alongside supported playgroups. Research by Daly et al. (2019) reports significant positive economic benefit of playgroup to Australia, with cost benefit analysis suggestion a \$3.60

return on investment for every \$1.00 spent on community playgroups. This research introduces findings of cultural inclusivity in community playgroups which has previously been reported in supported playgroups specifically targeting one cultural group in the community.

Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) contend that “group membership defined by ethnicity, race and language...have long-standing influences on the cultural practices in which people have the opportunity to participate, often yielding shared circumstances, practices, and beliefs that play important roles for group members” (p. 21). However, they also propose that the motives of those within these cultural groups will be individual and will change over time through their experiences in cultural communities or within institutions and interactions with others and by considering the varied ways of participating in these institutions a deeper understanding of the individual will follow (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). The caregivers in this research valued the opportunity the community playgroup provided for them to interact with many varied caregivers and their children that lived within their community and identified their own motives for attending the playgroup that promoted cultural inclusivity.

Cultural inclusivity provides the opportunity for the early childhood societal values of diversity and cultural competency to meet with the motives of the caregivers to learn about cultures other than their own, interact and socialise with families within their diverse community, and provide an environment that is supportive for families. This meeting of values and motives took place within the institution of playgroup. Hedegaard (2009) contends that while the individual and the society both have influence over the practices within institutions, the institutions can also influence caregiver motives and societal values. As the findings reported in this thesis would seem to be the first available research to investigate the co-constitution of caregiver motives and societal values within the institution of playgroup, there is little evidence at this point of the shared motive and value of cultural inclusivity within playgroup participation at the institution level influencing changes within the society. This research provides important foundational knowledge for understanding the potential for community playgroups to promote cultural inclusivity.

Reading Books

The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) identifies reading and sharing books with children as an important part of the early years curriculum. For example, Learning Outcome 5, children are effective communicators, suggests that “children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 41), which is promoted when educators “read and share a range of books and other texts with children” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 41). Research shows that reading books to children

benefits educational outcomes and is a valued activity in early childhood (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Hatherly, 2006; Lee, 2017; Price et al., 2012).

This research found that caregivers from both playgroups participated in reading books to their children at home. However, motives for reading books at playgroup were not consistent across both playgroups. While caregivers from Tenby playgroup identified motives for reading books at home and at playgroup this was not the case for the Warrington playgroup where caregivers identified motives for reading books at home only. The Tenby playgroup gathered as a group towards the end of the playgroup session to read a book together, however, the Warrington playgroup did not have a group time in their playgroup session where everyone came together to read a book. Both playgroups had books on a shelf for children and their caregivers to read during the self-guided play component of the playgroup session however, while the Tenby playgroup caregivers and children read the books during the session, the Warrington caregivers and children did not. The Warrington caregivers commented that it was too busy and noisy at the playgroup for caregivers and their children to read books during the session. A lack of a group time within the playgroup session may have influenced the inclusion or omission of reading children books at playgroup for the caregivers in this research.

Research that indicates the types of experiences provided for children at playgroups in general often includes stories, books and reading (Knaus et al., 2016; McLean et al., 2014; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017; McLean, Edwards, & Morris, 2017; Wright et al., 2019) while research also suggests that group times that include reading books are sometimes included in a supported playgroup session (Knaus et al., 2016; McEwin et al., 2015; McLean et al., 2014; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017). In this research the Tenby playgroup had a group time towards the end of the session where the caregivers and their children came together to listen to a book and sing some songs. Reading books was seen as co-constituted between societal values and caregiver motives for playgroup and activities at home for the Tenby playgroup, while for the Warrington playgroup it was shared between societal values and motives for activities at home only.

The lack of a structured group book reading time at Warrington playgroup and the inclusion of one at Tenby playgroup may have contributed to the differences in motives for play-based learning and open-ended experiences which are outlined in the following section of this chapter. The informal structure of the playgroup session provided at the Warrington playgroup allowed the children to make choices about the activities they wished to participate in for most of the playgroup session, with the children coming together only for morning tea part-way through the session. Once

the children had finished eating, they could return to their self-guided activities both indoors and outdoors. Conversely, at the Tenby playgroup the session began with self-guided play after which the group came together for morning tea, a group craft time and then a group time that included book reading and songs.

As community playgroup research the findings of this research differ from that of existing playgroup literature in general. The delivery of community playgroup differed between the two playgroups in this research. At Tenby playgroup Farsana, who was a playgroup parent, ran the playgroup session. At Warrington playgroup there were committee members who assisted with the running of the playgroup. Warrington playgroup differed from Tenby playgroup in that it was not led by a particular person who made decisions about how the playgroup session was organised. This difference in having a nominated leader or facilitator may have influenced the inclusion or omission of a structured group time. In this research both playgroups were located in a culturally diverse community and many of the participants of the playgroups had English as an additional language. It may be that access to books at playgroup in the caregivers' home languages may further support caregivers to read books to their children at playgroup (Morgan & Chodkiewicz, 2011; Page et al., 2019).

As previously discussed, in Hedegaard's cultural-historical theory an individual participates in activity settings within the institutional practice. In this research these institutional practices are seen as family practice and playgroup practice. Reading children books is identified as an activity setting within these institutions. This is particularly relevant for the caregivers and their children that engage in book reading during a typical day in either the family and playgroup institutions, as it is a recurrent event that takes place within institutional practice (Hedegaard, 2012a). For example, Wanda and Marvin (Tenby playgroup) read books together each night before bed. Through participation within activity settings such as reading children books, the personal motives of the caregivers meets with the societal value of reading books to children. In the Tenby playgroup the motives of the caregiver and values of society meet to be co-constituted through the inclusion of a group book reading time and the bookshelf with books for the caregivers and children to read through the course of the playgroup session and the reading of books in the homes of the caregivers. However, for the Warrington playgroup, the caregivers that participated in the research did not engage in book reading with their children in their experience of playgroup. The Warrington caregivers reflected that the environment at playgroup was too busy and noisy for books to be read. The caregivers of the Warrington playgroup also shared that the younger children of the group may find it difficult to participate in a group book reading time. Therefore, the theme of reading books to children met only in the motives for activities in the home and the early childhood

societal values for the Warrington playgroup. This suggests that the context of the community playgroup including the environment, the session structure and the age of the children may influence the caregiver motive of reading children books in the institution of playgroup.

Summary

The institution of community playgroup is co-constituted by socialisation and cultural inclusivity. While not relevant as motives for activities at home, they were both identified as a caregiver motive at playgroup and an early childhood value for playgroup. This research builds on the existing understandings of community playgroup as it provides further evidence of the opportunity playgroup participation provides for caregivers and children to socialise with other caregivers and children outside the home. However, the research has also found that it is a strong motive for caregiver participation in playgroup, with the opportunity for children to socialise with other children and caregivers highlighted by the caregivers ahead of their own opportunities for socialisation. The research also adds to existing understandings of community playgroup in relation to cultural inclusion. Little research has currently been undertaken to understand cultural inclusivity within community playgroup with current research limited to supported playgroup that focus on cultural groups. This research found that the caregivers identified the cultural diversity and inclusivity within the two playgroups an important motive for their attendance at the playgroup.

Existing policy directions concerning community playgroup recognise the social opportunities playgroup provides for both children and caregivers (Playgroup Australia, 2019; Playgroup Victoria, 2020b), however this research suggests that a greater emphasis on the social opportunities for children provided through playgroup attendance would meet the caregiver motives. Also highlighted through this research was the opportunity community playgroups provided for the caregivers to socialise and interact with a range of caregivers from within their community that they may not have met had it not been for the community playgroup. As a community playgroup that receives little funding these playgroups provide a financially viable option alongside supported playgroup in diverse communities.

Reading books to children was co-constituted at the Tenby playgroup between caregiver motives for activities at home and playgroup and early childhood values for playgroup, however, it was co-constituted between caregiver motives for activities at home and early childhood values for playgroup only at the Warrington playgroup. This variation between the two participating playgroups provides evidence of the influence of caregiver motives in their participation of community playgroup. The context of the community playgroup, such as the inclusion of a

nominated facilitator, and the session structure may influence the inclusion or exclusion of reading children books at playgroup. This finding adds to the existing playgroup literature as limited playgroup research has investigated the routines of community playgroup sessions and the activities provided for children while participating.

Motives and Values That are not Co-Constituted in the Institution of Playgroup

The research found that there were a number of early childhood values and caregiver motives that were not co-constituted in the institution of playgroup. The caregiver motives for activities at home and at playgroup that were not co-constituted with early childhood values include digital media, grandparents, outcomes-based art and craft, self-guided play, teaching and learning new skills, worksheets, volunteering and spending time with children. The early childhood values that were not co-constituted between caregiver motives and societal values include play-based learning, open-ended activities, agency and self-help skills, inclusive of additional needs, inclusive of Indigenous culture and music.

Digital Media

The use of digital media featured in the caregiver's initial interviews about activities that took place in the home. This included use of iPads, tablets, phones and television, with many of the caregivers' taking photographs of their children using these devices. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) identifies the use of technologies to teach children new skills and techniques to explore new information and represent their ideas between children as well as between children and educators. The use of digital media is also outlined in the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) Statement on Young Children and Digital Technology (2018), which identifies the opportunities available to children for "play and pedagogy in digital contexts...[which involves] children using a range of digital devices for exploration, meaning-making, collaboration and problem-solving" (p. 18). However, the ECA Statement on young children and digital technology states that "educators engage in active decision making about the use and non-use of digital technologies for learning" (Early Childhood Australia (ECA), 2018, p. 18). Part of this decision-making process involved the exclusion of digital media in the early childhood values I identified for playgroup as an experienced early childhood professional. This decision to exclude digital media was also made by the caregivers that participated in the research with each caregiver who had taken a photograph of their child engaged with digital media in the home deciding that this did not represent their experience of playgroup. This suggests that for the participants within this research, including myself, digital media was not perceived as a pastime or activity that children engaged in while at playgroup. All the caregivers identified socialisation as a key motive for playgroup participation, it may be that digital media may

be seen as a more individual activity that may hinder the social aspects of playgroup participation (Radesky, 2019; Vidal-Hall et al., 2020; Wartella, 2019). It is also possible that digital media was not used at either playgroup as it was not available. Had digital media been available it may have been used by the caregivers and their children while attending the playgroup.

Caregiver motives for digital media use at home were described in terms of preparing the child for school, distracting the child, a quiet activity for the child and enhancing the child's learning. Many of these motives were not relevant to the playgroup environment, such as a distraction or quiet activity, and may account for the exclusion of this motive at playgroup for some of the caregivers. The caregivers noted that they tried to limit the amount of time the children spent on digital media. They may have also recognised that there were many other activity options for their children to undertake while they were at playgroup.

Volunteering

Participation in the community playgroup provided some of the caregivers the opportunity to volunteer their time to assist in the operation of the playgroup. The motive of volunteering was expressed in terms of participating and gaining work experience in a new country (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 17; Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14), learning and gaining confidence in speaking English (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14), engaging with families within the community (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p.14; Jess, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 14), and qualifying for government benefits to reduce childcare fees (Madison, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 11). Playgroup research literature identifies benefits to the community through playgroup participation. These include the feeling of connectedness to the local community (Deadman & McKenzie, 2020; Keam et al., 2018; McShane et al., 2016) and links to the local community, particularly within the playgroup through support, friendship and social networks between caregivers who attend (Gibson et al., 2015; McLean et al., 2016). Additionally, playgroup literature has identified that volunteering at playgroup is often a caregiver's first experience of community volunteering and leadership and can translate into future volunteering and leadership within community organisations such as preschool and primary school committees (Keam et al., 2018). This research adds to the literature by providing insight into the motives of caregivers volunteering within the playgroups and the community benefits through the volunteering and participation of the caregivers in the community playgroups. This new insight can assist in policy direction to further encourage caregivers to volunteer their time to continue to provide accessible community playgroup across a range of communities. While volunteering is an important component of community playgroup, I had not identified volunteering as an early

childhood value for playgroup. This may have been because I was focused on the pastimes and activities of children for playgroup participation.

Grandparents

Grandparents played a significant role in the families and children's lives for three of the participating caregivers. Kiby's (Tenby playgroup) parents lived with her family and Jess' (Tenby playgroup) father-in-law lived with her family. Super Nan (Warrington playgroup) was the grandmother of Buzz and Sophia and attended the playgroup each week with her grandchildren. Motives for the role of grandparents in the children's lives were described in terms of caregiving, engaging in pastimes and activities with the children and spending time with their grandchildren. Playgroup research literature identifies the increase in provision of intergenerational playgroups (Hernandez et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2012), while Playgroup Victoria notes that interest in setting up, attending and running an intergenerational playgroup has increased (Playgroup Victoria, 2020b). Playgroup research literature has considered intergenerational playgroup within residential aged care facilities (Rosa Hernandez et al., 2020; Skropeta et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2012), however, there is limited evidence within the playgroup literature of community playgroup participation of grandparents with their grandchildren. This research indicates that community playgroup provides opportunities for grandparents to spend time and play with their grandchildren, particularly in a carer role.

Agency and Self-Help

Incorporating children's agency and self-help skills is an important component of early childhood education and care programs (Houen et al., 2016) and is reflected in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009). In this research the phrase 'agency' is used to describe the opportunity given to children to make choices and decisions on events that involve them. This research found that self-help and agency was not a caregiver motive for community playgroup.

When I shared my early childhood value of incorporating children's agency and self-help skills in the co-creation of the play map interviews the Tenby playgroup caregivers all commented that this represented their experience of both home and playgroup. However, it was not something the caregivers discussed until I raised it with them. When I discussed children's agency and self-help skills with the caregivers from the Warrington playgroup, the caregivers all reflected that the caregivers were more likely to do things for their children and commented that there were limited opportunities for the children at the Warrington playgroup to do things for themselves. Providing opportunities for children to develop their sense of agency is a component of the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), and as such is a phrase that I am familiar with as an early childhood professional. It may be

that the caregivers participating in this research and myself were drawing on varying understandings in the use of the term 'agency'. When discussing this topic with the caregivers it appeared that more attention may have been given to the phrase 'self-help skills' by the caregivers in their responses.

Incorporating children's agency and self-help skills can be seen as a societal value that comes from within the tradition of early childhood. As previously highlighted, each individual participating in an activity setting within institutional practice may experience different social situations within the settings (Hedegaard, 2012a). In this research while incorporating children's agency and self-help skills represented societal values the interpretation and experience of these may have been different between myself and each of the caregivers. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) defines children's agency as "being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world" (p. 45). Agency involves providing children with the opportunity to make their own choices in their actions without guidance by others and can include the way a child regulates and expresses themselves through a "variety of symbolic means" (Genishi & Dyson, 2014, p. 229). Children are valued for their individuality, respected for their views, opinions and decisions on matters that affect them (Einarsdottir, 2014). As an early childhood professional my understanding of agency is entwined within these definitions. However, when discussing children's agency and self-help skills with Kiby (Tenby playgroup) she spoke of Mia setting the table for mealtimes at home (Kiby, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 9) and Wanda (Tenby playgroup) discussed Marvin assisting with putting the grocery shopping away (Wanda, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 3). Jess (Tenby playgroup) also stated that within the playgroup Fresh was making things for herself when she played with the playdough (Jess, Tenby playgroup, Play map interview, p. 7). These varying interpretations provide the opportunity to reflect on differential understandings of the phrase agency and self-help skills between providers of early childhood education and care services and those held by parents and caregivers.

Music

Music and singing are often an important component of an early childhood program offering children opportunities for "playful exploration, discovery, self-expression and communication" (Suthers, 2004, p. 45). Research has shown that music experiences in early childhood settings provide many benefits to young children (Bainger, 2010; Bond, 2015; Pérez-Moreno, 2018) including opportunities for "self-expression, individualised responses and sociable interactions as well as opportunities for the development of cognitive, physical, social, language and musical skills" (Suthers, 2004, p. 49). Playgroup research literature often reports on the provision of a music and singing time in a supported playgroup session (Abad & Williams, 2007;

Knaus et al., 2016; McLean et al., 2014; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017; Wright et al., 2019).

Music was not raised by any of the caregivers from either playgroup in either their initial interview or their play map interview. For the Tenby playgroup, music was often incorporated into the playgroup session, usually towards the end at a group time. The Warrington playgroup did not stop for a group time during the session, and the caregivers did not indicate that music represented their experience of community playgroup. Sarah (Warrington playgroup) commented that she thought that it would be difficult to keep the children's attention, particularly with the varying ages of the children that attended the group, and the younger children may not be interested (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Play map interview, p. 5). The inclusion or exclusion of music within the community playgroup session may be indicated by the structure of the session. The variation in session structure between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup may also be attributed to the inclusion of a nominated playgroup facilitator. In the case of the Tenby playgroup, Farsana was the nominated facilitator and was responsible for the structure of the playgroup session, including the inclusion of a music time. At the Warrington playgroup, there was not a nominated leader or facilitator, which may have influenced the exclusion of a group time and music session as there was a lack of a facilitator to lead the music session. This suggests that like the motive of reading books, the context of the community playgroup including the session routine and the inclusion of a nominated facilitator, may influence the motive of music in the institution of community playgroup.

Play and Learning

Play is important in the lives of young children and their development (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013). Play is also the primary focus of children's activity at playgroup (McEwin et al., 2015; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, & Lambert, 2017; McLean, Edwards, Evangelou, Skouteris, et al., 2017; Needham & Jackson, 2012; Sincovich et al., 2020), providing children with the opportunity to engage in play-based learning through their participation in the playgroup program (McLean et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2019). Playgroup is recognised as an early childhood setting in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) and is guided by the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) which describes play-based learning as "a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations" (p. 3). This description of play-based learning was reflected in the societal value for play and play-based learning used in the research. In early childhood education play and learning are often paired as in the description of play-based learning where play is seen as a context for learning. However, this pairing can also be framed in a way that suggests a dichotomy in which learning is something that happens when children are being taught

and play is something that happens when children are free from adult control and participation whereby play is separate to learning (Nilsson et al., 2018; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006). Play-based learning was an early childhood value that I identified for playgroup as an experienced early childhood professional, while conceptualisations of both play and learning varied for the caregivers of the Tenby and Warrington playgroups in this research.

Open-ended experiences provide children with the opportunity to explore the materials provided to them in a variety of ways. Spaces, materials and equipment for young children that have more than one way to use them allow for children to explore their environment and the experiences within it (Curtis & Carter, 2015). This allows children with a range of abilities and interests to engage with the environment and experiences, and engage in problem-solving and collaboration which will challenge each child's thinking and encourage their creativity and imagination (Curtis & Carter, 2015). An open-ended environment encourages children's agency as they make choices about their play and learning. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) explains that early childhood environments "that support learning are vibrant and flexible spaces that are responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. They cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions" (p. 15). The provision of open-ended experiences and open-ended art and craft activities was a societal value for playgroup used in the research.

Conceptualisations of play held by caregivers and educators are significantly influenced by the cultural context (Gupta, 2015; Rentzou et al., 2019). Play can be seen as a universal activity engaged in by children from many cultural backgrounds, while it is also an activity which has a cultural foundation (Rentzou et al., 2019). Aspects of play may be similar across cultures, however, there will also be variations in conceptualisations, beliefs and values about play which will affect the way play is provided for children (Rentzou et al., 2019). This variation was evident within the caregivers' motives for pastimes, activities and play of their children from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup as well as myself, representing societal early childhood values. The variation in conceptualisations of play was noticed within the caregiver motives of outcomes-based art and craft, self-guided play, teaching and learning new skills and worksheets, as well as the early childhood values of play-based learning and open-ended activities.

The caregivers from both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup spoke about play as an activity that children engage in. This is similar to research that suggests that for some caregivers play is perceived to be child-led and value the enjoyment children gain from engaging in

play (Fisher et al., 2008; Fogle & Mendez, 2006; Kane, 2016). For example, Farsana (Tenby playgroup) spoke about Sonic giving his Transformer™ a voice as he pretended with the toy (Farsana, Tenby playgroup, Initial interview, p. 2) while Sarah (Warrington playgroup) spoke about Sophie engaging in pretend play with puppets (Sarah, Warrington playgroup, Initial interview, p. 6). The inclusion of play-based learning that is embedded into the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) draws our attention to the societal value of play-based learning that forms the basis for Western-European early childhood curriculum and pedagogy and was represented in the research as early childhood societal values for play-based learning.

This research found that there were variations in the way caregivers described the play of the children and the activities provided for the children at each community playgroup. For the caregivers who attended the Warrington playgroup play was strongly characterised by imaginative play such as play with puppets and dressing up. This is similar to research by Fisher et al. (2008) who found that unstructured play such as imaginative play was valued by some of the caregivers in their research. The Warrington playgroup caregivers also spoke about the self-guided play their children engaged in, both at home and at playgroup. Self-guided play was described by the Warrington playgroup caregivers as play their children were engaged in without adult participation, either alone or with other children, as well as play the children chose to participate in when provided a range of activities to choose from. In the literature self-guided play is described as play-based learning where the children learn without realising they are learning and learning through hands-on engagement (O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012). At the Warrington playgroup the children were provided with many outcomes-based art and craft activities. Outcomes-based art and craft refers to art and craft activities that are provided for the children where the focus of the activity is on what the artwork looks like once it is finished. The children at the Warrington playgroup were able to choose whether they participated in the art and craft activities, while there were also some open-ended art and craft activities available for the children to engage in.

At the Tenby playgroup, play was described by the caregivers in terms of educational play, such as teaching the children letters, shapes, and numbers. This is similar to research that suggests that some caregivers value a structured academic environment for children (Breathnach et al., 2016; Knoop & Jensen, 2003; LaForett & Mendez, 2017; Lin & Li, 2019; Lin et al., 2019, 2020; O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012). The Tenby playgroup provided worksheets for the children to complete during the self-guided activities at the start of each session, and caregivers spoke about the children completing worksheets at home in their initial interviews. The art and craft activities at the Tenby playgroup were outcomes-based, where the children and caregivers sat together

during each playgroup session to complete a particular art and craft project where they copied the sample artwork that was on display.

The variation in motives between the caregivers from the two playgroups influenced the approaches to both the structure of the playgroup session and the activities offered within it for each community playgroup in this research. The Warrington playgroup consisted of an open-ended self-guided structure to the playgroup session, while the Tenby playgroup had a more structured, educational play focus. The discordance between the societal value and the motives for play of the Tenby playgroup caregivers means that it was not co-constituted between the caregiver motives and societal values. Importantly, the findings from this research identify two varying perspectives of play provided in these community playgroups. These perspectives are further evident in the structure of the community playgroup session and the activities provided for the children.

Interestingly the two perspectives of play are reflected in much of the research that has been undertaken into caregiver's perspectives of play in both home and educational settings. For example, research undertaken by Breathnach et al. (2016) found that caregivers either saw children learning through their play or they saw learning taking place separately to play. Similarly research by O'Gorman and Ailwood (2012) found that the caregivers in their research either valued the learning that was taking place through the children's play or saw a more structured learning environment focusing specifically on literacy and numeracy more beneficial for children's learning. There is also an interesting distinction between various cultures' perspectives of play within the literature which reports variations in opinions about the value of play as a tool for learning and the value of more direct structured learning for young children from caregivers from different cultural backgrounds (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010; Knoop & Jensen, 2003; Parmar et al., 2004; Parmar et al., 2008; Rentzou et al., 2019; Tobin & Kurban, 2010; Wu et al., 2018). This study contributes to this body of research as it highlights variances in perspectives of play between caregivers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Although identifying with cultural backgrounds including Italian and Australian the caregivers from the Warrington playgroup indicated that they were all Australian born. These caregivers reflected on the children learning through their engagement in the play. Conversely, the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup indicated that they had each migrated to Australia from Indonesia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Sudan. These caregivers shared that they valued more structured educational play.

Hedegaard and Fleer (2013) contend that the institutional practice that an individual participates in (such as family practice or playgroup practice) frames the activities undertaken within that institution. An individual's activities such as play take place within the institutional

practices of home and playgroup, however, the institutions provide the cultural frame for those activities (Hedegaard & Fler, 2013). For example, in this research the institution of playgroup provides the frame of play as a context for learning, however, the individual motive for the play varied for each caregiver, and for each playgroup. The societal value of play-based learning influences the institutions of playgroup and home in alternative ways creating the various structures of the playgroups. "Communities and families value play differently, and they set up different kinds of spaces, structures, and resources, including time for their children" (Hedegaard & Fler, 2013, p. 102) which impacts how play is enacted. Gupta (2015) suggests that this creates a 'third space' whereby the Western-European early childhood play pedagogy represented in curriculum documents such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) intersects with the values, beliefs and culture of a community within settings such as community playgroup with varying degrees of commonality.

This research has identified a variance in the perspectives of play as an activity and play as a context for learning between myself as a representative of societal early childhood values, and the playgroup caregivers. Caregiver motives for activities at home and motives for playgroup influence the activity setting within the institutional practice of playgroup in which they participate. The variance in perspectives of play suggest a conflict in the caregiver motives and the early childhood values that meet within the institution of playgroup. For understanding community playgroups, this research indicated that variations in the caregiver perspectives of play, learning and play-based learning provide variations in the provision of play experiences that are provided for the children to engage in when they attend the playgroup.

Summary

There were several motives and values that were not shared in the institution of playgroup. Most notably were digital media, play and learning, volunteering, grandparents, agency and self-help and music. These motives and values provided varying perspectives influencing the institution of playgroup. This research adds to existing understandings of community playgroup as it provides new information about caregiver motives for digital media use in the home and suggests that caregivers do not see a role for digital media within community playgroup, perhaps viewing digital media as an individual activity that is in contrast to the motive of playgroup being a place for socialisation or not having access to digital media within the community playgroup setting. This is in contrast to curriculum documents such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) which suggest that digital media provides opportunities to extend children's learning.

Community playgroup relies on caregiver volunteers to facilitate their operation. In this research three of the caregivers highlighted varying motives for their volunteering at their playgroup, providing new insight into the reasons why caregivers choose to volunteer their time to assist in the operation of community playgroup. These motives included meeting new members of the community, gaining work experience, gaining additional experience speaking English and volunteering to qualify for government benefits to reduce the cost of childcare. Similarly, this research provides new insight into the role of grandparents within families and suggests that while there is some indication of interest in intergenerational playgroup within aged care facilities (Rosa Hernandez et al., 2020; Skropeta et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2012), promoting opportunities for grandparents to attend playgroup with their grandchildren is also of value.

Variations in understandings of, and opportunities for, agency and self-help amongst children attending community playgroup was identified in the research. This variation provides opportunity to reflect on the understandings between caregivers and early childhood professionals. Caregivers also commented that facilities, such as adult-sized sinks in the bathroom, did not provide children opportunities to be able to complete tasks for themselves.

Similar to the motive of reading books to children, the playgroups varied in their inclusion of music activities for the children. This finding provides further evidence of the influence of caregiver motives in their participation of community playgroup. Like the motive and value of reading stories, the context of the playgroup and the session routine may influence the inclusion or exclusion of a music session within the playgroup, adding to the existing playgroup research literature in regard to community playgroup session routines and the activities provided for the children.

Variations in the way children's play and learning, including the use of open-ended materials such as art and craft activities, were perceived were identified within the findings of the research. Caregiver motives for learning at the Tenby playgroup were often described in terms of educational play such as teaching the children letters, shapes and numbers, while the Warrington playgroup caregivers described their motives for play and learning in terms of self-guided play and imaginative play. Art and craft activities at the Tenby playgroup tended to be structured, with a 'correct' way of completing the activity to reproduce a recognisable image. At the Warrington playgroup children had a choice whether to complete the structured art activities provided, while there were also opportunities for open-ended art and craft such as drawing. In contrast, as an early childhood value for playgroup, play was seen as a context for learning, with the provision of open-ended activities, including open-ended art and craft activities an additional early childhood value.

Literature supports this variation in caregiver and educator perspectives of play and learning, however, there is little evidence within community playgroup research literature. Literature also suggests cultural variation in the value of play for learning. This research provides new insight into caregivers' perspectives of play and cultural variation in caregivers' perspectives of play when attending community playgroup. It provides the opportunity to consider existing policy directions in regard to play and children's learning and whether these reflect cultural variations in the value of play.

Understanding Community Playgroups

The findings of this research indicate that the institution of playgroup is shaped by societal values and individual motives. The societal institutions such as playgroup and family practice "change over time in a dynamic interaction between...[an individual's] activities, institutional practice [and] societal traditions" (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 72). An individual's participation within the institutions involves a two-way motion whereby the institution is influenced by motives and values while the institution concurrently contributes to an individual's motives and societal values. Both society and its institutions "change over time in a dynamic interaction between...[an individual's] activities, institutional practice, societal traditions and discourse and material conditions" (Hedegaard, 2009, p. 72). Through the caregiver's interactions and actions with the institution of playgroup they have influence on the settings that they are participating in and what happens within the setting. For example, in this research the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup expressed the importance of educational play in their family practice which was also incorporated into the playgroup practice. At the same time society and its values frame the institutions such as playgroup and family practice which provide the conditions for the everyday life that takes place within the institutions (Hedegaard, 2009).

Within the institutions of playgroup and family practice are activity settings which are the traditions of a society that take place within an institutional practice and are seen as an individual's social situation (Hedegaard, 2012a). Activity settings in this research are seen as the activities that take place within the family and playgroup institutions such as outdoors, music and reading books. The meeting of caregiver motives and societal values within an activity setting provides the social situation for an individual which in turn provides the opportunity for an individual's motives to be realised. An individual's motives are realised within the institutions when their activities meet the cultural traditions and values (Hedegaard, 2012a). In this research, this was realised when the playgroups provided opportunities for the children to spend time outdoors.

In this research, outdoors was the only shared motive for activities at home, motive at playgroup and early childhood societal value that was considered across both the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup providing the only co-constituted motive and value. The two community playgroups in this research both had direct access to an outdoor area which allowed them to run an indoor-outdoor session where for some, or most of the playgroup session the children were able to choose whether to play indoors or outdoors. This option may not be available for all playgroups (Lloyd et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2019) with access to outdoor environments influencing the structure of a playgroup session. The community playgroups in this research operated out of purpose-built community centres which allowed the playgroups to have access to an enclosed room with built in storerooms, bathrooms, and kitchenettes. Community playgroups operate in many available facilities (Playgroup Australia, 2015) that may or may not be as adequately set up and resourced as the ones in this research. It is also timely, given social distancing and social gathering requirements in the current Covid-19 pandemic, to consider whether community playgroup always requires access to an indoor area at all. There is evidence of some community playgroups operating bush or nature playgroup which are provided in parklands or playgrounds in communities where the children are able to play and explore outdoors for the whole playgroup session (McShane, 2015; Playgroup Victoria, 2020b).

Socialisation and cultural inclusivity are also determined to be co-constituents of the institution of playgroup; however, they do not carry the motives of caregivers at home as they are exclusive to being a part of playgroup participation outside the home. Community playgroup provides both caregivers and children the opportunity to socialise with other caregivers and children. This socialisation provides caregivers with friendship and support in their role as caregivers to young children. For children, participation in community playgroup provides friendship, as well as confidence to interact with caregivers and children outside their family unit. This research also found that community playgroup provided the caregivers with the opportunity to interact and make friends with caregivers from cultural backgrounds other than their own, as well as make connections within their local community. The importance the caregivers placed on the interactions with caregivers from cultural backgrounds other than their own, in preference to a playgroup that was aimed at a particular cultural group supported cultural inclusivity within the community playgroup. Providing an economical alternative to supported playgroup (Daly et al., 2019), this research provides evidence of inclusivity in a culturally diverse community playgroup that has often previously been limited to research within supported playgroups that focused on cultural groups within a community.

Community playgroup offers opportunity for spending time outdoors, socialisation for both caregivers and children, and inclusivity. However, community playgroups are also idiosyncratic reflecting both the shared societal values but also the unique individual motives of the caregivers that attend. The idiosyncratic nature of each playgroup means that community playgroups may differ in many ways while still providing opportunities for caregivers and children from diverse cultural backgrounds to come together to provide social opportunities for the children and caregivers. The institution of playgroup in this research both provided a consistent foundation of outdoors, socialisation and inclusivity that was then adaptable to the varying motives of playgroup attendance that was indicated by the caregivers. Some of the adaptability included the play-based open-ended experiences offered for the children and the inclusion of music and book reading.

Community playgroups are adaptable to the caregivers and families that attend. Despite the diversity of individual motives of the caregivers that attend the playgroups in the research, the playgroups operate as a cohesive unit. The context of the playgroup including the environment, the session routine, the age of the children attending, and the inclusion or absence of a nominated leader may influence the idiosyncrasies of the playgroup. In this research there were some notable differences in the routines of the playgroup sessions including the inclusion and omission of reading books to children and sharing music with children. This difference may have been influenced by the inclusion or absence of a nominated leader. For example, at Tenby playgroup Farsana was the nominated leader, while at Warrington playgroup there was more of a team approach to the decision making of the playgroup. The inclusion of Farsana as the leader may have contributed to the inclusion of a structured group time that included stories and music, while the lack of a nominated leader at Warrington may have influenced the omission of a group time.

All children have opportunities for play at playgroup, however, the play may look different and have a different focus for each community playgroup. Play may be conceptualised in varying ways by the caregivers attending the playgroup. These conceptualisations of play held by caregivers may be influenced by cultural contexts that may affect the way play is provided for the children attending the playgroup. While Western-European early childhood curriculum and pedagogy is guided by the value of play-based learning and open-ended experiences for children, educational play and learning was identified as a motive for many of the caregivers in the research. As discussed previously in this chapter there were variations in the focus of the experiences provided for the children to engage in while attending the community playgroup. These variations represented the variations on the motives of the caregivers who attended the playgroups. The adaptability of community playgroups ensures that individual caregiver motives can be realised through their

participation in the playgroup. Caregivers are likely to move playgroups until they find one that fits in with their motives.

The variations of motives and values for play may create a 'third space' (Gupta, 2015) where the societal values for play-based learning guided by Western-European early childhood play pedagogy provided in early childhood curriculum documents, such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), intersects with the cultural values and beliefs of the caregivers in the institution of community playgroup, providing the opportunity for a balance between the caregiver motives and the early childhood values (Gupta, 2015). This may involve a mismatch or blending of the Western-European pedagogy with the beliefs, values, tradition, culture and educational ideals of the caregivers attending community playgroup (Gupta, 2015).

Finally, a community playgroup may be co-constituted differently to a supported playgroup. A supported playgroup may provide a greater link to societal values as the facilitator may be more aware of early childhood societal traditions and values through the training they have undertaken with many supported playgroup facilitators obtaining early childhood educator qualifications (Commerford & Robinson, 2016). Community playgroups have an important role as they provide access to playgroup families who may not otherwise be able to attend. Community playgroups also operate with minimal outside support and operate under the leadership of caregivers with limited or no early childhood training. Therefore, the connection to early childhood values may prove to be less than those of supported playgroups, who by definition receive more support from their facilitator to operate.

Community playgroups are idiosyncratic, shaped by societal values and individual motives of the caregivers who participate in them. They provide opportunities for outdoors, socialisation and inclusivity but are adaptable to the motives of the caregivers that attend. The unique context of the playgroup will influence the particular characteristics of each community playgroup, making the playgroup reflective of the community and caregivers that engage with it and offering an alternative to supported playgroups.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings in relation to the research question:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

The co-constitution of the institution of community playgroup is characterized by outdoors, socialisation and cultural inclusivity (Figure 69). This is the first time the institution of playgroup has

been characterised according to shared societal values for early childhood education and caregiver motives for participation in community playgroups. Understanding the institution of playgroup in this manner provides insight into the future development of playgroup as a site for the cultural development of both children and adults. For example, increased access to opportunities for spending time outdoors benefitting children's physical development, increased opportunities for child and adult socialisation promoting feelings of belonging, and an institutional approach towards promoting cultural inclusion in community settings. Despite the shared motives and values of outdoors, socialisation and cultural inclusivity, the research illustrates that there are also specific aspects of community playgroup in terms of activities enacted and the framing of play as a context for learning, suggesting that playgroup is adaptable to the motives for community playgroup attendance indicated by caregivers.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This chapter provides a concluding overview of the thesis. The significance of the contributions of this study to extending existing knowledge about community playgroups is discussed through a review of the research question and key findings. Practical implications for the research are also discussed along with limitations of this research. Finally, further questions arising from this study are proposed.

Aims and Rationale of the Thesis

This thesis investigated how the institution of playgroup is co-constructed by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup. Community playgroups operate across Australia in metropolitan and regional locations (Playgroup Australia, 2015), with an estimated number of over 170,000 children and families participating in community playgroups across Australia (Daly et al., 2019) and one in three children attending playgroup before they begin school (Gregory et al., 2017). An increased focus by the Victorian government in early childhood and a commitment to playgroups as universal early childhood services provides the opportunity to consider the role play and playgroup has in the lives of caregivers and their children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1990) recognises children's rights to play while the Australian national curriculum for children aged birth to five years, the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), describes play-based learning as a context for children's learning. However, variations in conceptualisations and understandings of play may be held by caregivers (Fisher et al., 2008; Fogle & Mendez, 2006; Fung & Cheng, 2012; Ihmeideh, 2019; Kane, 2016; O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012; Pirpir et al., 2009) attending community playgroup with their children. These variations may be influenced by the cultural context of caregivers (Gupta, 2015; Rentzou et al., 2019) which can inform the provision of play by caregivers attending community playgroup.

The literature review examined and acknowledged theories of play from the 1600s to Piaget, Vygotsky and socio-cultural perspectives of play. I noted the change of focus from individual children and developmental domains as outlined in Piaget's theory and DAP that influenced early childhood education in many Western-European countries, including Australia during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Edwards, 2007; Saracho & Evans, 2021a), to a consideration of the social and cultural foundation of learning of socio-cultural theory that was influenced by the work of Vygotsky. This shift in focus to a socio-cultural perspective considered children's play and learning

to be guided by interactions with peers and adults with a focus on culture, social situations and contexts (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Fleeer, 2021). The literature review further suggested that the cultural context has a significant influence on understandings and conceptualisations of play (Gupta, 2015, 2020; Rentzou et al., 2019). The social setting within cultural contexts mediates adult's expectations and provision of play. This mediation provides the opportunity to explore the potential of playgroup as a unique context for blending universal and culturally specific aspects of play.

There is evidence within the literature that the status of play and the perspectives of both educators and caregivers in relation to play is influenced by the cultural context within varying countries (Fung & Cheng, 2012; Gupta, 2015, 2020; Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010; Ng'asike, 2014; Rentzou et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2018). Rentzou et al. (2019) suggest that while there are some universal characteristics of play, there are also non-universal characteristics that are specific to the cultural context within each country. These variations will influence the status of play and the way it is provided for children within each culture (Rentzou et al., 2019). For example, in countries such as Denmark and Estonia an 'ethos of play' is evident (Rentzou et al., 2019). Here play is conceptualised as supporting children's learning and development and children are given time to play. In other countries such as Cyprus and Turkey "schoolification prevails" (Rentzou et al., 2019, p. 13) where play is provided for more academic purposes. In Hong Kong (Fung & Cheng, 2012) and India (Gupta, 2015, 2020) culturally specific blends of play-based pedagogy that reflect the experiences of the culture have been implemented providing a variation to Western-European conceptualisation of play. The literature about cultural contexts of play has predominantly explored early childhood teachers' conceptualisations of play and how culture influences pedagogy (Gupta, 2015, 2020; Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010; Rentzou et al., 2019). Less is known about caregiver's expectations of play and how these mediate the provision of play in early childhood settings such as community playgroup.

Playgroup research literature is limited within the Australian context, with much of the current research focused on supported, rather than community playgroup (McLean et al., 2020). Research shows benefits to children (McLean et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2016), caregivers (Deadman & McKenzie, 2020; McShane et al., 2016; New et al., 2015; Strange et al., 2017) and the community (Keam et al., 2018; McShane et al., 2016) through playgroup participation. Participation in playgroup provides children with enhanced development across all areas (McLean et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2016), as well as social engagement with others (McLean et al., 2014; Needham & Jackson, 2012). For caregivers benefits of playgroup participation include friendships, support and an enhanced sense of community (Jackson, 2011; Mulcahy et al., 2010), while for the community

social capital is enhanced through playgroup participation (Keam et al., 2018; Strange et al., 2014). There is limited evidence of research literature that discusses caregiver's learning about play through participation in playgroup or the provision of community playgroup within CALD communities in Australia.

The literature review showed that there was capacity for better understanding caregiver perspectives of play and how these are indicated in their motives for community playgroup participation. While community playgroups are among the most highly accessed form of playgroup in Australia (Daly et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2017) limited research has been undertaken within them. The lack of research into community playgroup has indicated value in researching and better understanding how the institution of playgroup is constituted. This thesis sought to address the dearth of research into the institution of community playgroup by posing the research question:

How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup?

How the Investigation was Carried out

In order to answer the above research question the research was situated within the cultural-historical theory of Hedegaard which considers a person's social, historical and cultural practices (Hedegaard & Fler, 2008). This theory considers the three perspectives of the state, the institution and the individual as constitutive of development and conceptualises development through the inclusion of the perspectives of the individual, consideration of practices and their traditions within institutions and the societal conditions for these practices (Hedegaard, 2009). The research considered the perspectives of the caregivers as the individual, the practices and traditions within the institutions of family practice and playgroup practice and the societal conditions of early childhood for the practices within these institutions (Hedegaard, 2009). Within the research society was represented by the community in which the caregivers lived which was a suburb within Melbourne, Australia. The culture and traditions such as family culture and early childhood education were seen to hold values which impacted the institutions in which the caregivers of the research participated. These institutions were family practice and playgroup practice. The motives of the caregivers were seen to have an influence on the institutions in which the caregivers participated. Within the institutions were activity settings such as outdoors, reading books and music in which the caregivers participated. Both society and the individual, through values and motives were seen to have an impact on the institutions in which the caregivers participated, while the institutions also have influence on the society and the individual. In this research the individual motives for play of the playgroup caregivers were investigated along with

the early childhood societal values for play that I identified as an experienced early childhood professional. The meeting of these caregiver motives and early childhood values within the activity settings that took place in the institutions of playgroup and family practice provided the co-constitution of the institution of playgroup.

Methodologically, the research was undertaken using a qualitative case study approach which followed a constructivist paradigm. It considered the historical and social perspectives of the participants that change with their experiences within the world. A constructivist paradigm guided the research with a belief that multiple realities exist and that knowledge is a shared construction between myself as the researcher and the caregiver participants in the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a). A naturalist approach was taken to the methodology of the research which involved interviewing the caregivers in their natural environments to understand the constructions they used to make sense of their world (Hatch, 2002). The research involved seven participants from two community playgroups (Tenby playgroup and Warrington playgroup) in a culturally diverse Melbourne metropolitan community which were identified using 2016 ABS Census data (Australian Bureau of Statistics). The data was collected in three phases. These were: Phase 1A – caregiver photograph documentation; Phase 1B – researcher autoethnography; Phase 2A – semi-structured interviews; Phase 2B – review and highlighting of the interview transcript by the participants; Phase 3 – co-constructed play map. The data was inductively analysed to draw out common themes within the data (Patton, 2015). Deductive analysis was then undertaken of the data obtained through each phase of the research according to Hedegaard's three perspective of the society, institution and individual, as well as caregiver motives and researcher values.

A Mosaic approach to qualitative data collection was undertaken in this research whereby multiple methods of data collection were used (Clark, 2010a). These data collection methods included caregiver photograph documentation, researcher autoethnography, semi-structured interview, a co-constructed play map, a play map interview, and a researcher reflective journal. A Mosaic approach constructs an image of the research and participant responses using a variety of research pieces or data (Clark, 2010a). The use of these methods provided the research the ability to form a "composite picture or 'mosaic'" (Clark, 2010b, p. 117) while also providing the participants the opportunity to play an active role in the research process.

The play map that was co-created between myself and each of the participants was a unique form of data collection that was developed specifically for this research. Using data gained through the Mosaic approach (caregiver photographs, researcher autoethnography, and semi-structured interview), a visual representation of the shared values and motives of myself and the

caregivers' experiences of early childhood, playgroup and family was developed. This process provided an opportunity for a visual narrative of the institution of playgroup to be developed.

Overview of the Findings

Data analysis generated three key findings which highlighted the co-constitution of community playgroup by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending. These were 1) the institution of playgroup is co-constituted by the inclusion of the outdoors; 2) the institution of playgroup is complemented by the opportunity community playgroup provides for socialisation and cultural inclusivity; and 3) community playgroups are idiosyncratic to the caregivers who attend with their children.

There were nine categories within these findings which illustrated the co-constitution of community playgroup by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending. These were:

1. Caregiver motives held in common for activities at home
2. Caregiver motives held in common at playgroup
3. Caregiver motives held in common at home and/or at playgroup
4. Caregiver motives that were different for each playgroup for activities at home and at playgroup
5. Caregiver motives that were different for each playgroup at playgroup
6. Educator (societal) early childhood values for playgroup
7. Shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator (societal) early childhood values for playgroup that were different between each playgroup
8. Shared caregiver motives at playgroup and educator (societal) values for playgroup held in common by each playgroup
9. Shared caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and educator (societal) values for playgroup

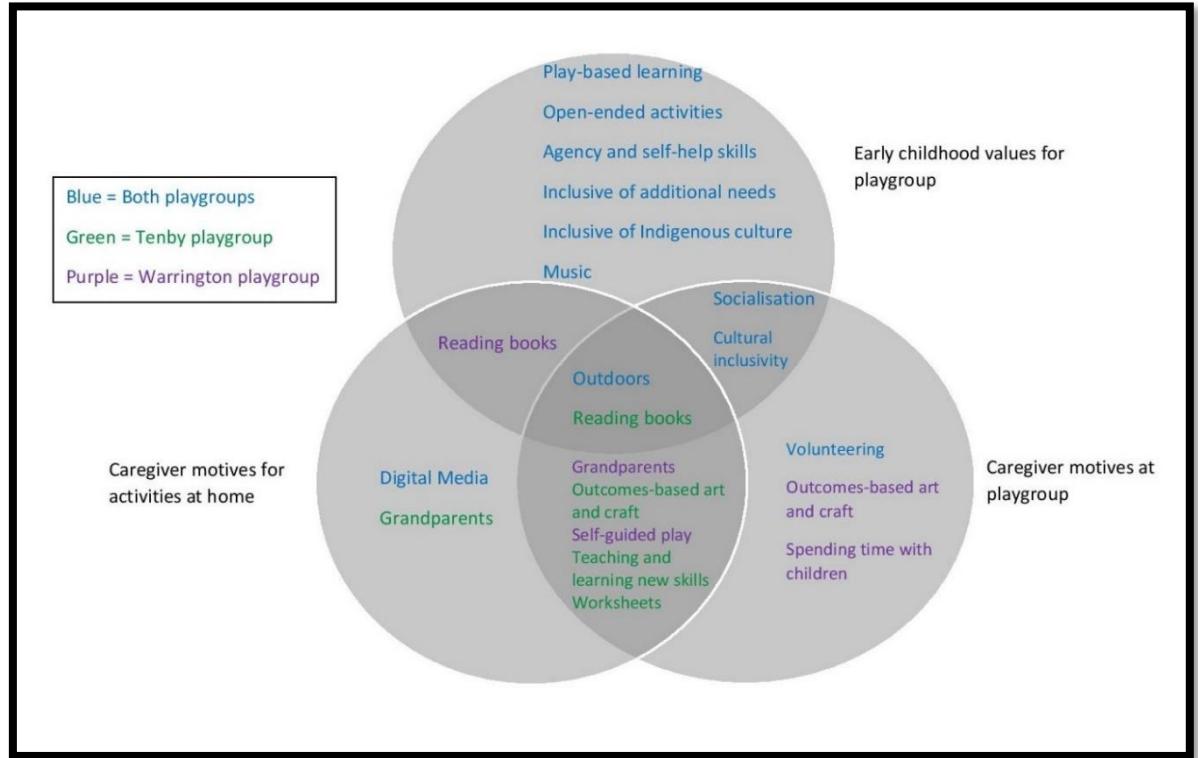
The categories and themes within the categories are identified in Figure 68 and again here in Figure 70. This figure shows the interrelationship between the caregiver motives for activities at home, caregiver motives at playgroup and early childhood values for playgroup between the Tenby playgroup and the Warrington playgroup.

The outdoors was the only shared caregiver motive for activities at home, caregiver motive for playgroup and early childhood societal value for playgroup. This was supported by two shared caregiver motives for playgroup and values for playgroup – socialisation and cultural inclusivity.

There were other motives for activities at home, motives for playgroup and values for playgroup, however these were not shared between the playgroups and between caregiver motives and societal early childhood values. The research found that playgroups are idiosyncratic, providing opportunity for a range of motives and values to be expressed and suggesting that the institution of playgroup is adaptable to the motive for community playgroup attendance expressed by caregivers.

Figure 70

The Interrelationship Between the Caregiver Motives for Activities at Home, Caregiver Motives at Playgroup and Early Childhood Values for Playgroup Between the Tenby Playgroup and the Warrington Playgroup



Significance of the Research

This research contributed to knowledge in terms of the methodological approach and new understandings of community playgroup. These will each be discussed in this section.

Contribution to Knowledge: Methodological Approach

This study has contributed to methodological knowledge on the use of a Mosaic approach to data collection. This approach has previously been used to map child and adult participants' views of learning environments in early childhood education (Botsoglou et al., 2019; Clark, 2010a,

2011a, 2011b). A Mosaic approach constructs an image of the researcher and participant responses using a variety of research pieces or data (Clark, 2010a). Through the use of multiple data collection methods a “composite picture or ‘mosaic’” (Clark, 2010b, p. 117) that brings together both verbal and visual research methods (Clark, 2010b) is constructed of the phenomena under investigation (Botsoglou et al., 2019).

In this research a Mosaic approach to data collection (Clark, 2010a) was used to gain insight into the varying perspectives of participating caregivers. This provided the research with the opportunity to be able to co-construct knowledge, providing me with the ability to follow a subjectivist epistemology within a constructivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018a). This methodological approach provided a co-creation of understandings where I as the researcher and the participants of the research co-constructed the understandings of community playgroup. A Mosaic approach involves multiple methods of data collection, is participatory research and engages the participant and the researcher in reflection on meanings (Clark, 2010a, 2011b). This research offers new ways of implementing a Mosaic approach, map making and co-construction of research with participants through the various data collection methods and culminating with the co-construction of the play maps between myself and the caregiver participants.

The research followed three stages in the data process (Clark, 2010a) 1) gathering participant and researcher perspectives; 2) discussing and reflecting on perspectives; and 3) co-constructing meaning based on individual and shared perspectives. Gathering participant and researcher perspectives was undertaken during Phase 1A, caregiver photographs of their children’s pastimes and activities, and Phase 1B, my researcher autoethnography. Shared perspectives were explored through Phase 2A, the semi-structured interviews and Phase 2B, the review and highlighting of interviews and autoethnography. The co-construction of meaning between myself and the caregiver participants took place during the co-construction of the play maps in Phase 3.

The varying ways of sharing the in-depth perspectives that the caregivers offered were acknowledged throughout the data process using a variety of research pieces to create a co-constructed map between each participant and myself as the researcher, as a mosaic representation of each caregiver’s individual, institutional and societal perspective of play and playgroup. The mapping component of this research involved the use of integrated Venn circles that represented societal values and individual motives, where the values and motives met and were shared, and the societal, individual and institutional perspectives of play and playgroup (Appendix 8). The societal, individual and institutional perspectives along with the values and motives linked directly with Hedegaard’s (2009) cultural-historical theoretical approach in which

the research was situated. This varied from the map making that Clark (2010b) had used previously within this approach to map children and adult's views of early childhood learning environments.

The play maps that were created between myself and the caregiver participants was a unique form of data collection that was developed specifically for this research. The use of the Mosaic approach provided the opportunity to integrate multiple methods of data collection within Phase 3, the play mapping, of the research. In this research the Mosaic data consisted of caregiver photographs, researcher autoethnography and semi-structured interviews, including participant highlighted words and phrases from the semi-structured interviews.

Contribution to Knowledge: New Understandings of Community Playgroup

This study provides new insights into the institution of community playgroup. As a part of the playgroup landscape in Australia, which also includes supported playgroups, limited research has been undertaken into community playgroups (McLean et al., 2020). Through the conceptualisation of Hedegaard's cultural-historical theory and the model of learning and development through participation in institutional practice (Hedegaard, 2009, 2012a), an understanding of caregiver motives and societal values for play and the institution of playgroup was identified. The research identified that the institution of playgroup is shaped by societal values and individual motives. The motives and values influence the institution, individual and the society in a reciprocal interaction.

Opportunities for children to spend time outdoors, opportunities for both caregivers and children to socialise with others and cultural inclusivity were found to co-constitute the institution of playgroup. As the only shared caregiver motive for activities at home, motive for playgroup and early childhood value for playgroup access to outdoor spaces has not previously been widely reported in the playgroup research. The findings suggest that the provision of an outdoor area for caregivers and their children to use while attending community playgroup is an important consideration for new purpose-built facilities and in the selection of venues for community playgroup. It is also timely to consider whether an indoor environment is required at all. With social distancing and limitations to social gatherings, particularly indoors, during the times of COVID 19 this research provides evidence that a caregiver motive of spending time outdoors may provide an economic and socially responsible alternative for community playgroup participation.

Socialisation was found to be a shared caregiver motive for playgroup and early childhood value for playgroup. The caregivers specifically spoke of the importance they held for their children to gain the opportunity to socialise with others through their participation in community playgroup. Playgroup research has identified the social benefits for caregivers and their children through

playgroup participation (Jackson, 2011; McLean et al., 2014; Needham & Jackson, 2012), however, there is less evidence of the priority caregivers place on the social opportunities for children as a motive for playgroup attendance. This research also identified the opportunities children have through playgroup attendance to increase their self-confidence in their interactions with others as well as being able to separate from their caregivers. Moreover, this research identified community playgroup as a place where caregivers could share their experiences of parenting with other caregivers, providing caregivers with support networks to increase their parenting skills and knowledge.

Cultural inclusivity was also found to be a co-constructed motive and value for playgroup participation. This research found that community playgroup in culturally diverse communities provides caregivers from various cultural backgrounds the opportunity to come together with their children. Research investigating cultural inclusivity has often been limited to supported playgroup (Deadman & McKenzie, 2020; Jackson, 2006; Oke et al., 2007), while further research suggests that playgroup can be homophilous, comprising of caregivers who share cultural backgrounds (Mulcahy et al., 2010). However, the caregivers in this research reflected that through participation in the community playgroup they had made friends with caregivers from a range of cultural backgrounds. The caregivers in this research also suggested that they preferred the support and friendship they had gained through their culturally diverse playgroup in preference to attending a playgroup aimed at a particular cultural group. This research provides foundational knowledge for understanding the potential for community playgroups to promote cultural inclusivity.

Caregiver motives for play may vary from societal values for play within community playgroup. Caregivers from the playgroups in this research spoke about play as an activity children engage in while at home and at playgroup. The caregivers from the Warrington playgroup spoke about play in terms of the children participating in both self-guided play and imaginative play. While the caregivers from the Tenby playgroup spoke about play in terms of educational play such as teaching the children letters, shapes and numbers. Although not a new finding concerning caregiver perspectives of play research, this research provides insight into perspectives of play held by caregivers who attend a community playgroup in a culturally diverse community. Research suggests that conceptualisations of play held by caregivers are significantly influenced by the cultural context of the caregivers (Gupta, 2015, 2020; Rentzou et al., 2019). This research adds to this body of work, finding that the cultural context of the caregivers attending community playgroup may have influence on their conceptualisations of play within the home and at community playgroup.

I contend through this research that community playgroup provides opportunity to address what Gupta (2015) describes as a “third space” where the societal values for play-based learning which are guided by Western-European early childhood play pedagogy and provided in early childhood education curriculum documents such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) in Australia, meets with the cultural motives, values and beliefs of the caregivers attending community playgroup. This third space provides the opportunity for a balance between caregiver motives for play and early childhood values for play within the institution of community playgroup.

This leads to the final contribution to new knowledge about community playgroup. This is that community playgroup is idiosyncratic. This research found that there were many caregiver motives and societal values that were not shared, while there were also motives that were not shared between the caregivers of the two playgroups that participated in this research. This provides evidence that community playgroups are responsive to the motives of the caregivers that attend them. The unique context of each playgroup will influence the characteristics within each community playgroup making the playgroup reflective of both the community and caregivers that engage with it and offering an alternative to supported playgroup.

Community playgroups are shaped by the societal values and individual motives of the caregivers that participate in them. Community playgroup provides opportunities for outdoors, socialisation and inclusivity but are also adaptable to the motives of the caregivers that attend making them idiosyncratic in their formation as institutions in which caregivers participate. Current research is limited in understanding community playgroup, with this research providing new knowledge and understandings about these playgroups. Community playgroup provides opportunity to be conceptualised within the ‘third space’ whereby the societal values for play and playgroup can meet the caregiver motives for play and playgroup within the institution of playgroup.

Limitations of the Study

The intention of this thesis was not to make generalised claims about the institution of playgroup and the societal values of playgroup and early childhood and individual motives of the families attending community playgroups. This was not possible given the research was undertaken with seven caregivers and two community playgroups. However, this study has produced a complex and intricate picture of my societal values of early childhood as an experienced early childhood professional and the motives of caregivers attending community playgroup in a suburb of Melbourne, Victoria.

An identified limitation of this study was that whilst conducting the semi-structured interviews and the co-construction of the play map the caregiver participants and I may have had different understandings of terms used within the interviews and play maps. One such term was identified on page 163 when discussing the term 'agency and self-help skills' with the caregivers. Another identified limitation was the caregiver's understandings of being inclusive of Indigenous culture and being inclusive of children with additional needs. These phrases are very familiar to me as an experienced early childhood professional due to their use in early childhood and the inclusion in early childhood curriculum documents such as the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009), however the caregivers may not have been as familiar with these terms. In this research further explanation of these terms and phrases were given to the caregivers.

I also recognise that positioning myself within the research may have presented power issues within the research. Through piloting of the play map I recognised that the play map process of taking turns between the caregivers and myself to add photographs, images and words was not going to be successful. I determined that if we took turns to place photographs and words into the play map, what I added to the play map was going to influence what the caregivers added, that they would think that they had to agree with me or modify what they would add to fit in with my ideas. To minimise power issues within the research, I provided the caregivers the time and space to add all of their photographs and words/phrases first, only adding mine if we had something the same, or waiting until they had completed theirs before adding mine to the play map.

The final possible limitation was the consistent use of the images and phrases I used with each caregiver. Each play map interview was structured slightly differently to the previous one, as they were led by the photographs, words, and phrases of each caregiver. I had a range of printed images and phrases to use in the play maps and from these selected the ones to use while conducting the play map interview with each caregiver. During some interviews the same images and words were used for each caregiver, and in others some images and words were not used. However, this process may also be positive as the semi-structured interviews provided rich data that were able to be adapted to each individual caregiver participant and provides the opportunity for co-construction between myself and the caregiver (Cohen et al., 2018; Hatch, 2002).

Further Questions Arising From the Study

This study has contributed new knowledge about the societal values and caregiver motives of community playgroup. There is, however, scope for further research that can extend what we know about community playgroup. Key findings from this research identified that participation in a community playgroup offered opportunity for spending time outdoors, socialisation for children

and caregivers and inclusivity. This raises further questions about the availability of outdoor space for community playgroups, and how this space is used. The caregivers in this research identified that their playgroups were culturally inclusive, with many caregivers highlighting that this was the reason they attended their playgroup, as they enjoyed meeting other families with cultural backgrounds that varied from their own. It would be beneficial to further explore inclusivity within community playgroup to determine if this finding is consistent across these playgroups. The caregivers in this research highlighted that their priority was to provide social opportunities for their children, above their own social interests. Again, it would be beneficial to further explore if caregivers participating in community playgroup prioritise their children's opportunities for socialising over their own to determine if this finding is consistent across playgroups.

The two playgroups that were represented within this research, Warrington playgroup and Tenby playgroup, provided insights into the provision of play within the institution of playgroup. The Warrington playgroup provided an open-ended play-based session structure, while the Tenby playgroup provided a more structured educational play focused session. The caregivers from both playgroups spoke about play as an activity that children engage in. It was also identified in this research that little is known about caregiver's learning about play in community playgroups. As community playgroups are volunteer led and the experiences for the children are provided by the volunteers and caregivers, further research investigating caregiver knowledge about play and providing play opportunities for children would be beneficial.

Little research has been undertaken exploring the experiences and activities provided for children while attending playgroup. This research identified experiences that were similar to those provided for children in the home. Further research could be undertaken to explore the experiences children engage in while attending community playgroup. Furthering this point, this research identified a variation within the two participating playgroups in the provision of music and stories for children attending playgroup. Some research in supported playgroups suggests the inclusion of music and story group times that provides learning opportunities for children. However, there is little indication as to the inclusion of these within community playgroups which may also offer similar activities with recognised benefits for children. This information would provide insight into the activities and opportunities for learning provided for children attending community playgroup.

A Personal Perspective

This research stemmed from my interest in play. While undertaking my Master's course work I was introduced to some work undertaken by Brooker (2005) who describes a scene where

two children from a Bangladeshi background first enter a pre-school environment in the United Kingdom:

The outer door opened and Amadur and Mohiuddin were shepherded in by their mothers. As it closed behind them, all four stood stiffly just inside the room, staring ahead. Mrs Goode approached them with a welcoming smile: 'Hi there, come on in, lovely to see you! Mums, you can go, these two will be fine. Come on boys'. She took the hands of the 4-year-olds and led them cheerfully towards the sandbox, leaving their mothers to exchange glances and then exit, backwards through the door. Amadur and Mohiuddin stood beside the sandbox looking blank and bewildered. Mrs Goode collected shovels, gave one to each of them, and dug industriously herself. After a few moments both boys dutifully squatted on the floor and began to dig, in imitation. They continued this way for some time, and Mrs Goode, after praising their efforts, moved off to another activity. The two boys, who were cousins, slowed their shovelling, stopped, and stared at each other (Brooker, 2005, p. 115).

Brooker (2005) goes on to explain differences between the lives and beliefs of the Bangladeshi families and the European families within the study particularly regarding the children and play. The scene described above, and the ensuing information about family life caused me to reflect on my work with children in the past and I carried it with me in my future work with children and families. When undertaking research into playgroup this image of children's engagement of play emerged again. I wondered what participation in *playgroup* would entail for cultures that did not share the Western-European image of play.

The co-construction of knowledge stemmed from my interest in the constructivist paradigm that guides this research whereby there are multiple understandings of the world and people's experiences within it. This led to the consideration given in this research to co-constituted societal values and individual motives for play and playgroup. As an experienced early childhood professional, I was able to provide a societal perspective to this research through my experience, knowledge and understanding of early childhood education in Victoria, Australia. My expectation was that the motives of the caregivers attending community playgroups may differ from my societal early childhood values. At times throughout the research this expectation was realised, however, I was surprised with how similar the motives and values were in this research.

Engaging in the theoretical perspectives underpinning this work provided me with a deeper and richer understanding of both children's development and the interconnectedness of the societal and individual perspectives and interactions with the institutions in which we participate. I also gained a stronger connection to the motives we as individuals hold, and the values society brings to our lives and the relationship these have with each other. Exploring the socio-cultural and cultural historical theories of Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner, Hedegaard and their contemporaries has provided me with a stronger knowledge of the theoretical perspectives and their influence on early childhood education. This provided me with the opportunity to strengthen my knowledge base in my work in both early childhood settings with young children and tertiary settings with pre-service teachers.

My interest in playgroup as an early childhood setting is cemented through this research. I value and respect the work that is done in this area with young children and families. Through my research I recognise that research into playgroups, with particular focus on community playgroups is limited and look forward to continuing to add to knowledge in this field.

Conclusion

This chapter revisited the aim and context of the thesis and the research question that was posed for the investigation. It considered the literature, theory and methodology used to guide the research. The chapter reviewed the findings and discussed the significance of the research. The chapter discussed the implications of the research for community playgroup. The limitations of the research were identified. Further research in relation to the provision of community playgroup was highlighted with particular focus on the availability and use of outdoor spaces, cultural inclusivity, the prioritisation of social opportunities for children, caregiver's knowledge about play and the provision of play opportunities for children attending community playgroup.

The aim of this thesis has been to answer the question: How is the institution of playgroup co-constituted by societal values and individual motives for play within families attending a community playgroup? Situated within the cultural-historical theory of Hedegaard (2009) the research was methodologically undertaken using a qualitative case study approach which followed a constructivist paradigm. An innovative use of the Mosaic approach provided the research with the opportunity to use multiple methods of data collection. The multiple data collection methods included map making where the participant and myself as the researcher were able to co-construct our understandings of the institution of community playgroup. This was done through the investigation of caregiver motives and my representation of societal values for play.

The research found that the institution of playgroup is co-constructed by the inclusion of opportunities to spend time outdoors, opportunities for both caregivers and children to socialise and community playgroup to be a place of inclusion. Additionally, community playgroup provides a third space whereby societal values and caregiver motives that are understood within the cultural context of the caregivers can come together, making community playgroup idiosyncratic to the caregivers and children that attend.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Ethics Approval

Dear Applicant,

Chief Investigator: Dr Karen Joy McLean
Student Researcher: Ms Melanie Thomas (Doctoral Student)
Ethics Register Number: 2019-44H
Project Title: Caregivers living in culturally diverse communities and the institution of playgroup.
Date Approved: 11/06/2019
End Date: 30/06/2020

This is to certify that the above 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.

If you require a formal approval certificate in addition to this email, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

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

Appendix 2. Explanatory Information Letter



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

PROJECT TITLE: Caregivers' living in culturally diverse communities and the institution of playgroup.

APPLICATION NUMBER: (2019- 44H)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Karen McLean

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Melanie Thomas

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Participant,

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

What is the project about?

The research project investigates what playgroup looks like for caregivers living in a culturally diverse community. Early childhood programs in Australia are guided by the integral premise that play provides opportunity for young children to grow, learn and develop, which is reflected in the early childhood curriculum frameworks at both state and national level. Play is also central to the provision of *playgroup* for caregivers and their children, with play being the activity provided to children while attending. This project seeks to identify perspectives about play held by caregivers living in a culturally diverse community and the extent to which these constrain or enable their participation in locally available playgroups.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Melanie Thomas and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Dr Karen McLean. Dr McLean currently leads the 'Australian Playgroup Provision' stream of the Early Childhood Futures Research Program at the Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education at ACU and has an established research program in playgroup research. Melanie Thomas has a Master of Education Specialising in Early Childhood Education and a Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood) and has held various roles in early childhood for 25 years.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

If you experience any distress or embarrassment when being asked to reflect on play during the interviews or when engaged in a discussion of shared and individual perspectives about play when co-creating the play map, you will have the option not to provide this information.

What will I be asked to do?

Taking part in this project will involve:

- Taking a minimum of ten photographic examples over a one-week period (approximately 2 photographs per day) of pastimes and activities that your child is engaged in throughout the day and that you consider to be important and meaningful for your child;
- Sending these photographs to the researcher using the Edmodo™ App;
- Participating in a 30-minute individual interview, that will be digitally audio recorded, about the photographs you have taken and your thoughts regarding your child's activities and pastimes and play;

- Participating in a second 30-minute meeting with the researcher in which a play map will be co-created between yourself and the researcher of our individual and shared perspectives of play.

How much time will the project take?

Both the individual interview and the co-created play map will take approximately 30 minutes each. The researcher will use an audio-recording device to record the interview. If you are currently attending a playgroup the interview and play map creation will be conducted with you at the playgroup. If you are not currently attending a playgroup the interview and play map creation will take place at a mutually convenient location. Taking and sending the photographs is expected to take 2-3 minutes per photograph for a total of 30 minutes for 10 photographs.

What are the benefits of the research project?

This project aims to provide an evidence-based understanding of what the institution of playgroup looks like for caregivers living in culturally diverse communities. The research will provide new knowledge about caregivers' perspectives of play that is needed to inform responsive approaches to promoting playgroup participation.

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 of your 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 documents bin).

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

This research will be published in a thesis for the completion of a doctoral degree. It will 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. If you give permission to use images of you and/or your child(ren) that were sent through Edmodo™ to the researcher, to be shared with third parties in publications and/or presentations resulting from this study, these images will not be associated with any confidential and/or personal information provided by you and/or your child(ren) and identifying features will be removed or distorted.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

An individual letter summarising the results of the research will be sent to you at the completion of the research.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

For any further information, please contact 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 2019-0457). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics and Integrity Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics and Integrity


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.

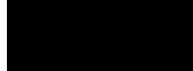
I want to participate! How do I sign up?

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 Melanie Thomas.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Karen McLean
Chief Investigator



Melanie Thomas
Doctor of Philosophy Student

Appendix 3. Modified Explanatory Letter for Participants With Limited English Literacy Skills



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

PROJECT TITLE: Caregivers' living in culturally diverse communities and the institution of playgroup.

APPLICATION NUMBER: (2019- 44H)

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr Karen McLean

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Melanie Thomas

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Participant,

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

What is the project about?

The research project investigates what playgroup looks like for caregivers living in a culturally diverse community. This project seeks to identify perspectives about play held by caregivers living in a culturally diverse community and the extent to which these constrain or enable their participation in locally available playgroups.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Melanie Thomas and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor 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 play during the interviews or when engaged in a discussion of shared and individual perspectives about play when co-creating the play map, you will have the option not to provide this information.

What will I be asked to do?

Taking part in this project will involve:

- Taking a minimum of ten photographic examples over a one-week period (approximately 2 photographs per day) of pastimes and activities that your child is engaged in throughout the day and that you consider to be important and meaningful for your child;
- Sending these photographs to the researcher through the Edmodo™ app;
- Participating in a 30-minute individual interview, that will be digitally audio recorded, about the photographs you have taken and your thoughts regarding your child's activities and pastimes and play;
- Participating in a second 30-minute meeting with the researcher in which a play map will be co-created between yourself and the researcher of our individual and shared perspectives of play.

How much time will the project take?

Both the individual interview and the co-created play map will take approximately 30 minutes each. The researcher will use an audio-recording device to record the interview. If you are currently attending a playgroup the interview and play map creation will be conducted with you at the playgroup. If you are not currently attending a playgroup the interview and play map creation will

take place at a mutually convenient location. Taking and sending the photographs is expected to take 2-3 minutes per photograph for a total of 30 minutes for 10 photographs.

What are the benefits of the research project?

This project aims to provide an understanding of what the institution of playgroup looks like for caregivers living in culturally diverse communities. The research will provide new knowledge about caregivers' perspectives of play.

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 of your 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 documents bin).

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

This research will be published in a thesis for the completion of a doctoral degree. It will 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.

If you give permission to use images of you and/or your child(ren), that were sent through Edmodo™ to the researcher, to be shared with third parties in publications and/or presentations resulting from this study, these images will not be associated with any confidential and/or personal information provided by you and/or your child(ren) and identifying features will be removed or distorted.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

An individual letter summarising the results of the research will be sent to you at the completion of the research.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

For any further information, please contact 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 2019-0457). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics and Integrity Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics and Integrity
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

Appendix 4. Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

Copy for Researcher

TITLE OF PROJECT: Caregivers living in culturally diverse communities and the institution of playgroup.

APPLICATION NUMBER: 2019-44H

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/ SUPERVISOR: Dr Karen McLean

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ms Melanie Thomas

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 project which will involve:

- ☐ Taking a minimum of ten photographic examples over a one-week period (approximately 2 photographs per day) of a range of pastimes and activities throughout the day that my child is engaged in and that I consider to be important and meaningful for my child;
- ☐ Sending these photographs to the researcher using the Edmodo™ App;
- ☐ Participating in a 30-minute unstructured conversational digitally recorded interview about the photographs I have taken and my thoughts regarding my child's activities and pastimes and play;
- ☐ Participating in a second 30-minute meeting with the researcher in which a play map will be co-created between myself and the researcher of our individual and shared perspectives of play.

I understand that findings from this research will be published in a thesis for the completion of a doctoral degree and may be published in journals and presented at conferences about early childhood education. Images sent to the researcher via Edmodo™ will only be used for analysis and in the thesis, unless I give optional consent for these images to be published and shared with third parties (i.e., at conferences and in publications) by circling 'I DO' on the following statement:

I DO /DO NOT agree with images of my child(ren) sent to the researcher via Edmodo™ to be used in published journal articles and presented at conferences.

My confidentiality and that of my child/children will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms for my photographs and transcripts of interviews.

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

.....

I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences by contacting Dr Karen McLean, 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).

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

Child's name:

Your relationship to the child:

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE:DATE:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/SUPERVISOR:  DATE:

(and)

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:  DATE:

Appendix 5. Child Assent Form



Children's Assent Form

Hi, my name is Melanie. 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 the types of things you like to do.

I have asked your caregiver to take some photos of the things you do every day and to share these photographs with me.

Please answer "Yes" or "No" by circling the "thumbs up" or the "thumbs down" under the statement.

My caregiver will take photographs of things I do every day and send these to Melanie.



I will write about the things you like to do 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 6. Image Taking Guidelines



Guidelines for taking photographs

Thank you for your participation in our project 'Caregivers living in culturally diverse communities and the institution of playgroup'.

Please find below guidelines for taking photographs of your child participating in pastimes and activities as part of this project.

Please try to take photographs:

- At various times of the day such as; morning, midday, afternoon and evening
- Of different pastimes and activities that your child is involved in throughout the day



- That do not show your child's face



YES

NO

Please check with your child that they are happy for you to take their picture.

Please take 10 photographs over one week.

Thank you.

Appendix 7. Instructions for Using Edmodo™

Instructions for using EDMODO

1. Download the EDMODO App from the App store



EDMODO App in
the app store
will say install



EDMODO App on
your phone once
installed

2. Open the App and tap Create Free Account



Tap on Create Free Account

3. Tap on the student button



Student

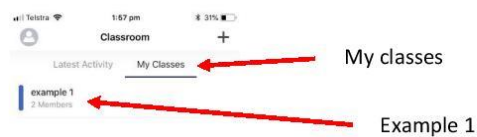
4. Enter the code 5k8s57 and create a username and password. Tap next.

A screenshot of a mobile app registration screen. At the top, the status bar shows 'Telstra', '1:53 pm', and '31%'. The screen has a white background with a back arrow in the top left. Below the back arrow is a text input field containing '5k8s57', with a red arrow pointing to it from the label 'Code'. Below that is another text input field containing 'MelanieJKeagan', with a red arrow pointing to it from the label 'Username'. Below that is a password input field with six dots, with a red arrow pointing to it from the label 'Password'. Below the password field is a text input field with the placeholder 'Email (optional)'. Below the email field is a yellow button labeled 'Next', with a red arrow pointing to it from the label 'Next'. Below the 'Next' button is a small text line: 'By tapping Next, you and your parents agree to the Terms of Service and Privacy Policy'. Below that is a keyboard with a 'Next' button on the right side.

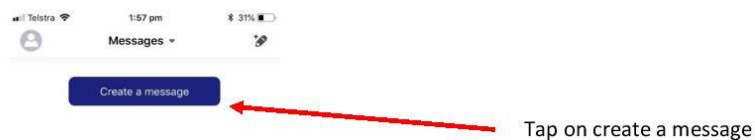
5. Enter your name and tap create

A screenshot of a mobile app registration screen titled 'Introduce Yourself'. It has a white background with a back arrow in the top left. Below the back arrow are two text input fields: 'First Name' and 'Last Name'. Below these fields is a light blue button labeled 'Create'. Red arrows point from labels to these elements: 'Your first name' points to the 'First Name' field, 'Your last name' points to the 'Last Name' field, and 'Tap create' points to the 'Create' button.

6. You will then be in the group 'Example 1' in the 'My Classes' section. As more people join the member numbers will increase. To send a photograph to Melanie tap on the Messages icon down the bottom



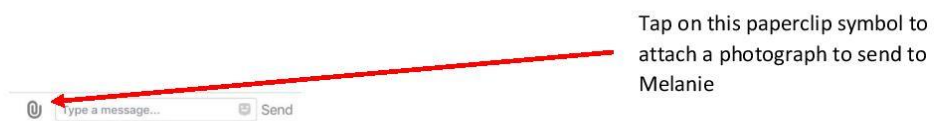
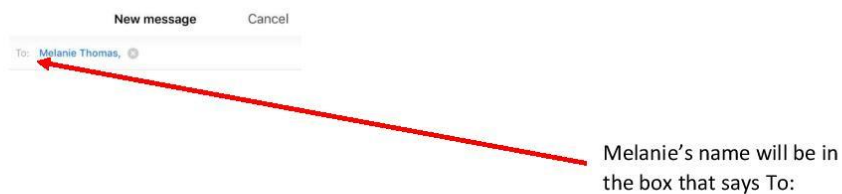
7. Tap on create a message.



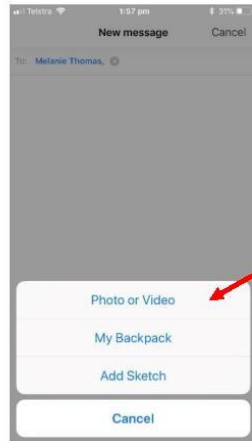
8. Tap on Melanie Thomas to send Melanie a message with your photo attached



9. Melanie's name will be in the To: box. Tap on the paperclip symbol in the bottom left corner.



10. Tap on Photo or Video option

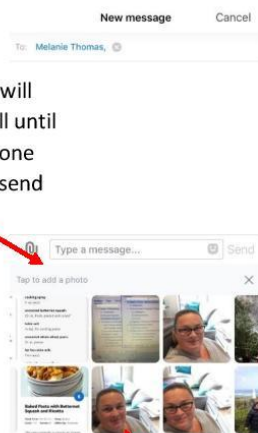


This screen will appear

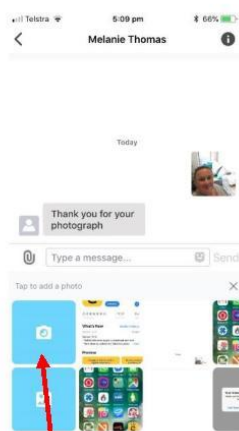
Tap on the Photo or Video option

11. Your photos will appear down the bottom. Scroll along until you find the photo that you wish to send. Click on that photo. If you wish to take a photo to send click on the top blue icon shaped like a camera. The first time a prompt will appear that will ask if you would like to allow EDMODO access to your camera or photos. Click OK.

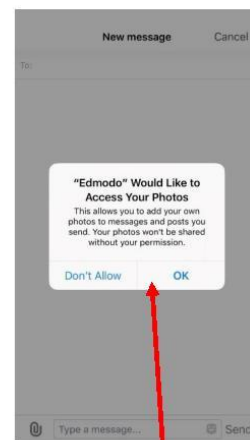
Your photos will appear. Scroll until you find the one you want to send



Tap on the photo you want to send

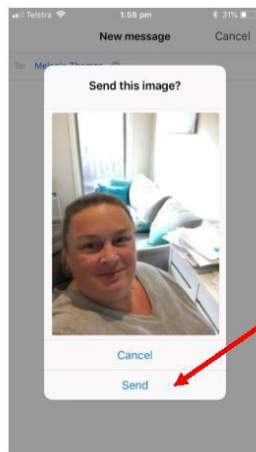


If you haven't taken the photo you can tap here to go to your camera to take the photo



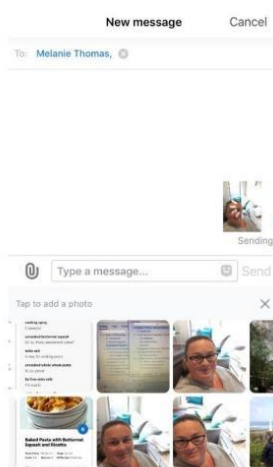
The first time you will need to click OK to allow the App to access your photos. You will not need to do this next time

12. If the photo that you wish to send appears tap on send.



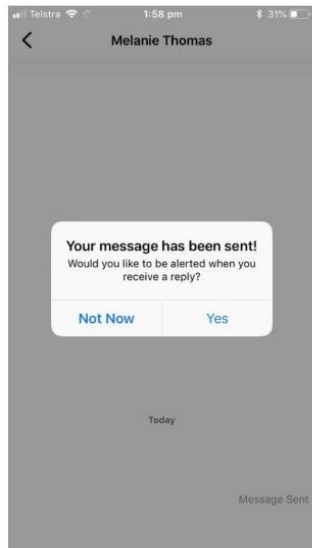
The photo you have chosen to send will appear. Tap on send to send to Melanie

13. A sending symbol will appear. It is sending the photo to my account.



Sending

14. Your message has been sent to me. If you would like a notification that I have sent a reply tap yes, otherwise tap not now.



15. When I have opened the application and received your photograph, I will send you a reply.



I will send you a message to let you know that I have got your photo

16. Then next time you have a new photograph –

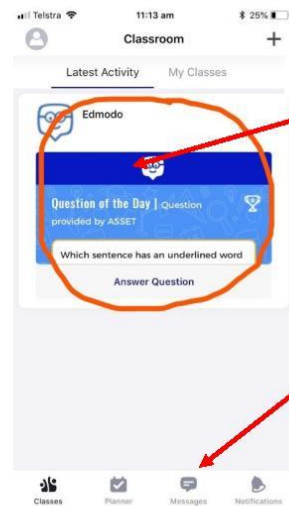
- a. Tap on the app,
- b. tap on messages, (Please ignore the display that appears, it will be different each time)
- c. tap on Melanie Thomas,
- d. tap on the paperclip,
- e. tap on Photo or Video,
- f. Tap on the photo you want to send or tap on the camera icon to take a photo,
- g. Tap on Send,
- h. It will say sending and then Message Sent
- i. Melanie will reply

a.



EDMODO App

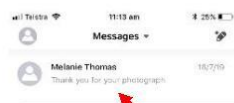
b.



Ignore anything that appears here

Tap here on messages

c.



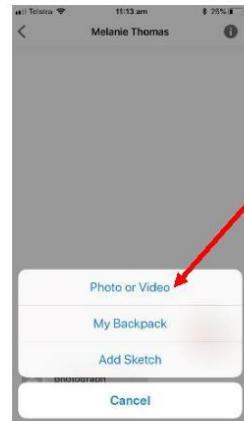
Tap on Melanie Thomas

d.



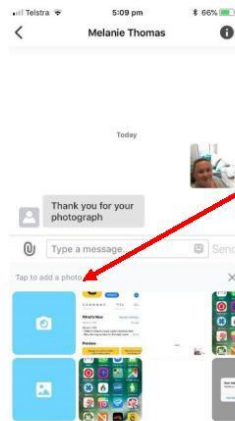
Tap on the paperclip

e.



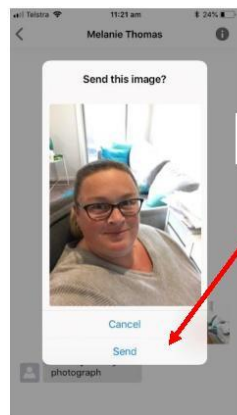
Tap photo or video

f.



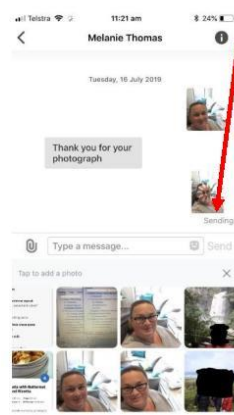
Tap on the photo that you want to send or use the camera to take a photo

g.



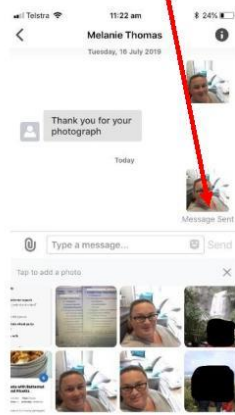
Tap on send

h.



Sending

Message Sent

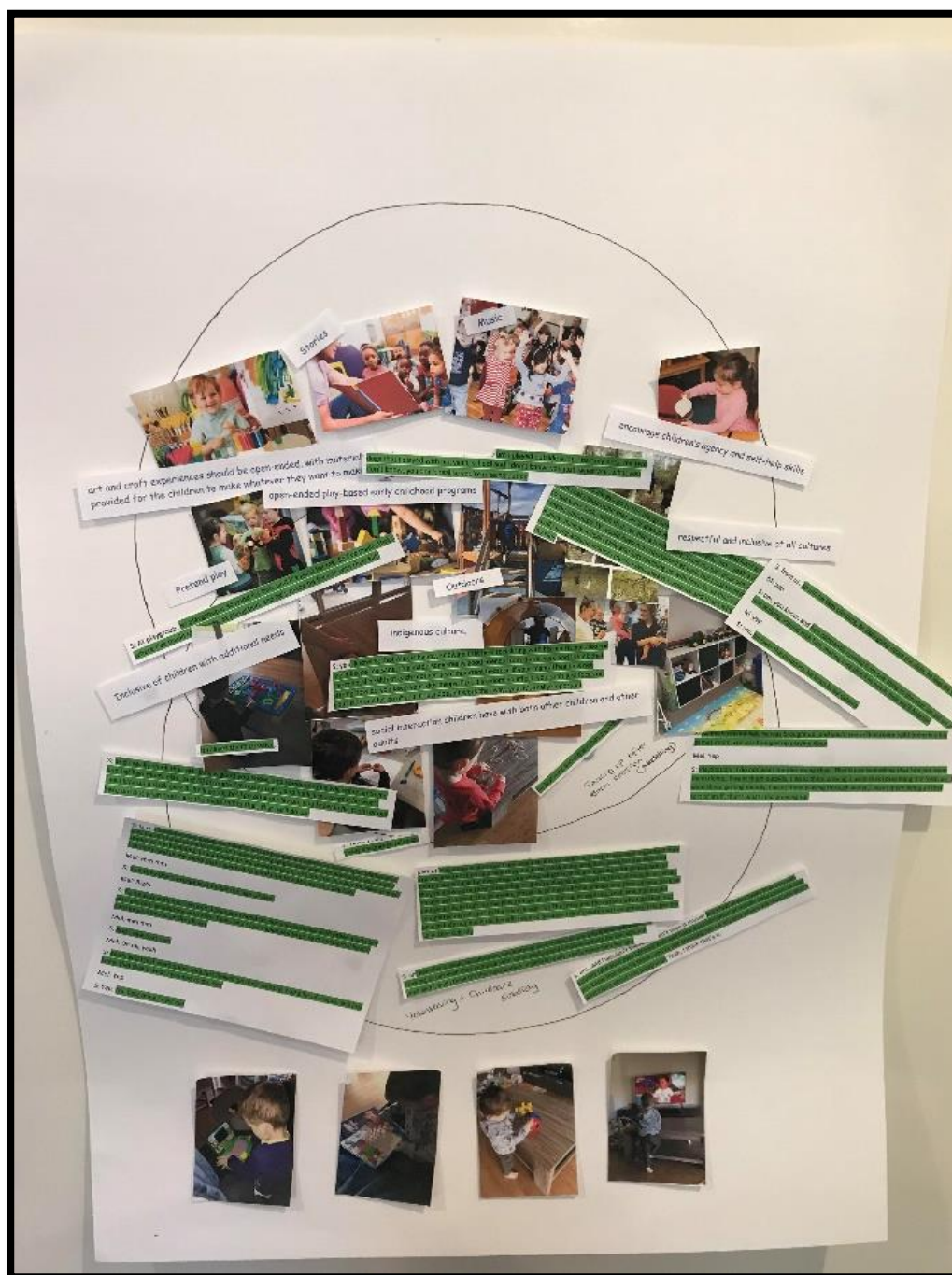


i.

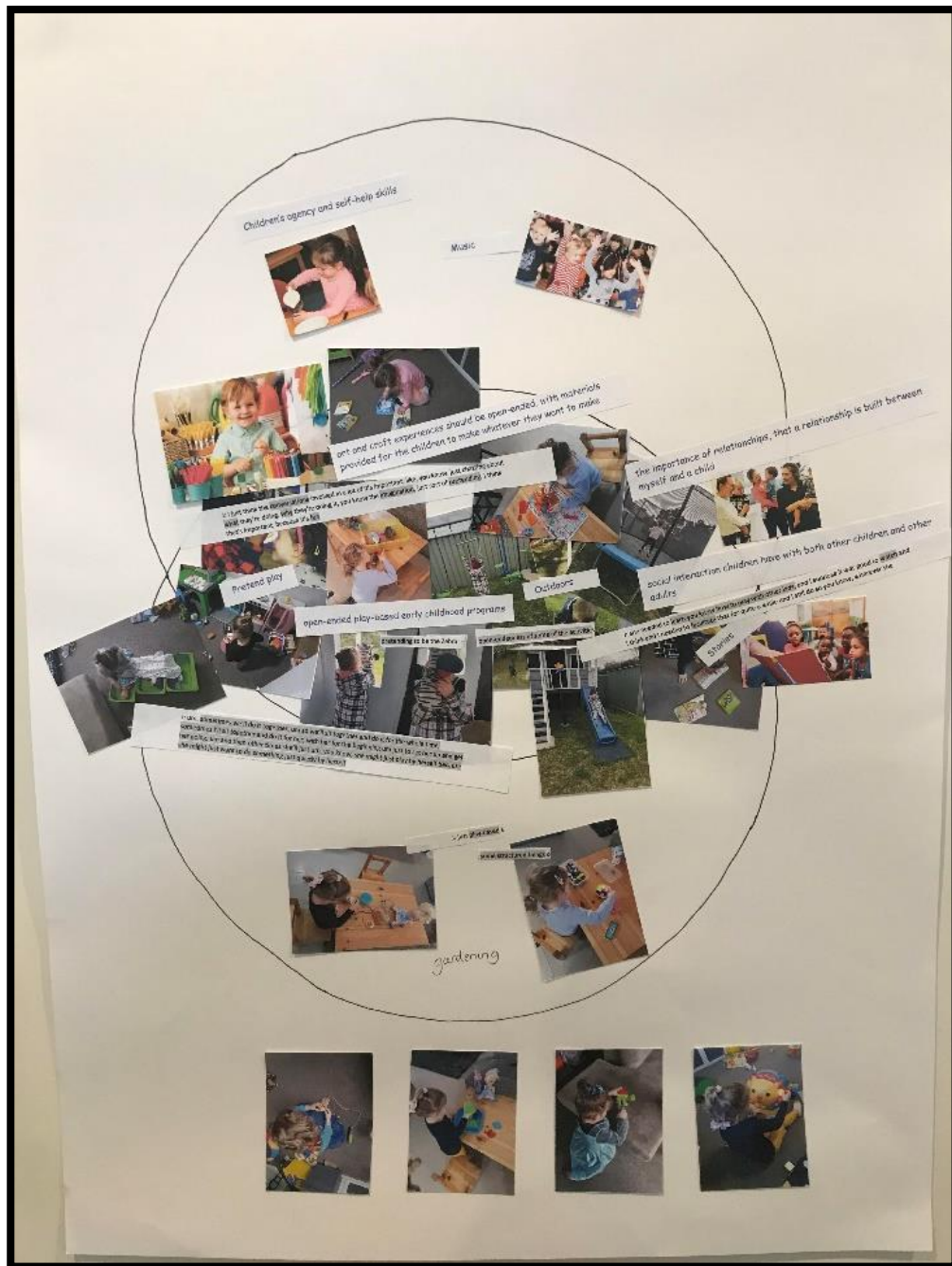


Melanie's reply

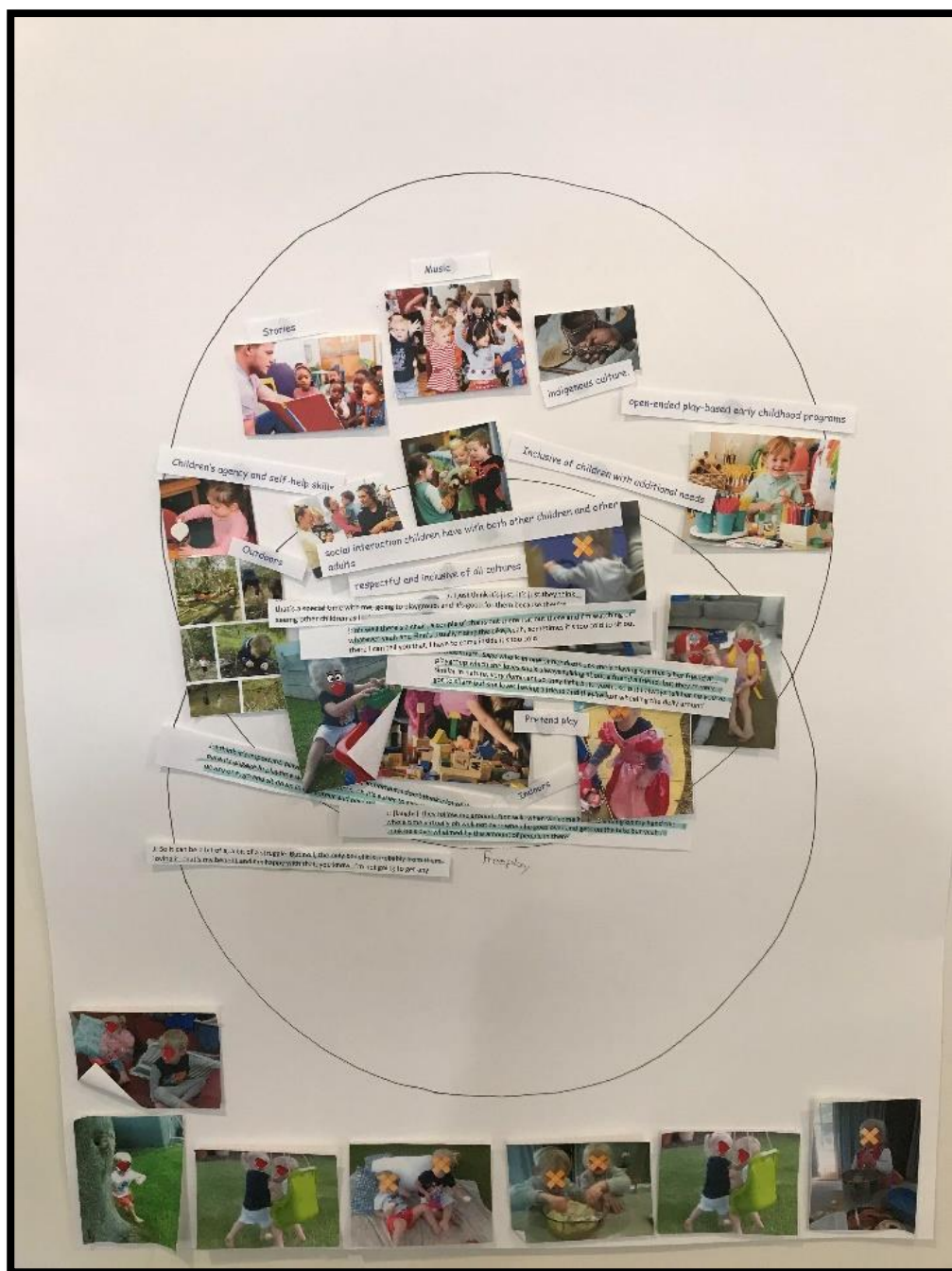
Appendix 8. Co-constructed Play Maps



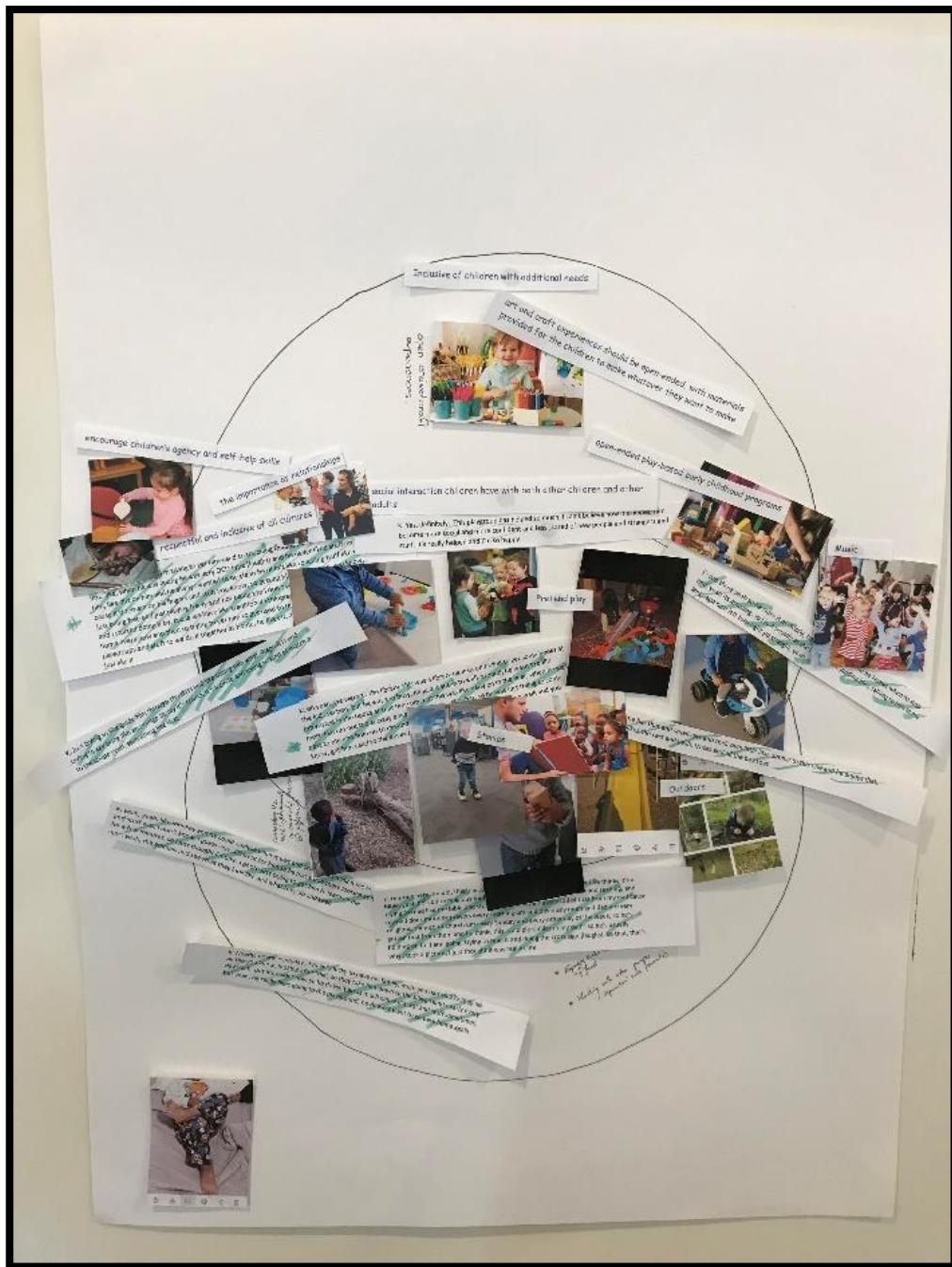
Madison. Warrington playgroup. Co-constructed play map.



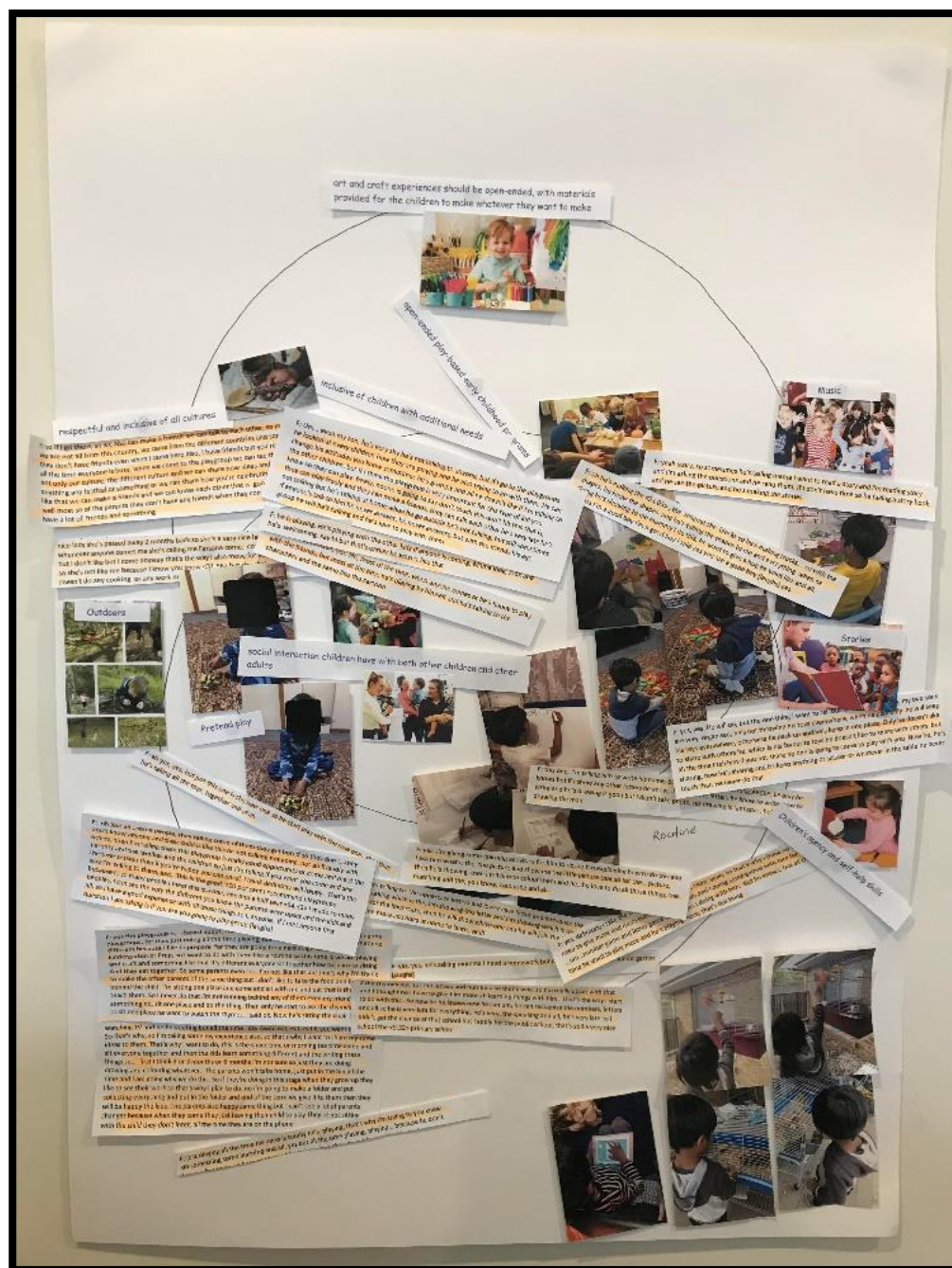
Sarah. Warrington playgroup. Co-constructed play map.



Super Nan. Warrington playgroup. Co-constructed play map.



Kiby, Tenby playgroup. Co-constructed play map.



Farsana. Tenby playgroup. Co-constructed play map.

Appendix 9. Letter of Agreement to Participate - Tenby Playgroup

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 21 October 2019 4:59 PM
To: Melanie Thomas <melanie.thomas2@myacu.edu.au>; karen.mclean@acu.edu.au <karen.mclean@acu.edu.au>
Subject:

Dear Ms Melanie Thomas and Dr McLean,

In my role as playgroup Facilitator for the [REDACTED] playgroup I give permission for the [REDACTED] Playgroup to participate in the study 'Caregivers living in culturally diverse communities and the institution of playgroup' as outlined in the Information Letter provided.

Regards

[REDACTED]
Playgroup Facilitator [REDACTED] Playgroup

Appendix 10. Letter of Agreement to Participate - Warrington Playgroup

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 12 November 2019 2:26 PM
To: Melanie Thomas <melanie.thomas2@myacu.edu.au>
Subject: Permission from [REDACTED]

Dear Ms Melanie Thomas and Dr McLean,

In my role as playgroup Facilitator for the [REDACTED] playgroup I give permission for the [REDACTED] Playgroup to participate in the study 'Caregivers living in culturally diverse communities and the institution of playgroup' as outlined in the Information Letter provided.

Regards

[REDACTED]
Playgroup Facilitator [REDACTED] Playgroup

Appendix 11. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Background information

- How old is your child and what is their name?
- Tell me about your family
- What is your cultural background?
- How long have you been coming to playgroup?

Play

- What can you tell me about this photo? What is happening here in this photo?
- Why did you choose to send me this photo?
- Can you tell me about your role in this pastime/activity?
- Can you tell me about other pastimes and activities that your child does at home like this one?
- What do you and your child like to do together?
- What does your child like to do?
- If your child is playing, tell me about what they are doing, what might you see them doing?
- What other activities/pastimes is your child involved in on a typical day?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your child's pastimes and activities and the photographs?

Values and motives

- What do you remember spending time doing in your childhood? Can you tell me about that?
- What do you think is important for your child to be involved in everyday? Why do you think that is important?

Playgroup

- Tell me about your playgroup; what do you do there?
 - Tell me about what you like about playgroup. What are the pastimes and activities that you like to do there with your child?
 - Tell me about what your child does at playgroup? What do they like to do? Is there something that your child always does at playgroup?
 - Tell me about how the playgroup is organised. Can you tell me about what you like the most?
 - What do you think are the benefits of playgroup for your child?
 - What do you think are the benefits for you?
 - Tell me about the similarities between playgroup and home.
 - Tell me about the differences between playgroup and home.
 - Do you talk to others about playgroup? Who do you talk to? Why? What do you talk to them about?